

THE SUBALTERNITY OF WOMEN IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S NOVELS

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Abstract

In the post-colonial theories, the term subaltern refers to the lower classes and the "lower" social groups, who are at the margins of a society. In this paper, a critical examination of the ways in which women of the subaltern characters are presented in Mulk Raj Anand's novels is presented, where the authors have attempted to provide voice to those subaltern women by portraying their horrible struggle to survive in this world with self-respect. Raj Anand has sketched a true picture of societal exploitations as a part of subaltern in his novels with the intention of social awareness, which describes the sufferings and agony of downtrodden women.

Keywords: subaltern, women, gender, inequality, power

Introduction

Simone de Beauvoir's renowned assertion, "one is not inherently a woman, but rather becomes one," implies that the concept of 'woman' is constructed, with the other gender playing a significant role in its formation (8, Butler). According to Beauvoir, the primary reason why women are considered the second sex/gender is quite straightforward. She is positioned there by the opposite sex rather than having voluntarily assumed the second-ranking position herself. This is the modus operandi of the patriarchy in all social contexts.

Beauvoir, Butler, and Foucault engage in a discussion over the concept of "power" inside society. The allocation of that authority centres around the "formation" of social standing based on gender. Due to the patriarchal nature of social milieus, authority is exclusively held by males. They are influential individuals who determine what actions should be taken and how they should be carried out.

The meaning of the term 'subaltern' has evolved since 1982. Subaltern is a phrase that is now commonly used to refer to various marginalised groups, such as minorities, oppressed women, refugees, colonial subjects, illiterate individuals, and silenced children. Postcolonial writers endeavour to raise awareness of the plight of the oppressed, marginalised, or so-called Subalterns. This awareness will enable them to transition from the periphery to the core of the society.

Throughout history, women have often been regarded as the property of their husband's family, a possession to be owned and controlled. This belief has persisted since ancient times, including the apostolic era. Women are objectified as just physical entities, expected to pursue pleasure and be subjugated by masculine force and authority. Men establish regulations for women to adhere to, and if the females fail to comply, they are subjected to torture. A woman who gives birth to a man is oppressed by him. It is quite ironic in the life of a lady. In Indian society, it is not acceptable for females to refrain from contemplating matters pertaining to their own lives. Even while females lack the authority to make decisions about their own future, males possess all kinds of privileges and are free to utilise them as they like. Virginity holds significant importance in Indian society, particularly for women. The women who adhere to sexual purity are revered and praised, whereas those who have lost their purity and live in shame are despised and criticised.

Women willingly subject themselves to male oppression and actively prepare themselves to fulfil various roles, obligations, and performances. Women often lose touch with their true selves or individuality when fulfilling their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers, all while being subjected to

the authority and monitoring of men. The veil system symbolises the moral integrity and modesty of women, while also representing their devout nature and respected reputation within society. Women are merely manipulated by men; their bodies are carefully controlled in the patriarchal society, where regulations are exclusively imposed on women. The veil system is strongly enforced in order to preserve the purity and piety of women, as it is considered a grave sin to compromise their purity.

Literature Review

Gauri stands out as a distinctive novel in Mulk Raj Anand's body of work due to its singular focus on a female protagonist. This novel is a work of fiction by Mulk Raj Anand that clearly demonstrates his unwavering sympathy for the suffering people of India. It compels one to inquire about the nature of the Indian character. In our community, women are referred to as Mata, Devi, and Laxmi, and we assert that they have always been accorded the respect they deserve. Simultaneously, we also defeated them, ignited them, or transformed them into the residence. Mulk Raj Anand's novel Gauri effectively reveals the hypocrisy prevalent in our culture. It not only expresses a vehement objection to the mistreatment of women, but also examines, using Gauri as an example, what actions women in India could do to achieve their liberation. Gauri is portrayed as a submissive and mild-mannered rural woman who endures silently the difficulties and unfair treatment imposed on her by her mother, mother-in-law, and even her husband until she encounters the enlightened urban doctor. Under his influence, she blossoms and becomes aware of her inherent value as an autonomous individual.

Mulk Raj Anand's work depicts the villagers' profound ignorance and their tendency to conflate superstition with faith. Anand demonstrates the victimisation of Gauri through the portrayal of superstition. Panchi, the husband of Gauri, initially admired her modest and naive demeanour, as well as her submissive nature resembling that of a cow. However, due to the superstitious beliefs instilled in him by Kesero, Gauri's mother-in-law, his perception of her drastically changes.

