

CHAPTER – II
THE NOVELS OF
MULK RAJ ANAND



(1905-2004)

“...there were no black or white people, no yellow or brown people, not even French and German, English and Hindustanis and Chinese and Japanese but there were only two races and two religions in the world, the rich and the poor...”

The Sword and the Sickle,

CHAPTER – II

THE NOVELS OF MULK RAJ ANAND

Mulk Raj Anand, a socially committed novelist, has produced a good deal of literature. He has written more than a dozen novels and about seventy short stories and a host of essays and articles on a number of subjects. His novels fall into two categories namely social and autobiographical novels. He focused his attention on the sufferings, misery and wretchedness of the poor as a result of the exploitation of the downtrodden class of the Indian society. Religious hypocrisy, feudal system, East-West encounter, the place of woman in the society, superstitions, poverty, hunger and exploitation are his common themes. The present chapter deals with five of his novels namely, *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and *The Road* (1963), which deal with poverty, hunger and exploitation as their major themes.

Untouchable

Mulk Raj Anand's first novel *Untouchable*, published on 1st May 1935, was welcomed by a few but criticized by many. Several news-papers in London criticized it as 'a dirty work'. E.M. Forster anticipated such criticism in his preface to *Untouchable*. He says;

It seems to me indescribably clean and I hesitate for words in which this can be conveyed. Avoiding the rhetoric and circumlocution, it has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it (*Untouchable* 9).

The novel gained popularity among the Western readers slowly but surely. The Preface written by E. M. Forster made them perceive its aesthetic value. Later it became so popular that it was translated into more than twenty languages. Saros Cowasjee in his book *So Many Freedoms* rightly observes:

The book however quickly cut its way through supercilious criticism and established for itself a popularity that remains unrivalled for work of fiction by any Indian author. (Cowasjee 45)

The novel covers the span from 1930 to 1940 when poverty, slavery and the inhuman exploitation of the masses were at the peak. It was Gandhi who had waged a war against the forces behind these evils. The novel describes a single day in the life of the protagonist Bakha, a scavenger boy. The entire action takes place within a period of less than twenty four hours. Though the scene of the novel belongs to a small, interior town of the Punjab, the happenings are pan Indian in character. Bulandshehar, a small town with an outcaste colony on the outskirts represents a normal Indian town found anywhere in India. Most of the action of the novel takes place at an outcaste colony and in the streets of the small town.

Bakha starts his day welcomed by the abuses of his father and is forced to clean the latrines with a brush and a basket. His sister Sohini goes to fetch water from the caste well where she is compelled to wait for a caste Hindu to draw water which is again a routine for her life. Pundit Kali Nath fills her pitcher with water and summons her, with an ill intention to clean the temple courtyard. Bakha, on the request of his father rushes to the town to clean the roads. On his way he meets his friends and they plan a hockey match in the afternoon.

While walking through the streets of the town, a caste Hindu gets defiled by his touch to which he tries to apologize. Joining his hands in humility, he stands deaf and dumb. The people gather around the scene and abuse Bakha. He pleads but no one feels pity for him. The defiled man gives a slap on Bakha's face and leaves the place. For the first time in his life Bakha is made aware of his status as an untouchable. He feels insolent and rushes to the courtyard of the temple announcing his arrival aloud. While roaming outside the temple he curiously looks into the temple. A Brahmin sees Bakha on the steps and shouts at him for polluting the temple. While climbing down the steps he finds his sister Sohini standing in the courtyard frightened and speechless. She tells Bakha about the priest's attempt to molest her while she was cleaning his latrine. She further tells him that she screamed out of fear and the priest came out shouting that he had been defiled by an untouchable girl. An enraged Bhaka decides to look for the priest but Sohini stops him. As both of them realize their helplessness due to the limitations of their caste, they decide to give up. Bakha sends Sohini home and goes to an alley nearby to beg for food.

He starts shouting for food but nobody responds. Tired of the hectic schedule he sleeps on the wooden platform in front of a caste Hindu's house. A high caste woman comes out of the house on the call of a Sadhu. She shouts at Bakha for polluting her house. She asks him to clean the drain to get a piece of bread. Meanwhile a woman from a neighbouring house gives him a chapatti. He returns home and tells his father Lakha about his insult and Sohini's molestation by the Pandit. To assuage his son's grief Lakha narrates him a nasty experience of his own life. It brings Bakha back to his senses. He leaves the house to meet his friends. After spending some time with his friends he goes to

Havaladar Charat Singh to collect a hockey stick. Bakha gets excited with his kind treatment and goes to the playground to play a hockey match.

The son of a high caste Hindu is hurt in the quarrel that takes place after the match. When Bakha takes the wounded boy to his house, his mother, instead of giving thanks shouts at Bakha for defiling her son and the house. As he returns home in the afternoon, his father welcomes him with abuses for bunking his afternoon latrine cleaning work. Utterly given up to despair he goes out and sits under a pipal tree cursing the day. Colonel Hutchinson, a priest from the church, finds him lonely and takes him to the church where he asks Bakha to confess his sin so that he can be converted to the Christian religion. The Colonel's wife shouts at him for bringing a 'bhangi' at her house. Bakha runs away from the church.

While wandering through the railway station he hears the news of Mahatma Gandhi's arrival in the town. He rushes to Golbagh to hear Gandhi's speech. With the sight of Gandhi he forgets all the miseries of the whole day. In his long speech Gandhi expresses his wish to be reborn as an untouchable. He calls them 'Harijan' and the cleaners of Hindu religion. He also warns them against their bad habits and asks them to stop accepting the cooked food for their work. Through the conversation between the two pro- and anti- Gandhi groups, Bhaka comes to know that the only solution to eradicate untouchability is the use of machine or the flush system. With this 1

Anand is the first Indian novelist to have depicted in the novel from the stigma of this evil which isolates a man from his own society. (Jha 59)

Not only the protagonist but also most of the minor characters in his novels belong to the low caste, downtrodden society. Mulk Raj Anand in his article “The Source of Protest in my Novels” says,

I wished to create the folk, whom I knew intimately, from the lower depths, the lumpens and the suppressed, oppressed repressed, those who have seldom appeared in our literature. (Anand 20)

All these characters embody a particular vision of reality which the novelist has assigned to them. They are normal, simple, credible human beings unaware of their social condition. In the preface to *Two Leaves and a Bud* Mulk Raj Anand says, “All these heroes and the other men and women... were the reflection of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth.... They were the flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood.” Bakha’s character is modeled after one of Anand’s childhood friends, who was humiliated by his own mother for being a sweeper boy but whom Anand adored as a hero. Anand could never forget that sweeper boy and the insult and humiliation that he received by Anand’s family. He gave voice to his views against the exploitation of a sweeper-boy through the character of Bakha in his very first novel *Untouchable*.

According to Premila Paul, Bakha serves as a mirror to the pathetic correlation of the untouchables. He represents all those sweepers who are doomed to live life worse than the slaves. E.M. Forster in his Preface to *Untouchable* rightly observes;

...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.... (10).

During his psychological transition from innocence to experience, he faces identity crisis. Initially he possesses no awareness of being an outcaste. The kind treatment from the White Tommies makes him feel superior to his fellow outcastes and this superiority complex is reflected in his attitude and appearance. He does not live unclean or uncouth like other scavengers. His intelligence, sensitivity and the air of dignity differentiate him from his fellow outcastes. Even a high caste Charat Singh feels "Here was a low caste man who seemed clean" (23). He calls Bakha a gentleman.

But his role as a gentleman is thwarted by a series of incidents that happen during a single day. He suffers without any fault of his own. The slap he receives from the high caste Brahmin for defiling him by his touch makes him aware of his true identity. Soon after this he faces another moment of humiliation at the steps of the temple that increases the rage in his soul. But the molestation of his sister by the priest turns him violent to which he reacts aggressively. The giant stride of the sweeper towards the temple frightens the crowd. "His fist was clenched. His eyes flared wild and red, and his teeth ground between them the challenge: 'I could show you what that Brahmin dog has done!'"(86). But his hereditary serfdom acts as a handicap to his spontaneous rebellion. He realizes that he can do no more than being enraged against the brutalities of the high castes.

Instead of appreciation, Bakha receives condemnation even when he saves the child from an accident and takes him to his home lifting on his hands. The thankless mother of the child shouts at him for defiling her house and wounding her son. He thus receives inhuman

treatment from almost everybody. They throw things at him the way they do to the animals. This inhumanity reaches its climax when a so called mother throws a thin slice of bread at him from the top of her house. He feels ashamed of himself for picking up the bread from the pavement.

He is simultaneously an exploited person and a rebel. He is a scapegoat of the rigid caste system. Injustice inflicted upon him makes him rebellious. Excessive abuse and insult makes him think about retaliation. At such moments he feels like a tiger at a bay. Saros Cowsjee in her book *So Many Freedoms* rightly says,

But he is a tiger in a cage, securely imprisoned by the conventions his superiors have built up to protect themselves against the fury of those whom they exploit. (Cowsjee 52)

Bakha wants to protest but he who cleans the filth of the people becomes aware of the filth around him. He realizes that he is surrounded by his own people who are meek, humble and who have accepted exploitation as their fate. His father tries to calm him down by making him realize that such exploitation is not unknown to their caste. His sister, Sohini, also tries to pacify him by asking him to accept it as a part of their destiny. His inability to revolt should be perceived as an outcome of the oppression of the outcastes for thousands of years.

His submission to the superiors who exploit him is the result of the inborn slavery that he inherits. Bakha imitates the life style of the Whites and desires to live life in their manner. While copying the White sahib in all regards, his excessive 'fashun' makes him an object of ridicule. Some of the critics call it a colonial exploitation of Indians

by the British. It is important to discover whether Bakha's imitation of Tommies is a symbolic representation of the youth in Pre-Independent India or an untouchable's natural reaction against the exploitation by the high caste Hindus. If it is considered as a symbolic representation of the youth, such a reaction was generally found in the rich and educated high caste people and not in the downtrodden outcastes. It must be a reaction to the treatment he receives from the high caste people.

Though he has a number of characteristics of a hero, he cannot revolt openly against exploitation as a modern hero does. He belongs to the transitional period. His father Lakha symbolizes the servile attitude of the last generation who cannot even think about the revolt. The feeling of revolt grows in Bakha's consciousness due to the bitter experiences he has. However this urge to revolt could never be materialized as it was practically not possible for an outcaste to revolt against the higher classes. This passivity or helplessness of Bakha is a true reflection of social reality in the then India. The only difference that is found between Bakha and his father is that the idea of revolt infused in Bakha's mind can never ever be thought of by his father. There is at least a ray of hope which is found in Bakha possibly because Bakha happens to be a child of modern India.

The theme of exploitation is best expressed through the character of Sohini, Bakha's sister. She not only exemplifies caste exploitation but also sex exploitation. As a caste-exploited, she is shown waiting patiently for a long time when she goes to fetch water from the caste well. "She had in her docile and peaceful bearing." (33, 34) Gulabo, a washer woman, a caste superior to all other outcastes exploits Sohini. "Now Sohini, being of the low caste among the

outcastes would naturally be looked down upon by Gulabo". (34) She not only abuses the sweeper girl but also rushes to hit her. Sohini behaves unlike any other outcaste woman. When other women make servile appeal and show their abject humility to the passerby high caste Hindus to draw the water from the well, she sits patiently away from them.

She becomes the victim of sexual exploitation due to her caste and poverty. She is very beautiful but she has not enough clothes to protect her beauty from the hungry eyes of the male. Saros Cowasjee in *So Many Freedoms* observes:

Her figure could have vied with the sculptured images of Konark and Khajurao, but she has been condemned by birth to walk the path of the outcastes and to suffer their mortification. (Cowasjee 90)

When the Pundit tries to molest her she screams to protest, but when the priest accuses her for polluting him she remains wonderstruck. She realizes that no one will believe her. She stops her brother from taking any aggressive action against the priest and returns home. She accepts her humiliation with the docile humility of the woman of her caste.

Bakha's father Lakha is the symbol of passive submission to the exploitation by the high castes. He represents the force of tradition, orthodoxy and conservation. He does not blame the high caste for the exploitation but blames himself for this fate. He believes that his birth in the low caste is the result of their sins committed by him in the previous birth. He does not get angry even when Bakha tells him about the molestation of his daughter. He cannot even think about revolt

against the stubborn order. He is so afraid of them all that when Bakha talks about retaliation, he says,

“We cannot 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 them and do as they tell us. Some of them are kind.”(109)

Bakha’s thought of retaliation against the established system becomes significant when we compare it with the passive submission of Lakha to it. Pundit Kali Nath is the priest of the temple in the town. This so called custodian of Hindu religion and culture turns out an ill-humoured devil. Though he is a priest he lacks the real strength of a spiritual person. His moral weakness is exposed when he tries to seduce a sweeper girl. When he fails in his sexual assault he accuses her for defiling him. Through the character of Kali Nath, Anand brings out the underlying hypocrisy of the high caste advocates of the so called morality and culture. It has been a custom in most of the villages of India to convert the low caste girls into ‘Devdasis’. The girls are married to the god but are used by the priests to satisfy their sex hunger. Those who firmly believe that the touch of the outcaste defile them, do not get defiled when they sleep with the untouchable women.

