

☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC

237

Volume 237

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers



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Contemporary Literary Criticism

Preface

Named “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today’s reader.

Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

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- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
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- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
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- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces an annual cumulative title index that alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in *CLC* and is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Mulk Raj Anand

1905-2004

Indian novelist, short story writer, memoirist, essayist, critic, nonfiction writer, and playwright.

The following entry presents criticism on Anand's career through 2004. For additional information on his life and works, see *CLC*, Volumes 23 and 93.

INTRODUCTION

Counted among India's most prominent authors writing in English, Anand was a prolific writer whose diverse works influenced the forms and inspired the themes of Indian English-language literature for most of the twentieth century. He was one of the first Indians, along with R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, to write novels in English, incorporating Punjabi and Hindustani idioms into the language. Although Anand wrote on an array of topics, ranging from Indian art, cuisine, and folk tales to socialist politics and the history of ideas, an abiding concern for marginalized and underprivileged persons pervades his socially conscious novels and short stories. In these works he describes the cruelties and injustices perpetrated against the poor of India not only by British colonialism but also by indigenous caste prejudice. The everyday subjects and literary realism of Anand's popular early novels have led many critics to compare his influence on contemporary South Asian literature to that of nineteenth-century novelists Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola on European letters.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born in Peshawar in present-day Pakistan, Anand was the son of a Hindu coppersmith who became a soldier in the British Indian army. Anand studied at Khalsa College, Amritsar, before he entered Punjab University. Upon graduating with honors in 1925, Anand received a research scholarship to attend University College London, where he completed his doctoral dissertation in 1928 on the thought of English philosophers ranging from John Locke to Bertrand Russell. During his time at university, Anand circulated among the literati of London, befriending E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf of the Bloomsbury group and T. S. Eliot, who hired him to write book reviews for his magazine *Criterion*. In 1928 Anand took a short trip to India, where he met Jawaharlal Nehru, India's future prime minister. He

spent the next few years traveling throughout Europe. During the early 1930s he published books on Indian art and occasionally lectured on international cooperation and workers' education, while contributing commentary to a BBC program hosted by George Orwell, who became a lifelong friend. Anand also became interested in India's struggle for national independence. In 1932 he returned to India, staying for some time with Mohandas Gandhi, whose philosophy influenced his own social conscience. On Gandhi's advice Anand wrote his first novel, *Untouchable* (1935), which included an introduction written by Forster. This was immediately followed by another novel, *The Coolie* (1936). These novels drew international attention to Anand even as he fought with the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War, rallied for leftist causes in England, and agitated for national independence in India.

Dividing his time between England and India during the late 1930s and early 1940s, he wrote a series of socially conscious novels, including *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) and the trilogy consisting of *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942). When World War II ended Anand permanently settled in Bombay, where he became involved with Indian national and literary affairs. While he campaigned for social reforms, Anand also founded the Indian art magazine *Marg* in 1946 and continued to publish his own works, most notably the novel *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953) and *Seven Summers* (1951), the first volume in a projected series of autobiographical novels comprising the "Seven Ages of Man." Other novels in the incomplete sequence include *Morning Face* (1968), *Confession of a Lover* (1976), and *The Bubble* (1984).

Between 1948 and 1970 Anand taught art history at Indian universities, accepting the position of Tagore Professor of Fine Arts at Punjab University in 1962. Anand was named an honorary chairman of the National Academy of Arts in 1966. A tireless advocate for human rights and the underprivileged throughout his career, Anand lectured on several continents, and he regularly participated in various international writers' conferences, meeting and corresponding with some of the world's leading authors. His efforts earned him many accolades during his lifetime, including the International Peace Prize from the World Peace Council in 1952, the *Padma Bhushan* award for distinguished

service in Indian art and literature in 1967, and a Sahitya Academy award in 1972. Anand continued to write and publish until he died in Pune, India, in 2004.

