

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction

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November 10, 2025. Anand (2).

review: comparative literature

- ▶ Faulkner, Narayan, Anand all write from peripheral situations, the global South
 - ▶ social/natural disorder: mess everywhere (land, water, family, region, class)
 - ▶ modernity as uneven development: time out of joint
 - ▶ individual agency dwarfed by larger social/natural forces
 - ▶ pretty funny (grotesque)
- ▶ their narrative is the obverse of reportage
 - ▶ Narayan published in a newspaper (*The Hindu*, Madras)
 - ▶ Faulkner and Anand are documenting big social problems (muckraking)
 - ▶ ...but the perspective is not journalistic

review: language

"Bhangi! (Sweeper) Bhangi!" (69)

- ▶ What does English signify, again?

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- ▶ What does English signify, again?
- ▶ English as a world literary language
 - ▶ ...in Bakha's unequal world: "fashun"; "I will pay you an anna per lesson" (31);
 - ▶ ...in Anand's unequal world: footnotes, local-color idioms
 - ▶ in the relation of EN to CF (or is it EF?)

talking back?

There were many legends current about this hat. Some said it was a symbol of authority of the *sahib logs* (white men) who ruled over the regiment. Other said that the hat had been forgotten in the regimental office by a sahib (officer) once, and since, being a sahib (rich man), he didn't care to reclaim his lost property, it had been kept on at the quarter-guard. (86)

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He had often felt like reading Waris Shah's *Hir and Ranjah*.^{*} And he had felt a burning desire, while he was in the British barracks, to speak the *tish-mish*, *tish-mish* which the Tommies spoke. (30)

caste: the lesson

- ▶ What does this novel teach you about caste, and how? Find specifics.



Umesh Solanki, "Mansukh Bhangi, Public Toilet, Adesar," photograph, February 7, 2012, nirdharumesh.blogspot.com. Adesar is in Gujarat, in the west of India.

in theory...

- varṇa** four scriptural "estates": Brāhmaṇ, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, Śūdra; Brāhmaṇs dominate, Kṣatriyas rule (in theory)
- jāti** thousands of communal/occupational groups, including Muslims, Sikhs, Jains
- Dalits** jātis outside and beneath the varṇas; ritually "untouchable"; now legally protected ("Scheduled Castes") but still often persecuted

teaching methods

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Now Sohini being of the lowest caste among the outcastes would naturally be looked down upon by Gulabo. The delicate features of her rising beauty had added fuel to Gulabo's fire. (17)

He was a sweeper, he knew, but he could not consciously accept that fact. He had begun to work at the latrines at the age of six and resigned himself to the hereditary life of the craft, but he dreamed of becoming a sahib. (30-31)

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learning outcomes: bad

"No, no," said Lakha. "They are really kind. We must realize that it is religion which prevents them from touching us." He had never throughout his narrative renounced his deep-rooted sense of inferiority and the docile acceptance of the laws of fate. (70)

learning outcomes: better?

Like a ray of light shooting through the darkness, the recognition of his position, the significance of his lot dawned upon him.... 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, and had sent a quiver into his being, stirred his nerves of sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste, all into a quickening. "I am an Untouchable," he said to himself, "an Untouchable!" (42)

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.

Michael Denning, "The Novelists' International," in *The Novel: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 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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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. (32)

'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)

next

- ▶ finish *Untouchable*
- ▶ Forster's afterword
- ▶ Anand, "Genesis" (Canvas)