
**HUMANISM IN MULK RAJ ANAND: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *Untouchable*,
Coolie and *Two Leaves and a Bud***

Ms.Geeta Sharma (Assistant Professor)

Deptt. of English

D.A.V.College for Girls, Yamunanagar

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to present Mulk Raj Anand as a humanist writer who has a deep compassion and respect for the underdog of the Indian society. He covers two worlds—the colonial time period as well as the post-colonial generations. His first-hand knowledge of the drawbacks of Indian social structure lends a realistic hue to his novels. He basically presents the grim social scenario in which the poor suffer due to the callousness of their fellow human beings. Humanity is at risk as the downtrodden have no solace anywhere. What is more disturbing is the fact that their sorrows are mostly man-made. Particularly Anand attacks caste-system which divides human beings. The caste-system is inhuman as it upholds exploitation and oppression of people who belong to the lower strata of society. A humanist society would promote every measure that minimizes the gap between the haves and the have-nots. But unfortunately the so-called high-caste people cause further misery to the oppressed motivated by their greed, lust, cruelty and indifference. Anand has exposed the hypocrisy of such people and he emphasizes the need of a balanced society based on humane principles which would lead to a world of peace, justice, prosperity and equality.

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand has been a great champion of the downtrodden. With him started an era of depicting the miserable condition of the poor and the oppressed. Before independence, Indian people were suffering under cruel regime of the British Empire. But there was a particular group that not only faced the unjust policies of the British imperialism but also the callousness of the so-called high-caste people of India. Anand had a first-hand experience of the miseries of the lower strata of Indian society as he used to play with the children of the families of sweepers. Besides this, he also witnessed an unfortunate incident happening in his own family in which his aunt was outcast by her family for having taken meal with a Muslim woman. This ultimately resulted in a suicide. It is said that Anand was so much pained that he started writing

against such a suppressive social set-up. He exposes the hypocrisy of the upper strata of Indian society accompanied by a visible disgust. At times he becomes even explosive as his tone and style become vehement when he describes the endless sorrows occurring one after the other in the life of the poor labourers. The most unfortunate thing is that their sufferings are most of the times man-made originating from the unkind indifference of their fellow-beings. Anand is a humanist writer and strongly upholds ideals that can ensure human dignity. The sympathy Anand feels for the oppressed originates from humanism. Humanism term was first used during the Renaissance time period of English literature. The term refers to a system of thoughts where human issues hold prominence. Anand, too, promotes and upholds values that elevate human dignity. He exhibits his contempt for all sort of social injustice meted out to the poor at the hands of the higher strata of society and appeals for immediate reforms that would create a heavenly world of peace and social justice. The establishment of the socialist principles would do a lot in this regard. The oppressive social evils prove havoc for individual happiness and create an atmosphere of suffocation for the working class. The aim of this paper to highlight the humanistic concerns that Mulk Raj Anand has shown for the exploited and the oppressed in his novels *Untouchable*, *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and A Bud*.

The novel *Untouchable* is about the cruelty of the oppressive social scenario and the callousness of high class people. It presents a vivid picture of the caste-ridden Indian society before independence. The protagonist Bakha belongs to the family of sweepers. The novel records the incidents occurring in a single day of Bakha's life. The description of these incidents is so convincing that the whole of Indian social system stands naked with its all drawbacks. Like all major characters of Anand's novels, Bakha is also equipped with potential of thinking of a better society especially for the oppressed and the neglected people who think they are born only to be exploited in this cruel world. When the novel starts, Bakha is shown being yelled at by his father Lakha. Lakha is an idle being and wants others to work in his place. Bakha gets up reluctantly and goes to perform his duty of cleaning latrines. Anand has described the miseries and suffocation of the poor people like Bakha with a humane sympathy. A sensitive reader would feel the sufferings and the acute pain of Bakha as if he himself is the sufferer. The major theme remains untouchability or the caste-system, still the writer has tried to bring out the callousness of society as a whole. Caste-system is inhuman that keeps lower strata under perpetual oppression. The discrimination between the workers and the employer, between the rich and the poor, between the high and the low cannot be accepted in a civilized society. Anand is terribly against class divisions because they divide human beings. His compassionate heart cannot accept any sort of discrimination as it hinders individual happiness. He attacks the hypocrisy of the high class people who would not hesitate in molesting a low-caste girl whose physical contact can otherwise make them impure. Pandit Kalinath tries to molest Bakha's sister Sohini when they are alone but after being seen by the crowd as Sohini runs away weeping, he pretends that

