

COLONIALISM, IDENTITY AND POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S *ACROSS THE BLACK WATERS* AND *THE SWORD AND THE SICKLE*

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ABSTRACT:

Mulk Raj Anand's *Across the Black Waters* (1940) portrays the trials of Indian soldiers in the First World War, whereas *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) analyses the exploitation of the peasantry by imperialism and the rise of peasants against the same. Through the journey of Lalu Singh, both novels link personal tragedy to wider structures of imperialism and oppression. In *Across the Black Waters*, Lalu's experiences of war and military service, as well as racial discrimination, undermine his admiration of Europe and its civilisation. Similarly, in *The Sword and the Sickle*, Lalu's coming back to his village demonstrates the ways in which the peasantry is exploited in terms of land dispossession, indebtedness and the imbalance of agricultural labour. This paper compares these two novels in order to explore how colonial oppression influences the formation of identity and transforms the disillusionment of an individual into political awareness. With the help of textual analysis and critical perspectives of Jonathan Highfield, Angela Eyre and Suresht Renjen Bald, the paper investigates Anand's portrayal of resistance, the political agency of marginalised groups and the drawbacks of revolutionary leadership. It is found that Anand links military servitude to economic exploitation but questions the ability of political movements to bring about equality. Despite allowing an opportunity for the marginalised to articulate themselves against those in power through the novels, there is no clear resolution regarding the achievement of social harmony.

KEYWORDS: Mulk Raj Anand, *Across the Black Waters*, *The Sword and the Sickle*, colonialism, identity, political consciousness, peasant resistance, imperialism

1. INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial literature provides a very effective medium through which one can study the impact of colonialism in relation to issues of identity, culture, and society. For the writers of postcolonial literature in India, English became the language for articulating and preserving their identity. Mulk Raj Anand is one of the writers of Indian origin who has written in English. He is known for his writings about the lives of poor people belonging to Indian traditional society. Through division and the compelling exploration of the intricate relationship between regional and national

identities, it primarily addresses human thoughts, suffering, pain, oppression, victimization, tragic deaths, and abuse of women (Yaseen et al. 361). The works of Mulk Raj Anand are rooted in the realities of the social and political life of India during its colonial period. This is what makes his writings socially and politically significant. "S. Shankar situates Mulk Raj Anand within the tradition of Indian Writing in English, describing *Untouchable* as a 'canonical text of Indian writing in English' and, more specifically, a 'canonical Anglophone novel' (332). Furthermore, the positioning of Anand in Indian literature in English has much to do with his decision to give priority to social experience in literature. One of the most prominent aspects of social realism practiced by Anand is his portrayal of the marginalized. The position of Anand as an Indian author active in the British literary world highlights the complex attitude that Anand had towards the colonial era. Anand was uncomfortable with getting advantages from the British literary world while being opposed to British rule in India. Commenting on this paradox, Anand said that he feared hating British rule in India and living on its dole (Barnsley 1).

The political aspect of Anand's works emerged in connection with his involvement in Marxist and anti-imperialist ideology. In particular, Anand attended Marxist seminars and meetings in London and held an anti-imperialist and Marxist position along with Ralph Fox and other writers. Anand's conversations with Ralph Fox helped him realize the works of Marx on India. In his reflection about this ideological impact on his work, Anand says that "a whole new world was opened to me" once he read Marx's writings on Indian colonies (Anand *Apology for Heroism* 68). That means that Marxist ideology opened for Anand wider perspectives of understanding colonial exploitation. This ideology is important for considering his *Across the Black Waters* and *The Sword and the Sickle* because colonialism in these novels is viewed in terms of war, labor, land, poverty, and classes. Highfield also refers to the following statement by Anand that directly reflects this issue. Working on the Punjab trilogy, Anand states that "imperialism destroyed the basis of the old village life" and then concludes that it "broke up and

changed India but refused to renew it” (qtd. in Highfield 116). This is the way that it links colonial governance to social transformation. Colonialism is not only about gaining political power; it involves the reshaping of the economic structure of the village community. It becomes important when *The Sword and the Sickle* shifts from Lalu’s soldiering experience to that of the peasants in Punjab. For Anand, it was not the writer’s task to indulge himself but to shoulder responsibility. His essays always stressed the idea that “art must justify itself by serving the needs of humanity” (Anand, *Apology for Heroism* 112).

