
UNIT 1 A SHORT HISTORY OF THE INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Early Essayists
- 1.3 Early Fiction
- 1.4 The First Indian English Novel
- 1.5 Other Early Novels
- 1.6 Towards Independence – Novels and Novelists
- 1.7 Post-Independence – Novels and Novelists till 1980
 - 1.7.1 The Trinity
 - 1.7.2 Other Novelists
- 1.8 Rushdie and After
- 1.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.10 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will delineate a short history of the Indian English novel in order to understand the trends in its growth from the very beginning till the turn of the millennium. We will try to identify the concerns and themes of the novelists.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

When we think of the early Indian English novel, we think of the trinity – Mulk Raj Anand (b. 1905), R.K. Narayan (b. 1906), and Raja Rao (b. 1908). All three began writing in the nineteen thirties and all three have seen the turn of the century. Their influence or their importance in the world of the Indian English novel cannot be measured. With Anand's **Untouchable**, Narayan's **Swami and Friends**, and Rao's **Kanthapura**, the Indian English novel found its place in the gamut of Indian literatures.

But the Indian English novel did not have its beginnings in the thirties of the twentieth century. How could that have been when the modern novel came to India in English, with the English?

English education was introduced in India in early nineteenth century. It is reasonable to expect that essays and articles and sketches would have begun to flow from Indian pens soon after, especially with the establishment of English journals and newspapers. With the English presence in India from even earlier, it should be expected that some Indians wrote in English even earlier than that. All this should lead almost naturally to fiction in English – short as well as long.

1.2 EARLY ESSAYISTS

But even to begin the history of the Indian English novel without mentioning other earlier prose writings is to do injustice to earlier writers. The stage for longer fiction was set by sketches and memoirs and short fiction. Dean Mohamed (1795-1851) has

lately been discovered to have the greatest claims to have been the first Indian writer in English with his travelogue laying claim to be the first published Indian English text. But usually the credit for this has been given to Cavelly Venkata Boriah (1776-1803) whose **Account of the Jains**, written c. 1803, was published in 1809. But the first Indian prose writer of note in English is not so surprisingly Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833). M.K. Naik regards his essay **A Defence of Hindu Theism** (1817) as the "first original publication of significance in Indian English literature."¹

If Raja Rammohun Roy is well-known as a social reformer for his essays as well as his belief in and advocacy of English as a tool to eradicate the ills of Hindu society, there were other prose writers in the middle and later years of the 19th century. Some of the writers like Krishna Mohan Banerji (1813-85) and Ram Gopal Ghose (1815-68) were early beneficiaries of English education. Both were students of Henry Derozio, the famous poet. Ram Gopal Ghose was also known as an orator. Expectedly many of the pieces are about social reform and more than a few are journalistic pieces or treatises. As in the case of other Indian languages, it was the establishment of journals and magazines and newspapers that contributed to the development of Indian English prose.

In western India, one of the major essayists was Behramji Malabari (1853-1912). Malabari was also a poet but here we are interested in his role as one of the pioneers of Indian journalism. Malabari wrote periodical essays in the style of Addison and Steele. His essays were collected in two volumes, **Gujarat and Gujaratis** (1882), and **The Indian Eye on English Life** (1895). His style and humour make him an essayist of a high calibre. He too was a social reformer with a steady eye. Nagesh Vishwanath Pai (1860-1920) was Malabari's contemporary and equal in prose writing. His **Stray Sketches from Chakmakpore** (1894) is a collection of character sketches drawn from different strata of society. According to Ramamurti, Chakmakpore is the forerunner of Narayan's Malgudi.

1.3 EARLY FICTION

A Journal of 48 hours of the Year 1945 by Kylash Chunder Dutt was published in **The Calcutta Literary Gazette** (6th June 1835). This is the tale of an unsuccessful revolt against the British. This piece of literary fantasy once again underlines how Indian English literature (think also of Henry Derozio's poetry) was nationalistic in nature from the very beginning. Or to put it differently, Indian English literature felt the need to distance itself from any sense of complicity in British rule. Writing in English perforce meant critiquing the English as well as the local Indian reality.

Shoshee Chunder Dutt (1825-1886) was a JP and a Rai Bahadur. His short novel, **The Republic of Orissa: Annals from the pages of the Twentieth Century**, was published in the **Saturday Evening Hurkaru** on 25th May, 1845. The action in this tale takes place in the second decade of the twentieth century. The British are defeated and a republic is established in Orissa. Once again English is used against the English!

1.4 THE FIRST INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL

As a matter of fact the famous Bengali novelist, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya (1838-94), wrote his first novel in English. This was **Rajmohan's Wife**, which was serialised as **Wife** in the Calcutta weekly, **The Indian Field**, in 1864. This was published in book form only in the 1930s, and republished in 1990s. Bankim was much influenced by the English novelists that he had read, Sir Walter Scott and

Charles Dickens in particular. **Rajmohan's Wife**, like his Bengali novels, deals with social issues of the day. In a sense, the main agenda of the Indian English novel was set in this first attempt itself. **Rajmohan's Wife** is about the effects of a bad marriage on the woman. The sufferings of a middle class housewife, Matangini at the hands of her husband, Rajmohan, in rural East Bengal forms the subject of the novel. This was the time of social reform and it shouldn't surprise us that the first Indian English novel isn't a historical romance as has been suggested some times but a social novel. Bankim may not have written another novel in English but his Bengali novels were to influence the course of the novel in India.

1.5 OTHER EARLY NOVELS

The second Indian English novel of note is also by a Bengali. Lal Behari Day published **Govinda Samanta, or, the History of a Bengal Raivat** in 1874. The novel is set in Burdwan district in mid-nineteenth century. The author's intention in his own prefatory words is to furnish "a plain and unvarnished tale of a plain peasant living in the plain country of Bengal." This novel is a family saga, which relates the life and times of Govinda Samanta, from his birth till death. We see the trials and vicissitudes of his extended family. The novel is said to have won a prize offered in 1871 for the best novel in Bengali or English illustrating the 'Social and Domestic Life of the Rural Population and Working Classes of Bengal.' What it therefore achieves and introduces into the Indian English novel is a high level of realism.

Lal Behari Day was aware of the challenges of portraying Indian reality in the English language. How would you have Bengali peasants speak in English? Day, like R.K. Narayan later, makes his peasants speak in 'good' English. He realises that his characters speak 'better' English than English peasants but as he says if he had made them speak in some kind of rural English dialect, "I should have turned them into English and not Bengali peasants."² He writes elsewhere of cultural differences and like all Indian English writers deliberately cross pollinates the English language with Indian cultural markers. The challenge of the medium was best articulated more than sixty years later by Raja Rao in his famous foreword to **Kanthapura**.

You would have noticed that most of the writers named so far are from eastern India. This is after all a short introduction and can name only a few select writers. But even so, the early writers in English all came from areas which had the greatest British influence, namely the Bengal region, the western coast, and the south. Since we are looking at the rise of the Indian English novel, we have concentrated on eastern India. If you want to know the names of essayists and prose writers from other areas of India, you should refer to M.K. Naik's history. You will also get to know the names of other early novelists. I am only going to refer to the more famous among them in this unit.

Toru Dutt (1856-77) is better known as a poet. But she may very well be the first woman novelist in Indian English, and perhaps the first Indian novelist in French! Her unfinished English novel, **Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden**, was published in Calcutta in 1878. This is a romantic love story set in England. Malashri Lal believes that Toru Dutt couldn't finish this novel because it was autobiographical and "mirrored the turbulence in her young life"³ and that she was critiquing people close to her in it. Critics have felt it a great pity that the novel is incomplete because as K.S. Ramamurti puts it, if the novel had been completed, "it would have given us not only the first good Indian novel in English but a beautiful model for the Indian writers of English fiction, if not in terms of content, at least in terms of a natural graceful style."⁴ Because her setting is English and even the Spanish characters are settled in England, Toru Dutt does not have the usual challenges of the Indian English

writer. Thus she can exhibit her felicity in the language, which makes for good reading, as Ramamurti points out.

Mention must be made here of another woman writer, Krupabai Sathianandhan (1862-1894). She was one of the earliest women medical students but unfortunately her health did not permit her to complete her education. She lived with her husband in Ooty and later Madras (now Chennai). She wrote for the South Indian Observer, and the National Indian Journal. What she is known for are her two novels. Both were published in the **Journal of Madras Christian College**. They were published in book form after her death. Both **Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life** (1894), and **Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life** (1895) are autobiographical in nature. **Saguna** is about her earlier years and depicts the transformation of a Hindu brahmin family into a Christian household. **Saguna** is set in present-day Maharashtra and Gujarat where Krupabai grew up. **Kamala** was written after the loss of her child and is about her sorrows and conflicts. Both these novels have been reprinted recently.

By now you would have noted that the impact of colonialism can be seen not only in the use of a new language to write in but also in concerns of the writers – from reform and defence of Hinduism and/or a new construction of India, to the depiction and sometimes celebration of conversion to Christianity. This is even more apparent in the genre of poetry.

While on the subject of women novelists, we must not ignore Shevantibai Nikambe, social reformer and educationist, who wrote **Ratnabai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Wife** (1895). This short novel holds forth the ideal of a companionate marriage. A young married girl, whose husband is away in England, is sent to school against all opposition by her father. She suffers much at the hands of her in laws but when her husband returns he finds a wife he can converse with and all ends happily. This was part of the larger discourse of reform and the treatment of women in Hindu society.

Other women writers who normally find mention in the history of Indian English fiction are Rajalakshmi Debi whose novel in verse form, **The Hindoo Wife or The Enchanted Fruit**, was published in 1876, and Cornelia Sorabji, a distinguished lawyer, who published three collections of short stories in the first decade of the twentieth century. These much admired collections are **Love and Life Behind the Purdah** (1901), **Sun Babies** (1904), and **Between the Twilights** (1908). While Sorabji never wrote a novel, Rabindranath Tagore's sister Swarnakumari Ghosal (1855=1932) wrote three – **The Fatal Garland** (1910), **An Indian Love Story** (1910), and **An Unfinished Song** (1913). The first is a historical romance while the last is novel of sensibility that shows the influence of novelists like George Eliot.

To turn to male novelists of late nineteenth and early twentieth century, we find that many wrote historical romances. But, Shoshee Chunder Dutt, whom we have already referred to, wrote **Shunkur: A Tale of Indian Mutiny 1857**, and **The Young Zamindar** (1883), both of which depict the greatness of the cultural heritage of the country and aim at raising the consciousness of the readers to fight for political freedom. H Dutt wrote adventure fiction and is known for two novels – **Bijay Chand: An Indian Tale** (1888) and **Lieut. Suresh Biswas: His Life and Adventures** (1900). Some of the historical romances written around that time are – Chakravarti Khetrpal's **Sarala and Hingana** (1895), and T Ramakrishna Pillai's **Padmini: an Indian Romance** (1903), and **The Dive for Death: An Indian Romance** (1911), S.M. Mitra's **Hindupore: A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest – An Anglo-Indian Romance** (1909), and Balkrishna's **The Love of Kusuma: An Eastern Love Story** (1910).

While Romesh Chunder Dutt translated his own Bengali novels into English – **The Lake of Palms: A Story of Indian Domestic Life** (1902), and **The Slave Girl of Agra, an Indian Historical Romance** (1909) – one a novel of social reform and

widow remarriage and the other a historical romance as promised in the title, Sarath Kumar Ghosh wrote a fantasy, **1001 Indian Nights: The Trials of Narayan Lal** (1906), and **The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna** (1909). Ghosh's second novel is perhaps one of the earliest to explore the East-West encounter, a popular theme in the Indian English novel.

Two novelists from the early years of the twentieth century deserve mention here. They are Rajam Iyer and A Madhaviah, both from Madras. Both were pioneers of the Tamil novel, both publishing their first novels in Tamil in 1896. Rajam Iyer's importance is not so much in the number of novels he wrote – he actually wrote only one incomplete novel – but in that he wrote in English at all and in what he wrote. **True Greatness of Vasudeva Sastri**, which appeared as a serial in 1896-98, was published posthumously in book form in 1925. This religious novel about a vedantin is seen as a forerunner of novels by Raja Rao.

A Madhaviah wrote quite a few novels in English – **Satyananda** (1909), **Thillai Govindan** (1916), which was published earlier, in 1908, under a different title (**A Posthumous Autobiography** edited by Pamba), **Clarinda** (1915), **Nanda, the Pariah who Overcame Caste** (1923), and **Lt. Panju – A Modern Indian** (1924). **Thillai Govindan** is about a contemporary Tamil Brahmin youth and the impact of western education on his life. It ends with his rediscovery of faith in Hinduism. **Clarinda** is a historical romance about a woman who was converted to Christianity in Tanjore. It is believed that she built the first church in that part of the country. According to Ramamurti, the church still stands in Palamcottah and is known as Glorianda Church. The novel traces the growth and development of a Maratha Brahmin girl from innocence and naivete to heroism. According to Ramamurti, one of the major achievements of Madhaviah is the language spoken by his characters. His Indian characters and his English characters speak very differently from each other even while he manages to make them speak in colloquial English. Ramamurti also feels that Madhaviah's humour is similar to that of R.K. Narayan's. He manages to portray the middle class India of his times with wonderful felicity and ease.

1.6 TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE – NOVELS AND NOVELISTS

When what Naik calls the Gandhian whirlwind struck India, many things changed including the novel. What we are talking about is the intensification of the sense of nationalism and the attempts to use all means to construct the idea of a modern India. Once again we begin with a novelist who was also a poet. This is K.S. Venkataramani (1891-1951). He has two novels – **Murugan, the Tiller** (1927), and **Kandan, the Patriot: A Novel of New India in the Making** (1932). **Murugan** contrasts the life of two friends, Kedari and Ramu, the former a materialist and the latter a Gandhian. A Gandhian colony is established at the end of the novel and the two friends settle down there. **Kandan** is set during the period of the Civil Disobedience movement. Kandan, an ICS officer who has been educated in England, resigns from government service and joins the freedom movement only to be killed at the end.

The problem with Venkataramani's novels is that their narrative style leaves a lot to be desired. Venkataramani doesn't seem to have been impressed by any contemporary narrative models. This is true of his contemporary A.S.P. Ayyar as well. Ayyar, an ICS officer, was a dramatist as well. He couldn't write novels about contemporary politics because of his official position. So like nineteenth century poets, he resorts to Indian history to construct his idea of India. His novels are **Baladitya** (1930), and **Three Men of Destiny** (1939). He split the latter novel into two parts and published them separately as **The Legions Thunder Past** (1947), and **Chanakya and Chandragupta** (1951). **Baladitya** is set in the 5th century and is about the defeat of invading foreigners, in this case the Huns. **Three Men of Destiny**

is about the aftermath of Alexander's invasion of India. The three men are Alexander, Chandragupta Maurya, and Chanakya.

Another novelist we should name before we talk of the trinity is K. Nagarajan. His *Athavar House* (1937) is a family saga that depicts a Maharashtrian Vaishnava Brahmin family settled in the south. It portrays a joint family, and explores the impact of modernity and Gandhism on the family. Nagarajan has another novel set in the thirties, but this, *Chronicle of Kedaram*, came out much later, in 1961.

As we know the trinity of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao began writing in the 1930s. You are studying all three writers though only two of them have their novels prescribed for you. R.K. Narayan finds place in your course only as a short story writer, but I advise you strongly to read his novels, especially one of the following two – *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), or *Vendor of Sweets* (1967), both of which treat Mahatma Gandhi and the impact of Gandhism quite differently. All three writers began writing during the freedom struggle soon after the Civil Disobedience movement of early 1930s. The issues they tackled were all relevant issues of the time, issues that had to be depicted and debated in the quest to construct an ideal nation. You have Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) in your course and you'll know immediately that issues of caste and 'the upliftment of the downtrodden', modernity and religion, the role of religions, the effects of colonialism, the question of gender roles – mainly the place of women in society, the situation of the village and the peasantry, all find place in the Indian English novel as influenced by the trinity. Not that these issues had not entered the novel earlier but that these novelists had a great impact, which can be felt even today.

Mulk Raj Anand (b. 1905) is a prolific writer. He went to England in 1924 to do research in philosophy and came back a committed socialist. He even took part in the Spanish Civil War. His other interest than fiction has been art criticism – he is the founder editor of the art magazine, *Marg*. His first literary efforts were to chronicle the lives of the under-privileged. If *Untouchable* is about a sweeper, *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) are about labourers. If *Coolie* depicts the lives of displaced labourers who are exploited by all kinds of economic forces including colonialism, *Two Leaves and a Bud* exposes the conditions of plantation life in British India. If in the first the protagonist comes down from the hills, in the second the protagonist is lured from Punjab to Assam. The trilogy – *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1941), and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) – on the Punjabi peasant followed next. The trilogy follows the life of Lal Singh who rebels against his village mores. He fights in the first world war in Flanders, is taken prisoner by the Germans, becomes a communist and ends up in prison again in India! In his last novel before Indian Independence, Mulk Raj Anand depicts one day in the life of a coppersmith. *The Big Heart* (1945) debates the virtue of the machine and modernity.

You would have realised through your reading of *Untouchable* that Anand is quite passionate about his causes. He displays what Naik calls "ruthless realism" (Naik, p. 160). He goes boldly where very few if any have gone before, inventing an English that has the flavour of Punjab. This is one of the major achievements of the trinity who each in his own way manages to write an English that is constructed by and constructs the geographical and social space depicted by their novels.

R. K. Narayan (b. 1906) is a very different writer from Anand. Narayan is one of the few Indian English writers of the earlier generation, or even any generation, who has been a full time writer. Thanks to television adaptations of his stories, his fictional town, Malgudi, is known to more than the readers of Indian English fiction. All his works have Malgudi as their setting, and he polishes and carves this one inch of ivory to perfection. His is the middle class world of the small town – modernity has impinged on this society but not whole sale westernisation. In his novels written before Independence, Narayan develops and fixes the ingredients of his recipe for his successful fiction. *Swami and Friends* is a delightful tale about the escapades of a

schoolboy. **The Bachelor of Arts** (1937) is about the goings on in the life of a bachelor, Chandran, who rebelling against the idea of an arranged marriage even becomes a sanyasi for some time. He, of course, returns to a traditional arranged marriage! **The Dark Room** (1938) is Narayan's attempt at something different – a story about the suffering and abortive rebellion of a housewife. Narayan never attempted such serious fiction again though **The English Teacher** (1946), which was written after the tragic death of his wife, is a poignant novel about loss and reconciliation. This novel explores the world of the supernatural, again a subject that Narayan does not deal with seriously ever again. This understandably was his last novel before Independence.

Raja Rao (b.1908) who completes the trinity is as different from the other two as possible. You will not get the complete picture of this novelist from the novel in the course. **Kanthapura** is the only novel written by Raja Rao before Independence and this too shows a writer contemplating and depicting the changes that were taking place in the making of the modern nation. You will be studying the novel and I don't want to anticipate the discussion here but you would have realised after reading the novel that the foreword to **Kanthapura** is one of the most important documents in Indian English literature. It is here that an Indian English writer sets out as fully as Rao does the agenda for Indian English writers, their intents and the challenges they have to face. The problematic as he puts it is "to convey in a language not one's own the spirit that is one's own." So while the language is foreign, the experience is local. But the language isn't completely outside our ambit, he says. He identifies that English has the same position of power as Sanskrit or Persian had in their days. And the Indian English writer chooses to write in the language of power and the powerful. But, cautions Rao, this does not mean that the Indian English writer wants to be appropriated, he doesn't want to write like the English. The colonial encounter has changed all, and the Indian English writer has to use the space in between the coloniser's language and culture and the local traditional lives and experiences in order to create what the English writer cannot, and create what is made possible only because the writing is in English. Thus the Indian English writer is duty bound to create and use Englishes that makes it impossible for the monolingual English reader to appropriate his/her experience with any degree of ease. Don't write like the English, and don't write what can be easily written in the Indian language of your region. This is the agenda that Raja Rao sets forth and you will have to decide how well he achieves his own ends. Do you think the situation is still the same or that it has changed now?

