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Main Characteristics of the Writings of Mulk Raj Anand

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Abstract:

In this paper, we are going to discuss Mulk Raj Anand and his main characters. He portrays the philosophy of life that hope is most important for human being. Feelings of dejection, frustration and rejection may come but if hope survives, we are successful in our lives. Rebellion against the ruling class is portrayed in most of his novels. Anand's realism is visible in his fiction as well as his characters. The good, bad and ugly are the shades of his novels. Mulk Raj Anand is against the moral decay. By awakening and arousing the social consciousness he wants every Indian to wake up. His concept that we should light at least one candle so that the darkness is removed.

Anand has deservedly come to be regarded as pioneer of the Indian Novel in English. He has endeared himself to millions of readers, throughout the world, because of his impassioned moral vision. He has an uncanny capacity for empathizing with the lowliest of the lowly, in a realistic manner. There is a sense of battle in his prose. He is a crusader. His love for the down trodden coupled with the Western exposure enabled him to carry the tradition of Tagore, Prem Chand, Bankim and Sarat to new heights. He not only interpreted the soul of India, the real India of the villages to the West, but also convincingly made known to the colonial rulers, the debilitating aspects of their presence in India, the real India of the villages to the west, but also convincingly made known to the colonial rulers, the debilitating aspects of their presence in India. He has made an earnest effort through his works to promote understanding among individuals and nations, for which he was honoured with the International Peace Prize by the World Peace Counsel in 1952.

What gives Anand a distinctive place in the Post-Colonial Indian English Literature, is the great importance, he attaches to his vocation as a writer. Anand thus states about his career:

- I was offered the political career so many times, but I do not want to do that. I will write novels and do my moral duty to arouse the dormant vision of the masses. Thus writing novels is a self-imposed duty to eradicate all immoral practices and evils prevalent in our system. (Interview of Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, Dec. 25-27, 2000)

C.B. Christesen, paid a rich and well-deserved tribute to Anand for his contribution in nurturing and sustaining the basic moral values of the society:

- He (Anand) is one of the most stimulating men I have ever met. Mulk Possesses that special kind of talent which helps to fertilize the living mind and gives it the sense of a base on which to build. Such men are rare, in any country. Standing in his own permanence, professional, dedicated, he has sought to interpret in terms of art, the 'Mores' of his own people. Above all, he has insisted on the need for 'Values' – the civilizing values, which help nourish and enlighten and humane society. This has been an essential part of Mulk's character: and the aspirations to which he has given expression are now part of India's cultural and intellectual history. His work stands as a nobly proportioned edifice. (C.B. Christesen, Contemporary Indian Literature, 50).

Anand knew that he cannot remove all darkness in the world, but he decided to light at least one candle. Though he would rather not be stamped a reformist, it is increasingly evident from his novels that Anand throughout his life, consciously or otherwise, has taken on the mantle of an activist-writer. He raises a lot of questions in his fiction. Like, what is the meaning of human existence? How is man to live in the face of all oppression, chaos, and decadence of values in society? He provides some tentative answers. What is more important is that he makes the reader-even a casual one-sit up and takes notice.

Right from his first novel to the present: he admonishes and criticizes and advocates demolishing the malafied structure of the society and build it on a new, just foundation. Anand visualizes the creative writer as a trio who combines Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. He destroys the spurious elements of the contemporary society, purifying it of dross and creates afresh. In his role as Vishnu, he advocates the right values of make this society work. Anand is taken up with the plan or rebuilding a sovereign India. He is advancing the idea that the real change would be possible if Gandhi's moral vigour is combined with modern scientific ideas. This would lead to a change which will be organic and not mechanical. Bakha of Untouchable will then be resurrected from his ashes. Only then he felt "the

sweepers can be 'free from the stigma of 'Untouchability' and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society". (Unt., 171). K.D. Verma made an interesting interpretation in this context:

- Untouchability, as Anand tries to stretch the metaphor, is a universal global problem: in a sense, we are untouchables like Bakha denied social discourse by all rungs of society, but also they are willfully and intentionally created by a permanent category in fulfilment of the self indulgent egotism of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. (K.D. Verma, the Indian Imagination; Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English, 95).