Colonel Hutchinson, the chief of the local Salvation Army, and a Christian missionary is a symbol of the Christian assault on the Hindu religion. The Christian missionaries always tried to take advantage of the Hindu superstitions. They were always behind the untouchables because they knew they could be easily victimized. The poor outcastes who were exploited by their own religion could be easily converted into Christianity. Hutchinson represents this colonial

exploitation. He always carries a number of copies of Hindustani translation of the Bible and the Gospels and always looks for the possible 'victims'. When he finds Bakha in a miserable condition, he takes him to the church but fails to persuade him to be converted. Anand holds the character of Hutchinson as a caricature of a missionary.

A few characters like Havildar Charat Singh, Pandit Kalinath, Colonel Hutchinson do not belong to the low caste society. But all these characters are rooted in reality. They are true to life and convincing. Anand says that his characters are concrete human beings and not generalized symbols. He says that he has tried to create rough characters in all their authenticity. Some of the critics say that his characters are type characters. But Pramod Kumar Singh in *Contemporary Indian Novelists* says,

Type characters are condition of the socialistic novels... The plot moves in space and characters are fixed to their intended roles or behavior. (Singh 23)

As exploitation is the major theme of *Untouchable*, it deals with different types of exploitations such as social, economic, political, religious and sexual exploitation. But social exploitation is at the root of all other exploitations. The class discrimination on the basis of birth, which gives some castes undue advantage over other castes, can be called social exploitation.

Untouchable is an inner conflict of an individual who is caught in the web of an age old caste system. P. K. Rajan in his *Studies in Mulk Raj Anand* says,

It is the individual's quest for freedom in a social system of ruthless exploitation. Bakha as an untouchable seeks his freedom in the feudal society with its unquestionable faith in the infallibility of caste discrimination, with its hypocrisy, cruelty, deceit and inhumanity. We see him stand passive and bewildered at the immensity of horror, hoping for a change. (Rajan 15)

Anand shows his concern over the organized evil in the society which is the cause of the miseries of the outcaste downtrodden. This organized evil is the real enemy of the society. It deliberately denies the basic human rights to the unprivileged class. Caste system kills the human dignity by giving an unfair advantage to a certain class over the others on the basis of their birth which damages the homogeneity of the society.

Anand wants to awaken the exploited, suppressed, dehumanized classes of the society. He feels that exploiting the proletariat has been our national sin which we have been committing for centuries together. They are forced to such a depth that they will sink lower and lower and cannot rise above. They have been pushed to such a lowly life that it makes them feel subhuman. Anand wants to uplift them from the deeps. Bakha endures his social exploitation for quite a long time in the novel.

The smouldering rage of Bakha is followed by his helplessness and remorse. When Sohini is molested by Pundit Kali Nath, he reacts instinctively.

He felt he could kill them all. He looked ruthless, deadly pale and livid with anger and rage.(86)

But after sometime his sense of fear comes back. He feels weak.

He could not overstep the barriers which conventions of his superiors had built up to protect their weakness against him.(89)

Anand wants to highlight that even the untouchables are human beings. Though the patience is the badge of the low caste, there is limit to human endurance. The awareness of this abject humility in the blood of the untouchables does not allow Anand to make his protagonist revolt against the exploitation. He neither revolts nor runs away. He does not try actively to change the circumstances. The protagonist's revolt against the exploitation would have been unrealistic in the Indian social scenario of Pre Independent India. Anand only wants the readers to realize the pangs of an untouchable who for no fault of his own is exploited by the high caste. The verbal and physical abuse and humiliation which he faces creates sympathy for the low caste exploited and anger at the high caste exploiters. He wants the reader to listen to the untouchable's cry.

Bakha's retreat at the temple shows his submission to the tradition and established norms, rather than the defeat of his conscience. He becomes acutely conscious of his social exploitation. This awareness alienates him not only from the higher castes but also from his own caste. The slice of bread thrown by a woman of a big house completes the process of alienation. Bakha's oscillation between rage and despair comes to an end.

With every incident of exploitation by the high caste, Bakha is alienated from the society. He shows his anguish over humiliation of his friends by asking them to throw the sweets at him. The shame of untouchability accompanies him like a shadow. When he joins the

crowd at Golbagh to listen to Gandhi, he observes everything with the same detachment.

Through Bakha's monologues, Anand puts forth some of the basic questions on the Hindu caste system. It is not only high caste Hindus but the outcaste Hindus who do not belong to the sweepers, treat sweepers as untouchables of lower grade as it is already discussed. They allow the animals like bulls to rush through the streets but do not allow the untouchables to walk through the same streets. Through the scenes of stinking bull he highlights the inhuman treatment given to the untouchables. Anand wants to analyze the predicament of the untouchables and pernicious effect of social discrimination on them through Bakha's reflections.

Denial of education to the outcastes is a part of social exploitation. Bakha aspires after education and wishes to go to school when he was a child.

“But then his father had told him that the schools were meant for the babus, not for bhangis. He hadn't understood the reason for that then.”(54).

The reason is, the education would have made them revolt against injustice. The ignorance of the exploited is a bliss for the exploiters. The abject humility among the untouchables is the result of the sense of inferiority complex and docile acceptance of the laws of fate. They do not blame the high caste ones for their exploitation, neither do they hate them.

By confronting supreme arrogance of the high caste exploiters against the low caste exploited, Anand creates sympathy for the low caste. Those who clean dirt are treated like dirt by the high castes.

The caste Hindu feels, “They ought to be wiped off the surface of the Earth!”(56). On the contrary, Anand shows the depression of the untouchables through the question of the protagonist “What have I done to deserve all this?”(133)

The rich Hindus feed the idle priests and sadhus with sumptuous, fresh cooked food but throw a stale and dry thin slice of bread at the outcastes who work for them. A high caste Hindu woman offers fresh meal to a sadhu who does nothing for her but she asks Bakha to clean the drain to get a slice of bread. She asks her son to relieve himself in the drain so that the sweeper will clear it away. “He was too disgusted to clean the drain after this especially, as the little boy sat relieving himself before him” (10). Ironically, these women expect that the untouchables should call them ‘mothers’ but they treat the untouchables unmotherly, even worse than animals. They are more kind to the animals than to the untouchables. They do not allow them to touch them though they touch even the stinking animals like cows and bulls.

The outcastes are exploited by almost all on economic level too. The sweetmeat-seller manipulates the scales to cheat the outcastes knowing that they will not protest.

The shopkeepers always deceived the sweepers and poor people, charging them much bigger prices, as if to compensate themselves for the pollution they allowed by dealing with the outcastes.(63)

Anand exposes the hypocrisy of these high caste shop keepers even. They accept the money paid by the outcaste by splashing water on it and throw at them the things they buy.

He caught the jalebis which the confectioner threw at him like a cricket ball, placed four nickel coins on the shoe-board for confectioner's assistant who stood ready to splash some water on them. (64)

The superiority and the inferiority complex are both deeply rooted in the high caste and the low caste respectively. The high caste Brahmin feels that to praise the low caste is below his prestige. When the low caste praises him, he accepts the praise with reservation. Anand says, "Charat Singh was feeling kind, he did not relax the grin which symbolized two thousand years of racial and caste superiority" (24). On the contrary, a low caste person must accept the generous act with servility inherited from their forefathers. When Bakha is sympathized, "A soft smile lingered on his lips, the smile of a slave overjoyed at the condescension of his master, more akin to pride than to happiness"(25). Ramcharan, a low caste boy feels proud of being even an illegitimate son, of a high caste Hindu father. All this happens due to their ignorance and lack of education. Gulabo takes pride in being a mistress of a high caste Hindu. Lakha advises Bakha to bear the injustice with patience and fortitude in order to reborn into the higher caste.

Anand's presentation of the high caste exploiters and the low caste exploited ones is very objective and balanced. While showing the scathing woman from the big house he does not fail to show a kind woman in the same lane who treats Bakha as a human being. Havildar Charat Singh not only allows him to go to his kitchen but also offers him tea from his own cup; on the contrary a low caste woman Gulabo treats Sohini with malice. If Kali Nath is a symbol of hypocrisy and

hunger for food and sex, Rakha is a symbol of dirt and filth of untouchables.

Anand has sympathy for the low castes but he does not spare them for their meek submission to the exploiters and condemns their passive abject acceptance of exploitation. He does not fail to show the social discrimination even in the low castes. Many a time people are kind hearted but the rigid system does not allow them to show their kindness. They do not listen to their conscience when Lakha violates the religious bindings and touches Hakim's feet to request him for his son's life. The Hakim gets angry for defiling him by a bhangi but when he realizes the seriousness, he rushes to Lakha's house and saves his child. Sexual exploitation of Bakha's sister is symbolic. The molestation of the untouchables by the high caste landlords, moneylenders and the so called custodians of religion is very common throughout the countryside of India. They look at the low caste women as objects of sexual satisfaction.

When Sohini protests against the sexual assault by Pundit Kali Nath, he abuses her for defiling him. The people who gather around, know the truth well but the indecent aggression of the priest towards the untouchable girl is tolerated by them because of the superiority of Brahmins in the caste hierarchy. Even the teen-aged Sohini who suffers humiliation understands that the attempt made by the Pandit cannot be retaliated. Even her brother's impotent anger has no value. They have to accept it. However, through the temple incident Anand has succeeded in showing that the outcastes have the potential to hit back. Mere advance of Bakha with clinched fist makes the crowd run away. The same incident shows the cowardliness of the high caste

exploiters too. When the Pandit fails in his attempt to molest Sohini he levels the charge of defiling against her and disappears in the crowd.

Anand feels that somehow Hindu religion itself is responsible for this social discrimination. He condemns the temples as being the instruments of exploitation. He makes sarcastic remarks on Hindu gods and rituals. He laughs at the multiplicity of Hindu gods. The high castes use their gods for their own advantage. They create fear in the minds of the outcastes. While going to the temple Bakha feels ‘The temple seemed to advance towards him like a monster’ (82). Anand expresses his anger, agony and despair of the exploitation of the outcastes in the name of religion. Through the miserable plight of untouchables he wants to make the reader aware of the horrors of the poverty and sufferings. He makes us sensitive to the heartlessness of a few who thwart the promising life of the helpless young low caste.

They exploit the poor in the name of religion. Brahmin priests and Mahants who are the so called custodians of religion enjoy special privileges and positions in the society. They are allowed to summon anyone to work for them. They allow the sweepers to clean the courtyard of the temple but do not allow them even to tread the steps of the temple. They keep themselves away from the shadows of the outcastes but do not hesitate to molest their girls.

Government’s negligence of the untouchability is an example of political exploitation. By not making any law against the evil practice of untouchability they allow the superstitions to continue. They know that inhuman treatment given to the untouchables by their own people sow the seeds of revolt against the rigid caste system. They also know the fact that the untouchables can be easily converted into Christians and they succeeded in their mission as one can find in the study of

Indian History. In *Untouchable* Anand has made a caricature of the white missionaries. Colonel Hunchinson, a missionary takes advantage of Bakha's miserable condition and tries to attract him towards Christianity. Ironically, Bakha who tries to imitate the sahib's appearance, does not find anything attractive in the Christian religion. This is yet another kind of colonial exploitation of the downtrodden. He however does not fall a victim to his psychological exploitation. Bakha's driving the strength from the sun shows his faith in the Hindu religion. But being a Hindu, himself, he is doomed to suffer monstrous injustice. The pompous behaviour of a Christian priest is thus not quite different from that of the Hindu Pundit.

Economic exploitation has been a common cause of poverty and hunger in the countryside of India. This has been the subject of a number of Anand's novels. The landlords and moneylenders exploit the peasants and become the cause of their poverty and hunger. The exploited have no liberty to earn their living. They are at the mercy of the exploiters for their basic needs. The sweepers work for the high castes but they do not get anything in return. They beg for food, water and clothes. The description of the outcaste colony in the beginning of the novel reveals not only poverty but also the subhuman level of their existence. The entire set up where Bakha lives with his family reveals the poverty of the downtrodden.

There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters and other out castes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal-clear water now 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. The absence of the drainage system had, through the rains of various seasons, made of the quarter a marsh which gave out the most offensive smell. And altogether the ramparts of human and animal refuse that lay on the outskirts of this little colony, and the ugliness, the squalor and the misery which lay within it, made it an 'uncongenial' place to live in. (14)

The castes which look after the cleanliness of the high castes are destined to live in dirt. Anand holds the mirror to the inhuman practices of the Hindu social structure. Bakha lives in a cave-like, dingy, dark one-room mud house. He sleeps on a faded blue carpet under a worn-out greasy blanket. His father and brother sleep on a broken string bed under a patched quilt. Bakha buys second hand clothes from the rag-seller's shop. Bakha's sister cannot wear bodice under her muslin shirt. They cannot buy high quality sweets; they can afford to buy only low quality sweets like jalebis. The high caste Hindus are responsible for such a poverty stricken plight of the outcastes. Unfortunately nobody in the colony is aware of their subhuman life. Bakha and other untouchables clean latrines but are not allowed to use them. Only the rich high castes are allowed to use latrine. The poor low caste men and women squat in the open outside the city, on account of which the goras call them "Kala Adami Zamin par hagane wala" (28).

Bakha's poverty is revealed through the incident of his willingness to buy some sweets. He considers 'Dare I buy some sweets?' (62) After considering all varieties of sweets he decides to buy jalebis. Even the confectioner knows the sweepers taste and limits. "Sweepers should not buy sweets, if at all they buy, it should

only be coarse stuff like jalebis” (63). When Bakha buys jalebis “He was vaguely ashamed and self conscious at being seen buying sweets” (63). The entire family of Bakha depends on the high caste Hindus for their meals. It seems all have to go through the lanes of the town to beg for food. When Bakha fails to get enough food for their lunch, Rakha, his brother goes and begs.

