

“Either I’m Nobody, or I’m a Nation”:

Anand, Rushdie, Adiga and the National Quest for Independence

by

Michael A. Billotti

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APPROVED BY: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor

Date

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Reader

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Reader

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Chair, Graduate Committee

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Chair, Department of English

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## Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) are each framed within national terms. Each novelist portrays the nation within narrative, using allegorical devices. Anand, writing during the buildup to Indian independence, Rushdie, reacting to the aftermath of a suspension of democracy in the country, and Adiga, in the economically divisive modern state, each create imagined landscapes that compete with the dominating force of the nation. These novels, from distinct periods in India's history, each demonstrate an awareness of and a desire to engage with the problem of nation. Each author grapples with the nation's impact on the individual through the employment of national allegory. This thesis will address how each character is placed outside the experience of his nation because of the terms by which the nation is defined. As a result, each character is unable to live in the way that he desires and creates a new world in his narrative. This narrative world rivals the nation, allowing each character a measure of freedom and agency that has been otherwise denied.

## Chapter One: Searching for an Invisible Nation

Mulk Raj Anand, Salman Rushdie, and Aravind Adiga are each prominent Indian-English novelists who express a concern for the means by which individuals in Indian society react to and reconcile with their nation. In each author's fiction, we find a sincere grappling with this issue. This concern most often manifests through the specific political and social circumstances of each author's respective time, thereby spanning the period before independence through to the modern economic boom of the new millennium. These novels, from very different periods in India's history, each demonstrate an awareness of and a desire to engage with the problem of nation. By examining Anand, Rushdie, and Adiga in relation to each other, the true scope of the burden of nation is revealed. While presenting a different portrait of India, each novel engages with issues of national identity and allegory and offers a distinct perspective on the impact of the nation on the individual. It is my contention that a pattern will emerge through an examination of each of these novels: due to the way in which the nation is created, each character is unable to live in the way they desire; as a result, each character is forced to go outside of his nation by creating a world of his own. The path for each author involves some method of allegory, using the novel and the specific construction of language in the text, as a means of exploring the relationship between the subject and his nation. Through the act of writing and the process of creation, each narrative imagines a nation contained within

itself, one that is not held to the rigidity and exclusion experienced by those outside its confines.

Before beginning my analysis of the work of Mulk Raj Anand, Salman Rushdie, and Aravind Adiga, it is important to work through the critical frameworks and considerations that will be examined and employed for this thesis. I will first use Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* to demonstrate the inherent connection between the colonized writer and the nation, thus fusing the concept of nation and the treatment of national allegory through Fanon's examination of the formations of nations after colonial rule and the manner in which they develop. I will then examine the difficult and fabricated construct of the nation and how it acts to juxtapose the individual with society, especially focusing on the work of Benedict Anderson and his work with "imagined communities." Following this, I will consider the issue of national allegory, especially as it is employed and considered in postcolonial literature and criticism. I will draw upon the work of Fredric Jameson, Imre Szeman, and Aijaz Ahmad in order to demonstrate the inherent difficulties in employing national allegories. Finally, I will consider the struggle for "authenticity" that plagues each of the authors considered for this thesis. The problem of authenticity helps us to understand how the focus on the "real" challenges the voice of the author and the voice of the novel in order, propagating the dominant narrative of the nation. For this section, I will consider the work of Vikram Chandra, a contemporary Indian-English novelist, and Meenakshi Mukherjee. These critics concern themselves with the role that the individual occupies within the nation, and how these divergent identities

influence and react to each other. I will be using their work to demonstrate how the factors of national identity, allegory, and authenticity present themselves in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*.

### **After the Colonizers Leave**

Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, first published in 1961, is an examination of the political realities and psychological effects of colonialism. For my purposes, I will focus on two chapters from this influential text, namely "The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness" and "On National Culture," each of which provide a strong link between the theoretical grounds continued in the work of Benedict Anderson (and others) and the practical concerns of the postcolonial nation.

Fanon's discussion of national consciousness considers the human element of colonialism. As such, Fanon's work takes a critical tone occupied with a sense of immediacy. He offers the perspective of a man engaged with the postcolonial struggles of nation on a personal level. Fanon's writing is infused with an intensity that would only result from being within the kind of struggle he is writing about.

Fanon begins by describing his interpretation of national consciousness, stating that,

Instead of being the coordinated crystallization of the people's uttermost aspirations, instead of being the most tangible, immediate product of popular mobilization, national consciousness is nothing but a crude, empty, fragile shell. The cracks in it explain how easy it is for

young independent countries to switch back from nation to ethnic group and from state to tribe (97).

For Fanon, there is great potential in national identity, but it is almost inevitably thwarted. National identity has the ability to move people to action against colonial forces, but does little in the way of practically bringing them toward a productive system of governance in the aftermath of success. Fanon's assertion that the center of national consciousness is a "crude, empty, fragile shell" explains the way in which Anand, Rushdie, and Adiga have their characters operate. Each text uses allegorical strategies to highlight the emptiness of national identity, offering an acknowledgement of its limitations and the opportunity for an alternative.

Fanon also discusses the role of national parties and the bourgeoisie. National parties, he contends, "mobilize the people with the slogan of independence, and anything else is left in the future" (99). Thus, the nationalist movement and the functioning body of the nation are left separate. Fanon also contends that the "leader" should not be individualized in order to foster a sense of community. As Fanon asserts, "If the leader drives me I want him to know that at the same time I am driving him. The nation should not be an affair run by a big boss" (127). He calls for a collaborative system that operates in conjunction with the individual. This desire to be included in the national system will run throughout Anand, Rushdie, and Adiga.

Finally, in "The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness," we will consider Fanon's discussion of colonial mimicry. Fanon discusses the extent to which the national bourgeoisie come to imitate and represent their colonial oppressors,

saying that, “At the core of the national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries a hedonistic mentality prevails—because on a psychological level it identifies with the Western bourgeoisie from which it has slurped every lesson” (101). Fanon demonstrates how completely colonial influence comes to dominate a culture. The work of Homi K. Bhabha, specifically the chapter “of Mimicry and Man” from his book *The Location of Culture*, explores the issue of colonial mimicry as well. In both Fanon and Bhabha, we see a concern for the extent to which a postcolonial culture is manipulated by its colonial past. From Bakha’s attempts at “fashun,” to Saleem’s experiences at Methwold’s estate, to Balram’s literal and figurative pursuit to replace his master, each novel involves a character engaging in colonial mimicry. Each character will evolve beyond these imitations, but each will take a much different path. These divergent paths reflect the different circumstances and possibilities afforded to each character. Using Fanon’s and Bhabha’s work as a foundation, we will consider how the colonial past informs and implicates the Indian nation, causing each character to feel a pressure that is both cultural and political.

Fanon discusses the three stages of the colonized writer in “On National Culture.” He considers how the writer functions and reacts to a colonial presence (and subsequent removal) in “On National Culture.” For Fanon, the writer is a figure of power and influence that can infuse a colonial people with the ideas necessary to carry them forward toward national consciousness. In this section, he outlines the path that colonized writers tend to take in their writing, which consists of: (1) assimilating the colonizer’s culture, (2) having his convictions shaken, and finally (3)

entering into a “combat stage” to “rouse the people” (158-59). His model of the colonized writer will serve the important function of demonstrating the extent to which each of the authors’ works present and use the colonial past of the nation in order to construct a new or alternate vision of the future. As Fanon remarks, “When the colonized intellectual writing for his people uses the past, he must do so with the intention of opening up the future, of spurring them into action and fostering hope.” Anand, Rushdie, and Adiga each draw on the past of their nation, either to inspire, to criticize, or to satirize. Fanon’s model for the colonized writer becomes a useful means of analysis for the way in which each author uses India’s colonial past in his novel.

There is a tone of obligation and burden for the writer present in Fanon’s language. In Anand’s *Untouchable*, Bakha’s narrative demonstrates the path of Fanon’s colonized writer. In Anand’s Bakha, we see this development most clearly, as he begins the novel in British “fashun,” but ultimately develops an almost uncontrollable rage, seeking an outlet for his justifiable feelings of injustice. Of course, at the novel’s conclusion, he is not offered an outlet for this rage. While Rushdie and Adiga also display a measure of Fanon’s stages in their respective novels, they both employ a much murkier vision. Rushdie’s novel follows these stages, from Saleem’s days at Methwold to his eventually perceived role as a human bomb in a crowd, even if its conclusion is grim and uninspiring to those intended to hear its message. Adiga’s Balram takes Fanon’s model and refashions it into the realm of the modern Indian economy. In Balram’s India, we see an immediate

connection between the national bourgeoisie and the colonizers. For Balram, they have become identical. By this measure, Balram is the most successful representation of Fanon's stages, manifesting as the product of a successful overthrowing of the master. And yet, troublingly, he does not reject, but acts as a replacement for, his master's culture. In this way, he can be seen as a repudiation of the ultimate aim of Fanon's theory to move the culture forward toward justice for its people. Fanon's approach offers a lens into the political and social dilemmas faced by the postcolonial subject and the postcolonial author.

In order to develop these concerns, these authors use specific techniques meant to ultimately subvert and betray their narratives. By recognizing the qualities and forms that their writing can take, each author produces a novel that challenges the nation through stylistic and textual means. As such, it is important for us to consider how the nation itself can be defined, and what these terms mean for the individual.

### **Writing the Nation**

Benedict Anderson's influential *Imagined Communities* suggests that the nation "is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign"(6). Anderson contends that "the novel and the newspaper... provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation" (25). This concept is crucial in understanding the means by which I will consider the nation in relation to the worlds inhabited in *Untouchable*, *Midnight's Children*, and *The White Tiger*. Therefore, a brief summary of Anderson's work is both a productive and necessary means to setting my argument within the existing

critical framework. This thesis will focus on the identity that is produced from the formation of “imagined communities” as well as the emphasis on written production as a means of influence and control. For Anderson, language creates the nation through deliberate manipulation. This sometimes overlooked element of Anderson’s theory is crucial to understanding how Anand, Rushdie, and Adiga use language in each of their respective texts as a means of creation.

Anderson discusses the importance of the newspaper as a cultural product, one that becomes novelistic in form but teleological in approach (35). According to Anderson, the newspaper becomes a novel for the nation, where the date acts as the connecting thread between an intentional variety of events and issues. The emphasis on the impact of literary *production* allows Anderson to examine how “nations” can be built from products, creating a fabricated communal experience on a much larger plane. Benedict Anderson posits, working from a similar suggestion by Hegel, that the newspaper had replaced the morning prayer, demonstrating the impact which Anderson considers these productions to have (36). At the core of Anderson’s argument, we see the importance of literary text, especially the *production* of such text. These texts serve to create the identity of the nation, a force that imposes itself on its people in ways that are both dominating and unrelenting.

Like Fanon, Anderson contemplates the implications of the tendency for imperialist nations to culturally influence and even replace colonized peoples. He describes Thomas Babington Macaulay’s “Minute on Education,” a “thoroughly English education system” that would, “create ‘a class of persons, Indian in blood and

colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect (90-93). This consideration is crucial to understanding the social function and creative capacity of Mulk Raj Anand's central protagonist Bakha in *Untouchable*, as well as Rushdie's Saleem Sinai, and Adiga's Balram Halwai in their respective novels. When we consider the implications of this system of replacement in these novels, it becomes possible to understand the purpose of literary production, as it is described by Anderson. For each author, the novel they create is somehow an act of defiance—a rebellion against this system of influence by the nation.

Later in his book, Anderson moves into a discussion of the ways in which language operates in the creation of “imagined communities,” determining that nationalisms were “historically impossible” until the creation of “linguistic-nationalisms” (109). He then suggests that,

It is always a mistake to treat languages in the way that certain nationalist ideologues treat them—as *emblems* of nation-ness, like flags, costumes, folk dances, and the rest. Much the most important thing about language is its capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*. After all, imperial languages are still *vernaculars*, and thus particular vernaculars among many... Language is not an instrument of exclusion: in principle, anyone can learn any language. On the contrary, it is fundamentally inclusive, limited only by the fatality of

Babel: no one lives long enough to learn *all* languages. Print-language is what invents nationalism, not *a* particular language per se” (133-34).

In this passage, we see the paradox of language, which is that its limitation is directly informed by its power of access. It is a powerful force in the creation of nation, and thus acts as an empowering agent. Because of one’s ability to learn language, unlike one’s ability to change one’s ethnicity or gender, the power granted to a community based on language is vast. And yet, the inability to gain access to every language acts as a source of limitation to one’s access to nation. While inclusion is permeable, the active function of language conveys the appearance of impermeability, of a construct that is static and impenetrable. Language becomes either a breakthrough or a barrier for the individual, a power structure that can either define or deject the individual.

