



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

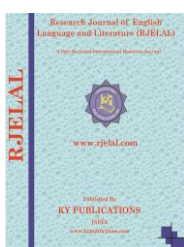
2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

“THE LOST CHILD” MULK RAJ ANAND’S MAGNUM OPUS

Dr. NISHI SINGH

Adhyapak: Govt High School of Parsora

Block: Berasiya, Dist-Bhopal (M.P.)



ABSTRACT

The first story which automatically selects itself as an illustration of what Anand wrote best is ‘The Lost Child’. This poetic short story does not have humour, irony or satire at the back of the reading. But it is a gem of lyrical writing which has been translated into other languages more extensively than any other story of his. It is a great story about family bonding, especially amongst children who always want to remain along with their parents. In this story we find a nameless young child who goes to a spring mela and gets lost. What happens to him after he gets lost is the problem. The child remains lost to his parents till the end of the narrative. Whenever a literary artist writes both novels and short stories, the latter are, usually not considered in the final reckoning. But this short story is an exception.

Key Words: festival; child psychology;

Introduction

The story “The Lost Child” is one of the most liked, admired and most anthologized short stories of Mulk Raj Anand. There should be no hesitation to say that it is a world’s favourite story. It is difficult to say when it was first published. But it is certain that “The Lost Child” is one of the earliest creations of Mulk Raj Anand. At the time when Anand was struggling to get his first novel *Untouchable* published he managed to get the first collection of short stories, *The Lost Child and Other Stories*, published in England. It may be around late 1930s. In its Indian reprint by Visison Books, New Delhi it was dedicated by Anand to Francis Connery Chappell. The story was provided with illustration by Eric Gill when it was published in *Great Short Stories of the world* (1929) and published by Oldhams, London.

Mulk Raj Anand always liked to write finished and extremely rich in content as the stories of *Kathasaritasagar* had been. For this he chose the

folk tale style and synthesized it with the European style. Amrik Singh says,

The folk tales of India.. ..interpret the joys and sorrows of a peasant people of the long eras of Indian feudal life. And in spite of the wit, wisdom and morality which they represent, they are not typical of the modern sensibility. Therefore, while accepting the form of the folk tale, especially in its fabulous character, I took in the individual and group psychology of the European *conte* and tried to synthesise the two styles. And thus I sought to create a new kind of fable which extends the old Indian story form into a new age, without the moral lessons of the Indian story, but embodying its verve and vitality and including the psychological understanding of the contemporary period. (Internet)

Mulk Raj Anand wrote, in all, some seventy or eighty short stories. Some of the earlier collections of his short stories were published in England. Since he knew the English taste and inclinations there was no difficulty in getting some

of his earlier stories published in England. He was also aware of the fact as to what the Indian reading public would like and admire. As to the substance of what he wrote, he did not deviate from the Indian reality with which he had always been directly involved. This is the reason that the short stories were admired by people in the East and the West.

Discussion

The first story which automatically selects itself as an illustration of what Anand wrote best is 'The Lost Child'. This poetic short story does not have humour, irony or satire at the back of the reading. Many stories like 'A Pair of the Mustachios', 'The Maharaja and the Tortoise', 'A Promoter of Quarrels', 'The Man Whose Name Did Not Appear in the Census', 'The Man Who Loved Monkeys More Than Human Beings' can be cited as examples of the comic in Anand's works. But it is a gem of lyrical writing which has been translated into other languages more extensively than any other story of his. The opinion of Saros Cowasjee can be quoted here:

The story can be read at different levels. At its simplest it is about a child's natural fear of being left alone; at its most profound, it is a metaphor for the human condition. The child in the story epitomises our individual cravings, desires, fears, but most of all our vulnerability and dependence on one another. Anand has said that a maxim by Guru Nanak—'We are all children lost in the world fair'—was reverberating in his mind when he wrote 'The Lost Child'. This provides the essence of the story. The nameless child is the proverbial 'everyman', and the village fair is a microcosm of our universe with its beauty, joy and pleasures, but underscored by pain and insecurity. (Amrik Singh, on the internet)

But this comic or Satiric element is entirely absent from this story. It is great story about family bonding, especially amongst children who always want to remain along with their parents. In this story we find a nameless young child who goes to a spring mela (Fair) with his parents. People flock to the festival on all types of clothes. Some traveled to the fair on foot, some on horseback while many others travelled by bamboo and bullock carts. Since it was a village fair it was being attended by village folk.

The child was clad in gaily coloured clothes like most people who flocked towards the mela. He was extremely happy. Time and again the child was separating from the family as he was stopped by the fascinating toys that drew his attention. and each time he was called by his parents and very obediently he hurried back to them at their call. On the way to the mela the child saw many shops where he wanted to buy something but every time there was a refusal from his parents.

Soon a flowering mustard field came into view and the child was delighted beyond measure. The mustard field was "pale like melting gold as it swept across miles of even land." (On Interent) Dragon flies were hovering with their gawdy purple wings, over mustard plants and they gave a wonderful view of the field. The child was lost in the sight. However, he was called up by his parents.

A sweet-meat seller was selling gulan-jamun, rasaguylla, burfi, jalebi and other sweets. The child's mouth watered and he asked his parents to buy him some but their reply was a stern 'no.' Somebody was selling yellow, red, green and purple balloons. At another place was a snake-charmer playing a flute to a snake which coiled itself in a basket, There was a roundabout in full swing. People were being carried away in a whirling motion, shrieked and cried with happiness. But the child was denied pleasure of either of these things. Then suddenly he found himself lost. Anand says,

A full, deep cry rose within his dry throat and with a sudden jerk of his body he ran from where he stood, crying in real fear, "Mother, Father." Tears rolled down from his eyes, hot and fierce; his flushed face was convulsed with fear. Panic-stricken, he ran to one side first, then to the other, hither and thither in all directions, knowing not where to go. "Mother, Father," he wailed. His yellow turban came untied and his clothes became muddy. (Text on the Internet)

For sufficient time he cried asking for his "mother" and "father." After sometime he was picked up by a person who desired to calm down and stop crying. But the child was so disconsolate that he would not just listen. The stranger tried to take him to all the places where his parents had refused to buy him something. Even the roundabout

and the snake charmer did not please him. He just cried "I want my mother, I want my father!" It is a well-known fact that Anand was a very sensitive person from his childhood. This is the reason that he was so well able to describe the pain the little Child felt at his separation from his parents.

There is no doubt that "The Lost Child" is a perfect story in every sense of the words and brings tears to the eyes of the sensitive readers for its poignancy. A child gets lost in a spring fair. Before getting lost, he wanted his parents to buy him many things. Now when he is lost he is offered all those things his parents were not prepared to purchase. But the child desires for his parents only and the emotional security it signifies stands nowhere in comparison to those things. This is the main strand of the story.

Another feature of this short story is the nature descriptions that Mulk Raj Anand makes during the course of the story. The first three paragraphs especially describe the benign aspects of nature. It is the spring time when nature in North India provides great happiness.

Conclusion

The pathos of this short story in planning and execution is superb. The depiction of the child's psychology after he gets lost in the fair has been very beautifully done. The whole story is superb in execution. The contrast in the behavior of the child before he gets lost and after he gets lost is very correctly and psychologically handled. All in all, the story is in all respects superb.

References

- Anand, Mulk Raj, "The Lost Child", New Delhi, India: Vision/Orient Paperbacks (2007), ISBN: 9788122203684
- Singh, Amrik "Mulk Raj Anand : role and achievement"Biography, Government publication, State or province government publication, New Delhi : National Book Trust, India, 2008.