MAJOR WORKS

Describing the social injustices and human suffering endured by the poor in India, Anand's novels and short stories are largely responsible for the emergence of a genre in modern Indian literature that depicts the plight of the *dalit*, a term which refers to the "untouchable" or casteless members of Indian society. His socialist-inflected fiction reflects both his own experience with the dehumanizing effects of the caste system and his concern about the political, social, and economic conditions of Indian society, particularly those resulting from religious or ethnic custom and foreign colonial policy. For instance, Anand's first published essay documents his response to the suicide of an aunt, who was ostracized from her Hindu community after dining with a Muslim woman; and much of his early poetry draws upon memories of his own young love for a Muslim girl.

Similarly, his early fiction vividly dramatizes the inherent cruelties and daily sufferings of the destitute lower castes. Inspired by a childhood incident during which Anand's mother beat a low-caste boy for carrying her higher-caste son home after he was injured, *Untouchable* chronicles a single day in the life of Bakha, a teen-aged toilet-cleaner, who, as a member of the lowest caste, is designated "untouchable." He begins the day by accidentally touching a member of a higher caste, who becomes the first of many people to humiliate Bakha as the novel unfolds. Along the way, he seeks comfort in encounters with a Christian missionary and a follower of Gandhi, but he ultimately comes to believe that his salvation lies in the promise of the newly introduced flush toilet, which would perhaps render both his livelihood and his caste obsolete.

Anand's interest in social themes and the tribulations of working-class life in India continues in his other early novels, which resemble American and English proletarian fiction of the 1930s. *The Coolie*, a story about a fifteen-year-old child laborer who dies of tuberculosis, frames a critical analysis of the human misery perpetrated by the caste system, colonialism, and capitalism. Similarly, *Two Leaves and a Bud* describes the brutal exploitation of a poor Punjabi peasant on a tea plantation. Ultimately he is killed by a British official while trying to prevent his daughter's rape by the official. The trilogy comprising the novels *The Village*, *Across the Black Waters*, and *The Sword and the Sickle* centers on Lalu Singh, the son of a Sikh farmer. The novels recount his impoverished childhood and rebellious adolescence

in the Punjabi village of Nandpur, his military service in France during World War I, and his participation in agrarian and social reform movements in his hometown during the period before Indian independence.

In Anand's later works, social protest and political attack give way to psychological interests and spiritual concerns. For example, *Private Life of an Indian Prince* explores the emotional and mental deterioration of a young royal who neglects his duties and pursues an affair with a peasant woman. The autobiographical novels comprising the "Seven Ages of Man" series narrate the personal struggles of Krishan Chander, whose spiritual journey to attain a higher sense of self-awareness mirrors significant events in Anand's life. The first volume of the series, *Seven Summers*, recreates Anand's infancy and early childhood, exploring the interaction between reality and imagination unique to that stage of human development. The second volume, *Morning Face*, recounts his experiences at primary and secondary school, detailing the cruelties inflicted upon him and his classmates by merciless schoolmasters. In *Confession of a Lover* Anand's college years provide material for an examination of the pain caused by lost love; and the final volume of the incomplete series, *The Bubble*, draws upon Anand's time in London, weaving skillful erotica with memories of the Bloomsbury literary group. In addition to fiction, Anand's other major works include essay collections on a wide range of subjects, including Gandhi, Nehru, Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, socialists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the Kama Sutra, Indian sculpture and ivories, South Asian painting, and classical fables.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critics have long recognized Anand as a pioneer of Indian literature written in English, grouping him along with Rao and Narayan as "founding fathers" of the Indian English novel. Beginning with his first novel, his work has attracted readers from around the world, and his fellow Indians have acclaimed his writings as national treasures, particularly his realistic descriptions of the social and economic problems attending the caste system. Commentators have often remarked on his writings' ability to raise the consciousness of readers unaware of the life circumstances of the *dalit*; however, the absence of a practical, concrete vision for resolving the problems explored in his works has sparked critical debate both in India and abroad. Although commentators have generally praised Anand for introducing into Indian literature such topics as the plight of the "untouchables," child labor, and the isolation of rural Indians, many others have also noticed a heavy polemical approach in his early novels, especially when India's social problems are solely attributed to the caste system,

