

Theme of tribulations in novels of M.R. Anand in reference of Dalit

Archana Shrivastava

Hindi Officer, Rajbhasha Section, IGNTU, Amarkantak Madhya Pradesh, India

Abstract

Dalit Literature is the realistic Reflection of those oppressed classes. This Literature is always a question of question which still needs answer as it is very difficult to define the exact time and place of its beginning. We only can guess its history from the written source based on 'Manusmirity' or Ambedkar's essay "Who are Shudres? It comes against the physical reaction to the violence against untouchable or Budhists. When we peep in the history of 1940, we find the great novel on life of Bakha, the hero of "The Untouchable" by Mulk Raj Anand. Mulk Raj Anand was initiated into the literary career by a family tragedy, instigated by the rigidity of the caste system. Anand's first prose essay was a response to the suicide of an aunt, who had been excommunicated by his family for sharing a meal with a Muslim. This paper presents the exploitation of day to day life of the status of under-privileged in his later novels like *two leaves and A Bud*, *In the Old Women and the Cow*, *The Sword and the Sickle* and *The Big Heart*. This is an effort to disclose the views and thoughts which are spreading in the novels and mind of the Author because the problem is still present in our society and the writer is also coming out with solutions.

Keywords: caste, exploitation, Dalit, society, labors, inequality

Introduction

His first novel, "Untouchable", (1935), was a stark reflection of the day-to-day life of a member of India's untouchable caste. The book was widely acclaimed and Mulk Raj Anand was hailed as India's Charles Dickens. His second novel "Coolie" depicts the plight of India's poor through the story of a 15-year-old boy, trapped in servitude as a child labourer, who eventually dies of tuberculosis. His novels are the mirror of the age that reflects not merely the external features of the age but also its inner face.

Two leaves and A Bud presents the theme of exploitation of the Dalit with a greater concentration and force than done in *Coolie*. Gangu, the chief protagonist of the novel, is a victim of society. He comes to the plantation to start up a new life but an end losing his life. Gangu is the victim of capitalist exploitation. His exploitation starts even before he is aware of this fact - when he is lured to the tea plantation with false promises that working and housing conditions are ideal and that he will soon be able to acquire his own land. Before leaving for the tea plantations Gangu had wished that his brother had not mortgaged his land to Seth Badri Das. After losing all his property he has no option but to indenture his life, his wife and two children as labourers in a British-owned tea plantation. The sweet and rosy worlds and false promises of Sardar Buta lure Gangu into a trap from which the only movement is towards death.

According to K. Suneetha Rani, "The novel [*Two Leaves and A Bud*] starts with the cliché of Indian philosophy: Life is like a journey. Though life is a journey, the poor man's life is the most-unhappy journey. There are no delightful resorts on the way and the destination of journey is not a heaven but a hell. They travel from sorrow to sorrow; exploitation to exploitation, to use Samuel Beckett's phrase, 'from nothingness to nothingness.' It is unconscious journey towards eternal doom. It is a journey straight into the mouth of Hell. Gangu travels but never returns^[1].

The political system also aids in exploitation as the laws of

the British Government favoured the landlords. Though Gangu has not borrowed money, yet under the law he has to suffer for the loan his brothers had received from the money-lender. The feudal exploitation is helped and aggravated by the political factor of the British rule in India. In the same novel, when coolies want to go back to their homes and ancestral villages, with their families, to get rid of exploitation, the military arm of the British beats the coolies mercilessly and forces them to return back to their plantations. In this way feudal exploitation is perpetuated.

At the lower level, Reggie Hunt, an assistant manager, is more direct and brutal in his exploitation. Taking advantage of the helpless position of workers he exploits their women and uses brutal methods upon them. This novel also tells us about the indirect exploitation by the British authorities. The executive machinery of the British plays a significant role in this exploitation. "Where is nazrana?" someone asks.

The novel is poetic, brutal and realistic. It is full of satire against British capitalism. Gangu is a victim of this capitalist exploitation. After being thoroughly exploited by the Indians he is also exploited by the British, and their capitalist machinery. He came to the tea plantation in the hope of making a new beginning but all his hopes are shattered. He leaves the plantation only after his death., In the words of M. K. Naik: "The entire tragedy is unfolded against the background of the tea plantation which is a microcosm itself, a world in which British officials and their subordinates, on the one hand, and the indentured coolies, on the other, are ranged in two separate camps of the exploiters and the exploited^[2].