This crucial passage will be used to demonstrate the means by which language serves a creative function in the work of Anand, Rushdie, and Adiga. Anderson demonstrates that “from the start, the nation was conceived in language, not in blood, and... one could be ‘invited into’ the imagined community” (145). This simultaneously open and closed function of the nation, its ability to be both exclusive and inclusive, will be central to my considerations concerning the work of Anand, Rushdie, and Adiga. We will see, in the works by these aforementioned authors, how language can also be used to create an alternative to the construct of the nation: an entirely new path for the individual of each novel, created through the careful construction of language.

However, it is through specifically linguistic (and often textual) means that these alternatives are imagined and established. Using Anderson's theories we begin to see the function of each narrative, how each operates as a foundational juxtaposition to the dominant and dominating version of the nation, creating an alternate vision, either within or outside of that construct, through the medium of the text. This is achieved either through the voice of the author or his imagined narrative subject. As such, the form of each text, and the means by which each author ties his narrative to the nation, becomes an important aspect for analysis.

### **National Allegory and the Individual**

*Untouchable*, *Midnight's Children*, and *The White Tiger* each employ national allegory as a means of helping their respective characters to carry on larger significance. Each makes specific attempts to create and maintain a sort of national allegory that, however incomplete, serves to tie the respective subject of the novel to his nation. The prevalent use of national allegory in postcolonial literature has been examined extensively, and the resulting body of criticism discussing the various authorial objectives and complications has resulted in an interesting, if polarizing, ongoing debate. Before examining some of the ideas and concepts associated with national allegory, it seems productive and worthwhile to offer a working definition for each of these terms.

The definition developed by Benedict Anderson, that the nation exists as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and

sovereign” seems an appropriate voicing for this difficult and intangible concept (6). This definition was discussed at length in the above consideration of Anderson’s work and its relation to the novels being explored in this thesis. For our consideration of “allegory,” I will turn to Imre Szeman’s essay “Who’s Afraid of National Allegory? Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization,” which attempts to quell the criticism lodged against Frederic Jameson’s assertion that all third-world literature is national allegory. In his essay, Szeman, using Jameson’s definition, suggests that, “the allegorical mode is not limited to the production of morality tales about public, political events—tales that could just as well be described in journalistic terms as in the narrative structure of novels or short stories.” It is Szeman’s contention, in the process of supporting Jameson, that third-world texts merely “speak more directly of and to the national situation” (808). Szeman’s workable explanation serves to emphasize that allegorical devices are not mere fables—they do not act in service of their ideologies. Instead, they function as rich, complicated examinations of matters both personal and public, fusing these identities for a larger purpose.

Critics such as Aijaz Ahmad (in his well-known rebuke of Jameson), Meenakshi Mukherjee (authoring the influential “The Anxiety of Indianness”) and Vikram Chandra (responding to all of these authors in “The Cult of Authenticity”), as well as others, all enter into the complex interrogation of the circumstances and stakes of the use of national allegory in Indian-English texts. Jameson’s contention, or at least the interpretation of his work that is largely accepted by the postcolonial critical community, is a “literary black hole,” as Margaret Hillenbrand so aptly contextualizes

it. Jameson's theory relies on presuppositions and generalities for "third-world literature," which are divisive and problematic. However, based on the emphasis that it has been granted, it is an important catalyst. The authors under consideration in this thesis each have an awareness of the issues at the core of this debate, which largely consist of how a text relates with its world, and how a postcolonial author connects with his or her country. Most significant are the reactions to Jameson's comments, which point to the ever-shifting arena in which these authors produce their work.

Aijaz Ahmad's polemic "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness" acts to dispel many of the assumptions that make Jameson's argument problematic. Ahmad examines the development of the term "third-world," noting that this designation is the only member of the Three Worlds Theory that is "defined purely in terms of an experience of externally inserted phenomena" (78). By first examining the implications of the term "third-world," Ahmad casts himself in opposition to Jameson's argument, concluding that, if a "third-world" nation is set against, and within the frame of imperialism and colonialism, continually made to be "Other," then it will invariably consider itself in nationalist terms. The "third-world" can never move beyond nation and consideration of nationhood in this system. Through colonialism, it is forever trapped in its nationalist shell. Ahmad concludes that "if we replace the idea of the 'nation' with that larger, less restrictive idea of 'collectivity,' and if we start thinking of the process of allegorization not in nationalistic terms but simply as a relation between private and public, personal and communal, then it also becomes possible to see that allegorization is by no means specific to the so-called

Third World” (82). Ahmad seems to provide the most practical pathway for postcolonial authors and critics. By extending Anderson’s “nation” theory he allows for a space where the public and the private can be discussed in conjunction without the constriction of the nation’s identity. By changing our terms and expectations, and not the form, Ahmad finds a theoretical means of reconciling this difficult issue.

For Mulk Raj Anand, and other authors in the “first wave” of Indian-English literature, the use of national allegory might carry a sincere, if ultimately faulted, application. In the earliest years of its development, and especially in the years leading to its independence, allegory serves as a means of structurally tying an imagined construct to a very physical presence. It is this connection that is responsible for much of the idealism that we find in *Untouchable*. As readers, we might suspect Anand’s idealism, but an understanding of its application (mostly gleaned from his commentary about his aims for the novel) helps to clarify its intentions. However, in Rushdie and Adiga, we see a different use of allegory. While Anand might offer a sincere, if still complicated, allegorical tie between his character and his country, Rushdie and Adiga both subvert the use of this technique, exposing the inherent limitedness of it. Yet, for these later authors, allegory becomes a very useful technique *because* of its limitedness. Through creating a national allegory, these authors demonstrate the limitedness of the allegory *through the limitedness of the nation*. The textual means by which each demonstrates this is crucial to understanding the creation of a new, text-based nation for the individual.

In this respect, we can see a purpose to allegorization: not to contain the breadth of experience within one individual, but to connect the private and public spheres of experience themselves. It is a means through which the individual can engage in a dialogue with the nation. Yet, the authors considered here each face another complication as criticism questions the validity of an author in exile to speak for a place he or she no longer resides. This consideration is fundamental as it infuses a critical aspect of the function of national allegory for these specific authors. In striking ways, it becomes a means of pushing back against the dominating, but artificial, presence of the nation. The author uses national allegory as a means of demonstrating the emptiness of the nation.

### **Beyond Authenticity**

In his essay “The Cult of Authenticity,” Vikram Chandra, a contemporary Indian-English author responds to the question that he contends plagues Indian-English authors: “How can you live abroad and write about India?” His article addresses the ongoing debate of authenticity that has followed Indian-English writers, placing his own voice within those of Meenakshi Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, and others. In Chandra’s article, we find a defining question, one which persists through each of the discussed authors’ works: How does one portray the myriad of experiences and ideologies of the “nation” while remaining “authentic”? If an author solely relies on his experience in his nation can he truly be said to speak for those that are not contained within it? This concern is the final component that will be addressed in each author’s text.

Before discussing Chandra's article on the subject, it seems beneficial to briefly discuss the controversial article by Meenakshi Mukherjee at which he is aiming his response. Mukherjee's article, "The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English" begins with the oft-expressed concern that "English is not just any language—it was the language of our colonial rulers and continues even now to be the language of power and privilege" (2607). Mukherjee's article traces the use of English by Indian authors to writers such as Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, and Mulk Raj Anand. Of Anand, she specifically states that his "anger at the class and caste inequalities in the heirarchic Hindu society" is representative of an unconscious "anxiety" that pervades Indian-English authors. This anxiety of the first generation of Indian-English writers comes from a "desire to be rooted," but the anxiety of the new generation could easily be seen as an "anxiety [of]...the pressures of the global marketplace" (2610). It is through the function of the nation as commodity that this anxiety persists. According to Mukherjee, "There is no getting away from the burden of India if you want to write in English" (2609). It is a burden that plagues each writer, from Anand in the 1930s, to Rushdie in the 1980s, to Adiga in the new millennium. It is a common thread that unites each of these authors, and their effort to construct an identity within the nation is a reaction to this burden. Mukherjee's assertion is easy to reconcile with the current place that Indian-English authors occupy. When an Indian author resides on the same bookshelf as an African, Japanese, or Russian author (to name a few), is there not a significant pressure to relate the experience that makes them specifically "Indian?" Yet, in an increasingly

global market, this function becomes less important, as the desire to speak for an intangible, imaginary communal distinction diminishes.

Therefore, it is not surprising that this “anxiety” is examined and questioned by Chandra in largely personal terms, drawing on his experiences and reflections as a contemporary Indian-English author. A major concern that arises is the depiction of, and especially the explanation of, Indian culture and realities. According to Mukherjee, these images are the result of the East pandering to the West. For Chandra, it is much simpler: they are the images used to create a narrative. Thus, we see that these figures have vastly different conceptions of what it means to be an “authentic” Indian author. To Mukherjee, it is a quality to be strived for; for Chandra, it is merely an impossibility. Chandra, mimicking a popular sentiment among the Indian critical writing community, remarks that

The “Real India” is anywhere but where you are, that the “Real India” is in the urban slums, in the faraway villages of Bihar, in the jungles of the tribals. So if you write in English, and are improperly contaminated by the West, if you’ve travelled across the Black Waters and lost your caste, then the “Real India” is by definition beyond your grasp. “Real India” is never *here*, it is always *there*. “Real India” is completely unique, incomprehensible to most, approachable only through great and prolonged suffering, and unveils herself only to the virtuous (12).

Of course, we see the immediate and intentional contradiction of this description. It is this contradiction that fuels the narratives of Anand, Rushdie, and Adiga. By refusing to even *attempt* to create an “authentic” portrait of India, each author is thereby rejecting the notion of authenticity. The refusal to be authentic is the refusal of nation. It is the perseverance of the public and private representation of allegory, and the individual emphasis on the relationship of experience. At each stage, we find an unwillingness to sincerely engage with a construct or concept that is reductive or oppressive, whether it be in the form of the nation, allegory, or the specter of authenticity. Each author is creating something new outside of these constrictions. And this new landscape provides a space in which each character can exist.

The landscape of Indian-English writing and criticism is an intricate and intensely diverse landscape, one that reflects the inevitable pressures of writing from, within, or outside any nation. By first considering the role of the colonized writer through a Fanonian lens, then constructing an understanding of nation and its operation outside the world of each novel, then moving into an understanding of the function of national allegory in each novel, and finally considering how each connects to the pressures that Indian-English authors face in the struggle for “authenticity,” we will be able to appreciate how each author is representing and reconstructing his nation through specifically textual means. As an admittedly and consciously limited form, the medium of writing offers a creative means of expression for the author that acts as a form of construction. In writing, the author creates his or her world, which acts as an entirely personal construction, one that

ultimately juxtaposes the limited and endlessly constructed dominant version of the nation. It is a world defined entirely by experience, which makes the universal a personal matter and the personal actions of a character the allegorical functions of his nation. In narrative the author creates allegory not by creating a character that represents a nation, but by creating a nation represented by a character.

Chapter Two:  
Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*: Conversations for Strangers

Published in 1935, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* functions as one of the early examples of an Indian-English novel. The story follows Bakha, an untouchable, through one day in his life. It is a *bildungsroman*, charting the spiritual awakening and progress of the subject at the novel's center. It is, at once, a routine and remarkable day, one in which Bakha carries us through the everyday trials and struggles of his life and one in which he encounters horrible treatment and conditions. He is talked down to and belittled by elders and higher castes, and is subjected to extreme verbal and physical abuse. Stylistically, the novel owes as much to the tradition of Indian literature as it does to the European Modernism that so heavily influenced Anand. As such, the novel serves as a hybrid of these two seemingly divergent influences. This hybridization makes *Untouchable* a far more interesting and engaging novel than the polemical text it initially appears to be. Due to the specifically Modernist techniques employed by Anand, the novel transcends the simplicity of political rhetoric to challenge the purportedly grandiose impact the nationalist movement could have for a man such as Bakha. *Untouchable* becomes a novel of unknown transition—growth in an uncertain and unspecified direction, both for character and country. Anand demonstrates not only the means by which the individual and nation can coexist, but also how they can collapse.

