

**VOICE OF THE VOICELESS: A STUDY OF MULK RAJ ANAND'S UNTOUCHABLE, COOLIE AND TWO LEAVES AND A BUD****Ms. S. ANITHA**Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Akshaya College of Engineering and Technology,
Kinathukadavu, Coimbatore**ABSTRACT****Article Info:**

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Mulk Raj Anand, a pioneer of Indian writing in English, has gained an international reputation through his works. Anand's literary career is notable for his depiction of the lives of the poorer castes in traditional Indian society. His novels set an entire generation of educated Indians thinking about India's social evils that were perpetuated in the name of religion and tradition. His works were a chilling exposé of the day-to-day life and used it as a tool to make broad attacks on various elements of India's social structure and on British rule in India. It brought into sharp focus the dehumanising contradictions within colonised Indian society. Through his writings he revealed that in addition to the foreign colonialism of Britain there existed layers of colonialism within Indian society. This internal colonialism stood in the way of India's transition to a modern civil society. While exposing the overarching divide between the British and a colonised India, he reveals an Indian society creating its own layers of colonisers and colonised thereby rendering the fledgling Indian nationalism an extremely problematic concept. An incredibly prolific writer, Anand's creative career spanning a period of more than seventy-five years has been inextricably intertwined with the search for a just, equitable, and forward-looking India. He has written extensively in areas as variegated and diverse as art and sculpture, politics, Indian literature and history of ideas.

The topic chosen for study Voice of the Voiceless: A study of Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable, Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud describes how Mulk Raj Anand voiced the woes of the socially voiceless communities of India. His social concern is clearly projected in these novels. Untouchable mainly deals with caste conflict. Coolie is about class conflict and Two Leaves and a Bud deals with both class conflict and British exploitation.

In all civilised societies there are some kinds of inequalities that lead to social injustice. In the west it is racial discrimination, in India it is 'Casteism'. The other common inequalities are class distinction and oppression. Many a good man has attempted to cure the society of these evils in his

own way. Of the writers of Indian writing in English Mulk Raj Anand stands out as the lone voice that lent voice to the sufferings of the socially and legally voiceless communities of India through his writings.

Mulk Raj Anand is a great novelist with a mission. His aim is to evoke compassion in the minds of the upper class and privileged sections of the society for the poor. His novels expose the silent passions that burst in the hearts of the people who are forbidden to rise up and express themselves. His purpose in writing fiction has been to focus attention on the suffering, misery and wretchedness of the poor and the down-trodden people of the society. He is against all types of exploitation whether by the 'White Sahibs' or by the

'Brown Sahibs'. All the victims of exploitation portrayed by him are based on people in real life. All these real people are the untouchables, the coolies, the poor peasants and the uneducated 'pathans', fighting an unpleasant battle for survival. His humanism makes him to write for the betterment and upliftment of the underdogs of the society.

The first novel *Untouchable* deals in particular with Anand's humanitarian concern for the untouchables. They are also called as 'Dalits'. He dared to transmute into art the life and feelings of the latrine cleaner Bakha. The novel is about the sweepers of Bulanshahar. Untouchable is not a caste but a group of untouchable castes where sweeper is the lowest rung. Caste plays a significant role in every aspect of Indian life. The novel is about the story of the lowest caste 'Bhangi'. It is a caste which is considered 'untouchable' even among the untouchables themselves. The Hindu society considered the 'dalits' as the dirt of the society. They never respected them even as human beings. Anand felt that the role of literature is not only for entertainment but for social reform. The theme of the novel is an eventful day of Bakha, a Bhangi boy. The tragic sufferings of the Bhangis is clearly revealed through the central character Bakha.

Bakha is a boy of eighteen. He is the son of Lakha, the Jamadar of all the sweepers in the town. Bakha has to do the unclean work of cleaning upper castes dirt from their latrines. He is very responsible and duty-conscious. Bakha goes to the town to sweep the streets. There he faces many experiences. Anand, a strong believer in the dignity of man and equality of all men, is naturally shocked by the inhuman way in which the untouchables are treated by the superior castes – especially the Brahmins. The untouchables are forced to live away from the village. They cannot use the public well as the caste Hindus, because the high caste Hindus think that their touch will pollute the well.

