

# Exploitation And Suffering of the Dalit and Subaltern Class in the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand With Reference to “Untouchable”, “Two Leaves and a Bud” and “Across the Black Waters”

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**Abstract** – *Exploitation and suffering of the Dalit and subaltern class has been one of the major themes of literature. The novels of Dr. Mulk Raj Anand depict a realistic and sympathetic portrait of the Dalit and subaltern class of his time in India focusing on how they suffer in their struggle of managing their livelihood and how they are exploited by the upper class and well to do people in the society depriving them of their every prospect of opportunity. For his presentation the humanist has pictured the lives of the sweepers, peasants, the daily wagers, the workers, and the soldiers, all other depressed and oppressed people of his notice. The focus on the prevailing pains and plights of the have-nots is like revolutionary in his part. We find a true Indian society in his novels with special attention to the misery of the poor.*

*This research paper is an attempt to study how during 1930's, in India the Dalits and the subaltern class were neglected and exploited. They did not enjoy the minimum human dignity and had to go through a constant struggle for their survival. Gandhi, as a social reformer, redeemed the life of these untouchables and underdogs of society by standing like a rock. He was not only a social reformer but also brought religious renaissance among the Hindus.*

**Keywords:** *Untouchable, Discrimination, Laborer, Downtrodden, Revolutionary, Renaissance, Dalits, Exploitation, Suffering, Subaltern, Humanity, Futility, Sorrow.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand is regarded as one of the pioneers of Indian English fiction who is considered a committed humanist. Though his writings had been subjected to various interpretations, he can be labeled as a social realist, the champion of the poor, for his vivid presentation of the exploitation and suffering of the Dalit and Subaltern class in most of his novels. They illuminate his love for downtrodden and sufferers. His love for humanity and his concern for the socially and economically oppressed came from his peasant parents who in consequence acquired a status of being the advocate of the underprivileged. He wrote on behalf of those common people who need to suffer for no fault of their own. The socially conscious novelist, Dr. Anand, always kept notice on the apathy and despairs of the sufferers in the society of his time and openly expressed his feelings without any veil even to the most crucial situations. Thus he aspired to rectify the follies and evils of society and established classless society based on equality among people.

## EXPLOITATION AND SUFFERING IN 'UNTOUCHABLE':

'Untouchable' (1935) is the first novel of Mulk Raj Anand which depicts the suffering and struggle of the low caste Hindus called 'untouchable' for their survival and identity. They always suffer from poverty and fall the victim of injustice of the society. Their struggle for survival is ever and on. They need to bear the physical and mental tortures receive from the high caste Hindus. Their born in that caste is a curse on them which they suffer in their entire life and cannot avoid by any effort. The central figure of the novel 'Bakha', the son of Lakha, the Jemadar of all the sweepers in the town Bulashah is only the symbol of this kind and the events of a single day of his life covers the whole story of the novel. It is a typical day in his life mixed with hunger, hope, small pleasures, insult and setbacks.

In the beginning of the novel we find a realistic picture of the outcastes' colony. Bakha begins his

daily routine work with his father's cascade of abuses: 'Get up, ohe, you Bakhya, ohe son of a pig!' '..... Are you up? Get up, you illegally begotten'. ( *Untouchable*, P. 5 & 6 ). Such abuses are almost regular and common in the day to day life of Bakha who symbolizes the exploitation and oppression which has been the fate of the untouchables like him. The work of this caste is to clean toilets and streets and keep them clean for the upper castes. Their living condition is extremely dirty and they are forced to reside in mud-wall, single-roomed cottages devoid of proper drainage system where a foul smell is always constant. From sunshine to sunset he is forced to deal with discrimination. Hatred, hypocrisy and ill-treat of upper class people. The treatment he receives from people is worse than the treatment people give to an animal. When he is hungry, chapattis are thrown to him from the third floor of a building. Similarly, jalebis are given to him as if a bone of an animal is thrown to a dog. A Hindu shopkeeper throws a packet of cigarettes at him. Thus he has suffered a series of humiliations from the very beginning of the morning. He is very much astonished to receive a slap from high caste Hindu, Lallaji, in the accusation of polluting him by his touch. Anand writes about physical suffering and mental agonies of Bakha. Although he has strength enough to retaliate, he remains silent, taking all indignities to his fate. This kind of action of the high caste Hindu whom Bakha touched and polluted (!) only reveals the tragic dilemma of the untouchables. Sad situations and painful experiences like these indeed arose the feeling of protest in Bakha. But he silently bears all as he is alone in his side and nobody cares him.

