

Social Injustice and inequalities in Untouchable and Coolie

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Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand is regarded as the scintillating star in the firmament of Indo Anglian Literature. He was an Indian English novelist who approached Novels with missionary zeal to portray the pains and sufferings of the down-trodden at the hands of the native rich people and Colonial rulers. "Untouchable" and "Coolie" are major novels of Mulk Raj Anand which chronicled the social maladies in India and he felt that they would be eradicated by following the footsteps of great leaders like M. K. Gandhiji. Mulk Raj Anand always believed that literature should be an interpretation/explanation of the truth of people's lives. It should be written through felt experiences of human beings and not through books. He belongs to the Category of few prolific Indian Writers in English whose novels and stories are highly praised all over the world. As a humanist, Anand always hates superstitions, bigotry caste, class - capitalism, exploitation, overpopulation, tyranny, colonialism, fascism, war, and genocide. He associated himself with the socio-political problems, pains, and sufferings of masses in the typical Indian Scenario. In a real sense, Mulk Raj Anand was one of the major pioneer novelists of this period along with R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. His personal experiences and the reforms of India's political, social, and cultural institutions have been the major elements in his writings. The novels 'Untouchable' and 'Coolie' are their best examples. The Clash between the establishment and the outcaste and poor becomes the major theme of Mulk Raj Anand's fiction. As a down-to-earth fiction writer, his experience is deeply rooted in the social conditions of his time. Through his novels, Mulk Raj Anand presents a society charged with the evils of untouchability, communal disharmony, caste compartmentalisations, and appalling economic differences. Having progressive learnings, Mulk Raj Anand is a committed writer. His sympathies lie with the Untouchables, the outcaste, and the starving multitude.

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Till the early 1930s, Anand focused on the books of art and history. Anand's hatred of imperialism and the hypocrisy of Indian rights with its castes, habits, and customs were the greatest motifs of his art. In the 1930s, the Indian struggle for independence was at its peak. He was aware of the immense suffering of people from poverty and humiliation due to the political and social system at that time. In the 1930s, Anand's fictional works *Untouchable* (1935), and *The Coolie* (1936) were written almost in sequence to dramatize the Cruelties inherent in the caste system.

'Untouchable' by Anand was inspired by the author's childhood memory of a low-caste Sweeper boy who carried him home after he had been injured; the boy was, however, beaten by Anand's mother for touching her higher-caste son, In a real sense, the book was a revelation to readers unaware of the circumstances of life in a caste society and sparked extensive critical debate. Mulk Raj Anand was highly motivated to write the novel, 'Untouchable' from the ruthless suppressed. The novel was started in 1928 and could be published in 1935. Incidentally, Anand read a simple narrative article in

'Young India by Gandhiji' describing how he met "Uka", a sweeper boy, and finding him with torn clothes and hungry, took him into his Ashram'. Then he hurried to visit the old man at Sabarmati Ashram to capture the Character. Being influenced by Gandhiji when he showed the drafts of his novel to Gandhi, Gandhi was extremely critical because he claimed that there was too much of the 'Bloomsbury' feel to it on which he was probably right. Untouchable was revised and Indianized during Anand's stay at Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram. While in Ahmadabad Anand lived like a disciple and did his share of cleaning the toilets - an act seen as defilement for a caste Hindu.

The novel 'Untouchable' highlights the fact that how Untouchable was at the time when the novel was written, lived in inhuman conditions, and were subjected to the worst kinds of humiliation, sometimes on trifles and sometimes without any cause whatsoever. But though the novel begins as a note of despair, it ends on a note of hope, with echoes from Shelley's "Ode to the West wind and "Euganean Hills'.

Anand displays compassion for the plight of Untouchable but never sentimentality. In many ways, the novel represented his thinking beyond the limits of Gandhi's idea of Untouchable as Harijans- Children of God. For Mulk Raj Anand this is far too patronizing and it is for this reason that his fictionalized account depicts a debate between a Gandhi-type figure espousing the Oneness of humanity and simple living on the land and a poet who poses a modern solution to the problems of untouchability flushing toilets!

