

A study on social issues described in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand

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Abstract

This Study shows Mulk Raj Anand has exposed social injustice which was in practice in the Indian society and its culture. Mulk Raj Anand was the most prolific of all Indian writers of his age. Even though he was born in a Hindu family, he never hesitated to expose how poor and downtrodden people are suppressed and treated badly in the society. This paper deals with the characters suffering and misery, the individual's difficulties in facing them with illustrations from the two novels. This study shows Mulk Raj Anand's success in his intention of exposing social injustice.

Keywords: Social injustice, treated badly, Misery.

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand was born on 12 December 1905 in an ordinary Hindu family. He had completed his studies in India and in the United Kingdom. He was awarded Doctor of Philosophy by London University in the UK in 1928. He became associated with T.S.Eliot's literary periodical 'The Criterion'. He returned to India in 1932 and lived in Sabarmati Ashram with Mahatma Gandhi and that was the inspiration for him for his first draft of 'Untouchable'. It had been rejected by as many as nineteen publishers in England and at last it was published by an English firm in 1935. Then four other novels came from him in quick succession and one among the four is 'Coolie'.

Anand was awarded International Peace Prize for promoting peace among the nations through his literary work, in 1952. In the same year, he visited China as a member of an Indian delegation. He visited Australia in 1961 and attended Australian Peace Conference in Melbourne. He went to Egypt in 1962 as the leader of the Indian delegation to the Afro-Asian writers conference. He was awarded Padma Bhushan for his distinguished services to Art and literature in 1967. He was awarded 'Sahitya Academy' for his novel 'Morning Face' in 1972. Indo - English fiction was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi.

Mahatma Gandhi's movement for the upliftment of the Harijans, the emancipation of women, the awakening of the masses and the freedom of the country inspired many novelists. His writing career spread almost 50 years in which he had produced more than 12 novels and 70 short stories. His novels are very big contribution to Indian English literature.

Mulk Raj Anand was a humanist and socialist in many aspects. He hate superstition, tyranny, colonialism, fascism, class, caste, genocide, war and history. According to Anand, most of our problems are created by man himself and can also be solved by man.

Mulk Raj Anand was well known as one of the key founders of the Indian Progressive writers movement which was started by a group of Indian students with literary aspirations in 1930's. Anand strongly believed that literature had a social purpose. Anand saw his characters and their actions in relation to the social and political upheavals of his time. In the words

of Saros Cowasjee, " No Indian writer of fiction in English comes anywhere near Mulk Raj Anand in providing a social and political portrait of India from the time of the Delhi durbar of 1911 to the demise of the Indian princess following Indian Independence in 1947".

Mulk Raj Anand and Manohal Malgonkar, both the Indian novelists pay attention to historical facts and the political background and distort truth for literary effect. Saros Cowasjee says "Mulk Raj Anand and Manohar Malgonkar portray the princess in all their complexity against the backdrop of Indian Independence"

Mulk Raj Anand does not like to write merely for the sake of art. According to him, Art should have some purpose. He handles novel as a weapon of social reform and tries to expose the weaknesses and evils of Indian society like Bernard Shaw, Charles Dickens and Galsworthy. Sympathy as well as pity form part of Anand's humanism and it is on this theme that all his stories and novels are built.

As a writer, Anand's distinction lies in his themes both in their choice and in their treatment. The themes which Mulk Raj Anand has chosen are based on such problems as casteism and human suffering caused by a variety of factors like political, economic, social and cultural. His novels have been translated into many languages and this reflects the admiration which the world has for Anand's approach to the problem that he has tackled in them. No one in India, had yet written the epic of suffering adequately because the realities were too crude for a writer. Further it was not easy to write an epic in India while all the intricate problems of the individual in the new world had yet to be solved.

Research Work

The novelist shows the real condition of the bottom dogs with a remarkable objectivity. It exposes the sorrows and sufferings that the caste Hindus inflicted on the scavengers, the leather workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters etc. The sweeper is the worst and the most miserable creature among the low castes. He stands in the lowest rung even in the hierarchy of the castes among the low castes.

In the words of E. M. Forster; "The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound forever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them. They have to purify themselves, and to rearrange their plans for the day. Thus he is a disgusting object to call out and warn them that he is coming"

'Coolie' portrays the class distinction between the have's and the have nots. The novel depicts the sad and the pathetic life of a young boy called Munoo. Mulk Raj Anand presents the picture of an orphan boy Munoo who is despised by the society, rejected by his relatives and oppressed by his masters. M. K. Naik rightly observes; "The author's compassion for the exploited and downtrodden is pure and intense but does not degenerate into blind hysterics or dull preaching, one aspect of exploitation is presented in coolie. This exploitation of the Indian by the white man and poor by the rich" Munoo is an orphan boy. His father died of shock because he could not pay the debt to his landlord.

