CHAPTER II

REJECTION AND SUFFERINGS

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the major voices of Modern India. His work anticipates some of the seminal developments in postcolonial theory and practice and as such has important implications for postcolonial studies. Mulk Raj Anand presents the saga of India’s struggle for independence not through the conventional bourgeois discourse, but from an alternative perspective foregrounding worker’s struggle over and against the gradualism of Anglophile leaders.

Re-reading Mulk Raj Anand’s work which covers more than six decades especially at the threshold of twenty-first century, one is really struck not only by the degree and scope of the author's literary achievements, but also the simultaneous historicity and contemporaneity that his works exhibit. It is this rich diversity and rare resilience of his works that allows and demands multiple and newer approaches from time to time.

Margaret Berry uses a biographical approach to study the emerging connection between Mulk Raj Anand the man and Mulk Raj Anand the writer in *Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and the Novelist*.

Balaram Gupta in 1972, Saros Cowasjee in 1975, Alister Nivn in 1978, Premila Paul in 1983 have undertaken thematic studies and focusing on Mulk Raj Anand’s humanism, his concern with freedom, compassion and social commitment respectively. Krishnanandan Sinha in 1972 and M.K.Naik in 1975 attempted an assessment of Mulk Raj Anand’s achievement as a creative writer. Marlene Fisher analysed the philosophy of life of Mulk Raj Anand’s works and concluded that despite his commitment to idealistic social goals of Marxism, Mulk Raj Anand’s purpose is neither chiefly propagandist nor political. Besides, there have been innumerable articles on different aspects of Mulk Raj Anand’s fictional *oeuvre*.

The general critical neglect Mulk Raj Anand suffered in recent postcolonial studies appears to be due to a shift of focus to diasporic writers. The slant in post colonial theory needs to be set right and a systematic re-reading of the work produced at home must be undertaken. Post-colonial discourse springs from the specific socio-cultural dynamic created in ex-colonies following colonial encounters. The present study on Mulk Raj Anand’s select fictions places Mulk Raj Anand within the
larger context and attempts a reading of Mulk Raj Anand’s novels as part of the discursive formations of post-colonial discourse.

Growing up during the high day of the colonial rule and writing as a colonial and post-colonial, Mulk Raj Anand stays close to the multifarious manifestations of this historical encounter. The colonial experience is a live experience to him, and his writing is therefore linked to this theme directly or indirectly. He writes out of an acute social consciousness which is virtually concerned with politics and society, with the function of power in a given society and its effects on the moral, social, cultural and even aesthetic values of the people in that society. He is convinced of the social obligations of a creative writer and holds that art cannot be divorced from its social functions. He is a spokesman for art for people’s sake and he wonders thus in, “Pigeon Indian: Some Notes on Indian Writing in English”:

What is a writer if he is not the fiery voice of the people?…(245)

Mulk Raj Anand firmly believes that a writer in an emerging society has multiple roles to play. A writer should become a teacher, guide, mentor, reformer and conscious-keeper of the race. The most urgent task a writer in colonial society must address is the restoration of human dignity. Mulk Raj Anand sincerely felt that a writer in an ex-colonial society should help to exalt men to the full heights of their dignity to equip them with
necessary spirit to tackle the task before them. Mulk Raj Anand clearly states the social responsibilities of an artist in the present age in his *Apology for Heroism*:

One of the first things to be done in the modern world is to educate people to place the vast accumulation of knowledge collected in the researches of the past at the disposal of everyone. So that man can thoroughly learn to recognize the fundamental principle of human living and exercise vigilance in regard to the real enemies of freedom and socialism…(91)

It is important to note in this context that Mulk Raj Anand’s programme for de-colonization does not stop with the achievement of political independence for the state, but insists on complete realization of individual autonomy in social, religious, cultural and psychological terms. Mulk Raj Anand’s fiction typically presents the complexity of the warring elements in contemporary society. In his work, the conflicts are not resolved decisively, but the possibility of a solution in future is hinted at. Any conflict involves two groups or institutions. So also in Mulk Raj Anand’s novels two polarities are introduced and all the characters fall into either of the groups. In *Untouchable* the conflict is between the caste Hindus and the untouchables; Coolie presents a class struggle between the haves and the have-not; *Two Leaves and a Bud* deals with the confrontation between British plantation owners and the Indian
labourers; *Lalu Trilogy* portrays different stages in the Indian struggle for freedom. *The Big Heart* fictionalizes the conflict between capitalists and industrial labourers; Gauri elaborates female protest against male domination and so on. However, the conflict in all these novels is not a clash between the equals; it takes the form of exploitation of a less fortunate and less privileged group by a more powerful and privileged set of individuals. The two groups involved, therefore, turn into victims and victimizers, and the writer's sympathy for the former becomes obvious.

Mulk Raj Anand’s first novel *Untouchable* deals with a hegemonic structure peculiar to India-caste. The target of Mulk Raj Anand’s attack in this novel is the bigotry of Hindu orthodoxy and the contestation is launched from the subject-position of a member of the exploited group – the untouchables. Mulk Raj Anand throws open a heterogeneous field where different kinds of exploitations are at work and different systems of dominations such as caste, class, gender and denial operate in criss-cross manner.

Bakha occupies a position of subalternity in more than one scheme of exploitations such as caste, class and colonial subjugation. Mulk Raj Anand conceptualizes the entire complexity of the colonial condition by describing a day in the life of Bakha. R.T.Robertson has made a
commendable observation in this regard in his article, “Untouchable as an Archetypal novel”:

The greater effect of the novel is in its archetypal presentation of the colonial situation...(5)

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.

It was with untouchable that Mulk Raj Anand made his debut as a major novelist. As such, he knew that only by maximum effort in the utilization of one’s inherent artistic gift one could achieve greatness and therefore he directed his head and heart towards it. The novel is the result of several inchoate and wild urges that present the mind of Mulk Raj Anand which he reflects thus:

.... the vanity of youth wanting recognition, the departure from abstract philosophical theories towards the search for philosophical insights faced on the lives of the human beings whom he knew the flesh and the blood: the urge to express oneself at all costs in an absolutist manner so as to explore the ugliness of death in life by deliberately dramatising even through distortion, the non-human realities which impinged on one from all sides...(5)
The novel describes one day in Bakha’s life in Autumn. It begins in the early hours of the day and by the time dusk approaches, the author has been able to create round his hero, an eighteen year old sweeper boy named Bakha, a spiritual crisis of such proportion that it seems to seize the whole Indian subcontinent.

