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The Miserable Plight of Women in the Novels of M. R. Anand

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Abstract – Mulk Raj Anand, a socially committed novelist, has produced a good deal about the miserable plight of women in his novels. In his first novel Untouchable, the miserable plight of a woman has been best portrayed by him. Anand has stressed in his Old myth new myth: recital verses Novel, the need for effecting a synthesis between tradition and modernity in novel form. He is conscious of the Hazards involved in keeping up the spirit of the old myths sustained in the contemporary idiom. Mulk Raj Anand has, in his novel taken a bold stand on behalf of millions of Indian women tortured and hounded by unsympathetic husbands, crafty in-laws, fault-finding and censorious kith and kin and above all, by deep seated guilt-feeling and self-accusing remorsefulness on the part of the woman, born out of centuries of psychological subjugation and bombardment.

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Even after sixty eight years of independence, Indian society has not been able to deliver justice and dignity to Indian Women. Atrocities against them are still increasing. Every two hours, one woman is assaulted, everyday women are raped, murdered and burnt alive.

In the same country that has produced a Prime Minister like Indira Gandhi, there are people still indulged in activities such as sex change for infants girls. It is indeed staggering to see parents insisting on changing the sex of their own girl. As per the news in July 2001, "Genitoplary, a sex change operation", was being conducted on girls aged from 1-5 years, in order to turn them into boys. According to the news, these parents are mostly from metropolitan cities like Delhi and Mumbai, who went to surgically correct their daughters. (The Journal of Sophia Asian Studies)

The birth of a girl child has always been viewed as a calamity in Indian society. It was the British who first documented the practice of female infanticide in India in the late 18th century, chiefly among the upper castes in the north.

Many Indian writers raised this issue in their writings like Munshi Prem Chand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. Mulk Raj Anand, a socially committed novelist, has produced a good deal about the miserable plight of women in his novels. In his first novel Untouchable, the miserable plight of a woman has been best portrayed by him. The main woman character in this novel is Sohini. She not only serves as a good example of caste exploitation but also sex exploitation. As a caste-exploited she is shown waiting potentially for a long time when she goes to fetch water from the caste well. She is a gentle and peace

loving woman. Gulaboo, a washerwomen, a caste superior to all other untouchables exploits Sohini. Now Sohini, being the low caste among the outcastes will naturally be disdained by Gulaboo. She not only abuses the sweeper girl but also rushes to hit her. Sohini behaves unlike any other outcaste woman. When other women make servile appeal and show their abject humility to the passer-by high caste Hindus to draw the water from the well, she sits patiently away from them. Sohini become the prey of sexual exploitation also only due to the reason that she belongs to a low caste. She is very beautiful but she has not enough clothes to protect her beauty from the hungry eyes of the male. Saros Cowasjee in So Many Freedoms observes:

Her figure could have competed with the sculptured image of Konark and Khajuraho, but she has been condemned by birth to walk the path of the outcastes and to suffer their humiliation. (Cowasjee, 90)

When Pundit Kali Nath attempts to abuse her, she cries to revolt, but when the priest blames her for defiling him she remains wonder-stuck. She realizes that no one will believe her. She stops her brother from taking any aggressive action against the priest and returns home. She accepts her humiliation with the submissive humility of the woman of her caste.

Anand, in one of his novels Gauri, has remarkably shown the miserable condition of a common Indian woman. In this novel Gauri is the protagonist who is married to Panchi, a man with feet of clay, one finds a submissive and non-committal wife, she is predestined to suffer the worst forms of humiliation. She has to work hard to finish the household works. She

is carrying with her the stigma of inauspicious presence, virtually finds her unhorsed and alienated. She is even abused and beaten up by her husband for all her unconscious transgressions. She is ill-treated by her mother-in-law and even her purity is questioned. Unable to bear the constant nagging of her mother-in-law, she returns to her village for only to sold by her mother to Seth Jairam Das, a banker in Hosiarpur in lieu of cash and the wiping out of the mortgaged two houses as well as a cow, Chandri.

