

Dalits, Missionaries, Tourists and Flaneurs: 'Free Movement' in India before 'Dalit Literature'.

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'They do not figure in any of the so-called ancient Indian literatures- as though they have never talked, never walked; as though they never lived on this soil at all' (Kancha Ilaiah, Post Hindu India: A Discourse on Dalit-Bahujan, Socio- Spiritual and Scientific Revolution. New Delhi Sage, 2009: 26)

It is an honour and privilege to be writing this essay for a book to mark, with a Festschrift, the 60th birthday of Professor Jesurathnam. If my memory serves me right when I was visiting Professor of Old Testament Studies and Sociology at UTC Bangalore in the summer of 2014, Professor Jesurathnam was largely on sabbatical in the United States. Hence, we were not in direct daily communication, and I learnt of his work through reading his books. In no way could I fill his shoes whilst at UTC- and that was not the intention-, but even so, given our meetings at other conferences, seminars and events over some years in India, he was kind enough to remark on my solidarity with his commitment to the life of the Dalits and the importance of biblical exegesis relevant to their context. He has consistently and effectively devoted his career to developing the liberative dimensions of Dalit exegesis.

1. Introduction

This essay considers aspects of the degrading social experience of Dalits through looking at narratives of free and restricted movement and travel in India. Three narratives are utilised. First, *A South India Diary* (1951) by Lesslie Newbigginⁱ is considered, followed by an incident related in a report by Bishops Azariah and Whiteheadⁱⁱ from 1930, and finally, in a justly celebrated and well-known short novel from 1935 by Mulk Raj Anandⁱⁱⁱ, entitled *Untouchable* (and I draw some brief comparisons between this text and Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*^{iv}). During my research on the history of Christianity and biblical exegesis in India, I have read these books over the years with increasing interest, and in some ways this essay is meant as an appreciation of them; at the same time, repeated reflection on them has led me to see how they portray differences of the experience of 'free movement' in India. This essay considers what these books can tell us about Missionary and Dalit movement through physical and public spaces in their context. This will provide a point of departure for considering briefly how texts about 'being unclean' in the Hebrew Bible might resonate or challenge Dalit hearers and readers of the biblical text today. Moreover, a firmer grasp of the 'authentic' Dalit voice can be achieved, and consideration given to the challenges a Dalit poetic poses to biblical exegesis.

In all three cases, the *direct* personal voice of the Dalit is *not* heard. The account of Lesslie Newbiggin (1909-1998) describes for his audience of family, friends and well-wishers back home in the United Kingdom, his experiences and shares his knowledge of village life in South India, where the gradations of caste are clear and operative but which Newbiggin arguably describes from a sanguine distance. The fictional narrative written by Anand (1905-2004), published before Ambedkar's *The Annihilation of Caste* (1936)^v but after the Poona Pact (1932), covers one day in the life of the untouchable Bakha, from the sweeper caste. The incident recounted from Bishop Azariah (1874-1945) and Bishop

Whitehead (1853-1947) in their *Christ in the Indian Villages* (1930) serves in my essay as a bridge between Newbiggin and Anand, providing an example of how the 'mass movement' of Untouchables converting to Christianity encouraged deeper knowledge of the life of Dalits.

Anand himself was from the Kshatriya varna, but his narrative evidences great empathy with the life of his fictional character, and is remarkable for the way in which it captures and expresses the depth of humiliation, anger and despair that characterises Bakha's experience. As such it is an improvement on the reportage of Dalit experience presented by Newbiggin, but is still not a vehicle of an authentic Dalit voice. More authentic voices are found, for example, in the poems and short stories written by Dalits and in auto/biographies. One recent (2004) classic example is *Joothan: A Dalit Life* ('scraps') by Valmiki. Comparing *Untouchable* by Anand with the personal vivid firsthand accounts of Valmiki in *Joothan*, shows that Anand's *Verstehen* is very strong. The expression of the lasting and haunting trauma that humiliating and violent and shocking encounters had on Valmiki are excruciatingly given in *Joothan* and bear comparison with Anand's imaginative reconstructions, for example. However, even while Anand described the squalor and material nature of human existence, through references to bodily functions, sex and sexuality, through the constant presence of the abject, it is *Joothan* that can shock the reader more with the sheer cruelty and violence that is metered out on the central subject, and with the acts of sexual exploitation of women, and the ever presence of dirt, filth and excrement that is portrayed: all the senses are assailed.

