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Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, Volume 18,
Number 1, Winter 2017, pp. 63-87 (Article)

Published by Slavica Publishers

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2017.0003>



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Indian Leftist Writers of the 1930s Maneuver among India, London, and Moscow

The Case of Mulk Raj Anand and His Patron Ralph Fox

KATERINA CLARK

The framework for this article is the dynamic of what Kris Manjappa has called in his article “Communist Internationalism and Transcolonial Recognition,” in the collection *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones*, “the socialist global ecumene,” or more specifically of the “transcolonial ecumene” formed within it. Manjappa means by this term an “ecumene” in the modern sense of a far-flung or worldwide community of people committed to a single cause and engaged in discussions, lobbying, and writing aimed at working toward a common program, at generating a common discourse. In Manjappa’s somewhat idealized account, this ecumene involves not relations between powerful centers and their dependencies but rather lateral connections of the worldwide like-minded. In generating this discourse, literature, so much more valued in earlier decades, but especially in the 1930s, played a major role.¹

Here I am applying Manjappa’s model to the case of a putative, or would-be, Moscow-oriented ecumene of leftists, which was most active in the 1930s. Some intellectuals were members by dint of some communist affiliation, while others, though they might toy with Marxist ideas, were not interested in affiliation but participated in networks or publishing ventures that were committed to some core common values. There was, then, a lot of lateral connection among its members, but Moscow, and more specifically the Comintern, played an important role in fostering and mustering what they hoped would become an ecumene of those committed to socialism,

¹ Kris Manjappa, “Communist Internationalism and Transcolonial Recognition,” in *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas*, ed. Sugata Bose and Manjappa (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 172, 159.

antifascism or the struggle against imperialism, and generally to a nexus of all three. My article aims to complicate both the vertical and the horizontal models for the functioning of the ecumene by suggesting that to some extent it functioned in both directions and not always in unilinear fashion. It also shows that the ecumene did not operate in an intellectual silo but overlapped and interacted with other, contiguous “thought zones.”

In looking at this dynamic, my focus is on writers, because they more than any other category were most engaged in developing a common discourse. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, in the Soviet Union (and by no means uniquely) during the 1930s a close symbiotic relationship between literature and culture was at the heart of official culture, and the government accorded literature and writers a particularly privileged place in its society.² A similar attitude inflected its activities abroad. A great deal was invested in fostering an international community of writers who might look to Moscow as their metropole: a series of international conferences of writers was organized (Moscow 1927, Khar’kov 1930, and, effectively, Paris 1935 and Valencia—Madrid—Barcelona—Paris, July 1937); writers’ organizations affiliated with central bodies established at these congresses were set up in many countries; and the Soviet Union began to publish a journal, eventually titled *Internatsional’naia literatura*, which after the Khar’kov conference appeared in semi-parallel versions in English, French, German, and for a time Chinese and Spanish.³ Much of this international activity in literature was fostered by the Comintern, though after the Paris Congress of 1935 it was on the Soviet end run by the Foreign Commission of the Writers’ Union, if by much the same cast of characters. Such bodies and publications facilitated the development of multinational networks of writers who continued to associate for decades, while other Comintern institutions, such as the international section of the Communist University for the Toilers of the East (KUTV) also fostered such networks among their alumni who were writers.

One should not just dismiss the ecumene as yet another example of an insidious Soviet imperialism with the foreign participants as unwitting pawns. In the 1930s when the Soviet Union was a patron of anticolonialist movements and one of the few governments actively standing up to fascism, it attracted to its various noncommunist but Moscow-oriented literary organizations large numbers of leftists who were, given this orientation, also

² Katerina Clark, “Moscow, the Lettered City,” chap. 2 of *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

³ From 1928 to 1930, it was known as *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury*, from 1930 to 1932 as *Literatura mirovoi revoliutsii*, and then as *Internatsional’naia literatura*.

confronted by the possibility of buying in, to some degree at least, to the new Soviet literary “method” of Socialist Realism, purveyed at the time as an alternative to Modernism; they were swept up in a wave of the 1930s that was meant to be carrying them back—or forward?—to some form of realism. One example would be the so-called Progressive Movement in British literature, which emerged in the 1930s as a reaction against the esoteric and highly subjective art of the 1920s; its leaders included such well-known intellectuals as W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis, Christopher Isherwood, and Edward Upward.⁴ Several of them fought in Spain, and they all, to varying degrees, entertained the “Moscow” possibility and were foregrounded and lauded in articles about British literature published in *Internatsional’naia literatura*.⁵ But by the end of the decade most of them had moved on.

As in the case of the British Progressives, few of the major writers in my putative ecumene actually joined a communist party or became mere peons of the Comintern. They preferred greater independence and in their writings drew on a variety of influences, generally including some Modernist ones. At the same time, these writers had to negotiate for themselves the competing draws of the national and the international. During the 1930s, the issue of how to resolve the conflict between the pull of the national and the ideal of the international came to a head, due in part to the rise of fascism. An underlying problematic of the Popular Front internationalism was the way “the clichés of national tradition simultaneously constitute and undermine an ethic of internationalist solidarity.”⁶ Resolving the two also had more strictly literary dimensions after the Soviet promulgation of Socialist Realism as *the* national (Soviet) literary method, which was also to serve, potentially, as the basis for a hegemonic, transnational literary tradition. A further complication, as we shall see, is that many of the writers were themselves transnationals.

In this article I present what could be seen as a case study that brings out some of this ambivalence. It concerns Indian leftist writers of the 1930s and their relationship both to organizations affiliated with the Comintern, and to the discourse and conventions of an emerging Soviet literature.

The entry of Indian leftist literature into the Moscow-oriented ecumene was, somewhat counterintuitively, brokered in London, the metropole of

⁴ R. K. Dhawan, “The Thirties Movement and *Coolie*,” in *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. Dhawan (New Delhi: Prestige, 1992), 57; Jack Lindsay, *The Elephant and the Lotus: A Study of the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand* (Bombay: Kutub Popular, 1965), 52.

⁵ See, e.g., L. Borovoi, “Predvoennoe pokolenie,” *Internatsional’naia literatura*, no. 5 (1938): 190–94.

⁶ Glyn Salton-Cox, “Cobbett and the Comintern: Transnational Provincialism and Revolutionary Desire from the Popular Front to the New Left” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2013), 3.

India's hated colonial power. In 1928, in the aftermath of the 1927 debacle in China, a big shakeup occurred in the Comintern, and its approach to India was changed. Inter alia, the Indian Communist Party was put under the supervision of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). This arrangement meant that Indians in England—rather than, as before, Indians stationed in Berlin, Moscow, or Tashkent—became important facilitators of Indian participation in the ecumene.

Here, given constraints of length, I simplify my account of these London-based Indian writers and present in sketch outline the case of two prime actors, the Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand and one of his CPGB patrons, Ralph Fox, who was both on the Central Committee of the British Party and affiliated with the Comintern. I have chosen these two because Mulk Raj Anand was the most prominent of the writers in his cohort. In the 1930s, he enjoyed the reputation of being the best Indo-Anglian writer of his generation.⁷ His prominence has endured, and today he could be considered a figure of world literature; his two most famous novels, *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936), have been republished many times by many presses, including as Penguin classics—most recently in 2014 and 1994, respectively. Anand, an impoverished Punjabi son of a minor official in the British army in India, arrived in London in 1924 as a student (University College London and then Cambridge for a PhD) and stayed in England for over two decades, returning to India permanently only in 1945.⁸ In the London of the 1920s, he became something of a darling of the Bloomsbury set and other Modernists, including Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Lytton Strachey, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, and E. M. Forster. He also began to write himself, at first short stories and essays.

