

# The Theme of Social Justice and Exploitation in Mulk Raj Anand's Fiction

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## ABSTRACT

Anand intricately weaves through his novels, the theme of exploitation and social justice. The paper highlights the marginalized sections of the society whose pangs and pains wrenched his heart. The novelist supposed that human being is living a life with dignity which has been denied to the lower castes and the outcasts the lower dregs of humanity because of the repulsive attitude of the rich. He is presented a humanist of the highest order. The paper covers most of the characteristic anxiety and primary issues of life Anand has become a strong defender of the exploited and the down trodden people.

**Keywords:** Downtrodden, exploitation, humanity, humiliation, suffering, problems, and freedom

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## INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand was an Indian writer in English, notable for his depiction of the lives of the poorer castes in traditional Indian society. One of the pioneers of Indian English fiction, he, together with R.K. Narayan and Ahmed Ali, was one of the first India-based writers in English to gain an international readership. Born in Peshawar, he studied at Khalsa College, Amritsar, before moving to England where he attended University College London as an undergraduate and later Cambridge University, graduating with a PhD in 1929. During this time he forged friendships with members of the Bloomsbury Group. He spent some time in Geneva, lecturing at the League of Nations' School of Intellectual Cooperation.

Anand's literary career was launched by family tragedy, instigated by the rigidity of the caste system. His first prose essay was a response to the suicide of an aunt, who had been excommunicated by his family for sharing a meal with a Muslim. His first main novel, *Untouchable*, published in 1935, was a chilling exposé of the day-to-day life of a member of India's untouchable caste. It is the story of a single day in the life of Bakha, a toilet-cleaner, who accidentally bumps into a member of a higher caste.

The downtrodden people have figured often in major Indian novels. Owing to the deep-rooted nature of the problem it has become a major concern with many of our writers. The main purpose of the present study is to concentrate on Mulk Raj Anand's novels in this respect. Anand, being most conspicuously committed writer among the Indian English novelist, has a more seeking mind of understanding the life the down-trodden people. He looks at the problems of the down-trodden from many angles consciously. Of all Indo-English novelists, Mulk Raj Anand has discussed the Down-trodden problem most comprehensively.

Anand draws his heroes from the real men and women whom he happens to know in actual life. He states that he was interested in some people and they forced him to put them down in novels. They seem to be rare human beings to him, he knows them fully well for a pretty long period. Anand himself confesses that the characters created in his novels "are taken from my intimate experience, but are transformed creatively from within- often a Lamb becomes a Lion and a Dove becomes a Jackel. I rely on my sub-conscious life a good deal in my creative work, and allow fantasy to play havoc with facts" (Saroj Cowasjee: 14). Therefore, it must be believed that the characters taken directly from life are transformed by the author's creative imagination; and thus becomes striking original and unique.

The characters in his novels are given maximum freedom to express themselves so as to make the novels both a convincing picture of life and artistically satisfying. In fact, as a novelist, Anand is not so much concerned with any formal philosophy regarding men and women. He emphatically states that he creates novels, not to expose his philosophy of humanism, but to portray human beings with their interior as well as exterior life.

Anand's way of writing is completely different from most of our Indian writers like Bankim Chand chatterji, Ratannath Sarshar and Rabindranath Togore and so on. He is under influence of Rousseau, Gopal, Tolstoy and Gorky. He believe that " even the so-called lowest dregs of humanity, living in utmost poverty, poverty, squalor and degradation, could become heroes of fiction"( M.K Naik, 16 ) This is the reason why he makes them sweepers, coolies and the lowly like Bhaka, Manoo, Gangu, Gauri, Lalu and others as the central figures of some of his best known novels.

