

Mulk Raj Anand and Gandhian thoughts

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Abstract

M.R. Anand was very much influenced by Gandhiji. This paper reveals the thoughts of Gandhiji is scattered in Novels of M.R. Anand. His first novel is based on Untouchability which was affected the roots of Indian society since long times. Its eradication was the prime motto of Gandhiji. We can see M.R. Anand seems to stand with him in every aspect. Anand's literary career is moving with thoughts of Gandhiji. He was the shadow of Gandhian thought. Present Paper revealed the feeling of Gandhiji is the approach of M.R. Anand. Both have the empathy towards downtrodden. Both have similarities of thoughts and actions. Gandhiji has such powerful thought. Which transformed freedom into realities. India's freedom movement was one of those cataclysmic acts that have influenced every walk of life including depiction in literary forms.

Keywords: Gandhiji, freedom, idea, action, humanism, downtrodden

Introduction

According to M K. Naik, "The winds of change blowing steadily across the Indian subcontinent during more than a half-century after the Great Revolt of 1857 had left tell-tale marks on the political and social geography of the country. The end of World War II - a watershed in European history - proved to be an equally significant period in Indian life, when the Gandhian whirlwind began to sweep over the length and the breadth of the land, upsetting all established political strategies and whispering in refreshingly new ideas and methods which shook Indian life in several spheres to the core. As Nehru puts it, Gandhi was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take a deep breath ^[1]."

Gandhi returned to India in 1915 from his successful campaigns in South Africa. In 1919 agitation against the Rowlatt Bills led to the Jalliallala Bagh massacre which would always remain a black blot on the British Government. By this time Gandhi's leadership had already assumed all-India character, and it was symbolic of the fact that age had ended and another era dawned. Soon after the Jallianwala tragedy, Gandhi launched his first countrywide Non-Cooperation campaign. This Gandhian movement resulted in an unprecedented awakening, the most important feature of which was that it had converted Indian nationalism from a middle-class movement to a people's emotion which initiated the people into a new faith and new hope and inspired them with a new power to fight for freedom.

Ten years later Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience Movement In 1930, which differed from the earlier Non-Cooperation movement substantially, though the goal remained the same. While the first was passively revolutionary the new one became actively revolutionary. Among these acts, the one that captured the imagination of the people most was the illegal making of salt. Gandhi's twenty-four-day march from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi, to break the salt laws in March 1930 electrified the entire civilized world. Another decade later the third and last *Satyagraha* campaign of 1940 which, after the historic

'Quit India' Resolution of August 1942 led to violent underground revolutionary activity. Soon Gandhi and his trusted lieutenants were put in jails. Soon after the end of World War II, the political leadership proposed to Britain to leave India for good.

The entire period of nearly three decades of the Gandhian Age was one of the far-reaching changes not only in the political scene but in practically all walks of Indian life. "It is now generally accepted that Gandhian thought made a deep and abiding impact in a variety of ways on the creative writers of India: during the thirties and forties and that and it continues to influence some of the significant Indian writers even today" ^[2]. He sense in which Gandhian thought is used here is inseparable from Gandhi the person, public leader, and religious reformer. There can be no rigid line of demarcation between Gandhi and his thought, particularly when it is an action-oriented thought Gandhi was not a thinker in the abstract sense of the term. His thought is the product of the challenging social and political situations. Indian novel in English is a product of this great influence: "Indian novel in English is no doubt the product of the cultural and national awakening which had its origins in the nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance. The Western-educated intelligentsia, the product of Western liberal education in Indian and English universities heralded the democratic consciousness ^[3]."

In the twenties, the Renaissance spread beyond the borders of Bengal and acquired an all-India character. It created a national consciousness, which began to find larger meaning in disparate social activities in different regions of the country.

Gandhi was not a creative writer himself but a great creative thinker. Literature was not his field of interest. He has described his relationship to art in these words: "I can make no literary pretensions. My acquaintance with Gujarati and for that matter any literature is for no fault of mine, next to nothing." But the inspiration and influence that his ideas exercised on Indian novelists are of immense importance. His thoughts unleashed intellectual and moral passions and introduced a new mode of thinking. The process of this

influence on novelists is manifested in their deeper sense of changing social and political situation in India.

