



From Caste to Class: Mulk Raj Anand's Experimental Portrayals of Indian Society

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ABSTRACT

Mulk Raj Anand is the pioneer of Indian English literature who is known by his radical literary experimentations and social justice. This paper will deal with how Anand portrays changing society in India, especially how he left the caste discrimination thence turning to class exploitation. With the careful scrutiny of *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two leaves and a bud* (1937), the paper will look at the efforts that Anand went through in utilizing new techniques of narrative structures e.g. the use of stream of consciousness, linguistic hybridization and the application of dialogic narratives to give voice to the oppressed and make known the oppressions of the system. Relying on Gandhian humanism and Marxist philosophy, Anand developed works which remained beyond the traditional literary roots and were possible to combine political activism and literary experimentation. The paper can conclude that the experimental nature of fiction helped Anand to make the Indian English literature an effective means of social critique and the legacies of this author can be applied to the modern discourse on caste, class and inequality.

**Introduction :**

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the first influential writers in Indian English literature to have taken a seminal place in the history of Indian fiction. Many times seen as an early advocate of the voiceless, Anand applied his novels as instruments of opposition, compassion, and changeover. When Anand wrote against colonial India which was a country burdened with tradition-based social stratification, surging outbursts of nationalism and burgeoning modernism Anand tried to write on these harsh realities of the disenfranchised. His career as a writer is an aspiration of a severe consideration to the urgency of his age: the oppression of the lower castes, the working exploitation of workers and the overall consequences of colonial capitalism as well. What makes Anand stand out among his peers, is not only the set of themes that he decided to work on, but also the reckless literary experimentation he adopted in the form of his narrative, language-play and ideological framework.

The discrimination based on caste is the crucial theme of early fiction, particularly first novel of Anand *Untouchable* (1935). Young sweeper boy Bakha is a literary representation of the untouchability and social ostracism which was inherent in the traditional Indian society. Nevertheless, the social injustice that bothered Anand was not limited to caste only. In *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) his attention was drawn more and more to problems of class oppression and economic exploitation. These novels point to the developing understanding of the way the systems of colonial economies, classes and labor organization overlapped and in certain situations, overwhelmed the system of caste. With the developing literary imagination of Anand class started taking its place as an overriding pattern of oppression in the colonized and fast industrialising India.

It is also a thematic shift (caste the caste to class) that comes to be accompanied by important narrative experimentation. Being inspired by European modernist authors James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Leo Tolstoy, Anand followed their example and by using elements of stream of consciousness, free indirect discourse and internal monologue, gave his characters depth that is rather psychological in nature. Simultaneously, he made English language indigenous in order to incorporate the rhythm, words or expressions and cultural contexts in the Indian life. His prose had the knack of using vernacular phrases and Indianized English syntax that led to a distinct language style that appealed to the Indian and the global regions.

The ideology that informed the work of Anand had a combination of Gandhian morality, Marxist interpretations of class consciousness and personal experiences in the West. Being a true humanist, Anand was sure that literature could change a person. His fiction chronicles the experience of the oppressed as well as aiming at creating moral and political awakening. So his novels are no pure art works but rather an experimentation in literature to reform society.

This research paper will discuss the evolution of Anand as portrayed in the experimental depiction of the Indian society in his major novels. It is concentrated on passage of caste issues to class issues based approach and analysis of literary methods he used to illustrate this change. Through a critical reading of *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, and *Two Leaves and a Bud*, the paper seeks to unravel how Anand wrote a



revolutionary way within the Indian English fiction, which till today has shaped literary and socio-political discourses.

Caste in Anand's Early Works: The Case of *Untouchable*

Thematic Concerns

Untouchable (1935), the first novel by Anand is an agonizing account based on the one-day life story of Bakha, a sweeper boy at the lowest point of the caste system. This novel is a scathing criticism of untouchability and ritual purity that are imbibed in Indian social practices. In this case the backdrop is not the caste but the main axis of dehumanization.

Experimental Type of Narrative

The increasing time line combined with the stream-of-consciousness allows Anand to bring out the inner world of Bakha. It is a modernist device used to fill the gap between Indian content and western form, influenced by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, it was not common in Indian texts even in the times. Anand also uses free indirect discourse and allows the readers to see the inner turbulence of Bakha and at the same time is still distant with the story.

What does it mean to Humanize the Marginalized?

The difference in Anand is that he tries to make the outcast human. Bakha is portrayed as considerate, inquisitive, dreamy which are otherwise not available to the low caste humans in the traditional literature. Dignity that Anand gave his characters challenges the caste system to become the moral authority.

