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[A] Negotiating a 'New World Order': Mulk Raj Anand as Public Intellectual at the Heart of Empire (1924-1945)

Susheila Nasta

Although Mulk Raj Anand spent twenty years of his long, distinguished life in Britain, there is remarkably little evidence of his presence in British literary and cultural histories. By the time he returned to India on a trooper ship in 1945, there is no question that his various voices – whether as novelist, political activist, cultural critic, essayist, literary editor, publisher or BBC broadcaster – were well known. There is little doubt too that Anand's sojourn in Britain, like that of others who 'voyaged in' to the dynamic 'contact zone' at the heart of the colonial metropolis, was crucial to his political and cultural formation.¹ For, as I argue elsewhere, it was in the radical anti-colonial atmosphere of inter-war London that he began to articulate an evolving but highly prescient global alternative to a predominant Euro-American vision of modernity, carving out a space to locate himself as well as his Indian subjects in history.² It was in London too that Anand gained the skills – as both an Indian and a British citizen of empire – to lay claim to, and use against itself, a 'metropolitan discourse of rights and self-assertion'.³ Drawing on his wide knowledge of eastern and western enlightenment philosophy, he created a distinctive, authoritative secular voice, well able to expose the absurd contradictions that were blocking, even among left-leaning metropolitan anti-imperialists, the case for Indian independence.

As this chapter will demonstrate, Anand exploited a number of self-conscious rhetorical, interpersonal and politically nuanced strategies to attempt to inscribe

himself as public intellectual into twentieth-century British literary history. In straddling numerous uneven and often competing political and cultural platforms on the western literary stage, he was aware from the outset of the need to manipulate his multi-voiced position as insider and outsider, to be both authoritative informant and interlocutor, who could not only infiltrate and mediate but also change and subvert the orthodoxies of the implicitly imperialist 'structures of relationship and feeling' that surrounded him.⁴ There is no doubt that Anand was an adept cultural translator, an accomplished go-between, who despite his oblique location in the imperial metropolis had the benefit of a double vision. As George Orwell, close associate and colleague at the BBC Eastern Service from 1941 to 1945, once wrote, Anand was simultaneously 'interpreter of Asia for the West' and a 'Westernising' influence among his Indian friends.⁵ Crucial, too, was Anand's dexterity in deploying English as a shared cultural resource, a tool of productive exchange and a medium more powerful than any other weapon to show 'the other's viewpoint [always] exists'.⁶

Many of Anand's writings have drawn attention to the competing historical, cultural and political forces which shaped his ambivalent location as the split subject of an Indian modernity, a 'kind of bridge trying to span, symbolically, the two worlds of the Ganga and the Thames'.⁷ In a series of letters to Herman Ould, the then Secretary of British PEN, written between 1941 and 1943 while he was struggling to compose an early version of his 1946 historical memoir Apology to Heroism, 'I Believe in Man', Anand begins to make a prophetic case for what we today might call (following Paul Gilroy) a post-national, 'planetary humanism'.⁸ Arguing that all histories co-exist within the same world, Anand implies (anticipating later cultural theorists such as Frantz Fanon and Edward Said) that Britain needs to think its history as one that is not separate from but intellectually and culturally integrated with its

colonies.⁹ For, as Anand expresses it to Ould, '[t]he seas' currently dividing 'nations and continents' should not be seen as 'barriers' but rather as 'connecting links' creating the foundations for a 'new world'.¹⁰ He makes it abundantly plain in both this unpublished correspondence and what later becomes his Apology that he perceives the cosmopolitan bilingualism of his cross-cultural Indian inheritance to be a privileged 'vantage-point' from which to critique the 'wastelands' of the broken West, where it was obvious that 'the towers of London, Vienna and Paris were about to fall'.¹¹ Moreover, alongside the strident voice that comes through on the pressing issue of independence and cultural freedom is a narrative which makes a convincing case for a global interpretation of the 'modern', what Anand calls the possibilities offered by a transformative 'new humanism', articulated from a specifically Indian 'sense of locality'.¹² Arguably, then, as early as the 1940s Anand was already beginning to map out what we might now term in the age of theory a transnational aesthetic for a 'rooted cosmopolitanism';¹³ positing a view of 'culture' as the 'efflorescence of all the contradictory impulses of civilisation'.¹⁴

[B] Revisiting Anand

Despite Anand's many accounts of the mixed range of artistic and intellectual networks with which he engaged, the trajectory of his time in Britain has often been represented by readings which refuse to allow Anand to step outside the borders of predictable critical frames.¹⁵ It is often alleged that it is after his 'ill-fated' adventures as a young student of western philosophy at University College London, where he fraternized on the edges of Bloomsbury with the likes of Virginia and Leonard Woolf,

T. S. Eliot, E. M. Forster, Clive Bell and D. H. Lawrence – a period Anand himself ironically reconstitutes, critiques and complicates in his retrospective autobiographical recollections Conversations in Bloomsbury (1981) – that he rejects the purist sanctuary of the modernist project in favour of ‘a hard-driven [social] realism’ which enables a more authentic representation of ‘the lives of the Indian poor’.¹⁶ Typically and reductively, then, Anand appears either as a collaborative and ultimately complicit ‘babu’ figure, or as a revolutionary Marxist renegade who, in writing back to empire, alienated the majority of his metropolitan English friends. Even recent attempts to bring Anand ‘back to Bloomsbury’¹⁷ and to expand the limited parameters of canonical modernism have not yet fully risen to the challenge presented by Anand’s complicatedly interwoven and extensive network of social and political relations.

