

Between Bloomsbury and Gandhi? The Background to the
Publication and Reception of Mulk Raj Anand's
Untouchable

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Untouchable, Mulk Raj Anand's first and perhaps best-known novel, was published in 1935 by the small left wing British publisher, Wishart Books Ltd. Now a prestigious Penguin Modern Classic, it is frequently heralded as one of the most significant milestones in the history of modern Indian writing in English, and has been republished and translated several times since its first appearance. The novel's route to publication, however, was not an easy one; even though Anand at the time was well connected both in Britain (amongst the Bloomsbury group), and the subcontinent (as a Founder of the Indian Progressive Writer's Association). Following rejections from nineteen publishers, Anand was grateful in the end for the patronage of his friend and fellow-novelist, E.M. Forster, who, in writing an influential preface to the first edition, provided some much-needed early legitimization for the book among a sceptical British reading public. To many the central focus of this novel, concerning a day in the life of Bakha, one of India's untouchables (a sweeper and latrine cleaner) seemed to be too 'vulgar', even too 'dirty'; too inappropriate a subject to be admitted easily into the 'supposedly' respectable world of 1930s British fiction. In colonial India furthermore the book's reception and circulation was thwarted soon after publication, though for different reasons. There Anand's attempt to write the story of Bakha, a voiceless subaltern, into Indian history was seen by the then colonial government as potentially explosive: not only because of the novel's explicit political agenda - which castigated the iniquities of the ancient Hindu caste system and

manifestly sought parallels with the plight of the colonized under British rule - but also because an early draft had been directly influenced by the interventions of Mahatma Gandhi, whom Anand visited at his *ashram* in Ahmedabad in the late 1920s.¹ Perhaps not surprisingly, soon after publication the novel was placed on the list of proscribed books, and banned as an import by the colonial government, along with Anand's following two novels, *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937).² Despite the chequered nature of its early history, *Untouchable* was to receive many accolades following Independence in 1947; especially from nationalist critics keen to establish Anand's reputation as a 'founding-father' of the Indo-Anglian novel, one who - alongside his now distinguished contemporaries, RK Narayan and Raja Rao - was regarded as having been essential to the establishment of a uniquely Indian vision of modernity. Thus *Untouchable* is frequently claimed as *belonging* to the *national* tradition of Indian writing in English; indeed as one of the texts marking its inauguration. Yet when one examines the actual circumstances of the novel's composition, as well as the history of its subsequent journey into print, a slightly different trajectory presents itself – one, which might more accurately locate the book as deriving from a cross-cultural literary geography situated somewhere *between* Gandhi and Bloomsbury. Without doubt, *Untouchable* was a first novel of its kind in the history of Indian writing in English. Anand's passionate desire to portray 'the human condition of an Indian in the lower depths', combined with his attack on the structures of colonial power, served a recognizable political agenda linking him with the nationalist movement of the 1930s.³ Yet the novel also emerged out of an eclectic range of far broader international influences. In this way it was to lay the ground for a new cultural landscape not only anticipating the hybridity of the Indian novel in

English today but also creating an important conduit, or in Anand's own metaphor a symbolic 'bridge', between the 'the Ganga and the Thames'.⁴

This essay locates the background to the publication and reception of Anand's ground-breaking novel stemming in a series of rich transnational connections—literary, historical, political—between several cultural worlds. Straddling (amongst several others) the world of Bloomsbury and the run up to Independence of Gandhi's India, the genesis and reception of the book (both at its publication and subsequently), provide us with a case study of the impact of national and cultural politics, often determined by narrowly conceived notions of 'taste', 'tradition' or 'genre', on aesthetic and literary judgments. In a broader sense this very background served to highlight the danger of falsely institutionalizing or compartmentalizing such texts as have arisen from sometimes contradictory colonial histories split by their very nature across national boundaries and sitting uncomfortably within established 'academic orthodoxies'.⁵ The hasty imposition of fashionable critical/theoretical discourses onto texts existing outside the boundaries of fixed national traditions can sometimes stultify reading practices; ultimately it can also frustrate the free passage and circulation of such works across what are still, regrettably, fiercely guarded canonical borders. In this context it is worth bearing in mind a recent observation of Sydney Shep's, noting that whilst the academic discipline of Book History has traditionally conformed to nationalist models of print culture, it now needs to step *outside* such fixed paradigms to investigate the shifting contours of its own frontiers. Conscious of the pressing need to widen the angle of vision, she stresses that we must now focus on rearranging 'book history's furniture' the better to contemplate 'the physical, intellectual and spiritual mobilities ... of those material objects we call books'.⁶

Before examining the fascinating background to the genesis and publishing history of *Untouchable*, it might be worth pausing for a moment to consider the surprisingly narrow and often polarized critical landscape surrounding evaluations of Anand's fiction, since the evolution of the related critical nomenclatures often proves revealing of the formation of national canons and literary judgments. Most commonly—despite several positive reviews early in his career and connections with **several** major writers in 1930s Britain, Anand has been all but invisible in British literary histories. ⁷If accorded any serious mention -- at least until very recently—his work has most often been noted either in the context of anti-colonial resistance or occasionally in relation to controversies sparked by EM Forster's well-intentioned 1935 preface to *Untouchable*. In such accounts Anand is seldom described as a dynamic activist, or as a key contributor to the refashioning of Britain as a crucible for international modernity, but as a colonial outsider 'lifted up' by the patronage of Forster's liberal humanist cosmopolitanism. ⁸ Frequently portrayed through a series of predictable and myopic critical caricatures, Anand thus makes an **occasional** appearance as a kind of collaborative mimic or colonial 'babu' writing back to Empire; or, alternatively, as an overly noisy and dogmatic Marxist situated on the fringes of a Euro-American modernity, alienating the majority of his Bloomsbury friends by his anti-imperialist politics and his residual commitment to an increasingly unpopular Stalinism after the outbreak of war. As V.S. Pritchett comments, reflecting on Anand's sudden return to India following the end of hostilities in 1945:

