

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction  
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Prof. Andrew Goldstone ([andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu](mailto:andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu))  
Office hours: Monday 2 p.m., or by appointment

April 29, 2021. Anand (2).

## review: geographic analogies

- ▶ the periphery (“global South”)
  - ▶ bad infrastructure
  - ▶ power elsewhere; law replaced by force; rigid social hierarchies
  - ▶ overflow, grotesquerie, life with the dead
  - ▶ cf. Faulkner, Toomer, Hurston...and Joyce
- ▶ the colony
  - ▶ “civilization” belied by visible coercion (military)
  - ▶ color lines (town/cantonment)
  - ▶ “colonial mimicry” (Homi Bhabha)
  - ▶ uneven development (modernization, but spotty)
  - ▶ multilingualism, stratified

## review: English

“Bhangi! (Sweeper) Bhangi!” (69)

He remembered so well the Tommies' familiar abuse of the natives: 'Kala admi zamin par hagne wala' (black man, you who relieve yourself on the ground). (12)

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- ▶ Indian writing in English exists because of imperialism
  - ▶ English was and is a language of education, status, “culture”
  - ▶ *and thus* also a language of Indian nationalism and independence
- ▶ English is privileged over the “vernaculars”
  - ▶ English can reach a national and international audience
  - ▶ but never an Indian majority: never Bakha
- ▶ English is remade by globalization
  - ▶ Anand creates a distinctive literary register of Indian English

The sahib, however, was singing, singing to himself and saying *Yessuh Messih* was the son of God. How could God have a son? Who is God? If God is like Rama, He has no son, for he had never heard that Rama had a son. It was all so puzzling that he thought of excusing himself by lying to the sahib that he had to go to work and couldn't come with him....

[The Colonel sings a hymn...] forgetting, as he had often done while had been with Bakha, that the sweeper-boy didn't understand a word of what he was singing. (112–13)

## caste: the basics

- ▶ 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 Act, 1950 Constitution)
  - ▶ Dalit (contemporary)

Caste underscores every aspect of Indian life: from the ownership of resources, to the systemic, routine marginalisation of lower-caste and indigenous people, which denies them access to healthcare, education and employment. The rigours of upper-caste endogamy mean that people from lower castes are rarely able to have relationships, or even friendships, with those outside their caste.

Earlier this month [December 2020], Devraj Anuraji, a 25-year-old farm hand in the state of Madhya Pradesh, went to a small party. He picked up a plate to serve himself some food, and two upper-caste men took offence. They cornered Anuraji, beat him senseless and dumped his unconscious body outside his family home. Two hours later he died. A few days after his murder, a member of parliament from Madhya Pradesh publicly reiterated the sanctity of the caste system, as adumbrated in ancient Hindu texts, and admonished lower-caste people for protesting against the word ‘untouchable’.

Skye Arundhati Thomas, “[Caste Atrocities](#),” *LRB Blog*, December 21, 2020.

## Discussion

- ▶ How does *Untouchable* explain the caste system to its readers? Find an indicative passage.



The contempt of those who came to the latrines daily and complained that there weren't any latrines clean, the sneers of the people in the outcastes' colony, the abuse of the crowd which had gathered round him this morning. It was all explicable now. A shock of which this was the name had passed through his perceptions, previously numb and torpid... "I am an Untouchable," he said to himself, an "Untouchable!" (42)

"But, you eater of your masters! why did you sit down on my doorstep, if you had to sit down at all! You have defiled my religion! You should have sat there in the gully!"... She saw the sadhu waiting. (60)

That the Mahatma should want to be born as an outcaste! That he should love scavenging! (130)

## another affiliation

In the world of that time, it was not possible for the voice of the rejected to be heard.

Anand, South Asian Literary Recordings Project, Library of Congress, New Delhi Office, 2000[?].

[www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/delhi/salrp/mulkrajanand.html](http://www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/delhi/salrp/mulkrajanand.html).

## 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* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), 14. [UMDL Texts](#).

## novel problems

Several challenges presented themselves: 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; and the attempt to create a vision of revolutionary social change in a form almost inherently committed to the solidity of society and history.

Denning, "The Novelists' International," 1:710.

## 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?’ (18–19)

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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.’ (37)

‘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!’ (38)

## the politics of untouchability

[Gandhi:] “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.” (Anand, 128)

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, *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables* (Bombay: Thacker, 1943), chap. 4. [ambedkar.org](http://ambedkar.org).



## 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, *Mr. Gandhi*, chap. 10. [ambedkar.org](http://ambedkar.org).

next

- ▶ bring Anand back in