Gandhi's belief in the unity of human life implied that all problems, social, political, economic, educational, and personal, are intertwined and have to be seen as a complex whole. The novelists of this period were deeply stirred by the vast upheavals beginning to take place in Indian society. The characteristics of these two decades are reflected in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand. His novels of this period also illustrate the fusion of the personal, the intellectual, and the social that the Gandhian thought effected. According to Albert Schweitzer, "Gandhi brings the idea of the activity and the idea of world and life-negation into a relationship in such a way that he can regard activity in the world as the highest form of communication of the world"^[4].

The uniqueness of Gandhian thought lies in the fact that it derives from an interaction between his ideas and actions. It is in a constant process of growth in which ideas are sustained by action and action gets modified in the light of the experience gained.

The sole object of Gandhi's main movement was to arouse an all-India consciousness, the first requisite of the growth of national identity. It is this aspect of Gandhian thought that had an immediate appeal for the Indian novelists in English. By practicing his ideas through these movements Gandhi showed that India was culturally united and possessed one consciousness. Moreover, though these movements that resulted in the main upsurge of a people, certain aspects of Indian society and culture were revealed to the novelists. It is significant to note that in conducting these movements Gandhi functioned as a link between various classes of Indian society. In the creation of this all-India consciousness, the English language played a vital role. Inevitably, in a variety of ways and a small or large measure. Novelists in English were influenced by Gandhian thought'. It answered their emotional need to seek national identity in their creative writing.

There are many ways in which the work of Mulk Raj Anand can be approached and estimated. Its importance in the development of Indian culture is its most obvious aspect, but it has an equally important place in world literature. For the first time in his work, India is defined on a grand scale. No doubt Indian life and culture are so vast and various that no one could deal with all the aspects and complexities. But Anand tackles the fundamental aspects of the Indian situation and sets these on a broad canvas and builds up a real and authentic picture of Indian society. No doubt, contemporary literature is a mirror of society. Naturally social evils, political waves, religious rigidity, economic scarcity, personal and impersonal relationships, delineation of the conditions of women are seriously engaged in the act of Anand's creative writing.

The movement was of unprecedented awakening in the condition of women, who responded whole-heartedly to Gandhi's call. This was something unique in the entire history of India to this day. The spectacle of hundreds of women taking part in political mass movements was something unique. The rise of the strong youth movement was another notable result of the Gandhian movement. Religious reform movements like the Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj made a plea for equal rights to the untouchables. "The caste system", Swami Vivekananda said, is opposed to the religion of the Vedanta. Caste is a social custom and all our great preachers have tried to break

it down. From Buddhism downwards, every sect has preached against caste, and every time it has only riveted and chains."⁵ The social evil that Anand first attacked was casteism. *Untouchable* is the result of this attack.

Mulk Raj Anand also dreamt of female liberty. *Gauri* is the result of this dream of Anand. The social life in India has traditionally been controlled and conditioned by men and the customary laws framed by men for their selfish ends have still been in prominence. As such women are granted an inferior status. Women are often subjected to endless torture by the pleasure seeking and selfish husbands, the merciless mothers-in-law, and nagging sisters-in-law. Anand the champion of the downtrodden, outcastes, waifs, and women has attempted to delineate their conditions and attempt improvement in them. In *Gauri* Anand champions the cause of women most extensively. It is his only novel in which the chief protagonist is a woman; all others are male-oriented.

In the economic sphere, the period of World War-I saw the rapid development of Indian industries, and soon after the Russian Revolution, Marxist ideas reached India. The freedom movement was to the Indian writers, including Indian writers in English, what resistance was the writers of France during World War-II. The inspiration of the movement produced an urge for unity and a sense of purpose for the common cause of freedom. However, this movement, essentially nationalistic, was gradual to be transformed into an inspirational, universal, humanistic freedom of man. The transformation took place under the dynamic and inspiring leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Karl Marx, a lover of humanity and a terrible opponent of social injustice in all forms, stressed the role of economics in man's exploitation and enslavement. He raised the slogan and banner of socialism. Mahatma Gandhi, a great patriot, and even great humanist and avid humanist, fought for a better future for his people and all mankind. Karl Marx and Mahatma Gandhi were highly dissatisfied with the existing system and they felt the need for a quick transformation. The existing social-economic order causes frustration and Gandhi longs for a class-less society. Man suffers from self-alienation. Gandhi wanted to transform the state of self-alienation into a state of self-realization. Marxism is based on an economic foundation while Gandhism is rooted in moral structure. Gandhi and Marx were two outstanding personalities who influenced Anand profoundly and his *Untouchable* remains an outstanding result of the confluence of these two streams.

