CHAPTER – SIXTH

NOTE OF COMPASSION
NOTE OF COMPASSION

While in London, Anand came in close contact with the "leaning tower" group of writers. Like them, he, too, was sensitive to the stresses of his times; but, unlike them, he was rooted in an entirely different civilization. The European tradition which had come to him as a literary heritage, no doubt, influenced his intellectual make-up, but the whole of his emotional life drew its sustenance from the richness of the Indian past. He had come to England in order to find his spiritual moorings. He found, to his dismay, that "there was not enough daylight in England and Europe either, so, in his mind he came back to Punjab and to India and wrote those exquisite prose poems and those remarkable novels, which remind one of Arthur Rimbaud."¹

Mulk Raj Anand's greatest, perhaps only, allegiance has been to the cause of suffering humanity. He is himself conscious of his constant struggle over the past thirty years to give expression to his passion or compassion for the people - the victims of so many wrongs and of so much misunderstanding. His commitment to the philosophy of humanism forms the very basis of his creative enterprise. he believes firmly in "a new conception of the role of man, and

¹ M.C. Pant, "Mulk Raj Anand, the Man", Contemporary Indian Literature, p. 17.
emphasis on the importance of a human being as such, a profound respect for man, love for him and faith in his capacity to straighten his back and look at the stars."² He does not merely echo the concept of European Hellenism or Renaissance humanism but offers a kind of a blueprint for the solution of the present day ills in the light of the modern experiment. He favors the removal of poverty, caste, and racial barriers; the introduction of a new educational system; and freedom in the social, economic and political spheres. Man as the measure of all things, can thus become "the maker of ever new worlds, the dreamer of ever new dreams, so that he can pour the sweat of his sinews and the grease of his brains into the slow fire and make it burgeon like a flame the beacon light of a new human civilization."³

In novel after novel, Anand has dramatically given a fictional expression to his philosophy. He states the main impulse behind his creative effort when he says: "I have indicated that the compulsion to write was in my case the choice between life and death, the quality of love, the values which make man human - for consciously and unconsciously, in oscillating between Asia and Europe, I have evolved for myself the philosophy of synthesis in what

³. Lines Written to an Indian Air, p. 11.
I call my comprehensive historical humanism."  

The first three novels of Mulk Raj Anand — *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, and *Two Leaves and a Bud* — are in a class by themselves. They not only present a mirror reflection of the actual life lived by the less fortunate, the lowly, and the disinherited, but move us also to the catharsis of pity. The range of their realism is unlimited. While *Untouchable* deals with the life and fortune of a humble scavenger, *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud* weave the tragedy of the working class. The human situation in each one comes in for sharp criticism, but the irony is diluted to some extent by a tender, moving pathos. These are, indeed, rich, human documents, having varying degrees of excellence.

Anand's work is closer to the regional language literature of India in its thrust, direction, and forms of narrativity, and may be best described as an instance of what Aijaz ahmad calls "Critical Realism." To quote Ahmad, "what Critical Realism demanded was that a critique of others (anti-colonialism) be conducted in the perspective of an even more comprehensive, multifaceted critique of ourselves: our class structures, our familial ideologies, our management of bodies and sexualities, our idealisms, our silences."  

In Anand's vision, there are no fixed boundaries

between the criminalities of the colonialist authorities and the brutalities of the indigenous tyrants - feudal lords, money lenders, scheming priests, among others. In his fiction, he offers a critique of all forms of authoritarian control and urges freedom that is complete in all aspects.

Anand's first novel Untouchable deals with a hegemonic structure peculiar to India-caste. The target of Anand's attack here is the bigotry of Hindu orthodoxy, and the contestation is launched from the subject-position of a member of the exploited group - the untouchables. Anand throws open a heterogeneous field where different kinds of exploitation are at work and different systems of domination (caste, class, gender and colonial) operate in a criss-cross manner. Bakha occupies a position of subalternity in more than one scheme of exploitation: caste, class and colonial subjugation. Anand conceptualizes the entire complexity of the colonial condition by describing a day in the life of Bakha. Through the events of the day, Bakha grows aware of his own subject-position, and that of his community. He is also convinced of the need to act, and urge for a change. This change in Bakha symbolizes the awakening of subaltern consciousness.
Anand begins his narration with a vivid description of his young protagonist. In fact, Anand portrays him as a symbol of the psychological slavery that pervades a colonized society: Bakha is a young man of fourteen "who had been caught by the glamour of the white man's life." He cuts a rather ridiculous figure as he stumps out in ammunition boots, wearing the discarded trousers, putties and breeches of the Sahibs, with a red lamp cigarette smouldering between his lips. Bakha is somewhat of a dreamer and he often muses. "I will look like a Sahib. I shall walk like them...." In the next moment, he realizes "...except for English clothing there was nothing English in his life."

