Impact Factor (QJIF): 8.47 E-ISSN: 2583-1615, P-ISSN: 3049-3498

International Journal of Research in Academic World

Received: 25/November/2025 **IJRAW:** 2026; 5(1):37-42 **Accepted:** 08/January/2026

Humanising the Poor: Socio-Economic Reform through Literary Realism in Dickens and Anand

[*1]Manoj Singh and [2]Vishnu Pratap Singh

[*1]Research Scholar, Department of English, Prof. Rajendra Singh (Rajju Bhaiya) University, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India.

[2]Assistant Professor, Government PG College, Sangipur, Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Abstract

This paper examines how Charles Dickens and Mulk Raj Anand employed literary realism to humanize the poor and advocate for socio-economic reform in their respective cultural contexts. Through comparative analysis of Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) and *Oliver Twist* (1838), and Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936), this study demonstrates how both authors used realistic portrayal, sympathetic characterization, and social critique to challenge dehumanizing economic systems. While Dickens confronted industrial capitalism and Victorian class hierarchies in England, Anand exposed the intersecting oppressions of colonialism, capitalism, and caste in India. Both writers transformed marginalised individuals from statistics into fully realised human beings, making their suffering visible and morally urgent to middle-class readers. This comparative study reveals how literary realism serves as a powerful tool for social consciousness and reform across cultural boundaries.

Keywords: Literary realism, socio-economic reform, Charles Dickens, Mulk Raj Anand, poverty, humanism, social critique.

Introduction

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed unprecedented socio-economic upheaval across the British Empire. Industrial capitalism in Victorian England and colonial exploitation in India created vast populations of impoverished, disenfranchised people whose suffering was often invisible to those in power. Two novelists—Charles Dickens (1812-1870) and Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004)—emerged as literary champions of the poor, using the conventions of literary realism to expose social injustice and advocate for reform. Though separated by nearly a century and vastly different cultural contexts, both authors shared a fundamental commitment: to humanize the poor by revealing their inner lives, dignifying their struggles, and demanding social change.

Literary realism, as a mode of representation, emerged in the nineteenth century as a response to both Romantic idealization and the social transformations wrought by industrialization. George Levine argues that realism "was committed to the premise that reality was secular, material, and knowable through observation and reason" (5). For Dickens and Anand, realism provided the aesthetic framework to document social conditions with documentary precision while simultaneously engaging readers' sympathies through individualized characters. Their novels function as what Raymond Williams calls "structures of feeling"—artistic forms that capture the lived experience of historical moments and make visible the human cost of economic systems (132).

This paper examines how Dickens and Anand employed specific literary techniques to humanize the poor and advocate for socio-economic reform. The analysis focuses on four major novels: Dickens's *Hard Time*s (1854) and *Oliver Twist* (1838), and Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936). Through close reading of these texts, this study demonstrates how both authors:

i). Challenged dehumanizing discourses that reduced the poor to abstractions;
ii). Created sympathetic, psychologically complex characters from marginalized communities;
iii). Exposed the structural violence of economic systems; and
iv). Advocated for social reform through their art.

While acknowledging important differences in their cultural contexts and political commitments, this comparative analysis reveals profound continuities in their humanistic vision and reformist project.

Theoretical Framework: Literary Realism and Social Reform

Before examining the specific novels, it is essential to establish the theoretical relationship between literary realism and social reform. Ian Watt's foundational study The Rise of the Novel identifies realism's commitment to "the

***Corresponding Author:** Manoj Singh

particularization of time, place, and person" as its distinguishing feature (21). This particularity—the insistence on specific names, locations, and circumstances—works against the abstraction that allows systematic exploitation to continue unexamined. When factory workers become statistics or untouchables become faceless masses, their suffering loses moral weight. Realism counters this by insisting on the irreducible particularity of individual experience.

Catherine Gallagher notes that nineteenth-century social problem novels created a paradox: "they simultaneously insisted on the reality of fictional representations and the fictionality of social categories" (45). By making readers care about invented characters like Oliver Twist or Bakha, novelists demonstrated that the categories used to dismiss real poor people—as lazy, immoral, or subhuman—were themselves fictions, social constructions that served the interests of the powerful. The emotional investment readers made in fictional characters could then transfer to actual marginalized people.

