The word 'exploitation' sounds the keynote of the themes that Anand and Achebe proceed to examine in their novels. In fact, the processes unleashed in the socio-political and cultural realms of a country as a consequence of colonial intrusion, are marked by an overwhelmingly exploitive character. It will be no exaggeration to affirm that Anand and Achebe have consistently investigated the theme of exploitation. Exploitation in Marxist jargon, signifies the iniquitous relationships that prevail in the economic sphere only.

It is again from the Marxist perception of poverty and exploitation at the micro and macro levels that we have inherited terms such as class, proletariat, labour, surplus, means and mode of production, used to analyse a capitalistic system. According to Marx, a society is divided into two classes the poor and the rich, also called the ruled and the ruling classes or the dominated and the dominant classes.

Marx predicted a class struggle consequent upon the appropriation and accumulation of surplus value in the hands of owners of capital and the deprived proletariat becoming poorer and poorer. In his views, the history of modern society is the
story of the struggle between these two classes. The phenomenon of production of extremes of poverty and wealth, pauperism and luxury will sharpen the class-struggle until it breaks into open revolution. The end-product will be a stateless socialism wherein production will be carried on for the good of all and bring about the classless society.

No wonder then that Anand who came under the influence of Marx’s writings and was fascinated by Marxist theory of social change and revolution, set out as a writer to expose the evils of a capitalist society divided into these two polarities or classes. In particular Anand’s attention is focussed on the aftermath of the colonial imposition of an alien world order. Margaret Berry sums up Anand’s method of attacking the capitalist system in this manner:

Anand’s attack on the capitalist system is executed in the novels by direct and indirect presentation of the evils of private ownership, private enterprises and the profit motive in business. Even in the first novel, Untouchable, Sarshar the Socialist calls for a casteless and classless society. In depicting the road to such a society,
Anand does more than dramatize the issues with plots, themes and settings. His 'approved' characters boldly expound the socialist program and with dialectic and oratory, compound their opponents - villains, 'respectable' compromisers, and sincere but unenlightened men.

(Berry, 1970: p.63)

Anand's *Coolie* (1963) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) portray the scandalous gulf existing between the rich and the poor in pre-Independence India. Hence Anand aims at highlighting the role of the British in bringing about this unfortunate situation. Industrial capitalism was imported from the West by the Colonial rulers. This upset the applecart of the Indian social and cultural relationships and polity. And this development was made possible by the British who introduced commerce and trade based on mere profit-seeking and cut-throat competition. And it should be noted that the Indian soil was just ripe for accepting this western product as it had been preconditioned by forces such as mechanisation, industrialisation and scientific materialism.

As a direct result of the interplay of these forces, Indian society of the thirties was losing its cohesion and stability, the hallmark of its social fabric before the onset of
industrialisation. Money became the principal symbol, measure and means of well-being and happiness. Moreover all relationships and interactions began to be scrutinized and judged by the criterion of possession or non-possession of money.

Munoo, the central figure of Coolie and Gangu the hero of Two Leaves and a Bud are both Kshatriyas, the second highest in caste-hierarchy. But they come of an indigent background and, therefore, become victims of the cruelty and marginalisation that are associated with the upper classes.

Munoo and Gangu are represented as labourers or coolies who depend for their livelihood on the wages paid to them for selling or hiring out their labour. Munoo is driven from his home in the sylvan setting of the Kangra Valley merely because, "my aunt wants me to begin earning money". Anand makes sure that we are briefed about the havoc played by the landlord in his father's life by seizing his five acres of land in return for the interest on mortgage not paid. Munoo’s family was a hapless victim of an unscrupulous landlord. Thus Anand underlines the role of feudalism in wrecking the lives of innumerable, unlettered, ignorant, unwary villagers who sought the help of the land-lord money-lenders for loans. Munoo’s plight is symbolically presented by Anand as he makes his child-hero wander from place to place in search of a job, a livelihood.

Munoo’s experiences in Sham Nagar in the family of Babu Nathoo Ram are evidence enough to bring out the kind of
ill-treatment meted out to a poor wretch just because he is destitute. He is told clearly that he is no more than a servant and hence cannot hope to mix with people of the rank and dignity of Babu Nathoo Ram's family. His sojourn in Daulatpur, working as a labourer in the pickle factory owned by Prabha, a former coolie and Ganpat a crooked and villainous partner who eventually swindles him, has been described by Anand with a keen eye for details of Munoo's psychological reactions, revulsions and final disillusionment. He is made to realise that it is only the likes of Ganpat and Sir Todar Mall who have access to big money and therefore to influence and power, who can lead a comfortable, easy-going and pleasure-seeking life while honest and hard working poor have no chance of survival.

Anand further pits his waif-hero against the powerful and unscrupulous world of the rich mill-owners in Bombay. Here again Munoo wilts and withers under the heavy oppressive weight of a system biased in favour of the rich and powerful. The strike organised by the workers is put down with an iron hand and the revolt quelled mercilessly by the unilateral decisions of the British management aided by their Indian henchmen. The worst irony of it is that the whole strike is undermined and debunked as sparking off communal clashes. In point of fact, communal riots were engineered by the anti-worker management in order to blacklist and denigrate the striking workers and the labour union leaders.
Finally we see a hunted and hounded out Munoo seeking asylum in the household of a half-caste, scrupulous and over-sexed Mrs. Mainwaring at Simla. Here again Munoo becomes a victim of all the whims and fancies of this rootless caricature of an Anglo-Indian woman. The last days of Munoo as he wastes away under the effects of consumption are one long night of sorrow and pain only terminated by his untimely death.

Anand contrasts solidarity, endurance and friendliness of the pavement dwellers in Bombay and the poor coolies in Bombay and other places with the sordidness, complacency, self-righteousness and superciliousness of the rich. The novel is a severe indictment of the capitalist system that spawns such inhuman monsters without a trace of concern for the deprived, side by side with hosts of workers, coolies and destitutes like Munoo whose life is one long nightmare of thwarted ambition, unrewarded honesty and hard work and unrequited love and service. They are condemned to a life of slavery and abject poverty with no way out, however much they may struggle and strive.

