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## **“Social Realism and Humanism in Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable and Coolie”**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Mulk Raj Anand, one of the most celebrated figures in Indo-Anglian literature, is renowned for his deep humanism, social realism and uncompromising critique of India’s socio-cultural conditions during the colonial era. His novels *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) are landmarks in Indian English fiction, vividly depicting the lives of marginalized and oppressed communities. Through Bakha, the sweeper boy in *Untouchable*, Anand exposes the inhuman practice of untouchability, while in *Coolie*, he portrays the tragic journey of Munoo, an orphaned child laborer, who becomes a symbol of India’s exploited working class. Both novels highlight poverty, social discrimination, economic exploitation and the dehumanizing impact of caste and class hierarchies. Anand, influenced by Gandhian ideals and socialist thought, combined realism with compassion, making his fiction not only literary works but also social documents with reformist zeal. This paper explores Anand’s use of **social realism**, his empathetic portrayal of the downtrodden and his literary technique of blending narrative artistry with social critique. It also examines how Anand used literature as a weapon against oppression, giving voice to India’s voiceless and oppressed millions.

**KEYWORDS:** Mulk Raj Anand, Social Realism, Humanism, Untouchability, Exploitation, Poverty, Indian English Literature, Gandhian Influence

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Among Indian authors, Mulk Raj Anand is the most notable for his contributions to Indo-Anglian literature. He was, in fact, a representative of the Indian literary landscape of the twentieth century. Although he was an excellent intuitive observer, his writings show that he was also an insightful commentator on life. Massive upheavals in India marked the beginning of the twentieth century. Cultural deterioration and stagnation in large swaths of the country were nurtured by foreign influences. Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) was the first modern Indian novelist to use English as a vehicle of expression. He was the most prolific author of Indian English prose and one of the field's oldest practitioners, with sixteen novels, a novelette and nine collections of short stories to his name. Anand has done an excellent job of liberating it from the restrictive limitations of romanticism that had been imposed on it by the earlier exponents. India is vividly depicted in his books, which show his deep interest in the country's socioeconomic realities. They demonstrate an



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artist's ability to delve into the depths of the human psyche, which is crushed under the inhumanity of society.

In 1935, Anand published his debut novel, *Untouchable*, which is also one of his most concise and artistically gratifying works. These events are shown as a day in the life of a sweeper kid named Bakha who is unable to be touched. Exclusion from regular social interaction and economic deprivation are also examples of being untouchable. *Untouchable* has the same narrative style as James Joyce's and Virginia Woolf's works. The "stream of consciousness" approach is a term for this method. The sweeper boy is given a lot of attention throughout the book and it shows.

*Untouchable* is a scathing critique of India's twisted and corrupt social and religious order. It is also an excellent piece of art, which depicts the world as it really is and elicits our empathy for society's misfits and strays. For its representation of the pervasive societal injustice against the untouchables in Hindu society, the book still enjoys a great deal of appeal. Christ, Gandhi and flush-systems are all mentioned at the end of the storey as possible answers to the evil of untouchability. Many of Anand's short stories and novels deal with the fate of India's working class. A little kid from the Himachal Pradesh village of Bilaspur in the Kangra Hills named Munoo is the central character in "Anand's second novel, *Coolie* (1936)", in which the author explores the gap between the affluent and the poor. An orphan youngster dying of TB brought on by starvation was the focus of *Coolie*'s film. By telling the storey of a victim who was exploited, it exposes the entire system. His warmheartedness, affection, comradeship and interest remain even in the most depressing conditions. Those who are poor, abused, exploited and greedy are to blame for this human tragedy, which is compounded by a lack of empathy. The society in which Munoo is born and raised is to blame for his plight, not destiny or the almighty. (*Coolie*54)

Inner studies are prominent in all of Mulk Raj Anand's writings. In his life and work, Mulk Raj Anand demonstrates a major influence from Gandhi. Gandhi makes an appearance in the film *Untouchable* to speak out against the evils of untouchability. Writing in English, Anand aimed to speak up for the underprivileged and oppressed in India's traditional, conservative and at times inhumane society by giving them their own voice. On the other hand, *Coolie* (1935) and *Untouchable* (1935) (1936). He is a social reformer, Mulk Raj Anand. In his profession as a creative writer, his compassion and reality make him stand out. He's from the same time period and explores a wide range of topics that he deemed relevant to Indian society at the time in his novels. His stories depict the poverty and social injustices that pervaded rural India in the early twentieth century. he has written about a wide range of social, political and economic issues in his novels. These include: "the plight of children, prison conditions, the gap between 'haves and have-nothings', the evils of dowry, maladjustment in marriage, helplessness of widows, ....., the rich and poor, the rich and poor. Realism and socialism may be seen in the depiction of these various aspects." (*Coolie* 124)



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That includes not just peasants and child labourers but also low paid instructors; authors; journalists; and so on. The novelist expresses his genuine compassion for the impoverished and oppressed. Women, on the other hand, bear the brunt of the consequences of a terrible social structure and the lustful desires of immoral males. Consequently, Anand paints a bleak picture of colonial India's poorest citizens at a period when British rule was displaying its most heinous aspects.