Mulk Raj Anand's novel Coolie, another system of class as of the economic 'Classes' were in the focus, opposite to the Caste system as in Untouchable. In Coolie, an economic group has become so rigid that a man of one group can hardly think of joining another. So, as far as the theme is concerned, basically Coolie of Anand is an extension of Untouchable and there is much similarity between Bakha of Untouchable and Munoo of Coolie. In Untouchable, Anand Culminates social evil that has run its course through Indian history right from the time when Varnashram was invented or came into being as a matter of necessity in those dark days when all sorts of superstitions crept into Indian life to corrupt its tradition of philosophy and culture. A strong believer in the dignity of man and equality of all men, Anand is naturally shocked at the inhuman way the untouchables and coolies are treated by those who belong to the superior caste and Class.

Bakha, the Central character of the novel, "Untouchable" is the representative of all the downtrodden society in Pre- Independence India. He is a Universal figure to show the oppression, injustice, and humiliation done to the whole community of the outcastes in India. He symbolizes the hardships and humiliation which has been the fate of Untouchables like him. He suffers because of

his caste. With Bakha, the central character, other characters also suffer because of their lower Caste. The novel focuses on the hardships and emotional humiliation undergone by the untouchables. The word "Untouchable" refers to an Indian caste system that includes the lowest of the lower working class of India and is justified by different ideas, especially religious ones.

In Coolie [1] , he portrays the life of young Munoo, Kshatriya by caste but a peasant boy who travels from his mountainous village through north India and eventually finds himself in Bombay. Munoo is an orphan and so is forced to take whatever work he can to survive. He works as a servant, in a mine, a factory and as coolie-black men who empty their bowels in the fields . In each of these situations Munoo is subjected to harassment, beatings, and financial exploitation at the hands of employers, moneylenders and he is so-called betters. But the story is also about the development of a young boy who begins to learn about the world around him and attempt to make some sense of it. Through Coolie, Mulk Raj Anand proves that Munoo is the victim of social injustice and inequalities.

Untouchable, Mulk Raj Anand's first novel is a highly Charged intellectual discourse on the Karmic illusion of work and untouchability while Coolie in a humanistic discourse on the subject of human labour. It may be argued that the central issue in either case is the philosophy of work and that untouchable and Coolie are analogical metaphors of human enslavement, subjugation, and oppression.

Mulk Raj Anand, as an Indo Anglian Novelist, had approached novels with missionary zeal to portray the sufferings of the downtrodden at the hands of the native rich people and colonial rulers [9]. Anand's novels chronicled the social maladies in India and he felt that they would be eradicated by following the footsteps of great leaders like Gandhiji. While in untouchables and inequalities, Anand's Vision is limited to a small section of society i.e., Untouchable and the theme is related to the gross torture and inhumanity perpetrated on his segregated section of society in Coolie, for from being limited to a small section, the theme of the novel shows social injustice and inequality clearly.

According to K.D. Verma that despite several injustices to Bakha as an untouchable, Mulk Raj Anand cannot be a rebel. Beautifully, Anand draws the picture of social injustice and inequalities through the painful experiences of Munoo and Bakha. However, Munoo of Coolie, being a Kshatriya by Caste, can at least rebel, While Bakha's complicated existence as an untouchable is situated in the Varnashram structure of Hinduism, Munno's fate as a rickshaw puller is tied to his dehumanizing work as a Coolie. The fact remains that both Bakha and Munoo are helpless labourers whose work has been permanently devalued and misappropriated. They are in dire need of

social justice. However, Anand stretches the metaphors of Untouchable and Coolie to suggest that we all are Untouchables and Coolies. Krishna Nandan Sinha has rightly remarked, "While the later novels retain the passion for social justice, they sound greater emotional depths".