Sauda in the Bombay phase seems to have penetrated into the mechanics of a class society when he echoes Anand's ideas: "There are only two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor", Sauda continued, "and between the two there is no connection. The rich and the powerful, the magnificent and the glorious, whose opulence
is built on robbery and theft and open warfare, are honoured and admired by the whole world and by themselves. You, the poor, and the humble, you the meek and the gentle, wretches that you are, swindled out of your rights, and broken in body and soul, you are respected by no one and you do not respect yourselves."

(Coolie, Pp.265-266)

Child labour is one of the evils of the capitalist system as it provides the factory owners with cheap labour in most inhuman and abominable conditions. Anand's description of this most heinous practice endorsed by the rulers is as pathetic as it is mind-boggling.

Two Leaves and a Bud is another novel that is devoted to the theme of exploitation built around cash-nexus of the capitalist mode of economic organisation. This novel is more concretely about the class of coolies represented in the novel by Gangu the central character, who is a hapless peasant lured to the plantations of Assam with false promises of better material prospects. The irony of it all is that apart from being cut off from his roots, losing his freedom and self-dignity in serfdom and bonded labour, he eventually dies at the hands of his diabolical boss. Although Gangu is sceptical of the exaggerated overtures of Buta, he is finally beguiled by Buta who uses the peasant's strong love of land as a decoy.
Gangu's destiny is inextricably wedded to the plantation from now on. He will lose his wife after an epidemic of cholera takes a heavy toll of the coolies. The filth and squalor of the coolies' lives defies description. As if these hazards at the work places were not sufficient, the coolies and their children are exposed to untold health hazards. The British overlords have not an iota of sympathy or concern for the workers.

Anand analyses the relationships existing between the white masters and the coolies. It is a condescending and contemptuous attitude with no concern whatever for their well-being, safety or happiness. The coolies are herded together in plantations as if they were cattle and have no need for the higher pleasures of family life and human solidarity.

Reggie Hunt, the assistant planter is an embodiment of the cruelty, heartlessness, and frivolity of the white planters and the class of planters as a whole. He prowls around the plantations seeking for a prey to devour. He is not only brutal in terms of his treatment of deviant coolies but a sexual wreck who seeks to satiate his lust by preying on any coolie woman. He has no moral qualms about his unethical behaviour and immoral exploitation of the plantation workers.

De la Havre is an exception to the general apathy, inhumanity and ruthlessness associated with the planters. He has a different perception of the deplorable plight of the coolies
and the injustice and sinfulness of the system that is operating. However he is powerless and finally deported after being labelled as a non-conformist, anti-British humanitarian. He is not only a compassionate doctor but a champion of the cause of the coolies.

Coming to the coolies, we find them averse to any protest or reaction. They are illiterate and ignorant and it is their crass stupidity that makes them resigned to their inhuman situation. They are incapable of making a protest, leave alone mobilising the group to wage a battle against the consistently anti-labour policies and practices of the British planters. The mild protest organised by the leaders of the group ends in a fiasco as they are overawed by the presence of the white masters, particularly Reggie Hunt. Gangu is a typical character belonging to this group. He is fatalistic when it comes to the crunch, be it his wife’s death or his daughter’s narrow escape from the rapacious grasp of Reggie Hunt symbolised by her escape from the python.

The climax of this story of subtle satire on the white bosses in relation to the natives is achieved when the court finally acquits guilty Reggie. This, in other words, is symbolic of the ultimate triumph of evil in the capitalist world of the ruling class suppressing the working class and treating them as the scum of the earth.

Anand’s portrayal is grim and is a vehement plea for the subverting of this system so that the workers will not only get adequate wages and recompense but will come in possession of the
means of production. This is what is declared by Anand through his mouthpiece de la Havre. As perpetrators of an unjust system of capitalist exploitation and the resultant furtherance of social stratification, the British administrators have no right over the land of the Indians.

The Big Heart is another novel where Anand has addressed this question from the point of view of mechanisation. Class consciousness can eventually overtake caste which as of now is a powerful factor in all human commerce and relationships. The coppersmiths who have attained to wealth and prosperity and a better social position in the caste hierarchy, look down upon the others and forge new ties with their business counterparts.

Murli Dhar who excludes this thathiar brotherhood from his son's betrothal ceremony is made to rue his decision by the thathiars who boycott the function. The thathiars may be poor. But caste should be respected. Murli who asserts his class superiority at the expense of caste unity is taught a lesson. Gokul Chand regrets to have formed a partnership with a man of lower caste at the risk of losing his own. Ananta takes a middle position while the other thathiars reject the machine and mechanisation altogether and uncritically. Ananta stands for a rational approach and wants to eschew violence and vandalism. Machine is the sign of the advent of the capitalist mode of production. The thathiars resist it as they sense a threat to
their profession. But Ananta is able to perceive the wisdom of accepting the machine. But he believes in the solidarity and unity of the workers which alone can achieve the desired goal.

Paradoxically, Ananta dies at the hands of a frenzied Ralia in the very act of dissuading him from mindless violence. Ananta's death is not the end, but the beginning of the new alliance of workers and women to be forged by Ananta's friends and admirers together with Janki who vows to carry on the struggle, launched by Ananta.

Anand has masterfully laid bare the mechanics of a class society marked by greed, acquisitiveness, jealousy, rivalry and fissiparous tendencies. The cause of the workers' unity is thwarted not only by the relentless strangle-hold of the owners of the factory but also by the fatalistic, unenlightened approach of a section of coppersmiths themselves. Moreover the presence of different ideological postures within the group accentuates the division and polarisation. Anand in this novel pleads for unity and solidarity of workers in the larger interest of securing their rights and privileges and of eventually mastering the machine and owning it.

