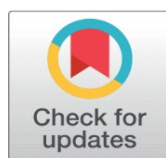
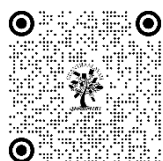


# WOMAN CAUGHT BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY A STUDY OF MULK RAJ ANAND'S THE OLD WOMAN AND COW

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## ABSTRACT

Tradition and Modernity are essential components of the flow of human life. It is natural, therefore, that their respective meanings, importance in life and their clash that provides a major theme to the creative writing, be examined in the present paper.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tradition and Modernity are essential components of the flow of human life. It is natural, therefore, that their respective meanings, importance in life and their clash that provides a major theme to the creative writing, be examined in the present paper.

The term, tradition, has very close associations with human life and is used with reference to its various aspects. It influences man-to-man relationship and at the same time its impact on social life. Tradition derived from Latin word, means:

“A long established and generally accepted custom or method of procedure, having almost the force of a law; and immemorial usage”.<sup>(1)</sup>

**Funk and Wagnalls** Dictionary observes that tradition is “The transmission of knowledge, opinions, doctrines, customs, practices, etc. from generation to generation, originally by word of mouth and by example.”<sup>(2)</sup>

In the literary context specifically, tradition becomes a body of customs, beliefs, skills, or sayings, handed down from generation to generation or age to age. Tradition functions responsibly in regard to the individual as well as society.

Tradition plays a significant role in the advancement of human knowledge. Being "a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence." <sup>(3)</sup> Tradition is essential even to human existence. Human mind with ever present reasoning power, is prone to question and rationalize the old views and beliefs in every field of life. And this thing causes the change in tradition. The human capacity of assimilation of prevalent ideas and projection of new ideas – the spirit of revolt, reform, restraint and revival is the pave for novelty and for modernity in human thought and activity. Modern means "of or pertaining to the present and recent times, as distinguished from the remote past; pertaining to or originating in the current age or period." <sup>(4)</sup>

**Funk and Wagnalls** Dictionary notes that the term "Modern" signifies: "belonging to or characteristic of time not remotely past; not ancient antiquated, or obsolete; recent." <sup>(5)</sup> In the light of these definitions, one may assume that 'modernity' is spirit of newness and uniqueness, which forces a conscious questioning – a break away – from the set patterns, established theories and beliefs or all sort of influences. Modernity becomes all the more important in the present times. The demand of the age to cast away all the shackles of convention to express oneself fully and freely, to be original and innovative in every mode of expression. With the advancement of man's knowledge, his fields of thought and action enlarged obviously. He started probing deeper into the mysteries of nature and explored a lot. The ever-present spirit of questioning and incessant human thirst for knowledge and more knowledge in every field of life, forced man either to make a complete break from the past or to mould the old practices and values considerably so as to suit the present-day requirements.

Though all the three forms of creative literature: poetry, drama and fiction, have witness the conflict between tradition and modernity, yet in fiction especially, this clash becomes more evident as a novel provides the artist with a wider canvas upon which he paints his multitudes of character from various walks of life, placed in varied circumstances. There has been the novelist like Mulk Raj Anand, who elevates old values instead of it, a change or break away from tradition.

The theme tradition and modernity as the prominent one in the works of all the major Into-Anglian writer, before and after independence. This theme is the central one in Mulk Raj Anand's **The Old Woman and the Cow**. Since his own life has been a battle ground of the clashing values, the traditional Indianism and the Modern Westernism, almost all his novels deal with this clash, yet **Untouchable** (1935), **The Village** (1939), **Across the Black Water** (1941), **The Big Heart** (1945) and **The Old Woman and the Cow** (1960), require special mention. Though covering a gap of fifteen years, **The Big heart** (1945) and the **The Old Woman and Cow** (1960) may be grouped together due to one common factor : the theme of tradition versus modernity. "the first shows a low class Indian Youth boldly championing modernity against tradition and losing his life in the process; the second presents an Indian rustic girl being transformed from a docile 'Cow' into a tigress under the impact of modernity and being "virtually reborn as a result of it". <sup>(6)</sup>

In **The Old Woman and Cow**, Anand employs the pathetic tale of a young woman named Gauri. He portrays her character with a view to woman caught between tradition and modernity from different angles and attitudes towards women in the Indian society.