Bakha's adulation for the Whiteman is not only that of an innocent youth's admiration for sola topees and immaculate white dresses, but has deeper roots. It stems from the fact that they "had treated him as a human being." He doesn't realize the implications of the Whiteman's presence; the larger political issues affect him little. What is real to him is the discrimination meted out to him by the caste Hindus. At the same time, he is not aware of class divisions. Through his association with White soldiers in the barracks "he had

7. Ibid., p. 3.
8. Ibid.
learnt to think of himself as superior to his fellow castes." He hates all that is native from ablutions to rugs and he sacrifices good many comforts for what he considers "fashun" or European style. This is a classic case of 'alienation' that is typical of the colonized.

Bakha passes through a series of mortifying experiences in the course of a single day. Lost in his fantasies, he touches a caste Hindu inadvertently and is abused and insulted by the "polluted" man and the jeering crowd: the temple priest tries to molest Bakha's sister, and having failed in his attempts raises cries that she has defiled the temple. And Bakha stands a helpless victim to this injustice: A woman throws a piece of bread to him, and he picks it up from the gutter. Later in the day, when Bakha carries a wounded child home, the child's mother finds fault with him for having polluted her child. Bakha boils with helpless rage but acts with restraint throughout. However, a strong sense of protest begins to smoulder within him.

Bakha, in the course of the day, comes upon three possible solutions to his problems - conversion to Christianity, Gandhian idealism and mechanization. Colonel Hutchinson, the Chief of the Salvation army, is ready to take him under the fold of Christianity and rescue him from
the curse of untouchability. Anand uses this encounter between the White missionary and the sweeper boy not only to highlight the cultural chasm that exists between the colonizer and the colonized but also to shatter the myth of former's civilizing influence over the latter. Hutchinson bursts out into song after song elucidating the glory of the Lord. he insists that Bakha should confess his sins and obtain forgiveness. The colonel's proselytizing zeal and vociferous preaching confuse Bakha and the religion which considers all men sinners fails to convince him. Bakha follows the Padre with a hope of getting a pair of old trousers, while the missionary rejoices at the possibility of adding to the number of conversions he achieved which remained at a miserable five in thirty-five years. The brusque intervention of the Padre's wife gives Bakha an opportunity to take to heels. The Whiteman's religion does not hold and viable solution for Bakha's problems.

Bakha attends a meeting addressed by Gandhi and he notices that religion, caste or class mattered little to that crowd at that moment as they assembled to hear the great man. here is an instance wherein the internal differences of a community are subsumed by more important tissues which involve a threat from the external forces. The gathering, charged with patriotic fervour, forges the consciousness of a new identity in Bakha - that of an Indian although he is totally unaware of the change taking place
within him. For the first time, the presence of the White Police Superintendent clad in immaculate uniform [which normally would have fired Bakha's imagination] appears an anomaly to him. This marks the beginning of a change in Bakha's values and attitudes. Besides, Bakha also grows aware of his place within the community of the untouchable. He is exhilarated to find the Mahatma championing the cause of the untouchables. Gandhi's argument that the untouchable "are cleaners of Hindu society" gives Bakha a sense of importance as he realizes that his job is after all an important profession. Furthermore, Gandhiji suggests that the untouchables "should now refuse to accept leavings from the plates of high caste Hindus" and should have free access to wells and temples. This sets Bakha truly in the direction of finding a programme of action. It is important to note, however, that the work ethic that Gandhi preaches has always been observed by Bakha, who did his job of cleaning the latrines with an innate reverence for work. Gandhi provides the idiom for the expression and comprehension of several complex feelings and thoughts that Bakha himself had experienced as a member of the subaltern group. Bakha later overhears a young poet talk about the introduction of "flush system" as the ultimate solution to the problem of untouchability. The novel ends on an inconclusive note leaving Bakha "thinking of everything he had heard, though he could not understand it all."

10. Ibid, p. 133.
All the same, Anand unmistakably strikes a note of optimism by making his young hero aware of the need for urging, and a possibility of realizing, a change in the state of the untouchables. The problem no longer remains that of an individual, but turns into a group issue, and it is not to be borne or accepted as the destiny or karma of an individual, but needs to be contested at a social and cultural level. As E.M. Forster rightly suggests: "His [Bakha's] Indian day is over and the next day will be like it but on the surface of the earth, if not in the depth of the sky, a change is at hand."

What is important here is the assumption of the agency by Bakha. He is the foreground and the point of view of the whole novel. It is his experience as an untouchable, and his response to that experience that constitutes the subject of the text: everything that Bakha experiences, hears and reflects upon is drawn into his own consciousness, and it is this alternate pattern of experience and reflection that firmly shapes the novel. The process of individuation Bakha goes through has a transformative value. He sees himself as a part of larger social formations and the humiliation he suffered through the day now acquires the dimension of class exploitation. Bakha is also convinced that the problem of

untouchability is a social issue and needs to be handled collectively at the social and cultural levels. He is, therefore, eager to share his new-found knowledge with his father and friends, and do his bit for the amelioration of others like him. More importantly, he also grows aware of the futility of aping the Whiteman’s ways. "The prospect of never being able to wear the clothes that Sahibs wore, of never being able to become a Sahib was horrible." But "it does not matter", thinks the changed Bakha. Thus Bakha's movement from a blind imitation of the colonizer to a realization of the need for self-assertion signifies a shift from dependence to autonomy and the release of the subaltern from the position of liminality.

