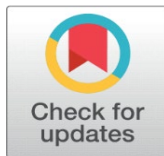
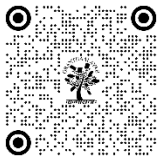


THE QUINTESSENCE OF MULK RAJ ANAND'S NOTION OF FERVENT SOCIALISM IN THE INDIAN ETHOS

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ABSTRACT

Mulk Raj Anand, the most prolific writer and the pioneer of Indian English fiction in the twentieth century, had an enlarged and magnanimous vision of the whole human race. When Anand wrote his first four novels in the 1930's, he responded to the world-wide tendency of using a sociological approach in literature. Anand was proved to be a product of a particular phase in the evolution of twentieth century ideas. Mulk Raj Anand is a committed artist with a philosophical paradigm and moral and poetic vision of life. The image of India is the focal point of his creative imagination. Mulk Raj Anand's humanism consists in a system of thought in which humanitarian interests, values and dignity are held foremost. It implies commitment to the concerns of humanity. It is an attitude that centres on the activities of man rather than on the supernatural world. His humanism makes him to use his art for the services of humanity. Anand was filled with a purpose – to emphasise the quandary of the poor, suffering masses of India. Only he would dare to make the lowest of the lowly his hero for the first time in the history of Indian English fiction – Bakha, in the *Untouchable*. He would repel against any form of compulsion or fascist moves which angst his countrymen. This Paper examines the quintessence of Mulk Raj Anand's notion of fervent socialism in the Indian ethos.

Keywords: Socialism, Indian Culture, Literature, Humanism

1. INTRODUCTION

Coming under the sway of the writings of Tolstoy, Ruskin, Morris and Gandhi, Mulk Raj Anand became a hard boiled socialist. He was also a downright devotee of Nehru's socialism and valiant and clear cut in conveying his thought even when they surged against the current. His lucid writing has left an indelible mark in Indian English literature which replicated the socio-political life of the twentieth century generation.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Mr. Anand was a vocal supporter of the Gandhian movement for national liberation from the British colonial rule. Although the socialist sympathies took him considerably beyond the ambit of gradualist reforms favoured by the Mahatma, Mr. Anand had a visceral appreciation for the proletarian life. He articulated his empathy for the oppressed working class and the subaltern castes, those marginalize by States and markets in his many novels. He wrote movingly of the predicament of India's many disempowered people like the rural poor, the illiterate, women and the social attrition wrought on those who crossed caste or communal lines.

Anand's literary career has been fashioned by what he himself calls in *Apology for Heroism*, "the double burden on my shoulders, the Alps of the European tradition and the Himalaya of my Indian past" (104). His numerous works form

a fictional chronicle in which his eclectic humanism and his traditional compassion for the underprivileged are persistent themes.

Anand was at the pinnacle of his powers in the Thirties when he believed in his creed with a religious ardour. He was not mortified to admit that he was using literature as a means to some other end, and that this end was the elevation of the suffering of fellow human beings. Anand has affirmed his position in unambiguous terms when he said, "Any writer who said that he was not interested in *la condition humaine* was either posing, or yielding to a fanatical love of isolationism" (9). Later he elucidated his stand as a realist who allows his insight to be conditioned by the time, the place and the circumstances of his age. He also feels that "a writer must go straight to the heart of the problem of our time, the problem of human sensibility in present complex world, the tragedy of moral man" (78).

Anand's sympathy for subalterns never left even in later works like *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953) where he tried to grapple with the idiosyncrasies of the high and the mighty. In this novel we see in the relationship of the narrator, Dr. Hari Shankar, the young royal physician and his bearer Francis, remnants of Anand's undying interest in the lower classes:

... rationalizing Francis's default by thinking that the relationship of a master and servant was the most humiliating and that the basic defect lay in me [Hari] for employing a bearer on the modest pay of rupees thirty plus board and lodging, when the actual worth of Francis's human personality was much higher, ... (119).