He vanished ... and there seems to be a long silence—no doubt the war was responsible.⁹

In fact Pritchett was one of Anand's more sympathetic readers and reviewers at the time. However his comment on Anand's so-called 'disappearance' from London literary life is interesting, not least because it implies an *absence from and invisibility in* British literary history. Such inconspicuousness was to remain even *after* the dawn of a reclamatory and historicist trend in the new era of postcolonial literary studies. A particularly graphic example occurs in the context of an essay for the new millennium published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in October 2000 and dedicated to reviewing the new Modernist volume of the *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*. Oddly enough, given the predictability of the exclusive Euro-American focus of the review – ironically entitled 'How the Critic came to be King'—it was illustrated by a now celebrated photograph, taken on behalf of the BBC Eastern Service's radio magazine programme *Voice* in 1942¹⁰. *Voice* was broadcast monthly and was a regular feature to which Anand and several other prominent Indian writers and journalists of his generation were invited to contribute.¹¹

[INCLUDE FIGURE 10.1 HERE. Caption: *VOICE* – the monthly radio magazine programme in the Eastern Service of the B.B.C. (Left to right, sitting) Venu Chitale, J.M.Tambimuttu, T.S.Eliot, Una Marson, Mulk Raj Anand, C.Pemberton, Narayana Menon; (standing) George Orwell, Nancy Barratt, William Empson.]

The original version of this image, now held in the BBC picture archives, lists the names of ten writers and critics: they include Una Marson (Caribbean poet and presenter), Venu Chitale (assistant producer), J.M.Tambimuttu (major poet and editor of *Poetry London*), Mulk Raj Anand, Narayana Menon (writer and broadcaster), T.S. Eliot (poet and critic) William Empson (poet and critic) and George Orwell (novelist

and essayist). But the caption running beneath the photo as reproduced in the *TLS* wipes out the names of all the non- Euro-American participants, and in so doing perpetuates the deletion of the cross-cultural relationships existing between these writers so interestingly grouped together. The *TLS* caption simply read: ‘among others—TS Eliot, George Orwell and William Empson.’¹²As I have argued at length elsewhere, the occlusion of these major colonial writers not only pinpoints an ongoing critical failure to acknowledge the role writers such as Anand played in the reinvention of Britain as a transnational site for the growth of a global modernity, but comfortably relegates these supposed ‘others’ to yet another containable location on the margins of mainstream literary studies: namely that of the ‘colonial’ or the ‘postcolonial’, placed *outside* and conveniently separated *from* the key tenets of the body of European modernity.

Interestingly, as I intimated at the outset, certain readings of Anand’s work by a generation of sub-continental scholars have inadvertently reproduced similar acts of narrow critical reading. Despite the unanimous celebration of Anand’s stature as ‘founding-father’ of the tradition of Indo-Anglian literature, his work is often entrapped by its categorization as ‘nationalist’, worthy ‘social realist’, or in the case of *Untouchable* as providing the first proletarian Indian-Anglian novel. True, a number of recent studies in South Asia have begun to view Anand’s contribution through a more wide-angled and global lens. Vinay Dharwardker, for example, praises Anand for his global vision of a ‘pro-subaltern cosmopolitanism’, and Harish Trivedi compares Anand’s early experience of 1920s Britain with the experiences of some later diasporic writers such as Salman Rushdie. The majority of critics, however, persist in taking Anand’s agenda of social and political protest as their prime point of departure.¹³ Surprisingly, this kind of approach surfaces again in Priya

Joshi's recent monograph *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture and the Indian Novel in India* (2005), which sets out to explore the global markets surrounding colonial publishing in India and in the process to overturn the rigid binaries of nationalist models of book history. Whilst Joshi (following Edward Said) views the inter-relationships between the imperial and post-imperial worlds as a zone that is 'intellectually and culturally integrated', she fails to comment on Anand's work in this light, noting instead and rather reductively that Anand as social realist is 'somewhat mechanical rather than literary or innovative'.¹⁴ Social realism of course does not sit easily with some fashionable theoretical paradigms. Anand has suffered particularly from postcolonial critics in this respect. Either his so-called revolutionary political radicalism has been seen in the end as essentially conservative and complicit, or he not been regarded as sufficiently experimental - unlike say GV Desani, whose *All About H Hatterr* (1948) is regularly cited as literary precursor to the inauguration of the cosmopolitan tradition of migrant writing marked by the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981.¹⁵ Of course this question of 'experimentalism' versus 'engagement' is an old chestnut in debates concerning the development and evolution of early twentieth century modernism. The opposition between these two ideals has been shown to be fallacious by many, including Jean Paul Sartre, who makes the useful observation that 'art loses nothing in engagement. On the contrary ... the always new requirements of the social and metaphysical engage the artist in finding a new language and new techniques'.¹⁶ Although Anand embarked on a long career as social activist and follower of Gandhi, he still remained influenced during the period when he was first drafting *Untouchable* by the 'experimental' prose of the literary world he encountered in 1930s Bloomsbury. The fact, however, that works by writers such as Virginia Woolf, EM Forster and James