### **Fashioning a National Narrative Without a Nation**

Before considering *Untouchable* as the novel of an emerging nation it becomes necessary to examine the social and political environment surrounding the book's publication. Mulk Raj Anand, an Indian-born writer, became part of the "first wave" of Indian-English writers, alongside figures such as R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. In his essay, "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*," Anand reveals that he sought out Mahatma Gandhi's assistance in revising the novel. According to Susheila Nasta, Anand is often seen as "belonging to a *national* tradition of Indian writing in English" (2). Specifically, Anand is considered as one of those Indian authors who helped to create the narrative of the nation, specifically through the novel *Untouchable* (2-3). The importance placed on the author's role in the creation of national narrative demonstrates how powerful this role could become. Anand, and his contemporaries, worked to create a vision of India for all of its citizens. This reading suggests that these authors helped to shape the national conversation and perception of India while the country was still in its infancy. By creating narratives especially focused on the experience of living in India and by attempting to provide access to the lives of individuals, these authors were said to serve the function of production described by Anderson. Authors, such as Anand, Narayan, and Rao were helping to shape India into the narrative of the nationalist movement. Allegory acted as a means of communicating fundamental principles and values of nation. Thus, when this form was found to be empty, the implications were far-reaching.

Not surprisingly, the novels of this period are often said to follow the traits of seventeenth-century fiction from Europe, not the more experimental forms being explored by other Modernists. As a result, Kwame Anthony Appiah, in “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” advances that it was seen as obvious for writers of this time that “New literatures in new nations were anti-colonial and nationalist” (120). This supposition makes a degree of sense in some of the work from this era. Much like Anderson’s suggestion that the construct of the nation is created through the novel and the newspaper, the social function of the novel for Anand would allow his work to function as a similarly historical document. Although there is sentimentality in this reading, the more difficult history of *Untouchable* casts a different light, one that is much murkier.

Anand also developed his writing in the company of Modernists such as E.M. Forster and James Joyce. When specifically considering Anand, one must also factor the major influences of Europe and the Modernist movement. As Susheila Nasta remarks, “one...might more accurately locate the book as deriving from a cross-cultural literary geography situated somewhere *between* Gandhi and Bloomsbury” (2). Certainly, we must examine the India of the 1930s in order to begin to understand how Anand’s novel factors within it. Anand, as a writer, found himself pulled between the Bloomsbury literary scene, of writers such as E.M. Forster and T.S. Eliot, and the Gandhian pro-nationalist movement sweeping across India at the time. However, many readings of *Untouchable* have largely overlooked Anand’s British influences and aspirations in favor of the appealing narrative of nationalism that flows

from the latter. While *Untouchable* seems to contain many elements of the nationalist novel it is often purported to be, it also contains experiments in writing that are entirely Modern in influence and intent. To ignore these elements is to restrict the complexity of Anand's text to a polemic. This partial reading creates the false impression of a novel of Indian nationalism. Certainly, there are elements of this influence in the text. But, ignoring the difficulty surrounding these elements dismisses the true complexity and implication of Anand's text.

*Untouchable* creates a dense landscape of experience for Bakha, one that conveys the triumphs and struggles of his reality while also delving into the constructional inventiveness of its writer's Modernist contemporaries. As such, the implications of this stylistic decision are crucial. Anand structures his novel between two cultures—there is a fragmentation at its core. This we see as a means of reconciling the two dominant, somehow incongruent influences in his life. We also wonder if these lives can be made to be compatible with one another. In this consideration, we must examine the means by which Anand structures his novel, as well as the language that dominates it. Does Anand permit a unity between the two influences? As we will see, these conflicting considerations manifest themselves within the text of *Untouchable*, most notably in the central interests and motivations of its central protagonist. In Bakha, Anand creates a character enamored with the lifestyle of the British, disgusted with the culture and customs of his country, and initially unable to find unity through this identity. Bakha's story is that of a man in isolation, complicated through Bakha's suggested pathway out of this situation.

### **Clothes Make the Man**

Very early in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, the novel's central protagonist, Bakha, is described as "a child of modern India," with "the clear-cut styles of European dress" (10). It is a moment that reflects a theme carried throughout the novel: Bakha is an Indian untouchable caught between the low-caste reality of his circumstance and the high society appearance of his desire. This most directly manifests in his attraction to clothing and "fashun," especially early in the novel, when Bakha is described as being "possessed with an overwhelming desire to live [the British soldiers'] life... He had felt that to put on their clothes made one a sahib too. So he tried to copy them in everything" (11). Bakha, early in the narrative, finds his identity tied to his attire. Bakha prescribes a high level of respect and importance to clothing, one that transcends caste. This is not necessarily his circumstance enforced by the narrative, but rather Bakha's interpretation of the glamour of Britishness. Yet, in a sense, Bakha's attraction is not incorrect. Certainly, his position of British superiority is troubling. But his ability to see himself outside of the rigid boundaries of caste is forward thinking, if ultimately flawed. While many criticisms can be leveled at Bakha, none can say that he is a static character. Bakha is a figure in perpetual transition—even if it remains uncertain the shape and implications of this transition. For, if one's identity is found in his clothing, it can be changed entirely on a routine basis. It is an identity of choice, one that directly contradicts the caste identity thrust upon him at birth. Bakha can become a wealth of different identities simply by altering his wardrobe. Of course, this only exists in the world of the text,

but Anand is demonstrating that there is incredible power in this world as well. Anand places Bakha at the center of a novel actively engaged with the prospect of transition: those moments when growth and development occur, whether they be in national or individual terms. For Anand's *Untouchable*, these outbursts of development seem to coincide with each other, creating an unspoken conversation between the character and his nation, both of whom are entering unknown territories.

For Bakha, "India," and any of the customs or rituals associated with its namesake, is a source of shame. After all, it is the country that has continually and routinely diminished and destroyed his humanity. The reader understands Bakha's life has been one of struggle and mistreatment as a result of conditions outside his control. For Bakha to regard his country with such plainspoken disgust is not only understandable, but inevitable. The British, on the other hand, are viewed by Bakha as a culture worthy of his admiration. Anand remarks that, "Whatever [the British] did was 'fashun.' But his own countrymen—they were *natus* (natives)" (19).

Although he questions the British, he is ultimately accepting of their values precisely because of their Britishness, assuming a kind of European superiority and envy.

However, the British are not entirely open or accepting of Bakha. At one point a British colonel makes no attempt to relate to or communicate with Bakha. Instead, he merely pushes his ideology on Bakha. Bakha is very critical of India, which has subjected him to debasing and humiliating treatment due to the circumstance of his birth. As such, Bakha is not given a space in which he entirely can be said to exist. So, at the genesis of the novel, Bakha is a man without a country. Thus, it seems

strange that it will be Bakha that will come to embody the country itself. Yet, through Bakha's increasing awareness of his circumstance and its implications, Anand develops this very connection. We will see, in Bakha's interactions with other citizens of his nation, how Anand's central figure might not be representative of India's past or its future, but the space occupied in its transition.

### **Multiplying Nations: The Crowd as Nation in *Untouchable***

Early in the narrative of Bakha's day, he is confronted by an angry group of people in the street. The situation arises after Bakha mistakenly makes physical contact with a man. However, it is how the crowd reinforces and amplifies the disgust and contempt of the first man that is our focus. By the time of this moment in the text, the reader has developed a relative understanding of and sympathy for Bakha. We have been privy to thoughts that distinguish him from other untouchables and, likely, have grown to develop a connection with his plight. Through this portrait, we do not see Bakha as a faceless caste member, but as an individual. This transition is one of the central goals and accomplishments of Anand's text. Bakha's specific character development acts as a contrast to the people in this crowd scene, who are described in very anonymous terms:

the crowd which pressed round him, staring, pulling grimaces, jeering and leering, was without a shadow of pity for his remorse. It stood unmoved, without heeding his apologies, and taking a sort of sadistic delight in watching him cower under the abuses and curses of its

spokesman. Those who were silent seemed to sense in the indignation of the more vociferous members of the crowd, an expression of their own awakening lust for power (49).

The terms employed by Anand to describe the crowd cast the group as a monolith, moving and acting as one agent. The crowd is denied textual individuality by Anand. As a result, we view them as a faceless representation; these people signify no specific citizens of India, but rather could take the form of a multitude. We see Bakha against the crowd, which acts for the nation as it currently exists. During the course of this event, Anand makes a connection between the treatment of Bakha by the faceless crowd and the treatment of the untouchables by the nation as a whole. His use of non-descriptive pronouns creates an impression of something amorphous and inhuman impressing upon Bakha, who has been carefully constructed and very consciously humanized through the preceding fifty pages. The reader is made to identify with Bakha, but is not granted the same access to the humanity of the crowd. It is at this point, once Bakha has been empathized with and constructed as an individual, that Anand begins to construct a national experience around his identity, his triumphs and his setbacks. We begin to see Bakha as a character seeking to change his circumstance, to grow and develop from the limited and suppressing caste of his birth. The reader might understand the crowd to be the present circumstance of the nation, but comes to desire an alternative. In a novel with an “untouchable” at its heart, it is those around him whom we inevitably find to be unclean.

### **Bakha's Allegorical Complications**

Anand's decision to fashion Bakha as an allegorical figure carries many complications and questions. To begin, we must examine how *Untouchable* functions as a national novel. Mulk Raj Anand, an upper caste Indian educated in Britain, is a man who seems initially suspect to convey the unflinching and harsh realities of the untouchables. In the introduction to *Untouchable*, E.M. Forster concludes that Anand is possibly the *only* writer capable of capturing this voice. Yet the British author of *A Passage to India* might not be the proper authority on the validity of a novel dealing with the life of a lower caste Indian man. We must examine Anand's ability, *but not his authority*, to accurately convey the experiences and trials of an untouchable in British India. Arun P. Mukherjee, in "The Exclusions of Postcolonial Theory and Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*," considers the juxtaposition that is seemingly inherent in the social position of Anand and his central protagonist. As she suggests, "We must examine and remain aware of the difference between 'a voice for' and 'a voice of'" (36). Using Mukherjee's supposition, let us analyze how Anand represents the untouchables in his novel, and if this transpires as an act of speaking "for" or "of." Anand might be attempting a sincere portrait of the life of an untouchable, but it remains uncertain if he can be entirely successful.

To begin in this line of inquiry, we should examine the ultimate aims and purposes of Anand's novel. Anand, in "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*," remarks that "Gandhi says the struggle for free untouchables is equal to the struggle for freedom for India" (95). In this remark, we see Anand make a specific connection between

these two issues. Anand also implicitly demonstrates his support of Gandhi and the nationalist movement. The connection between Mulk Raj Anand and Mahatma Gandhi is demonstrated in “On the Genesis of *Untouchable*.” Anand lived with the Mahatma for three months, seeking assistance in editing his manuscript (94). Anand does not underplay Gandhi’s influence. Instead, he fully embraces it, citing entire passages that were excised at Gandhi’s suggestion. We see, in this connection, the structural basis of Anand’s novel. At the core of Anand’s novel is the fundamental belief that there is a moral connection between untouchable rights and national independence. In this respect, it is entirely logical for Anand to construct his narrative by tying together these two threads. Anand wishes to connect the personal experience of the untouchable with the public outcry for an Indian nation.

However, as Mukherjee suggests, the basis of Anand’s assertion might be suspect. Anand is supplanting one power structure for another, without recognizing the common faults central to both. While he is genuine in his desire for a change in the treatment of untouchables, the bond formed with the nationalist movement becomes problematic for this effort. Mukherjee contends that, “In [*Untouchable*’s] repression of [the lower castes’] voices and in its displacements, the novel closely aligns itself with the version of nationalist historiography,” which is intimately connected to the discourse of the nationalist bourgeoisie as envisioned by Fanon. This discourse creates a system in which the new rulers merely become a replacement for the colonizers that have vacated the country. Mukherjee demonstrates the extent to which Gandhi became a voice *for*, but not *of*, the untouchables. For Mukherjee, the

narrative voice of Anand's novel, so thoroughly influenced by Gandhi's vision, becomes one of "middle voices alone" (40). We must examine the extent to which Bakha can function as an allegorical figure, and the extent to which he is restrained by Anand's authorial limitations. If Bakha is to remain marginalized, both by his nation and his narrative, can those people he is said to represent be made to move beyond any such limitation themselves?