Colonialism in the novels of Anand is depicted not only in terms of British rule over politics but also in terms of the manner in which it penetrates the daily existence of individuals. This is reflected in the way it shapes what people possess, how they live, how they view others and even how they view themselves. According to Bulhan, “colonialism is economic, political, cultural and psychological and its impact stretches beyond the ‘thought, behavior, and generally the life of colonized peoples’” (239–40). Bhatia and Priya further elaborate on the matter in order to highlight the way the power of colonization persists in terms of culture, labour, knowledge, and “self-image” of people (1–2). Anand illustrates the process in his novel through Lalu Singh. In *Across the Black Waters*, Lalu does not start by criticizing British imperialism. Instead, he is enamored by the world which he has been taught to admire through colonial culture (Highfield 121). In other words, his idea of Europe precedes his experiences there, and one gets to see how the colonial mindset impacts a man’s preferences as well as his notion of superiority. This is precisely why the colonial background of Anand becomes highly relevant to the current study, since it helps to understand why the author constantly shifts between the personal and the structural in his writing. His experiences may be specific, but the influences exerted on him are wider than mere individual conditions. War, labour, land, taxation, caste, and social hierarchy become just different facets of colonial power.

1.1 The Selected Novels

The second and third novels in the trilogy by Mulk Raj Anand are *Across the Black Waters* (1940) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942), and they are preceded by *The Village* (1939). These two books have been chosen to be the subject of the present paper because they reflect two aspects of the colonial experience and therefore allow studying the development of the characters’ consciousness in a variety of social contexts. While *Across the Black Waters* deals with Indian soldiers serving in the British Empire military system and their experience of war and their growing awareness of the nature of imperialism, *The Sword and the Sickle* moves to rural Punjab, where Lalu meets the peasants who are losing their lands, struggling with poverty and economic exploitation, and gaining political awareness. According to Highfield, Lalu is searching for “another India, an India free of oppression, misery, and classism” (Highfield 115). Thus, the transition from war to village enlarges the experience of the oppression that the character undergoes and links it with the socio-economic conditions of the peasantry.

1.2 Argument of the Paper

This study examines how Mulk Raj Anand’s *Across the Black Waters* (1940) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) novels represent the oppression experienced during colonialism in terms of military service, racial discrimination, landlessness and peasant oppression. The existing literature by Jonathan Highfield and Angela Eyre considers the issue of Lalu Singh’s political consciousness as well as the difficulties of peasant resistance. The reading of the two novels comparatively aims to illustrate the correlation between the experience of suffering during war and peasant life in order to reveal the transition from individual experience to the system of oppression. The disillusionment of Lalu regarding the oppression of the British Empire transforms into awareness of the oppression experienced by Indian peasants. At the same time, Anand raises a question regarding the possibility of political leaders representing the marginalised people and struggling against unequal power relations.

2. Colonial Power and Imperial Authority in Mulk Raj Anand’s *Across the Black Waters*

In Mulk Raj Anand’s *Across the Black Waters* (1940), which forms the second part of his Punjab trilogy, Lalu Singh and other Indian soldiers from Punjab are sent to Europe during the First World War. The novel starts with the excitement of departure, but soon replaces that excitement with uncertainty, displacement, military discipline, and the psychological devastation brought on by the war. Colonial power is not only introduced here through political description but also through the working of the Indian regiment. In Marseilles, the language of Empire extols the loyalty of Indian soldiers to the King-Emperor and Lord Kitchener, while the Indian soldiers themselves remain unsure of where they are going and what is in store for them. This difference matters much as for the colonial administration, the Indian soldier is a loyal colonial subject, whereas for Anand, he is a human being who finds himself trapped in a system over which he has no control at all. Anand writes:

“The smoke from the funnels of the convoy ships before, behind, and on both sides was talking to the sky. The sea spoke the language of his soul, restless and storm-tossed, while the wind went bursting with joy in the sun. And the ship was urging him forward into the unknown. He was going to Vilayat after all, England, the glamorous land of his dreams” (Anand *Across the Black Waters* 9).