Joyce were to impact significantly on the genesis of *Untouchable* does not point simply (as some have argued) to colonial mimicry, or conservative collaboration but instead, to Anand's desire to explore the potentiality for the creation of a revolutionary, new form. As Jessica Berman suggests in an illuminating article, interpreting Anand's early novels as constitutive of, rather than an appendage to, the body of a newly developing global modernity, the now well-known impact of Joyce's banned novel *Ulysses* on *Untouchable* was not 'simply a unilateral matter of influence, influence though it certainly was'. Rather, such intimate inter-textual and inter-political relations highlight 'the multidirectional flow of global literature... where streams of discourse move not just from metropolis to colony, or even back from colony to metropolis, but... from colony [Ireland] to metropolis to another colony [India] and back again'.¹⁷ Or, as Anand was to put it in 'Why I Write', a piece which both details the autobiographical background to the drafting of *Untouchable* and signals his awareness of the need to move beyond the prescriptions of any one orthodoxy, any one tradition:

I have the conviction that if man's fate could be revealed ... beyond the mere subjectivism of literary coteries, which ends in blind alleys, in the newly freed countries of the world, the freedoms, beyond political freedom, may be ushered.¹⁸

The reasons for this are perhaps obvious. Written breathlessly over one weekend, but redrafted and edited several times between 1928 and 1934, the book was initially composed during a period when Anand was resident in London as a student and would-be writer, frequenting the Georgian drawing rooms of Bloomsbury

and the reading rooms of the British Library. However, he was also fired, like so many other young Indian radicals of his generation, by the intensification of Gandhi's *swadeshi* campaign, the Indian Freedom movement and a commitment to international socialism. Initially inspired by the memory of a childhood playmate, who, despite the absence of a formal education could recite several cantos from the Punjabi epic poem, *Heera Ranja*,¹⁹ Anand's desire to write Bakha into existence crystallized during a period when he himself, as a recently arrived migrant in London and pupil of the modernist Islamic poet Iqbal, was being subjected to a number of powerful but often competing cultural influences. *Conversations in Bloomsbury* is a series of witty autobiographical essays written with hindsight and recounting his early days as a student as he attempted to navigate between the houses of European modernism and his burgeoning political radicalism. The opening lines of its Preface in some senses set the scene for the genesis and reception of *Untouchable*:

I arrived in London after a brief jail-going in the Gandhi movement in the early twenties and found myself removed suddenly from the realities of the freedom struggle into the world of Bloomsbury where the pleasures of literature and art were considered ends in themselves.²⁰

Moreover, Anand's preface to these *Conversations* - literary and political dialogues which in a sense he continued to have throughout his life *with* Bloomsbury as an icon of Western modernity - suggest the difficulties of his contradictory position in 1925 as an Indian colonial writer and radical socialist attempting to forge a global, transnational vision. They are also suggestive of the polarities of art, politics and national culture which later came to predetermine the book's location and publishing

history. For like many other colonial and postcolonial writers who followed him, Anand was caught both within and outside the frame of a British canon that sought both to define and to exclude him.

I am signaling ‘Gandhi’ and ‘Bloomsbury’ here both as literal influences on Anand in the actual writing of the book, and as complementary elements in the book’s publishing history: for both were crucial to the material emergence of *Untouchable* into print. They were also to function as signifiers of the cultural geographies lying between Anand’s composition of the work and the contexts determining its reception. It might be worth elaborating briefly on the notion of Gandhi and Bloomsbury. A shorthand way to read them, and in many ways a predictably polarized one, would be to equate ‘Gandhi’ with Anand’s anti-colonial political activism and, ‘Bloomsbury’ with Anand’s formative encounter in the 1930s with the elitist literary salons of high modernism. However, if examined them more closely, these can now be re-interpreted and realigned. Gandhi himself, like Anand, was a classic instance of an early cross-cultural and cosmopolitan traveler, a man whose life and works not only straddled several worlds, but also, like many other young Indian lawyers of his generation, lived for a while in several of them.²¹ Similarly the notion of ‘Bloomsbury’, as easy password for an elitist cultural movement has recently come under scrutiny from contemporary urban geographers, keen to expand the limited parameters of its aesthetic jurisdiction. As such it has come to be seen less as a rarefied literary *space*, dominated by the likes say of Virginia and Leonard Woolf, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, Edith Sitwell or E.M. Forster but rather as a real and multicultural *place*, a dynamic and polyphonic ‘contact zone’ where notably, several languages were spoken on the streets and where many so-called ‘foreigners’ and colonials resided whilst studying at the British Museum, or pursuing courses at nearby University

College, London. The ‘geographical heart of Bloomsbury’ – the area from Euston Road to Holborn, Woburn Place, Tavistock Place and the edges of Russell Square—was as Sara Blair notes, totally “cosmopolitan”.²² Significantly too, Anand’s connections with British writers during his time in London extended well beyond the elitist parameters of the so-called ‘Bloomsbury’ modernists to more socially-committed figures such as Dylan Thomas, George Orwell, Stephen Spender, Aldous Huxley, Louis MacNeice, Naomi Mitchinson and Stevie Smith.