For both Dickens and Anand, humanization required more than sympathetic portrayal; it demanded what Martha Nussbaum calls "narrative imagination"—"the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself" (10). Their novels function as exercises in perspective-taking, inviting middle-class readers to experience poverty from the inside. This imaginative identification serves political purposes: once readers recognize the poor as fully human, the moral case for reform becomes undeniable.

However, as critics have noted, the relationship between literary representation and social change is complex and mediated. Amanda Anderson warns against assuming direct causality between novels and reform movements, arguing instead that literature participates in broader "networks of social knowledge and feeling" (12). Dickens and Anand wrote within specific reform contexts—Dickens amid parliamentary debates about factory legislation and the Poor Laws, Anand during India's independence movement and emerging Dalit consciousness. Their novels both reflected and shaped these movements, contributing to what Raymond Williams calls "the long revolution" of expanding human dignity and democratic participation (xi).

Charles Dickens: Humanizing the Poor in Industrial England

The Critique of Utilitarian Dehumanization in *Hard Times*

Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) directly confronts the ideological foundations of industrial capitalism, particularly the utilitarian philosophy that reduced human beings to economic units. The novel opens with the infamous pedagogue Thomas Gradgrind announcing his educational philosophy: "Now, what I want is, facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else" (Dickens, *Hard Times* 9). This emphasis on facts represents the broader cultural tendency to quantify, measure, and abstract human experience—precisely the process that enables exploitation by obscuring the human reality of the poor.

Dickens dramatizes how utilitarian thinking dehumanizes both workers and the middle class who employ them. When Gradgrind's model student Bitzer defines a horse in purely mechanical terms—"Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive" (10)—Dickens satirizes educational systems that replace genuine understanding with abstract classification. This same reductive thinking appears in the industrialist Josiah Bounderby, who dismisses workers' complaints by claiming they want to be "set up in a coach and six, and to be fed on turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon" (58). Bounderby cannot imagine workers as having legitimate needs and aspirations because his ideology requires viewing them as fundamentally different from himself.

Against this dehumanizing ideology, Dickens presents Stephen Blackpool, a power-loom weaver whose integrity and suffering embody the human cost of industrial capitalism. Stephen's famous declaration—"'Tis a muddle"—captures his inability to comprehend the systematic injustices that trap him (118). Significantly, Dickens grants Stephen an inner life rich with moral complexity. When Stephen refuses to join the workers' union, not from capitulation to management but from personal conviction, Dickens refuses to flatten him into a type. His painful marriage to an alcoholic wife humanizes him further, showing how poverty compounds personal tragedies.

Stephen's death—falling into an abandoned mine shaft, a hazard of industrial negligence—literalizes how the system consumes workers' bodies. Dickens describes Stephen's rescue with painful particularity: "They drew him out, mutilated and crushed, but conscious; and he smiled faintly at them, as if he knew some merciful hand had been stretched out to rescue him from the deep, deep pit" (237). The physical detail forces readers to confront the bodily reality of working-class suffering, while Stephen's consciousness and capacity to smile affirm his humanity even in extremis. His dying words indict the system: "I ha' fell into th' pit... that has been wi' th' knowledge o' old folk now livin', hundreds and hundreds o' men, who ha' fell into th' pit... and it ha' been wi' th' knowledge o' th' House Commons" (238).

Dickens also humanizes the poor through Sissy Jupe, the circus child whom Gradgrind adopts. Sissy embodies imagination, emotion, and love—everything utilitarian philosophy excludes. When Gradgrind tests her knowledge, asking what the first principle of political economy is, she answers "To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me" (63), transforming economics from abstract calculation into moral relationship. Sissy's eventual triumph—she becomes the emotional center of Gradgrind's reformed household—suggests that humanistic values can resist dehumanizing ideologies.