The complex problem that confronts India is the caste system. According to Karl Marx, the working class has been reduced to penury because of capitalist exploitation. He wanted a total revolution to bring to an end of this condition. Mulk Raj Anand recognized the role of the working class in building a strong and united India. For centuries they have been working silently without whining; they sink lower and lower every day even to the level when they are denied the title of human beings. Anand felt that people wanted to justify all evils in Hindu society, like untouchability to this karma theory. Karl Marx believed that "religion is an illusion"; its unscientific and baseless. It is sought to offer some comfort to the afflicted and suffering. The advancement in scientific knowledge and technical skill has created an atmosphere that led to the ruin of man and his afflictions. Man is made to realize his potentiality. This is the essence of the Marxist religion.

According to Mulk Raj Anand, love is the root of religion. Man cannot think about the attainment of happiness and immortality hereafter but he has to think about it here itself. He can find real and absolute happiness in this very existence. Priests stand as middlemen between the worshipper and the worshipped. They create a gap between God and his worshippers, which becomes a cause of exploitation. When Bakha in *Untouchable* of Mulk Raj Anand, reaches the temple to have a *darshan* of God he is shocked to hear the words 'polluted, polluted.' What Anand wanted to preach to the people was not weakening piety but life-giving strength, which is an embodiment of love. The aim of religion must be the welfare of humanity. In this aspect, Mulk Raj Anand and Karl Marx come very close to each other's thinking. Anand believes that religion is love and religion is understanding. As a humanist Mulk Raj Anand deals with how a man can be changed and how can he be relieved of his evils. Some persons in his novels are religious. But they are rich and usually belong to the upper class, which is full of kindness and humanity.

Karl Marx, Mahatma Gandhi, and Mulk Raj Anand were committed to the cause of the downtrodden. Marx was an inveterate fighter and so were Gandhi and Anand. Philosophy was based on the concept of the struggle for existence, class war- 'expropriators must be expropriated' - and the concept of the survival of the fittest. He gave a revolutionary gospel to the poor and downtrodden to change the course of history. His call is supposed to be an open incitement to violent revolution to destroy the existing social order and the destruction of all that he conceived as wrong and unjust. Mulk Raj Anand's aim is the same. He, too, wants the destruction of social order but through the weapon of non-violence, which was also the call of Gandhi. Anand's concepts of 'man' and 'alienation' bring him closer to Gandhi. In many theories, Anand is similar to Marx. The transformation of the world was the sole aim of Marx, Gandhi, and Anand. His novel *Untouchable* seems to be a synthesis of these two modern 'isms.' Although Mulk Raj Anand was influenced by Marxian philosophy he was not a Communist at heart.

He pointed out: I am not a Communist. I am a friend of all. I have my own independent opinion and it is no fault of mine if the present rulers of India think that anyone who does not belong to their group is their enemy. I have differences with the Communists and if even I had any intention of taking an active part in politics, I could have joined any political organization I do not want to do that. I will write novels and do my duty^[6].

His abiding faith in humanism has also made Mulk Raj Anand optimistic about the future of mankind. The human heart is bound to survive all the calamitous changes. Puran Singh, a poet and thinker, and the mentor of Ananta in *The Big Heart* remark emphatically, "Actually no one can wipe out the whole of humanity. Only certain men can destroy the will of other men by piling terror upon terror"^[7].

More controversies have gathered round Mulk Raj Anand than any other Indo-English novelist. The origin of the controversies lies mostly in the non-fictional writings of Anand and the personal participation in socio-political movements by the author, both in England and India. Anand has not only written a large body of non-fiction and critical work relating to social, cultural, and literary problems but also taken an active part in movements associated with a variety of ideologies ranging from Marxism to Gandhian

Pacifism and humanism.