There are some other writers and novels that need to be looked at however brief this history may aim to be. One of the most interesting novels of this era is **Twilight in Delhi** (1940) by Ahmed Ali. Ahmed Ali portrays middle class Muslim life in early twentieth century Delhi, and attempts to capture the decay of a culture. Ahmed Ali became a Pakistani citizen after Partition, but this novel remains a landmark in Indian English fiction. Iqbalunnisa Hussain's **Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household** (1944) delivers what it promises – an intimate picture of a way of life. Another novelist who deserves mention is K.A. Abbas who wrote many popular film scripts for Raj Kapoor, the noted Hindi film maker. His novel **Tomorrow is Ours: A Novel of the India of Today** (1943), tries to construct an India with a role to play in world affairs. There are a number of other novelists who wrote novels on the freedom struggle and its impact.

1.7 POST-INDEPENDENCE – NOVELS AND NOVELISTS TILL 1980

1.7.1 The Trinity

The trinity have continued their long and distinguished career after Independence but there have also been a number of other major novelists during the period we are looking at. How many can you name?

Mulk Raj Anand returned to India for good in 1945 and didn't write for some time because of a nervous breakdown. **Seven Summers** (1951), his next book, was understandably a fictional recreation of his childhood, and was meant to be the first of a series of autobiographical novels with Krishan Chander as protagonist. After **Private Life of an Indian Prince** (1953), a novel about a milieu with which he did not have much familiarity, Anand returned to familiar territory with **The Old Woman and the Cow** (1960). The Old Woman and the Cow is about peasant life and the pressures on people that drives them to inhumanity in order to survive. The protagonist is Gauri, the 'cow' of the title, who is deserted by her husband and sold off by her grandmother who has to choose between her cow and Gauri. Gauri grows from a cow to a tigress!

Anand's next novel was **The Road** (1963) which travels the same territory as **Untouchable**. **The Death of Hero** (1964), which Anand reissued in the 1990s, is about Kashmir. His next two novels were part of his autobiographical series. **Morning Face** (1970), which won the Sahitya Akademi Award, and **Confessions of a Lover** (1976) follow the career of Krishan Chunder through his schooldays, adolescence, college and an unsuccessful love affair, till he leaves for England.

R.K. Narayan achieved greater fame and fortune after Independence. He started off with **Mr. Sampath** (1949), a novel about the world of films, and then wrote **The Financial Expert** (1952), **Waiting for the Mahatma** (1955), **The Guide** (1958), **The Maneater of Malgudi** (1962), **The Vendor of Sweets** (1967), **The Painter of Signs** (1976), **A Tiger for Malgudi** (1983), and **The Talkative Man** (1986), **The World of Nagaraj** (1990), and **The Grandmother's Tale** (1993). Critics feel that Narayan was at the height of his powers from **The Financial Expert** till **The Vendor of Sweets**. Narayan is a delightful comic writer who studies middle class small town South Indian mores. **The Guide**, which won the Sahitya Akademi Award, is perhaps his most famous book and did very well in a movie version that R.K. Narayan himself did not feel too happy about.

Raja Rao has written more than he has been able to publish and his second book **Serpent and the Rope** (1960), which won him his Sahitya Akademi Award, showed him in very different light from **Kanthapura**. This novel, autobiographical in tone, is about the travels of a young man abroad and his life and loves till he understands that he needs to search for the true Guru for an understanding of life. This philosophical novel, in which, as Naik puts it, "the philosophy is not in the story – the philosophy is the story", signals the arrival of the philosopher novelist. Rao's **The Cat and Shakespeare** (1965) is a metaphysical comedy. Rao tries a different kind of novel in **Comrade Kirilov** (1976) where he looks at the life of an Indian intellectual, Padmanabha Iyer (the Kirilov of the title), in the 1930s and 40s in England. His recent work is the voluminous **The Chessmaster and His Moves** (1988). His attempt overall is to espouse an Indian philosophical point of view in the novel.

1.7.2 Other Novelists

A major novelist who began writing in 1947 is Bhabani Bhattacharya (1906-1988). Another social realist, he has said that every novel should have a social purpose. His first novel, **So Many Hungers** (1947), is set during the years of the Bengal famine. It depicts the various kinds of exploitations that took place during that period, from that of the colonial power to that of the local traders. **Music for Mohini** (1952) is an attempt to wed the city and the village, through the marriage of a city bred girl who has to then move to a village. In **He Who Rides a Tiger** (1952), Bhattacharya has Kalo, a blacksmith who is jailed for stealing a bunch of bananas, takes revenge on society by becoming a godman. **A Goddess Named Gold** is an allegory where a magic talisman raises false expectations. His next novel, **Shadow from Ladakh** (1966), which won him the Sahitya Akademi Award, is set against the background of the 1962 war with China. In this Gandhism is pitted against modern technology. A

Dream in Hawaii (1978) is Bhattacharya's attempt to explore the East-West encounter. Bhattacharya has had a successful career with his novels being translated into many languages.

Another novelist from Bengal who was quite popular during that period was Sudhindranath Ghose (1899-1965). His tetralogy – **And Gazelles Leaping** (1949), **Cradle of the Clouds** (1951), **The Vermilion Boat** (1953), and **The Flame of the Forest** (1955) – follows the life of a nameless narrator-protagonist through about twenty years of his life. The central theme is the growth of the narrator's mind. This is a wonderful attempt in terms of narrative experimentation, written more like a magic realist tale (in other words, a traditional Indian story) than a western novel. Perhaps Ghose will be back in fashion some time.

If Bhattacharya believes in the novel with a social purpose, the novelist who believes in complete entertainment is Manohar Malgonkar (b. 1913). Among his novels, **Distant Drum** (1960), his first novel, and **Bandicoot Run** (1982) are based in an army setting, a setting with which Malgonkar, as a retired army officer, is familiar. The latter novel is a spy thriller of a high order. He had written another competent espionage novel earlier, **Spy in Amber** (1971). **Combat of Shadows** (1962) is another attempt at writing a fast moving tale of passion and murder. **The Princes** (1963) is a picture of the times when the princely states merged with India and is considered a critical success because Malgonkar seems more interested in the issues than in just telling a fast tale. His novel on the Partition, **A Bend in the Ganges** (1964), is again a readable novel written on a large scale. **The Devil's Wind** (1972) is an attempt to portray the Revolt of 1857. In **Cactus Country** (1992), Malgonkar sees the 1971 war from the point of view of a Pakistani officer. Malgonkar is an exciting writer who deserves to be better known and deserves to be always in print. Among other novelists of this period are Khushwanth Singh (b. 1918), Kamala Markandaya (b. 1924), Nayantara Sahgal (b. 1927), and Arun Joshi (1939-19). These are all novelists with a substantial amount of works. But perhaps this is the time to pause and look at certain novels which have had a great impact in Indian English fiction.

One such novel is G.V. Desani's **All About H. Hatterr** (1948). This is a book that displays great comic virtuosity and anticipates many a post-modernist novel in form and style. It is not easy to summarise this novel which has to be read to be admired for all that it attempts and attempts successfully. What I can say here is that Desani manages to use the language with great flexibility and it is a pity that neither he nor any of his contemporaries could pull it off again, or even tried to do so.

Another novel that I must direct you to read, and this is more easily available and more easily readable, is Attia Hosain's **Sunlight on a Broken Column** (1961), which is an account of life in pre-Partition Lucknow. It is a classic of its kind, looking at the impact on the Muslim aristocracy of the winds of change brought about by the freedom struggle as well as notions of modernity.

Khushwanth Singh's **Train to Pakistan** (1956), which has been made into a feature film recently, is his first and most famous novel. It is the story of the impact of Partition on a village in the western border and how the peaceful life of two communities is rent asunder by forces that they cannot understand. It is a wonderfully paced novel that also tells a love story as it delineates a society. In **I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale** (1959) Khushwanth Singh's portrays a Sikh family and all that it goes through the freedom movement and the 1940s. Singh also has an enormously popular late novel, **Delhi**, to his credit.

Kamala Markandaya has a number of novels to her credit. As a diasporic writer her major concerns seem to be the East-West encounter and the different roles of women. Foreign characters people her fictional Indian world, which in any case shows the effect of processes of modernisation and urbanisation. **Nectar in a Sieve** (1954) is

her first novel and critics have often wondered where in India such a village as depicted in the novel could be. Some of her other novels are: **Some Inner Fury** (1955), **Silence of Desire** (1960), **Possession** (1963), **A Handful of Rice** (1966), **The Coffin Dams** (1969), **The Nowhere Man** (1972), and **Two Virgins** (1973). Markandaya's output is substantial and her novels are eminently readable.

Nauyantara Sahgal, who belongs to the Nehru family, is the only political novelist in Indian English fiction. Her construction of the political space also includes the struggle for identity of the post-Independence Indian woman. **A Time To Be Happy** (1958) is her first novel and it immediately announces the arrival of a fresh new voice. It deals with the last phase of the freedom struggle and the newly independent India. In *Maya*, it has the first of Sahgal's trapped-in-bad-marriage women. This **Time of Morning** (1968), and **Storm in Chandigarh** (1969) depict situations in Independent India and contain portraits of recognisable political figures. Both portray strains within marriage and the polity. **The Day in Shadow** (1971) is again about a marital breakdown as much as it is about political goings on, and **A Situation in New Delhi** (1977) deals with India after Nehru's death. Her finest and most ambitious novel so far has been **Rich Like Us** (1985). This novel deals with the entirety of the history of modern India culminating in the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi. The novel tries to trace the almost inevitability of the journey from Mahatma Gandhi to Indira Gandhi. It is an extremely complex novel which cannot be summarised in this space. Her **Plans for Departure** came out in 1986.

Arun Joshi's **Strange Case of Billy Biswas** (1971) is a wonderful introduction to the world of post-Independence Indian English fiction. This is an extremely well paced book and tells the story of an Indian who returns from the west and where his search for identity takes him in the new nation. He ends up leading a tribe in so called 'primitive' India and is shot dead by a policeman ironically during an effort to secure him by his well wishers. Even his first book, **The Foreigner** (1968), was about a similar theme, of alienation. Joshi's heroes search for meaning in life, for an identity beyond the given. This holds true for two of his other novels, **The Apprentice** (1974), in which the life of an idealistic youth is delineated, and **The Last Labyrinth** (1981), which won him the Sahitya Akademi Award. But Joshi's **The City & the River** (1990) is a political allegory that shows the cyclical nature of human greed and deceit. Joshi is another of the novelists who deserve to be read by future generations.

You have Anita Desai's **Clear Light of Day** (1980) in your course. Anita Desai (b. 1937) is novelist whose career began in 1963 and is still going strong. To a large extent Desai's focus is on the inner world of her main characters, usually women. From *Maya in Cry, the Peacock* (1963) to *Uma in Fasting, Feasting* (1999), her main characters are essentially lonely and struggling with the forces of existence. I don't need to say more here since you will be studying about her. Suffice to say that among women writers, Desai largely shifted the theme from the outer world. This is not entirely true of all her fiction, of course.

I must mention here another single novel that many of you may like to read, Rama Mehta's **Inside the Haveli** (1977), another winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award. In this novel the author portrays the married life of an urban educated woman who is forced into *Purdah* in a Rajput household. Very well written the novel surprises the reader in advocating compromise with this way of life.

1.8 RUSHDIE AND AFTER

1980 is a watershed year in Indian English fiction. The preceding decade had seen the effervescence of Indian English poetry and a sense of ennui had actually descended on the novel. But the publication of **Midnight's Children** by Salman Rushdie (b.

1947) changed all that. This novel led to increased interest in and market for Indian English writing and coupled with a Governmental decision about import of books into India, and the entry of Penguin, led to a boom in publication of Indian English books.

Again you have **Midnight's Children** in your course and therefore I shall not anticipate the discussion of the novel or of Rushdie's works as a whole. Suffice to say that the novel articulates the viewpoint of a migrant who looks at all constructions of nation as fiction. If till **Midnight's Children** you have had Indian English novelists attempting to delineate continuities and define nation-ness, if they have tried to show life in Independent India so as to work towards redefinitions of good citizenship and governance, **MC** brings in the notion of the flawed imagination of nation, of the impossibility of a modern India. As an iconic text of postcolonial literature, **MC** (and Rushdie) celebrates the hybridity of the migrant and argues against alternate Indian visions of purity or continuity or possibility of cultural one-ness. This fiction as true history has influenced many a subsequent novel. His use of joyfully pollinated English language has had an equally great impact.

Among the host of novelists and novels that have come to the fore after 1980, I must look briefly at the career of Amitav Ghosh (b. 1956). Beginning with **The Circle of Reason** (1986), and **The Shadow Lines** (1988), where he shows the constructed and thus shadowy nature of boundaries between states, this immensely talented writer has dissolved the boundaries between fiction and anthropological and historical research. **In an Antique Land** (1993) and **The Glass Palace** (2000) are examples of such uncategorisable writings. In between he wrote a science fiction mystery thriller, **The Calcutta Chromosome** (1996). He has also been an influential essayist writing on subjects as varied as the nuclear bomb and the jungles of Burma.

A writer who has been writing throughout this period and whose reputation has grown quietly is Shashi Deshpande. In her explorations of the lives of middle class women, Deshpande shows you a different facet of society from Anita Desai. Among her novels, you may like to read **The Dark Holds No Terrors** (1980) and **That Long Silence** (1988) in order to get a picture of this accomplished writer.

Other novelists and novels you may wish to read are Upamanyu Chatterji (whose **English, August** explores the empty and angst ridden life of the upper middle class Indian youth has a cult status), Vikram Seth (whose **Golden Gate** is wonderful example of poetic skills used for narration and whose **A Suitable Boy** is a sprawling social realist book of the India of the fifties), I. Allen Sealy (whose **Trotter Nama** heralded the arrival of a great Anglo Indian novelist, and who has followed it up with the critically acclaimed **Everest Hotel**) and Githa Hariharan (whose award winning debut novel **The Thousand Faces of Night** established her as a careful crafts person, a reputation she has safeguarded through her other works). There are many other novelists – for example, the Booker Prize winning Arundhati Roy (**God of Small Things**), Mukul Kesavan (**Looking Through Glass**), Manju Kapoor (**Difficult Daughters**) – that you may already be aware of. There are again a number of diasporic writers including Bharati Mukherjee, Sunetra Gupta, and Rohinton Mistry. There are any number of other writers of varying critical reputation and you have to make your own choices as regards your reading..

1.9 LET US SUM UP

Meenakshi Mukherjee in her influential study of Indian English fiction, **The Twice Born Fiction**, states there were three kinds of fiction from the 1920s till the 1970. They are the historical novel, the socio-political novel, and the novel of identity. The first two broadly occur before Independence and the third occurs after. As she herself

points out this is not meant to be a rigid framework and the phases may overlap, and individual exceptions may always be there. She also identifies the major themes as – 'The Making of a Nation', 'East-West Encounter', and 'Renunciation as an Ideal'.⁵ The major problematic she identifies is that of language and the expression of Indianness. This is tackled both in the language that the writers fashion and the narrative techniques that they use including the use of myths.

The question of language is seen differently by the new writers. As far as they are concerned the language they write in is theirs, English is their first language. But this is an English that has undergone many changes. But even this English cannot represent the complete daily life of any individual in India, where even the die-hard English speaker will have to use some other Indian language(s) in various social situations. If this is not taken into account, many nuances which can be exploited by the writer can be lost to her/him. Also, many Indians do not use English at all in their daily lives. How does the Indian English writer represent them? So even if English is the first language of the new writers they should be aware of the challenges that have always been there for Indian English writers.

After Rushdie, the Indian English novel has gone transnational with many writers living in the west and writing from a perspective beyond nationality. On the other hand, though always with the chance of international exposure, there are many novelists who live and publish in India, who still work on questions of identity in this multicultural multilingual nation. This may be the era of the postmodern novel but Indian English novels still do not forsake India.

1.10 QUESTIONS

1. Write down in point form the milestones in the growth of the early Indian English novel.
2. Assess the contribution of the trinity of Anand, Narayan, and Rao to the growth of the Indian English novel.
3. Name some major women novelists and write about their contribution to Indian English fiction.
4. Examine Raja Rao's foreword to *Kanthapura* and then formulate in your own words the major challenges that the Indian English novelist faces. Name some novels that have met these challenges successfully.
5. Assess the state of the Indian English novel after 1980.

References

- ¹ M.K.Naik. *A History of Indian English Literature*, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982, p.14.
- ² Lal Behari Day. *Govind Samanta, or, The History of a Bengal Raivat*, vol.1, p. 89.
- ³ Malashri Lal. *The law of the Threshold: Women writers in Indian English*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1995, p.37.
- ⁴ K.S.Ramamurti. *Rise of the Indian Novel in English*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1987, p.71.
- ⁵ Meenakshi Mukherjee. *The Twice Born Fiction – Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English*, New Delhi: Heinemann, 1971.

UNIT 2 LIFE AND WORK OF MULK RAJ ANAND

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Early Life
- 2.3 Literary Career
- 2.4 Literary Awards
- 2.5 The Thirties Movement
- 2.6 The Writing and Publication of *Untouchable*
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Questions
- 2.9 Suggested Reading

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to introduce you to the life and work of the pioneer Indian English novelist Mulk Raj Anand. Also a section of the unit is devoted to the Thirties Movement which greatly influenced the writing of Anand. The unit also deals in detail with the circumstances in which Anand's first novel *Untouchable* was written and published.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding unit of this Block we have given you a bird's eyeview of the rise of the Indian English novel from the very beginning till the turn of the millennium. In this unit we shall discuss Mulk Raj Anand who, with R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, established Indian English novel in the gamut of Indian and world literatures. Anand's life may be divided into three periods, according to the place of his residence and activity: (a) the early years in India until his departure for England 1905-1925; (b) the years in Europe, 1925-1945; and (c) the later years in India, 1945, until the present. This division corresponds to the different stages of his literary career. The first period reveals the various strands and influences that shaped his mind and later came to bear upon his writing. The second period is concerned with Anand's hard struggle to become a novelist and the eventual success that he got. The third period reveals his achievements in the social and cultural life of India.

2.2 EARLY LIFE

Mulk Raj Anand was born in a Hindu family of Kshatriyas on 12 December 1905 in Peshawar, the central city of Northwest Frontier Province, now in Pakistan. He was the third of five sons of Lal Chand, a silversmith turned sepoy. Anand's father belonged to the Thathiar caste. People of Thathiar caste were workers of copper and silver. Lal Chand left his hereditary occupation to attend school. He learnt English, took a British military examination and served in cantonments including Sialkot, Ferozepur, Peshawar, Mian Mir, Nowshera and Malakhand. He was appointed a head clerk, attached to the Thirty-eighth Dogra Regiment. He was said to be the only literate man in the whole regiment. He was a worldly man, highly ambitious for his sons' education and economic status. As an Arya Samaji, Anand's father also served

as president of the Nowshera Samaj from 1910 to 1913. As the society incurred the hostility of the British Officials for its rebellious activities, Lal, fearing the displeasure of his superiors and the British rulers in India, withdrew from the group. Mulk Raj Anand inherited from his father a professional artisan's industry and minute attention to detail as also the revolutionary temperament.



