Mulk Raj Anand and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (James Ngugi), both long regarded as canonical writers in English, favoured very young boys as central characters in many of their novels. The practice of making children and adolescents protagonists is neither new nor limited to novelists of any one culture: Dickens, Twain, Kipling, and Golding (among many others) have presented humanitarian viewpoints effectively through the eyes of children. But this paper is interested in the portrayal of adolescents in colonial situations, such as those seen in *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *The Village*, *The River Between*, and *Weep Not, Child*.

The opportunity to encapsule in the state of adolescence the conflicts and contradictions of a society under colonial rule is immense. Adolescence provides a suitable arena to enact the clash of opposing cultures; an adolescent eagerly seeking the state of maturity offers excellent ground to contrapose the forces of tradition and the forces of modernity.
Doubts regarding the wisdom of granting centrality to adolescents have bothered some readers of Anand and Ngugi. Eustace Palmer, for example, is of the opinion that

the main weakness of *Weep Not, Child* is the choice of Njoroge as the central consciousness. Not because Njoroge is too passive and ineffective to be at the centre of the novel's events, but because a young, inexperienced boy is not the best vehicle to demonstrate that an obsession with education as a panacea is escapist. It is in the nature of young boys to dream, and have illusions about the future, and one can hardly expect them to understand the complexity of national affairs. The same tendency in an adult would have been much more convincing. (10)

The generalization in Palmer’s observation appears to be incorrect. If a “young and inexperienced” boy like Huckleberry Finn serves to judge a whole civilization, why should young boys not be employed to present the “complexity of national affairs”?

With both Anand and Ngugi, the choice of young protagonists for their works was quite deliberate. Ngugi considered young boys as specially responsive to a world that is in a state of transition. As Cook and Okenimpke observe: “In a rapidly changing society like modern Kenya, it may be hard for older men to keep pace with the inexorable movements of history. Young men and women are needed, in key with the times, who are free from self interests and immune to the prejudices, both of power-magnates and of their own teachers” (27).

Anand displays the same trust in youth when it comes to depicting reality. “The young cannot afford to stay neutral,” he declares in *Morning Face* (567). One needs to remember that these writers who found young boys particularly suited for centrality in their works were convinced that in a drastically changing system, it was impossible for one to stay neutral.

It may be relevant here to note Jean Paul Sartre’s perceptive observation that the spread of colonial culture begins with the
colonization of young boys—with the brainwashing of the young by Western values:

The European élite undertook to manufacture a native élite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of Western culture; they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, whitewashed. (quoted in Fanon 7)

The headmasters of the Siriana Mission and representatives of Western ideology in Weep Not, Child and The River Between are examples of the European élite that Sartre mentions. The headmaster in Weep Not, Child firmly believes in the supremacy of the white man’s values and promptly imposes them on young boys. He brings up the schoolboys “to copy and cherish the white man’s civilization as the only hope of mankind and especially the black races” (115). In his mission of spreading Western culture and religion, Livingstone in The River Between also adopts the “catch-them-young” policy. He trains young natives like Waiyaki, Kamau, and Kinuthia and sends them to villages where they engage themselves in the mission of spreading European values. Livingstone “had always liked the idea of training some Mission boys who could then be sent out to spread the good news” (55).¹ Joshua (caught young and trained in Siriana Mission) is one such early candidate who is “sent to spread the good news”: “He, along with a few others, had been the first to be converted to the new faith. He was then a young man who ran from the hills and went to live with the white man in the newly established Mission.... The new faith worked in him till it came to possess him wholly. He renounced his tribe’s magic, power and ritual” (29).