Personification of the sea and the emotion-filled journey prove the fact that Europe is the imagined reality for Lalu. In the statement “glamorous land of his dreams,” the cultural fascination with the colonial world is made

clear. Lalu fails to understand the political dilemma of serving the Empire that governs India. According to Highfield, "Lalu's journey starts in the imaginative, romantic Europe, but ultimately cures him of his romantic ideal of Europe" (122). The journey thus becomes the shift from imagination to experience for Lalu. The colonizing hierarchy developed by Anand is portrayed through the character of Jemadar Subah Singh. On learning about his promotion, Subah tells Lalu:

"Look out, son, I am to become a Jemadar soon," Subah said to Lalu, as they hurried towards the main road. 'The Subedar Sahib told me to-day, so you behave if you value your life'" (Anand Across the Black Waters 21).

Subah's pride is an example of how colonial military authority can be replicated among the Indians. His later designation of himself as a "Jemadar Sahib" exemplifies the relationship between ranking and prestige and power. This attitude can be analyzed using the theory of mimicry as proposed by Bhabha – Subah speaks the language of the colonizing officer, but at the same time, his position depends on the hierarchical order managed by British officers. At the same time, Uncle Kirpu questions military authority using jokes, whereas Daddy Dhanoo views service from the perspective of inherited concepts of duty, gratitude and honor. These attitudes are best observed during the soldiers' debate about their orders before the battle. Gradually, the language of military service turns into the language of absolute obedience:

"Obey the orders of the Sarkar and of God who made us servants of the Sarkar or our past deeds," interrupted Lal Singh" (Anand Across the Black Waters 122).

"Servants of the Sarkar" is a political notion that ties together religious and traditional values. The same feeling of loyalty has been depicted by Daddy Dhanoo through his statement of "eating the salt."

"We have eaten the salt," said Daddy Dhanoo, gobbling his words in a unique eloquence. 'It is a question of gratitude.' 'Gratitude and honour,' mocked Uncle Kirpu" (Anand Across the Black Waters 122).

Kirpu's response introduces scepticism from inside the regiment. He refuses to equate obedience with honour and argues:

"I won't refuse to go to my destruction, but I say this, that if one who slays one is a murderer then he who slays a thousand is not a hero," said Kirpu" (Anand Across the Black Waters 123).

It is very important to note that Kirpu does not oppose military service but rather highlights the ethical dilemma in the rhetoric of imperial heroism. In the same way, Naikar states that Across the Black Waters is an "elaborate running commentary on the four years' war," while "Anand's denunciation of war, its brutality, its violence, and 'its ultimate meaninglessness' is central to the novel" (34). The presence of the European setting undermines Lalu's perception of Western supremacy. In Marseilles, the café seems to embody the luxurious and rich side of Europe:

"Cognac! Cognac!" the waiter repeated and ran with the agility of a clown towards the bar inside the café, studded with tall mirrors and huge chandeliers and decorated with plush sofas on which sat well-dressed superior sahibs, eating with silver forks and knives..." (Anand Across the Black Waters 39).

However, it causes Lalu to have a sense of "shame and inferiority" (39). The meeting of the Black soldiers creates another twist in the racial hierarchy of colonial India. According to Anand, Lalu wonders:

"And if the French liked the blacks, why shouldn't he like them? ... Why had he thought himself superior? He felt ashamed" (Anand Across the Black Waters 84).

