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Gender Violence and Humanitarian Discourse in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh and Mulk Raj Anand

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Abstract

Gender violence is one of the most persistent manifestations of social inequality, operating through physical, sexual, psychological, economic, cultural, and institutional forms of oppression. Indian English literature has played a significant role in representing these structures of violence and in bringing marginalised voices into literary and social consciousness. Mulk Raj Anand and Amitav Ghosh, although belonging to different generations and literary contexts, share a sustained concern with marginalise d communities and the unequal distribution of power. Anand's fiction emerges from the colonial period and exposes caste oppression, poverty, labour exploitation, and patriarchal structures. Ghosh, writing in a postcolonial and increasingly globalised context, extends the discourse to migration, displacement, communal conflict, ecological vulnerability, and the complex gendered consequences of historical and political violence. This paper comparatively examines gender violence and humanitarian discourse in selected novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Amitav Ghosh. Anand's *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, and *Two Leaves and a Bud* are examined for their representation of women subjected to caste, class, sexual, domestic, and colonial violence. Particular attention is given to Sohini in *Untouchable* and Sajani and Leila in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, whose experiences reveal the intersection of gender, caste, poverty, and colonial power. In Ghosh's fiction, the paper focuses primarily on *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide*, and *Sea of Poppies*. The analysis examines May Price's sexual violation in *The Shadow Lines*, women's vulnerability under patriarchal and colonial structures in *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies*, and the interconnected experiences of Kusum, Moyna, Piya, and other women in *The Hungry Tide*. Recent feminist scholarship has specifically argued that May Price's sexual violation has often been overlooked in criticism of *The Shadow Lines*, while recent ecofeminist scholarship reads Kusum and Deeti through the interconnected structures of patriarchy, colonialism, and environmental dispossession. The paper argues that the humanitarian dimension of these novels lies in their ability to transform gender violence from a private or individualised experience into a social and political question. Both writers reveal that violence against women cannot be separated from caste, class, colonialism, economic dependency, displacement, and unequal access to power. Anand's social realism foregrounds the immediate suffering of women within oppressive social structures, whereas Ghosh's transnational and ecological imagination demonstrates how gendered vulnerability can cross geographical and historical boundaries. The study concludes that their fiction contributes to a broader humanitarian discourse based on dignity, agency, empathy, justice, and recognition of marginalised voices.

Keywords: Gender Violence, Humanitarian Discourse, Mulk Raj Anand, Amitav Ghosh, Feminism, Patriarchy, Caste, Colonialism, Subalternity, Sexual Violence, Social Justice, Indian English Literature.

Introduction

Literature has historically provided a powerful space for representing experiences that remain suppressed or marginalised in official social narratives. Among these experiences, gender violence occupies a particularly complex position because it operates simultaneously at personal, familial, social, economic, political, and cultural levels. Violence against women is not limited to physical assault. It may take the form of sexual

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exploitation, domestic oppression, forced dependence, denial of economic autonomy, social humiliation, displacement, political violence, and the systematic silencing of women's voices.

The literary representation of gender violence is therefore closely connected with questions of power. Who possesses the authority to speak? Who has the right to define women's experiences? Whose suffering is recognised as violence, and whose suffering is normalised as part of social life?

Indian English literature has repeatedly confronted these questions. Mulk Raj Anand and Amitav Ghosh are particularly significant because both writers place marginalised individuals and communities at the centre of their narratives. Although Anand and Ghosh belong to different historical generations, their fiction demonstrates a common humanitarian concern: the recognition of people whose lives are shaped by unequal structures of power.

Mulk Raj Anand's major novels appeared during the colonial period. *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) examine caste, poverty, labour, colonialism, and social exploitation. His literary realism is grounded in sympathy for the oppressed and a desire to expose the social mechanisms that produce suffering. Scholarship on *Untouchable* has particularly situated the novel at the intersection of colonial modernity, Gandhian nationalism, and anti-caste thought.