Given the more recent explosion, and publication in both original languages and in translation (into English) of Dalit fiction, poetry and auto/biography it is now possible to hear more authentic Dalit voices. Within biblical studies, it is now possible to directly hear the voices of Dalit biblical scholars through their own exegesis.^{vi} In the absence of ethnographic data, the literature produced by Dalits can serve as a very good proxy and lift the veil on Dalit experience and trauma that would otherwise remain closed to those not of Dalit origin. Lifting the veil on Dalit experience prior to modern times is harder than today, but whenever Dalit social worlds are encountered the reader is challenged. One question that remains in the development of Dalit biblical exegesis within the field of theological and biblical studies, is the extent to which the Christian Dalit writers and exegetes 'water-down' so to speak, and anesthetize the Dalit experience, rendering it more anodyne in the interaction with the biblical text and the communication of its meaning to a Christian audience, and hence altering the full force of the Dalit poetic. Perhaps the full voice of the Dalit can be best captured through ethnographic work in the field and in the capturing of first-hand life histories: this has only just begun.^{vii} The final voice to be heard of course is that of the oppressed in the Bible itself- the Dalits of the ancient world. What is the best procedure for retrieving these voices, is a pressing question in global and Dalit biblical hermeneutics.

2. 1947: Partition and The Church of South India

It was events in 1947 that brought Lesslie Newbiggin back to India but it was not on account of the Partition of India which accompanied the Independence of India and the creation of Pakistan and East Bengal (Independence is dated to August 15th, 1947). This tragedy caused one of the largest displacements of people in world history that has ever taken place. Any account of movement in India has to recognise its significance. A contemporary writer states: 'Whole worlds suddenly fell apart at the time of India's partition'.^{viii} It is estimated that between 12 and 16 million people were displaced. Numbers who died (or were murdered) during the transition is impossible to determine with figures as large and incomprehensible as 2 million. Many stories are related of the massacres of passengers on trains crossing the new borders either way, and there are memories of the long columns of people

walking on foot, in *kafilas* of up to 40,000 persons and caravans '45 miles long in places'.^{ix} The legacies of Partition continue into the present day: the culture and social geographies of major cities like Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi were dramatically altered by the sheer number of refugees and the need to assimilate people who were total strangers to their new surroundings, for example^x. One historian observes that 'Partition had a wide-spread psychological impact which may never be fully recognised or traced...Some people went, quite literally, mad.'^{xi}

The experience of Indian Christians has not figured prominently in the historiography. Charitable aid for the refugees became a major preoccupation of Christian groups, but it is important to learn of the ways in which Christian groups were perceived by other ethnic/religious groups. There are occasions when Hindus and Muslim together attacked Christian and Parsi premises.^{xii} In other cases the Indian Christians were seen as potential members of other communities- if it could be shown that Christians should be counted as in alliance with Muslims for example the increase in the numbers could improve the claim to be a majority group in an area. There are known cases in the Punjab where Christians were advised to clearly show their identity and affiliation through wearing red crosses or other symbols so that it was obvious that they were neither Hindu, Muslim nor Sikh and could escape the rioting, pillage, rape and murder.^{xiii} Untouchables and Christian minorities were not directly catered for in the drawing of the maps of Partition.^{xiv} In recent times, more attention is being paid to the diversity of experience of Partition, differentiating different castes.^{xv} However, at the present time it is not possible to relate the experiences of Indian Christians and the routes they took during Partition and how these experiences of 'forced migration' impacted their biblical exegesis and theology, nor their social relations and psychology.

It is striking that whilst in the North of India partition was taking effect, in Southern India, within Christian communities, a process was taking place bringing different religious parties together under the newly created Church of South India. The Church of South India was inaugurated in September 1947 bringing together the four denominations of Anglicans, Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Methodists. In the North, partition was ripping communities apart and intensifying communal violence and murder, while in the South attempts were being made to ecumenically combine various Christian denominations. It is this event in South India that is found in histories of Christianity in India.

It would be a worthwhile project, in my view, if Christian responses, especially their use of biblical exegesis to address the issues of Partition, were to be examined and written about, so as to have a complete history of the role of the Bible in Indian political, cultural and social life. Newbigin was on furlough as the war ended and Independence was achieved by India and Pakistan. There are no references to Partition in *A South India Diary*, and in his autobiography, for example, he only makes a passing comment, and largely has a rosy optimistic view of the achievement of Independence and attitudes to the departing British Raj. His assessment of the achievement of Mountbatten certainly is not in agreement with more recent work.^{xvi} He wrote: 'On the wider political scene there was much to bring zest and excitement into life. India, newly Independent was full of plans for development. The style in which Mountbatten had carried through his final actions had wiped out the bitterness of earlier years and the British who remained in India basked in the sunshine of an unaccustomed popularity. Even the tragedy of partition brought one good gift: the challenge of Christians in the south to go to the north and help with the terrible consequences of the murderous communal strife between Hindus and Moslems. The assassination of Gandhi by the hand of a Hindu zealot sent shock waves through the whole nation.'^{xvii}

