



THEMES IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF MULKRAJ ANAND

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ABSTRACT

The most significant event in the history of Indian fiction in the 1930s was the appearance on the scene of its major trio, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Mulk Raj Anand, the eldest of the three has been the most prolific. He derives his fervent socialist faith and his vision of a modern egalitarian society. In this paper, I have taken his five selected Novels- Untouchable, Coolie, Two Leaves and a Bud, The Big Heart and The Road which forms a fictional chronicle in which he eclectic humanism and his humanitarian compassion for the underdog or persistent themes and motifs.

Keywords: Casteism, confrontation, culminate, exploitation, hypocrisy, humiliation, identity and modernity

INTRODUCTION

The Motto of Mulkraj Anand's novels which portrayed different characters. The essence of literature is to attain immortality with a strong base of humanism. So an artist or scholar can build a citadel of peace and beauty upon this earth by skilfully blending the literary values and human values together with invisible thread of love (towards man and woman). So Anand is called an exuberant novelist as he fulfilled this mission through his literature.

Which stand as symbolic figures representing various social evils like casteism, class conflicts, religions bigotry and hypocrisy, exploitation of the poor by the rich, persistent popular superstitions, confrontation between tradition and modernity, quest for identity, search for freedom etc everlasting features in the Indian society. Therefore the recurrent themes of Anand

have attracted the attention of the readers for critical analysis and comment and find a prominent place in every critical study of his novels.

Literature in general and novel in particular fulfil a dual duty of reflecting and shaping the society at the same time. Mulkraj Anand a laureate by humanity presents a photographic picture of the society showing as it is and as a social reformer shows the seeds of humanism for the betterment of the society. Thus Anand becomes the first Indo-Anglian Novelist to give new and contemporary themes – the socio-economic problem confronting the under dogs of the Indian society. So he derives themes not only from his memory of the past but also from the topical events of his time.

Anand brings to limelight the problem of the pariahs and the underdogs rather than the elect and sophisticated into the realm of fiction and thus ventured into a territory that had been largely

ignored till then by Indian writers (Iyengar p.333). As a true artist Mulraj Anand holds mirror upto nature as a result of which his novels vividly reflect the pressures and perplexities of the society and time. As a non-believer of the principle 'art for art's sake' Anand had a different but strongly view of fiction. The present study affirms that Anand's sympathy lies with the poor because of his unpolluted love for them.

1.Untouchability – A Touchstone to Humanity

The caste system is an indigenous phenomenon in India but the class system has universal dimensions. Anand finds the stratification of society on the basis of caste system. He tries to create in the readers an urgent awareness. *Untouchable* is a scathing indictment of Hindu society and irony is the weapon of this indictment.

'*Untouchable*' is unique in several aspects Anand select a particular untouchable boy Bakha as the protagonist of *untouchable* and selectively narrates certain incidents that happen to him in a day's span and suggests the impact they have an effecting a gradual growth of the boy's personality and producing in him an acute awareness of his low social status and the possible way out of the situation. The character of Bakha also illustrates Anand's concept of work as worship, his belief in dignity of labour and the importance of developing man's personality as a whole. Infact, Bakha's day down to the harsh tone of his father's abuses intended to whip him upto work. He is officially in-charge of the three rows of public latrines of the colony. He occupies the centre of the stage throughout the novel.

Bakha declines the offer of Christian compassion as a solution to his predicament. He understands the statement of missionary is that Christ 'sacrificed himself to help us all for the rich and the poor, for Brahmin and the Bhaugi'. Bakha is impressed by the Gandhij's speech and the thought that Gandhi is on their side, strength comes to his demoralized soul. The Mahatma seems to have touched the most intimate corners of Bakha's soul and the young man is spell bound. So it is not surprising that Bakha stands head and shoulders above as very epitome of human qualities. The cherished dream of Anand and the purpose of novel

is filled by the untouchability act of 1955 was passed by the Government of India.

2.Cooile – The Childhood - Oppression

'Munoo' is the child-hero of *collie* who is cruelly victimized and forced to suffer mainly because of wicked propensities of the adult world the protagonist Munoo, is an orphan moves from place to place from the village to the town, from the town to the city and then to the mountains through a video vision of the varied scenes and sights of India, in search of livelihood driven by hunger, till he finally meets with his doom. The adventures are presented in a picaresque manner; the orphan boy is not a rogue but the victim of world's rogueries. The chain of incidents is joined together keeping Munoo as its unifying figure. It succeeds in rousing the reader's humane feeling for the poor and the oppressed

The novel portrays the trials, tribulations and humiliation of Munoo, an orphaned boy of fourteen. In its inclusiveness and suggestiveness the one-word title chosen for the novel is comparable to the title of *untouchable*. Poverty which gives birth to exploitation is the root cause of Manoo's tragedy. Even in search for bread to him in a world where poor man's flesh and blood is treated as cheaper than bread, makes him restless and forces him move from place to place and finally fall into the clutches of death. Munoo is made to pass through diverse situations, as a domestic servant in an urban middle class family of Nathoo Ram in Sham Nagar, as a child labourer in a small pickle factory and as a coolie struggling for work in the city market in Daulatpur, as a worker in a cotton mill in Bombay and as a rickshaw puller in Shimla.