Gauri Mulk Raj Anand advocates strongly for the recognition and endorsement of women's rights. The novelist expresses a lack of belief in the Christian perspective of vice, highlights the importance of compassion in human connections, criticises the use of money as a guarantee, and consistently reproaches unquestioning faith in superstitions such as karma and god. These humanistic themes form the basis of the novel's plot. Within our prevailing socio-cultural norms, the woman continues to be unrecognised, confined, and subjected to oppression. The primary tenet of Mulk Raj Anand's humanism, which forms the central theme of this story, is the imperative for women to achieve parity with men. Mulk Raj Anand portrays the conventional mindset of a male through the character of Panchi, who saw his wife Gauri as someone he can embrace at night and mistreat during the day, someone who would beautify his home and assist him with the land.

The emancipation of Indian women and their liberation from discriminatory laws and societal norms is hindered by the deep-rooted social and psychological traditions, as well as the opposition from conservative factions. Consequently, even in the present era, a significant number of Indian women continue to suffer from the oppressive conventions of our society, which is inherently unfair towards them. They are designed to benefit the self-centered nature of humanity. They grant men several rights and freedoms that women are barred from. They employ distinct criteria to evaluate the personal and societal behaviour of males and females.

Anand's work, *The Road*, vividly portrays the suffering of women caused by the dowry system. This work is considered the sequel to *Untouchable* and takes place twenty-five years after the events of *The Road*. Although the scenario and characters have been altered. The concept of the high caste exploiting the low caste remains unchanged. The city of Bulandsheher in Uttar Pradesh has been substituted with Govardhan in Haryana, while the name Bakha has been replaced with Bhikhu. Pundit Suraj Mani has replaced Pundit Kali Nath. Mala and Rukmini have replaced Sohini at the location. Anand aims to demonstrate in this novel that the achievement of freedom has not brought about any substantial improvement in the fate of the untouchables. The lower caste individuals exhibit a slight inclination towards rebellion, whereas the higher caste individuals become more inflexible in their attitude towards them.

The novel "The Road" focuses on the character of Rukmini, a young woman who faces numerous restrictions and obstacles imposed by her own mother. It is recommended that she refrain from mentioning the names of the young individuals in this village. She is prohibited from wearing bright and colourful clothes. She must refrain from wearing them until her wedding. However, Bhikuhold possesses an image of Rukmini, but due to his belonging to the untouchable caste, he does not have any prospects of a future with her. Sanju, her sibling, is exempt from all of these limitations. Boys are expected to exhibit mischievous and quarrelsome behaviour, whereas girls are expected to be calm, disciplined, obedient, and develop the ability to tolerate any form of misbehaviour from others. The female characters in this tale are uncomplicated, genuine, yet tormented individuals. The exploitation of women from high caste and low caste is similar with little variation. When comparing Bhikhu's mother Laxmi, Sanju's mother Bhagwanti, and Lachman's mother Sapti, their attitudes towards life are found to be rather similar. All of them possess superstitious beliefs, adhere to religious practices, conform to stereotypes, and exhibit rustic characteristics.

Both Rukmini, the daughter of Thakur, and Mala, the daughter of Dholi Singh, are victims of the dowry system. They lack autonomy in expressing their opinions. They are unable to risk severing the connections that link them to the Indian traditions. The feminine characters are thereafter marginalised. Elaborating on characterization is unnecessary for the development of the fundamental issue, as the theme does not revolve around the exploitation of an individual. It is the act of one class exploiting another.

This demonstrates that the subjugation of women is a prominent issue in the story, alongside the oppression of low caste Hindus by the high caste. Mala and Rukmini are subjected to the dowry system, while Bhagwanti and Sapti are victims of the patriarchal system. Bhagwanti, despite being the wife of the village Sarpanch, lacks personal agency. Sapti briefly defies her husband's desire. Both Bhagwanti and Sapti are ladies who have superstitious beliefs. Pandit Suraj Mani exploits the naïve faith of his followers. He coerces Sapti into abandoning her husband and forces Bhagwanti to do a specific puja for his personal benefit. Laxmi is a victim of social exploitation. As a woman belonging to a low caste, she is now not permitted to have Two Leaves and a Bud. This film effectively portrays the distressing circumstances faced by women. Anand depicts the sexual exploitation endured by the women employed in the tea plantations of Assam in this story. Anand's story highlights the prevalent occurrence of sexual exploitation within the tea plantation. No female family member, whether mothers, sisters, or wives, is secure on the tea estate. The female coolies are obligated to work for pay lower than those of the male coolies. They entrust their children to the baskets while they go to the tea gardens. Upon their return, they discover a multitude of them strewn in the dirt, submerged in a drainage system, or even deceased on the side of the road. For women, motherhood can be a source of great suffering, as many children perish due to malnutrition and inadequate nutrients. However, they continue to give birth to infants in order to augment their workforce and generate income for their livelihood.