Bakha is a young man of eighteen, strong and able-bodied, the son of Lakha, the Jemadar of sweepers in the town and the cantonments and officially incharge of the three rows of public latrines located in the extreme end of the colony by the brook-side. He has a strange fascination and respect for English men and life because Bakha feels that they respect him. In this regard Mulk Raj Anand describes:

….But then he had been working in the barracks of a British regiment for some years on probation with a remote uncle, and had been caught by the glamour of the ‘White man’s’ life. This Tommies had treated him as a human being and he had learnt to think of himself as superior to his fellow-outcastes. Otherwise, the rest of the outcastes (with the possible exception of Chota, the leather-worker’s son, who oiled his hair profusely, and parted it like the Englishmen on one side, wore a pair of shorts at hockey and smoked cigarettes like them; and Ram, Charan, the washerman’s son who aped Chota and Bakha in turn) were content with their lot... (The Story, 12-13)
Bakha starts the work just out of the bed without even having a little hot water to warm his throat. Hence after completing five rounds of cleaning the latrines, he returns home with the hope of getting something hot to drink. But there is no tea and not even water. Hence his sister Sohini takes a pitcher and goes in search of water:

....She had a sylph-like form, nor thin but full-bodied within the limits of her graceful frame, well-rounded on the hips, with an arched narrow waist from which descended the folds of her salwars and above which were her full, round, globular breasts, jerking slightly, for lack of a bodice, under her transparent muslin shirt. Bakha observed her as she walked along swaying. She was beautiful. He was proud of her with a pride not altogether that of a brother for a sister.

The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor, were they allowed access to the nearby brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream. They had no well of their own because it cost a lot of money to dig a well in such a hilly town as Bulandshahr. Perforce they had to collect at the foot of the caste Hindu's well and depend on the bounty of some of their superiors to pour water into their pitchers. More often than not there was no caste
Hindu present. Most of them were rich enough to get the water-carriers to supply them with plenty of fresh water every morning for their baths and kitchens, and only those came to the well who were either fond of an open-air bath or too poor to pay for the water-carriers’ services. So the outcastes had to wait for chance to bring some caste Hindu to the well, for luck to decide that he was kind, for Fate to ordain that he had time—to get their pitchers filled with water. They crowded round the well, congested the space below its high brick platform, morning, noon and night, joining their hands in service humility to every passer-by; cursing their fate, and bemoaning their lot, if they were refused the help they wanted; praying, beseeching and blessing, if some generous soul condescended to listen to them, or to help them...(Untouchable, 26-27)

On that morning, Sohini has been “lucky” enough to return home without waiting for a long time. Soon the mixture of tea-leaves, water, milk and sugar is prepared. Bakha feels very happy. The sharp, warm taste of the liquid sends forth a strange stimulus spreading into his flesh. He is soon out again to sweep the market road and the temple courtyard. On the way, he buys four annas worth of cheap sweetmeat after much speculation:

…..’Eight annas in my pocket,’ he said to himself, ‘dare I buy some sweets? If my father comes to
know that I spend all my money on sweets,’ he thought and hesitared, ‘but come, I have only one life to live,’ he said to himself, ‘let me taste of the sweets; who knows, tomorrow I may be no more’. Standing in a corner, he stole a glance at the shop to see which was the cheapest thing he could buy. His eyes scanned the array of good things; rasgulas, gulabjamans and ludus. They were all so lushly, expensively smothered in syrup, that he knew they certainly could not be cheap, certainly not for him, because the shopkeepers always deceived the sweepers and the poor people, charging them much bigger prices, as if to compensate themselves for the pollution they courted by dealing with the outcastes. He caught sight of jalebies. He knew they were cheap. He had bought them before. He knew the rate at which they were sold, a rupee a seer.

‘Four annas’ worth of jalebis,’ Bakha said in a low voice, as he courageously advanced from the corner where he had stood. His head was bent. He was vaguely ashamed and self-conscious at being seen buying sweets.

The confectioner yawned and smiled faintly at the sweeper’s taste, for jalebis are rather coarse stutt and no one save a greedy low-caste man would ever buy four annas’ worth of them. But he was a shopkeeper. He affected a casual manner and, picking up his scales abruptly, began to put the
sweets in one pan against bits of stone and some black, round iron weights which he threw into the other. The alacrity with which he lifted the little string attached to the middle of the rod, balanced the scales for the shortest possible space of time and threw the sweets into a piece torn off an old. *Daily Mail*, was as amazing as it was baffling to poor Bakha, who knew he had been cheated, but dared not complain. He caught the jalobis which the confectioner threw at him like a cricket ball, placed four nickel coins on the shoe-board for the confectioner’s assistant who stood ready to splash some water on them, and walked away, embarrassed yet happy... *(Untouchable, 51-52)*

Bakha being an untouchable, to avoid pollution by touch, the confectioner throws the packet of *jalebis*, like a cricket ball, for Bakha to-catch. He catches it. He then places four nickel coins on a shock-board near which the confectioner’s assistant has been standing ready with some water to sprinkle and remove the pollution and then he walks away.

Bakha becomes currently happy with the sweetmeat in his hand. He opens the packet with alacrity and puts a piece quickly into his mouth. The taste of the warm and sweet syrup gives him satisfaction and delight. He attacks the packer again and again with great excitement and continues to walk along the road, munching and looking at all the sights.
This makes him forget to call out. “Posh, posh, sweeper coming”, and he suddenly bears someone shouting at him:

...."Keep to the side of the road, ohe low-caste vermin!” he suddenly heard someone shouting at him. “Why don’t you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cock-eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning!".

Bakha stood amazed, embarrassed. He was deaf and dumb. His senses were paralysed. Only fear gripped his soul, fear and humility and servility. He was used to being spoken to roughly. But he had seldom been taken so unawares. The curious smile of humility, which always hovered on his lips in the presence of high-caste men, now became more pronounced. He lifted his face to the man opposite him, though his were bent down. Then he stole a hurried glance at the man. The fellow’s eyes were flaming.

‘Swine, dog, why didn’t you shout and warn me of your approach!’ he shouted as he met Bakha’s eyes. ‘Don’t you know, you brute, that you must not touch me!’...(Untouchable, 52-53)

The Lalla who is ‘polluted’ continues to bombard abuses on Bakha. Soon he is encircled by men who have gathered to know what the uproar is
about. The crowd which presses round him, is without a shadow of pity for him. When the Lalla is tired of shouting at the defenceless Bakha, he gives a sharp, clear slap at him as a punishment for his ‘damned impudence’, and ‘ran-away, like a dog with the tail between his legs’.

Bakha recognizes with a shock his social position. It illuminates the inner walls of his mind. He realizes that though he possesses like any human being, head and heart, and flesh and blood, he is in the eyes of the world an untouchable. Then conscious of his position without failing he shouts aloud the warning words to announce his approach: ‘Posh, posh, sweeper coming’ His pace quickens.

