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Teaching Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*: Colonial Context, Nationalism, Caste

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Mulk Raj Anand's novel Untouchable *(1935) offers opportunities to introduce and explore a variety of theoretical, historical, and ethical issues in the classroom. A canonical text of Indian writing in English, the novel presents a day in the fictionalized life of a Dalit ("untouchable") boy in colonial India. As such, it is situated aesthetically in the triangular tension between colonial modernity, Gandhian nationalism, and Ambedkarite anti-caste radicalism.* Untouchable *enables rich discussions in relationship to these aspects through contextualization and comparison. Especially fruitful is re-evaluating the novel in the light of new work in relationship to caste.*

Keywords: Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable*, postcolonial literature, critical caste studies, *Indian Writing in English*, colonial discourse

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*[1] is certainly a canonical Anglophone novel, though it has remained somewhat obscure compared to the even more canonical post-Rushdie—post-*Midnight's Children*—novels in English from India. Written in 1933, the novel was published in 1935, twelve years before India's independence in 1947, and nearly fifty years before Rushdie's classic novel was published in 1981. Viewed within the literary tradition of Indian novels written in English, *Untouchable* offers interesting possibilities in the classroom, especially on how to read the novel in relationship to evolving critical expectations.

Untouchable tells the story of an "untouchable" sweeper boy named Bakha. At the cusp of manhood, Bakha is presented as he goes about his duties during a single day. The novel begins with Bakha waking up before dawn to clean the toilets used by the soldiers of the British army, which includes white "Tommies" Bakha looks up to and Indian sepoys. As the day unfolds, the novel presents the many experiences of a precocious as well as naive Bakha—Anand emphasizes at one and the same time Bakha's inquiring mind and his innocence. Most of Bakha's experiences—like the disgusting and degrading cleaning of the toilets—are routine. These everyday experiences comprise a series of encounters with the denizens of the town Bakha lives

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1 Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* [1935] (London: Penguin, 1940).

in, including a hypocritical Brahmin who first fondles Bakha's sister Sohini and then accuses her of polluting him.

The turning point in the novel occurs when Bakha's father Lakha berates him for being late. This scolding occurs right after the "high caste" mother of an injured boy has yelled at Bakha for touching her son in an effort to help him. The double injustice sends Bakha careening into an internal turmoil:

> Before now, Bakha had often borne the brunt of his misery with a resigned air of fatalism. . . . To-day, however, he had had more than enough. The spirit of fire which lay buried in the mass of his flesh had ignited this morning and lay smouldering. A little more fuel and it flared up, like a wild flame.[2]

The episodes of the novel accumulate and impress upon Bakha his despised "untouchability." Bakha runs away and is first met by Colonel Hutchinson, "chief of the local Salvation Army," who tries to recruit Bakha for his religion.[3] Bakha, however, is both bored and confused by Hutchinson's account of Christianity and flees as soon as he is able.

Then comes the famous denouement, much discussed in the critical literature on *Untouchable*. Bakha finds himself at the edge of town, in a vast crowd gathered to listen to Gandhi. In these concluding pages, Anand presents Gandhi as the agitated and hurting Bakha sees him—as an awesome and saintly figure. Gandhi's visit to Bakha's town is to deliver a speech exhorting social reformation of the caste system. Gandhi refers to people like Bakha by his own invented, though eventually official, name—*Harijans* ("Children of God"). Bakha listens raptly as Gandhi speaks of Brahmins in his ashram cleaning toilets, but the Mahatma remains a figure on a distant stage. After the meeting is over, Bakha overhears a debate about Gandhi between a poet and a barrister, during which the poet refers to a machine capable of cleaning excrement without need for human touching—that is, a machine that makes manual scavenging obsolete. Bakha finds mention of this machine astounding; he recognizes the revolutionary potential of this flush toilet. The novel ends with Bakha resolving to return home: " 'I shall go and tell father all that Gandhi said about us,' he whispered to himself, 'and all that that poet said. Perhaps I can find the poet some day and ask him about his machine.' "[4] Thus, the novel ends by presenting Bakha with two utopian possibilities—Gandhism and modern technology. It is worth noting in this context Mulk Raj Anand's association with the leftist Progressive Writers Association from its inception in 1935, around the time his novel was written.