When Bakha watches the beggars at the railway station, he feels “a sadistic delight staring at the beggars moaning for alms but not receiving any” (183). He finds them despicable. Their moaning, wailings and blessings oppress him. The beggars at the railway station exhibit poverty in general.

The pavements were crowded with beggars. A woman wailed for food outside one of many cook shops which lined one side of the road. She had a little child in her arms, another child in her bag on her back, a third holding on to her skirt. Some boys were running behind the stream of carriages begging for coppers. (183)

He hopes for happiness for the entire outcaste downtrodden who try their level best to exist under exploitation and strive for the better life. He feels that if the poverty is alleviated, they can free themselves from the slavery. One of the solutions to free them from untouchability is to change their professions. By Gandhi’s spiritual message, Anand brings Bakha back to his normal senses. Gandhi’s words ‘Harijan’ and ‘cleaners of Hindu religion’ replace his humiliation by pride. The discussions which follow the speech make us realize that Gandhi’s spirituality, supported by modern technology can give us a genuine solution of using flush system to the problem of

untouchability. Anand proposes modernization through industrialization within the ideological framework of Gandhism.

Gandhi's speech works as a unifying factor. He looks at Gandhi, "first with a mixed feelings of wonder, reverence and fear" (194). But later he starts feeling "something intimate and warm about him" (197) Gandhi makes him aware of the fact that "untouchability was not sanctioned by religion." (199) Gandhi makes him aware of their rights saying that they should ask for food grains as their right to labour charges and not contaminated, thrown away food or the 'leavings' from the plates of the high caste.

Some of the critics claim that Anand's *Untouchable*, like his other novels, is a presentation of Marx's philosophy. Instead of Marxist idea of retaliation against the privileged, Anand seems to be more convinced by the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence. He expects a change in the attitude of the exploiters as a result of a non-violent submission by the exploited. He followed Gandhi closely while writing the novel. He stayed in Sabarmati ashram and corrected the manuscript following the instruction of Gandhi.

Thus Anand seems to be influenced by Gandhi and not by Marx. Marx opined that religion was the opiate of mankind and it must be done away in the interest of human welfare. He condemns the priests who stand as middlemen between the God and the worshipper. They create a gap between the god and worshippers and provide opportunities of exploitation. Marx wanted to give a revolutionary gospel to the poor and the downtrodden. On the contrary, Gandhi wanted to remove poverty, which is the cause of exploitation and make them aware of their rights. He wanted them to fight against the exploiters, not with violence but with non-violence. Anand feels that

making the outcastes aware of their exploitation by the high castes is the first step towards their emancipation. The identity crisis through which Bakha undergoes and his realization of untouchability thus form the major theme of this novel.

Anand's exploration of the theme of untouchability when Gandhi was raising his voice against it through mass movement is not a sheer coincidence. It shows Anand's faith in Gandhi's ideology and his own concern about untouchability. Gandhi wanted Anand to write in the form of a documentary but Anand preferred the form of fiction. By portraying the happenings in a single day of the life of an untouchable scavenger he succeeds in driving home the futility in their ideas of caste superiority. Anand's realistic presentation made *Untouchable* a historical document.

Coolie

Mulk Raj Anand's second novel *Coolie* is written within three months and got it published without much difficulty in 1936, within a year after the publication of *Untouchable*. It was widely praised by the readers and the critics alike. The popularity of the novel can be judged by the fact that the novel has been translated into more than thirty eight languages. Some call it an 'epic of misery,' others call it an 'odyssey' of a coolie. Anand himself calls it a Whitman poem 'Passage to India' V.S. Pritchett praises it as a political novel of high order.

Anand calls this novel a Whitman's poem, 'A Passage to India' not for its poetic quality but for its picaresque nature. It moves from hills to the plain, village to city from the north to the west and again to the north. Anand wants to show in all its varied nuances, that

exploitation is same everywhere. It is not the religion, race or caste but only cash and class that matter. They all exploit the poor.

Munoo, an orphan, naïve hill boy of hardly fourteen is compelled to move from place to place against his will in order to earn his living. His father dies of the feudal exploitation and mother of poverty and hunger. An orphan faces domestic exploitation at the hands of his uncle and aunt. They find their nephew, fourteen year old boy, old enough not only to earn his own living but also to support his uncle who works as a 'chaparasi' in one of the banks in the town. They send him to work as a servant in a middle class family in a small town. Here he is exploited by the wife of his master. She treats him like an animal and other members of family treat him like a monkey; an instrument of amusement. In one of such entertaining act in the role of a monkey he bites the daughter of his master. Nathoo Ram, the master considers it as a sexual assault on his daughter and beats him mercilessly. Munoo can no longer bear the cruelty and slips out of the house.

Prabha Dayal, an owner of the pickle factory in a neighbouring town feels a strange affinity for this orphan boy and takes him home as an errand boy. Fortunately, the kind hearted wife of Prabha gives him love of his mother. But Ganpat, the partner of his master treats all the workers mercilessly. Ganpat, betrays his partner by spending the clients' money extravagantly on drinking and whoring. Prabha gets ruined. The partner's treachery not only ruins him but also breaks him completely. He sells out his factory and repays the loan. Munoo works as a coolie not only to earn his living but also to help his master. But Prabha returns to his native place leaving Munoo alone.

While wandering to get a job, Munoo meets an elephant driver who takes him to Bombay. Here with the help of Hari, a mill worker, he gets a job and shelter. A child of fourteen is compelled to work for eleven hours a day on meagre wages. Here the head foreman, Jimmie Thomas whom labourers call Chimta Sahib makes his life miserable. He treats the factory workers as animals. Ratan, a co-worker protects Munoo from his exploitation but pays the penalty by losing his job. The workers go on strike to protest. But instead of reinstalling Ratan, the management gives them a notice of reducing their working hours. To divert the attention of the agitators they spread the rumour that the Hindu child has been kidnapped by a Muslim. The workers enraged with the communal frenzy, spread riot all over the city. Munoo gets hurt in it and cannot return home. In the morning he meets with an accident. A car knocks him down. The owner of the car, Mrs. Mainwaring takes him to Simla.

Munoo recovers soon and starts working as a domestic servant and a Riksha-puller for Mr. Mainwaring. The strenuous work deteriorates his health. The disease turns out to be tuberculosis. Despite all the possible treatments, one day, he dies on the lap of his friend.

As the central theme of the novel is exploitation, Anand portrays two classes of characters: the exploiter and the exploited. Munoo is the only major character and a number of minor characters are placed around him in every phase of his life. The characters of British origin in Anand's novels can be divided into two categories. In one category there are owners of the capitalist machinery like cotton mills, tea estates and banks. In the other category there is the entire British bureaucracy. In *Coolie* most of the British characters belong to

the first category. They are shown as racist. They willfully ostracize the natives. They are paragons of the capitalist exploitation. All the whites support each other in their brutal exploitation of the natives. They do not assimilate with the natives, because they think that they survive only through the brutal and outright exploitation of the ignorant natives. The characters like Thomas, Mr. Little and Mr. White eke out their existence on the exploitation of the natives only. They are the symbols of callousness of capitalists. They are not only unmindful to the problems of the natives but also reticent about them. They look at the Indians as disease-ridden dirty people.

Anand is concerned with the capitalist nature of the white characters who belong to the class of oppressors. Edward Burra, a well known critic says,

The English occur only as minor characters and are described mostly with an inclination to caricature in fact precisely as they must appear to Indian eyes. It would have been false to Anand's purpose to describe them otherwise. (Dhawan ed.82)

Anand shows their role in contaminating the Indian society by supporting the evils of the class system. Anand has been criticized for presenting English characters as caricatures. An English critic Alaister Niven in *Yoke of Pity* says, "The cotton Mill episode shows Anand's sustained attempt to write off the European characters." (Niven, 61) In the group of Indian minor characters Daya Ram, Babu Nathu Ram, Ganpat, Bibi Uttam Kaur and Sir Todar Mal and his wife belong to the class of exploiters in a restricted sense. They are directly or indirectly responsible for the exploitation of the protagonist. Seth Prabha Dayal, Ratan, Mohan, Hari, a union leader Sauda and two women characters Lakshimi and Parbati all belong to the class of the exploited. Though

Munoo is the protagonist, he is a flat passive character. He remains diffident and ineffective till the end. As Riemenscheider points out,

Munoo is not the common type of hero we expect to find in a novel. In his opposition to society he is passive while the society is active. Munoo does not build his own life which on the contrary, is built for him. (Riemenscheider 32)

Anand has based Munoo's character on his childhood playmates who were working in a pickle factory and who accepted their lot with fatalism peculiar to the Indian downtrodden. Munoo represents all the children subjected to tyrannies of social class system for no fault of their own. He is a symbol of child labour victimized by the exploitative capitalist system. He also symbolizes all those coolies who are victims of industrialization, beaten from pillar to post, as S.A. Khan rightly says,

He is one among the millions of coolies tested and formulated by myriad forces of class distinction exploitation and dehumanization.... the story of Munoo is quintessentially the story of every exploited individual in India and the pattern of his life is intended to show the pitilessness that lies imbedded in the lives of millions of people who are condemned to lead a life of an unending saga of social depredation. (Khan 30)

On account of his being a realistic social novelist, Anand does not make his protagonist a rising force or rebel against the capitalist exploitation but makes him a victim of it. Being a child, he is not even aware of the nature of exploitation; so there is no question of freeing himself from or rebelling against the exploitation. In *Untouchable* Anand has shown his protagonist as both a victim of and a rebel

against the caste system but in *Coolie* the arch character is only a victim of the class system.

The want of provisions makes him dream of tasty food to eat, beautiful clothes to wear and of costly toys to play with. He remains innocent throughout the short span of his life. A number of social factors push him into the active mode of life. But, as far as Munoo himself is concerned, he is never, body and soul one with reality. Self realization has been the characteristic feature of almost all Anand's heroes. Munoo also asks himself "What am I – Munoo?... I am Munoo Babu Nathuram's servant (68). He accepts his identity as a servant or a slave in the very beginning of his saga of miseries. This cannot be called self realization because his level of consciousness is found to be quite low.

Munoo is made aware of the cash nexus but he is never after money. He constantly remains under the fear of losing his job. He becomes a victim of the cash nexus. Prabha can be called a different projection of Munoo. Prabha also had been a coolie earlier but out of sheer hard work he becomes an owner of a pickle factory. Munoo also works hard; but too much work in his early childhood leaves him a victim of tuberculosis, with no hopes of recovery in those days. He is made aware of the social discrimination in the early stage of his life. "There must be two types of people in the world: the rich and the poor" (69). The rich are always exploiters and the poor are always exploited. Munoo is exposed to all sorts of mental and physical torture. He is forced to live even among the slum dwellers in subhuman conditions. He becomes the hopeless victim of exploitation everywhere.

Munoo never shows reluctance to work hard. He expects sympathy and love which he does not get even after whole heartedly

sacrificing himself to his employers. He lives under the constant fear of his masters in every phase of his life. In the first phase his uncle and aunt make his life miserable, in the second phase his master's wife makes his life hell and in the third phase his master's partner deprives him of the stable life he wishes to lead. In his Bombay phase a number of exploiting forces make him spiritually die and finally his last master Mrs. Mainwaring's acts of exploitations kill him physically. What Premila Paul says in her *Thematic study of Mulk Raj Anand* is quite right, "His aspirations, passionate longings and potentialities go waste before they could find fulfillment." (Paul, 53)

Munoo's entire life seems to be a nightmare. Poverty, hunger and exploitation seem to be transmitted to him from his parents. A few like Prabha Dayal's wife lend him a helping hand in his fight for survival and moments of happiness. But others like Nathu Ram's wife Uttam Kaur give him only packs of miseries and sorrow. S. A. Khan says, "The story of Munoo is the story of unending pain relieved only by some imperfect glimpses of happiness" (32). The glimpses of happiness are given only by those who tested the bitterness of indigence. Thus Anand makes his character voice his own consciousness and touches upon the conscience of the reader.

Among the Indian characters Daya Ram is the first person responsible for Munoo's miseries. When Munoo's father loses his land, being the younger brother, he indirectly becomes the victim of the feudal exploitation. Later he is brought up by his brother and sister-in-law. But he forgets it as soon as he gets married. The greed for money compels him to exploit his fourteen year old nephew. He enjoys the monthly wages of his nephew but does not love or sympathizes with him. Babu Nathu Ram is the second character responsible for the

miseries of Munoo. He is a typical lower middle class person who has neither self respect nor any voice of his own. Henpecked Nathu Ram backs his wife in her merciless treatment to Munoo. Biwi Uttam Kaur or Biwiji, exploits her servant to show her class superiority. She does not allow Munoo to play with her children. Under the false superiority complex Biwi Uttam Kaur makes Munoo's life a hell. She is portrayed as a stern, snobbish Hindu orthodox woman bound by the innumerable customs and taboos. Ganpat is another wicked character responsible for Munoo's miserable condition in the third phase of Munoo's life. Right from the beginning, he shows his cruel nature by abusing Munoo as 'Seducer of his daughter'. By often referring to him as 'the goat face', Anand shows his inhuman nature.

Seth Prabha Dayal, one of a few well wishers of Munoo can be called a possible projection of Munoo in other circumstances. He comes to city from hills as Munoo does and makes his fortune through hard work. He can be called the only Gandhian character in the novel. He does not forget that he had been a coolie in the past. He shows love for his servants. But his excessive humility ruins his career. He gets bankrupt due to his partner's deceitful conduct. But he sells out his property and repays all the debts. Ratan can be called a significant character of the Bombay phase. In spite of his being a wrestler He is a very kind hearted person. Though he works as a coolie he does not lose his self respect. He helps those who are exploited by the society. He falls short of the moral standards set by employers. He dares to raise his hand against the foreman and the moneylenders who exploit the coolies. In Ratan we find Anand's hope for the future. Through his bravery, the seeds of protest are sown in the minds of workers. Through his leadership he inspires his co-workers.

