

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction
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November 13, 2014. Anand (2).

review: peripheries compared

- ▶ on the edge of the provincial city
(itself peripheral w.r.t. metropolis)
- ▶ uneven development
- ▶ race and hierarchy
- ▶ impurity and mess
- ▶ formal strategy: realism *or* technique
- ▶ the mobile writer (Faulkner/Paris, Anand/London)

peripheries contrasted: the colonial situation

- ▶ occupying army
- ▶ colonial mimicry and anticolonial resistance
- ▶ the language question

language and affiliation

Gandhi: Why don't you write in your language?

K.C. Azad: I have no language. My mother tongue is Punjabi. But the Sarkar [government] has appointed English and Urdu as court languages!...Few of us write in Punjabi. The only novel writer is Nanak Singh. There are no publishers in Punjabi or Urdu....In English—my novel may get published in London...

Gandhi: Acha! Write in any language that comes to hand. But say what Harijans say!

(Anand, *Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi* [1991; qtd. in Shingavi, *The Mahatma Misunderstood*])

“say what Harijans say”

For, although he didn't know it, to him work was a sort of intoxication which gave him a glowing health and plenty of easy sleep. (18; qtd. by “AK”)

How a round base can be adjusted on a round top, how a sphere can rest on a sphere is a problem which may be of interest to those who think like Euclid or Archimedes. It never occurred to Sohini to ask herself anything like this. (22)

“any language that comes to hand”

- ▶ *Untouchable*: an Anglophone text from a multilingual world
 - ▶ footnotes, in-text notes
 - ▶ “Bhangi! (Sweeper) Bhangi!” (81)
- ▶ That was a Hindu custom, Bakha knew. (53)
- ▶ but also: defamiliarizations
 - ▶ *Yessuh Messih* (128)

Anglophone position

It is to the directness of his attack that Mr. Anand's success is probably due. (v)

Indians, like most Orientals, are refreshingly frank; they have none of our complexes about functioning. (vi)

By caste he is a Kshatriya, and he might have been expected to inherit the pollution-complex....He has just the right mixture of insight and detachment. (vii)

(E.M. Forster, introduction to *Untouchable*)

ambivalence

The man, a fair-complexioned Muhammadan dressed in the most smartly-cut English suit he had ever seen, interrupted him:

'Eh, eh, black man, come here. Go and get a bottle of soda-water for the sahib.'...

'*Ham desi sahib* (I, native sahib), don't stare at me,' said the man deliberately using the wrong Hindustani spoken by the English, but becoming kinder for a moment. (150–51)

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The harangue was impressive, with such fire was it delivered. Not only was the crowd moved but the anglicised Indian was silenced. (153)

'If only [Bakha thinks] that 'gentleman' hadn't dragged the poet away.' (156)

caste system

- ▶ endogamy, hereditary occupations, ritual hierarchy
- ▶ varṇa (“class”/estate): Brāhmaṇ, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, Śūdra
- ▶ jāti (“birth [group]”): kin/tribe/communal group
 - ▶ late 1800s: British Census puts all jātis in a varṇa
 - ▶ caste as putative “essence” of Hindu India
- ▶ those outside the system:
 - ▶ “outcaste” or “untouchable”
 - ▶ harijan (Gandhi)
 - ▶ Scheduled Castes (1935, 1950 Constitution)
 - ▶ Dalit (contemporary)

another affiliation

“the voice of all the rejected was not being heard”

(Anand in a Library of Congress recording)

proletarian fiction

Feodor Gladkov, *Cement* (1925)

Mike Gold, *Jews without Money* (1929)

Agnes Smedley, *Daughter of Earth* (1929)

Kobayashi Takiji, *The Factory Ship* (1929)

Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929)

Quayaquil group, *Those That Leave* (1930)

Jacques Roumain, *The Bewitched Mountain* (1931)

Sajjad Zaheer et al., *Angaaray* (1932)

Patrícia Galvão, *Industrial Park* (1933)

Paul Nizan, *Antoine Bloyé* (1933)

Yi Kiyong, *Hometown* (1934)

Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (1935)

C.L.R. James, *Minty Alley* (1936)

the artist of the proletariat?

To produce pure proletarian art the artist must be at one with the worker; this is impossible, not for political reasons, but because the artist never is at one with any public.

(William Empson, "Proletarian Literature," in *Some Versions of Pastoral* [1935])

novel problems

Several challenges...: the attempt to represent **working-class life** in a genre that had developed as the quintessential narrator of bourgeois or middle-class manners, kin structures, and social circles; the attempt to represent a **collective subject** in a form built around the interior life of the individual; the attempt to create a **public, agitational work** in a form that, unlike drama, depended on private, often domestic consumption.

(Michael Denning, "The Novelists' International" [2002])

public, agitational

Sad and wistful, she heaved a soft sigh and felt something in her heart asking for mercy. The sun overhead shot down bright arrows of heat, and inspired a feeling of the passing of time....And yet no caste Hindu seemed to be near...‘Oh, Maharaj! Maharaj! Won’t you draw us some water, please?’ (26)

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He knew if the little one told his mother that his elder brother was teaching a sweeper to read, she would fly into a rage and turn the poor boy out of the house. He knew her to be a pious Hindu lady. (40-41)

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‘Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, you cockeyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself.’ (46)

‘This dirty dog bumped right into me! So unmindfully do these sons of bitches walk in the streets! He was walking along without the slightest effort at announcing his approach, the swine!’ (47)

the politics of untouchability

'I shall only speak about the so-called "Untouchables," whom the government tried to alienate from Hinduism by giving them a separate legal and political status.' (146)

These political demands of the Untouchables have been the subject matter of great controversy between the Untouchables and the Hindus. Mr. Gandhi, the friend of the Untouchables, preferred to fast unto death [in the 1932 Pune *satyagraha*] rather than consent to them and although he yielded he is not reconciled to the justice underlying these demands.

(B.R. Ambedkar in 1943)

democracy and caste

The Hindu has no will to equality. His inclination and his attitude are opposed to the democratic doctrine of one man one value. Every Hindu is a social Tory and political Radical. Mr Gandhi is no exception to this rule. He presents himself to the world as a liberal but his liberalism is only a very thin veneer which sits very lightly on him as dust does on one's boots. You scratch him and you will find that underneath his liberalism he is a blue blooded Tory. He stands for the cursed caste. He is a fanatic Hindu upholding the Hindu religion.

(Ambedkar)

debate form

Discussion

(see handout)

next

- ▶ Anand wrap-up
- ▶ Hurston: focus on the first half (through 99)
- ▶ commonplace from Hurston