Synopsis of the Thesis entitled
SOCIAL REALISM IN SELECT NOVELS OF MULK RAJ ANAND, U.R. ANANTHA MURTHY AND ARUNDHATI ROY - A STUDY

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This thesis attempts to study Social Realism in select novels of Mulk Raj Anand, U.R. Anantha Murthy and Arundhati Roy – A Study. The three writers have been chosen as for the similarities in the matter of their treatment of untouchability, oppression of downtrodden, fair sex, religious orthodox, meaningless rituals and inhuman ill-treatment of marginalized people, pseudo-communism and denial of education to untouchables and girls.

These novelists are primarily social realists who revolt against man-made anti-human establishments. They evince keen interest in the eradication of social evils and their novels are nothing but artistic attempts to arouse the slumbering conscience of the people to actuate them to remove these evils.

I have attempted to study the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, U.R. Anantha Murthy and Arundhati Roy in general and the theme of Social Realism in particular in chapters concerned. In Chapter I, Introduction, an attempt has been made to trace the evolutionary development of Indian English novel from its beginning. The contributions of prominent writers for the enrichment of Indian English and the life and works of novelists are perceptively discussed.

Chapter II deals with the contemporary Indian societal problems like untouchability, the living conditions of the poor in unhygienic and filthy environments, the attitude of village business men, the hypocrisy of the priests and helping nature of some upper caste people towards untouchables and three solutions offered to eradicate untouchability.

Anand’s Untouchable mirrors the inhuman and heartless attitude of the merciless caste Hindus. It is an attempt to project the humiliation and agony faced by a subaltern in the Indian society which is divided into the graded inequality and hierarchical anarchy; where the tall claims of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” have proved to be merely a utopian dream. Anand has railed upon this centuries-old, and deeply-rooted inhuman practice which has denied a
subaltern, ‘Dalit’ a right to be a fellow human being, a ‘touchable.’ The novel is a remarkable piece of art for the convicting photographic fidelity of the pictures drawn, cumulative ferocity and force of detail, and an uncanny accuracy of facts. Anand, through his subaltern hero, makes an attempt to subvert the conventional hierarchical order and challenges the phallocentric ideology since it perpetrated marginalization of subaltern. He has given the subaltern Bakha a voice, an identity and a speech which is denied to him by the upper communities in the caste-ridden society. His main concern is to ‘dismantle’ the social order based on Manu’s ethics and laws.

Untouchable is a sociological novel which seeks to stress the evils of untouchability by focusing attention on the miserable plight, suffering, poverty and degradation of a large section of Indian Society. Bakha as an untouchable seeks his freedom in the infallibility of caste discrimination, with its hypocrisy, cruelty, deceit and inhumanity. He stands passive and bewildered at the immensity of horror hoping for a change. Bakha, thus, is a symbolic figure, a universal figure, who stands for a large segment of Indian Society which had been doomed to suffering since times immemorial.

Bakha is a young boy of eighteen who has not surrendered to his fate like his father Lakha. He is a child of twentieth century and is given to modern way of dressing. “From a Tommy he has secured a pair of old breeches and from a sepoy a pair of old boots; he would, if he could, like to look like the white foreigner and so be in the ‘fasshun,’” He dreams of a good life but as soon as morning dawns his job of toilette-cleaning starts. Three rows of latrines to clean single handed, and several times too; to bring cleanliness in the place of filth and possible disease; such is Bakha’s daily toil which he turns into a dexterous art.

In all the incidents that took place in the novel Untouchable including—Temple Incident, Bazar Incident, Hockey Match Incident, Well Incident—the hero has to suffer due
to the curse of untouchability, so vehemently criticized by M.K. Gandhi. The water problem among the untouchables is depicted through the ‘Well Incident.’ They were not allowed to touch even the brook or pond, as they would contaminate the stream. They had to wait hours beside the well and had to request the upper castes to pour water in their pitchers. They weren’t allowed to ‘touch anything that touchables touched’. This is the cruelest irony of life that even for water, the basic necessity of human existence, the sweepers have to depend on the mercy of the caste Hindus.