As Mr. W. P. England belongs to an ordinary family he has not the sense of alienation for the natives of India. Being an honest man, he feels that he should make clean breast of his actual family background and lower education. But like other white characters he has to show colonial superiority through his behaviour.

Jimmie Thomas is an Englishman who symbolizes the colonial exploitation. He is a wicked and repulsive character. Through this character Anand has shown that the people like Jimmie Thomas exploit the Indians due to their colonial power but when wrestlers like Ratan challenge them they show their timidity. It is nonetheless, the true nature of English characters. But the wicked Thomas takes revenge upon Ratan by terminating his services in the nick of time. His tyranny brings all the workers and the factory in trouble and resultantly they go on strike due to his exploitation. He exploits the worker not only on the basis of his power as a government agent but also by his own vested coteries of exploitation in the shape of his private ownership of huts and money lending business.

Mrs. Mainwaring is an Anglo-Indian lady who comes in the last phase of Munoo's life. Anand has severely criticized this character. Saros Cowasjee in his *Coolie: An Assessment* observes,

...Anand gets so involved pillorying the Anglo-Indian woman that he loses sight of his hero. He gives some five pages to sketching her background and her somewhat shady present. (Cowasjee 53)

Most of Anand's characters are modelled after his acquaintances. This character seems to be an attempt of Anand to express his feelings against women similar to her. Mrs. Mainwaring is a caricature of an Anglo-Indian lady split between two cultures. She

suffers from inferiority complex about her origin. She is torn between the fear of sin and fascination for sex. This contradiction turns her nature into a strange perversity. She treats Munoo with utmost care. But Anand gives a hint, by her strange attraction towards Munoo, as a boy, that she exploits Munoo sexually. By showing her past, which was full of her longing for sex and love, Anand makes us suspect that she arouses Munoo's passion. No doubt, the character of Mrs Mainwaring is an authentic portrayal. But as Saros Cowasjee says, "...the novel does not substantiate the whore the author has shown her to be." (Cowasjee, 54)

Among Indian women characters, Gujri and Biwi Uttam Kour are shown exploiting Munoo. But in later phases some women give him mental and spiritual solace. Parbati takes care of him like his mother. Her sympathetic words link her with Munoo's mother. Hari's wife Lakshimi understands Munoo's torments when she lulls him to sleep with the incantation. "We belong to suffering! We belong to suffering! My love!" Saros Cowasjee finds fitting conclusion of the novel in her incantation "We belong to suffering! We belong to suffering."

Anand does not want to present merely a gloomy picture of a coolie in the capitalistic society but he wishes to arouse the conscience of humanity against the ruthless exploitation of the downtrodden. Through the tragedy of Munoo he touches upon the sublime areas of human experience. *Coolie* has been criticized by the Indian critics as 'a novel of propaganda.' Paul Varghese calls it a 'blatant propaganda'. S.C. Harrer also calls it 'downright propaganda. In his essay "The Fire and the Offerings" he observes,

Coolie demonstrates an early tendency in Anand to present life in terms of proletarian experience and a commentary on the experience, and these two aspects are artificially separated at certain points of authorial intrusion or didactic characterization because of the intellectual limitation of the central character” (Qtd in Khan 37).

For the Western critics like C.J. George it is all praise and not merely propaganda. It is “only the photographic fidelity of the hard realities of their subhuman existence” (George 64). Saros Cowasjee also denies the charge on the basis of the author’s violation of the rule of authentic solution to the problem. In his *Coolie: An Assessment* he says,

If there is propaganda in the novel, it is as V.C. Pritchett points out, ‘digested completely’ or, at its worst, as Peter Burra comments, it is propagandist only in the sense that any frank statement of such facts bound to appeal for correction. (Cowasjee 7)

A well known critic of Indian Writings in English, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar says, “If *Untouchable* is microcosm, *Coolie* is macrocosm” (Iyengar 265). *Coolie* presents the victimizing force of *Untouchable* in a different form. The place of ‘caste’ is taken by ‘class’. Anand explores the stresses and strains generated in the Indian society as the result of the commercial, capitalistic forces from Europe. They brought into existence a new class arrangement in Indian society. In *Untouchable* he deals with the Indian problems but in *Coolie* he takes into consideration a universal problem. What Premila Paul says in this regard in her *Thematic study of Mulk Raj Anand* is worth

noticing. She says, “Anand’s earnest interest in the welfare of the suppressed in particular and man in general is admirable. (Paul 56)

In *Untouchable*, Anand deals with a gap between the high castes and the untouchables. But in *Coolie* he deals with the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots. The class conscious society is shown more complex and monstrous than the caste-ridden society. A western critic Edgell Rickword in “Three Views on *Coolie*” observes,

With *Coolie*, Anand’s second novel we are plunged into much more complicated world, a world where apparently everyone is free to move about and earn his living at whatever trade or craft he pleases; but which actually imposes an even more rigid discipline than the old. For the untouchable may be chided or kicked, if he offends the laws of caste, but he has his place in the system... That is what Munoo, the central character of the *Coolie* learns in his short life. And in his drifting from job to job, from his native hills to plain, we get the most vivid panorama of life in India today. (Dhawan, ed. 78)

The central theme of the novel is the exploitation of a poor boy by the different forces in the society supported by Indian social rigidity. There are two types of exploitations in general – social and economic. In the former the novelist deals with religious, sexual and domestic exploitation and in the latter, he deals with the feudal, capitalistic and industrial exploitation. P.K. Rajan in his comparative study of *Untouchable* and *Coolie* says that the theme of both the novels is the same. He observes,

It is an individual’s quest for freedom in a social system of ruthless exploitation... The society of coolie is one in which

chief form of exploitation is capitalist though the feudal exploitation still remains, Munoo, in his quest for freedom, is squeezed dry by the machinery of capitalist exploitation until he meets his tragic end. (Rajan 15)

Munoo's saga of miseries begins with the feudal exploitation. As an orphan he faces domestic exploitation at the hands of his aunt and uncle. Then he is exploited by his master's wife. In a pickle factory he faces industrial exploitation. He is compelled to work for eleven hours a day on meagre wages. In the cotton mill he faces, with other workers, the capitalistic and colonial exploitation. He faces religious exploitation in the form of the communal riot at the end of his Bombay phase. The communal riot can be called a form of capitalist exploitation, because the employers engineer the riot in order to suppress the workers' strike. They use the blind faith of the workers as a weapon against themselves. The poor coolies and the wretched destitutes are victimized. In the final stage he faces physical as well as sexual exploitation by his master. The graph of his exploitation goes up with every phase of his life.

Anand has used his protagonist in most of the novels as his spokesperson but in *Coolie* he uses a minor character as his spokesperson. Munoo, being a child of fourteen cannot serve as the writer's mouthpiece. Anand instead uses a union leader Sauda to give way to his views on the plight of the labourers. Anand poses some genuine problems of the poverty-stricken people through him. By presenting the Charter in which the expectations of the workers from the owners of the factory are given, he tries to show the difference between the rules and the realities. The Charter says that the workers are human beings and not machines. They live in and should be saved

from the clutches of the moneylenders. But exactly opposite things happen. The foreman of the cotton mills appoints all the labourers on commission. They are offered such huts to live in that they do not have even essential amenities. Almost all the workers of the factory are indebted to their foreman, pathans and grocers. The interest rates are so exuberant that the maximum part of their meagre wages goes to pay the interest. Anand wants to express his anguish and anger towards such capitalist exploitation.

Though there are laws against such exploitation the rulers are always on the side of the exploiters. Anand shows his anger towards the administrators through the incident of Seth Prabha's arrest and the inhuman treatment given to him. The police arrest him without warrant and torture him, so as to make him admit the crime which he has not committed. The brutal treatment breaks the kind hearted person not only physically but also spiritually. Anand describes, "They struck him blow after blow in wild orgy of excitement, his face set his lips stiff and his body towering over the poor man's frame"(132).

Though there is a law against the child-labour, children are openly exploited in the capitalistic society. They are compelled to work under inhuman and unbearable conditions for long hours on paltry wages. What Premila Paul says in this regard is Anand's intention too. She says, "It is a noxious practice almost built in a capitalistic factory framework" (Paul 48). Anand wants to lay bare the social evil of child-labour through the tragedy of Munoo. When Anand was asked by Girija Priyadarshani in her interview with Anand in 1988 about the solution on the problem Anand had answered that labour problem can be solved neither in the British capitalistic manner nor by

resorting to communism. It can be solved only by democratic socialism to which he calls a socialistic participatory democracy.

Anand knows that the conscience of the readers must be aroused in order to make the change in the society. He wants to appeal to the people to change their outlook on the society. He gives the motto of human life when he says, "If you cannot do a good deed by which people may remember you, you haven't lived" (226). Human tenderness can be the only solution to the problems of the downtrodden. K. R. Srinivasa Iyanger feels that Anand wants to say that man should cease to take coolie as "a cheap and useful machine, an uncomplaining target for uses and indignities" (Iyanger 340).

By showing the evil effects of money through a number of characters and incidents, he points out that only money cannot solve the problem. Daya Ram forces his nephew to work to avoid his responsibility to look after him. Ganpat swindles the factory money and spends it on gambling and whores and bankrupts his partner. His ingratitude towards the person who gives him shelter shows evil power of money. Mrs. Mainwaring marries a number of times to settle herself financially but she is never happy. C. D. Narasimnaihah observes, that Anand wants to show that, economic prosperity is not the criterion of happiness for Munoo.

Anand shows their physical exploitation through the description of their daily routine. He writes,

Thus they worked from day to day in the dark underworld full of intense heat of blazing furnaces... they ran about bare-foot and naked except for loin-cloths... they worked long hours from down to past midnight so mechanically that they never noticed

the movements of their own or each other's hands. Only the sweat trickled down their bodies and irritated them into awareness that they were engaged in a strenuous physical occupation. (110)

The life of workers in it looks less miserable when compared to that of the workers in the cotton mill, under the supervision of the white foreman. He appears to be an enlarged copy of Ganpat. He is shown as a symbol of colonial and capitalistic exploitation. The workers' life on almost subhuman level in the huts is worse than the animals'. They are indebted to the foreman, pathans and even the grocers for their daily bread. The fear of losing the job compels them to suffer mutely. Describing their conditions when they receive the notice of the reduction in working hours Anand writes,

The coolies of Sir Geroge White factory crept like ghosts through the waste lands of the mills that afternoon. They seemed to have died all of a sudden; that little spark of life which made them more about willingly had died, and left them queer race of men, dried up, shriveled, hollow-chested, hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed. Their wretchedness has passed beyond the confines of suffering and left them careless, resigned. (260)

One can easily judge the outcome of the capitalistic exploitation by the plight of Munoo when he leaves for Simala. When Munoo leaves Bombay he is not only physically but also mentally and spiritually broken. A fifteen year old boy feels defeated like an old man. Anand says,

But really he was mentally and physically broken. And as he thought of the conditions, under which he had lived, of the

intensity of the struggle and the futility of the waves of revolt falling upon the hard rock of privilege and possession, as he thought of Ratan and Hari and Lakshami and the riots, he felt sad and bitter and defeated, like an old man. (284)

This shows that Munoo, a boy of fifteen undergoes the suffering of entire life within the span of two years, due to the industrial or capitalistic exploitation. Machine, which represents industrialization, is shown as a discarding force. Machines are compared with monstrous animals and devils – ‘many-headed, many armed chuckling machine god.’ It is ironical that in *Untouchable* Anand looks at machine as a solution to the problem of caste conflict whereas in *Coolie* he shows it as the cause of the class conflict. In class conflict it becomes the tool of exploitation in the hands of the rich. It eventually leads to sharpen the social stratification.

Machines are the ruthless means of exploitation of the poor. Their owners suck the blood of their users. The exploitation in the mills is so ruthless that C.D. Narsimhian calls Munoo’s survival as the triumph of the spirit. Narsimhian is quite right because exploitation kills the natural instinct to react, to fight and to claim one’s right to live. Even the leader of the workers, a rebellious character, Ratan who fights for the rights of others feels defeated when he loses his job. He wishes, “I would like to die” (217).

For some critics the industrial exploitation in Sir George White Cotton Mill is an extension of economic exploitation practised in the industries in England. It is the exploitation of the workers by the industrialists. But in the Indian context this exploitation is multi dimensional. It is the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. The root cause of exploitation in the Indian context is poverty

and hunger. The tenants of the landlords and the artisans of the small villages become preys of feudal exploitation and industrial exploitation respectively. The starving poor are compelled to desert their native places to earn their livelihood in towns and cities. They live the life of homeless destitutes.

Anand wants to expose all those social villains in the tragedy of Munoo and wants to make an appeal to the Indian society for the just class division of the society. Leo Tagore in his “Social Justice in Anand’s *Coolie* and Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*” says,

Thus the novel seems to be Anand’s perspective on the question of social justice in the Indian context as verified in the life and lot of a poor hill boy. Munoo is a microcosmic reality reflecting and signifying the larger reality of the ever-widening gap between the haves and the have not and the mechanisms that operate in our society in favour of the rich and the powerful and positively hostile to the marginalized and the poor. (Tagore 91)

Poverty is thus the root cause of all the evils in the life of the protagonist. Poverty makes his father lose his land and makes his mother unable to bring up her son. Both of them die, leaving their child, an orphan. Thus the root cause of the feudal exploitation is poverty. Even Daya Ram, Munoo’s uncle, tries to get rid of his nephew due to poverty. Munoo desperately fights for his survival in every phase of his life. The constant fear of poverty and hunger makes him accept various occupations at various places. He continues his weakening struggle for existence with the dreams of bright future. But he always remains abject and drab.

