



CONCEPT OF INDIVIDUALISM IN AYN RAND'S ANTHEM

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ABSTRACT

Ayn Rand, Russian American writer came to the world when Russian Revolution was in its peak. She personally experienced the atrocity of communism in action. So she fled to America, as she found it to be the freest country. But she was shocked when the Communist, Fascist and Nazis ideals became very popular in America. So, in her novels the process of collectivization is portrayed successfully at a deeper level i.e. political, economical and social. Ayn Rand, through her novella *Anthem* has brought an awakening sense about the horrors of collectivism. This paper makes an attempt to show the philosophical convictions of Ayn Rand with special reference to her novella *Anthem*.

Key words: Ayn Rand, Anthem, Collectivism, Objectivism, Philosophy, Individualism

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Ayn Rand's philosophy of human nature is perfectly exhibited in her outstanding novella 'Anthem'. The central theme of the story, the individual versus the collective, is almost transpires in all her novels but Rand initiates the theme from this novella. This theme becomes an important element of her moral and political philosophy. The story takes place in a communist society that is unnamed where an individual has no rights of his own, and he has to live solely for the society and to serve it. The hero, Equality 7-2521 is a creative and innovative young man who longs to be a scientist but is condemned by the society and works as a street sweeper. In fact the government fears his independence of mind and restricts his development.

This is the case of the society, and the citizens are treated only as pawns that have no rights and are able to move only by the orders of the

government. They are born in state controlled hospitals, grown in nurseries under the control of the state, works in jobs assigned by the state, rests at nights in massive barracks allotted by the state. There is no right for a human being to love and have sex for their own interest and they should engage in state controlled breeding and the government decides who sleeps with whom and when. At its worst they should not have any individual names and they are named on collectivist slogans – Unity, Fraternity, International followed by numbers, and the word 'I' has been banned and erased from the minds of the people and language. In a sense, it is an unspeakable word in the society. The individuals should use the collective 'We', when they speak of themselves as there is no individualistic words present in the society.

In such a society, Equality 7-2521, the hero of this novel, struggles for his own life in conflict

with the oppressive dictatorship. He wants to think, live and love. His struggles form the theme of this novel. Rand gives a premonition through this novel to the modern society that moves towards collectivism. At the time of writing this novel there is a sense of urgency with the fashion of the various collectivist factions. The novel *Anthem* is the precursor to Rand's major novels 'The Fountainhead' and 'Atlas shrugged' in the theme of intellectual freedom. All these novels present heroes of staunch loyalty to their independent judgment. They have free will and they make choices of their own. They are the persons who think and act by their own judgment.

Equality 7-2521 is one of such Rand's heroes. He was a free thinker living in the state of collectivism, almost as a slave. The state demanded blind obedience from its citizens, but he refused. Rand intended to present 'Anthem' as a devastating critique of collectivism. Here, she attempted to show the outcome of the ideals held by the communists, Fascists and their supporters. To them collectivism is the underlying principle. Society is given priority over the individual interests. An individual exists to serve the society. The citizens are mindless puppets who willingly obey the commands of the council.

The hero Equality 7-2521 also accepted the commands of the council because he was born and brought up in the collectivist society. His conscious mind accepted all the rules and regulations of the society but his sub conscious mind supported individualism. He secretly admired individualism without knowing what it was. He believed that the individuals had the right to think and to use their mind. He believed that a man had to choose what he should be. He loved to become a scientist and he wanted to pursue his carrier. But he was made as a street sweeper by the council. In fact, his teachers and the council knew his extraordinary intelligence.

It is clear that the society fears this intelligence. He was punished continuously. The council had decided to suppress this intellectual mind and so he was consigned to the work of sweeper. But Equality7-2521 proved that an intellectual mind cannot be stifled as such. He pursued his own interest secretly.

In this story, Equality 7-2521's independent mind finally lead him to discover the 'power of the sky'. Though he is forbidden, he secretly did his experiments in an accidently found dark tunnel. He also accepted the social judgment that to think and act alone is evil because he was brought up in a society like that. He knew that he would be executed if he was caught but his desire to know things, to understand universe, superseded all. Ultimately, he found the society as hostile but he was driven by his passion to know the earth. He possessed the soul and intellect of a great scientist and a creator.