This convert rejects the Gikuyu customs and practices with a vehemence not seen even in the white man, Livingstone. The native convert disowns his own daughters Muthoni and Nyambura the instant they incline either to the old faith or to old customs.
At the start of the colonization process, the young men, caught in euphoria about the West, begin to doubt—and even reject—the indigenous values and ways of life. After returning from Siriana, Waiyaki shows conspicuous changes in his attitudes, indicating the extent to which his mind is colonized by Livingstone’s ideology. Earlier, whatever details regarding Gikuyu land and culture Chege had related to him were like visions; but now he regards his father’s ideas as an old man’s illusions. Earlier, Waiyaki longed for circumcision, but after the Siriana trip he cannot participate in the circumcision dance and songs without embarrassment; he regards the whole ritual (which is part of the initiate’s education in tribal customs, traditions, and beliefs) as an act of “tribal frenzy”—an expression he has borrowed from Livingstone’s ideology. One may recall a similar situation in Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart: Okonkwo’s son Nwoye refuses to return to his father’s ways once he is converted to Christianity. John Boy in Matigari typifies a Westernized native. The villagers send him, a poor native’s son, to England for higher studies. The natives fondly believe that John Boy, armed with the knowledge (power) of the white man, “shall come back and clean up our cities, our country and deliver us from slavery...”: they see in John Boy “a future patriot”. In other words, John Boy is expected to return with the brains of the colonizer and the heart of a patriotic native. But contrary to the natives’ hopes, John Boy’s education in England makes him fulfil the colonizer’s design of manufacturing Westernized natives who serve as the settler’s parasites. On his return, the natives discover that Boy has forgotten the people who supported him and has lost all respect for their ways, customs, and language. He contemptuously remarks: “But you black people? You walk about fettered to your families, clans, nationalities, people, masses” (49). Such figures, black élites, are to be seen even in A Grain of Wheat.

Since colonization begins with the adolescents, it is natural to expect decolonization also to begin with the young. In The River Between, Waiyaki’s father, Chege, considered a representative of
native ideology, is nagged by a sense of failure to awaken his people against the white man’s invasion of the Gikuyu land. But it is his belief that his son, because he is young, has the ability to resist alien ideology. And so he entrusts to Waiyaki the responsibility of maintaining the unity and purity of the tribe. Chege was opposed to the Siriana Mission (i.e., Livingstone’s ideology) all through his life, yet he sends his son to the mission in the hope that it will equip him better in the struggle against colonial occupation of the Gikuyu land. Kabonyi, who represents the orthodox native culture, sends his son to Siriana too. He believes that his young son, Kamau, needs to be trained in the white man’s ways in order to fight him.

In a world where decolonization has advanced significantly, the European élite becomes aware of its own irrelevance in the native’s land. Anand’s Untouchable is a work where the nationalist movement is shown approaching its peak. The natives readily recognise the irrelevance of a missionary like Colonel Hutchinson of the Salvation Army. The attitude of every native to this missionary is marked by a sort of good humoured indifference—this in spite of the missionary’s deliberate adoption of the native costume. It is to be noted that the adolescent protagonist Bakha meets Hutchinson immediately before he witnesses the people’s response to Gandhi. Colonel Hutchinson, the Christian evangelist, attempts to catch young Bakha and convert him to Christianity. Bakha does not understand the Colonel’s preachings, but he follows him to the church in the hope of getting a pair of trousers—the symbol of English life. But Bakha slips off from the colonel’s sight as he listens to his wife’s contemptuous remarks on Bhangis and Chamars. Even an illiterate boy like Bakha can clearly see the contradictions between what Hutchinson sermonizes and what he actually lives. Colonel Hutchinson is not successful in winning the natives to his ways.

But the point at which the implications of decolonization are acutely dramatized is when Bakha is made to listen to the debate on Gandhi’s speech concerning untouchability and swaraj (self-
governance). According to Gandhi, swaraj is possible only when two of his strongest desires, emancipation of the untouchables and protection of the cows, are fulfilled.

Two antithetical perspectives are presented on Gandhian ideas. The first perspective is that Gandhi is a humbug and a hypocrite (because "in one breath he says he wants to abolish untouchability and in the other he asserts that he is an orthodox Hindu," 127), anti-democratic in spirit and old-fashioned in his ideas about swadeshi and the spinning wheel. This view is contradicted by another: "Gandhi is by far the greatest liberating force of our age" (128). The first view is held by barrister Bashir, who (with his English education, outfit, and ideas) precisely answers to Sartre's description of a native élite manufactured by a European élite.

The one who opposes Mr Bashir is the poet Iqbal Nath Sarasher, significantly dressed in the native manner. With his "delicate feline face, illuminated by sparkling, dark eyes and long, black curly hair...dressed in flowing Indian robes" the poet supports Gandhi's ideas but differs with him in his attitude towards the adoption of technology for the progress of India. Although Gandhi rejects the machine, his follower Iqbal Nath Sarasher asserts: "I shall go against Gandhi there and accept it. And I am sure in time to come all will learn to love it. And we shall beat our enslavers in their own game" (128).

