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## Exposition of Social Reality and the Predicament of Child in the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand

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Indian writing in English that is not too old than two centuries has bloomed tremendously today by number of Indian writers who got remarkable awards on their literary ferber. Indian writing in English today has become a literary firmament where innumerable stars twinkle every night and help each other shine. These stars have provided much light to enable the beneficiaries to understand the "complexities of Indian life, which is getting transformed very fast under the impact of forces from all over the world since independence." (Maheshwari 2002, Preface) But the attempt to bring out the camouflaged crises enveloping Indian masses and the mind was agog in its pre-independent day too. Mulk Raj Anand, one of the three pioneers of Indian writing in English led this movement with a charismatic zeal to portray the penury and the predicament of common man in India crushed and trampled under the demoniac yoke debarring man from his fellow beings in the name of petty man-made dichotomies.

### **Untouchable and Coolie.**

Mulk Raj Anand's first novel is an archetypal dealing with the worst evil of Indian society as untouchability perpetrated by the 'Varna' system. Bakha, the child protagonist was very sensitive. He suffers a great deal of humiliation at the hands of caste Hindus. The selection of the child character like Bakha testifies to Mulk Raj Anand's belief in the dignity of labour. Bakha, being a boy has to clean the latrines a job disliked by upper caste people, and has to suffer great miseries.

Bakha, the 18 years old boy is one of the two sons of Lakha, the jemadar of the sweepers of the town and cantonment. Bakha is a child of 20<sup>th</sup> century and the impact of new influences stirs him. From Tommu he has secured a pair of old breeches and from a sepoy, a pair of old boots, he would if he could, like to look like the white foreigner and so be in the 'fashun'. But as the day dawns, his work of latrine — cleaning also begins. He is a steady and an efficient worker. Three rows of latrines to clean single handed and several times too to bring cleanliness in the place of filth, such as Bakha's daily toil, which he turns into a dexterous art.

Seeing a boy injured in hockey match, Bakha brings him to house. Instead of praising and appreciating his efforts to assist an injured boy. Bakha not only is assaulted and debarred but is also charged with defiling the injured boy.

In the ancient time there were only four major castes — Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras and now their numbers have increased into more than two thousands castes. Bakha is taken as dirt because he cleans and touches dirt. This was the position of millions of Bakhas in our country. For Anand, it is

acceptable and hence creation of Bakha's inner life makes 'Untouchable' the kind of novel that has great social as well as human significance. Anand had great sympathy and gave concern for untouchables. Bakha neither leads an insurrection nor runs away nor tries actively to change his circumstances. The protagonist suffers i.e. morally, socially and economically. The exploitation of simple peasants and ignorant people; the blood sucking image of landlords, Sahukars, Seth and especially custodians of religion, in the form of priest etc. is really heart melting. The sweepers, who are brutally tortured, belong to the lowest among them. That sweeper caste is counted neither in Hindus nor in Muslims.

The story becomes a pattern, the kind of 'Phulkari' embroidered in Haryana. The females are shown through their fantasies of happiness. The young people like Bhiku, differ from Bakha, a doer. And the old lambardar goes out of his caste and class into the possibility of the new man. He tried to achieve awareness of the insulted and injured by the transcending the first 'amazement' through the Anand's character says,

"They think we are dirt, because we clean their dirt." (Anand, *Untouchable* Penguin, 2001) The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolation of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others, when he touches them. They have to purify themselves. Thus he is a disgusting object to orthodox as he walks along to public roads and it is his duty to call out and warn that he is coming. No wonders that the dirt enters into his soul and he feels himself at moment to be what he is supposed to be.

Anand's playmates were sweepers and other poor boys attached to the regiment in which his father was employed. In fact, Bakha, the hero of the novel 'Untouchable' is drawn after the sweeper boy with whom Anand played, appears in both the autobiographical novels. Anand has given us the description of the incident, which is deeply rooted in his sub-conscious mind:

The cruelty of the God made order (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Outcastes) come home to me, when Bakha, a sweeper boy brought me home bruised in the head by an accidental stone. My mother abused him for carrying me. And she bathed me even though I was bleeding. This little incident was to remain in my conscious — unconscious and became a passion for injustice against the old fixtures of non-human discrimination against untouchables. (Anand, *Literary Creation*, 1983)

Anand's warmth towards his favourite character Bakha, to some extent has emerged from his warmth towards Gandhiji. The act of cleaning latrines once a week during his stay in Sabarmati Ashram had an impact in his first and one of the most popular novels untouchables.