Kristin Bluemel has, for example, provided one of the most insightful readings of the complexity of Anand’s position and his relationship to inter-war British culture through the wider-angled lens of ‘intermodernism’.¹⁸ In setting up a new critical compass which locates Anand off-centre as ‘radical eccentric’ – a figure, who, like George Orwell and his less well-known friends Stevie Smith and Inez Holden, sits more comfortably outside the historiography of prevailing critical orthodoxies – Bluemel’s bold reading still tends to chart Anand’s formation according to a developmental ideological pattern. In other words Anand moves from what Bluemel calls a ‘radical’ yet still ‘collaborationist’ ‘intentionality’ in his early 1930s fictions to a more fully realized, less ambiguous and more polemical articulation of his actual political stance in his later and non-fictional works of the 1940s. According to Bluemel, it is in Letters on India (1942) and Apology to Heroism (1946) that we first witness a decidedly ‘unapologetic’ and vociferous Anand who announces the

rationale for his separation from the ‘politics of mainstream English culture’ and the sympathies of his former Bloomsbury and 1930s English friends.¹⁹

In light of this, it is perhaps not surprising that far less consideration has been paid to the competing voices, range of genres and transverse contexts underlying the large volume of non-fictional works Anand published in Britain than to his early fiction. In fact if Anand’s role as cultural critic and public intellectual is discussed at all, he is rarely investigated as a multi-voiced polymath who, by strategically straddling the discourses of numerous different and often competing political constituencies, could re-infect thinking on the cultural histories of both India and Britain. This omission is significant and regrettable on a number of counts. First, it is in and through Anand’s non-fiction that we can best trace the close affiliations that existed between the various European, British and Indian networks that drove both his activism and his not insignificant role in contributing to and shaping debates in British and Indian periodicals. It is also, arguably, only in this thicker context that we witness the many differently inflected voices Anand navigated as cultural critic and activist, building on what he called the creative synergies of ‘living together’ as part of an ‘international fraternity’.²⁰ Second, it is in this variegated, uneven cultural landscape, often eclipsed behind the composition and production of Anand’s works, that the convergences and shared cultural milieu connecting Anand to a range of British intellectuals and divergent political causes and aesthetic movements can be most substantially appreciated. Third, it is only once the significance of these reciprocal relations and textured cultural circuits are recognized that we can read his already well-known and celebrated fictional works in their conjoined fullness and complexity.

Attempts to stage Anand's anti-colonial resistance in starkly linear and instrumental terms do not always take adequate account of the fact that even his earliest novels were engaged in extending and subverting the canonical discourse of 'modernism' against itself. An appreciation of Anand's encounters with Irish writers such as A. E. Housman, W. B. Yeats or Sean O'Casey in the late 1920s when he visited Ireland, and his subsequent identification (like many other Indians) with Irish anti-colonial politics, enables a more nuanced reading of the influence of a Joycean modernist aesthetic on The Untouchable (1935) as Anand engages with the uncomfortable introduction of modernity to late colonial India. Besides, Anand graphically signals this 'arc of a hyphenated international trajectory' on the book's final page, where the mobile context of its inception, 'Simla – SS Viceroy of India – Bloomsbury', points ironically to its mixed cultural genesis, as well as its subversive political intention in inscribing the 'colonial margin' ambivalently 'in the aesthetic heart of the centre'. Importantly, too, Anand's enigmatic authorial inscription is dated 1933 and clearly situates the novel (given its publication date in 1935) between the proposals for Indian constitutional reform outlined in the 1933 White Paper, and the 1935 Government of India Act. Reaction by Indians to the continuing injustices of what were perceived to be half-baked promises for a semblance of democratic autonomy in an India still controlled by the dictates of the British imperial government was extreme, and Anand himself takes up this banner directly seven years later in Letters on India. Yet already here, in this first novel, Anand is self-consciously situating its content 'in relation to both the high politics of imperialism and ... diasporic anti-colonial activism'.²¹

[B] Transverse Connections

It is as a direct consequence of Anand's physical proximity in London to a large international community of editors, writers and publishers (he lived first in Hendon, then at several different addresses in Bloomsbury, and later in Primrose Hill) that he was able to impact in a variety of ways on the heated debates of an active, vocal and wide-ranging imaginary community. It was here too as a young writer that he was able to flex his literary muscles as artful ventriloquist and to make the necessary contacts to seize opportunities to re-angle orientaling stereotypes and 'open the world a little more' (as Salman Rushdie was much later to put it) to the complex historical formations of Indian culture. Anand's standing was of course strengthened by the impressive range of his intellectual credentials. His wide knowledge of European, Russian and Indian literatures and a thorough grounding in western enlightenment thinking was combined with his attraction in the metropolis as a 'native informant'; one who, as an Indian, had direct experience of and the authority to comment on the suffering caused by restrictions on human rights and cultural freedoms brought about as a consequence of British imperialism. At times deliberately manipulating this perspective, he tapped into the fears engendered by the growing threat of fascism in Europe, the fallout from the Japanese aggression in Manchuria in 1931 and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Building on a new-found sense of equality with European intellectuals and a close identification with the activism of wider international movements, he ensured that the parallel case for Indian independence came to the fore.

For Anand and other anti-colonial activists like him – such as C. L. R. James, George Padmore or Cedric Dover – the virtual spaces of the national and periodical press ‘manufactured a ... public sphere as powerful as any physical place’, providing a forum with wide impact ‘in which imperial coercion’ as well as ‘resistance to that coercion could take place’.²² Significantly, too, as Julie Codell argues, the possibilities offered by such interventions enabled a participation in a mutually transformative dialogic cultural space where divisions between ‘centres and peripheries’ might be ‘vanquished’ and differences ‘juxtaposed’.²³ We must not forget however that gaining entrance to the world of British letters was also at times a restrictive process. The press and the publishing industries were harsh arbiters as is evident from the nineteen rejections Anand received from publishers when attempting to get Untouchable into print.²⁴

Even a brief survey of the material traces of Anand’s presence in Britain – evident in the pages of a wide range of periodicals, adverts from publishers as well as letters, diaries, reviews and archives at the BBC – make visible the fact that he not only interacted with but sustained affiliations and friendships with an enormous spectrum of local and global networks. From 1935 his main fictions were regularly reviewed in the mainstream press gaining frequent coverage in the columns of the Times Literary Supplement, The New Statesman, Time & Tide, Life & Letters, The Mercury, Left Review and New Writing. On the other hand, Anand often subtly modified his critical voice to engage with major works by British writers, as he earned a living by reviewing and writing sharply-angled critical commentaries on the works of Rudyard Kipling, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Edward Thompson, E. M. Forster, Lionel Fielden, Stephen Spender and George Orwell. Often in the dual role of both

stranger and insider, he helped to promote key Indian publications such as the second edition of Gandhi's An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth (1940) or Nehru's An Autobiography (1936), and significantly raised public awareness of the cultural background informing the writings of familiar Indian poets Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu and Mohammed Iqbal.²⁵