It is important to note that the great debate regarding the prospects of a nation and its people is presented not through an intellectual, but through the consciousness of the adolescent Bakha.

In a colonial context, the keepers of native culture, as well as the disseminators of "superior" culture, impose great demands on youth. Hence the role of youth in any struggle against colonial oppression becomes pivotal. In Weep Not, Child, Njoroge's brother Boro joins the Mau Mau. Such young ones, considered the biggest threat to the colonial government, become prime targets of its troops and the home guards. While the missionaries in schools are busy colonizing the young minds with Western civilization, the home
guards in the forest are busy killing not only those who have turned into Mau Mau fighters but also those who are suspected of having joined the movement. This is why Njoroge, a suspect, is expelled from school and brutally assaulted by the police. Njoroge’s father, who is tortured and castrated by the police for allegedly murdering a native collaborator of the colonial rule, laments: “They don’t want an old man’s blood…. They — want — the — young — blood” (123). Incidentally, during the Mau Mau movement, Ngugi was a school boy—about the age of Njoroge in Weep Not, Child. As a boy he had known school children to assist the “forest fighters” by smuggling arms.

All this must suggest that Anand and Ngugi saw great scope for unfolding momentous social and political events through the personal dramas of their young heroes. In other words, social and political conflicts unravel themselves in the development of boys like Bakha and Waiyaki.

One may briefly examine in this context the manner in which the central conflicts operate in The River Between. Chapter One of the novel describes two ridges, Kameno and Makuyu, whose very appearances suggest a rivalry for leadership in the Gikuyu region. But this antagonism of the ridges starts getting dramatized in Chapter Two, in the quarrel between two boys, Kinuthia and Kamau. Kinuthia belongs to one ridge and Kamau to the other. The fight is sparked off because Kamau has jeered at Kinuthia’s father, who died poor, and Kinuthia has called the other’s father “a convert to the white man.” Kamau calls Kinuthia a beggar and is in the bargain dubbed “white man’s slave” (5). The expression “white man’s slave,” according to David Cook and Michael Okenimpke, refers to a convert in a country where Christianity has made recent entry (26). This seemingly trivial episode actually suggests the impoverishment and slavishness of people under colonial rule and introduces the central conflict between the two main ridges of the Gikuyu land. The chief representatives of the ridges are Waiyaki—whose follower to the end Kinuthia is, and Kamau, Waiyaki’s
competitor throughout. Chege (Waiyaki’s father) and Kabonyi (Kamau’s father) are, of course, there as important figures in the clash of values. Later on, Waiyaki’s dream of resolving the discord between the two ridges is but consistent with the role that he had played in Chapter Two as arbiter between two wrangling companions Kinuthia and Kamau. The entire book offers extended versions—in terms of social and political significances—of this early episode. Clifford Robson in his book, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, makes a somewhat similar remark: “What on the surface appears to be a quarrel between children contains in embryo the shape of future conflict” (6).

The present discussion, it is hoped, turns to better account Robson’s insightful but passing remark by making a subtle shift in emphasis: Ngugi specially chooses the very young to introduce and develop the collision of cultures in Gikuyuland. This clash of cultures is heightened over customs relating to attainment of puberty and adulthood—circumcision and baptism. For the Makuyu group—whose important figure is Joshua, devoted to the new faith as only a convert can be—the most important issue centering on the young is baptism; for the Kameno group, the corresponding mandatory subject is circumcision. One needs to note well that the most passionate concern of these ridges are those relating to circumcision and baptism. The ridges representing the old and the new faiths are paradoxically separated by the river Honia (meaning “cure”). The bank of the river serves as a common site for the ritual ceremonies of baptism and circumcision, which are conducted around the same time—Christmas—particularly on Sundays. Educated in the Siriana Mission School, Waiyaki has his hesitations regarding the old custom of circumcision. But young Muthoni’s rebellion against her staunch Christian father, Joshua, assists Waiyaki’s acceptance of the circumcision rite. In a most decided way, Muthoni leaves her father and crosses over to the other ridge to her aunt and undergoes circumcision. The father disowns his daughter immediately (and totally). An unruffled
Muthoni dies a few days after her circumcision, but her poise lends unquestionable strength to her character. Facing death, she asserts in the most collected manner that she has seen Christ ("Tell Nyambura I see Jesus", 75). The conviction of young Muthoni’s personal vision easily surpasses the dogmatic Joshua’s vociferous proselytization. Trained in a Christian school but deeply influenced by the pagan ritual undergone by the native Christian’s daughter, Waiyaki struggles for the rest of the novel to achieve the blend of the old and the new faiths—an almost impossible, nevertheless noble, ideal. As already noted, the grasp of these cultural conflicts and dilemmas is from the vantage point of adolescence.