Munoo could not forget the way in which his father suffered and his mother worked hard every day. He is a victim of poverty, exploitation, man's greed and selfishness. The root cause of Munoo's tragedy is poverty. When the novel begins Munoo was fourteen and when the novel ends he died at the age of sixteen.

In the words of G. S. Balarama Gupta; "Anand believes that poverty is the cruel evil and cruelty itself a deadly evil. We see in Coolie how these evils of poverty and cruelty crush a bud of youth before it could bloom to any extent. Dayaram, Mr and Mrs. Nathooram, Ganapath, Chintasahib and Mrs. Mainwaring too, have only contempt for Munoo. They slap him, kick him and abuse him as if he were a leper, an untouchable; all because he is poor".

Mulk Raj Anand clearly realized that as a writer he must devote himself to the cause of the poor and the disadvantaged. Anand was the only realist writer in English of his enthralled by the movements of the human soul. He depicted human emotions from the point of view of the way they were affected by a developing and strengthening society. His attention was attracted by the different ways in which people adapted to it, the way in which social order changed man. He was interested in human passions first and foremost from the social and psychological point of view. Thus Mulk Raj Anand undoubtedly has succeeded in his intention of exposing social injustice through his first two novels.

There is no question that Mulk Raj Anand has fashioned with 'Untouchable' and 'Coolie', the novels that articulate the abuses of an exploited class an untouchable in 'Untouchable', and a waif Munoo in 'Coolie'. He is indeed the 'Fiery voice' of those people who form the untouchable caste and tyrannized child-labour like Munoo. The period of 1930's was the seed-time of modern Independent India - a packed decade indeed when Raja Rao wrote : 'Kanthapura', and Anand too could not but respond to the impact of events in India. He wrote of the poor, for the poor and as a man of the people.

In writing of the pariahs and the bottom dogs rather than of the elect and the sophisticated, he had ventured into territory that had been largely ignored till then by the Indian writers. For all their nationalist fervor, Bankim Chandra's novels were but romances, Tagore was chiefly interested in the upper and

middle classes, and Sarat Chandra in the lower-middle classes; and Munshi Pranchand Chose his themes from the peasantry and humble folk of Uttar Pradesh.

None of them cared to produce realistic and naturalistic fiction after the manner of a Balzac, or a Zola. K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger writer about the themes of Mulk Raj Anand :- "It was Anand's aim to stray lower still than ever Sarat Chandra or Prem Chand, to show to the west that there was more in the Orient than could be inferred from Omar Khayyam, Tagore or Kipling, and so he described a waif like Munoo in 'Coolie' and untouchable like Bakha, and indentured labourer like Gangu and set them right at the centre of the scheme of cruelty and exploitation that India held in its vicious grip".

Thus, When Anand started writing fiction, he decided to prefer the familiar to the fancied, that he would avoid the highways of romance and sophistication but explore the by lanes of the outcasts and the peasants, the sepoys and the working people. To Anand it was no labourious exercise, rather it was merely the easier and more natural way; he was himself of the proletariat and he wrote in a brisk unselfconscious way about what he had seen at first hand in the years of his childhood, boyhood and youth.

Bakha is eighteen year old son of Jamadar, Lakha who gets a pair of breeches from an English soldier, and tries to be in 'fassun'. But as the day begins, his work of toilet-cleaning begins. He is steady and efficient in his work. Bakha's sister Sohini goes to village-well to fetch water; Kalinath, the village priest of the temple out of the special favour draws water to fill Sohini pail, and feels attracted to her beautiful body, and driving away the others suggests her to go to his house later in the day to clean the courtyard.

When she goes to his house, he makes improper suggestions to her, and she starts screaming, he shouts 'polluted, polluted', and a crowd of people gather. Bakha reaches at that spot, after suffering at the village temple, and a caste Hindu whom he touched by chance, and finds Sohini standing with her face-downward, attacked by caste Hindus who sided with Kalinath. Bakha, understanding the situation, black with anger but remembering the thousands-year old slavery, controlled himself. Sending away Sohini, goes to collect food from door to door. There also he meets with insult, people throw loaves of bread towards him as if he were a dog.

'Coolie' is visible India, that mixture of the horrible and the holy, the inhuman and the human, the sordid and the beautiful. The general effect is panoramic; good and evil being thrown together as in actual life. Munoo as orphan was left to be brought up by his cruel uncle and aunt. Munoo's cruel aunt keeps beating, abusing and scolding because Munoo causes financial burden upon the family. His uncle decides to send him to Shamnagar to appoint him as a domestic servant in Nathuram's house.

At Shamnagar, due to his impish curiosity and juvenile buoyant spirit often put him to trouble. Due to the class distinction Munoo has no right to join in the merrymaking of little girl, Sheila and her friends. He cannot eat from a plate as his social superiors do. His sitting for toilet in the open, breaking crockery caused for him a lot of scolding and beating.

Scrubbing the vessels, sweeping the floor, preparing the beds and laying the table and ofcourse, getting abused, constituted his monotonous daily routine. Munoo comes to the

conclusion: - "There are two kinds of people in the world; the rich and the poor".