The workers on the tea plantations are deprived of their basic freedoms - they are over-worked, under-paid and ruthlessly exploited. Then, the British become suspicious of all Indians, their motives, and their actions. Even when hunt kills Gangu, the jury finds hunt innocent--'not guilty or the charges or murder and culpable homicide' and discharge him. In one go Anand exposes the hypocrisy and

shallowness of the British claims that they are fair in the administration of justice.

Thus, *Two Leaves and A Bud* dramatizes the tragic denial of Gangu's wild urge to live. It opens with Gangu's arrival at the tea plantation and ends with his tragic death as a result of man's cruelty to man. As the humanist and the social critic de la Havre puts it: "There is nothing more horrible in this universe than the cruelty of man to man." [3]. But there are many critics who feel that in his concern for the downtrodden Anand becomes unfair to the British. C; S Balaran Gupta remarks: "Anand's concern for the downtrodden has been overbearing in *Two Leaves and a Bud* that the dice is *too* obviously overloaded against the British, and this has led to an amount of distortion of reality [4]. But one feels that the depiction of Indian life is a true reflection of the ways in which life is lived.

In *The Old Women and the Cow* Anand presents exploitation of women in Indian society. The Old Women and the Cow is unique among Anand's works as it is his only novel in which the chief protagonist is a woman. The novel presents a virtuous, cow-like and gentle woman before us in the shape of *Gauri*. The novel is an epic of women's exploitation. It, as indeed all Anand's fiction, expresses his indisputable concern for the suffering humanity of India. It forces us to ask a few basic questions about the Indian character.

Mulk Raj Anand was keen that along with men, women too should learn to master their destiny. Like the heroine of *The Old Women and the Cow*, he wanted them to look the world in the face. She successfully fought against the age-old but outworn traditions of her village and strove for her rightful, honourable place in the social order as a human being.

Before *The Old Women and the Cow* was published, Mulk Raj Anand had produced more than half a dozen novels. All of them are suffused with his deep social and political awareness about which he made significant formulations in *Apology for Heroism*. He consistently believed that art must have social relevance and artists and intellectuals have a major role to play in the cultural reorientation of societies. As a literary artist with a critical consciousness, Mulk Raj Anand successfully located himself in history, strove towards attaining higher awareness, and shared it with his fellow beings through his writings. His sense of commitment is so strong that quite often his fiction dangerously comes close to propaganda.

Projecting the idea of novel as a revolutionary form of writing, Mulk Raj Anand specifies the areas of social experience which dominate his writings: "I am conscious of the need to help raise the untouchables, the peasants, the serfs, the coolies and other suppressed members of society, to human dignity and self awareness in view of the abjectness, apathy and despair to which they have been condemned [5]. Since his initial efforts at writing were devoted mostly to the poor, the downtrodden and the depressed classes, exclusive attention to women had to wait, but not for long. In the 'Postscript' to a later edition of *Apology for Heroism*, the suffering people who claimed Mulk Raj Anand's attention and love included "the eternally wronged woman [6].

On account of Mulk Raj Anand's preoccupation with untouchables and coolies and the political ferment in India, small women figure marginally in his earlier fiction. Most of these women are victims - either of the oppressive political system or of the lust of British and Indian men.

From amongst them Maya in *The Sword and The Sickle* and Janki in *The Big Heart* are noteworthy. They share with each other certain interesting similarities. Maya lives with her male companion Lalu while Janki is attached to Ananta because they love their male companions. However, since they are widows they cannot be married to the males who love them. This is mainly because of the social customs in which a widow cannot get remarried. Their relationship with their lovers is therefore outside the normal social framework. Very late in the novel Lalu marries Maya according to the Arya- samaj rites to avoid embarrassment. In spite of their lack of formal education, they are fairly intelligent and participate in the political activism of their lovers. Of the two Janki is the more impressive, because she helps Ananta to sort out his confusions. Through argument, discussion and sustained interrogation, in the spirit of critical sympathy, she enables him to clarify to himself on the issue of the help of machines in the trade and of his projected solutions to the problems arising out of the intricate relationship between tradition and modernity.

Although Mulk Raj Anand does not deal specifically and pointedly with the problems of women in his earlier novels published before *Gauri*, he sharpens our awareness of the injustice and inequity done to them as part of his overall strategy of censuring all that is unfair in the system. He is also conscious of their problems as women in a set-up, which is tradition-bound, fixed, immutable, and overwhelmingly male-dominated. During the course of her several debates with Ananta, Janki refers to her situation as that of a person who is denied any freedom by the traditional society.

