



ROLE OF PROTAGONIST IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF MULK RAJ ANAND

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ABSTRACT

Mulk Raj Anand was a staunch believer of doctrine of humanism. Therefore he was very much sensitive to the sufferings of the people belonging to lower classes and castes. According to his theory of novel, Anand believed that a novel must not be only reportage of social events. He emphasizes on the idea of realism in the novels. But he talks about poetic realism. Following the theory of novel, Anand has made people from dirt and dust as protagonist of his novels. It was for the first time in Indian writings in English, barring some exceptions in regional writings, that the marginalized appeared as protagonists in his novels. The latrine sweepers, indentured coolies, tea estate workers, subjugated women, poor factory workers appear in his novels as heroes (rather antiheroes as Anand calls them). By making the underdogs as heroes, he had broken the tradition of English novels having heroes from the elite class. Anand was perhaps the first novelist who had made the unprivileged bottom dogs as heroes of his novels. By doing so he had taken the tradition of Sharat Chandra, Tagore and Premchand to great heights. Almost all of the protagonists in his novels were reflections of the real life people whom Anand had met or acquainted from close quarters.

Keywords: -Mulk raj Anand, Novels, Untouchable, Exploitation, Protagonist

I. INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand is one of those novelists whose contributions have brought Indian writing in English especially fictional works a special position and identity in the world literature. He is perhaps the first Indian novelist in English who gave voice to the voiceless by making the ordinary and unprivileged people heroes of his novels. We find untouchable latrine sweepers, plantation workers, coolies, farmers, factory workers, oppressed as protagonists in the various novels of Anand like *The Big Heart*, *Coolie*, *Untouchable*, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, *The Road*, *The Village Trilogy*, *the Old Woman and the Cow*. Thus his art is not for art's sake but it is for life's sake. Anand's place in Indian literature in English and is unique and unparalleled. When Anand appeared on literary scene, only elite class was central concern of his contemporaries as well as the predecessors in fiction. The lower class people had no place in the literature especially in the fictional writings. His novels proved as harbingers of revolution in this regard by introducing heroes from soil and dirt. Iyengar rightly comments:



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...None of them cared to produce realistic or naturalistic fiction in the manner of Balzac or Zola. It was Anand's aim to stray lower still than even Sharat Chandra or Premchand to show to the west that there was more in the Orient than could be informed from Omar Khayyam, Lipo, Tagore or Kipling.

Anand was perhaps the first novelist who had made the unprivileged bottom dogs as heroes of his novels. By doing so he had taken the tradition of Sharat Chandra, Tagore and Premchand to great heights. Another significant aspect of his corpus was that he had portrayed these lowly and lost as they were in real life with all their desires, aspirations and struggle for existence and the consequent failure against the power and authority, and tradition. Owing to his realism, humanism and social protest, Anand becomes a pioneer novelist.

II. THE NOVELS OF MULK RAJ ANAND

Mulk Raj Anand, a socially committed novelist, has produced a good deal of literature. He has written more than a dozen novels and about seventy short stories and a host of essays and articles on a number of subjects. His novels fall into two categories namely social and autobiographical novels. He focused his attention on the sufferings, misery and wretchedness of the poor as a result of the exploitation of the downtrodden class of the Indian society. Religious hypocrisy, feudal system, East-West encounter, the place of woman in the society, superstitions, poverty, hunger and exploitation are his common themes. The present chapter deals with five of his novels namely, *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and *The Road* (1963), which deal with poverty, hunger and exploitation as their major themes.