In his another novel *The Road*, Anand deals with the same problem but with a difference, as it is a novel of today where untouchability legally forbidden. The novel however, shows that the untouchables or ‘Dalits’ are still subordinated and live as subalterns. On a symbolical reading, the novel is a crusade against the inequality and inhumanity practised against a subaltern untouchable—the triumph of good over evil. In this novel, as in *Untouchable*, casteism is practised and condemned because it disgraces human dignity. The story revolves round the subaltern Bhikhu, the leader of the untouchables of a village, condemned to build a link road. The road, instead of becoming a way to enlightenment is converted into a place of human degradation.

*The Road* is a symbolic protest against the concept of Karma and Fatalism. *The Road* represents a period of transition where the old order of the Hindu beliefs in untouchability will change yielding place to a new vision of human unity and cooperation. *The Road* looks to the time gap needed for the change in human mind for the vision of the coming together of the Dalits and the caste Hindus.

A new social dynamism through work based on human cooperation is what Anand has in his vision. The depressed classes are caught in the cobweb of poverty and social degradation. They can secure social status and gain economic freedom only through the
gospel of work. Anand is interested in a collective social action and he thinks that the salvation of human beings lies through work. It is in this respect that the novelist raises the question of the future of the depressed classes. He feels that their social life must be actively involved in an ongoing programme of work. The impact of industrialization is felt in the construction of work.

He feels that dung and latrine cleaning bring indignity to men like Bakha. The only way to remove this dishonour is to introduce a scientific device whereby the life of the untouchable will undergo a sea change. The indignity comes from the work they do. Anand’s solution is that the introduction of flush system changes the character of work. Anand adds another point and he says that gaining of economic freedom will modernise their life and make them respectable human beings. The degeneration in social life is considered to be the result of a conservative religion.

Chapter III focuses attention on the theme of orthodoxy, superstitions, religious conservatism and the blending of divergent aspects of human life in Hindu society. This chapter mainly concerned with a clash between the two ways of life - the modern and the traditional.

_Samskara_ presents before us a community of persons who are interlocked with each other through various complex relationships- caste, economy, gender, social hierarchy, religious questions and taboos ferment a complex web of relationships, against the backdrop of which the story line has been sketched. Superficially the novel deals with the dilemma of performing the last rites of Naranappa, a rebellious Brahmin who could not be excommunicated from his community by the rest of the Brahmins; yet at another level it also Judges the quality of an entire way of life through the major characters, Praneshacharya and Naranappa Who are presented as foil and counterfoil to each other. These characters are
affected, albeit in non-identical manner, by the traditions of their milieu help to define it, and are absolute, ends in themselves.

_Samskara_ presents a vivid picture of a society which has accepted caste discrimination as a norm. It has unquestioningly accepted the Brahmin eminence, and pushed the lower caste people to a periphery. Brahmins are supposed to be the spiritual and temporal guides, teachers and exponents of law, whereas the Sudras perform menial services only. They are routinely denied even the semblance of equality. Their hutments are quite a distance away from the Brahmin agrahara. The abject poverty of their life is also discernible. They depend on manual labour for their livelihood. Chinni and Belli pick up the cow dung. They are treated with indifference. Chinni begs for something to eat, standing at a distance from a Brahmin woman, “Please, _avva_, throw a morsel for my mouth, _avva_.” Betel leaf, betel nut and tobacco are thrown at her from some distance. Such incidents highlight the extent of untouchability practised in the contemporary South Indian society.

