Ars Artium: **An International Peer Reviewed-cum-Refereed Research Journal of English Studies and Culture**
ISSN (Online) : 2395-2423 • ISSN (Print) : 2319-7889
Vol. 7, January 2019
Pp. 67-71
http://www.arsartium.org

Discrimination and Exploitation in the First Trilogy of Mulk Raj Anand

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Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand is a great pioneer in the domain of Indian-English fiction. He distinguishes between the upper class and lower class of people in the society through his first trilogy. He is free from East-West complex. Undoubtedly, he believes in humanism and realism. He touches the themes of untouchability in *Untouchable* (1935), poverty, hunger and exploitation in *Coolie* (1936) and labour problem in *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937). The writer shows his sympathy and compassion for the down-trodden and the poor people who face infinite problems to establish their identity. This paper is a study of discrimination and exploitation in his first trilogy.

Keywords: Discrimination, Suffering, Exploitation, Trilogy, Sympathy.

Mulk Raj Anand is the most prolific as well as the most committed Indian writer in English. He studied at Punjab University and went to England for higher study and research in Philosophy. He was awarded PhD degree in Philosophy and wrote a number of articles for *Criterion* and other journals. He was much influenced by Tagore, Bankim Chandra, Sharat Chandra, Munshi Premchand, Mahatma Gandhi and Mohammad Iqbal and western writers Gorky, Tolstoy, James Joyce, Chekhov, Flaubert and Virginia Woolf. The work of Sarojini Naidu, Puran Singh and Harindra Nath Chattopadhyaya also influenced him. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) much influenced him. He read a lot of continental literature including Marx, Mazzini, and Proudhon. Professor K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes, "As a novelist … Anand has been as effective almost as Dickens himself." (Iyengar 330)

M. R. Anand is a celebrated Indo-Anglian novelist with global recognition. Every novelist is an artist and the greatness of a novelist is directly proportional to the artistic quality of his output. The artistic quality of Anand's literary works has been widely acclaimed by both Indian and foreign reviewers and critics. He has made painstaking efforts to understand the soul of his land which has been expressing itself through

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Indian thoughts and culture. The simple fact is that his novels *Untouchable* and *Coolie* are available in 38 languages of the world. Anand has shown his stamina and stern consistency of purpose among Indo-Anglian novelists.

Along with Raja Rao and R. K. Nayayan, Mulk Raj Anand makes great trinity in Indian English literature. These three great novelists have highlighted different aspects of Indian life in their works. Mulk Raj Anand wrote social novels and tried to break the barriers of the caste and creed. His *Untouchable* is an attempt to abolish the evil of untouchability from Indian society. Economic slavery and colonial exploitation are the subject matter of *Coolie* and the *Two Leaves and a Bud*. R. K. Narayan, through his social comedies, has mirrored the little ironies of domestic life and crumbling old values in the developing society. Raja Rao has championed the case of Indian philosophy on the one hand and on the other hand essence of Gandhism. *The Guide* and *Bachelor of Arts* of R. K. Narayan and *Serpent and the Rope* and *Kanthapura* of Raja Rao are immortal works.

M. R. Anand is an artist of universal greatness. An important aspect of his fiction is its concern with the reality of organised evil. In all his novels, he appears as a social critic. The society, he has seen and observed is the field of his work. His writings probe deeply into the social process. For him "literature is an expression of society" and the large majority of the questions raised by him are social questions: questions of tradition and innovation or rigid customs of exploitations and tyranny and the fight for survival with dignity.

M. R. Anand is also a great humanist. He thinks that most of our problems have been created by man and they can be solved by man. He has sympathy and compassion for the down-trodden and poor people. He has much respect for man. He hates superstitions, bigotry, caste, class, capitalism, exploitation, over-population, tyranny, colonialism, fascism, atomic stock-piling, war and genocide. He exposes social hypocrisy and taboos, class-exploitation and class-struggle, social and economic injustice and the inhuman atrocities of the erstwhile British rule in his novels.

His first novel *Untouchable* was published in 1935 when the Gandhian struggle for freedom was at its height. Gandhi's love and sympathy for the untouchables influenced him very much. He described the difference between the life of oppressed and the oppressors. His early novels are called mainly a literature of protest. Bakha is the hero of *Untouchable*, a sweeper boy of eighteen. He is the central figure of the novelwho experiences discrimination and exploitation. There was a custom for sweepers to carry a drum and to beat it when they entered the bazaar so that the people of so called upper castes could keep themselves away from the sweepers, even from their shadows. One day Bakha was very happy and bought jalebis to eat. When he wanted to eat it, unfortunately he gets touched by a person of upper caste and that person abused him and hurt him severely by calling him 'dirty dog', 'son of bitch', etc. Going to a temple was banned for untouchables. There are a number of incidents that bring to light the suffering of untouchables created by the so called upper caste people.

Bakha is a dexterous workman of 20th century. His sister Sohini is also dexterous after her fashion. One day she goes to the village well to fetch water. Kali Nath, the

priest of the temple, sees her and gets attracted to her youthfulness. He pours the water into her pot and suggests that she should come to his house later in the day to clean the courtyard. When she goes, he makes improper suggestions to her. She starts screaming and he shouts "polluted" and indignant high caste people gather there. Meantime, Bakha also comes upon the scene, having swept the streets. He is furious and sends away Sohini to home. At home he bitterly tells his father: "They think we are mere dirt, because we clean their dirt."But he leans that Sohini is molested by the priest. She tells Bakha about the priest that "He-e-e-e just teased me, ... And then when I was bending down to work, he came and held me by my breasts." (69-70) Bakha exclaims, "Brahmin dog! I will go and kill him!" But next moment he feels weak and wants support. His eyes are deemed. The sense of fear comes creeping into him. Pandit Kali Nath treats Bakha's sister Sohini like a juicy morsel of girlhood. The same attitude prompts the betel-leaf seller from whom Bakha buys cigarettes to fling the packet at the untouchable "as a butcher might throw a bone to an insistent dog sniffing round the corner of his shop."