The novels of Anand and Ngugi are affirmations of an awakening. The need for rejuvenation of the culture under colonial rule, the need for a national awakening, is effectively expressed through the awakening consciousness of the adolescent mind. That is why Anand describes Bakha as a "child of Modern India" (Untouchable 10).

Adolescence, a vital stage in the development of an individual, denotes a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. It indicates a significant change in the individual's physical nature as well as in his mental, emotional, and social attitudes. At the threshold of adulthood, the adolescent arrives at a heterosexual attitude—which is what the attainment of physical and social puberty mainly implies. The search for identity becomes crucial at this point of one's life. Erik Erikson, in Childhood and Society, captures the adolescent predicament:

The adolescent mind is essentially a mind of the *moratorium*, a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood, and between the morality learned by a child, and ethics to be developed by the adult. It is an ideological mind—and, indeed it is the ideological outlook of the society that speaks most clearly to the adolescent who is eager to be affirmed by his peers and is ready to be confirmed by rituals, creeds and programs which at the same time define what is evil, uncanny and inimical. (263)
Any child’s eagerness for adulthood is understandable. Erikson’s observation makes clear to us why initiation rites are central to an individual as well as to a community. Waiyaki, in *The River Between*, does not like to be thought young, for he considers himself capable of making “decisions like a man” (47). His desire to play the game Demi Ma Mathathi is but an expression of his eagerness to “become a man.” Similarly, Njoroge, in *Weep Not, Child*, “always longed for the day he would be a man” (47). He perceives manhood as a way of finding freedom. This is seen in his desire to “touch circumcised girls”; for, as a boy, he is prohibited to mix with them. Bakha in *Untouchable* and Munoo in *Coolie*, share with Waiyaki and Njoroge the longing to become men. Adulthood signifies for them dignity and freedom. As a child, Bakha’s desire was to become a washerman or a sahib on growing up; Munoo, in *Coolie* “would have liked to shave his beard with a sharp, long razor of his master’s” but “there was yet no hair on his cheeks or his chin. He wished he would grow up soon and have a beard. He wanted to become a man” (91). When Munoo is refused a coolie’s job in the grain market because his frame is considered too young to carry the sacks of grain, he feels humiliated and is indignant about himself. He muses, “when will I grow up and be a strong man?” (124). Becoming a man is necessary for his survival in the competitive world of coolies: Lalu’s ambition, in *The Village*, is to “grow up quickly and be a man,” to “learn to plough like his (elder) brothers” (87).

Anand’s and Ngugi’s adolescents are no different from adolescents in general. But they are adolescents placed at special moments in the histories of their countries; their yearning for adulthood is dramatized in a socio-cultural arena of heightened historical significance. One may recall what Anand says in *Apology for Heroism*: “The era to which I was born was...the historical turning point of my country” (71).

It would be rewarding to consider briefly, from this perspective, the use of myths by Ngugi and Anand. In a discussion of *The River Between*, T. N. Dhar observes: “The single most interesting thing
about the coming of the whites in Ngugi’s fiction is that he mythologizes the event” (69). The Gikuyu seer Mugo had prophesied, in the remote past, the coming of the whites: “There shall come a people with clothes like butterflies,” and “disrupting the peace and the ordered life of the country” (The River Between 19). “Mugo often said you could not cut the butterflies with a Panga. You could not spear them until you learnt and knew their ways and movement” (20).