A. S. Desan, in his essay, "Anand's Art of Fiction: A Journey into existential Humanism" analyses the cause of Munoo's exploitation. He says,

Munoo's plight in *Coolie* is a symbol of societal negation of life, love and natural affection. Death versus life is the predominant emotion of the artist in the novel. The reader is given to understand how terrible and tragic the divide between the rich and the poor is. The reiterated emotion is that the poor belong to suffering by virtue of the divide created by the power of money which, Munoo comes to realize as everything on life. (97, 98)

The realistic picture of poverty can be seen in Anand's depiction of the sordid life of the labourers living in the slums of Bombay:

The bodies of numberless coolies lay strewn in tattered garbs. Some were curled up in knots, other lay face downwards on folded arms, others were flat on their chests... He had hardly gone three yards when he stumbled on a heap of patched quilt that half enclosed the rotting flesh of a leper.

Sick with disgust and pity and stung by fear he capered aside only to be greeted by the hoarse moan of a sheeping beggar, who protected her little child as she lay close to it, resting her head on her elbow and looking out into the dark with tiger's steel glance in her eyes. (188)

Hari represents all those coolies and beggars when he refers to death as 'a release', an escape from the miserable hell of life. C.D. Naramsimhaiah in *The Swan and The Eagle* says that death has ceased to frighten those poor, it is life that is threat and death, a release.

(Naramsimhaiah 126) Munoo, a coolie, in his struggle for existence, yells for the sympathy of his masters. Three characters from the rich class – Seth Prabha Dayal, his wife Parbati and Mrs. Mainwaring give him economic and emotional support. Four characters from the downtrodden – Lakshimi, Hari, Ratan and Mohan support him emotionally. A few from the rich class and the poor class show him sympathy but quite a few from both the classes exploit him.

Considering Gandhian influence on the novel we do not find any real Gandhian character in it. We get some glimpses of it in Seth Prabha Dayal. None else is sketched as a symbol of Gandhian philosophy, however, the entire novel can be called Gandhian critique of capitalism or industrialization. Anand reflects Gandhian ideas about industrialization. Gandhi related the issue of imperial economic exploitation of India to the indictment of machinery. It is the reason of man's indifference to man. Gandhi was against the capitalistic civilization due to its inhumanity. Anand's protagonist first gets fascinated by the machine but, later, the factory appears to be the inferno for him. Through the incident of Ratna's termination from the job and the union leaders' appeal to start a strike he tries to expose communist leaders. Rama Jha in her book *Gandhian Thoughts and Indo-Anglian Novelists*, says, "It is in the handling of this situation Anand's upholding of Gandhian values becomes clear (Jha 69).

Anand is criticized for his pessimistic view in the novel. Being a realistic novelist, he makes his protagonist die. His protagonist gets defeated in his struggle against class system. However, a critic, A. V. Krishna Rao, finds optimism in the pervasive pessimism on the death of Munoo. In his *Indo-Anglian Novel and the Changing Tradition* he says,

It is suggested by the death of Munoo, the coolie belongs to suffering and his life is wholly determined by the ruthless forces of the society but beneath his pervasive pessimism, there is an essential undercurrent of optimism, in that protagonist's death poignantly established the rotten state of society and the consciousness of the need for its drastic reform. (Rao 33)

If the end of *Coolie* is compared with that of *Untouchable*, it can be interpreted that the survival of the protagonist in *Untouchable* is in sharp contrast to that of one in *Coolie*. Anand wants to show the comparative destructive power of the two evils and suggests that one can survive the severity of caste but not that of money.

Two Leaves and a Bud

Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* is based on a factual report of the racial or imperial exploitation perpetrated by the British rulers in the early period of their regime. The bitterness with which he does it is worth noticing. Mulk Raj Anand in one of his letters to J.F. Brown says "I conceived *Two Leaves and a Bud* as a poem in suffering. I admit that it is the most bitter of my novels, but it is poetic. Were it a literary reportage, it would be hundred times more bitter." (qtd in Sinha 36) In the preface to the second edition of *Two Leaves and a Bud* Anand recalls;

What I to say in it was deep in me from the days when I lived for a while near a plantation in Assam and visited Ceylon and saw the inhumanity and barbarism prevalent there with the consequent dehumanization of the colonials involved in the process..... I would say that the descriptions in *Two Leaves and*

a Bud are comparative under estimates. Only the decent Englishmen at home will not easily believe that their representatives in the empire could be guilty of such excesses as are familiar to most of the subject races. (qtd in Geroge 71)

The title of the novel is taken from the refrain sung by the coolies while they work on tea plantation.

I will make a good sheaf

Plucking, plucking, plucking

Two leaves and a Bud

Two leaves and a Bud (*Two Leaves and a Bud* 110)

It is both crisp and suggestive and though the workers find a tilt and swing in it, it throws light on the monotonous routine of the work. They sing it for relaxation, but they uncover their own drabness. “The little hands clipped the leaves more eagerly and more nervously, two leaves and a bud” (50).

The novel is set in one of the tea-estates, a symbol of colonial exploitation in the British Empire situated on Assam hills in the north-east India. The entire drama takes place on the tea- estate. The protagonist Gangu who is from a small village near Amritsar is taken horizontally from Punjab to Assam. He is compelled to leave his native place on account of the loan his brother had taken against their ancestral land and the house, from the money- lender. The tea estate agent Buta takes him to the tea estate by creating an encouraging picture of the future.

On the tea estate De-la-Harve, the doctor visits the house of the planter Charles-Craft Crook. He talks ironically about the British rule in India and expresses his view that the British should allow the

Indians to run their own country. Gangu and his family are given a tiny tin hut to live in. They start working under the supervision of Reggie Hunt, the assistant planter, a symbol of evil and lust. Narian, a coolie, describes him rightly when he says “ He is a very Badmash sahib and he has no consideration for any one’s mother or sister. He is openly living with three coolie women!” (42).

After a week while going to the Bazaar, Gangu realizes that they are paid less than what he used to get alone by working on the fields at his village. He censures the white for the exploitation of the poor villagers. Even at the Bazaar the farmers are compelled to sell their produce at cheap rates and buy the essential commodities on high rates. Gangu returns home with high fever. His wife Sajani who represents “the fastidious village women whose whole life had been spent cleaning and washing and cooking and cleaning again,” (36) looks after him. But she herself gets infected and dies. The epidemic of malaria spreads.

The families and the British officers gather in the club to talk about the epidemic. Doctor Harve comes with Doctor Chunilal. Hunt insults him for his being a black doctor and orders the bearer to turn him out. He embodies the racial superiority of the White. Other English officers Ralf, Hitchcock and Twitee support him. Barbara, the daughter of the planter gets disturbed with their arrogance and pompous behaviour. Gangu goes to Burra Sahib (Croft) to borrow money for the funeral of his wife. But due to the fear of infection he orders Gangu to leave at once. Though he is the head of the estate he has neither any craft to mitigate the sufferings of the coolies nor any sympathy to understand their problems. Gangu borrows money from the baniya and cremates his wife.

Hunt succeeds in keeping the wife of Sardar Niogi, the supervisor, as his mistress. Chambeli, a dark woman, ex-mistress of Hunt, quarrels with the wife of Niogi. He lathi-charges the coolies gathered to watch the show. Hunt arrives on the spot and orders his supervisors to attack the coolies. Supervisors beat the coolies so mercilessly that one among them dies and a number of others get seriously injured. All of the coolies are provoked. Harwe advises them to retaliate. The angry but frightened group of coolies march towards the office with Gangu as their leader. But Hunt and Crock stop them on their way and compel them to return.

Gangu visits his neighbour Narain to express his wish to return home. Narain makes him realize how impossible it is even to think about it. He convinces Gangu and others that they have to settle there forever. Croft is disturbed with the unrest among the coolies. He sends the message for the arms and ammunition. The arrival of the plane disturbs the agitators. They run helter-skelter to save themselves from the possible air-raid. The doctor comes to help them but realizes that mutiny has been crushed. He decides to leave India.

The coolies settle down. Gangu is fined for the agitation; and he accepts the charge with the docility of the slave. His economic condition worsens with the interest he has to pay to the Baniya. The life becomes miserable to him. Hunt tries to seduce Gangu's daughter Leila in the tea garden. She shouts and runs back to her hut. Hunt follows her and calls her out. When the neighbours gather he gets nervous and shoots his revolver in the air. Gangu rushes to the spot and gets killed by Hunt who shoots him point blank. He is charged with the murder of Gangu. The trial takes place before a nine-man-jury out of whom seven are British declare Hunt 'not guilty'.

As the central theme of the novel is colonial exploitation, Anand portrays two types of characters, the rulers and the ruled. In the former group we have British characters while in the latter Indian characters. Most of the rulers are exploited. Most of the planters are cruel hearted businessmen. Most of the characters are lifelike but somehow the British persons represented here are not as true to reality as are the Indian. However, not a single character is developed thoroughly. Most of the English characters are shallow and due to the absence of psychological insight into the Indian characters they are also not so convincingly projected. The British characters are always conscious of their power and racial superiority. There is a somewhat uniform behavioural pattern in them through out India.

The Indian characters, on the contrary suffer meekly due to their inferiority complex and they surrender to the exploitation by their rulers in order to save themselves from hunger. The central character Gangu is a middle aged person who can be called a symbol of all those coolies in the early stage of the British colonialism who were lured away from their native places. As a victim of the feudal exploitation in the hands of the landlord at his native place, he is brought into the valley of Assam. Here he becomes the victim of the colonial and capitalistic exploitation. Ill-paid and ill-fed, he is compelled to live in unhealthy and unhygienic conditions. Though he knows that the 'Sahukar' has been the cause of his plight in the village, he has no other alternative but to repeat his mistake.

Like most of the coolies and peasants, Gangu too is superstitious by nature He considers his exploitation as one more reward for the misdeeds of his past life. But when the exploitations of all sorts weigh heavier on his soul his faith shatters. Some of the critics

say it is a tragic flaw in the character of Gangu. A peasant who is superstitious suddenly denies the presence of the god. But through the pessimistic words of Gangu, Anand shows how the strong impact of the colonial exploitation crushes the exploited's faith in god. Though Gangu is a central character, Anand does not make him rebellious. He shows courage to lead the march of the labourers but "a tremor of weakness travelled down his spine" (151). His instinct makes him lead the march but his experience makes him surrender to the exploiters. He cries, "Lord, God, deliver me save me from the wrath of my enemies. My children are young and my heart is weeping" (183).

In the end Gangu dies at the hands of the exploiter without any fault of his own. However, he does not die the death of a hero. He on the contrary dies like one of the millions of coolies who die of poverty, hunger and exploitation. An unexpected, untimely death of the hero creates anguish in the minds of the readers. The trial which follows the murder of the hero creates intense anger against the colonial, capitalist exploiters, which seems to be the very aim of the novelist.

If Gangu embodies the inferiority of the ruled, Reggie Hunt, the assistant planter embodies the racial superiority of the ruler. He flogs the coolies almost regularly. He calls Indians "crawling black men diseased and rotten" (269). He tries to seduce almost every woman on the plantation. His lust for woman turns him a murderer. A few partial British Jury declare him not guilty and free him to help the British for racial and capitalistic exploitation of the Indians.

John de-la-Harve seems to be the spokesperson of the novelist. Though by birth he is a White, he does not show any sign of racial superiority. He cannot tolerate the vileness of the colonial. We do not find in him shrewdness and cunning which are the normal qualities of

the English blood. His sympathy for the coolies is not superficial like that of the others. His awareness of “the dim anxieties and the strange crushed tenderness of the lives of the coolies” (9) makes him rebel against the British exploitation. He shows guts to stand against his own people. He ironically says to his beloved Barbara that the tea they drink is a symbol of Indian exploitation by them. He does not hesitate to speak with his fellow officers with the bantering manner. Some of the critics call it a flat character like other English characters. He is a stereotype character who embodies the missionary intention of the novelist. When he fails in his protest, he accepts the punishment passively and leaves the tea estate forever.

Charles-Croft Crook, the planter can be called a symbol of capitalistic exploitation. In Indian characters Narain as a leader overshadows Gangu. Though he leads the coolies he knows how futile their revolt against the ruler is.

The themes of Anand’s earlier novels *Coolie* and of *Two Leaves and a Bud* are the same. By shifting the act of the colonial exploitation from the cotton mill in Bombay to the tea plantation in Assam, by replacing innocent child Munoo by an experienced middle aged man Gangu, by replacing the foreman of the cotton mill by the assistant planter of the tea-estate, Anand succeeds in making the point that with a slight difference in the quality and the quantity, the colonial and the capitalistic exploitation is more or less the same everywhere in India. In fact the harassment of the coolies on the tea plantation is more gruesome than that of the cotton mills of the big cities. So Anand is more aggressive and bitter while attacking on the dehumanizing effects of colonialism and capitalism in *Two Leaves and a Bud*.

Through both the novels Anand wants to show that the effects of capitalistic exploitation such as the class system have become more dominant than the caste system in the Indian society. The protagonists of both the novels are high caste Kshatriyas by birth, but these births fail to lift them socially or economically in the capitalistic system because both belong to the same class, that of 'the poor'. High caste Hindus respect Sardar Butaram who is by caste a barber. When the high caste people turn penniless, they are compelled to greet and obey their low caste superiors.