So, her home coming was not a happy moment. She was sold to a man with the gulams of conscience. She protests the amorous advances of the banker and seeks refuge in nursing homes of Colonel Mahindra, a sensitive and upright doctor, who gives her both shelter and consolation. But even there she had to fight out the attempted molestation by Mahindra's co-partner Dr. Ratan Chand Batra. Nonetheless, she exhibits a remarkable forbearance and makes her living bearable under the protective tutelage of Dr. Mahindra. At the end, Gauri is restored to her husband through the new repentant mother. Her husband was very happy to get her back but again he wants to taste her chastity. Gauri finds that the whole situation has gone and protests with resoluteness not becoming of her characteristic moral computation and heroic fortissimo. She says:

I am not Sita that the earth will open and swallow Me.

Telling this, she takes the road back to Hosiarpur and starts her new life there. Permila Paul observes:

The Old Woman and the Cow (Gauri) is the only novel in which Anand spins the plot around a women? Character, Gauri, the heroine, falls in line with Anand's suppressed heroes. But while the most of his heroes register their protest within the framework of evil society, Gauri sheds her narrow domestic coils before they can strangle her to death, and escapes into the refreshing world of modernity. Where most of the heroes face premature death, she emerges as an awakened woman, with a fresh lease of life.

Anand has stressed in his Old myth new myth: recital verses Novel, the need for effecting a synthesis between tradition and modernity in novel form. He is conscious of the Hazards involved in keeping up the spirit of the old myths sustained in the contemporary idiom. In his endeavours to delineate the character of Sita in the persona of Gauri. Anand partially succeeds in making her essentially human, naïve and loveable; where exactly he fails in the development of the subsidiary characters. For example, in the character delineation of Panchi, Anand attempts to show the predicament of an individual unwillingly caught betwixt the psychological pulls and social demand which overweight his conscience. Panic is apparently an un-heroic hero, a cardboard figure with any individually of his own, while Gauri is "Cow like" in her goodness and keeps up her essential naiveté and purity of character. So is the characteristics of an Indian woman. Instead

of meekly submitting to the irrational demands of society, she takes the roads to which are both redemption from the inflexible social custom and age old bondage from male chauvinism. Gauri's character is drawn with expert strokes and her gradual initiation into defying the customary male domination is as indeed an act of self-assertion. As Anand observes:

Gauri who believes in the worship of her lord and master and wanted ultimately to conquer him with her devotion and willing to wait like the Hindu wife and go potentially through everything.

Like Hardy Tess, she was now abandonees the Goddess of her religion and readies herself to confront the malevolent fate. Her dell house now crumbled, she turns back on the society which has spurned her, exactly in the manner of Nora in A Doll House. As S. C. Harrex observes:

The novel might be called the pastoral version of poetic realism.....the story conceived as a folk tale of modern India. The plot is complicated and archetypal situation sets the narrative in motion.

The main action of the novel con concerns the heroine's travails and it develops conventionally, fluctuation from catastrophe to survival in accordance, as it were, with the inevitable law of dharma. (142-58)

Thus, Anand's novel The Old Woman and The Cow (Gauri) is a powerful evocation of the Indian milieu in which the menacing pones of heredity and the demand of social custom overweight other considerations. The communal psychology is traced out with the expertness by fusing myth and realism. Anand's alembic of power is revealed, particularly, in affecting the transmutation of the whole perspective of the old myth into the contemporary tale of a woman struggling to extricate herself from the social perversities, which are brought out with a remarkable fitness. He is also able to transform the myths to meet the contingencies of the contemporary reality, while retaining the traditional aura. As Balarama Gupta points out:

The Old Woman and the Cow (Gauri) is the sole novel dealing with women's status in society. It reveals Anand's emphatic pleas for the amelioration of women. Anand vividly portrays the wretched position and situation of women in rural society and suggests the changes that are coming about by giving a lively description of heroine enlightened reaction to tradition and customs, corrupted through man's selfishness, ignorance and vested interests.

In The Old Woman and the Cow, Anand has set an ambitious project of adopting the mythic resonance of the Ramayana. But he has obviously failed to sustain the mythic tempo. In the Ramayana, the protagonist, Rama is endowed with the qualities of both the head and the heart and he is in her in true sense of the term. But Panchi, Anand's proletarian hero in the present novel appears to be a pale shadow. He is

neither the individuality nor the moral fortissimo to defy the ossified religious sanctions. He discards his wife only because he cannot keep her with him, especially in the teeth of opposition from both within and without. His attempts to put Gauri in the fire ordeal are seemingly trivial in the context of a changed situation. On the other hand, Gauri retains her essential selfhood and never succumbs to the attempt molestation by Dr. Batra. Even when she is sold to Seth Jairam Das, she does not protest as it was customary in those that a woman once sold as a page, as resist the elders. But Gauri is not presented as a meek and docile woman, as most of the heroines of Tagore are. Shaw shows her real vim in the circumstances when they become seemingly uncongenial. She stands before the village elders and boldly resists the social sanctions and their rigidities and the novel, she prefers to live in self-isolation and anonymity rather than meekly submitting to the senseless social customs. For her, marriage is a social convenience, a taboo that she comes to know of it only at the fag and end of her life.