Now Lalu knows a hierarchy within him has been internalized, where he feels inferior to the Europeans while thinking of himself as superior to others. His feeling of shame is an important step on his path of conscious development. When the soldiers come near the trenches, the fantasy of the European image completely breaks down. The "exalted sahibhood" of the Tommies is no more there as war reduces existence to exhaustion, repetitions, and fears. Anand notes how "one hour had begun to seem to them like the other and each day like the last" (133). He further describes the sepoy as men who are:

"Ordered about by the Sarkar ... without a will of their own ... though ... there lay the sensitiveness of their own humanity, their hopes, their fears and their doubts" (Anand Across the Black Waters 133).

Obedience versus humanity is the main issue in the portrayal of the colonial soldier by Anand. The Empire attempts to discipline the sepoy as a military machine, while the narrative keeps trying to bring back his individuality. As Highfield states, the war starts Lalu's "questioning of the English rule of India" (118). It means that the battlefield is also a place for political enlightenment. At last, the death of Daddy Dhanoo brings the political awakening to personal grief. Lalu discovers the sepoy's body in the flooded ditch and asks, "How did it happen?" While Kirpu responds, "However it happened, it has happened" (Anand Across the Black Waters 139). In other words, the lack of explanation leaves Lalu deprived of any heroism in the death. Highfield calls Dhanoo's

death “inauspicious,” and Naikar highlights the anti-war position of Anand. In such a way, the journey of Lalu through the “black waters” becomes one from admiration to disillusionment. With the help of the military hierarchy, cultural interaction, racial consciousness, and battlefield experience, Anand gradually uncovers the contradictions of colonial rule and starts the transformation of Lalu from an obedient colonial subject to a questioning political individual.

3.Identity, Displacement and the Colonial Subject Across the Black Waters

Lalu Singh comes to Europe with a split identity that includes not only his life as a Punjabi peasant but also the new one that he has gained from being a soldier in the British Indian Army. However, Anand does not present these identities as different stages in the development of the character. On the contrary, they stay together and become the source of conflict. At first, Lalu feels attracted to the colonial reality because his image of Europe is influenced by the status of the sahibs, and England seems to be for him “the glamorous land of my dreams” (Anand Across the Black Waters 9). It is significant since Anand does not make Lalu politically conscious at once. First, he demonstrates that the culture of colonization could create some admiration and desire. In a similar way, Highfield notes that Lalu brings from Punjab such features as “his father’s love of the land, his generosity, his stubborn pride and humour” (123). The sense of split identity is manifest in the scenes set in Europe. In the café, Lalu finds himself attracted towards the riches and glamour of the Europeans but at the same time feels “ashamed and inferior” (Anand 39). This sense of shame becomes further complicated in the context of Lalu’s confrontation with the Black soldiers. Here again, Lalu starts questioning himself:

“Lalu felt guilty at having averted his eyes from them. At Marseilles he had seen a few African girls in the cafes and the French sahibs did not mind ... And if the French liked the blacks, why shouldn’t he like them? (Anand Across the Black Waters 84).

In other words, his meeting with Europe makes him question the attitudes he has acquired in India. The Jemadar Subah Singh is an example of a different reaction to the same hierarchy. His pride in his military rank proves that the hierarchy can also be attractive for the colonised subject. Subah Singh wants to be seen as a “Jemadar Sahib” (Anand Across the Black Waters 21). It can be interpreted according to Bhabha’s theory of mimicry: Subah Singh has adopted the language and position of an authority figure, but his power is dependent on the hierarchy created by the British rulers. On the contrary, Lalu experiences an opposite development. Highfield says that his army experience “cures him of his romantic ideal of Europe” (122). His attraction to the colonial world gradually turns into doubt. The psychological aspect of this metamorphosis is best felt in the trenches. Anand portrays the sepoy as people who have already ceased to be individuals:

“The response of the sepoy seemed to show as if they had resigned themselves to their kismet ... one hour had begun to seem to them like the other and each day like the last ... Ordered about by the Sarkar ... they were like conscripts ... without a will of their own ... though ... there lay the sensitiveness of their own humanity, their hopes, their fears and their doubts” (Anand Across the Black Waters 133).