Books, like the ideas of writers themselves, have always traveled and *Untouchable* is a particularly apposite example of the ways in which the lives of books often straddle and open up the borders of several worlds. Anand’s italicized authorial signature at the close of *Untouchable* -- ‘SIMLA—SS. Viceroy of India-BLOOMSBURY’-- playfully draws the reader’s attention to some of the different physical and cultural contexts of its gestation – India, shipboard and London - locations which deliberately mark the liminality of the novel’s composition and subsequent rite of passage. As readers familiar with Anand’s work will no doubt be aware, there are several slightly different versions in circulation of the story of how *Untouchable* came to be written and published. It is well known, for example, that in his early drafts Anand drew on a wide range of autobiographical and cultural influences including his own immersion (as a fluent Panjabi and Urdu speaker) in the vernacular traditions of Indian literature, his readings of Russian writers –Tolstoy and Gorky—as well as works by Bloomsbury members such as E.M. Forster, Virginia and Leonard Woolf and T.S. Eliot. However, it was the electrifying fusion of art and politics he was to encounter through his first reading of James Joyce’s novel *Ulysses*, combined with Gorky’s fictional portraits of the ‘lowest dregs of humanity’²³ that were to have the most resounding influence. Recognizing that ‘in the face of India’s

poor, I might have to go beyond literature as defined in Bloomsbury' and create 'new writings from vital experience', Anand was to come across a short piece written by Gandhi, entitled 'Uka', and published in his magazine, *Young India*. Still at the time a student at University College and very much a Bloomsbury 'groupie', Anand was inspired by the simplicity and stark austerity of Gandhi's essay – which, fascinatingly, was on the subject of a sweeper boy he later adopted and took into his ashram:

The narrative was plain, direct and without all those circumlocutions about Bakha, which I had attempted, in imitation of Joyce's 'language of the night'. I now saw the mocking bird in myself and was ashamed of my impressionableness.²⁴

In what is an oft-cited, and possibly apocryphal story in the history of modern Indian literature, we are told that Anand (clutching his half-finished manuscript under his arm) secured a personal invitation to visit Gandhi at his *sabarmati ashram* near Ahmedabad. Gandhi was not a habitual reader of novels. He swiftly instructed Anand to get out of his corduroy costume, don a *kurta-pyjama*, learn to stop drinking alcohol and clean the latrines once a week. Some weeks later, having read the first draft of Anand's book, he returned with the harsh verdict that the novel did not convince: mainly, because Anand's anti-hero Bakha, spoke far too many long words for an untouchable and was too much of 'a Bloomsbury intellectual'. Advised to cut out at least 'a hundred or more pages and rewrite the whole', Anand was to industriously revise his manuscript for a further three months before returning to London to begin the quest for a publisher.²⁵ Although, as Berman notes, there is no hard evidence for Gandhi's editorial interventions (other than recycled versions of this story), and no

‘extant manuscript’, this tale has come to determine the ways in which the politics of Anand’s early literary career have been interpreted. Most importantly perhaps, it has continued to feed the assumptions behind critical readings keen to draw attention solely to Anand’s credentials as an authentic ‘social realist’ and literary icon of Indian nationalism.²⁶

A lesser-known but perhaps equally telling story behind the composition of *Untouchable* appears in *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, where Anand recalls an important discussion with EM Forster about the ending to *A Passage to India* (1924). It is important to note that whilst Anand’s recollection of this episode refers to a meeting between himself and Forster in 1925 -- several years before *Untouchable* was conceived and well before Forster came to write his famous preface of 1934 -- Anand’s written narrative of this symbolic encounter was only made available in print in 1981 when his Bloomsbury memoir was published. Despite this gap in time, Anand’s account is revealing, especially given the political direction his first novel was to take and Forster’s pivotal role in facilitating its publication. Having already devoured *Passage to India* shortly after his arrival in Britain, and reclining (so we are told with EM Forster and Leonard Woolf), under a tree in Bloomsbury, Anand asked Forster an incisive question about its ending:

‘Mr Forster, Sir,’ I began, trying to be tentative, ‘you make Aziz and Professor Fielding go apart—even their horses go in different directions [...] Do you think they will [only] come together when India becomes free?’²⁷

Forster’s evasive retort as reported by Anand that ‘I am Morgan to all my friends. Not “Mr Forster, Sir”’, clearly constituted a veiled rejoinder. Yet he does not

in Anand's retelling engage either with the political implications of the question or with the deliberate irresolution of the novel's famous ending in which the two friends, one Indian and one English, are unable to connect, swerving apart surrounded by a chorus of voices echoing, 'No, not yet.[...] No, not there'.²⁸ Later in his account of this dialogue Anand makes it abundantly clear that he identifies not only with Aziz's incipient nationalism but also with what he calls Aziz's inability to express the truly 'revolutionary potential' of his 'desire for revenge'. Clearly equating Aziz's situation more broadly with the predicament of the powerless in colonial India, Anand, much to Forster and Leonard Woolf's uncomfortable amusement, continues by making further parallels: between his own predicament and that of Caliban as rebel in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and later with Gandhi.²⁹ Whilst it is difficult to know whether or not Anand's account of this conversation is to be believed, it does invite us to reflect on a number of issues concerning the inter-relationship between *A Passage to India* and *Untouchable*. It has often been suggested that Anand's novel ends with a positive vision signaling the 'possibility for future reform and progress towards freedom for both Bakha and India'. As Ralph Crane notes, *Untouchable* thus overturns the pessimism at the close of Forster's novel which offers little hope for any 'meaningful interaction' between the Indians and the British.³⁰ It is clear, as we have seen from Anand's recollections of his 'conversations' with Forster that he was keen to interrogate and move beyond the questions raised at the close of *A Passage to India*, and to find a new point of departure: to develop, in other words, a productive dialogue with the political and cultural issues implicit in Forster's text but not fully realized within it. Interestingly, we are given a hint of the possibility for an alternative vision of modernity from Forster himself in the 'Temple' section of *A Passage to India* when Aziz, living as a self-exiled Muslim doctor in a Hindu state,

