



# Contemplating on the Upshot of the Silent Insurgence in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand

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## Abstract

Existentialism is a philosophy that focuses on the question of human existence. Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche are the founding fathers of existentialism. Existentialism is a search for authentic existence. Each and every individual must raise the question for himself as to who he would be in this society. Each one's existence is their own. Jean-Paul Sartre says, "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of existentialism." Existentialism is a feature of humanism and Anand has portrayed it through human beings wretched sufferings and miseries. For instance, in the novel *Untouchable* Anand manifests Bakha's existential crisis and alienation from the society, fellow men and from his family, which ultimately results in his identity crisis. Therefore, alienation, according to Marx, is the outcome of development of the capitalist mode of production that converts man's labour into dehumanizing existence. Mulk Raj Anand in some of his novels projected the ill-effects of Silent insurgence that is analyzed in this paper.

**Keywords:** *Existentialism, Humanism, Sufferings, Miseries, Existential Crisis and alienation*

"The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays". -

*Soren Kierkegaard*

Mulk Raj Anand is capable of portraying various forms of alienation in his novels to expose the reality to the public. Here, this novel, *Coolie*, contains deeper levels of plight and degradation, with less amount of delight. For example, Munoo, the hero, moves from the village to the town, from the town to the city and then to the mountains, and ultimately meets his doom. He shifts from place to place for the sake of job. He is almost rootless, incompetent of finding a place for himself in society. Premila makes a remark,

“What is brought out is a disturbing picture of a harassed underdog, a helpless victim of oppressive forces and sport of a quixotic destiny. He (Munoo) symbolizes the disinherited and the dispossessed of the earth whose tragic life indicates man’s inhumanity to man”

In this novel, Munoo’s exploitation in Bombay and Daulatpur portray his savage struggle for survival. In that struggle life seemed to be a threat and death was a release. This novel shows death through alienation. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Gangu’s despair and anxiety is portrayed as an alienated peasant in the tea estate. He is aware that the real cause of his misfortune is his poverty, he puts up with his suffering and humiliation subserviently. In the new environment, he faces the crisis of existence. Like that, in *The Road*, the theme of self-realization is developed more meaningfully through laborers. When a dispute arises, the huts of Bhikhu and other untouchables are burnt down. They face the crisis of existence and crisis of identity. This novel portrays not only the sufferings of the untouchables but also of the generous caste Hindus who try to awaken the conscience of the members of their own community against the evils of untouchability. To say about existentialism, it is not at all about pessimism but about bringing a positive meaningful change in one’s life.

### **Longing for Humanism**

The humanist view of life is progressive and optimistic, in awe of human potential, living without fear of judgement and death, finding enough purpose and meaning in life, love and leaving a good legacy—Says Polly Toynbee. Humanitarianism is an ethic of kindness, benevolence, and sympathy extended universally and impartially to all human beings. Humanism is the philosophy of man. In *Untouchable*, Anand portrays Bakha as a sensitive outsider introducing him as the most striking person in the out-caste colony. He has a sort of dignity, which is very uncommon with his filthy profession. He undergoes bitter and traumatic experiences due to many humiliating incidents, which psychologically has disturbed him. He goes to buy cigarettes, he puts an anna on the board. The shopkeeper splashes some water over the coin, picks it up and throws it into the counter. Then he throws the packet of cigarettes at Bakha. This insult severely hurts the sensitive lad but he goes his way.

Here Bakha longed for that humanism, which is not shown to him. He is treated like a dog. His identity is shattered. Havildar Charat Singh, the famous hockey player of the 38<sup>th</sup> regiment, was very kind to Bakha because he was very good at play. He also treats him as a human being and has generously offered him a hockey stick to play. His whole body and mind were tense with admiration and gratitude to his benefactor. Bakha goes to play hockey. A young boy, a spectator is badly hurt. Bakha carries him home. The boy’s mother is angry with him for he

has touched and polluted her son. Here the treatment of the boy's mother towards Bakha is completely devoid of humanism.

The Novel *Coolie* also portrays the same level of humiliation and bitterness meted out to the hero Munoo. When Munoo arrives in Bombay and goes for a refreshing drink, for which he pays, the moment he introduces himself as a Coolie, the proprietor tells him to sit on the floor and not on the chairs. He is treated like a leper. In another instance when Hari's house is washed away due to heavy rains, Ratan takes them to Shibu, who treats them with due respect and humanism. C. J. George has rightly observed:

“The novel presents a chain of adventures in a picaresque manner. But Munoo the hero is not a rogue. He is only a victim of the world's rogueries. His search for bread, in a world where a poor man's flesh and blood is treated as cheaper than bread, makes him restless and it forces him to move from place to place.”

In *The Road*, though the subalterns are deprived of humanity, through Dhooli Singh's character his humane approach for the oppressed is delineated. In *Two Leaves and a Bud* the cruelty of humanity at different levels is portrayed. Here, Gangu doesn't have any means for the last rites of his wife. When he goes to the colonel and begs for money, he is kicked out. It is only due to the kind act of Dr. Havre he could complete his wife Sajni's final rites. One of the coolies in the act of trying to save Reggie Hunt, droops forward beneath a load of undergrowth. In return Reggie strikes him with his whip. This was the way the coolies were treated with severe barbarism.