colonialism, and capitalism. Consequently, some critics have treated Anand as a liberal propagandist whose literary merit is suspect. They have found that his prose style in general is simplistic and at times verbose, and that sentimentality, instances of purple prose, and stereotypical characterization have compromised his literary achievement. Many critics, though, have observed increasing stylistic and thematic restraint in Anand's later novels. A number of scholars have analyzed the connection between Anand's ideological commitments and his characterization of his protagonists, demonstrating the political and sociological relevance of his writings in a variety of postcolonial contexts. Critics have also studied Anand's use of indigenous symbolism to develop his characters and the role dialect and speech pattern play in establishing his characters' social classes and cultural identities. Literary historians have widely acknowledged that the value of his novels lies in their witness to India's transformation from an imperial colony to an independent nation optimistic about justice and freedom for all of its citizens.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Persian Painting* (criticism) 1930
The Hindu View of Art (criticism) 1933
The Lost Child, and Other Stories (short stories) 1934
Untouchable: A Novel (novel) 1935
The Coolie (novel) 1936
Two Leaves and a Bud (novel) 1937
The Village: A Novel (novel) 1939
Across the Black Waters: A Novel (novel) 1940
The Sword and the Sickle: A Novel (novel) 1942
The Big Heart: A Novel (novel) 1945
Apology for Heroism: An Essay in Search of Faith (nonfiction) 1946
Seven Summers: The Story of an Indian Childhood (fictional autobiography) 1951
Private Life of an Indian Prince: A Novel (novel) 1953
The Old Woman and the Cow (novel) 1960
The Road: A Novel (novel) 1961
Death of a Hero: Epitaph for Maqbool Sherwani: A Novel (novel) 1963
Morning Face: A Novel (fictional autobiography) 1968
Author to Critic: The Letters of Mulk Raj Anand (letters) 1973
Confession of a Lover: A Novel (fictional autobiography) 1976
Conversations in Bloomsbury (nonfiction) 1981
The Bubble: A Novel (fictional autobiography) 1984
Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi (plays) 1991

CRITICISM

Saros Cowasjee (essay date 1 March 1973)

SOURCE: Cowasjee, Saros. "Mulk Raj Anand and the B.B.C." *Indian & Foreign Review* 10, no. 10 (1 March 1973): 19-20.

[In the following essay, Cowasjee recalls events from Anand's association with the British Broadcasting Corporation during World War II.]

Mulk Raj Anand's contact with the BBC began when he received a letter from the late Sir Malcolm Darling, dated 8 March, 1941, asking for short plays for the BBC's far eastern programme—a programme designed to help enlist India's support in Britain's fight against Germany.

Sir Malcolm, a distinguished member of the Indian civil service and best known for his studies of the Punjab peasantry, had been appointed Indian editor of the BBC in 1940. He knew Anand personally and the hardships he was undergoing making a living writing book reviews.

Anand turned down the offer on 22 March, 1941 with words which sum up his integrity and close affiliations with those struggling for Indian independence:

Briefly, as you know, since the breakdown of negotiations between the Viceroy and Gandhiji, the position of Indians in this war has become very invidious. Particularly is this so with regard to the Indians in England at the moment. Because, even those who have the most distant affiliations with the Congress, are bound to feel a certain sense of national humiliation if, with full awareness of the internment of hundreds of their compatriots and the savage sentence on Pandit Nehru, they do anything to help the war effort. My own connections with the Congress are rather more intimate. And the one question that has been taxing my mind all these months is how to reconcile that affiliation with my belief that fascism would destroy all that I stand for. I am afraid that the British government has done nothing which may help to solve the dilemma which faces some of us: it has declared neither its war aims nor its peace aims—and India seems to be its one blind spot. This enforces on us a kind of vague neutrality, the strain of which could be very harrowing for the more timid individual, who is torn between conflicting loyalties. I, for instance, have friends in this country with whom I have worked in the anti-fascist struggle for some years. . . . I don't want to bore you with these personal and ideological difficulties, but I hope, from what I have said, that you will see how difficult it is for me to associate myself with the work of the Indian broadcasting section in any way. I want to assure you that nothing I have said above detracts from my