In the context of a revolutionary socialist society, it is a term that derives from Russian-inspired beliefs about the role of literature in society. "Social realism" is a term used to describe the way people interact with one another. Much of the international output of social realism literature is characterised by a belief in the power of the written word and the writer's ability to correctly depict social reality in an honest and rewarding manner. Myriad factors contributed to the development of social realism, including "the Russian Revolution, Soviet Communism, international Marxism and the need to reply critically and denunciatorily in response to the many forms of repression in use today." (Iyengar 330)

As a result, the suffering is not the result of fate, but rather a result of the human condition and the social context in which it occurs. Bakha and Munoo, the heroes of *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, are the protagonists of their own stories of adversity.

Anand is called a reformer since it is one of his goals to jolt his readers out of their complacency and urge them to approach reality in a new way. In *Untouchable*, the protagonist is a progressive revolutionary, a humanist who cares deeply about the struggling, oppressed and socially excluded. Realists who use Marxism in their social realism carry their readers along, earn their trust and develop a strong, harmonious relationship with them and with the characters they write about. Rather than adhering to old traditions and practises, Anand places a high priority on the demands of the current moment.

Like *Coolie*, *Coolie's* new instinct has epic amplitude and splendour and he has a vast range of experience. That he never lets his perspective of social reality be obscured by idealism is unquestionable. Premchand is also a serious author and impassioned reformer, one who links the origins of social injustice and moral degradation to disruptions founded on cooperation and brotherhood, as well as to the emergence of inequity and dictatorship based on caste and class concerns.

Despite the fact that Anand released *Untouchable* at a young age, he had already accumulated a sizable amount of expertise in the field of storytelling. No one can argue with his ability to observe life in all of its essential details and describe it with a level of accuracy that has rarely been surpassed. He included every biographical and biological factor, recorded every breath and examined each character's individual thoughts all without resorting to literary vivisection. He grew up in a milieu of discontent, infusing his fervent belief that things might be better into the



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circumstances into which he had been born. This is why he rejected the philosophy of art for its own sake, because there is sufficient evidence that he was acutely aware of a purpose and that he clearly began to reform injustices and correct wrongs through covert propaganda in many of his novels and that he was highly aware of a purpose in many of his novels.

He was a liberal democrat who cared deeply about people. Anand's universality appears to be limited to the lower classes. It's safe to say that no Indo-English writer before Anand had given as much persistent attention to society's poorest, most marginalised individuals as Dickens did to the English. There were lots of things for Anand to be moralistic about because he was born in an age when moralising was quite fashionable. When he paints, he focuses on depicting those aspects of human nature that elicit typical human emotions like tears, joy and sadness. (Walsh 69) When it comes to depicting a modern man's dilemma in a hostile environment, current novels are more like epics. Novels tend to take the style of epics of the everyday lives of the common man. It accurately depicts the many facets of daily living. As a global figure, Munoo depicts the pain and starvation of the millions of people in India.

Anand's *Untouchable* and *Coolie* depicts the plight of India's underclass and workers, who are subjected to a plethora of hardships, including social exclusion and poverty. His legendary Bakha and Munoo reflect the Indian civilization. Anand throughout Bakha's whole existence, tragedy develops and increases, with no respite. His poverty and lack of contact with the outside world make Bakha an idealist who is unable to think of bucking society's norms, religion, or even the "agents" of religious organisations. (Anand *Untouchable* 154)

Anand's novels are all about social realism since they are based on real-life experiences. His childhood friend Bakha, the untouchable sweeper kid, was brought to life as a fictitious character in *Untouchable*. Bakha was scolded by Anand's mother for bringing home a bleeding Anand, who had been injured by a stone. When Bakha is seen cleaning the latrines of caste Hindus, he is despised by them, but Anand catches Bakha's delight in the work: his meticulousness lends the movement of his movements a degree of beauty. As well since being a strong social tract, the novel was also a great technical achievement, as the author built around his hero a spiritual crisis that encompassed India in a single day's action. He stated in the introduction: It has gone directly to the core of its topic and refined it.