The theme of colonial relationship obliquely touched upon in Untouchable receives greater attention in Anand's next two novels Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud. Anand's focus here is on the economic exploitation of the Indian peasant and worker by the oppressive forces capitalism and colonialism. The author makes it clear that the so-called civilizing mission of the colonizers is a myth and that the economic self-interest of the empire has been a major motivating factor for colonization.

12. Untouchable, p. 133.
In *Coolie* Anand shows how the policy of industrial capitalism promoted by the colonial power spread its tentacles over the poor and helpless, often claiming their lives. As the novel progresses, its statement about the nature of capitalist power with its destructive effect on the working class community, is increasingly insistent in tenor. Anand portrays the predicament of the industrial workers through the tragic tale of the protagonist. Munoo, a village lad turned an industrial worker. The novel adopts the structure of a journey-quest, and traces Munoo's journey of life beginning in his native home in the Kangra Hills, through the trials and tribulations of living in the impersonal city of Bombay, and the agony of working in the oppressive atmosphere of the industrial town of Daulatpur, and coming to an untimely end on the cold hill slopes of Shimla. In this quest, Munoo moves from one affliction to another. Munoo's journey is more in the form of a flight, desperately looking for a safe shelter in the moral wilderness of contemporary society, and his one aspiration all along is: "I want to live, I want to know, I want to work..."13 The central conflict is between the protagonist's will to live and the hostile landscape's unrelenting effort to hurt. The various attempts Munoo makes at earning a livelihood include working as a domestic servant in the

household of a Baboo at Shamnagar, as a worker in a pickle factory at Daulatpur, as a labourer in a cotton mill in Bombay, and as a rickshaw puller in an Anglo-Indian household in Shimla where he contracts consumption and meets an untimely death. What is important is the uprooting of the village lad from his familiar rural world, and setting him aboard the alien landscape of an industrial world. This may be read as a case of forced exile, dispossession and estrangement.

While narrating the tragic tale of Munoo, Anand exposes and attacks all the enemies to man's freedom - the native bourgeois and the White colonists alike. Anand spares none - the vindictive termagant Bibi Uttam Kaur, the merciless bully Ganpat, the White foreman Jimmie Thomas, the indifferent industrial manager Mr. England, the ignorant Anglo-Indian Mrs. Mainwaringall are shown to be culprits in the crime of Munoo's murder. In fact Munoo becomes the symbol of the writer's disillusionment with the world around him. The violence, dislocation and extended suffering Anand describes here suggest that the time is ripe for revolution.

The scenes dealing with Munoo's life in the industrial slums of Bombay offer a graphic account of the working of the capitalist system. The factory is an intolerable inferno with unbearable heat radiating from the tin sheets, the
continuous wild hum of the machine, the monotony of the work, the threat of impending danger and above all the inhuman attitude of the employer. The coolies working under such conditions degenerate into moving corpses with fear fixed on their brows. The British management offers no security, pays low wages, saps the last drop of energy from them and effects retrenchment summarily.

Anand offers an insight into the motives of the White capitalists in the scenes dealing with European characters. The foreman Jimmie is often seen muttering: "Goddam all the natives." Mr. Little, the manager, is put off by the slightest signs of protest among the workers. He complains about the labour leaders: "These dammed swine are spreading discontent fast" and even suggests. "They [the workers] should all be put up against a wall and shot, the whole damned lot of them." By juxtaposing the helplessness of the workers with the mercilessness of their masters. Anand is questioning the ethical efficacy of an economic system which endorses such injustice and inequality. Though Anand's prime concern here is exposing the evils of economic exploitation, the political machinery which colludes with such exploitation and the moral matrix of materialistic values that supports it, also come in for severe censure.

15. Ibid.
Munoo eventually succumbs to consumption, but the brave fight the puts up with life and death is undoubtedly heroic. The subaltern's struggle for survival against all odds of life is itself a mark of strong will to fight and eventually succeed. As C.D. Narasimhaiah succinctly puts it; "In the circumstances, sheer survival must be looked upon as a triumph of the spirit, the very will to live must be reckoned a strength." The success lies not in reaching, but in striving itself. As Munoo lies in bed putting up stiff resistance to the fatal disease. Mohan his friend and mentor, tells him: "Asha Munoo brother, you are a brave lad. This is the author's verdict on, and reader's response to Munoo's heroic struggle with an oppressive social order.