Anand could have approximated the story line with the story of Ramayana. But this would have put him into some insurmountable difficulties, for her fire ordeal can never be accepted by a woman who deems herself to be a libertine. Gauri rightly does it so though it may seem repugnant to a few. The tempo of the Ramayana myth cannot be sustained, however much the artist tries to keep it up. The story of Ramayana itself is full contradictions and Anand rightly denounces the myth as spurious, though he does not catechize its moral timbre. His meaningful essay *The Old myth and the New Recital form*, further amplifies the true purport of the nova, K. N. Sinha observes:

The Old Woman and the Cow creates the legend of a heroic peasant woman in a small minded village. It has definite epic strain to it. The closeness of Nekrassov's poem does not in any way diminish the richness and beauty of its original conception based on the Sita myth which is woven like a central jewel into the whole design. The novel suggests continuous parallels and links between the primitive past and the desolate present and thereby presents the most absorbing image of the Human condition.

Mulk Raj Anand himself has successfully portrayed the conflict arising out of the incompatibility between a woman's individuality and self-awareness and the traditional views of her husband and her kinsfolks in his novel.

The protagonist of this novel, Gauri, the first and probably the only female protagonist of Anand, is a welcome and revolutionary departure from the novelistic tradition for him, as for many other contemporary novelists. For S. C.

Harrex, Gauri is "the modern Mother India".

Shantha Krishnaswamy in her comprehensive study titled *The Woman in India English Fiction* has the following to say about this novel:

Gauri breaks away from the established pattern of saved males and doomed females. At novel's end she had been rejected by Panchi her husband, on the standard Hindu charges of inauspiciousness and impropriety. She acquires enough self-assertion to take the road to the town towards the hospital of the humanistic Dr. Mahindra. It is Panchi who now stands doomed in the slough of rejection and existential loneliness. (26)

Mulk Raj Anand has, in his novel taken a bold stand on behalf of millions of Indian women tortured and hounded by unsympathetic husbands, crafty in-laws, fault-finding and censorious kith and kin and above all, by deep seated guilt-feeling and self-accusing remorsefulness on the part of the woman, born out of centuries of psychological subjugation and bombardment. Gauri by her attitude of mature revolt and defiance when the chips are down, delivers a lethal blow to the machismo ideals of a male-dominated society. Gauri's experiences as a daughter, a wife and an employee are all marked, by a shattering sense of the futility of expecting her husband or the other males and females around her to vibrate with her predicament. Although Anand draws a parallel between the cow of the story and the meek cow that Gauri is he nonetheless present her as a modern day Sita, who is undaunted in the face of traumatic and humiliating experiences at the hands of an unsympathetic and money-minded Lakshmi, her mother. Her anger and resentment, although unexpressed, keep swelling to a point when Gauri can no longer bear it. She has the courage to walk out of her husband and his ego-centred world, into an uncertain future, but with a gritty determination to shape her future and that of her child to be born.

Anand focuses his attention and the reader's, on the fortunes, the stress and strain and the psychological and emotional response of Gauri. There is a very slow progression in her self-awareness. The Gauri of the first half of the novel is a perfect replica of her mythic counterparts. She is tolerant, self-suffering, self-sacrificing even to the extent of allowing herself to be sold as a concubine to a rich old merchant. She suffers enormous injustices and exploitation at the domestic level. She almost allows herself meekly to be manipulated by her mother, uncle and others. Nevertheless, Anand has shown uncanny and keen interest in Gauri's inner development, growth as a person from being a near non-person. It is on this growth process that Anand focuses his attention and ensures that she develops into a strong person endowed with moral courage, intellectual clarity and awareness of the reality around.