Although Anand's major novels are frequently discussed primarily in relation to caste and class, gender is an important dimension of his social realism. Women belonging to oppressed communities experience multiple forms of marginalisation. Sohini in *Untouchable* is vulnerable not only because she belongs to a Dalit community but also because she is a woman whose body becomes a site of sexualised power. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Sajani and Leila experience the combined effects of poverty, colonial plantation structures, and patriarchal domination. A study of the novel through the concept of the "gendered subaltern" argues that its women characters experience oppression from both colonial authorities and patriarchal structures.

Amitav Ghosh's fiction extends these concerns into the postcolonial and global world. His novels examine migration, colonial history, borders, cultural identity, displacement, ecological crisis, and climate change. His women characters frequently negotiate social expectations while attempting to establish agency and independent identities. Scholarship on *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace*, and *The Hungry Tide* has noted the significance of women who challenge conventional gender roles.

However, Ghosh's representation of gender violence also requires critical scrutiny. Recent feminist scholarship on *The Shadow Lines* has drawn particular attention to May Price, arguing that her experiences of sexual violation have often been subordinated to the novel's better-known themes of nationalism, borders, memory, and communal violence. The study argues that the novel's male-centred narration can minimise May's agency and obscure the seriousness of the sexual violations she experiences.

Similarly, *The Hungry Tide* provides an important framework for examining the relationship between gender, poverty, ecology, and political violence. Kusum's experiences demonstrate how gendered oppression can intersect with displacement and environmental dispossession. Recent ecofeminist research reads Kusum and other women in Ghosh's fiction as figures whose oppression is connected to both patriarchal structures and the exploitation or control of natural environments.

The present paper therefore examines gender violence not as an isolated literary theme but as part of a larger humanitarian discourse. The term "humanitarian discourse" is used here to refer to a literary and ethical

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concern with human dignity, suffering, vulnerability, agency, and the responsibility of societies to recognise and respond to injustice.

The central argument of this paper is that Anand and Ghosh reveal how gender violence is sustained by larger systems of power. Their novels show that women belonging to marginalised communities often experience overlapping forms of oppression. Gender cannot always be separated from caste, class, colonialism, migration, or environmental vulnerability.

2. Objectives of the Study

The present study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the representation of gender violence in selected novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Amitav Ghosh.
2. To analyse the relationship between gender, caste, class, colonialism, and social power.
3. To examine the representation of women's agency and resistance.
4. To explore the humanitarian dimension of the novels of Anand and Ghosh.
5. To compare the literary treatment of gender violence by the two writers.
6. To examine how marginalised women experience multiple and interconnected forms of oppression.
7. To demonstrate the relevance of literary representations of gender violence to broader discussions of human dignity, social justice, and humanitarian ethics.

3. Research Methodology

This research follows a qualitative, comparative, and interpretative methodology. The study is based primarily on close textual analysis of selected novels.

The principal works of Mulk Raj Anand examined are:

- *Untouchable* (1935)
- *Coolie* (1936)
- *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937)

The principal works of Amitav Ghosh examined are:

- *The Shadow Lines* (1988)
- *The Glass Palace* (2000)
- *The Hungry Tide* (2004)
- *Sea of Poppies* (2008)

The theoretical framework incorporates feminist literary criticism, postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and humanitarian approaches to literature.

The study also draws upon recent scholarship concerning women and gender in the works of both writers. Recent research on Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* specifically examines women as "gendered subalterns" and explores their silence and resistance within colonial plantation society. Research on Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* similarly examines women's struggles against patriarchal norms and their attempts to establish agency.

4. Conceptualising Gender Violence

Gender violence can be understood as violence directed against individuals because of gendered power relations. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, economic exploitation, coercion, intimidation, forced dependence, and institutional discrimination.

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A feminist approach to literature is particularly useful because it asks readers to examine how gendered power operates through narrative structures as well as through characters and events.