asks Professor Godbole for advice on his newly written poetry. As Godbole comments -- perhaps prophetically -- the promise of Aziz's future will be fulfilled not by a simple rejection of his embryonic nationalist concerns, or by abandoning his local allegiances to Urdu and Islam—but by embracing a more cosmopolitan vision of 'internationality'. For it is 'India', as Godbole is quick to note, seeming as it might to the British 'not to move', that will in fact 'go straight there' and create a new space for cultural expression, 'while ... other nations waste their time'.³¹ There is no doubt that, when Forster first drafted his short preface to *Untouchable* in 1934, he was already aware that Anand was extending his reach well beyond a simple recounting of a day in the life of his untouchable anti-hero, Bakha. Pointing perhaps to the possibility of resolution not realizable at the time he penned his own novel, he comments at its close: 'The 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'.³²

E.M. Forster completed his preface to *Untouchable* in 1934, a couple of years after Anand's return from his spell at Gandhi's ashram and following the book's unsuccessful submission to nineteen British publishers between 1932-34. These included major houses such as Macmillan (Anand's first choice), Jonathan Cape, Hutchinson, Unwin, Kegan Paul and Chatto. Various accounts have circulated over time regarding the trials and tribulations Anand experienced in getting *Untouchable* into print. As Saros Cowasjee, Anand's literary biographer states, whilst the almost suicidal author collected rejection slips, several of his English literary acquaintances attempted to reassure him. On reading the manuscript Naomi Mitchinson, for example, described the book as both 'fascinating and horrible', and suggested to Anand that 'a good many people just won't read it' simply because of 'the dirt and cruelty ... conveyed in it'. However, she also praised Anand's ability in conveying

that 'dirt' with a candid vision that avoided unnecessary romanticization. And Bonamy Dobrée (one of Anand's closest friends), recommended the book to Jonathan Cape with the strong affirmation that although the novel addresses, 'things we don't know', it is confidently 'written by somebody who ... does'. When Anand eventually came to submit the now well-travelled manuscript to Chatto and Windus --one of his last attempts-- it was accompanied by a letter Anand had received from his friend, E.M. Forster dated 5 May, 1934. Forster writes:

Dear Mr Anand,

I am just going abroad, and have only had time to read hastily through your Ms., but I found it extremely interesting. It recalled to me very vividly the occasion I have walked the 'wrong way' in an Indian city, and it is a way down which no novelist has yet taken us...you present it all very convincingly. You make your sweeper sympathetic yet avoid making him a hero or a martyr, and by the appearance of Gandhi and the conversation about machinery at the end, you give the book a coherence and shape which it would otherwise have lacked....The objection against the Ms from the practical point of view seems...not... its length but its 'squalor'. I put this word in inverted commas as indicating that it doesn't convey my personal opinion, but it may well represent the opinion of the public, which the publishers are bound to consider when making their decision. ³³

Anand had been reluctant to approach Forster earlier in his search for a publisher for fear of being seen to be a 'typical Indian Babu', begging 'a letter of recommendation'. ³⁴Yet when the manuscript was eventually dispatched (following

the advice of the poet Oswald Blakeston), to Edgell Rickward, Editor of Wishart Books Ltd, former editor of *The Calendar of Modern Letters* and an avowed Marxist, Anand received his first positive reply, a reply that was accompanied by a small advance of £35 and the proviso that Forster should ease the book's reception by prefacing it with an introduction. Forster readily agreed and the book was finally published on May 1, 1935. Rickward clearly admired Forster's introduction and wrote the following reply to Anand on the 30 November, 1934:

I am glad to get your letter, and to find that you admired Forster's introduction as much as I do. I think from every point of view it was just what we wanted. It is a little masterpiece of suggestion and understanding, and will be the book's *passport* through the latent hostility of the ordinary reviewer.³⁵

Although Rickward praised Anand's manuscript for its 'sincerity' and 'skill', he was clearly nervous about the book's potential sales, fearing that the firm would find it hard to 'dispose of more than one thousand copies'. He was also quick to point out that the 'prospect of good sales in India must largely affect our decision'.

³⁶Rickward's original aim to market *Untouchable* as widely as possible in order to reach an Indian audience is ironic in the light of the book's later proscription, though Anand did attempt in 1939 to get Wishart Books to transfer the publishing rights to The Socialist Book Club in Allahabad, along with some of his later novels and works by other leftist friends, such as Lytton Strachey's *Theory and Practice*.³⁷ It is not clear how far this arrangement progressed as the correspondence from the archive is incomplete but there was clearly a concerted move to provide reciprocal rights with Wishart Books on a number of left wing titles, even though Wishart turned out later to

be one of the first British publishers to be banned export rights in India. Interestingly, despite the fact that the book has been published in several editions over the years, E.M. Forster's original preface has not only always remained with it but is most often (as in the current Penguin edition), featured on the front cover.