personal respect for you and your writing, and I hope you will understand and forgive me for my disability to take your offer.

FIGHT AGAINST FASCISM

Sir Malcolm responded with a taciturnity characteristic of a Britisher whose sympathies are divided between the raj and a subject people. He wrote to Anand on 26 March, 1941:

I respect the reasons given in your letter of March 22nd for your inability to collaborate with us and I greatly appreciate your kindly reference to myself. I hope that we may meet again some time.

Three months later Hitler invaded Russia. George Orwell, who had meanwhile joined the eastern service (India section) of the BBC, persuaded Anand to help fight fascism. Both Orwell and Anand felt uncomfortable working for the BBC, Orwell questioning the very ethics of allowing oneself to be used by the British governing classes. For Anand he had this to say in a letter to a mutual friend George Woodcock:

He is genuinely anti-fascist, and has done violence to his feeling, and probably to his reputation, by backing Britain up because he recognises that Britain is objectively on the anti-fascist side.

They were together to fight Nazi fascism and, in spite of the demands of the job, the two did much to keep "propaganda slightly less disgusting than it might otherwise have been."

WELLS, SHAW & "NEW PHRASES"

Anand's first two broadcasts were on H. G. Wells and G. B. Shaw in February 1942 as part of a series called "These Names Will Live." He captures Wells with a cartoonist's eye for the peculiar and the essential in his subject:

He is a stocky little man with a big head on a small neck. His heavy torso is poised on short, strong legs. His large, searching eyes almost pop out of a pink face, which is unwrinkled in spite of his seventy odd years.

In his talk on Shaw he comments on the dramatist's self-esteem, contradictions, wit, and desire to shock people so that he might be heard. He recalls an amusing incident of running into the sage on the Thames embankment and asking him: "Am I speaking to Mr. Shaw?" "Indeed you are!" retorted Shaw. "Do you want an autograph?"

In March and April, Anand gave five talks in a series called "**New Weapons of War.**" He discussed phrases such as "fifth column", "lebensraum", "new order", "pluto-democracy", and "propaganda"—phrases which had passed into current usage and were flung to and fro in the media.

He explained how the phrase "fifth column" arose during the Spanish civil war of 1936-38 when "the rebels against the republicans boasted that they had four great columns of troops marching on Madrid and a fifth column of helpers within the city itself."

"Lebensraum" or living space was one of Hitler's most famous slogans to accommodate the rising population of Germany; "new order," Anand explained, was the name for the old order, whereby a big state had a stranglehold on the economic life of several client states, while "pluto-democracy" was Hitler's dubbing of the shortcomings of democracy.

The best of the five talks was on "propaganda." It dealt with Hitler's and Mussolini's attempts to distort truth and inculcate in their people the feeling of superiority. He showed how in the hands of an unprincipled leader, propaganda could become a lethal weapon.

INTERVIEWS & "OPEN LETTERS"

The series "**New Weapons of War**" was followed by a series of nine talks called "**Meet My Friends.**" In this series Anand interviewed people from a wide spectrum of life, among them an actor, a chimney sweeper, a fire-watcher, a factory worker, a painter, a scientist and a detective-story writer. The purpose of this series, as of the one that followed it, was to familiarise Indians with the pursuits of the ordinary people in Britain.