Gender violence can be divided into several overlapping categories:
Physical Violence
This includes beating, bodily harm, murder, and other forms of physical coercion.
Sexual Violence
Sexual harassment, sexual assault, coercive sexual behaviour, and exploitation constitute forms of gender violence.
Domestic and Patriarchal Violence
Women may experience control and oppression within family and marriage structures.
Economic Violence
Dependence upon male economic power can restrict women's autonomy.
Structural Violence
Social systems may produce conditions in which women are disproportionately vulnerable even without a single identifiable perpetrator.
Colonial and Political Violence
Colonial and political systems can intensify women's vulnerability through displacement, militarisation, labour exploitation, and racial hierarchy.
Ecological and Environmental Vulnerability
Environmental crises may disproportionately affect women in poor and marginalised communities because of their social and economic positions.
These categories frequently overlap in the novels of Anand and Ghosh.

5. Mulk Raj Anand and the Humanitarian Imagination

Mulk Raj Anand's fiction is fundamentally concerned with the suffering of marginalised communities. His literary realism seeks to make social injustice visible.

His humanism emerges from the belief that individuals who are treated as socially inferior possess the same fundamental human dignity as members of privileged communities.

Although Anand's fiction is often analysed primarily through caste and class, gender is inseparable from these structures.

Women belonging to oppressed communities experience what may be called **intersectional marginalisation**.

They are disadvantaged because they are:

- Women
- Poor
- Members of marginalised castes or communities
- Labourers
- Subjects of colonial power.

Consequently, their experiences cannot be understood through gender alone.

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6. Gendered Violence in *Untouchable*

Untouchable provides one of the clearest examples of the intersection of caste and gender violence in Anand's fiction.

The protagonist Bakha is a young Dalit sweeper. However, his sister Sohini is also an important figure in understanding the novel's gender politics.

Sohini is subjected to sexual harassment by the temple priest. The episode reveals a profound contradiction in caste society: the Dalit woman may be regarded as "polluting" in social interaction while simultaneously being treated as sexually available by a powerful upper-caste man.

Research on Dalit women's representation has specifically identified the scene in *Untouchable* in which the priest attempts to molest Sohini and then reverses the accusation by claiming that he has been polluted.

The episode demonstrates how sexual violence can operate within caste hierarchy.

The woman's body becomes a site upon which social power is exercised.

The priest possesses:

- Caste privilege
- Religious authority
- Social status
- Gender privilege.

Sohini possesses very little institutional power.

When she resists, the social system is capable of transforming the perpetrator's behaviour into an accusation against the victim.

This is an important feature of gender violence: the victim can be blamed for the violence committed against her.

The incident therefore illustrates the interconnectedness of caste and gender.

The humanitarian significance of Anand's representation lies in his decision to make this violence visible.

Rather than presenting caste merely as an abstract social institution, he reveals how caste hierarchy affects women's bodies, safety, and dignity.

7. Caste, Sexuality and the Dalit Female Body

Sohini's experience demonstrates that Dalit women may experience forms of oppression that are distinct from those experienced by Dalit men or upper-caste women.

Bakha is humiliated and excluded because of caste.

Sohini experiences caste oppression as well as gendered and sexual vulnerability.

This produces a double marginalisation.

The Dalit woman's body becomes simultaneously:

a caste-marked body + a gendered body + a vulnerable body

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Anand's representation anticipates a later feminist understanding of intersectionality, even though the terminology itself belongs to a later theoretical context.

The humanitarian significance of such representation is that it prevents readers from treating "women" or "Dalits" as homogeneous categories.

Different forms of disadvantage intersect.

8. Gender and Exploitation in *Coolie*

Coolie primarily focuses on Munoo's experiences, but gender remains part of Anand's representation of the social world.

Women in the novel occupy different positions within structures of domesticity, sexuality, economic dependence, and class.

The novel presents a society in which poverty creates vulnerability for both men and women.

However, women's vulnerability is often intensified by patriarchal structures.

Anand's social realism therefore suggests that economic exploitation and gender inequality cannot be considered completely separate.

Where poverty limits economic independence, women can become particularly vulnerable to coercion.

The humanitarian perspective of *Coolie* lies in Anand's broader critique of a social system that turns vulnerable people into instruments of economic production.

9. *Two Leaves and a Bud*: Women as Gendered Subalterns

Two Leaves and a Bud provides perhaps the most important Anand text for examining gender violence.