Unsurprisingly the preface begins in a fairly self-referential manner with a reference to Forster's own novel, *A Passage to India*. Whilst this blurring of the line between the two books has been viewed as 'absorptive rather than equalising',³⁸ Forster's opening anecdote is a powerful one. And it finally made it clear to Anand exactly why so many puritanical British publishers had turned down his so-called 'dirty' novel. As Forster begins:

Some years ago I came across a book by myself, *A Passage to India* which had apparently been read by an indignant Colonel. He had not concealed his emotions. On the front page, he had written 'burn when done' and lower down, 'has a dirty mind, see page 215'. I turned to page 215 with pardonable haste. There I found the words: 'The sweeper of Chandrapur had just struck, and half the commodes remained desolate in consequence'. This lighthearted remark has excluded me from military society ever since.³⁹

Only one edition of *Untouchable* to my knowledge does not conform to the pattern of retaining Forster's canonical preface without comment and that is the Bodley Head edition, published in 1970, which adds a revealing 'Afterword' by Saros Cowasjee, one of Anand's most perceptive critics and biographers, providing details of the novel's troubled publication history. Notably too the Bodley Head edition carries a slightly amended dedication. Whereas the first edition of the book is dedicated to the writer Edith Young, in the 1970 Anand adds the names of M.K.Gandhi and K.S.

Shelvankar as inspirations for the novel. Later editions, such as the Penguin Modern Classic currently in print, revert to the original dedication.

The question of prefaces written to introduce colonial texts by canonical British figures has long been a controversial one for the politics of prefaces in general but also for the after-lives of the texts themselves. Often, as Amardeep Singh has pointed out, the split between preface and text merely heightens a sense of colonial alterity as the canonical ‘preface-writer assumes a European readership, and poses the non-European writer’s culture as remote and unrecognizable’. Yet, as Singh suggestively continues, such prefaces can also challenge ‘European modernism’s temporal and spatial universalism’ precisely because of their ‘visible textual proximity’, and the fact that preface and text (as in the case of Forster and Anand) have continued to appear alongside each other for years. On the one hand such material proximity may arguably delimit the future promise of the colonial author so framed by reinforcing old binaries of centre and margin; on the other, such prefaces can also serve to highlight ‘a scene of exchange’ that existed ‘between European and non-European writing’, an inter-relationship which helps to ‘push’ the frontiers of European ‘modernism *outside of itself*’.⁴⁰ In this sense, Forster’s preface to *Untouchable*, a frame which has appeared with every published edition of the book, not only registers an already existing and continuing dialogue between the two authors but is also suggestive of a realignment that can extend the borders of European modernism into the global histories of colonial and postcolonial space.

At the time of course, Forster’s preface served the primary purpose of creating a ‘passport’ (as one reviewer in the London Mercury noted) for ‘an author whose work might easily have escaped attention’. In this role Forster was simply an

important 'intermediary, legitimating Anand as a writer to be taken seriously and providing some much-needed recognition that was crucial to the book's later survival. In addition, by praising the 'purity' of Anand's intentions, Forster not only deliberately dissolved some of the assumed boundaries between himself and Anand but directed much of the adverse criticism of the book's 'dirt' against himself, making it clear that 'material that lends itself to propaganda' can also 'be so treated as to produce the pure effect of art'.⁴¹ As Cowasjee tells us:

Though *The Times*, *London Mercury* and *Punch* agreed with Forster's appraisal, the *Left Review*, *News Chronicle*, *Observer*, *Star*, *Sunday Referee* and *The Manchester Guardian Weekly* took up issue with him. Much of the argument centred on whether the book was 'dirty', or 'indescribably clean' as Forster made it out to be.⁴²

Interestingly too, it was in the heart of the salons of upper class 'Bloomsbury' that Anand met with some of the harshest criticism, a reaction which served to distance him from his acquaintances there, and spurred him on to publish his following more explicitly political novels, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves in a Bud* and *Across the Black Waters* (1940). *Across the Black Waters* not only exposes Britain's exploitative enlisting of Indian *sepoys* to cross to *Villayet* (England) as cannon-fodder during the First World War but, as I have argued elsewhere, also demonstrates how so-called 'barbarism', was generated from 'within as much as without, the inevitable product of Western modernity that had led to global atrocities worldwide'.⁴³ Several controversial non-fictional pieces also appeared around this time, such as the starkly political *Letters on India* (1942) and the more autobiographical essays in *Apology to Heroism* (1946).

Edward Sackville-West's response to *Untouchable's* use of the outcast(e) Bakha as the main protagonist in the novel, is perhaps indicative of the mood of many diehard *Bloomsburyites*. For as he is reputed to have said: 'You can't do a novel about that kind of person... one only laughs at Cockneys, like Dickens does'.⁴⁴ Or, as Cyril Connolly, one of the first metropolitan reviewers of the novel was to observe, the 'untouchable' of the title was perhaps simultaneously a vehicle to represent Anand's sense, not of 'exile' as an Indian writer living in the imperial metropolis, but of alienation in a fundamentally racist climate where all 'WOGS' (Western Oriental Gentlemen as Anand later describes them in *The Bubble* (1984)), were still seen as 'untouchables' themselves.⁴⁵