Dhar’s observation becomes meaningful in the light of the argument of this thesis. Standing at the threshold of adulthood, and at a special period in the history of the country, native adolescents like Waiyaki and Bakha face two sets of traditions and values, most often presented in the form of myths. Mythification and demythification are invariably at work at the arrival and exit of the colonizer. The colonizers as well as the natives involve themselves in mythifying and demythifying each other. But these sets of conflicting myths address themselves most compellingly to the adolescent mind. Which are the myths that are desirable, and which are those that are to be eschewed? Adolescents like Waiyaki and Njoroge face this choice crucially at puberty; therefore, the centrality of circumcision in Ngugi’s fiction. In the acquisition of one set of myths and the discarding of others is interwoven the freedom and future of the native culture. Such a need may actuate an amalgamation of different sets of myths and values. On the day of Waiyaki’s “second birth” ceremony, Chege is eager to bequeath a sense of heritage to his son by relating him to the seer Mugo and to his promise. The seer had uttered: “Salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood that flows in me, I say from the same tree a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people!” (The River Between 20). If Waiyaki must acquire the white man’s learning, it is in order to realize Mugo’s prediction. “Arise,” the father exhorts Waiyaki, “Heed the prophecy. Go to the Mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites” (20).
Similarly, Njoroge’s faith in the future shows itself in the way he attempts a reconstruction of myths:

It did not make much difference that he had come to identify Gikuyu with Adam and Mumbi with Eve. To this God, all men and women were united by one strong bond of brotherhood. And with all this, there was growing up in his heart a feeling that Gikuyu people, whose land had been taken by white men, were no other than the children of Israel about whom he read in the Bible. So although all men were brothers, the black people had a special mission to the world because they were the chosen people of God. This explained his brother’s remark that Jomo was the black Moses.

(49)

Njoroge’s development is based both on traditional folklore and the Bible, specially on the Old Testament characters like David, Job, and Moses. He looks up to Jomo Kenyatta as the saviour of black people and listens with great interest to the stories about Jomo:

Njoroge listened keenly as they talked of Jomo. Already he felt intimate with this man. For Njoroge was sure that he had read about him in the Old Testament. Moses had led the children of Israel from Misri to the Promised Land. And because black people were really the children of Israel, Moses was no other than Jomo himself. It was obvious. (50)

In Untouchable, where decolonization is in an advanced stage (in contrast to the situation in The River Between, where it had just begun) there are two sets of myths and legends that present themselves before Bakha. The ‘sola topi’ in the barracks had been a symbol of status for Bakha. There are various stories and beliefs regarding the topi: it is a symbol of the sahib’s authority over the regiment; it is thought to be imprisoned, since its owner, a white man, could not be imprisoned for a murder he committed; it belongs to an officer and would be returning to take it. The younger children believe this last version and are scared because of the association
made between ghosts and white sahibs. However, the topi has generally been understood as a symbol of status. Bakha, too, as a child, is fascinated by the topi. But as he grows, his attitude changes slightly. Significantly, on the verge of adulthood, he is attracted to it as a “lover”: “Bakha had for years looked with longing at the sola topi…. Ever since he was a little boy he had contemplated it with the wonder-struck gaze of the lover and the devotee. Whenever he was given the chance of going out sweeping in the compounds…he could steal glances at the object he coveted” (86).

The topi is still an object of status for Bakha, but disassociated from any idea of the supernatural.

A most interesting aspect of the fictional works of Anand and Ngugi is that the need for liberation from an oppressed foreign rule gets artistically woven into the young adolescents’ zeal for adult, independent status. The desire for adulthood involves, naturally, the need for independent identity and dignity. In other words, the adulthood aspirations of boys like Waiyaki, Njoroge, Bakha, Munoo, and Lalu are seen as mirroring their societies’ struggle for liberation from oppressive foreign rule to attain nationhood—indpendence. During the passage from adolescence to adulthood, an initiate is separated from childhood but not fully integrated into adulthood; the bewilderment and confusion that he experiences during the transition are reflected in the political turbulence of that society. Fredrick Jameson in “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” aptly sums up the situation thus: “Third-World texts…necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public in Third World culture and society” (68).

It is fascinating to see how this truth is realized in fictional terms by both Ngugi and Anand.