Mulk Raj Anand (1905-)

Anand's mother came from a devout Sikh peasant family of Sialkot, a part of Central Punjab. She was a religious woman who had a great faith in orthodox beliefs. She had a vast knowledge of folk tales, having heard them in her childhood from her own mother, as also legends, fables, myths and other narratives of gods, men, birds and beasts. "So sure was my mother's gift for storytelling," says Anand, "that sometimes I found myself rapt in her tales with an intensity of wonder."

The first twenty years of Anand's life seem to have been spent in the Punjab area. After passing his matriculation in 1920, Anand entered Khalsa College, Amritsar. He joined non-violent struggle against the British government and courted arrest. His early recollections focus on two cantonments, Mian Mir and Nowshera. In 1925, he graduated from Punjab University with Honours in English. The first break in Anand's life came when he received a scholarship for research in philosophy under Professor Dawes Hicks in London. It is here that he started creative writing. In 1926, he completed dissertation on the thought of great philosophers: John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume and Bertrand Russell. In 1928, he was awarded Ph.D. degree by London University. He then associated with T.S. Eliot's literary periodical *The Criterion*.

2.3 LITERARY CAREER

Mulk Raj Anand enjoys the reputation of being a pioneer novelist because of a corpus of creative fiction of sufficient bulk and quality. He is a prolific writer and is continuing to write and publish at the age of ninety-six. Besides novels and short stories, he has written a number of books on art, paintings and literature.

Anand became an exciting name with his early novels *untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) in which he started the new trend of realism and social protest in Indian English fiction. In his novels, he portrays the doomed lives of the downtrodden and the oppressed. His protagonists-a sweeper, a

coolie, a peasant - are all victims of exploitation, class-hatred, race-hatred and inhuman cruelty. Over the years, Anand has become a vigorous champion of the oppressed and the downtrodden.

Untouchable, a powerful novel, can be regarded as quintessential Anand since it projects most of his characteristic concerns and fundamental issues of life. The main theme of the novel is untouchability as a problem in Hindu society.

In 1939-1942, Anand wrote a trilogy, a series of three novels dealing with the same protagonist called Lal Singh. The novels were titled *The Village* (1939), *Across Black Waters* (1940) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942).

In 1951, he published *Seven Summers*, the first of a series of seven novels which Anand planned to write as a kind of autobiography in seven parts, corresponding to the seven stages of a man's life as described by Shakespeare in his play *As You Like It*. *Morning Face*, the second of the seven novels in the series, was published in 1968 and received the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1971. This has been followed by *Confession of a Lover* (1976), *Bubble* (1984), *Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi* (1990) and *Nine Moods of Bharata* (1999).

Besides novels, Mulk Raj Anand has written more than seventy short stories which have been published in various collections entitled *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934), *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (1944), *Corn Goddess and Other Stories* (1947), *Reflections on the Golden Bed and Other Stories* (1953), *The Power of Darkenss and Other Stories* (1959), *Lajwanti and Other Stories* (1966) and *Between Tears and Laughter* (1973). In addition, he has retold older Indian tales in two collections: *Indian Fairy Tales* (1946) and *More Indian Fairy Tales* (1961).

2.4 AWARDS

In 1952, Anand was awarded the International Peace Prize of the World Peace Council for promoting peace among the nations through his literary works. In 1967, he was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the President of India for distinguished service to art and literature. In 1978, he won the E.M. Forster award of Rs.3000 for his novel *Confession of a Lover* which was adjudged the best book of creative literature in the English Language. This was the first annual award instituted by M/s Arnold Heinemann.

2.5 THE THIRTIES MOVEMENT

"Among the Indo-English novelists," observes Anniah Gowda, "Mulk Raj Anand is the most conspicuously committed writer... Perhaps the best word for it is the plainest: it is propaganda writing."¹ The Propaganda novel in the true sense is one so dominated by its author's ulterior purpose that the propaganda cannot be ignored, and normally one who dislikes that line of propaganda would find the book unreadable. Such a novel, Gowda opines, cannot rank among the great works of literature. In a similar vein, Chetan Karnani complains of the extra-literary intentions of the novelist: "The trouble with Anand is that he is not able to hide his proletarian sympathies."² These 'determined' detractors of Anand, and some others, charge him of having used the artistic medium of the novel for pure propaganda. Indoctrination, they hold, does not go with the creative process and aesthetic experience.

Anand is not deterred by such criticism: "I do not in the least mind criticism, even adverse probably because the suffering from which my novels have been written has

already been rewarded by the fact that they have gone into so many languages of the world in spite of their truthfulness and exposure of many shams, hypocrisies and orthodoxies of India."³

This is true, for in his fiction Anand was heeding his artistic conscience than following any pre-conceived formula. And that accounts for the abiding appeal of his novels.

Untouchable, as also some other early writings of Anand, cannot be fully appreciated unless studied in relation to the movement of the nineteen-thirties in Western Europe. For, as a writer he was shaped in the Thirties when several problems bogged the intellectuals. The problem that Anand "tried to face as a writer was not strictly a private, but a private-public problem."⁴ As it was, he found it impossible to maintain aloofness from politics in the post-World War Europe.

Anand stayed in London for over two decades, from 1924 to 1945; he was therefore deeply influenced by the Progressive Movement in literature that flourished in the Thirties. In London, Anand came under numerous literary, political and social influences and it is in them that the sources of his synthesis of Marxist and humanist thought can be seen. "You will find that amorphous as my books are," writes Anand, "I did stick to the novel form, more or less, as an imaginative interpretation of Indian life rather than use it as a vehicle to sermonize. And the posing of the problems of human beings in the 30s by people like Malraux, Celine and Hemingway gave the necessary sense of discrimination to my own treatment of the predicament of our people as against the European view."⁵ He was an overt nationalist and championed the socialist cause in his fiction in common with many European and American writers of the day.

The peculiar conditions during the early decades of the century in Europe and elsewhere put a great pressure on the writers to sympathize with the social cause. The complacency following the First World War, based on the erroneous belief that the League of Nations was going to preserve peace and security, was suddenly exploded, leaving a feeling of loss and disenchantment. There was complete erosion of human values.

Another event that had a profound influence on writers like Anand was the General strike of 1926 in the Great Britain. It made people conscious of the class war between haves and have-nots in modern civilization. On his arrival in England, Anand had admired Britain for her achievements in science and technology. Living through the strike, this illusion of his was shattered with a bang. He increasingly came to realize that the scientific and technological discoveries if controlled by a select band of people need not result in social benefits. "And it was no use speculating on the beneficence of science," avers Anand, "if its discoveries were to be manipulated to their own advantage by a small group of individuals who controlled the key industries and had an absolute say in matters of domestic and foreign policy."

The object of the General Strike was to attain specific rights for the mine workers; in a way it was a proletarian challenge to the government and its capitalist bias. Anand and a group of his colleagues sided with the workers; they felt dismayed at the failure of the strike. The strike had revealed the reactionary character of the English State "that it could put back human progress for a thousand years."⁷ Anand felt convinced "that the people of Britain, no less than the people of India, had yet to win their liberty."⁸

After the destruction wrought by the First World War, European society had plunged anew into the shadows of economic depression and cynical mood. The economic depression caused disastrous effects; it gave rise to unemployment that brought in its fold unending distress and appalling misery.

The rise of Fascism in Italy under Mussolini and the Nazi power in Germany in 1933 under Hitler reflected the paralysis of the Western democracies. The Japanese aggression on Manchuria in 1931, the Italian conquest of Ethiopia in 1935, the extinction of Spanish Republic at the hands of Germany and Italy in 1936-37, all in succession tolled the death knell of the league of Nations.

Such a disintegrating world disillusioned the intellectual of the day; he strove for a commitment that would restore order and save his world from the existing chaos. The writer was not only absorbing the atmosphere as a participant but also seemed readily inclined to reflect it in his writing.

Alarmed at the situation the intellectuals of the West prominently led by Maxim Gorky of Russia, Romain Rolland of France, Thomas Mann of Germany, and E.M. Forster of England assembled in Paris in 1935. They raised the voice of liberty as Shelley and Dickens had done in their own times. "I want greater freedom for writers," declared Forster, "both as creators and critics for the ... maintenance of culture."⁹ He appealed to the writers to be courageous and sensitive to fulfil their public calling; he urged them to come forward and arouse the people to act and struggle for creating a just and humane society. The conference was dominated by the writers with a socialist background, or having some affiliation with communism. They posed a premonition of a threatening situation, caused by the aggressive imperialism of the day. The psychology working in the background was the moving force that impelled the writers to use their talents against fascism and write for the working classes.

Inspired by these ideas some Indian students studying in England assembled in London a few months after the Paris Conference and formed the Progressive Writers Association. Their meetings were attended and occasionally addressed by Ralph Fox, Karmford and Caudwell. They framed a manifesto of the Association, which was finalized, amongst others by Mulk Raj Anand and Sajjad Zaheer.

Sajjad Zaheer who played a prominent role in the organization vividly recalls his association with Anand: "I have had the good fortune of having known Mulk...since 1930, when we were both young and in our twenties and were students in England. In 1935, Anand and I, together with a few other young Indians founded the Indian Progressive Writers Movement, spreading to almost all the great languages of India, blessed and supported by such eminent figures as Tagore and Premchand."

The progressive writers believed that the principal function of literature was to reflect and express the aspirations and fundamental problems of the toiling masses and ultimately help in the formation of a socialist society. Even those who were not Marxists adhered to the idea of a basic social transformation and political independence. A new content is discerned in literature, which not only bears out a radically revolutionary character but also a basically new rationale for such a change. "That truth alone should matter to a writer," says Anand in his essay "Why I Write?," "that this truth should become imaginative truth without losing sincerity. The novel should interpret the truth of life, from felt experience, and not from books."¹⁰

The Progressive Movement then has a reaction against the esoteric and inward-looking art of the nineteen-twenties. In England, it began with the publication of Michael Robert's anthologies, *New Signatures* and *New Country* which grouped Auden, Spender, Day Lewis, Isherwood and Edward Upward together for the first time. These writers were responsible for making social realism and tendentious literature of revolt fashionable in both Europe and America. It was during the same time that Anand was working on his novel *Coolie*. He essentially shared the political and social philosophy of the left wing intellectuals: "there was ample confirmation in the thinking aloud of the younger writers like Aragon, Malraux, Auden, Spender, Day Lewis and others that the questions they were asking themselves were more or less

similar to ours in India, and, irrespective of race and colour, we shared similar concepts and aspired towards kindred objects." ¹¹ *Left Review*, an important organ of the new writers, carried extracts from the then unpublished *Coolie*.

The particular conditions of the Thirties account for many close resemblances between Anand, Mahatma Gandhi and George Orwell; both had much in common; esp. a passionate sense of social justice, "a recognition, more than a recognition, indeed knowledge--of the innumerable frustrations and suppressions. Both men hated the social prejudices that helped to maintain the oppressive status quo; the class system in England, the caste system in India."¹² Moreover, both the writers shared a profound dislike of colonialism. In tone and temper, Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* carried the same burden as Anand's *Coolie*.

One of the notable consequences of this movement was a growing rejection of the aesthetic theory of "art for art's sake." Anand has felt, from the very initial stages of his awareness of the human predicament, that the writer cannot shut himself in an ivory tower; he cannot stand on a high perch, but has to go into the raging storm itself, to be with the people to ally himself with their many sorrows and little joys. The purpose of the novel, according to Anand, is to change mankind, and through mankind society. He is vehemently opposed to the formalists or aesthetes who hold that art, though influenced by life, is essentially governed by its inner logic and not by outside forces. Nor has he any sympathy with the writers who are self-centred subjectivists indulging merely in petty variations of Proustian aestheticism.

The Thirties movement defined in specific terms the position of the artists and the functions of his art. In *Apology for Heroism*, Anand places the writer on a very high pedestal, glorifying him as "precisely the man who can encompass the whole of life."¹³ He is superior to the moralist, the scientist and the politician, each of whom takes a limited view of man, while the writer "is uniquely fitted to aspire to be a whole man to attain, as far as possible, a more balanced perspective of life."¹⁴ A novelist like any other artist is concerned chiefly with the truth. And he reveals it not like the philosopher who does it in a cold statement of dogma but only in terms of life, rendered through the devices of dramatization.

Anand, like Lawrence, Gorky, and Eric Gill, believes that the work of a genuine creative writer is inspired by a mission. He seems to be in full agreement with Arnold's dictum that literature at bottom is the criticism of life. He is strongly committed to his creed, and in his opinion "any writer who said that he was not interested in a condition humane was either posing or yielding to a fanatical love of isolationism--a perverse and clever defense of the adolescent desire to be different."¹⁵

The Thirties movement proved to be a watershed in the literary sensibility in Europe. It shook the writers from age-old slumber and awakened them to the realization of new possibilities, which had so far eluded them. The early fiction of Anand was truly representative of the movement. His fictional world depicted not the feudal splendors and mysticism of traditional Indian literature, but the hard and suffering lives of the millions of his countrymen. Anand thus ushered in the realistic fiction.

In the choice of themes, therefore, Anand is unquestionably an innovator. He is the first novelist writing in English to choose as his raw material the lower-class life of the Indian masses. In *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, he almost dreads the flight of imagination, feels shy of soaring high and keeps close to the ground with a vengeance. He does not hesitate to turn the floodlight on the darkest spots in Indian life.

2.6 THE WRITING AND PUBLICATION OF *UNTOUCHABLE*

Life and Work of
Mulk Raj Anand



Untouchable was written over a long weekend in 1930. Mulk Raj Anand tells us that it poured out like hot lava from the volcano of his imagination, and that during its composition he hardly slept for more than six hours in three days. In his article *On the Genesis of Untouchable: A Note*, Mulk Raj Anand tells in detail about the writing of the novel. During a long week-end in the early twenties in Dublin, he started writing the first draft of the novel, then called *Bakha*. A little later, he came across a poignant story about a sweeper-boy Uka, written with utmost simplicity by Mahatma Gandhi in *Young India*. Anand wrote to the Mahatma and was allowed to meet him in three months' time. In April 1929, he went to see Gandhiji in the Sabarmati Ashram in the boiling heat of Gujarat. He showed Gandhiji the novel he had written.

Gandhiji was opposed to the writing of a novel depicting the love-affair of a boy and girl. Anand explained to him that it was about *Bakha*, a sweeper-boy, an untouchable. Gandhiji suggested that he should write a straightforward pamphlet about Harijans. Anand defended himself by saying that he wanted to tell the story just as Gandhiji had narrated his story about the sweeper Uka. Anand was allowed to stay in the Ashram provided he promised not to drink, not to think of his English girlfriend and clean latrines once a week. The three-month stay in the ashram rejuvenated Anand. The austerities that he practised there awakened his conscience and converted him to a life of sincerity, simplicity and truth.

Anand read some portions of the novel to Gandhiji who suggested that he should cut down more than a hundred pages, specially those passages in which Bakha seemed to be thinking and dreaming like a Bloomsbury intellectual. Following Gandhiji's advice, Anand revised the entire novel during his three month stay in the ashram. Out of two hundred and fifty pages, only one hundred and fifty pages were left. He read the revised version to Gandhiji who gave his approval to it.

However, the book failed to draw the attention of the publishers for more than two years. Anand felt quite disheartened by the fact that no publisher found the book worth publishing. Edward Thompson, an eminent writer of several books about India, wrote a letter to Anand giving reasons for the publishers' rejection of the manuscript: "It is true that Indian books do not sell. There is such a welter of propaganda and sentimentalism over everything Indian-British die-hard, National Congress journalist, fake poet and mystic, theosophist, Gandhi-adorer, American Women's club, all combine to make everything Indian depressing to anyone not half-witted. I seem to find signs that India is beginning to bore even Indians."¹⁶ As a matter of fact, the novel was not accepted because it was unlike the traditional books. The main objection to the book was the squalor and dirt that it depicts.

Even Bonamy Dobree, a leading literary figure and friend of Anand, found the book wanting in some respects. He advised Anand "to make the beginning a little more different..... It does smell rather strong." He wanted Anand to delete the descriptions of dirt and cruelty in novel, for he felt that "the average reader does not want to be instructed but amused."¹⁷

Following the advice of Dobree and other critics, Anand revised the novel several times. For example, he tones down the opening pages of the novel. In writing of these, he had been greatly influenced by Dickens' description of London slums. Jonathan Cape, The Bodley Head, Chatto and Windus, and several other publishers turned it down, in spite of strong recommendation from Dobree.

Perhaps the most encouraging response came from E.M.Forster. After reading the manuscript, Forster wrote to Anand a letter on 5 May 1934: "I found it extremely interesting.....you make your sweeper sympathetic yet avoid making him a hero or a martyr, and, by the appearance of Gandhi and conversation about machinery at the end, you give the whole book a coherence and shape which it would otherwise have lacked."

By September 1934, the novel had been rejected by as many as nineteen publishers. Anand felt so disheartened that he contemplated suicide. At that juncture, a young British poet Oswald Blakeston took the manuscript to Wishart Books. The publisher accepted to publish it on the condition that the eminent English novelist E.M.Forster should write a Preface to protect it against being called 'dirty'. Forster not only quickly supplied the Preface but also insisted that Anand should accept the fee received for writing the Preface. He wrote the Preface as a matter of conviction. "It will be a great pleasure to me," he said, "if I should be of any help in introducing such an interesting and original piece of work to readers in this country."

The book was published on 1 May 1935. It received a mixed response to begin with, but soon it established for itself a popularity that remains unrivalled for a work of fiction by an Indian author. In 1944, the Penguin edition of the novel was published. By now, the novel has been translated into thirty-six languages of the world. Anand now lives in Khandala, a small hill station about hundred kilometres from Bombay and is leading a very active life-writing, attending seminars and conferences, meeting people and doing social work. His busy schedule of work shows him to be one of the most energetic of literary men of the twentieth century.

2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the shaping influences on Anand's life- parentage, association with the writers of Twenties and Gandhiji. We have also told you in detail the genesis of his master piece *Untouchable*. With these insights you should be in a better position to appreciate Anand's contribution to literature and society.

2.8 QUESTIONS

1. What major influences moulded the literary career of Mulk Raj Anand?
2. Trace the literary achievement of Mulk Raj Anand.

2.9 SUGGESTED READING

Mulk Raj Anand, *Apology for Heroism*. Bombay, 1957.

Mulk Raj Anand. "Why I Write?" *Kakatiya Journal of English Studies*, vol. II, No. 1 Spring 1977.

Mulk Raj Anand. "On the Genesis of untouchable: A Note," in *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1992.

Berry, Margaret. *Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and the Novelist*. Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1971.

Saros, Cowasjee. ed. *Author to Critic: The Letters of Mulk Raj Anand to Saros Cowasjee*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1973.

Saros, Cowasjee. *So many Freedoms: A study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Dhawan, R.K.ed. *Explorations in Modern Indo-English Fiction*. New Delhi: Bahri.

E.M. Forster. *Abinger Harvest*. London, 1953.

H.H.Anniah Gowda. "Mulk Raj Anand," *The Literary Half-Yearly*, vol. VI, No. 1 January, 1965.

Chetan Karnani. "Mulk Raj Anand: The Novelist as a Socialist Chronicler," *Thought*, 23 August, 1974.

Sinha, Krishna Nandan. *Mulk Raj Anand*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972.

