

Mulk Raj Anand as a pioneer novelist of Indo-Anglian literature emerging as a social realist at all costs: An Appraisal

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An Abstract: This paper projects Mulk Raj Anand as a pioneer novelist of Indo-Anglian literature reflected through his writings. The main focus of this paper is to bring about the influence of English over the Indians. English is the language of colonial domination, the construction of English education which is a part of the colonial cultural design. The light of post-colonialism reveals that language is the fundamental site for post-colonial discourse because the colonial process itself begins in the language. Language functions not simply as a device for reporting experience, but also defines the experience of its readers. Therefore, there is no doubt he has set a new trend in Indo-Anglian literature.

Keywords: Pioneer novelist, colonial domination, post colonialism, language, new trend, colonial process, economic force, remarkable variety, veritable feast, tragedy, social realist

The phrase ‘Anglo-Indian Literature’ may be used either in a broad or in a narrow sense. Broadly speaking, it includes anything that deals with India which is written in English. But strictly speaking, it means anything mainly describing the life of the English in India. In a still narrower sense, it may be taken to mean literature dealing with the life of the Eurasians who now prefer to be called Anglo-Indians. But now the term ‘Indian English Literature’ has come to be accepted in usage and it refers to the literature produced by Indians in English. The term Indo-Anglian refers to regional creative writing in English by Indians. As K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar has put it, “The ‘novel’ as a literary phenomenon is new to India. Epics, lyrics, dramas, short stories and fables have their respectable ancestries, going back by several centuries, but it is only during a period of little more than a century that occurred and taken root in India” (Quot. in Vaidyanathan 5). A few such notable Indian English novelists as Rabindranath Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayanan, D.F.Karaka, Ahmed Abbas, Ahmed Ali, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Khushwant Singh, R.P.Jhabwala, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Anita Desai have contributed a lot to the growth of Indo-Anglian and their contribution to Indo-Anglian fiction deserves merit and attention from all literary circles.

Mulk Raj Anand is a pioneer novelist of Indo-Anglian literature. It was he who, undoubtedly, introduced the new wave of realism in Indo-Anglian fiction with his earlier novels like *Untouchable* and *Coolie*. “These two books”, says Sajjad Zaheer, “remain the first among the best in this new people’s trend in Indian literature. To Anand belongs the honour of being the pioneer, the first in launching modern Indian literature on this new road” (P 1). Under the influence of the ‘Thirties Movement in England’, Anand emerged as a novelist of social protest and humanism. M.K.Anand is said to have won renown and repute for himself as the chief spokesman of the Indo-Anglian literary naturalism with a proletarian bias. According to him, human behaviour is determined by its social environment. The society, not character, is the destiny of man. His ‘Coolie’ (1936) is possibly the foremost folk epic of the Indo-Anglian fiction. In the words of A.V.Krishna Rao, “It is a typical novel of this oppressive trend (pro-proletarian) in modern society and becomes multi-dimensional with its philosophy of naturalism and the contemporary national ideas. But beneath the pervasive pessimism, there is an essential undercurrent of optimism and need for drastic reform of the rotten society” (P 11).

In a writing career spread over almost forty years, he has produced more than a dozen novels, half a dozen collections of short stories, and numerous other works on subjects ranging from art to cookery. His fiction is nothing but “a characteristic product of the modern Indian ethos. He is distinguished from other Indian writers by his sense of commitment, humanism, realism, creative vigour and abundant sympathy for the bottom dogs and dregs of society” (Vaidyanathan 11). Of all the Indian writers in English, M.R. Anand is perhaps the most prolific, for he is a writer with a sense of commitment and he is the first Indo-Anglian novelist the depict the tragic plight of the pariahs and the underdogs of Indian society who are the agonised victims of one form or the other aspect of exploitation. The sufferers are nor the victims of Fate or God but of the man-made society.

Mulk Raj Anand was born in Peshawar on December 12, 1905. His father, Lal Chand Anand, was a craftsman in Amritsar but he joined the British Indian Army. His mother, Ishwar Kaur, came from Central Punjab. He developed a sense of hatred towards the superficial trappings of religion. At the age of eleven, his cousin, Kaushalya died before his eyes. This was the first defining episode which created a crisis in his life. As he said, “I could see the contract of life and death”. Professor K.N.Sinha observed:

“The memory of Kausalya was to remain one of the most poignant in his life, something perhaps comparable to what Henry James felt in the loss of his cousin, Mimy Temple” (M.R.Anand 19).