He was prominent as well in several other ventures, at times producing Indian editions of British journals and writing for specialist interest groups such as Indian Art and Letters (the publication of the India Society led by artist William Rothenstein) The Tribune, Labour Monthly (organs of the Labour Party) and the Asiatic Review. In much of his journalism, he was committed not only to synthesizing and enabling a 'two-way traffic' between East and West but also to proactively creating specific publishing platforms for lesser known Indians to voice their own interpretations of Britain. Keen to debunk the powerful trope of Rudyard Kipling's often rehearsed dictum 'never the twain should meet', Anand commissioned several essays on topical issues which would appeal to a wide audience, such as a piece on Jawaharlal Nehru's 'campaign for civil liberties' for Left Review. He also contributed to selecting the contents for Indian Writing – a magazine linked closely to the India League as well as the Progressive Writers' Association, and published intermittently from the Bibliophile bookshop in Great Russell St, WC1, from 1940 to 1945.²⁶ As signatory, with over two hundred other major British writers, to Nancy Cunard's 'Authors Take Sides' – a petition which reached an audience of over 3,000 in Left Review – Anand joined forces with communist activists Ralph Fox, Christopher Caudwell and John Cornford to fight the Republican cause in Spain. From another perspective again, Anand as self-appointed war correspondent from Madrid wrote a four-part series for the Congress Socialist drawing stark parallels between the predicament of the Spanish

peasants under Franco and that of the agrarian castes in India, still entrapped by imperialism.²⁷

The range of Anand's strategies as essayist becomes obvious if one begins to examine the various means by which he promoted an agenda for cultural resistance while at the same time seeming to comply with the expectations of the specific audiences he addressed. In 'The Poetry of Sir Muhammad Iqbal' (based on a talk he gave to the India Society in 1931) Anand is obviously highly aware of the fascination with Indian art and culture among his largely sympathetic British audience of Indophiles and draws them directly into his subject matter by referencing debates recently sparked in press reviews of Reynold Nicholson's translation of Iqbal's Asar-i-Kundi ('The Secrets of the Self'). Deliberately placing the Persian names of Iqbal's poems in front of their English equivalents, Anand provides an erudite analysis of the mixed cultural influences informing Iqbal as poet, at the same time offering his own substantial English translations of the works he cites. Importantly, he makes a passionate case here for an Indian modernity, not separated from Iqbal's role as visionary philosopher and 'national prophet' but which had long preceded T. S. Eliot's 1922 poem The Wasteland in seeing that 'a suicide's death awaits [western] civilisation'.²⁸ Diplomatically pinpointing the intertextual influences on Iqbal's art, Anand thus maps Iqbal's evolution as Indian modernist with reference to the works of major western figures such as Goethe, Hegel, Cowper, Emerson and Whitman.

Anand's performative engagement with and negotiation across various coteries is evident also in the background to his several substantial books of cultural criticism and the many talks he delivered to different institutional bodies which were all engaged – whatever the gradations of their political colours – in the defence of

cultural freedoms.²⁹ Persian Painting (part of T. S. Eliot's Faber Criterion Miscellany series) was published to coincide with the 1931 exhibition of Persian art at Burlington House and describes Anand as a 'distinguished Oriental critic'. It also acknowledges the input of Laurence Binyon who, along with the Ceylonese art critic Ananda Coomaraswamy, had inducted Anand into the aesthetics of Hindu art as well as the contents of the Asiatic collections at the British Museum. Alternatively his Curries and Other Dishes (1932), based on his time earning a living as a cook's assistant in various curry houses in London, was addressed primarily to the English housewife. Providing a populist guide to numerous spice shops and Indian restaurants in London, it highlights the extent to which Indian culinary traditions had already permeated the culture of the city.³⁰ It was soon followed by The Hindu View of Art (introduced by sculptor Eric Gill in 1933) and Anand's scholarly introduction to five poets of the new India, The Golden Breath (one of John Murray's highly successful Wisdom of the East series). His impassioned speech, 'The Place of India' (delivered to the XVIII International PEN conference in London in 1941), was anthologized on the other hand in Writers For Freedom, a volume introduced by Herman Ould, which included companion pieces by Storm Jameson, J. B. Priestley, E. M. Forster, Rebecca West, Arthur Koestler, Hsiao Ch'ien, Erika Mann and Alfred Kerr.

The variety of registers, subjects and audiences that Anand came into contact with not only demonstrates the complexity of his affiliations but also complicates a schematic framing of him first as Bloomsbury disciple and then as increasingly vociferous Indian rebel. In fact, the reciprocity of intellectual companionship, as witnessed across the production and transmission of his non-fictional writings, indicates a far more engaging if untidy dynamic of cultural and political exchange. Recounting for example his early association with Eric Gill, the sculptor who

introduced The Hindu View of Art, Anand says, it ‘was an equal friendship ... I gave to Gill, [what he] wanted to know about Indian art. He was ... fascinated with Indian sculpture’. They ‘began to write a book’ together ‘because he had the notion that the medieval idea of the craft guilds’ was linked in some important way to India. This ‘was a collaboration and a creative act’.³¹ And notably, while Herbert Read in a 1933 review in The Listener makes distinctions between the two artists in terms of agenda and cultural perspective, he also makes connections, emphasizing that not only did Anand and Gill share ‘the same world’ but Gill’s voice is ‘stretched like a hurdle’ across Anand’s study.³² Similar points could be made concerning Anand’s writerly convergences in a whole range of other publications, including E. M. Forster’s famous preface to Untouchable, which has most typically been perceived as a liberal humanist form of patronage, enabling the struggling and then unknown colonial writer Anand to be ‘lifted up’ into print. A more informed reading of the proximity of these two voices together in print in 1935 might witness the beginnings of an extended exchange between ‘European and non-European writing’ which helped both Forster and Anand, who continued their dialogue as colleagues at the BBC well into the mid 1940s and beyond, to push the frontiers of European ‘modernism outside of itself’.³³