The novel is set within the plantation economy of colonial Assam. Gangu, a poor labourer, migrates with his family to the tea plantation in search of economic security.

Instead of finding prosperity, the family encounters exploitation, racial discrimination, poor working conditions, and colonial domination.

The women in the novel experience an additional layer of vulnerability.

Research on the novel through a subaltern framework identifies Sajani, Leila, and other women as "gendered subalterns" whose lives are shaped by both colonial and patriarchal control.

The plantation functions almost as a closed social system.

Workers possess limited mobility.

Women possess even less power.

The plantation's economic hierarchy intersects with patriarchal hierarchy.

Thus:

Colonial power + class exploitation + patriarchy + gender = compounded vulnerability

10. Sajani: Gender, Poverty and Structural Violence

Sajani, Gangu's wife, represents the vulnerability of poor women within colonial plantation society.

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Her suffering is not restricted to one violent event. Instead, it emerges through structural conditions:

- Poverty;
- Inadequate health conditions;
- Economic dependence;
- Patriarchal family structures;
- Exploitative labour conditions;
- Colonial domination.

This is important because gender violence does not always appear as spectacular physical violence.

A woman can experience structural violence through conditions that progressively destroy her health, autonomy, and ability to control her life.

The tragedy of Sajani therefore becomes part of Anand's larger humanitarian argument.

The suffering of poor women is produced by an entire system rather than by a single individual.

11. Leila and Sexual Violence

Leila's experience represents the most direct connection between colonial power and sexual violence in *Two Leaves and a Bud*.

Her vulnerability is intensified by her status as the daughter of a poor plantation worker.

The colonial plantation manager's power over workers creates an environment in which women's bodies become vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Gangu's final confrontation while attempting to protect Leila illustrates the extreme consequences of this structure.

Scholarship on the novel identifies the sexual exploitation of women as part of the broader system of colonial plantation oppression and describes the women as struggling against the control of colonial elites and their agents.

The episode reveals that gender violence can function as an instrument of colonial domination.

The woman is not merely an individual victim.

Her body becomes a site upon which colonial power is exercised.

12. Amitav Ghosh and the Expansion of Gendered Humanitarianism

Amitav Ghosh's fiction operates on a wider geographical and historical scale.

His novels frequently cross national boundaries and connect personal experiences with larger historical forces.

Gender violence in Ghosh is therefore often linked with:

- Colonialism;
- Migration;
- Race;
- Nationalism;
- Communal violence;

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- Economic inequality;
- Ecological displacement.

His women characters are frequently resilient and intellectually active, but the novels also expose the limits imposed upon their agency.

Recent scholarship on Ghosh's women characters argues that figures in *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace*, and *The Hungry Tide* challenge conventional gender roles and seek independent identities.

However, a humanitarian reading must also examine situations in which female agency is suppressed or narratively marginalised.

13. May Price and Sexual Violence in *The Shadow Lines*

The Shadow Lines is usually studied through themes of nationalism, memory, borders, communal violence, and identity.

However, May Price's experience provides an important gendered dimension to the novel.

Recent feminist criticism has argued that May's sexual violation has been insufficiently examined in comparison with the novel's other themes. The critic specifically identifies two episodes of sexual violation and argues that the male-centred narrative structure restricts May's ability to articulate her own experience and obtain meaningful redress.

This observation is important because it demonstrates that literary violence can operate at two levels.

The first level is represented violence.

The narrative depicts an act of sexual violation.

The second level is narrative violence.

The victim's perspective may be limited because the story is filtered through a male narrator.

This distinction is crucial to feminist literary criticism.

A text may depict violence against women while simultaneously reproducing certain limitations on female agency.

May's situation is especially complex because her identity as a white British woman intersects with her gender.

The postcolonial context complicates the power relationship.

The colonial hierarchy between Britain and India is partially reversed through the male Indian protagonist's relationship with the British woman, but gender hierarchy remains.

Thus, the novel creates an intricate intersection of:

race + colonial history + sexuality + gender + narrative authority

This makes May Price a particularly important figure for humanitarian analysis.