As he continues to walk he sees something strange in contrast to what has happened to him:

…..A huge, big-humped, small-horned, spotted old brahminnee bull was ruminating with half-closed eyes near him. The stink from its mouth as it belched, strangely unlike any odour which had assaulted Bakha’s nostrils that day, was nauseating. And the liquid dung which the bull had excreted and which Bakha knew it was his duty to sweep off, sickened him. But presently he saw a well-dressed, wrinkled old Hindu, wearing, like a rich man, a muslin scarf over his left shoulder, advance to the place where the bull was enjoying its siesta and touched the annual with his forefingers…(Untouchable, 60)
Immediately he realizes the wickedness of the society in which he is placed, which considers touching a human being like him as a malediction and touching a dirty bull like the one he has seen just then as benediction. He pauses for a few seconds and again resumes his steps shouting: ‘Posh, posh, sweeper coming!’ Within a short time he reaches the temple courtyard. He begins to sweep the area. He becomes suddenly curious to see what is happening inside the temple. The unfailing sense of direction of his inner impulse leads him through the temple steps towards the entrance door of the temple. Just then he hears a thudding sound:

....‘Get off the steps, scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the pacificatory ceremony, Get down, get away, dog!'"  

Bakha ran down the steps, past the priest below him, to his sister. He had two impulses, that of fear for himself, for the crime he knew he had committed, another of fear for his sister, for the crime she may have committed, since she stood there speechless. “You people have only been polluted from a distance,” Bakha heard the little priest shriek. ‘I have been defiled by contact’.

‘The distance, the distance’ the worshippers from the top of the steps were shouting. ‘A temple can be polluted according to the Holy books by a low-caste
man coming within sixty–nine yards of it, and here he was actually on the steps, at the door. We are ruined. We will need to have a sacrificial fire in order to purify ourselves and our shrine’.

‘But I ... I... ‘shouted the lanky priest hysterionically and never finished his sentence.
The crowd on the temple steps believed that he had suffered most grievously, and sympathized. They had seen the sweeper-boy rush past him. They didn’t ask about the way he had been polluted. They didn’t know the story that Sohini told Bakha at the door of the courtyard with sobs and tears.

‘That man, that man’, she said, ‘that man made suggestions to me, when I was cleaning the lavatory of his house there. And when I screamed, he came out shouting that he had been defiled’.

Bakha rushed back to the middle of the courtyard, dragging his sister behind him, and he searched for the figure of the priest in the crowd. The man was no longer to be seen, and even the surging crowd seemed to show in heels as it saw the giant stride of the sweeper advance frighteningly towards the temple. Bakha stopped still in his determined advance when he saw the crowd fly back. His fist was clenched. His eyes flared wild and red, and his teeth ground between them to challenge: ‘I could show you what that Brahmin dog has done!'
He felt he could kill them all. He looked ruthless, deadly pale and livid with anger and rage. A similar incident he had heard about rose to his mind in a flash. A young rustic had teased a friend’s sister as she was coming home through the fields after collecting fuel. Her brother had gone straight to the fields with an axe in his hand and murdered the fellow. ‘Such an insult!’ he thought, “That he should attack a young and innocent girl. And then the hypocrisy of it! This man, a Brahmin, he lies and accuses me of polluting him, after – father of fathers, I hope he didn’t violate my sister’. A suspicion stole into his mind that he might have. He was stung to the quick when he suddenly felt that he too had looked at her with desire.

“Tell me, tell me, that he didn’t do anything to you!”

Sohini was weeping. She shook her head in negation. She couldn’t speak.

Bakha was reassured a bit. ‘But no, the attempt!’ he thought. ‘The man must have made indecent suggestions to her. I wonder what he did. Father of fathers! I could kill that man. I could kill that man!” He was being tormented with the anxiety to know what had really happened, and yet he hesitated to question his sister again lest she should begin in cry. But his doubts and misgivings about her were too much for him.
“Tell me, Sohini,’ he said, turning fiercely at his sister, ‘how far did he go?’

She sobbed and didn’t reply.

‘Tell me! Tell me! I will kill him if…’ he shouted.

‘He-e-e- just teased me,’ she at last yielded. ‘And then when I was bending down to work, he came and held me by my breasts’.

‘Brahmin dog!’ Bakha exclaimed. “I will go and kill him‖. And he rushed blindly towards the courtyard.

‘No, no, Come back. Let’s go away’, called Sohini after him, arresting his progress by dragging hard at the lapel of his overcoat…(Untouchable, 69-71)

These incidents make his blood boil. He feels a wild desire to retaliate. And yet there is a futility written on his face. He knows that he will not be able to over-step the walls which the conventions of his superiors have built up to protect their weakness against him. The incident of “touching” along with the attempt of the temple priest to induce his sister Sohini to surrender her chastity poisons all that happens subsequently, even such pleasant episodes as a hockey match, a country walk and a wedding. When the dusk approaches he finds three solution to his problems.

He may become a Christian with the help of Hutchinson that Christ receives all men and that Yessuh Messih makes no difference between the Brahmin and the Bhangi. But the missionary’s talking of ‘sin’ and
‘confession’ and his failure to clearly tell who Christ is, confuses the mind of Bakha. The second solution is that he may take comfort in Gandhiji’s chastisement of the caste Hindus and wait till the social conscience of the people is roused. Hard upon this comes the third solution that he may put his faith in the water-closet. It is worth quoting here the historic statement made by E.M.Forster in this regard in his preface to Untouchable:

….It is prosaic, straightforward, and considered in the light of what has gone before in the book, it is convincing. No god is needed to rescue the untouchables, no vows of self-sacrifice and abnegation on the part of more fortunate Indians but simply and solely – the flush system. Introduce water-closets and main-drainage throughout India, and all this wicked rubbish about untouchability will disappear…(10)

Bakha thinks of everything he has heard and returns to his mud-walled hut, with the desire to tell his father all what Gandhi said about them and what a clever poet said about the flush system.

In this sensitive portrayal of an individual, Mulk Raj Anand displays his penetrating thought and humane attitude in understanding the grim realities of the social life in India. It is a revolutionary novel in the sense that it has an outcaste as its protagonist. Mulk Raj Anand’s turning to the evil of caste system even at the very start of his writing career is understandable because it answers to his need to create in readers an
urgent awareness of the dehumanizing social evil, to stir the springs of tenderness in them, and to rally them for the removal of these evils in order that a desirable or a just social order may come into being. It is significant that this Indian novel in English first appeared at a time when social reformers in India were engaged in an earnest effort to remove casteism and untouchability. It is more than half-century, since the novel first appeared. Though social life in India has been completely revolutionized since then, one cannot say with confidence that casteism is fully wiped off. It is in this context Mulk Raj Anand’s *untouchable* and Bakha assume contemporary relevance and add strength to the present research endeavour.