The sweepers are in charge of maintenance of cleanliness and hereditarily they are destined to live in places lack of hygiene and sanitation. They are considered so polluted that are not allowed to draw water from the common well. They have to depend on the mercy of caste Hindus for it. The writer here presents a poignant picture of the harass reality and the curse of untouchability through the water episode which is very much touching and heart rendering. Through his powerful use of regional language, use of abuses and naked picture of untouchability, Anand clearly focuses on the pathetic condition of the Dalits. Sohini, Bakha's sister is treated badly by the high caste Hindus when she goes to fetch water from the common well. Pandit Kali Nath, graces her by filling her pot and calls her to his house to clean the courtyard of his house at the temple. His intention is vulgar. When Sohini reaches, he catches her by her breast but she refuses to submit her self and chastity. Anand here throws light on the hypocrisy, lustfulness and pretensions of so called priest Pandit Kali Nath who believes to be polluted by the touch of untouchable but shamelessly keeps up strong sexual desire with an untouchable girl. This duality and hypocrisy is vividly revealed by Anand in the novel *Untouchable* which forces the untouchables to suffer. Bakha appears in the scene and bursts out in a rage with an impulse to beat the Pandit. As both of them realize their helplessness due to the limitations of their

castes, they have no other way but to give up. Such humiliation is common for untouchables and they have accepted it as it is age old tradition. It clearly justifies the sad plight of the out castes. They are not allowed to enter the portals of temples because their contact defies the house of God, the creator of all. But sexual harassment to an untouchable in a temple is not a matter to heed on to them.

Bakha returns home desperately and tells his father Lakha about his insult and Sohini's molestation by the Pandit. To lessen his son's grief Lakha narrates him a nasty experience of his own life how he once suffered to save the life of his son Bakha. It brings Bakha back to his sense. He then submits himself to his destiny.

Mulk Raj Anand, as a social reformer, considers untouchability a vice of society and in the latter part of the novel he gives a few suggestions to get rid of such vices. Bakha listens to Gandhi in a public meeting saying all Indians are equal and there is no difference between the work of a sweeper and a Brahmin, which gives an account of a Brahmin doing sweeper's work. Gandhi moreover expresses his wish to be re borne as untouchable. As a social reformer he redeemed life of these untouchables by standing like a rock. He was not only a reformer but also brought religious renaissance among the Hindus. He gives them a new name 'Harijan' and calls them cleaner of Hindu Religion. Such words of Gandhi create a vibration of hope in Bakha's heart. He also hears the flash system and realizes it as the only solution to get rid of untouchability. On his way back to home he thinks of everything. Now of the Mahatma, now of the machine. He aspires to tell his father all about these, as if some relaxation from their suffering. Anand suggests that it is technology in the form of newly introduced flush toilet that may be his savior by eliminating the need for a caste of toilet cleaners. Thus the novel ends with a resounding note of optimism. By the presentation of the suffering of the untouchables Anand revolts against the social discriminations and becomes the spokesman of the Dalits.

The novel evokes in the mind of the readers the horrifying malady and woe of downtrodden people in the Indian society. Anand focuses on the suffering of the Dalits, how they are exploited and suppressed and most significantly dehumanized. 'Untouchable' really becomes a tragic saga of the Dalits.

### **EXPLOITATION AND SUFFERING IN 'TWO LEAVES AND A BUD':**

'Two Leaves and a Bud'(1937) is the third novel of Anand where he presents a picture of the suffering of the labour class in the tea plantations of Assam in the form of exploitation and mis treatment they received at the hands of British plantation owners. Here also Anand focuses on the troubles faced by the poor and downtrodden.