Marlene Fisher has this to say about Anand's effective manner of expressing Gauri's growth juxtaposed to Panchi's lack of it:

The fullest fictional expression of Anand's advocacy of freedom for women is his novel, *The Old Woman and the Cow*, published in 1960. This narrative is convincing and effective, in part, because, the sympathy Anand evokes for young Gauri is not at the complete expense of her husband Panchi. The latter's inability to keep up with his wife in her growth into selfhood is due to his own immaturity, his blind, orthodox Hindu views governing the relationship between husband wife and the pressures of earning a livelihood in a period of drought and famine. An orphan brought up by his aunt Kesaro, Panchi is hard put to deal with Kesaro's jealousy of Gauri or with an effort to retain her own hold over her nephew. (99-100)

Thus Gauri becomes a fascinating study of a woman in travail and despair, of how she faces the challenge of a moronic and sadistic husband and comes out of this crucible, chastened purified, enlightened and emboldened.

The weight of meaningless traditions and values that bends her down for years is cast off by Gauri, the moment she realizes her own inner potential and reserves. Her final act of departure from her household is the death-knell she rings, for all the customs, rituals and structures, legitimised by religion and glorified by ancient literature as absolute values, while they always militated against basic human being. Anand questions the values of female inferiority, subjugation and dependence underpinning some of the gruesome traditional practices such as sati and dowry, outmoded marriage and family laws, inheritance rights and atrocities such as abortion, rape and many other. If Dr. Mahindra is his mouthpiece for proclaiming his revolutionary counter-ideology, Gauri is his objective correlative, a symbol of his protest against social and sexual inequalities and discrimination. The following words of Shantha Krishnaswamy seem to mirror exactly what happens in the action of this novel, especially in the elaboration of the theme in and through the life of the central character:

The awakening of the woman's consciousness establishes a new set of values in the fictive system.

The typological experiences of these women have constant elements like an abrupt awakening, intense introspection, a stasis in time and action, and an abrupt ending with a conscious decision.

The ending does not lead to a resolution of her problems, but the fictional shaping of a very specific kind of crisis seen through her eyes is rewarding, for it leads to inner enrichment, a sense of exhilaration and vicarious achievement as we see her battling through harsh reality. (vii) M. K. Anand has successfully resolved the binary opposition, of woman as subject versus woman as object in this novel. While most of

the women characters, including Gauri of the earlier phase, function as objects, passive participants, it is only Gauri who emerges as a subject of her own life and destiny. She is unable to stand the injustice heaped on her for too long. Therefore she decided for herself and becomes her own saviour without depending on or expecting her husband or other male champions to defend her cause. She conducts her own defence and doesn't allow anyone else to interfere with or intervene in her life. Although Dr. Mahindra has played a ennobling role in her life, he is no more than a mentor or guide. It is Gauri who makes the decision to quit her legitimately-wedded husband.

Mulk Raj Anand emphatically portrays Gauri as a subject of her own destiny. Anand's intention of making the woman a subject is very clearly observed in Gauri's arbitrary exit from her husband's abode. Indirectly Anand has denounced male dominance, as a value that should be eschewed by Indian society. Anand richly deserves the encomium paid to this work by Meenakshi Mukherjee in these words.

This novel is unique among Indian novels, in rejecting rather than extolling, the time honoured womanly virtues of patience and submission. (159)

In point of fact Anand has done such more by creating a character like Gauri and making her a fictive prototype of a modern Indian woman of the village, whose institution as a woman, more than her education, had led her to a stand that changes the face of the women's situation in India and signals the changed roles of women, not only in fiction but in reality.

Anand is able to perceive Gauri as, not just an individual a radical or revolutionary, but as a focal point between the growing and expanding human consciousness and the fundamentalist and obscurantist walls and blocks that prevent human solidarity or stall progress. Anand believes in universal human solidarity and salvation or liberation in which the woman has a crucial role to play. As an intelligent student of social dynamics, societal change and transformation Anand knows that such a process sans the enlightened and self-determined woman is bound to be lopsided and abortive. The woman can be and is a potent rallying point for all the forces of liberation. If continuous on-going struggle on all sides and at different levels is the only answer to today's multifarious societal problems and questions, the woman can never be ruled out as an active agent and catalyst of social transformation.