Bakha the protagonist of the novel is a dedicated worker. He begins his day even before dawn at the rude command of his father. The most beautiful aspect of Bakha is that he is very dutiful. While his father has often fabricated some sickness for himself to escape doing his sweeping work, Bakha avoids all such alibis accompanying idleness and goes about with strength and vitality. He finishes the fifth round of work even before he could have his morning cup of tea. His reverence for work makes him a Gandhi disciple without knowing it. But the society pays no credit to his devotion to duty. Cigarettes are flung at him as a bone is flung at an insistent sniffing dog. *Jilebis* are thrown at him, like the wastes thrown at a pig; and the thin paper flung like a kite from the third floor. Wherever
Bakha goes, he is belittled with such words as ‘defiled’ and ‘polluted’. The privileged castes Hindus assert their superiority over the outcastes by inflicting pain on them. The mental depression of all untouchables finds its expression in Bakha’s agonized interrogation. “What have I done to deserve all this?”

“Dogs” is the name that normally comes to the mind of the privileged folk to identify the outcastes. The “touching incident” reveals the horror of being an untouchable. The people who gather around Bakha shoot abuses by calling him, “low-caste vermin”, “swine”, “cock-eyed son of a low-legged scorpion”, “dog”, “brute”, “dirty dog”, “son of a bitch”, “son of a dog”, and “offspring of a pig”. These abusive words thrown on a lonely and helpless person are in opposition to the privileged folk’s claim of being “twice-born”. These words actually reveal their polluted mind.

Anand is a social critic. He often uses the tool of irony to expose social evils. Untouchability is particularly vulnerable to ironic treatment as its practitioners are satanic in their hypocrisy and pharisaical in their piety. In this regard what Saros Cowasjee says in his book So Many Freedoms: A Study of the Major Fictions of Mulk Raj Anand is worth quoting here:

As irony is implicit in the theme, one finds it everywhere and even more pervasively than in any other Anand novel. The novel unfolds with a child of modern India shackled by age old traditions; the
Hindus who pride themselves on their cleanliness gargle and spit in the stream and pollute the water while a person incomparably cleaner than themselves is treated like a dirt. There are Muhammadans walking about with hands in their pyjama, purifying themselves in the ritualistic manner preparatory to their visit to a mosque, but infuriated when asked what they are doing; men squatting in the open to relieve themselves, earning from the Tommies well-deserved abuse; the rich Hindu businessmen overfeeding idle priests but grudging dry bread to those who sweat for them; the pretty merchant-cum-money-lender whose prices go up for the poor, and the sweet-meat seller who deftly manipulates the scales to cheat the outcastes.

There are orthodox Hindus who worship a bull emitting foul smells but will not touch a human being; there are temples whose doors are closed to those who keep its ground clean, we see the queer Hindu notion of “pollution by touch” and “pollution from a distance”; and the hypocrisy of Hindu women who treat the sweepers as pariahs but want to be called “mother” by them.

The ruling class too comes in for criticism. Englishman, after years in India, learn only some useful imperatives and swear-words such as ‘acha’ (good); ‘jao’ (go away); ‘jaldi karo’ (be quick); ‘sur ka bacha’ (son of a pig); ‘kute ka bacha’ (son of a dog)...
Mulk Raj Anand had with his remarkable skill entered into Bakha’s soul and explored Bakha’s helplessness, frustration, anxiety and agony to the degree that he has become an embodiment of Bakha himself. The author’s struggle to expiate his own personality and ideas in order to give scope for the character to express himself who is very hard. Throughout the novel Mulk Raj Anand has been able to embody in Bakha a genuine person that attracts one’s attention. E.M. Forster making a commendable assessment of Bakha observes:

Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometime grand, sometimes weak and thoroughly Indian. Even his physique is distinctive; we can recognize his brand intelligent face, graceful torso, and heavy buttocks, as he does his nasty jobs or stumps out in artillery boots in hopes of a pleasant walk through the city with a paper of cheap sweets in his hand…(9)

Mulk Raj Anand does not make Bakha revolt outright. He is shown to be caught by the glamour of the Whiteman’s life. Mulk Raj Anand has placed the individual in his native feudal as well as colonial context. It is the glamour of the western culture that Bakha is enamoured of. The racial identity of the “Whiteman” as contrasted to that of the “Blackman” is established at the outset. He is keen on showing the “virus of change” in Bakha’s sensibility since the time of his contact with the white people in the cantonment.
Bakha is in trouble with other section of Hindu society. Though Mulk Raj Anand builds up the major conflicts between Bakha and different members of the upper caste (especially the Brahmins) with a view to focusing more sharply on the extent of cruelty of man to man, he is not forgetful of Bakha’s interaction with his own community. The quarrel scenes between Bakha’s sister Sohini and Gulabo, the washerwoman and between Bakha himself and Dharam chand during the wedding of the latter’s sister illustrate this view.

Mulk Raj Anand creates a number of incidents which make Bakha acutely conscious of his plight as an untouchable. At the temple Bakha is again disturbed by the priest's shouting “Polluted! Polluted! Polluted!”. It is the priest who has tried to molest Sohini, but he tries to create a scene saying that he has been “defiled by contact”. Here goes the hue and cry:

Get off the steps, scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purificatory ceremony. Get down, get away, dog! …(*Untouchable*, 69)

This has finally killed Bakha’s inside. He is incapacitated by his culture to rise against such a hypocritical system. He reacts thus:

…. He was completely unnerved. His eyes were covered with darkness. He couldn’t see anything. His tongue and throat were parched. He wanted to
utter a cry, a cry of fear, but his voice failed him. He opened his mouth wide to speak… He tried to raise himself from the awkward attitude of prostration, but his limbs had no strength left in them. For a second he was as if dead…(*Untouchable*, 68)

From this point onwards Bakha’s spiritual agony centres round his phobia of being an untouchable. He has become incapable of mixing openly with his playmates, Chotu and Ramsharan. The process of his alienation from his own milieu reaches a climax when his own father pushes him outside his house. But before Bakha finishes his journey, he is made to have three encounters namely with Hutchinson of the Salvation Army, Gandhi, a poet-editor Iqbal Nath Sarashar.

Critical opinions differ on the last section of the novel. Some critics are of the opinion that these encounters create an anticlimax, that novel should have ended with Bakha being pushed out by his father. Bakha before his encounter with Mahatma Gandhi, is shown to be in a peculiar vacancy caused by the memories of the morning. He is, as the narrator says, in “Ghaoon Maoon”, “the spiritual nausea”.

