

Reflection of Marginalized Voices in the Selected Novels of Mulk Raj Anand

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Abstract—Mulk Raj Anand was born in Peshawar, now in Pakistan. He is one of the three pillars of Indian English fiction along with Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan. He had received The International Peace Prize, Padma Bhushan, Sahitya Academy award and various other prestigious awards.

For Anand his novels were like a mirror in which contemporary Indian society can see its drawbacks and malpractices. His novels are known for addressing social evils and problems like hunger, poverty, untouchability, superstition, financial crisis, identity crisis, etc. He slowly became one of the strongest voices of marginalized sections of the Indian society. His two well known novels *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) are finest examples of how realistically Anand had presented the socio-economic problems of marginalized ones in post independent Indian Society. His novel *Coolie* is a story of 14 year old boy Munoo, and his plight due to poverty and exploitation aided by the social-political structures of Indian society. On the other hand *Untouchable* is a story of a day in the life of a young boy named Bakha; presenting the horrifying and realistic problems that an untouchable faces in a caste based society. Although Anand's *Untouchable* is the voice of just one young sweeper boy Bakha but he represents his whole untouchable community. Anand in his novel *Untouchable* puts light upon mental, sexual, financial, social oppression which any untouchable suffers every single day of his life and provides a deep insight of an untouchable's psyche. Although, the central theme of both the novels are different yet they have similar observation in the core of the plot, the caste and class distinctions are the root cause of all sufferings and problems of marginalized people like Bakha and Munoo. Mulk Raj Anand is undoubtedly one of the highly skilled novelists in the sphere of Indian English Literature and when it comes to social novels he stands unparalleled as a novelist.

Index Terms—Society, Culture, Class, Caste, Subaltern, Untouchability, Economy, Humanism

I. INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand is a prominent figure in Indian English Literature, he left an indelible mark on the literary landscape while exploring the social issues and human conditions of his time. He can be seen as a literary luminary of Social Realism. His novels serve as a powerful medium to present struggles and injustices faced by the underprivileged and marginalized sections of the society.

Anand's early life is filled with many such incidents which later became part of his novels and also played an important role in shaping him as a novelist. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, in his book *Indian Writing in English* mentions that:

“Mulk Raj Anand as a child had mixed freely with the children of sweepers attached to his father's regiment, and such association cutting across caste divisions had continued during his boyhood and youth. These early playmates and friends became, with necessary imaginative idealization and transformation, the heroes of his first novel.” (pg.334)

He witnessed the pains and sufferings of marginalized sections of Indian society from very early age and this exposure to social discriminations ignited his passion and he made his novels a medium to attain social justice for the suppressed voices of common people varying from a young untouchable boy to a poor coolie. In her book *So Many Freedoms: A Study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand*, Saros Cowasjee says that Anand in his first three novels provides : “a faithful picture of the underdog in a society which offers little hope of his amelioration,” (pg 98).

Anand's engagement with Progressive writer's Movement is proof of his commitment to social justice that remained a prominent element of his journey as a novelist. His novels even today serve as

reminder of the need for compassion, equality and empathy in a world marked by social injustices.

II. THE MARGINALIZED IN INDIA AND ITS REFLECTION IN THE NOVEL UNTOUCHABLE

Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable* delves into the harsh realities faced by the marginalized sections of society, particularly the Dalits, in pre-independent Indian society. Set against the backdrop of a deeply entrenched caste system, the novel paints a vivid picture of the life of Bakha, a young sweeper who belongs to the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. In the novel, Anand exposes the dehumanizing experiences of the untouchables, a group relegated to a life of poverty, social isolation, and discrimination. Bakha's story serves as a poignant representation of the struggles faced by millions of Dalits during that era. Through Bakha's eyes, Anand illuminates the indignities suffered by the untouchables, from being denied access to public places to enduring verbal and physical abuse from higher caste individuals.

Anand's portrayal of Bakha's daily life highlights the profound impact of caste-based discrimination on an individual's self-worth and aspirations. Bakha's desire for education and his dream of breaking free from the shackles of his social status underline the universal human longing for dignity and equal opportunities. However, the oppressive social structure of the time stifles his ambitions, leaving him trapped in a cycle of poverty and despair. The novel also sheds light on the deeply ingrained prejudices prevalent in society. Bakha says: "They always abuse us. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too. That's why I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines every day. That's why they don't touch us, the high-castes." (*Untouchable*, 43). Anand masterfully exposes the hypocrisy of the upper castes, who preach about spiritual purity while engaging in inhumane treatment of their fellow human beings.

