



## A study of Mulk Raj Anand's contribution to English literature in general and society in particular

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### Abstract

This study focuses on Mulk Raj Anand's contributions to English Literature in general and society in particular. Being born and brought up in India, he was more concerned with his society and explored his vision by writing about his Indian society. Mulk Raj Anand got his degrees from foreign Universities and got attached to English Literature and discovered his strength in writing in English in general but mentioned his experience of society. This paper will generate enthusiasm to explain his courage, urge, and zeal to make possible changes and remove the criminalities and impurities in the form of caste, creed, and color of Indian societies. This study encourages readers to adopt his positive attitude towards the unacceptable norms of society.

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### Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand has always written extensively about art, saying that while it does reflect life, it cannot be regarded as life itself. The fact that Anand did not come from a downtrodden part of society gave him the required awareness of the gap between art and life. As a result, Anand's political ideas have a distinct position in the analysis of his novels. They stem from his conception of literature as a means of revealing life in all its paradoxes. A piece of art is a social event in his eyes, and a novelist must create but not determine. His duty to his fellow-men is to transform the world and make it a better place for all of us (Padmamma, 2015) <sup>[18]</sup>. Mulk Raj Anand, the originator, generator, and pioneer of Indian English Literature, was born on December 12, 1905, in Peshawar to a Kshatriya family. Mulk Raj Anand had renounced his ancestors' profession and went for higher studies abroad. He got encouraged with intellect to work upon his background and used his writing skills creatively (Raghavendra, 2021) <sup>[19]</sup>. Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Coolie* has become a classic in modern Indian literature since its publication in 1936. The novel criticized the social, economic, and cultural consequences of more than two centuries of British colonialism and India's severe caste system, which has long divided its residents into groups based on their employment position and ethnicity (Clark, 2017) <sup>[4]</sup>. The novel appeared at the height of a turbulent decade in which India itself, under the moral leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, began to agitate for its independence and, in the process, struggled to define itself (Easwaran, 2011) <sup>[5]</sup>. Because Anand was among the first prominent Indian authors to introduce the idioms and patois of India's indigenous people into otherwise English-language writing, *Coolie* secured a place in 20th-century Anglo-Indian literature (Singh, 2018) <sup>[26]</sup>. Dr. Mulk Raj Anand has contributed significantly to Indian global literature in English through his remarkable prolificacy, daring innovation, and aesthetic sensibility (Khurshid, 2010) <sup>[15]</sup>. His Dickensian humanistic attitude influences his unorthodox issues and characters. He uncovered new trends by creating competing heroes/anti-heroes in his novels. His fictional universe is populated by characters from diverse social strata, ranging from the very lowest to the very top of the social structure. Anand's portrayal of characters who "once were actual men and women" and are not simple phantoms of fiction reveals great psychological understanding.

His otherwise authentic and objective character characterization, on the other hand, is magnificent, and the primary need of a piece of artwork (Tiwari, 2011) <sup>[27]</sup>. This study discusses his influence on English literature and his mind-and-soul presence in society. This paper is proof that he wrote his short stories and novels in English, but his themes depict his native land and the issues of casteism and untouchability. Being an Indo-Anglian writer, he takes much stress and puts his numerous efforts into developing his writing skills purely in Indian style. Anand's literature contains many people/readers who interact with one another (Gopal, 2009) <sup>[8]</sup>.

According to Akbar (2018, p.250) <sup>[11]</sup>, "no Indian writer of fiction in English comes close to Mulk Raj Anand in offering a social and political portrait of India from the time of the Delhi darbar in 1911. Until the demise of the Indian princess following Indian independence in 1947." Mulk Raj Anand regards art and Literature as the instruments of humanism. In reality, Anand's humanism has been the inspiration and the driving force behind the writing of the novels. It can be illustrated with Anand's biography. The thematic base of his novels and short stories made him more creative and understandable among his readers. His childhood experiences developed a good range of themes in his novels. His father served in the Indian Army. As a child, he mixed freely with the children of the sweeper and undercastes attached to his father's regiment. His life experiences kept motivating him to use his childhood mates as the characters of his famous novels.

Anand has undertaken the theme of untouchable with the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, and he is also awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel 'Morning Face,' in which he completely talks about Casteism and its barriers. Like Gandhiji, Anand's motive is to eradicate the evils of untouchability from society. The primary themes of his novels and short stories are to remove the impurities of society by liberating females from veils and other restrictions, poverty, and untouchability, and to erase the diversion of caste and class (Karki, 2007) <sup>[13]</sup>.