A still different relationship is configured in Anand’s 1944 preface to Ralph Fox’s posthumous study, The Novel and the People, first published in 1937, soon after Fox’s tragic death in the Spanish Civil War. In celebrating Fox’s memory, Anand talks of their mutual participation at radical reading groups on the Gray’s Inn Road, their joint involvement in the international movement against fascism in the 1930s and their shared politics and commitment to action in the fight against Franco in the Spanish Civil War. It was the fundamental dynamic of equality and exchange which consolidated the close friendship between the two as they spent long hours

comparing ‘notes on Flaubert and Meredith, on Hardy and Tolstoy, on L. H. Myers ... the new Russians and almost everyone else’.³⁴ Though Anand never signed up formally to any political movement and did not join Fox as member of the British Communists, it is clear from numerous intertextual echoes that their thinking was closely embroiled at the time.³⁵ Where Anand speaks for example of his desire to write an ‘Indian epic’ devoted to the ‘inner forces which condition human experience’,³⁶ Fox claims the novel as the main vehicle for an ‘epic of the struggle of the individual against society, against nature’.³⁷ And when Anand praises what he calls the broad imaginative sweep of Fox’s ‘revolutionary socialism’, an ‘intense preoccupation with ideas’ communicated without using ‘the methods of the platform propagandist’ and offering a vision of ‘historical man’ caught in the full ‘gamut of inner and outer conflict’, he is no doubt also commenting indirectly on his own frustrations at being circumscribed as a ‘social realist’ who wedded to an instrumental politics of liberation could seldom succeed in moving away from reportage or the political tract.³⁸

Importantly, traces of the exchange between Fox and Anand are not only limited to the platforms they shared in print. To be sure, they were both closely associated with Left Review which published from Red Lion Square in WC1 and already by the end of 1935 had achieved a circulation surpassed by only one literary monthly in England.³⁹ Set up initially as the journal of the British Section of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers, it marked the shifting terrain of a much wider literary and political movement, providing ‘a popular, intellectual and artistic alliance’ that defended human culture in the face of ‘Fascism, imperialism and war’.⁴⁰ Fox, along with Randall Swingler (another friend and one of the editors of Left Review), was key to the formation of the London branch of the Indian Progressive

Writers' Association, proactively addressing several early meetings and drawing links with the wider political situation in Europe.⁴¹ And notably linked to this group was a further Left Review editor Edgell Rickward, who was instrumental, with E. M. Forster, in getting Anand's first novel Untouchable into print.

Much scholarly attention has already been paid to the unique convergence of historical and cultural factors which led to the formation of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) in London in November 1934.⁴² It is not my intention here therefore to rehearse the details of that wider history but rather to focus on some distinct cultural and political contexts which impacted on its direction at this particular moment in time. By all accounts, the group was formally constituted in an 'unventilated' rented back room of the Nanking Chinese restaurant in Bloomsbury and attended by around thirty-five Indians, mainly drawn from university circuits across Britain. It was during this first meeting that Anand was elected president of the Association and asked to draft its manifesto. The first draft was edited down by Sajjad Zaheer and Dr Jyotirmaya Ghosh (both co-founders) and published in Left Review in February 1936.⁴³ Despite the India Office's constant surveillance and deep mistrust of the political ethos of the group, the formation of the London branch of the PWA was accompanied by several positive notices in the British press. As a 'News Reel' in Life & Letters notes in 1939, from a small beginning, the Association has become 'one of the largest blocs for the defence of culture in the world' today. Moreover, as Zaheer, one of the key forces, recounts, the 1935 inauguration 'was the seed' out of which developed a 'great' vernacular movement in India. Our vision spread 'to almost all the ... languages' and was fully supported by major political and literary figures such as Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore and Premchand'.⁴⁴

Fox's influence on the group was crucial. It was Fox, as Zaheer remembers, who consistently 'warned us ... that our enthusiasm for progressivism must not degenerate into sectarianism and prejudice'.⁴⁵ And while Anand saw the moment as an important political turning-point in ensuring that Indians were finally accepted 'as equals ... in England', he, like Fox, was keen to stress that the PWA was not a regimented group, 'a clique or ... new coterie', but rather a 'collection of readers and writers, groping together, in spite of our different individualities towards the realisation of certain facts'.⁴⁶ It is important to recognize that while the PWA was closely affiliated with some individual members of the Communist Party in Britain, this was by no means its only significant interaction.

It is also worth remembering that both Anand and Zaheer were significantly inspired by the powerful spirit of the International Congress for the Defence of Culture in Paris which they attended as members of the audience in June 1935. Here they encountered an enormous congregation of major writers from over thirty-eight countries who had come together for five days to debate how active measures could be taken to defend 'the perils confronting cultural freedom' worldwide. Invited delegates from Britain included figures from across the political spectrum and ranged from Virginia Woolf to E. M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, Storm Jameson and Herbert Read. Significantly, too, French writers Andre Gide, Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland, the organizers and intellectual force behind the convention, already had close connections with India. Gide was the French translator of Tagore's Gitanjali; Barbusse helped the wife of the 'then deported M. N. Roy ... to agitate for a reversal' of the expulsion order which had exiled Roy in Luxembourg; and Rolland, already with long literary and political links to India, had been key in inviting Tagore to sign

the 'Declaration of Independence of the Spirit' in June 1919 following the atrocities at Amritsar.⁴⁷ Importantly, E. M. Forster's formal address, ironically entitled 'Liberty in England', not only made explicit his support for an anti-imperialist politics but also critiqued, in terms not that dissimilar to those of Anand, what he called a latent 'Fabio-Fascism', an insidious apparently liberal discourse which had a 'dictator-spirit' working 'quietly behind the façade of constitutional forms, passing a little law (like the Sedition Act) here ... emphasizing the national need for secrecy elsewhere, and whispering and cooing the so-called "news" every evening over the wireless, until opposition is tamed and gulled'.⁴⁸ Both Anand and Zaheer were to maintain contact individually with Rolland, Barbusse and Gide, and it was their example of finding a vehicle to transform intellectual commitment into political action that was to inspire their own activism in formulating the manifesto for the PWA.