The novel begins with Gauri's marriage to Panchi and after dealing with a series of her misfortunes, ends with her separation from him. The first half of the story depicts her docility, while the second half traces her transformation from a cow into tigress. In the beginning, her aunt in-law, Kesaro, accuses her of inauspiciousness and dalliance and poisons Panchi's ears against his wife. Consequently, he harasses her, beats her up and forcibly sends her to her mother's house. Her mother, Laxmi, at the instance of her (Laxmi's) cousin, Amru, sells her to a rich, old widower. Despite her protests, she is given over to her buyer, Seth Jai Ramdas. Here after, she emerges strong enough to defend herself. She foils the Seth's attempts to subdue her; she resists Dr. Batra's overtures to seduce her, and finally when her husband assails her, calling her chastity in question, she refuses to be cowed down and leaves his house in protest against his callousness. Gauri leaves Panchi's house for Dr. Mahindra's hospital. She has decided to earn her living and have her child delivered there :

'I shall go and work in Daktar Mahindra's hospital and have my child there. And I will not come back again! She was defiant and her face knit together with a terrible strength, even though the tears were in her eyes. 'And if you strike me again, I will hit you back.....' And she stood up, her frame shaking'. (p. 226)

Gauri is projected as a docile cow throughout the novel, She is the cow of the novel's title. During her marriage negotiations, her parents are fond of repeating, "Gauri is like a cow, very gentle and very good" and panchi naturally feels like "a holy bull" going to marry "the little cow Gauri". When Kesaro, Panchi's evil aunt, builds up a "hate campaign" against Gauri, the young husband's defence is : "Chachi, Gauri had the reputation of being as gentle as a cow in her village."

(p. 41) But this docile cow changes. She changes thoroughly. It is, in the words of Naik, "a change from bondage to freedom, from meekness to self-assertion, from weakness to strength ..... it is the transformation of a cow into a tigress." (p. 86) She changed as Anand would desire every Indian woman to change. (7)

Gauri's struggle to realize herself shows the way to woman's destiny in Indian society and the way to overcome her degradation and realize her potential and integrated self to attain dignity, strength and power. Gauri on her way from the docile, humble and humiliated status to self-realization rises to the stage of an independent individual capable of having her own way in life. She leaves home with a determination that she would find an independent existence. This realization comes to her through Dr. Mahindra. His unsentimental approach to the suffering of man, realistic outlook and strong will power enable him to realize the ills of society and the need to fight constantly against them. His mature and self-assured personality enables Gauri to get out of her shell and walk on the road of self-reliance. This enlightenment makes her understand herself, her destiny, and enables her to come much closer to the 'Ideal of man'. Against the background of contemporary Indian society Gauri succeed in achieving the utmost an individual can, by realizing herself while struggling against the prevalent social set-up. Before Gauri's transformation from weakness to self-assertion, is a sad tale of the exploitation of women leading to endless miseries in traditional Indian society.

Indeed, Gauri challenges the traditional belief that a woman has only an empirical reality, and that she lacks individuality and an independent will. She acquires self-esteem as she walks on with her head held high. She does not look back to find some supporting prop in the Sita-myths. She does not look down to escape underneath the earth. She thinks of the road ahead and plans her immediate future. She is determined to find justification for her life. She is determined to give her child a distinct personality. She does not worry whether it would be a male or a female. She is only keen to make her baby a perfect individual. Her march towards the town is indicative of her journey towards self-esteem and self fulfillment.

Anand tries to capture the spirit of new India. No doubt, he reveals his artistic success in presenting the rediscovery of the Indian identity in the light of the Indian tradition and the impact of modernity. Thus the novel highlights the place of woman in our society. Anand himself is of the view that **Gauri** is "my offering to the beauty, dignity and devotion of Indian women." (8)

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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