She represents an oppressed section of humanity endowed with remarkable qualities of endurance, acceptance and compassion, so very essential for human liberation. Anand's Gauri constitutes a singular impetus to the liberationist zest and trends found in the Indian sub-continent and its literature, and is a boon to activists and literary men/women committed to the cause of liberation of all oppressed people and of

women in particular. While it cannot be labelled as a handbook for liberation activists, it is without doubt a magnificent clarion call of a committed novelist to his contemporaries not to ignore the silent half of India, the women, without whom the process of liberation can never succeed. It is a superfine novelistic affirmation of the crucial role that women can play in actualizing the dream of visionaries like Anand for the total emancipation and real freedom of the teeming millions of India.

In Gauri Anand has highlighted this problem, albeit in an indirect or, implicit manner. Although the protagonist Gauri is cast in the mould of a conformist, tradition-bound, self-effacing rural girl and wife, there is a dramatic change towards the end of the novel. Her sufferings and humiliations have mellowed her and facilitated her maturation.

But the real exposure to modern values and habits occurs in the hospital of Dr. Mahindra and thanks to his example and efforts. There is a sharp contrast between the Gauri that meekly accepts her unhappy married life with Panchi and her being sold to a rich merchant and the Gauri of the last pages who stages a walk out on husband who refuses to acknowledge her fidelity or regard her changed modes of thinking and behaving as indicative

of her personal growth as a working woman. Anand condemns the habit of mudslinging and character assassination so rampant in Indian society, as detrimental to the cause of liberation. In this novel Dr. Mahindra becomes the spokesperson of Anand for expounding his humanistic philosophy. Mahindra proposes the antidote to fear and recommends a fearless and indomitable spirit. Gauri carves out for herself a path and follows it with devotion and conviction, whatever the maligning tongues of her kith and kin may pronounce. She becomes the subject of her destiny. She is the model of the new woman as perceived and represented by Anand. Gauri is as much a creature of traditions as a product of modern ethos and values. She is a symbol of the integration of the traditional spirit and the modern scientific or rational temper. For Anand, adherence to truth, sincerely and human values is as important as scientific and rational outlook, if Indian society should march towards progress and emancipation.

Two Leaves and a Bud after Untouchable and Gauri, also shows the miserable plights of women. In this novel, Anand portrays the sexual exploitation of those women who work there in the tea state of Assam. In this novel, Anand shows that sexual exploitation is very common feature of the tea plantation. Nobody's mother or sister or even wife is safe on the tea estate. The women coolies are compelled to work on the wages less than those of the male coolies. They leave their children in the baskets while going to the tea gardens. When they return, they find many of them

lying in the dust or a drain or even dead by the wayside. Motherhood seems to be bane for the women because many children die of malnutrition and lack of proper nourishment. But they keep on giving birth to the babies in order to increase hands to earn their living.

The women coolies are compelled to work as rigorously as male coolies. The supervisors do not hesitate to punish women. The picture of a mother who is chased to the work spot even while she is her child shows how inhuman the rulers are even towards the women. The white compel the coolies to hand over their wives and daughters to them for the sake of fun and frolic and many a time to satisfy their sexual passion. The young officers like Hunt are always in search of young girls and women. Narain tells Gangu that Hunt stays with three women who are wives of the coolies. When Hunt comes to the work sight, he tries to exhibit his boasting personality on the Women. "The coolie women shuffled like hens at the arrival of a much dreaded cock." (49)

Being the masters, they expect that their slaves should after their wives and daughters to them willingly.

Sometimes they bribe the poor husbands by 'bakshis' to win their wives. If they protest, they use their guns to terrorize them. Hunt offers five acres of land to Niyogi for his wife whereas he lashes one of the coolies, for not giving up his wife to him. When they get fed up with them, they throw them away in order to set the new ones. In urban areas, the British behave like cunning imposters. But in the remote part like the valley of Assam they behave like wild animals. Here they are not afraid of the poor coolies because they know they will not raise their voice against them.

The exploitation of women is one of the prime concerns of *The Sword and the Sickle* as well as all the novels of Mulk Raj Anand. Through *Maya*, he throws light on the problems of wideners in India. This novel *The Sword and the Sickle* mainly deals with the exploitation of the Indian peasants by the British Colonialist and the Indian landlords. Anand announced the title of the novel as *All Men are Bothered* but on the suggestion of George Orwell, he named it *The Sword and the Sickle* is adapted from a stanza by William Balke in *Poems from a Note-Book*, 1775:

The Sword sung on the barren health. The Sickle in the fruitful field, The Sword he sang a song of death, but could not make the sickle yield. (Cowasjee, 112)

The Sword is a symbol of force, born to suppress and defeat whereas the sickle is a symbol of the suppressed, defeated peasants. As the novel deals

with the theme of exploitation, the title is concerned with the theme of the novel.