### **Passive Awareness**

According to Jiddu Krishnamurti, the highest form of thinking is Passive Awareness. If one describes someone as passive, it means that they do not take any action but instead let things happen to them. Passive awareness is a concept that Jean-Louis Lascoux has created to describe the state of self-awareness without being able to act on what is the conscience object. In *Untouchable* Bakha goes to the shop to get some sweet meat. But he is very much aware that his weighing machine is fraudulent but he just keeps staring at it unable to do anything regarding the same. The reason is the serfdom of thousands of years that has made him humble and also the social heredity which prevents him from displaying adequate resentment to the offenders of inhuman acts. Hence, he feels severely handicapped to act in a decisive way.

About the caste discrimination and the passive nature of the downtrodden in the novel, one of the scholars of Indian English literature, Rumina Sethi comments in her article, “*Untouchable*, Anand's first novel, is a depiction of the difference between the high and the low, represented by the ruthlessness and hypocrisy of the caste-rich Brahmins against the passive untouchables”

Further, in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, the protagonist Gangu who has learnt through his long experience like Prabha of *Coolie* silently accepts whatever befalls him. Here he represents the fatalism and the sense of tragic

futility of the Indian peasantry. He accepts all sorts of intense suffering and humiliation with a resigned acceptance. He feels that this was just the reward for the misdeeds of his past life. He is passively aware about his pathetic situation but he is unable to show any kind of protest against it. So, in this way, he is constantly struggling for his self-identity.

Next, in the novel, *The Road*, the transportation from Govardhan village to Gurgaon city would definitely result in the improvisation of the economy of the downtrodden that was not acceptable by the caste Hindus. The subalterns are very much aware, but they are unable to raise their voice against them. They constantly remain as passive observers. Another meek character, Pandit Suraj mani, who does not feel ashamed of extracting food from the untouchables, deprives them entry into the temple stating that the temple teaches Dharma, they cannot enter the house of God. But they can make dry offerings for the preservation of the Dharma, which may emancipate them. The poor too feel highly humiliated and insulted at this remark of Pandit, but they do not have any voice against the higher caste Hindus, so, their question of identity remains.

### Submissive Trait

A submissive person is someone who willingly submits to the authority of another. The result of submissive behavior is that you get little of what you want whilst losing the respect of other people. In *Untouchable*, Lakha's family and their dependence on the High caste Hindus for basic amenities is delineated. Therefore, poverty and hunger make them submissive in all walks of their life. This is the reason their identity always remains a lingering question. Once when Sohni rushes to the well to fetch water for her thirsty brother Bakha, she finds a whole lot of crowds waiting there for water. All of them wait very patiently and pray to God to bring a caste Hindu to the well so that their pitchers could be filled with water. Here the submissive nature of the subalterns is delineated.

When Bakha receives a tight slap, their behavior stings Bakha mentally, he is strong, possesses the ability to hit back, but the years of suppression has made him submissive in nature that makes him to suffer from all such social humiliation with complete politeness. Even his father Lakha believes that any injustice meted out to them is the cause of their low birth and destiny. He is the symbol of submission to the exploitation of the caste Hindus.

M.K. Naik points out, "The caste Hindu refuses to accept the fact that the untouchable is a human being, but insists on treating him like a subhuman creature, to be ignored, or bullied or exploited as the occasion demands" (26).

In *The Road*, Bikhu leads his pious mother towards the temple which they are forbidden to enter. Actually, Laxmi belongs to the old-generation of outcastes in her belief and attitude. The submissive nature in her can be visualized, when she makes a remark to her son that we should love them even if they hate you, you should love everyone and everything. Through good deeds we shall rise into higher caste. We should love all God's children; hence we shall get the love back. If not now, in the next life.

In *Coolie* when Munoo is humiliated physically and mentally to the extreme, a serious question arises into his mind about his identity just as Bakha and Bhikhu face at the time of crisis. He gets the answer, that he is Munoo, Babu Nathoo Ram's servant. Munoo is so submissive in his thoughts that he takes his identity as a servant for granted.

Philip Henderson observes that *Coolie*, "takes us into a world in which the comradeship of man for man exists only among the very poorest people. With nothing to hope for, their common humanity is all they possess"

Lalu in *The Sword and The Sickle* is very smart, intelligent and quite observant who realizes that the problems which are instigated by others is accepted quietly by his village fellow men without showing any protest against it and seem to be contended to be a victim of exploitation. His elders in his house are against education with the belief that education is useless and harmful for a peasant's son. This annoyance towards modernity puts the peasants of his village into an unquestioning submission to blind faith, superstition and traditional religion. Finally, Mulk Raj Anand's characters especially in his first trilogy are visualized to be submissive in their attitude that definitely weakens them and their environment resulting in crisis of identity.

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