Ngugi’s grasp of the transitional nature of the Gikuyu society expresses itself fictionally through the transitional stage in the life of an adolescent like Waiyaki. The incorporation of the individual
into community life is an important act in Gikuyu society, and hence the centrality of the circumcision rites in Gikuyu life. In fact, circumcision is the biggest of events. After it, the novice becomes a full member of society.

He thus symbolically belongs to the land and to the tribe as a whole. According to the elders who watch the spectacle, Waiyaki’s ability to endure the pain is confirmation of his resistance to the corrupting influence of the white man’s ways. The circumcision rites in *The River Between* most emphatically relate the adolescent to his land. With the perception that he is related through blood to the earth, Waiyaki’s adolescent consciousness enlarges to an adult consciousness.

The affirmation or denial of adulthood to a people is a reliable pointer to the feeling for nationality and self-governance; self-governance must presume recognition of national territory as homeland. Ngugi’s tale “The Martyr” (*Secret Lives and Other Stories*), set during the Mau Mau movement, should serve to illustrate this. The story opens with the news that two English settlers, Mr and Mrs Garstomes, have been murdered by native “gangsters,” with the help of the Garstomes’ servant. This deed is symptomatic of the general violence that makes every white settler in the land insecure. Mrs Hill, in whose house the murder is discussed, is a liberal who keeps reiterating that “the natives are obedient at heart and all you needed was to treat them kindly” (40). She herself treats her servant kindly, but she does not know that her liberal, kind ways have taken her servant Njoroge to the limits of his hatred for settlers, and especially for Mrs Hill, and he had secretly contacted the “gangsters” (the Mau Mau fighters referred to as Freedom Boys by the natives). The plan is to kill Mrs Hill at night, and Njoroge has agreed to lead them up to her door. Mrs Hill is ignorant of this development; but despite her articulation of kind treatment to natives, her mind is impressed by one detail: it was the Garstomes’ servant who had rendered the master and mistress vulnerable. Njoroge has served her for more than a decade—but could there not be a repeat
performance of disloyalty in her own house? So she arms herself with a pistol. Meanwhile, Njoroge “betrays” not his employer but the Freedom Boys, for he cannot imagine killing Mrs Hill, who is a mother of two children. He gives the Freedom Boys the slip and goes up to Mrs Hill’s door and knocks. His intention is to warn Mrs Hill against them. Night has advanced, and Mrs Hill’s mind is full of only the circumstances of Garstones’ death. Sweating with fear, she shoots and kills her servant: “She did not know she had in fact killed her saviour” (47). The morning’s papers are full of praise for the white woman who has single-handedly braved a “gang of fifty” and has even killed one!

It is interesting that the people of the land are treated as boys. The servants are invariably referred to as “houseboys” by the whites. Njoroge has been with Mrs Hill for ten years and he is still a houseboy; in fact this houseboy is a middle-aged man with two wives and a number of children. Any reference to the houseboy as a man appears ridiculous to Mrs Hill. In a subtle manner, the freedom fighters who oppose the settlers as well as the servants—in short, all natives—are retained in boyhood. Otherwise stated, the white settlers incline to deny adult status to all natives. They are all Freedom Boys, houseboys, or shamba boys. A sensitive reader knows that the practice of referring to male natives (irrespective of their age) as boys is but a dehumanizing device of the colonizing instinct.

The nation’s aspirations and struggle for independence in Untouchable are comprehended through Bakha’s advance towards adulthood. Since untouchables are kept outside the pale of society, there is no community into which Bakha can grow up; adult status is denied to untouchables, as it is for slaves. There can be no social or psychological dimensions to the puberty of young untouchables like Bakha and his sister Sohini. The poignancy of the denial of adulthood is achieved through frustrating the scopes for achieving even physical maturity. It is true that, at the age of eighteen, Bakha has developed the conspicuous physical features of an adult. In
spite of “the poor nourishment he got, he had developed into a big, strong man, broad-shouldered, heavy-hipped, supple-bodied” (14). But his physical growth or physical maturity is one that is not meaningfully realized; rather, it seems aimlessly attained. Bakha’s strong body may enable him to perform better the serf’s work, but it cannot earn him full membership of society. In spite of the generous description of Bakha’s physical frame, there is hardly any hint in the novel regarding his marital opportunities. Bakha’s youth and physical development are built up solely to be frustrated. This is best delineated in the episode concerning the marriage of Ram Charan’s sister. Bakha had, in his childhood, played husband to this girl in a game. The role assigned to him is one that Bakha has cherished all along. He has since then watched Ram Charan’s sister grow up into a “tall girl with a face as brown as ripe wheat and hair as black as rain clouds,” and we are told that he “always felt proud of having once acted as her husband” (74). However, the role of husband to a woman who can be a match (in sheer physical energy at least) is one that will never materialize in his real life. It is on the day of her wedding—a time when he himself is at the threshold of adulthood—that Bakha fully becomes aware of his lowly position in society. Bakha’s unexpressed ambition for adult status is violently punctured as Ram Charan in his boyish manner knocks “the bottom out of that ambition by telling Bakha though he [Ram Charan] touched him and played with him, he was a Hindu, while Bakha was a mere sweeper.” Bakha was too young at that time “to understand the distinction implied in the washer boy’s arrogant claim” but on the day when Ram Charan’s sister is married, Bakha perceives adult and social status as an impossibility: “now he knew that there were degrees of castes among the low-caste, and that he was the lowest” (76).

