

11

MULK RAJ ANAND ASA DEFENDER OF THE POOR AND THE OPPRESSED

Bidwe N R

*LalbahadurShastriMahavidyalaya,
Partur, Tq. Partur, Dist. Jalna,
Maharashtra, India.*

&

Dr Satpute V D

*Principal
Late R W Arts, Com. & Science College
Sonpeth, Dist. Parbhani, Maharashtra*

Abstract:

Being born in a coppersmith family and having seen the hardship, suffering, and exploitation of the common folks at the hands of the government, orthodox, hypocritical caste Hindus and merciless religious order Mulk Raj Anand is moulded as a defender of the poor and the oppressed. Since his childhood he has seen the atrocities foisted upon the common folks, hypocrisy of the priests, the corruption in different offices, indifference of the ruling class to the poor, the hardship in the life of untouchables, other lower castes and in the life of the peasants. He has also seen how the nation was going through the nationalistic and patriotic tide to get independence from the foreign rule and from atrocious caste system. He also wanted to be a part of the change. To this cause he has used the weapon of words. He has written a number fiction works to cause the change. He believed in the theory, "art for life's sake". All his fiction work to achieve this end. The present paper tries to show how Mulk Raj Anand was a representative of the poor and the oppressed. He used the poetic realism to describe the oppressed and the oppressors. He is on the side of the oppressed.

Keywords: *Champion, Poor, Oppressed, Black Waters, Sword, Sickle, Sub-castes, Untouchability.*

Mulk Raj Anand, one of the major Indian fiction writers, was born on December 12, 1905, of a coppersmith family in Peshawar, Punjab. As he has gone through a number of experiences of a common folk since his childhood, boyhood and youth, and seen the social, economic and religious disparities, religious hypocrisy, the struggle of the poor, their pathetic lives, his novels are full of humanism. He can be called the defender of the poor and the oppressed.

His father Lal Chand left his ancestral profession and worked as a regimental Head Clerk in the British Indian Army. As his father's regiment was transferred from place to place, Anand had to move with him and, thus he acquired new experiences both about Indian and European society. He knew the life of officers and soldiers. He also saw rural life closely. His mother, IshwarKaur belonged to an orthodox peasant family of Punjab. From her he derived the knowledge of peasant life and myths, songs, talks and epics of the village community. He learnt in a cantonment school and he saw corruption in the schools very closely. Also his father Lal Chand, a cautious father about his son's education, gave him the novels of the great English masters. In his childhood he read Thackeray, Hardy, Dickens, Reynolds etc. Anand did not like his father's loyalty to the British rule. Also he noticed his father's hypocritical life; for his father read *Gita* daily but he did not practice it in his life. When he began writing he revolted against the tyranny of the British rule and

the hypocrisy of the middle class. Hence all his characters, the exploited and the exploiters, are drawn from men and women he saw around him.

He has used poetic realism in his fiction. In all his novels common folks are the protagonists. He has included Indianness in his novels. This well educated Sahitya Academy Award winner believes in the inherent goodness of man. In his novels we find boundless compassion and sympathy for the poor and the neglected. He discards the 'art for art's sake' theory and considers that art exists for the sake of man. Major themes of Anand's novels are *social, cultural, political and autobiographical*. "In his novels – *Untouchable* (1935), *The Road* (1963), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Big Heart* (1945) – Anand comes as the Defender of the underdog and a crusader against social distinctions and man-made barriers which divide humanity. He vehemently condemns the apathy for the poor and the exploited, self centeredness and lack of human sympathy and understanding in the upper strata of society. He is both a realist and humanist whose fundamental aim is to establish the fundamental oneness of mankind.

"Anand's first novel *Untouchable* brings to light the sorrows and sufferings that caste Hindus inflicted on the untouchables and the outcastes– the scavengers, the leather workers, the washer-men, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters etc. This novel breathes a strong protest against social injustice meted out to untouchables. With unflinching realism Anand describes a single day in the life of an untouchable, Bakha, in the town of Bulashan" (Kumar 75). How he is ill-treated and humiliated by the upper caste Hindus, how the priest tries to molest his sister, how an upper-caste Hindu woman throws bread to him from the first floor and how he misses the catch, how the Christian Father tries to convert him to Christianity, how he looks forward to escaping, at the arrival of the machine, from the toilet-cleaning work, how he looks forward to the fulfilment of Gandhiji's dream of India without castes- everything is described in detail. In *Untouchable* Bakha thinks that machine and Gandhism would bring equality in his life and that he would be saved from the toil of toilet cleaning job.

