

Exploration of Humanism and Compassion in the Literary

Works of Mulk Raj Anand

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Abstract

This study examines the central themes of humanism and compassion in Mulk Raj Anand's fiction, highlighting his empathetic portrayal of marginalized communities and his critique of systemic inequalities. Anand's works, such as *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, and *Two Leaves and a Bud*, reflect his unwavering commitment to social justice and his belief in the transformative power of compassion. Through vivid storytelling and realistic depictions of poverty, caste oppression, and labor exploitation, Anand amplifies the voices of the subaltern, emphasizing their dignity and humanity. Influenced by Gandhian principles, Marxist ideology, and Indian cultural values, Anand's humanism transcends caste, class, and religious boundaries, advocating for universal brotherhood and equality. This study explores how Anand's compassionate narratives challenge societal injustices and inspire empathy, making his works relevant to contemporary discourses on social reform and justice. Anand's fiction remains a timeless appeal for compassion as a driving force for individual and collective transformation.

Keywords: - Humanism, Compassion, Mulk Raj Anand, Literature

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand, a doyen of Indian English literature, is well known for his humane and compassionate vision of fiction. The socio political realities of colonial and post colonial India, the works of his give a compelling voice to the marginalized. Anand takes the root of humanism to be one simple thing, that is the principle of universal brotherhood and social justice, which transcend the boundaries of caste, class, religion, nationality but the principle of shared humanity, which connects all human beings. Anand's writing was influenced by Gandhian philosophy, Marxism, and his own experiences with entrenched inequality, and critiques societal injustice through celebrating the resilience and dignity of the oppressed. Through his novels he pays a tribute to his heroes, outcasts, laborers and other marginalized groups, usually anchored by the humanity within despite dehumanizing circumstances as in *Untouchable* and

Coolie. Anand's storyteller's compassion is apparent in his compassionate depiction of people who suffer so greatly, but nonetheless fight for dignity and agency in a universe overflowing with prejudice and exploitation. Anand mixes realism and emotional depth to reveal the harsh realities of poverty, the caste discrimination, economic exploitation and at the same time, argues for social reform. His works are separated from the elite on one side and the subaltern on the other as he uses vernacular expressions and narratives that are culturally rich. Anand calls compassion more than an emotional response; it's a transformative force he says can promote societal change. He encourages readers to reflect on their own roles — or their role — perpetuating or combating these inequities through his stories, fostering empathy. Anand's humanism is in part a literary and in part an ethical position. Based on the conviction that art can motivate us to action and create social equality. All his fiction is a confirmation of his unwavering faith in human capacity to empathize and do the just thing. His narratives still hold a relevance to readers today, demonstrating that being empathic and having collective responsibility at those persistent inequalities of today's world is crucial. Anand revolutionized Indian English literature by his humanistic vision and gave us a universal message of hope, of endurance, of the perennial power of compassion.

Mulk Raj Anand's Life and Philosophical Influences

Indian English writer Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004) lived in England as a student and settled there permanently after having gone through hostilities in India, and his life and works were intimately affected by his personal experiences and by the influence of philosophical ideas. Anand, who was born in Peshawar to a family of modest means in colonial India, came from a place where caste discrimination, and social and economic

inequalities were visible. Their early experiences deeply shaped his worldview and made him very sensitive to the plight of the marginalized. Anand was educated in England and studied at the University of London and Cambridge where he was exposed to Western philosophies and progressive ideologies like Marxism and humanism. Karl Marx, Leo Tolstoy, and Charles Dickens wrote things that marked him permanently and influenced him to dedicate social justice and the dignity of labour. Anand was also deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, and the Gandhian ideals of nonviolence, equality and upliftment of downtrodden that seem to run in his family. Anand's seminal novel *Untouchable* is a reflection of the word 'Untouchable' which Gandhiji dwelled on the eradication of. Anand's own familiarity with Indian spiritual traditions as well as his broad and secular humanist perspective contributed to this unique blend of cultural

rootedness and universalism. Anand used his life to write about the rights of the underprivileged and throughout his life remained a vocal proponent for the underprivileged. Throughout his life he remains, indeed, committed to humanism, compassion and justice; his works reflect this stand and undoubtedly, he becomes the torchbearer of socially conscious writing in Indian English literature.

