

## **SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN MULK RAJ ANAND’S FIRST TRILOGY**

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**Abstract:** Man’s fate, today, is no longer in the hands of the gods, but is often in conflict with the evil in other men. Man makes himself, or thinks he can. The heart and mind of contemporary man is therefore, moved by other casualties, than salvation. \_\_ Mulk Raj Anand

Identity is a state of mind in which someone recognizes or identifies their character traits that leads to finding out who they are and what they do. It’s basically who you are and what you define yourself as being. The thirst for identity has always been an aspect of significance in the Indo -Anglican novels. The novels of R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao laid the foundation of the new Indian English fiction. The post-colonial age represented by these three novelists was chiefly a quest for identity along different dimensions of socio-political and economic order of India. Anand's purpose is to show that even a person belonging to the lowest social class is a human being who has a dignity and suffers from the alienation forced upon him by caste society. The novel *Untouchable*, describes a day in the life of Bakha, a scavenger a well-built child of nature. He, like every individual, longs for his identity. Likewise, in *Coolie*, Munoo, the protagonist, moves from the village to the town, from the town to the city and then to the mountains in search of identity. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, the opening line of the novel, “Life is a journey into the unknown” hints at the identity crisis that it’s filled up with. The protagonist Gangu, an old and beaten man becomes a victim of colonial exploitation.

**Keywords:** Identity, quest, alienation, exploitation, victim, dignity, society.

### **Introduction:**

Anand tries to seek the causes of identity crisis in his characters. Anand, like Shelley believes that every individual is an imaginative being and it’s his imaginative mind that always seeks its identity with the universal system of things. In *Untouchable*, Anand describes the violent stirring in the soul of Bakha as such; “The accumulated strength of his giant body glistened in him with the desire for revenge while horror, rage, indignation swept over his frame”.<sup>1</sup> Bakha becomes a victim of the prevailing caste-system during pre-independent India. He is slapped for the only reason that he belonged to a low caste. Here he faces a crisis of identity. In *Coolie*, Munoo, the main character of the story undergoes the existential crisis of inch-by-inch suffering and death. *Coolie* has an edge over *Untouchable*. Munoo’s experiences in Bombay and Daulatpur emphasize his savage struggle for survival. Munoo’s rapidness, the utter humanness of his impulses, the sheer wantonness of his unconscious life force reveal his natural vitality. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Gangu becomes a victim of man, god and civilization. He faces the storm, which ruins his harvest and shakes his identity.

### **Bakha’s Self Cry**

Bakha questions himself about his identity in this world:

“Why was all this fuss? Why was I so humble? I could have struck him! And to think that I was so eager to come to the town this morning. Why didn’t I shout to warn people of my approach? That comes of not looking after one’s work. I should have seen the high-caste people street. That man! That he should have hit me! My poor jilebies! I should have eaten them. But why couldn’t I say something? Couldn’t I have joined my hands to him and then go away? The slap of my face! The liar! Let me come across him one day. He knows I was being abused. Not one of them spoke for me. The cruel crowd! All of them abused, abused, abused why are we always abused? The sanitary inspector that day abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too.... I am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable I am an untouchable!”<sup>2</sup>

### **Bakha’s Resistance**

Bakha belonged to a scavenger caste which was categorically hated and being hated till this day by any man and woman belonging to even any other pettier castes of the Indian society. Bakha possessed strong physical strength. He had a good muscular body. He could do any kind of manual labour without any hesitation.

He could have been a successful weight-lifter, hockey-player or a foot-ball champion, but because of the so-called fate and lack of identity, he could not gain any of these. He had to satisfy himself with the mere food-wastes thrown to him by the socially, politically and economically affluent just for the sake of keeping his spirits alive. Any high caste-Hindu, who had just the stamina of a dead-fish could hit at him but he could not hit-back though he had more physical strength than that of his adversary just because he belonged to a socially-secluded caste. This was built by a determined unethical blockade that could not be broken down by his mere physical strength.

### **Sexual Exploitation**

Even the girls and women of the lower castes are not spared. They seduce them, use them and misuse them. Sohini is an example of this fact. She goes to fetch water from the well of the high-castes. First of all, she had to wait for a long time to fetch a little water just to quench the thirst of her thirsty brother. Secondly she had to become a victim for the lust of Kalinath, the self-acclaimed 'Pandit' who wants to quench his thirst of lust amidst the alleged caste-barriers who accuses her guilty as an 'untouchable' when she did not relent to his wish. Bakha wants to thrash him but he was reluctant to do so in the absence of his own identity.

### **Bakha's consolation**

Bakha's fight for his identity and survival get some consolation when the sister of Ramcharan creates for Bakha a new world full of wonder and enchantment. Bakha's feelings for that girl have been very graphically described in the novel as:

"There was something wistful about her, a soft light in her eyes for which she had become endeared to him. She had grown up to be a tall girl with a face as brown as ripe wheat and hair as black as the rain clouds." 3 Bakha is trapped and is a victim of a recalcitrant society and he needs neither Gandhi nor Christianity but the poet who gives him a new vision to liberate him from his sickening surroundings.

