

# INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES ON THE WRITINGS OF MULK RAJ ANAND

*Gunjan Jain*

*Professor, Global Education Department Westminster International University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan*

Received: 22 Mar 2021

Accepted: 24 Mar 2021

Published: 30 Mar 2021

## ABSTRACT

*Mulk Raj Anand was a novelist of and for the people reason being his writings deal with a variety of issues affecting various social classes. He tries to educate the upper crust of Indian society about the sufferings of the lower caste poor caused by inhumane but deeply embedded religious and social institutions in the tradition-bound country. He vehemently raised his voice for the poor downtrodden, underdog which is quite patent on the very surface.*

*The title of his various novels clearly points the exploited classes, miseries and disability that is highlighted in his writings. He portrays faithful, realistic and true to life picture of the miserable of Indian society. Anand's first-hand experience had gained stood him in good stead, when he decided to write about them. He believed that it was his responsibility and life's goal to draw attention to the myriad wrongs, injustices, and injuries that were being inflicted on this wretched estranged section of Indian society.*

*This paper aims to study the life and the humiliating condition of the low downtrodden victims of the inexorable social, economic, and political order that existed in traditional Indian villages that Mulk Raj Anand chose for himself.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Social and Political Issues, Mulk Raj Anand*

## INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the luminous gems in the diadem of Indian writing in English. His writings are distinguished by his acute understanding of the Indian tradition, the darker forces that impact the weaker section of the Indian society. His humanitarian outlook, and deep compassion for the oppressed and deprived people contributed in establishing the basic form and themes of Indian Literature.

Mulk Raj Anand was a versatile genius, an optimist, a humanist, a deep thinker, a moving speaker, an able organizer, a politician, a civil servant, journalist, a great scholar, a patient teacher, a capital storyteller, and a literary architect all in one, and he was an host in himself as a belletrist. His close encounter close encounters with the suffering underprivileged began early in his life. K.N. Sinha comments:

Anand, it seems to me, is nothing less than a novelist of the human condition, a novelist whose province is human nature. The appeal of his novels is passionate; this significance is multiple and hopefully timeless rather than topical and temporal.<sup>1</sup> (Sinha 72)

Mulk Raj Anand takes a bold and fearless plunge by going to the lowest stratum of life. He decides to paint India in stark colors. Real India he felt could be found amidst untouchables, coolies, landless laborers, exploited wives and expelled princes. Anand's writings focus on the issues such as casteism and human suffering caused by a number of factors including political, economic, social, and cultural factors. He refuses to accept "this tenancy on the earth as a death on the installment plan."<sup>2</sup>(Naik) He categorically comments, "I would no longer live by the dead ideas of traditional philosophies, the ritual of the old religions or by the tame word of classics".<sup>3</sup>(Anand, Crossroads in life 34)

Mulk Raj Anand is a pioneer of the Modern Indian novel. His writings portray empathy for the underprivileged and downtrodden. He can be called the champion of the downtrodden. The striking factor of his writings is that he reveals a true intuition of the inhumanity of man, his exploitative nature and his possible redemption. He rejects all the institutions in favor of man as the convincing solution can be found in man "the maker and the breaker of the world." That is the reason why Anand repeats in his novels that "I believe in Man!" His extraordinary consciousness is touched to the core by the rich's exploitation of the poor, and he is compelled to portray this exploitation in his novels.

I began to dream of writing about the poorest of the poor human beings whom I had known, and not very much about the orthodox and superior people of high caste, class and status in the town and villages where I had grown up. Especially I was inspired to brood on the caste ways, because the richer people were anyhow mostly on the side of the White Sahib.<sup>4</sup> (Iyengar 340)

Through his cast of characters, Anand delves into the complexities of human life. It's an analysis of his social ethos, which has been distorted by society's immorality. Mulk Raj Anand, speaking about the real test of the novelist, what he was through seven decades of his literary career once said:

It may lie in the transformation of words into prophesy. Because, what is writer if he is not the fiery voice of the people, who, through his own torments, urges and exaltations, by realizing the pains, frustrations and aspirations of others, and by cultivating his incipient powers of expression, transmutes in art all feeling, all thought, all experience - thus becoming the seer of a new vision in any given situation.<sup>5</sup> (qtd. in Dhawan, 14)

Anand was persuaded that art cannot and should not be separated from its social role as he grew up under the British Raj and wrote against the backdrop of colonial rule and anti-colonial resistance. His poetics of protest, which portrays the writer as a revolutionary, is indelibly influenced by Marxist thinking. It's also a feature of the postcolonial rhetoric that arose during the period of colonialism's decline.