Furthermore, while in London, he was influenced by Marx. Untouchable, Coolie, Two Leaves, A Bud, Across the Black Waters, and The Sword and the Sickle were among his novels that welcomed human experiences and communicated a feeling of life and character. As a humanist, he believes that a man can solve the problem through universal love and compassion. Few people like Hawildar Chart Singh, who belongs to a high caste but has a soft corner for Bakha. Thus, humanity can save low-caste people from being exploited. Mulk Raj Anand was one of the who is Kshatriyas who experienced, thought about, and wrote about them. His attitude was not only sympathetic but also empathetic. With this excellence of experimentation and boldness, he also contributed not only to Indian literature but also to the world's literature in English. Mulk Raj Anand was influenced by the short story style and Western psychological approach (KC, 2015). The years from (1925-to 1945) were the complete struggle of Mulk Raj Anand as a novelist after being popularized as a short story writer where he worked upon varied themes like freedom struggle, the collision of Eastern-Western, religious hypocrisy, the relationship of the rural and the ruled, exploitation of poor and downtrodden. His struggle to be a novelist flourished and gave him wings to be in the air of name and fame as a novelist. His novels deal with the themes of poverty, hunger, and exploitation in

Untouchable-1935, Coolie-1936, The Village-1939, Two leaves, and a bud-1937, The Sword and the Sickle-1942 and The Road-1963. The best way to deliver the writer's point of view is 'Novels. It was rightly said by Francis H. Stoddard, which Sharma later on quoted:

"A novel is a story about human existence under emotional stress." That is where it differentiates from the epic. It is a story about ordinary people, not superhumans, told through the prism of ordinary rather than extraordinary or heroic feelings (Bhatnagar & Rajeshwar, 2000) <sup>[2]</sup>. Mulk Raj Anand was a torchbearer for the Progressive Writers' Movement of the twentieth century. Untouchable, Mulk Raj Anand's new novel, depicts a day in the life of Bakha, an Untouchable sweeper boy (Hossain, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>. He explains the feelings, aspirations, and problems of this sweeper boy, who undergoes many hardships because he belongs to a low caste within Indian society. The famous quote from Untouchable is, "They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt." (as cited in Rathee, 2021 p.86) <sup>[21]</sup>. It briefs Anand's understanding of the sad realities of India's social life. Prof. H.M. Williams exemplifies the problem of 'untouchability,' which he defines as "the treatment of the latrine-cleaning class doomed to isolation and hardship as feces handlers; he exposes this as a social evil and provides a cure" (Joshi, 2013, p.2) <sup>[12]</sup>. The evil of untouchability in India has an Ancient History. It originates from the four groups of Hindu castes-Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Sudras. The Sudras represent the lowest of all in the social hierarchy). The next prominent theme is based on Social Realism which presents the reality of society and its living organisms in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand. Other renowned writers like A.K. Ramanujan and R.K. Narayan take up the theme of Social Realism in their works as they all are social reformers. The reality lies in the thoughts of human beings who have developed their minds with the hierarchy of class and caste, which does not allow them to think beyond the level of superiority of their class (Halpern, 1998) <sup>[10]</sup>.

Untouchable is the story of the never-ending indignity and humiliation of this class in society. Untouchable, a powerful novel might be considered archetypal Anand because it addresses most of life's core themes (Ramachandran, 2003) <sup>[20]</sup>.

The central theme of Untouchable is that untouchable it is a problem in Hindu society. His aunt's experience with a Muslim woman and is regarded as an outcast by her family inspired him. The writer Martin Seymour Smith has described Untouchable as one of the most eloquent and imaginative works to deal with this challenging and emotive subject. Bakha is the central character in the novel Untouchable (Regmi, 2021) <sup>[22]</sup>. The whole story revolves around his character as he plays a vital role as an 18 years young man. He represents the entire community of outcasts treated as untouchables and meant to live miserable lives. Bakha is very strong, fearless, and frank. In the words of E.M. faster, "Bakha is an individual, lovable, thwarted, and very strong but becomes weak at times, and the most important aspect of his personality is that he is Indian. He is marked for his fortitude, tolerance, humility, and broad vision." (George, 1994, p.41) <sup>[7]</sup>. Anand used much of his writings to describe the trauma those at the bottom of India's complex social hierarchy suffered. Untouchable's narrative centers around the case for abolishing the caste system. This novel is the new awareness that may lead to the emergence of a new morality. Bakha, the novelist's protagonist, is the archetypal figure of

