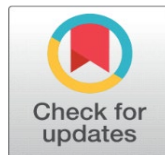
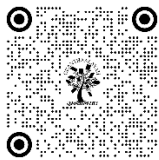


RELIGION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF EXPLOITATION: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF MULK RAJ ANAND

R. Esther Reshma ¹, Dr. S. Bharathiraja ²

¹ Research Scholar (PT), Department of English and Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai-625021(TN-IND)

² Research Supervisor, Assistant Professor & Head (i/c), Department of English, Vivekananda College, Tiruvadakam West, Madurai-625234 (TN-IND)



DOI

10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.4250

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.

ABSTRACT

The present study analyzes Mulk Raj Anand's aim on exposing the fraudulence that has crept into the practice of religions. Regarding Hinduism, Anand's main target of attack is its caste system. He finds the division of society on the basis of caste abominable. In the earlier days, the caste system has been based on the division of labour. Later on, it has been degenerated into a system in which the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas look down upon the lower castes. They do not even like to touch the sweepers or to be touched by them. Like *Untouchable*, *The Village* also reveals the miserably unhygienic living conditions of the sweepers. They live inhaling the most obnoxious and rotten air of the most foully odorous pond in the midst of the dirt of the city. Almost the same miserable unhygienic conditions prevail in *The Road*. The upper caste people have a sense of superiority. The Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the two upper castes in Hindu society, justify their superiority by asserting that they have earned their position by the good-deeds of multiple lives. In *The Road*, the outcastes are not permitted to enter the holy shrines. Pandit Suraj Mani bars the way of the Untouchables by joining hands with the caste Hindus when they want to worship. The Untouchables are deprived of some of the most 27 essential needs of human life and by this deprivation they are made abject and servile. One such thing is the denial of education. Bakha views education as a means to escape from his hereditary profession. In *Coolie* Prabha Dayal is unable to pay back his creditors as he has been cheated by his partner Ganpat. In the initial stage Prabha does not realize that his partner is wicked. Mulk Raj Anand's condemnation of the exploitation indulged in by the British capitalists is revealed through the unhappy and miserable life that the native workers are made to lead in the cotton mill in *Coolie* and tea-plantations in *Two Leaves and a Bud*.

Keywords: *Untouchable*, *The Road*, *Coolie*, *The sword and the Sickle*, *The Village*, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, *The Big Heart*, Religion, Economic Exploitation



1. INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand's parents were only outwardly religious and neither of them knew much about religion. Anand seems to have inherited from his father an irreligious mind and he used to join his father in making fun of his mother's idolatrous devotion to all gods both in heaven and on earth.

This has made Mulk Raj Anand get interested in bringing into focus religious bigotry and hypocrisy. In most of his novels the chief theme is the degradation of institutionalized religion into an instrument of exploitation. In almost all his novels, Anand makes sarcastic references to religion. People have developed a natural tendency towards the outward form. Mulk Raj Anand highlights this decadent state to which traditional religions in general and Hindu religion in particular have fallen.

The noble Intention of religion is to establish a communion between man and God and harmony among people. Hence, it ought to make man a noble and compassionate being. But religion does not seem to have served its purpose. As Paul observes, "... the world teems with people who make a show of religion rather than practice it" (58). The sham and corruption promoted in the name of religion could be seen everywhere.

Priests play a major role in exploiting people. Mulk Raj Anand finds these supposed representatives of God to be cheats. He is enraged that these religious men entrap the superstitious folk by exploiting their innocence. As counterfeit it sainthood is a phenomenon that is seen everywhere in our country, it forms a recurrent theme in Indo-Anglican fiction. R.K. Narayan has made this the central theme of his novel *The Guide*. This novel shows how a criminal released from jail cheats the people under the mask of saintliness. Taking into advantage the gullible nature of the villagers the hero Raju acts like a saint. One of the main reasons for which he does so is to fill up his stomach.

The representatives of organized religion are often found to be actively involved in doing the wicked things. Mulk Raj Anand's satirical attack on fake saints and fake priests stems from his righteous anger against exploitation of any kind, whether it is religious, social or economic. Religious faith is bred in the bones of the Indians. The credulity of the people is shamelessly exploited and various atrocities are committed in the name of religion. People have no proper religious leaders, and their guidance is like that of the blind leading the blind.

The holy men who appear in Mulk Raj Anand's novels are obviously fake. Anand's attitude towards them is not one of comic acceptance but of moral indignation. The priests and Mahants who appear in his novels are criticized by the author "...not for their lack of spiritual authenticity, but for the tyranny and hypocrisy they precise" (Mukherjee 108).

