

Human Rights in The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand

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Abstract

Human rights are those essential standards necessary for the dignity of human life. These are birth rights inherent in all the individuals irrespective of their cast, creed, religion, sex and nationality. Literature has always contributed to the protection of human rights.

Mulk Raj Anand is a great Indian novelist whose novels deal with the underprivileged sections of Indian society. In his novels, Anand reveals the inhumanity inflicted on the oppressed sections of the society which is the violation of their right to life and physical safety.

Mulk Raj Anand is a great humanist and his prime concern is human predicament. His writings exhibit the violation of the human rights of the underprivileged people during the pre- independence period. The present paper is an effort to show Mulk Raj Anand's treatment of the oppressed and suppressed classes of Indian society and the violation of human rights as the most recurrent themes in his selected novels such as 'Untouchable', 'Coolie' 'Two leaves and a Bud' etc.

Key Words: - Human rights, dignity, civil liberty, untouchability, labour, exploitation

Human rights are essential for all round development of the personality of the individual in society and therefore they ought to be protected and be made available to all individuals. Article 1st of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, provides that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Human rights, being the birth right, are therefore inherent in all the individuals irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, sex and nationality. The human rights are also sometimes called as 'fundamental rights', 'basic rights', 'inherent rights', 'natural rights' and 'birth rights' Civil liberties are the rights guaranteed to citizens as a matter of fundamental rights. According to section - 2(d) of the Protection of Human rights Act 1993, 'Human rights' means the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the constitution or embodied in the international covenants.

Mulk Raj Anand is a socially committed Indian novelist and has produced a good deal of literature. All his novels deal with the underprivileged sections of Indian society. The most recurrent theme in his novels is his treatment of the oppressed and suppressed classes of society. He is keenly aware of society and he chooses a central character through whose view point he stares at the various absurdities, eccentricities and other ills of society where basic human rights are denied to anybody.

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Mulk Raj Anand is a great humanist and his prime concern is human predicament. The major thematic concern of Anand's novels is the economic exploitation of weaker section of society and existing class discrimination causing serious inequality.

Anand's novel 'Untouchable' (1935) highlights the pitiable condition of downtrodden people in Indian society. In the novel, Anand's purpose is to show that even a person belonging to the lowest social class is human being who has a dignity and suffers from the alienation forced upon him by caste society. The story reveals the effects on Bakha, a sweeper boy of the events of a day in his life. Bakha comes from the lowest social caste. In the novel, the confectioner throws the "Jalebis" to Bakha and his assistant splashes water on the nickel coins Bakha has placed on the shoe-board. The low castes are deprived from their simplest and basic right which is water. The lower castes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Bakha and chhota dare not to attend Gulabo's, daughter's wedding due to their social status. Instead, they watch the wedding party from a distance and wait for their friend Ram Charan to bring them sweets. Bakha suffers humiliation due to the neglect of human rights and reaches a state of mind where he accepts all indignity and hates himself. He considers himself the meanest of mankind not appropriate even to touch others. All this is because of the lack of awareness of human rights principles and public ignorance which created this social injustice. Through the novel 'Untouchable' Mulk Raj Anand attempted to make use of literature for the noble cause of upliftment of untouchable.

Anand's second novel 'Coolie' (1936) illustrates his compassion for lost childhood through the character of Munoo. Child labour is the greatest of maladies that has spread across the world. Child labourers in India work in agriculture sector, factories, heavy industries, cottage industries etc. Child labour deprives a child of happy and innocent childhood. In the novel 'Coolie', Munoo is an orphan boy who lost his parents very early stage of life. He lives with his uncle Dayaram and aunt who consider him burden. His aunt beat him more than he beats his cattle. His uncle keeps Munoo as a domestic servant in the house of Baboo Nathoo Ram, where he is tortured greatly. To escape his misfortune he runs away. Now he works in a pickle factory, then as a coolie in the bazaar at Daulatpur. Circumstances compel him to leave Daulatpur and he reaches to Bombay, where he works in a White Cotton Mill. From Bombay, he was taken to Simla by Mrs. Mainwaring as a personal servant and rickshaw-puller. However, change in the town brings no changes in his tragic life. He receives the same treatment from Mrs. Mainwaring. There in Simla, he is attacked by consumption and he succumbs to it, broken mentally and physically. Suffering all agonies of life Munoo dies at the age of sixteen.

'Coolie' is a great work of art. Its central theme is the exploitation of the poor and the underprivileged by cruel, inhuman forces of capitalism and industrialization. Such forces always prove a great threat to human rights of common people. Munoo is denied his fundamental right to life and happiness. He struggles for existence. Munoo's struggle is a quest for life which is most brutally denied to him. His birth rights seem to be destined terribly. He is totally deprived of his human rights.

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His novel, 'Two leaves and a Bud' (1937) relates the tribulations of working class life in India under British rule. Gangu, the central character, is worker in a British owned tea plantation. Gangu has a wild urge to live which is tragically denied. Gangu's wife Sajani, catches malaria and dies. Gangu himself is shot dead when he intervenes, while a British Assistant Manager tries to rape his daughter, Leila. The tea estate has no proper sanitation and water supply. The owners of the estate have no concern for the welfare of workers. The workers are over worked, under paid, ruthlessly exploited, starved and suffered. Working conditions are inhuman which cause fatal accidents. Every worker is entitled with some human rights like right to work, physical safety, residential security and proper wages and social and economic development. On the contrary, all these rights are blatantly violated. Mulk Raj Anand has described all these issues regarding the human rights of Industrial workers. He had an intention of bringing changes in those conditions.

The above discussed novels 'Untouchable', 'Coolie', 'Two leaves and a Bud' disclose his sympathies and compassion for the downtrodden. He portrayed the lives of a sweeper, coolie, a peasant etc. who are all victims of exploitation, class hatred and inhuman cruelty which deprived them of their birth rights. He voices the need for restoration of human rights to every downtrodden, underprivileged and deprived section of society. His novels create a link between fiction and politics through their promotions of human rights.

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