In Coolie Anand formulates a basic question, "human beings or soulless machines"? This is highly indicative of those modern aspects of the class structure of Indian Society, which spell misery, unhappiness and frustration. They are interpreted in terms of the conflict between egoism and socio-political necessity. Infact, money is the major factor, which overrides both caste and class. A Munoo, remarks in Coolie "There must only be two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor". (Coolie, 87) Peter Burra opined that Munoo of Coolie is a universal figure.... the passion not only of India but of mankind". (Peter Burra, review of coolie, The Spectator, 186). The advent of machine has brought some change. But Anand's analysis is that the prospects of the machine and the new technology would be bleak, if it works in coalition with the class and caste-system. Instead of nourishing the dreams of the deprived, it would become exploitative. S.C. Harrex observed, "The ethical ambivalence of the machine becomes fully apparent. The Machines potential for common on good, as envisaged by Munoo, has been prevented by the self-interest of the powerful few". (S.C. Harrex, The Fire and the Offering: The English Language Novel of India, 21). This reinforces the idea that the hands of exploiters machine become the tool of strangulating and coercing people into submission. If flush-system appears the most meaningful alternative of relieving Bakha from his predicament, machine becomes symbolic in Coolie of churning people's cravings and will to live under its soul-less wheels. The coolies are merely used as means by the capitalist calls to achieve their ends. There has been no contradiction in Anand's attitude towards utility of machine for the Indian Society. Anand advocated Ganhi's perception about how to evolve an Indian Culture that would take the best of the West and yet retain its basic 'Values'. Another focal point in Coolie is the predicament of the slums. The predicament remains intact. Infact the problem has grown with growing population. The Magsaysay award winner, and police officer Kiran Bedi, write about slums in the present scenario:

- Nurseries of delinquency, bad habits, violence, exploitation, illiteracy, unemployment, starvation for sex... and what not. (Kiran Bedi, quoted by Prof. Ravinder Singh Sandhu, The Tribune, 5).

People at the helm of affairs are doing little. Slums are treated as vote-banks and there is lots of politicization and exploitation.

Throughout the world, there has been a growing awareness that decolonization and emancipation of every society and its people is an integral process of economic, political and cultural systems. In this process of radical change, literature is of paramount importance as one of the main potential promoters, accelerators and catalysts of social change. Two Leaves and a Bud, the title at a glance suggests 'valley of sunshine'. But that is not what the novel is about. It is about the murkiness lurking behind the sunshine. The dehumanizing condition of the labourers creates sheer terror. The master of tea estates is no better than wild wolves. It is tempting to shrug the novel off as an exaggeration. Saros Cowasjee puts it in the right perspective when he writes:

- The picture Anand paints is more than substantiated by the report of the Royal Commission on Labour... Anand had drawn much of his information from the report, and far from exaggerating matters he has minimized the brutalities of the English and the hardships inflicted on the coolies. (Saros Cowasjee, Anand's Two Leaves and a Bud, Indian Literature, 35-36)

The Worm has turned. At times now the pendulum moves to the other extreme. But the change that has taken place in the tea gardens is noticeable. Manraj Grewal comments on the present state of affairs in the tea gardens:

- The labour unrest is the way of live there. No matter, how many demands you accept, fourteen other always remain outstanding. A manager in the neighbouring Tea Garden was gheraoed and was thrown into boilers. Such hair-raising account abound. (Manraj Grewal, Indian Express, 8).

Kamla Das paid a flowing tribute to the authentic accounts of Anand's Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud:

- The two novels had done their job as neatly as an assassin's knife... Mulk Raj Anand had changed me from a romantic steeped in a world of fantasy to a realist. (Premila Paul, The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand: A thematic Study, 9).

Anand evaluates exploitation, subjugation, colonialism, imperialism, including intellectual and cultural colonialism, as moral evils. He creates universal types in Bakha, Munoo, Gangu and Lalu by a process of transformation of philosophy, history, value and morality. They are 'individuals'-full bloodied characters yet at another level they symbolize universal subjugation, colonial and imperil suppression. Anand deals with the eternal themes of evil and suffering.

The residuum of old customs, sham religion, exploitation of the labour force and the anti-war campaign are the highlights of The Trilogy. Indeed, Anand has expressed his strong belief in the universal ideals of 'Karuna' and 'Bhakti'. Margaret Berry focuses on Anand's ability "to synthesize the religio-philosophical Marxist and Christian socialism". (Margaret Berry, Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and the Novelist, 82). Both the individual human beings and the social structure need to be changed. K.D. Verma remarks in the context that

As a student of European intellectual thought, Anand is certainly, familiar with other forms of humanism – the Greek ideal of humanism, the eighteenth century notions of humanism. Marx's humanism and Forester humanism, Anand's liberal humanism emphasizes both individual freedom and a progressive reconstruction of a new social order. (K.D. Verma, The Indian Imagination; 93).