Coolie portrays the tribulations of coolies in a class-ridden society. In Bombay poverty and hunger are to be witness on an even larger dimension. At Sir George White's cotton mills – the unscientific working conditions the wicked creditors the tyrannical foreman treat the Indian labourers like animals. Coolie takes us a guided tour of India where we come into contact with the people who have plenty of appetite but no food to eat as well as people who have plenty of food who have no appetite; the rich who are restless on their Dunlop beds as well as the wretched ones who enjoy peaceful sleep on the bed of stone slap and pillow of

brick, causing shock to innocents like Munoo. Anand has best given his motto of every man to change the in human pattern of society.

3.The Big Heart – Tradition verses Modernity

Caste Discrimination is the main subject in 'The Big heart'. Anand Projectsthe conflict between the old and the new, between tradition and modernity. One of the major forms it takes is the replacement of man with money as the measure of reality is achieved at the cost of dignity of man. The industrial mechanization certainly tilts the balance and leads to disequilibrium in Indian society. The capitalist mechanism, no doubt, causes ruptures in human relations. In 'The Big Heart' which is about the coppersmiths, Anand does not concern himself with the relations between the high castes and outcast, but with those among members of a particular high caste. Two Sub-castes have emerged among the Coppersmiths, namely the Thathiars who are makers of utensils and the Kaseras who sell those utensils in the bazaar. The Thathiars are looked down upon as low and inferior by Kaseras.

The sense of caste superiority is a burden inherited from the past for several generations so that even a well-meaning man like Gokul Chand, who is the headman of Kaseras is not able to free himself from it. Ananta, a Thathiar be moans the lot of his sub-caste. He tells Janaki, "we Thathians live in a small world, full of denial and refusal insults and humiliations; we have begun to feel doomed" (p.142). Lalla Murali Dhar Thathiar earned a lot and attained a position in society so they now enjoy in the eyes of the world the same class status as Gokul Chand of the Kaseras. Murali Dhar's invitation to attend the betrothal ceremony places his partner Gokul Chand an embracing predicament, although he is not as much hardened as the other in his caste prejudice. It is obvious that the profit motive of a businessman, who has to be called a capitalist, is behind his liaison with Murali Dhar Gokul Chand replies to Seth Gansyam Das that the world has changed – we sit together with people of high caste and low caste in the trains – we walk on roads swept by Bhaugis. When then is our religion we ought to shrug our shoulders at the slight distinction that there is between us and the more well to do respectable Thathiars like Murali Dhar and gladly accept then as equals (p.187).

'The Big Heart' has been praised of course justly for the many attractive things it has. Naik regards the novel as a notable achievement of Anand for giving us his 'best realized hero' Anand takes a balanced view of several issues. He recognizes for instance, that there can be capitalists who are humane and who do have the welfare of the workers at heart, even though capitalism thrives on the exploitation of labour.

4.The Road – Paved a path of illumination among Untouchability

The era of 'The Road' is not very different from the social milieu of untouchable. The law of the land has not influenced the attitude of the society. As in untouchable, so in this novel we find the caste Hindus ill-treating their outcast brother. They are not allowed to come into physical contact with the 'twice-born' or permitted to enter the temple for coming into contact with the God of all. Just like in untouchable, in the Road also Anand introduces a lecherous and hypocritical priest. The Road (1961) was based on an actual incident.

The enchanted mirror, Anand created 'The Road'. It has a story and plot. The scene of action is in the village, Surajpur. There is a conflict between the caste Hindus and the Untouchables of the village, over an approach road being built to connect the village to the main highway, which would enable the villages to transport easily the milk they produce to the city, and help them to become economically prosperous. The road building is one of the schemes initiated by the government to improve rural economy. The Caste Hindus, led by Sarpanch Thakur Singh oppose the construction of the road because it is being built by Bhiku and other untouchable young men and even refuse to touch the stones broken by them. The issue becomes complicated as Lambarder Dhooli Singh, though of the upper caste aligns himself with the untouchables, becomes the source of inspiration for the young untouchables. The conflict becomes a feud resulting on Thakur Singh's son Sajnu and Dhooli Singh's son Lachman burning down the huts of the untouchables to whom Dhooli Singh provides shelter on his own land Lachman joins his father after sometime and his friend Sajnu also regrets and fights at the side of untouchables. The bitter conflict between the two groups comes to end with the confident hope that one day Rukmani

daughter of Thakur Singh would marry Lachman, and that Mala daughter of Dhooli Singh would marry Sajnu. When the road is clearly built, Bhiku who has to be regarded as the protagonist of this novel, walks out of the village because he is insulted and slapped by the belligerent Sajnu and makes his way towards distant Delhi, where, he hopes, there would not be any discrimination in the name of castes and outcasts.