3 A South India Diary (Newbigin 1951)

As communities in Northern India were being wrenched apart by these geo-political processes, in South India, the Church of South India sought to bring a number of separate Christian denominations under one overarching constitution. It was the founding of the Church of South India and the installation of nine Bishops that brought Lesslie Newbigin back to India. Newbigin is well known as a churchman, theologian, missionary and writer committed to the Church of South India, and grappling with the inter-cultural processes of communicating the word of God in a modern and post-colonial society. Newbigin was installed as Bishop of Maduria and Ramnad. He writes an account of this process, and his involvement in it, in his Diary. *A South India Diary* begins with an account of the ceremony held at St George's Cathedral in what was then Madras (today Chennai) in Tamil Nadu on September 27th, 1947. Newbigin was beginning his duties as the new Bishop and he devotes himself in these first years to visiting as many of the 550 villages that are in the Diocese. The diary is full of personal and lively descriptions of his experiences as he travels around his large diocese, travelling by bus, by car, as pillion on a motorbike, visiting as many village communities as possible, and offering his reflections on the enormity of the task, and the range of very challenging problems and issues that required his attention. Problems included intervening on behalf of striking Christians who were associating with communists; asking caste communities to allow Dalit access to their wells; baptising the children born from the union of men and the women that men of the Puliyan caste Christians had 'captured'; the impacts of Hindu boycott of Dalits recently converted, and establishing schemes for economic self-reliance.

3.1 Newbigin and 'The Country Bus'

If 'Travel Writing' can be very generally described as 'an encounter between self and other precipitated by movement' ^{xviii} then Newbigin's *A South India Diary* qualifies as an example of the genre, and we expect to find descriptions of the new impressions he sees, and the 'negotiation between similarity and difference' that takes place, and which, through the narrative, reveals aspects of his self and of the other. In what follows I provide a passage from Newbigin's *A South India Diary* which is one of my favourite pieces of writing by a European missionary and traveller in India. The passage runs as follows:

'The country bus sways and jolts along the road, scattering the poultry, cattle and pedestrians in front and leaving a long cloud of white dust for a hundred yards behind. It is a ramshackle affair and there seems to be no reason why it should not fall to pieces at any moment. Inside it there is a close-packed cargo of men, women and children, baskets, sacks, boxes and babies. Those who don't get a seat squat comfortably on the floor. There is a continuous high-pitched crackle of conversation, easily heard above the roar of the engine. We do not talk about the weather or anything so trivial. Money, marriages, village gossip, religion, politics-these all have their share of attention. The stranger is thoroughly catechized. Occupation, native place, monthly income, father's name and income, destination, object of journey- these questions have to be answered by way of introduction. The last question leads out into theological territory where everyone can join in. Even the V.I.P's. in the front seat beside the driver turn round to cock an ear at the conversation. There is every variety of response from the open-eyed wonder of the villager who has never heard of the Gospel, to the blasé scepticism of the college graduate who has seen through it all. A prosperous-looking Brahmin begins a mocking imitation of a missionary preaching in Tamil: 'Ah, rascals, dolts, tramps and vagabonds, come to us and we will take you in'. Tamil has no words which really mean to 'save sinners.' Apart from Christ, how could it? The words in the Tamil Bible could equally be translated 'to provide free board and lodging for rascals'. That is one of the inescapable problems of evangelism. The Brahmin has made a good hit and gets a good laugh for it. I am wondering how to reply when an unexpected ally turns up. A young

farmer, sitting on the bench behind, leans forward and tackles the Brahmin. 'I know all your nonsense. "All religions are the same", you say. "All roads lead to God". It is not true. If you want to go somewhere you have to get into the right bus. If you get into the wrong bus you get to the wrong place. If you want salvation you have got to have the religion that gets you that. That's Christianity'. The Brahmin was not expecting this and is silenced. It is quite good fun teasing a missionary but decidedly less edifying to argue about religion with an obvious outcaste. The farmer tells me his story, how he became a Christian, how he learned to be a good farmer, how he has developed fruit farming. Here is his place now. There are his fruit trees over there. He shouts to the driver to stop and gets down, shoulders his bundle, and tramps off through the fields to his house. The Brahmin is a little sorry for his attack and we have a good talk.