Anand's focus in *The Village* is Religion-Morality of Ritual? Similar contempt for rituals is vividly delineated by Jnanpith award winner, Indra Goswami in her novel *The Man from Chinnamasta*. She is a close friend of Mulk Raj Anand and writes in a similar vein "I believe in Divine Power but wholeheartedly reject rituals and regard them as a disease afflicting our society" (Ranjit Biswas, *The Tribune*, 4).

The Second volumes of the Trilogy, *Across the Black Waters* depict war as God of Death. It is a rare Indo-Anglican novel dealing with war. This novel is very successful because Anand could convey his seething criticism without being didactic. He is openly satirical about the romantic heroism associated with war. "Barvery, Said Lachman; 'What a bravery, Sepoy Usman Khan was hit by rifle fire. He was hit a second time but he stood like a Bahadur. A large piece of flesh was blown away from both his legs by a splinter and he had to be carried back by Karnel Sahib who has recommended him for a medal – 'He can decorate it on his.....' said Kirpu, 'now that he has no body left to decorate' (A.B.W., 120). What C.J. George terms: "Uncle Kirpu's Falstaffism towards honour and war" (C.J. George, *Mulk Raj Anand: His Art and Concerns*, 105) appears repeatedly in the novel and crystallizes Anand's attitude. Anand does not recognize the heroism of war. A new kind of heroism is perceived by Anand. The heroism of restoring peace and harmony, he hopes that India's peace efforts can stave off the drift towards jeopardizing peace in the world. Anand is clear about his vision: "we need bread even without butter. We need paper for books for children. We need hospitals and no cremation grounds". (Mulk Raj Anand, *The Sunday Observer*, 4-8).

The Sword and the Sickle, the last volume of trilogy, echoes Rent! Eviction! Death! Revolution! Ultimately, the sword could not yield the sickle force of India'. Alastair Niven, a critic of Anand, has remarked about Lal Singh that "he is an embodiment of 'An Indian Everyman', for he embodies in his person the doubts, fears and confusion of millions of Indians in early twenties". (Alastair Niven, *The Literary Half Yearly*, 48). In *The Sword and the Sickle*, the masses get together and form a revolutionary society. They are no longer abjectly indifferent and spineless. The new movement gives them a new faith. Today, the 'movement' has continued and will continue in the future. Anand explicitly shows the inevitability of revolution for the progress of man and the society. Infact, Anand's ideology of revolution is quite close of Olaf Stapledon, to whom Anand has dedicated his first edition of *Apology for Heroism*.

If your revolution is to succeed, it must consist not merely of an economic change, through this is indeed necessary, but also of a widespread deepening of our consciousness of ourselves and one another. And unless that deepening consciousness controls the economic revolution, all will have been in vain. (John Huntington, "Olaf Stapledon and the Novel about the future", 356)

S. Menon Marath finds *The Trilogy* as "the finest and most balanced of Anand's works". (S. Menon Marath, "The Three Indian Novelists" *Life and Letters*, 190).

Anand has said, "Most of my women characters are slaves or semi-slaves to customs. Only Irene in the *Bubble* is a free woman, whom the hero loves for the courage". (Interview of Dr. Anand, as cited above). Male chauvinism is pervasive in *Gauri*. Anand's treatment of women in *Gauri*, is symbolic. He is fully aware of the full dimensions of the problem:

- There are no brief comments on the status of Indian Women in our present set-up. *Gauri* in my own treatment resembles a few hundred families, few hundred young brides whom I may have noticed during my lifetime. Of course, the Indian village woman *Gauri* is not in the same situation, as the large number of women in Islamic society such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Arabia. In Pakistan, if a woman is raped, she has to prove for evidence for someone who say her being raped, to prove the rapist guilty. Islam has sunk to the most inhuman level in Afghanistan where a woman can't show her feet. (Ibid.)