It is important to note that the novel, despite its large canvas and crowded milieu, is largely pivoted on a focal point that is adjusted to the consciousness of the central character - Munoo. It primarily traces the gradual flowering of an adolescent consciousness against the backdrop of hostile social forces that constantly threaten to crush and destroy. It is a novel of education, describing the young peasant boy's maturing sensibilities and his growing political awareness alongside. At personal level, as

Munoo enters early manhood he gets initiated into the mysteries of sex, and Anand portrays the response of a young heart to the pleasures of body with rare sensitivity. Early in life, at Shamnagar, Munoo feels a strange and inexplicable urge in the presence of Sheila, his master's daughter; he experiences the joys of sensuous excitement sitting in the lap of Parvati; he is enraptured by the passion of male-female intimacy that he notices in the harem of Piari Jan; he is initiated into the mysteries of sex life in the arms of Lakshmi and he is thrilled to the marrow by the coquettish overtures made by Mrs. Mainwaring, Munoo's craving for a life of senses reflects his zest for living.

Alongside, Munoo grows aware of the mercilessness of the world of money and materialism. He realizes the power of the class-divide and rightly infers that "there seemed to be only two kinds of people in the world." Caste did not matter, Munno thinks:

I am a Kshatriya and I am poor, and Varma, a Brahmin, is a servant boy, a menial, because he is poor. No caste does not matter. The babus are like the sahib-logs, and all servants look alike; there must only be two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor.  

This basic lesson in the politics of power that he learns early in life, is further reinforced through his experiences in the impersonal city of Bombay. Munoo finds Bombay to be "a land of cruel contrasts" (Coolie, 270) where the pomp of the rich coexists with the agony of the destitute, and luxury and drudgery dwell along-side. The despair and squalor of the labourer's dwellings is juxtaposed with the technology and glitter of the central city and their interrelationships ghetto to industrial giant, labour to capital are stressed. In all this, Munoo is quite certain of what he desires: "I want to live, I want to know, I want to work, to work this machine ... I shall grow up and be a man, a strong man like that wrestler ..."19

As one among the thousands of labourers, underpaid and overworked, bullied by the employer and the money lender, working in the infernal mills, he grows fully aware of the authority wielded by the rich and the helplessness of the poor. However, he also gets initiated into the activities of the trade union and the possibilities of collective action. In the angry demands of Sauda, the trade union leader, Munoo finds his own inmost thoughts powerfully articulated.

The process of Munoo's education further widens its scope as he lives through the experiences of the workers

strike, the autocracy of the management, the right-left divide among the trade unionists, and the bewilderment of the helpless coolies. Finally, witnessing the violence of the communal riots triggered deliberately by the management to divide the agitating labourers, he is fully convinced of the power of evil: For the first time he realises the hardness of life; he feels "sad and bitter and defeated, like an old man."²⁰ His indomitable spirit, will to live and zest for life are so strong that he soon recovers, ready to respond to the scenic splendour of Shimla, the mysteries of memsahib Mrs. Mainwaring's household and the prim beauty of English shops. However, as he turns into a rickshaw puller, his young body slowly gives in to the strain of load pulling, contracts consumption and succumbs to that dreadful disease. Confined to bed coughing and spitting blood, he still hopes: "After all I am not going to die."²¹ The author soon adds: "But in the early hours of one unreal, white night he passed away - the tide of his life having reached back to the deeps."²²

Anand's Coolie is more than the story of Munoo. The central character emerges as a figure whose personal experience crystallizes the experience of the entire

²². Ibid.
community - the community of peasants and workers. The novel suggests that the crippling effects of colonial rule and capitalist economy are all-pervasive and as varied as life itself. The negative effects of these oppressive systems are identified over and over again. But this very repetitiousness enacted in the experiences of Prabha, Parvathi and the workers in the pickle factory. Hari, Lakshmi and others, the industrial workers in Bombay, Mohan and the other rickshaw pullers in Shimla-reiterates the sufferings of the subaltern in a forceful manner, and makes their voices, however feeble, unmistakably audible.

In Two Leaves and a Bud, Anand once again turns to the theme of economic exploitation, this time against novel draws upon the real life account of plantation labour in British owned tea estates in Assam. Dwarakanath Ganguli gives a graphic account of the life of Bengali plantation labour in his study on the subject in Slavery in British Dominion: Though slavery as an institution was unknown to the laws in British India, it came into this country through the back door under the name of contract labour or indentured system. Assam then was practically inaccessible and organizing the labour was no easy task for the British estate owners. Special recruiting agents of the

Sarkar used all sorts of bait to lure the landless peasants from the remote villages into working on these estates. The most important of all was the promise of a piece of land. Once these workers were recruited and transported to these uphill estates, they found themselves practically prisoners, left to the mercy of ruthless planters and greedy middlemen. They were constantly ill-treated and flogged to work, their women were often insulted and molested, and these families were condemned to live in tin sheds with no basic amenities. The topography of Assam besides the cautious vigil kept by the employer made escape impossible. Any sign of revolt was dealt with a heavy hand and the poor peasant had no support of any kind. The British planters could get away with anything including murder, as the English jury could acquit them of any crime on grounds of paucity of legal proof. Anand's novel is an unvarnished tale of the suffering of peasants in this British plantocracy.