### **Munoo – hit from pillar to post**

In Coolie, Munoo, the protagonist moves from the village to the town, from the town to the city and then to the mountains broadening the canvas of the novel. He tries to avail chances of progress but his ill fate produces obstacles in his way. The Coolies as a class belong nowhere as Anand points out even the lower caste rejects and casts away the Coolies. The orphan boy Munoo runs to avoid every place of cruelty in search of happiness and identity but everywhere he is suppressed. Munoo realizes that it is his poverty, not caste, that is the root of all his untold miseries, and arrives at, rather precocious conclusion that the worst thing in one's life is to be poor. Munoo generalizes this, drawing attention from his own felt experience. 'Money is everything' his uncle had said on the day of his journey to town. "Money is, indeed, everything", Munoo thought. And his mind dwelt for the first time on the difference between himself, the poor boy, and his master, the rich people... caste does not matter ... There must only be two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor".

### **Social Exploitation of Munoo**

At fourteen, Munoo is forced to work in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram, a worker in Imperial Bank in Sham Nagar. Bibiji, the wife of Nathoo Ram, objects to Munoo playing and laughing with her children for considerations of prestige, status and her own physical comforts.

"What right has he to join the laughter of his superiors?" 4. she asks as she sees him laughing and dancing with her children. What is the role of Munoo in that house? What is his identity? He is just a mere slave there doing all the work told by each member in the family. Bibiji, prompted instinctively of her own creature comforts asks Munoo in a sharp cruel tone:

"Is there no work to do that you go wasting your time? Haven't I told you that your place is in kitchen?" 5

### **Deprivation of mere liberty**

Munoo, is deprived the mere liberty to attend to the nature's call, who is humiliated and is riddled with shame. Realization comes quickly for the fourteen year old boy, used to liberty in his hill village where he was a master of his will in spite of his aunt's rebuke:

"Munoo felt humiliated. He did not know how to face people if they were all going to be told what he had done this morning. He realized finally his position in this world. He was to be a slave, a servant who should do the work, all the odd jobs, someone to be abused, even beaten, though as yet it had not come to that. He felt sad; lonely"6

Death of Munoo, is a memorable and moving moment.

“Munoo clutches at Mohan’s hand, felt the warm blood in his veins like a tide reaching out to distance to which it had never gone before”. 7

### **Gangu’s journey into the Unknown**

In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, the opening lines of the novel, Life is a journey into the ‘unknown’ hints at the crisis that it’s packed with. The novel presents an exploited Gangu whose wife dies of a disease and he is killed while trying to protect his daughter from being raped by a British colonial officer. Through Gangu, Anand portrays the mental state of the laborers of tea-plantation who feel jeopardized while working under the ruthless masters. Gangu, lured by the false promises of a tout, started with his wife Sajani and children Leila and Buddhu to work on the Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam. He was offered a hut without any heed to the hygienic requirements of the occupants.

### **Unhygienic living conditions**

The coolies live in stifling surroundings and are part of the larger colonial experience. Gangu becomes a victim of man, god and civilization. He faces the storm, which ruins his harvest and shakes his identity. His wife dies due to lack of medical facilities and his world is broken. After the death of his wife, Gangu loses his poise and interest in life, and passes from bad to worse with no peace in his heart.

“He had been weakened by life into an accepting character. For working under a torrid sun, sowing, reaping, attending to a hundred different jobs, fighting nature, had taught him patience and endurance, virtues which make for dour hearts but weak wills.” 8

### **Prison without Bars**

The tea garden in Assam, becomes a symbol of his slavery and this world of a tea plantation was like a prison house. Narain who was executed on a contract of three months, was confined there for last twelve years. Narain tells Gangu:

“The prison has no bars, but it is nevertheless an unbreakable jail. The chowkidars keep guard over the plantation, and they bring you back if you should go.”9

### **Zeal and zest for life**

Gangu drifted from bad to worse and finds no peace at heart. His all hopes destroyed when Narain tells the pitiful stories of how the planters along with police and magistrate torture the erring coolies. Gangu’s entire life is a saga of struggle and every moment he tries to safeguard his identity but fails. Much more than a scapegoat he sacrifices himself at the altar of the narrow racial prejudice, but he is not without zeal and zest for life. Anand pens:

“He gripped the handle of his spade with a wavering faith and dug his foot into the sod made by a furrow and sensed the warm freshness of the earth that would yield fruit.”10

CONCLUSION: Mulkraj Anand explored the thick congested fabric of Indian life and structured his fiction with unquestionable authority. The crisis of identity plays vital role in the cast of the narrative of Anand. His novels explore the hidden dimensions of human psyche along socio-economic and cultural dimensions. The novels of Anand are not only an attack on the caste-system but it’s also an individual’s struggle against a sea of dogmas. Anand’s characters suffer the crisis of identity no doubt, but on regaining their identity after a prolonged struggle it is a moment of delight for them. Radhakrishnan, too, endorses what the protagonist of Anand’s novel does: For the flower to develop the bud has to die, for the fruit the flower, for the seed the plant and for the plant the seed. Life is a process of eternal birth and death. All progress is sacrifice.”

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