His next several books dealt with the fate of India's working class, a topic he continued to explore in his later works. An orphan youngster dying of TB brought on by starvation was the focus of *Coolie*'s attention... By telling the storey of a victim who was exploited, it exposes the entire system. His warmheartedness, affection, comradeship and interest remain even in the most depressing conditions. When the land of Anand's mother's family was taken away by the landlord of the hamlet, he was motivated to write *The Village* in order to examine what life was like for the poor peasants under British control.



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Bakha and Munoo are in the same boat when it comes to their own personal hardships. Both *Untouchable* and *Coolie* deal with a same theme: “the exploitation of the underprivileged by the forces of capitalism, industrialism and colonialism in their respective countries. Throughout Anand's *Coolie*, Munoo is denied his right to life and happiness. He is abused and made to suffer till he succumbs to consumption. The author makes it quite plain.” (*Coolie* 67)

It's not only Munoo who gets taken advantage of in this way. He represents the millions of people who are subjected to such exploitation and deprivation on a daily basis. Rural and urban India's underprivileged have the same bleak and terrible lives. Even if you live in a tiny town like Bilaspur or a large city like Daulatpur or Bombay, the tale of suffering is the same.

One of Anand's extra-ordinary epics of misery, Bakha and Munoo's harrowing voyage is a distinctive characteristic for studying comparative elements. Their social contexts, exploitation by landlords and masters, bad luck brought about by their surroundings, societal beliefs and cumulative torment all have a lot in common with each other. Bakha and Munoo are both crushed beneath the weight of life's burdens and crumbled into ashes with the so-called clean and pious dust of mother India, which is supposed to purify the soul. (Anand *Untouchable* 11) This book by Mulk Raj Anand depicts the dreadful plight of India's social outcasts and "coolies." Both of these books were written for a specific reason. The underdog and underprivileged are shamelessly and tragically exploited in these works, which are scathing indictments of modern Indian capitalist society and the feudal system. They both want to live, but society won't let it. A lack of food and shelter are the main causes of their death. The majority of society's ills may be simply remedied by treating the poor with compassion. Because there is no other option, humanism is the only viable approach.

The novel's central conceit - that no one can touch you - is eerily accurate. Bakha, the protagonist of *Untouchable*, is a social outcast in a realistic tale. It's an unaltered snapshot of a day in the life of the subject. The colony of outcasts is depicted accurately in the first pages of the book. The photographic authenticity and accuracy recall the novel's local flavour.

As Anand himself has observed, he has delivered this accurate depiction. Throughout the storey, the author employs a style of realistic description. When it comes to painting a picture of a reality-based Hindu colony, Anand has done an excellent job.

In the cabin of an untouchable, one may glimpse the truth. Anand captures the true essence of a scene via his lens. Bakha's father, Lakha, is the jamadar of all the town's and the cantonment's sweepers and he scolds him every day. Bakha aspires to be just like the British in every way. He begins to describe Bakha's yearning to seem like Britishers, which is very much genuine to the colonial Indian untouchable's psyche.

When Bakha first arrived to the British regimental barracks with his uncle, he was awestruck by the Tommies. For the duration of his stay, he had glimpsed into the Tommies' way of life, which





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included sleeping on weird low canvas mattresses wrapped with blankets; eating eggs; sipping tea and wine from metal mugs; and walking to the market with silver-mounted canes in their hands. He was immediately enthralled with the idea of living their life. Bakha, on the other hand, was living in a fantasy world far removed from reality. Father: 'Get up, ohe you Bakhiya, ohe you son of a pig, get up!' His father's voice emerged from the midst of a jarring, jarring, interrupted snoring; his father's voice was clear as the day. The sepoys will be enraged if you don't clean the latrines. Anand has utilised phrases that are incredibly relatable and he has done so by delivering them in an Indian-sounding manner. Bakha is obligated to clean the colony's three rows of public latrines because he is in charge of them. Anand notices the steady stream of men making their way to the latrines. With their loincloths off and a holy thread knotted over their left ears, most of them were Hindus. In order to quench his hunger, Bakha heads back to his home, when he finds an empty pitcher since there is no water. Anand explains the societal scourge of untouchability. "Untouchables are physically and socially isolated from the caste system. Anand depicts the brutal truth and the affliction of untouchability in a clear and concise manner." (Anand 45)

It's hard to see the water scene and not be moved. Untouchability is clearly depicted in the book by Anand by his use of abuses, real-world terminology and a frank depiction of it.