Mulk Raj Anand stresses the point that though the Indian Constitution has made it a crime to practice inequality and untouchability There are still 60 million people in India who are discriminated against (Saroj Cowasjee) and this gives Mulk Raj Anand his Contemporaries and makes his fiction extremely relevant today as the reflection of caste system largely constitutes his realism from which systems emanates his protest, Commitment, and ideology. Mulk Raj Anand is a champion of underdogs because of his graphic portrayal of Indian Society including its unpleasant aspects and Categorical indictment of the hypocritical values, mutilating India's social harmony and dynamism... Anand believes that man can make her destiny. He has immense faith in man and his power. He is convinced of the immense manpower to master his nature through rationalism, Science, and technology and visualizes a renovated social order in India based on reason and faith in human ability. Being an artist, Anand does not pour his sentiment in black and white but gives artistic form to the painful experience of a man of sensibility who has seen the terrible evil from close quarters. His protest and warning lie within the framework of his art.

Anand's personal experiences and the reforms of India's political, social, and cultural Institutions are major elements in Anand's writing. Such early fictional works as Untouchable (1935), The Coolie (1936) dramatize the cruelties inherent in the caste system. It was full of social injustice and inequalities. Untouchable, for example, was inspired by the Author's childhood memory of a low-caste sweeper boy who carried him home after he'd been injured; the boy was, however, beaten by Anand's mother for touching her higher-caste son. The book was a revelation to readers unaware of the circumstances of life in a caste society and sparked extensive critical debate. Anand's interest in social themes continued in The Coolie which relates the tribulations of working-class life in India. In Coolie, Munoo's endearing qualities, innocence, tenderness, friendliness and cheerfulness, sympathy and helpfulness make us recall Dickens Juvenills, David Copperfield and Pip, Victor Hugo's Gar Vorche and Marie Twains, Huck Finn.

Anand's style shifted to more psychological and humanistic interpretations which explore the emotional and mental deterioration of the protagonists in his novel "Untouchable" and "The Coolie". Through his novels, he wants to show the real picture of human beings' pains, sufferings, social injustice, and inequalities. This is evident from his novels that his heart always bled for the down-trodden. Out of all the novels, his first two novels

"Untouchable" and "Coolie" bear more significance, because of so many reasons which have been discussed clearly.

Anand has risen above sectarian or Communal outlook and consistently wrote and spoken against capitalists and pleaded against the oppression of the down-trodden. Anand's objective to highlight social injustice and inequalities shows his humanism. He does not believe in harrowing conditions with which the laborers live as their fate. He is rational in his approach. He believes that One day the suffering would come to an end but to make the process they have to rise. The novels are a record of his concern for the oppressed Bakha, the central character of the novel Untouchable is the representative of all down-trodden society in Pre- Independence India. In a nutshell, he is a Universal figure to show the oppression, injustice, and humiliation done to the whole community of the Outcastes in India. While the story of Coolie, basically depicts the conflict between Munoo and the people of affluent, reactionary society, with the former turning out to be at the receiving end and the latter being Victorious. The theme of the story is the exploitation of the oppressed at the hand of such people. He got an impetus to write these novels from the ruthless suppressed.

Mulk Raj Anand deals with the problems that engage him in his novels- the exploitation of the poor, the impact of industrialization, colonialism, and race relations. He was the first Indian novelist to make an Untouchable the hero of a novel. Through his novels dealing with Down-trodden," MRA established his Credentials as a novelist exposing the exploitation of the underprivileged class by the upper class of society. These novels brought into the main focus the humanitarian contradictions of colonized Indian society. His novels drew the attention of the young Indian generation towards evils prevailing in the society and motivated them to stop such practices of Religion and Tradition.

Anand's Concentration has always been on the eradication of social stigmas like casteism, Untouchability, unequal social gradation, and stratification based on birth. He believes that man should be known by his worth and not by birth. He utilizes art to fulfill this intent The social blots have been in the Indian Society for ages together. Anand has a deep sense of sympathy for the depressed their plight and predicament and calls them truly heroic. On one hand, he exposes the economic disparity among the Indian people, and on the other hand, he hits hard against the age-old human, base traditions that rendered these unfortunate sections of the society equal to the savage. In both novels Untouchable and the coolie this kind of structure is conspicuous, and a vision also has been present, which suggests a way out of these odds of the society. It is the reality that through his characters and the world around them, as well as the incidents, one can see Social Realism. Truly Anand has tried to focus on the untouched parts of our society and exposed the ills and

evil, of it. And, also tried to provide the solution to how can social injustice and inequalities be removed from society.

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