T. Vasudeo Reddy in his essay on the comparative study of Anand's first three novels calls this novel 'A crusade against social exploitation'. He says,

Two Leaves and a Bud is more or less a veritable chronicle narrating the novelist's crusade against social exploitations and injustice.... the novel as a whole is a faithful record of tragic fate of a poor peasant who is rather callously denied of the fundamental right to minimum happiness, domestic as well as economic at home and in the society". (Reddy 50)

Exploitation in all its dimensions is thus the major theme of the novel. He faces capitalistic, colonial, racial and physical exploitation in his life. Sexual exploitation of women is also prevalent in the novel. The writer shows that the root cause of the exploitation is poverty and hunger.

Premila Paul in her thematic study of the novel says that this novel portrays, "the yawning hiatus between the haves and the have-nots, the exploiter and the exploited and the rulers and the ruled." (Paul 32). The capitalistic exploitation widens the gap between the rich and

the poor. This novel is an example of how the capitalistic exploitation kills the life of the poor labourers on one of the tea-plantations in Assam. This novel can be called a proletarian novel as it centers around the predicament of the poor labourers. It can also be called an example of the cancerous effects of the class system and colonial exploitation.

When the coolies are brought on the Tea-estate they realize that they have houses to live in but the houses resemble tin boxes which are like furnaces in the hot season and cold storages in the winter. They get neither higher wages nor free pieces of land. They become slaves. A number of sardars keep watch on all of the workers when they are at work. A number of watchmen keep watch on them when they are at rest. No worker is allowed to leave the tea-estate without permission. One of the coolies tells Gangu that he has been working on the tea plantation for the last twelve years but he has not been allowed to see his relatives.

But the employers feel that the peasants are far superior as slaves on the plantation. The wages are ten times better than those of the peasants on the fields at their native places. Though the capitalists profit by millions of rupees through the tea plantations they do not look after even the essential amenities for the workers. When Cholera spreads, the doctor says that last year it killed two hundred coolies. When he tells the planter of the tea-estate to look after the water supply the planters are not willing even to spend one or two lakhs on the employees because they are subhuman and do not deserve the benefits of hygiene. It shows the ruthless attitude of the capitalists. Doctor Harwe says,

I know that thousand of these coolies may be swept off by the parasites in those wells. And I feel conscience shriven. It would be criminal not to do anything about it since I know the water supply is infected. And considers the company earns millions of pounds every year on their labour, it wouldn't be such a terrible loss for it to spend a lakh to save the coolies from perishing through gnats and vests. (30,31)

This shows that the capitalists are not concerned with the miserable plight of the coolies on the plantation. They are more interested only in their own profits. In one sentence, Harwe shows the true picture of exploitation. He describes the contents of a cup of tea as "The hunger, the sweat and the despair of a million Indians!" (22).

The third phase of exploitation is the colonial exploitation. The coolies on the tea plantation look at the white as their 'Mai Baap' and expect kind attention from them. But through their brutal treatment the white present themselves as frightening monsters. Even the appearance of the White sahib creates panic among them. They create queer tension in the minds of the coolies at the entrance itself so that the coolies go pale with fear. The whites look at the coolies as barbarians from the point of view of intellect and culture. They treat them as subhuman creatures. They call them born liars. The irony however is this that the Whites pretend to be caretakers of the Coolies. Tweetie, an engineer says,

...after all, the coolie is favoured here to some extent. We respect his customs and conventions. He is housed and fed. He can keep goats and fowls. His acts are simple, and he is probably not unhappy. He may be oppressed, no one in truth

could deny that, I suppose, but he does not feel it as we should.
(32)

Hypocrisy of the whites is also revealed through Croft's statement when he condemns the coolies for their illiteracy in cleanliness and hygiene. When the responsibility of providing clean water lies with them, they blame the coolies for their negligence. They say that the whites are "roasting like a steak on a grill" in Indian climate, when they live in the houses built like Natural Historical Museum, and compel the coolies to live in tin huts which generate unbearable heat. The whites entertain themselves by constructing tennis courts, polo grounds, gardens and clubs but they do not provide the coolies with essential amenities. They live in such lanes which are so dirty that hookworm breed and thrive in abundance there. This proves how indifferent they are towards the welfare of the ruled. It also shows how they exaggerate their worst instinct and call out the worst in the Indian.

While presenting the conflict between the two races, Anand gives a proper analysis of the arrogance of the Whites and the submissiveness of the Blacks. The Whites keep the coolies at the safe distance for two reasons. They think themselves to be superior to the coolies and they are also afraid of them. They always find flaws in Indian persons. They call them civilized barbarians who need constant flogging to improve them. They are also of the opinion that without the masters like the British they are bound to perish. "Almost all Englishmen in India believed, with varying degrees of individual emphasis, that the Indians could not rule themselves" (32). Anand says that cowardliness is also the reason behind their aloofness. The Whites know that they are less in number and if the coolies revolt against them

they cannot even protect themselves. They guard their living places as well as places of entertainment from the animals and the black men. Even the planter Croft considers his life a risky one because he is under the constant threat of the coolies and labour riots. They gather almost instantly in the club whenever there is even a slightest agitation among the coolies. This is very ironic that they send the message to call the departments of the company defence such as the Police, the Military and even the Air Force for arms and ammunition to crush the possible revolt.

These Whites in India however create quite a different image of theirs in the Western countries by pretending that the whites are respected in India for their superior clothes, praised for their knowledge and admired for their personal qualities. The new officers from England come to India with that image in their minds but soon come to know that they can control the Indians only by keeping them constantly under pressure. Hunt represents all the British in India when he says,

They (the black) would have over run the White race because of their sheer predominance in numbers if they had not been kept in check. They must be taught to become human beings for they were a thousand years behind. And the Whites could only rule them by putting the fear of God into them and by dealing with them severely when they played monkey tricks. (269)

On the contrary, the Indians, the exploited, quite often prepare an easy way for the exploiters by their too servile behaviour. Neither hunger nor exploitation provokes them to rebel against the exploiters because "Abject submission is there almost second nature" (49). This passive submission to the exploitation at the hands of the rulers is

condemned by one of the Whites. Dr. Harwe calls the coolies, “docile, gutless, spineless coolies who never raised their voices except on the day of the Holi” (148). This overall submissive psyche, according to Anand, is the reason of their victimization. Their faith in Indian philosophy of Karma and their superstitions make them submissive. They blame their misdeeds in the past life for their present misfortune. They do not realize their strength and hence underestimate themselves before the whites. B.K.Bhattacharya in one of his articles rightly observes. “These half-clad thousands with the strength of a tiger and innocence of a lamb would take decades to understand that they are human” (qtd in Priyadarshani 106)

Through Dr.Harwe’s speech Anand expresses his views about the capitalist rule:

Why do these swarming, under-nourished, bleary, worm eaten millions of India suffer so? Is it because of the festering swamps of the tropics breed disease and that they cannot check the tribulations of destiny? Certainly it seemed to me so; at first that fate had here conspired with the seasons to obliterate everything capriciously. And it seemed an old civilization in decay... Therein lies the necessity of revolution in this country. On the one hand, the vast masses, prisoners of so many chains, bearing the physical signs of grief of lassitude, even of death and on the other hand, the supercilious rich, wrapped up in their self-assurance and complacency, never one questioning the ideals of glory, and power and wealth... (123,124)

Physical exploitation seems to be a very common sight on the tea plantation. They punish the so called lazy coolies through the

Indian supervisors. When the agitation breaks, Hunt does not hesitate to ride his horse in the thick crowd.

“Strike them” he yelled to the warders, “strike them”. And with his lips tight and his head strung into a wooden hardness, he rode his horse into the thick of the crowd, tumbling on the men, women and children who pushed and groveled and ran in utter confusion. The frightened mob screamed and wailed as they scrambled and rushed in frantic dismay, but he rode straight at them, filled with a wild rage to destroy” (194,195).

Narain shows the cruelty of the estate owners through the stories of the coolies on the tea plantation. They do not hesitate to kill those who try to escape from their prisons. They do not allow the coolies to form their trade unions. Neither do they allow the leaders of the trade union outside to visit the tea estates. They do not allow reporters to enter so that their brutality should not be revealed.

When Anand was criticized for exaggerating the colonial exploitation in the Assam tea estates, Saros Cowasjee defended him by stating that most of the facts are based on the report of the Royal Commission of Labour. In fact “...far from exaggerating matters he has minimized the brutalities of the English Planters and the hardships inflicted on the coolies (qtd in Fisher 46).

Sexual exploitation is portrayed as a very common feature of the tea plantation. Nobody’s mother or sister or even wife is safe on the tea estate. The women coolies are compelled to work on the wages less than those of the male coolies. They leave their children in the baskets while going to the tea gardens. When they return they find many of them lying in the dust or a drain or even dead by the wayside.

Motherhood seems to be a bane for the women because many children die of malnutrition and lack of proper nourishment. But they keep on giving birth to the babies in order to increase hands to earn their living.

The women coolies are compelled to work as rigorously as male coolies. The supervisors do not hesitate to punish women. The picture of a mother who is chased to the work spot even while she is feeding her child shows how inhuman the rulers are even towards the women. The white compel the coolies to hand over their wives and daughters to them for the sake of fun and frolic and many a time to satisfy their sexual passion. The young officers like Hunt are always in search of young girls and women. Narain tells Gangu that Hunt stays with three women who are wives of the coolies. When Hunt comes to the work sight he tries to exhibit his boasting personality on the women. “the coolie women shuffled like hens at the arrival of a much dreaded cock” (49).

Being the masters, they expect that their slaves should offer their wives and daughters to them willingly. Sometimes they bribe the poor husbands by ‘bakshish’ to win their wives. If they protest they use their guns to terrorize them. Hunt offers five acres of land to Niyogi for his wife whereas he lashes one of the coolies, for not giving up his wife to him. When they get fed up with them they throw them away in order to set the new ones. In urban areas the British behave like cunning imposters. But in the remote part like the valley of Assam they behave like wild animals. Here they are not afraid of the poor coolies because they know they will not raise their voice against them.

Apart from this multi dimensional exploitation, coolies are also victims of poverty and hunger. The peasants from various parts of the country join the tea estates as coolies in order to save themselves from

the poverty and hunger. But both follow them there too like their shadows. Narain comes to the tea estate as victim of the famine. Three of his brothers and two sons die of hunger. Narain and his wife survive by eating the figs and leaves of trees. They escape from death and come to experience the hell even before the death. Gangu also faces the same destiny. When he broods over his poverty he shows his faith in God's honest intentions He says,

I have always said it and I say it now again that though the earth is bought and sold and confiscated, God never meant that to happen, for he doesn't like some persons to have a comfortable living and others to suffer from dire poverty. He has created land enough to maintain all men, and yet many die of hunger and most live under a heavy burden of poverty all their lives, as if the earth were made for a few and not for all men. (257,248)

Deep in his heart, Gangu knows that he has no hope in the tea estates. He not only accepts his destiny but also becomes indifferent to it. "He felt he wanted no gold, no silver but only food and to exist" (261). Though his senses turn numb by the cruel fate, the sense of hunger stays perennially insistent. The meager wages, the penalty to be paid to the office and persistent demand of money from the money-lender frustrate him to such an extent that he says to Narain:

Yes brother, money is everything. It is the crux of the world-gold. Gold is the living source of man. Every absurdity appears agreeable in a man on whom gold has smiled, even though he looked like a dog and think like a donkey. (264)

This realization makes him upset. He starts looking at the world with a sense of resignation. There seems to be neither improvement nor

escape from the sufferings. When a pregnant woman totters to her feet at the time of agitation and dies before his eyes Gangu says, “Happy death,... with a soul which had tired of pinning in its sorrows” (225). This is the fate of not only that woman but also of Gangu and other coolies at the tea plantation.

Thus the novel portrays the miseries of the Indian coolies under poverty, hunger, and the multiple dimensions of exploitation. Tracing Gandhian impact on the novel, there are neither Gandhian characters nor Gandhian philosophy directly delivered. But through the conflict between the two groups ‘the rulers’ and ‘the ruled,’ Anand shows the Gandhian influence. The conflict is pitched between the exploiter who represent violence and the exploited who represent submissiveness as a part of ‘non violence’. Lindsay a critic rightly says that the book helps us to “understand something of the reality of the Gandhian non-resistant movement where the passivity is rigorously alive with the deep warm togetherness of a folk who own a long memory of peaceful co-operative ways” (qtd in Jha 71).

While talking about the impact of *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Kamala Das in her review of one of Anand’s novels says,

The two novels had done this job as neatly as an assassin’s knife killing in me the desire to remain safely ensconced in the feudalistic society of my hometown and just as the knife lies abandoned after the deed is done, the books lay forgotten. Only their message flowed in my veins, causing a rage to rise whenever a laborer was flogged by an irate relative or when a pregnant maid servant lay floating in the well where her rich lover had thrown her at dead of night (Das 59).

If a poetess like Kamala Das reacts with such a rage against the exploiters, one can say that Anand succeeds in his purpose of writing this novel.