Anand had ample milieu and solid support for framing a socialist perspective in his writings. He had founded the Progressive Writers' Association in London with Sajjad Zahir, as many socialist – oriented Indian writers were there at that time. The association he launched afforded an established structure for resuming the venture of humanism and egalitarianism.

In spite of his western rationalistic leanings and his personal life style, Anand pursued Mahatma Gandhi intimately for a time, on account of his humanistic, compassionate spirit, living in the Sabarmati Ashram where Gandhi corrected the manuscripts of the *Untouchable*.

Anand was filled with a purpose – to emphasise the quandary of the poor, suffering masses of India. Only he would dare to make the lowest of the lowly his hero for the first time in the history of Indian English fiction – Bakha, in the *Untouchable*. He would repel against any form of compulsion or fascist moves which angst his countrymen.

When Anand wrote his first four novels in the 1930's, he responded to the world wide tendency of using a sociological approach in literature. In Europe, it was the 'Pink' decade, when Spender, Auden and Isherwood in England, Gide and Malraux in France, Beecher and Brecht in Germany, Ignazio Silone in Italy - were all engaged in trying to find a solution to the world's woes through new political ideologies. On the other side of the Atlantic, the same concerns were evident. Thus Anand was proved to be a product of a particular phase in the evolution of twentieth century ideas.

Mulk Raj Anand was a celebrated Indian writer in English who strappingly insisted on socialist realism in literature. Along with Prem Chand, Yashpal and Nagarjun in Hindi, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas and Kishen Chunder in Urdu, Anand associated himself with the *Pragativad* movement and determined to write with a view to discovering the causes of the mental and material chaos in India and the world. The setting and characters in his novels are realistic and they embody the social conditions prevailing in his times. As professor K.R.S. Iyengar points out:

When Anand started writing fictions, he decided he would prefer the familiar to the fancied, that he would avoid the highways of romance and sophistication but explores the by lanes of the outcastes and the peasants, the *sepoys* and the working people. It was, however, no laborious exercise of the self-conscious proletarians. To Anand it was merely the easier and more natural way; he was himself of the proletariat. It is the atmosphere of the late twenties and early thirties, the air was filled with the dust of politics and infected with the fumes of man's inhumanity to man, but it was not altogether unrelieved by hope. It is also worthy of mention that Anand is a committed writer. (334)

Anand's works are wide ranging in mood and tone. His short story *The Lost Child* is a parable in which the traumatic experience of a child separated from its parents in a country fair symbolizes a universal human plight. A young, simple, peasant woman in an advanced state of pregnancy is presented in the story *Birth*. She feels assured that the goddess Kali is by her side as she finds the birth pangs starting, when she is on her way to work, alone and nervous. In contrast to these imaginative tales, there are starkly realistic studies of man and woman crushed by overwhelming forces. Among these are *Lajwanti*, the story of the helpless rustic girl persecuted by her in-laws; and *Old Bappu* and *The Cobbler and the Machine* are heart breaking sketches of two unfortunate outcastes.

There are stories of strong social consciousness which reveal Anand's acute perception of the complex forces at work in modern India. *The Power of Darkness* and *The Tractor and the Corn Goddess* demonstrate the inevitable clash between tradition and modernity in the contemporary Indian society. Feudalism and capitalism are pilloried in *A Kashmir Idyll* and *The Prince of Bananas* respectively.

Anand's most ambitious endeavour is his trilogy and it marks a turning point in his literary career. The three novels – *The Village*, *Across the Black Waters* and *The Sword and the Sickle* – contain the quintessence of Anand: they exemplify his strength and his weakness; they reach his finest achievement and also mark his decline. In an essentially picaresque manner, the trilogy traces the career of Lal Singh, a Punjabi peasant youth, through vigorous experiences in India and abroad.