'Untouchable' covers many events in the life of Bakha, who has dreams like a common man. Sometimes he would have looked like a white foreigner. His sister Sohini is also a fond of modern ways of living and fashions. One day when his sister Sohini goes to a well to fetch water, she has abuses from other castes as she belongs to the lowest caste. The custom is that she cannot take out water from the well, like the people belonging to other castes, and has, therefore, to depend on some gentleman who can give her water. At last Pt. Kali Nath agrees to get water for her. He tries to have a full glance of the zestful youth of Sohini, though he was old age. When Sohini goes to clean the courtyard, he tries to molest her. Subsequently, she repels her advances. Pt. Kalinath, having no option, accuses her of polluting him and collects the crowd of high class people. Bakha also came and sends Sohini back home to avoid her humiliation and himself listens to the abuses of Kalinath.

Bakha is frustrated by caste prejudice. Possible solutions to get rid of these problems are suggested to him by a Christian missionary who advises him to adopt Christian faith, which will save him from humiliation and torture on account of caste prejudice. Bakha listens to Gandhiji who advocates eradication of untouchability and who also exhorts him to shun dirty habits. One day, Bakha buys sweetmeat for four annas. While enjoying the sweetmeat he forgets to call out, "Posh Posh . posh sweeper coming" (p.46) and accidentally touches a Hindu. He received many abuses and slapping from that Hindu. Bakha is a boy of modern, free India. He has numerous dreams. He cannot understand why people are so unfair and tyrannical with those born in low-caste families, why they do not realize that the low caste people too are made of flesh and blood, therefore should be treated as human beings. He performs his duty well. Still he is a neglected person of the society. But he had known that the sepoy's did not hesitate to touch him. In his childhood, Bakha fell ill, his father rushed to Hakeemji to save his son's life. But being an untouchable he had to maintain a distance. At last the Hakeem was moved after a number of petitions, gave his treatment and he was saved with great difficulties.

In the last section of the novel, Bakha comes upon a proselytizing English priest whose words, with their emphasis on sin, meant little to him. But the elegant cut of the Sahib's trousers was a different matter. A little later, while listening to the lecture delivered by Mahatma Gandhi on the untouchables, the "children of God", Bakha's warm heartedness responds to the personal eloquence of the speaker's words. Finally on this memorable day, Bakha hears a Congress-Wallah and a poet speaking passionately about how the introduction of flush toilet would allow the sweepers to :

Free of stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society.

The first solution is suggested by Christian missionary, to convert Bakha into a Christian boy. The second solution suggested to him is to escape from degradation by adopting flush system in our country. The second seems to be more impotent as to convert into another religion will not lead to a suitable solution to escape from caste prejudice.

Bakha was humiliated by everyone. He undergoes similar soulbreaking tortures at the hands of the town folk who inflict on him severe physical, moral and spiritual injuries while keeping him subject to hunger, humiliation dirt and deprivation. In the colony, Bakha's father showers demeaning abuses on him, his younger brother ridicules him for not being favourite with his father and his friends mock at him for aping the English man. The rich woman flings the bread to him from the top of her house and babu<sup>1</sup>'s wife hurls insulting reproaches on him for defiling her injured son. Consequently he detests his profession of a scavenger and dreams like the camp prisoners of a free life. He declares to his father, "I won't go down to the town again. I have done with this job." (70)

Anand compares him with a tiger, lion and elephant, which live by the impulse. On the contrary, the upper caste people curse him as a pig, dog, swine and bull which act by the instinct. Bakha himself occasionally act as the young and healthy animal, to keep inviolate his life morality and sanity. Bakha works dutifully and efficiently and, thereby, he earns appreciation of the upper caste Havildar Charat Singh, who immediately promises to give him a hockey stick for his good work. It gives him fresh hope and happiness and he turns continues to work equally well for the rest of the day in spite of all miseries.

All of them abused, abused, abused why are we always abused. The sanitary inspector that day abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it to..... I am a sweeper, sweeper untouchable. I am an untouchable! (43)

'Coolie' is the second novel of Mulk Raj Anand, which is written in 1936. The novel Coolie deals a hill boy, Munoo, who is an orphan boy. He is forced out of his village in search of a livelihood. At all stages of life Munoo is ill treated, insulted and disdained. Munoo is Kshatriya. He does not belong to a low caste, but being poor, his fate is no better. He, too, is subject to insult, humiliation and exploitation. He tries to understand his position in the world. In 'Coolie' Anand shows that suffering and pains are inevitable features of human existence but man cannot control pain and erode sufferings by universal brotherhood, love, compassion and equality. In fact, Munoo represents a class, the poor class struggling to earn its living. Probably Munoo is only an inconsequential waif in the eyes of the world, but for Anand he is as important as any other human being in flesh and blood, and he brings to bear such profound pity on the boy that the novel gives the impression that his death implies the death of all that is good at the altar of cruelty. (Anand, Coolie, Arnold, 1981)

In his adventures Munoo meets not only cruel and bad people, but kind and good fellows too. Chota Babu in Sham Nagar, Prabha Dayal and his wife in Daulatpur, the elephant driver of the circus, and Ratan in Bombay show kindness to him. Munoo suffers not because of Fate or Chance. He is victim of circumstances, of the cruelty of man. Since most of our problems have been created by man, they can also solve by man.

