

Portrayal of Marginalized Protagonists in Anand's Novels: An Overview

¹ Dr. Sanjay N. Shende, ² Dr. Premila Swamy D, ³ Dr. Aslam Sheikh

¹Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Shree Shivaji College, Rajura, India

²Assistant Professor, Dept. of Humanities, Ramaiah Institute of Technology, Bangalore, India

³Associate Professor, Dept. of English, N. H. College, Bramhapuri, India

Corresponding Author Email ID: shendesanjay1976@gmail.com

Abstract: *Mulk Raj Anand champions the cause of underdog of Indian society with all the vehemence and skill at his command. All the protagonists of Anand belong to either marginalized class or caste and they have been taken from real life situations. His heroes are downtrodden sweepers, pathetic coolies, the unemployed coppersmiths, indebted farmers, exploited wives and poor simple soldiers. They suffer exploitation and exclusion at the hands of the British masters, the village money lenders, the business men, the native rulers, priests, tea-plantation owners, and the so called upper castes. So acute is the writer's sympathy for the poor and the oppressed that; in his novels, we sometimes find the author cry with anguish against the injustice. This paper attempts to take an overview of Anand's novels vis-à-vis his portrayal of the marginalized protagonists.*

Keywords: *Mulk Raj Anand, marginalization, marginality, protagonists, humiliation*

The striking feature of Anand's novels is that he has portrayed bottom dogs as protagonists. Indian writing in English rarely presented such dregs of the society as heroes barring few exceptions in regional literature. We find untouchable sweepers, coolies, laborers, farmers as central characters in his novels. Anand took a bold and fearless step by going against the English literary traditions and picked his heroes from the soil and the dirt. In his each novel, we find simple noble human souls pitted against the evils of the society. His heroes (rather 'antiheroes' as Anand calls them) are from lower strata of the society. Poverty and suffering are the defining, and persistent hall-marks of their life as it is of all the people in general who face marginalization.

Untouchable (1935), the debut and classic novel of Anand, presents the condition of thousand of untouchables in the country in the then social scenario. Bakha, being an untouchable latrine sweeper, belongs to the marginalized caste. He becomes a helpless victim at the hands of evil social order. Bakha lives in the outcaste's colony which is situated at the end of the village. Anand shows the fate of untouchables through Bakha. Wherever Bakha goes, he is welcomed with derogatory epithets and pejorative abuses. Not only this, the very existence of the untouchables is challenged and cursed by the caste Hindus. They declare: "They (untouchables) ought to be wiped off the surface of the earth" (*Untouchable* 142). Anand gives us a glimpse of the attitude of caste Hindus towards this sweeper boy.

The novelist is pained to note that Bakha's misery is related to his low caste. The dignity of Bakha as a human being is questioned by a caste-conscious society. The solution lies in the adoption of Gandhian way, conversion and modernization. Anand, further explores the problem of untouchability in another novel i.e. *The Road*.

Coolie (1936) portrays the suffering of the poor through the protagonist Munoo. Though Munoo does not belong to marginalized caste like Bakha, he belongs to the marginalized class of the society i.e. the poor. The poor always face exploitation and marginalization at the hands of the rich. The novel follows the misfortune of hill boy Munoo, first at the hands of his uncle and aunt in his village Bilaspur, then with a bank sub accountant's family at Sham Nagar when Munoo works as a domestic servant. He goes to various places in search of work and suffers marginalization everywhere. Munoo's remarks on his own life are the clear instance of pathetic and compassionate statement: 'We belong to suffering! We belong to suffering!' (*Coolie* 198). The novel makes the readers grievous at the end when Munoo dies of tuberculosis. Through *Coolie*, Anand mourned not only for Munoo but also for thousands of Munoo's who die untimely because of becoming victims of the materialistic society. Anand's observation about the class consciousness is indeed true when he writes:

"There are only two kinds of people in the world; the rich and the poor, and between the two there is no connection" (*Coolie* 233).

Anand's regret at the condition of the marginalized sections of the society i.e. the poor is clearly visible in this novel.

Like *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and A Bud* (1937) is about marginalized class i.e. the poor. It is the story of Gangu, a laborer at the tea plantation. Gangu and his family suffer because of their poverty and low marginalized status in the society. Gangu becomes a victim of poverty and

British colonialism. Through this novel, Anand showed the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, the exploiters and the exploited, the rulers and the ruled. Gangu, the hero of the novel, gives expression to the axiom of Anand that life is a trial for a struggling poor man. He begins to work as a laborer on the tea estate and becomes a victim of exploitation. Like Bakha, Gangu faces humiliation and abuses at every moment. Gangu is abused, insulted and expelled out. Cooke reacts:

‘Get out! Get out!’ exclaimed Croft-Cooke, turning purple with rage, and staring at the coolie. ‘You bloody fool, get out ! Get out ! You have been spreading infection all over the place! Didn’t you know that you were under segregation? By whose orders did you come here?’ (*Two Leaves and a Bud* 114).