This difficulty of Bakha's allegorical composition is exemplified in the employment of Anand's "one in place of many" device, which he employs to help connect the novel to the national circumstances encompassing his protagonist. As readers, we are obviously meant to sympathize with Bakha, especially following his mistreatment by the crowd on the street. Emotionally, Bakha is described as having "immense pent-up resources lying deep, deep in his body" (16). Physically, he is continually described as "glowing" and bathed in light (18). Anand also remarks that Bakha possesses "a nobility, strangely in contrast with his filthy profession and with the sub-human status to which he was condemned from birth" (20). Bakha is set as an untouchable who is somehow transcendent of the unfortunate circumstances of others in his position. He is given an elevated social position in the world of the novel that is denied to him in his country. This avenue of scholarship is pursued in Dinithi Karunanayake's essay "The Empire Writing/Righting Itself," which makes an argument that Anand's Bakha comes to embody the "colonialist myth" of a sympathetic Indian subject. Karunanayake remarks that,

Bakha would not only be totally acceptable to a European readership, but as a “good,” “masculine” colonial who is built along the lines that the colonial project decreed, he would even be admired. In fact, it is precisely because he is so “admirable” that the abominable treatment meted out to him generates unreserved sympathy for Bakha and equally strong revulsion for high caste Hindus (75).

The result of this sympathetic portrayal is the urge for the reader to elevate Bakha to the colonialist realm of Rousseau’s “noble savage.” We come to see Bakha not as a common untouchable, but as a young man somehow separate from his surroundings. Yet, it is my contention that Anand is aware of his employment of these elements and their sympathetic effect. The audience of this novel, an Indian novel written in English, would undoubtedly be international, especially with an introduction by Forster. Anand would be anticipating the cosmopolitan values of Europe, especially those in the literary establishment in the reception to his novel. To portray a sympathetic untouchable is a calculated political act—one that demonstrates that Anand is working with a full understanding of his audience.

One of the values of Karunanayake’s analysis of *Untouchable* is his effort to bring Mulk Raj Anand’s novel into the current discussions and considerations of postcolonial studies. By examining the means by which this prominent author of the first wave of Indian-English literature still resonates in relevance today’s critical discourse, Karunanayake creates a new space for Anand’s work to be examined. Karunanayake concludes that,

The significance of this kind of interventionary literature for post-colonialism today is the unearthing of a history that clearly demonstrates the vital manner in which literature can and did contribute to the politics of the day, not by being narrowly prescriptive but by articulating the nature of societal problems and the inadequacy of the solutions offered (83).

By providing a space for critical discussion of Anand's place in postcolonial scholarship, Karunanayake crafts an argument that broadens the scope of each author's respective lens. In this way, we begin to understand the means by which Anand's work embodies concerns that course through Rushdie and Adiga as well. This postcolonial consideration is relevant in its effort to place Anand in a political context. While examining Anand's use of allegory in relation to the nation, it can be easy to dismiss the technique as antiquated. Yet, by understanding the political and social context, as well as Anand's own motivations, it becomes clear that the application has practical implications. While Anand's Modernist tendencies ultimately work as a means of deconstructing the nation, the practicality of tying Bakha to India acts as a unifying element for the novel, creating a quiet but powerful political statement against the colonial system. Bakha is representative not of the India that exists, but of the imagined nation that could. As such, when we wish to see Bakha succeed, the reader takes part in a revolutionary act. Through allegory, Anand allows his readers to create an escape from the restrictions of Bakha's reality.

### **Bakha's Desire to Succeed**

In relating Bakha's trajectory for growth, Anand seizes on education as a means for advancement. This is both an interesting and logical avenue to pursue for Anand. For Bakha, the promise offered by education is very enticing, and it is a desire that was shared by many like him. According to Ramachandra Guha, working from biographies of untouchables written in the aftermath of independence, "There was a great expansion of school and college education... an entire generation of first-generation learners came into being... the school population doubled in the first decade after independence, the number of former untouchables in schools swelled eightfold or tenfold" (378). In *Untouchable*, Bakha desires an education for himself, but is left without the means to make this desire a reality. Instead, any education he might obtain is secondhand or pieced together. Unlike the untouchables freed from caste after independence, Bakha does not have access to education, but this does not prevent an intense yearning for education from guiding his actions.

Early in the novel, Bakha demonstrates a desire to learn English. Bakha offers to pay an elder boy in exchange for English language lessons (39-40). Bakha's recognition of the power of language, specifically the language of his colonizer, is very significant. For Bakha, English will grant him access to a world outside of the Indian caste system—it will gain him entry into the seemingly glamorous and alluring world of British culture. The neighborhood boys taunt him, saying he will be a "big man," acknowledging the cultural and socio-economic advantages of learning English in colonial India. While Bakha will have many moments of revelation in the novel,

this is among the few that is entirely prompted by him. He is not propelled or encouraged by any outside force. It is a moment that revolves around a free-market economic transaction. As such, it sets Bakha in a liberal, democratic system that promotes his own development. It is a situation diametrically opposed to the static, debased condition of his caste circumstance. As a result, it is crucial that this event occurs so early in the text. This event forms a portrait of Bakha as a man unsatisfied with his situation and desiring of change. Although the reader never sees these lessons come to a meaningful conclusion, the event frames Bakha's experiences through the remainder of his day, throughout which he will encounter many provocations, both encouraging and destructive.

### **Three Written Forms with Varied Success**

*Untouchable* uses a variety of languages to relate Bakha's experience. Anand seamlessly transitions between English and Hindi expressions, also infusing British colloquialisms throughout the novel. In one such passage, Anand writes, "Others were bathing to the tune of 'Ram re Ram,' 'Hari Ram' —crouching by the water... He remembered so well the Tommies' familiar abuse of the natives: '*Kala admi zamin par hagne wala*' (18). In "Comparative Colonialism: Joyce, Anand, and the Question of Engagement" Jessica Berman argues that,

If the new 'pigeon-English' of the Coolie or the Untouchable cannot be assimilated into either the standard English of Empire or the Hindi of a caste-conscious India, then it contains the possibility of resistance

to both. This neither/nor language provides the moment of potential power for those shut out of conventional hierarchies, since it creates its own system of signification (482).

The language used by Anand has a creative function. Through Bakha's language, his nation is created. This nation is his alone. Thus, when others try to subvert or alter his conditions, they are met with hesitancy and confusion.

During the final section of *Untouchable*, Bakha encounters three very different people, all of whom attempt to better his conditions for him in different ways. Each of these figures comes from a different place in Indian society, but all share a position significantly higher and more respected than that of Bakha. The Colonel, the Mahatma, and the poet each attempt to enlighten Bakha. Each figure specifically involves language of some kind in their attempt. However, there are specific reasons why each of these attempts ultimately fails to reach Bakha.

The first figure to approach Bakha during this section is the Colonel. Colonel Hutchinson is initially of interest to Bakha because of his European dress and manner. This encounter occurs first in the text precisely because of Bakha's intense interest in, and his belief in the superiority of, British culture. As Bakha remarks, after the colonel takes interest in him and touches him, "He could have cried to receive such gracious treatment from a sahib, cried with the joy of being in touch with that rare quality which was to be found in the sahibs" (125). His very presence is of significance to Bakha, who is so routinely disregarded and ignored by his society. The colonel's treatment of Bakha temporarily confirms the vision of Britishness that

he has held to for the bulk of the novel. Even though it becomes clear that Colonel Hutchinson's intentions are to convert him to Christianity, in which Bakha has no interest, Bakha is overjoyed by the gracious attention he receives. It demonstrates and reinforces his conception of the British, even though he does not entirely comprehend what the colonel says. Bakha does not imagine himself capable of understanding a figure for whom he has so much admiration. Therefore, initially, this miscommunication only increases his positive impression of the Colonel.

The effort to convert Bakha mostly consists of a repetition of a hymn of Jesus' sacrifice. This story is clearly a foreign concept to Bakha, which goes unrealized by the Colonel. As such, Bakha begins to deconstruct, and ultimately reject, the main tenets of Christianity that are necessary for belief. The Colonel is unable to communicate effectively to Bakha because he does not speak to his experience. Instead, he relies on language and allusions that are unknown to Bakha. The Colonel uses the language of Christianity, especially hymnals, "forgetting, as he had often done....that the sweeper-boy didn't understand a word of what he was singing" (129). Bakha ultimately leaves this conversation thinking that,

He was afraid of the thought of conversion. He hadn't understood very much of what the Salvationist said. He didn't like the idea of being called a sinner. He had committed no sin that he could remember. How could he confess his sins? Odd (130).

This internalization speaks volumes of this interaction. Through his own mental process, Bakha analyzes the situation with the Colonel's attempted conversion. It

makes him uneasy, mostly because he came away with an unsatisfactory understanding of the faith. This does not imply that a more thoughtful approach would have succeeded, just that the main cause of *this* misalignment was of language, not message. The Colonel only offers a cursory explanation of the concept of sin, which is an idea very foreign to Bakha's experience. A much more thorough and nuanced explanation is necessary in order for the Colonel to achieve any measure of success. Bakha, faced with the contrast of his own experience and the ideas espoused by Colonel Hutchinson, has no choice but to follow his own. These issues stand as binaries due to the Colonel's inability to understand Bakha and re-contextualize his own language toward his experience. Notably, Bakha walks away so disenchanted with the Colonel that he alters the language he uses to describe the man. He is no longer described by his British military title, but by his new, religious role. He has become a "Salvationist." As will be reinforced in each interaction, those attempting to "better" Bakha will each make this mistake, to varying degrees. It becomes important for the reader to relate beyond the ideas and into the circumstance of Bakha. Thus, Bakha makes the determination that the Colonel's beliefs are "odd," and moves about his day.

Bakha's next interaction occurs on a much grander scale. He encounters Mahatma Gandhi speaking to a crowd. This interaction contains much more promise for Bakha. Bakha finds himself once again in the midst of a crowd. While this remains a chaotic and intense depiction, Bakha is included and carried away by the movement: "He had not asked himself where he was going. He hadn't paused to

think. The word ‘Mahatma’ was like a magical magnet to which he, like all the other people about him, rushed blindly” (136). This impulsive movement toward Gandhi demonstrates the intense excitement over the figure, if perhaps not the message, of the Mahatma. There is a magnetism, a pull toward an identity, which Bakha feels with no small degree of conviction. For a period, Bakha becomes part of this crowd, and even sets himself in the lead, while the rest “followed like sheep” (137). Bakha determines, while within the crowd “with an instinct surer than that of conscious knowledge, that the things of the old civilisation must be destroyed in order to make room for those of the new” (137). This awareness of change demonstrates Bakha’s understanding of the importance of the events occurring around him. It is not an action that promotes this newfound awareness, but something within himself. Bakha represents a desire that cannot be defined fully in words. Language fails to offer a mode of expression for Bakha in this moment—the experience is outside his frame of reference. Anand connects Bakha’s impulse to a larger movement, something elemental that courses through the crowd as “an instinct.” This is not something that Bakha understands, but rather a movement that he *feels*.

Given Gandhi’s direct influence on Mulk Raj Anand’s novel, one would expect this scene to be an epiphanic and idealistic climax to Bakha’s journey. However, Bakha is actually quite unsettled by the scene, both before and during Gandhi’s speech. The language that voices Bakha’s reaction demonstrates this discomfort. As the crowd surges forth, Anand describes that,

Bakha *stopped short* as he reached the pavilion end of the cricket ground. He leant by a tree. *He wanted to be detached...* There was an *insuperable barrier* between himself and the crowd, the barrier of caste. He was part of a consciousness which he could share and yet *not understand* (137 emphasis added).

The detachment felt by Bakha speaks to the rigid distinction between himself and the crowd, composed entirely of higher caste citizens. We learn that Gandhi will deliver a speech that calls for the destruction of the caste system. For a moment, Bakha is overcome with the desire to rush into the crowd. Yet, he understands that nothing will fundamentally change as a result of this speech alone: “He realised he couldn’t rush even though the Mahatma had abolished all caste distinctions for the day. He might touch someone and then there would be a scene. The Mahatma would be too far away to come and help him” (142). The physical space between the Mahatma and Bakha demonstrates the distance between the nationalist movement and those people who would be most impacted by its success.

Anand does not include the text of Gandhi’s speech. The narrative is in Bakha’s language, which is not the voice of Gandhi or his movement. This narrative decision helps to grant Bakha a modicum of agency in the text. The rally does spark the beginnings of a national pride in Bakha:

Bakha was not interested in sahibs, probably because in the midst of this enormous crowd of Indians, fired with enthusiasm for their leader,

the foreigner seemed out of place, insignificant, the representative of an order which seemed to have nothing to do with the natives (144).