Thus 'The Road' is an extension of 'untouchable' apart from the thematic similarity incidents, situation and characters. If untouchable is a novel of struggle, 'The Road' is a novel of achievement. The construction of the road despite obstructions is nothing but an optimistic approach towards the eradication for the evil untouchability. For its more profound thought, content, action and humanism 'The Road' is certainly one of the Anand's finest works.

5. Two leaves and A Bud

This title in reality stands in sharp contrast to the tragic clash and destinies between the Indian Coolies and the British master and their sycophants. It is also symbolic of the coolies who are also as defenceless as the leaves and the bud that can easily be plucked and crushed. And this defencelessness makes them a pray to the tyranny of power, greed and exploitation under the British colonial rule. The central theme of the novel is the exposition of the ill-treatment of thousands of wretched labourers at the hands of a handful, selfish and arrogant British planters and their sycophants on large tea estates in the thick hill forest area of Assam.

'Two leaves and a Bud' is essentially a dramatic novel that culminates in a tragic clash of interest of destinies where in what is bright is just out and what is dark triumphs. Anand's novels particularly the early ones, present the eternal clash between the opposites, his character usually fall under two categories, namely the rulers and the ruled, the exploiters and the exploited, the oppression and the oppressed. Hence, he adds a third category called, 'Social commentators' who stand for liberty, equality and fraternity. Croft-cooke, the merciless manager of the plantation, the arrogant and lusty Reggie Hint, his deputy manager and Berbar, represent British imperialistic exploiters. Both the British and Indian exploiters nurture the

same. Pre-justice against the Indian coolies and their utterances contribute to the East-west tension in the novel. The Indian sycophant Subordinates are no less in their exploitative measures mercy, compassion and human qualities in the heart of the honey tongued villain Buta Ram are conspicuous by their absence, for a handful of silver he becomes an accomplice in the crime of exploitation of oppression by trapping his own-fellow men in the incapable same of death. Babu Shastri Bhushan Battacharya is another Indian who joins hand with Buta Ram. His heartless and unsympathetic nature is exposed when he demands the commission from Ganga.

The author's social criticism on the evils of capitalism presented through Narain is free from artificiality and it has no enervating effect on the novel. Anand portrays Narain convincingly but he does not provide enough flesh and blood to John de la Havrea and Barbara. They are robots operated by the author. They are given extreme benevolence as if to strike a balance with the extreme malevolence given to the British plants. The portraying of English characters in his novel is a sign that he has undermined the credibility of his characterization. Anand's own confession given in the 'preface' to the second edition is an evidence to his characterization i.e. "I confess that as I got into the book I was biased in favour of my Indian characters and tended to caricature the English men and English women who play such a vital part in this book".

Anand satirizes the capitalist concept of looking at the poor workers as mere tools or worse even as beasts of burden and using them as economic units for their own selfish ends. However his artistic control slackens, particularly in two leaves and a Bud, because of the intrusion of his ideological preoccupations though he appears as a writer with an axe to grind the social evils.

SUMMATION:

In summing up Anand's thematic concerns as shown in his first/three novels i.e. untouchable coolie, two leaves and a Bud, the Road, the villages is no doubt a disclosure of a fact that literary works have the power to move the world to compassion and kindness. He is able to bring new matter, new style, new technique, and new attitudes to Indo-English fiction. He modernized the Indian novel by

his creation of protagonists from the pariahs and the under-dogs who had not been allowed to enter the sacred precincts of the novel. His interpretation of India is based on realism as his protagonists are based on real characters with whom he freely mixed for play and friendship, paying no attention to their caste, class or creed.

The first malpractice Anand has attacked as a social critic is the caste system, which in the words of Raja Ram Mohan Roy is, "the supreme root of all our social evils" and it is presented through the painful experiences within a single day in the life of an untouchable boy, Bakha.

Anand's second and third novels 'Coolie', 'Two leaves and a Bud' are directed towards the evils of class system which is a greater evil than caste system. Coolie is a novel of the poor and the down trodden, the misery of poverty is presented through an orphan boy. Two leaves and a Bud gives expression to the unending anguish of tea plantation labourers under extremely selfish British masters who treat the male folk among the labourers as bonded slaves and their women and daughters as objects of sexual gratification. The novel is a powerful crusade against imperialism and capitalistic exploitation. Anand pleads in 'The Big Heart' for industrialisation with caution. The protagonist of the novel 'Ananta' is modelled as the author's 'real life application' that helps him to bring out the protagonist's perfections and imperfections. The theme of tradition versus modernity which forms a cultural conflict in the novel is convincingly portrayed.

Anand has felt concerned with all those countless millions of Indian society who have been oppressed, repressed, dispossessed, disinherited, defrauded, downtrodden, discriminated and dehumanized in the name of caste, class, religion race etc in all his novels. He stresses the need for a humanistic approach to life. His novels expose the silent passions that burst in the hearts of the people who are forbidden to rise up and express themselves. His aim is to evoke generosity and compassion in the minds of the privileged sections of society.

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