His novel *The Road* also deals with the theme of untouchability. Bhikhu the untouchable protagonist takes part in the road building. A road is being built from Goverdhan village to Delhi. As it is built with the stones quarried by the untouchables the upper caste Hindus refuse to touch the road (refuse to walk along it). Out of their anger they set the huts of the untouchables on fire. The road is built and walking along it Bhikhu escapes to Delhi.

In *Coolie* Munoo too goes through the experiences of Bakha and Bhikhu – manual work, ill treatment and exploitation. Munoo, an orphan village boy from the Kangra hills works at different people and places – first at a semi anglicised house in Shyamnagar. Tired of the ill treatment at the hands of the lady of the house he escapes to Mumbai. In Mumbai too he is ill treated by the foreman in a cotton mill. Then he works as a rickshaw puller of a lady who in turn ill-treats him. Munoo tries to escape from life and takes shelter in one place after another but everywhere he is ill-treated and exploited; and in the end at the age of sixteen Munoo dies of tuberculosis.

Two Leaves and a Bud is a pathetic story of Gangu, a small farmer in Punjab displaced in Assam. Troubled by drought, starvation and the moneylender Seth Badri Das he escapes along with his wife Sajani and daughter Leila to Assam and works as an indentured worker on a tea estate. Before succumbing to death he has to go through a lot of misfortunes.

As soon as he reaches Assam his wife dies. The assistant manager of the estate Reggie Hunt tries to molest Leila and in a fit of frenzy kills Gangu. And the cold blooded murderer is acquitted, in the end, of the heinous act and thus Gangu and his family are sacrificed at the altar of capitalism, racial discrimination and the disintegration of village community.

The Big Heart refers to the heart (nature) of the protagonist Ananta, the good natured youth who fights, on one hand, for the unity of sub-castes of the Kshatriya community and the workers in India and on the other hand, for the acceptance of machine.

There is conflict between sub-castes– that is castes within castes which also issue from economic and social factors. The coppersmiths are Kshatriyas, the second highest caste in India but their adoption of the profession of the coppersmiths has lowered their social status. Here, LalaMurliDhar, the snob, being conscious of his social superiority, does not invite his brethren to his son's betrothal ceremony. As he is rich he considers himself superior to the poor *Thathiar* of his own community. His poor *Thathiar* brethren ostracise him. *Kaseras* another sub-division of the Kshatriya caste consider themselves superiors to *Thathiar* and invariably use word 'low' to refer to them. Gokal Chand, the head man of the *Kaseras*, is condemned because he opens "a new account book in partnership with people whom they consider to belong to a lower caste." The protagonist Ananta is an enlightened member of the *Thathiar* community. He stands for the abolition of the caste system which leads to conflict.

Also, due to installation of machines the traditional caste-based unskilled labourers get unemployed. Rallia and Viroo, who lose their trades because of industries, blame machines for their ills and want to destroy them. But Ananta pleads for unity of labourers and acceptance of machines. He thinks that machines should be controlled by united labourers and not the capitalists. In the end Ananta is killed by Rallia while checking the latter from wrecking machines. But his sacrifice does not go in vain. He bequeaths a message to his beloved Janki and fellow craftsmen, who carry on the work left unfinished by him.

In *Untouchable*, *The Road*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and A Bud* and *The Big Heart* Anand deals with the theme of untouchability, discrimination, exploitation and oppression. In *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and A Bud* Anand also deals with the theme of the disintegration of the village community, which has plagued the poor villagers into untold sufferings and which has also disturbed the cultural unity of India. G. S. Balram Gupta comments on it:

While *Untouchable* and *The Road* indicate how man's cruelty to man in the form of caste, hatred and oppression results in the unspeakable misery of innumerable untouchables in India, *Coolie* and *Two Leaves And A Bud* point a ghastly picture of the lot of Indian peasants who, uprooted from their soil, lose their way, enter a wider and more cruel world, suffer countless indignities at the hands of the affluent and powerful men, and eventually die premature and tragic deaths (Gupta, 37).

In the three parts of *The Village Trilogy* – *The Village* (1939), *Across The Black Waters* (1940) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) – Anand deal with the theme of disintegration of the Indian villages, the exploitation of the poor at the hands of money lenders, priests, lawyers and even law courts. Lalu the protagonist of the trilogy rebels against the conservatism. Lalu is little different in his social position from Bakha the Untouchable or Munoo the Coolie, but in writing three novels around his sympathetic character Anand for the first time shows some possibility of escape from the social prison into which the underdog in India is traditionally born. Lalu is against all established systems like economical, social, political and religious. Nandpur, the Village in which Lalu is born, is an example of an Indian village. The poverty and the dirt in the village do not

escape from the keen eyes of Lalu. He has such thoughts— what good, after all, is a railway which links the major cities but by-passes his own village by some distance? He also does not consider God to be kind to the poor. He expresses his thoughts about God and religion in the following way:

“The twilight was falling as if the hand of God was throwing invisible dust into the open eyes of the world” (Anand 52).

