

Exposure of Evils in Mulk Raj Anand's *Gauri*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyze Mulk Raj Anand's The Old Woman and the Cow (1960) or Gauri in order to find out various evils which create misery among the women. Anand, in this novel, expresses the theme of requirement of liberating women from the bondages of the evils spread in the society. Evils in the society are the root cause of suffering, pain, harassment, struggle and problems. It is believed that woman either rich or poor; she must be marginalized in our society. Woman has to suffer a lot when the condition of the society where we live is weak. In man dominated society, she has to be a victim of male aggression and she has to suffer very passively. She rarely raises her voice against injustice and social taboos meted to her. She becomes submissive and meek. We must be aware of the various evils only to get rid of them and make society free from evils.

Mulk Raj was always against the evils such as exploitation, caste, class struggle, decline in community, blind tradition, poverty, human weaknesses, decline of human rights, denial of equality, alienation, inhumanity, humiliating servility, unjust social oppression, economic and moral injustice, dehumanizing superstition, corruption, parasitism of exploiter-groups, conflict between ancestral orthodoxy and rebellious individualism, the generation gap in the context of arranged marriage, romantic love and feminine emancipation, decline of social values, individualism and selfishness, consumerism and greed, decline of family, crime and violence, egocentric world, marginalization on account of caste, class, gender and status, devouring socio-economic condition, degradation, cruelty, hypocrisy, deceit, deep rooted prejudices, barbarism, untouchability, ill-treatment, the young, drugs and alcohol, illiteracy, gender discrimination, starvation, misery, wretchedness, suffering, torturing, troubling, tormenting, dominance, suppression and oppression, immigration and responses to immigration etc.

I would like to concentrate on some of the evils mentioned above as Anand has explored in this novel. Tale of Gauri is simple and least complicated. Her tragic life passes from various phases and fatal experiences until it reaches the moment of her bold and rebellious final parting from Panchi. She proves herself more superior to Sita. She was rejected and humiliated by Ram but when Sita was asked about her husband Ram, she replied that she expected to live with Ram forever. But Gauri, being a rebellious and humiliated Hindu wife, she leaves Panchi and his house forever, lifting her head and walking on, without looking this side or that. Even she doesn't take care of the call of respected Rafique Chacha and Hoor Banu. She thinks of the road to the town, the road of humanity like Bhikhu in *The Road*, expecting that the incoming child to her would not be the coward that Panchi was or as weak as she had been.

The novel is the most effective one as a piece of implied indictment of cruelty towards wives. Gauri represents the lot of Hindu wives. The abnormal behavior of Panchi is tolerated by

Gauri like a Hindu wife. Panchi is cruel and Gauri is meek. Because of her meekness she is humiliated, tortured, ill-treated, mal-treated and tormented but she earns nothing except brutality, distrust and suspicion.

Anand, in his novels, criticizes religious and moral conventions that continue the exploitation of the poor. The moneylenders exploit the poor people in the society. On various occasions such as draught, flood, failure of crops or on social celebrations, the poor farmers have to borrow money from them with heavy interest rate and if they do not pay their debt, they take away their land. At the time of marriage ceremony of Panchi, the in-laws of Panchi expect dowry from Mola Ram because it is a custom and Panchi belongs to a little inferior caste so Mola Ram says:

So everyone is departing from age-old customs.....
And, since you say that the dowry you have brought is meager, and not as is customary, you will have to.....
(14)

and he feels insulted. Though his uncle, Mola Ram brings a large party, he expects to be treated well. They have not better harvest in little Piplan, he says:

We are not mean people! We have brought dowry, even though I had to mortgage Panchi's main acre! (14)

It is clearly seen that the old tradition of dowry still prevails in the society and the moneylenders exploit the poor farmers when they are in need of money. They either sell their property or mortgage or borrow money on high rate of interest.