Rand argues, by this kind of independent and intellectual individual, a society moves from ignorance to enlightenment. The basic need of the creator is independence. The reasoning mind...demands total independence in function and in motive. To a creator, all relations with men are secondary.(Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand 252)

Equality 7-2521, by being a free thinker is unconcerned the society's opinion or about the judgments of others. His free thinking and action continues in spite of the oppression of the society. When an innovator like Equality7-2521 is caught in a political dictatorship which prevents him to do his research to pursue his findings, then the creative mind is stifled. This is what happened in the life of many great thinkers. For example, Socrates was executed, Galileo was threatened with torture, Charles Darwin was damned, Henry Ford was mocked. Their findings are praised in due course of time but they were condemned in their society.

According to Rand, a mind must be left free to think and to act on its findings. And this, she presented as the theme of the story. In a free society, the original thinkers like Equality 7-2521 is free to experiment and research, to invent and innovate, and to make scientific breakthroughs and technological advances. That is why the world's freest countries have made so many scientific innovations and becomes a powerful nation. Science and progress require intellectual freedom.

There are, fundamentally, only two causes of the progress of the nineteenth century- one is psychological and the other is existential. The first is

reason, the second is freedom. (Philosophy:Who Needs It.90)

As the novel opens the narrator, Equality7-2521, was writing his diary. He knew that it is a punishable sin in his society, but he thought and wrote. He said, It is a sin to write this. It is a sin to think words no others think and to put them down upon a paper no others are to see. It is base and evil. (Anthem 1)

He was writing this in an underground tunnel which he found accidentally. He knew if he was discovered he would be sentenced to ten years in the palace of corrective detention. But he did not take it as a matter. He was twenty one years old and six feet tall. It was constantly pointed out by the leaders and his teachers. He began to think that he was born with a curse and he could not resist the forbidden thoughts of thinking and writing. According to their council all men must be alike and they should be one, big, happy, indivisible "We". They were not supposed to be alone and that was also a crime.

As he was different from others, he loved to know the science behind everything and wanted to know all about the world and its mysteries. So each night, he sneaked out of the fun time from the theatre and went down to the tunnel. He spent a couple of hours there. Again he went back to the theatre before anyone left it.

He began to steal everything he wanted from the Home of the street-sweepers. He also stole vials, powders, acids from the Home of scholars. He made strange metals and an oven of bricks. He began to steal manuscripts which were meant for the scholars. His conscious mind believed that it was an evil to do all this and he was the only transgressor who acted upon his wishes. But in his subconscious mind he felt greater peace to pursue his wishes and he had no shame over it.

The world council suppressed the individuals and they had no rights of their own. It was the governing body that set the policy to the whole world. From his five years, Equality 7-2521 in his Home of the students, had taken the resolution,

We are nothing. Mankind is all. By the grace of our brothers are we allowed our lives.

We exist through, by and for our brothers who are the state. Amen. (Anthem 9)

They were not allowed to speak of their past also. The world council deemed it as unmentionable times. In those days, the individuals had rights and political freedom. So speaking about those times was considered to be evil and punishable. Every individual was compelled to believe the Great truth that they were not individuals but mere fragments of the whole. They had to believe that individuality was unreal. These ideals were taught from the time of Great Rebirth. It was a period of dictatorship where individuals were compelled to live for their society. When an individual preferred to pursue his wish or if he took an independent judgment it was considered to be 'Transgression of preference'. They were not even allowed to have friendship. But Equality7-2521 had friendship with International 4-8818 who was also like him. International 4-8818 had interest in drawings and wished to go to the Home of the Artists. But every wish would be refused in this society and so he was in the Home of the street sweepers.

Ayn Rand here suggests the intention behind the dictators. They always prohibit the individuals to express their opinions because they are the expressions that make the collectivist ideas and its society dread. They know the truth if their ideals are scrutinized they cannot withstand in the society. Hence they suppress the individuals thinking and communication.