In portraying characters under the yoke of suffering, Mulk Raj Anand skillfully employs the technique of the inner working novelist, and aims at exploring the intense sufferings of their souls. He attempted to introduce the downtrodden in the realm of novel and this is a memorable contribution to Indian English novel. He creates a traditional caste ridden Indian village which is away from all modern ways of living. In the village Sudras, Pariahs are the so called marginalized. His characters are from the lower strata of society, like the sweeper, the peasant, the plantation labourer, the city drudge, and the coolie, and he treats them with sympathy and respect as human beings. Mulk Raj Anand remarks: The passions which have occupied them were, perhaps, my own dominant moods, and therefore, all those characters may be said to be part of the same autobiography of the torments, ecstasies and "passionate consciousness" of the last three generations. Anand's characters depicted a realistic and soulful portrait of the poor in India. Anand himself was initiated into the literary career by a family tragedy, instigated by the rigidity of the tiring caste system. His 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. His first novel, *"Untouchable"*, (1935), was a stark reflection of the day-today 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. In the 1930s and 1940s Mulk Raj Anand divided his time between London and India. He joined the struggle for independence,



but also fought with the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. After the war Anand returned permanently to India and settled in Bombay. According to Prof. C.D Narasimhaiah, "the Indian novel in English has shown a capacity to accommodate a wide range of concerns, in Mulk Raj Anand a human concern for the underdog, not just a pre-occupation with economic determinism

. His second novel "Coolie" depicts the plight of India's poor, through the picture of a 15-year-old boy, trapped in servitude as a child laborer, who eventually dies of tuberculosis and is really a character to be pitied up on, as he enlivens the real Indian citizen under British colonialism. Raja Rao recaptures a wide range which has been more widened by inclusion of untouched themes and characters. In both the writers we can see a common as well as unique ability to bring about a pictorial presentation of the vivid characters of leadership qualities, but always underemphasized or rather we can simply summarize and say that these characters were forbidden to grow, and bring light to their lives, as in reality the Indian folks were underestimated by the masters and mistresses of the age. Here Mulk Raj Anand's zeal for overemphasizing the picture of exploitation, to some extent damages his art and vision. By the end or at the final part of the novel, where Shimla scene is introduced by the hackneyed, device of accident is poor. This part of the novel gives the impression of being sketchy, hasty, and it is slightly unconvincing. Now I would like to look into the art of characterization through the eyes of the protagonist of the novel Coolie by Mulk Raj Anand.

III. CHARACTERS IN ANAND'S NOVELS

Anand's choice of characters is in accordance with his theory of fiction. For Anand, novel has been a medium of expression of his deepest concern for the underdogs of the society, for the deprived and the rejected people who were marginalized either by caste or class in one way or the other. Since Anand believed in the dictum of 'arts for life's sake', he wanted to write about these marginalized folk, their problems and their struggle with the society. Though fictional works, in general, mostly deal with the imaginary characters, Anand has presented real people in his novels. Anand has confessed that there has always been a strong connection between his life and his writings throughout his literary career (Sources of Protest 18). Most of the characters in his novels are those whom he knew in real life. About his fictional characters who were modeled after the people with whom he chanced to live at one or the other stages of his life, Anand writes in his special preface to *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1951):

All these heroes, as the other 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 I owed them for much of the inspiration they had given me to mature into manhood, when I began to interpret their lives in my writing. They were not mere phantoms...They were flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood, and obsessed me in the way in which certain human beings obsess an artist's soul. And I was doing no more than what a writer does when he seeks to interpret the truth from the realities of his life

These characters not only obsessed Anand but forced him to pen them down in novels. The choice of characters in a novel is determined to a large extent by the exigency of the period in which the novel is



written and by the writers own interests, whims and idiosyncrasies (Arora 3). While writing novels, Anand has portrayed the real people—the people who were marginalized by society on the basis of caste and class. Indian writing in English or Anglo-Indian fictional works rarely presented such characters.

Anand took a bold and fearless step by going to lowest stratum of the society to pick his heroes from the soil and the dirt. His heroes are downtrodden sweepers, coolies, the unemployed coppersmiths, indebted farmers, exploited wives and poor simple soldiers.

Poverty and suffering are the badges of their class. They live and die, unwept, and unsung. His choice of characters and his objectives of writing novels were altogether different from other contemporary novelists. Anand confesses:

My novels were intended to be different from those of others, departures away from the upper and middle section fictions. I wished to create the folk, whom I knew intimately from the lower depths, the lumpens and the suppressed, oppressed, repressed, those who had seldom appeared in our literature, except in SaratChatterjee, Perm Chand, Bibhuti, Tarashankar and ManeckBanerjee.

