

## **SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S THE ROAD**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The sociological perspective is a perspective on human behavior and its connection to society as a whole. It invites us to look for the connections between the behavior of individual people and the structures of the society in which they live. The Road, sheds light on the novelist's changing perspective on social reality prevailing in India during 1960s and thereafter. The humanist in Anand makes another attempt to plead for, values such as compassion, humanness, peace, love and good neighborliness, which would generate lasting happiness to society and its members. Accommodativeness and sensitivity must be cultivated so that social and economic injustices might cease to cause unhappiness and discontent and make, the world a better place to live in.

**KEYWORDS:** Changing Perspective, Build a Road, Gandhi's Sentiments, Forgiven

### **INTRODUCTION**

Mulk Raj Anand was an Indian writer in English, notable for his depiction of the lives of the poorer castes in traditional Indian society. One of the pioneers of Indo-Anglian fiction, he, together with R. K. Narayan, Ahmad Ali and Raja Rao, was one of the first India-based writers in English to gain an international readership. Anand is admired for his novels and short stories, which have acquired the status of being classic works of modern Indian English literature, noted for their perceptive insight into the lives of the oppressed and their analyses of impoverishment, exploitation and misfortune. He is also notable for being among the first writers to incorporate Punjabi and Hindustani idioms into English.

The story of the novel begins with the government decision to build a road connecting the city to the village of Govardhan where plenty of milk and vegetable are produced. Though the road would mean prosperity for the village, the landlord Thakur Singh and his men oppose it as they cannot tolerate the idea of untouchables like Bikhu taking part in, the construction and drawing wages just like the high caste people. There, then, emerge two opposing factions: One led by the landlord Thakur Singh and the other one led by Lambardar Dhooli Singh who, though a high caste man himself, is inspired by the teachings of Gandhi regarding the question of untouchability.

Thakur Singh instigates the village priest to excommunicate Dhooli Singh. As the feud continues, Thakur Singh's son, Sanju, along with Dhooli Singh's son Lachman, burns down the huts of the untouchables to translate his father's fury into action. Later, Lachman repents his act of arson and goes to work with others to build the road. Sanju, after a brief period of repentance, pursues his crusade against the untouchables, revealing the feudal blood acquired from his father. This feud between two groups spoils the marriage plan between Lachman and Thakur Singh's daughter Rukmani on the one hand, and between Sanju and Dhooli Singh's daughter Mala on the other.

Dhooli Singh firmly sticks to his resolve of helping the untouchables by showing courage to give them shelter until huts are rebuilt, in spite of the objections raised by his own community. Meanwhile, the construction of the path

continues and when the road is built Bikhu sets out on his journey towards Gurgaon on his way to Delhi, the capital of India. The story of the novel points out that Anand's basic concern here is not against the social systems as such but in opposition to certain people who cannot reconcile themselves to the wind of change which is sweeping across the country. They refuse to allow the new egalitarian values to flourish and stick to the obscurantist values of the past. The focus shifts to espousing those inhuman practices and conventions to which some people are still clinging because these people do not want to part from their vested interests.

Dhooli Singh echoes Gandhi's sentiments. He is moved by the condition of the poor. He is full of compassion for them. He is willing to make sacrifice for them. But all this remains an individual response and does not grow into collective action. He believes in teaching others through his personal example. A staunch disciple of Gandhi, he carries on a single-handed crusade against untouchability. He represents the novelist's vision of an ideal Hindu: compassionate, tolerant, sacrificing, and courageous but he fails to realize that such individual example cannot change the whole society. Again Dhooli Singh exemplifies the Gandhian dictum of hating the sin and not the sinner when he does not outrightly condemn Thakur Singh and his son for burning down the huts of the untouchables. He invokes God's mercy on the helpless victims but does not express his abhorrence at the dastardly and heinous act of the landlord and his cronies.

Equally unconvincing is the role-played by Bhikhu during the time of great man-made disaster. He, too, appears helpless and resigned to his fate. Unlike any rebel character he does not show any sort of resolve and determination to take revenge against the persons responsible for perpetrating the crime Bhikhu had stood grim and taciturn, but now turned his face away from the tender scene with dimmed eyes and contemplated the smoke above the flames, Strong and sincere but calm, he was too spiritually pure to hate; and had learnt, through long submission, to endure evil and violence from the upper castes, without protest, only hoping that, through work and more work, he would be liberated, somehow, he did not know how.. In fact, Dhooli Singh even repents that the whole thing has happened because he sided with the people of low social rank. He thinks that the landlord's action is designed to punish him rather than the low caste people. Even though he is well meaning and a true friend of the socially victimized folk, he cannot see things in the right perspective. He can offer the victims only his pity:

"Come, come my sons and daughters, come, all is yours. I will not need to go to the Ganga to wash my sins.... Here, come and take what you have lost! For the boys there is nothing but for the women there is enough...." He was panting for breath as he spoke. "You can eat me", he shouted. 'I am guilty one to be punished! I am full of rottenness rotten with the religion of my birth.... Eat me if you like!.'(23)

Dhooli Singh does not want any permanent antagonism or bitterness to develop between Thakur Singh and the untouchables. He would like all of them to remain united for the upliftment of the village symbolized by the road- Therefore, when some of the untouchable begin to speak in terms of 'we' and 'they', Dhooli Singh admonishes them :

"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 or as little as you. When it comes to money we have to earn enough cash 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?... It is a hard business the land! We must face our own nakedness, the naked truth of our moneylessness! God must come down Incarnate as bread in our country." said the Mahatma. (48)

Even Roop Krishna, a government officer, is curiously unwilling to punish Thakur Singh and his son, even though he knows that they are guilty. Dhooli Singh's son Leman, who was guilty of theft, is forgiven by him once he confesses his crime, because, Roop krishan believes that even a thief or a criminal has conscience and can experience a change of heart. Repentance, in his view, the greatest punishment. He counsels compassion and patience to Thakur Singh :

Diwan Roop Krishna puffed at the hookah a little deliberately. Then he coughed and stretched out his left hand towards Landlord Thakur Singh's shoulder saying: "Patience—Setpanch Thakur Singh! You rhust ask yourself if you are going to die like Almgir, the Moghul, leaving neither hut, nor hearth, nor water in the pitcher? Or will you get the bop in the village to finish the road before the rains." (25)

Thus, the novel ends on a highly ambiguous note as regards the question of untouchability. The only plausible argument which the novel seems to offer is that a social evil like untouchability is not an inherent feature of society but is the result of the failure of the dominant personalities to show courage and character to end this debasing practice. Instead of trying to change the system, not an easy task, efforts should be made to awaken the conscience of the people, to make than aware of how wasteful and debilitating this practice is for the whole society and just for a small group of people who are its victims.

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