I would like to draw this discussion to a close with a brief postscript. Despite the difficult odds *Untouchable*, survived the mixed reception it received in the 1930s and won praise even from conservatives such as Eliot, with whom Anand worked briefly at *The Criterion* between 1932-34. Yet by the early 1940s, despite regular appearances with notable figures such as George Orwell and William Empson on the BBC Eastern Service, Anand's reputation in Britain had seriously begun to decline. Anand's prolific publication of a series of explicitly political and anti-British works did not of course aid the situation. He was also sternly criticized by many of his former friends for taking up arms in Spain and stubbornly refusing to drop his communist commitment to Stalin after the outbreak of war in 1939. In fact, by the time Leonard Woolf was to publish his less complimentary and less renowned preface to Anand's utterly unambivalent, anti-imperialist *Letters on India* in 1942, the attitude in 'Bloomsbury' circles towards the once much fêted Indian intellectual had decisively changed. Woolf, once a close associate, begins affectionately, but soon

makes clear his reasons for departing from the expected convention of a supportive introductory note:

It will not be the usual kind of introduction, which seems to me nearly always impertinent, in both senses of the word, for in it a distinguished or undistinguished person irrelevantly pats the author on the back. Even if I wanted to – which I do not – I would not dare to pat you or any other member of the Indian National Congress Party on the back [...] The British record in India is not as black as you make out, black though it might be.⁴⁶

The scathing tone evident in Woolf's preface was perhaps to signal the mood of things to come. It certainly marked a significant shift in the British reception of Anand's work that persisted well into the mid 1940s and was perhaps to determine Anand's so-called 'disappearance' back to India after the war. And even though Anand was to continue to make several contributions to BBC radio programmes, he was reluctant to be 'co-opted', like the Sri Lankan poet Tambimuttu, to reinforce what he regarded to be 'the ascendant ideologies of Britain and North America' especially 'the propaganda movements against fascism and communism'.⁴⁷ One wonders, with hindsight, whether Anand's strange 'absence' from the narratives of British literary histories of the 1930s and 1940s can simply be attributed to his colonial background and the apparently 'nationalist' Indian subject-matter of so many of his works or whether his passionate political agenda and increasing radicalism after the outbreak of the Second World War alienated precisely those in literary power who had originally supported him. For whilst Anand was often to declare a utopian affirmation of Western modernity during his period as a young colonial student in Bloomsbury, his relationship with European enlightenment thinking had always been problematic. It is

perhaps owing to the complexity of such contradictions that his work can now be seen to have laid the ground for a split and transnational vision of modernity, a modernity that could straddle the words and worlds of both 'Bloomsbury' and 'Gandhi'. That, however, is a subject for another essay.

¹ There is some disagreement about when precisely Anand did visit Gandhi at his ashram. Anand says he made this visit in the Spring of 1929; see: Mulk Raj Anand, 'Why I Write' in KK Sharma, ed., *Indo-English Literature*, (Vimal Prakashan, Ghaziabad, 1977),p.14 ' and Saros Cowasjee notes the date as 1932 in several of his essays. See: 'Mulk Raj Anand: The Early Struggles of a Novelist', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*,7,1,1972,p.53; also, 'Afterword' to *Untouchable* (Bodley Head, London, 1970),p.180.

² According to Srinivasa, Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English* (Asia Publishing House: New York, 1962),p.335. All three novels were banned in India and *Two Leaves in a Bud*; as Iyengar notes, was 'withdrawn from circulation in England on the threat of prosecution as an obscene book'. Further details appear in Norman G. Barrier, *Banned: Controversial Literature and Political Control in British India, 1907-1947* (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 1974). As Barrier notes (p. 126): 'Of the 175 titles seized whilst entering India between 1932 and 1934, at least 150 titles were Communist or by known sympathisers', p.137. He adds that 'Between 1935 and 1938 customs seized 450 titles, most of which were communist-linked. John Strachey, Mulk Raj Anand, Agnes Smedley and P.R. Dutt fell snare either to customs or postal centres dotting India'. Customs officers, postal authorities etc. were not required to read or comment on any of these books. They were however issued with a crude list identifying obvious links: anything with Gandhi in the title (Barrier, p. 116), anything from Wishart, and proceeded on that basis. It was therefore most likely guilt by association. I am grateful to Robert Fraser, editor of this volume, for this insight.

³ Mulk Raj Anand, 'The Making of an Indian-English Novel: *Untouchable*', Maggie Butcher,ed.,*The Eye of the Beholder* (Commonwealth Institute: London, 1983), p.35.

⁴ Mulk Raj Anand, *Roots and Flowers: Two Lectures on the Metamorphosis of Technique and Content in the Indian-English Novel* (Karnatak University Press: Dharwar, 1972),p.16.

⁵ Bryan Cheyette, 'Venetian Spaces: Old-New Literatures and the Ambivalent Uses of Jewish History,' Susheila Nasta, ed., *Reading the 'New' Literatures in a Post-Colonial Era* (D.S.Brewer:Cambridge, 2000), p. 57.

⁶ Sydney Shep, 'Books Without Borders: The Transnational Turn in Book History' in Robert Fraser and Mary Hammond eds, *Books Without Borders Volume One: The Cross-National Dimension in Print Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), pp

⁷ See Mulk Raj Anand, *Conversations in Bloomsbury* (Arnold-Heinemann: New Delhi, 1981); also Kirstin Bluemel, *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics: Intermodernism in Literary London* (Palgrave: Basingstoke, 2004), pp.69-92; also, Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (Palgrave: Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 25-34.

