

# Humanism in the works of Mulk Raj Anand

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## Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand was born in 1905 in Peshawar. It is now with Pakistan. His father was a Subedar in Indian Army. Anand had been a witness to all the tyrannic rule of the British and the orthodoxy treatment of the upper caste Hindu society. This research paper is an account of Mulk Raj Anand's humanism in exposing the in-humanistic tendencies of the British and upper caste people. Anand's humanism and humanitarianism are the keys to open his mind, heart, consciousness and philosophy. His humanism places his characters in the centre of all things. Anand has granted complete freedom to his characters to grow and exercise their creative choices. Anand's humanism throws light on the creative union of heart, mind, soul and work. He emphasises on the need to integrate human psychology, human values, and human rights. Mulk Raj Anand will always be missed for his social life and his work and participation in the Indian-English fictional world.

**Keywords:** Untouchability, Downtrodden, Marginalised, Discrimination, Caste System

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Indian English Literature refers to the writings of the Indian writers who write in English and whose native or co-native language could be one of the many languages of India. It is also includes the works of members of the Indian Diaspora. It is referred to as Indo-Anglican literature. Indian writings in English are the outcome of the historical encounter between Indian and Western culture which continued for almost 200 years. India had the feudal economic system, before the beginning of British rule, in which vast population of the country had evils of caste system and varied religious beliefs. At this critical hour, especially after the disintegration of Mughal Empire, India needed a political and cultural change. It was British rule in India that resulted

in breaking the barriers of the closed society. The introduction of western education system casted an indelible imprint on the Indian society. English language gave an opportunity to the the Indians to know and understand the Western literature and western culture. Under the impact of English language a peculiar body of Indian- Anglian literature was created- in which Indian contents were expressed in English language.

Raja Rammohan Roy, laid the foundation of Indo-Anglian literature. He was the one who prepared the stage for his successors and contemporaries like Kashi Proshad Ghose, Hasan Ali, Mohan lal and Michel Madhusudan Dutt etc. 19th century was the time of great

literary and social revolutions in the history of Indian English literature. At that time legendary thinkers like Maharishi Debenra Nath Tagore, Kesub Chandra Sen, Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj have contributed to a great extent in bringing educational, social and religious reform which brought renaissance in India.

In 1930s, the most important event in the history of Indian English Literature was the advent of the trio-Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Anand, the eldest of the trio, will remain one of the most prolific and versatile of Indian English authors. His works have not only been translated in many languages but have also been researched and widely re-researched. Anand was an indefatigable traveller who was endowed with apparently inexhaustible energies and was actively associated with numerous literary and cultural associations both in India and abroad. He also engaged himself in social work. He was a celebrated Indian English writer with global recognition. He has to his credit a score of novels: *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1937), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1941), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942), *The Big Heart* (1945), *The Road* (1963), *Death of a Hero* (1964) and his seven volume fiction--*Seven Ages of Man*. Besides, he has written hundreds of short stories, a number of books on varying themes and a lot of essays and articles on different subjects.

Though many approaches to his life and works are possible but the best way to appreciate him is to analyse his candid endeavour to demonstrate social evils and his crusade against superstitions, feudalism and imperialism. Anand's fiction has been shaped by what he himself called "The double burden on my shoulders, the Alps

of the European traditions and the Himalayas of my Indian past."

And it is mainly from the European tradition that he derives his fervent socialist faith and his vision of a modern egalitarian society. Before his 'Untouchable' in 1935, Indo-Anglian novels were mainly based on history or romance, but Anand's purpose in writing had been to focus attention on the suffering, misery and wretchedness of the poor and the underdogs of the society caused by the exploitations of the capitalists, the feudal lords or by the impact of industry on the traditions and agricultural way life. He modernized the Indian novel and carried the tradition of Tagore, Premchand, Bankim Chandra and Sharat Chandra to new heights. Anand condemned some of the social, political, ethical and moral practices which result in the oppression of the poor and the downtrodden and also injustices against women. He stood for woman's emancipation. He discarded the odd inhuman customs, rituals and traditions and welcomed the progressive outlook. His fiction unfolds his socialist vision and impassioned humanism, largely shaped by the European socialism as well as by the thoughts and philosophy of Eric Gill, Herbert Read, E.M. Forster, T.S. Eliot, Jack Lindsay, George Orwell and H.G. Wells. His contact with these intellectuals contributed to his rational and humanistic outlook on life which was further broadened by his studies of Karl Marx. With his first novel *Untouchable*, he, in fact, inaugurated the literature of the underdog. He not only interpreted the soul of India, the real India of the villages to the West but also convincingly made known to the colonial rulers the debilitating effects of their presence in India.