Soon after the Paris convention, Anand participated as invited speaker in a number of other international congregations. Indian representative at the second conference of International Writers in Defence of Culture in London in June 1936, he also went to Belgium that autumn with friend and fellow writer, Cedric Dover, to participate in the Brussels World Peace Congress. As vocal advocate for coloured unity and a global anti-racism, Dover connected Anand at this Congress with the activism of a much 'wider coloured' movement', one which straddled several nations and linked 'Indians, Chinese, Eurasians, Indonesians, American Negroes, West Indians, Africans, Tunisians, Arabs, Jews and other subject peoples' in the world-wide fight for equality.⁴⁹ Already well acquainted with Nancy Cunard's anthology of black writers Negro, as well as her essays denouncing the 'colour bar' in Left Review, Anand and Dover joined forces to compose a written memorandum which precipitated the later consolidation of a wider pan-African global movement already

well advanced by Dover with leading black colonial radicals George Padmore and C. L. R. James, and the League of Coloured Peoples. Notably, the signing of this formal memorandum in 1936 was to lead eventually to the organization of an Asian-African conference, held in Bandung eighteen years later with the support of Jawaharlal Nehru, the prime minister of a then independent India.

[B] Public Intellectual at Work

These brief glimpses of Anand's networks and political alliances cannot do full justice to the wealth of resources forming the wider context of his activism or the full range of his writings. They do, however, offer a sense of the variegated contours of the landscape as well as the remarkable density of exchange that not only characterized these encounters but contributed to his wider literary, political and cultural project. I want to return briefly now to the early 1940s when Anand was commissioned to write Letters on India, an invitation which came from Herbert Read at Routledge while Anand was working along with Read, George Orwell and an eclectic mix of other intellectuals for the British war cause at the BBC Eastern Service. Anand had initially refused Sir Malcolm Darling's invitation to join the BBC in March 1941 due to his 'conflicting loyalties', his intimate engagement with Congress and his difficulties in accepting Britain's internment of 'hundreds' of his 'compatriots' including leading Congress members such as Nehru. Yet three months later, after Hitler invaded Russia, he agreed to join. It is worth looking here at some of the often eclipsed contexts informing Anand's composition of his Letters on India if only to open up the terrain of interpretation and reconsider how this final phase of Anand's time in Britain has

been represented to date. For contrary to common consensus, this phase could also be read as the apex of Anand's career as a public intellectual in Britain, a moment when, as Edward Said puts it in Representations of the Intellectual, Anand seized the opportunity to 'explicitly ... universalise the [Indian] crisis, to give human scope to what a particular race or nation suffered' and 'to associate that experience with the sufferings of others'.⁵⁰

Written in an epistolary form and addressed (not without irony) to one 'Tom Brown', an ordinary English working man, Letters on India was controversially introduced by Leonard Woolf, who, sympathetic in principle to Anand's blatant anti-imperialism, openly condemned what he regarded to be Anand's misjudged and blinkered Congress stance. There is no doubt that Anand's polemical stance was unequivocal in its critique of Britain's continuing hypocrisies in its treatment of India; or that the seventeen letters, with their bold accusatory tone, were specifically framed to highlight what Anand calls the 'Messrs facing-Bothways' double-speak of British politicians. Anand is certainly not afraid to outspokenly voice his condemnation of the Cripps mission to India in 1942 and the continuing refusal of the British to offer India (still under the rule of the viceroy) any real promise of democracy. Furthermore, he alleges that the British are not only culpable for the violence they inflicted on India but reprehensible for maintaining this indefensible defiance of the human rights declarations of the Atlantic Charter with a heedless arrogance. Carefully framing Tom Brown's questions to suit his own purposes, Anand, as friendly but not impartial Indian expert, enlightens the British worker on the gruesome facts that have caused India's current social and economic plight. Consistently detailing an argument to show that British and Indian histories are inextricably intertwined, Anand points out that while 'India' may be seen as colonial 'suburb' of London, it has also always been

a key 'bedrock of the whole financial, economic and political structure of the ... Empire'.⁵¹ As Tom Brown says at one point, expressing his urgent desire to discover the 'real' history of India: 'Now, you know, as we of the British working-class movement know, that there is widespread ignorance in this country of the history of British imperialism in India, as it could be told by the subject peoples of Empire'.⁵²

It is often argued that the critical tone of Leonard Woolf's introduction marked a symptom of Anand's increasing distance from his British leftist friends. And, to some considerable degree, Anand himself was keen to advance this view. As Saros Cowajee claims, by the mid 1940s and certainly after the publication of Apology to Heroism, 'Anand's attitude towards his [British] contemporaries' had changed and was 'chiefly determined by their stand on ... Indian freedom'.⁵³ To be sure Woolf's preface (also written as a letter beginning 'Dear Anand') was not, as he puts it, 'the usual kind ... which seems to me nearly always impertinent', where 'a distinguished or undistinguished person irrelevantly pats the author on the back'. For although Woolf, throughout his career, had long denounced imperialism 'for the harm it does both to the imperialist and the subject peoples', he could nevertheless not accept what he calls the 'dangerously biased' politics of Anand's Congress case, or the blackness of his portrait of the British in India.⁵⁴

The content of Woolf's introduction generated a flurry of further exchanges. Anand himself expressed great shock at Woolf's shift away from their shared socialist vision, accusing him of having almost gone 'to the Amery extreme' in warning 'Tom Brown against my one-sidedness'.⁵⁵ He denied he had ever asked Woolf to write the preface and insisted his reply (also a letter) was printed alongside Woolf's introduction in the Labour Book Service edition. This was followed by a lengthy Tribune review by Orwell who not only denounced the hypocritical blimp-like