Munoo is not treated as human being but as a beast of burden. The novel invokes pity for Munoo and other exploited children. Anand portrays the plight of coolies, before India got her independence. And portrays the tribulation of coolies in a class-ridden society. Munoo, the protagonist, is an orphan village boy from Kangra hills, who sets out in search of livelihood. First he is tortured by his uncle and aunt at village, Bilaspur, later on as the house servant with the family of a subaccountant at Shamnagar. Being fed up with the miserable life that he is forced to lead as a servant, he goes to Daulatpur to work in a pickle factory and later on, as a coolie in the bazaar of Daulatpur. Thereafter again in search of livelihood, he comes to Bombay where he works as a labourer in a cotton mill. From there in an injured position he is brought to Shimla by a European lady. After his convalescence, she uses as her rickshaw-puller. But he is unable to bear the strain of a rickshaw-puller and consequently meets his tragic end. Thus throughout the novel the scene shifts from one place to another carrying same misfortunes for the poor boy, Munoo, who is treated by his masters not better than a sub-human being.

Munoo is a sensitive and intelligent boy full of high spirits and zest for life. Poverty compels him to be apprenticed to a servant's life at the age of 14. His only prayer is, "I want to live and I want to know, I want to work." (128) Munoo realizes that there were only two kinds of people — rich and poor. And Munoo is the victim of this evil of poverty. He is a miserable creature. His condition becomes even worse, when he shifts from his uncle's house to Babu Nathuram's house appears to him like a mad house, inhabited by mad people quarrelling and shrieking all the time. The lady of the house, Bibi Uttam Kaur, snobbish and suspicious termagant underfeeds, nags and humiliates him. The man who gives solace to Munoo is Chota Babu. Finally, he realized that his position is like a slave, a servant who should do the work, all the odd jobs, someone to be abused even beaten also.

In this novel Munoo is the central character. And he shift from one place to another in search of his dreams to be settled safely and happily with some job at one place. In a way 'Coolie' can be said to be a picaresque novel. Because the hero moves from one place to another in search of his identity. He never finds rest. To get rid of beatings of Babu Nathu Ram and his wife, Munoo runs away from their house at midnight and hides himself inside a train. Fortunately, in the train he meets with a kind Seth Prabha Dayal, who take away with him to Daulatpur. And makes room for him beside himself. But Munoo fails to receive their parental care for long as Ganpat, Prabha's partner is callous and cruel. Ganpat refuses to help Prabha in the business and goes away. He is not able to pay the debts at once and he falls ill with fever and ultimately has to leave Daulatpur on the advice of doctor. He cannot take Munoo with him because of shortage of money. Munoo is again left alone. At the railway station Munoo stood sadly looking at his master and mistress... He felt miserable and alone, as if he had, already been cut off from them forever. (152) After that Munoo meets a man in Bombay, named Samaritan where he sees the miseries of others. Coolies are brutally treated here.



The coolies toil with their sweat and blood while oppressor discusses the weather over a cup of tea. (Paul, Anand, 1978)

The factory is a huge octopus with its numerous tentacles clutching the labourer in its deadly grasp, slowly paralyzing and poisoning him. The British Management offers no security of tenure, a landlord, who rents out ramshackle cottages at exorbitant rent and money lender all-rolled into one. The Pathan, door keeper practices usury with even more drastic methods. The ill-paid, ill-housed, under-nourished and bullied labourer is broken, both in body and mind as Munoo finds his friend Hari is, though his own youthful vitality saves him from his ultimate fate. The fourth and final act of Munoo's tragedy commences when Mrs. Mainwaring, whose car knocks him down, takes him to Shimla, as she wants a servant. And he became a rickshaw-puller.

Anand tries to lift the image of Munoo, a boy. Coolie represents all the cadres of the society starting from coolies to autocratic Englishman. The variety of the ranks of people is basically selected to highlight the contrast among the various classes. At last Munoo's sufferings became end with his own death and the remains are his wishes, his desires. He wants to live, he wants to do work. But God finished his all miseries with his death.

Thus, the two novels gives the picture of child characters who are not only victimized by the society but also crushed by the cruel hands of society. Anand visualizes their predicaments with full of sensitivity and reality. He exposes that the norms of society crushes human values and again human laws works against the laws of nature. Man is made for love and sympathy but man-made rules and deformities in the society kills all that comes in their way.

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