By mentioning the age as Dark Age, Rand promotes the idea that the dictatorship will lead any modern society to the dark ages again. They not only make the individuals to accept their rule but also make them surrender their mind. But Equality7-2521 did not surrender as such because he was an individualist. He sensed that a human being should be a free thinker and acted on his own consciousness. Rand here shows that commitment to one's self is fundamentally commitment to one's mind.

Again, we should notice that the intellectuals of the society were treated with hostility. The new ideas were suppressed and so the society regressed into a second Dark Age. But

whatever the society may be, an individualist lives his own life as Equality 7-2521. He noticed a young girl, Liberty5-3000 and began to love her. Men were forbidden to think of women. But he said that he could not think of anybody else.

Liberty5-3000 had been assigned to work in the soil and she was living in the Homes of the peasants beyond the city. There was great road ran from the city to the north and passed by the fields. There was a hedge between the road and the fields. It was the duty of the street sweepers to clean this road along the hedge. Women worked in the fields and there Equality 7-2521 saw her working along the furrows.

Their eyes were dark and hard and glowing, with no fear in them, no kindness and no guilt. Their hair was golden as the sun; their hair flew in the wind, shining and wild, as if it defied men to restrain it. They threw seeds from their hand as if they deigned to fling a scornful gift, and the earth was a beggar under their feet. (Anthem18)

For the first time in his life, Equality felt fear and pain. From that time on, he regularly noticed her and she also reciprocated it. They greeted each other with their eyes. But they dare not speak. He thought that this was a new sin, a second transgression of preference. He gave her a new name. He felt that she was not like others. Equality 7-2521 had already broken so many laws of his society. Now he again broke it, by thinking of Golden one, for men were not supposed to think of women except at the time of mating which was fixed by the Government. Children were born in winter, but women were not allowed to see their children and the children never knew their parents. Hence the hero considered sex as a shameful matter.

Rand constantly shows here even in a suppressive society like this, individuality is difficult to eradicate. No one can suppress individuality for it is man's intuitive feeling. Rand believes that individuals should be equal before the law, but they are altogether different from one another as individuals. They can make choices of their own. Many follow the rules of society and some follow their own decision. Rand believes that it is important for a society to revere individualism for its

betterment. It is a true value of human beings. Personal values cannot be measured. It depends on the individuals and on what they value. Here, Equality values science and so he pursues it. But his society stifles his freedom and does not allow him to pursue his things of personal value.

In due course of time, he discovered a new power of nature. He conceived the power would be gotten from the copper wire, in which it was hanging. Immediately, he put a piece of zinc and a piece of copper in a jar and joined it with a wire. He had found something miraculous. He named it as 'Power of the sky' – electricity.

Though he could not understand it, he began to study it. He studied the power of lightening. Men in his age did not know what caused lightening. He attempted to know this. Because of his relentless dedication to scientific knowledge he found out all these. He now realized that an independent mind was of great value that made the man capable of great achievements. If his realization was known to the world council it was held to be the cardinal sin in his society.

Yet, great achievers were often tormented or tortured in our history before they get recognition. The same thing happened in his life also. Even then they pursued their achievements not with a purpose to serve the humanity, but to satisfy their own thirst of knowledge, for their satisfaction. He did not know anything about the great inventions or inventors and their history. But now he recognized their feelings and understood the importance of individuality. It was for his individual satisfaction, for his selfishness, he did all these.

Ayn Rand dedicates a good part of her philosophy to explain this virtue of selfishness. Rand says Selfishness entails (a) a hierarchy of values set by the standard of one's self interest and (b) the refusal to sacrifice a higher value to a lower one or to a non-value. (The virtue of Selfishness 67)

Here, Equality 7-2521 found out individuality had higher value than the act of self sacrificing. If a man sacrificed his life to get freedom for his society, it was accepted as self sacrifice. But Rand says that there is selfishness in his act also. He

sacrifices his life for he is not willing to live as a slave in the society. Hence selfishness becomes a virtue.

The World Council in the name of the society suppressed the human intelligence for their selfishness. It was hidden behind every action of them. Equality 7-2521 and the Golden One proved an important theory of author's human nature – independent persons form values of their own not in the name of society. They both did not passively accept the beliefs of society. Both loved each other because they identified their virtues they possessed.