Ram Charan is from a low caste, only one rank above Bakha’s, and yet his attitude to Bakha is marked by arrogance. How much more insensitive and hostile then, would be the attitude of the social system to Bakha’s aspirations for adulthood? The obstructions
in the way of Bakha’s adulthood are in fact obstructions to his human status.

The “right to freedom” of a society is expressed through the right to human status of its individuals—which means granting full membership to them. But a person like Bakha (who is kept outside the pale of society) can be initiated only through indoctrination—since the social atmosphere denies experience to him. Hence the significance of Gandhi and his speech in the novel.

Gandhi arrives at that moment when Bakha’s feeling of frustration is most biting. The Mahatma raises his right hand and blesses the crowd with gentle benediction. The effect is intense. It is “as if he had sent an electric shock through the mass of humanity gathered at his feet” (121).

Bakha for once forgets that he is an untouchable: “In the stillness of the moment, Bakha forgot all the details of his experience during the day, the touched man, the priest...his father, Chota, Ram Charan...the missionary and his wife” (122). Gandhi’s speech is about untouchability, which for a seer like him is about individuals’ freedom as well as the nation’s: “As you all know, while we are asking for freedom from the grip of a foreign nation, we have ourselves, for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse for our inequity” (123).

It is not a coincidence that Gandhi speaks on the very subject—emancipation of untouchables—that centrally involves Bakha. To Bakha, who has felt totally separated from the human world, Gandhi appears as a unifying force, a link between him and the rest of humanity. Standing in the crowd that is magnetically drawn to Gandhi, he thinks he is “in the midst of humanity which included him in its fold and yet debarred him from entering into...contact with it. Gandhi alone united him with them.” The entire thrust of Gandhi’s speech is in the direction of leading untouchables (“low dregs of humanity”) towards human dignity. Bakha becomes more attentive when Gandhi says that “Untouchability is the greatest blot on Hinduism” (116). Throughout his boyhood Gandhi had
questioned why physical contact with untouchables was forbidden. Gandhi had grown to adulthood “smilingly protesting” that untouchability had no religious sanction; he had regularly touched untouchables on his way to school. Gandhi speaks of the need to consider human beings as equals in order to qualify for spiritual freedom. It is this need that is expressed in his rejection, in case he is born again, of any other status in society than the untouchable’s. Bakha gets even more involved in Gandhi’s address when Gandhi says there is an eighteen-year-old Brahmin boy (and Bakha, too, is eighteen) in his ashram who does a sweeper’s work. “Bakha felt thrilled. A tremor went down his spine” (125). Swaraj, or freedom from foreign rule, has no meaning for Gandhi as long as untouchables are treated as slaves by Hindus. Hence his appeal to grant them human status.

Gandhi’s voice is like a whisper, yet it ensures clarity to the words he utters and has the effect of religious indoctrination (in a positive sense) for an initiate. In the awakening of the.lowliest in society is the possibility of the nation’s awakening.