Mulk Raj Anand depicts suffering of the untouchables in this novel more artistically and he succeeds in bringing out the real pictures of social evils prevalent in Indian society in the form of hatred. Andrew M. Stracuzzi in his article "The Indelible Problem: Mulk Raj Anand and the Plight of Untouchability" writes, "There is no question that Mulk Raj Anand has fashioned with *Untouchable* a novel that articulates the abuses of an exploited class through sheer sympathy in the traditionalist manner of the realistic novel." *(The Literature and Culture of the Indian Subcontinent (South Asia)in the Postcolonial Web)*

Coolie is another great epic of misery. Its central theme is the exploitation of the poor and the under-privileged by the forces of capitalism, industrialism and colonialism. Munoo is the hero of this novel. He is an orphan of only fourteen years old. He is exploited by his aunt Gujri and his uncle Daya Ram. He is ill-treated by them. He is happy in his native village of Bilaspur. He is employed as a domestic servant in the house of Babu Nath Ram, sub-accountant, Imperial Bank, Sham Nagar. The lady of the house, Bibi Uttam Kaur a snobbish and suspicious, termagant, under-feeds, nags and humiliates him, and his uncle takes away three rupees which he earns. He was to be a slave, a servant who should do work, all the odd jobs. Being a poor and helpless orphan, Munoo is denied his fundamental rights to life and happiness. He is exploited and made to suffer till he dies. The premature death of Munoo is very tragic because he is an innocent child. According to C. D. Narasimhaiah, "The situations Anand creates are convincing on the whole and reveal aspects of life hitherto generally kept out of fiction as though are tabooed from it." (119)

Anand shows the reality of village like Bilaspur, small town like Sham Nagar, big cities like Daulatpur and Bombay. In Daulatpur, he is ill-treated by Ganpat who frequently beats him and abuses at his innocent head. When Munoo works as a coolie to make both ends meet, he finds that there is cut-throat competition and the corn-traders exploit the situation. The coolies are paid extremely low wages and they have to carry excessively heavy loads. They are abused, beaten and turned out at the least fault. Munoo is not alone, he is only one out of the countless victims of such

exploitation. The next tragedy commences with Mrs. Mainwaring in Shimla. She makes him her boy servant, her rickshaw puller and there are hints that he is exploited sexually also. And as a result of which he dies at the age of sixteen.

Margaret Berry comments: "The centre of consciousness in the novel, a pair of spectacles through which is surveyed the social life of India in all its misery and wretchedness. All other men and women, their morality and behaviour, their mode of thinking and speaking are evaluated in accordance with Munoo's reaction to them." (26)

Gangu is the hero of *Two Leaves and a Bud*. He is an industrious, shrewd and upright peasant who lives with his brother in a village of the Hoshiarpur district of Punjab province of British India. He finds himself deprived of his only means of livelihood in advanced age when his brothers mortgage the families landed property and mud house to set Badri Dass for the repayment of their debt. At this juncture the cunning British planter's agent Buta lures him to go to work as a coolie on the Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam by promising him high wages, a fine house to live in, a plot of land to cultivate rice and a loan to tide over a financial crisis in lieu of his services. So he undertakes a hazardous train journey into the unknown land of Assam in the company of his wife Sajani and his two children Leila and Buddhu. After his appointment he gets only half a rupee a day for working on the plantation with his whole family. He lives in brick-built room with a tin-roof which becomes hot during the summer and cold during the winter. It is situated in the unhygienic surroundings, where the epidemics of cholera and malaria break out very frequently and kill hundreds of the inhabitant every year. He receives ill-treatment from the selfish and supercilious British managers. Croft-Cooke and Reggie Hunt, the British managers of the Macpherson Tea Estate, live luxuriously in spacious and well-furnished bungalows on the highlands. They do not execute the plan for clean water supply in order to protect them from the epidemics of cholera and malaria. Gangu's wife Sajani dies of malaria. Reggie Hunt is a villain who not only flogs the Indian coolies mercilessly but also rapes their wives and daughters without any qualms.

Gangu exposes the brutal exploitation of Indian coolies by the British managers of the Tea Estates in Assam during the 1930s. He bears the brunt of the brutal treatment mated out to the Indian coolies by the British managers of the Tea Estates in Assam very patiently till he is murdered by the British and lustful superior.

Really great writers cannot be prevented from raising issues and questions of severe nature and views about caste, class and woman and the problem of evil always provokes writers in tackling such questions in their writings. Anand has been an avid watcher of various cruelties, injustices and hypocrisies since his childhood and presents the same in his novels. His heroes Bakha, Munoo and Gangu have become universalized figures of miseries caused by discrimination between the upper class and lower class of people. Through his first trilogy Anand tries to sensitise people to suffering of the down-trodden in society and eradicate it in order to establish healthy social environment, humanity, co-existence, justice, fraternity, mutual respect, equality, harmonious relationship and peace.

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