Anand moreover emphasises the principle that money should not rule the mind of man, and what is essential is possessing a 'big heart'. This is the refrain of the protagonist which falls
on deaf ears. And his heroic death stings their simmering consciences and rouses them to the reality of multiple exploitation they are victims of.

Dr. Rengachari has effectively summed up Anand's fictional goal in these novels thus:

Coolie is concerned with a different social aspect. The treatment of the caste system is turned upside down in this novel. Caste-hierarchy dwindles into insignificance, for Mammon is represented as the undisputed ruler in the world of Coolie. Money is the summum bonum of human existence. It can catapult a pariah to a respectable position and Dr. Merchant is a case in point. Indigence can plunge the high-caste Munoo into the ignominious depth of obsequiousness....

....The Big Heart highlights the inbuilt irritants in relationship between the different strata of higher castes, among the kshatriyas, kaseras impelled by a sense of superiority stemming from the assumption that they have descended from Lord Rama, become snobbish and supercilious and look down upon the thathiars.
....he chastises their inherent shopkeeper mentality, the mercenary motive of the Britishers in Two Leaves and a Bud. The British never do anything, he says, without trying to extort the maximum advantage out of it.


A dispassionate analysis of the situation of the unbridgeable gap existing between a small group of the wealthy and the overwhelming majority eking a subsistence level or below poverty line existence, unfolds the undeniable fact that the British were the prime cause as they introduced the capitalistic form of trade and commerce. Of course later it became an unavoidable and inevitable phenomenon any country or society has to reckon with. Saros Cowasjeee in his 'Coolie: An Assessment' remarks:

But the plight of Munoo and his kind is the direct result of the British rule and the industrial revolution they introduced without paying sufficient heed to social reforms. Munoo's position in life raises the question of freedom in a capitalistic society. As Anand sees it, freedom to Munoo, as to millions of others, means no more than being beaten from pillar to post.

(Cowasjee 1976 :17)
And Margaret Berry seems to agree with Anand's point of view vis-a-vis the role of the British when she comments:

For pre-Independence India, capitalism was identified with colonialism: the great political enemy was the British. Anand's pre-1947 novels quite naturally attack the English Sarkar at every turn, as the major source of India's ills, the preserver of corrupt social institutions, the exploiter of Indian labour and wealth, the tyrant over civil liberties.

(Berry, 1970: P.67).

Anand's spokesman de la Havre in Two Leaves and a Bud verbalises Anand's own perception and anger in the following crisp words:

"And when, after enjoying the monopoloy of Indian trade for generations, our Britons, who never, never shall be slaves, found they had cut their own throats by introducing the steam engine into India, not only because their home manufactures competed with their colonial manufactures, but also because the Indian moneyled classes were pressing for a share in the industries of their country, they began to
bully the coolies and bleed them as much as they could before the judgement day arrived."

"... But what is a contract with a slave? Less than a scrap of paper: And that is your Empire." (P. 1106-107)

de la Havre seems to have gone to the root of the question of exploitation and squarely placed the blame for it all, on the British colonisers. His perceptive insight is not altogether bereft of a sympathetic concern for the sweat and toil of the condemned coolies. He says that 'a single cup of tea contains the hunger, the sweat and the despair of a million Indians'.

If this was true of India during the British Raj, it is more poignantly descriptive of the contemporary Indian predicament.

Achebe hasn't explicitly addressed himself to or dwelt on, except in passing or by implication, the whole area of class distinction or class-consciousness in the aftermath of the tribe's encounter with the colonial world in his novels, Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God. Of course in his other novels he is specifically probing the political situation in Nigeria before and after Independence. In Anthills of the Savannah, there is a systematically worked out anatomy of power in all its dimensions, manifestations, functions and corruption. Achebe has exercised his social and artistic
conviction bearing on the conflicts and contradictions resulting from Class-distinction, an off-shoot of capitalism.

In Things Fall Apart, Achebe has made an allusion to the colonial trade or market based on money introduced by the British into the tribal milieu. In chapter twenty nine, there is a reference to this:

"The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price and much money flowed into Umuofia" (p.161).

Achebe is perceptive enough to point to the capitalist trade or market system as one of the two major changes that began to challenge the vitality and the relevance of the traditional forms. The trauma that the tribal economy suffers is dramatically expressed in the most essential commodities like palm-oil and kernel becoming dearer and the whole market system dominated by money. This is the beginning of the capitalist economy making inroads into a primitive tribal economy. The flow of money into Umuofia suggests that trade and commerce based on cash had become a regular and predominant feature of the economy of the clan, nay of the whole of Africa.

Achebe is quick to point out that erosion of traditional values because of the western patterns imposed on the tribe, had begun to show unmistakable symptoms, the most glaring one being corruption. He makes only a mild reference to it in chapter
twenty where Obierika and Okonkwo are engaged in a conversation and Obierika seizes him of the latest happenings in the world of their clan. Speaking about the land dispute which resulted in the hanging of Aneto, Obierika alleges that the white man’s court decided it should belong to Nnama’s family as they had given much money to the white man’s messengers and interpreter. This is as shocking as it is revealing. But in the context of the new form of market economy that is functioning, it is quite understandable and in fact to be expected.

In *Arrow of God* Achebe’s interest is focussed on the conflict between the forces of oppression and the traditional structure that is showing signs of breaking up. Nevertheless he has made sure to direct his ire against the third enemy the economic system, the white administration and the religion being the first two. In this novel he has created several characters who listlessly flit between the two cultures in a bid to assimilate the new values without being alienated from their cultural roots.