Bhaka the hero of *Untouchable* is a sweeper lad of eighteen who cleans latrines. He is a good representation of Indian down-trodden. The day which the author chooses to describe is not an ordinary day, it is a day when Bhakha changes from an unquestioning being and unquestioning on, it is also a day when the feelings of retaliation and revenge stir in his heart. He lives in a world where there are two worlds, one that of the caste Hindus which subjects him to constant humiliation and treats him as mere dirt, and the other, the world of those outside Hinduism which is inhabited by Muslim, Christians, and the soldiers who treat him as a human being.

In fact, the practice of untouchability is still in existence in Indian. The outcaste Bhaka becomes socially segregated. "The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindu of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed access to the nearby brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream."( Mulk Raj Anand, 23 ) It is great hostility of society towards Bhaka which forces him to realise his plight. Thus the novel depicts so many problems of the down-trodden. It show the sweepers as disgusted with their dirty job, meditating on their sad; and indignant at the behaviour of the higher castes towards them.

On the other hand, the events in *Coolie* are far more variegated. It is more episodic than the other novels of the author. It treats mainly the adventures of a coolie called ' Munoo'. Munoo is an orphaned village boy from the Kangro hills. He serves several roles in the novel such as a domestic servant in an urban middle-class family in Sham Nagar, as a worker in a pickle factory and a coolie in the bazaar in Daultpur; as a worker in a labourer in Cotton Mill in Bombay; and rickshaw puller in an Anglo-India household in Shimla, the last job of life that bring s him consumption and an untimely death.

Thus Coolie is a more complicated novel. The framework of the novel is picaresque and because its action is not confined to some particular village, but moves from the village to the city, from the North to the South, and then again to the North. It is twice as the *Untouchable* and is built on a vaster scale. The central theme of the novel is the exploitation of the poor and the down-trodden by the forces of colonialism, capitalism and industrialism. Munoo can be compared with Bhakha; both are passive characters. But Munno is more life and attractive of the two, who has some ambitions in life.

Another novel, '*Two Leaves And A Bud*' also deals with the down-trodden people. Its central character 'Gangu' is a middle aged farmer working on his field in a village near hoshiapur in Punjab. The entire tragedy is unfolded against the background of the tea-plantation. The tea-estate is run by foreign capitalists. There are two groups in the novel. The British officials and their Indian subordinates on the one hand, and peasants, poor village folk and coolies on the other. These two separate camps of the exploiters and the exploited are realistically drawn in the novel.

In this novel, Anand, the humanist, has revealed the truth by exposing the hard-heartedness, callousness, selfishness, hypocrisy, and meanness of the English planters and factory managers. Anand's themes are mainly concerned with the Indian society. His " novel together bring out the tragedy and the futility-the cynical curve of revolutions-of one failure leading to another, of rebellion leading to slavery and to rebellion"( Veena Singh, 56 ) Therefore, it is very clear that his main aim is to expose the follies and affections of the privileged classes, priest, money-lenders, business-men, tea-planters, British rulers and so on. He does not merely aim at stating the problems, but he also suggests their solutions. He believes that man is the master of his destiny.

The outcaste and Pariahs and other under-dogs of Indian society are the heroes and heroines of Mulk Raj Anand's novels. By doing so he has brought true surrealism into Indo-Anglian fiction. His heroes are the down-trodden sweepers, coolies, the unemployed coppersmiths, the indebted farmers and poor simple soldier. Poverty and suffering are the badges of their class. These heroes are small men and common men. They are pursued by the inexorable economic and social forces, which toss them this way and that till they break to pieces. These heroes are not able fight these forces because they are ignorant and uneducated and they belong to the unprivileged classes. Anand's suffering heroes and heroines remind us of Gissing's economic and social order as it obtained in those days. Gissing's Thyrza and Hardy's Tess and Elizabeth jana may be placed in the same category as Gauri and Janaki of Anand's so far as they have to suffer immensely for no fault of their own.

The White skinned English people belong to a separate class of exploiters. By virtue of their being the member of ruling class, white men and women had the liberty and the to exploit Indian down-trodden people. The English people did not

identify themselves with the Indians. They did nothing to reform the out-dated, Indian religious practices purposely. In the name of giving freedom to Indians in the observance of their religious practices they allowed the superstitions and the utter ignorance of Indians to continue.

