

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction

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November 12, 2025. Anand (3).

review: the lesson of caste

- ▶ the novel explicitly shows you how caste *works*
 - ▶ jāti: hereditary occupation, ritual hierarchy, endogamy
 - ▶ the ideology of the four varṇas and their outside (the "outcastes")
 - ▶ the daily *process* of making caste happen (oppression, resignation, habit)
- ▶ not matter for contemplation: pathos, disgust, outrage, mobilization
 - ▶ problems of the "proletarian novel": collectivity and activism
 - ▶ Anand: "In the world of that time, it was not possible for the voice of the rejected to be heard."

South Asian Literary Recordings Project, Library of Congress, New Delhi Office, 2000[?].
www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/delhi/salrp/mulkrajanand.html.
 - ▶ an Indian novel, but also a world novel: "the voice of the rejected" (class and caste...and race)

affiliation/distinction

In the exuberant first draft of *Bakha*, I later felt I had tried not only to assimilate the stream of consciousness method, but also had allowed myself to imitate Joyce's word coinage, puns and other literary eccentricities....

I read my novel to Gandhiji and he 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. The old man wanted me, as far as possible, to transliterate from the mother-tongue.

Anand, "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*," 133, 134–35. Other sources give the date of Anand's visit to Gandhi's ashram as 1929 rather than 1927.

...distinction: the double-edged sword

And no Untouchable could have written the book, because he would have been involved in indignation and self-pity. Mr Anand stands in the ideal position. By caste he is a Kshatriya...He has just the right mixture of insight and detachment.

E.M. Forster, preface to *Untouchable* (London: Wishart, 1935), 9, rpt. as afterword to *Untouchable* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 142–43.

The great little man came into sight. His body was swathed in a milk-white blanket, and only his dark clean-shaven head was visible, with its protruding big ears, its expansive forehead, its long nose, bridged by a pair of glasses which were divided in the lenses in two, the upper for looking, the lower for reading. There was a quixotic smile on his thin lips, something Mephistophelean in the determined little chin immediately under his mouth and the long toothless jaws resting on his small neck. But withal there was something beautiful and saintly in the face. (125)



Studio photograph, 1931, [Wikimedia Commons](#).

ipsissima verba

I do want to attain *Moksha*. I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings, and the affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition...

The fault does not lie in the Hindu Religion but in those who profess it. In order to emancipate yourselves you shall have to purify yourselves. You shall have to get rid of evil habits like drinking.

"Mr. Gandhi and the Suppressed Classes," *Young India*, May 4, 1921: 144, [HathiTrust](#). This is a reprint (in Gandhi's own paper) of a speech Gandhi made in Ahmedabad on April 13, 1921, the anniversary of the Amritsar massacre in 1919.

- What is the effect of including Gandhi's own words in the novel?

discussion-discussion

- ▶ Consider either Gandhi's speech (128ff) or the dialogue between Bashir and Iqbal (132ff).
 - ▶ What kinds of arguments do these learned characters make?
 - ▶ How does the novel report Bakha's response to their arguments?
 - ▶ How does the combined presentation of speakers and audience **frame** these ideas?

comment thread

There was only one queer voice which dissented from all this.

"Gandhi is a humbug," it was saying. "He is a fool. He is a hypocrite. In one breath he says he wants to abolish untouchability, in the other he asserts that he is an orthodox Hindu. He is running counter to the spirit of our age, which is democracy..."

Bakha came down the tree like a black bear, and arrested the democrat's attention by the ridiculous sight he presented. He was going to slink away shyly, but the man, a fair-complexioned Muhammadan dressed in the mostly 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." (133)

Gandhi's speech in the novel

Bakha felt thrilled the very marrow of his bones. That the Mahatma should want to be born as an outcaste! That he should love scavenging! He loved the man. (130)

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. (131)

The Mahatma's face appeared before him enigmatic, ubiquitous. There was no answer to be found in it. Yet there was a queer kind of strength to be derived from it. (138)

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next

- ▶ *Nightwood*, in book form, in class. 3–54.