The Shift to Class: Coolie and the Economical Exploitation

In *Coolie* (1936), Mulk raj Anand makes a transition of greater thematic and ideological significance, in the context of the caste based narrative of *Untouchable*, to a more general ideology of exploitation on the basis of caste and in terms of colonial India. In spite of the fact that the aspect of discrimination against casts is an offense less overtone in *Coolie*, the issue of economic inequality and the insulting work position is one of the tremendous themes of dehumanization. The vision of India as unveiled by the novel is penned in the vision of Munoo, an orphaned boy of the age of 14 years who serves as the mouthpiece of the silent groups that had been trodden under the feet of poverty, rectification process and colonialism.

In contrast with Bakha, the protagonist of *Untouchable*, whose role and purpose lie in the inflexibility of the caste system in Indian society, the theme of Munoo, in turn, leads to his condition and his socio-economic status. The deceit, pain and violence that acclaims the life in a colonial capitalistic society are shown as Munoo travels to different moves of village to town, servant to factory worker to rickshaw puller. His trip to other cities Bilaspur, Daulatpur, Bombay and Simla all of which signify different strata of social injustice and economic inequality has been documented in the novel. The movement of Munoo presents an account of the rise of class as the key to social identity and agony in contemporary India by Anand.



Literary experimentation is included in *Coolie* through its narrative approach used by Anand. The novel is semi-picaresque, as the main character wanders through a variety of geographical location and social groups. This episodic structure gives Anand a chance to open the reader to diverse exploitative structures- house hold slavery, factory work and colonialist high society. The language is also the result of experimentation of Anand. He does not abandon his English-Indianizing practice, using words of his vernacular and culturally-specific idioms to give the story a local Indian socio-linguistic setting. Meanwhile, Anand uses free indirect discourse (or a stylistic effect of mixing the stream of thoughts of the character with the latest narrative voice in a modernist fashion) which allows him to explore all the psychological states of Munoo.

Another strongest feature of the *Coolie* must be the way in which Anand portrays industrial capitalism and its effects. His life in the cotton mill in Bombay makes him experience the bitter truth of the factory life and child labour, poor working conditions, and exploitation of the color of his skin by the colonial overseers. Anand makes explicit similarities between British colonialism and economic imperialism as he depicts the ways in which these two institutions are interdependently monopolized in the exploitation of India poor. The British are not the only culprits that are shown to be exploiting the Indians, the Indian landlords, traders, and factory owners are depicted as being involved and doing it to preserve or uplift the divisions among the classes so that they also can benefit.

The end of the novel is tragic as Munoo dies symbolically. It represents the destructive burden of a system that deems the poor without any protection or dignity. In contrast to *Untouchable*, which concludes with the possibility that a reform can take place, *Coolie* is not left with any hope: that problem of exploiting classes is inherent and well-spread in colonization.

In *Coolie*, Anand manages to divert the narrative gaze, so that instead of focusing on caste, the plot stage is turned towards the class, and literary experimentation reveals the principles of economic injustice. The novel has continued to stand as one of the milestones in Indian English fiction due to its radical nature of the depiction of the oppressed and their daring judgment against colonial capitalism and the division of society into classes.

Caste and Class Fusion in *Two leaves and a Bud*

Two Leaves and a Bud (1937) by Mulk Raj Anand marks a watershed in his own ideological and literary career since he here lays in a more integrated fashion the axes of caste and class together in a more inclusive symbolization of the oppression in colonial India. On the one hand, *Untouchable* stands out in its criticism of the historically rooted caste system and *Coolie* prioritizes the problem of exploitation through classes, whereas *Two Leaves and a Bud* combines these two forms of oppression, against the background of British colonialist capitalism. The novel shows the developing political mind of Anand and a struggle to portray caste and classes as connected systems and together they contribute to the social injustice in the society. By presenting Gangu, a Punjabi peasant, displaced in his village and recruited into indentured labor at an Assam tea plantation, Anand displays the inability to find any resolution to caste-based discriminations in the light of an economic modernization in favorable conditions of mine but rather succumbing to expressing it under colonial and capitalist models.



The introduction to *Gangu* presents a small landowner of the lower-caste agricultural group, with him spending his life disturbed by the oppressive institutions of zamindari (landlordism), indenture, and the corruptibility of the bureaucratic way of life. *Gangu* leaves his family and moves to Assam having been promised a great living standard by a recruiting agent of the tea plantations. This first scene preconditions a critical interpretation of the economic displacement developed by Anand, through which the colonial industries take advantage of the weakness of the rural poor to obtain workers. Nevertheless, Anand does not restrict the description of the suffering of *Gangu* to the exploitation of the classes. The tea plant, which is run by the British planters, in turn, turns into a microcosm of the colonial India in which the domination of the classes is not the only factor dictating the social construct, since the assumptions of the inferiority of the Indian countrymen against their peers based on the notion of caste prejudices are equally present here as well.