Now Bakha was utterly bored. Never mind if it was a sahib who was giving him his company. He was afraid of the thought of conversion. He hadn’t understood very much of what the Salvationist said. He didn’t like the idea of being called a sinner…. As a Hindu he didn’t believe in the judgement day. He had never thought of that. He had seen people die.
And he just accepted the fact. He had been told that people who died were reborn in some form or other, after the god of Death, Yama, had tried them in hell for their faults. He dreaded that he should be reborn as a donkey or a dog… (*Untouchable*, 145-146)

At this point of the novel, Bakha is psychologically most amenable to receive Gandhi’s message. He is taken out of himself when he hears a Chorus of voices shouting, “Mahatma Gandhijiki Jai”. Bakha sees a sea of people ascending the railway bridge. But Gandhi works as a unifying factor. Mulk Raj Anand succeeds in giving a mythic dimension to Gandhi when he makes Bakha recall how people said Gandhi was a saint and a reincarnation of Vishnu and Krishna. Bakha had also heard of a story of the spider’s weaving a portrait of the sage who would push the British out of India.

Mulk Raj Anand fixes the focus on Bakha again, when Gandhi arrives on the scene. And from now on, the close ups of intense and heightened consciousness of Bakha are filmed with unflagging concentration and the effect is the emergence of an intensely human character in Bakha, also the most artistically realized character in Indian English fiction. Bakha reacts to Gandhi thus:

….. He seemed to get a thrill, imagining himself in this scene. He felt theatrical. Then a queen stirring started in his stomach. He was confused. His face was flushed and his ears reddened. His breath,
came and went quickly. A chorus of ‘Mahatma Gandhiji Ki Jai, released his tension, as it came from the distance and chilled the heat of his body with a sudden fear that it brought to his soul.

He looked across and saw that a vast crowd had rushed the gates of the golbagh and surrounded a motor-car in which, presumably, the Mahatma was travelling. He didn’t know what to do, stand still or rush. He realized he couldn’t rush even though the Mahatma had abolished all caste distinctions for the day. He might touch someone and then there would be a scene. The Mahatma would be too far away to come and help him. He hesitated for a moment, then he looked at the tree overhand. There were some people perched on the branches like vulture waiting for their prey… (Untouchable, 156)

Mahatma Gandhi’s visit to the Goal Maidan near Bulesah leads the novel to its climax. After Mahatma Gandhi has left the Maidan, a group of people stay on there discussing the Mahatma’s views. The arguments steal away some amount of the greatness of the novel. Their discussion on Vedas, Upanishad, Maya, Nirvana and Machine versus man has no satisfactory convergence. Bakha is too much under the Mahatma’s spell to listen to anyone. But the mention of a “Machine which clears dung” and which may enable a sweeper to change his profession so that he may no longer be thought of as an untouchable grips his attention it also catches his fancy. Of the three solutions given at the end of the novel,
Bakha seems to be slightly inclined towards the flush system over the other two. It may be due to the fact that it makes no demands on his religion, as against the solution given by the Salvation Army Pastor and it is something revolutionary unlike the non-violence of Gandhi. The machine which can clear the dung is of great use to the society. It can also replace the label pasted on some section of society as scavengers. Hence it falls within Mulk Raj Anand’s concept of controlled introduction of machine. K.N.Sinha’s estimate of the artistic merits of Untouchable explains:

Much of the power of Untouchable derives from its solidity of specifications. Anand creates here a dense web of actualities, so that the created universe in the novel, bears a direct resemblance to the actual one…(21)

Bakha is peculiarly affected by Gandhi’s invocation of self, the emancipation of which makes Bakha accept his lot. He faintly hopes for the introduction of the flush. Moreover, the calmness that descends on Bakha at the end of a day of crises makes him give up the pursuit of becoming a “gentleman”. He is shown to have come back to his culture from which there is no escape. But it is the culture on tradition modified by Gandhian thinking that upheld, purified and reformed Hinduism which incorporates the best of the West.
Untouchable ends on a note of faith and idealism. As Bakha returns home his mind is raised with the hope that soon the age of flush system will come when the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society.

Mulk Raj 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 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 of karmas of an individual, but needs to be contested at a social and cultural level. On commenting on the end of Untouchable E.M. Forster observes thus:

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…(7)

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 at 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’ ways. Bakha reflects:

….He had got a new stick, but that, it occurred to him, was something which his father could not appreciate. He did not like him to play hockey. That was what all the trouble was about. ‘Raha must have told on me’, he muttered, ‘because he could not go to play. What a day I have had! Unlucky, inauspicious day! I wish! I could die!’. And he sat nursing his head in his hands, utterly given upto despair…(*Untouchable*, 134-135)

Thus Bakhas movement from a blind imitation of the colonizer to a realization of the need for self-assertions signifies a shift from dependence to autonomy and the release of the subaltern from the liminal position.

*Untouchable* is a tragic poem of the individual caught in the cross-roads of social hypocrisy. At the same time the novel has a tragic beauty of its
own. The very structure of *Untouchable* and the classical purity of its form, brings Bakha’s drawing inwardness and loneliness into sharp relief. His inner urge to revolt and his awareness of the inability of successfully doing so makes him stoically placed. In fact, it is his failure to revolt that gives fidelity to the novel.

*Untouchable* closes on a note of faith and idealism. As Bakha returns home his mind is raised with the hope that soon the age of flush system will come when the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society.

Bakha reflects:

As the brief Indian twilight came and went, a sudden impulse shot through the transformations of space and time, and gathered all the elements that were dispersed in the stream of his soul into a tentative decision: ‘I shall go and tell father all that Gandhi said about us’ he whispered to himself; and what the clever poet said, perhaps I can find the poet on the way and ask him about his machine. And he proceeded homewards…(*Untouchable*, 175-176)

Certainly Mulk Raj Anand’s maiden novel, *Untouchable* is a masterly work, because it evinces a harmony between his social preoccupations
and artistic gifts. It is really a very bold literary adventure against the negative and hostile social conditions prevailing at that time.

The achievement of Mulk Raj Anand in his first novel is not a fierce preaching of a message solely for his own society but the enunciation of an archetype of the colonial conditions and of its resolutions in a reharmonizing of the rebellious individual into his own and only culture. While tracing the colonial conflicts in Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* R.T. Robertson makes an observation thus:

… The archetypal colonial condition is more often the basis of writing from Africa and the Caribbean than it is of writing from the older nations of Commonwealth, but Anand’s resolution of the condition is familiar in different terms in the literature of those nations. There it takes the form of a realization that the colonial cannot escape to the metropolis where his is still “between two worlds” but must achieve a “home coming” in his own region. If he is a writer then he must return from Europe- as Anand did in Gandhiji’s ashram – and begin to create his national literature, as Anand did with the publication of *Untouchable* forty-six years ago…(104)

Thus Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* deals with the whole colonial situation, that encompasses all Commonwealth writings and presents that situation in one memorable figure. *Untouchable* can also be seen in Commonwealth literary studies as the archetypal novel of the isolation of the individual experienced as the concept of “untouchability”.
Mulk Raj Anand’s fictions are usually concerned with the reality of organized evil. He appears as a social critic in all his novels. The society he has seen and observed is the field of his work. His writings probe deeply into the social processes. They depict the wretched condition of the overburdened peasant who is powerless to fight superstition and social convention and is hindered at every step for a better life. Mulk Raj Anand is a humanist, a proletarian who does not believe in “Art for Arts’ Sake” but writes to awaken the social conscience. He is audacious enough to admit that he is using literature as a means to some other end and that this end is the alleviation of the suffering of fellow human beings.