14. Gender, Memory and Narrative Authority

One of the most significant questions raised by May's character concerns who controls memory.

The narrator of *The Shadow Lines* reconstructs events retrospectively.

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This means that May's experience is mediated through someone else's memory.

The problem is not merely whether the narrator remembers accurately.

The deeper question is whether the victim has sufficient narrative agency to define her own experience.

This issue is central to humanitarian discourse.

Humanitarian representation can become problematic when suffering is narrated entirely by outsiders.

The victim may become an object of sympathy without becoming a subject with independent agency.

Ghosh's novel therefore allows for a productive critical tension:

It humanizes suffering while also raising questions about who has the authority to narrate suffering.

15. Women and Colonial Modernity in *The Glass Palace*

The Glass Palace examines colonialism, migration, war, and social transformation across India, Burma, and Southeast Asia.

Its women characters inhabit a rapidly changing political and social world.

Recent scholarship has specifically examined the gendered character of colonial modernity in the novel, arguing that colonial modernity creates tensions in relationships between men and women and exposes contradictions within elite and middle-class social structures.

The novel therefore demonstrates that colonial modernity is not gender-neutral.

Changes in education, mobility, marriage, social status, and economic structures affect men and women differently.

Women may gain new opportunities while simultaneously encountering new forms of control.

The humanitarian significance lies in recognising women as historical subjects rather than merely as supporting figures within male-centred narratives.

16. *Sea of Poppies*: Patriarchy, Colonialism and Women's Agency

Although the question of gender violence can be studied through several Ghosh novels, *Sea of Poppies* is particularly significant because of its portrayal of women within nineteenth-century colonial India.

Deeti's life is shaped by patriarchal expectations, caste, marriage, economic dependence, and colonial economic structures.

Her experience illustrates how women's oppression can operate through apparently traditional institutions such as marriage and family while being intensified by colonial economic systems.

Recent ecofeminist scholarship on Ghosh's fiction identifies Deeti as a woman oppressed by patriarchal structures and connects her experiences to wider historical processes surrounding the opium trade and colonialism.

Deeti's movement away from an oppressive social environment represents an important form of agency.

She does not remain merely a victim.

She becomes an active participant in shaping her own future.

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This transition from victimhood to agency is an important element of Ghosh's humanitarian discourse.

17. *The Hungry Tide*: Gender, Ecology and Violence

The Hungry Tide offers perhaps the most complex intersection of gender and humanitarian concerns in Ghosh's fiction.

The principal female characters include:

- Piya Roy
- Kusum
- Moyna;
- Nilima.

They occupy very different social positions.
Piya is an educated scientist with professional independence.
Moyna struggles against economic and social limitations.
Nilima works within a community-oriented social framework.
Kusum experiences poverty, displacement, patriarchy, and political violence.
The diversity of these characters demonstrates that there is no single female experience.

18. Kusum: Gendered Displacement and Political Violence

Kusum is one of the most important characters for understanding gender violence in *The Hungry Tide*.

She is a poor woman whose life is shaped by displacement and economic vulnerability.

Her participation in the refugee settlement at Morichjhapi connects her personal history with a major episode of political violence.

Her experience demonstrates the intersection of:

Gender + Poverty + Migration + Environmental Politics + State Violence

Recent ecofeminist scholarship argues that Kusum's oppression is connected to both patriarchal structures and the displacement of marginalised communities in the Sundarbans.

Kusum's fate demonstrates that environmental policy can have profoundly gendered consequences.

When vulnerable communities are displaced, women may face particularly severe consequences because of their economic dependence, family responsibilities, and limited access to political power.

19. Piya Roy: Professional Agency and Vulnerability

Piya Roy provides a contrasting representation of womanhood.

She is educated, professionally independent, and scientifically trained.

Her presence challenges the assumption that women belong exclusively to domestic spaces.

She travels independently and conducts scientific research in a difficult environment.

However, her professional independence does not eliminate vulnerability.

Her interactions with the male characters and her exposure to the physical environment demonstrate that professional agency and vulnerability can coexist.