Anand seeks to instill in the readers a sense of urgency about the dehumanizing social evils, to arouse tenderness in them, and to mobilize them to fight these evils and bring social order into being. In his usual ebullient fashion, Anand has asserted:

If you ask me why I write novel, I say it's because I love. The love not for oneself or one's own, but for the entire mankind, transcending all constricting limitations of caste, creed, and economic or social status, and all geographical boundaries of nations all of which are man-made. Looking back on how the words I have written come through in my fiction, I feel that the deeper urgings were from the wish to communicate and be understood, which is essentially the desire to be loved.<sup>6</sup> (Anand: Icon of Indo Anglian Literature)

The theme of exploitation, similar as other theme is widely explored in the writings of Anand. The works are influenced by his own life experience and the life of people around him. Anand gained his firsthand experience of pre-partitioned Punjab from cantonment which he visited with his father frequently as his father being the soldier in army was transferred from cantonment to cantonment. Anand, since his childhood and youth found himself very closely connected with the life of underprivileged and untouchables as he lived in the same society of children. He very minutely observed and felt the pain and agony of this weaker section which prompted him to portray their exploitation with transparent clarity in his novels. He had himself seen the misery, the wretchedness, and the squalor of the lower classes of Hindu society, and his conscience had rebelled against the injustice being done to them. His novels are protest against the conditions which prevailed in the day when these novels were written. He remarks:

I had to soak myself in the lives of men and women from within their tormented senses. I immersed myself in the sub world of the poor, the continuous pilgrimage to the village, the small town and big town bastis of our country.<sup>7</sup> (Anand, *Why I Write?*)

Despite the fact that Anand was usually based in England, he felt compelled to react to the effect of those events on Indian society and literature. He wrote for and about the people, and he assumed himself the in-charge of the common people, the marginalized Indians. His early novels reveal an effort and a sense of direction akin to a deluge or flood, which demonstrates vigor, strength and motivation. Mulk Raj Anand interprets the problems besetting man and society and comes out with an adult view of life with his firm belief in the perfectibility of man in the togetherness of life. K.R. Rao rightly observes:

Mulk Raj Anand however reveals a total commitment to socialist doctrine and gives credence to ideological analysis and humanistic evaluation. He merely presents a cross section of Indian society through the national survey of the prevailing conditions in the 20s subordinates, rather than highlight the historical experiences.<sup>7</sup> (Khan 17)

Anand's interaction with Gandhiji, gave him better understanding of not only about social but also the economic issues of poor Indians in general- exploitation that was rooted in the political structure of the imperialist exploitative Britisher's colonial rule of India. With the widening of his vision of exploitation, economic exploitation as a part of this political situation and as distinct from the largely social exploitation in *Untouchable* became the major theme of his *Coolie*. The political element increases all the more in the economic exploitation portrayed in *Two Leaves and a Bud*. All these aspects of exploitation – social, economic and political – find expression in the novel. In the trilogy, *The Big Heart*, *Private Life of an Indian Prince*, *Gauri or Old Woman and the Cow*, the political-economic problem is the main theme while in *The Road* the social problem – particularly the concept of untouchability--- is reiterated by Anand. The theme of the trilogy—the *Village*, *Across the Black Waters*, and *The Sword and the Sickle*—shows the real development of Anand's mind and art. "The change that is chronicled in this trilogy is pivotal to Anand's whole development",<sup>9</sup> writes Alastair Niven. The trilogy covers all kinds of problems –religious, social, political and economic.