‘sentimentalism of the [British] left’ but launched an attack on the refusal of enlightened people everywhere to perceive the dangers of a narrowly conceived and often dangerously patriotic ‘nationalism’.⁵⁶ The injured Woolf soon penned a reply to Orwell (also published in the Tribune), which accused Orwell of completely misrepresenting his politics as well as his so-called ‘anger’ at Anand’s outspoken Congress case. He had long supported Anand and was in favour of Indian independence. His main bone of contention was that Anand was in danger of playing into the hands of the British imperialists by suggesting the problem of the Muslims did not exist.⁵⁷

If seen in a wider context, these high-profile exchanges, while acrimonious, were exactly what Anand desired in drawing public attention to the complexity of the Indian situation. They also, paradoxically, affirm the high level of Anand’s confidence, his closeness to Woolf (in being able to argue with him and publicly challenge his views), as well as his increasing sense of an equal status with mainstream British intellectuals. When Letters on India appeared, Anand had already anyhow gained much applause in airing a similar perspective to a very different audience of writers gathered together at the widely attended London International PEN conference in 1941. In his talk ‘The Place of India’ Anand stresses, as in Letters on India, that ‘India is an integral part of the modern world’ and that ‘culture and civilisation are not the monopoly of any nation’.⁵⁸ Almost anticipating Woolf’s later critique of his supposedly blinkered Congress stance, Anand makes it clear that there are not only many human versions of ‘truth’ but many ‘nationalisms’; moreover, these ‘nationalisms’ vary markedly in context and purpose:

There is the aggressive, predatory nationalism of the [European] Fascist State which has plunged the world in the black hell of this night of history ... Our nationalism is rather the urge to be free, the aspiration to live as a part of the human family, with a clear recognition of our responsibilities in the economic, social interdependence of the world ... We have long put our faith in that ideal of nationalism as a corollary of internationalism which Rabindranath Tagore has defined.⁵⁹

And he continues:

if the ideals of Freedom and Democracy are good enough for the ninety million Czechs, Poles, Dutchmen, Belgians, Norwegians and the other conquered peoples of Europe, why is it not thought fit to apply them to the four hundred odd million peoples of India.⁶⁰

Interestingly, in a private letter written to Herman Ould, also in 1942, Anand insists that it is his role as an intellectual to facilitate a dialogue between Britain and India that is most important. Suggesting that he follow up his Letters on India with a more culturally focused publication entitled 'A Letter to an Englishman of Letters', he adds the important proviso that 'as I happen to have two countries, I can't talk of one without involving the other'.⁶¹ It would seem then that Anand was not as isolated in his standpoint as has sometimes been suggested. Over 300 people attended the 1941

PEN conference and India was also a hot topic at the time in the British press review columns. Several other controversial books debating the future of India appeared around the same time – whether K. S. Shelvankar’s radical Penguin history The Problem of India (1940) which was banned from circulation, or Lionel Fielden’s more moderate Beggar My Neighbour (1943). Both of these had also excited inflammatory reviews. Robert Herring captures the mood in his editorial to the 1942 Indian edition of Life & Letters:

This long-prepared Indian number coincides with the belated interest which is now replacing previous indifference towards India ... We ourselves may not find it paradoxical that we stand as champions in Europe of a unity we refused India; we ourselves may cheerfully endure our own habits of belated and makeshift compromise; but they are not necessarily endearing to a race of another cast of mind.⁶²

It is not surprising given this public context that Anand’s confidence was running high when his Letters on India appeared. Although his war novel Across the Black Waters (1940) had offended many by its seemingly inappropriate and insensitive subject matter which highlighted the atrocities inflicted on Indian sepoys during the First World War, his publications also gained many complimentary notices as evidenced in several of E. M. Foster’s radio talks.⁶³ And it was George Orwell, a close friend, who was to suggest the title for his novel The Sword and the Sickle (1942) while walking across Primrose Hill, close to Anand’s flat in St George’s Mews, during a blackout.

Anand was also boosted in his fight to lift the ban on books in India during this period by the support of the large constituency of Victor Gollanz's Left Book Club as well as the friendship of Michael Foot (then Labour MP) who led a petition to include India within the scope of the Atlantic Charter.⁶⁴ Still centrally involved in promoting the works of the Progressive Writers, Anand expanded the networks of the newly launched Indian Writing, consolidating already existing connections with John Lehmann's New Writing and his Hogarth Press publications. Besides this, Anand was energetically setting up (on the request of Orwell) a whole range of different programmes for the BBC Eastern Service aimed at very different target audiences. Commissioned to write witty, discursive pieces on individual writers such as Bernard Shaw or H. G. Wells, he also offered several contributions, sometimes as sole broadcaster, to series such as 'New Weapons of War', 'Books That Changed the World' and 'Meet My Friends'.

Perhaps most importantly he was centrally involved in the innovative and influential 'Voice' programme, a six-part poetry magazine for radio. Anand not only helped to produce this programme but was also engaged in commissioning for it, ensuring that proper space was attributed to Indian poets, such as Tagore and Iqbal, alongside their European contemporaries. It seems highly likely that it was the influence of his broadcasting work on the BBC 'Open Letters' series that partially determined the form of his own Letters on India, the dialogic nature of the genre being a useful 'peg to hang one's narrative on'.⁶⁵ Finally, there is no doubt that Anand's own profile in Britain benefited from the platform he shared on the prestigious 'Voice' programmes with key British, Indian and colonial intellectuals – Edmund Blunden, William Empson, Herbert Read, T. S. Eliot, Narayana Menon,

Una Marson, Stephen Spender and Tambimuttu – as well as from the ‘extraordinary prestige’ that was, as W. J. West points out, ‘attached to radio in those days’.⁶⁶

Perhaps not unsurprisingly given this context, several more invitations for lectures, talks and commissions from publishers followed prior to Anand’s departure from Britain in the autumn of 1945.⁶⁷