However, this awakening lacks a practical application. Bakha is given a swell of ideology, but the words are not given agency or action. Bakha is left with no place to put his newfound awareness into practice. Although Gandhi's speech was focused on Bakha, it does not speak to him. Thus, once again, we see an attempt to change Bakha's situation through a language he does not fully understand.

The final man to surround Bakha is an unnamed poet, who admittedly is the most successful in reaching Bakha. The poet's defined vocation is one of language and communication, which connects him to the thread of communication through oral "print-language" that runs from the Colonel through the Mahatma. However, the poet does not attempt to reach Bakha through language, like the prior attempts. Bakha learns from the poet, notably through eavesdropping, a circumstance which reinforces his subservient societal position. The circumstance of being ignored by the intelligentsia is one that is not unknown or abstract for Bakha. Although he is excluded from a conversation that is directly concerned with him, Bakha benefits from the discussion nonetheless. By only being a listener, Bakha is denied a participatory role. However, of his interactions, this is the most successful because it is fully dependent on Bakha's desire to continue listening. By failing to include him, the poet does not need to speak in a language Bakha will understand or misunderstand. Rather, Bakha obtains a small level of agency in his role as a listener. By choosing what he will take from the overheard conversation, Bakha is given

control of information. It is not a powerful function, but it acts as a catalyst. The function of the poet seems to mirror the intended function of the author for Anand: to provide a pathway for development without necessarily being polemical. He does not provide the active transformation one might have expected earlier from Gandhi's speech, but does provide an atmosphere to spark growth in Bakha, one that actively anticipates and challenges the domination of his nation and its directed role for him.

The poet introduces Bakha to "the machine," a toilet that will replace the menial and degrading labor of Bakha's vocation and caste. The poet provides a practical and functional means for advancing Bakha's life and opportunities. Interestingly, the introduction of this device stands in direct opposition to the nationalist movement as conceived by Gandhi, which actively opposed modernism's encroachment on society. That Bakha is made to see the betterment of his life through modernity demonstrates Anand's ambition to infuse European culture into India. This desire creates a distinct divergence from the nationalist narrative reading espoused by many Anand scholars. Anand may carry Gandhi's influence, and share a large degree of his ideology and optimism, but he does not permit his character to follow the agrarian model of Gandhi's vision. Instead, in its final moments, Anand reveals a lasting flourish of modernity and, in his narrative, one that defies the nation being developed, if not the one that will come to exist.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* is a complex and difficult text that demands inspection beyond its deceptively simple construction. Anand is consciously toying with conventions and styles to subvert both Indian and European conceptions of the

nation. By the novel's conclusion, we do not see a figure who has significantly grown or developed, but rather a kind of stunted *bildungsroman*—Bakha knows the nation he wishes to live within; he is merely waiting for it to catch up with him. Conversely, those attempting to aid Bakha know the nation and have a vision of the necessary steps to its creation, but they are not engaged with those that would be most intimately impacted. Anand's national narrative thus devolves into a novel of miscommunication and stunted language.

In his essay "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*," Anand remarks that, in James Joyce, "I had before me the model form as it had grown in the hands of the modern writer... Especially as... revealed... through their streams of consciousness, without resort to biographical commentary" (94). This statement demonstrates the difficult position occupied by Anand, and the complex novel that resulted. Anand found the future of the modern novel in Joyce, who shared something of his own conflicted colonial past. Clearly, these Modernist underpinnings find their way into *Untouchable*, and ultimately serve to challenge the attempt at connecting a national allegory entirely to Bakha.

Anand has fashioned a novel centered around a figure of political and historical relevance; a figure with which he could find sympathy. In the novel's delivery we see a clear connection between Fanon's description of the role of the colonized writer and the employment of the device of national allegory. These elements create a novel that is indispensable and immediate, embodying the force and anger of a colonial people and carrying these emotions beyond the individual through

an allegorical mode of delivery. In *Untouchable*, many voices try to speak to, and influence, Bakha. But through his narrative, Anand attempts to force us to something far more challenging and revolutionary: listen.

Chapter Three:  
Rushdie's "Collective Fiction" and the False Construct of National Allegory

In India, the diversities of race, language, and religion were far greater. Unlike those in Europe, these 'countries' were not 'nations': that is, they did not have a distinct political or social identity. This, [Sir John] Strachey told his Cambridge audience, 'is the first and most essential thing to learn about India—that there is not, and never was an India, or even any country of India possessing, according to any European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious.'

- Ramachandra Guha *India After Gandhi* (3)

Because a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history... was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will—except in a dream we all agreed to dream; it was a mass fantasy... India, the new myth— a collective fiction in which anything was possible, a fable rivaled only by the two other mighty fantasies: money and God.

- Salman Rushdie *Midnight's Children* (125)

On August 15 1947, India was made a nation. And yet, the Partition, arbitrary land division, fractured language states, and massive social and economic inequalities of the region made any notion of sustainable unity questionable from the outset. From its inception, for those both inside and outside the country, the question of an Indian "nation" has been debated and redefined. For many, it has been a question of religious stability; for others a question of divisive language and culture. Through each of these debates there has been, and still remains, an overriding concern for its "fragility."

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, written in 1981, has been heralded for its vibrant and complex portrait of India in the years following independence. Its

narrator, the exuberant and charismatic Saleem Sinai, does not conceal the connection he finds between himself and his nation; he actively engages in its construction. As a result, it is quite tempting for the reader to accept his allegory. Critically, the novel has often been considered as a national allegory, with Saleem signifying the historical and current status of India. However, this reading becomes problematic when we consider the complex manner in which Rushdie constructs the character of Saleem and the nation of India. To consider Saleem as an allegory for India is, at some level, to accept that there is a definition that can be obtained for the nation. Or, at minimum, to accept that Saleem believes there to be a singular and absolute definition for a nation. Throughout the novel, both of these considerations are shown to be compromised, often by Saleem himself. While, it is unproductive to completely dismiss the idea of Saleem as an allegorical figure, considering the extent to which he defines himself in this image, we must reexamine the conclusions that are drawn from this connection. I will argue that the function of Saleem's narrative is to actively construct a new community for himself. This community, at first, deceptively seems to be forged by forming an identity with his nation. However, it is through the act of writing that Saleem is able to define his experience and that of his nation in parallel terms. While Saleem the character is being defined by his nation, Saleem the writer is simultaneously defining the *parameters* for his nation. It is a conjunctive relationship, one which prohibits a complete allegory from being formed. Rushdie crafts a novel

that construes a false national allegory. When we begin to look closely, we can see the fine threads of its construction. Yet, this does not take away from its power or validity as a narrative. It also does not reduce how the novel can engage with the construct of nation. Saleem's national allegory is simply a fiction, another story from which he is attempting to define his meaning. And, what better source from which to pull meaning than the fragile construct of the nation? Perhaps Sir John Strachey's remark that "'India' was merely a label of convenience" was valid after all, if not for the same conclusions he had drawn (Guha 3).

### **The Fictional Construct of Nation**

To begin our discussion of the false construct of nation, let us again turn to Fredric Jameson and his comment that "all third-world texts are necessarily... allegorical and...are to be read as *national allegories*" (69), the reaction to which has been discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis. It is important to begin with this perspective as a means of demonstrating the conditions and perspectives in which *Midnight's Children* is born. There is a history of considering postcolonial texts as attempting to provide a voice for the nation. This is a problematic means of analysis for a text such as *Midnight's Children*, which relies on subtle complexities of narrative to subvert any allegorical overtones.

A better starting point for a discussion of the nation in *Midnight's Children* is Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, which treats the concept of nation as a similarly fluid and transitory functionary. The dates presented throughout Saleem's version of history serve to connect his experiences, to bundle them into the confines of "print-capitalism." Rushdie's novel is structured in a somewhat teleological fashion. It is building toward a pivotal point in Indian history: the Emergency of 1975-1977, which suspended democracy in the country. It contains personal and public histories surrounding the years from India's independence through these troublesome years. Yet, Saleem's stated objective is not to relate the experiences of his nation to his readers, but rather to relate himself to those of his nation. We find the thread of constructing meaning throughout the novel; it remains Saleem's central objective for his narrative. Anderson comments that,

the very conception of the newspaper implies the refraction of even 'world events' into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers; and also how important to that imagined community is an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time" (63).

Historical dates provide a means of threading together the multiplying characters, the various locations, and the endless experiences that unite to form Saleem's existence. Saleem defines his experience by these public dates. As he remarks, "Newspapers celebrated me; politicians ratified my position. Jawaharal Nehru wrote... 'We shall all

be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, a mirror of our own” (139). It is through these dates that Saleem is able to construct his narrative; it is through the public ritual of newspapers and national figures that Saleem is able to structure and find meaning in his life. That these dates and figures are subject to inaccuracies of memory only serves to emphasize their importance in creating Saleem’s national story.

Saleem’s narrative is filled with examples of his hesitancy to define his nation, or himself through that construct. Throughout his narrative, Saleem shows that the nation not only defines the conditions of his life, but also the absolute rendering of his being. In this way, Saleem is echoing figures throughout Indian history that considered the country more as an idea than a concretely defined place or image. Myriam Louvriot writes that, “When [Rushdie] dreams of [India], he, to a certain extent, also dreams of the world. His India is not like Indira Gandhi’s or the Mahatma’s” (45). This focus on how the individual experiences his nation serves to disengage the national allegory while keeping intact the pressures imposed on the individual from the nation. It retains conditions and causes without compromising the voice of Saleem.

While Saleem’s narrative is not analogous with the nation, the overbearing pressure of the latter still has an intense effect on his life. In slightly different terms throughout the novel, Saleem consistently pleads to the reader that “to understand me

you'll have to swallow a world" (441). He does this to demonstrate the multiplicity of voices, experiences, influences, and memories contained within even one man. If Saleem's own being exists in such fragmentation, how can he provide a voice for the nation? Rushdie deliberately creates this paradox as a means of exploring the false premise of such a pursuit. As Mark Mossman argues:

There is the fact that he is writing a novel about the colonized using the colonizer's language; there is also the fact that Rushdie cannot be a national writer simply because by being at first an expatriate, and now a forced exile, he in a sense has no 'nation.' Thus, this novel, *Midnight's Children*, this supposedly national narrative, is instead a kind of joke, a playful comment on the possibility of Rushdie even writing the emblematic national novel." (75).

Mossman makes a valid argument that the text seems, in light of the absence of a credible national allegory, to function as a kind of epic punchline. However, it becomes problematic when he questions Rushdie's ability to speak for the nation, due to his being an expatriate. This avenue, much like that of national allegory, is a misnomer. Rushdie's inability to be a national writer has less to do with his citizenship than with the fragile construct of the nation. Saleem does not ask the reader to swallow *the* world in order to understand him, only his own. For Rushdie, there is no authoritative nation; therefore, there can be no voice that is more valid

than another. The author refuses to engage in a debate based on his authority to speak for the nation. If no such place exists, no such standard can either. As Saleem remarks, “there are as many versions of India as there are Indians” (308). If every voice is considered, no voice can be eliminated. Simultaneously, the individual’s experience becomes the only means of expressing life within a nation, and an inevitably flawed representation as such. Each voice becomes a valid expression of the national experience. And, while no single voice can represent the entirety of life in India (or any nation), the act of identifying one’s self in this capacity acts as a democratizing force—it reassigns the power given to the nation and places it in the realm of the individual’s experience. Memory becomes both the only means of constructing the nation, and the very means by which its fragility is exposed.

### **Erroneous Memories and Too-Many-Fathers**

What I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: ‘my’ India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions. I tried to make it as imaginatively true as I could, but imaginative truth is simultaneously honourable and suspect, and I knew that my India may only have been one to which I (who am no longer what I was, and who by quitting Bombay never became what perhaps I was meant to be) was, let us say, willing to admit I belonged.”

- Salman Rushdie “Imaginary Homelands” (10)

In his essay “‘Errata’: Or, Unreliable Narration in *Midnight’s Children*,” from the collection *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie explicitly outlines errors, both

intentional and unintentional, present in his novel. As he remarks, “Originally error-free passages had the taint of inaccuracy introduced. Unintentional mistakes were, on being discovered, not expunged from the text but, rather, emphasized, given more prominence in the story” (23). For Rushdie, those passages felt false because they relied on the dominant narrative of the nation, not that of his character or his memory. The purpose of Rushdie’s essay is to convey the processes of memory and how these processes both validate and complicate the construction of the text. He is not asking the reader to consider his India to be the “Real India,” but rather is demonstrating that no such standard can exist. The only reality is inside experience, which is an entirely individual act. To keep the myth of a national allegory from disintegrating, some of these falsities seem to have been overlooked. However, these errors are fundamental to understanding how Rushdie produces a narrative that disguises itself as a national allegory for the purpose of rejecting the valid pursuit of such a convention.