The Sword and the Sickle

The novel *The Sword and the Sickle* deals with the exploitation of the Indian peasants by the British Colonialist and the Indian landlords. Anand announced the title of the novel as *All Men Are Brothers* but on the suggestion of George Orwell, he named it *The Sword and the Sickle*. It is adapted from a stanza by William Blake in 'Poems from a Note-Book, 1773':

The sword sung on the barren heath,
The Sickle in the fruitful field,
The Sword he sung a song of death,
But could not make the sickle yield. (qtd in Cowasjee, 112)

The sword is a symbol of force, born to suppress and defeat, whereas the sickle is a symbol of the suppressed, defeated peasants. As the novel deals with the theme of exploitation, the title is in concord with the theme of the novel.

There are two plots running parallel to each other throughout the novel. On one hand it is a struggle of Lal Singh a revolutionary who fights for the rights of the peasants and on the other it is a love story of Lalu and Maya. The story of Lal Singh as a revolutionary develops through four phases. The first period is the war-period which deals with Lal Singh's participation in the war, his capture by the enemy and his release. The second phase deals with Lalu's return to his native place. The third phase, which forms the major bulk of the story, deals with Lalu's role in the agrarian agitation. The last phase is

Lalu's imprisonment, when he starts dreaming about his future with his wife and his son.

Considering the reflection of reality in the novel, it can be observed that the characters and events in this novel are related to the persons alive and the events occurred in early twenties in one of the provinces of India. The major incident is based on Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography* (1936) which Anand has reviewed such as Kissan's march towards Allahabad to make the politicians aware of the inhuman treatment to the peasants by the landlord and Nehru's approval to visit the place to make an enquiry form the core of the plot. The arrest of Lalu and his comrades and their trial are historically true. The period at the background of the novel is a transition period in the history of India both politically and socially. Anand observes the changing political and social scenario and comments on them.

Regarding the theme of the novel Krishna Nandan Sinha in his book *Mulk Raj Anand* calls it a novel of social protest. He says,

It is, an emphatic document of peasant life caught in the phase of national regeneration. It seeks to achieve its purpose by dramatizing the class struggle and by offering social criticism. (Sinha 52)

Some of the critics call it "an intimate picture of Indian rural life" and others call it 'a novel written with burning sincerity.' The attempt is sincere but turns out a monotonous doctrinal writing. He succeeds in making his point through the novel but fails to achieve success as a writer. He gives a realistic picture of the Indian peasants after the First World War. They had been the victims of the

exploitation by the landlords and money lenders. But during this period their miseries are intensified by the colonial exploitation.

Lal Singh's family becomes the victim of the feudal exploitation. Lal Singh loses almost all the members of his family, his ancestral house and his land. His miseries are doubled by the colonial exploitation. He loses his job in the military as a reward of his services to the British army in the World War. Both these exploitations convert him into a revolutionary. He decides to help the victims of the feudal exploitation. He goes to Rajgrah with a mission "to knit the small landholders, the tenants, the evicted tenants and labourers together and to formulate their immediate and local demands" (90). The feudal system which is prevalent in almost every village of India is responsible for the miserable plight of the peasants. The manner in which the leader of the evicted peasants approaches the landlord shows that they are treated like animals by the landlords.

Whereupon the one eyed man gingerly lifted the curtain and began to crawl towards the place where shoes were discarded, with his outstretched hands joined before him, his forehead rubbing the ground, his black face closed in a silent, shriveled knot of misery above the neat beard, his body dragging on the floor in a way that was both revolting and yet strangely poignant. A host of other pigmy sized black men crowded in behind him, the whites of their eyes glowing in the black hollows and their joined hands lifted towards the company, cracked, horny and repellent, their whole down-at-heel manner an insult to the light. (97)

Anand throws light on the views of the landlords on the poor peasants through the Count's ironic speech. He says,

... I am told that whether empires come or empires go, the peasant is a slow person who goes about with a bowed head under a merciless sky and always continues to do so.... And some say that the peasants persist because there are so many of them, that the loss of a couple of lakhs through death makes no difference. (135)

Nasirabad peasants are evicted from their lands for the non-payment of the revenue to the landlords due to the failure of the season of harvest. As a result of the famine, peasants are unable to feed their families, but they are compelled to pay the revenue by the landlords and their lords. The tenants who had been cultivating the lands for generation are evicted without any notice and handed over to the new tenants. All this is done by the landlords to show their loyalty to the British and to maintain their pompous life style. There is no other authority for redress of the grievances of the tenants. When the Count asks the peasants why they do not go to the police, one of the peasants says, "The police will beat us if we go to them." (168)

The Manager of the Nasirabad estate kills the son of a tenant "A son was ordered to do forced labour and because he refused, the boy was beaten so mercilessly by the Manager that he died" (166). Nobody dares to raise voice against the Manager. Abject poverty and helplessness compel the parents to go to the court not for justice but to save them from the further wrath of the Manager and to appeal to the Manager through the Count not to evict them from their houses. When the peasants get the news of the murder of the tenant's son they show their helplessness. They do not even express their anger. Anand says,

But now they only sat up, crouching or kneeling, their hands still joined, their eyes still blank, which their black brows

intensified into a rudimentary abjectness, as if they had been reduced to the last limit of degradation, to the primitive state of their ancient ancestors, in whom waves of conquerors had instilled the darkest fears during two thousand years of history. The shadow of the old fortress, and the moldering, half-buried, discoloured ruins of a grave of the time of a later conquest, filled the air with doom, casting an almost tangible weight of oppression. (166, 167)

The description confirms that docility is in their blood. They cannot raise their voice against the exploitation. On the contrary, the arrogance runs in the very blood of the landlords. They consider that exploitation of the tenants is their birth right. The peasants are inspired by Lalu to show their protest. When the peasants take out the procession of the dead body of the child, with a view to showing their protest, the Manager attacks the procession through his men and bull dogs. He does not hesitate to fire at the rebellions. The Manager kills one of the peasants and compels them to retreat.

When the peasants succeed in the case against them before the White Magistrate, they grow in confidence. The blind peasant Sukhua gives the landlord 'a resounding slap' "The old days have gone... Lecher! If you go teasing other people's wives, I will teach you a lesson" (324). The violence on the part of peasants is like an eruption of a volcano. They show a kind of arrogance through a number of such acts. A Marxist revolutionary Verma Sahib calls it hooliganism. Anand expresses his own views as a common man through one of the revolutionaries. For instance, the student Razwi says,

I would like to ask you one or two questions Is it only "hooliganism" when the peasants lift their hands? Is it not

“hooliganism” when the landlords or the police beat them up?... why not protest against that “hooliganism” a little?.... why is violence unthinkable and undesirable against those who do violence to us? If the English declare that they won India by the sword and by the sword shall they hold it, why can’t we say that we shall won India back by the sword and by the sword shall we beep it! (328)

The feudal exploitation is always supported by the colonial exploitation. The police always support the landlords. They arrest Lalu and the evicted peasants for beating a chaparasi of the co-operative bank but they do not arrest the Count who is involved in the same act. They do not take any action against the Manager who kills the peasant boy by brutal treatment and who shoots a peasant with the gun. The Superintendent of Police, Captain Effendi, helps the Manager in his brutal treatment to the tenants. He directly supports the Nawab to face the agitation of the evicted peasants.

Through a dialogue between Lalu and Gandhi, Anand confronts with the two attitudes towards the colonial and feudal exploitation. Lal Singh says,

They (peasant) are suffering from poverty, and are weak. They cannot protect themselves against the continual threat of being beaten up. When we were intercepted in our march on the outskirts of Nashirabad, I called on them to hit back. That had the proper effect. (201)

While criticizing the colonialists for their tyranny, Anand does not spare the Indians who help them through their so called loyalty to them. Sukhua calls these black employees ‘the Black sahibs’ who are

worse than 'the White'. They do not have conscience. They work only for money. Anand observes that the railway officials provide safety only to the rich and not to the crude rustic. Even the 'black sahibs' behave arrogantly with the peasant due to the support of the British. A chaparasi of the co-operative bank beats a clerk before the Count. He does not pay heed to the Count (the brown sahib) because he is supported by the White sahibs. Later the same chaparasi and the Police beat Lalu mercilessly, before the crowd.

The laws exist only in the books. The British bend them according to the need of the Landlords. The count observes,

If the law of the land needed strengthening in certain respects in favour of property owners, it had our ardent support, as it protected us in the enjoyment of our justly acquired possessions and kept those who possessed nothing in their proper places !”
(221)

It is always a Hindustani who is at the throat of another Hindustani. Anand proves it through the Gurkha watchman and the bank chaparasi. Both cross their limits while torturing the poor peasants. They show the arrogance of their white masters while interacting with their own people. But through a sub-Inspector Anand shows that these are some, who do it in order to save their jobs. Anand is very sarcastic about the policemen Lalu says “...God who made the peasants poor made them free, while the sarkar who made the peasants policemen, made them slaves” (281).

The economic policy of the British can be called the best example of the colonial exploitation.

They had fixed the prices at which the peasants should sell their crops... and the peasants had to sell whether they wanted to or not.. But they had not fixed the prices of the produce of the towns which the peasants wanted to buy. (189)

The exploitation of woman is one of the prime concerns of Mulk Raj Anand. Through Maya he throws light on the problem of widows in India. A widow is treated as an ominous person in Hindu religion. She is proscribed by very rigid rules. Being the daughter of the landlord, Maya suffers more restrictions than the common women. Her servants guard her like watchdogs. She is always chaperoned by her mother. Maya revolts against the social norms as she breaks through the shackles of the vicious society and elopes with her lover and marries him. In the society where widows are looked at as 'fair game', remarriage could have been a good solution. It can give her some status and dignify her in the eyes of the society.

Anand expresses his views on women's dignity and pride through the love story between Lalu and Maya. He wants such a country "where women, who were sold to the highest bidder, have become free to choose their own lives..." (103). By making a widow remarry, Anand tries to bestow that dignity in the rigid social system of the Indians. Maya who thinks that it is a sin to meet a man in privacy, boldly asks Lalu "so you thought women only choose their men freely in vilayat" (80).

Anand also comments on the widening gulf between the rich and the poor. The exploitation of the poor by the rich knows no colour or race.

Everywhere it was the same. In fact it seemed to him, there were no black or white people, no yellow or brown people, not

even French and German, English and Hindustanis and Chinese and Japanese but there were only two races and two religions in the world, the rich and the poor... (83)

Anand wants to show that due to the colonial and capitalistic exploitation the entire world is divided into only two classes 'the rich' and 'the poor'. The rich are becoming richer and the poor, the poorer. The rich do not consider the poor as human beings due to the barriers between them. Anand expects these barriers to be removed. The Count says, "Once we have broken the barriers that subsist between them; there will rise new morality among them, a new sense of right and wrong"(244).

With the help of so many descriptions, Anand throws light on the plight of the poverty stricken peasants. In the death procession, the peasants cannot even walk due to their physical weakness.

But the other peasants half walked, half ran, with eager set faces, as if they were escaping from some evil spirit, their bodies naked above the waists, shining like seals with the sweat that poured down their backs. Their bare legs covered with thick black-brown crusts of skin and dust, their voices subdued. (174)

The entire description throws light on the humiliation of the peasants. Their appearance indicates their poverty and hunger. In such a dire poverty the feudal system compels them to follow certain customs.

The one-eyed man came forward, put four nickel anna pieces at count's feet, according to the custom which the landlord of

Nasirabad had established for tenants when they came to air their grievances before him. (98)

Anand wants to show the conflict in the minds of the revolutionaries on the advent of Gandhi on the political scene of India. They fail to achieve their purpose through the violent acts. They look at Gandhi as a man of deformity and at his philosophy with indifference but when they fail in their revolutionary acts; the Count suggests that Gandhi should be called upon. One of the revolutionaries says that Gandhi has bad opinion about communism. He says,

... When a man becomes a god he turns his back an ordinary mortals and lives by a compromise with the other gods and colonial imperialism. According to this new god, Gandhi, the communists are evil people, in league with the Devil who meet in desolate cremation grounds and desecrate the dead, spit on idols in temples, abuse the mighty and temple upon all human decency... (196)

Lalu and the Count both make fun of Tiwari and his Gandhian philosophy. Verma sahib criticizes Gandhi for his support to industrialization. He calls him a man with dual policy. The count says, “Don’t you see that he is an ingenious Gujarati bania with the shopkeeper’s sure instinct for making money” (210). Lalu calls him devil or a man with physical deformity. Due to all these remarks some of the critics feel that Anand shows his anti-Gandhi and pro-Nehru attitude in this novel. However, it is not true. To understand this impression of the critics based on the different views expressed by the revolutionaries, the period in which the story takes place needs to be taken into consideration. The story takes place at the beginning of the Gandhian age. Anand wants to show the attitudes of the revolutionary

groups who were under the domination of the Marxist philosophy and were influenced by the Russian revolution in early twenties.

Anand wants to demonstrate how both the groups think ill about one another. The Count thinks that Gandhi should be tried to solve the crisis. He says, “As you know God appeals to the imagination of our peasants and can still be exploited” (196). By making the two ideologies confront with each other, Anand proves superiority of the non-violence over the revolutionaries’ philosophy of ‘hit-back’. Anand represents Gandhi’s philosophy in most of his novels through a number of characters but in this novel Gandhi himself explains the philosophy of non-violence.

Non-violence does not mean submission to the will of the tyrant. Working under the law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust Empire and lay the foundation for that Empire’s down fall or its regeneration. (201)

Gandhi’s philosophy is brought into the small village by a lawyer and Congress leader Tiwari. He warns the Count against his revolutionary activities. He says, “I am afraid your struggle will not develop in this country, Kanwar sahib if you base it on hatred... As Gandhiji says, our struggle must be completely non-violent...” (157).