Anand's protagonist in the novel, Gangu, is a different character here with unique distinctions. He arrests the attention of the readers as a veteran of the coolie class who works hard to attain his goal. As a husband, father, and head of the household, Gangu, makes every effort to render his responsibility for the family. Anand presents him as a respectable and decent man who is able to adequately provide whatever needed for his family. He is a true coolie with mixture of innocence and wisdom in his character. He is a positive role model and an example of how to live admirably. He has lost his home and his land because of the iniquitous and unjust laws and practices inflicted upon the lowly persons of the coolie class. He is obliged to pay debt incurred by a member of his extended family. He respectfully attempts to fulfill his obligations to the best of his ability. Still he suffers and falls the victim of dishonest Buta who deceives him showing him a bright future in Assam in vain.

Coming to Assam tea estate soon Gangu realizes his ill fate. He is exploited by every superior. His family is given a very small amount per month which is less than eight annas. He falls the victim of Malaria. Although it releases him, he has to sacrifice his wife Sajani. His sadness and suffering increase when he finds no money to buy a red cloth and make a bamboo hearse. He feels utter emptiness when he fails to manage a loan to do the funeral rites of his wife. Instead of showing sympathy to him the manager of the estate Mr. Croft Cooker throws him out of his office the most inhuman manner.

There is no end of Gangu's sufferings till his death in an incident to save the chastity of his daughter Leila, as a true father. Reggie Hunt, a manager of the Estate, desires to physically have her in a sexual way. Gangu has made a choice to fight against this sin rather than let this cruel man sexually abuse his daughter. He reacts with anger and rage and goes to confront Reggie's demand. Unfortunately he is shot dead at once, but he is able to save his daughter for the time being. The suffering hero meets his tragic end in the hand of his exploiter.

### **EXPLOITATION AND SUFFERING IN 'ACROSS THE BLACK WATERS':**

Anand's 'Across the Black Waters' is the second novel of the trilogy (1939-42) that deals with poor Laloo's suffering as an army in the World War I. He is forced to take part in the war against his will. The regiment he is attached with is untrained and unequipped for modern warfare. Indian soldiers with the sense of inferiority salute every white face they come across. The soldiers are basically the poor peasants for the evicted tenants. Only with a meager worth Rupees Eleven a month they find it difficult to free their parents from the debt of the money lender and landlord. The British not only exploited the Indian peasants, coolies and laborers but also the Indian soldiers. They are not soldiers due to their indomitable patriotism. They are even confused

about the battle and where they are to take ambush. They are only to follow the command of the British officers and fight against the enemies with outdated weapons and untrained state. They do not have proper ammunition and sophisticated weapons for a wide attack. In the midst of such mental agony, their only consolation is that although the place is an unknown one, they are in the company of their native soldiers. Lal Sing (Lalu) loses his comrades one by one. Hwalder Lachman Sing is killed in war. Hanumant Sing refuses to fight for the British Government and is killed by an Indian Officer: Dhyan Sing and Kipu Ram fight bravely and die in the course and Daddy Dhanoo is drowned. Lal Singh, too, is wounded and taken prisoner by the Germans at Festubert.

The exploitation and suffering is exposed in the novel by the fact that the British not only gives the soldiers very low payment but also fails to fulfill its promise in anticipation that the Government would give them a piece of land as a reward. Moreover it is described in the novel that the sons of poor peasants, overburdened with debts, find no way out to free their mortgaged land from the grips of the landlords. The old fathers had hoped against hopes that their sons would one day bring them fortune by sending cash money.

Thus through the novel, Anand makes the British responsible for exploitations and social prejudices. He also exposes the landlords and moneylenders as heartless being. Lalu's life as a captive is full of suffering. He is presented as one of those ready for any havoc, ready to fall or fell. The conflict, the fire and fury of action, the frenzy of bullets—all place him in a world of embarrassment and dismay.

### **CONCLUSION:**

To conclude it can be said that the novels: "Untouchable", "Two Leaves and a Bud" and "Across the Black Waters" clearly show the exploitation and the suffering of the subaltern class through most of the characters. With such realistic presentation of the Dalits and the Subalterns in his novels Anand has become a proletarian novelist.

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