Child Poverty and Social Reform in *Oliver Twist*

If Hard Times attacks utilitarian philosophy, *Oliver Twist* (1838) directly assaults the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which institutionalized cruelty toward the poor under the guise of rational reform. The novel opens with Oliver's birth in a workhouse, and Dickens's narrator immediately establishes his humanizing project: "Although I am not disposed to maintain that the being born in a workhouse is in itself the most fortunate and enviable circumstance that can possibly befall a human being, I do mean to say that in this particular instance, it was the best thing for Oliver Twist that could by possibility have occurred" (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 3). The ironic tone masks bitter critique—the workhouse represents society's failure to provide basic care.

Dickens's description of workhouse conditions employs realistic detail to shock middle-class readers. The famous scene of Oliver asking for more gruel becomes iconic precisely because Dickens renders the moment with such specificity: "Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from the table; and

advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity: 'Please, sir, I want some more'" (12). The physical props—basin and spoon—ground the scene in material reality, while the psychological notation—"alarmed at his own temerity"—grants Oliver interiority. The master's response—"What!" with "horror"—reveals how the system treats hunger itself as transgressive (12).

Throughout the novel, Dickens humanizes Oliver through his incorruptibility. Despite exposure to the criminal underworld of Fagin and Bill Sikes, Oliver retains his moral purity. Critics have sometimes faulted this characterization as unrealistic, but Dickens's purpose is clear: Oliver's goodness proves that poverty does not cause immorality. The dominant Victorian discourse blamed the poor for their condition, attributing poverty to moral failure. By making Oliver innately good despite his circumstances, Dickens refutes this logic. As the narrator observes when Oliver finds refuge with Mr. Brownlow: "The poor and the afflicted are sometimes as ready to discharge their debts as the rich and the prosperous; and while the worldling fancies that the former feel their obligations a grievous burden, he little knows how sweet and pleasant is the consciousness of discharging the duty" (87).

Dickens further humanizes the poor through Nancy, the prostitute who ultimately sacrifices her life to save Oliver. Nancy's complexity—her love for the brutal Bill Sikes coexisting with her moral revulsion at child abuse—makes her one of Dickens's most psychologically realistic characters. When she refuses to abandon Sikes despite the opportunity for a better life, she explains: "I am chained to my old life. I loathe and hate it now, but I cannot leave it... I have been brought up among thieves from a child, and I have been one myself for some years. There is no turning back for me now" (334). This speech reveals how poverty constrains choice itself. Nancy is not simply immoral; she is trapped by circumstances beyond her control. Her murder by Sikes becomes the novel's most harrowing moment, with Dickens sparing no detail: "The housebreaker freed one arm, and grasped his pistol. The certainty of immediate detection if he fired, flashed across his mind even in the midst of his fury; and he beat it twice with all the force he could summon, upon the upturned face that almost touched his own" (380).

By depicting Nancy's murder so graphically, Dickens forces readers to confront the violence inflicted on poor women. Nancy becomes a martyr, her death indicating both the individual brutality of Sikes and the systematic violence of a society that produces such desperation. Her humanity—her capacity for love, self-sacrifice, and moral complexity—challenges middle-class assumptions about the "fallen woman."

Dickens's Reform Agenda

Dickens's humanism served explicit reformist purposes. His novels participated in contemporary debates about factory legislation, education reform, and the Poor Laws. As Philip Collins documents in Dickens and Crime, Dickens actively campaigned for improved workhouse conditions, visiting institutions and publicizing abuses (67). His fiction complemented these efforts by building emotional constituencies for reform. When readers wept over Oliver or Stephen, they were more likely to support legislative changes.

However, Dickens's reformism had limits. His solutions often relied on individual benevolence rather than structural transformation. In Oliver Twist, Oliver's rescue depends on the kindness of Mr. Brownlow and the Maylie family, not systematic change. Similarly, in Hard Times, Gradgrind's personal conversion provides the novel's resolution. As Raymond Williams notes, Dickens "could see what was wrong with society, but he could not see a social answer to it" (95). His humanism remained fundamentally individualistic, focused on changing hearts rather than institutions.

Nevertheless, Dickens's achievement in humanizing the poor cannot be overstated. By making working-class and criminal characters psychologically complex, morally serious, and worthy of readers' identification, he challenged the dehumanizing discourses that enabled exploitation. His novels expanded the circle of moral consideration, insisting that the poor deserved not just charity but justice.