References

¹ H.H.Anniah Gowda, "Mulk Raj Anand," *The Literary Half-Yearly*, vol. VI, No. 1 January, 1965, p. 50.

² Chetan Karnani, "Mulk Raj Anand: The Novelist as a Socialist Chronicler," *Thought*, 23 August, 1974, pp.19-20.

³ Saros, Cowasjee, ed. *Author to Critic: The Letters of Mulk Raj Anand to Saros Cowasjee*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1973, pp. 15-16.

⁴ Mulk Raj Anand, *Apology for Heroism*. Bombay, 1957, p. 78.

⁵ Cowasjee, Saros. *So many Freedoms: A study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977. p. 24.

⁶ A. H. Anand. p. 32.

⁷ *Ibid*; p. 32.

⁸ *Ibid*; p. 35.

⁹ E. M. Forster, *Abinger Harvest*. London, 1953, p. 768.

¹⁰ Mulk Raj Anand, "Why I Write?" *Kakatiya Journal of English Studies*, vol. II, No. 1 Spring 1977, p. 251.

¹¹ A. H. Anand. pp. 79-80.

¹² Dhawan, R. K. ed. *Explorations in Modern Indo-English Fiction*. New Delhi: Bahri, 1982, p. 80.

¹³ A. H. Anand. p. 87.

¹⁴ *Ibid*; p. 87.

¹⁵ *Ibid*; pp. 81-82.

¹⁶ Mulk Raj Anand, "On the Genesis of untouchable: A Note," in *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. R. K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1992, p. 80.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

UNIT 3 *UNTOUCHABLE*: TITLE, THEME, PLOT & CHARACTERISATION

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Title
- 3.2 Theme of Untouchability
- 3.3 Plot and Structure
- 3.4 Narrative Technique
- 3.5 Characterisation
- 3.6 Other Characters
- 3.7 Questions
- 3.8 Suggested Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to acquaint you with the important aspects of the novel *Untouchable*. Here we shall discuss in detail the title of the novel, the theme of the evil of untouchability in India, the broad framework of the plot, and the narrative technique of the stream-of-consciousness and the flashback. This unit will also focus on Anand's art of characterisation, a detailed critical analysis of the protagonist Bakha and other characters.

3.1 TITLE

As stated in Unit 2.5, the novel was originally titled 'Bakha' and was almost double its present length. During his three-month sojourn at Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram, Anand narrated the story to the Mahatma and also read Gandhi's poignant story about the sweeper-boy Uka, written in utmost simplicity and published in *Young India*. In his article "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*: A Note," Anand tells us that on the advice of the Mahatma, he removed the portions which were his "deliberate attempts at melodramatic contrasts of the comic and the tragic motifs, through which the spontaneous feelings, moods and lurking chaos in the soul of Bakha, had been somewhat suppressed." Gandhi also suggested to Anand that he should cut down more than a hundred pages, especially those passages in which Bakha seemed to be thinking, dreaming and brooding like a 'Bloomsbury intellectual.' Incorporating these suggestions and revisioning the plot from the sensibility of a novelist rather than a pamphleteer, Mulk Raj Anand finally published the novel in 1935 with its present title *Untouchable*.

The absence of the definite article 'the' before the title makes the novel a symbolic saga of the miserable lives of the millions of untouchables in India who are at the lowest rung of the caste-ridden Hindu society in India and are victims of social injustice. In fact, Bakha becomes that representative untouchable who exemplifies the predicament of not only the sweeper-untouchables but also of all the dispossessed and deprived classes in every society who are forced to lead a life of self-pity and helplessness; and are treated as 'social outcasts' by the so-called superior castes, both at the physical and psychological level. The title thus is quite apt and appropriate, evocatively indicative of the main theme of the novel.

3.2 THE THEME OF UNTOUCHABILITY

Mulk Raj Anand has been described as a novelist with a deep social commitment. A close study of his works shows that he juxtaposes the social evils against the mindsets of individuals and some privileged sections of the society. In *Untouchable*, he has chiefly dealt with the ghastly evil of untouchability afflicting the Hindu society of the pre-Partition era, in the larger backdrop of the caste-configurations within the Hindu society that have successfully stifled the healthy growth of a considerable section of Indian community for centuries.

Anand has vividly depicted in the novel the miserable lot of the unfortunate untouchables and suggested that they can be freed from the shackles of killing orthodoxy and tradition only if men infuse into their own hearts some sympathy and tenderness and if the men who are humiliated as pariahs muster enough courage to live boldly and healthily.

Anand has artistically portrayed the harsh reality of the Hindu society which was getting divided into various pigeonholes. E.M. Forster comments on this aspect of the novel in his preface to *Untouchable*:

The sweeper [untouchable in this case] is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them. They have to purify themselves, and to rearrange their plans for the day. Thus he is a disquieting as well as a disgusting object to the orthodox as he walks along the public roads, and it is his duty to call out and warn them that he is coming. No wonder that the dirt enters into his soul, and that he feels himself at moments to be what he is supposed to be. (U, p.6-7)

The opening paragraph of the novel epitomises the 'big divide' between the untouchables and other resident communities in the town:

The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. (U, p. 9)
References to the text are from the Orient Paperbacks 1935 rpt. edition of *Untouchable*.

A strong believer in the dignity of man and equality of all men, Anand is naturally shocked by the inhuman way the untouchables are treated by those that belong to superior castes—especially the Brahmins or the so-called "twice-born." The degradation and humiliation inflicted on the unfortunate sections of society is highlighted through the oft-repeated refrain of Bakha 'Posh, posh, sweeper coming.' The very fact that they were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the only source of drinking water in the town of Bulandshahr called 'the caste-well', and had to wait sometimes for hours together for the generosity of some caste-Hindu to pour water in their empty pitchers, speaks volumes about how deep-rooted this evil had become. Although Bakha and his other outcaste friends sometimes played hockey with the two boys of the Hindu babu, yet the mere touch of a caste Brahmin unleashes an invasion of abusive epithets and physical assault on Bakha. He had purchased the mouth-watering jalebis and is lost in enjoying the taste of eating a portion of them when he unconsciously touches the tunic of a caste Hindu who immediately starts shouting:

Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cock-eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning. (U, p. 51)

Title, Theme, Plot
and
Characterisation

Coming out of his reverie, Bakha is completely taken aback and his hands instinctively join together in apology without uttering a single word. He only bends his forehead over them and mumbles something but the 'touched' man does not care to hear what he says as he is not satisfied with Bakha's dumb humility. He again starts abusing him:

'Dirty dog! Son of a bitch! offspring of a pig!' he shouted, his temper spluttering on his tongue and obstructing his speech, and the sense behind it, in its mad rush outwards. 'I . . . I'll have to go-o-o . . . and get washed-d-d . . . I . . . I was going to business and now . . . now, on account of you, I'll be late.' (U, p. 51)

The situation results in a crowd gathering round to see what the row is about and this encourages the aggrieved man further in his denunciations. Bakha felt further confused by this fresh development and the novelist describes his misery, hopelessness and helplessness in these words:

His first impulse was to run, just to shoot across the throng, away, away, far away from the torment. But then he realised that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the onlookers, but a moral one. He knew that contact with him, if he pushed through, would defile a great many more of these men. And he could already hear in his ears the abuse that he would thus draw on himself. (U, p. 52)

One of the urchins in the crowd falsely accuses Bakha of 'beating them.' When he protests against the false accusation and asks for forgiveness for his present crime of 'forgetting to call his arrival' and 'touching the caste-Hindu', no one in the crowd believes a word of what he says. The peculiarity of his problematic situation is echoed aptly in these observations of Anand:

He was really sorry and tried hard to convey his repentance to his tormentors. But the barrier of space that the crowd had placed between themselves and him seemed to prevent his feeling from getting across. And he stood still while they raged and fumed and sneered in fury: 'Careless, irresponsible swine!' 'They don't want to work.' 'They laze about!' 'They ought to be wiped off the surface of the earth!' (U, p. 54)

The sympathy that miserable Bakha draws from a passer-by Mohammedan tonga-wallah infuriates the 'touched man' further who gives Bakha a harsh and sharp slap on the face and it results in his turban falling off and the jalebis in the paper bag in his hand getting scattered in the dust. This unfortunate incident makes him indulge in pitiable self-analysis of his plight in this interior monologue:

Why was all this fuss? Why was I so humble? I could have struck him! And to think that I was so eager to come to the town this morning. Why didn't I shout to warn the people of my approach? That comes of not looking after one's work. I should have begun to sweep the thoroughfare. I should have seen the high-caste people in the street. That man! That he should have hit me! My poor jalebis! I should have eaten them. But why couldn't I say something? Couldn't I have joined my hands to him and then gone away. The slap on my face! The coward! (U, p. 56)

He becomes acutely aware of his low social status and protests in his mind:

The cruel crowd! All of them abused, abused, abused. Why are we always abused? The santry inspector that day abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too. That's why I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines every day. That's why they don't touch us, the high-castes. (U, p. 56)

He is moved by the kindness of the tonga-wallah but the word "untouchable" haunts him:

The tonga-wallah was kind. He made me weep telling me, in that way, to take my things and walk along. But he is a Muhammadan. They don't mind touching us, the Muhammadans and the sahibs. It is only the Hindus and the outcastes who are not sweepers. For them I am a sweeper, sweeper—untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable! (U, pp. 56-57)

Another aspect of untouchability is unfolded by Anand through the kind of treatment meted out to Bakha and other outcastes by the Mohammedans, Christians and the men in the armed forces. Bakha is humanely consoled by the Mohammedan tonga-wallah after he is slapped by the touched-Lalla. Havildar Charat Singh too offers him tea and gives him a hockey stick. The unexpected visit of Hakim Bhagwan Das to Lakha's house when Bakha's condition had deteriorated to the extent of impending death establishes the nobility of the medical profession.

Towards the end of the novel, Anand seems to suggest a few solutions to this evil of untouchability. One of these refers to the efforts being made by the Christian missionaries through their local Salvation Army, the head of which is one Colonel Hutchinson. According to him, Christianity and Christ stand for equality of all human beings. In an answer to Bakha's constant questioning as to who Christ was, the Colonel says: "He sacrificed Himself out of love for us. . . . He sacrificed Himself to help us all, for the rich and the poor, for Brahmin and the Bhangi." (U, p. 142) Bakha seems to feel that in Christianity, there is no difference between 'the pundit of the morning' who thought himself defiled and polluted by his touch, and a sweeper-boy or bhangi like him. But the question of the Original sin and all human beings being sinners baffles him. He also cannot bring himself to accepting conversion to Christianity for the sake of equality.

In this confused state of mind, he confronts a crowd of people who had gathered at the Golbagh to listen to Mahatma Gandhi's speech. Here in this sea of humanity, he finds people from all classes and castes together as if Gandhi was a magnetic force to bring the much-needed equality for all and the eradication of the evil of untouchability. But he also felt that

There was an insuperable barrier between himself and the crowd, the barrier of caste. He was part of a consciousness which he could share and yet not understand. He had been lifted from the gutter, through the barriers of space, to partake of a life which was his, and yet not his. He was in the midst of a humanity which included him in its folds, and yet debarred him from entering into a sentient, living, quivering contact with it. Gandhi alone united him with them, in the mind, because Gandhi was in everybody's mind, including Bakha's. Gandhi might unite them really. (U, p. 151)

Fortunately Gandhi is speaking on the evil of untouchability in the Indian society in that meeting. As a Congress volunteer puts it rather authoritatively: "The government has allowed him out of gaol only if he will keep strictly within the limits of his propaganda for harijans for the removal of untouchability." (U, p. 155) During the course of his speech, Gandhi clarifies:



Lost childhood

As you all know, while we are asking for freedom from the grip of a foreign nation, we have ourselves, for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse for our iniquity. For me, the question of these people is moral and religious. When I undertook to fast unto death for their sake, it was in obedience to the call of my conscience. (U, pp. 160-61)

He further says that he regards untouchability as "the greatest blot on Hinduism" (U, p. 161) and exhorts the Harijans not to accept the left-over food from the Hindus but the grain. He also expresses the opinion that all public wells, temples, roads, schools and sanatoriums must be declared open for the untouchables.

Another solution to the evil of untouchability is offered by R.N. Bashir, an advocate, and his young poet friend Iqbal Nath Sarashar who think that the introduction of the flush system will automatically put an end to this obnoxious social evil. As Sarashar says:

Well, we must destroy caste, we must destroy the inequalities of birth and unalterable vocations. We must recognise an equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone. The Mahatma didn't say so, but the legal and social basis of caste having been broken down by the British Indian penal code, which recognises the rights of every man before a court, caste is now mainly governed by profession. When the sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain Untouchables. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without anyone to handle it—the flush system. Then the sweepers can be freed from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society. (U, p. 162)

However, there is no definite and final solution to this deep-rooted social evil which seems to have eaten into the very vitals of the caste-ridden Hindu society. Therefore it cannot and does not lend itself to any easy solutions within the fixed parameters and the novel seems to have done a yeoman's service in highlighting the theme of untouchability in all its multi-faceted perspectives through its open-endedness.

3.3 PLOT AND STRUCTURE OF THE NOVEL

Untouchable has no story interest; it is just an impassioned plea for a social cause. And it is this singleness of purpose i.e. exposing the evil of untouchability and analysing its various aspects—social, moral, psychological, religion-based, etc.—that provides structural unity to the plot. The plot of *Untouchable* can, unmistakably, be hailed as one of the most compact and coherent plots in Indian English fiction. This view finds confirmation in the fact that getting convinced of the advice of Mahatma Gandhi, Anand reduced the size of his manuscript to almost half of the original, keeping out extraneous details. In his well-known essay *On the Genesis of Untouchable*, Anand observes:

In retrospect, I feel that, under the tutelage of the Mahatma, who did not pretend to be an artist, I was able to exorcise all those self-conscious literary elements which I had woven into the narrative in anticipation of what the critics might approve. He thought that the paragraphs of high-sounding words, in which I had tried to unite the miscellaneous elements, in what was essentially a walk through the small town of my hero, must go. Also, the old man suggested the removal of my deliberate attempts at melodramatic contrasts of the comic and tragic motifs, through which the spontaneous feelings, moods and lurking chaos in the soul of Bakha, had been somewhat suppressed.

And the Mahatma asked for the deflation of those clever tricks, which had made the expression of concrete detail into a deliberate effort at style.

Out of two hundred and fifty pages, hundred and fifty were left.²

Observing the three Aristotelian unities, though unconsciously, the novel records a day's events in Bakha's life which serve as a mirror to the pathetic condition of the untouchables who form the lower stratum of society in the caste-ridden orthodox Hindu society, especially in the pre-Partition times.

The novel begins with an autumn morning in Bakha's life. He is in bed, half-awake, "covered by a worn-out greasy blanket, on a faded blue carpet which was spread on the floor, in a corner of the cave-like, dingy, dark, one-roomed mud-house." (U, p. 10) It is so early that the sun has not risen.

Bakha is the son of Lakha, the 'Jemadar' of all the sweepers in the town and the cantonment. His chief duty is to keep the three rows of public latrines clean. These latrines are used by men from both the town and the cantonment. Bakha has for sometime worked in the barracks of a British regiment. He had looked at the Tommies, with wonder and amazement when he first went to live at the British regimental barracks with his uncle. He had had glimpses, during his sojourn there, of the life the Tommies lived: sleeping on low canvas beds covered tightly with blankets; eating eggs, drinking tea and wine in tin mugs; going to parade and then walking down to the bazaar with cigarettes in their mouths and small silver mounted canes in their hands. And he had soon become obsessed with an overwhelming desire to live their life. He knew they were white sahibs. So he tried to copy them as much as he could in the exigencies of his peculiarly Indian circumstances. His father had

been angry at his extravagance, and the boys of the outcasts' colony teased him on account of his eccentric dresses and called him 'Pilpali sahib'. And he knew, of course, that except for his English clothes, there was nothing English in his life.

**Title, Theme, Plot
and
Characterisation**

As he is still lying in his bed, Bakha hears his father's stern and authoritative call, "Get up, ohe you Bakhya, ohe son of a pig!" (U, p. 13) He is angered at the abuse as he is already feeling depressed that morning. His father's abuses create a growing dislike in his heart for the short-tempered, sickly old man. But he has fond memories of his mother and thinks of the days when she was alive. She showed him all the affection that warmed his heart. She used to give him a brass tankard full of a boiling hot mixture of water, tea-leaves and milk from the steaming earthen saucepan. It was so delightful, the taste of that hot, sugary liquid, that Bakha's mouth watered for it on the night before the morning on which he had to drink it.

Bakha comes out of his reverie as he hears the shouts: "Ohe, Bakhya! Ohe, Bakhya! Ohe, scoundrel of a sweeper's son. Come and clean a latrine for me!" (U, p. 15) It is Havildar Charat Singh, the famous hockey player of the 38th Dogra regiment. He suffers from piles and accuses Bakha for his ailment: "Why aren't the latrines clean, ohe rogue of a Bakha? There is not one fit to go near. I have walked all round. Do you know you are responsible for my piles! I caught the contagion sitting on one of those dirty latrines!" (U, p. 16) Bakha picks up his brush and basket and sets out to clean the latrines.



**Human excreta is being carted away to disposal sites after it was physically
Cleaned and carried from household toilets by scavengers**

Though his job is dirty, Bakha remains comparatively clean. He looks intelligent, even sensitive, with a sort of dignity that does not belong to the ordinary scavenger, who as a rule is uncouth and unclean. The Havildar is thoroughly impressed by Bakha's quickness and efficiency in doing his job: "You are becoming a 'gentleman', ohe Bakhya!" (U, p. 17) With a grin which symbolises two thousand years of racial and caste superiority, he asks Bakha to see him that afternoon and take the gift of a hockey stick from him.

Bakha feels grateful at this gesture on the part of one of the best hockey players of the regiment. Charat Singh's generous promise calls forth that trait of servility in Bakha which he has inherited from his forefathers: the weakness of the down-trodden, the helplessness of the poor, the passive contentment of the bottom dog, suddenly

illuminated by the prospect of fulfilment of a secret and long-cherished desire. He salutes his benefactor and bends down to continue his work again.

When he gets to the end of his work in the third row of latrines for the second time during the morning, he feels a cramp in his back and stretches himself out from the bent posture he has maintained all the while. After the process of cleaning the latrines in the final fourth round, he feels extremely exhausted but he is intuitively reminded of his next job.

The real ordeal for Bakha begins when he goes into the town to sweep the streets as a substitute for his father who has said that he was not feeling well. Bakha is not only scolded but also slapped by a Hindu merchant who alleges that Bakha has touched him and thus polluted him. Says this man: "This dirty dog bumped right into me. So unmindfully do these sons of bitches walk in the streets." (U, p. 52) Bakha stands motionless, with a hopeless expression of meekness on his face. The entire crowd gathered there forms a circle round Bakha, but takes care to keep at a distance of several yards from him. They all are on the side of the man who has been complaining about Bakha's misdemeanour. Bakha feels as if he will collapse. A street urchin who has just joined the crowd says that this sweeper-boy, namely Bakha, has been beating small innocent chaps like himself. Bakha tries to defend himself by saying that he has never beaten this urchin but nobody comes to his rescue. The crowd feels absolutely no sympathy for Bakha. Rather the onlookers take a sadistic pleasure in watching him in distress. It is only a Mohammedan tonga-wallah who shows sympathy towards him.