Gangu represents this unfortunate community of uprooted peasants trying to negotiate their destiny in the alien landscape of tea plantations. Falling prey to the false promises of a collie-catcher Buta, Gangu allows himself and his family to be transported to the distant, unfamiliar tea estates in Assam. He soon finds that it is a prison without bars, an unbreakable jail. Gangu's life here
is one of unrelieved suffering: his wife Sanjani dies of malaria; unable to meet the expenses of her funeral he falls into the debt-trap of a money lender; meanwhile his daughter, Leila, draws the attention of the roving eye of the lusty manager Reggie Hunt; and in a melee that follows, he is shot dead by the manager.

While unfolding Gangu's tragic tale, Anand leaves no aspect of plantation life untouched. Particularly he throws light on the dubious values and dehumanizing motives of the British colonizers raising certain vital questions about the basic premises of colonization. It is interesting to note, however, that the most vehement critic of the colonial policy comes from among the White establishment. The estate doctor John Detla Havre is the compassionate revolutionary who dispassionately attacks the British official policy of colonization, and condemns the evils unleashed under the guise of the civilizing mission. He repeatedly states: "Yes why not let the natives run their own show? It is their country and we have really no right in it." He ventures to expose the shallowness of his fellow Sahibs and sides with coolies at the risk of losing his place not only in the White set-up, but also the heart of his lady love. The reward, for his idealism, predictably is his unceremonious eviction from the plantation.

The average British attitude to Indians is expressed by Croft-Cooke and Reggie Hunt, the managers of the plantation. They are convinced that the natives are born liars and lazy. They firmly believe that Indians are too ignorant and barbaric to rule themselves and that "one can only control these people by strength, courage and determination," which is often expressed through the brute force of baton. Besides poking fun at the folly and absurdity of the colonizer's claim to the civilizing mission, Anand exposes the cruelty and inhumanity of this regime in all its crudity. This novel was banned initially, in India and England as well. In fact, this novel is often quoted as an instance to illustrate Anand's tendency for over-writing. In the words of Harrex: "The action of Two Leaves and a Bud degenerates from an evocative dramatisation of a peasantry life into a melodramatic class-conflict." Anniah Gowda considers this novel "unrealistic" on the ground that it implies an assumption that an ideal undertaking fulfilling the conditions of equality, justice and humanity is possible. This line of criticism reveals the critical resistance to the ugly reality contained in this sordid story of the social underdog related in unsparing detail.

The cumulative effect of the sordid details and symbols in *Two Leaves and a Bud* is that the reader is presented with a harrowing and relentless vision of life on the plantation. The plantation is a microcosm of the colonial society and reflects the divisions and systematic horrors perpetrated under the colonial rule. It is sick to the very core, rotten with the congealed decay of years of domination, capitulation and betrayal. Peasants are engaged in a ceaseless, debased and dehumanizing struggle simply to eke out their lives from day to day. There is nothing gratuitous about Anand's presentation in all this. His portrayal needed to be as graphic and as comprehensive as it is in order to be a disclosure of roots and causes; in order, ultimately, to be productive of the type of knowledge that must accompany decisive social action-subaltern struggle for liberation in this case.

It is almost ten years after the publication of *Coolie* that Anand's *The Big Heart* (1945) appeared. But major concerns of this later work were anticipated in *Coolie* wherein the wrestler Ratan suggests 'Big Heart' as the only viable solution to the problems of class-conflict. While *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud* elaborate the struggle of exiled protagonists against the hostile forces in an alien landscape. *The Big Heart* may be read as a document of
return. Here Ananta, a coppersmith, returns to his home-town of Amritsar having worked in the industrial townships of Bombay and Ahmedabad, to resume his hereditary trade. The protagonist here is neither an "untouchable" nor a "cooler" representing a particular caste or community, but Ananta (the boundless) signifying the omnipresence of exploitation and the incessant struggle for liberation. He is not a type but a prototype symbolizing the turbulent human spirit which seeks freedom breaking down all barriers. Unlike the earlier Anand protagonists, Ananta is a man of action. He is a revolutionary urging change both in his personal and public life. At the personal level, he chooses to live with Janaki, a young widow, breaking the conventional norms of caste and religion. He looks after her with tender care even as she is dying of consumption. The Ananta-Janaki relationship meets with serious social disapproval of the caste-brotherhood, but it exemplifies the self-sustaining love that needs no social or institutional scaffolding.