The pertinent question is that the scene today is no different from what Anand described in *Gauri*, nearly fifty years ago. Shankar Sen, director of the institute of Social Sciences reports in *Nothing's Changed*, Wife beating is still on, "almost 50 percent of women suffered abuse in the hands of their partners. And the precipitating factors were often trivial like ill-cooked food, purported neglect of children, et al." (*Indian Express*, 5). Anand's *Gauri* revolts, slowly but surely. Towards the end of the novel, she is a cow, no more. *Gauri*'s heirs too must take their own hands, equipped with education and confidence. Anand is deeply committed to this view.

Anand seems to be fighting mental wars with his various ego selves of projections, and the answer to his preliminary hypotheses, achieved through a continuous process of acceptance and rejection, are only illusions of truth, to ascertain which one needs that Nietzsche calls "extra-moral sense". (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 42-47). A common thread in all his novels is a process, thorough which the protagonists achieve some sense of dignity and their own worth. That is the beginning of the recognition of one's moral strength. Anand's fiction present two opposing attitudes towards life. Man may accept life as he finds it, endure its imperfection and determine to survive it or reject the life of humiliation, rebel and work towards a better life. That is what Bakha does in *Untouchable*, Lal Singh in the Trilogy and *Gauri* in Anand's *Gauri*. Forester makes a special note of Anand's art of kindling the spark of rebellion. He writes in his preface to *Untouchable*:

- He (Anand) has just the right mixture of insight and detachment, and the fact that he has come to fiction through philosophy has given him depth. It might have given him vagueness – that curse of the generalizing mind-but his hero is no suffering abstraction (E.M. Forster, *Preface to Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand*, 7).

This observation about Bakha is also very much true of *Gauri* she is an individual, who has been perpetually victimized because of her gender. But *Gauri*, as Kher comments, "refuses to accept the hypocritical values of her society and its double standards of sexual morality". (Inder Nath Kher, *Gauri*, 43). The road she has chosen, if followed with diligence leads to self-determination, self-esteem and self-fulfillment or self-actualization.

This rebellion is reflected in the collective form, when the whole state of Shampur, breaks into rebellion, against feudalistic tyranny of the ruler, in *Private Life of an Indian Prince*. Through, such princes are no more in existence, but the feudalistic pattern is still prevalent in many parts of India. Many other problems retain their original brutal figure. The predicament of jails is also not much improved from what is projected in *Private Life of an Indian Prince*. Infact, predicament of jails is alarming even today. Kiran Bedi's Biography reveals certain facts in chapter "Jailhouse Shocks" and "The Inherited Legacy: Tihar Jail", It reflects that even though India has been independent and we have a democratic form of government for the past many years, the condition of the prisoners and the prisons is reprehensible. Anand and Kiran Bedi sound like contemporaries!

Anand is realistic throughout his fiction so far as the delineation of character is concerned. There are heroes and villains – white and black characters. He also covers the various shades of grey. The division between good and bad is not based on race. He has not spared his Indian characters many of them are coarse, brutal and uncivilized. It can be a debauch priest in *Untouchable* or the Village or the Barbar, Buta Ram, in *Two Leaves and a Bud* who has left his profession of traffic in women to shift into the profession to traffic in men. In *Across the Black Waters*, Lance Corporal Lok Nath is an abominable portrait. Subah Singh, son of the Subedar Major Arbel Singh, is equally tyrannical. In *The Sword and the Sickle*, Sukhua made a keen observation that the Englishmen "bring Hindustani" bearers and chaprasis who make friends with our watchman and demand flour and pulses. It is always one Hindustani who is at throat of another". (S & S, 116). On the other hand, the portraits of Colonel Hutchinson in *Untouchable* and Dr. De La Havre in *Two Leaves and a Bud* are noticeable, because it shows that Anand is objective and free from bias against a race or a class. These characters are fully developed and are a real presence in the novel.

Anand has come to recognize the vitality of the creative imagination. It can be a powerful instrument of change for individual and society. It can help to liberate people of their fears. Anand as an artist and critic insists on the social and moral function of art and the artist. Anand is fully committed to the responsibility of preventing social and moral decay by awakening and arousing the social consciousness, through his fiction.

The fact that he practices what he has 'preached' makes his writings authentic. There is never a hollow ring to them. They are backed by 'lived' experience. The work of a writer is never done. Such a writer can never be lulled and must remain ever-vigilant. According to Anand:

A modern writer must go to the heart of the problems of our time, the problem of human sensibility in the present complex situations and the tragedy of modern man. (Interview of Dr. Anand as cited above).

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