In this essay I explore both (descriptively) how I taught Anand's novel several years ago and (prospectively) how it would be possible to teach it now, after intervening years of sustained work on questions of caste, not only by me but by other scholars. My own work includes my forthcoming novel *Ghost in the Tamarind*, my critical volume *Flesh and Fish Blood: Postcolonialism, Translation, and the Vernacular*, and my forthcoming co-edited special issue of the journal *Biography* "Caste and Life Narratives,"

2 *Untouchable*, 118–19.
3 *Untouchable*, 121.
4 *Untouchable*, 157.

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all of which deal extensively with questions of caste.[5] Scholarship in English is finally beginning to catch up with the boom of the last few decades in Dalit (formerly Harijan or "untouchable") literature in several languages of India and the increasing prominence of Dalits and Dalitbahujan (members of non-Dalit castes just "above" Dalits) in public spheres formerly closed to them.

In the descriptive sections, I draw on experiences teaching an upper division undergraduate class focused on the (post)colonial novel in English. My intent there was to explore with my students through the novel some of the links between aesthetics and a colonial context marked by burgeoning anticolonial movements. Of course, the caste question remained important—how could it not with a novel entitled *Untouchable*? But the frame for my pedagogy was postcolonial theory's rich exploration of colonial influence and nationalism. This approach to teaching the novel is presented in the first two sections. In the more prospective concluding section, I explore what it would mean to foreground the caste question. Thus, part of my purpose here is to show how *Untouchable*—and, indeed, any novel—may be taught to reveal the nature of evolving critical fashion.

The Novel as an "Encounter between the East and West"

Untouchable is an Indian novel presenting Indian experiences, but its publication is not just an Indian matter. Early in his life, Anand was associated with the Bloomsbury Group in London. Indeed, *Untouchable* was written in India, in Bloomsbury, and during the voyage by ship between the two locations (as indicated by Anand in a brief postscript). In *Conversations in Bloomsbury*,[6] a volume published nearly half a century later, Anand recorded his memory of Bloomsbury in the form of dialogues with luminaries. He writes in the preface:

> 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. . . . [A]nd the talks evoke some of those lovable, liberal Englishmen and women, who compensated us for Rudyard Kipling's contempt for the lesser breeds, with inspiration for free thinking. Not only did I learn to indulge in dangerous thoughts in Bloomsbury, but I began a love affair with life which has lasted till today.

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar in *Indian Writing in English*, first published in 1957 and for decades in revised editions one of the most influential critical works aimed at consolidating a nationalist canon of Indian literature in English, considered Anand's *Conversations in Bloomsbury* to be filled with "the thrill of encounter between the East and West, India and Britain."[7]

The notion of encounter reproduced here by Iyengar within a nationalist framework, albeit problematically, is a useful way of exploring the metropolitan

5 S. Shankar, *Ghost in the Tamarind* (forthcoming from University of Hawa'i Press); *Flesh and Fish Blood* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012).

6 Mulk Raj Anand, *Conversations in Bloomsbury* (New Delhi: Safdarjang Enclave, 1981), 5–6.

7 K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, revised and updated [1957] (New Delhi: Sterling, 1985), 768.

(British) context for the novel's publication, which was certainly facilitated by Anand's incorporation into the Bloomsbury scene. E. M. Forster, a member of the Bloomsbury Group and already the author of *A Passage to India*, wrote a preface for *Untouchable* that is found in most editions of the novel, including the Penguin Classics edition I assign for my students. This metropolitan context is of course not separate from the nationalist impulse underlying the production of the novel, which I explore in greater detail in the next section. An opportunity is presented here to have students reflect on ways that anticolonial nationalism as well as liberal metropolitan opinion remain wedded to colonial tropes (for example, "encounter between the East and West").