Ananta's political education begins during his association with trade union activities in Bombay where he learns his first lessons in comradeship and collective resistance. There is a certain degree of idealism in Ananta's dreams for a socialist utopia and it is this idealism which alienates him from the starving and suffering brethren of his community. He opposes violence and urges bloodless revolution. He is inspired by the achievements of
the workers in Russia and suggests socialist revolution. Ananta says: "get together as men, it will make us brothers and make our voice irresistible..."  

He believes in the power of men to make their own destinies, and resists any centre of authority outside, be it God, sarkar or employer.

The central conflict dramatized in the novel is the conflict between tradition and modernity symbolically represented by the temple and the clock. In a more localized sense, for the community of coppersmiths the conflict is between the machine and man's skill. There are three distinct responses to the conflict: The older members of the community "behind like gnomes before the fire in mature furnaces," "groping for light in a world where they say darkness is spreading" (BH, 18). They consider the intrusion of machines into their world as an act of destiny and surrender to it with a sense of fatalism. Ananta too is convinced of the inevitability of change but is hopeful that man can master the new gadgets. He says: "When we thathiars begin to handle the machine we shall soon show them! ... We need not become slaves to the profiteers or the machiners. We are men. We will make a Revolutionary."  

Then there is Satyapal, the student agitator, who demands violent action: "Seize the factory if you can, wreck it if you can't."

The conflict is precipitated into a crisis as a large number of coppersmiths are rendered jobless by the installation of new machines. Ananta's effort at peaceful negotiations bear no fruit and his ideology of planned action fails to abate the rage of the hungry labourers. The militancy of Satyapal's speeches evokes an instantaneous response and a melee ensues. Ralia, a fellow coppersmith incited by the general frenzy, goes on a rampage, breaking machines and in his maniacal fury kills Ananta who tries to stall the destruction. It is ironical that Ananta who had always resisted violence should fall prey to mindless aggression. After all his dreams of a golden future when men may become the masters of machine Ananta ends up as a sacrifice at the altar of man-machine duel. Although Ananta fails as a leader on account of his inability to carry the crowd with him, his heroic efforts at organizing the community for meaningful action hint at the possibility of the eventual emergence of leadership from among the subaltern. One could perhaps say, 'the revolution is not yet; but no too far away either.

In *The Big Heart* Anand allows different ideological positions to emerge, contest, and conflict with each other within the textual space. Puran Bhagat's Nehruvian eclecticism, Mahasha Hansraj's Gandhism, Ananta's socialist idealism, Satyapal's policy of militant action, Janaki's
commonsense approach to the problems of the poor—these and many more disparate approaches emerge, colliding with each other and forming strange patterns of ideological criss-crossings that shape the structure of the novel. The author's anxiety to project the complex political spectrum of the '40s in India sometimes results in awkward fictional contrivances and mars the artistic appeal of the work. Like Untouchable. The Big Heart too records the events of a single day, but it lacks the compactness and control of the earlier text. Again, Ananta here lacks the vivacity and exuberance of the other Anand protagonists. Most characters in the novel are card-board figures primarily meant to represent certain ideas. Furthermore, unreasonably long speeches diffuse the tension at crucial points of the narrative. One cannot but agree with C D Narasimhaiah's evaluation of this text: "The Big Heart is most magnificently conceived, yes, magnificent in conception but the execution is not an unqualified success like Untouchable and like Coolie..."30 However, The Big Heart is important as a text that incorporates disparate discourages of the time.

In The Road (1961), Anand returns to the theme of untouchability once again, though the temporal locale of the text is now shifted to post-independence India. This insistent return to a theme which he has already

fictionalized with phenomenal success earlier, is meant to make an important point: Political autonomy has not brought liberation to all the sections of society; one-third of Indian citizens, namely Harijans, still remain enslaved in India even after more than a decade of independence. Anand felt the need to make this point urgently, being a personal witness to the discrimination and humiliation to which Harijans were subjected in a remote village of Haryana. As Anand himself explains:

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 limbo of oblivion. There was something tragi-comic to me in the fact that the caste Hindus would not touch the stones quarried 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 to him by showing it to him in the enchanted mirror."31

Anand's novel *The Road* is a fictional representation of this unpalatable reality. In the course of the narrative, the road however acquires a symbolic connotation. It comes to signify journey, progress and development. In a broader social context, it connects the village to Delhi, the epicenter of power. As one of the characters in the novel, Dhooli Singh explains: "... the milk of the village will be borne to the city and more cash will come to the folk ... I say it is only roads and roads and more roads and electricity that will bring prosperity."\(^{32}\) However, the problems arise when chamar boys are employed to build the road. The community is divided over the issue and the ensuing conflict breaks families, shatters friendships, spoils marriage alliances and sets the village on war path.