The priests make their fortune by exploiting the ignorance of the people. As Sharma says, the Brahmins and priests "... pick the pockets of the poor peasants and extract money by conducting ceremonial and ritual rites" (33). The people are made to part with their money for the performance of special prayers and ceremonies which are believed to ensure their well-being. The priests of Anand are like the scribes, whom Jesus Christ talks about to his disciples: "...desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; ... devour widow's houses, and for a show make long prayers..." (Luke 46, 47).

The priests in Mulk Raj Anand's novels make a show of everything and try to keep up their prestige only. In *Untouchable*, the priest Pandit Kali Nath is an ill-humoured person with a moral weakness. This weakness gets the better of him as he lacks the real strength of a spiritual person. He is not able to ward off temptation. His rigid respect ability gives into waves of amorousness and he covers up his weakness by bullying others. In the episode where the *Untouchable* gather around the well to get water, one could see that Pandit Kali Nath's eyes are always yearning for a prettyface. As Anand says, he has "as good an eye for a pretty face as he had a bad ear for the sound of a request" (*Untouchable* 33). That is why Pandit Kali Nath first calls Sohini to get water from him. And, in order to hide this weakness, he splashes water on the other outcastes.

The warmth that Pandit Kali Nath has felt by standing near Sohini spurs him to call her to come to clean the temple courtyard. When Sohini comes to clean the courtyard he tries to molest her, Sohini tells Bakha that when she "... was bending down to work, he came and held me by my breasts" (*Untouchable* 71). When the attempt is foiled, he accuses her and her brother of defiling him and the temple. It is ironical to note that a Brahmin makes such a shameful attempt. But he escapes, and the innocent Bakha and Sohini become victims. This brings into focus the hypocrisy and the double standards that underlie the supposed purity and spirituality of highclass people.

Pandit Suraj Mani of *The Road* is also a hypocrite like all such characters of Anand. He also has a moral weakness like Pandit Kali Nath. This could be seen from his desire to be seen naked by the village women while bathing. As Mulk Raj Anand says, "Pandit Suraj Mani devoutly lifted the triple cord from his waist upwards to the shoulder and then adjusted it around his left ear..." (*The Road* 11). This act has given "him just the time he needed to appreciate the contours of Rukmani's figure" (*The Road* 11). He makes the girl blush with his smile and it is said that his "eyes caressed the curves of her (Rukmani) body with the concentrated lasciviousness of old age" (*The Road* 12). All these things, as Shivpuri puts in his article "*The Road: An Interpretation*," "Epitomizes... the entire exhibitionism of his character" (20).

In *Untouchable*, the priest offers water to Sohini, the outcaste girl. There is a similar situation in *The Road*. Here Pandit Suraj Mani receives water from Rukmani, a high caste girl. Though Suraj Mani surreptitiously gazes at her figure, he does not make bold advances to her as she is a caste Hindu girl and the daughter of a powerful man in the village. While Pandit Kali Nath shouts and abuses to hide his weakness, Pandit Suraj Mani mutters 'Ram! Ram!'

The fat yogi of the shrine of Bhagat. Har Das in *Coolie* is a craftier version of Suraj Mani. He distributes free water to people. Though water is said to be given free of cost, it is really paid. After drinking water everyone throws a copper coin at the feet of the holy man. When Munoo does not throw a copper after drinking water, the "Brahmin scowled at him and muttered the proverb: 'May the misers fade away'" (*Coolie* 154).

Munoo is taken in by the yogi's appearance and seeks his help to initiate him to spirituality so that he could prove to be a worthy person. The yogi entertains Munoo to serve him saying "we will make you a disciple and you may rise to be a saint if you serve your guru" (*Coolie* 156). But Munoo is overpowered by a sense of shame when he sees through the mask of saintliness worn by the yogi, who specializes in enabling rich and young childless women conceive and beget children. Thus the yogi seeks physical gratification under the pretense of performing rituals.

Mulk Raj Anand not only shows the so called holy men or the representatives of God as indulging in immoral activities, but also accuses them of being gluttonous. The pious people shower delicacies on the priests. In *Untouchable* Pandit Kali Nath recalls "... the

taste of the various delicacies to which he was so often treated by the pious" (31). His gloating comments are sickening. "How nice and sweet is the kheer, sticking to the teeth and lingering in the mouth. And Kara parshad, the hot, buttery masses of it melt almost as you put a morsel of it in the mouth" (*Untouchable* 31).

He suffers from a chronic constipation due to over-eating. That is why he condescends to draw water for the untouchables. He thinks that the exercise would do his belly some good.