The Old Women and the Cow is the story of the rebellious behaviour of a young rustic Punjabi wife, *Gauri* first given in marriage to a poor and violent villager (weak and ignorant), then sold off by her mother to an aged merchant (Seth) and finally rescued by Dr. Mahindra.

In the first part of the novel *Gauri* is constantly associated with blood and family after marriage she is brought by her husband Panchi to his uncle's place. Before this marriage his aunt Kesaro, doted upon him. Her secret attachment to Panchi causes consternation in *Gauri*. Kesaro is against any woman coming between her and Panchi. So she always finds faults with *Gauri* and blames her on every possible occasion. She calls *Gauri* inauspicious and says that famine, draught and poverty that come are because of the arrival of this inauspicious girl in the family. She says to Panchi: "Control her, if you can! This bride of yours! From the day that this witch from Piplan set foot in our house we have had bad luck. You know the crops have withered and burnt up. The bullocks have fever. And there is no sign of rain [7]. She casts aspersions on *Gauri*'s character as well. It is a sort of exploitation of one woman by another woman. *Gauri*'s so called, free behaviour with Panchi's friend, Rajguru is misinterpreted by Kesaro. She says to Panchi: "I don't like the visit to our home of Rajguru and your, other friends, when you are not here and as usual her head was uncovered while she was working [8]. But Panchi is not prepared to put faith in the ministrations of his aunt. He tries to reassure his aunt about *Gauri* by reminding her that in her village *Gauri* has the reputation of being as gentle as a cow [9].

Gauri feels forlorn in her new home. This aggravates her helplessness and emotional starvation. She had lost her parents early in life. She remembers them and silently weeps. A girl with such a background of emotional

insecurity and frustration badly needs a husband who can fill her with love and security. She wants her husband to show extra affection and love so that she may forget her past sorrows. But Panchi, although good by nature, is influenced by Kesaro's opinion and starts beating his wife time and again.

One day without any warning Panchi is asked by his uncle to leave his house at once and start his own house with his wife, Gauri. Soon Panchi is able to appreciate the love and affection, which Gauri bestows on him. She plays the role of the traditional Hindu wife by bending down and symbolically touching his feet. She is not only a loving wife but an understanding wife as well. She is conscious of the financial straits in which they are placed and gives him her ear-rings so that he could pawn them and get the required money: "It will help us pay for the seed and the lentils and the rice till the next harvest,"^[10] she declares. Panchi is a member of the patriarchal society and he believes in the ideal of wifely chastity. But the seeds of doubt have already been sown in his mind by his aunt Kesaro regarding her dalliance with Rajguru and possibly with others. So he begins to doubt about her chastity. One morning Gauri tells him, "Now the rains will have to come because I am with child and we shall soon have another mouth to feed"^[11]. But doubt has already made home in his heart. He yells at her that she is a whore and asks her to go to her mother's place.^[12] He point blank asks her to tell about the father of her child. Gauri falls at his feet and begs with her hands folded but Panchi beats her right and left. So she gets up and walks towards her home to protect the child in her womb from Panchi's violence. Thus, her exploitation begins from the place where she should feel most protected.

Her fate at her mother's place is no better. She is sold by her mother because of the cash nexus involved. She is sold to a Seth in Hoshiarpur. Here she suffers from an acute fever. So the Seth calls for Dr. Mahindra. The doctor comes to know from Gauri that she has been purchased by the Seth. She wants to run away but her increasing fever would not allow it. Then she is admitted to Dr. Mahindra's nursing home.

This nursing home becomes a turning point in the life of Gauri. After become well she refuses to go to the place of the Seth and instead wants to meet her husband, Panchi. In the meantime Gauri begins to work in the nursing home. Here Dr. Batra, another partner of Dr. Mahindra tries to seduce Gauri. But she holds firm against the advances of Dr. Batra and is able to maintain her integrity. But a wife living away from her husband is never safe in Indian society. Such a woman soon becomes an object of temptation for the lust Foe men.