This reflection is further facilitated by Forster's preface. After my students and I have had a chance to engage in a preliminary discussion of the novel, I ask them to respond to the preface, directing particular attention to two of Forster's remarks: "Indians, like most Orientals, are refreshingly frank; they have none of our complexes about functioning"[8] and "*Untouchable* could only have been written by an Indian, and by an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about his troubles. And no Untouchable could have written the book, because he would have been involved in indignation and self-pity."[9] In conjunction with Anand and Iyengar's remarks about Bloomsbury, these passages allow us to raise questions of interpretation, audience, and literary creation: How important might Forster's imprimatur have been to the publication and reputation of the novel? In asking this, I share with the students rumors that the publication of the novel was contingent on Forster's preface. I also ask, do we agree with Forster's general assessment about the art of *Untouchable*? Who is the novel intended for? Is it true that an "untouchable" could not have told Bakha's story? How do we regard Forster's generalization about "Orientals"? We pursue answers to these questions, some of which are familiar to us from previous discussions during the semester, by referring back to the text of the novel and engaging in close readings.

By juxtaposing the novel with Bloomsbury and Forster in this fashion, I hope to convey in concrete ways to my students how the "encounters" Iyengar identifies may be regarded, perhaps despite him, as liminal spaces out of which a novel such as *Untouchable* and, more generally, (post)colonial literature in English emerges.

The Novel as a Nationalist Text

Untouchable was published around the same time as debut novels by two other Indian writers with whom Anand is often associated—R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* was published in 1935, and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* in 1938.[10] When I taught *Untouchable* in the class on the (post)colonial novel in English, it was alongside *Kanthapura*.

The 1930s were a time of swelling nationalist sentiment and of Gandhian consolidation within the nationalist movement. I review this history with my students,

8 *Untouchable*, vi.

9 *Untouchable*, vi–vii.

10 R. K. Narayan, *Swami and Friends* (London: Hamilton, 1935); Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* [1938] (New York: New Directions, 1967).

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deliberately relying on Sumit Sarkar's *Modern India*, a standard and influential textbook, to provide key events.[11] The most important of these events are the first and second Civil Disobedience movements launched by Gandhi between 1930 and 1934, precisely the years during which *Untouchable* was written. Sarkar emphasizes that the roughly ten years between 1927 and 1937 were a time during which the Indian National Congress under Gandhi's leadership stepped up its confrontation with British rule through actions such as the Salt Satyagraha (Gandhi's campaign to break draconian colonial laws against making salt), suffered setbacks, but ended the period with partial control over the bureaucracies of governance.[12] I share these events with students to suggest the turmoil within India out of which Anand and his peer novelists emerge.

The launching of three remarkable literary careers (of Anand, Narayan, and Rao) during this transformational period is neither the result of mere determinism nor entirely unrelated outcomes.[13] In engaging in an illustrative discussion regarding literature and historical context, I take care to emphasize that *Untouchable*, *Swami and Friends*, and *Kanthapura* are not the first Indian novels to be written in English. As early as 1864, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee had written *Rajmohan's Wife*, though he was subsequently to abandon English to focus his energies on building an illustrious career in Bengali. The example of Chatterjee allows me to both underscore the literary prehistory out of which Anand and his two peers emerge and to emphasize their novelty—Chatterjee and other writers like him who preceded Anand and wrote occasionally in English did not build the long careers in English that these three writers did.

Untouchable teaches well alongside Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, a novel with which it shares (unlike Narayan's *Swami and Friends*) a direct engagement with politics and anticolonial movements. Gandhi makes an appearance in both of these novels and, indeed, parts of *Untouchable* were written in Gandhi's ashram in Sabarmati. Both of these novels have been described as Gandhian, though this description is somewhat problematic in their cases. A significant part of the second Civil Disobedience movement launched by Gandhi in 1933 was a campaign specifically aimed at the eradication of untouchability and the upliftment of *Harijans* (Gandhi's term, no longer accepted by militant Dalits). *Kanthapura*, too, has references to this Gandhian campaign. Thus, a series of comparisons becomes possible in teaching *Untouchable*.

In exploring the theme of nationalism, we build on ideas introduced earlier in the semester not only through *Kanthapura* but Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. We discuss the predominantly nationalist modes in which anticolonialism expressed itself in India as well as other parts of the colonized world. What is it about the call to shared belonging in a nation that is so effective in mobilizing large masses of people against foreign occupation? Posing this question in relationship to a novel like

11 Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885–1947* (Madras: Macmillan India, 1983).