The passage highlights themes of identity, displacement and colonial power. The soldiers have become machine-like followers, but Anand emphasizes that they retain their internal life. Their bodies are controlled by the army, but not their minds. This duality is at the heart of Lalu’s identity. The death of Daddy Dhanoo turns this dichotomy into a personal struggle. When Lalu sees the body of Dhanoo lying in the flooded ditch and says, “How did it happen?” (Anand Across the Black Waters 139), Kirpu answers, “However it happened, it has happened,” denying any heroism to his death (Anand 139). Highfield characterizes the deaths of Dhanoo and Kirpu as “inauspicious,” while interpreting Anand’s novel as an attack on the cruelty of war (122). The death of Dhanoo is thus not merely personal but further alienates Lalu from his home, as well as making him realize the human cost of serving an empire. Lalu’s consciousness is thus developed through experience. He oscillates between Punjab and Europe, respect and skepticism, obedience and interrogation. As Highfield puts it, this is described as an “ever-widening orbit” (115).

4.Colonial Economy and Peasant Exploitation in The Sword and the Sickle

Mulk Raj Anand’s novel *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) focuses on the emergence of the peasant movement in Oudh of U.P. during the period of 1920-21. In contrast to representing poverty as personal misfortune, Anand sees the misery experienced by these people in connection with the power system that rules their labor and possessions. Lalu Singh’s return from World War I is an important element here because he realizes that neither his army service nor his family’s deprivation of land will guarantee him a better future. Anand introduces the insecurity of rural life through Lalu’s return to Nandpur. His admission that:

“Do you think you could put in a word for me, Babuji Is there any hope for a reward or something? I don’t really want to stay in the new regiment, but I would willingly serve a few more years if there is any hope of getting thing which would help my family.”(Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 20)

This highlights the disparity between the imperial promises and the reality of the Indian soldier. Lalu has labored and laid down his life for the empire, but he finds himself in a situation where the economic future of his family is still uncertain. As Eyre observes, in his review of Edwin Muir's *The Listener*, Lalu has already lost his land at the beginning of the novel, but there is no mention of the lack of reward from the British for his war service:

“Lal Singh returns to his native place at the end of the last war on being released from a German prison camp. He finds that his father’s house and property have been sold up to satisfy a money-lender and he sets out for Oudh (quoted in Eyre 3).”

Furthermore, Anand expands the issue of the loss of land through the stories of the common cultivators. The statement of one of the peasants that “My land doesn’t exist, baba! My land was the ruin of me!” the grey beard whined, as he swayed the heads of the other...” (Anand 30) is an example of a person’s hopelessness who works but is unable to become a landowner. This story highlights the process of how debt, economic problems, and the influence of the moneylenders can take away the family's connection to its land. The significance of the passage is connected to the contrast between cultivation of the land and its ownership. In this situation, the cultivator is responsible for all the work and risks, and the moneylender or landowner can have more influence on the results. Similarly, Saroj Prajapati also considers the exploitation of the peasantry by the British colonizers and Indian landlords as one of the main issues of the novel (154).

Further, the landlords and moneylenders have more resources and contacts than the peasants. Because of their power and authority, they have the right to make claims, threaten eviction and affect the circumstances in which the cultivators have to survive. This is evident from the story about the peasant – One-Eyed Sukhua, a peasant who has been evicted from his land, and another peasant who died during his begar or forced labor. Thus, Lalu takes part in the struggle, learns how to make speeches at the rallies, tries to interest Gandhi and Nehru in the issues of the peasants, and witnesses the creation of the kisan sabha and the acquittal of a peasant after his demonstration. However, this apparent victory turns into a tragic ending at the end of the novel, as the zamindar leaves the peasants to talk to the authorities and save himself from being interned; the peasants follow him and get shot, and Lalu ends up in prison.

Further, for Anand, physical pain does not just undermine economic gain but also dignity and agency. By denying Lalu his rightful reward for participating in the war and confiscating property from his family, there is revealed a gulf between the sacrifices required by the Empire and their fulfillment in providing security. It connects the colonial aspect and the agrarian aspect of the novel together in one stroke. Here, the return of a soldier from abroad to a place where ownership of the land still remains in other people’s hands. Such criticism accounts for the significance of the reception of the novel.