Impact of Anand's Humanism on Indian Literature

Mulk Raj Anand is a founder of the tradition in Indian literature of a socially oriented writing, his humanistic vision leaving a durable imprint on India's literary heritage. Anand reframed the role of literature in Indian society by dealing with caste oppression, labor exploitation and struggles of marginalized communities. His works, including *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, represented the lived reality of the oppressed and social reform became an imperative theme of Indian English literature. Anand's unrepentant realism and her strident advocacy of justice motivated a generation of writers to do the same, to engage literature and activism. His humanism, too, greatly influenced postcolonial Indian English writers such as Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan, authors who as much as he do concretely tackled the problematics of Indian life under and beyond colonialism. Anand's precept on the social equity and universal brotherhood was echoed by later writers including Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie who also criticised its ineffable flaws. Anand's own approach to literature echoes that of pioneers like Premchand who concentrated on social problems but in the Hindi stream. Whereas Premchand's stories told of the tribulations of rural India, Anand extended the scope of that narrative to include urban laborers and untouchables—telling tales of the und wyped in English so as to be heard by an international audience. What was timeless and globally significant about his works was his humanism, which was deeply imbued with Indian ethos but universal in scale. Anand's legacy is the fact that he was able to humanize the paperless and help them be heard: Indian literature became a powerful tool for empathy, advocacy and social change.

Key Themes of Humanism in Anand's Fiction

Mulk Raj Anand's fiction is deeply rooted in humanism, exploring themes that advocate for equality, dignity, and compassion. His works reflect his commitment to addressing societal injustices and his belief in the transformative power of empathy and universal brotherhood. Below are the central themes of humanism in Anand's writings:

- **Advocacy for Social Justice**

Anand employ literature as a powerful tool for social advocacy showing the systemic injustices the marginalized face. He shows untouchables, laborers, plantation workers struggle, and their humanity and strength of the struggle. Untouchable and Coolie novels graphically exhibit the exploitation of the oppressed and author blasts the social norms responsible of inequality. Anand thought literature was supposed to be the agent for change — a pushing of readers toward questioning and reforming unjust structures.

- **Dignity of Labor and the Marginalized**

The dignity of labor and untouchables are recurring themes in Anand's works. Coolie and Untouchable both feature downtrodden characters, like Mikhail Bakha who feels harassed in Untouchable and Munoo in Coolie, who nonetheless maintain their humanity. Anand celebrates their strength, resilience, and rightly so urges for their inclusion in society. And he counters the dogma which lowers the dignity of labor, and denigrates it and holds it in least account, by presenting manual labour as a first essential, without which week cannot subsist.

- **Critique of Caste and Class Oppression**

At the heart of Anand's humanistic vision are his critiques of caste and class hierarchies. Through descriptions of how these oppressive systems act as dehumanizing means, he reveals these as deeply embedded societal evils. Untouchable shows how cruel caste-based discrimination is, and Coolie exposes how great that exploitation is of the working class. Anand's works contest colonial and indigenous power structures alike by arguing for a society without such inequality.

- **Emphasis on Empathy and Universal Brotherhood**

Anand's humanism is transcendent of those societal divisions, it is based on universal brotherhood, based on empathy. He often sees solace in small acts of compassion on the part of his characters for the power of compassion to break down social barriers. The universal human values that Anand believed in his e narrative, is a call to the entire human beings that we should have a collective sense of responsibility with the oppressed. Anand promotes a shared humanity that transcends caste, class and culture by the way he tells stories.

In essence, Mulk Raj Anand fiction represents humanism through the promotion of social justice, the dignity of the underprivileged, the criticism of all inequalities and advocacy of tolerance and universal brotherhood based on empathy. His works provide a standing testament

to the importance and resilience of these values in leading the way to a more equitable world.

Humanism in Selected Works

Mulk Raj Anand's selected works exemplify his deep commitment to humanism, portraying the struggles of marginalized individuals with compassion and realism. Each novel addresses unique facets of social injustice, creating a collective cry for equality, dignity, and solidarity.

- **Untouchable: A Cry for Social Justice and Equality**

In *Untouchable*, Anand provides a harrowing depiction of caste oppression through the life of Bakha, a young sweeper born into untouchability. The novel critiques the dehumanizing practices of the caste system, exposing the daily humiliations faced by the oppressed. Anand humanizes Bakha, portraying his aspirations for dignity and self-respect, even as societal structures deny him these basic rights. Through Bakha's interactions with Gandhi, Anand advocates for social justice and the eradication of untouchability, emphasizing the need for systemic reform.