In this it fell far short of its aim, for few people in India understood English, and fewer still had shortwave radios. Still the series must have evoked interest, for in November of 1942 Anand was asked to start a new series along similar lines called "**A Day in My Life.**" In this series he interviewed seven people from ordinary life in London (including an Indian technician), who were contributing to the war effort not by heroic conduct on the battlefield, but by no less heroic conduct in their respective jobs.

Apart from running the series all on his own, he participated in several joint ventures. The one called "Open Letters" appealed particularly to him, and he wrote to George Orwell:

I think that the idea of an open letter as a peg to hang one's narrative on is a good one. And I should like to attempt the letter to a Chinese guerilla. . . . May be, I shall write to Mao Tun, the leader of the Chinese writers' movement who is a guerilla or to Shelley Wang who is dead. Shelley Wang was a great friend of mine and I feel a letter to his living spirit may be best, because then all the political, social and cultural problems we shared together may gain point from his sacrifice when he fell at the head of an anti-Japanese squad in occupied territory.

The "**Open Letter to a Chinese Guerilla**" was addressed to Madame Shelley Wang, and in it he quoted Shelley Wang's song of defiance at the fascist eagles soaring above.

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

Saros Cowasjee (essay date June, September, and December 1973)

SOURCE: Cowasjee, Saros. "Mulik Raj Anand's *Untouchable*: An Appraisal." In *Literature East & West* 17, nos. 2-3-4 (June, September, and December 1973): 199-211.

[In the following essay, Cowasjee evaluates the literary strengths of Untouchable, assessing the novel's plot, characterization, and themes.]

I have detailed in my Afterword to the revised Bodley Head edition of *Untouchable*¹ the traumatic experience of the author in finding a publisher for this book. Written over a long weekend in 1930, the novel was revised several times in the next four years. Bonamy Dobree, Naomi Mitchison, Maurice Brown and Edward Thompson did all they could to help Anand to find a publisher, but with no success. By September 1934, the book had been rejected by as many as nineteen publishers and the author contemplated suicide, but was saved by the timely intervention of a young English poet, Oswald Blakeston, who took it to Wishart Books. Edgell Rickwood, the editor, liked the book for its “sincerity and skill” but was quick to point out that “the prospects of good sales in India must largely affect our decision; and also the possibility of getting an introduction from, say E. M. Forster.”² Forster had already praised the novel in a letter to the author,³ and he did not hesitate to supply an enthusiastic Introduction. Rickwood wrote to Anand:

I was 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. We could not have had anything better.⁴

From the surviving records it appears Anand made no broadcasts in 1944. He left London soon after the war was over, his last talk on the BBC in 1945 being **“London as I See It.”** He painted a grim picture of war-time London, but concluded with high praise for all those who withstood Hitler’s onslaught.

The book was published on May 1, 1935, and the anxious author given £35 only as advance on royalties, since the publisher feared that they could not “dispose of more than one thousand copies.”⁵ It has since sold many times that number, and has been translated into over twenty world languages. Richard Maine in a recent broadcast on the BBC referred to it as a “classic,” and of Anand’s forty odd books it is certainly the most popular.

Untouchable opens quietly on an autumn morning, and by the time the evening approaches the author has been able to build round his hero Bakha (a sweeper lad of

eighteen who cleans latrines) a spiritual crisis of such magnitude that it seems to embrace the whole of India. "Get up, ohe you Bakhya, ohe son of a pig!" his father calls out, and Bakha sheds his reverie of the Tommies' life he wishes to lead and once more tackles his task of cleaning the public latrines. Returning to his hut to quench his thirst for tea, he is out again to sweep the market street and the temple courtyard. On the way he buys four annas' worth of cheap sweetmeat after weighing the consequences of it in rational and philosophic terms:

"Eight annas in my pocket," he said to himself, "dare I buy some sweetmeats? If my father comes to know that I spend all my money on sweets," he thought and hesitated, "but come, I have only one life to live," he said to himself, "let me taste of the sweets; who knows, tomorrow I may be no more."