In *The Road* it is said that Pandit Suraj Mani could eat twice as much as anyone in the village. Dhooli Singh's description of Suraj Mani is very apt. He says: The crafty Brahmin dog was at the root of the whole trouble . . . the hypocrite, with the rosary in his hand, eating twice as much as anyone in the village, with the feasts on the death anniversaries falling due somewhere in the village every day, saying things with double meanings. (*The Road* 18)

As Pandit Suraj Mani depends on the high caste families for his food, he changes sides as the situation suits his purpose. When he talks to Dhooli Singh, he praises him for the project he has undertaken. When he talks to Thakur Singh he pleases him saying that Dhooli Singh is defiling the land and that he would receive punishment. Later on, one could see that Suraj Mani is willing to accept an offer of mangoes from Dhooli Singh, the leader of the defiled party, whom he has been about to excommunicate a little earlier at the instance of Thakur Singh.

The Mahant Nandgir in *The Village* is a master sinner; secure in his saffron robes. His avarice for food is no less than that of the other priests referred to earlier. He reveals his greed by fleecing the poor of the village and taking gifts, money and other delicacies in exchange for mantras and other religious rituals. Lalu, the protagonist of the novel says that he is a "religious teacher who in greed is so gluttonous that he will suck the blood of the poorest" (*The Village* 24). He forces the poor to give grains, clothes and other gifts while they die of hunger. Thus he feeds "...upon the life-blood of the poor peasants" (Sharma 32). His characteristics can be best summed up in Lalu's words: "The lecher! He ate sumptuous food, dressed in yellow silks, smoked charas and drank hemp, and if reports were true, whored and fornicated. And he was kept a holy man, the Guru of the community" (*The Village* 67).

The Mahant thus proves to be a confirmed glutton, drug-addict and lecher. Thus from Mulk Raj Anand's portrayal of the priestly figures in his novels, one could know about the nature of the priests and how they exploit the people in the name of religion. But Anand's presentation of priests tends to be monotonous. He focuses on only one side of their life. This may be due to, as Paul observes, "... it is not his intention to present any unified image of the priests as such in his novels. His principal aim is to project exploitation in all its facets, religion being one such facet" (66).

The tradition-bound people develop an apathetic attitude towards life, and this is well-illustrated in many of Anand's novels. As Paul says Religion makes some of his characters accept their lot abjectly, prevents them from resisting evil and promotes inveterate inertia" (60).

In *Untouchable* Bakha resents the incessant inhuman treatment meted out to the Untouchables by the caste Hindus. He tells his father: They think we are mere dirt, because we clean their dirt. That pundit in the temple tried to molest Sohini and then came shouting: "Polluted, polluted." The woman of the big house in the silversmith's gully thrift the bread at me from the fourth storey. (*Untouchable* 89)

Thus Lakha is very much touched by this. But when Bakha says that he could have retaliated, Lakha consoles him saying: "No, no, my son, no... 'we can't do that. They are our superiors. One word of theirs is sufficient against all that we might say before the police. They are our masters. We must respect the manddoas they tell us" (*Untouchable* 90).

Thus, Lakha advises Bakha to bear the ill-treatment with patience and fortitude. Similarly in *The Road* Bhikhu's mother advises him to be passive to all insults. She asks him to love the caste Hindus so as to ensure for them a higher birth in the next life. Lured by the hope that they may be born in a higher caste these innocent people subject themselves to all humiliation and suffering in the present life.

The untouchables believe that the misfortunes they experience are due to some lapses on their part in this life or in an earlier life. For instance in *The Road* when the huts of the untouchables are burnt down by the caste Hindu boys, Laxmi attributes the cause of their misery to her delay in lighting the saucer lamp at the feet of the goddess and her son's defiance of the caste Hindus. In *Coolie*, the poor coolies accept their plight unquestioningly and murmur, "Ram, Ram" even when they are condemned to a hellish existence. The harijans in *Untouchable* askohli says, are "riddled with the

False sense of karma and are willing to succumb to pressures" (233).

Similarly, every human suffering is accepted as an inevitable punishment for the evil deeds done in the past life. People believe that the saintliness of the righteous is tested through mishaps. This faith is an age-old malady of Indian society. All these things show that what remains of religion is its bare skeleton. It is extremely regrettable that religious sentiments and even religion as such are sought to be exploited for the attainment of one's own selfish ends. Mulk Raj Anand particularizes the corrosive effect the so-called religious practices have on the very soul of man. To the gullible, regular visits to the temple and performance of rituals are signs of being religious.