In the 'Well Incident' in the novel, Anand tries to show the water problem among the untouchables. The Dalits have to wait at the well for a long time, until a caste Hindu is kind enough to draw water from the well and pour it into their pots. Sohini, Bakha's sister faces the same problem. She goes to take water. She waits for a long time; no one comes forward to fetch water for her. After some

time Kalinath, the priest comes there. He is presented as a lustful creature. He is attracted by Sohini's youthful beauty and draws a pail of water for her from the well. Then he orders her to come to his house to clean the courtyard. When she goes to his house, he tries to molest her. She screams loudly. Suddenly he shouts at her and accuses her for polluting his home. A crowd of angry caste Hindus gathers there to scold her. This incident clearly shows that justice is denied to the untouchables' even though they are right. As a result they usually become the victims of the upper caste's lust. Kalinath is supposed to lead a life of purity both inwardly and outwardly. Here, Anand exposes the hypocrisy and the practice of double standards.

The sad experiences of Bakha, in the town, are revealed by Anand pitifully. In the town Bakha sees many shops and he buys a packet of 'Red-Lamp' cigarettes and cheap sweet meats which are thrown at him by the shop keeper because of the fear of pollution. Even the nickel coins paid by him are purified by sprinkling some water on them. This cruel act shows the ruthless behavior of the high caste people. While he walks, unfortunately a Lalaji, an upper caste Hindu gets touched by him as Bakha forgets to announce his arrival. It is a custom at that time, to announce their approach by beating a drum, so that the man who does not want to get touched by the untouchables be on guard. But, here he forgets to announce his arrival. Lalaji starts shouting at him and also gives him a slap. Tears trickle down from his eyes. He stands motionless without uttering any word. The entire crowd gathered there forms a circle around him but takes care to keep a distance of several yards from him. They all are at the side of the Lalaji. No one is on Bakha's side. He feels extremely insulted and embarrassed. He also recognises with a shock, his social position. It illuminates the inner walls of his mind. He realises that though he possesses, like any human being, head and heart, flesh and blood, he is in the eyes of the world an 'Untouchable'. Here, Anand raises a question. If an untouchable boy touches a caste Hindu, it is considered as pollution. But a priest like Kalinath tries to touch an untouchable girl for his physical need is not

considered as pollution. Why is this strange logic? It is the logic of injustice.

Another example of their sufferings is shown through the 'Temple Incident'. Bakha after being hurt by the Lalaji in the town goes to the temple to sweep the courtyard. He sees the devotees in the temple are chanting 'Ram, Ram'. He wants to go up and see the deities, but he does not have the courage to go inside. Because, being an untouchable he is not allowed to move beyond the courtyard. Finally, he decides to go inside and climbs five steps. Then he has a glimpse of a sanctuary which had so far been a secret, a hidden mystery to him. He looks at the deities and unconsciously joined his hands and bowed down his head in the worship of the unknown God. He hears just then a loud cry. He is seen by a priest worshipping the God and the priest scolded him and said that he had polluted the temple. According to Hindu religious belief God is everywhere, in dead and living, in animals and in plants, but not in 'Untouchable'. Untouchables are not allowed to enter the portals of temple because it is believed by the caste Hindus that their contact will pollute the house of God, the creator of all. It shows that they are not even allowed to worship God.

Towards the end of the novel Bakha meets Colonel Hutchinson, chief of the Salvation Army. He talks to Bakha about Christian faith, but Bakha cannot get peace of mind in his words. Then he listens to the speech of Mahatma Gandhi in a meeting. His speech plays a great role in the novel. He says that untouchability is the greatest bolt on Hinduism. He calls Untouchables 'Harijans', the sons of God. Bakha is highly influenced by his words. He also meets a poet in the meeting. The poet's name is Iqbal Nath Sarshar. He says that the problem of untouchability can be solved, if the flush system is introduced. After hearing all these words, Bakha's wounded heart gets consoled.

Anand's novel *Untouchable* is considered as the 'Dalit novel' by the 'Non Dalit'. To crown the effect, Anand has introduced Gandhi as a character in the novel. Both Gandhi and Anand stand for the exploited against the exploiters and do not believe in passive acceptance of injustice. Anand's life and experience in the novel 'Saharmathi Ashram' proved extremely useful in realising the characters of the

novel. For staying in the Ashram he is asked to take few vows. Especially his cleaning of latrines in the ashram is a lesson in recognising the dignity of labour. He realised that devotion to duty is the highest form of worship and all labour is a kind of creativity.

Anand's commitment to reveal the deep rooted social evil like untouchability in the Indian society made him to create Bakha. Anand's childhood friends are mainly children from the cantonment. They included a dhobi boy called Ramcharan, a Muslim boy named Ali, and a sweeper boy Bakha. He mixed with them freely without giving importance to the caste feeling. His passionate childhood feelings and memories are reflected in every page of *Untouchable*.