Bhikhu, the protagonist here, is a new avatar of Bakha of the earlier novel. He is strong and able bodied with a strong faith in the gospel of work. "Call me if you need two strong arms" is his standing offer to people around him. Unlike Bakha, he is literate; he can read, write, sing and even compose verses. In brief, he is the child of independent India. He has found new cultural models in Sant Kabir and Jawaharlal Nehru. The tragedy is, the society in which he lives has not changed correspondingly to

---

accommodate the likes of Bhikhu or let them live with dignity and self-esteem. This in turn must be viewed as a part of the feudal politics that continue to dominate life in villages. The high-caste Hindus are unwilling to let go the ossified caste-structures, since they enjoy a privileged position in this orthodox dispensation. This section is represented by the landlord - Thakur Singh, and the priest - Suraj Mani in the novel. It is important for them to keep the untouchables poor, because it is wealth and not caste that determines 'the social status in the changing world of materialistic values. If the road brings prosperity to men of lower castes, it must be resisted. However, there are also men like Dhooli Singh who believe in work and progress for all. It is important that even liberal humanists like Dhooli Singh too would go only up to a point, and not beyond, in their penchant for reform. He would happily let the chamar boys work, earn and make a better future, but he wouldn't even consider the possibility of letting his daughter marry an untouchable.

Encouraged by Dhooli Singh, Bhikhu and his crew work on the road against all opposition from the caste Hindus. Bhikhu is humiliated, insulted and hurt by the high caste boys, all of whom were once his playmates. The issue involved is not merely one of caste-restrictions, but the
fact that the untouchable boys are making money through this employment. The crisis is triggered as Sarju and Lachman set the Harijan hamlets on fire. The homeless harijans are sheltered on Dhooli Singh's field. The Sarkar supports the chamar workers and even the priest and landlord are forced to relent as the general tide is not in their favour. However, the attitude of the high caste boys does not change; they still treat the untouchables as dirt. Bhikhu knows he has the physical strength to hit back, but the decides to quit and find a break elsewhere. He takes the road he has helped to build, and starts his journey to Delhi "where no one knew who he was and where there would be no caste or outcaste." One should not look at this departure as 'defeat' or 'flight' of the protagonist. Even as violence becomes an increasingly important factor in Anand's texts, his revolutionaries opt for alternate modes of retaliation. They choose to wait but do not take to violent action hastily.

Some critics found this straightforward account of a real life incident too documentary to be a serious literary work. However, as Alistair Niven rightly describes it, Anand's The Road is a "a fable." The prime objective of the narrative is to give a moral: liberty without equality is incomplete and devoid of substance. Anand clearly

33. Ibid, p. 110.
suggests that the constitutional legislation alone does not eradicate the social evils. On the other hand, an attitudinal change is imperative to bring about real social change.

Anand is almost all by himself not only in reflecting the situation of the sweepers, coolies, workers and peasants in his novels, but in leaving the fictional space to groups marginalised hitherto, for the enactment of their lives at their own will. From these novels a history of the evolution of the subaltern in Indian society may meaningfully be formulated. Anand's achievement lies in the abrogation of the imperial language and appropriation of the same to tell the stories of Punjabi peasants. Unlike other post-colonial or neo-colonial writers, he is not obsessed with the project of identity-self-definitions of intellectuals, aristocratic alienations, metaphysical meanderings, transcontinental travels, but is concerned with the immediate socio-cultural issues and their impact on the private world of common men and women.

Anand's *Gauri* (1960) must be accorded a special place in this discussion because here the novelist focuses on a character subjected to multiple forms of marginalization - a peasant woman in a post-colonial society. Anand is simultaneously addressing two issues here: the class structure that discriminates against the poor and the gender bias that relegates women to a secondary status, into a
literary tradition (of Indian English writing) which generally glossed over the issues of class/gender, Anand's work injects the occasional sense of the Indian working class: the labourer and the peasant, and their struggle for survival in a world dominated by the forces of colonialism and capitalism. Within that, Anand again exposes yet another form of exploitation based on gender that operates within all classes and castes reducing women to a state of glorified slavery. The novel takes the form of a novel of initiation tracing the protagonist Gauri's growth from the initial powerlessness to self-confidence, passivity to activity, submissiveness to freedom from restraint, and unfolds the author's vision of female empowerment.

The novel begins with the marriage of Gauri, and her subsequent departure for her husband's village. Gauri's travails begin almost immediately after that. She is constantly bullied and ill-treated by her husband's aunt Kesari (who entertains a sort of nephew-fixation) and abused and beaten by her strong-limbed and weak-minded husband Panchi. In a quick succession of misfortunes that follows, Gauri and her husband are thrown out of their ancestral home following a family feud; they fail to make a home of their own on account of a terrible famine that breaks out in the village; and pledge all their earthly possessions to a money-lender. Their zest for life is shattered by poverty, hunger and helplessness. Panchi begins to believe that it
could all be due to the ill-luck his bride brought him. Gauri's pregnancy, ironically, comes as the last straw and Panchi, terrified by the idea of "one more mouth to feed," turns his wife out.