The bus is slowing up again at the signal of a group standing by the roadside. This is where I have to get down. The pastor, the village teacher, and some of the elders are waiting to greet me. The village deacon comes forward with one of the exquisitely beautiful garlands with which the Tamil expresses his greetings. We walk together to the village.^{xix}

This passage is full of life, and its almost as if we can enter the bus ourselves, find a seat and join the ride and contribute to the conversation. It's a colourful cosmopolitan scene, and whilst there are individuals from different walks of life, of various castes and statuses (the front seat beside the driver is the reserve of the most important), the bus feels more like a republic of persons travelling in the same direction. Given that the European traveller, and the missionary, undertakes many journeys and in a variety of vehicles, it is appropriate that this is one of the opening narratives of Newbigin's diary. Newbigin, is fully conscious of his experience, and of its newness. His senses are alert and he notices what is going on in detail. In some ways it is remarkable that Newbigin seems so relaxed since it was his being involved in a bus accident in the 1930's in which his legs were badly damaged that forced him to return to Scotland for medical treatment. It was during this period of recuperation after surgery on his legs that he learnt Tamil and this explains the ease with which he converses with all on the country bus. The 'ramshackle affair' brings attention to the quality of the vehicle on which he is travelling. The 'miracle' of its staying together and functioning is noted and he would not be surprised if were to fall to pieces at any moment. There is a Madiga short story, translated from the Telegu, where, after only a short distance, the Dappu drummers who have boarded a bus to journey to the funeral where they will be paying their respects and playing their drums, have to disembark since it has quickly broken down. Gogu Shyamala describes this as follows: 'the bus arrived after some time, and one by one, the old men, the young boys and their dappu climbed into it. They squeezed past passengers holding onto their dappu for dear life, crushing all and sundry as they hurried towards empty seats. But the bus had not plied even a mile before it sputtered and hushed to a stop'.^{xx}

The bus journey in *A South India Diary* itself is the vehicle for the conveying of theological truths and church history. Modes of travel and the experience of types of movement are part of the consciousness of being in India but they can also serve as symbols of spiritual journeys, and of routes and pathways undertaken. Pathways through life, through places and even through texts. 'Movement' is a powerful metaphor that is not lost on Newbigin. Indeed, the 'Outcaste man' expresses the symbolic meaning of journeys and taking the 'right bus' or the right path to arrive spiritually and literally where you wish to end up. Challenging the Brahmin's idea that all roads lead to God he states: 'If you want to go somewhere you have to get into the right bus. If you get into the wrong bus you get to the wrong place. If you want salvation you have got to have the religion that gets you that'. There is something realistic (since it brings to mind similar interchanges that one has experienced in India) about the way that people on the bus learn of Newbigin's background, status and purpose. As he says he was 'fully

catechized'. The use of the terms of religious formation merge here with the dimensions of identity that are of importance in Indian culture. The challenge of inclusion of Dalit members in the Christian Church is presented through the comic parodying of a Christian missionary by the Brahmin. Newbigin's humour and good will is not undone and he does not fail to note that he and the Brahmin have a good conversation even after the comic and critical banter has occurred. The power of the Gospel to appeal to Untouchables, but also the idea that through contact with Christianity the self-respect of the Dalit is improved, is presented in the case of the farmer who has converted to Christianity and now is successful. Newbigin's interest and excitement of being in India, pursuing his vocation, and travelling joyously to his destination is clearly conveyed in the passage. Newbigin leaves the bus when he reaches his destination and is greeted by the village gatekeepers with the customary garland. Then they walk together to the village.

4. Azariah and Whitehead: *Christ in the Indian Villages*

Let's move from the almost holiday atmosphere of Newbigin's adventure, where we can almost feel the bumps in the road and the breeze coming through the open windows of the Country Bus, to a road in Kerala, and hear the report of a Christian traveller near Travancore, from 20 years before. A more painful picture of the relation between Dalit movement and the caste system is related in this pre-partition work by Bishops Azariah and Whitehead, in a chapter entitled 'Christ Among the Outcastes' in their *Christ in the Indian Villages*. They record the account of a visitor to Travancore who related:

'I was walking down a road one evening on the south west coast of India and a brahmin priest, a member of the highest caste, was behind me. Turning a corner, I came across about twenty outcastes, coming in from their work in the fields. As soon as they caught sight of the Brahman they scattered about thirty or forty yards on each side of the road, cowered down in abject, servile fear in the mud and slush of the rice fields, put their hands to their mouths, lest their breath should defile the high caste man, and cried out in harsh pathetic tones, "unclean, unclean", to give warning of the pollution of their presence'.^{xxi}

