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Mulk Raj Anand: A Humanist Writer for Peace and Progress of the Downtrodden

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Abstract:

The present paper deals with the contribution of Mulk Raj Anand for Peace and Progress of the Downtrodden. Mulk Raj Anand is a renowned scholar and versatile writer among the Indo-Anglian novelists. The researcher has made analysis of four novels; *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and A Bud*, *Seven Summers*, etc. All these novels are mainly concerned with peace and progress of weaker section of society. Mulk Raj Anand, as a humanist writer, becomes a spokesperson for the downtrodden community. He uncovers bitter reality of poor people in the country. His characters are in search of peace of mind in the era of industrialism. His heroes, such as Bakha, a sweeper boy, Munno a coolie, Gangu and Ananta are labourers. Anand divides his characters between positive and negative peace. They struggle for their existence. They want inner peace of mind. They look forward optimistically for positive energy and peace of mind. Bakha, the protagonist of *Untouchable*, and Ananta, the central character of *The Big Heart* are the representatives of the victims of the social system of India. Mulk Raj Anand believes that humanism and democratic principles can change the insecurity in India. Many of his novels expose the impoverished condition of the downtrodden. Social humiliation, economic injustice, and sexual exploitation are some of the prominent themes of his novels. Anand himself was closely associated with the wretched condition of the

untouchables in Punjab. One of the famous critics, C. D. Narasimhaiah, in his introduction to M.K. Naik's book Mulk Raj Anand remarks about Anand's concern with common people. He says:

In Mulk Raj Anand, human concern is for the underdog, not just a preoccupation with economic determinism. (Naik 4)

Key Words:

Peace, Downtrodden, Humanity, Injustice, Exploitation, Humiliation, Discrimination, Untouchability, etc.

Introduction:

Mulk Raj Anand, for his writing for the peace and progress of the downtrodden, received the International Peace Prize from World Peace Council. He is, indeed, a learned writer who was influenced by various books, people, circumstances, philosophers, etc. Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru also made long-lasting impressions on Anand as a novelist. Anand was associated with Nehru because of his political activities in India and abroad. Anand read Karl Marx's 'Letters on India', which were highly impressive for him. Besides, he sharpened his mind by reading several books, especially *The Possessed* by Dostoevsky and *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, etc. He believed in the writings of Gorky and Lawrence as well. He described a true image of the oppressed and the reasons for their pathetic lives. Humanism is an ideology in which



human interest, values, and dignity are held dominant. It implies a devotion that concerns mankind. It is an attitude of mankind that concentrates on the activities of man rather than the supernatural world of spirits or the so-called animal kingdom. Cruelty and pain, according to Anand are the chief diseases of all countries. These unavoidable problems can be reduced with the assistance of science. Anand, in his article entitled *The Sources of Protest in My Novels*, says,

'Our parents asked us to have a bath after playing with untouchable children from the hutments, because we may have touched them. I early realized that since we were of the Kshatriya caste, we were "superior", with Brahmins above us, Vaishya shopkeepers slightly inferior to us, and all castes far, far below us, forever branded from birth by Verna Ashram the Hindu caste order' (Reddy 22-23).

Anand's Contribution for Peace and Progress of the Downtrodden:

Anand is known as the humanist writer of downtrodden rather than of the sophisticated rich people. He wrote about the pathetic lives of untouchables and farmers rather than the romance of capitalists. He was quite aware of the poverty and exploitation of the farmers. He saw many poor farmers subjugated by the people like moneylenders, businessmen, revenue officers, etc. Henderson asserted that the best novels have always been out to change men and society. Anand took the same idea from Henderson and applied it to his fiction. A strong assault on social evils like barbarity, insensitivity, and love for the human being became the main concern of Anand's writing. Anand says that he wrote from the compulsion of a morbid obsession within himself. He has a deep concern for the poor people around him. Anand depicts his different experiences with the untouchables, peasants, workers, and coolies. His observation of the exploited society compelled him to write about the underdogs for their peace and progress.

Anand's characters can be categorized into two groups. Such as Bakha, Munno, Ananta, Kirpu, Lal Singh, and Nihal Singh fell into the category of humble and ideal people. People feel sympathy for all of them. The other group of characters, such as Pandit Kalinath, Seth Gokul Chand, Raggie Hunt, Lallu Muralidhar, and Buta Singh, are called selfish and hypocrites who exploit the downtrodden. Anand's characters are immense in variety and are typically depicted in his novels and short stories. He practically depicted complex social ranges, from kings to the common people, soldiers to policemen, politicians to priests, tracers to clerks, etc. As far as the female characters of Anand are concerned, they are rustic and urban types that occupy a prominent place in world literature.

Anand is a popular author of sociological novels. His novels deal with social evils and demand peace and progress in society. For example, *Untouchable* deals with problems of untouchability. Anand forcefully depicts the suffering, exploitation, injustice, and cruelty of the untouchables by the capitalists. All of his novels succeeded in creating social awareness in the hearts of readers. There is barely any exploiting element of Indian society that has not been attacked by Anand in his novels. He protested against exploitation and showed deep sympathy for the oppressed class. For him, a writer is the prophet of his time who holds a mirror up to society. He does not believe in writing fairy tales or fantasy but instead writes about the problems of common people.

