

Mulk Raj Anand's Innovative Views: A Critical Review

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Abstract – Every great author writes about his age, its rich beauties wonders, nuisances, awesome absurdities and chilling woes. He has his own creed in art. It involves his views, opinions and principles given on a wide range of issues. There are certain events, incidents and situations too that also leave their impact him. Mulk Raj Anand is such an author, as fittingly distinguishes himself in relation to his age. The close contact of human life around him in all its contrasting forms gives him an immense variety of experience which, in turn, helps formulate his overall mindset fairly called an author's 'Literary Creed'. Time is a great teacher as it affects inevitably everything and nearly every human being coming across within its omnipotent sway. An artist is supposed to sharply react to the beats of his times so that he could try to explain to the best of his satisfaction the hazy puzzles and riddles of human life confronting before his eyes in all their crude extremes- good and bad ,beautiful and ugly, weak and strong ,sweet and bitter etc.

Keywords:- Age, Creed, Events and Situations, Human life, Times, Puzzles and Riddles.

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INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand is a distinguished Indo- Anglican novelist writing in English during and after the colonial rule in India. Born on 12 December 1905 in Peshawar in an era of vast and undivided India, but now in Pakistan, he had seen a very tumultuous time known for its sad mayhems of social and political turmoils throughout the country. Many freedom struggles and movements had already begun to get India free off the callous British rule. So apart from the notable events, what were other vital factors prevalent in those days, influencing Anand and formulating his social vision and literary creed?

In order to know the various influences including his family background and the lasting impact of his surroundings on him and his personality as a whole, it is of a vital importance to look first into his early life, his childhood percentage and his education because these shaping things are most likely to affect everyone whether be a normal human being or an author. He belonged to the Hindu Kshatriya family of Lal Chand, a silversmith, and mother Ishwar Kaur, a highly religion woman of a good moral character. His father, also a staunch Arya Smajist was" a head clerk in the 38 Dogra Regiment of British Indian Army. Parents are a child's first school. From here, it grows to learn whatever it sees in its family circle as Anand's father's display of his religiosity was but merely a hollow propaganda as he would receive bribe. But it absolutely distorted for ever a little child's faith in

religion. Anand castigates his father's stuffed Hinduism in his self-effacing book, "Apology for Heroism".

"Paying lip service to the tenets of Hinduism while

seeking to amass a fortune through sufficient service as well through various sidelines in money lending, buying and selling houses, accepting mortgages of property and bribe" (1957 P-12).

Anand is an atheist in religion, a declared socialist marxist and a humanist in thoughts, a staunch lover of freedom, equality and fraternity. He is, of course, a passionate lover of a classless and a casteless society. He is a born pleader of civil liberties and a propagator of a reason based and scientifically approved brighter approaches which benefit humanity. The contemporary socio- economic evils and flaws like feudalism and capitalism were also not approved by the novelist following their anti-human side effects. What prompted Anand to be an atheist was the sudden demise of his dear cousin, Kausalya, aged nine, following a fatal disease of lungs. This incident shocked him personally; it also shattered his faith in God for ever. For, he could not believe how an innocent child like her who had done nothing wrong, should depart so early from the earth. How this tragedy influenced him severely in the rest of his life, and cast an impact on his writings, it can be seen during a serious study of his literary work. Similarly, Anand's failure to marry Yasmin on religious grounds, his aunt Devaki's

ostracization after sharing a meal with a Muslim woman from neighbourhood and consequently her desperate suicide as a result of this- are some vital points here to underline as to why he grew up hating every institutionalized religion that divide people. Although Anand's novels do not reflect much on religious matters, he has tried to express his views but now and then which exhibit an echo of his mother's secularism. G.S Balaram Gupta quotes Anand in his book "Mulk Raj Anand : A Study of His Fiction n Humanistic perspective"

"I do not believe in institutionalized religion and like Tolstoy, I would like to leave the beliefs of the people to their private conscience, collaborating with them for certain secular ends, without objecting to their pet religion" (1994 P-21).