12 *Modern India*, 254–348.

13 Sometimes Ahmed Ali, author of *Twilight in Delhi* (New York: New Directions, 1994), originally published in 1940, is included in this grouping. Standard nationalist Indian literary histories (such as Iyengar's) problematically exclude him, however, because Ali migrated to Pakistan in 1947. Is that enough to cause him to be regarded not as an Indian writer? Or is this exclusion not, rather, a symptom of the religiously polarized constructions of nationalist histories in South Asia?

Untouchable allows us to denaturalize nations and nationalism. *Untouchable* is an especially good novel through which to carry out this exercise, for the novel is strictly speaking more about intranational oppression (the horrors of untouchability and caste-based discrimination of Indians by Indians) rather than the oppression of Indians by the British. Indeed, Bakha looks up to and is treated much better by the British soldiers he knows than by the Indians. Still, the narrative impulse of the novel is not to explore the implicit fissures within nationalism thus exposed but rather to foreground the Gandhian resolution to the colonial conundrum, which involved the delineation of a distinctly Indian ethos of tolerance conjoined to a reformist impulse with regard to the flaws of Hinduism.

In posing questions about nationalism as anticolonialism and eliciting and guiding a nuanced discussion in response, I do not fail to note that the novel itself is not fully committed to a Gandhian politics. As noted previously, Anand was associated with the left-oriented Indian Progressive Writers Association from its inception. The novel's ending juxtaposes Gandhian politics to sheer (and possibly anti-Gandhian) faith in modernity. In addition to a political Gandhian path out of his degraded condition, Bakha is enabled to contemplate a simple technological liberation when he overhears the remarks made by the poet about a flush toilet. I emphasize in this discussion that the novel does not categorically choose between these alternatives of Gandhism and technological modernity. I ask the students to consider why the novel might forego a clear resolution. Is the lack of a resolution the result of confusion or ambivalence? Or is it rather that the purpose of the novel is to pose questions rather than resolve them?

Rather than guide the discussion toward a definitive answer, my hope is to generate an appreciation in the students for the ways in which novels go about doing what they do. That is, I seek to deepen and develop ongoing discussions about genre and aesthetics with regard to postcolonial novels. To bridge politics and aesthetics in a concrete way, I redirect my students to a text that we have already discussed, the brief but famous foreword to *Kanthapura* written by Raja Rao (if *Kanthapura* is not taught alongside *Untouchable*, a photocopy of this brief preface can easily be provided), which includes the following lines in which Rao reflects on his practice as a novelist:

> One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word "alien," yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. . . . The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs. We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move we move quickly.[14]

We are then able to contrast Forster's comments to Raja Rao's, and thus develop an awareness of the complex relationships of dependence and agonism that characterize the emergence of a novel such as *Untouchable*.

14 Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* [1938] (New York: New Directions, 1967), v.

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The Novel and Caste-Life

It has never been possible to ignore the question of caste with regard to *Untouchable*: after all, the experiences of the protagonist—indeed, the very title of the novel—take the reader to caste issues. Nevertheless, it is one thing to read the question of caste in the novel through a focus on nationalism and anticolonialism, and quite another to switch emphases or at least to make the question of caste worthy of pedagogical inquiry in its own right.

Because of ignorance and misconception, caste is still a difficult topic to engage in the North American classroom. The problem here is not unrelated to the more general problem of teaching literary texts—such as *Untouchable*—that can be easily rendered exotic and thus distant by North American students. The first thing to do when taking up caste, then, is to historicize it and disabuse students of their preconceptions regarding it. With regard to caste, some students will have heard of a rigidly hierarchical structure with Brahmins (or priests) at the top followed by Kshatriyas (or warriors), Vaishyas (or merchants), and Shudras (or craftspeople). In all likelihood they will know only the four-fold arrangement rather than the actual labels for the four castes. They will certainly have little appreciation of the largely theoretical and aspirational (but not therefore inconsequential) nature of this interpretation of caste.