Anand's novels show his natural gift for homely pathos. He succeeds in an immense measure in bringing to the forefront, the poignancy and the pathos of the life of his heroes and his heroines who suffer, and suffer immensely. But sometimes Anand's sympathy for the down-trodden gets the better of his judgement and so he overstates. He tries to wring an extra tear for his hero from the situation. This is exactly why Anand sometimes has to lead his suffering hero and heroine to improbable ends. For instance, in *Coolies* the events leading up to the strikes move rhythmically and realistically. But after the abortive strikes, Munoo is knocked down by the car of Eurasian lady who takes him off to Simla. Here as an over indulgent servant Munoo dies of tuberculosis. This episode has no organic unity with the previous phases of Munoo's development, and is introduced only to get an extra tear from the readers for the hero Munoo. In this respect he resembles Dickens who also heaps sometimes improbable sufferings on his heroes. The treatment meted out to David Copperfield in Creakle's school is an instance.

Nevertheless it is indeed true that Anand's strengths and limitations are generally those of the committed or sociologically preoccupied novelist. For Anand a socially irrelevant hero would be morally inconceivable. His characterisation within the proletarian compass are strong, varied and impassioned, but outside this range they are mostly less deft often flat, strained, or rhetorical.

The eminence of Anand's fictional art lies in the realistic portrayal of the object plight of suffering masses and writings provide abound with the essential human sympathy. His writing provides a panoramic view of the rural life in India with all its merits and draws backs. He is thorough knowledge of the masses and the peasant life with vividness of description. It is this photographic presentation which makes his fictional theme more appealing. Though, his characters such as Bhaka, in *Untouchable*, Munoo is Coolie or Gangu in *Two Leaves and A Bud* are his own powerful creations, they rise above the limited confines of the thematic sphere and strongly stand for a social causes.

MulkRaj Anand's fiction is shaped and moulded by as he say, "the double burden on my shoulder, the Alps of the European tradition and the Himalayas of my Indian past" (MulkrajAnand, 67 )

He is one hand critical of the deadwood of the hoary Indian tradition characterized by obscurantism and aware another of its finer and enduring aspects. But Anand has derived his fervent socialist faith from the European tradition and this inculcated upon him a vision of modern egalitarian society. His novels faithfully chronicle his under-dog. To fan his socialistic view, Anand has shackled himself to political evangelism and has taken it upon himself to advocate the downtrodden and under-privilege. It has been Anand's self conscious effort "to transform the material of life freely into communicable forms, rather than accept the mould of the objective form of Flaubert or Henry James preciousness" (MulkrajAnand, 51 )

Anand has always written to emphasizes the essential dignity of man, despite his weakness, and to endanger compassion for the down-trodden: "most of the critics who have written about my novels, have not noticed that my fictions arose from the compulsion of life the lower depths, where the rejected in our country have been condemned to live .I have re-enacted their tragedies again and again" (MulkrajAnand, 51 )

As Anand states " I wished to created the folk, whom I knew intimately from the lower depths, the lumpen's and the suppressed, oppressed in our literature, except in Sarat Chatterjee, Premchand, Bibhuti, Tarashankar and Meneck bannerji" (MulkrajAnand, 51 )

"For Anand, every insult humiliation, every deprivation must be protested, only in the defence of divine status of human being have we opportunity to end the alienation of men and women from themselves and each other" (MulkrajAnand, 51 )

In his apology for Heroism, Anand has himself stated-"the theme of my work is the whole man and the whole gamut of human relationships, rather only one single part of it." (MulkrajAnand, 67)

At his best, Anand's humanist convictions and his humanitarian compassion have fired his imagination and have given us un forgettable scenes such as Bhaka touching the caste Hindu and paying the penalty; Ananta being knocked down dead on the machine which he love; Manoo's traumatic realization that he is born to be exploited and ignorant rustics enthusiastically accepting modernity, when they are convincing that a new avatar of an age old deity.