The shock was later doubted by the death of his uncle Pratap and aunt Devaki. Anand started questioning the meaning of life and suffering. This mood looms large in *Lament of the Death of Master of Arts* in which he explores the philosophical meaning of suffering. Anand was very much influenced by the British oppression in Jallianwalla Bagh. He caricatured Englishmen in his novels later on. He studied at the Khalsa college at Amritsar. It was here that he met Iqbal, the poet-philosopher who influenced him a lot. In 1925, he went to London on a scholarship to obtain a Doctor's degree. Anand studied many philosophers but he was mainly influenced by Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. He also read Freud and Jung. He started writing for Eliot's *Criterion*. In England, he studied Indian Art and philosophy. In 1932, he returned to India and stayed with Gandhi for some time. It was in this year that he wrote his first novel namely *Untouchable*. In 1938, he organised the Progressive writers' movement and for some time, edited *Indian Literature*, an organ of this movement. Anand was an enemy of fascism and imperialism and wrote two books *Marx and Engels on India* and *Letters on India*. He went to London in 1939 and worked for the Independence of India. Saros Cowasjee observes:

“Few know that he has fought all his life for Indian independence and that along with Krishna Menon, he did more to influence British Public opinion in England in India's favour than any other Indian resident in Britain” (P 28)

At the end of World War II, Anand came back to India and by this time, many of his novels and collections of short stories had come out. In 1948, he went to Russia. His novels were very popular in this country. Besides, he edited *Marg*, an art magazine. Dr. Marlene Fisher holds:

“To spend a single day with this eccentric individual at his Khandala retreat is to attend a happening. And the happening is the man himself, in all his explosive ebullience and quiet generosity, in his sense of drama and fun and his over consciousness of the plight of his fellowman, in his patterned alterations of work and play, of rest and activity” (42)

He has to his credit publication of such novels as 1. *Untouchable* (1935), 2. *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937),

3. *Coolie* (1936), 4. *Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts* (1939), 5. *The Road* (1961), 6. *The Death of a Hero* (1963), 7. *The Private Life of an Indian Prince*, (1953), 8. *Seven Summers* (1951), 9. *The Big Heart* and 10. *The Village Trilogy*. What has to be understood by this survey is that M.R. Anand is a prolific writer of novels and short stories. This impressive corpus of creative fiction makes him one of the most outstanding novelists of India. Realism and humanism are supposed to be the two outstanding traits of his fiction.

“It is held that Mulk Raj Anand brought everything new to the Indo-Anglian novel and the short stories – new matter, new technique, new style and new approach” (Mehta 48), but the influence of some Indian masters like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Tagore, Sharat Chatterjee and Munshi Premchand was felt on the writings of Anand. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee transformed the folk romance into the novel, while Tagore brought a new humanizing breath of outlook to bear on his material and Munshi Premchand wrote about the defeated peasantry of Uttar Pradesh with acute poignancy. The influence of Premchand can be traced throughout the entire work of Anand. Sharat Chandra Chatterjee wrote about the lower middle class and brought forth the humanity of the humble folk. All these influences, Bankim’s romanticism, Tagore’s humanizing breath, Premchand’s sympathy for the suffering people and Sharat Chandra’s understanding of the human hearts influenced the artistic make up of M.R. Anand. In the words of Jack Lindsay, “Anand has one side facing into Premchand’s world, the other side facing into Tagore’s” (149). In short, Anand carried the tradition of Tagore and Premchand, Bankim Chandra and Sharat Chandra to heights unheard of before and brought the form of the novel in line with the latest developments in England and Europe.

What Anand actually succeeded in doing was interpreting the heart of India, the real India of the villages to the West in the form they could easily understand and appreciate. As the son of a coppersmith turned soldier, he had moved with his father as his regiment was transferred from place to place. Thus, he saw great many sections of Indian life and European life, the life of officers and the man of the army. His mother was a woman through whom he was nourished on the songs, talks, myths and epics, of the village community. He had known and seen and felt the rural life of the Punjab and the North West Frontier Provinces of those days. He had seen villagers, groaning under poverty and the village life sucked by the parasites and religious priests. All these had cast a spell on the mind of Mulk Raj Anand and he set his face against the exploitation of the poor by any class. He made up his mind to be the mouth piece of the underdog. “*The Village* (1939) treats them, not patronizingly, but with the sympathy and even the respect due to them as human beings. The sweeper, the peasant, the plantation labourer, the city drudge, the sepoy, all emerge alive from his novels – anguished and hungry, yet human superstitious and self-divided, vividly realized in spite of their thwarted purposing” (Sajjad 42-43).