“The rest of the story deals mostly with the peasant movement and the beginnings of the Indian Communist Party...I notice that Mr. Anand has already got himself into trouble by what is wrongly described as his bitterness...though the ultimate objective is to get rid of British rule,.....” (Orwell quoted in Eyre 4).

However, the discussion on whether the novel is confused politically may overshadow the issues at stake. Instead of asking such irrelevant questions, one should understand why peasants are poor, why their work cannot sustain them and why they pose threats to the existing structure. Thus, poverty in the novel becomes a structural problem, not a personal flaw of the characters.

However, Anand does not think that knowledge is enough for people to get liberated. Lalu should learn not only about injustices but also about politics and ways to fight them. From personal loss to collective struggle becomes the main theme once Lalu becomes acquainted with the political organization of peasants. The author uses irony, questioning the assumption that peasants are economically free since they can engage in certain financial relations. With regard to the discussion of liberty, the statement:

“The world is full of liberty, brothers It is the fault of peasants and workers if they don't catch it in their sacks, bundle it and bring it home.

For liberty is just lying about in the air!” (Anand *The Sword and the Sickle* 51)

Anand’s irony thus criticizes the economic terminology used to justify inequality. Moreover, Bluemel states that “none of Anand’s oppressed heroes is able to imagine for himself or India ‘a less oppressive, post-imperial future’” (p. 71). In *The Sword and the Sickle*, the vision of the future by Lalu while being imprisoned in the final part of the novel is quite vague: “Now is the time to change the world, to fight for Life and happiness” (Anand *The Sword and the Sickle* 393). Hence, Anand describes the idea of political awareness as a constant process and not the finished product.

5.From Social Suffering to Political Consciousness in *The Sword and the Sickle*

In ‘*The Sword and the Sickle*’ (1942), Mulk Raj Anand states: ‘Political consciousness is always from the feeling of individual injustice to that of social and economic injustice’. The peasants’ perception of the large landlords and

their complex arrangements depicts how exploitation may influence village life and probably leads to the development of collective consciousness. However, this awareness does not necessarily lead to struggle and action, as the peasants are also asked to analyze the reality of existing authority and understand the structures of their economic dependence. Anand establishes the connection between suffering and exploitation through a peasant who explains to Lalu how indebtedness has destroyed his livelihood:

“I lived on barley while I sold the wheat, just to be able to keep my land. Oh, woe is me! I slaved for that land. I sold my daughter to keep it intact. [...] I sold my honour, but I could not save that land! Oh, brother, what shall I tell you of my ruin!” (Anand *The Sword and the Sickle* 30)

The peasant's story captures the tension between farm work and economic safety. Even though he gives up everything for the sake of his land, he is still unable to save himself from being deprived of it. Repeated mentions of the land highlight its significance not only as something valuable but as a very essential means of living and belonging to the community. Thus, poverty becomes a structured phenomenon caused by debt and economic inequality. Kate O'Brien's review in *The Spectator* asserts that

'We get a picture of desperate poverty and of its relation to...traditional spiritual states-pride, hopelessness, humour, rancour, laziness and mystical detachment' (20).

While the idea that the poverty experienced has a psychological aspect is commendable, the use of 'laziness' hints at an unjust blaming of the victims for their poverty. Anand's account of a peasant whose life consists solely of toil and sacrifice problematises this, as it would seem that the economic situation precludes the possibility that laziness is the cause of poverty.

Anand's creation of class awareness is done using characters who see that there are class differences existing in the rural society. For instance, Santokh critiques the existing economic structure when he says that people “rob but call it profit” (Anand 58). This quotation shows the disparity between the language used to talk about money and the reality of exploitation behind it. Again, Professor Verma advocates the importance of “uniting the small land lords, the tenants, the evicted tenants and labourers” over their demands (Anand *The Sword and the Sickle* 92). Angela Eyre argues that the peasantry's political movement cannot be wholly aligned with any particular ideology, which shows the challenges involved in sustaining unity (8). This becomes critical since shared suffering does not necessarily mean the abolition of class distinctions and conflict of loyalty.

