



## Spirit of Survival in Mulk Raj Anand's Two Novels Untouchable and Coolie

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**Abstract:** \_Untouchable is a protest of a writer to gain recognition and the status of a human being for the 'untouchable on par with the caste Hindus'. It is a sincere and fervent attempt to integrate the polluted and the polluter, into the mainstream of the Hindu society without causing any damage or loss to either party. Anand has taken up the role of a writer committed to the eradication of the evils of society. Anand on the threshold of a literary career makes an effective protest against the stigma of pollution attaching to Harijanas with a total control of all aspects of the social evil.

**Key words:** Harijanas, Hindu society, social reforms

### Narration

Mulk Raj Anand's central preoccupation in his writings was with humanism. He conceived art and literature as instruments of humanism in the hands of a creative artist who exhibits ardent love for all human beings especially the downtrodden. His chief concern was for social reforms. He belongs to the class of writers, who do not believe in the principle of 'art for art's sake'. He used novel as a weapon for the improvement of society and created higher consciousness and intensity in the bottom-dog to enable him to rebel against the inhuman treatment meted out and injustices perpetrated on him (C.D. Narasimhaiah opines that "Anand is interested in sensitizing us to the horror of poverty and suffering, without going against the grain of art") He is one writer who proved that the three pillars of the Indian constitution liberty, equality and fraternity are only a myth with regard to certain sections of the society and in real sense do not exist what has caused pain to Anand was the social evils and his study of Marx and Engels gave him grasp of the dialectical method and

strengthened his belief in socialism, which alone he thought would provide the right climate for man's total development.

His two novels untouchable and coolie whose protagonists Bakha and Munoo respectively stand for upholding values which make man human. His view is that "the novelist helps men to take part in the drama of revolt from which emerges the new society". His first novel untouchable made a beginning of the literature of the oppressed. It is an epic of misery. Misery of a sweeper boy of 18 who is endowed with nobility which does not quite fit in with his 'low profession. He aspires for decent life, life with good education and wanted to be treated as a human being. In spite of his good merits, he is insulted and put beyond the possibility of proper recognition. The chronicle of Munoo's life in the novel coolie is no better Munoo is the victim of forces against which he is powerless to fight, and which, he can neither control or accept. (As a worker in a pickle factory, as a coolie at a railway station, as a labourer in a cotton mill in



Bombay, Munoo is ceaselessly in failing, tripped up by destiny).

Untouchable is a protest of a writer to gain recognition and the status of a human being for the 'untouchable on par with the caste Hindus'. It is a sincere and fervent attempt to integrate the polluted and the polluter, into the mainstream of the Hindu society without causing any damage or loss to either party. Anand has taken up the role of a writer committed to the eradication of the evils of society. Anand on the threshold of a literary career makes an effective protest against the stigma of pollution attaching to Harijanas with a total control of all aspects of the social evil. (Even Gandhiji condemned the practice of untouchability and said that it is a crime, a sin", untouchability as presented and practiced, is greatest blot on Hinduism. It is against Shastras. It is against the fundamental principles of humanity and it has no support in the Hindu shastras taken as a whole. The novel untouchable depicts the hero Bakha's one day odyssey, through social wrongs and mental crisis arising out of encounters with caste Hindus, traders, housewives and Brahmin presets in the cantonment town of North India. (He lives in a outcaste colony, a veritable hell of ugliness, squalor, misery and an uncongenial place to live in). In this atmosphere Bakha gains in awareness to think of revolting against injustice. Anand highlights those moment of deep emotional crisis in the life of Bakha despised and humiliated by high caste men, who looked down upon him as dirt and excrete with which he was professionally associated, he is plagued with isolation and lostness. He is one individual against many.

