

# SOCIAL TABOOS AGAINST WOMEN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GOURI OF MULKRAJ ANAND

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## Abstract

The history of Indian English literature has one most noteworthy event in the nineteen thirties was appearance in the scene of its major trio; Mulkraj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao, whose novels were published in 1935, 1935 and 1938 respectively; it is a mark of their stature that they revealed each in his own characteristic way, the various possibilities of Indian English fictions.

Mulk Raj Anand has different shades – as great scholar, a teacher of king dynasty, a novelist, a social reformer, a civil servant, a thought provoker, a journalist, a politician, a humanist, a strong writer, a literary story teller – make him produce many useful and outstanding works that expose sufferings of suppressed and oppressed, depressed and downtrodden. Consequently, he proves himself as a versatile genius, an optimist, a humanist, a profound thinker, a moving speaker, an able organizer, a capital storyteller, and a literary architect through his thought provoking and worth reading novels. In short, his novels are nothing but a medley of different shades.

The novel “Gouri” takes us to a village, like Nandpur, with its stern classical order obstructing the current changes. The conflict between adherence to superstition and violating it for new values of life forms the fabric of this novel. While going through the novel, it deals with the readers in three angles. The first two chapters show Gouri as gentle as a Cow, suffering mutely under the clutches of her mother-in-law and her husband. The next four chapters focuses how Gouri was necked out of her house, undergoes her metamorphosis as a result of her life at Hoshiarpur. Gouri symbolises the strength and purity of Sita and she is one of the most memorable female characters in the whole range of Indian fiction.

The novel, as the author rightly tells us, is his “offering to the beauty, dignity and devotion of Indian women”. It is also remarkably different from other Anand's novels in its tightness of structure. The cow like gentle Gouri presented in the first chapter, undergoes epic transformation mainly through suffering and at the end of the novel, she succeeds in vindicating her right to an independent life free from the violation and abrasions of male supremacy.

## **Full Paper**

*“It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing.” — Swami Vivekananda*

The history of Indian English literature has one most noteworthy event in the nineteen thirties was appearance in the scene of its major trio; Mulkraj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao, whose novels were published in 1935, 1935 and 1938 respectively; it is a mark of their stature that they revealed each in his own characteristic way, the various possibilities of Indian English fictions.

Being the novelist of Social Reformer, Mulkraj Anand feels that women, whether she rich or poor, is a marginalised being. Colonialism humiliated men and they in turn humiliated women. It may be past of present, whenever the condition of society is weak or humbled, women suffer the most. Men give full vent their anger and frustration on the women. Form olden days to modern days women are victims of male aggression, are passive suffers whose destiny lies in the hands of men.

A versatile genius, an optimist, a humanist, a profound thinker, a moving speaker, an able organizer, a politician, a civil servant, a journalist, a great scholar, a patient teacher, a capital storyteller, and a literary

architect—all in a unique medley in one is Dr. Mulk Raj Anand. And, as a belletrist, he is a host in himself. Early in life, his intimate contact with the suffering underprivileged and the myriad levels of Indian masses with their differences of caste, creed, and colour seem to have implanted in his mind profound impressions about ‘the still sad music of humanity.’ The premature death of his nine-year-old, beautiful girl cousin, Kausalya, appears to have vibrated his inner strings, as Keat’s brother’s demise did the poet’s, to brood over the mystery of life and death. Prompted by Irene, the charming daughter of a Welsh Professor of science with whom he fell in love at first sight, Anand became a writer. His research in philosophy has immensely contributed to his humanism; and as he admits in his *Apology for Heroism*, his research was, indeed, ‘search for truth’. He felt that philosophy, should answer the problems posed by human needs.

Mulk Raj Anand has different shades – as great scholar, a teacher of king dynasty, a novelist, a social reformer, a civil servant, a thought provoker, a journalist, a politician, a humanist, a strong writer, a literary story teller – make him produce many useful and outstanding works that expose sufferings of suppressed and oppressed, depressed and downtrodden. Consequently, he proves himself as a versatile genius, an optimist, a humanist, a profound thinker, a moving speaker, an able organizer, a capital storyteller, and a literary architect through his thought provoking and worth reading novels. In short, his novels are nothing but a medley of different shades. He depicts the lives of the poor and the downtrodden in his novels. He is one of the three pillars of Indian writings in English, Raja Rao, and R.K.Narayan being the other two. These writers, through their writings, tried to bring respectability and identity to Indian English Literature. These writers made a sincere attempt to articulate the subdued feeling and suppressed socio-economic emotion of their countrymen.

As Anand was inspired by the Russian poet Nicholai Nekrasov’s “The Peasant Women”, the story of Sita in the Ramayana and the writings of Ali Jafri ins, he started to write his tenth novel “Gouri”. It was first published in 1960 under the title, “The Old Woman and the Cow” and later reissued by Orient Paperbacks in its present name. It is unique among Anand’s works as it is his only novel with a woman protagonist. The old title, “The Old Woman and the Cow” given by the publisher and a poet friend of Anand was not satisfactory to the author as the focus of the novel is not on the shameless old woman in the novel, Laxmi and her cow, Chandari, but on her virtuous, cow-like gentle and patient daughter, Gouri. So, the author rightly renamed the novel Gouri.