One of Anand's first books, *Persian Painting* (1930), presents a distinctly aestheticist position, as such inimical to the so-called Progressive Movement in British literature. In this book Anand attributes to Persian miniature artists a "joyous sense of freedom from the tyranny of reality," adding "their work is "untainted by the brute reality of ugly facts," for the Persian artists "acquired that secret power of impressing their thought on the symbol, which raises the static to the ecstatic."⁹

But other themes in *Persian Painting* underpinned much of Anand's subsequent, more politically committed utterances. One of them was about India's regaining its rightful place in the concert of nations, a red thread running

⁷ Kristin Bluemel, *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics: Intermodernism in Literary London* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 67.

⁸ Dhawan, "Thirties Movement and *Coolie*," 55.

⁹ Mulk Raj Anand, *Persian Painting* (London: Faber and Faber, 1930), 26.

through many of Anand's publications of the 1930s and his interventions in the 1936 London writers' conference, a follow-up to the 1935 Paris Congress for the Defense of Culture. In this book he proposes that Asian art is capable of rivaling the European; experts concede that Persian art at its height was "better than anything European of that time," and that "oriental art was more highly developed." It flourished under the Moghuls, its highest point having been achieved in the work of Bihzad, of whom Babur the Moghul emperor of India speaks "in his memoirs as 'the most eminent of all painters.'"¹⁰

Anand's positive evaluation of Moghul art is clearly not only about India, however. He points out that Persian art took off after the Mongol invaders brought with them examples of Chinese art, "a lucky day for Persia," which brought a cross fertilization that started a "Renaissance" of Persian art. In his overall narrative, then, we virtually have a pan-Asian art movement, a dream of a vast transnational cultural space, an Asian space, one brought into being by violence (he writes of the "horror" brought about by Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, including the "butcher[ing] of 70,000 of a town's inhabitants"), but a renaissance, nevertheless, which saw its apogee under the Moghul emperor Babur.¹¹ Anand, an impassioned anti-imperialist, seems amazingly unaware that he is effectively an apologist for another empire(s), whose conquest by violence is allegedly justified (as in the case of the British Empire) by the "civilization" it brings to those it conquers.

In Anand's subsequent texts, he dropped the aestheticism of *Persian Painting* but retained his advocacy of both the national (the pinnacle of Persian art, superior to anything European at the time, was achieved under the Moghuls) and the international (it was achieved by breaking down borders to international cultural intercourse). This shift away from aestheticism could be attributed to many causes, including the emergence of the Progressives in Britain with whom he had close contact.¹² But another factor may have been his acquaintance with Ralph Fox (1900–36); as to whether Fox inspired the shift, or whether Anand became more open to Fox's influence after he made it, I could only speculate, but certainly the shift dates from around 1932, when Fox returned from the Soviet Union.

Fox, who is largely forgotten today, was an important figure of the Left in 1920s and 1930s Britain, where he wore several hats. One of them was as a labor organizer and journalist commenting on worker affairs, another was as CPGB functionary, and a third was as a prolific author and literary theoretician. But he also had a close relationship with the Soviet Union,

¹⁰ Ibid., 18, 21–22, 28.

¹¹ Ibid., 18, 23.

¹² Krishna Nandan Sinha, *Mulk Raj Anand* (New York: Twayne, 1972), 22.

where he had three stints in residence and made a short visit in 1936. During each of his longer stays, though his Soviet affiliation was different, he worked inter alia on or in Asia. In his first visit, 1922–23, Fox worked for the Friends Relief Mission in Samara helping with the famine but in the course of his duties spent five months living among the nomadic Kirghiz in Central Asia, procuring horses for impoverished farmers.¹³ For the second stint he was sent by the Central Committee of CPGB to work in the Comintern's Colonial Department, as British sources call it (actually the Eastern Department [Vostochnyi otdel]), concentrating on Indian affairs.¹⁴ And from 1929 to 1932, Fox largely worked at the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute (IMEL), where he was attached to the English Subsection (Angliiskii kabinet).¹⁵ At the time, one of IMEL's tasks was to study and edit the Marx-Engels *Nachlass*, including their statements on literature, which appeared in early volumes of *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*.¹⁶ Georg Lukács was working in IMEL for some of this time, and Fox's book of literary theory, the posthumously published *Novel and the People* (1937), important to leftists of the 1930s but virtually unknown today, is in most of its statements close to the positions Lukács took in his articles of the 1930s.¹⁷ Tellingly, when a Russian translation was published in the Soviet Union in 1939, it was reviewed positively by Lukács.¹⁸ At the Marx-Engels Institute, Fox also wrote educational textbooks for the Lenin School and for the Department of Foreign Lands (INZO) of the Central Committee of the VKP(b) on the history of the British labor movement and colonial policy of British imperialism. Additionally, he taught at KUTV from

¹³ Don Hallett, "The Hand That History Dealt: Ralph Fox (1900–1936)," *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society* 17, new series (2009): 113; Michael Freeman, "Ralph Fox: Telling the Times" (unpublished manuscript, 2009), 27; Workers' notebook, Ralph Fox, "Catching Tatars," *Daily Worker*, 8 January 1936.

¹⁴ Listed as a "praktikant referent Vostochnogo otdela" in Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) Komintern f. 495, op. 198, d. 391 (Angliia), l. 16; Security Service File, National Archives of Great Britain KV 2/1377, 15, 28, 92; Freeman, *Ralph Fox*, 149, 207; Hallett, "'Hand That History Dealt,'" 114.

¹⁵ RGASPI Komintern f. 495, op. 198, d. 391, l. 26.

¹⁶ Volume 1 of *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* (1931) contains the correspondence of Engels with Paul Ernst; no. 2 (1932) contains the correspondence between Engels and Margaret Harkness; no. 3 (1932) contains the correspondence of Marx and Engels with Lassalle about his play *Franz von Sickingen* (the most complete version of this published to that date); and nos. 7–8 (1933) contains Engels' letters to Minna Kautsky about her novel *The Old and the New*.

¹⁷ Raymond Williams, "Cambridge," in his *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: NLB, 1979).

¹⁸ Ral'f Foks [Ralph Fox], *Roman i narod*, trans. V. P. Isakova, intro. R. Miller-Budnitskaia (Leningrad: Goslitizdat, 1939), print run of 10,000. Note the Lukács review of this book, where he essentially suggests that Fox's text follows the ideas of the discussion on the novel (led by Lukács, who presented the keynote address) of late 1934/early 1935 (G. Lukach, "'Roman i narod,'" *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 16 [1939]): 45–48, this point on 45).

1930, at the Lenin School from 1931, and from 1930 served in the bureau of the party cell at IMEL.¹⁹ In this way, he was integrated into Soviet intellectual life; he was an inter- or perhaps transnational.

During his two stays in Moscow, Fox worked and published on Asia. While at IMEL, for example, he made a significant contribution to the debate over Marx's Asiatic mode of production, debunked by Stalin as part of his rethinking policies on Asia after the 1927 China debacle but espoused by Karl Wittfogel, who also visited Moscow while Fox was there.²⁰ He edited Marx's letters on India from the *New York Tribune* (which had appeared in Russian in the institute's journal *Letopisi marksizma*).²¹ Both in the 1920s and in the 1930s, Fox published several books on Asia, some written while he was in Moscow: *People of the Steppes* (1925); the novel *Storming Heaven* (1928); *The Colonial Policy of British Imperialism* (1933), two versions of which appeared in Russian, one of 1931 written while Fox was at IMEL in Moscow, and an updated, fuller version of 1934; and *Genghis Khan* (1936).²² Later, in 1936, Fox wanted to visit Mongolia to collect materials for a future book on that country and already had British and American publishers lined up, but when he wrote to the Comintern to get permission to go, they refused him, probably because of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, where he went later that year.²³ There he served as commissar to the British Battalion, and there he was killed soon after he arrived, in late December 1936. I might add that though this sequence suggests that Fox was a dutiful member of the Comintern, and indeed many have commented that in the 1930s he seemed overly dogmatic, yet records show that the Soviet literary officials and the CPGB accorded him a leading role somewhat under sufferance and looked at him and several of his publications askance.²⁴ Fox himself comes across as a somewhat idiosyncratic communist functionary who in many respects

¹⁹ RGASPI Komintern f. 495, op. 198, d. 391, ll. 34–35, "Avtobiografii Ral'fa Foksa."