The spirit of community has been broken in the society. A weakened sense of community and neighborliness is seen as the first social evil in the novel. The neighbors no longer look out for each other. Even the family members are not ready to stay collectively. They think that the age-old family system is out dated and look at it as an evil. They start separating from the family. They try to emancipate from the age-old evil but they become the victims of the modern evil, alienation. They feel isolated and loneliness and fearfulness. Panchi, illiterate

and orphan, lives with his uncle, Mola Ram, and aunty Kesaro but there is no sense of community among them. Panchi is exploited physically as he has to do overload work on the farm. His uncle has to do nothing but order him frequently. His land has been pawned. Kesaro treats Gauri as a slave and she does not allow a new couple to sleep with each other though they are married. Here Gauri is ill-treated, tormented, tortured and humiliated at every turn. She is completely trodden in the house. Panchi and Gauri are exploited physically, economically, mentally and socially in this house.. Panchi's emotional exploitation is in the hands of Kesaro. Gauri is tortured, trodden and tormented superstitiously and cruelly. She has been considered subaltern and treated inhumanly. As a couple is given neither social, economical, physical, emotional nor sexual and mental freedom, they firmly decide to be separated from the family and start living in a separate house away from the uncle and aunty.

Individualism and selfishness is seen in the most of the characters in the novel. Laxmi, Amru, Kesaro, Mola Ram, Panchi, Rafique Chacha, Hoor Banu, Rakhi, Dr. Batra, Young Nurse and moneylenders always look after their own interest. They are totally selfish. They never think of the welfare of their fellow brothers. They try to exploit the persons for their own selves without considering the need of the fellow beings or the society. Laxmi after the death of her husband she starts taking support of Amru. He is a bad man but to her a good fellow. She explains:

Now that you are grown up, you will understand that it was not easy for me to live without a man. I am not a stone. I could not have brought you up without some money. And not all the milk I could have sold would have provided for us both Amru is a bad man but he has been good to me. And without him, I could not have gone on! And he is afraid that you , being with child, will bring new burdens on our household..... (122)

Mola Ram exploits Panchi by giving him burden of farming and makes him marry selling Panchi's land. He makes a show of the true guardian of Panchi. Kesaro ill-treats Gauri because she is interested in Panchi. She is jealous of Gauri. She emotionally exploits Gauri's husband and does not allow them to live marital life freely. She becomes a great hurdle in their happy life. Kesaro's superstitious belief regarding Gauri is the fundamental cause of her separation from Panchi.

The certain characters in the novel *Gauri* become the victims of consumerism and greed. Generally they focus on the rise of greed. They have great mastery in trapping the people only to fulfill their own greed. The moneylenders, landlords, Panchi's in-laws, Gaury's in-laws, Mola Ram, Dr. Batra, Pandit Bholanath, Seth Jai Ram Das, Laxmi, Amru, Kesaro and many more greedy people. Moneylenders tempt the farmers who are suffering from draught, scarcity of water and poor harvest and some who want to celebrate social ceremonies. They offer them money on high rate of interest and if they fail to deposit their interest, their land must be confiscated. These Banias are blood-sucking leeches. It is generally common in society. Laxmi and Amru sell Gauri to Seth Jai Ram Das for money and

avoid the burden of the daughter and in coming child to Gauri. Amru says:

..... the bigger crime I have committed is not to sell you to Seth Jai Ram Das, but to sacrifice you..... I have been fond of you ever since you became a mature girl (134).

Gauri while talking with Seth Jai Ram, the possessor of her, she says, "But how could my mother sell me? Why didn't she choke me at birth.....(134)." She also blames Amru for ruining her mother's life and poisoning her father while taking interest in him. He only fulfills his own greed by torturing and ill-treating the others. Panchi's in-laws are greedy and they want more money and ornaments from him and they accuse them of gold plated ornaments instead of the original in dowry. Pandit Bholanath and Dr. Batra are lecherous and licentious and impious persons.