He defies Sikh tradition by having his hair cut. It culminates into his insult— blackening of his face and a donkey ride through the village streets. He also makes love to Maya, the landlord’s daughter. Partially, harassed and tormented by MahantNandgir, the Sikh priest and the landlord, and partially, as an escape from such harsh world, Lalu joins the army.

The second part of the trilogy *Across the Black Waters* describes the lives of the soldiers. As a soldier Lalu is sent to France. There he fights and kills and does not understand why human beings are killing each other. He also goes through the experience of suicide of his friend. Isolated from society and hardened by such events Lalu does not feel grief. “The general mood of the Indian sepoys is one of fascination and bewilderment; why should the Europeans, who are obviously such superior people, go about killing one another, making a large graveyard of a fair country like France? Lalu almost feels that “the whole of his fighting and devastation was accidental, the fault of some general who had given the wrong orders, that if only the general’s superiors knew they would call off the war”! (Iyengar 349). Anand condemns war in *Across the Black Waters*. “Anand thinks that on one hand, battle demands a total submission of personality to the general order and yet, on the other hand, it heightens the individual’s sense of his own personal doom. War is fought by armies and suffered by individuals.” (Alastair, 44).

Across the Black Waters shows suffering not against the almost timeless routine of rural life but in a period of crisis. I know of no Indian novel in which the plight of the ordinary man is more desolate, for these sepoys are thousands of miles from home in an atmosphere that wraps their faith and overrides many of their customs. There is literally no direction in which these men can turn other than towards death, mutilation, and continuous battle or, as in Lalu’s case capture by the enemy and the final submission of self (Alastair, 47).

Leaving the army, Lalu returns to his village. Lalu has spent some years in German prison and now thinks that he would be honoured and given some reward. But the army is demobilized and he gets neither honour nor reward. But in *The Sword and the Sickle* Lalu exhorts people to rise against the oppressors and expresses the need of unity and freedom for the growth and promotion of culture. “Government against people, the people themselves cut up into divisions, the pull of selfish greed and the pull of idealism and the need for sacrifice—these ingredients of a revolutionary situation are the content of *The Sword and the Sickle*” (Iyengar, 349). “It is essential to stress this rejection of the extremes of violence and non-violence to try to define exactly what it is which Anand preaches in the Lalu trilogy. In an extraordinary way he anticipates Frantz Fanon, for he believes that the underprivileged peoples of the world can only hope to be saved by saving themselves” (Alastair, 51-52).

In *Gauri* (1960) Anand deals with the exploitation of women. Gauri, bullied, mistrusted, beaten and exploited by her husband Panchi, abandons her home and husband to live on her own and to lead her own life. In this novel Anand questions the supremacy of man over woman.

In his novels Anand also criticises religious hypocrisy and exploitation. In *Untouchable* and *The Road* he reveals the highhandedness of high castes towards untouchables, which is stamped with religious sanction. Pt. Kali Nath in *Untouchable*, Pt. Suraj Mani in *The Road*, the fat yogi of BhagatHar Das Shrine in *Coolie*, MahantNandgir in *The Village*, lecherous Pt. BholaNath in

Gauri, Pt. Jay Ram and Pt. BalKrishana in *The Seven Summers* are the embodiments of the immoral, corrupt and hypocritical priestly order in Hinduism. An advocate of religious tolerance and rational spirit, Anand condemns all institutionalised religions. In *Death of a Hero* Anand assaults traditional religious bigotry and obscurantism. He criticises Colonel Hutchinson in *Untouchable*, Padre Annandale in *The Village* and Clary Young in *Gauri*. These people are interested only in religious conversion.

Anand also expresses his views on education. He expresses futility of education in *Lament on the Death of Master of Arts*. According to him modern education creates only misfits. The protagonist of the novel Nur does not find a job in spite of having academic qualifications. To him the academic qualifications are useless without influence and recommendations. Even after being uneducated Nur's friend Gama is more successful in business than Nur. Frustrated and dejected, Nur falls ill and dies in the full bloom of youth. Nur has become a symbol of educated but unemployed youth who are daily sacrificed at the altar of defunct, corrupt and meaningless system of education. Schoolteachers in Anand's fiction are corrupt and homosexual. Nur is beaten because he does not bring sweets to the teacher. Master Budh Singh in *The Morning Face*, Master Hukam Chand in *The Village* and Master Din Gul in *Seven Summers* have family likeness as far as corruption in education is concerned.