The British Imperialists often expressed their concern on the social evils in India with shrewd motivation. They wanted to keep the Indian intelligentsia busy with social reforms and thereby keep them away from interfering with statecraft. The British rulers patronized the activities of Dayanand Saraswati, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Narayana Guru, Dr.Ambedkar as well as the reformatory movements led by Mahatma Gandhi. They also enacted two laws against two top social evils such as Sati and Untouchability. The introduction of the Indian Penal Code by the British Raj in 1860 stated that all men were equal before the law and that the nature of the wrong was not affected by the caste, the person committing it or against whom it was committed. The British maintained a policy of non-interference with the social and cultural
life of Indians. Despite the Indian Penal Code of 1860 and its strict enforcement in British India, it did little for the alleviation of the sufferings of untouchables. No Bakha dared to go along the road without shouting “Posh! Posh! Sweeper coming!”.

*The Road* published in 1961 is yet another Mulk Raj Anand’s artistic work on the theme of the rejected. In the road, the intense imagination of Mulk Raj Anand returns to the same theme from which came his classic *Untouchable*. *The Road* is based on an actual incident. When Saros Cowasjee asked Mulk Raj Anand why he wrote this novel, since he had covered much the same ground in *Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand replied thus:

> Well, it was a kind of shock to me when I went to live in Haryana, 20 miles from Delhi in the human empire of Jawaharlal Nehru, to find that the outcastes not only in the South India, but in the mixed North were still confirmed to the limbo of oblivion. There was something tragic 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 any mentioning of this awkward fact. I said I would prove it to him by showing it to him in the “enchanted mirror”…”*(Author to Critic, 124)*
The “enchanted” mirror Mulk Raj Anand creates is his another historic novel *The Road*. The people in the village of Govardhan produce plenty of cattle milk and large amount of vegetables. But selling them to their city, Gurgaon, is a big problem as there is no transportation facility. The government aware of this serious problem faced by the villagers, decide to fulfil their aspiration by building a road connecting the city to Govardhan. The work is started. The villagers are very happy that soon vehicles would be able to visit their village and they would have an era of economic prosperity. Bikhu and other untouchables also get chance to work in the road construction. The landlord Thakur Singh who has become rich by exploiting the untouchables, cannot tolerate the idea of Bikhu and other untouchables drawing wages just like the caste-Hindus for taking part in the road construction. The caste feeling soars up. The upper-caste Hindus refuse even to touch the stones quarried by the untouchables. But the village headman Dhooli Singh, inspired by the teaching of Gandhiji decides to treat the untouchables as children of God or Harijans. He courageously joins hands with the untouchables in the road construction. The landlord Thakur Singh becomes furious. By his instigation, the village priest excommunicates Dhooli Singh. Soon the landlord’s son, Sanju, a merciless ‘goonda’, translates into action his father’s fury with the untouchables, by burning their huts. Dhooli Singh’s son Lachman, who is in love with the landlord’s daughter Rukmani, also joins hand in the arson organized by Sanju against the untouchables, in
the hope that it would please Thakur Singh and one day he would be able to marry Rukmani. On the other hand, the contre-téms lacerates the magnanimous heart of Dhooli Singh with sorrow and he decides to help the untouchables to build their huts. He generously permits them to occupy his own house till their huts are built. Dhooli Singh’s wife becomes angry at his behaviour of freely mixing with the untouchables and getting “polluted”, and so she leaves him. But Dhooli Singh stands all these ordeals with fortitude. When the government authorities come to know that the road, instead of uniting people, divides families, threatens friendships, spoils marriage contacts and is responsible for the burning of the huts of untouchables, they send an official to instruct the people that untouchability has been legally abolished and anyone perpetuating it can be punished under the law. Soon reason prevails over emotion in Dhooli Singh’s son Lachman and he joins the untouchables in the road construction. Sanju also behaves with repentance for some time, but soon the feudal blood he has acquired wings him to pursue his crusade against the untouchables. Hence the understanding that Lackman would marry Rukmani and Sanju would marry Dhooli Singh’s daughter Mala ends. Meanwhile the construction of the road continues. Finally when road is ready, Bhikhu did not go towards home.

He did not go towards home.
Instinctively he went in the direction of the road he had helped to build.
And in his soul he took the directions, out of the village, towards Gurgaon, which was the way to Delhi town, capital of Hindustan, where no one knew who he was and where there would be no caste or outcaste…(*Road*, 121)

Untouchability has always provoked the intelligent heart of Mulk Raj Anand into action. He finds that legislation as a means of social change does not work in the case of untouchability, since untouchability is deeply rooted in the Indian psyche. He realizes that this social evil can be removed only by appealing to the hearts of the privileged people who unscrupulously perpetuate it. He understands that untouchability can be abolished only through creating proper awareness among the people. Hence Mulk Raj Anand, the angry young man who protested against untouchability in the 30s tries his hand on the same theme after 25 years, in *The Road*. His coming back again to the same social evil in this novel reveals his emotional involvement with the problem of untouchability.

The era of *The Road* is not very different from the social milieu of *Untouchable*. The law of the land has not influenced the attitude of the society. As in *Untouchable*, so in this novel, one can find the caste Hindus ill-treating their outcaste brethren: They are not allowed to come into physical contact with the ‘twice-born’, or permitted to enter the temple for coming into contact with the God of all. Just like in *Untouchable*, in *The Road* also Mulk Raj Anand introduces a lecherous and hypocritical
priest. In both the novels one can come across the “slapping scene”. In *Untouchable*, it is a highly dramatic situation, the pivot of the novel, but in *The Road* it is a mere contrivance. On the last but one page of book the slapping incident occurs. The thirsty Bhikhu accepts a brass tumbler of water from Rukmani, the beautiful daughter of Thakur Singh. Her brother Sanju, who hates all untouchables sees this and rushes towards Bhikhu and slaps him for defiling the tumbler. Like his prototype Bakha, Bhikhu for a moment thinks of retaliating but commonsense warns him of the perilous sea in which he and the other untouchables struggle even after fourteen years of Indian Independence Anand’s depiction of the scene is apt to present here:

‘I am Bhiku – Harijan’ he answered. ‘I would like a drink of water’. He knew that Rukmani’s mother, Bhagwanti, had spoken.

