



e-ISSN:2582-7219



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH IN SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY

Volume 6, Issue 7, July 2023



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 7.54



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A Critical Analysis of the Struggles of the Marginalized Working Class in Mulk Raj Anand's *The Barber's Trade Union*

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this research paper is to develop better understanding of the struggle of working class in Mulk Raj Anand's novel *The Barber's Trade Union*. The paper will help readers to gain a deeper knowledge of the subject. It develops the critical thinking and enhances the knowledge regarding the work. Mulk Raj Anand, a prominent Indian writer, is widely recognized for his insightful portrayal of social issues and his unwavering commitment to social realism in his literary works. One of his notable short stories, *The Barber's Trade Union*, exemplifies Anand's adeptness at highlighting the struggles of the marginalized working class while shedding light on the socioeconomic inequalities prevalent in India during the early 20th century. Mulk Raj Anand experienced firsthand the disparities and injustices prevalent in Indian society. His exposure to the stark realities faced by the underprivileged in his formative years influenced his writing and provided him with the impetus to become a staunch advocate for social reform. The study will also explore Anand's personal experiences, coupled with his empathetic nature, laid the foundation for his deep understanding of the human condition, enabling him to craft compelling narratives that resonated with readers across the globe. It will show how the characters face the challenges which are prevalent in the society and the struggle of marginalised working-class condition.

KEYWORDS: Marginalized working class, Injustice, Humiliations, Underprivileged.

Anand was born on December 12, 1905, in Peshawar, British India (now in Pakistan). The Barber's Trade Union set in a small town in India, delves into the life of Soma, a humble barber. Anand employs this seemingly ordinary character to symbolize the larger struggles faced by the working class in India. Through Soma's story, Anand examines the exploitative labour practices and the lack of workers' rights that were prevalent during that era. Soma's daily routine, interactions with customers, and interactions with his fellow barbers expose the harsh reality of his existence and the challenges he confronts as a member of the lower socio-economic strata. Anand's narrative skilfully intertwines personal experiences and broader social issues. Soma's desire for fair wages, improved working conditions, and the establishment of a trade union serve as a microcosm of the larger labour movements that emerged in India during that period. The story highlights the struggles faced by the working class to organize and assert their rights against oppressive employers and societal norms. Through vivid descriptions and realistic dialogues, Anand captures the essence of Soma's life and the complexities of the barber's trade. He portrays the barber shop as a microcosm of Indian society, where people from different backgrounds converge, fostering a sense of community. However, beneath this facade of conviviality, Anand exposes the underlying tensions caused by societal divisions and class inequalities. Anand's writing style, characterized by its simplicity and lucidity, enables readers to connect with the characters and empathize with their plight. His masterful storytelling draws attention to the struggles and aspirations of individuals like Soma, whose voices are often drowned out amidst the cacophony of societal inequalities. By humanizing his characters and depicting their hardships, Anand compels readers to reflect on the larger issues of social justice and equality. The Barber's Trade Union serves as a poignant reminder of Anand's enduring legacy as a writer who fearlessly tackled social issues and championed the cause of the marginalized. His commitment to highlighting the plight of the working class and his exploration of themes such as poverty, inequality, and social change resonate with readers even today. In conclusion, Mulk Raj Anand's *The Barber's Trade Union* exemplifies his remarkable ability to shed light on the socio-economic inequalities prevalent in Indian society during the early 20th century. Through his insightful storytelling and empathetic characters, Anand offers a nuanced portrayal of the struggles faced by the working class. His work continues to serve as a powerful testament to his unwavering commitment to social realism and his timeless contribution to the world of literature.