Nwodika is one such character whose ambition is to reconcile the two opposite or contradictory cultures and in the process to earn money. He starts a trade and joins the market for the sole purpose of making a profit. Nwodika is a prototype of the new class of rich businessmen yet to emerge on the horizon of Umuaro. He is shown as a precursor and the voice of the future. While he testifies to the Igbo flexibility and
adaptability, he is unwillingly hastening the breakdown of traditional Umuaro, cutting across its time-honoured loyalties and allegiances. The class system just originating in the territory of Umuaro is an offshoot of the capitalist market economy introduced by the British for the purpose of augmenting the profits accruing to the Empire.

No Longer At Ease narrates the story of Obi the grandson of Okonkwo, his ups and downs as a western-educated, idealistic young man who eventually succumbs to the pressures of a modern Nigeria under the colonial regime. It has a very ominous opening with Obi being convicted for taking bribes. Achebe’s satire is quite penetrative and subtle as he probes the political and economic conditions that mark the Nigeria of his novel.

Obi’s failure is in one sense attributable to the irresistible attraction and temptation of material comforts and riches characteristic of the urbanisation and industrialisation that were overtaking Nigeria. The modern Lagos is a melting pot of cultural and social values emanating from the West. It is to this Lagos that Obi comes armed with his western categories of knowledge, values and principles. In Lagos however the emphasis is on money, success, luxury and class distinction. While this development is inevitable in the context of advance and progress sweeping through the entire universe, Achebe regrets its supplanting the traditional spiritual values.
Corruption has become the way of life of the people so much so, they are not distressed about Obi's accepting the bribe as much, as about his being 'caught' by the police. It is a sad commentary and a satiric narration of Achebe. Obi wants to root out corruption by sticking to a rigid code of public morality. But he belongs to the new elite class. He can't afford to dress, live or behave differently. Thus he is torn between the two pulls. To make this worse for him, his own village people who advanced a loan for his studies abroad demand the loan to be repaid while at the same time placing very high expectations in terms of his external appearance and overall life-style. In other words they want him to be a foreign educated man of the world. This pushes him against the wall and his resistance fails and he becomes corrupt.

With the onset of capitalistic system of business, the temptation to conform to one's class at all costs is great. It is important to note that this moral decline or decadence is itself a symptom of the fundamental changes occurring because of the colonial rule. The whites pride themselves saying that they have outgrown bribery of the overt kind. Anne Tibble in her essay "Chinua Achebe' puts it this way:

First Obi gets into debt over taxes, then over his new car, then over sending money to his people. Next he takes bribes. The white leaders are not free from using personal pull
in well-diguisised or civilized 'innocent' forms: such as that you're most likely to gain promotion if you go to church and say you are a Christian, if you let it be known that you have been to a well-known school, or even if your aunt slept with a king... As if unaware that any of these things are not in the deepest sense corrupt, they are supremely critical of the African new officials' form of corruption, their addiction to stark bribery, by money or gifts....

(Tibble, p.127)

A Man of the People analyses Nigerian politics after Independence and with a prophetic foresight foredooms Nigeria to coups and counter-coups resulting in a military dictatorship. Odili the principal character is originally in league with Chief Nanga. The struggle between the profoundly religious and spiritual values of the old world and the pursuit of material things flaunted as a value by the new order is further explored and sharpened. As G.D. Killam avers:

The emasculation of traditional religion is complete by the time of the action of A Man of the People. Achebe conveys this powerfully in a very brief scene. The brevity of the scene and the nature of the religious comment made
offers an exact ironic reflection of the efficacy of the restraining force of the traditional religion in the contemporary social situation. It is Christmas time and the hero of the novel, Odili, is visiting the wife of Chief Nanga M.P. Among other things, comment is made on the new house which is being built for Nanga. One townsman says:
"Look at the new house he is building. Four storeys: Before, if a man built two storeys the whole town would come to admire it, but today my kinsman is building four".

(Killam, 1975: p.35)

It is later announced that the house was being built free of cost by the European building firm of Antonio and Sons to whom Nanga has given the half million pound contract to build the National Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The casual and ironic way of providing this information is sufficient to underline the rampant corruption in high places which was corroding the very fabric of Nigerian society. The novel is a telling comment on the degree to which materialistic values, acquistiveness, general moral decline and unrestrained corruption have come to be synonymous with the way of life of Nigerian politicians and the uppish new elite. It is ultimately the capitalist system which has thrown up people like Nanga and Koko and seeks to suck in well-meaning people like Odili and Max.
Odili though an idealist has a desire to create a better country than that he lives in. Nevertheless Odili's idealism is tempered by an awareness of the pragmatic realities, assisted by a capacity for decisive action, unlike Obi the hero of *No Longer At Ease*. Max who is a rebel and a dreamer is nevertheless quite practical and does not hesitate to accept a bribe from Koko and to use it for his own campaign.

Nanga, with his uncanny ability to get closer to the masses and to get away with anything, is presented almost as a mafia leader indulging in thinly disguised system of bribery, corruption and nepotism in order to keep his position of power. His style of living and functioning is an eloquent testimony to the callousness, unscrupulousness, corruption scams and scandalous deals that were the order of the day in Nigerian government circles.

From Achebe's narration of the story it is quite obvious that he was pinning down all the woes and ills of the Nigerian political situation to the excessive love for money among the new elite of the country and the crucial role money played in all the political transactions. Even Odili and Max who eventually becomes a hero and a martyr by his death are not altogether free from 'corrupt' practices albeit for a cause. In fact even Odili's father who is otherwise a good man asks his son if his party C.P.C. has provided him with sufficient money to conduct
his campaign. And he has no scruples about using his son’s car for his personal requirements. Of course Nanga’s misuse of power and his strategy of wooing voters through bribes, his control of the media of the government and employing hired thugs masquerading as policemen are the very epitome of the moral degradation and erosion that has taken place in the wake of the capitalistic mode of production and the central place accorded to money in the country’s economy.

Achebe squarely places the blame for all this anarchy on the economic system based on competition and profiteering and acquisitiveness, which was at least originally introduced by the colonizers. Of course the system functions now, quite successfully, as the moral base of the Nigerian society has been already knocked out. And the new elite, educated, idealist youth of the country are victims of this system and not all perpetrators or supporters of anti-people, anti-social activities.