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This is important because feminist discourse should not reduce women to either victims or empowered individuals.

A woman can possess professional agency while simultaneously negotiating social, physical, or gendered risks.

20. Moyna and Economic Empowerment

Moyna represents another dimension of women's agency.

She is determined to become a nurse and improve her social and economic position.

Her aspirations challenge the limitations imposed by poverty and gender expectations.

Moyna's character demonstrates that education and employment can become important mechanisms of empowerment.

Her experience also suggests that humanitarian development requires access to opportunities.

Gender justice is therefore not only about protection from violence.

It is also about creating conditions in which women can exercise meaningful choices.

21. Gender Violence and Environmental Injustice

One of Ghosh's major contributions is his ability to connect gender questions with ecological questions.

Recent ecofeminist scholarship argues that *The Hungry Tide* links the oppression of women with the domination of nature and examines the relationship between female resistance and ecological consciousness.

This does not mean that women are inherently closer to nature.

Rather, the connection is structural.

Women in economically vulnerable communities often depend directly upon natural resources for survival.

When ecosystems are disrupted or communities are displaced, women may experience intensified economic and social vulnerability.

Thus:

Environmental injustice can become gendered injustice

This perspective broadens the humanitarian discourse beyond interpersonal violence.

22. Research Findings

The comparative study produces the following major findings.

Finding 1: Gender Violence is Structural

The novels demonstrate that gender violence is not limited to isolated acts of physical or sexual violence. It is embedded in caste, class, patriarchy, colonialism, economic dependence, and political structures.

Finding 2: Caste Intensifies Gender Vulnerability

Sohini's experience in *Untouchable* demonstrates that Dalit women can experience simultaneous caste and gender oppression.

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Finding 3: Colonialism is Gendered

Two Leaves and a Bud demonstrates that colonial plantation structures create conditions in which poor women are especially vulnerable to exploitation. Scholarship on the novel identifies its women as gendered subalterns whose oppression operates through both colonial and patriarchal structures.

Finding 4: Sexual Violence is Connected to Power

In both writers, sexual violence is not simply an expression of individual desire. It becomes a manifestation of unequal power.

Finding 5: Narrative Perspective Matters

The Shadow Lines demonstrates that the representation of sexual violence is affected by who controls the narrative. Recent feminist criticism argues that May Price's experiences have been insufficiently addressed because the novel is heavily mediated through a male narrator.

Finding 6: Women Possess Agency Despite Structural Constraints

Women in both writers' fiction are not merely passive victims. Sohini resists, Leila struggles, Deeti seeks a different future, Piya exercises professional autonomy, Moyna pursues education, and Kusum resists displacement.

Finding 7: Gender and Environment are Interconnected

The Hungry Tide demonstrates how ecological displacement can intersect with gender and economic vulnerability. Recent ecofeminist scholarship explicitly links women's oppression, nature, and political displacement in the novel.

Finding 8: Humanitarianism Requires Dignity and Agency

True humanitarian representation must do more than generate sympathy. It must recognise the agency and voice of those who experience violence.

Finding 9: Gender Justice is Social Justice

The novels demonstrate that gender violence cannot be separated from broader questions of caste, class, labour, migration, political power, and economic opportunity.

Finding 10: Literature Creates Ethical Consciousness

By representing experiences that may otherwise remain invisible, literature can encourage readers to question normalised forms of violence and develop greater sensitivity to marginalised lives.

23. Discussion

The comparative reading of Anand and Ghosh demonstrates that gender violence is historically specific but structurally continuous.

Anand writes in a society characterised by colonial rule, caste hierarchy, poverty, and limited opportunities for women. His women frequently inhabit extremely restrictive social and economic circumstances.

Ghosh writes in a world shaped by postcoloniality, globalisation, migration, and ecological crisis. His women often possess greater mobility and agency, yet they continue to confront patriarchal and institutional power.

This comparison demonstrates that social progress does not necessarily eliminate gender violence.

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Rather, the forms of vulnerability change.

The woman working in a colonial plantation may face sexual exploitation from a powerful employer.