But Panchi returns and feels happy to be with Gauri again. Her experiences of exile have educated her in many ways and she is more confident and courageous now. But soon he demands the proof of her chastity. He has no courage to defy the social opinion about his wife and Gauri cannot prove her purity except through honest declaration. She tells him that she has always been true to him. But he starts beating her. Then she says, "And if you strike me again, I will hit back."^[13] Her whole life is spent in saving her person. She has courage to face her husband's behaviour and gossip. But her husband is not so courageous. She decides to leave her home. Weeping and sobbing she says: "He [Panchi] is weak, spoilt creature. Spoilt by Kesaro. He pretended to be a lion among the men of the village. But really he is a coward. They are telling him that Ram turned

out Sita because everyone doubted her chastity during her stay with Ravana. I am not Sita that the earth will open up and swallow me. I shall just go out and be forgotten of him."^[14]

Her sense of identity has awakened. She wants to go to Dr. Mahindra's hospital to deliver her child and have a self-dependant life. Thus, Gauri grows more and more capable or love to the degree that she is able to forge a destiny of her own. She becomes a woman of higher consciousness, than a character like Maya in *The Sword and the Sickle*. Slowly and consciously Anand prepares for the change in Gauri from being an extension of her husband to an independent adult capable of taking her own decisions.

In the end, we can say that Mulk Raj Anand wants women to be bold, courageous and capable of taking extreme decisions, if they feel that their lives have become dwarfed by the burden of obsolete and out-worn customs and traditions. Gauri, to say the least, is a very courageous woman. S. C. Harrax, goes to the extent of hailing Gauri as "the modern Mother India. Gauri breaks away from the established pattern of saved males and doomed females. The quality of Gauri's courage, the simple unlettered girl of a remote village, had to be appreciated rather than the other traditional virtues that have been extolled in Indian society patience and submission. She does not will once she has decided on a course of action. She moves with a confidence that is highly praise-worthy.

According to C. J. George, "The removal of disabilities of the Indian women and their freedom from various forms of oppression has been an unending process. Though the law of the land does not admit of inequality on the basis of sex, old social and psychological habits and the reactionary resistance of the orthodox sections of society militate against the law and so even at the turn of this century majority of women are still martyrs to the conventions of our society in which they are born."^[15] Anand is saddened by the fact that an average Indian woman is still subjugated and is a slave "bound and fattened for the service of the hearth"^[16]. In many of his novels Anand has introduced the theme of the hardships women face in tradition bound Indian society.

Anand has introduced in many of his novels the theme of women's hardships. Rukmani in *The Road*, whose marriage has been delayed for want of money to give dowry, is not able to understand why males behave with superiority. She comes out with a rhetorical question: "Oh why, oh why were the tribes of men so privileged?"^[17] In *The Big Heart* Janaki says, "Who can know what a woman suffers how much she has to bear silently and without protest the abuse and the condemnation."^[18]

Though in 1856 widow marriage was legally permitted, yet orthodoxy did not permit remarriage and widowhood was considered as a punishment for a woman's earlier karmas. The widowed Maya in *The Village* trilogy, being a landlord's daughter faces many restraints. The ill treatment meted out to Gauri is mainly arranged by women themselves. If Kesaro and the midwife had not aroused suspicion in the mind of Panchi he would have been different in his behaviour towards his wife. Thus women are the worst enemies of women. Anand was aware of the social taboos against women so he presented such pictures of exploitation and misery of women.

In the end we can say that Mulk Raj Anand's portrayal of various types of exploitation is very touching and vivid. His

sense of anger against exploitation was aroused by his childhood experiences. His thematic range of exploitation expanded from the first to his last novel and his vision widened with the passage of years. He always come out with the solutions.

References

1. Suneetha Rani, Venkatta Reddy K, Bayappa reddy P. (eds), *The Indian Novel with a Social Purpose*, New Delhi Atlantic, 1999, 52
2. Naik MK. op. CiL, 46
3. Mulk Raj Anand. *Two Leaves and a Bud*, New Delhi, Arnold Heinemann, 1955, 119
4. Balaram Gupta GS. op. Cit., p. 51
5. Mulk Raj Anand. *Apology for Heroism*, New Delhi, 1986, 137
6. Ibid, 198
7. Mulk Raj Anand. *Gauri*, New Delhi, Arnold Heinemann, 1984, 40
8. Ibid, 39
9. Ibid, 38
10. Ibid, 59
11. Ibid, 101
12. Ibid, 102
13. Ibid, 284
14. Ibid, 265
15. George CJ. Op. Cit., 161.
16. Mulk Raj Anand. "The Bride: An Essay on the Status of Women in India," in *Lines Written to an Indian Air Bombay*, Nalanda, 1949, 185
17. Mulk Raj Anand. *The Road*, Bombay, Kutub Popular, 1961, 100
18. Mulk Raj Anand. *The Big Heart*, New Delhi, Arnold-Heinemann, 1980, 84