The society described by Anand lacks the values such as honesty, tolerance, sympathy, compassion, respect and reciprocity. Gauri, Panchi, Young Nurse and Dr. Mahindra become the victims of declining values in the society. Mola Ram, Kesaro, Laxmi, Amru and the others are interested in pursuing their own desires regardless of the potential harm to others. They are the persons who identify themselves as damaging consequences for society. Panchi has to fulfill the desires of Kesaro's belief of superstitions regarding Gauri, his friends and the people.

Poverty in itself is a curse or evil to the society. It is a trap and it controls the people and makes them live with limitation and without expectations. Poverty is nothing but a key-stone to others problems of the society. To be a poor is a curse and he or she has to struggle and suffer all the life without any choice. On the other hand growing inequality in India is socially disagreeing and morally wrong. Poverty is one of the evils to the society and Panchi, Gauri, Laxmi and Mola Ram become the victims of this curse and they have to suffer throughout their lives. Inequality is socially divisive and morally wrong in our society. Laxmi consoles Gaury by telling,

Only your father was a suspicious nature and never accepted you. Perhaps if you had been a boy, he would have liked you; for, among us, it is sons and son's sons- the girls are a curse..... (121-122).

As far as there is gender inequality in society, one can find man dominant society. As it is a man dominant society, Gauri has to suffer and struggle throughout her life which is morally wrong. As each and every person has human rights, she must be treated with humanity and she must enjoy her life equally well. She must not be treated as commodity. Panchi has not to expect his wife,

..... For there was the prospect of the prize of a girl- a girl whom he could fold in his arms at night and kick during the day, who would adorn his house and help him with the land.....And he liked to think that his would-be bride would-be obedient,....(9).

A strong and stable family is required to avoid the increase of the evils. The traditional family structure has no importance. The children must be guided well so that they

should adhere to their family. In the case of Gauri and Panchi bad parenting is said to be responsible for their parting. And it creates many other social problems and unhappy life.

The young people are victims in the novel and they are accused rather than encouraged. Instead of encouraging both Gauri and Panchi, they are stigmatized. And one can find a very big gulf between the young and the old. Having left Kesaro's house, a new couple starts living with the Muslim family of Rafique Chacha. The old decide to ex-communicate them from their caste.

Gauri leaves her husband and his house in a rebellious spirit. Such type of immigration leads to more competition for limited resources. First Panchi leaves her and he repents as he comes to know about her selling and starts doubting her chastity and he starts beating her though she says she is pure. But she is treated as an outsider. She feels alienation from herself, her husband, her parents and her in-laws and society.

Crime and violence are closely connected with prostitution, sexual exploitation and violence towards women is absolutely wrong. Gauri rescues herself from sexual exploitations from Amru by avoiding his tricks and she also avoids Seth Jai Ram's attempt to seduce her. Dr. Batra's attempt to molest her is avoided by the joint effort of Gauri and Yong Nurse. Hypocrisy and superstitions are also evils and

they are deeply rooted in the society and cause various troubles.

Anand knew that social taboos against women cannot be altered by legislation alone. People must discard the evils. Literacy must be required on the both sides. Human rights should be given and must remove the gender inequality. Though there are great inventions in every field, socially reformed and technologically sound country, the subhuman status of women reveals that there is no change in their position. Even if you progress globally, send the satellites in the space, defeat various countries and achieve every greatest thing of the world, it is useless without removing the evils of the society.

Gauri is a very easily managed and an obedient wife of a peasant. She rebels against the man dominant society and she selects to live independent life and deserts her husband. She is against all kinds of ills and evils prevailing in the society. She has a number of experiences and she realizes that woman is treated unjustly and as a commodity or a plaything of a man in patriarchal society. Anand concludes the novel with the rebellious spirit of Gauri. She thinks that it is better to live with dignity and independence than to surrender as a slave to Panchi. Gauri's bold decision to leave Panchi's house makes her protagonist of the novel even if she is in the midst of incompatible forces of poverty, illiteracy and patriarchy. Anand describes the suffering of a woman who faces a number of evils and suggests an alternate path of emancipation.

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