²⁰ *Letopisi marksizma*, no. 13 (1930).

²¹ K. Marks (Karl Marx), "Pis'ma ob Indii," *Letopisi marksizma*, no. 3 (1927): 36–55; Marx Memorial Museum and Archive, Ralph Fox files, letter of Bill Alexander, 2 May 1978.

²² Ralph Fox, *People of the Steppes* (London: Constable, 1925); Fox, *Storming Heaven* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928); Fox, *The Colonial Policy of British Imperialism* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1933), published in Russian as R. Foks, *Kolonial'naiia politika Anglii*, trans. N. Kamenskaia (Moscow–Leningrad: Moskovskii rabochii, 1931); Foks, *Angliiskaia kolonial'naiia politika (populiarnyi ocherk)* (Moscow–Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1934); and Fox, *Genghis Khan* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1936).

²³ RGASPI Komintern f. 495, op. 198, d. 391, ll. 1, 23–25; Hallett, "'Hand That History Dealt,'" 114. Fox had recently published *The People's Republic of Mongolia* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1935).

²⁴ Note the reproaches of S. Dinamov, the president of the Anglo-American Commission, International Union of Revolutionary Writers, Moscow, in a letter to Fox of 19 November

pursued his own passions and interests (in Mongolia, for example). The role of Fox in Anand's career cannot be viewed as simply a case of top-down influence from "Moscow," mediated by Fox.

In the 1930s, before Spain, Fox was a mentor figure for the Indian writers in London, as they have all recalled in their memoirs.²⁵ They seem to have somewhat whitewashed out of their memoirs, however, what appears to have been a specifically communist affiliation for these meetings. The British Security Service archives contain an entry from Indian Political Intelligence that suggests that "since the beginning of January, 1934 meetings of the Indian Students' Secret Communist Group have been held in London practically every week.... On most occasions a lecture on advanced Marzian [sic] topics has been delivered by RALPH FOX (the well-known Communist author)."²⁶ Of course, those filing intelligence reports often read communist affiliation overreadily, especially "secret" affiliation, so one should not assume the group was necessarily specifically communist.

Anand became particularly close to Fox, who, for example, talked through with him most of his future book *The Novel and the People* (published posthumously in 1937).²⁷ It was also most likely through Fox that Anand became prominent in a number of Moscow-oriented bodies; he was, for example, from its very beginning a member of the British Sector of the International Association for the Defense of Culture.²⁸ He also went, as did Fox, one of the organizers of the British contingent, as a delegate from Britain to the antifascist, Moscow-funded Paris Congress for the Defense of Culture in 1935.²⁹ He published in the British Left's literary journals *Left Review* (co-founded by Fox) and *New Writing*,³⁰ and most of his novels of the 1930s

1934 (S. Dimanov [sic], National Archives of Great Britain 67a O.F. 42/5 in KV 2/1377, 77; KV 2/1376, 55).

²⁵ Sajjad Zaheer in *Indian Literature*, no. 2 (1952), cited in *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents (1936–1947)*, ed. Sudhi Pradhan, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: New Rooplekha Press, 1985), 1:28; Mulk Raj Anand, "Preface," in Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People*, 2nd ed. (London: Cobbett, 1944), 9–10.

²⁶ I. P. I. (Indian Political Intelligence) entry 113a 464/14 of 5 July 1934, National Archives of Great Britain KV 2/1377, 71.

²⁷ Anand, "Preface," 10.

²⁸ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (RGALI) f. 631 (Inostrannaia komissiiia), op. 14, ed. khr. 179 (1937 svodki: Angliia), l. 155.

²⁹ Iu. E. Tupikova, *Mulk Raj Anand: Laureat mezhdunarodnoi premii mira* (Moscow: Znanie, 1955), 35; Hallett, "Hand That History Dealt," 123.

³⁰ A. P. Kiselev, *Ral'f Foks—publistist kompartii Velikobritanii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 1961), 22.

appeared with the communist-affiliated publisher Martin Lawrence and its successor Lawrence and Wishart, where Fox worked.³¹

So Anand, incorporated as he was in English literary life and its leftist literary institutions, was something of a transnational. But to be a transnational is in a sense to be somehow suspended in the air between cultures, or as Homi Bhabha has put it in *The Location of Culture*, “in a state of in-betweenness, endlessly negotiating between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the unknown and the unknown.”³² In Anand’s case he, as an anglicized colonial subject, may have been “constantly negotiating,” but not “between the familiar and the unfamiliar”; the colonial metropole was perfectly familiar. Nevertheless, throughout his career in the 1930s he was confronted with the problem of reconciling the demands of British leftism and its espousal of European antifascism with those of Indian patriotism and the Indian movement for national independence. He was a transnational who oriented himself around two points, London and India, with the possibility of a third, Moscow, thrown in for good measure. He was a nationalist, an internationalist, and a transnationalist.

This situation was particularly evident in Anand’s role in the main organization in which he played a leading role in the 1930s, the Indian Progressive Writers’ Association (henceforth to be known as IPWA). The IPWA was founded in London by a handful of Indian exiles, including Anand. Their meetings were attended and occasionally addressed by Ralph Fox, [Rupert] John Cornford, and Christopher Caudwell, all three of whom were highly educated English writers and communist activists.³³ Subsequently, one of the Indian members, Sajjad Zaheer, in the British National Archive account the leader of the “Indian Students Secret Communist Group,”³⁴ took the association’s manifesto back to India (it was initially published in Britain’s *Left Review*),³⁵ visiting major cities and recruiting for the association, attracting to membership writers and intellectuals from all over India to form 49 branches, so that it became the leading leftist intellectual organization in

³¹ National Archives of Great Britain KV 2/1337, 70, 98. In 1934–38, Anand produced a volume of *Marx and Engels on India*, published in India but brokered by Martin Lawrence, which included the letters Marx published in the *New York Herald Tribune* on which Fox had recently worked at IMEL: M. R. A. [Mulk Raj Anand], “Acknowledgements,” in *Marx and Engels on India*, ed. Anand (Allahabad: Socialist Book Club, 1938), 3.

³² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

³³ Dhawan, “Thirties Movement and *Coolie*,” 57. In this text Cornford is mistakenly rendered as Karnford and Caudwell as Caulwell.

³⁴ I. P. I. entry 113a 464/14 of 5 July 1934, 71.

³⁵ “Manifesto of the Indian Progressive Writers’ Association, London.” All communications to be addressed to Dr. M. R. Anand, *Left Review*, 1935.

the country.³⁶ In effect, the association was the Indian iteration of a series of Moscow-oriented writers' organizations that sprang up in different countries during these years, partly in response to the 1935 Paris Congress, which had founded the Association internationale des écrivains pour la défense de la culture, with which IPWA voted to become affiliated.