Mulk Raj Anand: Humanizing the Oppressed in Colonial India

Caste, Class, and Colonialism in *Untouchable*

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable (1935*) confronts an even more extreme form of dehumanization than anything Dickens addressed: the Indian caste system's treatment of Dalits (so-called "untouchables") as polluting and subhuman. The novel follows a single day in the life of Bakha, an eighteen-year-old sweeper, as he navigates the multiple oppressions of caste hierarchy, colonial subjugation, and economic exploitation. From the opening pages, Anand establishes his humanizing project by granting Bakha interiority, dreams, and dignity.

The novel begins with Bakha waking in his one-room home in the "outcasts' colony" outside the town of Bulashah. Anand's description emphasizes both the material conditions of poverty and Bakha's consciousness: "He stretched his limbs wearily and got up. He yawned as he stooped and picked up the broken enamel basin from the floor, and went to the door. He paused on the threshold of his home and looked at the smoke-laden, hazy sky" (Anand, *Untouchable 11*). This simple passage humanizes Bakha through specific physical actions and sensory awareness. He is not an abstraction but a particular young man experiencing a particular morning.

Anand's most powerful humanizing technique is showing how caste ideology inflicts psychological violence. When Bakha accidentally touches a high-caste man in the marketplace, he faces a brutal public humiliation: "Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, you cock-eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion!" (39). The high-caste man gathers a crowd, and Bakha must endure ritual abuse: "Now go, you brute of a sweeper! Go, before I kick you!" (40). Anand renders Bakha's internal response with devastating precision: "He felt as if his very soul was shrinking. He couldn't feel, he couldn't think. He simply stood there, bewildered, gazing at the crowd that had collected round him, dimly conscious of what had happened" (40).

This psychological realism—showing how humiliation attacks not just the body but consciousness itself—humanizes Bakha by revealing his vulnerability. Anand refuses to portray Bakha as either a noble victim or revolutionary hero. Instead, he is a complicated young man who admires British dress, dreams of upward mobility, and struggles to understand the ideology that oppresses him. When Bakha's sister Sohini is sexually assaulted by a high-caste priest and then accused of defiling the temple, Anand exposes the hideous hypocrisy of caste ideology. The priest can abuse Sohini with impunity because her body is already considered polluted and available; yet when she seeks refuge in the temple afterward, she is expelled for defiling holy space.

Anand structures the novel around three potential solutions to untouchability, each represented by an encounter Bakha has during his day. First, a Christian missionary promises that conversion to Christianity will end discrimination, but his speech reveals colonialism's instrumentalization of social reform: "God became man in Christ. Christ was the Son of God. Through Christ we can approach God. Only through Christ. Come to Christ... Christ will make you a free man" (121). Anand's irony is clear: replacing Hinduism with Christianity merely substitutes one form of ideological domination for another.

The second solution comes from a poet who suggests that British influence will gradually modernize India and erode caste distinctions. But this faith in gradual reform ignores both the urgency of suffering and colonialism's investment in maintaining social divisions. The third solution appears when Bakha listens to a speech by Gandhi, who advocates abolishing untouchability while preserving the caste system's underlying structure. Gandhi renames untouchables "Harijans" (children of God), but this semantic change does not address material conditions.

The novel concludes with Bakha hearing about flush toilets—modern sanitation technology that could eliminate the need for manual scavenging, his hereditary occupation. This technological solution appeals to Bakha precisely because it offers liberation without requiring the oppressor caste to change their hearts or ideology: "He felt he could now go home and announce the approaching change to the people... They should hold their breath and wait for it—the great change! Yes, a great change was coming over India" (156). Critics have debated whether this ending is optimistic or ironic, but Anand's point seems clear: genuine liberation requires both material transformation and ideological change, neither alone suffusing.

Economic Exploitation and Colonial Violence in *Coolie*

Anand's Coolie (1936) broadens the scope from caste to class exploitation, following the brief life of Munoo, a young orphan who works successively as a domestic servant, factory worker, and rickshaw puller before dying of tuberculosis at age fifteen. The novel's episodic structure—Munoo moves through different forms of labor exploitation—allows Anand to survey the entire landscape of poverty in colonial India. Each section humanizes different categories of the poor while exposing the structural violence that produces their suffering.