Perhaps one of the strongest aspects of the book is the way in which Anand highlights the fact that caste-based discrimination still thrives among the working classes even in a place where the idea is arguably meant to be expressed through suffering. In the tea plantation, the Indian labourer's are separated via regions, religion and caste that undermines any attempt at labour solidarity. Not only colonial masters but also other labourer's taunt *Gangu* by questioning his expertise and style of masculinity. As indicated by the novel, despite the shared oppression, cast groups are exemplified in the novel as a hindrance that prevents uniform resistance in a common face. Such synthesis of themes is the major literary innovation of Anand an admission that colonial capitalism is not a substitute to the established ways of oppression but rather a consumption and adaptation of those ways.

There is a transformation in the narrative strategy of Anand also in *Two Leaves and a Bud*. The panoramic and dialogic format is used by Anand instead of the first-person intimacy of *Untouchable* along with the episodic style of *Coolie*. The narrator of the story often switches the speaker-the British planters, Indian subordinates, and the native workers-so the reader could see the interpolated depth of the relationship of power. It is through this multiplicity in narratives that Anand is able to give not only the suffering of the oppressed but also the rationalization and self-justification of the oppressors. Take, as an example, such characters as Reggie Hunt and Superintendent Croft-Cooke who share the colonialist attitude toward native workmen as they are just a commodity which is dispensable. The way they treat *Gangu* and the other Indian workers shows that they have a lot of racial hatred which they talk over with a rhetoric of civilizing. Anand succeeds to criticize the ideological nexus of colonial capitalism through such characters.

The representation of *Gangu* as a tragic hero is also symbolic of the ideological convergence, in case of Anand. The death of the protagonist by the hands of Reggie Hunt who tries to molest his daughter is, not only a personal tragedy but it is a political comment. Although resistance by *Gangu* has the last word, fatally, but it is a triumph of moral-correspondence to the dehumanizing power structures. The fact that he offered his life to save the dignity of his daughter qualifies him to a status of a resistor other than a passive victim. In this scene, Anand injects humanistic nobility in his character and it makes a reader exercise to think beyond the categories of castes and classes to see the greater truth in the struggle of dignity and justice that is common to all of us.



The significant use of language in the experimental novel is also present. With Anand, English gets more Indianized with the use of native idioms and cultural metaphor as well as syntax that used vernacular languages. This language play further convinces the reader of the authenticity of his characters and settings and of the English language becoming a medium to demonstrate Indian reality and not to the colonial discourse. Further, the prose in *Two Leaves and a Bud* by Anand is full of a sense of urgency and indignation as the political tensions were at their height in the 30s. Anand himself was of the opinion that his fiction has become more political without necessarily losing its fiction qualities in the process as India came nearer to gaining independence and anti-colonial movements picked up.

The place of women in this circle of caste, class and colonialism is also brought by Anand to the fore. Leila a daughter of Gangu is a sign of weakness as well as dissent. The fact that she was almost raped by the British officer reflects the colonial state invasion into the lives of the natives and this is more so on their bodies, particularly those of the women. The character Leila, as it is portrayed by Anand is not only a mere plot element but also a reflection of how women become the victims of a combination of different forms of oppressions. This gender aspect is superimposed on this socio-stylistic blend of caste and class in the novel where the borders of Anand social criticism are widened.

As it turns out, *Two Leaves and a Bud* is a literary experiment in the description of having an oppression within an oppression in colonial India. The manner in which Anand incorporates the caste and the classes into one book demonstrates the growing realization that structural injustices in Indian society were quite diverse. It indicates that the social stratifications are dynamic and do not remain the same but respond to dynamic political and economic situations. By using strong characterisation, multiple narrative voices and an ideological clarity, Anand provides a significant study in the sense that, as caste and class interact in varying degrees, they profoundly affect the lives of the most vulnerable in India. The novel is a testimony to Anand and his adherence to fiction as an instrument of social change, and as his evergreen contribution as the author of political and literary experiments.

Language as Experiment: Indianization of English

A bold experiment of the Mulk Raj Anand in his effort to attempt to Indianise the English language is one among the most marked characteristics of his literary experiments. Working in the colonial language meant that as a writer Anand had a major problem of how to capture the lives, voices, and experiences of the Indian poor on the margins of the society in a language that itself has around it a heritage of deriving its power and authorship out of the elite, out of the colonial world as well. Anand did not merely borrow the British English literary traditions; he refurbished and remodeled the language in order to reflect Indian reality, in terms of social, cultural, and linguistic circumstances. This language experiment did not only extend the rupture between the colonial literary traditions but also created a new idiomatic Indian English novel, an idiom, born of the rhythms and texts of the Indian life.

Anand uses linguistic experimentation which is directly connected to his ideological mission. He made a cause of depicting the lives of the oppressed in India- the sweepers, coolies, peasants, labourers many of who were illiterate as well as spoke in regional languages. Speaking in smooth, Queen English would have given the impression of universality at the expense of the socio political context of their existence.