In the trilogy, *The Village* deals with Lalu's boyhood in a Punjabi village; *Across the Black Waters* takes him to Europe as a soldier in the Great War; *The Sword and the Sickle* tells of his involvement in the Indian independence movement. Lalu shares most of the characteristics of the other adolescent protagonists of Anand. Like Munoo the Coolie and Bakha the untouchable, Lalu is persecuted by individuals as well as by society; like the others, his spirit is indomitable. A more significant similarity is their common faith in progress. Lalu is different from his fellow villagers in his faith in the possibility of improvement, in his distress at the surrounding filth, in his hatred of customs that divide man from man. As in the other novels of Anand, in the trilogy also, the characters fall neatly into three types: the sufferers, the oppressors and the good men; and the protagonist is the sufferer-in-chief.

Anand is seen as a synthesizer of the western and the Indian philosophical world view when he affirms that the dignity of man must be maintained. Within his fictional genre the image of society as ogre and the odyssey of the poor as one of marginalized living, and the conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed take varied forms divulging the weaknesses and contradictions within some of the cultural and religious traditions and socio-economic-political visions and ways of life in India.

Humanism is a philosophy focused upon human means for comprehending reality. It is a philosophy of reason and science in pursuit of knowledge. Humanism is a Renaissance doctrine, which stresses the essential worth, dignity and the greatness of man as contrasted with an older view that man is wicked, worthless and doomed to destruction both in his life and in that is to come. Humanists reject arbitrary faith, authority, revelation and altered state of consciousness. It is regarded as a philosophy of imagination, compassion etc... It is a realistic philosophy. It is the philosophy for those in love with life. Humanists take responsibility for the lives of others.

Mulk Raj Anand's humanism consists in a system of thought in which humanitarian interests, values and dignity are held foremost. It implies commitment to the concerns of humanity. It is an attitude that centres on the activities of man rather than on the supernatural world. His humanism makes him to use his art for the services of humanity. It must be frankly admitted that humanism derives its strength from both eastern and western thought. But Anand has stated time and again that he rejected all kinds of system and categories of philosophy that are the basis of western humanism.

He is a humanist who reveals the essential dignity of the victims of Indian society. This Humanism is central to Anand's novels as is the essential man central to it. The charge of propaganda is discarded by an artistic pervasiveness which peeps out of characters and situations which Anand favours personally.

Anand had a great love and respect for early Indian culture, which played subsequently a remarkable rate in the formation of his philosophy of life. In *Lines Written to an Indian Air: Essays* he observes: "the kind of humanism, on which I believe the kind of world I hope for... is yet integral to the Indian tradition in which I grew up" (2). Anand's works illustrate mainly the problems of humanism. He says in *Is there a Contemporary Indian Civilization*, "This human philosophy for India today is the acceptance of man as a centre of all our thinking, feeling and activity and the service for the greater good of all humanity" (156).

The philosophy of 'being' and 'becoming' is envisaged in his fictional world chiefly through protagonists like Bhaka, Biku, Gauri, Ananta and Krishan. It is a lifelong conviction of Anand that all human activity should be geared towards making life glorious and exuberant. The poetic and philosophical realism that permeates his fictional canvas proclaims, celebrates and glorifies the philosophy of humanism with which he began his writing career. His works are examples of artistic affirmation of his philosophy of humanism with Indian overtones. His revolt against the systems that dehumanize people is the major concern of his first three novels, namely *Untouchable*, *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*.

Ananta of *The Big Heart* and Kishan Chander of *Nine Moods of Bharata* signify in a way Anand's holistic understanding and awareness of the chaos and pathos of life, and above all, his literary evolution from existentialism to

profound humanism with Buddhist overtones. From the time Anand began writing *Seven Summers*, we can notice an evolutionary budge in his moral emphasis. There is a gradual progression from the realm of revolutionary critical realism to that of compassionate understanding of life. Anand himself labelled it as a transition from existentialism to humanism. He says in his 'Apology for Heroism':

The theme of my work is the whole man and the whole gamut of the human relationships rather than only one single part of it. Just as I desire a total and true humane view of experience, a view of the whole man, in order that a completely new kind or revolutionary human may arise, so I have been inclined to stress the need for a truly humanist art commensurate with the need of our time. (59)