Both *Untouchable* and *Coolie* are excellent examples of his progressive proletarianism. Even almost all his novels that followed them

bring home to the reader the abject conditions and ordeals of the oppressed people, the overburdened peasants who are powerless to fight against superstitions and social conventions and are hindered at every step in their search for better life. Therefore, Anand's works reveal his social commitment, his belief in 'Art for life's sake, and his strong courage in exposing the exploiters-the imperial masters, the village moneylenders, the unscrupulous traders, the native rulers, priests, tea-planters and chauvinists. His deep anguish against oppression, injustice and against the breakdown of decencies was clearly pronounced by him in one of his letters:

“There is no avoiding the disgust one feels at the breakdown of decencies in present-day India. Perhaps I ought to write more because certainly nowhere is the drama of meanness, hypocrisy and double-dealing in the interest of power and money and privilege, being more actively played every hour the it is in our country.”

As a humanist, Mulk Raj Anand writes with the object of exploiting man's potential for growth and seeks to identify all those anti-human forces which obstruct man's progress towards a better world, and a healthy civilized life. Anand focuses on these anti-social evils which tend to divide mankind and create a state of perpetual conflict. Anand also stood for the emancipation of women. He shows in his novels women as victims of a social set-up which never sympathises with them-a system controlled and manipulated by male-chauvinists. Anand's women, with a few exceptions, are not unsatisfied with this social set-up. The position of women in a traditional Indian society is a recurring theme in the fiction of Mulk Raj Anand. An important fact perceivable on analytical study of the women characters in his novels is that Indian women may be coy, delicate and submissive but they are also firm as rock

and great in suffering. They prepare themselves against atrocities as incarnation of 'shakti' or Goddess herself.

Man and his place in society have always been a matter of concern to a writer. A true artist must have the capacity to have an insight into life and should be aware of his surroundings and environment. He cannot afford to live in an ivory tower when humanity is writhing in pain. M.R. Anand asserts that 'Art is for life's sake.' Anand is a realist whose social vision was shaped by time, place and the circumstances of the contemporary period. Anand is a writer with a mission to put an end to hypocrisy, cruelty, insensitivity, dichotomy and injustice prevailing in society. His stories do not deal only with the tales of oppression at the hands of Britishers but they reflect different anomalies going on in society too.

Mulk Raj Anand will be remembered most of all for portraying in his novels “the peasant, terribly emaciated, with nothing to cover his nakedness but a rag round the middle.”<sup>1</sup>

He is truly the novelist of the lowly, the lost, the underdog. Not that he was the first to voice the voice of the poor and the downtrodden in his novels. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Sharat Chandra and Munshi Prem Chand had also done it in their novels. But we cannot say about even one of them what Iyenger has said about Anand- “He wrote of the people, for the people as a man of the people”

Anand could make his work so powerful and penetrating because he had direct contact with the families of these so-called low castes. As they were flesh of his flesh and blood of his blood, they ceased to be children of fancy when they appeared in his novels.

He made his novels a mirror of the havoc poverty, exploitation, and priesthood were causing in Indian villages. He was one who had realized that the insulted and injured villagers deserved sympathy and respect as human beings, and, so, in his fiction he portrayed anguished and hungry, yet human, superstitious and self-divided, vividly realized in spite of their thwarted purposings- untouchables, peasants, labourers, sepoys. He also depicted women (most of whom play a minor role) “defenceless before an unknown enemy and equally unknown forces.”

One very important aspect of Mulk Raj Anand’s art as a novelist is his success in retaining the aesthetic value of his novels in spite of his crusade against injustice and exploitation. He made his novels a war against all those who were symbols of man’s inhumanity to man--but they are not mere propaganda: his characters are human beings to the extent fictional characters may be. His exercises in drawing tears of his readers added additional charm to his novels. For they brought in his work that amount of compassion which tempts a scholar to study it in the light of the ancient Rasa- Dhvani Theory and enjoy his novels better. This ancient Indian literary theory attempts to point out the character of the emotional effect and explains with great success the rise and nature of the aesthetic pleasure experienced by a responsive audience or reader. This theory was initially regarded as a fit yardstick to judge drama or poetry; but it is currently accepted as equally valid for all forms of literature. I have read many of Mulk Raj Anand’s novels and have derived this “Rasa” in them time and again.

To sum up, Anand’s humanism and humanitarianism are the keys to open his mind, heart, consciousness and philosophy. His humanism places his characters in the centre of

all things. Anand has granted complete freedom to his characters to grow and exercise their creative choices. Anand’s humanism throws light on the creative union of heart, mind, soul and work. He emphasises on the need to integrate human psychology, human values, and human rights. Anand was a rebel within a pilgrim, with a heart of dissent, searching for truth, truth that would change the world for the better and truth that would make all of us free in terms of understanding and comradeship. He believed in the dictum of ‘Art for the sake of Humanity’ and followed the profession of a writer with as great a patriotic spirit as some national leaders exhibited in carrying on the struggle for the country’s freedom. Writing novels was undoubtedly a form of patriotic activity for Anand. This harbinger of change will always be missed for his social life and his work and his participation in the Indian-English fictional world.

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