The Barber's Trade Union is a compelling short story written by Mulk Raj Anand that vividly portrays the struggles of the working class in early 20th century India. It set in a small town, the story revolves around the life of Soma, a humble barber, and his quest for fair wages, improved working conditions, and the establishment of a trade union. Anand masterfully delves into the life of Soma, utilizing his character to symbolize the larger challenges faced by the marginalized working class. Soma's daily routine in the barber shop becomes a microcosm of the socio-economic disparities prevalent in Indian society. Anand emphasizes the exploitative labour practices and lack of workers' rights during that era, shedding light on the plight of individuals like Soma who struggle to make a decent living. The story unfolds through a series of encounters and dialogues, allowing readers to witness the realities of Soma's existence. Anand skilfully weaves personal experiences with broader social issues, highlighting the struggles faced by the working class to organize and assert their rights against oppressive employers and societal norms. Through Soma's interactions with customers and fellow barbers, Anand captures the nuances of the barber's trade and exposes the underlying tensions caused by societal divisions. The barber shop serves as a gathering place where people from different backgrounds converge, creating a sense of community. However, Anand does not shy away from revealing the social inequalities that exist within this seemingly convivial atmosphere. Anand's portrayal of Soma's desire for fair wages and better working conditions reflects the aspirations of countless workers during that time. Soma's dream of establishing a trade union mirrors the larger labour movements that emerged in India, advocating for workers' rights and challenging oppressive systems. The author's writing style is marked by its simplicity and clarity, allowing readers to connect with the characters on a deeper level. Anand humanizes his characters, presenting their hardships and dreams in a relatable manner. This approach compels readers to reflect on the broader issues of social justice and equality that persist even today. *The Barber's Trade Union* stands as a testament to Anand's unwavering commitment to social realism and his ability to address complex social issues through compelling narratives. The story remains relevant, as it sheds light on the struggles faced by the working class and prompts readers to contemplate the need for social change and equality. *The Barber's Trade Union* is a powerful short story that explores the challenges confronted by the working class in early 20th century India. Through the character of Soma, Anand delves into the realities of labour exploitation, workers' rights, and the aspirations of individuals striving for a better life. The story serves as a poignant reminder of the author's legacy and his timeless contribution to literature by shedding light on social issues and advocating for a more just society.

The story offers a nuanced exploration of the themes of class, appearance, and respect in Indian society during the era of British colonialism. Through vivid characterization, compelling narratives, and thought-provoking symbolism, Anand delves into the complexities of social hierarchy, the pursuit of upward mobility, and the significance of appearances in determining one's social standing and the respect they receive. The story revolves around Sankar, a young barber from a lower caste who aspires to improve his social status and escape the limitations of his caste-based occupation. The barber caste, traditionally associated with menial labour and considered of lower social standing, faces disdain and discrimination from higher castes. Sankar's desire for upward mobility is reflected in his meticulous attention to appearance and his involvement in the barber trade union, which seeks to protect and elevate the social status of barbers. Class plays a central role in *The Barber's Trade Union*, shaping the characters' self-perception and their interactions with others. The stark divisions between the different castes are depicted through the character of Ragunath, a high-caste customer who treats Sankar with condescension and insults him based on his caste background. Anand deftly portrays the power dynamics at play, emphasizing the impact of class on individual agency, self-esteem, and the respect they receive from others. Appearance is intricately woven into the narrative, reflecting the importance placed on external markers of social status. Sankar's preoccupation with personal grooming, tailored clothing, and adherence to societal norms of appearance demonstrates his belief that one's outward presentation plays a crucial role in commanding respect and advancing in society. Anand highlights the pressure faced by individuals from lower classes to conform to the expectations of appearance and behaviour as a means of gaining acceptance and respect. Symbolism is employed by Anand to underscore the tension between appearance and genuine respect. The mirror, representing the barber trade union, serves as a metaphor for self-reflection and the pursuit of social recognition. The union's efforts to reshape the perception of barbers and elevate their social status through a collective sense of identity and purpose are reflected in the mirror. However, the mirror also represents the fragility and superficiality of appearances, reminding readers of the complexities that cannot be concealed by external facades. The narrative explores the intricate relationship between class, appearance, and respect through the character of Sankar's mother. Despite her low social standing, she exemplifies an alternative approach to respect, rooted in inner strength and dignity. Unlike Sankar, who relies on external markers to command respect, Sankar's mother asserts respect through her resilience and the depth of her character. Anand presents her as a symbol of the inherent worth and dignity that transcend social hierarchies and appearances. Through her character, Anand challenges the notion that respect is solely derived from external factors and encourages readers to question the superficial judgments often associated with class and appearance.



Furthermore, the story also highlights the limitations and contradictions inherent in the pursuit of respect based on class and appearance alone. Sankar's experience with Ragunath, who initially disregards him but later seeks his services due to his newfound position, exposes the superficial nature of respect based solely on social status. Anand suggests that genuine respect should be earned through qualities such as integrity, compassion, and empathy, rather than external markers. Anand's storytelling is characterized by vivid imagery, realistic portrayals of social dynamics, and a nuanced exploration of complex themes. Through *The Barbers Trade Union*, he critically examines the social hierarchies, the impact of working class on social interactions, and the quest for respect within a rigidly structured society. By delving into the intricacies, the struggles of class, Anand prompts readers to reflect on the deeper meanings behind these constructs and consider the importance of genuine human connection and empathy in fostering a more equitable and inclusive society. In conclusion, presents a profound analysis of class struggle of marginalised in British colonial India. Through the experiences of Sankar, his mother, and other characters, Anand explores the complexities of social hierarchy, the significance of appearances in determining social standing, and the pursuit of respect in a stratified society. The story serves as a powerful commentary on the limitations of class-based judgments and the importance of recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of every individual, regardless of their caste or appearance.

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