

Consider Gandhi's speech on untouchability near the end of *Untouchable*. In light of the political themes of the book and the way in which the novel depicts Bakha's experiences, are we to understand Gandhi's speech as offering a real solution to the problems Bakha experiences?

'If there any Untouchables here,' he heard the Mahatma say, 'they should realise that they are cleaning Hindu society.' (He felt like shouting to say that he, an Untouchable, was there, but he did not know what the Mahatma meant by 'cleaning Hindu society.') He gave ear to the words with beating heart and heard: 'They have, therefore, to purify their lives. They should cultivate the habits of cleanliness, so that no one shall point his finger at them. Some of them are addicted to habits of drinking and gambling of which they must get rid.

'They claim to be Hindus. They read the scriptures. If, therefore, the Hindus oppress them, they should understand that the fault does not lie in the Hindu religion, but in those who profess it. In order to emancipate themselves they have to purify themselves. They have to rid themselves of evil habits, like drinking liquor and eating carrion.'

But now, now the Mahatma is blaming us, Bakha felt. 'That is not fair!' He wanted to forget the last passages that he had heard. He turned to the Mahatma.

(148)

FRAMEWORK

1. Annotate the passage thematically. Consider each sentence one at a time, and explain what it tells us about Gandhi's, Bakha's, and Anand's (different) views. Some (not all) of the themes that may be relevant to individual sentences: the role of Hinduism; the role of Indian nationalism; the role of colonialism; the responsibility of the upper castes; the responsibility of untouchables.
2. Annotate the passage's narrative construction. *How* are views represented and related to one another by the text? What techniques does the novel use to shape your interpretation of Gandhi's remarks and of Bakha's responses? Challenge one another to point to individual phrases or sentences in this passage to support what you say.
3. Synthesize your observations into an interpretation: *are* we to see Gandhi as offering a real solution? To build an answer, take turns proposing an interpretation of details using the formula: "for this issue, it's significant that *X* because *Y*." *X* has to be from the passage; *Y* may take more of the novel into account.
4. Make notes together, so that any member of your group could talk through, in a clear paragraph, how the passage works narratively, thematically, and politically, for the whole class. This paragraph must address Gandhi's position, Bakha's response, and Anand's representation of them both.