In the concept of cash-nexus Mulk Raj Anand's *Gauri* is somewhat similar to Prem Chand's famous work *Kafan*. Anand was also influenced by Tagore. But the influence of Prem Chand was greater. Anand and Prem Chand, both are great humanists and were ever ready to fight for the cause of the poor and the downtrodden.

Anand's problems attain universal significance because of the artistic manipulation of his subject. Anand's humanism (that is his love of man, the whole man without his weaknesses, instincts, and impulses) and his concern for the underdogs of society and the miserable life of the untouchables, coolies, peasants, poor village folk, is reflected in all his novels, but *Untouchable*, *Coolies*, *Two Leaves And A Bud* and *Gauri* are particularly significant in this connection. They are the major subjects of Anand's humanistic attention. In the Preface to *Two leaves And A Bud*, he writes: "All these heroes, as the men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflections of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth. And I was only repaying the debt of gratitude owed them for much of the inspiration they had given me, mature into manhood when I began to interpret their lives in my writings"^[8].

Mulk Raj Anand exposes the cruelty and hardheartedness, greediness, lechery, callousness, arrogance, hypocrisy, selfishness, and meanness of these agents of cruelty, exploitation, and extortion. The English planters and factory managers have no sympathy for the natives and inflict inhuman tortures on them for their benefit. Reggie Hunt, the wicked manager of the tea plantation gardens bullies, abuses and beats cruelly the native coolies working there. Jimmie Thomas of *Coolie* is a greedy and avaricious officer who is very liberal in the use of his cane and foul tongue in his dealings with Indian laborers. In the opinion of Rama Jha, "Of course a few critics such as Srinivasa Iyengar, C. D. Narasimhaiah and M. K. Naik have approached Anand's novels more dispassionately and have generally seen in them more of Gandhian humanism and Gandhian moral vision than Marxism. And yet even they have not gone into details of the nature of Anand's absorption of Gandhian thought and the way it has conditioned various aspects of his novels"^[9].

As a novelist in the modern world, with a deep intellectual concern for humanity, Mulk Raj Anand uses his ideas and ideologies as raw materials for his art, and through his art, he intends to "reach down to the metabolism and perhaps transform the reader's consciousness by the empathy it creates"^[10] Mulk Raj Anand expresses similar concern with specific issues of Indian identity and civilization as Gandhi did in the *Hindu Swaraj*. How deeply affected by Gandhi's genius to synthesize disparate elements, his stand on anti-mechanization, and his philosophy of non-violence becomes evident from Anand's analysis of the tenets of Gandhian philosophy. He talks passionately about Gandhi's ideas of a new peasant civilization. In a postscript of the second edition of *Apology* entitled 'There is no Higher Thing than Truth,' he accepts that the philosophical basis that supplied the cue of reform and revolution is suspect and needs deeper analysis. Anand's concern with the individuals like Bakha in *Untouchable*, and Munoo in *Coolie* shows his unmistakable sympathies with the downtrodden and the lowliest of the low in Indian society.

Untouchable is Mulk Raj Anand's first novel in which he is concerned with the evil of untouchability in Hindu society. Anand is the first Indian novelist to have depicted in the novel form, the stigma of this evil which isolates man from his society. This novel portrays an individual's struggle to release himself from the customs and beliefs of the community. However, the individual activism of his traditional Hindu culture fails to do so. If Mulk Raj Anand's first novel exposes the evil of untouchability, his next novel *Coolie* that followed in 1936 presents a Gandhian critique of industrial civilization in India. It is the story of an orphan hill boy Munoo, who is reduced to the lot of a coolie in Bombay. According to Rama Jha,

In *Untouchable* Anand shows Bakha in interaction with members of different castes in a small town in Punjab and indicated the evils of the decadent and hypocritical orthodoxy of the Hindu system. In *Coolie* he brings its heroin contact with people of various sections of Indian society. There is much sharper criticism of the average Indians who are presented as bundles of selfishness, prejudice and are capable of sadistic cruelty ^[1]. His novel illustrates Gandhian humanism-as no other novel does. Here Anand's concern is to show the inhumanity and evil that man can do on man.

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