The nation and the individual exist in co-habitation. This difficult pairing causes conflict for the individual. Saleem’s distortions of memory serve to correct these conflicts. They allow Saleem to reconcile these divergent realities. By choosing his own version, Saleem is engaging in his own development—he is actively choosing his own vision of the world, not because he knows his to be true, but because he realizes any attempt at such a construct will be inevitably incomplete. For Saleem, insisting on his own memory can act as a constant, a comforting sense of

security. In his essay “The World and the Home” Homi Bhabha explicates on the concept of memory, remarking that, “When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the distortions of memory offer us the image of our solidarity and survival” (379). Saleem constructs and relies on memory because, after the dissolution of nation, it is the only absolute he can rationally accept.

Saleem’s narrative is constructed through personal memory, even though it uses dates as reinforcers. Despite failed attempts at linearity he cannot function in a teleological fashion. Instead he relies on tangential connections that pull him between the past and present. Before introducing the midnight’s children, Saleem remarks that “history, in my version, entered a new phase on August 15, 1947—but in another version, that inescapable date is no more than one fleeting instant in an Age of Darkness” (223). Saleem’s concession, an attempt at humility, serves as a recognition of the limited form of his narrative historical record. It is only one of several such examples of the personal nature of Saleem’s narrative. It might be the admission of “memory’s truth” triumphing over linear structure and historical record, but it is also simply another means of structuring a narrative. The concession reduces his portrait from the national to the personal. Instead of a fusion of these two considerations, Saleem recognizes them as parallel structures; influenced by each other, but never intersecting. In order to consider how Saleem’s narrative memory alters and distorts

any supposition of a national allegory, let us consider a pivotal aspect of the novel: Saleem's many fathers.

Saleem takes in fathers throughout the novel at a rate that is quite comical. Ahmed Sinai, Wee Willie Winkie, William Methwold, Nadir Khan, Uncle Hanif, Professor Schaapsteker, General Zulfikar, Picture Singh: each is identifiable, to a certain extent, as a literal or symbolic father for Saleem. Even Prime Minister Nehru, through his letter to Saleem at his birth and his national stature as father of the nation, can be considered a paternal figure. With all these fathers in the delivery room, tracing Saleem's lineage is a little difficult, to say the least.

These multiplying fathers function as a clear metaphor for the nation. Saleem is, as he repeats quite often, a product of many people; another unifying thread for his narrative can be the continual traces of influence for the complex, multi-faceted being that he becomes. There is an obvious parallel between Saleem's ever-expanding list of fathers and the multitude of influences that developed the nation of India. The variety of different patriarchal figures can represent the voices involved in its independence: Mohandas Gandhi's "Quit India" non-violence movement; Jawaharlal Nehru's pushes for modernism; Vallabhbhai Patel's strong support for a unified India; B.R. Ambedkar's social pleas for caste reform; Lord Mountbatten's somewhat arbitrary land division; Muhammad Ali Jinnah's push for two nations. Each, among scores of other figures in the public and private sector, played a fundamental role in

the foundation of the Indian nation (Guha 41-50). Yet, to conclude that Saleem's many fathers represent the many origins of India limits the degree to which we can understand their significance. Like many of the other ties Saleem creates to his nation, the metaphors are mixed.

His fathers rise and deflate at different points in his life; the father of his childhood, Ahmed Sinai, is not the father of his later years, Picture Singh. Each is constructed and selected for his metaphorical attachment to a time in Saleem's life. The fathers are also often confused with each other. Willie Wee Winkie, Ahmed Sinai, and William Methwold all occupy the role of paternal father, for a time, in Saleem's narrative. This intentionally convoluted lineage acts to subvert the allegorical tie between Saleem and his nation. While the figures in India's movement each work in somewhat different capacities, providing their own contributions to the national construct, Saleem's fathers function in a different capacity. These are fathers of memory, subject to its exaggerations and inconsistencies. In their impermeability, their constant fluidity, Saleem's fathers function more as an autonomous unit; their collective role unites them, but confusion serves to undermine these ties. Once again, Saleem's memory diminishes the ties to a national allegory. These fathers become another victim of narrative; another thread of memory from which Saleem is desperately trying to construct meaning.

Early in his life, Saleem begins retreating to the washing-chest. Inside Methwold estate, a holdover from British colonization, this small space provides “a hole in the world, a place which civilization has put outside itself, beyond the pale, this makes it the finest of hiding-places” (177). It is no surprise that, in this place, Saleem is awakened to the community of the midnight’s children. In the world of the text, Saleem attempts to construct his own community through the Midnight’s Children Conference, a meeting for those born in the first hour of India’s independence. The M.C.C. provides another national allegory, to that of the National Congress. Just as Saleem provides a personal list of fathers, the National Congress acts in a similar capacity, albeit within the public sector.

However, it is Saleem’s own admission of its incredulity that serves to undermine this allegorical device. As he remarks, “the midnight’s children shook even Padma’s faith in my narrative” (242). Saleem’s awareness of the far-fetched nature of the midnight’s children, outside of his narrative, is defended by his repeated appeal:

Memory’s truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else’s version more than his own (242).

This passage emphasizes the ultimate purpose of Saleem's narrative: It cannot function as a national voice, because the voice of India (as of any nation) is one of such fragmentation that no single voice, not even one of the considerable multitudes that Saleem purports to contain, could credibly do so. Thus, the personal is not the national. Rather, the national influences the personal. Saleem's narrative is national only in the sense that the external influences of the nation impact his life, as they do every individual within it. Saleem's narrative is a personal quest, a journey to understand himself through the lens of the nation. The construct is intentionally manipulated in order to suit his purpose—it is fashioned to become the fiction which Saleem will find most meaningful.

### **Collecting Fictions**

Scraps of memory: this is not how a climax should be written... This is not what I had planned; but perhaps the story you finish is never the one you begin.

- *Midnight's Children* (491).

To begin a discussion of the means through which Saleem constructs the nation, it is prudent to turn back to Anderson's theory of imagined communities. Anderson contends that language plays a fundamental role in the transformation of religious communities into national ones. As he says in *Imagined Communities*, "From the start the nation was conceived in language, not in blood, and that one could be 'invited into' the imagined community" (145) Essentially, language *enables* the

formation of nations through exposure to new cultures and technologies. And admission into the community is permeable.

In this light we begin to see national identity as a narrative construction. The nation is a construct that is created through language. Essentially, Saleem is constructing both his identity and his nation in conjunction; their creation is simultaneous. Considering their close relationship with each other, it is no surprise that these two constructs intertwine so frequently. In Robert Bennett's "National Allegory, or Carnavalesque Heteroglossia? *Midnight's Children's* Narration of Indian National Identity," he argues this idea through a combination of Anderson's imagined communities and Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, considering the manner in which an imagined community is created in the novel through a multitude of different voices.

Because "language divided [India]," according to Saleem, it is only fitting that each of his attempts to unify exist in this realm. His birth, by its connection to time, is meant to be a unifying event for the country. By framing the development of his being through linguistic metaphor, Saleem demonstrates his connection to the construction of language:

What had been (at the beginning) no bigger than a full stop had expanded into a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter; now it was bursting into more complex developments, becoming, one

might say, a book—perhaps an encyclopedia—even a whole language... (111).

This reliance on the construction of language is crucial to understanding how nation functions in *Midnight's Children*. Saleem is constructing his identity, his world, through a linguistic form. He is actively filling the role of Anderson's "print-capitalism" in this sense. In this representation, the development of India exists as nothing more than an imagined construction from Saleem's memory; that the national allegory seems to work so well only serves to demonstrate how captivating the myth of nation has become, both for Saleem and his audience.

The Midnight's Children Conference and Saleem's narrative both serve as linguistic explorations of unity. While the former quickly falls into reductive quarrels and name-calling, the latter seems to provide Saleem with a stronger sense of permanence (if only because he is forcefully preserving this attempt in a somewhat artificial form). Interestingly, Saleem chooses to complete his discussion of the midnight's children in "plain, unveiled fashion" (224). This sincere, but fleeting, commitment to structure, an attempt to create a kind of historical record, speaks to the fallibility of the midnight's children. It is when Saleem actively engages in the act of writing his narrative that he is allowed any modicum of success. In his essay "Borderline Fiction: Writing the Nation in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*," David Watson argues that:

Two worlds are created through the act of writing: the space of the writer, Saleem Sinai, and the space he creates through writing where India and its history confront the biographical events of Saleem's life. Through the manipulation of ontological levels in the text this space is viewed from the other side of writing—it is the space where writing becomes visible... it is an agency, not a space” (Watson 215).

For Watson, the “space of writing” is another place from which Saleem can draw meaning; a vantage point from which he can further manipulate his constructions. This manifests in a physical space which language occupies. Thus, language comes to occupy a function that nation cannot. Because Saleem can possess it, control it, and manipulate it for his purposes, language provides the meaning that he so desperately longs for in the text. At the end of the novel, we find Saleem constructing his own ending, through the possibilities of narrative. The nation, for him, has dissolved. The world he inhabits has become nothing more than fragments. As he says, “life unlike syntax allows one more than three” (533). And yet, his narrative is allowed to provide a kind of closure. It is an obvious construction, of course; yet it is a construction that can be manipulated and reconfigured by Saleem. It provides an agency and sense of meaning that the construct of nation, and by extension national allegory, cannot.

In “Bombay,” an essay that is both an analytical discussion of *Midnight's Children* and a narrative reflection on the author's own memories of the city of his

childhood, critic Homi K. Bhabha says that, “The narrative ‘energy’ builds up list by list, word by word, name by name, place by place, in that signature style of layered descriptions of people and things” (723). It is this “narrative ‘energy’” that is the unifying feature of the novel; everything Saleem accumulates serves to fuel its development. Here lies the ultimate function of Saleem’s use of national allegory: he is collecting fictions. These fictions manifest in various forms—in the stories of people, of religions, of politics and of the idea of the nation itself. Yet, they are each somehow made to be incomplete. Combined, they form a “collective fiction,” using Rushdie’s phrase, to help define Saleem. Nation is one of these fictions. Yet, ultimately it is a false construction. While it has aided in his development, Saleem’s India cannot be said to only be allegorical; after all, it’s still being written. And it is in writing that these fictions can be formed, manipulated, and produced, through the filter of memory; only in writing can Saleem construct that which he desires above all else: meaning.

That Saleem finds this meaning by redefining the nation that has cast him aside demonstrates the ultimate aim of his narrative. By creating his world, and creating an allegory for the nation that resides within and relies upon his being, he makes himself indispensable. This act serves to subvert the overarching narrative of the nation. In this new India, Saleem Sinai is at the center, and he cannot be removed. Anderson’s image of the fragility of the nation finds no more fitting an allegory than

Saleem Sinai: self-aggrandizing, slightly egomaniacal, forever at risk of fracturing into a million indecipherable pieces, and held together by his own mythological tale.

Chapter Four:  
Building the Rooster Coop: Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Balram Halwai, the charismatic and murderous narrator at the center of Aravind Adiga's 2008 Booker Prize winning novel, is telling us stories. He makes no effort to hide this; they are the stories of his success and those of India's history. As such, the development and intention of these stories becomes an interesting avenue to pursue when considering the implications of Adiga's novel. Where can we see Adiga's Balram Halwai in the literary context of Anand's *Untouchable* and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*? What implications does Adiga's character draw out when we consider this context? Adiga's novel takes the form of an epistolary novel, but assumes the function of a man writing his own emancipation; he is creating the world and the moral terms of his freedom from the nation that has so defined his life. As a result, processes and decisions of language become central to Balram's development as a character and as a narrator. We come to understand the former through the lens of the latter, a relationship Balram understands and exploits to his benefit. The allegorical structure conveys a national narrative framed within the familiar construct of a *bildungsroman*. As such, Balram can manipulate the reaction to his life. Yet, this ploy is not used to gain the reader's sympathy. Rather, it is intended as a much grander and more implicating device.

