



FROM MARGINS TO MORAL CENTER: RE-READING ANAND'S SOCIAL VISION THROUGH ANANTHAMURTHY'S CRITICAL LENS

Dr. Thammaiah R.B¹

Research Guide & Professor, Department of English, Al Ameen Research Foundation, University of Mysore, Mysore, Karnataka, India

Kumaraswamy²

Research Scholar, Department of English, Al Ameen Research Foundation, University of Mysore, Mysore, Karnataka, India

Abstract

*This research paper investigates the socio-cultural concerns embedded in the writings of Mulk Raj Anand and U. R. Ananthamurthy, two literary stalwarts who have significantly influenced Indian literature. Focusing on their commitment to addressing the plight of marginalized communities, caste oppression, and systemic inequities, the study highlights how both authors critique social hierarchies while envisioning pathways for reform. Through a comparative analysis of Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) with Ananthamurthy's *Samskara* (1965) and *Bharathipura* (1973), this paper examines their shared themes of casteism, class struggles, and moral dilemmas. Employing Ananthamurthy's critical lens, the paper reevaluates Anand's social realism, emphasizing the ethical imperatives central to their shared vision for a just and equitable society. Both authors, through their protagonists, challenge the entrenched orthodoxy of caste and class structures, offering narratives of resistance, hope, and human dignity.*

Keywords

Mulk Raj Anand, U. R. Ananthamurthy, Casteism, Class Struggle, Marginalization, Social Reform, Social Realism, Modernism, Postmodernism, Indian Literature, Moral Philosophy, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

Indian literature has long been a powerful medium for critiquing social injustices and envisioning societal transformation. Among its most prominent voices are Mulk Raj Anand and U. R. Ananthamurthy, whose works serve as moral and intellectual commentaries on the entrenched social hierarchies of caste, class, and gender. Anand, often regarded as one of the pioneers of Indian English literature, brings an unflinching realism to his portrayal of the struggles of the downtrodden, particularly the untouchables and the working class. Ananthamurthy, writing in Kannada, combines psychological depth with philosophical inquiry to critique the moral and ethical foundations of caste and religious orthodoxy.

This study undertakes a comparative analysis of Anand's *Untouchable* and *Coolie* alongside Ananthamurthy's *Samskara* and *Bharathipura*, examining how the two authors converge in their critique of social inequities while diverging in their narrative techniques and philosophical



orientations. By employing Ananthamurthy's critical lens, this paper reinterprets Anand's social realism, emphasizing the moral dimensions of his critique of caste and class exploitation.

The early 20th century witnessed the rise of modernism in Indian literature, marked by a shift from romantic idealism to a focus on the harsh realities of life. Anand and Ananthamurthy, though writing in different linguistic and cultural contexts, share a modernist commitment to depicting the struggles of marginalized communities. Anand's *Untouchable* and *Coolie* exemplify social realism, portraying the lived experiences of untouchables and laborers with stark, unvarnished detail.

Ananthamurthy, while rooted in modernism, also incorporates elements of postmodernism, particularly in his exploration of moral ambiguity and the complexities of human behavior. In *Samskara*, for instance, Praneshacharya's journey from orthodoxy to self-realization reflects a critique of rigid moral structures, while in *Bharathipura*, Jagannatha's attempts at reform are complicated by his own privilege and internal conflicts.

Casteism and class exploitation form the backbone of both Anand's and Ananthamurthy's narratives. In *Untouchable*, Anand portrays the daily humiliation and dehumanization faced by Bakha, an untouchable sweeper, exposing the entrenched caste-based discrimination in Indian society. Similarly, in *Coolie*, Munoo's tragic journey through various jobs highlights the exploitation of the working class within a colonial capitalist economy.

Ananthamurthy's *Samskara* critiques Brahminical orthodoxy, using Praneshacharya's moral and spiritual crisis to question the legitimacy of caste-based rituals and hierarchies. In *Bharathipura*, Jagannatha's attempts to liberate the untouchables in his village reveal the complexities of caste reform, particularly the resistance from both the oppressed and the oppressors. Together, these works highlight the intersectionality of caste and class oppression, revealing how these systems sustain and reinforce each other.

Both Anand and Ananthamurthy address the double oppression faced by women in caste-ridden and patriarchal societies. In *Untouchable*, Bakha's sister Sohini experiences sexual harassment from a high-caste priest, exemplifying the vulnerability of women at the intersection of caste and gender. Similarly, in *Samskara*, Chandri, a low-caste woman, becomes a catalyst for Praneshacharya's moral awakening, yet her agency is limited by the rigid social structures around her.

Ananthamurthy's portrayal of female characters often challenges traditional notions of purity and virtue, as seen in Chandri's unapologetic sensuality and her role in questioning Brahminical values. Anand, on the other hand, focuses more on the social and economic exploitation of women, as seen in the struggles of Munoo's female companions in *Coolie*.

Ananthamurthy's works offer a philosophical perspective that enriches our understanding of Anand's social realism. While Anand's realism is grounded in a direct portrayal of social injustices, Ananthamurthy's narratives delve into the moral and ethical dimensions of these injustices. For example, *Untouchable* concludes with a hopeful vision inspired by Gandhi's ideals, suggesting that societal reform is possible through collective action. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara*, in contrast, emphasizes individual moral transformation as a prerequisite for societal change, reflecting a more introspective approach to social reform.

Although Anand and Ananthamurthy write from distinct regional perspectives, their works address universal themes of oppression, resistance, and human dignity. Anand's depiction of untouchability and labor exploitation in North India resonates with Ananthamurthy's critique of Brahminical orthodoxy and caste oppression in South India. By reinterpreting Anand's works through Ananthamurthy's lens, we can appreciate the deeper moral and philosophical questions that underpin their narratives, transcending regional and cultural boundaries.



Conclusion:

Mulk Raj Anand and U. R. Ananthamurthy, through their narratives of caste, class, and gender oppression, provide a searing critique of India's socio-cultural fabric. While Anand's works focus on the external realities of social injustice, Ananthamurthy delves into the internal moral dilemmas faced by individuals within oppressive systems. Together, their works offer a comprehensive vision of social reform, rooted in a commitment to human dignity and equality.

By examining Anand's social realism through Ananthamurthy's critical lens, this study highlights the moral imperatives that drive their shared vision for a just society. Their protagonists—Bakha, Munoo, Praneshacharya, and Jagannatha—serve as symbols of resistance and hope, challenging readers to confront their own complicity in sustaining systems of oppression. In an era marked by growing inequalities, their works remain profoundly relevant, reminding us of the power of literature to inspire change.

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