The temple, a symbol of spiritual emancipation is not open to all. The Untouchables are not permitted to enter the temple. Only the high caste people could go into the temple. Some of these privileged people go to the temple not to worship God in the real sense, but for some other reason. People like Thakur Singh in *The Road* come to temple to invoke the gods to spite their rivals. Some people like Murali Dhar in *The Big Heart* change the temple into a rendezvous.

The untouchables are not allowed to enter the temple because it is said that "A temple can be polluted according to the holy books by a low-caste man coming within sixty-nine yards of it..." (*Untouchable* 70). Bakha too realizes that "an **Untouchable** going into a temple polluted it past purification" (*Untouchable* 66). In Romen Basu's novel *Outcast* one could see that Mahanta is publicly humiliated, beaten and arrested for the one and only reason that he has entered the kali temple to offer a hibiscus flower to the God.

The rituals intended for the promotion of one's spiritual well-being are performed for the fulfilment of selfish desires. People do charity with the hope of getting happiness in the next life or for are getting sponsor toward off evil. For instance, the Hindu sepoy in *Untouchable* gives Bakha a pair of boots and puttees, with the Intention of ensuring for himself happiness in the lives to come. The house wives don't take food before dispensing hospitality to the ash- smeared sadhus. Bhagwanti in *The Road* plans to sacrifice ago at and distribute its meat among the chamars to prevent set- backs in life. This is indicative of people's ignorance of what religion truly is or what the religious observances are meant for.

Mulk Raj Anand's aim is to expose the fraudulence that has crept into the practice of religions. Regarding Hinduism, Anand's main target of attack is its caste system. He finds the division of society on the basis of caste abominable. In *The sword and the Sickle* Prof. Verma says: "Hinduism is no religion, apart from the social Organism of caste. Anyone professing any belief is a Hindu, so long as he is born of the castes!" (166-67).

This shows that casteism is more marked in Hinduism than in other religions. Raghava rightly points out that: "The division of society into groups or start an arranged into a hierarchy of wealth, prestige or power is a universal factor. But, a society divided on the basis of caste groups is peculiar to India, especially the Hindu society" (57).

In the earlier days, the caste system has been based on the division of labour. Later on, it has been degenerated into asystem in which the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas look down upon the lower castes. They do not even like to touch the sweepers or to be touched by them. The outcastes are segregated from the rest of the people. It is religion that is responsible for this division; organized Hindu religion has the concept of untouchability deep-rooted in its caste system" (27-28). In *Untouchable* Bakha and his brethren live outside the town. It is said that: The out castes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. A Brook ran near the lane, once with crystal-clear water, new soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes. (*Untouchable* 11)

In such a dirty place live the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes. They should be content to live in such an unhygienic place, where the "...absence of a drainage system had, through the rains of various seasons, made of the quarter a marsh which gave out the most offensive smell" (*Untouchable* 11).

Like *Untouchable*, *The Village* also reveals the miserably unhygienic living conditions of the sweepers. They live in halting the most obnoxious and rotten air of the most foully odorous pond in the midst of the dirt of the city. Almost the same miserable unhygienic conditions prevail in *The Road*.

Religion has thus played its role in exploiting the Untouchables. Caste system has been prevalent in India from time immemorial. Life has been so very prominently governed by caste divisions that there are gradations among the Untouchables as well as the high castes.

Regarding the theme of religious exploitation, that is exploiting people In the name of religion, Mulk Raj Anand not only attacks Hindu religion but also other religions such as Islam and Christianity. Though Islam does not encourage the practice of caste distinctions, the Muslims have a deep communal feeling. *Coolie* shows that Hindu, Muslim and Sikh coolies mix freely with each other on the basis that they all belong to the class of laborers. *Untouchable* also shows that the Muslims do not treat the outcastes with contempt. But their communal feeling lies deep within them. This could be seen in *Coolie*, It manifests itself in primitive forms when a communal riot breaks out. The Hindu and Muslim coolies begin to clash among them. Due to theriot, Munoo flees from the spot and faints on the road and is knocked down by a car. The lady of the car wants to take him home. But the driver, a Muslim, recognizes Munoo to be A Hindu, and, excited beneath his apparent reserve bystrong religious sentiments, he did not care if the boy died or what happened to him. If he had mythical one, he might have killed him deliberately. As it was, he thought he had done so accidentally. He would have left him lying there, but he was afraid of the Memsahib. (*Coolie* 284)

Christianity, though it is not an Indian religion, has taken firm roots in India. Mulk Raj Anand, in spite of his great admiration for Jesus Christ, cannot accept Christianity in to. Mulk Raj Anand's attack on Christianity is directed against the missionaries who are engaged in proselytization. He accuses Christian missionaries of exploiting the caste differences and untouchability among the Hindus to draw the Untouchables into their own religion.