Bakha among his routine morning and evening rounds on regimental latrines, desperately longs for red lamp cigarettes, trousers, sola topie, only as an unconscious reaction against his life in the smokey world of refuse). He burns with an intense desire to get educated and become a Sahib unfortunately, he realizes that there was not a school which would admit him. It is an ironic fact that it is only the Tommies that treat him as a human being whereas his own country men refuse even to touch him. His attraction for the white man makes him feel superior to his fellow outcastes. A chance happening of touching a caste Hindu makes him realize that he is an 'untouchable'. He lives in a nightmare world. His consciousness gets conditioned by his social existence. The high caste priest's vulgarity, the inhumanity of the crowd delighting in his humiliation, and finally the rebuke for his injured self, have all made it clear to him that though, he is in the society, he is not of it what deeply pains him and perturbs him is the inscrutable behaviour of the caste elite who denigrate and insult him for his very existence. He finds that he has no way out. He tries hard in vain to be in harmony with himself. He realizes that he is an outsider to Hindu society. At the end of the novel, Anand suggests various measures for the betterment of untouchables (many things appeal to him and puzzles him Jesus kindness towards all without distinction of caste, missionaries slant on sin, Gandhi's speech). Bakha feels the heading touch only through the author, the poet, who is in tune with Bakha's strongest urges, shows a simple way of effacing the age old label of 'bhangi' by the introduction of the flush toilet and drainage system. The poet's solution opens up the exciting prospect of change



of profession and hope for survival. So Anand has infused felt experiences, a social vision and a prophecy for better society.

Anand moves from the pathetic in untouchable to the tragic in coolie Bakha's problem is particularly Indian, whereas Manoo's problem is of universal nature Bakha's experience is limited in time and space, but Munoo's struggle for survival takes him through the cross-section of the whole country coolie is a powerful social tragedy-Munoo, a hill boy moves from the village to the town from the town to the city and then up to the mountains. He moves from places to place in search of livelihood and finally falls into the cruel clutches of death. (He is made to pass through diverse situations as a domestic servant in an urban middle class family, as a worker in a small pickle factory, as a coolie fighting for work in the city market in Daulatpur, as a labourer in a cotton mill in Bombay and as a rickshaw coolie in Simla where he dies.)

Munoo like Bakha is a passive character, he does not act, but is acted upon by society. Anand in his novel is not talking about fate of an individual he is trying to prove that the underdogs wits are powerless in the face of the complex machinery of economic and religious oppression under these circumstances sheer survival is looked upon as a "triumph of the spirit" and the very will to live is reckoned as strength. It is made clear that poverty is the root cause of giving scope to exploitation. Before Munoo begins his inglorious odyssey, he is a sensitive and intelligence rustic adolescent, full of high spirits, but poverty and hunger force him to be apprenticed to life even at the tender age of fourteen. His expectations are modest

and he only desires to live, to know, and to work (His ordeal starts with his first encounter with the urban world as a domestic servant. His total ignorance of urban ways brands him as a stupid rustic. He is nagged, under fed and humiliated. He moves to a pickle factory from where he gets deserted when the owner gets financially ruined. He then becomes a self-employed porter, carrying loads in the streets. Destiny takes him to Bombay and finds himself in the midst of the labour shrike followed by an outbreak of communal violence. Meeting with an accident lands him in Simla as a servant and rickshaw puller to Mrs Mainwaring. He nourishes a deep rooted feeling of inferiority to superior people who lived in bungalows. The strain of pulling the rickshaw sucks his life blood, and he contacts tuberculosis and dies at the tender age of sixteen.) Coolie ends in a dirge like movement with the death of Munoo as a result of consumption as much as of the ills of society thus Munoo's veritable ceaseless quest for life has been most brutally and tragically denied to him. The novel touches the pathetic and sublime areas of human experience. The tragedy of Munoo is an indictment of the evils of capitalism, industrialism and communalism. The premature death of the protagonist becomes all the more tragic because he is an innocent child. It is his poverty, that put shackles on him, imprisoned him in the inescapable prison of the coolies life, and finally killed him.

The novel is a protest against the emergence of new world of money; exploitation and class distinction. Munoo is not able to redeem himself because he is made to think people like him are born to suffer. Munoo's destiny symbolizes the tragic situation of the poor and the



underprivileged who themselves are not responsible for their unalleviated suffering, but who are, all the same victims of ruthless exploitation. He is a sacrifice to the remorseless cruelty and exploitation of industrial colonial society.

Thus in the two novels untouchable and coolie Anand achieved a new dimension in his art by an unfolding of the interior drama of tension and conflict between hope and despair, between affirmation and negation. His tragic heroes, the down-trodden does not suffer from a tragic flaw, they are victims of society, their fates having been determined by heredity and environment. But they struggle heroically to change the dispensation and suffer in the process. The main characters of both the novels are balanced and dynamic. They are not content with life as it is, and were constantly in pursuit of their mental power to relate their own personalities to the realities of the world. The human predicament in these novels is one of the hope and instinct for survival.

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