‘Give him some water,’ another voice said, tired but benign. Bhikhu knew this was Landlord Thakur Singh speaking. ‘I am coming, son’.

Rukmani moved towards the pitchers in the shade of the indoor kitchen and, filling a brass cup of water, brought it to the hall. Bhikhu had seldom dared to look at the face of the landlord’s daughter in recent months. He took the brass cup, unaware of what he was accepting, and gazed at her now, while she became conscious of him. Her even visage was flushed with the heat of the oven by which she had
been seated. She surveyed him with her big eyes. And, as she recognized him, she blushed and drew the curtain of her dupatta over her eyes.

‘Who is it?’ came another voice from within the barn facing the dhori.

‘He wants water to drink!’ Rukmani said.
‘Hain?’ said Sajnu, the son of Thakur Singh, running up, playing cards in hand. ‘Bhikhu Chamar! … And you have given him the brass cup full of water! Foolish one!…

And, saying this, Sajnu rushed up and kicked the brass cup out of Bhikhu’s hand, sending it flying into the hall, the water covering the face of the untouchable like the sweat of hard labour.
‘How can you touch the brass cup and soil it forever! Have you not thought of your status?’

‘I forgot,’ mumbled Bhikhu.

‘Could you not have poured the water on to his palms, fool!’ Sajnu shouted at his sister.

‘Hai, we are undone!’ said Sajnu’s mother, emerging from her barn.

‘Our whole house will have to be purified,’ mourned Sajun…(Road, 94-95)
The upper-caste’s intransigent attitude to the changed social situation is evident in their refusing to touch the stones quarried by the untouchables, while enjoying the yield of the fields tilled by them. Pandit Suraj Mani in this novel reminds of Pandit Kali Nath of *Untouchable*. He and Pandit Suraj Mani, move about carrying with him a little earth to avoid pollution by treading on what has been ‘soiled’ by the untouchables. At the same time, he gladly accepts the mangoes plucked by the untouchables saying, “Sweet is the fruit of Lambardar Dhooli Singh’s grove”. The passage runs thus:

If it was true that Pandit Suraj Mani had been to see Lambardar Dhooli Singh, as the children had told him, then a mere mortal could not hear of such violation of Dharma without dying. And if his wife’s report about the priest having accepted mangoes from the chamar boys was well founded, then the earth should open up and swallow the whole village, for the dark age had really come…(*Road*, 81)

It shows his cunning attitude and hypocrisy. Pandit Kali Nath of *Untouchable* and Pandit Suraj Mani of *The Road* are black-marketeers of their religion for selfish ends. As they have not received the divine light, they are incapable of the Gandhian realization that untouchables are children of God or Harijans. In their shallowness, they mix up religion, politics and social life and vehemently preach on pollution by touch, pollution from distance or on the Karma theory which says that the
suffering of the untouchables is only a punishment divinely ordained for their bad deeds in their previous births and that they should submit themselves to every blow and kick the upper castes give them at every step of their lives with humility for the sake of caste-promotion in their next birth. Mulk Raj Anand’s anger with such guardians of religions seems to echo the fiery words spoken by Swami Vivekananda:

> Priestcraft is the bane of India… Do you think our religion is worth the name? Ours is ‘Don't touchism’, only ‘Touch me not’. Good heavens! A country, the big leaders of which have for the last two thousand years been only discussing whether to take food with the right hand or the left, whether to take water from the right-hand-side or the left…. If such a country does not go to ruin what other will? A country where millions of people, live on the flowers of the Mohua plant, and a million or two of Sadhus (monks) and a hundred million or so of Brahmanas suck the blood of these poor people, without even the least effort for their amelioration – is that a country or hell? Is that a religion or the devil's dance?…(Caste, 40-41)

*The Road* portrays not only the suffering of the untouchables but also of the magnanimous caste Hindus who try to awaken the conscience of the members of their own community against the evils of untouchability. To be honest is a dangerous thing where the rule of hypocrisy dominates. That is what led to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, Abraham
Lincoln and Martin Luther King. Socrates had to drink hemlock, Christ to hang on the cross and Joan of Arc to burn at the stake for being honest to society. Dhooli Singh, in *The Road* is a social reformer and a staunch disciple of the Mahatma. His following of his Master’s footsteps was a hard task. His single-handed fight against untouchability in a society where casteism is interpreted in terms of religion is considered as a challenge to the religion itself. But he represents the true religion; he personifies the author’s vision of an ideal Hindu.

In *The Road*, Mulk Raj 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. Mulk Raj 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.

Mulk Raj 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 epicentre of power. Dhooli Singh’s view clarifies this point:

...And he had promised that after the approach road was built the Sarkari Motor Van would come by the right to the square and collect the milk, which the women of the village had to carry on their heads a furlong and a half on the narrow pagdandi track, in three or four goes to the tanker...(Road, 1)

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 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 accept the classified 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 would go only up to a point, and not beyond, in their penchant for reform. He would happily let the Charmar boys work, earn and make a better future, but he wouldn’t even consider the possibility of letting his daughter marry an untouchable.

Bhikhu and his crew work on the Road against all opposition from the caste Hindus encouraged by Dhooli Singh. 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 Sajru and Lachman set the harijan hamlets on fire. The homeless harijans are sheltered in 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 he
decides to quit and find a break elsewhere. He takes the road, he has helped to build, and starts his journey to Delhi. One should not look at this departure as ‘defeat’ or ‘flight’ of the protagonist. Even as violence becomes an increasingly important factor in Mulk Raj Anand’s texts, his revolutionaries opt for other 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. C.Vijayasree has made a commendable observation in this regard in *The Raj and The Writer*:

> ….The prime objective of the narrative is to give a moral: liberty without equality is incomplete and devoid of substance. Mulk Raj Anand clearly 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…(42)

Mulk Raj 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 marginalized 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. Mulk Raj 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 worlds of common men and women.

In *Untouchable* Mulk Raj Anand had created a hero who was a victim of injustice, which society inflicted on his entire class. One can see the happenings in the context of the central character – his suffering, endurance and refusal to give in despite the most strangulating circumstances. The story is contracted within a day and the chronological duration of a single day assumes the dimensions of Eternity. As in all the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, the chronological time becomes a shadow of metaphysical time. The experience of living becomes the experience of the evolution of subjective moral choice against a blind collective will. The hero is not alone but outside his familial setting. The circumstances provide him no support. Like Hardy’s Jude, he has to train his own will to stand upto the severity of injustice, which he is too innocent to understand. *The Road* is a novel which works out its progress on the basis of a symbol. The symbol is the road, the road to progress, the road out of hell, the road built and evolved by the sufferers themselves.