The female coolies are obligated to work with the same level of rigour as their male counterparts. The managers often impose punishment on women. The image depicts a mother being pursued to her workplace while she is accompanied by her child, highlighting the rulers' lack of compassion and disregard for women. The white individuals coerce the coolies into surrendering their wives and daughters to them for the purpose of amusement and enjoyment, often to fulfil their sexual desires. Young policemen like as Hunt are constantly seeking for young ladies and women. Narain informs Gangu that Hunt resides with three women who are the spouses of the labourers. When Hunt arrives at the job site, he attempts to display his arrogant demeanour towards the women.

As the owners, they anticipate that their slaves should willingly accompany their wives and daughters. Occasionally, they use bribes in the form of 'bakshis' to persuade impoverished husbands to gain the affections of their wives. If individuals engage in protest, they employ their firearms to instill fear and intimidate them. Hunt offers Niyogi five acres of land as a bribe in exchange for his wife, while he punishes one of the coolies by striking him, because he refuses to give up his wife. When they become frustrated with them, they discard them in order to replace them with new ones.

Within urban environments, the British exhibit behaviour akin to shrewd deceivers. However, in the secluded regions such as the valley of Assam, their behaviour resembles that of untamed creatures. Here, the lack of fear towards the impoverished labourers stems from the understanding that they are unlikely to assert themselves in opposition. The issue of women's exploitation is a central theme in *The Sword and the Sickle*, as well as in all of Mulk Raj Anand's writings. Maya sheds awareness on the issues faced by widows in India.

Anand portrays the distressing condition of women by using the character of Maya in this story. In Hinduism, widows are often stigmatised and treated with apprehension. She adheres to highly stringent rules. As the landlord's daughter, Maya has greater limitations than other women. Her attendants protect her with the vigilance of watchdogs. Her mother always accompanies her as a chaperone. Maya defies societal norms by escaping from the oppressive culture and eloping with her lover, ultimately marrying him. In a society where widows are seen as vulnerable targets, remarriage could have been a viable answer. It can bestow upon her a certain social standing and elevate her reputation in the eyes of society.

Anand conveys his perspective on the dignity and self-respect of women through the portrayal of the love tale between Lalu and Maya. He desires a nation in which women, who were formerly sold to the greatest bidder, have gained the freedom to autonomously determine their own destinies. Anand attempts to confer dignity upon the inflexible social order of the Indians by encouraging widows to enter into a new marriage. Maya, who believes that meeting a man privately is morally wrong, fearlessly questions Lalu: Did you really assume that women in foreign countries only select their partners freely? In this story, Anand attempts to depict an authentic portrayal of Indian society.

In the story "Coolie," Munoo's mother dutifully performs all the household chores for her family without expressing any complaints. However, in the novel *Road*, Rukmini comes to the realisation that being bound to the chains of domestic slavery is incredibly tedious, leading to a gradual demise. A woman's soul becomes domesticated within the confines of her home, where she loses herself in the monotonous and laborious tasks of managing the household, traditionally assigned to men.

Conclusion

Many Indian writers have addressed the problem of women's exploitation in their literary works. M. R. Anand, a novelist with a strong social conscience, has extensively written on the dire circumstances faced by women in his novels. He has bravely advocated for the rights of countless Indian women who have suffered at the hands of unsympathetic husbands, manipulative in-laws, critical relatives, and most importantly, the internalised guilt and self-blame resulting from centuries of psychological oppression. Anand's novels, such as *Untouchable*, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, *The Old Woman and the Cow*, and *The Sword and the Sickle*, depict the distressing circumstances faced by women. Anand has skillfully shown the distressing plight of women, such as Sohini, Gauri, and Rukmini, who all endured the oppressive influence of a patriarchal society. Mulk Raj Anand's works provide evidence of India's arduous endeavour to overcome significant stagnation and establish a society where individuals, regardless of gender, can live with freedom and equality, enabling them to lead vibrant and innovative lives.

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