As an alternative, Anand decided to trigger his prose with Indian phrases, native idioms and cultural metaphors. His characters can be seen talking the English language which resembles their homeland languages in terms of interpreting with literal Hindi or Punjabi lines. This intentional misrepresentation of the so-called standard English does not only give the dialogue a touch of authenticity but also claims the validity of Indian English as a language of literature.

In other words, in *Untouchable*, the thoughts and speech of Bakha are expressed in English, but his Hindi-speaking world emanates through him into what is told here. Quite often, Anand invokes Indian vocabulary: latrine, sahib, pankha, tiffin, and bazaar, which he could perpetrate without any explanatory glosses, because the reader can decipher it on his own. The method, once a revolutionary breakthrough, is used in the work of postcolonial literature nowadays. In refusing to translate the Indian culture to western audiences, Anand was disputing linguistic hegemony of the English language, and claiming cultural independence of Indian writing in English.

Besides, Anand used a mixed form of narration which alternated between third-person narration and internal monologue in many cases just reflecting the mental state of his characters in their own language code. This application of the free indirect discourse enabled Anand to mix the voicing of the narrator and the character and reflect the shades of their social cultural positioning. As in the case of *Coolie*, the stream-of-consciousness of Munoo follows a style that shows his naivete and perplexity, but leave him still with the residue of his Indian community both in the cultural allusions and the vernacular, in other words, his milieu. In the same way, the dialectology of the Indian workers also stands out strikingly with the colonial English of the British plantation owners in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, underlining the linguistic and culture barrier that supports the division between classes and between races.

The decision to use certain words was also a political rebellion of decolonization by Anand. When at that time English were regarded as a language of privilege and power, Anand democratized it as English was being used as the language of the poor and the landless. His language is emotional, rhythmical, exclamatory and reminiscent of spoken tales of the Indian culture. By doing so, Anand did not only come to strengthen the versatility of the English language but also confronted literary purists who considered the language to be a frozen and homogeneous construct.

A larger sense would show that the language experiments by Anand pointed to the future course of Indian English writing. Other writers like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh have also toyed with English developing their own kind of linguistic style that is Indian to the taste. All these changes reflect the pioneering work done by Anand who demonstrated the ways in which English could be localized, indigenized, and retooled in order to articulate discrete Indian sensibilities. His prose therefore turns out to be a zone of opposition, where language itself turns into an instrument of cultural affirmation and social protest.

Ideological Experimentation and Philosophy-Influences

Gandhi and Marx



A combination of Gandhian humanism and Marxist socialism were influences in the ideological world view of Anand. The earliest works are characterized by ethos of dignity and non violent approach that Gandhi espoused in most of his writings and later fiction took a more Marxist tone on class criticism.

The Indian Ethos and the European Modernism

A European-educated writer with an interest in writers such as Tolstoy, Dickens and Lawrence, Anand combined current modernist narrative conventions with Indian philosophical and moral interests. This merger made a hybrid literary form which was experimental and culturally anchored.

Famously maligned and controversial

Didactic Vs Art

Critics have frequently criticized Anand as too didactic, as more concerned with message than art. But to such criticism one must clarify that his writing was guided by a sense of historical urgency. In the case of Anand, literature was a social reform and experimentalism was not an aesthetic luxury but the door to moral clarity.

Indian content, Western Form

There is another debate too on the problem of Anand using Western literary forms to speak of Indian reality. But Anand was of the opinion that form is neither Western nor Eastern, it is simply vehicle that has to be made to respond to the human experience.

Influence and Impact

Influencing the Fiction of the Indians

The experiments of Anand opened the way to the next Indian English authors Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Arundhati Roy. The way he represented the poor created a trend in socially concerned literature in India.

Applicability in the Contemporary Discourse

The problem of caste and class is still vital in contemporary India. The experimental nature adopted by Anand in handling these themes offers a model to be followed by modern writers and academicians who want to fathom the changes and differences that have occurred in the Indian social stratification.

Conclusion

The evolution of Mulk Raj Anand Untouchable to Two Leaves and a Bud is reflected in the evolution of India, which is a complex departure out of a caste-riddled society into the mold of a society more framed in classes. His ideas of story structuring, language, and ideology building became the main manifestations of narrative invention, experimentation with words, and ideological freedom, and Anand was proved to be a master of literature devoted to human dignity. Not only are his fiction works a



revelation of structural injustice within Indian society, but also a revolt of art against writing conservatism. The work of Anand keeps inspiring due to the fact that it is a combination of some urgency of the reform in politics with the playfulness of ruminations literary experiments, so instead of being a writer in a particular time, Anand is a timeless experimenter in the realities of Indian society.

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