Mulk Raj Anand is a devout follower of the doctrine of social revolution and the socialist social model. In his writings he not only tried to represent India from a realistic perspective, but also highlighted a new concept of identity which was emerging because of the dehumanizing condition generated by colonization. He tries to illustrate a national identity bedecked with sympathy, he also attempts at championing the causes of the marginalized in a larger perspective so that a universal construct of the marginalized could be established and followed. It is for his adherence to an indigenous

value system that Anand could champion the causes of the marginalized in his fiction and attempted to save these marginalized ones from the uncanny forces of double colonization. This is how, by representing the nation he was trying to go beyond the nation. Somerset Maugham has written in his Notebook about the marginalized in India:

It wasn't the Taj Mahal, the ghats of Benaras, the temples at Madurai or the mountains of Travancore that had moved me; it was the peasant, terribly emaciated, with nothing to cover his nakedness but a rag round the middle .... That was the sight that had given me the most poignant emotion in India.<sup>10</sup> (Bald 489)

The Indian society was packed with the dust of politics and tainted with the smolder of man's insensitivity towards man in the late twenties and early thirties, but it was not entirely pessimistic, which he has hinted in the Preface to the second Indian edition of *Two Leaves and a Bud*. When it comes to the pariahs and outcasts, Anand unhesitatingly projected in his writings which was not completely left untouched by the other writers who prefer to project the sophisticated and elite section of the society.

Despite their nationalistic overtones, Bankim Chandra's novels were more romances, with a historical or mystical bent, that were distinctly clichéd of Scott. Tagore was primarily interested in the upper and middle classes, while Sarat Chandra was mainly concerned in the lower middle classes; Munshi Premchand's themes were drawn from the peasantry and common people of Uttar Pradesh. None of them were interested in projecting realistic or naturalistic fiction set in India. His aim was to show the world that there was more to the Orient than what Omar Khayyam, Li Po, Tagore, or Kipling might tell them. He described a waif like Munoo in *Coolie*, and an Untouchable like Bakha, an impassioned laborer like Gangu, and set them right at the centre of the design of malice and exploitation that held India in its sadistic grip.

Mulk Raj Anand was a pivotal figure in the development of the new wave of realism in the 1920s and 1930s. All of Anand's novels, especially the early and best, are motivated attempts to reveal the agony and misery of India's social classes and castes. Anand was nothing less than a novelist of human condition whose province was human nature. The appeal of his novels is passionate, this significance is multiple and hopefully timeless and temporal. His novels offer a cogent balance of the propagandist protest and his persuasive sympathetic realism are relatively more convincing as literary exercise.

Those who accuse Anand of being a propagandist that his humanitarian zeal often carries him off his feet and his art degenerates into propaganda and that he plays a part of a social reformer at the expense of a novelist. They are of the opinion that he often seems to use the novel of the distillation of his social and political ideas and his characters mostly work out to be little more than elucidators and amplifiers.<sup>11</sup> (George 27)

Anand defends himself against the charge of propaganda:

In so far, I have dealt with challenges like those of color and caste, even without giving response, I have been accused of indulging in political and social propaganda. But, fundamentally my exposition of character and situation is to reveal life in as total a manner as possible. My adverse critics have seldom seen the symbolism, the attitude and rugged poetry beneath the prose. Therefore, if to attempt the meaning of life in any given environment is propaganda, then I am propagandist, otherwise this is expressionism which I define as an enactment of the body-soul drama of human beings through the imagination.<sup>12</sup> (George 27)

Mulk Raj Anand, the most notable and widely panned Indo Anglian author, revealed that the driving factor – rather than the primary trigger – behind the writing of his novels has been the characters in his novels. He observes, “All my novels and short stories arise from a long confession of nearly two thousand pages, which I wrote from a compulsion of a morbid obsession with myself, and the people who possessed me seep in my conscience”.<sup>13</sup>(Neena 5)

As the range of his expression and vision widened with his years and increasing contact with political and economic realities, the thematic range of exploitation also expanded from novel to novel. It developed from largely social exploitation imbedded in the political system reflected in his novels. He tried to show the kindness towards common people. *Coolie* is the best manifestation of his love for the common people. With goodness of his heart, he shares the joys and sorrows of people in his novel. He being the champion of truth interpreted the Indian life in terms of universalism and combined all that is best in human virtues. As a novelist he had achieved great success, he was sometimes tempted to overstate his case and thus turns his novels either in melodrama or farce.