IV. PROTAGONIST IN THE WRITINGS OF MULK RAJ ANAND

Most of the earlier Indian English literature was directly an imitation of Western models, but still it was a fine step towards the growth of Indian literature in English language. During the midnineteenth century Mulk Raja Anand, R. K. Narayan andRajaRao by using their excellence and experimentation flavoured Indian English writing with Indianness. Indian writers in English literature did not sever the connection from their mother tongue. By using their own mother tongue, they have done various experiments that show their love and sincerity for Indian soil as ‘KetakiGoswami’ observes. “Anand impregnates with such anecdotes that generate familiarity with the mode of perception of the Indians. He assimilates the flavour of North Indian, especially the dialect of Punjabi, whereas Narayan, Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya bring in the taste of Tamil, Kannada and Bengali tongues with their innotations.”iWriters like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand have skilfully used Indian English in their work. They twisted and manipulated language to fulfil their needs. In this context, Meenakshi Mukherjee in ‘The Twice Born Fiction’ observes, “English is a pliant language which each writer has to fashion a new to serve his particular purpose.”

Mulk Raj Anand is such a writer who has made various experiments on language. While doing so he used language in such a way that the portrayal of character and situation immediately capture the reader’s attention. Anand depicts his characters from all sections of Indian society. These characters are drawn from higher, middle and lower class in the society. They are the parts of contemporary Indian society which embedded with the problems like untouchability, exploitation and discrimination based on caste and class system. The indifferent way the upper caste people treat marginalized people, is so awful that it has filled the reader’s heart with shock, surprise and fear. All these elements are successfully presented by Anand through several linguistic expressions. Anand as a man and novelist inspired many other writers and in this regard his two novels, Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud, were highly appreciated by



Permila, “the two novels had done their job as neatly as an assassin’s knife... Mulk Raj Anand had changed me from romantic steeped in a world of fantasy to a realist”

Mulk Raj Anand is believed to be the first Indian writer who blended Punjabi and Hindustani idioms in the English language. Although Anand’s mother tongue was Punjabi yet he wrote in English, for the reason that the English language publishers did not refuse to publish his books.

Anand’s novels are the reflection of the social, cultural and political affairs of the era in which Anand himself live. In order to cast this scenario Anand deliberately used typical idioms and phrases to suits the linguistic situation. In addition to this, it arouses sympathy and sorrow and adds authenticity in the piece of work. Anand’s valuable contribution in Indian English literature and the way he inspired others is well described by C.B. Christesen “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 enlightened and human society. This has been an essential part of Mulk’s characters: and the aspirations to which help he has given expression are now part of India’s cultural and intellectual history. His work stands as a nobly proportioned edifice.”

V. CONCLUSION

In the comparative study of both the novels *Oliver twist* by Charles dickens and *untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand there were a lot of similarities related to the poverty and oppression .Though the countries were different, traditions were different, culture changes but the poverty remains the same. Both the protagonists *Oliver Twist* and *Bakha* suffered throughout the novel because of poverty and oppression. There were many similarities in writings of both the authors.

Anand deliberately and purposefully chose characters from soil and dirt because he wanted to write about their struggle for existence, struggle for identity and their problems. Anand’s protagonists evince a pattern of progression from passivity to self-sacrifice and self-awareness, through suffering. They are from lower strata of the society. They are marginalized in one way or the other. They are marginalized on the basis of caste, class or gender. Their journey of life is beset with unending problems, pestering troubles, unspeakable pain and dreadful agony. Suffering is the defining, indelible and persistent hall-mark of their life as it is of all the people in general who face marginality. They struggle in vain for their dignity and identity. They face dire socio-economic segregation and agonizing exclusion. Continual exposure to the cruelties of life begets in them the bitter awareness of their lowest social standing and position. This shuddering awareness emboldens a few of them for retaliation.



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