Whenever I teach caste in the North American classroom (it is not only *Untouchable* that raises questions of caste, after all), I introduce two terms that students are not likely to know: *varna* and *jati*. The former I note in my lecture is an abstract and scriptural understanding of caste, more closely aligned with the notion of a four-fold arrangement; the latter, on the other hand, is the term used commonly for the occurrence of caste communities in their manifold variations across the length and breadth of India. Indians rarely use the former term (*varna*) in day-to-day communications, preferring the latter (*jati*), which identifies the specific caste community (regarded loosely as a subdivision of a varna) to which an individual belongs. I underscore that different jatis belonging to the same varna can engage in many, if not all, of the relationships of exclusion as those belonging to different varnas.

I share with my students a passage from a Human Rights Watch Report entitled *Caste Discrimination: A Global Concern*:[15]

> Caste is descent-based and hereditary in nature. It is a characteristic determined by one's birth into a particular caste, irrespective of the faith practiced by the individual. Caste denotes a system of rigid social stratification into ranked groups defined by descent and occupation. Under various caste systems throughout the world, caste divisions also dominate in housing, marriage, and general social interaction—divisions that are reinforced through the practice and threat of social ostracism, economic boycotts, and even physical violence.

This passage serves to identify key elements of the system of caste such as birth and endogamy, while also allowing me to note the occurrence of caste outside India (as in Japan and parts of Africa). I supplement this passage by noting that the hereditary

15 www.hrw.org/reports/2001/globalcaste

occupation of a caste can be more notional than real (thus only a small minority of Brahmins are or have ever been priests in actuality, though they are commonly described as such), the varied impact of caste on men and women (the work of Sharmila Rege and Charu Gupta is a useful resource here),[16] and the significance of ritual ideas of purity and contamination. Typically, I end this review and discussion of caste by introducing an alternative term—the *varna-jati complex*. The term is drawn from *Toward a Non-Brahmin Millenium* by V. Geetha and S. V. Rajadurai, and to my mind better captures the knot of ideologies, social distinctions, ritual practices, and rank discriminations that make up caste.[17] Rather than *varna* or *jati*, it is the conjunction of these two terms (one more abstract and scriptural, and the other more lived and practical) that explains caste best. The point of the review described in this and previous paragraphs is to historicize and de-exoticize caste as much as possible.

The first slide of the PowerPoint presentation I use to introduce caste includes pictures of Dr. Ambedkar and M. K. Gandhi, both represented in ways that have by now become highly typified. The gaunt Gandhi is shown sitting cross-legged in front of a spinning wheel, clad in a loincloth with his upper body bare. The plump-faced Ambedkar is in a jacket and a tie. At the end of my review of caste, we return to this slide, and I share the biographies of these men—the "upper caste" Gandhi's globally iconic status as an apostle of nonviolence and as the man who led India to its freedom and the "untouchable" Ambedkar's struggle for the betterment of the condition of Dalits in parallel with, and often in opposition to, Gandhi. Gandhi recognized the terrible discrimination against Dalits and fought to remove vile practices such as untouchability; yet, I note, much to the chagrin of Dalits, he never outright condemned the caste system. Was that because Gandhi was deeply traditionalist in many ways? Was it because ideologically nationalism cannot accommodate the kind of fissures that a true engagement with caste oppression would entail? In any event, Ambedkar parted ways with Gandhi over Gandhi's overly cautious, indeed reactionary, approach to the political empowerment of Dalits, or "Depressed Classes" as they were known. A useful question that may be posed to students at this point is: Why is it that "upper caste" Gandhi signifies frugality and even poverty through his physical stature and his attire while the "lower caste" Ambedkar conveys plump comfort and Westernized prosperity?

After this review, we would be enabled to scrutinize *Untouchable* not in terms of metropolitan influences or debates about nationalism but rather representations of the varna-jati complex.

Although surprisingly Anand does not give Ambedkar a place in his novel (Ambedkar had already achieved national prominence by the time the novel was written), he and the preeminent leader of Dalits were friends. In 1990, long after Ambedkar's death, Anand facilitated the publication of Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*, for which he wrote a preface and at the end of which he appended a record of a

16 Sharmila Rege, *Writing Caste Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios* (New Delhi; Zubaan, 2006); Charu Gupta, *The Gender of Caste* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2016).
17 V. Geetha and S. V. Rajadurai. *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium* (Calcutta: Samya, 1998), xiii.