Bakha is a prototype of millions of untouchables in India, because he represents the agony and anguish, the misery and frustration of the innumerable low caste people. Nobody has ever taught of transmuting into art the life and feelings of a 'Dalit' especially the latrine cleaner. They had no forum to express their problems, feelings and emotions. They are denied all kinds of rights - the right to think, speak and act. They had been so thoroughly muted and silenced by casteism. Anand provides the voice for the troubles of the innumerable 'Dalits' by acting as a mouthpiece for them.

In the second 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. The novel is divided into five chapters. Each is devoted to a separate episode depicting a particular phase of Munoo's life. The first chapter of the novel shows him as an orphan boy. His parents died because of debt to their landlord. Munoo then lives with his uncle Daya Ram and aunt Gujri. His uncle treats him kindly, but his aunt dislikes him and always scolds him. His uncle and aunt consider him old enough to earn his own bread. So his uncle takes him to Sham Nagar to work as a domestic servant in Babu Nathoo Ram's house, who is a Sub-

Accountant in the Imperial Bank of India where Daya Ram also works.

The second chapter of the novel pictures Munoo in Babu Nathoo Ram's house, at Sham Nagar. Munoo is badly treated by Nathoo Ram's wife Bibiji. He is all the time abused by her without any reason. She makes his life a hell. One day, Munoo runs away from the house, unable to bear the cruelty any longer. After leaving Sham Nagar, he is taken to the 'Cat Killers Lane' in Daulatpur by Seth Prabha Dayal, who sees him in a train. Prabha Dayal owns a pickle factory in Daulatpur. The third chapter of Munoo's life starts in Daulatpur. Prabha's wife Parbati treats him with affection and care. Munoo works in the pickle factory. He has to work from early in the morning to late in the night, in the dark suffocating atmosphere. Prabha's partner Ganpet dislikes Munoo. Munoo is very much afraid of him. One day Ganpet cheats Prabha and puts him in debt and leaves the factory. The factory runs under heavy loss and soon Prabha lay ill. After some days he gets recovered and decides to go to his native hills. The factory is sold up and Prabha gives some money to Munoo. Munoo feels sad for his master and leaves Daulatpur.

Munoo then goes to Bombay and the fourth chapter of the novel deals with the miserable life of Munoo in Bombay. Munoo gets employed in 'Sir George Mills'. He is employed at very low wages. The hours of work are very long. He feels this as hell compared to Sham Nagar and Daulatpur. Hari Har, one of the workers in the company accompanies Munoo. Munoo likes him and his family very much. The foreman of the company is Jimmie Thomas. He is a powerful figure. It is he who engages the workers, supervises their work, and their job and the workers entirely depend upon him. He is proud, arrogant, and greedy, exploits the poor workers, and exerts money out of them in every possible way. Jimmie Thomas gives his cottage for high rental to the workers. Munoo and Hari live in his cottage. The cottage is not fit enough for animals to live in. Here, Anand clearly reveals how, the poor coolies are exploited by the powerful owners.

One day hundreds of the coolies' huts are damaged by heavy rains. Without informing Jimmie Thomas, Munoo and Hari leaves the place and secure accommodation by Ratan, one of the workers

in the company. Jimmie gets angry. He scolds Munoo, Hari and Ratan. He also dismisses Ratan. Soon a strike is announced. A meeting is arranged to take a decision on strike, but unfortunately it turned into a great conflict. Many are wounded and killed. Munoo is so much shocked and afraid. He decides to run away from the place as soon as possible.

In the last and the final chapter of the novel, Anand presents Munoo's sad plight in Simla. After leaving Bombay, he is knocked down by a car, and taken to Simla, by Mrs. Mainwaring. It is she who knocked him by the car. She appoints Munoo as her rickshaw puller and page. She treats him nicely and he feels happy and enjoys his life. But then one of his duties is to pull the rickshaw whenever she wants to go out for shopping. She goes almost daily, and the task of pulling the rickshaw, puts a severe pain on his lungs. He coughs frequently and blood comes out with his spittle. His condition worsens day by day and one night the poor coolie boy dies of tuberculosis.