Gandhian impact on Anand, as in all his other social novels, is clearly visible in this novel too. In fact, this is the only novel in which there is an open encounter between Anand’s principal character and Gandhi. In *Untouchable* too Gandhi appears, but he delivers only a public speech. In this novel the encounter scene plays a significant role because it converts the revolutionary protagonist into a Gandhian.

He accepts purification through the fire of suffering as Gandhi advises him to do. Mahatma Gandhi expresses his opinion on Lal Singh's act that strength does not come from the physical force. It comes from the inner spiritual will.

Anand, in his contemplation on the novel in 1973 says,

I have been condemned for writing *The Sword and the Sickle*, I think unfairly, I feel it is... the only kind of third volume to the trilogy. I wanted to state there the rise of consciousness and awareness of the new sense of brotherhood.... The awareness of brotherhood which Lal Singh declares from jail is a reassertion of faith in the struggle to grow and to fight for survival. This revelation comes to him in jail only after he's seen that he had been a political agitator in the pay of (a) big land-lord turned a leader who cases the people for his own glory,"... I was trying to say that leaders who are going to case people for their own ends, to attain power, are... not the leaders who will bring the destiny of human beings into anything like fulfilment. (qtd in Fisher 71)

The careful scrutiny of the novel shows that Anand succeeds in his mission of portraying political developments in India at the beginning of the Gandhi Era. In conclusion of the exegesis it can be inferred that though the novel sincerely depicts the exploitation of the poor peasants by the landlords under the British rule, it does not find approval among Indian critics due to its artistic failure.

The Road

The theme of *Untouchable* (1936) recurred twenty five years later in *The Road*. Though the setting and characters are changed, the

theme of exploitation of the low caste by the high caste is the same. Bulandsheher of Uttar Pradesh is replaced by Govardhan of Haryana. Bhakha is replaced by Bhikhu. Pandit Kalinath is replaced by Pandit Suraj Mani. Mala and Rukmani replaced by Sohini of *Untouchable*. When Saros Cowasjee asked him why he wrote this novel since he had covered much the same ground in *Untouchable*, Anand replied;

Well it was a kind of shock to me when I went to live in Haryana, twenty miles from Delhi, in the human empire of Jawaharlal Nehru, to find that the outcastes not only in South India, but in the mixed north were still consigned to the limbs of oblivion. There was something tragic coming to me in the fact that the caste Hindus would not touch the stones carried by the untouchables to make the road, because the stones had been touched by the untouchables. I mentioned this to the great Nehru. He did not believe me. He was quite angry at my mentioning this awkward fact. I said I would prove it him by showing it to him in the 'enchanted mirror'. (qtd. in Cowasjee 161)

Anand wants to point out that attainment of independence has not made any significant change in the misfortune of the untouchables. The low caste people turn a little rebellious but the high caste also turn more rigid in their attitude towards them. Anand suggests that it is necessary for the high caste Hindus to get down from the camel of their conservative attitude to achieve prosperity. Dhooli Singh says "No one can enter the little door sitting on a camel" (23).

The Road deals with a single incident in the life of an untouchable in a small village. The incident of constructing the road to facilitate transportation of milk from Govardhan to Gurgaon, a town

nearby creates a conflict between the caste Hindus and the low caste untouchables. The construction of the road shortens the distance between two places but widens the gap between the two classes. The novel opens with the conflict between the high caste Hindu boys and Bhikhu the low caste untouchable on the issue of the untouchables going to the temple. The humiliation of his mother infuriates Bhikhu. When a kind hearted man intervenes, the boys run away muttering filthy abuses.

Bhikhu goes to Dhooli Singh's field to his work on the construction. On his way he broods over the conflict and looks around the well for the landlord's daughter Rukmani whom he loves. A seventeen year old beautiful girl is also drawn towards the untouchable but her mother's advice to beware of the low caste warns her to avoid the thoughts of Bhikhu. She says "I am pure the daughter of the landlord" (17).

Thakur Singh criticizes Dhooli Singh for his close relations with the untouchables and warns him that if they get financially self reliant, the arrogant untouchables will one day dominate the high caste Hindus. He condemns Dhooli Singh for defying 'Dharma'. His arrogance of class superiority makes him believe that exploitation of the low caste is his birth right. On the contrary Dhooli Singh who is equal to the Thakur in social status plays a significant role in the emancipation of the untouchable. He tries to make the Thakur aware of the hardships of the untouchables who have neither land nor work.

The Thakur meets Pandit Suraj Mani, the only Priest of the temple to enforce religious sanctions against Dhooli Singh, but changes his mind and requests him to persuade Dhooli Singh. Pandit Suraj Mani, whom Dhooli Singh calls a crafty Brahmin dog, is shrewd

enough to exploit the situation. He decides to go to Dhooli Singh to have a compromise with him.

The Thakur's son Sanju expresses his reluctance to Dhooli Singh towards his son Lachman for his close relations with the untouchables. Lachman tries to protect his father's intention but agrees with his friend's opinion on joining them in the battle against the untouchables. The fear of losing Rukmani, his would be wife does not allow him to quarrel with Sanju.

Sanju and Lachman set the huts of the untouchables on fire. The untouchables understand that it is a punishment for their children's act against the high caste Hindus. When Dhooli Singh comes to know that his son is behind the arson he feels himself guilty for it and offers shelter to the untouchable victims. He offers them food and clothes. The government agent, Diwan inquires into the incident of arson. Lachman admits his guilt and returns to his father. Sanju, another culprit in the act of arson accepts Dhooli Singh's offer to join them in the task of the construction of the road in order to save himself from the punishment. The Pandit also understands the situation and joins Dhooli Singh.

The Thakur, gets frustrated with his son's sin and Pandit's treachery. But his son returns home soon. He feels guilty of joining the untouchables. After the completion of the road, the Thakur invites Bhikhu home. Rukhmani offers him water in a brass cup. Sanju turns violent for polluting the brass cup and kicks the cup out of Bhikhu's hand. Bhikhu is hurt but does not retaliate. Humiliated, he leaves and walks towards the newly constructed road, in the direction of Delhi "where there would be no caste or outcaste..." (111). The conflict ends

with the defeat of the untouchable. The failure makes Bhikhu leave his birth place.

Anand is severely criticized for the protagonist's escapisms. C.J. George in his *Mulk Raj Anand : His Art and Concerns* says,

Bhiku is portrayed through the novel as a defiant person who faced the realities of life boldly and with determination. Hence his escapist action at the end of the novel is not in conformity with his character. (Anand, 50)

Bakha of *Untouchable* and Bhikhu of *Coolie* share almost the same aspirations as well as appearance. But Anand fails to do justice to Bhikhu as a protagonist. Some critics call him a shadow of Bakha, some say that he is a caricature of Bakha. Bakha succeeds in reflecting the pangs of the untouchables through his inner conflict. He thinks about the retaliation against his exploitation but does not take any action. Bhikhu, on the contrary is a little more rebellious. He stands firmly against the high caste Hindu boys to protect his honour. Both face the slap incident and both react almost similarly. Both get furious but succumb to the exploitation. When the Thakur's son slaps "Bhikhu stretched out his to full height again till the Landlord's son cowered back"(111).

Bhikhu is thus the authentic voice of the downtrodden, low caste poor. He is both a victim and a rebel. He has almost all the qualities of the hero. Rukmani finds him, "...young body with the pucca- coloured, even face (14) finest man among the outcastes gay and good" (18).

At times, he goes against the rigid social system but realizes that there is no escape from the sufferings. Bhikhu belongs to the class of

the exploited but he has guts of the class of the exploiter. Simultaneously, he has a common sense and sanity.

He knows that he is being exploited without any fault on his part. He says that one is a leather worker by profession and not by birth. When he is obstructed by the high caste Hindu boys he protests strongly. He feels “why should he suffer this humiliation now ... The bard in him, who felt equal to life inside him if not from his status in the world, summoned up a strange foolhardy courage into his limbs...” (5). He is painfully conscious of his exploitation, of his ill treatment by the boys of the high caste. He knows he is physically capable of hitting them back but he socially is not capable to do so.”...he remembered that he was a chamar untouchable and controlled himself”(110). He only burns with anger whenever any caste Hindu exploits him.

Though Bhikhu is the principal character, Dhooli Singh also occupies a place of equal importance. Anand casts him in the mould of a social reformer. He goes against his own family and caste, for the emancipation of the untouchables. He does not hesitate to bend before an untouchable to express his apology for his son’s guilt. Such type of gesture is not only uncommon but also revolutionary on the Indian social background. He performs another revolutionary act by offering shelter to the untouchable women in his house. Though he accepts his religion without any doubt, he feels that the religion should not lay down the hurdles in the construction of the road which paves the way to progress, development and modernity.

He is undaunted by the sneering attitude of the high caste exploiters. It does not mean, however, that he is completely free from the superiority sense of the high caste Hindus. When the Thakur threatens him that his closeness to untouchables may induce his

daughter to marry an untouchable, Dhooli Singh says “she will not set her affection on the mean” (23). But when his son involves himself in the arson he frees himself from the shackles of orthodoxy and identifies himself with untouchables.

The female characters in the novel are simple, sincere but suffering souls. There is not much difference between the exploitation of the women of high caste and that of the low caste. If we compare Bhikhu’s mother Laxmi, Sanju’s mother Bhagwanti and Lachman’s mother Sapti with each other, they are found not much different in their attitude towards life. All of them are superstitious, religious, stereotype, rustic women. The same is true about the Thakur’s daughter Rukmani and Dhooli Singh’s daughter Mala. Both of them are exploited through the dowry system. They do not have their own voice. They cannot venture to break the ties that bind them to the Indian traditions. These female characters are thus relegated to the background. There is no need of elaborate characterization in the development of the central theme as the theme does not deal with the exploitation of an individual. It is an exploitation of one class by other.

The novel deals with the conflict between the high caste and the low caste Hindus. The high caste Hindus refuse to touch the stones quarried by the untouchables. The irony here is that the villagers are ready to enjoy the yield of the fields tilled by the untouchables but refuse to touch the stones quarried by them. So the real problem is not of polluting the religion. The untouchables are allowed to walk in the streets. Bhikhu and the boys of high caste Hindus have been friends. They play together and work together on the fields. “The earth had kept them together, but the togetherness had now been lost because

money wages had come in” (8). Even Bhikhu says to his mother, “Since money come into the world there has been less and less love” (2). An advent of the wage system for the work disturbs the high caste Hindus. The landlord says “They hope to ingratiate themselves with the sarkar and earn money so that they can buy the status of the twice born” (18).

This economic independence instills courage in the untouchables to stand against the high caste Hindus. Babu, one of the untouchable friends of Bhikhu shows the awareness of their economic independence when he says, “We are field labourers no more, growling on the earth” (22). He shows courage to comment on high caste Dhooli Singh for the arson. He calls him one among the exploiters when Laxmi tells Bhikhu that it is inauspicious to see a Brahmin’s face as first thing in the morning. It appears unusual but the statement clearly indicates that they no more call themselves inferior to the Brahmin. Even Bhikhu’s illiterate friends are not riddled with the false sense of karma. They do not regard the caste Hindus in anyway superior to them.

The exploitation of women is yet another dominant theme of *The Road*. Mala and Rukmini become the victims of the dowry system whereas Bhagwanti and Sapti are the victims of the patriarchal system. Bhagwanti though a wife of the Sarpanch of the village, has no voice of her own. Sapti, goes against her husbands wish but only temporarily. Both Bhagwanti and Sapti are superstitious women. Pandit Suraj Mani takes disadvantage of their blind faith. He compels Sapti to desert her husband and compels Bhagwanti to perform special pooja for his own advantage. Laxmi is the victim of the social exploitation. Being a woman of a low caste, she is not allowed to go to

the temple. Rukmani and Mala belong to the high caste but they are not even considered as human beings while arranging their marriages. They are offered by their parents in a bargain for the marriages of their sons. Rukmani exposes her anguish over the social system. "O why, O Why were the tribes of men so privileged" (100).

The Road is a symbol of progress, a symbol of sympathetic gesture of the low caste downtrodden towards the high caste Hindus, a symbol of friendship offered by the exploited to the exploiters. The completion of the road symbolizes the advent of modernization but the humiliation of Bhikhu displays rigidity of the orthodox caste system.

Anand has been criticized by many for the way the novel ends. According to Premila Paul, the end of the novel "...makes Anand's views quite ambiguous" (24). According to C.J.George also, Bhikhu's act of heading towards Delhi is confusing. George says,

The hero's action hardly has any symbolic significance. Perhaps Bhikhu must have reached the conclusion that even if prosperity and modernity embrace the village, the attitude of the villagers will not change and untouchability is bound to haunt and harass him and therefore, the solution to his problem may be found in his anonymous mingling with multitudes in Delhi. (George 49)

As a realistic novelist, Anand does not end the novel with the happy union of the two classes. He knows that untouchability is deeply rooted in the Indian psyche. The high caste youth 'Sanju' accepts the compromise to work with untouchables only superficially. He returns to his people and shows his arrogance, which is his true nature. He kicks the brass cup of water from Bhikhu's hand and mourns. "Our whole house will have to be purified" (110). The attitude of all the

friends of Sanju clearly shows that the youth of the high caste Hindus is not ready to accept the change.

This rigidity of the high caste youth compels the low caste youth to think about going far away from their birth places. Bhikhu fails to emancipate himself from his caste bonds and decides to desert his own people. His decision to go to a place where he cannot be recognized by his caste is symbolic. It could be realized as an escape of the protagonist from the bondage of the orthodoxy of the village life and an attempt to plunge into the wide arena of the modernity of the city life.