As a child servant in his uncle's home, Munoo faces casual cruelty. When he accidentally breaks a pot, his aunt beats him "with the rod of persecution which she had meant to be a playful chastisement but which had assumed the proportions of a severe punishment as she exercised her arm" (Anand, *Coolie* 22). Anand's observation that the punishment "assumed the proportions" beyond intention reveals how power relations enable cruelty to escalate unchecked. Munoo's consciousness throughout this beating—"he could not fathom what hurt him more, the blows or the humiliation"—again demonstrates Anand's commitment to interiority (22).

The factory section depicts industrial capitalism's dehumanizing logic most explicitly. Munoo works at a pickle factory where "the heat and the fumes of the cooking vegetables made a hell of a place, where men worked like machines, endlessly, tiresomely, mechanically" (89). This imagery of workers becoming machines echoes Dickens's *Hard Times*, but Anand adds the dimension of colonial exploitation. The factory owner is an Indian capitalist who has internalized British values, demonstrating how colonialism creates native collaborators in exploitation. When workers attempt to organize, they face brutal repression: "Some policemen... came up to the factory and began to beat the pickets mercilessly with their lathis [batons]" (112).

Munoo's final degradation comes as a rickshaw puller, where he literally becomes a beast of burden, his body the vehicle for wealthy passengers. Anand renders this ultimate dehumanization with painful physicality: "The sweat poured down his forehead, his neck, his back, and soaked the under-vest which he wore. The veins on his legs swelled and stood out... His heart palpitated. The weight on his shoulders seemed to have increased tenfold" (178). This bodily specificity makes abstract exploitation concrete. The novel's tragic conclusion—Munoo dies of consumption, his body worn out by labor before reaching adulthood—indicates the entire economic system.

Throughout *Coolie*, Anand employs what Saros Cowasjee calls "compassionate realism"—a detailed documentation of poverty that never loses sight of individual humanity (87). Even as Munoo suffers, he retains the capacity for joy, friendship, and wonder. His relationship with Hari, a fellow rickshaw puller, demonstrates the solidarities that emerge among the oppressed. When Hari teaches Munoo songs and shares his meager food, Anand shows how the poor care for each other despite having little to give. This mutual aid becomes its own form of resistance to systems designed to pit workers against each other.

Anand's Revolutionary Humanism

Unlike Dickens, whose reformism remained gradualist and individualistic, Anand's politics were explicitly revolutionary. Influenced by Marxism and the Indian independence movement, Anand saw literature as a weapon in the struggle against both colonialism and indigenous exploitation. In his preface to Untouchable, E.M. Forster notes that Anand writes "with his eye on an Indian target," aiming to mobilize Indian readers toward social transformation (7).

Anand's humanism differs from Dickens's in its collective dimension. While Dickens focuses on individual characters whose personal virtue might inspire reform, Anand consistently emphasizes class and caste solidarity. The solutions he imagines—whether Gandhi's mass movement, technological modernization, or workers' organization—are collective rather than individual. In *Coolie*, Munoo briefly experiences the possibility of collective action when factory workers strike. Though the strike fails, the experience of solidarity transforms him: "Something seemed to have cleared in his mind. He felt that these men were not his enemies but his friends, that they were all together in the same boat" (113). This consciousness of solidarity represents Anand's answer to dehumanization. The oppressed remain human not just because they possess the same capacities as their oppressors, but because they can recognize their common humanity and act together. Anand's novels thus perform a double humanization: they humanize the poor to middle-class readers while simultaneously affirming the poor's own consciousness and agency.

Comparative Analysis: Continuities and Differences

Shared Techniques of Humanization

Despite their different contexts, Dickens and Anand employ remarkably similar techniques to humanize the poor. Both grant marginalized characters psychological interiority, showing their thoughts, feelings, and moral reasoning. Both

use physical detail to ground poverty in bodily experience—hunger, cold, exhaustion, pain. Both create sympathetic identification by depicting the poor as victims of forces beyond their control rather than authors of their own misfortune. And both contrast the moral superiority of the poor with the corruption of the wealthy, implicitly questioning which group is truly civilized.