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mutually respectful conversation between Ambedkar and him that Anand said took place in 1950.[18] In the preface, Anand wrote:

> I had the privilege to know Dr. B. R. Ambedkar from the late twenties onwards. He criticized me for accepting Gandhiji in the role of liberator of untouchables, inspite of the Mahatma's allegiance to Hindu Varnashram [system of caste]. I accepted his rebuke and did argue with the Mahatma, who justified his stand by asserting the need of unity of people of all persuasion in the interest of the political struggle against British Imperialist attempts to divide Indians through separate electorates.[19]

In this context, it is worth noting that Anand's invention of a Dalit protagonist for his novel remains for decades an unfulfilled promise with regard to the Indian novel in English. Not until Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) do we once again encounter Dalit characters whose caste status is fully acknowledged and explored, albeit in ways that might need to be interrogated in a sustained way. Thus, *Untouchable* was ahead of its time, even as it remained of its time in comprehending Bakha mainly through a Gandhian lens and to the exclusion of Ambedkar.

A careful review of the varna-jati complex allows us to explore Anand's presentation of the caste-life—that is, life lived under the conditions of caste—of Bakha. Bakha's anger and naiveté are depicted in a peculiarly abstract and schematic way by the novelist. Despite the lack of depth and nuance in the presentation of Bakha, however, we may note that Anand is prescient in making Bakha's obsession with the "modern" clothes of the British soldiers part of his psychology, thus providing a point of comparison with Ambedkar's own attire. Anand recognizes, we can see, the poor comfort of traditionalism for a character such as Bakha. We would be enabled, too, to explore—through a close reading of the Brahmin's sexual assault of Sohini—the ways in which gender intersects with the varna-jati complex. Also made possible is a comparison to later works, which offer a much wider range of responses to the atrocious structures and practices of the varna-jati complex, though the difficulty here with regard to how such a comparison might be achieved within the limited constraint of a classroom remains. If a novel such as *A Fine Balance* is included (difficult to do because of its length), an interesting discussion comparing Bakha to Ishvar and Om (two Dalit characters in *A Fine Balance*) could ensue.

Of course, even more interesting, if also even more difficult, would be to juxtapose *Untouchable* with Dalit literary works that have appeared with increasing frequency since the 1970s in languages such as Marathi, Tamil, Kannada, and Hindi (and some of which now exist in translation).[20] We would then be able to juxtapose Anand's Bakha to Dalit representations of caste and Dalit life. The difficulty of engaging in such a pedagogical practice is real (because of access to well-translated longer Dalit works in

18 B. R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste: An Undelivered Speech*, ed. with preface by Mulk Raj Anand [1936] (New Delhi: Arnold Publishers, 1990).

19 *Annihilation of Caste*, 9–10.

20 Some works written originally in English by Dalit authors also exist, but by far the more celebrated are those in other languages.

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English) but to some extent mitigated by recourse to poetry. Classroom discussions of *Untouchable* could then conclude with a contrapuntal reading of iconic Marathi Dalit poet Narayan Surve's "Lifetime":

> A whole lifetime assigned to me:
> even the light when I was born
> was assigned to me;
> I said the things I was assigned to say.
> Cursing under my breath,
> I walked the street assigned to me;
> I came back to the room
> assigned to me;
> I lived the life I was assigned to live.
> They say we go to heaven
> if we follow the path assigned to us.
> Between the four pillars assigned to us
> I spit:
> there.[21]

The sensibility of this poem—with its bitter denunciation of fate and its spit-filled rejection of the practices of caste-life—echoes Bakha's many outbursts of anger at the same time that it offers a necessary counterpoint to the naive optimism of Bakha. Anand's *Untouchable* is a rich and rewarding text in the classroom because of its multiple and contradictory layers of historically sedimented meaning.

21 Narayan Surve, "Lifetime," *The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry*, ed. Vinay Dharwadker, trans. Vinay Dharwadker (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 159.

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