Bakha now becomes acutely aware of his being an untouchable and begins to announce "Posh, posh, sweeper coming" (U, p. 59) as he starts walking. With booming rage in his mind, he asks himself why he was treated in such an abusive and insulting manner by the Hindus. He also wonders why the sahibs and Muslims don't mind touching them. The cruelty and orthodoxy of the Hindus is thus sharply focussed. These factors, the novelist seems to hint, are the probable reasons for conversion of a large number of low caste Hindus to Christianity.

After roaming around aimlessly, though fascinated by the stalls where the brass band musical instruments are displayed, Bakha goes to the temple where he is to sweep the courtyard. The sight of the stone deities from a distance (as he is not allowed to enter a Hindu temple) seem to calm his troubled mind. Driven by his curiosity to know more about the caged snake-god, he climbs a few steps leading to the holy place inside. Deeply moved by the rhythmic singing there, he instinctively folds his hands as if to worship inwardly the unknown god. He hears just then a loud cry "polluted, polluted, polluted!" (U, p. 67) This runs a wave of shock among the devotees. Bakha thinks he is undone, having come so near the deities.

Just then, Bakha catches sight of his sister Sohini standing at a short distance from him. As he goes near, the crowd also closes in, shouting that Bakha had defiled the holy precincts. Sohini tells him a different story altogether. While she was cleaning the lavatory of the priest's house, the priest had tried to outrage her modesty. When she protested and screamed, he came out of his place shouting that he had been polluted by her touch. The priest had not only disgraced Bakha's sister but had also attracted the sympathy of the crowd by accusing him of having polluted the premises.

Though he feels much troubled at heart, Bakha realises his helplessness; he can do nothing to expose the hypocrisy of the priest. He takes hold of Sohini and they walk towards the outer gate of the temple in order to go home. On the way, however, he realises that he too was fully aware of his sister's charm and he hated the very idea of her being married to a stranger. The next moment he feels a wild desire to retaliate when the thought of the priest's action returns to him. But realising his helplessness, he wishes that his sister were not beautiful.



Human excreta as headload

As they approach the outcastes' colony, Bakha is reminded that his father has asked him to collect food for the family. Asking his sister to go home, he himself goes to the silversmiths' colony. He shouts: "Bread for the sweeper, mother; bread for the sweeper." Feeling tired and defeated, when no one responds to his requests, he sits down on the wooden platform of a house and, leaning against the door, falls asleep. Bakha sees a dream now where he finds himself on a railway platform. There is a train consisting of a large number of wagons loaded with goods of all kinds. Then he imagines himself in a small village with narrow muddy streets with cows wandering about and two big carts stuck in the mud. He also sees himself in the compound of a school where boys are reading aloud.

As his dream continues, Bakha suddenly hears loud words, "Alakh, alakh," the shouts of a half-naked sadhu and the women coming out with chapatis and dal for the holy man. A housewife becomes furious when she sees Bakha on the threshold of the house and scolds him "Perish and die" as he has defiled her house. Bakha asks for her forgiveness and appeals for food. After a lot of fuss, she flings a chapati as if giving it to a dog. Bakha's tolerance now reaches the nadir and he returns home with only two chapatis and does not know how he would explain the situation to his old father. He is uncertain whether he should inform his father what had happened to him and Sohini in the town. But he is unable to make up his mind.

The old man calls him a good for nothing scoundrel and expresses the hope that his younger son Rakha might bring something nice to eat from the barracks. Bakha's mind travels to those days when he used to get plenty of food from the Hindu families and the degrading incidents of the morning engulf him. Seeing him lost in thoughts, his father feels that something is wrong. Bakha gives a poignant account of all that had happened to him and Sohini and tells his father that he would not go to the town again. Lakha consoles his son impressing upon him the hopelessness of their situation and asks him not to abuse any Hindu and not to hit back at any stage. He then narrates an incident how during Bakha's acute illness in his childhood, he had

been ill-treated at the Hakim's house and also how the Hakim had later visited their house in the outcastes' colony to save dying Bakha's life.

When his younger brother Rakha comes with some food from the barracks, they all start eating from the same basket but Bakha suddenly stops when his hand touches something sticky in the pieces of the left-over chapaties and his mind is filled with a sense of revulsion that it might be mixed up with somebody's saliva. He excuses himself from eating by telling a lie that he had been invited by Ram Charan to his sister's marriage where he will receive his share of sweets.

Bakha reflects in an interior monologue his early association with Ram Charan's sister and his desire to marry her. But the girl's mother Gulabo thought it below their dignity and had taken two hundred rupees from another person for the hand of her daughter. Being washermen, they considered themselves superior to Bakha in the hierarchy even among the outcastes.

When he reaches near the place of the marriage, he meets his other friend Chota and cannot muster enough courage to join the marriage festivities. But having been seen by Ram Charan, both of them call him out so that they can go for playing hockey for sometime. However, Bakha starts behaving in a strange manner. Lost in his thoughts, he does not respond to their jovial behaviour. On learning about unhappy and disgusting experiences of the morning, both Chota and Ram Charan express sympathy with him and wonder if they could catch hold of the swine-like pundit to kill him on the spot. However, they realise that this will be impossible and futile. Ram Charan and Chota now ask him to get the hockey stick from Havildar Charat Singh and promise to return soon for the play.

On his way to Charat Singh's house, Bakha once again sees with longing eyes at a sola hat hanging in the quartermaster's room of the 38th Dogras. He had always longed to own that kind of hat and had even thought of stealing it somehow but the fear of the alert sentries makes him change his mind.

When he ultimately meets Charat Singh, he finds that the latter is a broad-minded person who offers him tea and gives him the promised hockey stick. Bakha is filled with deep gratitude for Charat Singh for his kindness and leaves the barracks in a happy mood.

On the way, Bakha meets the military babu's two sons who also want to play hockey. The younger son is not allowed to play as they feel that he might get hurt during the game. In fact, the younger son does get hurt and is carried by Bakha when he is still bleeding profusely. The Babu's wife is surprised to see her injured son and accuses Bakha of defiling her house by coming there. This confuses his mind and infuriates his heart. In a dejected mood, he returns to the playfield to find that all the boys have gone home. After hiding the hockey stick among the bushes, he starts trudging towards his home.

Bakha is ill-treated by both his father and younger brother for wasting his time instead of engaging himself in the job of cleaning the latrines in the barracks. When he is told to leave home, Bakha is filled with utmost despair. He starts wondering what he had done to deserve the misery he was experiencing. He says that he would rather prefer dying to being ill-treated both at home and outside.

In this dejected mood, Bakha sits under a tree and suddenly he is accosted by Colonel Hutchinson, Chief of the Salvation Army in the region. Bakha is overwhelmed by the foreigner's interest in him but is unable to understand what he is told about the love of Christ, the Original Sin and other related stories.

The rude behaviour and insulting remarks about the sweepers made by Colonel Hutchinson's wife fill Bakha's mind with pain once again and he starts moving

aimlessly when he suddenly hears some people shouting "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" followed by another group shouting still louder "The Mahatma has come!" Along with the crowd of people, he too goes to the Golbagh where Mahatma Gandhi is going to address a meeting. There he finds the Hindu Lallas, the Kashmiri Muslims, the Sikh rustics, red-cheeked Afghans, Indian Christians and many people from the outcastes' colony together in the crowd. He realises that it was only Mahatma Gandhi who could bring unity among all the castes. He overhears some babus talking about Gandhi being a legend and the freedom becoming a reality soon under his leadership. He also learns that Gandhi had been released from the jail on the condition that he would not make any political speech. Just then there arises a shout from the crowd "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai! Hindu, Mussulman, Sikh ki jai! Harijan ki jai!" and he sees the little man escorted by Kasturba Gandhi on one side and his English disciple now called Miraben, on the other.

During his speech, Gandhi declares untouchability to be the greatest blot on Hinduism and says that it was very strange for Indians to seek freedom from the grip of a foreign nation while they themselves were trampling upon millions of their fellow human beings for centuries. Then he relates the story of the scavenger boy Uka, an untouchable, for whose sake he always pleaded with his mother in his childhood. The Mahatma expresses the wish to be born a scavenger in his next life so that he could realise their misery in toto and talks of removing the social evil of untouchability. He then exhorts the untouchables to give up their evil habits of drinking alcohol and eating meat. He asks them not to accept the remains of the food from the high caste Hindus but to insist on payment in sound foodgrains. Gandhi concludes his speech with the words: "May God give you strength to work out your soul's salvation to the end!" (U, p. 164)

Bakha is deeply touched by the concluding words of the Mahatma's speech which seemed to convey Bakha's own feelings of horror and indignation at the ill-treatment of the untouchables by the caste Hindus. When the Mahatma leaves, people again shout, "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" but he also hears a dissident voice that says that Gandhi is a humbug, a fool and a hypocrite. He voices his disgust about Gandhi living in the ancient times without realising the benefits that could accrue to India from modern technology.

Iqbal Nath Sarashar, a young poet, and his friend R.N. Bashir, a Barrister-at-Law, now discuss how the Indian society can be rid of its bane of untouchability. They talk of introducing the flush system for sewage disposal and recognising equal rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone as was the case with the legal system. Bakha feels bewildered and his mind is filled with gloom once again when he is left alone. The conflict in his mind makes him more miserable and he makes up his mind to go home and seek some solace by relating the story about Gandhi's visit and his speech to his father. As E.M. Forster says in the Preface:

Some readers may find this closing section of the book too voluble and sophisticated, in comparison with the clear observation which has preceded it, but it is an integral part of the author's scheme. It is the necessary climax, and it has mounted up with triple effect. (U, p. 8)

The plot of *Untouchable*, though linear in form and simple in content, is perhaps one of the best experimental plots in the elementary stage of Indian novel in English. The use of the narrative techniques of stream-of-consciousness, flashback, reverie, interior monologue etc. and confining the action to less than twenty-four hours in the life of its hero Bakha makes it one of the most well-structured plots. The single-purpose theme of untouchability, being defined and analysed from different viewpoints and in all its complexity, provides it the much-desired coherence as is clear from Anand's observation in his essay on *On the Genesis of Untouchable*:

The binding together, the orchestration, and the interplay of Bakha's inner feelings and outer experience, with the apperception of the intangible "cloud of unknowing" hovering over his head, was not achieved merely spontaneously. The different elements had to be knit together, with intense effort, to achieve some sort of coherence.³

Though *Untouchable* does not have the conventional form of a proper beginning, middle and end, it does have a conclusive open-endedness offering three probable solutions to the removal of the evil of untouchability viz. conversion to Christianity, Gandhi's exhortation to the Harijans to shun the bad habits and get integrated into the mainstream of the Indian nation slowly but surely, and the introduction of the flush system. In this connection, Forster's observation in the Preface to the novel is quite relevant:

The book is simply planned, but it has form. The action occupies one day, and takes place in a small area. The great catastrophe of the 'touching' occurs in the morning, and poisons all that happens subsequently, even such pleasant episodes as the hockey match and the country walk. After a jagged course of ups and downs, we come to the solution, or rather to the three solutions with which the book closes. . . . Bakha returns to his father and his wretched bed, thinking now of the Mahatma, now of the Machine. His Indian day is over and the next day will be like it, but on the surface of the earth if not in the depths of the sky, a change is at hand. (*U*, pp. 7-8)

3.4 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Indian novel has gone through a major transformation owing to the impact of the West, in the early decades of the twentieth century. This metamorphosis of content and form is evident in the fiction of Mulk Raj Anand who writes in the English language. Talking about the creative process at work in his novel *Untouchable* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Anand says that these novels "bridge the gulf between the surviving recitalist narratives in the languages of India and the residual influences of modern techniques in the West."⁴ As a result, they take the novel form from the somewhat narrow provincial boundaries of Indian languages into the longer tradition of the international epic novel.

Mulk Raj Anand has admitted that he was amply influenced by the technique of James Joyce. And he has unconsciously imbibed the lessons of style and construction of the contemporary novel. Anand defines the novel as "the transformation by imagination of human beings through their conflicts in a given time space continuum as against the recital which is rooted in the timeless narration of Eternity."⁵ But Anand is very clear and declares eloquently that the influence exerted by European technique does not make his novel less Indian or inferior in any way. The richness of content, the ideas and the action: of our struggle to be human, to remain alive and grow, in our Gandhian time, keeps him unmistakably Indian and invests the narrative with 'aliveness' and 'intensity.'

About the form of the novel, Mulk Raj Anand says that he had begun writing a bardic realist narrative, under the influence, mainly, of the enormous feudal Urdu epic *Fasana-I-Azad* by Ratan Nath Sarshar, in the early twenties. This amorphous narrative seemed to be endless, protracted, "like a flood in the Ganga, arising from Shiva's head, in the Himalayas, which hoped someday to flow into the ocean of story."⁶

As Anand was thinking of the method for writing his works, he came across James Joyce's novels. After reading Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, he felt constrained to rewrite his loose narrative as a self-conscious novel, from which he

began to cut out the ballast, the outpourings, the long philosophisings, and the sermons, in order to reflect, from the constructed novel, the prismatic view of the characters, so that they would reflect their auras, radiances and atmosphere, without overt interpretation and personal comments.

As this task proceeded, he tried to take certain characters from his recital and began to work upon them in order to put them in compact long short stories. One such fundamental character in his endless narrative, who had been compelling attention, from the labyrinth depths of disaster, chaos and strife of India of that time was Bakha, the sweeper boy, whose tragi-comic life seemed to him symbolic of all untouchables. Anand wanted to transform the raw material of the conflict-torn rhythms of Bakha's existence into a narrative that would evoke response from the reader.

Also, Anand decided to create the atmosphere of the work-a-day world of his hero-antihero, who would be the very opposite of Joyce's lower middle class Jesuit intellectual, but would be integral to his own North Indian village landscape.

Anand wanted to create the plot, characters and milieu of his novels on the sound base of 'social, political, cultural, realities.' Being the son of a clerk in the army, he had the knowledge of lived experiences of life in the British Indian cantonments and he creates a strong segment in Bakha's life in his attempts to copy the Tommies by acquiring the sola topi, trousers, blanket and the hockey stick. The novelist had also gone through the 'misery, pain and humiliation in the lives of the outcastes as the loyalty of their family to the Ismaili Aga Khan faith made them a sort of 'untouchables' in the eyes of most of the orthodox Hindu brotherhood. Therefore, the pity for Bakha is aroused not so much from 'sympathy' but from 'understanding' of the degradation of outcastes, from sharing their pains, humiliations and inner aspirations. By maintaining 'distance' and 'objectivity', he was able to make his *passion* turn into *compassion*.

Anand's writings gained authenticity from his own awareness of the subhuman conditions. And he developed technical skill to communicate anger without bitterness. He was averse to creating a tragic character, for the life of Bakha would then be a tragedy. He therefore created Bakha as one of the first tragi-comic heroes of Indian fiction.

The stream-of-consciousness of the hero Bakha in *Untouchable* runs throughout the novel, with the undercurrents of reminiscence, reverie and intuition indicated in certain phrases, symbolic words and truncated thoughts. Anand puts into the middle of the day a dream sequence which was culled from the hero's imagination as a fable of his pilgrim's progress. Anand's own observation becomes very pertinent in this context as he writes:

The atmosphere of the reverie was to hint at the turbulent world of his broken unconscious. The presentiments of the unknown fate which inspired him to pursue his quest, and which would be baulked by the taboo against him. The heart of his human enigma was placed here as a poem of his bodily movements, to indicate the movement of his soul. I wanted to show the monotony, the flatness, and the sameness of Bakha's life through which he would go, urged by the incurable urge of curiosity itself, but thwarted, desolate and derelict.⁷

At the end of the hero's reverie, in this strange haunted world, Bakha is not allowed to place an offering before the saint. And he finds himself among a swarm of monkeys. This is the novelist's way of keeping Bakha within the confines of his own hell. The images chosen are the images of the world around him: the bullock cart; the Sikh man, dressed in the uniform of the English army, blaring out discordant music; railway station with the goods train with an engine at each end, pulling both ways; himself getting on to a wagon, a sola topi on his head; a small village with narrow

streets; sparrows on the heap of grain; crow pecking at the bruised neck of a bullock; a little girl outside a sweet shop; a silversmith fashioning ornaments; an emaciated man on the steps of the ritually ornamented building; soldiers carrying him to a burning ground, where there were mounds of human bodies; holy men pouring the ashes of their dead into their hair; a white man smiling on the scene; an ascetic ten thousand years old performing a magic trick by which the white man was turned into a black dog; Bakha offering a gift and being disallowed; a swarm of monkeys jumping down.

Anand tries not to create these scenes through Bakha's eyes. As a novelist, he is looking on from the side so that he could see him during his pilgrim's progress, confronting his routine cosmogony. Says Anand, "Although I could see Bakha alone, a kind of expatriate, an exile, the outcaste, I wanted to put him into his own setting. And he was rendered in terms of his own human situations."⁸ The most important thing for the novelist is to impart actuality to the scene through which the sap of his life flows, making everything into his felt experiences and not an abstract statement. The novel succeeds in giving a direct impression of the reality of Bakha's life, indicating the sources of his inner rhythms and vibrations.

Untouchable is essentially a contemporary novel. There is implicit in this novel the beginning of the free natural man of our era, enslaved by circumstances, and who is in revolt against the suppressions. The narrative techniques of flashback, reverie, reminiscence, instinctive awareness of reality, intuition, etc. coupled with symbolic images, words and phrases, truncated thoughts, and Mulk Raj Anand's conscious awareness of bringing about the objective correlative from a distance, make *Untouchable* a modern novel in the real sense of the term.

3.5 CHARACTERISATION

Are characters in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* individuals of flesh and blood or mere types? Does the novel have flat or round characters? Is the hero of the novel, Bakha, the bearer of the main theme, the vision of the author, and the representative of an important segment of society? The answers to these questions will determine the success of the novelist as a creator of strong and lively personages with the help of which the content and form of the novel get suitably illuminated?

It is significant to note that the main character in each of Anand's novels undergoes a certain experience through which he matures. Bakha in *Untouchable* is a much more complex character than Munoo, the protagonist in the novel *Coolie*. He is not passive or static. He changes and grows during the course of the novel. At the end of the novel, Anand offers the alternatives for Bakha in a three-fold approach: the attempt of an Englishman to convert Bakha to Christianity, the speech Gandhi delivers on untouchability, and the talk between a progressive poet and a semi-educated Babu. But Bakha himself steps out of the story: he is only a passive listener. Having received no education, he does not understand many of the issues raised. Still, Gandhi's simple words and the poet's mentioning of a new machine which will revolutionize the sweeper's job fill Bakha with a hope for a better future.

The characters, especially the hero-antihero of *Untouchable*, are individuals striving to change their destiny with their own grit and determination. Often thwarted by the onslaughts of a system that lays great value on one's birth in a particular caste and the economic status in the society, Mulk Raj Anand makes the following pertinent observation in this connection while commenting on *Untouchable* and *Kanthapura*:

They reveal the change of consciousness from the old feudal orthodox life to the new modern confrontation of human values in the individual life. They

dramatise the conflicts of the characters, beyond the age of the gods, into the age of man where the evil in other men became important and when the release into future growth began to seem possible through the acquisition by the individual of democracy, thus giving man the right to feel, to think, to breathe in his own skin, to be aware of his own vital sentence.⁹

**Title, Theme, Plot
and
Characterisation**

Untouchable is spun round the happenings of a day in the life of the sweeper boy Bakha who has been elevated to the position of a hero in the novel. In creating a sweeper boy as the protagonist, Anand makes a revolutionary departure from the tradition of fiction writing in India. The portrayal of Bakha in the novel is so realistic and convincing that it imparts to the work a new meaning and depth. Bakha, it must be noted, is both an individual as well as a type. As the title of the novel *Untouchable* does not have a definite article, Bakha seems to be a representative untouchable, exemplifying the predicament of not only a specific untouchable but also of dispossessed men everywhere.