There are two plots running parallel to each other throughout the novel. At one hand, it is a struggle of Lal Singh a revolutionary who fights for the rights of the peasants and on the other it is a love story of Lalu and Maya.

The story of Lal Singh as a revolutionary develops through four phases. The first period is the war-period which deals with Lal Singh's participation in the war, his capture by the enemy and his release. The second phase deals with Lalu's return to his native place. The third phase which forms the major bulk of the story, deals with Lalu's role in the agrarian agitation. The last phase is Lalu's imprisonment, when he starts dreaming about his future with his wife and his son.

Considering the reflection of reality in the novel, it can be observed that the characters and events in this novel are related to the persons alive and the events occurred in early twenties in one of the provinces of India.

The major incident is based on Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography* (1936) which Anand has reviewed such as Kissan's march towards Allahabad to make the politicians aware of the inhuman treatment to the peasants by the landlords and Nehru's approval to visit the place to make an enquiry from the core of the plot. The arrest of Lalu and his comrades and their trial are historically true. The period of the background of the novel is a Transition Period in the history of India, both politically and socially. Anand observes the changing political and social scenario and comments on them.

Regarding the theme of the novel Krishna Nandan Sinha in his book *Mulk Raj Anand* calls it a novel of social protest. He says:

It is an emphatic document of peasant life caught in the phase of national regeneration. It seeks to achieve its purpose by dramatizing the class struggle and by offering social criticism. (Sinha, 52)

Some of the critics call it "an intimate picture of Indian rural life" and others call it "a novel written with burning sincerity". The attempt is sincere but turns out a monotonous doctrinal writing. He succeeds in making his point through the novel but fails to achieve success as a writer. He gives a realistic picture of the Indian peasants after the "First World War". They had been the victims of the exploitation by the landlords and money lenders.

But during this period their miseries are intensified by the colonial exploitation.

Lal Singh's family becomes the victim of the feudal exploitation. Lal Singh loses almost all the members of his family, his ancestral house and his land. His miseries are doubled by the colonial exploitation. He

loses his job in military as a reward of his services to the British Army in World War. Both these exploitations convert him into a revolutionary. He decides to help the victims of the feudal exploitation. He goes to Rajgarh with a mission to knit the small landholders, the tenants, the evicted tenants and labourers together and to formulate a system which is prevalent in almost every plight of the peasants. The manner in which the leader of the evicted peasants approaches the landlords shows that they are treated like animals by the landlords.

Let me now come to my main point about the miserable plight of women, which Anand tries to show through the character of Maya in this novel. In our Hindu religion a widow is treated like a foreboding person. She is prescribed by very rigid rules. Being the daughter of the landlord, Maya suffers more restrictions than the common women. Her servants guard her like watchdogs. She is always chaperoned by her mother. Maya revolts against the social norms as she breaks through the shackles of the vicious society and elopes with her lover and marries him.

In the society where widows are looked at as 'fair game', remarriage could have been a good solution. It can give her some status and dignify her in the eyes of the society.

Anand expresses his view on Women's dignity and pride through the love story between Lalu and Maya. He wants such a country where women who sold to the highest bidder, have become free to choose their own lives. By making a widow remarry, Anand tries to bestow that dignity in the rigid social system of the Indians. Maya who thinks that it is a sin to meet a man in privacy, boldly asks Lalu:

So you thought women only choose their men freely in vilayat.

So, we see that in this novel Anand has tried to portray a real picture of Indian women.