The truth that Anand proclaims in his fiction is universally meaningful and humanly significant although the reality he dwells upon is topical and contextual, and therefore Indian. The fusion of the general and the particular is achieved without any conscious or intentional addiction or commitment to any particular propaganda. The incidents and issues interlocked with reality are ugly and perennial but Anand's fictional description of the reality is typically Indian because of its refreshing frankness and forthrightness. Anand is seen at his best for exposing the exploiters of his contemporary society so as to place them in their fictions. He vehemently criticizes the decayed aspects of the Indian tradition. In the words of M.K.Naik: "Anand is at his best when exposing the limitations of the decayed Indian traditions and championing the cause of modernism as a cure for the ills of Indian society and when in doing so, he maintains his balance" (23-24).

Anand's triumph as a maker of Indian English and consequently as a contributor to the 'Englishes' of the world lies in his deep-rooted Indian approach of his literary and social sensibility that was embedded with incisive thoughts and humane approach. The fact that he has consistently sustained *karuna* or compassion as the recurrent flow of his fictional streams not only enhances our understanding of two other values, namely, *satyam* or truth and *sundaram* or beauty. These we have cherished in India as our spiritual heritage. They also invariably proclaim Anand's works of art as a pioneering essay that focuses upon Indian critical realism – existential humanism *vis-a-vis* humdrum life in India.

Anand asserts that there is no heroism in the contemporary civilization because today's human society is in furore and all of us are bound to live in the age of destruction or fury (*Kaliyuga*). Under such circumstances, Anand believes that poetry becomes piety and art becomes courage. Thus literature becomes an abet in liberating ourselves from all kinds of bondage. The knowledge of Indian perception of *Satyam*, *Sivam* and *Sundaram* becomes an inevitable and essential quest for *nirvana*. Hence, Anand's real and fictional journey into the Indian cultural and spiritual heritage is wells of wisdom in conjuring up the concept of egalitarian society among his countrymen.

As life continues to be a bundle of muddles, chaos and pain, human beings need to transcend existence. This is the disposition of Anand in his later novels. The idea of life as a pilgrimage in to the discovery of shared values amidst friendly and affectionate human relationships becomes the new metaphor of Anand's art as seen in his novel *Nine Moods of Bharata. Pilgrimage to Ellora*, another novel, seems to be reiterating the identical thought. The original impulse that inspired Anand to write, namely, his predilection for the wretched of the earth, continues to haunt the mind of Anand in his works. In *Apology for Heroism* Anand says, "I believe that the deepest socialism is the only basis for perfecting the deepest human personality, that the two should be mutually inclusive, and that it is only by combining the two that a richer and more stable civilization will arise"(106).

Mulk Raj Anand is a committed artist with a philosophical paradigm and moral and poetic vision of life. The image of India is the focal point of his creative imagination. As a social realist in literature, he attacks injustice of every type. Exploitation with its myriad forms and ramifications *vis-a-vis* caste, religion, gender, colonialism, feudalism and industrial capitalism forms the major concern of his objective scrutiny. The forces of prejudice, superstition and ignorance come under his critical realism. Through art, he endeavours to demonstrate the ethnicity of his own people and insists upon the need for upholding civilizing values which help nourish an enlightened and humane society.

His creative effort to understand the soul of India exudes a vision of life that is both culturally Indian and universally human. The entire corpus of his literary output elucidates, examines and interprets a world view based on his vision of a modern egalitarian society. His fictional narratives convey both by insinuation and direct preaching his philosophical attitude to life, his view of the reality and his artistic vision of the need for transcendence from the riddles of human existence.

Mulk Raj Anand will be ever remembered as a pioneer of Indian English fiction, who, for the first time, took a socialist leaning and hoped for the establishment of a society based on equality of rights and opportunity. His era was such that he could not but help in going forward with his instinctual ideals. As a fervent believer in socialism, he earnestly sought

to bring his ideas and dreams into reality and they have influenced the literary world and national consciousness in an immense degree.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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