In his latest novel Anthills of the Savannah Achebe continues the same theme but declines to predict any viable form of government or any alternative to the present malaise. The polemical tone of A Man of the People is softened to a considerable extent as the omniscient narrator is missing. The very form and structure of the novel are understandably tailored to promote Achebe’s pluralistic vision of the future of Nigeria.
All said and done, Achebe's investigation of the theme of power and its manifold revelations and corruption, centres round the moral decadence that has crept in, after the onslaught of the powerful capitalistic system and values. The triumvirate ruling the fictional African state of Kangan, namely, Sam, Chris and Ikem are friends and rivals at the same time. They are products of the interplay of the oppressive colonial system and the new independent Nigeria still struggling to find its moorings, to settle down in the context of new found freedom and its concomitant of irresponsible leadership. Sam metamorphoses into a dictator ruling the country with a sycophant cabinet unwilling to displease the President. However, Chris and Ikem have different notions about power and policies and ruling. Once they are disillusioned with the President's authoritarianism, neo-colonial mentality, susceptibility to flattery and hero-worship, they turn sour and resign from their respective posts in the government and take to meeting the challenge in the midst of the masses.

Achebe's disaffection with the excesses of the military and dictatorial regime and the vagaries of the political leaders of the young independent Nigeria is powerfully expressed when, abruptly, he introduce the myth of Idemili and the formal structure and the theme of this myth and the hymn to the Sun, focus on the theme of creation and de-creation. Achebe blames the African leaders for causing a rupture with the religious and
moral past of the people and for their subservience to foreign manipulations' and adoption of 'inherited second-hand capitalism'.

Marçy Ebun Modupe Kolawole recapitulates Achebe's concerns as projected through this novel in the following words:

Achebe therefore dwells on the past to identify the root of current problems, in a search for social rehabilitation and transformation. He considers the present society too gullible and susceptible to all forms of orthodoxy. But the social X-ray is comprehensive as he asserts that the past and colonialism are not the only forces that have caused the present predicament. He blames African leaders for 'the subservience to foreign manipulation' and for adopting 'inherited second-hand capitalism'. But he goes beyond this to highlight the role played by corruption, repression, intimidation, neglect of the poor majority, insensitivity and inefficiency. He also blames the present leaders' mediocrity, parasitism, and fraud cover-ups.

(Kolawole, p.125)
From a reading of Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*, it becomes obvious that Kolawole’s analyses are objective. The novel is commentary on the unprincipled and egoistic lives of the political leaders of post Independence Nigeria, and a timely caution that the common people are going to call their bluff and expose their knavery whatever sacrifice and struggles it may entail.

All in all Achebe’s analysis of the present societal malady yields this precious insight that an artificially and uncritically transplanted capitalist mode of production and market and the attendant cut-throat competition and acquisitiveness are at the root of the present predicament. Of course Achebe refrains from going into a full-length investigation of the class-system as it operated in Nigerian society. It does not mean that class is not a reality there. On the contrary class consciousness and class formation in African society are a reality that has come to stay in Nigeria. Modernization or modernity is one facet of the capitalist system. And the traditional tribal society of Nigeria has undergone a sea-change specially after the advent of the Western trade and capitalist modes. The tribal economy and social life are marked deeply by the consequences of the capitalist system as understood and developed by the business class and the ruling elite.

While Achebe is interested in the ethical crisis and political instability that have been caused by the capitalist
system and not in its external manifestations, Anand is an angry man and seized with a righteous indignation and determined to expose the seamy side and the horrendous injustices and oppression unleashed by the class distinction and consciousness, an intrinsic part of the capitalist world. Hence, we have some moving, pathetic, gruesome, mind-boggling and tragic scenes and details of the social underdog’s experiences at the hands of the rich and powerful people who call the tune in a capitalist set up. Anand is out to denigrate not only the system as a whole but also the individuals and groups that manipulate the system in order to orient it in favour of their personal aggrandizement and profit-seeking. Anand is realistic in his approach to this theme, often reminding one of Dickens. Nevertheless his purpose is first and foremost to expose the insincerity and one-sidedness of this class character of a capitalist society. In order to highlight the inhumanity and injustice of it all he sometimes exaggerates the cruelty and barbarity of individual capitalists, particularly the British colonial masters in relation to their lowly subjects or employees.

Achebe doesn’t dwell on these aberrations at any length, probably his fictional matrix comprising the colourful precolonial past and the subsequent contradictions and confrontations does not really admit of such a treatment. Achebe is faithful to his avowed goals in his fiction writing even as Anand is true to his proclaimed social convictions.
Now we turn our attention to the caste system which has been instrumental for so much of exploitation in India and to a lesser extent in some other countries. It is believed that caste as it is today, is a remnant of the varnasramadharma, a differentiation of castes made on the basis of one's occupation for the common good of a given society. However, there is another theory which maintains that the Hindu religion originated the caste system as it favoured the so called ruling caste. According to this Hindu belief the four different castes emanated from the Brahma but from his different parts. The Brahmins, the highest in the caste hierarchy were said to proceed from the forehead of the Brahma, the Kshatriyas from the shoulders, the Vaishyas from the stomach and the sudras from the foot of the Brahma.

While the division based on the kind of work performed by a particular group is quite agreeable to reason, the theological explanation offered is an outrage to human dignity and become the basis for the ignominious and iniquitous social evil called 'untouchability'.

For Anand casteism and untouchability are two great wounds in the Indian psyche that need to be healed or two cankers in the body politic of our society sapping its very vitality. In this Anand is a fervent disciple of Gandhi. Anand had first-hand experience of this insidious practice of untouchability as his childhood was spent in the midst of children of all castes
including the untouchables. His Bakha of Untouchable is but a fictional recreation of Bakha, his childhood friend. His experience in Gandhi's ashram had instilled into him an abhorrence of this social taboo which is a sin against man and God according to Gandhi. Gandhi is said to have advised Anand on the manuscript. His own segregation and isolation on board a ship by some westerners left an indelible mark on him and a realization of the humiliation of being treated as an untouchable.