They both discovered the meaning of love. The society to which they belonged was devoid of the feeling love. Yet they discovered it because of their independent spirit. It was of personal value to them. They were not supposed to have their preference, but equality 7-2521 first valued his independent judgment, he valued his friendship with International 4-8818 who also had the same spirit but not so much stronger as him. He then valued the love of the Golden One in whose eyes he saw the reflection of free spiritedness. Only men and women who hold personal values are capable of loving. The author shows love is a result of personal values.

It took a number of nights for Equality 7-2521 to harness the power of electricity which he re-invented. He did not understand what he had created. He decided to present it to the World Council of Scholars; he wished that this secret should not be buried with him. The World Council of Scholars was having a meeting in their city. They met once a year in the different cities of the earth. He decided to confess everything and gave them his present. He thought he would be forgiven and would be assigned to the Home of the Scholars. Until then, he should keep this as secret. He was so proud of the accomplishment. For the first time in his life he knew the feeling of pride. This sense of pride brought him a self love. Again for the first time in his life, he wanted to see his own face and he wondered how it looked like with the sense of pride. It was a sin in their society to be conscious of their body and they should not ask above this to their brothers also.

On reaching his own values this pride engulfed him. He thought that it was a great boon

to the society. Here, the author brings it forth that the discovery is made not for the cause of the society but for his personal values. The author emphasizes that the motivating factor of any creative work is purely personal not social. They are motivated only by the love of their work. Equality 7-2521 wondered how to make it clear that he was solely responsible for this creation. But everyone said,

We made it. We created it. We brought it forth from the night of the ages. We alone. Our hands. Our mind. Ours' alone and only. (Anthem 30)

The word 'we' did not express his sense of pride. He now realized that this word did not accomplish his feelings. He understood that the word 'we' would not be enough but he struggled to reach the word individuality – a word that lost and clearly a sacred and unspeakable word. It was clear that the hero moved one step further to realize the importance of individuality. He was ready to prove his individuality before his society. He thought that this was the greatest gift and so all his sin would be forgiven.

He was caught before presenting it to the Council. He was imprisoned in a cell for many days. He waited for the day when the World Council of Scholars gathered. On that day before he escaped from the prison. It was very easy to him for the locks were old and rusted and there were no guards anywhere in the Palace of Corrective Detention. It is to be noted that there are no guards in the prison for the society is so successful in inculcating obedience in the minds of the people. It is far from imagination that an individual is ready to disobey the council. There was no need before to implement a systematic vigilance. It never comes to their mind that an individual can think of his own apart from the rules of the council. But it happens because of the actions of Equality 7-2521.

The next day he went to the Home of the Scholars where the World Council of Scholars was in meeting. Equality introduced himself. It seemed to them a great blunder and they were all angry. Equality explained that he or his transgressions was not a matter then. He brought them a great gift and said he held the future of mankind in his hands.

Then he kept it in the table and began to explain about that. He talked about his long quest, his tunnel, his experiments and his escape from the palace of corrective detention. He put the wires to the box and the light glowed. Everybody was terrified at the sight. They ran and huddled together because of fear. Equality said that the power was tamed and said,

We give you the power of the sky. We give you the key to the earth! Take it and let us be one of you, the humblest among you. Let us work together, and harness this power, and make it ease the toil of men. Let us throw away our candles and our torches. Let us flood our cities with light. Let us bring a new light to men. (Anthem 36)

They declared that the box was useless. They said many scholars had strange ideas about that power but when their brother scholars voted against that, they had abandoned their ideas. They were bound by the laws. They said if the invention was recognized, it would be a ruin to the department of candles. The candle was an invention of collective society. Hence it should not be ruined. Clearly, they knew the benefits of the light invented by Equality. But they were not ready to accept it. They wanted to believe that the candle was the great invention.

Again an individual like Equality posed threat to the collective society. If this was accepted many others might emerge like him. They would begin to think and they would question about the society, would talk about the humanity etc., and this would be a great danger to the society. So the scholars decided to break the box of light.