At the same time, IPWA was, of course, also de facto dedicated to the cause of wresting Indian independence from the British imperialists. Ironically, in the cultural sphere the anti-imperialist cause of Indians was to a significant degree now headquartered in the imperial metropole, London. It was also, as a part of the Popular Front, expected to support the antifascist cause. In response to the Nazis coming to power in Germany in 1933, there was a shift in the Comintern's policies, which were reflected in a new platform announced at its Seventh Congress of 25 July–31 August 1935 when a less sectarian profile for the Comintern was announced, one that foresaw collaboration with virtually any group committed to opposing fascism. The Paris writers' congress called for forming an antifascist people's front in capitalist countries and an anti-imperialist united front in colonies and dependent countries: a two-pronged effort against perceived oppression. The two were effectively hitched inasmuch as there was much overlap among their prominent members. In terms of India, in 1937, about the same time as IPWA took root there, leading intellectuals established the Indian Committee of the League against Fascism in Calcutta with Rabindranath Tagore as president, and a series of manifestoes signed by Nehru, Tagore, and others were sent to the various antifascist congresses convened in Europe.³⁷

While, then, the members of IPWA were committed to ousting the British imperialists from India, and while they were patriots, they were also politically aligned with those who dreamed of some postnational confederation (partly in reaction against the fascists who were associated with rabid nationalism and in the Nazis' case racism). Of course, the Soviet Union sought to make its emerging cultural tradition hegemonic, though in the spirit of the Popular Front, whose orientation dominated Comintern cultural policy after its Seventh Congress in 1935, they were not rigid about expecting foreigners to follow socialist realist conventions.³⁸

During the 1930s, Anand was active in the international antifascist movement. He was from the very beginning a member of the British Sector

³⁶ Melk Radzh Enand [Mulk Raj Anand], "Pis'ma v redaktsiiu," *Internatsional'naia literatura*, no. 5 (1938): 231.

³⁷ Sudhi Pradhan, "Preface to the Second Edition," in *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, 1:xi.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:xii.

of the International Association for the Defense of Culture.³⁹ He played an important role in the follow-up conference to the Paris Congress of 1935, as well as one held in 1936 in London, and made a pilgrimage to the battlefields in Spain (as did Nehru), where he fought in the trenches for a time.⁴⁰ Hence he did not immediately travel to India after the IPWA was founded, as had Zaheer, but rather was preoccupied with meetings and organizations for the antifascist cause. But in 1938 he visited India, touring the country on behalf of IPWA, and delivering the main address to its Second Congress that year, a locus classicus for the IPWA platform.

At this congress IPWA speakers confronted the task of defining what it might mean to be a “progressive” Indian writer in the second half of the 1930s. Was the IPWA a minor branch of the European antifascist movement in literature, or was it dedicated to the struggle against European imperialism, or in this specific case against the British occupation of India (and therefore British culture)? What might be the literary “method” or approach to be followed by Indian writers? Were they to adopt some form of Socialist Realism, or were they to reject European literary norms in favor of some revival of Indian literary traditions? Trying to find answers to such questions was further complicated by the fact that India itself did not have a single “Indian language” but rather 22 official languages (and many others besides) and many different scripts. There were also major differences in caste, ethnic group, and religious faith that divided even the “progressive” Indian writers. In fact, a sizable number of them were Muslim, and the overwhelming majority did not write in English.

Nehru attended meetings of the progressive Writers Association, and Tagore continued to bless its activities, but Anand was in its early years a leading figure within it. Perhaps—a colonialist cringe—the fact that he had been such a success in London gave him particular authority. The speech he delivered to the Second Congress of the IPWA, held in Calcutta in December 1938, is a curious document in that in it one can see how he tries to maneuver among the various possible orientations of the association (the earlier, First Congress had been hastily called, and the speeches made to it are considered less canonical).⁴¹ In his speech he also struggles with the problem of defining that elusive concept “India.” In some sections of the speech Anand addresses

³⁹ RGALI f. 631, op. 14, ed. khr. 179, l. 155.

⁴⁰ I. M. Reisner, “O romane ‘Kuli’ i ego avtora: Predislovie,” in Mul’k Radzh Anand, *Kuli*, trans. V. Stanevich (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1941), 23; RGALI f. 1397, op. 1, ed. khr. 681 (Perepiska redaktsii zhurnala s Enandom: Redaktsiia zhurnala “Internatsional’naia literatura”), letter of Anand to Rokotov of 29 March 1938, l. 8.

⁴¹ The speech was published in *New Indian Literature*, no. 1 (1939).

the problem of how to nationalize the different regional literatures by subsuming them under a single, pan-Indian literature. One partial solution often floated and proposed at the congress by Anand was the adoption of the Indo-Roman script, though—again the problem of colonial authority—versions were designed by two British scholars, Sir George Grierson and J. B. Firth. The Romanization of the script was a measure that in the 1920s had been undertaken in Turkey, among Chinese leftists, and for the scripts of many Soviet ethnic groups (though ironically at that very moment they were converting to a Cyrillic alphabet). In fact, Anand pointed to this precedent, saying, “The development of minority cultures in Russia will give an example to our regionalists of how extensively literature can grow up in a very short time.”⁴²

Standardizing a script would, however, be an easier task than standardizing a literature. There were fierce rivalries among the various literatures, and especially between the Hindi and Bengali traditions (the IPWA had its greatest success among intellectuals of Northern India and was somewhat scantily represented in the South). Here Anand, the great internationalist, at times betrayed something of a hegemonic impulse, insisting that among the various literatures of India, “The preeminent contribution of Bengal must be recognized,” continuing, “Bengal has a longer tradition of creative activity in the arts and literature,” and—here invoking class to bolster his argument—“unlike middle class writers of Northern India [read Hindi India] Bengali writers sell more” (he himself was a Punjabi, not a Bengali).⁴³

Then there was the problem of reconciling the movement in India with the European movements with which it was aligned while yet maintaining a focus on the struggle against the imperialists. One striking feature of Anand’s speech is the way he tries to maneuver between identifying the association with the international antifascist effort and the Spanish Civil War, to which leftist internationalists were then turning most of their attention, and the national, anticolonialist (and therefore anti-European) cause in India. Anand did so principally by identifying colonialist oppression with fascist oppression. He seized on the fact that the concentration camp had been invented by the British during the Boer War in an effort to somehow link the Indians’ campaign against British rule with the Europeans’ cause of the fight against fascism.⁴⁴

When Anand turned his attention to India exclusively, he faulted the colonial era for bringing about a “breakdown of our old social values, literary

⁴² Pradhan, *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, 1:23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1:7–9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:20.

codes and grammars,” effectively referring to the educational policies of Lord Macaulay and others in the mid-19th century who had sought to repress vernacular languages and literatures—traditional Indian culture—replacing it with what he saw as a higher culture, English culture. “The invisible war that has been waged upon our national existence for a century and a half” is “coming to a head,” Anand proposed, and “if we do not unite” “in a new united Cultural Front in this country,” “we are doomed to a more prolonged slavery through which we as a nation and our culture will lapse and be forgotten forever.”⁴⁵ However, Anand never subscribed to the cult of the ancient texts and particularly not to the Indian religious traditions, which he opposed not only from a secular viewpoint but also because he saw them as a cause of the dangerous divisions within the country that threatened independence. Also, though he opposed British policies in anglicizing education, forcing out Indian culture, he was himself in a strange position in that he himself wrote in English and was in effect integrated into the English world of letters. In reality the IPWA “failed to attract a substantial membership of Anglophone writers,” and in time most of its London-based founding members, such as Zaheer and Anand, drifted away from it.⁴⁶

During these early years of the IPWA, Anand published four of his most famous novels: *Untouchable* (1935, the first), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), and *The Village* (1939). All four, as two of their titles suggest, are about the lives of lower-class Indians. It is a cliché of writing about them that in their composition Anand mediated between English Modernism and the conventions of leftist, and even socialist realist, literature—Modernism’s self-appointed antagonist. I would argue, however, that this conclusion applies largely only to *Untouchable* and that Anand’s writing evolved under the influence of Fox and the “progressive movement” of the 1930s, drawing farther from the Modernists who had been his associates more in the 1920s, and acquiring a specifically Soviet orientation (though he never joined the Communist Party).