He is killed while trying to protect his daughter from being raped by a British colonial official and his wife dies of a disease. Gangu tries hard but fails to get loan for the cremation of his wife. Gangu is not marginalized by caste like Bakha rather he is on the periphery due to his poverty. Whenever we talk about margins, it necessarily implies a center. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, the capitalist colonizers –estate owners and their officials are at the centre and coolies like Gangu are on the margin

Two Leaves and A Bud was followed by a trilogy, a group of three novels—*The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942). The trilogy is perhaps the most faithful study of the individual in terms of traditional social values. The story follows the life of Lal Singh, the hero of the trilogy, from adolescent rebellion through his experiences in First World War, to his home coming and subsequent revolutionary activities. Here, Lal Singh being educated is considerably higher than Bakha, Munoo, and Gangu. Due to low status, Anand’s former heroes were prevented from shaking off their bondage of slavery and from working out of the destiny. Unlike them, Lal Singh is smart and progressive and able to diagnose his problems.

The Big Heart, published in 1945, is a novel of human crisis. The novel shows the struggle of people who are marginalized by class as well as caste. It offers a true-to-life study of the conditions and the problems of the poor *thathiar* community. Anand shows realistically how the capitalist exploit the unemployed craftsmen and dictate humiliating terms, which the starving *thathiars* have to accept for their survival. Anand does not oppose the setting up of machines but he is very much against the ownership of such means of production in the

private hands of the capitalist. Anand suggests indirectly socialization of machines as the remedy of these evils.

In *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953), Anand describes the socio-political scenario of the post-independence period when the Indian government was appealing to the princely states to merge with Indian union. Though Maharaja Victor, the central figure in the novel, does not seem to be a marginalized character but according to Mulk Raj Anand the princes too belong to disadvantaged sections of the society as their lands had been taken away. Since they had always led a royal life, they never knew how to work. Maharaja Victor's helplessness is described in his own words: "There was a time when they flaunt their wealth in a land burdened with poverty and debt and spend their fortunes freely on the turf as well as in the gambling houses of Nice and Monte Carlo" (*The Private Life* 211). Victor is seen as a victim, not merely of his own vices but also of weakness and villainies of democratic India where capitalism still reigns supreme and untamed, even after the British left. But, since he loses his sovereignty, assets, royal position and identity of being a ruler, he is also marginalized. Anand's views about the poor rich are pertinent:

"My knowledge of Indian life at various levels had always convinced me that I should do a 'comedy humane'. In this, the poor, the lowly and the untouchables were only one kind of outcaste. The middle sections and the nawabs and rajas were also to be included as a species of untouchables. Unfortunately, there has not been time to show the poor-rich of our country, who deserve pity more than contempt" (Anand qtd. in *The Private Life* IX).

The Old Woman and the Cow (1960) is the only novel of Anand having gender marginalization as theme. Through this novel, Anand has attempted to show the pitiable condition of the peasant women in India through Gauri, the female protagonist. Gauri stands for the entire class of women in the country who suffer marginalization by the male dominating society. In a patriarchal family system, women are very often marginalized and so is Gauri. He makes a powerful plea for gender equality. He observes that in Indian society, a woman "has sometimes been exalted as a goddess, but mostly pampered as a doll or kept down and oppressed..." (*The Bride's Book* 16). He therefore hopes for a new era when there will be equality between men and women. This stance Anand assumed to the question of women is at the heart of the novel, *The Old Woman and the Cow*.

The Road (1961) was written twenty six years after Anand wrote *Untouchable*. Here, Anand once again dramatizes the destiny of a poor and downtrodden road laborer Bikhu who belongs to low caste. Bikhu is a new Bakha in a changed situation. Both novels deal with the sufferings of the untouchables who are marginalized by class as well as caste. Bakha in *Untouchable* and Bikhu in *The Road* suffer only because of their low caste. When *The Road* was written, the observance of hierarchy of caste was prevailing and old caste taboos exercised their despotic authority and influence.

Lament on Death of Master of Arts (1938) is the story of an educated Nur who is disadvantaged because he is jobless. This novel is a candid biography of a highly educated but sadly unemployed modern young man who is buried under the burden of family responsibility. The novel is realistic account and artistic exposition of the endless physical suffering and mental agony of the present unemployed as well as under-employed youth of our country. The unemployed are often neglected by the employed and hence, in a way they are marginalized from the mainstream society.

Conclusion

Anand's protagonists face marginalization on the basis of caste, class and gender. They face dire socio-economic segregation and agonizing exclusion. They struggle in vain for their dignity and identity. The protagonist like Gangu, Munoo, Noor are mute sufferers of the exploitation. The protagonists like Ananta, Lal Singh and Gauri show some sign of revolt against the unjust social order. His portrayal of the marginalized castes and classes in the novels is authentic. His portrayal reflects the socio-political and economic scenario of the period in which the novels were written. Anand's protagonists evince a pattern of progression from passivity to self sacrifice and self awareness, through suffering

Works Cited

Anand, Mulk Raj. *Untouchable*, New Delhi: Penguin India, 2001 ed. Print.

Anand, Mulk Raj. *Coolie*. New Delhi: Penguin India, 2001. Ed. Print.

Anand, Mulk Raj. *Two Leaves and a Bud*. 2nd ed. Bombay: Kutub Popular, 1951. Print.

Anand, Mulk Raj and Krishna Hutheesingh. *The Bride's Book of Beauty*. Bombay: Kutub Publishers, 1946. Print.

Anand, Mulk Raj *The Private Life of an Indian Prince*, Noida: Harper Collins, Rev. Ed. 2008. Print