In his next novel *The Road*, Anand has shown the plight of women through the dowry system. As we know that this novel is said to be the sequel of *Untouchable*, recurred twenty five years later in *The Road*. Though the setting and characters are changed. The theme of exploitation of the low caste by the high caste is the same. Bulandshahr of Uttar Pradesh is replaced by Govardhan of Haryana, Bakha is replaced by Bhikhu. On the place of Pundit Kali Nath, Pundit Suraj Mani is there. Mala and Rukmini are there on the place of Sohini. Anand wants to show in this novel that attainment of independence has not made any significant change in the fortune of the untouchables. The low caste people turn a little rebellious but the high caste also turn more rigid in their attitude towards them. Anand suggests that it is necessary for the high caste Hindus to get down from the camel of their conservative attitude to achieve prosperity. Dhooli Singh says:

No one can enter the little door sitting on a camel. (23)

The Road deals with a single day incident in the life of an untouchable in a small village. The incident of constructing the road to facilitate transportation of milk from Govardhan to Gurgaon, a town nearby creates a conflict between the caste Hindu and the low caste untouchables. The construction of the road shortens the distance between two places but widens the gap between the two classes. The novel opens with the conflict between the high caste Hindu boys and Bhikhu the low caste untouchable on the issue of the untouchables going to the temple. The humiliation of his mother infuriate Bhikhu. When a kind hearted man intervenes, the boys run away muttering filthy abuses.

Bhikhu works under Dhooli Singh. He goes to work in Dhooli Singh's field. On his way, he broods over the conflict and looks around the well for the landlords daughter Rukhmini whom he loves. A seventeen years old beautiful girl is also drawn towards the untouchable but her mother's advice to beware of the low caste warns her to avoid the thoughts of Bhikhu.

Now, I came to the main point, which I have to discuss about i.e. the miserable condition of women shown in this novel by M. R. Anand. The female characters in this novel are simple sincere but suffering souls. There is not much difference between the exploitation of the women of high caste and that of the low caste. If we compare Bhikhu's mother Laxmi, Sanju's mother Bhagwanti and Lachman's mother Sapti with each other, they are found not much different in their attitude towards life. All of them are superstitious, religious, stereotype, rustic women.

The same is true about Thakur's daughter Rukmini and Dholi Singh's daughter Mala. Both of them are exploited through the dowry system. They do not have their own voice. They cannot venture to break the ties that bind them to the Indian traditions. Their female characters are then relegated to the background. There is no need to elaborate characterization in the development of the central theme as the theme does not deal with the exploitation of an individual. It is an exploitation of one class by other.

So, we can say that the exploitation of women is another dominant theme except the exploitation of low caste Hindus by the high caste, in the novel. Mala and Rukmini become the victims of the dowry system whereas Bhagwanti and Sapti are the victims of the patriarchal system. Bhagwanti though a wife of the Sarpanch of the village, has no voice of her own. Sapti goes against her husband's wish but only temporarily. Both Bhagwanti and Sapti are superstitious women. Pandit Suraj Mani takes disadvantage of their blind faith. He compels Sapti to desert her husband and compels Bhagwanti to perform special pooja for his own advantage. Laxmi is the victim of the social exploitation. Being a woman of low caste, she is now

allowed to go to the temple. Rukmini and Mala belong to the high caste but they are not even considered as human beings while arranging their marriages of their sons. Rukmini exposes her anguish over the social system:

O why, O why were the tribes of men so privileged.
(100)

The Road is a symbol of progress a symbol of sympathetic gesture of the low caste downtrodden towards the high caste Hindus. A symbol of friendship offered by the exploited to the exploiters. The completion of the road symbolizes the advent of modernization but the humiliation of Bhikhu and conventional treatment with the women display the orthodox system of the society.

Thus we see that in all the novels, M. R. Anand has depicted remarkably the miserable condition of women, either it is Sohini, Gauri or Rukmini, all suffered from the male dominated conventional society.

CONCLUSION

Many Indian writers raised the issue of exploitation of women in their writings like Munshi Prem Chand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. M. R. Anand, a socially committed novelist, has produced a good deal about the miserable plight of women in his novels. He has taken a bold stand on behalf of millions of Indian women tortured and hounded by unsympathetic husbands, crafty in-laws, fault-finding and censorious kith and kin and above all, by deep seated guilt-feeling and self-accusing remorsefulness on the part of the woman, born out of centuries of psychological subjugation and bombardment. Many novels of Anand including *Untouchable*, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, *The Old Woman and the Cow*, *The Sword and the Sickle* shows the miserable plights of women. In his next novel *The Road* which is said to be the sequel of *Untouchable*, he has shown the plight of women through dowry system. Thus we see that in all the novels, M. R. Anand has depicted remarkably the miserable condition of women either it is Sohini, Gauri or Rukmini, all suffered from the male dominated conventional society.

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