The year that the IPWA was founded, 1935, Anand published his classic novel, *Untouchable*, an exposé of the treatment meted out to this lowly subcaste, told from the point of view of a young “sweeper” (latrine cleaner). Anand takes the reader through a day in this sweeper’s life, touching on the repeated humiliations to which he is subject, his abject existence, and the details of how he cleans the latrines. Potentially, then, this novel was an

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1:6, 16–17.

⁴⁶ Snehal Shingavi, “India—England—Russia: The Comintern Translated,” paper delivered to the conference “Comintern Aesthetics” at the University of California, Berkeley, 17 April 2015, [4].

example of precisely the sort of “social realism” (very approximately Socialist Realism without its Bolshevik perspective and adapted to Indian conditions and culture) that Anand was to advocate for IPWA literature in his speech of 1938. But in fact the novel was written over a number of years, beginning in the 1920s when Anand was hanging out with leading Modernists in London. As he tells the story of the novel’s genesis, he was influenced by several Modernists but particularly by James Joyce’s two most famous novels, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*.⁴⁷ The latter novel suggested the strategy Anand adopted of following his protagonist through a single day but also the stream of consciousness (both approaches are also to be found in Virginia Woolf’s writings).⁴⁸ Actually, the Soviet opposition to Modernism had not yet coalesced, and in 1935 and early 1936 the Soviet Union began publishing Joyce’s *Ulysses*. In England, T. H. Wintringham, secretary to the Committee of the Writers International, was praising “Works of such power as those of D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce [that] show that the very stirrings of life are being poisoned by capitalism.”⁴⁹ At the same time, Anand was influenced by Gor’kii in writing this text, as he stated explicitly. In 1922 in prison Anand had read Gor’kii’s novella *Creatures That Once Were Men* (Byvshie liudi) of 1897 (other versions have it that Fox gave it to him to read some time after Fox returned to England in 1932).⁵⁰ This novella concerns down-and-outs in a dosshouse, most of them alcoholics. It chronicles their misery, their bouts of drinking, their spats, and how whenever one of their number manages to rise in the world, he generally succumbs to the bottle again or for some other reason sinks back into dire poverty. The residents bond together and conspire to force some money out of their landlord, who owns the neighboring factory, but the project misfires, and in the end when the teacher among them dies, the narrator makes it clear that death or a prison stint in Siberia might be preferable to their miserable existence. Though there are some gestures toward a condemnation of the exploiting classes, and toward class bonding, no way out is shown. This novella provides a somewhat inadequate comparison with Anand’s writings in that alcoholism is not a factor in the lives of the Indian down-and-outs, but the possibility of depicting unremitting despair and the lowest reaches of society may indeed

⁴⁷ Anand was also influenced by other Irish writers, such as Sean O’Casey, who wrote of the lower classes (Mulik Raj Anand, “On the Genesis of *Untouchable*: A Note,” in *Novels of Mulik Raj Anand*, 9–12).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ RGALI f. 631, op. 11, ed. khr. 192, l. 15.

⁵⁰ Tupikova, *Mulik Raj Anand*, 7; Mulik Raj Anand letter from Bombay of 2 August 1968, in *Author to Critic: The Letters of Mulik Raj Anand*, ed. Saros Cowasjee (Calcutta: A Writers Workshop Publication, 1973), 52.

have been suggested by Gor'kii. Additionally, Anand adopted for the ending of *Untouchable* the strategy Gor'kii used in ending his play *The Lower Depths* (1902) of providing three alternative possible (though actually not feasible) routes out of his characters' misery.

In the case of *Untouchable* the influences were not only European. Anand has recalled in several sources that he was so taken by Gandhi's story about an Indian sweeper named Uka, that he was inspired to return to India in early 1929 and visit Gandhi in his ashram at Sabarmati, where he showed Gandhi the manuscript of his book. Gandhi responded in most scathing terms, advising Anand to cut out 100 pages, "especially where he [the sweeper] thinks like a Bloomsbury intellectual."⁵¹ Anand took Gandhi's advice, simplifying and streamlining the novel. He also speculated, "Perhaps the depth came from Gandhi's Ashram, because I learnt to clean latrines myself there, after discarding my Bloomsbury corduroy suit, as Gandhi said I 'looked like a monkey.'"⁵²

Anand's novel, though it describes just a single day in the life of a single downtrodden boy, essentially uses this focus to air the general problems of caste and poverty in India. At the end of *Untouchable* in a somewhat contrived scene Anand has his naïve young protagonist, Bakha, confronted in rapid succession by three alternative solutions to his intolerable situation. First he stumbles across a mass gathering that is addressed by Gandhi in what is effectively a version of Gandhi's story about a sweeper, Uka, that Gandhi used in his speech to the 1921 Suppressed Classes Conference in Ahmedabad, in which he urges transcending caste and allowing the untouchable some dignity.⁵³ We might add that Anand's reverence for Gandhi was not shared by Fox, who, in his *Colonial Policy of British Imperialism* (first published in Russian in 1931 as a product of his stay in IMEL and then in English in 1933) charged that in 1922 Gandhi had given in to the English government and "betrayed" the Indian proletariat, becoming a "reactionary" and "agent of English imperialism."⁵⁴

While, in the novel, Bakha is still processing Gandhi's remarks he overhears the commentary of a highly Westernized "fair-complexioned Mussulman dressed in the most smartly-cut English suit he had ever seen."⁵⁵

⁵¹ Anand, "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*," 11.

⁵² Letter of Mulk Raj Anand from Bombay of 2 August 1968, in *Author to Critic*, 52.

⁵³ Alex Tickell, *Terrorism, Insurgency, and Indian-English Literature, 1830–1947* (New York: Routledge, 2012); M. K. Gandhi, "The Untouchables," in *The Gandhi Reader: A Source Book of His Life and Writings*, ed. Homer A. Jack (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1956), 162–67.

⁵⁴ Foks, *Kolonial'naia politika Anglii*, 38; Fox, *Colonial Policy of British Imperialism*.

⁵⁵ Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (New York: Penguin Books, 1940), 150.

Here the speaker is called R. N. Bashir, but the giveaway detail of “monocle in his left eye” points to Muhammad Ali Jinnah as the reference.⁵⁶ The supercilious Bashir is dismissive of Gandhi—“He is in the fourth century B.C. with his *swadeshi* and his spinning wheel,” and he concludes, “The peasant who believes this world to be *maya* (illusion) will not work the machine.”⁵⁷ Bashir’s interlocutor, a “young man with delicate feline face ... [his] dressed in flowing Indian robes like a poet’s” and named with the improbable combination Iqbal Nath Sarshar (improbable because it combines names from different faiths), has been taken by critics to be a conflation of three writers: Muhammad Iqbal, Ratan Nath Sarshar, and Rabindranath Tagore.⁵⁸ Anand uses “Sarshar” to critique European notions of Indian belief systems propagated by the Indoeuropeanists and Theosophists: “We don’t believe in the other world as these Europeans would have you believe we do.... The Victorians misinterpreted us. It was as if, in order to give a philosophical background to their exploitation of India, they ingeniously concocted a nice little fairy story.” At the same time, he makes a claim for Indian superiority over the European precisely because of their “six thousand years of tradition,” but also because the Indians are not like the Europeans who “were barbarians and lost their heads in the worship of gold.” Though Sarshar does not like machines, he proposes that the machine may provide a way out of Indian backwardness and its oppressive caste system, particularly for the lowly Untouchable whose lot as a sweeper could be obviated by the adoption of the flush toilet,⁵⁹ a remedy that critics have identified with Jawaharlal Nehru’s advocacy of modernization as the solution to India’s problems.⁶⁰ At this point in the narrative, however, the two interlocutors walk away, and though Bakha feels some exhilaration at the possibility of the flush toilet, essentially he is to resume his way of life and there is no resolution provided to his, or India’s, problems.