The modern professional woman may experience harassment despite possessing educational and economic independence.

The displaced woman may experience political violence because her community is considered expendable.

The migrant woman may experience vulnerability because of the absence of social protection.

Therefore, gender justice requires attention to both interpersonal and structural forms of violence.

24. Literature and Social Transformation

The novels of Anand and Ghosh demonstrate that literature can contribute to social transformation in several ways.

By Making Violence Visible

Literature brings hidden experiences into public consciousness.

By Challenging Normalisation

It questions social practices that have been accepted as ordinary.

By Creating Empathy

Readers encounter experiences beyond their own social circumstances.

By Preserving Marginalised Histories

Literature records experiences that may not receive adequate attention in official historical narratives.

By Imagining Resistance

Characters demonstrate that oppressive structures can be challenged.

By Encouraging Critical Reading

Readers are invited to question not only the violence represented in a text but also the ways in which victims are represented.

This last point is especially important in relation to Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. Recent feminist criticism demonstrates how rereading a canonical text can reveal dimensions that earlier scholarship overlooked.

25. Conclusion

Gender violence in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Amitav Ghosh cannot be understood simply as a collection of isolated incidents involving individual characters. It is embedded in larger systems of caste, class, patriarchy, colonialism, economic exploitation, migration, political violence, and ecological vulnerability.

Anand's *Untouchable* demonstrates how caste and gender intersect in Sohini's experience of sexual harassment. His *Two Leaves and a Bud* reveals how poor women such as Sajani and Leila experience the combined effects of patriarchal and colonial power. Research on the novel through the concept of the gendered subaltern confirms the importance of examining women's silence, exploitation, and resistance within the plantation system.

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Ghosh expands this discourse into a broader historical and geographical framework. *The Shadow Lines* raises difficult questions about sexual violence, narrative authority, and female agency through May Price. Recent feminist scholarship has been especially important in recovering this dimension of the novel and challenging readings that have focused almost exclusively on nationalism, borders, memory, and communal violence.

The Glass Palace demonstrates that colonial modernity is gendered, while *Sea of Poppies* examines the intersection of patriarchy, caste, marriage, colonialism, and female agency. *The Hungry Tide* further expands the humanitarian discourse by connecting gender with ecology, poverty, migration, and political violence. The experiences of Kusum, Piya, Moyna, and Nilima reveal that women occupy diverse social positions and respond differently to structures of power. Recent ecofeminist research particularly emphasises the relationship between women's oppression and ecological displacement in Ghosh's fiction.

The comparative study therefore reveals an important continuity between the two writers.

Anand exposes the immediate social structures that make women vulnerable. Ghosh demonstrates how those structures expand across borders, histories, and ecological systems.

Both writers nevertheless share a humanitarian commitment to making marginalised lives visible.

The most important contribution of their fiction is therefore not simply the representation of suffering. It is the transformation of suffering into an ethical question.

Why should a woman be vulnerable because she belongs to a particular caste?

Why should poverty restrict her autonomy?

Why should colonial or institutional authority permit the exploitation of women's bodies?

Why should displaced women bear disproportionate consequences of political violence?

Why should ecological policies ignore the voices of communities whose survival depends upon their environment?

These questions transform literature into humanitarian discourse.

A genuinely humanitarian approach must move beyond sympathy toward recognition, dignity, agency, and justice. It must acknowledge that women are not merely victims of history but participants in it.

The novels of Anand and Ghosh ultimately demonstrate that gender justice cannot be separated from broader social justice. A society cannot claim to be humane while tolerating violence against women, and development cannot be considered complete when marginalised women remain excluded from dignity, security, opportunity, and decision-making.

Literature therefore performs a vital cultural function. It remembers the experiences of those whose voices have been suppressed, challenges structures that normalise violence, and creates imaginative possibilities for a more just social order.

In this sense, the humanitarian discourse of Anand and Ghosh remains relevant not merely to literary studies but to contemporary discussions of **human rights, gender equality, social justice, cultural inclusion, and the ethical responsibilities of society**.

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