Hence Anand took it as a challenge to depict the lowly and colourless lives of the untouchables in his novels. In Untouchable obviously and in The Road Anand has created two immortal heroes drawn from the scum of the so called casteist society. Bakha of Untouchable has a perennial appeal as a child hero who grows from innocence to maturity and as a celebration in fiction of a sweeper boy, the likes of whom never entered the realms of literature before Anand's bold venture.

The sweepers' colony is described at considerable length by Anand, thus underlining the fact that they have an existence of their own, if it may be called an existence, about which the caste people, whose dirty jobs these untouchables do, have no concern or knowledge. It is a symbol of the filth and squalor that mark their persons and their lives. This is the paradox that the persons who are responsible for maintaining the hygiene
and cleanliness of the high caste people are systematically deprived of their basic rights to hygiene or cleanliness.

But this is just one level or kind of discrimination. But the belief that their proximity or their touch or contact can pollute and contaminate a high caste person is an outrageous denial of the basic humanness of these men and women. It is a contradiction in terms as those who practise it take it as a religious mandate and the untouchables themselves have assimilated it into their psychology and being, as their fate and as ordained by God Almighty. The privileged caste Hindus proclaim in all sneer and callousness: "They ought to be wiped off the surface of the earth" (p. 54).

Bakha’s insignificant daily life is filled with insults and humiliation. The climax occurs when he is said to have inadvertently touched a caste Hindu and is slapped by him. Being a sensitive and smart lad Bakha could not brook the injustice and shame of it. Anand makes this the moment of truth in Bakha’s life as he has an unprecedented illumination and clarity as to why he is being hated, and maltreated. He realizes painfully that his status of being an untouchable makes him a sucker, a pushover, a good for nothing in a caste-ridden society.

Apart from exposing the absurdity and stupidity of caste consciousness Anand also probes the different levels of casteism practised. In this novel he is able to point out the degree of
caste among the low caste groups. There are castes and subcastes. Bakha is a sweeper or scavenger belonging to the lowest sub-caste. It is this that makes Gulabo a washer-woman look down upon Sohini who is a sweeper girl. This is untouchability within untouchability, if one may say so. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes:

....there are degrees of caste among the 'low-caste' people, there being none low without one being lower still.

(Iyengar, 1962: p.337)

Anand has a cool dig as it were at the practice of touching a Mohammedan to neutralise the pollution caused by an unholy touch. The irony is that the high caste Hindus ordinarily regard the Muslims as outcastes.

Anand takes pains to uncover the ridiculousness of this system while at the same time castigating the high caste people and the Hindu religion which are responsible for the perpetuation of this unholy practice. He points out the several myths that have grown up around this system. He reproaches the untouchables for their sense of inferiority and self-effacing, of course a patrimony of thousands of years of servitude and servility. He ridicules the high caste superciliousness that thinks that it is presumption on the part of the plebeians to smoke like the rich. He is angry with the high caste housewives who favour the lazy sadhus with hot
vegetable curry and rice while they fling stale bread at the untouchable. He is irritated by the segregation of the untouchables in hotels by allotting separate tumblers.

Bakha is created by Anand as a sweeper with a difference. He is endowed with a keen sense of his own lowliness and the possibility of his escape from this sordid reality into a world of the tommies. This opportunity is provided him by some of the babus and sahibs who are more friendly towards him. His make-believe world consists of his occasional puff at a cigarette thrown by the high caste people, his sporting the clothes of the white man and his fondness for hockey. These are little details that work up to give a credible and authentic picture of Bakha’s genuine aspiration to transcend his own limitations.

Anand after providing three different alternatives for Bakha’s liberation leaves it to him to choose one. But Bahkha doesn’t find any of the three solutions too enchanting. He is nevertheless fascinated by Gandhi’s suggestion of liberation from their inferior status by their refusal to accept the 'leavings' from the plates of high caste Hindus and by seeking free access to wells and temples. He is moreover attracted by the poet’s proposal to end their drudgery by adopting flushout system and mechanisation.

Anand’s approach to this problem as manifested in the novel is one of actions done for the amelioration of the untouchables and a corresponding distrust of abstract propositions
and solutions. He steers clear of any intellectual or philosophical approach to this problem so entrenched in the culture and psyche of our people. Anand finds it a moral obligation to respond to this human problem not only on the part of individuals, but society as a whole. In this it is not so much Anand the Marxist, as Anand the Humanist who is grappling with this ancient problem that has defied solution till today. His socialism is not revolutionary or violent but well grounded in ethical principles and rooted in India's cultural values. His approach is existential, viewing the pernicious practice of untouchability from the victim's situations and perspective. The perspective of the subaltern is a necessary pre-condition for any objective analysis of their situation. Anand moreover brings to his job an artist's detachment as he by caste is a Kshatriya and not an untouchable. However he is able to strike a sympathetic chord as his heart vibrates with the untouchable's abject state and his artistic genius finds the fictional correlative to make the story and plot convincing.

His novel, The Road published in 1961, is again a reaffirmation of Anand's emotional involvement in the problem of untouchability. Anand created this 'enchanted mirror' primarily to illustrate to Nehru that untouchability is still a reality all the government's protestations to the contrary notwithstanding. Fourteen years of independence had done nothing to remove this social stigma from them but in fact had intensified the opprobrium of being an unwanted segment used as a mere tool.
Bhikhu the protagonist is a road-worker who has to contend with the ideology of a power structure that tolerates no change in the status quo. The road also symbolises the road to emancipation from an inhuman situation. And this is going to be an arduous and well-nigh impossible task given the socio-political situation today.