Mulk Raj Anand project himself as a humanist in his writings with a genuine desire to improve the health and happiness of the weaker and deprived section of the society which is treated unfairly by the elite. He illustrates the deplorable plight of poor and weak through the protagonists of his novels. The aim of his writings was to arouse social consciousness in the affluent and powerful people a sense of responsibility towards the victims of injustice and exploitation. In his interview he comments:

I wish to be judged a writer, who has tried to tell the truth of life and some compassion. I am not subject to western categories. The question is how far my novels recreate life.<sup>14</sup> (Neena)

Approximately 70 years after Independence, the problems of class, poverty, decadence, backwardness, ignorance and erroneous with in India portrayed in Anand’s novels written in 1935 continue to resist uncompromising and complete elucidation for easy solution. For his realistic portrayal of the social and economic problems suffered by Indians because of the caste system and British colonial rule, Anand is considered by many critics to be one of India's best writers. The value of his novels, according to Margaret Berry, "is the witness they offer of India's agonizing attempt to break out of massive stagnation and create a society in which men and women are free and equal."<sup>15</sup>(Verma 34)

Mulk Raj Anand had tried to focus on the problems prevailing in the society of the pre- independence India. He had not suggested proper solution of the problems but very successfully he successfully influenced the mind of the readers towards them, so that they could fight for their position and right in the society. Anand’s relevance and importance increased with the passage of time. The following passage of the substance he sums up his view as the novelist. The novelist emphasizes “the need for locating our society in the modern world.”<sup>16</sup> (Sharma xxiv)

What is a writer if he is not the fiery voice of the people, who, through his own torments, urges, exaltation, by realizing the pain, frustration, aspiration of others, and by cultivating his incipient powers of expressions transmutes in art all feeling, all thought, all experiences –thus becoming the seer of a new vision in any given situation.<sup>17</sup> (Dhawan 14)

Mulk Raj Anand has always focused on the elimination of social stigmas such as casteism, untouchability, unfair social gradation, and birth stratification. He believes that a man's worth should be recognized rather than his birth, and he uses his art to address the existing social problem. The social flaws have existed in Indian society for centuries, and Anand feels deeply for the depressed, their plight, and predicament, describing them as genuinely heroic. On the one hand, he

highlights the economic inequality among Indians, while on the other, he takes aim at the age-old inhumane, base customs that have made these unfortunate sections of society equal.

Anand knows that “there are only two kind of people in the world: the rich and the poor [.....] and between the two there is no connection.” His major novels carry no specific indictment of individuals; the indictment is against society as a whole. Anand believes:

Writing novels for the sake of writing novels was never my intention. I felt compelled to answer challenges and tried to get out of my own confusion.<sup>18</sup> (Rajan)

Anand reveals humanity's bitter misery or brutality on various levels in all of his novels; he absolutely dislikes and opposes evil in all of its forms and shades; and he profoundly succeeds in tuning his readers heart towards love and beauty in all of his novels. The true hero is man's fearlessness, his spiritual upsurge, and the plea for universal love is the real theme of his novels. He brings out the emotion and pathos of his heroes and heroines, who oppressed socially, economically, and politically, illiterate, ignorant, and superstition-ridden citizens of India's bottom rung. These heroes are inspired by the spirit of modern discontent and attempt to overthrow the established order.

Margaret Berry in her *Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and the Novelist*, comments that Anand’s “novels are the witness they offer of India's agonizing attempt to break out of massive stagnation and create a society in which men and women are free and equal.”<sup>19</sup>(e notes.com)

Literature, for Anand, was a reinterpretation of the reality of people's lives. It was written from personal experience rather than from books. His novels not only satirize the superstitions and orthodoxies early in his career, but they also celebrate the spirit of human revolt that all of his core characters embody. He was a crusader against all forms of social injustice and religious bigotry.

As a result, it can be inferred that Mulk Raj Anand's creativity is shown time and time again when he writes about crushed humanity. He instills compassion in contemporary prose, giving it a fresh tenderness.

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