Untouchable did not impress many of Anand’s Bloomsbury friends. Anand had, in fact, by his account been driven to write the novel when he overheard Edward Sackville-West remark: “There can be no tragic writing about the poor! They are only fit for comedy, as in Dickens! The canine can’t go into literature.”⁶¹ After it appeared, Virginia Woolf reproached him for

⁵⁶ Snehal Shingavi, “The Mahatma Didn’t Say So, But....” in *The Mahatma Misunderstood: The Politics and Forms of Literary Nationalism in India* (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 31.

⁵⁷ Anand, *Untouchable*, 150.

⁵⁸ Shingavi, “Mahatma Didn’t Say So, But....,” 31.

⁵⁹ Anand, *Untouchable*, 152–53.

⁶⁰ Shingavi, “Mahatma Didn’t Say So, But....,” 30–311.

⁶¹ Anand, “Sources of Protest,” 23, cited in *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics*, 17.

bothering to write about such a low-class, uneducated subject.⁶² It should be noted, perhaps, that Virginia had a family background in colonialism on her mother's side where several relatives had served as administrators in colonial India. Also, Anand had a great deal of difficulty finding a publisher for *Untouchable*, and it was accepted only after E. H. Forster agreed to write a preface, one of many aspects of Anand's career that illustrate my general point that "the ecumene did not operate in an intellectual silo but overlapped and interacted with other, contiguous 'thought zones.'" Forster, like Fox close to Anand, was an antifascist spokesman but neither communist or a communist sympathizer, and with his highly ironic style he could not be construed as inclining in the direction of Socialist Realism: his classic *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) provides a contrast with Fox's *Novel and the People*.

Anand's next novel, *Coolie*, was written in 1936 over a period of a mere three months and accepted by Lawrence and Wishart without hesitation.⁶³ It shows how he was clearly developing his literary talents in another direction, away from High Modernism. Anand was not only moving to the left but also becoming specifically more Marxist. He had begun reading Marx before, starting around 1926, where in leftist study circles he was introduced inter alia to *Capital* and to assorted Leninist texts such as *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, *Imperialism as a Higher Stage of Capitalism*, and *The Infantile Disorder of Leftism*.⁶⁴ But the impact on him of Marx's writings was greater in the 1930s. Around 1932 (not coincidentally, perhaps, the year Fox returned from Moscow), he read Marx's "Letters on India" of 1853 and was so impressed by them that he edited them for publication, along with other materials on colonialism from Marx and Engels.⁶⁵

That Marxism was now more in Anand's purview is reflected in this new novel (*Coolie*), where the condemnation of the effects of the caste system in *Untouchable* has been replaced by a critique of Indian society in terms of class. The novel demonstrates that there is no necessary connection between caste and economic station; those of high caste can live in desperate poverty. In fact, a virtual refrain is that caste does not matter because there are essentially two categories of people, the exploiters and the exploited. The particular coolie who is the central character in the novel, Munoo, is in fact a Kshatriya (i.e.,

⁶² "Author's Preface," *Mulk Raj Anand: A Reader*, ed. Atma Ram (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007), x.

⁶³ Saros Cowasjee, "Coolie: An Appraisal," in *Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, 66.

⁶⁴ E. Ia. Kalinnikova, *Mulk Radzh Anand* (Moscow: Institut vostokovedeniia Akademii nauk, 1986), 67.

⁶⁵ Anand, *Marx and Engels on India*; Gillian Packham, "Mulk Raj Anand and the Thirties Movement in England," in *Perspectives on Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. K. K. Sharma (Ghaziabad [India]: Vimal Prakashan, 1978), 56.

of the second highest caste, as was Anand himself), but reduced to extreme poverty; one of his acquaintances who is but a lowly servant is a Brahmin.⁶⁶

Coolie also has a different plot type as compared with *Untouchable*. Rather than confine the action to one place and a time span of a mere 18 hours, as in the earlier novel, *Coolie* has its protagonist, Munoo, move around much of the country over an extended period of time. Moreover, his peripatetic existence takes him from a minor, impoverished village to working as a degraded servant of a lowly Indian bank clerk in a small provincial town, then for a small factory making perfumes in a larger provincial town, and then in a cotton mill in the great metropolis of Bombay; in this way, Munoo's life course somewhat follows India's own historical progression from a primarily rural country to one that has a pronounced urban and industrial sector, pointed to in Marx. "Coolie" is a term for an unskilled laborer, but the category ranges in its application from the agricultural laborer to the factory worker, so that it is applicable to Munoo in all these occupations. The recurrent use of the term in the novel and its highlighting in the title points to the fact that no matter how much Munoo might progress in terms of being incorporated into a modern world, he remains one of the downtrodden, expendable and oppressed.

Coolie is more openly engaged in Indian politics than *Untouchable*. Munoo begins working at the mill as the result of a chance encounter with a fellow peasant, Hari, who has brought his family to Bombay to work there. Hari and his family represent a benevolent version of the traditional Indian peasant, but once Munoo begins working at the mill he becomes friends with another worker, Ratan, who is politically engaged and encourages Munoo to convert his frustrations into action. The situation of the mill workers reaches a crisis point when the workers' hours are reduced (to avoid losses for the shareholders in the wake of the economic downturn with the recession), threatening to throw them over the precipice over which they have been teetering all along. In these sections the activism of the Red Flag Union—the Indian trade union oriented toward Moscow—is contrasted with the passivity and accommodating stance of the All-Indian Trade Union.

The strike is not destined to happen. The mill workers are not destined to be liberated from degradation and suffering. The workers are about to vote for a strike when someone spreads the rumor (probably at the instigation of the capitalists) that the Muslims are kidnapping Hindu children. An ugly riot breaks out in which Muslims and Hindus butcher each other. The next day the workers return to their factory, totally cowed. As for Munoo, by a fortuitous circumstance he is extracted from the melée by a Eurasian woman,

⁶⁶ Mulk Raj Anand, *Coolie* (New York: Penguin, 1945), 155.

who had inadvertently knocked him over in her car, and who takes him to Simla to be her servant. There, however, it emerges that he has tuberculosis and he wastes away, tragically still only in his late teens. Munoo dies just as he has received a letter from Ratan inviting him to return to Bombay and take a minor position in the union. Rather as in *Untouchable*, Anand gestures in the direction of possible resolutions to the dire circumstances of India's poor, in this case by communist activism, but shies away from taking his characters to all-out revolt. In the socialist realist novel the narrative would end either in a triumph (a military victory or the completion of some economic project or construction), or in the tragic death of a comrade as a martyr to the cause. Munoo's death was, of course tragic, because he was still only in his late teens, but his was not the death of a political martyr but rather the death of a victim of capitalist rapaciousness, which scrimps on providing hygienic, dry accommodation for its workers and on paying them enough to feed themselves properly.

In *Coolie* one also sees a shift in the composition and themes of the novel that bring it closer to the conventions of Socialist Realism than was *Untouchable*. Most of Anand's novels in this period follow the life of a young man of great potentiality. Munoo, for example, loved school and had some propensities that might have destined him to become an engineer were he not a victim of grinding poverty and a cruel social system. His career is constructed as a tale of *Bildung* in which this protagonist's biological and social maturation parallels a maturation in political consciousness (Anand periodically takes time out of the narration to comment on the stage his hero has reached in this process).⁶⁷ Munoo in the early sections is full of childish exuberance, leading him to take some ill-considered steps, but as he gains in maturity he also becomes increasingly mature politically; in this way the novel resembles a standard Soviet socialist realist novel with its road-to-consciousness plot.⁶⁸ At the factory Munoo is drawn to Ratan, who is a union activist and functions as a mentor, helping further Munoo's political education to the point where, when the issue of whether to strike or not arises, Munoo is completely on the side of the Red Flag Union.