Overjoyed at his possession, he forgets to call out "posh, posh, sweeper coming!" and accidentally touches a caste Hindu. He earns for his transgression much abuse from the public and a slap from the man he has polluted. This incident, along with the attempt of a priest to seduce his sister and then crying out "polluted!" when she screams, poisons everything that happens subsequently, even such pleasant incidents as a hockey match, a country walk and a wedding. The approaching evening presents three solutions to his problems: he could become a Christian with the help of the Salvation Army missionary Hutchinson, he could take comfort in Gandhi's chastisement of caste Hindus and wait till the social conscience of the people is roused, or better still he could put his faith in the water-closet about which the positivist poet has spoken and which would rid him of his distasteful job. Bakha returns home with more hopes than he had set out with in the morning, but a hope that is nowhere near fulfillment forty years after the novel was written. Though the Indian constitution has made it a crime to practice untouchability, there are still 60 million people in India who are discriminated against.

What immediately strikes the reader is the gentle and balanced writing, which does not at the first impact move us to instant indignation. It is only after we have put the book aside and ruminated on Bakha's fate that the full implication of the tragedy becomes explicit—a tragedy of a large section of mankind condemned to pariahdom of which there is no parallel in human history. Anand wisely opens on a low key, and the most violent incident in the novel is *only* a slap that Bakha receives from a caste Hindu. I have said *only*, for very recently in a village in Ambikapur a 22-year-old pregnant woman was offered to the gods as a human sacrifice. And it is reported that between 1966 and 1968 no fewer than 1,100 untouchables were done to death. Anand could have inflicted any torture he wished on his hero and remained fully within the bounds of credibility. The

temptation must have been strong, for the novel compasses a single day of which the most had to be made. But whether he could have moved us more than he does now is doubtful. The book gains much of its strength from the author's depiction of an emotional crisis in his hero's life quietly and without hysteria, and from the treatment of a political subject without political parlance.

The story in the conventional sense hardly exists. Bakha's day is comprised of a series of incidents, some sad and some happy, which alternate with a measured regularity and bring forth varying responses from him. Early in the novel Anand piles on his hero three humiliating experiences hard upon one another: Bakha is slapped for polluting a caste Hindu, he witnesses his sister molested by a priest, and he is unjustly abused by a housewife. When he returns home his father Lakha, "Jemadar" of the sweepers, roundly berates him, and he reaches the very depth of misery. From this point on, Anand reverts to the technique of alternating pleasant with unpleasant episodes, except that Bakha's few pleasures are contaminated with the memory of previous misfortunes. The novel concludes on an ambivalent note: Bakha is neither happy nor unhappy as he listens to the missionary, is swayed with the crowd that has assembled to hear Gandhi, and from a non-polluting distance attempts to follow the harangue of a poet whose discourse ranges from Nirvana to modern plumbing.

Bakha is an attractive character, based on a sweeper boy Anand had known in his childhood. His physique is distinctive; he is described as intelligent, able-bodied and strong, with a broad, frank face, glistening high cheekbones, quivering lips and a graceful torso. He has, we are told, "a sort of dignity that does not belong to the ordinary scavenger, who is as a rule uncouth and unclean." Even those who abuse his services admit that he is a "bit superior to his job." There is in his portrayal a resemblance to the punkah-puller in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*:

When that strange race nears the dust and is condemned as untouchable, then nature remembers the physical perfection she accomplished elsewhere, and throws out a god—not many, but one here and there, to prove to society how little its categories impress her. This man would have been notable anywhere: among the thin hammed, flat-chested mediocrities . . . he stood out as divine, yet he was of the city, its garbage had nourished him, he would end on its rubbish heaps.⁶

If Bakha is pictured as something of a male god, his sister Sohini is pictured as a goddess with "a sylph-like form," "full-bodied," "well-rounded on the hips, with an arched narrow waist" and "globular breasts." Her figure could have vied with the sculpted images of Konarak and Khajuraho, but she has been condemned