[B] Complicating Resistance

It is difficult to explain why Anand’s influential and highly visible presence as a public intellectual in Britain has so often not been recognized. Perhaps his ‘disappearance’ can be accounted for by the regrettable flattening out of the rich power struggles that marked the conflicted historical terrain of modernity in the pre-independence period. As Amit Chaudhuri notes, such struggles were most typically characterized by a ‘robust, often contradictory creative opportunism’; defined, in other words, less by stark resistances than by the creation of cosmopolitan and often ‘vernacular’ trade routes, creating convergences which are at times considerably ‘simplified’ by the binaries of an overly oppositional ‘colonial’ and ‘postcolonial’ divide.⁶⁸ The hasty ‘imposition of fashionable critical/theoretical discourses onto texts existing outside the boundaries of fixed national traditions’ can at times ‘stultify’ our ‘reading practices’, obstruct our vision and prevent us from recognizing the importance of sometimes eclipsed but nevertheless proximate intellectual synergies.⁶⁹ It is important, when reading resistance backwards in time, to remember that the colonial encounter was always a mutually constitutive ‘transaction’, a two-way process, built on ‘complex negotiation and exchange’.⁷⁰ While resistance often acts as

the main framework for the broader project of the postcolonial, there are many forms of resistance and these can be complicit and oppositional at the same time. Moreover, such resistances, whether colonial or postcolonial, do not necessarily sit easily within what Anuradha Needham calls an ‘autonomous, uncontaminated space’ which announces ‘the “truth” of its pure opposition to the West’ but ignores ‘those articulations ... that emphasise’ their ‘multi-layered, mixed ... historical formations’.⁷¹ It is my hope that future readings of Anand’s formative years in Britain will focus on precisely those messy, contradictory and often unresolved elements of his competing allegiances. In investigating such transverse marks of affiliation, one may gain more insight into the ways Anand was able to both articulate his politics as anti-colonial Indian radical, writer and public intellectual in a period of major political and cultural change.

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¹ See Nasta, S. (2004), 'Voyaging in: colonialism and migration', in L. Marcus and P. Nicholls (eds), Twentieth Century English Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 563-85; and Snaith, A. (2010), 'Conversations in Bloomsbury: colonial writers and the Hogarth Press', in L. Shahriari and G. Potts (eds), Virginia Woolf's Bloomsbury, Volume 2. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 138-55.

² Nasta (2002), Home Truths; Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 15-55.

³ Boehmer, E. (2002), Empire, the National and the Postcolonial. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 21.

⁴ Williams, R. (2001), 'Tragedy and revolution', in The Raymond Williams Reader. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 96.

⁵ Orwell, G., Orwell, S. and Angus, I. (eds) (1970), The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell: My Country Right or Left 1940-1943. Volume 2. Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 253.

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⁹ Codell, J. (ed.) (2003), Imperial Co-Histories: National Identities and the British and Colonial Press. London: Associated University Press, p. 18. I am grateful here to Codell's argument on co-histories which derives from Frantz Fanon and Edward Said.

¹⁰ Letter from Anand to Herman Ould (30 November 1942), quoted courtesy of University of Tulsa, Mc Farlin Library, Department of Special Collections and University Archives: PEN Archive.

¹¹ Anand (1949), 'Prologomena to a new humanism', in Lines Written to an Indian Air. Baroda: Nalanda Publishing Company, p. 4; this essay is dedicated to E. M. Forster and draws on his BBC talk, 'The world I hope for no. 4', 28 October 1943 (BBC Written Archives, Caversham, Reading, BBC Eastern Service).

¹² Anand (1946), Apology for Heroism: An Essay in Search of Faith. London: Lindsay Drummond, p. 55.

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¹⁴ Anand, Apology, p. 63; emphasis added.

¹⁵ See Berry, M. (1971), Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and the Novelist. Amsterdam: Oriental Press Publishers, pp. 1-40; and Bald, S. R. (1974), 'Politics of a revolutionary elite: a study of Mulk Raj Anand's novels'. Modern Asian Studies, 8, (4), 473-89. These focus primarily on Anand within a Marxist radical context. See also my discussion of more recent versions of critical framings which exclude Anand's role in the formation of a global modernism, in Home Truths, pp. 25-9; a reading enhanced by a recent dialogue with Alison Donnell to whom I am also grateful for her reading of this chapter.

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¹⁷ Marcus. J. (2004), Hearts of Darkness: White Women Write Race. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, p. 5. A similar observation is made by Snaith in

‘Conversations in Bloomsbury’, p. 138.

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²⁰ Fisher, M. (1974), ‘Interview with Mulk Raj Anand’. World Literature Written in English, 13, 116.

²¹ Baer, B. C. (2009), ‘Shit writing: Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable, the image of Gandhi, and the Progressive Writers Association’. Modernism/modernity, 16, 576; emphasis added.

²² Codell, Imperial Co-Histories, p. 21. Codell makes the important point that the press was frequently a restrictive force and arbiter which blocked the participation of Indian colonial writers. In this context, it would be worth examining the many periodicals Anand did not publish in such as Horizon, despite his relationship with the editor, Cyril Connolly, and some of its regular contributors.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁴ Nasta (2009), ‘Between Bloomsbury and Gandhi? The background to the publication and reception of Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable’, in R. Fraser and M. Hammond (eds), Books Without Borders. Volume 2. Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. 151-70.

²⁵ See ‘Mulk Raj Anand’, Making Britain Database

<<http://www.open.ac.uk/makingbritain/mulk-raj-anand>> for further information.

²⁶ See for instance ‘Nehru’s campaign for civil liberties’ (1936), Left Review, September, 624; ‘Mr Eliot’s Kipling’ (1942), Life & Letters, 32, 167-70; Indian Writing (1940-42), 1-2, 1-4. Notably, a number of Indian writers associated with the PWA published regularly in this periodical including Iqbal Singh, K. S. Shelvankar, Ahmed Ali, Attia Hosain, Sasadhar Sinha (who ran the bookshop), Jawaharlal Nehru, Cedric Dover, Alagu Subramanian.