Anand, by means of a deft handling of irony and mild satire, reveals some of the psychological forces that operate in both the high caste Hindus and the untouchables in their inter-relationships in the context of a changed socio-economic situation. With the introduction of certain reforms in the village administrative set up and village economy, the government of an independent India, has paved the way for a slow amelioration of the condition of the untouchables. They can work and earn money as their wages. Thus the control hitherto exercised by the upper caste Hindus over the life of the untouchables is slowly disappearing. Hence they are stricken with fear coupled with jealousy that a progressively liberated and independent untouchable community may attain to the status of the 'twice born'. A sense of insecurity has been generated in the high caste Hindus as the outcastes are climbing up the social ladder helped by government's economic and poverty alleviation programmes.
Anand uncovers the hypocrisy and double standards involved in the high caste Hindus' attitude to the untouchables. They refuse to touch the stones touched and 'polluted' by the untouchables. Nevertheless they have no shame about enjoying the yield of the fields tilled by them. Pandit Suraj Mani who swears by the Vedas and demands a high standard in observing the prescriptions of religion and caste dharma, is an embodiment of this contradiction. He has to carry with him a little earth to avoid treading on what has been 'soiled' by the untouchables but he finds nothing wrong in eating the mangoes plucked by the untouchables.

The repeated and almost nauseating allusions to the divine origin of caste and duty of everyone to fulfil its obligations in order to work out one's salvation put in the mouth of landlord Thakur Singh and Pandit Suraj Mani are a powerful critique of the hollowness of such a theory and its hypocrisy. Anand is not sparing the chamars either. He presents them as socially aware and better off and bold enough to withstand the opposition of Thakur Singh, Lachman and Sajnu. But their self-awareness though better, is not deep enough to stand them in moments of crisis. They are unnerved and defeated by their own sense of inadequacy and inferiority. While Anand wants to shake the high castes out of their spurious sense of superiority and
complacency, he also attacks the lack of self confidence, self-awareness and courage of the chamars, of course sympathetically and with concern.

Dhooli Singh who belongs to the majority high caste and is Lambardar is an interesting portrayal of the change that can come about in a high caste Hindu who realizes that 'no one can enter a little door seated on a camel'. He is convinced that the road to progress and prosperity lies in casting off the shackles of orthodoxy and in building a broad alliance with people of all kinds including the untouchable chamars. Modernity cannot become an actuality if one is too conservative or closed in upon oneself.

Anand makes the character of Dhooli Singh quite credible as he strives to show that although he has a reformist fire in him, he is not altogether free from his traditional mental-sets and attitudes to untouchability. He wouldn’t want his daughter to set her affections on the mean. But his son Lachman’s puerile incendiariism that consumed in a fire all the huts of the chamars, helps him to overcome such reservations and ambivalence. He stands up courageously for the victimised chamars and offers his land and valuables to them as a compensation for their loss. He not only cuts across caste lines here but identifies himself totally with the pathetic situation of the chamars. No doubt Dhooli Singh is Anand’s vision of transforming the caste-ridden society into an egalitarian one.
Bhikhu is a mere symbol. He seldom reacts or retaliates. He is nevertheless a leader of his group deeply involved in bringing the fruits of modernity to his village. Of course he is up against a massive road-block, the curse of untouchability. However he is determined to lay the road which alone can aid his people to move into the mainstream of national life, destroying in the process, the barriers laid by caste and pride of wealth and power.

The conclusion of the novel is hazy and ambiguous leaving the reader to keep guessing. But one thing is clear that caste discrimination and untouchability, though legally abolished in India, continue to bedevil our so called modern democracy. The likes of Bhikhu have no other alternative but to escape into anonymity and die a slow death in the darkness of their loneliness. Bhikhu is a frustrated individual even as his superhuman efforts to construct the road, Anand's symbol for eventual progress and modernity, fail to elicit appreciation from his high caste brethren. He feels rejected and betrayed. Anand in this novel has mounted a bitter but ironic attack on the contradictions and hypocrisy that mark the attitudes and behaviour of the ostensibly superior castes. He lashes at their complacency and issues a stern warning that this caste system will not stand the test of time as the so called low caste
people, thanks to widespread availability of education and opportunities for employment, are slowly shedding their complexes and are aware of their inhuman situation and their responsibility to pull themselves out of this pathetic situation.

Anand has treated the same topic in his *The Big Heart* but from a new perspective. He examines the snobbery that marks inter-high caste relationship. The thathiars and Kaseras are sub-castes of the Kshatriya community, the second and highest in the branch of castes. The orthodox Kaseras look down upon the thathiars as low and have only contempt for their people and culture. Murli Dhar, a thathiah and Gokul Chand a Kasera are partners in the factory management. Nevertheless Gokul Chand is in no mood to accept the invitation to attend the betrothal of Sadanand’s son as he is a thathiah. He is frightened of the consequences of associating with the thathiars as his own brotherhood would frown on it. Although in business they are partners, in social relationships and functions they prefer to keep their caste identity and distinction.

Another interesting sociological development very artistically expressed by Anand is the tendency of the rich and business class of the low castes trying to move out of their own caste identity by striking alliances with the high caste. In this manner they feel their stigma as untouchable is removed, and
they come to be regarded as members of the affluent business class. Here is a very interesting and comical scene described with Anand’s typical eye for the humorous and the ironical wherein the betrothal of Nikka, grandson of Murli Dhar takes place. He has invited only a few important Kaseras like Gokul Chand and a few Arya Samajis and some leading thathiars. The rest of the thathiar brotherhood is not invited by Murli Dhar for he considers them ‘low’. But at the ceremony Gokul Chand is horrified not to see Murli Dhar’s kin. This is a moment of utter confusion and discomfiture for Murli Dhar. He is emphatically told that he can’t afford to ignore the kith and kin, just because they are poorer.