Untouchable. As he interacts with the world's evils, he becomes more unaware. Because of his untouchability, he is outside the caste and religious circles where Kali Nath is the priest who has created an atmosphere in the Hindu religion that involves the magic of incantation, idolatry, and ritualism. Bakha is attempting to get admission but is miserably humiliated. Finally, he transforms into a fledgling rebel. Individuals' articulate thinking is influenced by their need for identity (Saraswat, 2013) <sup>[24]</sup>.

### Problem Statement

The study aims to delve into the contributions of Mulk Raj Anand, a pioneer of Indian English Literature, and his impact on society. Despite his extensive work and influence, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that encapsulate his contributions to English literature and his societal impact, particularly in addressing issues such as casteism, untouchability, exploitation, and colonialism.

Anand's work, characterized by his unique Indo-Anglian style, has been instrumental in highlighting the societal norms and issues of his time. His writings, while being in English, vividly portray his experiences and observations of Indian society. However, the depth and breadth of his contributions, especially in terms of societal impact, have not been fully explored or appreciated.

This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by focusing on Anand's contributions to English Literature and society. It aims to generate enthusiasm to explain his courage, urge, and zeal to effect possible changes and remove the criminalities and impurities in the form of caste, creed, and color of Indian societies. The study encourages readers to adopt his positive attitude towards the unacceptable norms of society. The problem lies in the underrepresentation and lack of comprehensive understanding of Anand's work and its societal implications. This study aims to address this problem by providing a detailed analysis of Anand's contributions and their impact on society.

### Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to analyze Mulk Raj Anand's work and its societal implications. The study will focus on how Anand's literature, characterized by his unique Indo-Anglian style, has addressed and challenged societal norms and issues. It will also explore how his writings have influenced and shaped societal perceptions and attitudes towards these issues. The objective of this study is to critically analyze Mulk Raj Anand's contributions to English Literature and society. The study aims to:

- Understand the themes and narratives in Anand's works.
- Analyze the societal issues addressed in his works, particularly casteism and untouchability.
- Evaluate the impact of Anand's works on society and English Literature.
- Explore Anand's influence on subsequent writers and the Progressive Writers' Movement.

### Literature review

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) was one of the pioneering and most influential voices of 20th-century Indian English literature, who employed his fiction to highlight pressing socio-cultural issues that plagued the marginalized sections of society in India. By centering his novels and stories around the daily travails and injustices endured by subaltern groups, Anand confronted the endemic inequities around caste,

gender and class that were either deliberately obscured or reluctantly accepted as status quo in the name of religion, tradition or culture (Nayar, 2023) <sup>[17]</sup>.

### Religious roots of caste hierarchies

A significant focus of Anand's writings is depicting the wanton oppression and dehumanization unleashed by the Hindu caste system prevalent in India for centuries. He traces the patently discriminatory caste hierarchies sanctioned by Hindu scriptures to the ancient four-fold varna stratification of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras in accordance with their occupation and status. Anand constantly engages with how those branded as 'untouchables' and confined to menial, polluting jobs like latrine cleaning, suffered routine public humiliation, isolation and violence under the religious sanction of the caste architecture (Saini, 2012) <sup>[13]</sup>.

### The Innate Inequality of Caste Apartheid

Through the realist lens of his novels, Anand lays bare the innate inequality and dehumanization enabled by the social dominance of upper-caste Hindus throughout India's history. Along with other pioneering Indian writers in English like R.K Narayan and A.K Ramanujan, Anand used fiction as an instrument to reveal the unvarnished everyday realities shaped by caste prejudice that had been culturally silenced and normalised for generations. His extensive corpus diligently records how dominant power structures manifested in terms of elite castes, feudal classes and temple authorities legitimized the economic and sexual exploitation of subaltern groups through the internalization of assumed upper caste superiority among Indians themselves (Kumar, 2020) <sup>[16]</sup>.