Equality 7-2521 realized their intention and seized the box. He called them 'damned fools' and broke the window and escaped from there. He ran aimlessly until he reached the unchartered forest. For the first time in his life, he knew the strength of his body. He entered the forest further by cutting the branches of trees with great strength.

It was again a great feeling when he beat and caught a bird and cooked it for himself. The food that he obtained by his own gave him a great satisfaction. It gave him a sense of pride also. He wanted to be hungry again to have that feeling again. When he bent down to drink water and he

saw his reflection in it. His breath stopped for he seemed to be beautiful. He felt that his face was not like the face of his brothers. Whenever he saw his brothers' face, he had a feeling of pity. But there he felt no pity when he saw his own face. His face was different from that of his brothers. He had a sense of confidence in his face rather than the sense of gloominess in his brothers' face. His strength was not known to him for he utilized it never. He was limited to sweeping only. Now it was very pleasurable for him to know his ability. He could climb the trees, hunted his own food. It was a kind of exploration that he found out his own capabilities. Physically he travelled a long distance inside the forest. At the same time the path of his travel lead him towards self discovery.

It is to be noted here that Rand emphasis the heroic potentiality of human beings. She believed that the circumstances made a man heroic. Especially, a man like Equality who is ready to face all the dangers is highly heroic. Rand insists rationalism of human beings who use their rationality to learn things. Rationality leads men to perfection. Equality's rational mind began to doubt the rules of the society because what he now learned contradicted everything that he had already learnt. It was the first step of Equality to know about Individuality and Individualism consciously. Though he was an individualistic, he felt it in his sub conscious mind only. His conscious mind struggled to accept his concepts and ideals because of the indoctrination of his society. Initially he felt for the transgression of rules of his society. Then gradually he came to know the fact that his society had a wrong root in its concepts. He was happy then that he was not one among the faceless masses of brothers. He believed that he was an individual aloof from them. He was now completely free from the chains of his society. He did not have any regret for quitting his society and his brothers. In fact, he was so happy that he had been damned from the society.

On his second day in the forest, he saw the white tunic and a gleam of gold. It was the Golden One. In his joy he leaped to his feet and ran towards her. They could not speak and finally she said that

she had found him. There was a triumphant joy in her voice.

Here, the character of the heroine and her intense personality is expressed by Ayn Rand. She insisted that an individual man would be different from that of others. The Golden One said, Your eyes are as a flame, but our brothers have neither hope nor fire. Your mouth is cut of granite, but our brothers are soft and humble. Your head is high, but our brothers cringe. You walk, but our brothers' crawl. We wish to be damned with you, rather than be blessed with all our brothers. Do as you please with us, but do not send us away from you. (Anthem 43)

That was the stunning difference noticed by the Golden One. It was this difference that made her love Equality. In fact, Equality was also attracted towards her because of the difference in her. She had the courage to take decision against her society. When her society denied her even a look at man, she began to love a man. This was unconceivable for a woman in her society. She was such an individualist who had her own conception. Once she knew that Equality escaped to the forest, she had the courage to follow him. She knew that if she was caught she would be severely punished. Even then she did not want to give up her love. This showed her stubbornness. She was ready to face whatever might be the consequences. According to Rand, this stubbornness and the courage is the basic characteristic trait for any individualist.

They found a house there among the mountains. On seeing the house, they realized that it was a house from Unmentionable Time. They entered the house and were surprised. They had never seen a small house because they lived in masses. The rooms were full of light and there were large pieces of glass. Again, it was a surprise to them because this glass reflected their image as clear as in the stream. When they entered the sleeping hall, they stood in awe. The room had only two beds. It was unimaginable for them to build a house for two. They were perplexed about what kind of life the unmentionable times people had. There were manuscripts in a room. He glanced through it and decided to read the manuscripts from

the next day. He had a sense of satisfaction and he felt that in the Golden One too.