the girl's contact has spoiled him. Who can tolerate this kind of hypocrisy? Bakha wants to expose the evil deeds of Kalinath but it would put Sohini in further shame. The helplessness of the poor people like Bakha has been presented passionately by the writer. The entire social set-up is so suppressive that they find impossible to break off the chains of their born slavery. This is really unbearable for any real human being. There seems to be no ray of hope of getting their salvation. The scene at the well is again full of cruelty of the so-called high class people. Sohini is maltreated by a woman suffers humiliation. To expose man-made sorrows of the poor is major concern of the novelist. The inhuman behavior that Bakha receives when he tries to save an upper-caste boy by lifting him up, the boy's mother instead of thanking or rewarding Bakha starts crying at him for polluting her son with his touch. This is the height of cruelty of a social system. Thus caste-system causes mental torture to individuals denying them their dignity as human beings. What else can there be a greater stigma for any civilized society than this caste-system? Commenting on caste-system Dr. Rdahakrishnan remarks:

"The institution of caste illustrates the spirit of comprehensive synthesis characteristic of Hindu mind with its faith in the collaboration of races and the co-operation of cultures. Paradoxically as it may seem, the system of caste is the outcome of tolerance and trust. Though it has now degenerated into an oppression and intolerance, though it tends to perpetuate inequality and develop the spirit of exclusiveness these unfortunate effects are not the central motives of the system".

However the writer in Mulk Raj Anand is an optimistic visionary. The novel ends with Bakha's hope of getting salvation for his community in the form of new flush system. He returns to home with the hope that the introduction of this new system would minimize their burden of shame and slavery. Only a humanist writer would portray the sufferings of the downtrodden and try to offer a solution!

Coolie (1936) presents the unjust social scenario that causes suffocation and endless misery to children at their tender age. It is against child labour. The evil of child labour takes away the valuable childhood and its bounties from the poor children. Anand has delineated with pity the exploitation of poor children at the hands of the adult people who remain indifferent to their pains. Their indifference is so cruel that it causes never-ending torture to these young creatures. The greed, callousness, selfishness and unsympathetic behavior result in a grim social reality in which these children never enjoy happiness or self-respect. The reality is pathetic even today while Child Labour Act has been passed. Child labour is a crime but many children can be seen working at different places. This is the responsibility of the elder members of the society to initiate and promote every measure that would create a better environment for children. But unfortunately the reality is otherwise. The adult do not seem to be interested in minimizing the difficulties of the deprived children. On the other hand they create further wounds to them. *Coolie* is a story of Munoo who becomes orphan at an early age and is left alone to face the cruelty of this unsympathetic world. The harsh

social surroundings put out the lamp of his life when he is just fifteen. His short-lived life is a tale of endless misery. After the death of his father his mother has to struggle hard to make both ends meet but ultimately she loses the battle against poverty and dies soon. After her death Munoo's journey of intolerable pains starts at the age of fourteen. It is noteworthy here that most of Munoo's sorrows originate from the callousness, selfishness, indifference and greed of the adult people. It is also worthwhile to mention here that Munoo is just a representative of millions of poor children like him.

After losing his parents Munoo starts working as a domestic servant. This is a highly painful experience for him. He leaves this tiresome job and joins a factory of pickle which is run by Prabha. Prabha is considerate but to the factory workers but his business fails and Munoo is again left alone to fend for himself. His new job is that of a coolie. Soon he leaves for Bombay where many people like him are already struggling for work. Ultimately he reaches Simla where he works as a rickshaw-puller for an Anglo-Indian lady. He catches tuberculosis and dies at the tender age of fifteen. The humanist in Anand takes every pain in posing certain blunt but pertinent questions before society. How many Munoo's will suffer and lose happiness due to the oppressive social system? How can a civilized society remain silent at the agonies of the poor and orphan children? If a society remains silent at the plight of these little creatures of humanity, can it be called civilized at all? Can we provide any hope of happiness to the Munoo's of today? How far we would keep sustaining a social set-up that favours child labour? Expressing their ideas about the root cause of child labour Helen Sekar and Noor Mohammed write:

"Extreme poverty is the cause of child labour. Working children migrate to the city due to poverty. Migrant households seek hope of a better employment".