Furthermore, 'Untouchable' serves as a powerful critique of colonialism and its role in perpetuating caste-based discrimination. Anand skillfully intertwines the political context of British colonial rule with the social issues faced by the marginalized communities. The novel subtly suggests that the British, despite their claims of enlightenment and progress, are complicit in maintaining the status quo, thereby emphasizing the interconnectedness of social

and political oppression. E.M. Foster mentions in preface of the novel that only a person who is in position from where Anand had observed the situation can come up with a novel like *Untouchable*. He says :

"No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about his troubles. And no untouchable could have written the book, because he would have involved in indignation and self-pity. Mr. Anand stands in the ideal position." (*Untouchable*, pg vii)

Anand's narrative style in the novel *Untouchable* is both compelling and compassionate, inviting readers to empathize with Bakha's plight. The novel challenges societal norms and provokes introspection, urging readers to question their own biases and prejudices. Through Bakha's journey, Anand inspires readers to recognize the importance of empathy, equality, social justice and the ongoing struggle for a more just and equal world."

III. THE MARGINALIZED IN INDIA AND ITS REFLECTION IN THE NOVEL COOLIE

Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* was first published in 1936 and it tells the story of a fifteen year old boy Munoo who is a child laborer and eventually dies of tuberculosis at a young age. The novel beautifully depicts how the life of economically marginalized section is controlled by the social forces. In Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Coolie*, the author delves deep into the lives of the marginalized sections of Indian society, highlighting their struggles, aspirations, and the pervasive social injustices they face. Through the character of Munoo, Anand portrays the harsh realities of the marginalized sections, offering readers a poignant glimpse into their lives.

Munoo, a young boy, embodies the essence of the marginalized section in the novel. He represents the countless individuals who, due to their social status and economic circumstances, find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty and exploitation. Anand skillfully crafts Munoo's character, illustrating the challenges he encounters and the dreams he harbors despite his disadvantaged background. Describing Munoo's condition Anand says:

"His ego conditioned by the laws and customs of the society in which he had been born, the society whose

castes and classes and forms had been determined by the self-seeking of the few, of the powerful, sought all the prizes of wealth, power and possession exactly as his superiors sought them.” (Coolie, Pg.35)

The novel vividly portrays the exploitation faced by the coolies, who are often subjected to inhumane working conditions and meager wages. Anand sheds light on the deplorable living conditions, lack of access to education, and limited opportunities for social mobility that perpetuates their marginalization. As Sauda one of the official of “ RED FLAG UNION” in the novel, says:

“There are only two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor, and between the two there is no connection. The rich and the powerful.... whose opulence is built on robbery and theft and open warfare, are honoured and admired by the whole world and by themselves You, the poor and the humble, you are respected by no one, and you do not respect yourself.” (Coolie, Pg.233)

Munoo's journey becomes a powerful lens through which readers witness the resilience of the marginalized section amidst adversity.

Furthermore, Anand masterfully intertwines themes of caste discrimination, gender inequality, and economic disparity within the narrative. The coolies, belonging to various castes, are all victims of societal prejudices, highlighting the pervasive nature of discrimination in Indian society. The female characters in the novel also face marginalization, emphasizing on the oppression experienced by women from disadvantageous backgrounds. Through Munoo's experiences, Anand critiques the systemic injustices prevalent in Indian society during the colonial era. The British colonial rule crushed the struggles of the marginalized sections, as they bear the brunt of economic policies favoring the elite and powerful. The novel serves as a critique of the societal structures that perpetuate inequality, urging readers to reflect on the need for social reform and equality. Anand's prose is infused with empathy and compassion, humanizing the characters and allowing readers to empathize with their plight. Munoo's dreams and aspirations become symbolic of the hopes of the marginalized section, emphasizing their inherent dignity and the universal desire for a better life. These desires are presented by Anand through last part of Sauda's speech:

“We want the right to work without having to pay bribes.

We want clean house to live in

We want schools for our children

We want shorter hours....”(Coolie, Pg.233-234)

Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* stands as a powerful testament to the resilience of the marginalized section in the face of adversity. Through Munoo's story, Anand paints a vivid picture of their struggles, shedding light on the systemic injustices and discrimination they endure. The novel challenges readers to confront the harsh realities faced by the marginalized and advocates for a more inclusive and equitable society. "Coolie" serves as a timeless literary work that continues to inspire readers to engage with the issues of social justice and equality.

IV. CONCLUSION

To conclude, Mulk Raj Anand's faith as an artist lies immensely towards social change. He presents a realistic picture of life and problems of marginalized people in his novels *Untouchable* and *Coolie*. Although woven in different dimensions, both *Untouchable* and *Coolie* are very similar as far as their themes are concerned. The protagonists from both the novels present the voices of their respective marginalized sections. These novels carry a hope that one day or other untouchables will readjust their position in Indian society and this time their Identity will not be thrust upon them by some supreme power, they will create it themselves. As Mulk Raj Anand wrote in his book *The Story of My Experiment with a White Lie*:

"Man's fate, today, is no longer in the hands of the Gods, but is often in conflict with the evil in other men. Man makes himself, or thinks he can. The heart and mind of contemporary man is therefore, moved by other casualties, than salvation."(pg16)

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