The refrain of 'unclean, unclean' is a leit-motif of Dalit encounter. The account echoes some of the similar observations offered by Ambedkah in his *Annihilation of Caste* where he seeks to present the reality of the tyranny against the Outcastes/Dalits in past and contemporary India, and to give expression to the suffering, pain and humiliation of 'his people' and to argue for the need for social reform as well as political reform. Restrictions on Dalit movement and use of public highways and paths was and is a common situation (see paragraphs 2.8 to 2.12 for example^{xxii}). The situation of the Dalits and their inability to move with freedom and inattention along a common road in India that Azariah and Whitehead relate, is of a completely different order to the joyous freedom of travel recorded by Newbigin. In *A South India Diary* we are told about some of the difficulties of travel that he faces but it is mainly in order of difficult terrain and inaccessible regions of his Diocese, given the spread of the jungle, the state of the roads, tracks and paths, or the fact that there is hardly any way to penetrate to the interior or coast. In these latter examples Newbigin presents himself as a pioneer missionary, exploring unknown and uncharted territory, where the people he encounters have such an undeveloped material culture that were an archaeologist in later times to seek for material remains there would not be anything to find. Despite the difficulties of travel and access, nevertheless, Newbigin finds a way to achieve his destination, relying on various forms of transport, and the help of companions, guides and locals. It is the privilege of the white European missionary to be able so to wander and explore, to find and be immersed. He is pleased by what he finds, enjoys humane

relationships with one and all, sings the Christian 'kummies', and appreciates the nature that surrounds him, whether that be a pool of refreshing water where he can bath, or vistas of village or coast seen from an impressive elevation. The caste system in the villages is described as a well-functioning system and he expects change to come only slowly. When the changes begin to occur- precipitated by the coming of modernity, communications and Christianity- it is to be expected that caste Hindus will feel their world 'turned upside down'.^{xxiii}

Even though he is concerned with the various congregations and their spiritual and physical needs, and he makes sure to remember what resources or expertise might be required to improve their spiritual, economic or physical condition, one often gets the feeling that Newbigin is in the privileged position not to get, as it were, his Bishop's robes splattered with mud or blood or excrement, and whilst he certainly 'rolls up his sleeves' and devotes himself to the task at hand, he is able to leave and move on to other places or return after his tour to his relative haven back in Madurai. Newbigin in many ways is a Christian tourist. No such freedom or enjoyment of movement, or sense of new places or the possibilities of change are available to the Dalits that are observed cowering on the road side as the Brahmin walks through, in Azariah and Whitehead's account. Whilst the European visitor to India cannot fail but to notice, especially during the weeks of first encounter, all the variety of modes of movement in India, and the unique forms of transport that they will utilise as they travel to places, enjoying all the strangeness and uniqueness of the ride, it surely does not occur that movement for themselves is not possible, and in theory there is a belief that all places can be reached one way or another. This 'free' experience of movement is not shared by the Outcaste/Dalit. The Dalit is no tourist, and moreover, as we shall see, neither does the Dalit have the opportunity to be a *Flâneur*.

5. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935)

In this section I turn to consider a (fictional) account of Dalit (untouchable) life that gets closer to the social realities of caste that exist in India. The central character Bakha is an untouchable, sweeper and toilet cleaner. The narrative is one day in the life of this outcaste. One violent encounter during the day leads him to severely question his identity, destiny and fate. It is on this encounter that I want to concentrate.

Let's begin by walking through the local town with the outcaste, Bakha, the central character in Mulk Raj Anand's 1935 novel *Untouchable*. Bakha is of the sweeper caste, an outcaste, whose main occupation is to keep the latrines clean, with his bare hands and any broom he can make for himself. This is an inherited occupation, passed down through his caste. His father's duty of cleaning the streets of the local town, and also the Temple precincts, has on this day to be conducted by Anand. On the way from the outcaste colony to the streets, after three rounds of his cleaning of the latrines Bakha revitalises his senses, enjoys the sun on his face and limbs, buys cigarettes, begs a light from a Muslim, and is then consumed by observing all around him in the busy town. Anand describes all the variety of what he sees in a most colourful and engaging fashion. Anand writes:

'Passing through the huge brick-built gate of the town into the main street, he was engulfed in a sea of colour...and he couldn't help being swept away by the sensations that crowded in on him from every side. He followed the curves of the winding, irregular streets lined on each side with shops, covered with canvas or jute awnings and topped by projecting domed balconies...his first sensation of the bazaar was of its smell, a pleasant aroma oozing from so many unpleasant things, drains, grains, fresh and decaying vegetables, spices, men and women and asafoetida. Then it was the kaleidoscope of colours, the red, the orange the purple of the fruit in the tiers of basket which were arranged around

the Peshawari fruit seller, dressed in a blue silk turban, a scarlet velvet waistcoat, embroidered with gold, a long white tunic and trousers; the gory red of the mutton hanging beside the butcher who was busy mincing meat on a log of wood, while his assistants roasted it on skewers over a charcoal fire, or fried it in the black iron pan: the pale blond colour of the wheat shop; and the rainbow hues of the sweetmeat stall, not to speak of the various shades of turbans and skirts, from the deep black of the widows to the green, pink, the mauve and the fawn of the newly wedded brides, and all the tints of the shifting, changing crowd, from the Brahmins white to the grass cutters coffee and the Pathan's swarthy brown'.^{xxiv}

But then comes the dramatic interruption that will be the defining moment of the day and places all Bakha's feelings, past, present and future, in the wake of it. Like the experience of Bakha the collision with the Brahmin breaks into our reader's world. Anand narrates-

' "Keep to the side of the road, you low caste vermin!" he suddenly heard someone shouting at him. "Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, you cock-eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning.... "You swine, you dog, why didn't you shout and warn me of your approach!" ...'.^{xxv}

The physical and psychological effect on Bakha is immense. The encounter leaves 'A smouldering rage in his soul'.^{xxvi} He is slapped in the face, his turban is knocked off, the sweets he purchased scattered on the dirty ground, surrounded by an accusing crowd, insulted over and over again by the Brahmin, he is utterly humiliated. Anand describes: 'Bakha stood amazed, embarrassed. He was deaf and dumb. His senses were paralysed. Only fear gripped his soul, fear and humility and servility'.^{xxvii}

The most significant development is the absolute consciousness of his own status, of his occupation, of his stigma, of his caste brought about by this event. 'I am untouchable he said to himself, an untouchable...then aware of his position, he began to shout aloud the warning word with which he used to announce his approach: *Posh, posh, sweeper coming*'.^{xxviii}

5.1 The Dalit *Flâneur*?

For a short while, especially if the reader is inattentive to all details, the reader becomes distracted, like Bakha, by the attractions of the scene, with all its colour and variety of things and people and activities. The descriptions and Anand's manner of capturing the kaleidoscope of life are being admired by the reader, and they 'draw us in'. For a moment, Bakha is like the *Flâneur*, who practices *flânerie*. The *Flâneur* is the wandering detached character of European cities like Paris and Berlin, where the freedom of the street and its shops is open to the leisured individual (most usually a male), who can stroll through the environment without a care. The *Flâneur* has been made famous by modernist poetry and contemporary sociology.^{xxix} With Bakha we are leisurely taking in all the sights and sounds and smells as we walk with him. There is no care but only enjoyment and the consumption of sensation. Once he is shaken out of his reverie by the collision with the Brahmin we too are taken unawares, but once shaken we realise that throughout his tour of the town, Bakha has not been unaware of his caste status. For example, his shame means he does not return to the shop where he bought his cigarettes (a brand smoked by the sahib members of the Cantonment) to acquire matches, but chooses to ask a Muslim since, not being a Hindu, the Muslim would be more sympathetic to him as an untouchable- such matters matter less to a Muslim than a Hindu. Also, when he buys the cigarettes and later the (cheap and rough) sweets he desires, he places his coin on the counter, but this payment will not be taken up by the Hindu shop owner until they have been washed by an assistant. We notice these things only when the Brahmin interrupts the flow of Anand's description,

with his cries and insults, till then we have been lulled into the comfort of the scene. In short, Bakha is no European *Flâneur*: such an option is not available for an Untouchable. Indeed, in Indian society as such, since all, of all castes, are apparently so aware of each other and their status as compared with all others, it would appear that being a *Flâneur* is not available as a social practice in Indian public space. As was the case with the 'missionary tourist', the role of *Flâneur*, is also not available as an option for the Dalit as they move through social physical space. What is more, these experiences of restriction of movement are internalised by the Dalit characters and form part of their wounded psyche.