- **Coolie: Human Dignity Amid Exploitation**

Coolie explores the life of Munoo, a young laborer who endures relentless exploitation in colonial India. The novel highlights the plight of the working class, exposing the brutal realities of poverty, hunger, and labor exploitation. Despite his suffering, Munoo's innate humanity shines through, symbolizing the resilience of the downtrodden. Anand critiques both colonial and indigenous systems of oppression, underscoring the need to recognize the dignity of labor and address economic inequalities.

- **Two Leaves and a Bud: Compassion for Oppressed Plantation Workers**

In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Anand shifts focus to the exploitation of plantation workers under colonial rule. The protagonist, Gangu, becomes a symbol of the dehumanization inflicted on laborers by a system driven by greed and power. Anand portrays the harsh conditions of the plantation and the workers' suffering with deep empathy, condemning the systemic injustice perpetuated by both colonial authorities and local elites. The novel is a plea for compassion and solidarity with the oppressed.

- **The Sword and the Sickle**

In *The Sword and the Sickle*, Anand addresses the collective struggle of peasants and workers against systemic exploitation. The novel follows Lalu Singh, a revolutionary

who embodies the spirit of collective resistance. Anand portrays the interconnectedness of individual and communal struggles, emphasizing the importance of solidarity in achieving social reform. The novel reflects Anand's belief in the power of collective action and human compassion as tools for societal transformation. Through these works, Anand champions humanism by exposing systemic injustices and advocating for dignity, empathy, and solidarity across all divisions of caste, class, and colonial authority.

Literature Review

PANCHAL, V. (2021). A pioneering figure in Indian English literature, Mulk Raj Anand deeply emphasizes humanism through his writings that throw light on the sufferings of the marginalized Communities. His emphasis is on the prayers of the voiceless; the untouchables, laborers and the oppressed. In novels such as *Untouchable* (1935), Anand exposes the plights of a Dalit protagonist, Bakha, and in *Coolie* (1936), he exposes the life of the poor laborer, Munoo. Anand critiques societal hierarchies, caste discrimination and the dehumanisation wreaked by rigid traditions, all through his vivid storytelling. His characters exemplify resilience and dignity in the face of suffering, recognizing their inherent worth and humanhood. Anand's belief in equality and justice, which becomes evident in his writing, stems from his deep connection with the philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi and his exposure to European humanist thought. However, his works extend well beyond social critique; they urge on compassion, social reform and the brotherhood of mankind.

Kumar, V. (2022). Major novels by Mulk Raj Anand play a catalytic role in reflecting humanism and social evils intertwiningly as strong critiques of entrenched inequities in Indian society. Anand's novel *Untouchable*, narrates the story of the life of Bakha, a Dalit boy who has to clean latrines and reveals the indignity and oppression faced by lower castes through his life. But equally, *Coolie* discloses the harsh truth of class division and exploitation as Munoo, a young laborer, goes through hunger, poverty, and malice in a downright inhumane capitalist system. Feudal oppression, colonial exploitation, systemic inequality, and the portrayal of rural and colonial India's most marginalized voices are additionally exposed by the *Village and Two Leaves and a Bud*. However,

Anand's deep sense of humanism has permeated his narratives, while they are quite candid at depicting the suffering they have caused from these social evils. He celebrates the dignity of his characters through his empathetic portrayals as he stands for social justice and equality. Authored by Anand, his writing encourages society to shed prejudice and adopt compassion, a fervent plea of reform and universal humanity.

Mohanty, K., & Singh, K. P. (2022). Compassion is the central theme of the fictional world of Manoj Das because of his deep ethical view of human existence. In many ways, Das's narratives are permeated with elements of folklore, mysticism, and realism, exploring the profound interdependence of persons and the redemptive potential of empathy. Farewell to a Ghost, The Bridge in the Moonlit Night, compassion plays the role of a counterweight to the human susceptibilities and vices including greed, anger, alienation. With moral dilemmas and adversity of life standing by him, his characters gain the redemption and meaning by doing acts of kind and understanding. Both compassion as an emotional feeling and compassion as moral duty are explored by Das's writing to dispel long held societal norms and promote harmony. The character portrayals of the author are well nuanced and point that compassion is the glue that makes divides come together, forgiveness is the First step to healing and give a higher quest to this life. Manoj Das's fiction reflects compassion as a lasting virtue which makes individual lives joyful and the soul of humanity optimistic through his ethical lens.