Ralph Fox in *The Novel and the People* emphasized the importance of depicting a novel's protagonist as a "living man," a man of flesh and blood, not some plaster-cast saint or titanic hero. "But also [a novel should not comprise] merely lively description of persons and events. It is the story of

⁶⁷ See, e.g., *ibid.*, 56, 113, 201.

⁶⁸ See Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

men in being, developing, living, and perhaps dying.”⁶⁹ In *Coolie* Ratan is far from the zealous ascetic of the Soviet novel: he drinks to excess and frequents brothels. Munoo, too, is no plaster-cast saint, and as Anand chronicles his political awakening he charts in parallel the boy’s sexual awakening.

Sex and politics mix more overtly in Anand’s next novel, *Two Leaves and a Bud*. Here the setting is a tea plantation in Assam that has an English planter and his family, as well as an English overseer. The central plot concerns the fate of Gangu, typically for Anand an impoverished peasant from Punjab though in this case an elderly one, who is recruited to work on the plantation by an agent who lures him with false promises. Once there, he soon learns that he is in effect an indentured laborer. Gangu struggles to feed his family. His wife dies of malaria. The novel also describes, in somewhat caricatured form, the life of the English planter and his family, whose idle existence is largely confined to tennis, polo, cards and the club. Though well-meaning in their self-image, they are thoroughly imbued with the racist mentality of the English colonialist and capitalist exploiter. This book, which is so blatantly political, was by and large a failure. Anand himself said in his preface to the second Indian edition that he “was biased in favor of my Indian characters and tended to caricature the English men and English women who play such a vital part.”⁷⁰ In short, he had not learned from Fox and Engels.

Reggie, the planter’s assistant and field manager, is drawn with the darkest pen and is outright sadistic. He has delusions about being a Napoleon figure as he rides around the fields on his horse, cracking his whip, the revolver ever ready on his belt. In the end Reggie tries to force his attentions on Gangu’s daughter Leila and comes to their house. When Gangu arrives on the scene, summoned by his son to save the daughter, Reggie shoots him dead, but a subsequent trial with an all-European jury, save for two, acquits him. The plot of the novel, then, exposes the falsehood of the British imperialists claim to a “civilizing mission.” Exploitation, an interest in sheer profit, and racism trump any concern for amelioration, even the most sensible and least costly. In the figure of Reggie the British are shown to be more “barbaric” than the Indians.

Not all the Englishmen in the novel are caricatures, however. There are positive English characters in most of Anand’s novels of the 1930s; in *Coolie*, for example, one of the Red Flag Union organizers is English (in historical actuality there were three). But in *Two Leaves and a Bud* an Englishman plays a leading and positive role. In fact, this novel is the one exception to the rule that Anand’s novels feature protagonists who are young men shown

⁶⁹ Fox, *Novel and the People*, 128.

⁷⁰ Mulk Raj Anand, “Introduction,” in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, 2nd Indian ed. (Bombay: Kutub Popular [1951]), 6.

in the process of developing a political consciousness. Here there are two protagonists, and neither is shown to progress to a significant degree. One of them is Gangu, who with his family essentially represents the old India, superstitious and with little consciousness. Gangu gains a fairly low level of consciousness while at the plantation, largely by visits to his neighbor, Narain, who gathers the coolies in his hut in the evenings and talks of resistance and unionization. Narain is, however, only a shadowy figure in the novel, unlike the second politically engaged character, the other central character, John Le Havre, an English medical officer who is at the same time an instigator who persuades the coolies to revolt and is at the end fired. Le Havre is a positive character. He spends his time in a laboratory on the plantation and petitioning the government for funds to funnel clean water from the hills to the coolies, an inexpensive way of eradicating the recurrent and deadly bouts of cholera. But to no avail. Thus in a sense he represents Marx's notion that "European science," the secular knowledge of what he identifies as a superior civilization, can cure the backwardness and the misery of India, another and less symbolic version of the flush toilet in *Untouchable*. Le Havre, more activist than Bazarov (i.e., the protagonist of Ivan Turgenev's novel *Father and Sons* of 1862), urges the coolies on the plantation to riot, but their revolt is suppressed in an overkill: military planes that swoop down over the rioters and terrify them.

Le Havre is a sort of Bolshevized Bazarov figure, a man of science who, like Bazarov, falls in love with a woman of higher station (in this case the planter's daughter, Barbara), but in the end she rejects him. For Le Havre's encounters with Barbara, Anand inserts purple passages about his excesses of passion that seem lifted from D. H. Lawrence, such as "A wild wave surged over the dark chambers of his mind," somewhat overdoing Fox's demand for a "living man."⁷¹ Barbara demands that he decide whether he will favor the "revolution" or her; in the end she makes the decision for him and sides with her world of the planter so that he will return to England—and presumably revolutionary activity—alone.

Despite such highly fictional and even melodramatic aspects of their plots, and despite their trajectory of political *Bildung* that was at the heart of Socialist Realism, these novels are in fact heavily factually based. For example, in *Two Leaves* the Reggie drama in all its salient details actually recapitulates the well-known Khoreal case, where an assistant manager of the Khoreal Tea Garden, Reginald William Leonard Reed, shot Gangadhar Goala, a coolie, on 25 May 1920. After the killing the Sahib went off unruffled as if nothing

⁷¹ Mulk Raj Anand, *Two Leaves and a Bud* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), 120–21.

had happened and was acquitted by an all-European jury. This case was reported in an article in the *Modern Review*, a trendy journal among Indian intellectuals.⁷²

In this novel, and in *Coolie*, Anand also drew on a number of published reports made by English doctors and politicians sent to investigate conditions in colonial India. The three main sources he used, together with material from *Modern Review*, are A. A. Purcell and J. Hallsworth's *Report on Labour Conditions in India* (1928), V. H. Rutherford's *Modern India: Its Problems and Their Solution* (1928), and the Whitley Report on conditions in India (1931); the latter was actually from a Conservative, but advocated ameliorating the dire poverty that Whitley observed, while the first two were by members of the Labour Party.⁷³ These publications, then, are not communist. Moreover, in them the authors praise the work of the All-India Trades Union Congress, in *Coolie* a traitor to the cause, and simply omit mention of the Red Flag Union, idealized in the novel. Yet Fox also draws extensively on these sources in his *The Colonial Policy of British Imperialism* (Anand in turn also used this book by Fox, especially for his account of living conditions for workers and of how Hindu-Muslim clashes undermine the labor movement).⁷⁴ In this way, though Fox's book was of course inflected by Marxism, it also provided an important source on India for Soviet scholars, administrators, and politicians. We see here not just a unidirectional, top-down flow in influence, nor do we see Fox and his Soviet readers and colleagues operating in an intellectual silo.

It is thanks to these British sources that in writing about the world of the Bombay textile mills in *Coolie* Anand was able to provide a great deal of specific detail. The reader learns about the method of hiring, the underpayment of wages, contracts that render the workers virtually indentured, and the crowded and unsanitary conditions in which the mill owners and their "jobbers" (foremen and labor recruiters) accommodate the mill workers, while nevertheless charging exorbitantly as do the stores that provision the workers, leaving them on the edge of financial ruin for the duration of their employment. In the account Anand conflated elements of the British General Strike of 1926 and the Indian Meerut affair and other major industrial strikes

⁷² Jatindranath Sarkar, "Tea Garden Labourers in Assam," *Modern Review* (December 1929).