Anand has a natural gift for homely pathos, but sometimes his sympathy for the downtrodden gets the better of his judgement wringing an extra tear from the situation. That is exactly where sometimes Anand, has to lead his suffering heroes and heroines to improbable ends. The novel *Coolie* may be cited as the fitting example for this. The end of the novel would be taken for the events leading upto the strike move rhythmically and realistically. “After the abortive strike, however, Munoo is knocked down by the car of an Anglo-India, Mrs. Mainwaving who takes him off to Simla as an over-indulged servant, and he dies of tuberculosis. This episode does not have the organic quality of the previous phases of Munoo’s development, and could have been committed with gain to the book” (Lindsay 14).

Anand’s themes are the result of “the modern Indian ethos” and he has found a vision from the west. His problems attain universal significance because of the subject. Jack Lindsay observes:

“It is thus that Anand interprets Indian material in terms of a new universalism and combines all that is best in both East and West. And so there are in his works elements of mature poetry, breadth of compassion, irony and serenity; a wealth of varying planes of perception which Premchand could not encompass” (P 45).

He further says, “His European view gave him strong Indian sensibility enabled him to express this general scheme of movement without losing his whole-hearted sympathy with people as they were, people with a long rich tradition” (P 49). While Raja Rao is satisfied with India’s spiritual heritage, Mulk Raj Anand is a social interpreter of India. Even after Independence, many basic problems of India have not been solved. Anand has made these problems known to the West. To quote the Glasgow Herald, “As is among the most remarkable of contemporary novelists.” Like other novelists, he does not export the exotic India through his fiction. It is the real India with all her rightness, squalor and pathos that he shows in novel after novel with artistic success. Anand is a crusader against injustice of every type. He set his face against the exploitation of the poor by any class. This included the British masters, the village money lenders, the businessmen, the native rulers, priests and tea-planters. So acute is his sympathy for the poor and the oppressed that in his novels we sometimes find the author cry with anguish against the injustice so common in those days:

“And Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, the leftist is angry, he is very angry; but he is enough to an artist to save his excellent novels from the stigma of mere propaganda. And hence his characters ... at any time, his Indian characters – are almost as a rule recognizably human beings, not automats or formulate” (Iyengar 189)

Anand’s heroes are small men, common man pursued by inexorable economic forces, which toss them this way and that, till they break to pieces. They are not able to fight these forces because they are ignorant and uneducated belonging to unprivileged classes. It may be a tea plantation, Gangu caught in meshes of civilized slavery plantation, or it may be Mundu, the Coolie, who atlast dies in Simla, or it may be Ananta draws out the simplicity and nobility of their lives. Like the heroes of Hardy, they try to fight against the inexorable destiny, thus standing unbowed beneath the blows of fate.

Anand is the singer of the fortitude and nobility of the poor class. As Meenakshi Mukherjee has put it, “The heroes of Mulk Raj Anand are rugged individuals who suffer because they refuse to conform. Munoo the Coolie, Bukha the untouchable, Bhiku the Chamar, Lal Singh of the trilogy – all are persecuted by society for their non-conformity, but all of them are indomitable in spirit” (P 75).

To conclude, as a novelist, Mulk Raj Anand is endowed with a remarkable variety of mood. His novels are a veritable feast of satire, humour, pathos and tragedy. It is an actual orchestration of different notes. As V.S.Pritchett says, “Mr.Anand’s picture is real, comprehensive and subtle and his gifts in all moods from force to comedy, from pathos to tragedy, from the realistic to the poetic, are remarkable” (369). No Doubt, he has set a new trend in Indo-Anglian fiction – that of writing about the poor and the downtrodden. He may be remembered as a social realist and a pioneer novelist of Indo-Anglian literature.

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Mulk Raj Anand was a distinguished writer, critic, editor, journalist and political activist. Born into the Kshatriya (warrior) caste in the Punjabi city of Peshawar, he was educated at cantonment schools before completing a degree at the University of Punjab, Amritsar, where his involvement in the 1921 Civil Disobedience campaign against the British resulted in a short period of imprisonment.Â Prior to this, he had already seen success as an art and literary critic, publishing his first book, on Persian painting, in 1930.Â Berry, Margaret, Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and the Novelist (Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1971). Bheemaiah, J., Class and Caste in Literature: The Fiction of Harriet B. Stowe and Mulk Raj Anand (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2005).