The remarkable feature of Indian rural life is graphically presented to portray the villagers’ attitude. The novel traces the villagers’ belief in omens, superstitions, traditions and customs and how the Brahmins are rigid in following the religious rituals. The novel vividly portrays caste sanctimoniousness, the Brahmin ways of life, the smug hypocrisy of the local people and the inhuman cruelty in the name of religious rituals. The novelist presents many contrasting natures, affluence, and poverty, goodness and hypocrisy, power and helplessness. The novel decries the existence of superstitions in the age of science and technology, the role of tradition and religion, the sociological obsessions and psychological clashes of individuals. The listless poverty of the Brahmins of the agrahara is presented in the novel through various episodes.
In the entire novel *Samskara*, caste assumes central importance. The caste system is by common consensus the world’s longest surviving hierarchy and is based on the principles of purity and superiority, qualities that one is supposed to inherit by birth. A person becomes a member of a particular caste with his birth and dies in it. The Dalits or lowcastes are outside the caste system and their exploitation is common throughout India. They are looked down upon because of their low caste; birth in a low caste is supposed to be the result of their bad deeds or *karma* in previous lives. The caste system has been recognized by all sane Hindus as pernicious and deserves to be abolished, yet it flourishes due to the hold of racial purity on our minds. If caste system had been done away with, Naranappa would have been given a decent funeral.

Chapter IV *The God of Small Things* reflects social, economical, political and religious aspects of Indian society specially in Kerala. The biased treatment of parents between the son and the daughter, the double standards of pseudo communists, caste discrimination in Christianity, wife beating, denial of girls education and other important issues, like Industrialisation, Gulf money, indifferent behaviour of Police with the women and the helpless people.

*The God of Small Things* which depicts the socio-political milieu of Kerala during the sixties. It is all about atrocities against the small things childhood and youth, women-young and old, and the untouchable. Though at the centre-stage Roy places Velutha who is crushed to death. In Arundhati Roy’s fictional world, man and woman remain only islands and fail to shape up as continents, because their relationship lacks mutual love, understanding and adjustment. Pappachi – Mammachi relationship is ridden with jealousy, violence and hatred. Neither the external appearance of the “beautiful…Unusual, regal”. Mammachi nor her talent as a successful business woman succeed in ensnaring Pappachi. On the contrary her flourishing business and growing popularity intensify his Jealousy and desire for vengeance.
The edifice of their marriage survives, but its spirit crumbles totally when Pappachi, warned against beating, withdraws all communication with his wife.

Arundhati Roy presents a panoramic view of society and understands the effect of history on the individual. The focus of her entire work is the vision of the struggle between individual freedom and physical, psychological, political, and social restraints. *The God of Small Things* deals with the tribulation of women as daughter and wife in patriarchal society. Women have become victims of gender oppression. Gender, in our patriarchal society, plays a very important role in discriminating between the powerful and the powerless. According to the ideology of male superiority and female inferiority, all men are empowered to exercise “right” overall women. Though Mammachi belongs to the upper class she has no right whatsoever in her husband’s family. She is beaten, ill-treated.

In a sense, the story of Ammu and Velutha is not a story of Ayemenem alone. It is the tale of almost every Indian village immersed in darkness and nurtured by orthodox social codes and patriarchal values. Ammus and Veluthas have always broken the ‘Love Laws’ with a hope to find a better, happier tomorrow. They will again break the laws in future. Tomorrow will arrive with all its terror. They will wait for it knowing well that “things could change in a day.”

The fifth chapter conclusion, briefly summarises the arguments presented in the novels.

Even after six decades since India achieved Independence, Dalits are still oppressed in one form or another. If Dalits in villages are subject to punishments such as lynching death, rape and other humiliation, Dalits in urban spaces face a ‘White-Washed’ Form of Caste based-discrimination. If feudal society is responsible for the injustices meted out to the Dalits
in the rural setting (as seen in *Untouchable*), crimes, committed on Dalits in urban spaces are perpetrated by the state (as seen in *The God of Small Things*).

Though India’s Constitution of 1950 abolished the practice of untouchability, the Dalits continue to experience discrimination, segregation, and violence. The laws providing for the welfare of Dalits are often ignored. The government of India maintains that the problems should be handled internally and do not represent a form of racism, while the sections of Dalit intelligentsia seek international attention to the problems they face.

Mulk Raj Anand, U.R. Anantha Murthy and Arundhati Roy are for the renewal of the decadent society. Their novels throw light on many complex aspects of modern life and their outlook is almost identical as social realists. They think that the time is now ripe to have human protest, religious protest, social protest etc., on all sides. Their novels aim at every human being should enjoy social, political, cultural, economic and other freedoms.