### Untouchable – Anatomy of Religious Apartheid

Anand's breakthrough novel *Untouchable* published in 1935 offers an unparalleled expose of the workings of caste apartheid within Indian society through the lived experience of its sweeper protagonist Bakha. By meticulously detailing a single day in Bakha's life, Anand provides a microcosm of the endless humiliations and trauma endured by outcastes merely due to the accident of their birth. Bakha as an archetypal victim lays bare the systemic dehumanization unleashed by Hindu religious sanction that normalized violence against India's oppressed castes for generations (Saraswat, 2013) <sup>[24]</sup>.

### Social reality of caste atrocities

While caste discrimination had existed from ancient times in India, Anand's novel for the first time unflinchingly turns the spotlight on actual ground realities that had been hitherto culturally muted, suppressed or deemed religiously sacrosanct. *Untouchable* reveals to India's English-educated elite of the 1930s the chilling everyday brutality that underpinned the veneer of spiritual mysticism around Hinduism because of rigid caste hierarchies. Through Bakha's tragic tale, Anand exposes both the ubiquity and insidiousness of caste atrocities that his privileged contemporaries were able to ignore by virtue of their upper-caste status (Cherechés, 2019) <sup>[9]</sup>.

### The symbolism of Bakha's character

As the protagonist situated at the heart of *Untouchable's* narrative, Bakha emerges as the symbolic encapsulation of the traumatic existence of outcastes. His stoic endurance of



predictable public humiliations, religious hypocrisy and constant debasement poignantly mirrors the actual lived reality inflicted upon marginalized groups solely because of their birth status. Through him, Anand creates an exemplum of the voiceless, faceless outcasts dehumanized mentally and physically under Hindu dogma which enabled their economic, social and cultural exploitation by powerful savarnas without qualms (Sbeih, 2018) <sup>[25]</sup>.

### **Anand's Humanistic Vision**

While predicating his novel on the excesses of religious dogma, Anand locates the possibility of redemption in humanistic empathy that cuts across man-made social boundaries. Brief instances of compassion displayed by the British sergeant or havildar Charat Singh offers Bakha fleeting solace amidst the crushing oppression he endures from fellow Indians across class spectrum. Through these moments, Anand suggests the necessity of egalitarian humanism transcending parochial identities around religion, caste or race for overcoming long-entrenched social evils (Goswami, 2009) <sup>[9]</sup>.

### **The politics of caste in Anand's fiction**

Anand's extensive fictional output is embedded in the politics of caste inequality just as India's freedom movement gained momentum. By placing religious oppression faced by subaltern protagonists like Bakha at the heart of *Untouchable's* narrative, Anand contributed to raising social awareness about caste apartheid. His cultural intervention through English fiction engendered debates around the need to annihilate caste hierarchies as an integral component of India's nation-building efforts aiming to establish an egalitarian, pluralist society (Singh, 2018) <sup>[26]</sup>.

### **Influence on Indian public discourse**

By choosing to focus his artistic gaze on exposing the everyday realities around the dehumanization of marginalized groups in India due to religious sanctification of caste hierarchies, Anand played a seminal role in shaping modern understandings of social justice, equality and human rights in post-Independence India. His cultural legacy lies in placing victims of caste atrocities like Bakha at the center and demonstrating the urgent need to dismantle oppressive belief systems and structures in order to create a more just nation. through path-breaking literary depictions of the impact of caste discrimination in novels like *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, and *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Mulk Raj Anand compelled the English-educated elite of India to confront the stark oppression and trauma inflicted on subaltern groups which had been rendered invisible for centuries. His corpus of fiction helped raise social awareness about endemic inequities at a crucial juncture of India's anti-colonial movement. By denuding the cultural and religious misconceptions enabling caste apartheid, Anand crucially influenced modern re-examinations around social equality and rights necessary for an emancipated post-colonial India (Garg, 2017) <sup>[6]</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

As a result, the novel presents an authentic picture of brutal reality. The novel's overt call for abolition is unmistakable. Mulk Raj Anand has created a narrative that expresses the exploitation of an exploited class via sympathy in the conventional form of the realism novel. Anand is a well-

known writer who has been likened to Charles Dickens in this regard. There is a glimmer of optimism that India will be rid of prejudice, callousness, and unfair discrimination. The timeless beauty of equality and unity may soon reign in our land. This paper depicts the perspective of Mulk Raj Anand through his novels towards casteism and the negative attitude of the rich toward the poor, their behavior, and the development of negativity among them. This paper has made it clear that Mulk Raj Anand's contribution to English Literature and his society was remarkable and authenticated.

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