

Biting the forbidden fruit: the potential pathway to happiness



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The concept of the forbidden fruit has held constant since Biblical times; are the consequences worth the enjoyment? It is a concept that can link books that otherwise hold little to no relation to one another. Hence, when comparing the novels *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand and *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, the most apparent link is the disadvantaged state of the protagonists, but, one may not realize that they both rise up in relatively taboo ways. Furthermore, their unorthodox ways of achieving happiness is actually successful, therefore supporting the idea that forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest. As evident through the respective protagonists of *Untouchable* and *The Awakening*, both Anand and Chopin create their characters to indulge in the forbidden fruits of their lives to illustrate the importance of the pursuit of happiness.

Foremost, in *Untouchable*, the characterization of Bakha as more proper than other untouchables demonstrates how good can come from going against the grain; doing the forbidden. Bakha is an untouchable man who, despite of that fact, is seen as a man of higher status than his fellow men because of his attempts to prove that he deserved to be treated well. . Anand emphasizes this through Bakha's actions and appearances, because even though " his job was dirty" Bakha " remained comparatively clean" and " didn't even soil his sleeves" (Anand 16). In response to Bakha's actions, he is then directly characterized by others as " not the kind of man who ought to be doing this" (16). Bakha is letting himself dream to become a man of higher caste; most men of untouchable status must stay content with where they are at, because the laws of the system prevent the switching of castes. Anand therefore portrays Bakha craving the forbidden fruit of being of high

status in society; being treated as human. Despite being of both young age and untouchable status, he is already aware of the benefits when he abandons the mannerisms of the untouchables and acts as if he deserves happiness within Indian society.

This can be further corroborated when peering inside Bakha's thoughts about receiving an education. When the audience is first introduced to his thoughts about school, it is evident that he is very excited: Bakha noticed the ardent, enthusiastic look that lighted up the [school boy's] face. The anxiety of going to school ! How beautiful it felt ! How nice it must be to be able to read and write ! One could read the papers after having been to school. One could talk to the sahibs. One wouldn't have to run to the scribe every time a letter came. And one wouldn't have to pay him to have one's letters written. (38)

The idea of wanting to have an education is already taboo for someone of untouchable status. Anand creates these thoughts to characterize Bakha as someone who wants better for himself; who is willing to fight for his wants. This can be supported by when Bakha is later talking to his friend, and " a sudden impulse came on him to ask [his friend] to teach him" (39).

Furthermore, when he was met with reluctance, Bakha offers to pay a great deal of money for his education, even if it can potentially get both himself and his friend in trouble; this is another example of indulging in the ' forbidden fruits' of his life (40). However, an important facet of this is the happiness Bakha associates with receiving schooling. Despite the potential consequences, Anand demonstrates that Bakha is ready to risk it all to better

himself as a person, thus proving that forbidden fruit indeed tastes the sweetest because it leads to future happiness in himself.

To support the conclusion made from Bakha's example, it can be said that Edna, from *The Awakening*, is also pursuing her happiness in wicked ways while achieving what she wants in the process. Chopin characterizes Edna as an unhappy housewife- despite having all the comforts possible during late 19th century Louisiana. However, this is where the stereotypes within Edna of well-to-do women in this era end. For example, Edna is notorious for not being a "mother-woman," or a woman "who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals" (Chopin 181). She is a woman defined by herself and herself only. Throughout the novel, she partakes in acts that are unheard of as a woman; she seeks independence. Chopin does this to characterize Edna as craving something in her life. This can be supported by the scene in which she swims out for the first time the whole summer in which she was at her family's vacation home in Belle Isle. Prior to her swimming out, "a certain ungovernable dread hung about her," but soon after, "like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who all of a sudden realizes its powers," Edna realizes that "she wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before" (Chopin 212). Chopin highlights the juxtaposition between terror and joy in Edna throughout the novel. For example, she finds the courage in herself to pursue various suitors despite having a husband, and furthermore, she finds the courage to move out of her husband's home to live on her own; Chopin is inferring that Edna is- and should be -indulging in the forbidden fruits of being a woman in a

misogynistic time period. Despite the negative connotations associated with infidelity and the such, in this context, Chopin portrays this in a semi-positive light- as an awakening within Edna -because Edna, as a woman, is doing things that only men could previously do without major repercussions. Her status as a woman should act as roadblock to indulging in the forbidden, but Chopin creates it so that in Edna's case, it aids her in flourishing as an independent person. In this case, as a result of the happiness Edna achieves from the independence she gains, it can be said that forbidden fruit does taste the sweetest in the end.

Finally, when comparing the endings of the protagonists Edna and Bakha, it is evident that the authors are stating that taking a risk to achieve happiness is a risk that should be taken. Both of these characters develop in ways that are drastic due to the forbidden natures in which they act. While Bakha is an untouchable man of India and Edna is a well-off woman of Louisiana, they are both from places of disadvantage. As stated earlier, they begin to prosper by aligning themselves to the benefits and ways in which those of a higher status in their respective books partake in. Within the end of their respective books, there is a newfound happiness evident within the both of them. For example, despite not understanding everything, in the final scene of *Untouchable*, Bakha is listening to a conversation about the faults of the caste system that the author juxtaposes with another fighting for its benefits. Bakha, feeling as if he has learned a lot and go places with his new knowledge, "proceeded homewards" to "tell father all that Gandhi said about [the untouchables]," and Anand juxtaposes this idea with whimsical imagery such as "a handful stars [throbbing] in the hearts of the sky" to

make it clear that Bakha's knowledge comes with positive connotations (Anand 157). By creating sweet imagery such as this, Anand reveals that the overall tone of this passage is positive, and ends this novel on a hopeful note. Likewise, the same occurs in the ending of *The Awakening*; despite Edna's suicide, she achieves what she had wanted. Edna, in reaction to idea that her true love has left her, swims out to the sea as she did earlier in the novel. This time however, "exhaustion was pressing upon and overpowering her," causing her to sink. But, Chopin does not make this a devastating ending, for she is dying on her own terms, as evident by the sweet imagery of the final lines of *The Awakening*:

[As Edna was drowning], she heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air. (Chopin 351)

This is not to be seen as a scene created with melancholy; Chopin creates Edna to feel released because by choosing death, she is truly living in the way that she wants. Overall, despite the negative connotations of the events which led both of these characters to grow, both Bakha and Edna achieve happiness in their ends, this proving the validity of the statement "forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest". In conclusion, it is evident through the novels *Untouchable* and *The Awakening* that happiness can be achieved in a multitude of ways, and is sometimes only available when one participates in the taboos of society. Foremost, Chopin creates Edna as a woman who wants to live her life as an independent person- that also happens to partake in infidelity -and she eventually feels like her own person. Then, Anand creates <https://assignbuster.com/biting-the-forbidden-fruit-the-potential-pathway-to-happiness/>

Bakha as a young boy who rises up in his own way by going out of his way to learn the upper class ways; to gain an education about his place in society.

These characters were both created by their respective authors to encourage the pursuit of happiness no matter the means. Despite the differences in their plot lines, both of these protagonists go through similar experiences which prove the importance of happiness, and how it can be gained by taking a bite out of that sweet, sweet forbidden fruit.