In addition, Anand's depiction of the political awakening of the peasants also disputes the nationalists' assumption about the peasantry's ability to resist. In his autobiography, Nehru comments, “little staying power, little energy to resist for long” (64). It would seem that Anand is disputing this statement with the peasants' ability to “have the power for ceaseless activity even through dire agony and suffering,” with Lalu asking, “Who said that they had no staying power?” (Anand 200).

The agency is revealed through the eviction of the tenant from his land. As Ram Din states, “he could not pay his rent, and now his plot has been leased to a tenant chosen by the estate” (Anand 100). The story reveals the inequality inherent in the relations between the growers and the people who have control over the land. The critique offered by Suresh Renjen Bald on the revolutionary elites offers one more limitation, according to which revolutionary leaders can claim to be speaking for the oppressed but will not give political power to them (Bald 1). Thus, political awakening as shown in Anand's novel is much deeper than the refusal of the colonial regime.

6.Colonialism and the Transformation of Identity

Reading *Across the Black Waters* (1940) with *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) highlights the way in which Mulk Raj Anand constructs colonial identity in the move from the subjugation of the Indian soldier to the political awareness of the peasant. In *Across the Black Waters*, Lalu Singh begins by imagining England as the place he imagined (Anand *Across the Black Waters* 9), but the realization of racial prejudice and military discipline gradually chips away at his image of the imperial order. In *The Sword and the Sickle*, Anand refers to soldiers who are “ordered about by the Sarkar” but who nevertheless “have their hopes, their fears and their doubts” (Anand *The Sword and the Sickle* 133). This juxtaposition highlights the conflict between imperial obedience and human subjectivity. According to Jonathan Highfield, Lalu's comprehension is defined by an “ever-widening orbit” (115), whereby personal experience informs him of colonial oppression. However, the novel itself focuses more on psychological disillusionment than organized protest.

The Sword and the Sickle takes this line of criticism further to tie subjugation in politics with that in economics. Expulsion from the land, debt bondage and enforced labour reflect the way in which colonial administration functions together with the power structures within the local society. Professor Verma's strategy of unifying “the small landlords, the tenants, the evicted tenants and laborers” (Anand *The Sword and the Sickle* 92) implies the need for creating an identity based on certain needs. Nonetheless, the author does not depict peasant resistance as a united phenomenon under one political ideology. As noted by Angela Eyre, different critics understand *The Sword and the Sickle* in relation to specific ideologies: George Orwell identifies the peasant revolt with communism, while Leela Gandhi relates it to Gandhism (Eyre 7). Such readings can neglect the political

perception of the peasants themselves and the distinctions between their economic and ideological goals. The point of view of Michael Tickell:

“Anand’s literary project is to re-envision the parameters of a liberal-humanism by conveying the desperate pressure of marginalization or injustice” (227).

This approach would prove to be helpful since it would focus on the way Anand portrays the experience of marginalization of the peasants instead of whether the peasants fit into some predefined ideology. Political ambivalence does not necessarily mean that the narrative has failed, but rather reflects the fact that the movement itself was still in the process of forming its methods and language of struggle.

However, Suresh Renjen Bald raises doubts regarding the revolutionary leaders’ handing over power to the subaltern class. He says, “The paternalist authority of the state is not questioned; what is questioned is the character of the men who exercise it” (Bald 484). This statement highlights an ambiguity: A movement can struggle against the landlords and colonialists but remain dependent on the authorities.

The two novels therefore differ in focus but have one thing in common: the link between identity and power. “Across the Black Waters” reveals the alienation caused by the imperial army, whereas “The Sword and the Sickle” expands on the theme by exploring the issues of economic exploitation and oppression of peasants. In “The Sword and the Sickle,” Anand manages to demonstrate the connection between individual suffering and the structures of oppression, but he does not provide any concrete solution to the problem of what kind of society should be created after the fall of the British Empire.