*Gauri* is the only novel of Mulk Raj Anand with a woman protagonist. The old title of the novel was *The Old Woman and the Cow*. Mulk Raj Anand was not satisfied as the focus of the novel is not on the shameless old woman in the novel, Laxmi and his cow, Chandari, but on her virtuous, cow-like gentle and patient daughter, Gauri. So the author renamed the novel *Gauri*. Through the character of *Gauri* he not only eloquently exposes the hypocrisy of our society, but it also tries to explore the ways for the emancipation of women. It also tries to give voice to a strong protest against ill-treatment of women. Women, instead of leaving themselves at the mercy of their husbands or family members, should come forward and choose the path of their emancipation. The other character in *Gauri* is Panchi (the husband of Gauri) who is an example of male chauvinism. The technique of contrast adopted in the characterization of Panchi and Gauri brings out the nobility of Gauri as against the meanness of Panchi. Another character in the novel is Colonel Malvindra. Like Dr. John de la Havre, endorses the novelist's proletarian views. Anand uses him as his mouth piece. He provides protection and care to Gauri and plays a very important role in her transformation and emancipation. The other women character in the novel is Kesaro, the mother-in-law of Gauri and Laxmi, the mother of Gauri. Through her Mulk Raj Anand shows, how a woman is enemy of another woman and makes the life of Gauri hell. She is an example of typical mother-in-law. The mother of Gauri, Laxmi, is a very mean character who, in order to pay the debt, sells her own married pregnant daughter to an old man.

The novel “Gouri” takes us to a village, like Nandpur, with its stern classical order obstructing the current changes. The conflict between adherence to superstition and violating it for new values of life forms the fabric of this novel. As Jack Lindsey observes: ‘here the key-pattern lies in the tale of *Ramayana* of a wife who is banished because she had innocently lived in another man’s house.’ Panchi and Gauri, the young married couple, claim our sympathies as they strive to find happiness and peace in love. Whereas Panchi fails to defy the meaningless ancient system, Gauri, with a stronger will, faces the banishment and rejects the narrow world of sentiment and superstition that enthralled her husband. She leaves the village like Munoo. The frustration of Munoo caused by the evil of social inhumanity finds expression in Panchi

though in a different atmosphere and emphasis. Panchi stands for those diffident to defy the age-old senseless tradition; Gauri is a symbol of the courageous modern woman.

While going through the novel, it deals with the readers in three angles. The first two chapters show Gouri as gentle as a Cow, suffering mutely under the clutches of her mother-in-law and her husband. The next four chapters focuses how Gouri was necked out of her house, undergoes her metamorphosis as a result of her life at Hoshiarpur. The last chapter deals with arrival of Gouri to her house not to live with her husband but to leave her husband. Anand illustrates his feminist stance through the fate of a peasant woman 'Gouri' caught in the maelstrom of patriarchy. Here is a woman in all her aspect – the young girl, the married woman, the mother-to-be, the devoted wife and the tortured one, but at last to be a triumphant female at the end. Anand, despite his not being the feminist writer and a male above all, has certainly set the priorities of this 'other sex' right. Henceforth, we see the quest of this innocent Gouri for an identity, individuality, an assertion of the fact that she too exists.

Though the novel closes on a note of hope, one remembers the travails that Gouri has gone through, the humiliation she has been victim of remain in one's mind vividly. Though her decisive departure from her home reminds one of Henrik Ibsen's Nora (A Doll's House), she is different from the king of emancipated women that Nora represents. The narrative is generally sustained. But Dr. Mahendra who is another edition of Dr. de la Havre of "Two Leaves and a Bud", brings into the novel tedious and explicate didacticism. Once again in him we have Anand's spokesman, because he repeats many of his favourite ideas. The relevance of the ideas cannot be doubted. But the artistic quality of the novel suffers badly at a crucial point of the narrative because of the doctor's irrelating preaching. Cowasjee, who has reservation about Anand's achievement in this novel draws attention to the novelist's "clumsy" use of the English language and cites a number of passages. One could also refer to the unnecessary lengthy account of the journey of Laxmi and Adam Smith to Dr. Mahindra's Hospital. Reservation apart, this novel takes an important place among Anand's novels in his exploration of the theme of social discrimination.

Gourisymbolises the strength and purity of Sita and she is one of the most memorable female characters in the whole range of Indian fiction. She represents some of the most applauded qualities of Indian womanhood. The novel, as the author rightly tells us, is his "offering to the beauty, dignity and devotion of Indian women". It is also remarkably different from other Anand's novels in its tightness of structure. The cow like gentle Gouri presented in the first chapter, undergoes epic transformation mainly through suffering and at the end of the novel, she succeeds in vindicating her right to an independent life free from the violation and abrasions of male supremacy.

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