Anand’s perception of class being more powerful and exerting greater influence than caste in the long run, contradicts the theory of Periyar, E.V.R. who held that caste is not going to be altogether eradicated given our religious and cultural traditions. Not that caste is going to be altogether eradicated. But caste differences can be sunk and forgotten if the class association or alliance is strong.

Achebe evidently has not touched on caste as it is not to be found in his country in the form in which we find it in India. While class plays a rather serious role in the action of Achebe’s novels caste is not mentioned at all. However, if caste has to be broadly defined it could include distinctions of groups of people as undesirable or outcaste or ostracised.
It could be by extension applied to a category of people referred to as "Osu" specifically mentioned in No Longer at Ease where the protagonist Obi Okonkwo is in love with Clara who is an 'Osu'. In fact the conflict in Obi's life commences when this truth is revealed to his Christian parents who vehemently oppose this move. His whole village is against his marrying an "Osu" girl. Osu is an outcaste traditionally treated so by the Igbo tribes. Probably the real reason for this is hidden in the misty past or shrouded in mystery just as their many other beliefs were.

Anne Tibble explains the significance of this practice in the following manner:

Presumably 'Osu' are outcastes because of some crime or social misdemeanour one of their ancestors has been guilty of. The village elders attempt to identify themselves with relentless 'national' laws of punishment: they the guardians of the community's morals, cannot trust to present mercy and forgive the innocent descendant of an offender. They must hold to implacable logic of judgement. Simple human forgiveness would be thought weak and sliding.

*(Tibble pt in Cooke, p.125)*
It is undoubtedly a clear case of social ostracism which brands a whole section of people, generations of a family as outcaste. Although the concept of caste cannot be applied here as it is, it can be extended to it. Achebe disapproves of this 'caste' division within the same tribe. The fact is that such a distinction however limited it may be, exists among the tribes in Nigeria.

The scandalous side of this story is that Obi’s parents who are Christians and profess and preach equality, are most inflexible in holding on to this discriminatory practice. The deepseatedness of this prejudice in the minds of the people is thrown into bold relief by the reply phrased by Obi’s father Isaac to Obi’s first announcement of his affair with Clara, the 'Osu':

I know Josiah Okeke very well..... I know him and I know his wife. He is a good man and a great Christian. But he is "Osu". Naaman, captain of the host of Syria, was a great man and honourable, he was also a mighty man of valour, but he was a leper.....

"Osu" is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son, not to bring the mark of shame and leprosy into your family. If you do, your children and your children’s children into the third and fourth generations will curse your memory...(p.121).
And his mother literally shattered the fervent hope he nurtured by swearing that he would marry Clara only at the cost of her life. Unable to bear this, Obi decided to repudiate Clara. It was an astounding decision on Obi's part but it explains the pressure brought on him by his parents.

There is a reference to "Osu" the outcaste in *Things Fall Apart*, where a dispute arose in the young Church of Mbanta about admitting "Osu" into the church. The new converts vehemently oppose the idea of receiving "Osu" into their midst. The Osu is said to be a person set apart, a taboo forever, a slave who always carried the mark of his forbidden caste—long tangled dirty hair. The collective and ancient wisdom of the clan could not prevail against the force and vigour of the new faiths preached.

Though one may not insinuate there was 'caste' in the social structure of the Nigerian tribes, we are sure there were outcastes and the taboo was quite widely accepted and passionately adhered to.

Anand and Achebe are equally aware of the overwhelming power that class system can command, given the capitalist mode of production, distribution and consumption. The class division which is inevitable will spawn conflicts and struggles. The real problem of the third world is that of the gap between the rich and the poor. And the gap has been widening over the years as the inherent logic of capitalism dictates. The continued
pauperisation of the poor will escalate the conflict between the rich and the poor classes. This conflict cannot last long.

Anand and Achebe advocate different approaches to solving this impasse. Anand believes in action of 'bhakti' which means selfless action for the betterment of society. Anand expects every oppressed individual and group to engage in affirmative action for social transformation or universal liberation. He believes in a socialist, egalitarian, fraternal and caring society to emerge from the embers of the vanishing society. The writer or the intellectual has an important role to play in exposing these contradictions, in clarifying alternatives. He/she has to be the spokesperson or the 'fiery voice' of the voiceless. In other words he has to play a prophetic role.

Achebe too believes in the unique role of a writer or intellectual in the emerging social change. He/she acts as the pivotal point in the process of education and liberation. Therefore the writer becomes a teacher or educator according to Achebe. Achebe proposes struggle as the only way out of the present political and social muddle. He assigns a specific and important role to the new elite of Nigeria in this process of liberation. They need to be reeducated and regenerated. They should not be swallowed up in the rat-race for money and power and popularity. The writer becomes the conscience of the people. They have to educate and pull up the drooping confidence and
morale of the people. Struggles at all levels need to be carried on if the ultimate triumph has to be a historical reality.

Anand condemns caste discrimination as a pernicious, shameful and inhuman practice. Caste consciousness and casteism are so much a part of our cultural and religious heritage that it devolves on every Indian particularly the victims of this system to raise their voice of protest. Anand’s commitment to humanism shines through every one of his novels and underlies his powerful indictment, in some of his novels, of the atrocities perpetrated against the untouchables in our country.

Neither Anand nor Achebe is an obscurantist. They both appreciate and welcome the revolutionary changes in life-style, modes of thinking and relating, introduced by the processes of modern scientific and technological development. Machines are useful and are in a way indispensable. However man should master the machines. Human values cannot be sacrificed. Machines are good slaves, but bad masters. Therefore it is necessary to have machines for the purpose of making progress. But human dignity and respect for the human being as a person should be at the core of any programme for social change or liberation. Anand’s and Achebe’s ideas of social transformation seem to echo the following words of Aime Cesaire in "Discourse on colonialism".

It is new society that we must create .. a society rich with all the productive power of modern times, warm with all the sharing of olden days.

(Cited in Caspersz, 1992).