A self-evident (perhaps, therefore, unnoticed) aspect of Anand’s and Ngugi’s works concerns the starting point of their narratives. Quite a few of their tales begin to unfold around dawn. “Dawn diffused through cracks in the wall into the hut” (1). That is how A Grain of Wheat starts. Petals of Blood, which has four protagonists with their own tales, offers four inaugurals of the narrative. Each strand of this fabric starts around dawn: “They came for him (Munira) on Sunday. He had just returned from a night’s vigil on the mountains. He was resting in his bed...when two police constables...knocked at the door” (2); “Abdulla sat on a chair...he felt strangely calm after a night’s vigil” (3); “Karega was fast asleep. He had come from an all-night executive meeting of Ilmorog Theng’eta Breweries Union. He heard a knock at the door. He leapt out his bed in his pyjamas” (3); “One newspaper, the Daily Mouthpiece, brought out a special issue with a banner headline: MZIGO, CHUI, KIMERA MURDERED” (4). (It
may be safely assumed that the *Daily Mouthpiece* is a morning paper.)

The action proper of Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* begins: “On Friday morning Waringa was dismissed from the job.... On Saturday morning [she]...was visited by the landlord” (10). Thrown out by her landlord, she starts her journey to her parents’ house in Ilmorog the same morning. In the opening scene of *Matigari* the sun is “just rising” (3) when the hero is returning home from the mugumo tree. We are not explicitly told that it is morning when the action commences in *The River Between*, but the impression, if one goes by the magnitude of the sunlight, is that the sun is ascending, not descending: “If you strained your eyes and pierced into the misty distance you could see the land of Ukabi” (4).

These beginnings interestingly parallel those of Anand’s tales. At the commencement of *Untouchable*, Bakha lies “half-awake in the morning of an autumn day” (9) and he wakes up as the “sharp wind” blowing “from the brook at dawn” penetrates his skin (10). In the opening scene of *Coolie*, Munoo (who is about to leave his village), has taken out cattle under a “morning sun” (1). Computing the time Gangu takes to reach the plantation after alighting from the train, we must infer that the novel begins at morning. The opening scene of *The Village* has a morning setting. Alighting from the train at Nandpur station, old Nihal Singh walks towards his village. A little later, we read that the old man “lifted his eyes, undimmed by age, to the sun which had already risen high in the eastern sky” (11). The first pages of *The Sword and the Sickle* show Lalu waking up from sleep in the Bombay-Peshawar Mail to these words, “Awake... Awake....”“What time is it,” asks Lalu of a companion. “Dawn time” is the reply, “must be around five o’clock” (1).

It is not the mere fact of dawn figuring in the beginning of so many tales that calls for notice, but the frequency of such beginnings is sufficient to assume significance. Such a beginning as has just been discussed is quite in tune with the strategies Anand and Ngugi employ to relate personal awakening to adulthood with national
awakening. The awakening is to harsh realities. None of the works by the two writers ends in easy and false happiness. This may explain partly why many of their novels close with the approach of night. Untouchable ends this way: “The sun descended, the pale, the purple, the mauve of the horizon blended into darkest sky” (132). Coolie ends with Munoo’s death “in the early hours of one unreal, white night” (282). Two Leaves and a Bud closes with Gangu’s death in “scarlet darkness” (273). The final scene of The Village shows Lalu getting ready to go across the black waters: “He...looked across the sea-waves to the horizon where the sun haze descended in a mist” (247). Across the Black Waters draws to a close as Lalu is taken captive by the Germans after the final battle fought in the night. The pattern is similar in Ngugi’s works. The Devil on the Cross ends in the latter half of the day with Waringa killing her seducer and walking out of his house in a heroic manner. The River Between and Weep Not, Child end with the night encroaching upon the land.

Dawn and dusk are periods of transition, and hence quite appropriate to begin and end the accounts of transition on both the individual and the national scales.

NOTES

1 Ngugi recalls in Homecoming how the boys in the Mission School, where he was a student himself, were trained to be “good responsible leaders” of the people and how they were “being groomed to become a buffer state between the propertied white rulers and the harsh realities under which the African peasants and workers lived” (49).

2 This rite is performed by cutting a thin cord taken from a slaughtered goat and tied to the human child’s mother. The act symbolizes the severing of the umbilical cord and the child’s separation from his mother and his incorporation into a new world. The child’s head is then shorn of hair. After a ceremonial dip in the river, he comes out “clean.” The second birth ceremony makes the child eligible for circumcision.
 Works Cited