Bakha, the central character, is introduced to us on the very first page of the novel. He is described as a young man of eighteen, strong and able-bodied, who does his job of cleaning the public latrines promptly and satisfactorily. His father is a 'Jemadar' (chief) of all the sweepers in the town and is officially in charge of three rows of public latrines which line the extreme end of the colony.

Although his job is dirty, Bakha remains neat and clean. He does not let even his sleeves become soiled in the process of his sweeping and scrubbing the commodes. His laborious work results in his developing a fine physique. His muscular figure gives a wonderful wholeness to his body and imparts a certain nobility to him which is in contrast to his filthy profession and to the sub-human status to which he is born.

Bakha appears as a victim of social injustice at the very outset. He must get up early in the morning and attend to his work of cleaning the public latrines. He sleeps in a corner of his father's one-roomed mud-house. His father, Lakha, shouts at him if he is late in getting up from his bed which is by no means warm and comfortable. Bakha does not get a moment's rest and is frequently abused by his father who is very proud of being addressed as 'Jemadar' by the Indian sepoys. If Bakha goes to play with other boys, his father calls him back in the middle of the game and orders him to attend to the latrines.

On the particular day, to which the story pertains, Bakha is not only ordered by his father in a stern manner to get up but is also summoned by Havildar Charat Singh, who is waiting outside the latrines. He jumps from his bed as he hears him shout: "Ohe, Bakhya! Ohe, Bakhya! Ohe, scoundrel of a sweeper's son. Come and clean a latrine for me." (U, p. 15)

Bakha has a desire to look like a Sahib, to create his own world modelled after that of the English. Absolutely aware of his position, the sweeper does not accept his status but is eager to make others ignore it. As Anand says: "he had built up a new world which was commendable, if nothing else, it represented a change from the old ossified order and the stagnating conventions of the life to which he was born."

The flesh and blood character of Bakha is epitomised in the fact that Anand has taken care to caricature Bakha at times, especially in his fanciful efforts to imitate the ways of the 'sahibs' so much so that his friends Chota and Ram Charan nickname him "Pilpali sahib." (U, p. 12)

Bakha is stronger than Munoo, the central character in *Coolie*. He boldly faces his fate and is also mature sufficiently to analyse critically any situation with which he is confronted. It is evident in Bakha's fury about his father's unjustified abuses and his revolt against the hypocritical society which erupt over and again.

The futility of Bakha's rebellion and the extent of his suffering reveal an aspect of the conflict between the individual and the society. In spite of his revolt and strong resistance to opposing forces, Bakha is helplessly bound to his low caste status. He is conscious of the fact that his protest and rebellion will lead him nowhere. After he has polluted the temple and has learnt about the priest's immoral behaviour towards his sister, he becomes furious and wants to give the priest a piece of his mind: "And yet, there was a futility written on his face. . . . So in the highest moment, of his strength, the slave in him asserted itself, and he lapsed back, wild with torture, biting his lips, ruminating his grievances."

Bakha has not been idealized or glorified by Mulk Raj Anand. Though an exceptional lad among the sweepers, he remains a true representative of his class. As E.M. Forster says in the Preface to the novel:

Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand, sometimes weak, and thoroughly Indian. Even his physique is distinctive: we can recognize his broad intelligent face, graceful torso, and heavy buttocks, as does his nasty jobs, or steps out in artillery boots in hopes of a pleasant walk through the city with a paper of cheap sweets in his hand.

The different traits of his character stamp him as an individual human being.

3.6 OTHER CHARACTERS

Bakha is undoubtedly one of the strongest individual and symbolic characters in Indian English fiction. But Anand's strength in the art of characterisation also lies in the fact that the other characters in *Untouchable* complement and highlight not only the structural role of the hero but are also functional in mirroring the kaleidoscopic environment of the caste-ridden Hindu society of the pre-Partition days in the history of India.

One of the significant minor characters is Bakha's father Lakha who is the 'Jemadar' of the sweepers in the cantonment of Bulandshahr. He is a kind of patriarch who holds his children in great awe especially after the death of his wife. His reprimands and scolding, though resented by both the sons, do not produce any open protest from them. He is an egoist who likes to be addressed as 'Jemadar' and is proud of his 'izzat.' Though he bullies his children, yet the tenderness of his heart as a father is evident when he relates the story of Bakha's illness in his childhood. He acknowledges his subservience to the caste-Hindus and is reconciled to his low and inferior position in the society.

Lakha's younger son Rakha is a sort of a foil to Bakha. Unlike his elder brother, he has no element of intuitive protest in his character and lacks Bakha's love for cleanliness. He also does not attend to the work of sweeping and cleaning in the same efficient and natural manner as does Bakha. Anand has given a penetrating portrait of Rakha:

His tattered flannel shirt, grimy with the blowings of his ever-running nose, obstructed his walk slightly. The discomfort resulting from this, the fatigue, assumed or genuine, due to the work he had put in that morning, gave a rather drawn, long-jawed look to his dirty face on which flies congregated to taste the saliva on the corners of his lips. The quizzical, not-there look defined by his small eyes and his narrow, very narrow forehead, was positively ugly. (U, p. 92)

Sohini, an important female character in the novel, has a pleasing personality like her brother Bakha. The charm of her physical beauty is evidenced when she is described as having a sylph-like form, an arched narrow waist and globular breasts. Bakha is proud of her beauty and charm but cannot stand the humiliation suffered by her at an attempt of molestation by the priest in the temple. This episode shows the remarkable integrity and moral uprightness of her character. In fact, it seems that Anand has introduced the character of Sohini with the aim of exposing the hypocrisy of the caste Hindus who like all other human beings can and do fall prey to the sensuous charms of the female body. At the well, the priest of the temple goes out of his way to pour water into Sohini's pitcher, ignoring the others who have been waiting for a longer time than Sohini. Again, Pundit Kali Nath tries to seduce her in the lavatory of his house where Sohini has gone as per his order earlier in the day. Sohini's maternal instinct towards her brothers is of great significance in the novel. Her mother being dead, it is she who looks after the household, and the needs of her father and two brothers.

Pundit Kali Nath, like other minor characters, is a functional character with whose help Anand puts to satire and ridicule the hypocrisy and cruelty of conventional religion. He is one of the priests of the local temple in Bulandshahr. He is an ill-humoured old devil who gets ready to draw water from the village well when persistently requested by the crowd of untouchables to do so. However, it is not out of any sense of sympathy towards them but chiefly because of his selfish motive of the exercise of doing some good to the chronic constipation from which he suffers. He favours Sohini because he is enamoured of her physical charm. Later on, when Sohini protests against the attempt of molestation, he exploits his religious respectability and comes out shouting "polluted, polluted" and the crowd in the temple seems to be on his side. Thus he becomes a representative of the traditional tyranny and injustice often inflicted on the low castes in the name of religion by the so-called high castes.

In Charat Singh, we meet a generous-minded caste Hindu who stands in full contrast to the hypocritical priest. He is a Havildar in the army and is a famous player of the 38th Dogra regiment. He has a high sense of humour and mentions his piles to Bakha in a typical comical style. He is above caste prejudices and is free from the 'pollution' complex. He not only gives Bakha the promised hockey stick but also offers him a cup of tea. Bakha is duly impressed by his generosity and fair-mindedness.

Colonel Hutchinson, like his nagging wife, is one of the two English characters in the novel. He has been drawn in the comic spirit of caricature. The dress he designs for himself is a funny mixture of English and Indian costumes: a pair of white trousers, a scarlet jacket and a white turban with a red band across it. On his way to church, he starts singing with the hope of adding another convert to his list. He is made the purveyor of one of the probable solutions for the removal of the evil of untouchability. He is physically thin and lean and balding, and is fired with the zeal of converting low caste Hindus to Christianity. He tries long to persuade Lakha to become a Christian but the reply the sweeper always gives him is that the religion which was good for his forefathers is good for him also. In spite of his advanced age, Colonel Hutchinson is quite active and acts with a missionary zeal in the colony of the outcastes for which he is often criticised by his wife.

Iqbal Nath Sarashar, the poet, is a young man. He is a revolutionary social reformer who has a progressive outlook and seems to be a sort of the mouthpiece of the novelist offering the introduction of the flush system as another alternative solution to the removal of the evil of untouchability. He becomes the representative of those who consider modern technology to be the saviour of mankind. He is in favour of an organic change in society to the Marxian ideology. With his character, Anand endows the novel with a significant perspective to the main theme.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. Mulk Raj Anand's novels portray Indian social problems realistically. Discuss with reference to the novel *Untouchable*.
2. Write a critical note on the plot-construction in *Untouchable*.
3. Discuss the narrative techniques employed by Mulk Raj Anand in his novel *Untouchable*.
4. Bakha is not just a suffering abstraction but a man of flesh and blood convincingly portrayed by the author. Discuss.

3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Mulk Raj Anand. *Untouchable* 1935; rpt. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1970.

Mulk Raj Anand. "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*: A Note." In *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. R.K. Dhawan New Delhi: Prestige, 1992.

Mulk Raj Anand. "Roots and Flowers." In *Creating Theory: Writers on Writing*, ed. Jasbir Jain New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2000.

References

¹ Mulk Raj Anand, "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*: A Note," in *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. R.K. Dhawan (New Delhi: Prestige, 1992), p. 11.

² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴ Mulk Raj Anand, "Roots and Flowers," in *Creating Theory: Writers on Writing*, ed. Jasbir Jain (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2000), p. 50.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.56.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

UNIT 4 THE PICTURE OF A FRAGMENTED NATION IN ANAND'S *UNTOUCHABLE*

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 The Picture of a Fragmented Nation
- 4.2 Hinduism
- 4.3 Islam
- 4.4 Christianity
- 4.5 The Religion of Humanity
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Glossary
- 4.8 Questions
- 4.9 Suggested Reading

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to understand the emerging picture of the Indian nation in the colonial period as it appears in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*. In the novel, Anand focuses on the three given religions—Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. In addition to these is the fourth—preached by Gandhiji—the religion of humanity.

4.1 THE PICTURE OF A FRAGMENTED NATION

A cursory reading of the text makes it obvious that *Untouchable* does not directly deal with the complexities of nationalism. But in presenting the life of Bakha, an untouchable, the novel shows that the idea of Indian nation / national culture emerging in the colonial period failed to include within its body the whole of the demographic mass that it claimed to represent. Partha Chatterjee in *Nation and its Fragments* (1994) argues that "the formation of a 'national culture' was necessarily built upon the privileging of an 'essential tradition,' which in turn was defined by a system of exclusions."¹

How does Anand convey the isolation and exclusion of the untouchables in a novel which covers a time span of only one day? The novel opens with a description of the outcastes' colony which is excluded both from the town and the cantonment.

A group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and the other outcastes from Hindu society. (U; p. 11)

However, the next paragraph describes Bakha, the untouchable, as a "strong and able-bodied" man, who "thought" the outcastes' colony to be "an 'uncongenial' place to live in," (U, p. 13) and who was at the same time "caught by the glamour of the white-man's life" (U, p. 14) Thus Anand humanizes the untouchable by letting the reader see things from Bakha's perspective and by giving the reader an access to his private thoughts and emotions. The impact of Bakha's sufferings is further accentuated by the near total identification of the narrative voice with that of the

hero's. Saros Cowasjee remarks: "So strong is the identification with his hero that for the best part of the novel we forget the presence of the novelist."²

The exclusion of the hero is further accentuated by the novel's episodic structure in which each episode serves as a form of community existence from which Bakha is socially or emotionally excluded.³ For instance, Bakha's casual walk through the main street of the city becomes loaded with meaning when it highlights the humiliation that an untouchable constantly experiences. Even while paying for sweets Bakha's "head was bent [and] he was vaguely ashamed and self-conscious at being seen buying sweets" (*U*, p. 51). This is followed by the crucial moment in the novel when Bakha is slapped for 'touching' an upper caste Hindu. Anand observes:

His [Bakha's] first impulse was to run, just to shoot across the throng, away, far away from torment. But he realised that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the onlookers, but a moral one. He knew that contact with him, if he pushed through, would defile a great many more of these men. (*U*, p. 52)

The incident jolts Bakha into an awareness of his position in the social order. When surrounded by the mob, Bakha realizes that the barrier was not "a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulder would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like onlookers, but a moral one." (*U*, p. 54) The moment is crucial because it is for the first time that Bakha becomes painfully aware of the fact that he is an untouchable:

Like a ray of light shooting through darkness, the recognition of his position, the significance of his lot dawned upon him. . . . A shock 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. (*U*, p. 59)

His helplessness is further demonstrated in the next episode when his sister is molested and subsequently humiliated by the priest. Through these and other episodes, Anand shows the marginalized status of the Untouchables in India.

Further, instead of a simplistic portrayal of a Hindu-Muslim divide, the novel shows the complexities of the problems involved in the emerging model of the nation by highlighting the alliance between the lower caste Hindus and Muslims; the lower caste Hindus and English; and the rifts within the Hindu lower castes itself. It is impossible for the outcastes' to organize themselves into any sort of a movement against the oppression of the upper caste Hindus since they are themselves divided into a hierarchy of castes. Gulabo, the washerwoman, "thought herself superior to every other outcaste, firstly because she claimed a high place in the hierarchy of the castes among the lower castes, secondly because a well-known Hindu gentlemen in the town who had been her lover in her youth was still kind to her in her middle age." (*U*, pp. 27-28) Bakha's situation is peculiar since he not only belongs to the lower class but within the lower caste he belongs to the lowest category: "Ram Charan was admitted to be of the higher caste among them, because he was a washerman. Chota, the leather-worker's son, came next in hierarchy, and Bakha was of the third and lowest category." (*U*, p. 108) Thus Bakha faces a double alienation since he is alienated both from the upper and the lower caste Hindus.

The exclusion of the lower castes shows the gaps in the model of the nation based on privileging an essential tradition: on the one hand a bulk of the population does not figure in the model of the nation and, on the other hand, the dominant Hindu religion

faces a threat from within, since exclusion of the lower castes forces the formation of a possible alliance of the lower caste Hindus with the Muslims and the Christians.

Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* also deals with a similar phenomenon. The native community begins to break apart after the arrival of the Christian missionaries, who admitted the outcastes into the church. "These outcastes, or *osu*, seeing that the new religion welcomed twins and such abominations, thought that it was possible that they would also be received."⁴ Initially there is a protest against the inclusion of the outcastes, but Mr. Kaiga, who is in charge of the congregation, argues that "Before God . . . there is no slave or free. We are all the children of God and we must receive these our brothers."⁵

A similar issue is raised by Anand in *Untouchable*. Colonel Hutchinson, chief of the local Salvation Army targets the Untouchables as possible converts to Christianity. He was always seen "talking to some Untouchable in the rubbish heaps about divinity and trinity." (U, p. 135) For the Untouchable Bakha, conversion into Christianity not only promises an equal status with other human beings but also in the bargain the hope of becoming a *Sahib*. Bakha, even though the priest's songs baffle and bore him, follows him

because the Sahib wore trousers. Trousers had been the dream of his life. The kindly interest which the trousered man had shown him when he was downcast had made Bakha conjure up pictures of himself wearing the Sahib's clothes, talking the Sahib's language and becoming like the guard whom he had seen on the railway station near his village. (U, p. 143)

At the same time Bakha is influenced by Christ's message of equality: "He sacrificed Himself for the rich and the poor, for the Brahmin and the Bhangis' . . . 'Han, han, Sahib, I [Bakha] understand, 'Yessuh Messih makes no difference between the Brahmin and myself'." (U, p. 144) But most of what the Salvationist says makes no sense to Bakha:

He hadn't understood very much what the Salvationist said. He didn't like the idea of being called a sinner. He had committed no sins that he could remember. How could he confess his sins? Odd. What did it mean confessing sins? 'Does the Sahib want some secret knowledge?' He wondered. (U, p. 145)

The Salvationist instead of understanding the actual problems of Bakha mystifies the Christian religion which repel Bakha from the possible option of conversion to Christianity. Unlike Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, in which the conversion of the outcastes to Christianity breaks the clan, Anand in the *Untouchable* does not deal with such a possibility in any depth. However, by highlighting the possibility of an alliance between the lower castes and the Christians, the novel shows the dangers the Hindu community was facing from within.

As mentioned earlier, the novel demonstrates how the exclusion of the lower caste Hindus and Muslims forces the formation of an unspoken alliance between the two. Bakha feels "much nearer" to the Muslims whom "the Hindus considered outcastes." (U, pp. 48-49) It is a Muhammadan tonga-wallah who comes to Bakha's rescue when he is humiliated by the 'touched' Hindu in the market:

'Leave him, never mind, let him go, come along, tie your turban,' consoled the tonga-wallah, who being a Muhammadan and thus also an Untouchable from the orthodox Hindu point of view, shared the outcaste's resentment to a certain degree. (U, p. 57)

It is significant that Bakha is constricted by a "moral" hindrance and by a notion of defilement. Both concepts are products of orthodox Hinduism which misinterprets the caste-system invented by the Aryans. What had begun as a classification based on the type of work performed by individuals, eventually decayed into a rigid stratification with the Brahmans forming the top of the pyramid, followed by the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas, with the Shudras forming the base. Thus caste was a group system based on services and functions. It was meant to be an all-inclusive order without any common dogma and allowing the fullest latitude to each group.

While the first three castes occupied fairly important positions in their society, the Shudras were treated as the outcastes. These outcastes—though important for keeping the caste stratification intact—were made to feel superfluous and unwanted. Their function of keeping their society clean earned them the rubric of "untouchables" and progressively they were pushed to the margins of their society—literally and figuratively. Their plight is focussed on through little cameo scenes in the novel which speak for themselves, like the scene at the well, the events at the temple, Bakha's humiliation in the market-place, and the attempt on Sohini's honour.

Anand also stresses the fact that "defilement" and "pollution" are not related to a sense of hygiene in the Hindu community, but instigated by religion. At the opening of the novel, when Bakha is cleaning the toilets, we are told:

And though his job was dirty he remained comparatively clean. He didn't even soil his sleeves handling the commodes, sweeping and scrubbing them. . . Havildar Charat Singh, who had the Hindu instinct for immaculate cleanliness, was puzzled when he emerged from his painful half an hour in the latrines and caught sight of Bakha. Here was a low-caste man who seemed clean. (U, p. 17)

The contradictions inherent in the practice of untouchability are highlighted through Bakha's interactions with different sections of Indian society. On the question of education, Bakha ruminates on the absurdity of not being allowed to go to school on the pretext of being a sweeper's son, when "most of the Hindu children touched him willingly at hockey and wouldn't mind having him in school with them." (U, p. 42) The betel-leaf seller and the sweet-shop owner take his money, even cheat him, but not before they have thrown water on the coins and thereby purified them. This throwing of water instead of "ganga-jal"—the traditional purificatory instrument—for removing the pollution from an untouchable's money, throws light on the hollowness of jaded, inherited, notions of purity which have lost their significance and meaning but not their practice. Mulk Raj Anand explores the manner in which untouchability is addressed in different religions and the outcome of his study is truly illuminating.

