

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction  
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Office hours: Monday 2 p.m., or by appointment

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## review: the caste lesson

- ▶ hereditary occupation, ritual hierarchy, endogamy
    - ▶ the novel teaches you all of it
    - ▶ shown from outside, but Bakha is also outside
    - ▶ and Anand?
    - ▶ kin groups and estates
- jāti : “Bhangi! (Sweeper) Bhangi!” (69); Scheduled Castes  
varṇa : “By caste he [Anand] is a Kshatriya” (143)

## review: the proletarian novel

- ▶ a world literature: “the voice of all the rejected”
- ▶ formal problems of the genre
  - ▶ making you mad
  - ▶ collective subject
  - ▶ historical change

## technique and affiliation

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 baskets 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 himself 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-bond 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, the pink, the mauve and the fawn of the newly wedded brides, and all the tints of the shifting, changing crowd, from the Brahmin's white to the grass-cutter's coffee and the Pathan's swarthy brown. (34–35)

## affiliation/distinction

He [Gandhi] suggested I should cut down more than a hundred pages, especially those passages in which Bakha seemed to be thinking and dreaming and brooding like a Bloomsbury intellectual.

Anand, "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*," 135.

## discussion: Gandhi's speech

1. Consider the sentences in the segment beginning “Bakha felt thrilled...” (130) one at a time, and explain what each 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. *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. 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?

## revolutionary potential

He stood lost for a moment, confused in the shimmering rays, feeling as though there were nothing but the sun, the sun, everywhere, in him, on him, before him and behind him....As he emerged from the world of that rare, translucent lustre into which he had been lifted, he stumbled over a stone and muttered a curse. (26)

His wealth of unconscious experience, however, was extraordinary. It was a kind of crude sense of the world, in the round, such as the peasant has who can do the job while the laboratory agriculturalist is scratching his head. (81)

A superb specimen of humanity he seemed whenever he made the high resolve to say something, to go and do something, his fine form rising like a tiger at bay. (54)

A murderer might have advanced like that, one confident in his consummate mastery of the art of killing. (48)

## what happened?

1884 James, “The Art of Fiction”

1891 Tagore, “poṣṭmāṣṭār”

1893 James, “The Middle Years”

1916 Joyce, *Portrait*

1918 Tagore, *Mashi and Other Stories*

1923 Toomer, *Cane*

1923 Sayers, *Whose Body?*

1925 Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

1929 Hammett, *Maltese Falcon*

1930 Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*

1935 Anand, *Untouchable*

1937 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*



## four tendencies (...or?)

- ▶ elevating fiction: James, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner
  - ▶ ...Hammett, Toomer, Anand?
- ▶ specializing popular genre: Sayers, Hammett
  - ▶ ...Joyce, Faulkner, Hurston, Narayan?
- ▶ contesting racial representation: Toomer, Hurston
  - ▶ ...Faulkner, Anand?
- ▶ globalizing English: Tagore, Anand, Narayan
  - ▶ ...James, Joyce, Faulkner, Hammett, Toomer, Hurston?

## running themes

- ▶ techniques of consciousness
- ▶ Bildung
- ▶ the artist figure
- ▶ Standard English and its others
- ▶ the people, the folk, the masses
- ▶ ...

next

- ▶ come to my office hours in the fall
- ▶ read books