⁷³ A. A. Purcell and Joseph Hallsworth, *Report on Labour Conditions in India* (London: Trade Union Congress General Council, 1928), esp. 34–35 on the tea plantations; V. H. Rutherford, *Modern India: Its Problems and Their Solution* (London: Labour Publishing, 1928), esp. 99; John Whitley, *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India [and Evidence]* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1931).

⁷⁴ Foks, *Kolonial'naia politika Anglii*, 17, 38–41; Foks, *Angliiskaia kolonial'naia politika (populiarnyi ocherk)*, 34–37.

in India, so we are given a generic, transnational strike, but also an account based on actual facts. To some extent Anand's distillation of these events follows Marx's text of about 80 years earlier, including his analysis of the "revolution" brought about by the English. The mill's owner is an Indian, and there are recurrent references to the situation at the Tata mill at Jamshedpur (the Tatas were leading Indian entrepreneurs), so that the novel illustrates the general point that the Indians have produced their own exploiting class, which is no less rapacious and venal than the British and essentially supports the British order.

The semi-reportage nature of Anand's novels of the 1930s is nowhere more apparent than in *Two Leaves and a Bud*. In a bizarre section of the book a turning point in Barbara's relationship with Le Havre comes when she discovers his diary and reads in it a succession of quotations that he has amassed from what are in fact the above sources, at times identified. This is effectively a sort of laying bare of the strategy—or a symptom of haste and laziness—as the findings of these texts are largely plomped on the page, undigested, and not incorporated into the plot (other quotations from these sources are incorporated and presented as if they were the thoughts or utterings of Le Havre). In *Two Leaves*, despite these eclectic sources allegedly incorporated by Le Havre into his personal diary, there are also hints that he has communist leanings. Barbara calls him a "Bolshie," and he himself thinks in terms of Marx.

By Anand's next novel, *The Village* (1939), there is no such positive English character. The English would-be civilizer is parodied as ineffectual and hypocritical to boot. This novel follows closely the Marxian view of the "idiocy" of Indian village life. It also, as in Marx, shows how an alliance of the money lenders and the landlords (not always distinct categories) results in the beggaring of the poor peasants. His central character, Lalu, is again from the Punjab, but this time a Sikh, and after cutting his hair he is ostracized from the village. But it is for his attraction to a moneylender's daughter (and it is mutual) that Lalu faces arrest. He eludes his captors and joins the British army only to be sent off as colonial cannon fodder to fight in World War I, which breaks out soon after he enlists. *The Village* was in fact the first of a new series of novels. The next showed Lalu fighting in the trenches of France (a depiction based on Anand's own experiences in the trenches of Spain during the Civil War), and in the final book he becomes a political activist.

Anand was not merely gesturing toward Socialist Realism. He was also at the time being incorporated into the Moscow literary world in the sense that his novels and some shorter works were being published there. Assorted Moscow

archives contain numerous letters from Anand to Soviet literary bureaucrats and publishers negotiating the publications.⁷⁵ I have not yet pinpointed how the connection was brokered, but suspect it was by Fox corresponding with the Moscow bureaucrats as an advocate for their publishing more English material, and Indian material to boot.⁷⁶ Alternatively, it may have been brokered by his main London publisher, Lawrence and Wishart, a communist press. In the correspondence of Anand himself with potential publishers one is struck by his repeated declarations of enthusiasm for the Soviet Union and his desire to visit,⁷⁷ though his declarations should be regarded with a degree of skepticism given that in the same letter he would press for more of his books to be published and for royalties to be sent.⁷⁸ For example, when Anand returned to England after a year spent organizing the IPWA in India and presiding at its conference, he reported back to Rokotov, the then editor of *Internatsional'naia literatura*, “In all this work our writers look with great admiration to the workers *fatherland* [emphasis his], Soviet Russia, and in a special resolution moved at the Calcutta Conference they asked me to convey their greetings to the Russian writers, which I am very happy to communicate to you through this note.”⁷⁹

Of particular interest is Anand's correspondence about his next cycle of novels that begins with *The Village*: “I have myself finished a long novel, *The Village*, the first part of a trilogy which seeks to show the deterioration of the conditions of the peasant masses of India though the inroads of early capitalism.... [It concerns] a struggle which reflects the disintegration of feudalism and *the glimmering of a new light from Russia* [emphasis mine—KC], the land of socialism. The drama will be worked out in a second volume *Civilization* dealing with the last great war of 1914 which though it didn't happen in India, in so far as it changed the whole pattern of Indian society by bringing it into the network of Capitalism more completely. And a third volume, *All Men Are Equal* traces the story of growing revolt of the agrarian masses which began to see or hear of October 1917. I shall keep you informed

⁷⁵ See, e.g., RGALI f. 1397, op. 1, ed. khr. 681 (Perepiska s redaktsiei “Internatsional'naia literatura” o sotrudnichestve Ananda v zhurnale, ob indiiskoi assotsiatsii progressivnykh pisatelei i dr.” 31 May 1937–4 October 1941).

⁷⁶ See, e.g., RGALI f. 631, op. 11, ed. khr. 192 (Materialy po istorii angliiskoi sektsii Mezhdunarodnogo souza revoliutsionnykh pisatelei), l. 33; and f. 1397, op. 1, ed. khr. 681.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., RGALI f. 631, op. 11, ed. khr. 148 (Perepiska Ananda, Mulk Radzha, s Inostrannoii komissiei Souza sovetsskikh pisatelei), l. 8.

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Institut mirovoi literatury imeni A. M. Gor'kogo (IMLI) f. 75, op. 3, d. 58 (Enand, Melk Redzh, pis' mo Dinamovu Sergeiu Sergeevichu 8 avgusta 1938), ll. 1–3.

⁷⁹ RGALI f. 1397, op. 1, ed. khr. 681, l. 22.

about these books as they appear. And I shall send you some of my shorter work for publication in *International Literature*.”⁸⁰

Despite such outpourings of enthusiasm for the socialist “fatherland” Anand was not destined to have all his novels published in the Soviet Union. Critics objected to the “naturalism” in *Untouchable* (principally the detail about how Bakha cleaned the latrines), and it was rejected, though a short excerpt, “Beneath the Heel of Capitalism,” appeared in *Literaturnaia gazeta* in 1941.⁸¹ *Coolie*, however, appeared in Russian translation the same year with a generous print run of 50,000 and a separate journal edition.

But Anand, like most of his protagonists, never actually joined the Communist Party. In fact during the war he was cajoled by George Orwell, one of his London friends, into broadcasting for the BBC’s India Service as part of the effort to persuade Indians to join Britain’s struggle against the Germans. He had agonized over the invitation, negotiating for himself the competing loyalties—to the cause of Indian independence from Britain, in terms of which the BBC was an alien mouthpiece, and to the antifascist cause—suffering from the accursed in-betweenness of the transnational. The tensions between the cause of the national and that of the international seemed unresolvable. But then he agreed to Orwell’s invitation. This was at a time when, for example, Subash Chandra Bose, a leader of the independence movement in India, escaped from house arrest by the British and made his way first to Nazi Berlin, then to Tokyo, where he organized Indian troops who attempted to unseat the British Raj, starting their operations from Burma. In other words, Anand while still an anticolonialist, was not fully entrenched in the Moscow-oriented ecumene (which Orwell himself had famously turned against) but remained a cosmopolitan figure participating in the intellectual worlds of both London and India.

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⁸⁰ RGALI f. 1397, op. 1, ed. khr. 681, letter of Anand to Rokotov of 29 March 1938, l. 10.

⁸¹ “Pod piatoi kapitala,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 26 March 1941.