From among other major events of the day that had a lasting impact on Anand were the varied socio-political movements and campaigns. Needless to say, India was a colonial state at that time and a surge of nationalistic zeal was underway to get the country free from the callous British rule. As a keen and an awakened citizen, he could not resist the call of the nation which wanted some contribution from its people. In 1916, he took part in Home Rule movement from Amritsar, collectively led by Smt. Annie Besant and B.G. Tilak . Also, he suffered a brief term in jail for participating in non- cooperation movement run by Gandhi Ji. At the same time, he was also severely canned by an English officer for breaking off a curfew code during his protestation at Amritsar. Notably, the canning incident left Anand with a feeling of anger and disgust for the colonial rule which can be seen in his subsequent novels. Briefly speaking, all the sizzling events that happened there threw a deep impact on the growing mind of Anand. In fact, If Anand had not been beaten, flogged and thrashed; he would never have been able to know well about the ugly face of the British regime in India. He could not have thought of seeking freedom either. Admitting the truth, Anand once in an interview to C. Vijayashree said,

"Part of my consciousness and it is but natural that my novels became notes on my engagement for several freedoms" (1985, P- 2-3).

Anand's novels call for a change in the existing social, economic, cultural and political institutions and establishments operating in the country. He believes that there must be a conducive environment based on the concept of free thinking for the fair growth and upliftment of human beings. That is why he rejects a traditional society known for its baseless dogmas, blind superstitions and rotten customs. Instead, what he wishes to flourish in our surroundings is a consistent amelioration to all people irrespective of any caste, creed, sect and religion. Life's journey to the path of progress remains incomplete until the evil forces and inhuman practices like imperialism, patriarchy, feudalism, hierarchy, capitalism et all - are abolished altogether from our society. Anand regards

these evil forces as blood-suckers and complete obstructions to the well-being of mankind. Capitalism, Anand says, is an exploiting economic system as it favours the rich over the poor. It is to be noted here that capitalism was at its peak during the colonial era in India. Since the government nourished and helped it grow up freely at workshops, agricultural fields and at various tea plantations across the country, the soft and an easy targets of this prejudiced system were the poor victims- coolies, labourers, peasants and menials, who would be beaten up, harassed and terribly exploited in such hectic places. They were kept on law wages or sometimes no wages at all. The white owners in charge of these institutions had been treating the mass of humanity with scorn just like animals. Since there were no labour laws to protect the workers at that time in India under the foreign regime, they were forced to work like slaves amidst bitter conditions. How much Anand would have shocked with the contemporary predicaments of his times, he in his literary works raises this point of his due concern again and again. His novels," Two Leaves and A Bud, Coolies, 'The Village, 'The Big Heart and 'The Sward and The Sickle' in particular are his living treatises on capitalism. Munoo, Gangu, Ajanta, Lal Singh and other male protagonists of his are seemingly the representative victims of this cruel system. Instead of getting benefitted from the labour they do what they do receive, in turn, from their malicious bosses are just filthy abuses, beatings, slapping and thrashing. As a keen observer of human society, Anand does not leave any opportunity without raising his voice against such acts of injustice deeply entrenched in our spoilt system. Alistair Niven seems right when he in his critical book," The Yoke of Pity", A study in the fictional writings of Mulk Raj Anand, praises him by saying that in Anand we have,

"A writer whose life has been his art but who has never thought of art as separate from life" (1978 P-12)

Similarly, like the capitalism, Anand also condemns feudalism in all its forms, one of the most callous and hardest forms of injustice at village level in the erstwhile India. It is equally inhuman, barbaric, cruel and a repressive economic system. It is also a potential source of poverty, hunger exploitation, slavery and beggary as it promotes social distancing of inequality amongst the fellow Indians. Anand strongly believes that it is the evil of feudalism that has given birth to a class conflict and a vaulting feeling of superiority complex. Notably, similar to the temple priests and the caste Hindus in social hierarchy, in those days the feudal lords too would control the entire village structure and all its economic activities operating within its preview. They were supreme masters and an invincible owners of a vast area of agricultural land, where like the ruthless capitalists, they would also torture and exploit the poor peasants and helpless labourers working in fallow fields either on law wages or on wages at all.