From the perspective of our concern with mobility and the restrictions on movement, it is striking that when Gandhi and his entourage come to Bakha's town to hold a meeting (arriving by train and then motor car), and everyone is rushing to gain a Darshan of the great man and hear something of his discourse, Anand describes how the crowd moves together, and caste is lost sight of. Just as the apparent message of Gandhi is one of a collective India where the treatment of untouchability is to be improved, the movement of the crowd creates a solidarity of identity between each and every individual: the focus on Gandhi means that acknowledgement of caste is lost. Anand describes the scene: '...there was everybody going to meet the Mahatma...And like Bakha they hadn't stopped to ask themselves why they were going. They were just going: *walking, running, hurrying*, occupied them. (my italics).^{xxx}

Bakha's occupation is not revealed during this time because he is not carrying the tools of his trade, the symbols of his untouchability, namely, the broom and the basket. All persons present are occupied, moving, and there is no restriction of movement, the only hinderances to freely moving being the sheer numbers of people sharing a single purpose. However, at the end of the novel, Bakha's consciousness- which has brought home to him with piercing force- remains- that he is a sweeper, that he is Untouchable, and that he is, in the eyes of Hindu caste people, 'Unclean!'

6. Biblical Resonances of Being 'Unclean'

Bakha is brought to full consciousness, during the day in the life that Anand relates, that he is a sweeper, an untouchable, a Dalit. The Dalits in Azariah and Whitehead's account are fully attuned to their polluting status and scatter immediately the on-coming Brahmin is spotted. For Bakha, the need to announce his occupation, even when carrying the symbols of status and caste, is imperative. He, and the other untouchables in our sample, must announce that they are 'Unclean, Unclean'. If the Dalit forgets his status and occupation in public spaces through inattention, the consequences can be fatal.

From an outsider point of view, a resonance suggests itself between the 'unclean' call of the outcaste on the road and in the urban streets, as narrated by Anand, and recorded by the Christian writers Azariah and Whitehead, and the calling out of the leper as a warning to others that they are 'unclean' as found in Leviticus. Interestingly in Anand's novel, Bakha does come across a Leper, and he in no way sees an affinity between himself and the Leper. 'His attention was diverted to a black leper who sat swathed in tattered garments, exposing his raw wounds to the sun and the flies by the wayside, his crumpled hand lifted in beggary...Bakha had a sudden revulsion of feeling. He looked away from the man'.^{xxxi} This should alert us to realising that the association is not made by the Dalit. Bakha is repelled and feels revulsion. Rather it is the treatment of the Leper by others and the demand to call out their stigma to others that creates the affinity. In Leviticus the Leper is individualised and made to live outside the camp. For the Dalits, the stigma applies to all, is inherited and is bequeathed to the next generation, and all are made to live in a colony outside the village. When in Old Testament times the number of Lepers with incurable conditions warranted the need, colonies of Lepers were established.

It is possible to speculate on what type of response such biblical texts would have on the outcaste who has read or heard (from the missionary, the pastor or a fellow literate outcaste). However, it is always a risk without data to speculate on what a text means to a group of people, without being able to ask them. The risk of being inaccurate and non-historical is involved when we speculate on what a text might mean to a group of people from particular social contexts with particular social identities. Much less risky is to seek to uncover interpretations of what the text has meant and may mean from the outcaste user of the biblical text themselves. Such an account might be found in the published work of Dalit biblical scholars and, in the absence of such published work, information could be gathered from field work amongst the communities of bible readers and users, to uncover their attitudes to this text in the context of their own lives. The ethnographic turn in biblical studies suggests these ways forward. I can only offer some observations on the role of Leviticus 13.45 in the life of Dalit users of the Bible.

Leviticus 13:45 reads: 'The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be dishevelled; and he shall cover his lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean". He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone: his dwelling shall be outside the camp'.

Whereas a skin condition or a disease in Hebrew society rendered the person 'untouchable' and they were required to announce their presence and condition in wider society, and otherwise to 'live outside the camp'- their social status was affected only for the duration that they carried the stigma of disease. In the case of the Dalit, caste determined their social status, and their stigma was a permanent one. The 'disease' of being Dalit could not be cleansed. There was no way to lose caste. They were treated as if they were diseased like the incurable leper. Outcaste communities are found on the edges of the towns and villages where they reside. The colonies of the outcastes would seem to resemble in this symbolic fashion, the leper colony. Contact with the unclean Dalit would mean the caste Hindu would have to undergo a series of ritual purifications to restore their own cleanliness.

A Dalit response to the Leviticus texts could be to despair: that the way they have been treated in Indian society could be destined to be no different in any Christian setting that revered these texts; another possibility, is to appreciate that there have been other communities and individuals, even in ancient Israel, who have experienced the stigma and humiliation of being 'unclean' (sociologically perhaps Dalit sensibility could be generalised to reconstruct the 'life of the leper in biblical times'); alternatively, some hope might be found in the fact that the chance of recovery and being restored is suggested (though the administrations and power of the priests would strike a sour note no doubt); a further response would be to appreciate that Jesus in the Gospels not only heals the Lepers but is friend to all outcastes. Finally, and this is probably a response that would be the most resonant in contemporary India, and in Dalit poetics and politics, namely: to refuse to accept the label and condition of being 'unclean', and being similar to a Leper in other settings. The Dalit would assert their humanity and resist their caste name, status and destiny.