Back at her mother's place, Gauri soon realizes that she is an unwanted burden on the family's meagre resources. Once again poverty and hunger subsume all personal and familial relationships and Gauri is sold against her will to a rich banker in Hoshiarpur. Ironically, when Laxmi, Gauri's mother, had to choose between her cow that feeds the family and her daughter who the family has to feed, she chooses the former! Gauri falls ill in Seth's house, and is rescued by the doctor of the local hospital - Colonel Mahindra. The assistant doctor, Brata tries to molest Gauri and this incident brings about a rift between the two doctors. Yet, after all this, when she is physically and psychologically recovered under the care of Dr. Mahindra, Gauri tells him:

"I am with child by my husband, and I want to go back to him... I want to go back home..." 35

In the meantime, rains come and a repentant Panchi goes to Gauri's village seeking his abandoned wife. Gauri's mother comes to Hoshiarpur, searching for her daughter, and Gauri is restored to her "rightful" place in her husband's

home. The happy reunion does not last long. Enraged by the village gossip and rumours about Gauri's exile at Hoshiarpur, Panchi beats his wife and demands proof of her "chastity" ... 36 Gauri once again leaves home, this time never to return but determined to bring up her child in a better environment.

The mythic structure of the novel is too obvious to be missed or ignored. Anand had used material from fold and mythical tales before, but this is the first novel wherein he structures the text on the lines of a mythical tale. Anand invokes the canonical text. The Ramayana, early in his narrative, when Gauri is told by her mother to be "like Sita". Sita has always been considered the epitome of feminine virtues such as domesticity, devotion to one's husband and children, and capacity for self-sacrifice. Like the mythical heroine, Gauri too suffers and shows a tremendous capacity for suffering. While Sita is abducted by the demond Ravana, Gauri is forcibly sold to the demon-like Seth by her uncle Amru. Like her mythical counterpart, she too lives in exile, and returns to her husband chastened by the flames of suffering. But once again the male authority asserts itslelf when Panchi comes under the pressure of gossipmongers and demands proof of Gauri's chastity very much like Rama who abandons his wife under the influence of

36. Ibid, p. 262.
public gossip. Gauri decides to leave her husband and lead an independent life.

Anand's intention obviously is to subvert the canonical narrative in such a way that a totally new image of Sita-figure emerges. Anand describes Gauri's final departure from her husband's house as follows:

For a brief moment, the thought that the earth must open up to rescue her as it had opened up to receive Sita came as an echo from some distant memory. But the ground was hard and solid under her feet and showed no sign of opening up, to prove her innocence. She waved her head to forget Sita and thought of the road to the town.37

On a closer reading of Sita's story and Anand's rewriting of this story, one wonders whether Anand's rewriting is a subversion or sub-version of the original story.

The story of Valmiki's heroine has become the source of a wide range of literary, iconographical, musical, and cinematographic narratives most of which claim to have subverted the patriarchal ideology underlying the original. Sita, however, is one of the most widely misunderstood

37. Ibid, p. 264.
figures of the Hindu pantheon. While it is true that Sita walks on the fire to prove her chastity and returns to Ayodhya with her husband. She does not lose heart when she is abandoned by him again later. She takes refuge in the ashram of Valmiki, brings up her boys to be brave young men and in the final move she hands over the grow-up boys to Rama and returns to her mother. Sita's return to Mother Earth is an important feminist statement, since she registers a protest against all norms of patriarchal ideology including the maternity principle, in deciding to leave her children too and return to her mother in a way forging female bonding and reclaiming her position in a matriarchal lineage. Anand's Gauri, I would argue, re-enacts the Sita myth in her refusal to conform to patriarchal norms.

Besides this direct correspondence to the Sita myth, one finds several other mythical echoes in this novel. The central character, Gauri for instance, symbolizes Devi the power of the feminine. 'Gauri' is the spouse of Siva, and she is the source of the world. Gauri is like Parvati in her beauty, comity, and capacity for love. However, gentle Gauri can turn into "her other incarnation Kali, the divine destroyer herself" when faced with evil. She combines in herself the multifarious manifestations of the divine goddess. She is at once the benign, loving consort and

38. Ibid, p. 75.
companion; powerful and protective mother, and fearless destroyer of evil. Anand thus taps the mythical sources in creating a powerful woman character who can fight the hostile world and live life on her own terms.

Anand thus creates a range of men and women belonging to the socially oppressed categories: untouchables, collies, industrial labour, peasant women, etc., and reveals the horror and misery of their existence with a strong sense of social commitment. More importantly, he is among the first to create space for the subaltern in Indian-English writing which, to a large extent, remained a forum for the Indian elite. There are of course questions related to representation, such as: does Anand write the subaltern of write about them? does he speak for them or let them speak for themselves?

Anand's sympathy lay with the poor class. He was opposed to all kinds of exploitation in society. His writings highlight the predicament of the poor class which reels under the yoke of economic slavery. Anand through his writings arouses the feelings of pity in us for the poor who has to suffer due to this unjust exploitation.