When the chamars build a road to carry milk from the village to the town, Bhikhu does not understand the anger of the high-caste Hindus. His soul
Bikhu is fascinated by the landlord Thakur Singh’s daughter Rukmani and he knows that he will have to suffer if the half-conscious affection of his love of her were even to flow over the rains of his eyes. And yet at the ultimate point of excitement in him he asked: ‘Why not? (Road, 71) Pandit Suraj Mani, the representative of a cruel religion, is comic like all such characters in Mulk Raj Anand. If the rich are cruel, the priests have always provoked them to be more cruel. But even Suraj Mani is depicted with tolerance. He can enjoy the sensuous joys of nature in spite of his crude sensual nature.

The alacrity of his gait betokened urgency, and he hurried on his naked nimble feet, feeling the goodness of the dew on the little tufts of grass against the soles of his feet…(Road, 57)

His desire to be seen naked by the village women after he finished his bath epitomizes in a single situation the entire exhibitionism of his character. He does not want to wash his hands after toilet with the earth touched by the untouchables. But he is timid at heart like a “lizard frightened of its own shadow.” (Road, 58)

The tragedy of caste has acquired a new meaning in the new democracy. A democracy which cannot safeguard the economic interests of the outcaste is working under an illusion. Religion has played its role in exploiting the untouchable. Now there is an illusion of equality before law
and the outcaste has neither the money nor the time to go to a court of law. How can an outcaste be allowed to earn money. That way the “have-nots” would one day sit with the privileged class. The landlord Thakur Singh says:

Today they are taking the bread out of our mouths. By breaking the stones with the Sarkar and earn money so that they can buy the status of the twice-born. Already they are having more money than is good for them. And we have less and less...(Road, 68)

The road becomes a social symbol. The Lambardar Dhooli Singh sees the importance of the road:

Oh fool, the milk of the village will be borne to the city and more cash will come to the folk. After the journeys I have made to Delhi in that hard jeep motor of Diwan Roop Krishan, I say it is only roads and roads and more roads and electricity – that I will bring prosperity... (Road, 6)

In this context the laying of the road becomes a ritual. Though Bhikhu cannot change the hell in which the ritual of road-making brings punishments, yet the punishment itself proves to be a reward. He moves from the limited area of the village into the wide arena of town life. Though the road destroys his home, it liberates him also, taking him into
areas where the centre of the new activity is – the city. It is in this sense that *The Road* is a symbolic novel.

*The Road* shows the breaking of a small family based on custom in the interest of the bigger family of men. The failure of the familial relations in a society based on exploitation is best expressed by the fact that Lachman condemned his own father under the provocation of the priest Suraj Mani.

Bhikhu finds a confusion in his being and broods thoughtlessly on the memories of the other humiliations he had suffered before they had set fire to the houses. Dhooli Singh tells Bhikhu:

> What are you saying ‘theirs and ours’ as though they don’t want the road, and ‘we’ want it. They wanted to build it also, but they do not want you to work and earn money. And all the other things are lies. I am of them, as much for as little as you. When it comes to money we have to earn enough to survive against the drought. That is the new Dharma as I understand it. Not prayers! How much does a peasant with ten acres like me earn, anyhow?…

*(Road, 67)*

*The Road* is an extension of *Untouchable*. The time gap between the writing of the two novels is obvious not only from the changed time and scene but also in terms of thought and component. If *Untouchable* is a
novel in which doctrines and dogmas are assimilated into a total sensibility, in *The Road* this doctrines and dogmas are more clearly defined though underplayed. The emphasis now is not on the state of the downtrodden and their submissive attitude but on the senile attitude of the high caste Hindus and the newly found courage and determination of the suppressed peoples. While in 1929-1932, when *Untouchable* was written, the caste factor was a major one in the society, a factor which Gandhi was determinedly trying to fight against. By 1961 it had been rendered somewhat invalid by the changed times and circumstances and accorded sanction only by a very small segment of the society. This is more than evident by the defiant attitude of characters like Bikhu and Dholi Singh in *The Road*. Further, while *Untouchable* sounds somewhat sentimental as well as didactic, *The Road* appears more realistic and compassionate. And that is another reason why it is the maturer of the two novels, even if it overtly gives the impression of having been hurriedly written. Suresh Kohli in his article, “*The Road*: A Fresh Appraisal” makes a thoughtful observation in this regard:

While the Harijans in *Untouchable* are riddled with the false sense of Karma and are willing to succumb to pressures, the Harijans in *The Road*, even when finding refuge in religion, do not regard the caste Hindus in anyway superior, despite the fact that they partially have resigned themselves to their fate. A significant difference between caste Hindus in the
two novels is that while the high caste individuals sincerely believed in their superiority and in their divine right to prevent the Harijans from doing certain things, in *The Road* it is mainly vanity and the ego problems that we face. Thakur Singh, the landlord in *The Road* makes efforts to prevent the Harijans from constructing a road, while in *Untouchable* the Lalaji sincerely feels having been polluted by a simple touch of a Harijan boy. Religion also comes under a much stronger attack in *The Road*, as compared to *Untouchable*...(210)

Another significant point is that the Harijans in *The Road* succeed in their mission despite heavy odds. Mulk Raj Anand’s predilection for the machine, which, he believes, is a potent instrument in having the road for man’s prosperity, is an idea just hinted at in *Untouchable*, but it finds clearer expression in *The Road* wherein the outcastes take the help of a road-engine to complete the construction of the road.

Apart from the thematic similarity and the similarities among incidents, situations and characters and conceding the point that *The Road* is an extension of *Untouchable*, it is definitely the former which is a superior work, from any critical yardstick. If *Untouchable* is a novel of struggle, *The Road* is a novel of achievement, in more senses than one; the construction of the road despite obstructions, the humiliation of high-caste Hindus, and the coming of a new sense of direction. For its more
profound thought content, action and humanism, *The Road* is certainly one of Mulk Raj Anand’s finest works.

Thus Mulk Raj Anand both in his premier work *Untouchable* and in his mature work *The Road* delved much into the ills of Indian society. The social conditions both in pre-independence India as well as in post-independence India are more or less the same. Having afflicted with serious social commitment and consciousness, Mulk Raj Anand’s artistics efforts in both novels effectively expose the hypocrisy of Indian society. Both the *Untouchable* and *The Road* unarguably established Mulk Raj Anand’s diction that art is not for art’s sake but for people’s sake.

Thus one can see a gradual and an artistic evaluation of perception of Mulk Raj Anand from one novel to another novel. His views on his society become still more deeper in his choice of subject and in identification of areas. He identified and exposed the ills of untouchability in Indian social system in his euphoric novel *Untouchable*. It was the same vigour and energy he treated Indians negative attitude towards modernism and industrialism in his novel *The Road*. The forthcoming chapters would further reveal how far Mulk Raj Anand travels deep into the inner layers of Indian society to expose its callousness.