The life history of Munoo is the life history of starving millions of India who are beaten from pillar to post and who are overworked and insulted and treated as beasts of burden, till they die prematurely of hunger, suffering and disease. They are constantly exploited and ill-treated. This is well revealed through Munoo. Anand clearly presents the hard plight of Munoo at different places by different exploiters. It is only the exploiters that change, the exploited remains the same. Finally, it is revealed through the death of Munoo, that the coolie always belongs to the suffering community and his life is wholly determined by the ruthless forces of the society. In this unequal social order it is ever hard to get justice. Munoo runs from place to place in search of peace, happiness and justice but what he gets is pain, sorrow and injustice. That is the unwritten fate of the innumerable coolies in India.

The third 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 labourers in Assam Tea Plantations. It gives expression to the unending anguish of the tea plantation labourers under extremely selfish British masters who treat the male fold among the

labourers 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 labourers are deprived of fundamental freedom and subjected to a cruel militaristic organisation. They are overworked and ruthlessly exploited.

The Assam Tea Estate is a world within a world that projects suspicion, cruelty and exploitation of the poor labourers by the Britishers. The colonisers need maximum profits, larger outputs at the cost of the labourers' blood and sweat. The coolies are employed not directly by the English men, but through Indian agents. These agents speak the poor man's language so as to win their heart by making sweet promises. Finally, the labourers are caught in their web and suffer under the 'White Sahibs' till the end of their life. Without any resistance, the labourers accept all sorts of humiliation and restraints, so that they can get atleast something that fell into their lot for keeping their body and soul together.

The only kind hearted man in the novel is Dr. De la Harve. Among the Britishers, he is the one who is concerned about the welfare of the labourers. There are no proper latrines and the picture of hook worms hatching eggs and the millions of mosquitoes haunt his mind. He also finds the water supply at fault which causes cholera to spread regularly every year. Gangu narrowly escapes from cholera, but his self-sacrificing wife fall an easy prey to it. Gangu has no money with him at that time. He approaches the Assistant Manager Reggie Hunt for a loan to complete the last ritual of his dead wife, but he is thrown away from the office because his presence might spread infection all over the office.

The average British attitude towards Indians is represented by Reggie Hunt. He treats the

labourers as inferior human beings and bonded slaves. He is also a lustful creature. None of the wives, sisters and daughters life of the coolie men is safe. Anand pities the fate of women labourers and their insecurity of life in the tea estate. The novel ends with the tragic death of Gangu, while trying to save his daughter Leila's life from the cruel Manager Reggie Hunt. One day Reggie tries to molest Leila in her house. At that time Gangu comes to his daughter's rescue and he is shot dead by the cunning Manager Reggie.

The novel brought to light the inhuman cruelty committed by the 'Whites'. Anand, through Gangu portrays the poor plight of the labourers for their bread under the British capitalists. The painful truth of the living condition of the labourers in the tea plantation is revealed pathetically in the novel. The labourers struggle hard to come out of the pathetic situation but find themselves helpless to shake off the coils of evil. These suppressed labourers have no way of finding a remedy to their woes. Mulk Raj Anand speaks on their behalf through his novels.

Thus, Mulk Raj Anand has used the three novels as a platform to lend voice to the millions of the voiceless untouchables, the exploited coolies and the oppressed plantation labourers. Anand feels that if the sufferings of these people are not made known to the public, then there is no hope of redemption for them. Hence he decides to be their 'mouth piece' through his writings. As a responsible writer, he tries to create in the readers mind an urgent awareness of the dehumanising social evils, to stir the springs of tenderness in them and to activate them for the removal of all these evils. It is said that the sufferings of these people is a 'national tragedy'. It is not only a 'national tragedy' but 'universal' tragedy. History has innumerable examples of the evils like caste conflict, class conflict etc., Many writers said that social, economic and political freedom, is the birth-right of all men.

Seven decades have passed since the publication of the above three novels. The untiring efforts of Mahatma Gandhi, the ceaseless campaigns of social reformers and the subsequent measures of political and social forces have borne fruits. The legal protection for the 'Dalits' provided in the constitution laws of the country and the

declaration of political rights to them have certainly lifted their social status. The Hindu castes have been officially classified and graded and the untouchables, the coolies and the oppressed people are given all the rights enjoyed by their fellow human beings. The doors of education are opened to them. It can be stated with certainty that, Anand's novels have contributed their mite to this process of change of attitude of the people, and the 'untouchables' are now called Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The social changes, the political measures and legislations have greatly altered the situation of the 'Dalits' largely. It is all due to the efforts of Gandhiji and novelists like Mulk Raj Anand. It would be right to say here that, Anand's literary campaign is a beginning that had a good ending.

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