Related to the political thoughts he thinks, "... the shareholders of "Ram Rajya" were reaping rich dividends for once following Mahatma Gandhi and going to jail. Anand finds little change in the attitude of the rulers of free India from that of old English rulers" (Kumar 87). *The Sword and the Sickle* covers the politics of the twenties. The title of the novel is symbolic. The sword symbolises tyranny, exploitation and destruction, whereas the sickle stands for freedom, production, prosperity and peace; and also represents India's vast labour force, especially the downtrodden peasantry which constituted over eighty per cent of India's population in the nineteen twenties. *Death of a Hero: Epitaph For Maqbool Sherwani* (1947) depicts the background of the invasion of Kashmir by Pakistani invaders, which led to the signing of the Instrument of Accession to India by the Maharaja of Kashmir.

Private Life of an Indian Prince (1971) is a novel on political theme revealing the political turmoil of the period immediately following independence. The rulers of five hundred and sixty two princely states clamoured for independence. Sardar Ballabh Bhai Patel dealt with this critical situation tactfully and abolished the princely order. The novel shows how the Kings and the Princes of the small kingdoms were lecherous, vain and worthless. The example given here is that of Victor Ashoke Kumar of Shampur. It is shown how he was amorous and lost his kingdom and dignity for the love of the nymphomaniac Gangi Dasi. He also shows the royal arrogance and highhandedness. He is also an epitome of ignorance and inefficiency prevalent among the kings of his time. His women are at loggerheads with each other, pressurizing Victor into accepting their son as legal heir, while the Kingdom was actually going down the drains, with the Prince becoming mere puppet in the hands of his shallow, conniving advisers. The protagonist here is the Prince, a fallen young Royal fledgling. For him the fulfilment of his petty desire of lust is much more important than his duties as a King, the honour of his royal family and the continual suffering of his *janta*.

In the three parts of his ambitious autobiographical work— *Seven Summers*, *Morning Face* and *Confession of a Lover* Anand describes his life story. But " Apart from Krishan himself, the novel is peopled with a variety of characters who almost create the impression that we are here

following, not the life-history of an individual alone, but that of a people, of a society” (Iyengar 355).

In this way the fiction of Mulk Raj Anand comments on all fields of life of India in his time; and Mulk Raj Anand stands out as the defender of the poor, the oppressed and the common folks of India.

WORKS CITED

1. Anand, Mulk Raj, *Untouchable*, Mehata, Pune, 2012. Print.
2. Anand, Mulk Raj, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Liberty Press, New York, 1954. Print.
3. Anand, Mulk Raj, *Coolie*, Penguin, London, 1990. Print.
4. Anand, Mulk Raj, *Across the Black Wsters*, Orient Paperbacks, Hyderabad, 2008. Print.
5. Anand, Mulk Raj, *The Sword and the Sickel*, Kutub, Bombay, 1955. Print.
6. Anand, Mulk Raj, *The Village*, Bombay, Kutub, 1939. Print.
7. Gupta, G. S. Balram, *Mulk Raj Anand*, “N.P.” Print.
8. Kumar, Satish, “Mulk Raj Anand”, *A Survey of Indian English Novel*. First ed. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2011. Print.
9. Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasa, “Mulk Raj Anand.” *Indian Writing in English*. Eighteenth ed. New Delhi: Sterling, 2013. Print.
10. Alastair, Niven, “The Lalu Trilogy of *Mulk Raj Anand*.” *Indian Fiction in Enaglish*. Ed. Rao, P. Mallikarjuna, Rajeshwar M. Atlantic: Delhi. 1919. Print.
11. Gandhi, Leela, “Novelists of the 30s and 40s.” *A Concise History of Indian Literature in English*. Ed. Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna. Permanent Black: Ranikhet. 2008. Print.
12. “Mulk Raj Anand.” Wikipedia. 30 December 2014. Web. 17 March 2015.
13. Anu, “Private Life of An Indian Prince by Mulk Raj Anand”. *Scribbles of Soul*. August 21, 2011. Web. 17 December 2015.
14. “Two Leaves and a Bud”. India Netzone. Web. 10 March 2015.
15. Khuman, P, “Social Realism in Two Leaves and a Bud and The Big Heart”. *Shodhganga.inflibnet*. 2010. Web. 12 March 2015.



This is an Open Access e-Journal Published Under A Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

To Cite the Article: Bidwe N R & Dr Satpute V D, “Mulk Raj Anand as a Defender of the Poor and the Oppressed”. *Literary Cognizance*, 1-1 (2015): 56-61. Web.