The discovery of this house is significant because it will answer their unending quest. He knew that even basic knowledge was prohibited in his society and so the basic tenets of the nature were unconceivable to him. He also knew that the men of unmentionable times attained a lot of knowledge. He assumed that they conquered and tamed nature and its power. Actually, they wanted to create a world like this and accidentally they found the remnants of the past that made their work easy. The books in the house would provide the knowledge about unmentionable times. Knowing about the past times is not just their wish it is their life. It is knowing about living. The secrets of those times would give him understanding of nature as well as the moral and philosophical understanding of human kind. He pursued to understand human nature and his relationship to earth. He felt that the nature was waiting for him to reveal the secrets.

He was ready to learn whatever the secrets were, whether it might be good or evil. But there was no fear about any evils in his heart. He had a serene reverence and calm in his mind. He wondered about the secret and began to read the manuscripts. As per his expectations, he found the secret. He found answers to all his baffling questions. He said

I am. I think. I will. My hands... My spirit... My sky... My forest... This earth of mine... What must I say besides? There are the words. This is the answer. (Anthem 50)

This shows he understands the individualistic philosophy behind the word 'I'. He had already known the importance of individualism but by learning this word he had a conceptual understanding of individualism. This very word showed him the meaning of his own philosophical ideas. He always had it in his mind but it was baffling. Now the words he learnt explain and validate his ideas.

Again, a significant realization in his life, that he found, This, my body and spirit, this is the end of the quest. I wished to know the meaning of things. I am the meaning. I wished to find a warrant

for being. I am the warrant and the sanction. (Anthem 50)

Through this realization, Rand exhibits the core tenets of her philosophy. Equality began to understand the nature of his existence. He did not care whether the earth is the core of the universe, or a speck of dust lost in eternity. He cared only for his happiness. He found it was not the means to any end. Happiness was the end and goal. He would not be a tool for other's use. He would not be a servant of other's needs and he would not be a sacrifice on their altars. He would not surrender his treasures and share them. He considered the freedom as the greatest. There was nothing to give his brothers. Even his love, he would not give them without reasons. "I honor men with my love. But honor is a thing to be earned". (Anthem.51)

He thought it was by the word 'We' the depraved steal the virtue of the good and the weak steal the virtue of the strong. He wondered,

What is my joy if all hands, even the unclean, can reach into it? What is my wisdom, if even the fools can dictate to me? What is my freedom, if all creatures, even the botched and impotent, are my masters? What is my life, if I am but to bow, to agree, and to obey. (Anthem 51)

But he was satisfied that he escaped from the world of 'we' the word of serfdom, of plunder, of misery, falsehood and shame. He was very much happy about finding the God who will grant joy, peace and pride and that is the word "I".

Through all these findings, he became clear. So far, though he was rebellious against his society, he believed what he did was transgression for which he had to be punished. But now he had realized that all he had done was not wrong. The vocabulary he had found from the books of unmentionable times gave him a full comprehension of his emotions. He believed that an individual should live as an individual not as a subordinate of a group. Now that belief was concretized by the reading. His basic philosophy which seemed so much confused became clear. He conceived that a society could be formed by the human beings but that society should authenticate the sovereign right of every individual.

When the society denies an individual his basic rights then it will be slavery. Nobody should be a slave to the society. All are equal contributors of the society. The members in the society should respect each other's rights. Every individual has distinctive character. According to their characters, the individual is capable of love and friendship. These feelings are reciprocated and it is only preferential. These types of relationships are purely personal and have its own values. These emotions come out of individuals towards other individuals not out of groups towards the other group. When the love is extended to their work, they are willing to work longer and harder. Then the society will reach its full glory.

Rand's theory of 'egoism' is well defined in the findings of Equality. He discovered the word 'I' that satisfied his self and that is the root word of 'ego'. Rand stresses the freedom of individuals, their happiness as the purpose of his actions, their enjoyment of the benefits of their own actions. She also stresses that an individual should exist for himself not to sacrifice his self for others. And this theory of egoism is attained by Equality by reading the books of unmentionable times. Rand calls this as 'rational egoism'. An individual should not victimize others to make himself happy. When this happiness is reached by his hard work and honest effort, they can attain a fulfillment. His efforts will become meaningful and bring joy into his life. If he works for others, however fruitful it may be, he will not drive any satisfaction. He should be the beneficiary of his own work, then the work flourish and happiness blooms.

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