The religion which dominates the population of Bulandshahr, the setting of Anand's novel, is Hinduism. Though important for the dominant social structure to validate and propagate itself, the outcastes are forever at the mercy of the upper-castes. So congenial is their subservience that even wrongful abuse is countered by servile admission; a point well-illustrated by Bakha's plea to the affronted upper-class Hindu: "I have erred now. I forgot to call. I beg your forgiveness. It won't happen again. I forgot. I beg your forgiveness. It won't happen again." (U, p. 53) Bakha's innate sense of dignity is blunted by inherited notions of servility—"They are our masters. We must respect them and do as they tell us" (U, p. 88)—and in the temple sequence, his curiosity to see the shrine pulls him towards it and we are told:

But he soon lost his grace in the low stoop which the dead weight of years of habitual bending cast on him. He became the humble, oppressed underdog that he was by birth, afraid of everything, creeping slowly up, in a curiously hesitant, cringing movement. (U, p. 64)

The Picture of a Fragmented Nation



An old lady with her grandchildren

Throughout the novel, the Hindus are shown treating him worse than they treat their animals. The barrage of insults which are showered on his head by the upper-castes—men and women alike—are merited by the accident of his birth as an untouchable. We are shown a community which is ridden with superstition, false notions of class, and hypocrisy. The Hindu priests—the Brahmins—are the worst of the lot and in the figure of Pundit Kali Nath we see the worst possible conjunction of decadent traditions and hypocrisy. Though he would never allow an untouchable to enter the temple, he has no compunctions in making indecent suggestions to Sohini and even tries to molest her. Sohini's plight far exceeds that of Bakha for she is doubly oppressed—as an untouchable and a woman.

What comes through, quite unequivocally, is the unbridled exploitation of the outcasts at the hands of the upper-castes; through the figure of Bakha, Anand questions the assumptions based on which Hinduism practises untouchability and records the movements against untouchability, which were gaining force since the 1920s, in Bakha's questioning of his deplorable position in society.

4.3 ISLAM

Though the novel is dominated by a Hindu population, considerable space is given to the Muslims. This segment of the population is unconscious of the Hindu bias against the outcastes as Islam treats all human beings equally; and therefore, has no practice similar to untouchability.

The empathy which Bakha, technically a Hindu lower-caste, feels with the Muslims "whom the Hindus considered outcastes and who were, therefore, much nearer him," (U, p. 47) comes through in a series of scenes in which Bakha interacts with them. While the Hindu betel-leaf seller flings a packet of cigarettes at Bakha "as a butcher might throw a bone to an insistent dog sniffing round the corner of his shop," (U, p. 46) the Muslim barber asks Bakha to bend down and light his cigarette from his hukkah. The abuses which the Hindu showers on a hapless Bakha in the market place is counterpointed by the compassionate response of the tonga-wallah,

'Leave him, never mind, let him go, come along, tie your turban,' consoled the tonga-wallah, who being a Muhammadan and thus also an Untouchable from the orthodox Hindu point of view, shared the outcaste's resentment to a certain degree. (U, p. 55)

Bakha's response to the event is in keeping with his original empathy towards the Muslims: "The tonga-wallah was kind. He made me weep telling me, in that way, to take my things and walk along. But he is a Muhammadan. They don't mind touching us, the Muhammadans and the Sahibs." (U, p. 57)

4.4 CHRISTIANITY

The third segment of the population, of Bulandshahr, is composed of the "sahibs" in the cantonment. Bakha's interaction with the "tommies," occasioned by his employment in the barracks of a British regiment, offers him an avenue to see himself as something other than an untouchable. We are told: "The Tommies treated him as a human being and he had learnt to think of himself as superior to his fellow outcastes." (U, p. 10)

Mulk Raj Anand introduces the Christian angle in the novel through the comico-pathetic figure of Colonel Hutchinson, chief of the local Salvation Army. A true believer in his cause of saving souls, Colonel Hutchinson is a propagator of conversion. We are told:

He was marvellously active for his three score years and five, laying himself in hiding of yore in deep pits of filth or behind heaps of dung, to wait for some troubled outcaste who might be tired and hungry and would listen in his despair to the gospel of Christ. (U, p. 134)

It is this impulse which makes the colonel approach Bakha and invite him to visit the "girja-ghar." (U, p. 138) Though Bakha does not understand much of what the Colonel is singing or saying, one statement of the Colonel goes straight to his heart "He [Christ] sacrificed Himself to help us all; for the rich and the poor; for the Brahmin and the Bhangi." (U, p. 142)

Bakha, though doubtful of the Colonel's designs on him, follows him because he is too much in awe of this Sahib who mixes with the outcastes and also because he feels

that the Colonel might, out of kindness, gift him a pair of used white trousers. The farcical and comical aspects of conversion, as a possible solution for the outcastes to end their misery, are exposed by Bakha's inability to comprehend how he is a 'sinner,' (U, p. 143) and the Colonel's inability to break out of his jargon to satisfy Bakha's curious and questioning mind.

Moreover, the Colonel's wife's outburst, "I can't keep waiting for you all day, while you go messing about with all those dirty bhangis and chamars," (U, p. 145) shows Bakha that social snobbery would leave no scope for Christian tolerance and his dignity as a human being would suffer despite the act of conversion.

4.5 THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY

It was as if the crowd had determined to crush everything, however ancient or beautiful, that lay in their achievement of all that Gandhiji stood for. It was as if they knew, by an instinct surer than that of conscious knowledge, that the things of the old decadence must be destroyed in order to make room for those of new. (U, pp. 150-51)

The above extract, taken from the novel, elucidates the unifying power of Gandhiji's personality. He is referred to, in the course of the novel, as "a legend, a tradition, an oracle," (U, p. 153) and his crusade against untouchability is thrown into relief by the response he elicits and the words that he speaks. Gandhiji's experiences as a child, his desire to be born as an untouchable, and the story of the eighteen-year-old Brahmin doing scavenger's work in his ashram, touch Bakha's heart and he feels that "he could put his life in his hands and ask him to do what he liked with it. For him he would do anything." (U, p. 163)

Gandhiji's views on Untouchability are clearly defined in the novel. In his speech, Gandhi observes:

As you all know, while we are asking for freedom from the grip of a foreign nation, we have ourselves, for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse for our iniquity. For me, the question of these people is moral and religious. When I undertook to fast unto death for their sake, it was in obedience to the call of my conscience.' (U, pp. 162-63)

However, Gandhi's views are not accepted *in toto*. The Poet at the end of the novel, even while he accepts Gandhi's views on most subjects, questions Gandhi's stance vis-à-vis the introduction of machine in India. He argues that India by remaining agricultural "has suffered for not accepting the machine. We must, of course, remedy that. I hate the machine. I loathe it. But I shall go against Gandhi there and accept it. And I am sure in time we will learn to love it." (U, p. 169) It is the new laws introduced by the British in the Indian penal code along with the introduction of machine that will probably lead to the eradication of Untouchability:

We must recognise an equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone. The Mahatma didn't so say, but the legal and social basis of caste having been broken down by the British-Indian penal code, which recognises the rights of every man before a court, caste is now mainly governed by profession. When the sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain Untouchables. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without anyone having to handle it—the flush system. Then the sweepers will be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society. (U, p. 173)

The novel ends on a hopeful note with a probable solution for the Untouchables but in the process it reveals, directly or indirectly, the various problems that were inherent in the model of the nation that was based on a system of exclusion of minorities, Untouchables and outcastes. The possible alliance of the lower castes with the Muslims and Christians was a serious threat to the Hindu community around which the model of the nation was apparently based. Though there is a glimmer of hope at the end of the novel, there is no genuine possibility of a re-incorporation of outcastes into the Hindu community. Bakha till the end remains a passive spectator and not a doer: he can only hope for the introduction of the flush system but can himself do nothing about it: "‘That machine,’ he thought, ‘which can remove dung without anyone having to handle it, I wonder what it is like? If only that ‘gentleman’ hadn’t dragged the poet away, I could have asked him.’" (U, p. 174)

While in the crowd, Bakha is aware of "an insuperable barrier between himself and the crowd, the barrier of caste"; but he also feels that "Gandhi alone united him with them, in the mind, because Gandhi was in everybody’s mind, including Bakha’s." (U, p. 151) Anand offers no solution in the novel, with regard to untouchability, for it would be beyond his scope as a novelist, but what he does do—by playing off different points of view—is implant a seed of hope in Bakha’s mind of the possibilities which the future might hold.

Through Gandhiji’s presence, Bakha is given a real possibility of recognizing himself as a human being in his own society. In a letter to Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Gandhiji argues: "Caste has nothing to do with religion . . . it is harmful to both spiritual and natural growth. Varna and Ashrama are institutions which have nothing to do with castes." By calling the outcastes "Harijan"—the children of God—Gandhiji was striving to unite a sundered limb of Indian society to its body for achieving more effective social and political ends.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

We see, from the above discussion, that Mulk Raj Anand uses the novel to explore different points of view with regard to untouchability and expose the exploitation of the downtrodden in the name of religion. Anand critiques not only Hinduism but the other religions also to show how each offers only a partial solution to the problem of untouchability.

4.7 GLOSSARY

Congenital:	Existing since birth.
Conversion:	Changing one’s religion.

4.8 QUESTIONS

1. Write a detailed note on the social picture of colonial India that emerges from the novel?
2. Write a short note on Gandhi’s views on Untouchability in the novel?

3. Comment on M.R. Anand's criticism of Hinduism with regard to the practice of untouchability.
4. Does the novel provide a viable solution to the eradication of untouchability? Discuss.

4.9 SUGGESTED READING

Chinua, Achebe. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann, 1958.

B.R. Ambedkar. *Dr. Ambedkar on Poona Act*. Jalandhar: Bheem Patrika, 1973.

Mulk Raj Anand. 1935. *Untouchable*. New Delhi: Arnold, 1991.

Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Delhi: OUP, 1994.

Alastair, Niven. *The Yoke of Pity: A Study in the Fictional Writings of Mulk Raj Anand*. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1978.48.

Shaileshwar Sati, Prasad. *The Insulted and the Injured: Untouchables, Coolies, and Peasants in the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*. Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1997.

P.K., Rajan. "A Dialogue with Mulk Raj Anand." *Studies in Mulk Raj Anand*. New Delhi: Abhinav, 1986. 101.

---, "Realist and Fabulist: *Untouchable* and *The Road*." *Mulk Raj Anand: A Revaluation*. New Delhi: Arnold Associates, 1995. 29.

References

¹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* Delhi: OUP, 1994, p. 135.

² Qtd. in P.K. Rajan, "A Dialogue with Mulk Raj Anand," *Studies in Mulk Raj Anand* New Delhi: Abhinav, 1986, p. 29.

³ Alastair Niven, *The Yoke of Pity: A Study in the Fictional Writings of Mulk Raj Anand* New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1978, p. 48.

⁴ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* London: Heinemann, 1958, p. 111.

⁵ Ibid., p. 135.

UNIT 5 THE GANDHIAN INFLUENCE

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Gandhian Ideology
- 5.3 Gandhi in Indian Fiction
- 5.4 Gandhiji's Speech on Untouchability in the Novel
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 Questions
- 5.7 Suggested Reading

5.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will deal with the influence of Gandhi on Indian fiction in general and Mulk Raj Anand in particular. It will describe in detail Gandhi's appearance in the novel *Untouchable* and his speech on the theme of untouchability.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the early decades of the twentieth century, writers felt deeply inspired by Gandhi, Marx and Freud. Interestingly, none of them was a man of letters proper. But each was, in his own way, a prophet and a seer who made people think vigorously. They provoked intellectual turmoil and awakening amongst the intelligentsia. Of these, Gandhi's influence on Indian writers was most direct and significant.



Gandhi is indeed one of the most significant and influential figures of the present century. Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian Nobel Laureate, described Gandhi as "Mahatma in a beggar's garb." In spite of Gandhi's bitter protest against it, the appellation of Mahatma (the Great Soul) has stuck. The magnetic personality of Mahatma moved the spirit of Indian multitudes to act with high devotion to the cause

3. Comment on M.R. Anand's criticism of Hinduism with regard to the practice of untouchability.
4. Does the novel provide a viable solution to the eradication of untouchability? Discuss.

4.9 SUGGESTED READING

Chinua, Achebe. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann, 1958.

B.R. Ambedkar. *Dr. Ambedkar on Poona Act*. Jalandhar: Bheem Patrika, 1973.

Mulk Raj Anand. 1935. *Untouchable*. New Delhi: Arnold, 1991.

Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Delhi: OUP, 1994.

Alastair, Niven. *The Yoke of Pity: A Study in the Fictional Writings of Mulk Raj Anand*. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1978. 48.

Shaileshwar Sati, Prasad. *The Insulted and the Injured: Untouchables, Coolies, and Peasants in the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*. Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1997.

P.K., Rajan. "A Dialogue with Mulk Raj Anand." *Studies in Mulk Raj Anand*. New Delhi: Abhinav, 1986. 101.

- - -, "Realist and Fabulist: *Untouchable* and *The Road*." *Mulk Raj Anand: A Revaluation*. New Delhi: Arnold Associates, 1995. 29.

References

¹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* Delhi: OUP, 1994, p. 135.

² Qtd. in P.K. Rajan, "A Dialogue with Mulk Raj Anand," *Studies in Mulk Raj Anand* New Delhi: Abhinav, 1986, p. 29.

³ Alastair Niven, *The Yoke of Pity: A Study in the Fictional Writings of Mulk Raj Anand* New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1978, p. 48.

⁴ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* London: Heinemann, 1958, p. 111.

⁵ Ibid., p. 135.

UNIT 5 THE GANDHIAN INFLUENCE

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Gandhian Ideology
- 5.3 Gandhi in Indian Fiction
- 5.4 Gandhiji's Speech on Untouchability in the Novel
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 Questions
- 5.7 Suggested Reading

5.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will deal with the influence of Gandhi on Indian fiction in general and Mulk Raj Anand in particular. It will describe in detail Gandhi's appearance in the novel *Untouchable* and his speech on the theme of untouchability.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the early decades of the twentieth century, writers felt deeply inspired by Gandhi, Marx and Freud. Interestingly, none of them was a man of letters proper. But each was, in his own way, a prophet and a seer who made people think vigorously. They provoked intellectual turmoil and awakening amongst the intelligentsia. Of these, Gandhi's influence on Indian writers was most direct and significant.



Gandhi is indeed one of the most significant and influential figures of the present century. Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian Nobel Laureate, described Gandhi as "Mahatma in a beggar's garb." In spite of Gandhi's bitter protest against it, the appellation of Mahatma (the Great Soul) has stuck. The magnetic personality of Mahatma moved the spirit of Indian multitudes to act with high devotion to the cause

of winning independence through non-violent means and inspired a number of novelists in all Indian languages to write their works projecting the Gandhian ideology.

5.2 GANDHIAN IDEOLOGY

Gandhi stripped urban life of its pretentiousness and stressed that religion without compassion and culture without conscience were worthless. He wanted the writers to abandon their futile adulation of the past and boldly face the reality of India as she was. It was a country which was poor and starving, devoid of the luminous halo with which it had been associated by shallow intellectuals. Gandhi served as a beacon of light to the Indian intelligentsia, enlarging their mental horizon and adding a new dimension to their thinking. He provided a strong stimulus to the shaping of the literary trend and shifted the focus from Romanticism to Realism.

5.3 GANDHI IN INDIAN FICTION

The independence struggle traversed boundaries of language and community, involving the whole nation in the movement. India's struggle for freedom is a popular theme in Indian fiction. Mahatma Gandhi, a London-based Indian barrister, led this movement with his unique weapons of non-violence, non-cooperation, truth and love. Gandhi's advent on India's socio-political scene inspired a number of novelists in all Indian languages to write their works projecting his ideology. So strong was the influence of Gandhi on these writers that the eminent critic K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar names a particular period in Indian literary history as the "Gandhian Age": "The period between the two World Wars and comprising them both was the Gandhian Age in India. . . . Life could not be the same as before, and every segment of our national life—politics, economics, education, religion, social life, language and literature—acquired a more or less pronounced Gandhian hue." Gandhi exercised a potent influence on Indian literature both directly through his own writings and indirectly through the movements generated by his revolutionary thought and practice. Iyengar goes on to say: "As he [Gandhi] grew in stature, the nation grew in self-consciousness and strength." M.K. Naik describes the phenomenon of the strong influence of Gandhi as "the Gandhian whirlwind."

Premchand, the noted Hindi novelist, was immensely inspired by Gandhi. To put the Gandhian thought into practice, he resigned his government job and settled down in a village to experience the rural life in all its simplicity and austerity, and write about it. The dominant note in the later career of Premchand as a novelist reveals his deep insight into the life of the village folk and his abundant sympathy with their miserable existence. Gandhi's passionate crusade against colonial exploitation of the weaker nations by the stronger, his strong condemnation of any form of economic exploitation and his insistence on the upliftment of the downtrodden made a deep impact on his followers.

After World War I, the Indian writing underwent a sea change. It became more realistic and less idealized. Literature became a useful vehicle to convey the nationalist and revolutionary cause. It was the time when the nationalist movement in India was accompanied by a literary renaissance and social realism and tendentious literature of revolt had become fashionable. Thus the emergence of the Indian novels of social realism and political revolution after the first World War can be seen best suited to the times and condition. Social revolutionary tendencies became quite evident and pervasive in the literature of the Twenties and Thirties. Kai Nicholson rightly says: "A character who has loomed large in Indo-Anglian fiction during and

after his lifetime is Mahatma Gandhi." Sometimes he appears as a person and in some novels as an unseen hidden presence. In *Untouchable* (1935) and *The Sword and the Sickle*, Mulk Raj Anand brings him in as the central character in the plot. He appears in person also in R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), Khwaja Ahmed Abbas's *Inquilab* (1955) and Nagarajan's *The Chronicles of Kedaram*. Raja Rao introduces him through a representative in *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947). In *Kanthapura* (1938), which you shall read, he presents the central character Moorthy as a Village-Gandhi. In Mulk Raj Anand's *The Road*, Dhooli Singh is a Village-Gandhi. K.S. Venkataramani's *Murugan, the Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, the Patriot* (1932) are truly representative of Gandhian thought and politics extolling the ideals of Satyagraha and exhorting Indians to work for freedom and regeneration as a nation. In C.N. Zutshi's *Motherland*, Zeenut Futehally's *Zohra* and Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) also, the struggle for independence appears to be a major theme.

5.4 GANDHI'S SPEECH ON UNTOUCHABILITY IN THE NOVEL

Mahatma Gandhi is held in high respect by the people in the novel *Untouchable*. A large crowd is gathered in the golbagh to listen to the great man whose arrival is greeted with the words: "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai." (U, p. 157) There is a lot of excitement among the large crowd assembled there. The crowd is shouting Gandhi's name which has a magic effect upon Bakha who does not know anything about the great man but who has certainly heard his name and the word "Mahatma" in this connection. Bakha finds that among the crowd there are businessmen from the town, Kashmiri Muhammadans from the local carpet factories, the rough Sikh rustics from the near-by villages, red-cheeked Pathans—the followers of Abdul Gaffar Khan, the black-faced Indian Christian girls from the Salvation Army colony, and also men and women from the outcastes' colony. Here and there, Bakha also sees a stray European. All these people have come to pay their homage to Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi.

Bakha feels that there is "an insuperable barrier of caste between himself and the crowd." (U, p. 151) He feels that he has been lifted from the gutter to partake of a life which is his, and yet not his. He finds himself in the midst of a humanity that includes him in its folds, and yet debars him from entering into a living contact with it. Gandhi alone unites him with the crowd around him because "Gandhi was in everybody's mind, including Bakha's." (U, p. 151) It seems to Bakha that Gandhi might ultimately unite him with this crowd in every other respect also.