Both authors also employ what we might call strategic sentimentality—they deliberately evoke readers' emotions to bypass intellectual defenses. When Dickens describes Stephen Blackpool's death or Nancy's murder, or when Anand renders Munoo's final suffering, they make suffering visceral and unavoidable. This emotional appeal serves political purposes: readers who feel the poor's pain are more likely to support reform.

Finally, both authors use realism's documentary power to authenticate their representations. Dickens visited workhouses and factories; Anand drew on his own experiences of poverty. They present their novels not as fantasy but as truthful reports, claiming the authority of witnesses. This claim to truth-telling distinguishes their work from melodrama or sentimentalism, positioning their fiction as social testimony.

Contextual Differences:

Yet the differences between Dickens and Anand are equally significant. Dickens wrote for a British middle-class audience that was largely ignorant of working-class life but potentially sympathetic to reform. His novels had to overcome class prejudice but could appeal to Christian charity and emerging humanitarian sentiments. Anand, by contrast, wrote primarily for Western audiences (his novels were first published in London) and educated Indians, seeking to expose colonialism's violence and mobilize anti-colonial resistance. His target was not just class exploitation but the intersection of caste, class, and colonial domination.

This difference in audience and purpose shapes their aesthetic choices. Dickens's novels typically end with some form of resolution—the good are rewarded, the wicked punished, social harmony restored through individual benevolence. These endings, while sometimes criticized as sentimental, offered Victorian readers a path forward that didn't require revolutionary upheaval. Anand's endings are more ambiguous and often tragic. *Untouchable* concludes with uncertain hope for technological salvation; *Coolie* ends with death. These darker conclusions reflect Anand's assessment that genuine reform requires radical transformation, not individual charity.

The authors' treatment of agency also differs. Dickens's poor characters are often passive, rescued by benevolent outsiders. *Oliver Twist* does not liberate himself; he is saved by Mr. Brownlow. Stephen Blackpool never joins the workers' movement. This passivity reflects both Dickens's political conservatism and the limited models of working-class agency available in Victorian fiction. Anand, writing in the context of mass anti-colonial movements and influenced by Marxism, imagines greater potential for collective action. Even when his characters fail to achieve liberation, they actively resist, and their struggles point toward future revolutionary transformation.

Different Models of Reform:

Perhaps the fundamental difference lies in their visions of social reform. Dickens believed that changing individuals' hearts—making the wealthy more compassionate, the powerful more just—could gradually improve society. His novels perform this emotional education, teaching middle-class readers to sympathize with the poor. This approach assumes that the basic structure of society can remain intact if individuals behave more humanely within it.

Anand, conversely, saw individual benevolence as insufficient. The systems that produced poverty—colonialism, capitalism, caste—required structural dismantling, not humanitarian amelioration. His novels expose how individual cruelty stems from systematic dehumanization, suggesting that real change demands revolutionary transformation. When Bakha dreams of flush toilets or Munoo participates in strikes, Anand points toward technological and political solutions that would fundamentally restructure society.

Yet both authors share a profound conviction that literature matters for social change. They believe that representing the poor as fully human—granting them interiority, dignity, and moral seriousness—can transform consciousness in ways that lead to action. Whether that action takes the form of Victorian reform legislation or anti-colonial revolution, both writers understood fiction's power to make visible what ideology obscures.

Legacy and Continuing Relevance

The humanizing project of Dickens and Anand established a tradition of socially conscious realism that continues today. Contemporary writers addressing poverty, whether in the Global North or South, inherit their commitment to representing marginalized lives with dignity and demanding structural change. Authors like Aravind Adiga (*The White Tiger*), Katherine Boo (*Behind the Beautiful Forevers*), and Jesmyn Ward (*Salvage the Bones*) carry forward the work of humanizing the poor through realistic representation.

However, contemporary critics have raised important questions about the limits of humanization as a political strategy. Gayatri Spivak's famous question—"Can the subaltern speak?"—challenges the assumption that elite writers can authentically represent marginalized experiences (271). Does humanization, by making the poor legible to middle-class readers, inevitably distort their actual lives? Do sympathetic representations risk reinforcing paternalism, positioning the poor as objects of pity rather than political subjects?