⁸ Amardeep Singh, 'The Lifting and the Lifted: Prefaces to Colonial Modernist Texts', *Wasafiri*, Vol 21, 1, March 2006, pp. 1-3; hereafter referred to as Singh.

⁹ Letter to Saros Cowasjee dated 4 October, 1968; cited in Cowasjee, 'The Early Struggles of a Novelist', p.49.

¹⁰ Stephen Collini, 'How the Critic Came to be Kind', *TLS*, 8 October, 2000, p. 19.

¹¹ See Ruvani Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain: Culture in Translation* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2007) for a full discussion of this.

¹² Collini, p.19

¹³ Vinay Dharwardker, 'The Historical Formation of Indian-English Literature', in Sheldon Pollock, ed., *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2003), p. 250 and Ricard Allen and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Literature & Nation: Britain and India 1800-1990* (Routledge: London, 2000), pp.109-10, p.162.

¹⁴ Priya Joshi, *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture and the Indian Novel in India* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2002), p.210.

¹⁵ Jessica Berman's insightful essay, 'Comparative Colonialisms: Joyce, Anand and the Question of Engagement', in *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol 13, 3, 2006, pp465-486, develops this argument further as does Arun Mukherjee, 'The Exclusions of Postcolonial Theory and Mulk Raj Anand's "Untouchable": A Case Study', *Ariel*, 22,3 pp. 27-48. It is also key to Bluemel's description of Anand in her monograph (cited earlier) as an 'intermodernist'.

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- ¹⁶ Cited by Berman, p.466.
- ¹⁷ Berman, p. 466.
- ¹⁸ Mulk Raj Anand, 'Why I Write', p.16.
- ¹⁹ Mulk Raj Anand, 'The Making of an Indian Novel: *Untouchable*', p.35; also Saros Cowasjee, 'Mulk Raj Anand: The Early Struggles of a Novelist', p.53.
- ²⁰ See 'Preface' to *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, p.5
- ²¹ An interesting discussion of this can be found in VS Naipaul's tribute to Gandhi's partially nomadic life as an influence on his early work. See: 'VS Naipaul with Alastair Niven' in Susheila Nasta, ed., *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk* (Routledge: London, 2004), pp.109-111. See also Javed Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel and Postnational Identity: Gandhi, Nehru and Iqbal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), pp.239-269.
- ²² Sara Blair, 'Local Modernity, Global Modernism: Bloomsbury and the Places of the Literary', *ELH*, 71-3, 2004, p 821-25.
- ²³ Cowasjee, 'Mulk Raj Anand: The Early Struggles of a Novelist', p.53.
- ²⁴ Mulk Raj Anand, 'The Making of an Indian Novel', pp. 35-37.
- ²⁵ Mulk Raj Anand, 'Why I Write', p.14.
- ²⁶ I am following Berman's argument here.
- ²⁷ EM Forster, *A Passage to India* ([1924]; Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1978); p.316; all future references are to this edition.
- ²⁸ Mulk Raj Anand, *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, p.22, p69, p.74.
- ²⁹ *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, p.74.
- ³⁰ Ralph Crane, 'Untouchable', *Literature Online*, <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>, p.2
- ³¹ *A Passage to India*, pp.273-4, also p.290.
- ³² EM Forster, 'Preface' to *Untouchable* ([1935]; Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1986), p. viii; all future references are to the 1986 Penguin edition.
- ³³ Saros Cowasjee details this history in his 'Afterword' to *Untouchable* (Bodley Head: London, 1970), pp.179-185. Forster's letter to Anand is also published in Syed Hamid Husain, ed, *Only Connect: Letters to Indian Friends. E.M.Forster* (Arnold-Heinemann: New Delhi, 1979), p.73.
- ³⁴ Mulk Raj Anand, 'The Making of an Indian Novel', p.40.
- ³⁵ Saros Cowasjee, 'Afterword', p. 184.

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- ³⁶ Saros Cowasjee, 'Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable: An Appraisal*', K.Sharma, ed., *Indo-English Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Prakashan: Ghaziabad, 1977), pp. 88-89.
- ³⁷ Letter dated July 28, 1939 addressed to Anand from Z.H.Ahmad of the Socialist Book Club, Allahabad; held in Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (Ref: 3006/S-3), p. 1-3.
- ³⁸ Amardeep Singh, 'The Lifting and the Lifted: Prefaces to Colonial Modernist Texts; p. 3.
- ³⁹ 'The Making of an Indian Novel', p.40. Note here that Anand slightly misquotes Forster's actual preface in this essay. I have used the version of the preface published in the Penguin edtn.
- ⁴⁰ Amardeep Singh, pp. 1-3.
- ⁴¹ *London Mercury*, XXXII (May, 1935),p.89
- ⁴² Saros Cowasjee, 'Afterword', p. 184.
- ⁴³ Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain*, p.28.
- ⁴⁴ Anand quotes this comment in 'The Story of My Experiment with a White Lie', *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English* (Macmillan:Bombay, 1972), pp.2-18.
- ⁴⁵ Mulk Raj Anand, 'The Story of My Experiment with a White Lie',p.16.
- ⁴⁶ Leonard Woolf, 'Introduction' to Mulk Raj Anand, *Letters on India* (Special edition of Labour Book Service: London, 1942), pp. vii-viii.
- ⁴⁷ Ruvani Ranasinha, 'Talking to India: the literary production and consumption of selected South Asian Anglophone writers in Britain and the US (1940s –1950s),p.?