²⁷ Anand (1937), ‘Homage to Spain’, Congress Socialist, 1 May, 11 May, 15 May; 9-10, 11-14, 9-10.

²⁸ Anand (1931), ‘The poetry of Sir Muhammad Iqbal’. Indian Art and Letters, V, (1), 28.

²⁹ Between the early 1930s and 1945, Anand was a member of a wide range of different associations. These include the Workers Educational Association, the India League, PEN, the National Council for Civil Liberties, the PWA, the Ralph Fox Writer’s Group, the International Writers in Defence of Culture, the Left Book Club, and Friends of India. Anand also scripted a play Famine, performed at the Unity Theatre in Bloomsbury in 1942 in aid of Indian famine relief. See Packham, G. (1978), ‘Mulk Raj Anand and the thirties movement in England’, in K. K. Sharma (ed.), Perspectives on Mulk Raj Anand. Ghaziabad: Vimal, p. 58.

³⁰ Anand regularly invited his friends for lunch at Shafi’s restaurant at 18 Gerard St, W1. He had lunch there with Herman Ould of PEN before his departure in 1945.

³¹ Fisher, ‘Interview with Mulk Raj Anand’, 117.

³² Read, H. (1933), ‘The Hindu view of art’. The Listener, 30 August, 318.

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³⁴ Fox, R. (1944), The Novel and the People. London: Cobett Publishing, p. 10.

³⁵ See Croft, A. (2003), 'The Ralph Fox writer's group', in A. Shuttleworth (ed.), And In Our Time: Vision, Revision and British Writing of the 1930s. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, pp. 165-70.

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³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15. I am indebted here to the argument in Packham, 'Mulk Raj Anand', p. 56.

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⁴⁰ Brooker, P. and Thacker, A. (eds) (2009), The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines. Volume 1: Britain and Ireland, 1880-1955. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 634.

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⁴² See Ahmed, T. (2009), Literature and Politics in the Age of Nationalism. Delhi: Routledge, pp. 10-37; Coppola, C. (1974), 'The All-India Progressive Writers Association: the European phase', in Coppola (ed.), Marxist Influences and South Asian Literature. Michigan: Michigan State University Press, pp. 1-34; Gopal, P. (2005), Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence. London: Routledge, pp. 1-27.

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⁴⁶ Anand, 'On the Progressive Writer's movement', in Pradhan, Marxist Cultural Movement, p. 2.

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- ⁴⁷ Coppola, 'The All-India Progressive Writers Association', p. 13.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 16.
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- ⁵² Ibid., pp. 29-30.
- ⁵³ Cowasjee, So Many Freedoms, p. 30; see also Bluemel, George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics, pp. 86-9.
- ⁵⁴ Woolf, L. (1942), 'Introduction', in Anand, Letters on India, p. viii.
- ⁵⁵ Anand, Letters on India, pp. x-xii; Woolf's introduction was removed on Anand's request from subsequent trade editions of the book.
- ⁵⁶ Orwell, 'Review of Letters on India by Mulk Raj Anand, 19 March 1943', in Orwell and Davison, Orwell and Politics, pp. 173-6. Orwell addresses his review/letter to his friend 'Dear Mulk'.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 176. Davison is referring here to Leonard Woolf's reply in Tribune, 2 April 1943.
- ⁵⁸ Anand (1942), 'The place of India', in H. Ould (ed.), Writers in Freedom. London: Hutchinson, pp. 128-30.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 130.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 131.
- ⁶¹ Letter from Anand to Ould (30 January 1942) in University of Tulsa, McFarlin Library: PEN Archive: Mulk Raj Anand Letters.

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- ⁶² Herring, R. (1942), 'Editorial', Life & Letters To-Day, March, 158.
- ⁶³ E. M. Forster regularly lauded Anand in his BBC broadcasts. See Lago, M., Hughes, L., and Walls, E. M. (eds) (2008), The BBC Talks of E. M. Forster 1929-1960. London: University of Missouri Press; Muir, E. (1942), 'New novels' (review of The Sword and the Sickle). The Listener, 7 May, 602.
- ⁶⁴ Morgan, K. (2007), Michael Foot: A Life. London: Harper Collins, pp. 44-5. Foot led a campaign to send a deputation to Churchill to advocate for India's inclusion in the Atlantic Charter. He knew and admired Anand.
- ⁶⁵ Cowasjee (1973), 'Mulik Raj Anand and the BBC', Indian and Foreign Review, March, 20. Anand's BBC 'Letter to a Chinese Guerilla' was later published by Orwell in his 1943 BBC collection, Talking to India by E. M. Forster, Ritchie Calder and Others.
- ⁶⁶ Orwell, G. and West, W. J. (ed.) (1985), Orwell: The War Broadcasts. London: Duckworth, p. 18. See Ranasinha, R. (2010), 'South Asian broadcasters and the BBC', Journal of South Asian Diaspora, March, 57-71, for a fuller discussion of the many individuals involved in the diasporic networks at the BBC.
- ⁶⁷ Of note in particular was Anand's dinner speech to PEN (8 May 1945) and a wide constituency of international writers. He describes London as a 'second home' but also points out the major contribution that the Indian intelligentsia has made to the 're-assertion of the dignity of man as against the moral cynicism of the fascists', in the PEN Archive: Mulik Raj Anand Letters..
- ⁶⁸ Chaudhuri, A. (2009), 'Cosmopolitan's alien face'. New Left Review, 55, 1-5.
- ⁶⁹ Nasta, 'Between Bloomsbury and Gandhi?', p. 152.
- ⁷⁰ Trivedi, H. (1993), Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India. Calcutta: Papyrus, p. 15.

⁷¹ Needham, A. D. (2000), Using the Master's Tools: Resistance and the Literature of the African and South-Asian Diasporas. New York: St Martins Press, p. 28; also see Snaith, 'Conversations in Bloomsbury', pp. 138-57. Snaith puts forward a similar argument complicating how the affiliations Anand formed in 'Bloomsbury' have been seen.