Singh, K. K., & et al (2002). Rabindranath Tagore's novels have as deep a theme of humanism and nationalism as it has profound nuances of his philosophy and a deep commitment to universal values. Tagore portrays characters, who fight for individual freedom and social harmony, beyond the boundaries of caste, religion and gender, so his humanism makes its way through. Novels like Gora take up the interrelation of nationalism and humanism by showing evolution of Gora from a zealous nationalist to an inclusive and universal love. He attacks narrow and parochial nationalism and works for a conception based on the common aspirations of humanity. In The Home and the World (Ghare-Baire), too, Tagore explores the tension between nationalist exuberance and ethical principles via Nikhil's devotion to non-violence and Bimala's coming into her own as a successor to feminine agency. His narratives show that true nationalism must

be a humanism, which involves nationhood, freedom, unity and moral responsibility free of division or fanaticism. Tagore's vision here is to be careful that patriotism does not blind us to

compassion, or even love, for all people at all times, a message as relevant now as it was 160 years ago.

Arora, N. (2005). In doing so he has created two heroes in his novels who embody the plight of the marginalised and the conviction inherent in Anand's commitment to social justice and humanism. Anand's protagonists tend to emerge from the underdogs of society — oppressors of systems and evils of society. A poignant symbol of dignity and resilience in the face of the inhumanity of the caste system is the young Dalit boy Bakha from who is the protagonist of *Untouchable*. Like Coolie, Munoo, protagonist of *Coolie*, is the working-class suffering and experiencing exploitation of the working class, having to traverse endless hardships in a society riddled with class divisions. Anand turns to ordinary people not conventional heroes of triumph but rather people living in a world marked by the structural inequalities and moral failings of their world. However, Anand's characters struggle, but in true humanist terms, they are full of humanity and the desire for equality. Anand argues that his heroes are subjects of empathy and agents of change striving to reform a fragmentary and unjust social order, and he critiques hierarchies of society in these portrayals.

Research Problem

The research problem deals with humanism and compassion in the fiction of Mulk Raj Anand and reflects how these themes influence the literary works of Mulk Raj Anand and portray the societal concerns. Anand's is writing known for its empathy toward marginalized people including untouchables and laborers, or woman who are subject to systemic oppression and dehumanization. His fiction deals the human condition, espousing the subaltern's sufferings and militating for social justice, equality and dignity. In this study I endeavor to understand how Anand uses humanism as both a narrative device and as an ethical framework through which he contests domination and promotes compassion as a mode of social transformation. The portrayal of empathy and interconnectedness is investigated in his characters and their resilience in the adversity faced. In endeavoring to excavate how Anand's works call forth a collective moral conscience by focussing on his deep commitment to human dignity and his critique of caste, class and colonial exploitation, the research endeavors to shed light on Anand's role as a social critic. The study contributes, through this lens, to understanding the enduring relevance of Anand in the discourse of human rights and social change.

Conclusion

By highlighting the overarching theme of humanism and compassion, Mulk Raj Anand's fiction stalwartly continues to serve as a timeless voice documenting the injustices in society and encouraging social reform. Anand's vivid portrayals of marginalized individuals (untouchables, laborers, plantation workers, the oppressed) humanizes their struggles, and at the same time critiques the systemic structures that perpetuate suffering. From *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, to *Two Leaves and a Bud*, his works go beyond storytelling, being rallies for equality, dignity and empathy. Anand's belief in universal brotherhood and his crusade for social justice were based on his philosophical orientations, which include Gandhian principles and Marxist ideology, besides his adherence to Indian cultural values. Through realism and emotional depth, Anand brings the gap which exists between literature and activism together, creating a window of empathy and at the same time motivating readers to confront and fight societal inequalities. Anand's humanism does not consist of individual struggle alone, but extends also to a collective vision of solidarity as well as universal compassion. In his emphasis of the reformatory potential of empathy, he explores how empathy has the potential to deconstruct dehumanising hierarchies of caste, class, and colonialism. His narrative techniques, however, utilizing vernacular idioms and culturally rich, storytelling, reinforce his sense of humanity and brings him in touch with Indian sensibilities and globally in turn. Anand's fiction continues to influence Indian and postcolonial literature both in terms of its form, in which the role of art as a space of advocacy and change is redefined. His narratives are still important ones to employ in contemporary discussions of social equity because they remind readers that there are still many people who need compassion, justice and realisation that we are all human. Anand's works shall remain the harbinger to inspire, exemplifying the very idea of humanism as a literary and moral demand to achieve a just and equitable world.

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