Untouchable:

Untouchable is Anand's first powerful novel, which casts light on social wrongs. It portrays a day in the life of an untouchable boy, Bakha who is in search of peace and progress of the untouchables. He is a young boy of eighteen years old and is living with his father, Lakha, brother Rakha. He has a younger sister named Sohini. Bakha, in spite of being untouchable and a



sweeper boy, is the hero of the novel. The story happened in Bulasha, in Punjab. The untouchables are scavengers for water and food, for which they have to depend on the mercy of the high-class Hindus. Pandith Kalinath, the priest of the temple, asks Sohini to clean the courtyard of the temple, where he tries to molest her. He accidentally touches a high-class merchant, for which he gets slapped. While playing hockey, a little boy gets injured. Bakha takes him to his home, where he gets abused by the mother of the injured boy. She does not express any kind of gratitude towards Bakha. She gets disgusted due to Bakha's belonging to the untouchable's family. The novel deals with the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence in life. The novelist narrates exploitation through painful incidents in the life of Bakha. It relates to the psychology of the downtrodden community. Anand believes in the equality of the whole universe, which will be free from the pain and misery of the downtrodden. He is always treated as an outcast sweeper boy with a negative approach. Anand writes:

"The outcasts were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted." (Anand 26)

Coolie:

Coolie depicts the miserable life of an orphan boy Munoo. Like Anand's other novels such as *The Morning Face*, *Coolie* has picaresque elements. The young boy, Munoo, moves from place to place. Unlike Bakha; Munoo doesn't confine itself to a particular city or town. He begins his journey from a small village Bilaspur and moves to Mumbai, from Mumbai to North, from North to South, and again from South to North. In fact, Munoo is restless and agitated in his journey. Readers feel sympathy for social, economic, and sexual exploitation and absurdity in his life. He is exploited by his own Uncle Daya

Ram and Aunt Gujri. He worked as the servant of Babu Nathoo in the town of Shyam Nagar. Whatever salary Munoo was getting, it was going to Daya Ram. Anyhow, Munoo escapes from Babu Nathoo and gets refuge in a train, where he meets a passenger named Prabha. With Prabha, he moves to Daulatpur, where he becomes a coolie in the grain market. He works as a porter at the Daulatpur railway station as well. Meanwhile, Munoo meets an elephant hunter and moves to Mumbai. In Mumbai, Munoo, unfortunately, is knocked by Mrs. Manwaring's car at Malabar Hill. Mrs. Manwaring's, a rich woman, takes him to Shimla, where she makes him a domestic servant. She makes him a rickshaw puller boy. She molests Munoo physically and mentally as well.

Two Leaves and a Bud :

Anand, in *Two Leaves and a Bud* describes the pathetic lives of Indian workers in Assam. He works at the Tea Plantation farms. Gangu, a middle-aged farmer, is the hero of the novel. He is a simple and poor man. Before going to Assam, he was working on his farm near a small village called Hoshiyarpur. But, a tout named Buta Singh makes Gangu big promises of giving him good employment and takes him to Assam. Gangu, hopefully, moves to Assam with his wife Sajani and children, Leila and Buddha, to get out of the economic crisis. The exploitation of Gangu and his family begins as they reach in Assam. Many tragic events in Gangu's life take place one after another. Gangu gets the first blow when he comes to know that he is deceived by the tout of his native place. He works in Assam like a slave in the farm. His wife, Sajani, passes away due to malaria. Even at this point, Gangu's misfortune and exploitation don't stop.

The assistant manager, Mr. Raggie Hunt, a lustful man, tries to molest Gangu's daughter, Leila. When Gangu tries to rescue his daughter, Hunt shoots him dead. To the worst of things, when the trial follows after the molestation of



Lalia and Gangu's death, Mr. Justice Mowberly relieves Reggie as an innocent man. Thus, Gangu not only suffered and was exploited by the British Government but by the natives as well. It was the worst kind of exploitation of the natives by the British government in the colonial period of India.

Seven Summers :

The present novel is the first volume of the fictional autobiography of Anand, published in 1951. Anand started working on it when he got settled in Khandala. It tells us Anand's concept of the Seven Ages of Man. Anand planned to write this novel when he analyzed Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, in which Jacques calls all the world a stage and all men and women are merely players, diving human life into seven stages. Those seven stages of human life expose Shakespeare's philosophical views on human life. In fact, Anand wrote 2000 pages of his *Confession*, which has been regarded as the source book and inspiration behind writing this novel. Anand recalls his glorious past and his lost childhood. He keeps alive his childhood memories. It symbolizes the liveliness, energy, and spirit of living an ideal life. Krishan, the central figure in the novel, tells Anand's philosophy of a happy life and gives a valuable message to children to enjoy childhood as Krishan did. Anand informs us how Krishan and his mother, Ishwar Kaur, inspired him by telling the moral stories of Krishna and Kansa. These stories are found in the great Indian epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. It also clarifies that Bakha, the hero of *Untouchable*, is nobody but Anand's childhood friend. The novel concludes at the time of World War I in 1914, when Anand's mother gets a sense of lost childhood and Kali-Yug as well. Dr. Upendra

Singh opines that Anand projected a selfish and orthodox society in the present novel.

Conclusion:

In my opinion, the study of literature, culture, and the progress of the downtrodden becomes much more worthy when we analyze above selected novels of Mulk Raj Anand. Anand as a humanist, a lover of humanity writes for the rights of humans against exploitation, tyrants, and evil doors. He expresses his ardent love for humans through his novels. Anand's sympathetic attitude towards the downtrodden is to be found in his all novels. He feels modern writers should shoulder the responsibility to change society with the western realist tradition of writing. The tragic life of modern man, he feels, must be at the center of modern writers. It should deal with the problems of poor people. Thus, Mulk Raj Anand was a prolific novelist who encompassed several topics and themes, including the peace and progress of the society.

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