Balram's is the story of an "Indian entrepreneur," and in striking ways, it works as the ethically muddled marriage of *Untouchable* and *Midnight's Children*. Working from the concerns and themes of these two touchstones to create a strikingly

darker and more morally ambiguous novel. Adiga's *The White Tiger* contains a structure and social-consciousness similar to Anand, as noted by Sneharika Roy in "The White Tiger: The Beggar's Booker." In *The White Tiger*, Roy notes that, "as opposed to, say Anand, the setting is no longer colonial India but postcolonial India where the servant-master relationship is more than ever riddled with ambivalence" (58). Roy also uses Rushdie as a source of comparison for Adiga. He contends "Balram is...symbolic of a certain class...not of the entire nation, as is the case with Rushdie's Saleem Sinai" (59). However, while Balram may not be able to represent his nation, his narrative clearly aims to do so. Like *Untouchable* and *Midnight's Children*, *The White Tiger* is the result of the Indian nation of its time—an India critically divided by economic class, and the anger that inevitably results from such vast inequality. Balram Halwai seems to be best identified as an amalgam of Anand's and Rushdie's creations, combining the most combustible attributes of each author's protagonists and pushing the narrative into more violent and explosive territory. Balram is shown to possess the rage of *Untouchable*'s Bakha, often casting this anger toward the vast economic inequality he experiences in his daily life. He also possesses the charisma and grandeur of Saleem Sinai, but using this charm to enchant his audience. Balram's story is not the attempted rise of a low caste man through self-determination. Nor is it the struggle of a middle-class man to bring together the fissures of his nation through narrative. His experience is not informed by the rich cultural tradition of India's past, but rather its difficult and divided economic present. It is a novel that emphasizes the destructive and unsettling desires of the self. As

Stuart Jeffries commented in an article for the *Guardian*, “*The White Tiger* makes... *Midnight’s Children*... seem positively twee.” Considering the explosive conclusion of the latter novel, this is telling indeed. And, taking a cue from Saleem Sinai, Balram proclaims himself to be speaking for his nation.

Balram’s India is not Bakha’s, nor is it Saleem’s. It is a nation that belongs to no one but its author, as all nations inevitably come to do. And, in this last consideration, *The White Tiger* is unsettlingly hopeful, for Balram establishes conditions for his nation in which he proceeds to overcome and thrive in spite of difficulties. Whereas Bakha and Saleem are both destroyed, to a degree, by the nation of their creation, Balram is wildly successful. He creates the path for his success, whereas Bakha and Saleem both try to forge within the nation that opposes them. Balram sets conditions for survival in India that are all but impossible to succeed within. Therefore, his rejection and rebellion against them is justified for the reader. By framing his narrative in this way, gaining our sympathy before asking for acceptance, Balram is utilizing the charismatic and manipulative form of written language. This India is Balram’s creation, and thus it is his to define for us.

### **The Man of Tomorrow**

Balram, early in his narrative, states that, “I am tomorrow” (4). In this statement, he is speaking not only for himself, but for the nation of India that he claims to represent. He describes a new system of success, one that specifically focuses on the education of the individual, outside the traditional national and societal

structure. He proceeds to comment that he, and the “thousands of others” like himself, are “an odd museum of ideas,” formed from a variety of different sources. As a result,

All these ideas, half formed and half digested and half correct, mix up with other half-cooked ideas in your head, and I guess these half-formed ideas bugger one another, and make more half-formed ideas, and this is what you act on and live with (8).

He concludes by stating that, “Entrepreneurs are made from half-baked clay.” He is one such entrepreneur, and he is determined to reveal “the truth” about India and, more specifically, Bangalore (2). There are several integral aspects of Balram’s key statement, but none are as prescient as the undercurrent of anger in Balram’s prose. The reader finds it in Balram’s repetition of “half,” which demonstrates how he feels he has been underserved by his country. And, as a voice for “thousands,” he intends for this to carry weight. It is the language of unfulfilled promise—a seemingly endless chain of poverty and an incomplete education resulting in a mixture of unrealized ideas and dreams. In Balram’s angry depiction, there are thousands like him, but there are a very rare few willing to give in to the conditions required of success. It is the weight of “Dark India.” This anger, not so much for the people of India but for the inequality of Balram’s circumstance, remains throughout the narrative. Balram, like Bakha, knows the value of education, because it is something that has been taken away from him. Education is something that Balram must work for and, under the conditions he establishes, every scrap of knowledge that he obtains is a challenge to the nation. When Balram speaks of “slitting Mr. Ashok’s throat,” we

believe him; his language has been constructed from violence and “Darkness,” so could we conceive him to be composed of any less?

The image of “Dark India,” as described by Balram, finds its roots in Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* and is continued in *Midnight’s Children*, especially in the character of Shiva. Each of these texts somehow relates the experiences of a hidden Indian underclass. Balram’s depiction of the “Darkness” of his rural childhood, and subsequent “Light” in the technological, modern cities of New Delhi and Bangalore, casts a critical eye on a nation grappling with its relatively newfound economic progress. By conveying the extreme poverty of modern rural India, Adiga forms a literary thread between these two novels, spanning almost seventy-five years of national history. Of course, it is also not coincidental that Adiga, writing an Indian novel from the voice of an Indian subject in English (a language his narrator explicitly says that he does not speak), channels one of the form’s first wave of practitioners. And thus, once again, many of the issues that confront Anand (and Rushdie) fall upon Adiga. Once again the nation is fragmented and somehow irreconcilable with the path of the individual. But whereas Bakha and Saleem struggle within this, Balram’s path is decidedly different: the narrative he creates allows him the agency to form his own.

### **Dividing the Nation**

Before considering Balram as a character, it seems conducive to examine the terms in which Aravind Adiga’s protagonist sets his nation. Balram writes a telling

aside early in the novel. Bound between both paragraph and parenthesis, Balram comments, “(For this land, India, has never been free. First the Muslims, then the British bossed us around. In 1947 the British left, but only a moron would think that we became free then)” (18). The language of this passage is noticeably casual and dismissive of India’s colonial history, but equally so of its subsequent independence. This is a thread that will continue throughout the narrative, with Balram being especially dismissive of India’s most prominent and respected figure of independence, Mahatma Gandhi. Each author examined in this thesis uses the cultural products and touchstones of the nation for a different purpose. For Adiga, these images serve as a barrier to success: relics of a future that was never realized, but continually promised. In “The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness,” Fanon remarks that, “Refusing to break up the national bourgeoisie, the leader asks the people to plunge back into the past and drink in the epic that led to independence” (114). The power of this national narrative, this epic and celebratory story, is to retain support of and belief in the structures of power. In *The White Tiger*, Balram is dismissive of India’s past, and specifically its national epic of independence and its figures, because he must be. This attitude helps to separate him from the dominant power structure (the “Rooster Coop,” as he will later term it) imposed by his nation.

By corrupting the narrative that dominates his nation, Balram creates a space for his own. In his essay “DissemiNation,” Homi K. Bhabha remarks, “The emergence of a hybrid national narrative that turns nostalgic past into the disruptive ‘anterior’ and displaces the historical present—opens it up to other histories’

incommensurable narrative subjects” (318). By chipping away at India’s past, Balram allows his story to speak for itself. It is a means of creating his own world, and his own morality.

Balram claims that, “To break the law of his land—to turn bad news into good news—is the entrepreneur’s prerogative” (32). In Balram’s language, we see a binary established between the regulatory function of government and the freeing prospect of commerce. For the individual, life outside of the government seems not only glamorous, but also necessary. This juxtaposing consideration is only the first in a series of oppositions that Balram uses to establish his nation. For Balram, the act of establishing the nation as something opposed to his success serves a very specific function: it provides him access to a way out.

### **Balram’s Contradicting Constructions**

By his own account, Balram Halwai is a representation of India. The fashion of his narrative, a letter purporting to relate the experience of Indian life furthers the image of Balram as a representation. However, he is also a figure that exists in anonymity. The reality of Balram’s existence is demonstrated when he is waiting for Mr. Ashok, his master, in the car in the business sector of New Delhi. After realizing that, “Somewhere inside...were the big men of this country,” Balram remarks that he “wanted to run around shouting: ‘Balram is here too! Balram is here too!’” (114). Balram acknowledges his former position in his country, but uses it as a means for helping his readers understand the inequality that drives his actions.

Even Balram's name is a source of anonymity and confusion. Balram is given the name "Munna," or "boy," at his birth (10). On his first day of school, his teacher remarks, "'We'll call you...*Ram*. Wait—don't we have a Ram in this class? I don't want any confusion. It'll be *Balram*'" (11). The circumstance of Balram's name provides insight into the conditions into which he is born. Much like Saleem Sinai, Balram Halwai will have a series of names and a series of fathers during his life. These perpetual shifts intentionally distort his narrative, as he creates a world in which he can maneuver between different classes and circumstances. However, it will be the symbolic name he is given that will provide the most inspiration for his construction.

Balram is, much like Bakha and Saleem, cast as outside his class and unique in his personal abilities. In school, this distinction is made very clear:

"Any boy in any village can grow up to become the prime minister of India. That is [the Great Socialist's] message to little children all over this land."

The inspector pointed his cane straight at me. "You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals—the creature that comes along only once in a generation?"

I thought about it and said:

"The white tiger."

"That's what you are, in *this* jungle" (30).

The development of this passage is interesting in the manner in which it defines Balram's future. The inspector begins by re-telling the democratic myth of success through upward mobility, that anyone can reach the highest point of power in the country. And yet, it is only Balram that is shown to possess the qualities necessary for such a future. He is cast as possessing the qualities of a particularly violent animal. This use of animal imagery, which Adiga furthers through the slumlords that occupy the Darkness of the novel, taking names such as the Stork and the Mongoose based on physical descriptors, echoes Fanon's assertion that in the face of rampant class inequality, "The rich no longer seem respectable men but flesh-eating beasts, jackals and ravens who wallow in the blood of the people" (133). By casting these figures as animals, Adiga's novel fulfills a kind of fableistic quality, emphasizing the surface aspects of its allegory. This divide between the rich and poor pervades the novel and is elemental to understanding Balram's India.

And yet, the inspector believes in the myth of success. The inspector is insistent of the unique and special qualities that lie in Balram. The inspector then instructs Balram to attend "a real school far away from here" (30). This admission informs Balram's character, but contradicts the portrait he casts of himself. Balram cannot exist both as everyman *and* extraordinary example. However, this is precisely what he asks of his reader. We are to reconcile that he is representative of India's "Darkness," and is emblematic of the hundreds of thousands of people in this circumstance. Yet, we are also meant to view Balram Halwai as separate, distinct, and distanced from these people. As such, we might consider Balram's life as a

representation of his country and not his people. It is a representation more aligned with the aims of Saleem Sinai, if not altogether apparent to Balram from the outset. Balram even possesses some of Saleem's aspirations of grandeur. His role in the novel seems to be to lead the reader, through his narrative, from the "Darkness" into the "Light," much like his own ironic characterization of Gandhi, enshrined in a famous statue in Bangalore, "leading his followers from darkness to the light" (241). But, as Balram offhandedly remarks, "He's no Gandhi, he's human" (149). Gandhi's ascension is that of a man to godhood stature, for Balram. In his own tale, as Balram makes clear throughout, there is no opportunity for ascension—only advancement. Gandhi's India, for Balram, does not permit the morality required to ascend. Balram's Gandhi, much like his India, is a creation based on myths and relics that have been espoused from those before him. This image of Gandhi is yet another symbol of the past that Balram must tear at in order to create his own reality, for the image of Gandhi is so intertwined with the myth of democratic India. If Balram wishes to subvert the construction of the latter, he must begin by questioning the foundation of the former. Gandhi is no longer a human figure for Balram, as he is to Anand's Bakha. Rather, he encompasses an entire ideology—one that ceases to exist, and yet is still espoused to maintain the national story.

Balram's terms for success are defined as specifically economic, and as such are limited to this realm. Much of Balram's narrative takes on the task of justifying and mythologizing the actions Balram has taken. It is the charismatic narrative of Saleem Sinai used for the sole purpose of the self. In "Exciting Tales of Exotic Dark

India: Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*," Ana Christina Mendes claims that "The trajectory of [Balram's] life purportedly reflects the actuality of contemporary India which, alongside the information-technology boom, retains poverty, corruption, and inefficiency" (280). Mendes goes on to explain how, in this manner, Adiga has come to be emblematic of the "anti-Rushdie," as many Indian-English novels find themselves unfairly categorized in the contemporary landscape (Of course, as Mendes points out, Rushdie's work in stories such as "The Free Radio" is as gritty and sinister as many of the novels claimed to be "anti-Rushdie"). Mendes comes to conclude that Balram is "strategically inauthentic," a self-contradictory and ironic character meant to dispel any sincere aims to such. At its conclusion, *The White Tiger* does not represent "light" India, "dark" India, or even "India." Toward the end of the novel, Balram repeats a phrase, "There is no end to things in India" (275). In different turns it is meant to be optimistic and ominous. It is not difficult, given the global awareness of *The White Tiger* and the global experience of its author, to extrapolate implications beyond Balram's nation. Yes, there is no end to things in India, but there is also no end to things in the world. Yet, Balram has begun his story exclaiming to be the "man of tomorrow," claiming that the end of the West is coming. Balram understands that this contradiction helps to inform the image he has created of himself. He is both a product of the past and an entirely new vision of its future. And, in this awareness, we see that Balram has been telling us stories not of India, but of himself, and the world he has created to inhabit. Thus, it is quite intriguing to consider how this constructed world operates.

