

HUMANITY IN MULKRAJ ANAND'S NOVELS

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Abstract

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Mulk Raj Anand, a socially committed novelist, has produced a good deal of literature. He has written more than a dozen novels and about seventy short stories and a host of essays and articles on a number of subjects. His novels fall into two categories namely social and autobiographical novels. He focused his attention on the sufferings, misery and wretchedness of the poor as a result of the exploitation of the downtrodden class of the Indian society. Religious hypocrisy, feudal system, East-West encounter, the place of woman in the society, superstitions, poverty, hunger and exploitation are his common themes.

Keywords: Mulk Raj Anand, Mulk Raj, novels, humanity

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 Indo-Anglian fiction, he, together with R. K. Narayan, Ahmad Ali and Raja Rao, was one of the first India-based writers in English to gain an international readership. Anand is admired for his novels and short stories, which have acquired the status of being classic works of modern Indian English literature, noted for their perceptive insight into the lives of the oppressed and their analyses of impoverishment, exploitation and misfortune.

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 Co-operation.

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 her family for sharing a meal with a Muslim woman. His first main novel, *Untouchable*, published in 1935, was a chilling expose 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.

This simple book, which captured the puissance of the Punjabi and Hindi idiom in English, was widely acclaimed and Anand won the reputation of being India's Charles Dickens. The introduction was written by his friend, E. M. Forster, whom he met while working on T. S. Eliot's magazine *Criterion*. In it Forster writes: "Avoiding rhetoric and circumlocution, it has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it."

Humanity in Untouchable (1935)

Untouchable, Mulk Raj Anand's first novel is a highly charged intellectual discourse on the karmic illusion of work and untouchability. In *Untouchable*, the discourse between the young moderate poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar and the barrister R.N. Bashir recapitulates the western and the Gandhian ideologies of social and moral progress. *Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand's debut novel and magnum opus, is a unique novel. It, in the Joycean 'stream of consciousness' technique, describes the events in a single day in the life of Bakha, the protagonist in the novel, in the town of Balushah. Bakha, an untouchable boy, is a victim of the caste-ridden society. He belongs to the sweeper community.

Bakha searches for a salve to the tragedy of the destiny into which he was born, talking with a Christian missionary, listening to a speech about untouchability by Mahatma Gandhi and a subsequent conversation by two educated Indians, but by the end of the book Anand suggests that it is technology, in the form of the newly introduced flush toilet that may be his savior by eliminating the need for a caste of toilet cleaners.

Humanity in Coolie (1936)

Coolie is a humanistic discourse on the subject of human labour. Coolie, is a heartrending saga of human suffering. Munoo's travails and tribulations are sharp pointers to man's sadistic pleasure in torturing child domestics. Munoo represents those numberless children whose childhood is lost in endless physical labour. Love, care and fund are strange words for them. Mulk Raj Anand takes up the theme of human suffering again and again. Anand suggests that a little more sympathy and a little more tenderness on the part of the society could have turned Munoo into a happy individual, and also averted his tragic end. There are many writers in Indian Writing in English who have dealt with the theme of untouchability and segregation. But nobody has been able even to come near Mulk Raj Anand. With his literary power and perspectives he has tried his best to spring up the healthy human values and radical social transformation in our human society in which the haves and have not both can enjoy happily the bliss of human life on the same footings and fraternity peace, love and justice. In the novel Coolie, Anand tries to depict the social reality of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless. The novel shows the unbridgeable gap between the exploiters and the exploited, the rulers and the ruled. It narrates the life story of a young hill-boy Munoo, who is beaten from, pillar to post in his ill-fated search for liberation.

Humanity in Two Leaves and a Bud (1937)

The novel Two Leaves and a Bud is directed towards the evils of Class system and British exploitation. The novel is about the sufferings of the laborers in Assam Tea Plantations. It gives expression to the unending anguish of the tea plantation laborers under extremely selfish British masters who treat the male fold among the laborers as bonded slaves and their women and daughters as objects of sexual gratification.

The central character in the novel Gangu loses his ancestral property is exploited by greedy money-lenders and had been lured to the British owned tea plantation in Assam, by Sardar Buta, the coolie catcher. Gangu hopes for a better future in the estate. But it does not take much time for him to realise that he has entered a veritable hell. The estate has no proper sanitation and water supply. The coolies are almost ever under the threat of dreadful diseases. Gangu comes to Assam to start a new life, but he loses life itself. The laborers are deprived of fundamental freedom and subjected to a cruel militaristic organization. They are overworked and ruthlessly exploited.

Humanity in The Sword and the Sickle (1942)

The novel The Sword and the Sickle deals with the exploitation of the Indian peasants by the British Colonialist and the Indian landlords. The sword is a symbol of force, born to suppress and defeat, whereas the sickle is a symbol of the suppressed, defeated peasants. As the novel deals with the theme of exploitation, the title is in concord with the theme of the novel. There are two plots running parallel to each

other throughout the novel. On one hand it is a struggle of Lai Singh a revolutionary who fights for the rights of the peasants and on the other it is a love story of Lalu and Maya. The story of Lai Singh as a revolutionary develops through four phases. The first period is the war-period which deals with Lai Singh's participation in the war, his capture by the enemy and his release. The second phase deals with Lalu's return to his native place. The third phase, which forms the major bulk of the story deals with Lalu's role in the agrarian agitation. The last phase is Lalu's imprisonment, when he starts dreaming about his future with his wife and his son. Gandhian impact on Anand, as in all his other social novels, is clearly visible in this novel too. In fact, this is the only novel in which there is an open encounter between Anand's principal character and Gandhi.

Humanity in The Road (1963)

The theme of *Untouchable* (1936) recurred twenty five years later in *The Road*. Though the setting and characters are changed, the theme of exploitation of the low caste by the high caste is the same. *The Road* deals with a single incident in the life of an untouchable in a small village. The incident of constructing the road to facilitate transportation of milk from Govardhan to Gurgaon, a town nearby creates a conflict between the caste Hindus and the low caste untouchables. The construction of the road shortens the distance between two places but widens the gap between the two classes. The novel opens with the conflict between the high caste Hindu boys and Bhikhu the low caste untouchable on the issue of the untouchables going to the temple. The humiliation of his mother infuriates Bhikhu. When a kind hearted man intervenes, the boys run away muttering filthy abuses. The novel deals with the conflict between the high caste and the low caste.

Conclusion

Mulk Raj Anand, a socially committed novelist, has produced a good deal of literature. He has written more than a dozen novels and about seventy short stories and a host of essays and articles on a number of subjects. Mulk Raj Anand's novels *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*, are directed mainly towards the evils of class system. These novels show that class is a greater evil than caste system. His novels fall into two categories namely social and autobiographical novels. He focused his attention on the sufferings, misery and wretchedness of the poor as a result of the exploitation of the downtrodden class of the Indian society. Religious hypocrisy, feudal system, East-West encounter, the place of woman in the society, superstitions, poverty, hunger and exploitation are his common themes.

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