The caste Hindus abused Sohini's rights and privileges. In order to fill her pitcher with water, she waits patiently for an opportunity to bring a Hindu caste Hindu to the well. Anand puts down his thoughts:

Outcasts were not permitted to mount the platform around the well since doing so would cause the Hindus of the three upper castes to consider the water to be polluted, according to Hindu tradition. The surrounding brook was also off limits since their usage would have contaminated it. They didn't have their own well since digging a well in Bulandshahr, which is a mountainous town, was too expensive.

They had no choice but to gather at the foot of the caste Hindu's well and rely on the generosity of some of their superiors to fill their pitchers with water. The untouchables are used to this kind of treatment and they've come to accept it as a part of their culture. They all waited patiently, but they couldn't touch the well themselves since they were outcastes. Even so, they still had to wait. Anand says that she had rushed to the well, afraid and anxious the fact that she would have to wait her turn since she could see from a distance that there was a large group of people. She wasn't dejected by the fact that she would be the twelfth person to receive water, but rather depressed. She was aware of her brother's emotions. (Anand 65) Tired, he slumped over the desk. He needed to quench his thirst. Motherly instincts had taken hold of her as she made her way out the house to gather water for her loved ones back at home. Her heart plummeted as she sat in a row with other victims. There was no trace of somebody who may be a potential donor travelling through that area.



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The immediacy of the actual speech of feeling is embodied in *Untouchable*. It depicts a decadent civilization in all its glory and provides a deep sense of living. Anand demonstrates a deep comprehension of human nature and a keen eye for moral distinctions. With an honesty and power that stems from his own personal experiences, he also expresses himself in his writing. In the work, he retells his own childhood experiences in vivid detail. Bakha, who Anand likens to one of the numerous sweepers he knew back in the good old days, shares his private life with him. Character development has thus been influenced significantly by the author's own sense of time crunch. (Iyengar 333)

It is a tale depicting the suffering of the person caught in the caste system's net, but it also has a sad beauty all its own. Bakha is both a rebel and a victim at the same time, which makes him a paradox. Anguish and sadness become ours because of his pain. In the end, Bakha is nothing more than a scapegoat and a victim of an oppressive culture. It's only the lowest of the low whose destiny remains unaffected.

Artistic depiction of terrible, inhumane social forges such as poverty and exploitation makes *Coolie* a compelling social tragedy. Because the protagonist is a youngster, his early demise is much more heartbreaking. In the course of the tale, Anand used Munoo to depict several periods of proletarian living in unique locales, so structuring the action in a meaningful manner. On his journey from place to place in quest of work, Munoo is pushed by hunger and eventually meets his end. Coolie tells his storey.

With the actual colours of life, Anand has captured the essence of Munoo. The novel's brutal truth. The topic matter itself is a genuine entity. The storey of the poor boy's exploitation and misery is an accurate depiction of the society we live in today. In the novel, Anand depicts reality as a whole. The combination of natural language with translated phrases creates a sense of freshness and authenticity. Poor conditions in India are another example of social realism.

labourers. Munoo's experience of famine serves as an ironic commentary on the country's agriculture-based economy. Seth Prabha Dayal, owner of a pickle business in Daulatpur, has acquired Munoo. Munoo and Mulk Raj are greeted with a hearty meal upon arrival.

Anand exposes the atrocities of untouchability and the exploitation of child labour at the conclusion of his works *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, as well as the problems of social governance and the structure of society. The fact that this is happening is nothing more than a symptom of our contemporary culture. Both of these novels are concerned with the issues of untouchability, exploitation, poverty, starvation and the fate of the Indian populace, amongst other subjects. The novels have taken on epic dimensions as a result of the realistic representation of misery caused by terrible situations in life, as well as the courageous battle of its primary protagonists against enormous difficulties.



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## CONCLUSION:

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and *Coolie* remain timeless narratives of resistance, empathy and reform. Both novels reflect the harsh realities of colonial India while exposing the systemic injustices faced by marginalized communities. Anand's protagonists—Bakha and Munoo—are not merely individuals but symbolic representations of millions of voiceless Indians crushed under the weight of caste, poverty and exploitation. By employing realism, the stream-of-consciousness technique and biographical influences, Anand elevates his fiction into a vehicle for social change. He rejects the philosophy of “art for art's sake” and instead embraces literature as a moral and social force. His works mirror his socialist-humanist ideology, advocating for compassion, equality and reform in a fractured society. Anand's contribution to Indian English fiction lies not only in his artistic achievements but also in his commitment to social justice. *Untouchable* and *Coolie* stand as powerful indictments of caste oppression and economic exploitation, offering humanism as the only viable path for a just and humane society.

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