### **Balram and the Way of the World**

Early, in his justification to Mr. Jiabao for writing his letter, Balram expresses “great admiration for the ancient nation of China,” which he has learned about from “the book, *Exciting Tales of the Exotic East*,” which is “mostly about pirates and gold in Hong Kong” (3). Balram’s reliance on this text displays his fascination and dependence on recording, mythologizing, and even creating national narratives. In these opening pages, he conveys numerous times how important he finds these stories—so much so that he is upset that his India is not the narrative that will be conveyed to the premier of China.

Throughout *The White Tiger*, Balram espouses many theories on the way of India and the world at large, all of which are posited as inarguable fact. Balram avoids cell phones because they “corrode a man’s brain... as all of us know” (33). He draws conclusions about people based on superficial information, often using no more than a job title or ethnicity. Yet, the theory he seems to abide by most is that of the Rooster Coop. According to Balram, the Rooster Coop traps millions of men and women, and there is only one means of escape:

The pride and glory of our nation, the repository of all our love and sacrifice, the subject of no doubt considerable space in the pamphlet that the prime minister will hand over to you, *the Indian family*, is the reason we are trapped and tied to the coop.

...Only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed—hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters—can break out of the coop.

That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature (150).

Balram's ascent through social ranks is one that has a societal cost. In order to ascend in his country, he must turn his back both on his family and the societal contract to which he has unwillingly accepted. Thus, Balram Halwai's journey is one of distance: from both his familial lineage and his national heritage. The Rooster Coop places Balram and his desire to succeed in direct contrast with the path laid forth by his nation. This directly contrasts *Untouchable*, which allows for Bakha and his nation to be reconciled, albeit in a somewhat problematic fashion. By Balram's definition, in order to succeed in India, one must cut his ties to both his nation and his humanity.

Also worth examining is the way in which Balram achieves his freedom: by murdering Mr. Ashok, a figure that contains contradictions almost as startling as our narrator. Mr. Ashok has traveled the world and espouses opinions which often come from his experiences in America. Balram portrays him as self-absorbed and removed from the world of the poor, but also as a man of humility and compassion for his servant. Mr. Ashok often defends his servant, as he does when his brother begins reading Balram's mail. Mr. Ashok immediately questions his brother for reading Balram's private letter, and after its reading and his brother's attempt to shame the servant, remarks that, "Sometimes they express themselves so movingly, these villagers" (163). Yet, this passage also reveals the low regard Mr. Ashok has for Balram, as he expresses his surprise at his eloquence. Mr. Ashok, worldly and cosmopolitan in his outlook, is an Indian citizen that employs servants. Whereas

Anand's Bakha casts his anger at the British, Balram must direct his toward Mr. Ashok, a wealthy Indian man. Balram's anger is not directed at a colonial figure, but the postcolonial mimic of one. In "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," Homi. K. Bhabha remarks that, "If colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figure of farce" (77). By casting Mr. Ashok as the farcical embodiment of his oppression, Balram creates a world in which his murder is not only acceptable, but also necessary.

### **Adiga's Big Social Novel**

Adiga's novel uses many of the constructs and tropes of the nineteenth century social novel, which were being built alongside the greatest period of nationhood. The epistolary form, and the author's own comments on the aims of the novel, recall an earlier period in literature, when authors were grappling with the ways in which the novel could influence the social sphere. Adiga, in the *Guardian* interview, comments that, "My book will too cause widespread offense. Balram is my invisible man, made visible. This white tiger will break out of his cage." Adiga mentions Balram's "invisibility" through the course of many interviews. It would seem that his efforts to make Balram so charismatic and diabolical are an effort to subvert this invisibility. He is consciously taking a character that is typically overlooked in his society and making it impossible for his readers to ignore or forget him. It is a strategy that consciously recalls the socially focused novels of the nineteenth century.

And thus, in the tradition of many authors before him (including Anand), Adiga finds himself fashioning a character outside of his experience with a social function relative to the world he sees, or perhaps chooses not to see, around him. And, as a result, we see a return to many of the authenticity issues that have followed Anand, Rushdie, and almost every Indian author that has made the decision to write in English. Mendes says that, “The writer’s assertions of authenticity are based on his groundedness in a ‘Real India’ where speakers of English only amount to a meagre percentage of its inhabitants: Balram clarifies that he does not speak English from the outset” (288). As a result, there is a disconnect between the reality of his circumstance and the reality of our narrative. Balram cannot speak the language of his narrative. And, as he is speaking to the leader of China, it seems that there is a second level of linguistic disconnect. And yet, the decision to write in English, the internationally recognized language of business and commerce, seems a calculated consideration.

As mentioned, Balram notes that “Neither [Wen Jiabao] or I speak English, but there are some things that can only be said in English” (1). How can we reconcile this statement, made on the first page, with the narrative that exists? The decision that Adiga makes, to fashion a narrative from Balram’s voice and perspective seems in conflict with his decision to write in English. Just as Balram is “half-formed” and a collection of various national scraps collected through his life experience, he is also kept at a distance from his own narrative. Adiga frames Balram’s voice in a language that neither he or his intended audience understand. And yet, Balram understands the

power and influence of this language on his life. This conflict acts as a constant reinforcement of the inability (for Balram, India, or anyone) to centralize and exist in one space and location. Balram's statement casts the entire narrative as self-aware construction, just as Balram's "India" is a consciously formed and individually located expression.

The means given for Balram's escape from the "Darkness" are provided entirely through his narrative. While these means have very severe consequences, they are consequences of a narrative defined by its narrator existing entirely within his created world. This narrative allows Balram a freedom outside of his nation. It is the freedom of the "entrepreneur" that he is so passionately trying to define for his Chinese audience. Of course, we see no signs of communication from outside Balram's letters but that is hardly an issue: Balram's voice is one of his own desires. Balram creates the definition of India more for himself than for Wen Jiabao. His nation has kept him outside its walls, and as a result, Balram has learned to survive.

Balram, at the conclusion of *The White Tiger*, is the only character discussed in this thesis to be granted a relative degree of success. However, his success is not entirely comforting for his readers. Balram's success comes at the expense of his humanity. While he triumphs over the dominance of his nation, he does so at great personal cost. He has become a truly isolated individual, both in the physical space he occupies and the emotional quality of his life. As he says, "A White tiger keeps no friends. Its too dangerous" (259). In order to escape his nation, he is required to destroy the familial ties that kept him human. Most glaringly, his path to success has

placed him in the same space once occupied by Mr. Ashok—as the master of a fleet of servants. The system that Balram has designed, with all of its cruel design and vast inequality, is not meant to be dismantled. Rather, by his own admission, he has “switched sides” (275).

The narrative tricks that Balram establishes so effectively are the cause for our sympathetic reaction to his moral destruction. Balram fashions a nation, through narrative, that allows for no other means of escape. This imagined nation is designed for Balram’s success, a motivation he expects his reader to accept. It is a nation built around the value of the entrepreneur and one that rewards a man’s struggle to move past the circumstances of his birth. *The White Tiger* preys on our desire to see the individual succeed, and leave us with our fill of the Darkness.

Chapter Five:  
A Whole New World

In Derek Walcott's poem "The Schooner *Flight*," Shabine, the narrator, proclaims, "Either I'm Nobody, or I'm a Nation" (346). In this statement, Walcott voices the confusion, division and anxiety that are reflected in much of postcolonial literature. Mulk Raj Anand, Salman Rushdie, and Aravind Adiga are each contending with these issues as well. Each portrays a character that must ultimately choose between himself and his nation after a means of reconciliation between the two becomes an impossibility. The anxiety that results from this separation is expressed in the linguistic exploration offered through each text. None of these characters are granted the option of existing intact within their nations. Instead, each is forced to find a way to exist outside of these boundaries. As a means of forging this path, each author uses a somewhat allegorical structure that relies heavily on the manipulative power of language. As such, each author makes a concerted effort to use and construct language that represents the conflicting stature of the character's circumstance.

From the earliest examples of Indian-English literature, in Anand, and through to contemporary practitioners, the attraction of national allegory has remained. An allegorical structure offers the author an opportunity to create either unity or opposition with his or her nation, depending on the outcome of the narrative. Anand, Rushdie, and Adiga each choose to cast their characters in opposition. This pessimistic view of the ability for individual and nation to co-exist results from the

pressures placed upon both character and author by the construction of the nation. Each is asked to fit within the narrative as defined by the nation, and each responds by somehow exposing the emptiness inherent at its core. For the characters, this results in a desire to create an imagined nation, and for the authors, it manifests itself through considerations of language.

In Anand, Rushdie, and Adiga, we see a conscious decision to use English as a means of expressing the experience of the individual in contemporary India. These respective decisions have caused much debate. Brathwaite argues that the language used in works such as these is not necessarily the English language, even if the words being used are the same. He states that, “In its contours, its rhythms and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, might be English to a greater or lesser degree” (311). Of course, we each take an effort to make a language our own—we manipulate its structures to serve our individual purposes. In essence, we make it new. The use of any particular language, and especially one as broadly used as English, is dependent on change and evolution. And these evolutions take place as a result of the spaces of their use. This is precisely what we find in the work of Anand, Rushdie, and Adiga. Each author shapes English to suit his own purpose. And, more interestingly, this happens at a narrative level. Bakha, Saleem, and Balram each demonstrate a desire for new language as a means of communication. They each demonstrate an understanding of the power and integrity of language, and the role it can occupy in access to a new identity. Each uses language as a means of defying and rejecting the nation that has cast them aside.

In each narrative, the respective characters come to speak a language outside of their nation. These languages are the result of each figure living outside the experience of those inside of the national narrative. Bakha, searching throughout the narrative for an identity and space in his country, finds himself with a newfound voice at the novel's conclusion, albeit one that cannot be expressed in the words of any of the figures attempting to better his circumstances. The rage that develops throughout the narrative is not given an outlet at the novel's conclusion, but it is granted a voice. While Anand does not provide the image of the next step, we can see its inevitable conclusion nonetheless. Likewise, late in his narrative, Saleem Sinai comments that the requirements of chutnification are, "above all a nose capable of discerning the hidden languages of what-must-be-pickled" (530). We see Saleem engaged in the process of preservation—he is creating and preserving the world which has granted his agency. It is the world of his own language, defined by the words of his experience. Finally, Balram, at the conclusion of *The White Tiger*, remarks that he plans to,

take the money, and start a school—an English-language school—for poor children in Bangalore. A school where you won't be allowed to corrupt anyone's head with prayers and stories about God or Gandhi—nothing but the facts of life for these kids. A school full of White Tigers unleashed on Bangalore! (275)

This conclusion, to create an English-language school, demonstrates Balram's understanding of his newfound role. He has become a narrative unto himself, and

desires the creation of a future in his own image. And, through the narrative function of the novel, this future can become a fully formed reality for its narrator.

These respective characters come to be embodied by the worlds of their creation, and are thus only understood as a result. They resist the control of an imagined construction such as the nation. Instead, they become the products of their own creation. In “New Language, New World,” W.H. New suggests that, “Language affirms a set of social patterns and reflects a particular cultural taste. Writers who imitate the language of another culture, therefore, allow themselves to be defined by it” (303). Anand, Rushdie, and Adiga each go to great lengths to utilize and manipulate the English language to serve the ultimate freedom of their respective characters. When Balram says in the opening of his narrative, “There are some things that can be said only in English,” he is speaking not only of a language, but an ideology (1). Each author pushes his central character to a world beyond the nation, one that can be defined in any number of ways. This construct allows each character to define themselves, rather than be continually defined in relation to, or in reaction against, the oppositional force of the nation. This, we can find, is the ultimate aim of each novel: to find a means of escape, not only for its subject, but also for those encapsulated by his narrative.

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