How notoriously wide spread this system was in nature, It is evident itself from the fact that Anand's own grandfather, Nihal Singh, off a Daska village from Punjab had been a victim of it. He had lost his mortgage to a money lender of his village when he could not refund his debt on time. Anand has vividly mentioned this incident in his veiled autobiography 'Seven Summers': A Memoir. As like the capitalism and feudalism the landlords too had been getting support and shelter from the government, it was almost impossible to stop them. That is why the novelist directly blames imperialism for most of the sufferings it had inflicted on people because of its biased policies. Alistair Niven in his book, "The Yoke of Pity", quotes Anand vehemently imploring the rule, "imperialism destroyed the basis of the old village life mechanically and imposed a superstructure from the top. It destroyed the ancient forms, but left the festering sores of an age long sick body except treating it with potent medicines" (1970, P-38)

Being a staunch Marxist- socialist both in letters and spirits, Anand recommends a classless society based on fellow feeling of equality, liberty and fraternity. He strongly condemns social injustice in all its forms. He heavily relies on the fact that the concept of a 'Ram Rajya' remains incomplete, until a single person goes to bed hungry. So to get it truly happen on the ground, he trends to give the control and command on means of resources straight in people's hands so that they can greatly be benefitted out of their hard act of labour. The poor are getting poorer, simply because they are fully dependent upon the rich for their upliftment. In his utopia of thinking from the day the rich would start showing a philanthropic attitude, there will be no poor souls on the earth. Bakha, Munoo, Lal Singh and Ajanta have been menials just as they have been deprived to live happily by the elite class.

Anand was a devoted Gandhi. So like the letter, he had also dreamed of an ideal society in which there must not be any place for caste and class distinction. People ought not to be viewed on the basis of merely their social hierarchy as it creates a deep ditch of division amongst fellow human beings. Caste malice defeats one's plunge of resolution towards the higher achievements of life. It weakens one's morale and imbibes in the victim a disgusting feeling of remorse and nostalgia. What Anand often emphasizes is someone's ability and his judgemental mind as essential criteria for deciding his due place in society. To meet this requirement of equality and mutual respect, the novelist tends to strike the need of diversity as it will enable people from different sects and communities to merge with one another to find a solid voice for themselves. If this so happens in reality, Anand's dream of showing a due sympathy for the poor, the downtrodden, and for the marginalized sections of society will translate into the action on the surface. Then the prejudiced evil of hierarchy will also be abolished and vanished for ever. Anand's sympathy for the weaker people was not an abrupt phenomenon realized by him. It was not a sudden outburst that had

stirred his tender feelings. For these humanistic feelings in him, the events of his early childhood days were not less responsible. As he grew up playing with the children of lower caste, he would know more about them. The conclusion he drew from here onwards was that the world had just two kinds of people, the rich and the poor. And the caste is mainly governed by one's profession, not by birth. None is born with a lower or an upper caste and even no scripture or religion discriminates and promotes malice among people. But it is the self-seekers, priests and the hypocrite caste Hindus, who misquote these scriptures just to claim their own superiority over the helpless lower castes. Anyway, there are many characters in Anand's fiction, which come from the top rank of social hierarchy. But owing to some pressing economic circumstances, they are forced to behave as menials and servants. Santu, The Brahmin cook working in the Indian regiment in Across The Black Waters, Lachman, Varma and Lehnu in Coolie - are among some notable examples here which emphatically support the point raised by the novelist earlier in his first novel Untouchable, "Essentially that is to humanly say, all men are equal. We must destroy caste. We must destroy the inequalities of birth and unalterable vocations. We must recognize the equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone". (1904, P-126-127).

The above illustrations also prove Anand is a born humanist. His philosophy of humanism is based on the concept of universal brotherhood. In other words, he deeply feels about the poor masses around him including serfs, pariahs, coolies, labourers, peasants, menials, servants and the sort of wailing humanity from the weaker sections of society. Humanism for Anand is also a new way of thinking that treats man sympathetically in all his woes and sores of life. Here, it is important to mention that Anand came to know about this philosophy not through any sudden discovery; rather it was the result of his long experience he went through during his cantonment days he had passed at various places like Miamir, Ferozpur, Nowshera and the Malaland division. Here, Anand first time saw a new world of degrading humanity torn out in rags and forlorn. They were silent sufferers in need of a great help. But no one seemed to have sympathized with them. However, in later years Anand's formal training in philosophical studies abroad at the university college, London, on Hume, Berkeley and Russel, also gave him enough insight into the degrading lives of the bottom dogs of society. But the cantonment experience was really far greater. Here, mentioning Anand's humanism is important to get to know about his thoughts on various perspectives of life. His social vision, his literary creed and his concept of feudalism, capitalism and imperialism can not be fully understood well until one knows in detail about his views on humanity either. Therefore, the question that arises is as to why humanism finds a new innovative twist in Anand's

hand? It is simply because he redefines and contextualizes it in Indian perspectives, to treat and to embalm with it the corroding sufferings of his fellow countrymen. That way, he becomes a practical humanist. For, he tends to resolve the questions of his time not through any intelligent and intellectual pursuits, but by applying a commonsense to them. Corroborating the fact prof. Nagarajan in his book entitled "Indo-Anglican Fiction" comments:

"Anand sees life in the raw and exposes it mercilessly, flesh, wounds, blood and all shedding sentimentalism and writes with a fine touch of scorn of social and economic inequalities". (1968 P-64).

Like prof. Nagarajan, Anand too elaborates his faith in humanism by saying that it is "an enlightenment in the interest of man, true to his highest nature". Anand like Gandhi and Tagore is not a mystic humanist because like the latter he does not rely on the 'Divine Existence' of the world. Mystic humanists assert that man is a weaker creature before the powerful destiny while Anand puts man in the driving seat and regards him, 'the measure of all things'. Just as Anand had developed his sympathy for the poor souls during his cantonment days, similarly, his keen interest in the socialist ideology aroused during his London years (1924-1929), when he started participating in meetings at British Trade Union and of Marxist study circles. The coal miners' strike in 1926 led by Arthur Cook in which he also took part, made his resolution even much stronger in his humanistic perspectives. His reading of Karl Marx's 'Letters on India' published in the New York Herald Tribune in 1853, also helped out step up his faith in this ideology. Like on other issues and matters of importance, Anand also emphasizes the need of equality between men and women. Just as social evils and malpractices have no place in a civilized society, similarly, women's exploitation and their disrespect is not acceptable either. This so happens when women constitute nearly half the world we live in. But Anand is too shocked to find that in India women are often helpless victims of a highly patriarchal system that checks and restricts them in several ways. Like the unfortunate untouchables, they too have been since long subject to a series of maltreatments like abusing, beating, thrashing and the sort of many other unbearable insults which women confront even today in different forms. Anand's novels and his short stories present a moving account of the suffering women struggling out hopefully to get back their rights against the odds of society. Leila, Gauri, Sohini, Sajani, Maya, Janki among others suffer endlessly in life just because of the patriarchy and its rotten stereotypes. Anand is not a feminist writer, yet he vocally speaks about women's rights in India. He wants equality of opportunities to them in all true sense of the term like a sense of freedom to live and think freely. The western society allows women to exercise their full rights and take their decisions themselves in terms of life, marriage, education, profession and living. But in India it is quite shocking to see that even today in the 21st century, women have

been not able to find that dignity, love and respect from their male counterparts. Incidents of molestation, eavesdropping, taunting, attempts of sexual assaults and even rapes are very common both at work places and in remote suburbs of rural India. So what the novelist weighs down is not just pity or compassion for women, but a true love and a feeling of due respect for them. Margaret Berry in her book "Mulk Raj Anand : The Man and The Novelist, supports Anand's views, "The value of his novels is the witness they offer of India's agonizing attempt to break out of a massive stagnation and create a society in which men and women are free and equal" (1971 P-53).

To conclude the findings, what is derived here is that Anand keenly responds to the times he had lived in. He stops one minute or two and looks at everything and then draws out a meaningful lesson for life, to society and for himself as a whole. His own life had been highly tumultuous. He had seen what sufferings meant, and how nostalgia made his experience even worse. The result was that Anand wrote only what he saw it happen both to himself and to others. The contemporary events in which he remained deeply involved this or that way, also greatly helped him formulate his literary creed. He knew it well how the lethal effect the social evils and malpractices had brought to people's lives; and how the people were forced to practise them. The exploiting economic disparities had also robbed mankind beyond repair. These volatile situations had indeed, created a havoc for people and consequently they felt highly insecure in every possible way. Amidst these upheavals and in the years that followed, Anand became a dissenter to each evil, taboo and malpractice and system that seemed obstructing people's way to progress and their emancipation. The evil forces like capitalism, feudalism and imperialism also begun to see a decline due to a huge protest from its long time victims. What is more important to note here is that Anand does not explore a utopian society to remove all ailments and anxieties from it. Rather he wants but a free society giving equal opportunities for all irrespective of any discrimination. If this is so happens, the earth will look like a heaven.

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