Bakha eagerly recalls all that he had heard of this man. People had said that Gandhi was a saint, that he was an *avatar* or an incarnation of the gods Vishnu and Krishna. Bakha hears a Hindu say: "The Sarkar is afraid of him." (U, p. 152) The Hindu adds that the local magistrate had withdrawn his order against Gandhiji's entry into Bulandshahr. Another Hindu says that actually the government has released Gandhiji from jail unconditionally. A rustic nearby asks if Gandhiji can overthrow the government. A babu replies that Gandhiji certainly has that power, and that he can even change the whole world. The British government is nothing before him. India's religious culture makes this country superior to the West. Neither cigarettes nor cinemas nor sensual pleasure can lead to the path of religious discipline that alone is considered the highest bliss in the world. Gandhi would show this path to the modern world, and Gandhi would teach the Indian people the true religion of love of God. One of the men listening to the babu's words feels deeply impressed. To this man, "Gandhi was a legend, a tradition, and an oracle." (U, p. 153) His wife had told him of the miracles that the saint Gandhi could perform. He had heard from time to time that Gandhi was the incarnation of Lord Krishna.

Bakha recalls having heard that "Gandhi was very keen on uplifting the Untouchables." (U, p. 155) It had been rumoured that Gandhi had been fasting for the sake of bhangis and chamars. Of course, Bakha cannot quite understand what fasting has to do with helping the people of the low castes. Probably Gandhi thinks that by not eating food for a few days, he can save it for the poor. Then Bakha hears a Congress worker telling the crowd that the government has allowed Gandhi to come out of jail on condition that he can speak to the people only on behalf of the harijans and for the removal of untouchability. Bakha wonders what the word "Harijan" means. Bakha would like to tell Gandhi about his experiences of that day and inform him how he had been slapped for having accidentally touched a caste Hindu.

About Gandhi's appearance in the novel. Saros Cowasjee writes: "Perched on a tree, not quite unlike an ape, Bakha gets his first view of Gandhi. With superb skill, Anand fashions the image of Gandhi as all knew him: the little man swathed in a white shawl, with his big protruding ears, expansive forehead, quixotic smile and determined chin. But more than the physical details is the magic of Gandhi that Anand has been able to capture."

When Gandhi arrives on the scene, he is accompanied with his wife and an English woman Miss Slade, now known as Miraben. The crowd shouts "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!" (U, p. 158) The Mahatma raises his right arm and blesses the crowd with a gentle benediction. Someone stands up to sing a hymn. The Mahatma closes his eyes, as if lost in prayer.

After the singing of hymns, the Mahatma begins his speech. In a single sentence, Anand sums up the unique mass appeal of Gandhi: "This strange man seemed to have the genius that could, by a single dramatic act, rally multi-coloured, multi-tongued India to himself." (U, pp. 158-59) The stage is set for Gandhi to speak, but his power lies not so much in his message as in what he has come to signify to the common mind. It is for this reason that Anand devotes twice as many pages to the Gandhi legend—"no sword could cut his body, no bullet could pierce his skin, no fire could scorch him"—and the audience's frenzied reaction to the arrival of the Mahatma, as to the speech itself.

Gandhi's speech is carefully drawn from his autobiography, *Young India* and other writings. Gandhi begins by saying that he would speak only about the so-called untouchables whom the government has tried to alienate from Hinduism by giving them a separate legal and political status. Gandhiji then tells his listeners that the Indians themselves have, for centuries, trampled upon millions of human beings without feeling the slightest regret. He says that he has undertaken a fast to death for the sake of those downtrodden millions in obedience to the call of his conscience.

The opening words of Gandhi's speech are unintelligible to Bakha, but when the Mahatma says that he regards untouchability as "the greatest blot on Hinduism" (U, p. 161) and elaborates on it in personal terms as to how he reacted to it in childhood, Bakha is thrilled. Gandhiji goes on to relate the story of a scavenger named Uka who used to clean the latrines in his house. He says that often he had asked his mother why it was wrong to touch him and why he was forbidden to do so. He tells that if he accidentally touched Uka, he was asked to perform ablutions; and though he obeyed, it was not without protesting that untouchability was not sanctioned by religion. He often had arguments with his parents on this matter. He told his mother that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Uka as sinful.

Gandhiji also expresses his genuine love for the outcastes. He tells people that he was at Nellore on the National Day. He met the untouchables there, and prayed as he had done that day. He says that he did not want to attain spiritual deliverance; he did not want to be reborn. But if he were to be reborn, he would wish to be reborn as an untouchable so that he may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled at

them, in order that he may endeavour to free himself and them from their miserable condition. Therefore he prayed that if he were to be born again, he should be so, not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, but as an untouchable, an outcaste. Bakha is struck by this love of Gandhiji for his class.

Gandhiji further says that he loves scavenging and that, in his ashram, an eighteen-year-old Brahmin is doing a scavenger's work in order to teach the lesson of cleanliness to ashram sweepers. This Brahmin lad, says Gandhiji, is a regular reader of the *Gita*, and he regularly says his prayers; but this lad feels that his achievement would be incomplete until he has become a perfect scavenger. Bakha is delighted to hear Gandhi's words about the boy and Gandhiji's wish to be born as an outcaste in his next life. Bakha begins to adore Gandhiji in his mind. Bakha would like to do anything for Gandhiji. In fact, he would like to go and work as a scavenger in Gandhiji's ashram.

Continuing his speech, Gandhiji says that the untouchables should realize that by working as sweepers and scavengers they are cleaning Hindu society but that, in order to succeed in their work, they must purify their own lives first, and must cultivate habits of cleanliness. Those among them who are addicted to the habits of drinking alcohol, gambling and eating meat, must get rid of such habits. If the untouchables are oppressed by the Hindus, the fault does not lie with the Hindu religion but with the people who profess this religion. At this point, Bakha feels that the Mahatma is not fair because he is blaming the untouchables by referring to their habits of eating meat and drinking. He fears that the Mahatma is drifting from the main issue.

Gandhiji further urges the sweepers to stop accepting the left-overs of the meals of high-caste Hindus. The sweepers should accept only sound and wholesome grains and not the rotten grains. These words of the Mahatma are liked by Bakha who wants to tell the Mahatma that on that very day he had felt compelled to pick up a loaf of bread from near the gutter and that his brother had found it necessary to accept leavings of food from the plates of the sepoys. The great man's words have the effect of a balm on Bakha's troubled mind. Bakha wishes that Gandhiji should tell his father not to treat Bakha so harshly because Bakha is already a victim of the callousness of the caste Hindus.

Gandhiji then goes on to say that he is an orthodox Hindu and that he knows that the Hindus are not sinful by nature. The Hindus are only sunk in ignorance. Gandhiji further says that all public wells, temples, roads, schools and hospitals should be declared open to the untouchables. This is how the evil of untouchability is to be rooted out. Gandhiji wants all those who love him to carry on propaganda against untouchability and also to take care that they do not use compulsion or brute force in securing this end. Gandhiji says that peaceful persuasion is the only means to this end. Two of the strongest desires of Gandhiji at this time are "the emancipation of the Untouchables and the protection of the cow." (*U*, p. 164) When these desires are fulfilled, India would really be free, and his own soul would also feel free. He concludes his lecture with the words: "May God give you strength to work out your soul's salvation to the end!" (*U*, p. 164)

Gandhiji's lecture contains the second possible solution to Bakha's problem and to the problem of the entire class of sweepers and scavengers. The other two solutions are proposed by Colonel Hutchinson and the poet Iqbal Nath: the former proposes conversion to Christianity, the latter the introduction of the flush-system, that cannot by itself remove untouchability though it would enable the sweepers to get rid of an unpleasant duty.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

It may be noted that all the solutions suggested in the novel are now obsolete because the Constitution of India has already declared untouchability to be a punishable crime. In fact the government of the day has introduced a system of special rights and privileges for the Scheduled Castes and the Backward Classes which include the sweeper community.

Gandhiji's solution of peaceful persuasion suggests that Bakha must passively wait for a change of heart in the Hindus of India. Ultimately Bakha goes home, thinking of Gandhiji and also of the possibility of the introduction of flush-system suggested by Iqbal Nath though he does not know exactly how the flush-system works.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. Trace the influence of Gandhi on the Indian fiction written after the first world war.
2. Do you think Gandhi's appearance in the novel enriches it? Do you find the solution suggested by Gandhi viable in the present context.

5.7 SUGGESTED READING

Saros, Cowasjee. *So Many Freedoms: A Study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977.

K.R. Srinivasa, Iyengar. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1984.

M.K. Naik. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982.

Kai, Nicholson. *A Presentation of Social Problems in the Indo-Anglian and the Anglo-Indian Novel*. Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1972.

UNIT 6 STYLE

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Diction
- 6.3 Modes of Narration
- 6.4 Imagery
- 6.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.6 Glossary
- 6.7 Questions
- 6.8 Suggested Reading

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will examine Anand's style of writing and his use of imagery in his novel *Untouchable*.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Style is generally defined as a unique verbal pattern which a novelist has developed and which, therefore, carries his indelible stamp. In other words, the total of the qualities that characterize an individual writer's style constitutes his literary personality and reflects his psychological one. A writer's style is reflected in his diction, his choice of genre, narrative type, and imagery, among other things.

6.2 DICTION

The English which Anand employs in his works is, on the whole, correct and idiomatic; but not without a strong colouring of the Indian manner of speaking English. He tends to be accurately descriptive and his proclivity towards using more words than required to press home an idea is unmistakable. His word patterns give the impression of unplanned and spontaneous speech, in the dialogues, which contrasts with the controlled language of the descriptive passages, e.g., the description of the inner sanctum of the temple is accurate, detailed, and familiar yet, because Bakha sees it for the first time, every detail is attended to with cinematographic fidelity:

In the innermost recess of the tall, dark sanctum, beyond the brass gates, past what seemed a maze of corridors, Bakha's eyes probed the depths of a raised platform. There, from a background of gold embroidered silk and velvet draperies stood out various brass images dimly shrouded in the soft tremors of incense that rose from a dish at their feet. (*U*, p. 65)

In contrast, Bakha's effusive apologies to the offended Hindu smacks of a spontaneous torrent of words over which the speaker has no control: "I have erred now. I forgot to call. I beg your forgiveness. It won't happen again. I forgot. I beg your forgiveness. It won't happen again." (*U*, p. 53)

5.5 LET US SUM UP

It may be noted that all the solutions suggested in the novel are now obsolete because the Constitution of India has already declared untouchability to be a punishable crime. In fact the government of the day has introduced a system of special rights and privileges for the Scheduled Castes and the Backward Classes which include the sweeper community.

Gandhiji's solution of peaceful persuasion suggests that Bakha must passively wait for a change of heart in the Hindus of India. Ultimately Bakha goes home, thinking of Gandhiji and also of the possibility of the introduction of flush-system suggested by Iqbal Nath though he does not know exactly how the flush-system works.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. Trace the influence of Gandhi on the Indian fiction written after the first world war.
2. Do you think Gandhi's appearance in the novel enriches it? Do you find the solution suggested by Gandhi viable in the present context.

5.7 SUGGESTED READING

Saros, Cowasjee. *So Many Freedoms: A Study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977.

K.R. Srinivasa, Iyengar. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1984.

M.K. Naik. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982.

Kai, Nicholson. *A Presentation of Social Problems in the Indo-Anglian and the Anglo-Indian Novel*. Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1972.

UNIT 6 STYLE

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Diction
- 6.3 Modes of Narration
- 6.4 Imagery
- 6.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.6 Glossary
- 6.7 Questions
- 6.8 Suggested Reading

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will examine Anand's style of writing and his use of imagery in his novel *Untouchable*.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Style is generally defined as a unique verbal pattern which a novelist has developed and which, therefore, carries his indelible stamp. In other words, the total of the qualities that characterize an individual writer's style constitutes his literary personality and reflects his psychological one. A writer's style is reflected in his diction, his choice of genre, narrative type, and imagery, among other things.

6.2 DICTION

The English which Anand employs in his works is, on the whole, correct and idiomatic; but not without a strong colouring of the Indian manner of speaking English. He tends to be accurately descriptive and his proclivity towards using more words than required to press home an idea is unmistakable. His word patterns give the impression of unplanned and spontaneous speech, in the dialogues, which contrasts with the controlled language of the descriptive passages, e.g., the description of the inner sanctum of the temple is accurate, detailed, and familiar yet, because Bakha sees it for the first time, every detail is attended to with cinematographic fidelity:

In the innermost recess of the tall, dark sanctum, beyond the brass gates, past what seemed a maze of corridors, Bakha's eyes probed the depths of a raised platform. There, from a background of gold embroidered silk and velvet draperies stood out various brass images dimly shrouded in the soft tremors of incense that rose from a dish at their feet. (U, p. 65)

In contrast, Bakha's effusive apologies to the offended Hindu smacks of a spontaneous torrent of words over which the speaker has no control: "I have erred now. I forgot to call. I beg your forgiveness. It won't happen again. I forgot. I beg your forgiveness. It won't happen again." (U, p. 53)

As a social realist, Anand tries to achieve verisimilitude in his writings and so the speeches attributed to the characters are in keeping with their station in life. For example, Lakha, Bakha's father, can never speak without prefixing the choicest of pejorative words to his dialogues. For the same reason, Anand's writings are peppered with the use of Indian words which fall into three categories: (a) Untranslated Hindi or Punjabi words, e.g., *girja ghar*, *jalebis*, *harijan*, *babu*, etc., (b) Proverbs and swear words which are translated into English, e.g., son of a pig, cock-eyed of a bow-legged scorpion, rape-mother, rape-sister etc., and, (c) English words which have become a part of Indian vocabulary by subsequently adapting themselves to Indian pronunciations, e.g., *injan*, *gentleman*, etc.

Anand, explaining the reason for this extensive use of vernacular vocabulary, says: "The English language was the only accessible medium to me when I began writing, but I tried to translate into it the metaphors and imagery of Punjabi and Hindustani. If the resulting style is awkward, it is not unlike Irish English or Welsh English, with a rough rhythm of its own." His free use of slang, swear words, jargon of abuse, epithets of low-life, and verbal coinages, take Anand nearer to his avowed purpose of evolving a language as rich and powerful as Irish or Welsh English.

6.3 MODES OF NARRATION

The narrative modes which Mulk Raj Anand makes use of in *Untouchable* include the stream of consciousness technique, interior monologue, and, descriptive narration. Anand the author has complete control over his characters, and he gives us absorbing narratives with effective beginnings and thought provoking ends. *Untouchable* is remarkable in its being the chronicle of a single day in the life of an untouchable. Banal as it may sound, tremendous dramatic interest is generated by the presentation of this 'one day' as a graph of the myriad emotions which a human mind experiences, and how an ordinary work-day harbours the potential for future liberation. The opening of the novel is a good illustration of descriptive narration:

The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. . . . A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal-clear water, now soiled by dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it. . . . The absence of a drainage system had, through the rains of various seasons, made of the quarter a marsh which gave out the most offensive smell. (*U*, p. 9)

Anand, from the very opening of the novel, establishes the marginal position of the outcastes along with showing that they are an integral part of Bulandshahar society. The description encompasses sight, sound, and smell, besides functioning on a temporal scale of past beauty and present filth.

The stream of consciousness technique refers to the depiction of the thoughts and feelings which flow, with no apparent logic, through the mind of a character. An instance of the stream of consciousness technique may be located in Bakha's ruminations on his illiteracy:

He was a sweeper's son and could never be a babu. Later still he realized that there was no school which would admit him, because the parents of the other children would not allow their sons to be contaminated by the touch of a sweeper's son. How absurd he thought, that was, since most of the Hindu children touched him willingly at hockey and wouldn't mind having him at school with them. But the masters wouldn't teach the outcastes lest their fingers which guided the students across the text should touch the leaves of

the outcastes' books and they be polluted. These old Hindus were cruel. He was a sweeper, he knew, but he could not consciously accept that fact. (*U*, p. 42)

Anand, in this passage, focuses attention on the growth of consciousness in Bakha's mind vis-a-vis his social position. Unwittingly Bakha reveals the actual problem behind the plight of the untouchables. The deep roots of Hindu orthodoxy are shown as the reason behind the deplorable condition of the outcastes, besides illustrating that this concept is an invention of religion.

The incident in the market place, where Bakha is brutally abused by the upper caste Hindu, furnishes an example of interior monologue:

Why was all this fuss? Why was I so humble? I could have struck him! And to think that I was so eager to come to the town this morning. . . . My poor jalebis! I should have eaten them . . . the cruel crowd! All of them abused, abused, abused. (*U*, p. 56)

In this passage self-analysis is carried to an extreme of passion and is a crucial moment in the development of Bakha's character. The short sentences reflect the tempo of inner questioning and veers between humiliation, regret, and rage.

6.4 IMAGERY

In general, the term Imagery refers to the use of language to represent descriptively things, actions, or even abstract ideas. Anand is a novelist who relies a great deal on imagery to convey subtle ideas. We find two images which recur periodically in *Untouchable*: The sun and the river.

The sun is a creative and regenerative force in the novel, indicating the upsurge of life:

As they sat or stood in the sun, showing their dark hands and feet, they had a curiously lackadaisical, lazy, lousy look about them. It seemed their insides were concentrated in the act of emergence, of new birth, as it were, from the raw, bleak wintry feeling in their souls to the world of warmth. . . . The great life-giver had cut the inscrutable knots that tied them up in themselves. It had melted the innermost parts of their being. And their souls stared at the wonder of it all, the mystery of it, the miracle of it. (*U*, p. 38)

More specifically, as is evident from the following illustration, the sun concerns Bakha; it is an emblem of his vital impulse, a movement of energy, an effluence. It is also a symbolic index of his day and of his emotions:

Where the lane finished, the heat of the sun seemed to spread as from a bonfire out into the empty space of the maidan beyond the colony. He sniffed the clean, fresh air around the flat stretch of land before him and vaguely sensed a difference between the odorous, smoky world of refuse and the open radiant world of the sun. . . . He turned his hands so as to show them to the sun. He lifted his face to the sun open-eyed for a moment, then with the chin upright. It was pleasing to him. . . . He felt vigorous in this bracing atmosphere. (*U*, p. 36)

The second image, that we find in the novel, is the river. It is symbolic of the discontent and anguish of the hero. The image stands for the flow of existence and temporality:

He advanced eagerly. The old river lay on his right like a stormy sea of discontent whose mountainous waves the wind had swept, till the boulders and rocks reared up in knife-edges against the sky or rolled quietly over the earth. (*U*, p. 108)

However, not all the imagery in Anand's novel is visual. There are some powerful kinetic and auditory images such as in the following extract:

In the hills and fields, however, there was a strange quickening. Long rows of birds flew over against the cold blue sky toward their homes. The grasshoppers chirped in the anxious chorus as they fell back into the places where they always lay waiting for food. A lone beetle sent electric waves of ground quivering into the cool, clean air. Every blade of grass along the pathway was gilded with light. (*U*, p. 146)

6.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we see that Mulk Raj Anand through his diction, modes of narration, and imagery, succeeds in forging a style which is distinctly his own. In addition to creating a language that can carry the burden of his experience as an Indian novelist.

6.6 GLOSSARY

Pejorative:

Expressing disapproval.

Verisimilitude:

A quality possessed by a work the action and characters of which seem to the reader sufficiently probable to constitute an acceptable representation of reality.

6.7 QUESTIONS

1. What are the various elements which constitute Anand's style of writing?
2. Discuss the use of imagery in *Untouchable*.

6.8 SUGGESTED READING

Krishna Nandan, Sinha. *Mulk Raj Anand*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972.

NOTES