Mulk Raj Anand's condemnation of the exploitation indulged in by the British capitalists is revealed through the unhappy and miserable life that the native workers are made to lead in the cotton mill in *Coolie* and tea-plantations in *Two Leaves and a Bud*. The chief motive of the Britishers is to earn profit without bothering about the conditions in which their employees live.

Economic exploitation has played its role so effectively that the poor are subject to a great deal of suffering and have no fear of death. They consider death as a release from all their miseries. In *Coolie* Hari takes his family to sleep in a place where a man is said to have died the previous day saying that "he has attained the release. We will rest in his place" (*Coolie* 190)

Religion also plays a major role in exploiting the ignorant poor people. Anand is able to write in detail about this because his mother was a superstitious and ignorant woman. She observed all religious practices and used to distribute oil to barbers and feast the already over-fed priests.

Anand looks at the rituals intended for the promotion of one's spiritual well-being as meaningless ones performed just for the fulfilment of selfish desires. People do charity with the hope of getting happiness in the next life. The Hindu sepoy in *Untouchable* gives Bakha a pair of boots and puttees with the intention of ensuring for himself happiness in the lives to come. Bhagwanti in *The Road* plans to sacrifice a goat and distribute its meat among the chambers to prevent set-backs in life. This is indicative of people's ignorance of what religion truly is or what the religious observances are meant for. Lured by the hope that they may be born in a higher caste; these innocent people subject themselves to all kinds of humiliation and suffering in the present life. They accept every suffering as an inevitable punishment for the evil deeds done in the past life. Gangu is dominated by the feeling of abject self-pity and passiveness. He accepts the misfortunes that come across his life without any protest. He is prepared to accept every humiliation. Anand rails at those aspects of Hinduism that stupefy people and make them passive and submissive.

Anand is passionately concerned with the hardship of the life of villagers, their poverty, squalor and backwardness coupled with gross ignorance. So he writes about them with feeling and passion in his novels and short stories. As Agnihotri observes, Anand's heroes are unable to fight "...the inexorable economic and social forces which toss them this way and that till they break into pieces, because they are ignorant and uneducated..." (54). These poor ignorant people accept their lot without questioning. It may also be said that they take their misfortunes and sufferings as naturally as sleep. For such a condition, lack of education is the root cause.

REFERENCES

- Paul, Premila. *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand: A Thematic Study*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1983.
- Raghava, Sulochana Rangeya. *Sociology of Indian Literature; A Sociological Study of Hindi Novels*. Jaipur, Rawat Publications, 1987.
- Rees, R.J. *English Literature: An Introduction For Foreign Reader*. Madras, Macmillan, 1987.
- Sanyal, Samares, C. *Indianness in Major Indo-English Novels*. Bareilly, Prakash Book Depot, 1984.
- Sarma, G.P. *Nationalism in Indo Anglian Fiction*. New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1978. Scott, Wilbur. *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*. New York, Coolier Books, 1979. Sethi, Vijay Mohan. *Mulk Raj Anand The Short Story Writer*. New Delhi, Ashish Publishing House, 1990.
- Sharma, Ambuj Kumar. *The Theme of Exploitation in the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*. New Delhi, H.K. Publishers and Distributors, 1990.
- Walsh, William, *Indian Literature In English*, London: Longman Group, 1990.
- Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel*. London, Chatto and Windus, 1957. Burton, T.D, *Critical Essays on Indian writings in English*, Silver Jubilee Student Edition, Macmillan, Madras (1977)
- Forster, F.M. *Preface to Untouchable*, Hind Pocket Books, New Delhi, 1970.
- Naik M.K., *Mulk Raj Anand*. New Delhi, Arnold Heinemann India, 1973.
- Cowasjee Saros., *Coolie An Assessment*, OUP, Delhi: DUP 1976 245 Walsh, William. *Indian Literature in English*, Longman, London-New York, 1990, P. 64.
- Anand, Mulk Raj. *Is There a Contemporary Indian Civilisation?* Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1963.
- Roots and Flowers*. Dharwar, Karnatak University Publications, 1972,
- Author to Critic: The Letters of Mulk Raj Anand to Saros Cowasjee*. Ed. Saros Cowasjee. Calcutta, Writers Workshop, 1973.
- Conversations in Bloomsbury* New Delhi, Arnold-Heinemann Publishers India Private Limited, 1981.
- Chitralakshana: Story of Indian Paintings*. New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1989.