7. Military Colonialism versus Economic Colonialism

The link between *Across the Black Waters* and *The Sword and the Sickle* is made when Anand differentiates between the significance of human deeds and the acknowledgment of these from the system. In *Across the Black Waters*, Lalu’s deed of assisting his fellow soldier on the crowded cattle train is rewarded by the appreciation, “You are a hero, son!” (Anand, *Across the Black Waters* 58). It marks the transfer of the concept of heroism from acts of war to simple humanity. In this scene, the significance of Lalu lies not in the fact that he is obeying orders or furthering the objectives of the Empire, but in the fact that he has responded to the distress of another human being. In *The Sword and the Sickle*, however, this institutional recognition of the value of service in the armed forces turns out to be unreliable when Lalu comes back to India and finds that all his expectations are not met. On a combined reading of the two scenes, one can see the clash between two conflicting systems of value.

Anand continues this query of value in his book *The Sword and the Sickle* by introducing it in the context of nationalist politics. It is clear from Lalu’s irritation with political rhetoric that, “The man is talking religion when we want food” (Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 212). The quote does not necessarily amount to criticism of Gandhi’s beliefs. Instead, it raises the issue of what follows from putting the discourse of ethical sacrifice before the concrete needs of those people to whom the sacrifice is demanded. Food is about more than sustenance – economic well-being is what defines the criteria for measuring the quality of political leadership. Such formulation makes the comparison with *Across the Black Waters* even more relevant. In the former work, the soldier is called upon to fight for a cause set out by imperial authorities, whereas in *Untouchable*, the peasant may be asked to subjugate his or her practical needs to the ideal cause formulated by national political authorities. The political settings are different, but in both cases, Anand draws attention to the same pattern – the powerful define the ideals, while the less powerful have to suffer from their realization.

This question complicates the image of an unambiguous movement that strives for the social equality of the people involved. What is more, this quote indicates that initially, the idea of liberation might be perceived as gaining the right to the privileges that were denied to people with low incomes before. However, this particular exchange cannot be viewed merely as an indication of the peasants’ political naïveté since it reflects the processes of active discussions within a community regarding the nature of liberation and the definition of justice despite the lack of a common vision among the peasants. Anand’s works can prove this point since the peasants formulate their own political options independently of their leaders’ ideology. The final analysis indicates that there is no direct path from disillusionment under colonial rule to the accomplishment of liberation. *Across the Black Waters* probes into who measures the worth of sacrifice, whereas *The Sword and the Sickle* challenges who judges the gains of political change. What makes Anand unique is his ability to show how far apart promises are from reality. However, his unfulfilled task is whether solidarity and resistance have the capacity to reform both those in power and power relations themselves.

8. CONCLUSION

Comparing *Across the Black Waters* and *The Sword and the Sickle* shows that Anand sees colonialism not just in terms of political domination, but rather as a system that constructs identity through military discipline, racial order, economic dependency, and class division. *Across the Black Waters* explores the psychological effects of becoming an Indian soldier in the British imperial framework. Using Lalu’s experiences of displacement, racial encounter, and battlefield ordeal, Anand illustrates how admiration of imperial power turns into skepticism and disillusionment. *The Sword and the Sickle* explores the same issues through the economics of rural community

and depicts how eviction, indebtedness, and forced labor lead to the development of peasant consciousness and resistance.

The novels, therefore, reflect a transition from the personal experience of alienation to political consciousness, but it is not a fully completed process and is far from simple. Eyre reveals that the peasant revolution cannot be defined through any one ideology, whereas Highfield highlights the changes in Lalu's consciousness in terms of wider economic and social structures in rural India. The criticism of Bald provides an important addition since it challenges whether the revolutionary figures of Anand do give up their power to those who are supposed to be liberated. In the end, what Anand's social vision is based on is the belief that human dignity and political liberty are inseparable from material realities of life. This is shown in his novels through the subversion of the normalcy of colonial and class oppression as an act of linking personal suffering to the very system that causes it. When his characters start doubting the legitimacy of the system and realizing the potential for collective resistance, this is where the process of opposition begins.

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