There he finds gloom enveloping by the malevolent presence of the detestable, goatfaced, Ganpat. Due to Ganpat's cheating the factory is dissolved. Poverty and suffering are added by villainy and evil. Factory partner prabha is reduced to a coolie, and Munoo is thrown on roads. Munoo finds it hard even to find work a porter of Coolie. His experiences as a coolie in the grain market, and vegetable market are most depressing and disappointing. The pictures of coolies lying huddled at night because they do not have enough accommodation and their hectic search for work during day time show the multitudes of unemployed had to undergo in those days.

Escaping from Daulatpur Munoo reaches Bombay with the help of an elephant driver, with a piece of advice: - "The bigger a city is, the more cruel it is to the sons of Adam. You have to pay even for the breath that you breathe". Bombay, far from Munoo's dreams proves nightmarish. He is thoroughly disillusioned at the first contact with reality. At the corner of a footpath Munoo sees a Coolie lying huddled:- "pillowing his head on his arm, shrinking into himself, as if he were afraid to occupy too much space".

The bodies of numberless lay strewn in tattered garbs, in a sleep which looked like death. At Bombay, the cotton factory where Munoo comes to work is nothing but another version of hell where countless lads like him are condemned to subhuman existence. The coolies toil with their sweat and blood, while the oppressors discuss the weather over a cup of tea. The cruelty of child labour is another evil in Bombay and other industrial towns, making little children work under abominable conditions for long hours for a paltry wages is an evil practise almost built-in a capitalist factory frame-work.

Significance of the Study

Mulk Raj Anand touches new themes. His first novel 'Untouchable'. It tells about a day's event in the life of Bakha, a sweeper boy. The novel 'Untouchable' indeed offers a telling comment on what might be regarded as a running sore in the Indian body politics. The novel tells about the conflict between two classes of society; though the conflict there is not between untouchables and the caste hindus; it is between a class of artisans and a class of capitalists. Though 'Untouchable' was the shortest of all his novels, it has made the most effective impact on Indian readers.

In Bombay the labour exploitation is quite obvious. Munoo gets a job after much difficulty under Jimmy Thomas (Chimta Sahib), who would charge commission out of their wages. Then, Pathan, the gate-keeper and Sikh-merchant are some other vultures of the Society. The street in which Munoo and Hari have hired a room in a Chawl is full of stink of urine and dung. There are seven latrines for two hundred persons.

There are rival groups in the Trade-unions, and owners play politics by dividing the workers by creating communal riots. From Bombay Munoo is taken to Simla in a Motor-car by an Anglo-Indian lady Mrs Mainwaring. Anand is anxious to present his hero in the aristocratic set up too to complete his social picture of suffering and exploitation. Munoo finds in Simla that there are only two categories of people - 'Sahib Log' and the 'Coolies' the life of plenty and luxury, and the life of under-employment and over work. Even the kindhearted Mrs Mainwaring is unmindful of the over-worked

Munoo as a rickshaw-puller. Soon, Munoo develops tuberculosis, and after a brief treatment dies in a hospital.

Munoo's is a fight for survival that illuminates, with raw immediacy, the grim fate of the masses in Pre-independent and Partition India. Premila Paul writes about it: - "But in spite of the tragic ending 'Coolie' is not a pessimistic novel. The hope of humanity lies in people like prabha, Ratan, and Mohan". Anand is aware that poetic justice is not meted out in life. However, he is optimistic and has firm faith in human goodness. C. D. Narsimha is of the opinion the death has ceased to frighten the poor, they are past fright, it is the life that is threat, and death is a release.

Conclusion

'Untouchable' (1935) There is no question that Mulk Raj Anand has fashioned with 'Untouchable', a novel that articulates the abuses of an exploited class. He is indeed the 'Fiery Voice' of those people who form the untouchable caste, and fulfils the goal of the writer to transform 'words into prophesy'.

Anand's father was a subedar in Army and Anand, as a child mixed freely with the children of the sweepers, attached to his father's regiment, and such associations cutting across caste divisions, and continued during his boyhood and youth. These early playmates and friends became the heroes of his first novels. Recalling the occasion of writing the 'Untouchable', Anand Writes, "One day I read an article by Gandhiji describing how he met Uka, a Sweeper boy, finding him with torn clothes and hungry, he took him into his Ashram" (4) This seemed to be more truthful than Anand's draft-novel based on imagination.

At that time, living in Bloomsbury, England, Anand wrote to Gandhiji seeking an appointment and met Gandhiji at Sabarmati Ashram. Gandhiji read Anand's draft-novel and suggested him to be brief, more truthful and compact, and finally the novel was published in 1935.

The novel depicts a day in the life of Bakha, a Sweeper-boy, and brings out the impact on him of the various events which take place, by giving us his 'Stream of Consciousness', in the manner of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

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