MulkRajAnand laments the analysis of novels which “ignore the pressures of human life the compulsions on the writer’s conscience, which may be accessioned by miscellaneous inspiring and traces a new kind of religion of love for people, which has been called Mulk’s humanism”( MulkrajAnand, 51)

He further says, “Worship of each character becomes a passion behind the writing. I accepted all the strengths and weakness of the people.” All his major novels, *Coolies Untouchable*, *Coolie* and *Two Leave and a Bud* are in unequivocal terms, a crusade against social exploitation. The novel *Untouchable* is about the life of an outcaste Bhakha, a young sweeper lying in the outcaste colony of a cantonment set in north India. The colony becomes the lying symbol of the age old practice of the sin of Untouchability with pseudo-religious vigour. The life in the town and a cantonment with all its colour and smells the chants and the noises, the faith and cruelty, the kindness and the humanity, the shifting scenes in the temples, market places and the playground, with the quite of the hillside and the stir of the public meeting is described with no uncanny an accuracy that untouchable strikes us as a pictures of a place of a society, of a custom and of certain persons not to be forgotten. The picture has acquired the force of an indictment of the evils of the decadent and perverted orthodoxy. By addressing himself to the task of giving expressing to certain evils, Anand has to some extent acquired the effectiveness of Dickens.

Bhakha is destined to remain a victim of social and religious determinism, a system that has bounded him since his birth which itself strips him of the courage to rebel against the combined foci of the religion and culture. In this novel, Anand presented a powerful critique of the Indian caste system and colonial domination of India, which has actually increased the suffering of out castes such as Bhakha. The novel narrates a day in the life of Bhakha and the hardships that he to face in the coarse the day’ Bhakha is comparatively clean for sweeper, he does his job efficiently and the hard toil makes him very strong. Each muscle of his body hard as glass, what a dexterous workman’s the onlooker would have said. And though his job was dirty, he remains comparatively clean. Bhakha develops a feeling of loathsomeness at his miserable situations his tender heart is filled with indignant hatred at the caste Hindu when he is punished for accidentally touching a man in the street on the change of polluting him. Sahini, Bhakha’s sister, faces the same fate in the novel. Kalinath, the temple priest, attempts to molest her and when she rejects his advances the debased priest vindictively accuses her having polluted him.

As the novel progresses, though he does not find any sign of hope towards shadow of progress in his miserable situation, he gets three possible solutions to the problems from three different angles from a missionary to become a Christian, from the inspiring speech of Gandhi to fight out Untouchability and from a young poet who suggests improved sanitation as the only way to drive out Untouchability. At the end of the, Bhakha is found, “thinking of everything he has heard, though he could not understand it all” ( MulkrajAnand, 57)

Anand chooses to close the final scenes of his novel by appropriating the inner conflicts of Bhakha and Juxtaposing enthusiasm with naiveté. It carries a strong sense of hope, self awareness and self appropriation of the individual within the greater hope Hindu Society there is a strong indication of what Bhakha has endured throughout his day’s journey has had enormous effects on the way he appropriates himself what positive note, with the images of Bhakha going home and vocalizing his story hoping that some sort of resolution, or at least, some emergence of understanding will occur. The dilemma of the *Untouchable*: “wavering between the two world’s one dead other powerless to be born with nowhere to rest my head, like these, on earth I wait for long” ( MulkrajAnand, 57)

## CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding all this, it is held that there is some hidden want in Anand Mulk Raj Anand, the angry man is so much obsessed with the idea of class exploitation and capitalistic injustice to the poor and the erstwhile political domination of the British, that very often Anand’s novels becomes political tracts with their own axe to grind. This kind of over-loading the stories with extraneous motives sometimes mars the artistic value of his novels to some extent. Anand was written this novel before independent of India and at that time Religious hypocrisy, feudal system, poverty, hunger and exploitation

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