7. Conclusion

To travel with Dalits, at least with those who have communicated their life-stories, through the prose and autobiographical accounts which have been published, is to travel through all the mire, gore, blood, excrement and dirt, to be insulted and constantly hear bad language. To travel through an unsanitary, non-salubrious threatening environment, and to listen to their everlasting pain and trauma,

humiliation and ever-present fear. Dalit literature challenges the classical canons and their 'universal' rules of grammar and politeness, borne more of Brahmin and bourgeois respectability and (European?) Christian moral standards than anything else. An authentic Dalit hermeneutic it would seem, for biblical studies, in the light of this Dalit poetic, would be one where not only the quotidian but also the abject are brought to the fore. Can the Bible be read this way and the Dalit speak, and the voice be heard? Or will their journey through the text be restricted of movement, and not be mobile?

ⁱ Newbiggin, Lesslie 1951 *A South India Diary*. London: SCM Press

ⁱⁱ Azariah V. Z and Whitehead, Henry 1930 *Christ in the Indian Villages*. London: SCM Press

ⁱⁱⁱ Anand, Mulk Raj 1935/2014 *Untouchable*. London: Penguin

^{iv} Valmiki, Omprakash 2003 *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*. Kolkata: Samya

^v Ambedkar, B. R. 1936/ 2023 *Annihilation of Caste* Noida UP : Maple Press

^{vi} see Chalcraft, David J 2023 Strategies Past, Present and Future: The Context and Variety of Biblical Studies in Indian Culture and Society, in Chalcraft, David J and Angami, Zhodi ed. *Encountering Diversity in Indian Biblical Studies: A Biblical Masala*. London: Routledge, pp. 31-76, and the bibliography there.

^{vii} Ravela, Jeeva Kumar and Chalcraft, David J 2023 Encountering the Bible: Listening to the Voices of Madiga Christians, in Chalcraft, David J and Angami, Zhodi ed. *Encountering Diversity in Indian Biblical Studies: A Biblical Masala*. London: Routledge, pp. 190-211

^{viii} Nair, Neeti 2023 *Hurt Sentiments: Secularism and Belonging in South Asia*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press; Puri, Kavita 2022 *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories*. London: Bloomsbury

^{ix} Khan, Yasmin. 2017 *The Great Partition: the Making of India and Pakistan*. New edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 160

^x Guha, Ramachandra 2007 *India After Gandhi. The History of the World's Largest Democracy*. 1st edition. London: Pan Book, pp. 84-102

^{xi} Kahn, op.cit p. 187

^{xii} Tunzelmann, Alex von 2007 *Indian Summer: the Secret History of the End of an Empire*. London: Pocket Books, p. 57

^{xiii} Kahn op. cit p. 82

^{xiv} Kahn Ibid p. 110

^{xv} E.g. Banerjee, Sarbani 2017 Different Identity Formations in Bengal Partition Narratives by Dalit Refugees. *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. 19.4:550-565

^{xvi} e.g von Tunzelmann op. cit

^{xvii} Newbiggin, Lesslie 1985 *Unfinished Agenda: An Autobiography*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, p. 108

^{xviii} Thompson, Carl 2011 *Travel Writing*. London: Routledge, p. 10

^{xix} Newbiggin, Lesslie 1951 *A South India Diary*. London: SCM Press, pp. 27-9

^{xx} Shyamala, Gogu 2012 Trace it/Jaada, in her *Father May be an elephant and mother only a basket but...* New Delhi: Navayan, pp. 27-38, the quotation is from p. 32.

^{xxi} Azariah V. Z and Whitehead, Henry 1930 *Christ in the Indian Villages*. London: SCM Press, pp. 22-3

^{xxii} Ambedkar, B. R. 1936/ 2023 *Annihilation of Caste* Noida UP : Maple Press

^{xxiii} Newbiggin, Lesslie 1951 *A South India Diary*. London: SCM Press, pp. 43-50

^{xxiv} Anand, Mulk Raj 1935/2014 *Untouchable*. London: Penguin, pp. 34-5

^{xxv} Ibid p. 37)

^{xxvi} Ibid p. 41

^{xxvii} Ibid p. 37

^{xxviii} Ibid p. 42

^{xxix} Tester, Keith ed. 1994 *The Flâneur*. London: Routledge

^{xxx} Anand op. cit p. 120

^{xxxi} Anand op. cit p. 118