If we are to save the childhood of children like Munoo we would have to work for a society where humanity is above all. Child Labour Act is to be implemented forcefully. Any cruelty against children will have to be criticized and punished. People who employ children for work should be disowned by the society.

Two Leaves and A Bud again shows Anand's anguish at the sad plight of the poor and the sufferings resulting from their poverty. This novel records the pains of the coolies with a passionate heart. The protagonist is Gangu who has to undergo sufferings on account of his poverty and the unsympathetic behavior of the rich and the influential. The pains given by the British imperialism add all the more to his grief. He leaves a village of Punjab near Hoshiarpur and starts working at a tea plantation estate. He has his wife Sajani and kids Leila and Buddhu are with him. Croft-Cooke, the boss, and his wife are considerate to their workers. But the assistant manager Reggie Hunt is cruel and lusty. There is no end to his avarice and evil tendencies. The other exploiters are the foreign investors. Even their own countrymen Sardars keep exploiting these poor labourers. Gangu is innocent and is not able to understand Hunt's evil designs. On the

other hand he thinks that Hunt is a good human being who will help him in getting rid of his miseries. He tries to change his fortune with hard work but fails as everything is against him. Anand has described the unhygienic conditions in which the laboureres work. Malaria breaks out in the tea estate and Gangu's wife dies. Coolies get joined in order to demonstrate against the wrongs being done to them but do not succeed as the divisions erupt among them. Hunt attacks Leila in an attempt to rape her but she runs away. Lust takes over Hunt completely and he shoots in madness. Gangu gets killed and Hunt is released from the court without being punished for his misdeeds. It is worth-mentioning that the novel *Two Leaves and A Bud* was banned by the British Government as it exposed the cruelties of the Britishers against Indians. Anand's convincing and realistic description of the sorrows of the laboureres is the result of his first-hand knowledge of their condition. Commenting on this H.C. Harrex says:

"Anand's characterizations within the proletarian campus are so strong, varied and impassioned...his social criticism is usually spirited and challenging".

Anand had all the sympathy for the poor and the downtrodden. It was he who started writing about the pathetic condition of the underdog of the Indian society. Anand disregards fatalism and believes in the fact that an individual must try to change his destiny by believing in himself. He is against all sort of discrimination as it is man-made it must be curbed with full zeal. The only remedy left for the world is the establishment of humane ideals. In order to have peace and justice for the poor is to promote humanistic ideals. His heroes are optimistic and full of faith for a better world. They do not lose hope despite their intolerable circumstances and keep trying to uphold their standard of living and self-respect. Bakha hopes for a better world for the community of sweepers with the introduction of new flush western system. Munoo, the young hero, tries hard to face and overcome his difficulties with hard work. Gangu does everything to gain happiness for his family. If they fail, it is not because they are idle or fatalists. They fail due to the callousness of this harsh world and the oppressive social system. Anand's faith in the unfailing spirit of human consciousness has been portrayed in his novels with a hope to promote awareness among the masses. Come what may, every individual must struggle hard for self-dignity and try to bring about reforms in the surroundings for a making this world a better place to live in!

REFERENCE

Anand,Mulk Raj. Untouchable, New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1984.

Anand,Mulk Raj. Coolie, New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1936.

Anand,Mulk Raj. Two Leaves and a Bud, New Delhi: My Fair Paperbacks, 1981

Dr. Radhakrishnan. The Hindu View of Life, Unwin Books, 1963:6Sekar, Helen and Noor Mohammed. Child Labour in Home Based Lock Industries of Aligarh, Noida: V. V. Giri National Labour Institute, 2001.

Harrex.The Fire and the Offering. The English Language Novel of India 1935-70, Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1977, 144.