These concerns apply to both Dickens and Anand. Dickens's sentimentalization of the poor—Oliver's implausible purity, Little Nell's angelic suffering—sometimes flattens actual working-class experience into middle-class fantasy. Anand's representations, while more politically radical, still filter subaltern experience through an educated, cosmopolitan consciousness. Bakha and Munoo think thoughts and articulate critiques that reflect Anand's own analysis more than the likely consciousness of actual sweepers and coolies.

Yet these limitations should not obscure these authors' achievements. In contexts where the poor were routinely described as less than human—as dangerous classes, polluting castes, surplus populations—insisting on their full humanity was itself revolutionary. By creating characters like Stephen Blackpool, Nancy, Bakha, and Munoo, Dickens and Anand expanded readers' moral imagination, making it impossible to dismiss the poor as abstract problems or inevitable casualties of progress.

Conclusion

Charles Dickens and Mulk Raj Anand, writing in vastly different contexts, shared a fundamental commitment to humanizing the poor through literary realism. By granting marginalized characters psychological complexity, depicting

their suffering with documentary precision, and challenging dehumanizing ideologies, both authors transformed how readers understood poverty and social responsibility. Their novels demonstrate that realistic representation can serve political purposes, making visible the human costs of exploitation and building constituencies for reform.

Dickens confronted industrial capitalism and Victorian class hierarchies, exposing how utilitarian philosophy and Poor Law reforms treated human beings as economic units or moral failures. Through characters like Oliver Twist and Stephen Blackpool, he insisted that the poor possessed the same moral worth and human dignity as the wealthy, challenging readers to extend their sympathies across class lines. His reform vision, while limited by individualism and gradualism, contributed to Victorian-era social legislation and permanently altered English fiction's treatment of working-class life.

Anand faced even more extreme dehumanization in colonial India's intersecting systems of caste, class, and colonial oppression. Through Bakha and Munoo, he revealed how ideology naturalizes inequality and how exploitation destroys both bodies and spirits. His revolutionary humanism demanded not just sympathy but structural transformation, pointing toward collective action as the path to liberation. His novels helped catalyze both anti-colonial resistance and Dalit consciousness movements.

The continuities between these authors—their shared techniques of interiority, physical detail, and emotional appeal—reveal how literary realism can transcend cultural boundaries to serve humanistic and reformist purposes. Their differences—in political vision, treatment of agency, and imagined solutions—reflect their specific historical moments and the particular forms of oppression they confronted.

In our contemporary moment, when economic inequality reaches unprecedented levels and debates about poverty often remain abstract and dehumanizing, the work of Dickens and Anand remains urgently relevant. Their novels remind us that behind every statistic is a human being with inner life, moral worth, and the right to dignity. They demonstrate that literature can make the invisible visible, transform sympathy into action, and contribute to "the long revolution" of expanding human freedom. Most fundamentally, they insist that humanization—the recognition of shared humanity across lines of class, caste, and power—remains the foundation of any just social order.

References

1. Anand MR. *Coolie*. London: Penguin Books; 1993.
2. Anand MR. *Untouchable*. London: Penguin Books; 1940.
3. Anderson A. *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; 2001.
4. Collins P. *Dickens and Crime*. London: Macmillan; 1962.
5. Cowasjee S. *So Many Freedoms: A Study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand*. Delhi: Oxford University Press; 1977.
6. Dickens C. *Hard Times*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company; 2001.
7. Dickens C. *Oliver Twist*. London: Penguin Classics; 2003.
8. Forster EM. Preface. In: Anand MR. *Untouchable*. London: Penguin Books; 1940. p. 5-9.
9. Gallagher C. *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1985.
10. Levine G. *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1981.
11. Nussbaum MC. *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. Boston: Beacon Press; 1995.
12. Spivak GC. Can the Subaltern Speak? In: Nelson C, Grossberg L, editors. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press; 1988. p. 271-313.
13. Watt I. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 1957.
14. Williams R. *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press; 1983.
15. Williams R. *The Long Revolution*. London: Chatto & Windus; 1961.