

Humanism in Mulk Raj Anand's Novels

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Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand was a superb Indo-Anglian artist in literature who painted the portraits of the downtrodden class with original colors of life. His position as a proletarian humanist is remarkable. His novels are projections of humanism. The idea of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” influenced Anand. His position as a social critic and versatile conversationalist is unique. His novels are deeply concerned with social issues like untouchability and exploitation of labour. He was a humanist by heart, mingling in his humanism the elements of Renaissance, Hellenism, and the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, Nanak, Kabir, and Gandhiji. His commitment to human values is commendable. Due to his unparalleled contribution to Indo-Anglian literature, Anand will remain an immortal figure of the Anglo-Indian literary universe.

Key Words: - proletarian, humanism, conversationalist, renaissance, hellenism etc.

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand was a great Indo-Anglian novelist and short story writer who achieved immortal recognition for his realistic portrayal of the lives of the poor and downtrodden class in traditional Indian society. His position as a proletarian humanist is remarkable. Moreover, Anand was one of the founding members of the Progressive Writers' Association, established in London in 1935 aiming at social issues through literature. For his unique contribution in literary universe, he was honored with International Peace Prize (1952), Padma Bhushan (1967), and Sahitya Akademi Award (1971). Anand was a distinguished Indian writer for his realistic and compassionate depiction of the so called “marginalized” in India. Anand’s novels are deeply concerned with social issues like untouchability and exploitation of labour. His novels are projections of humanism. He was a remarkable novelist with a vision and a mission.

Mulk Raj Anand conceives art and literature as instruments of humanism. He came to have humanistic values under the influence of Karl Marx (1818–1883), Guru Nanak ji (1469–1539), Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), M. N. Roy, and other thinkers and saints of India and Europe. G. S. Balarama Gupta observes in his humanism- “the protagorean concept of man as the measure of all things.” Anand’s philosophy of compassion in his novels places man in the centre of all things. His compassion believes in the brotherhood of man through the affirmation of love. Anand, Dickens, Tagore, Prem chand, and Sarat Chandra had laid emphasis on the universal compassion and universal humanism. Mark the following statement in this context:

“The idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Premchand’s sympathy for the underdog, and Sarat Chandra’s deep understanding of the heroic sufferings and essentially noble heart of humble folk-all these seem to have influenced the artist in Anand. What Anand accepts in this regard is of contextual importance.”

Mulk Raj Anand’s struggle to bring modification in the form of Hindu society is matchless. He has emphasised on the performance of duties by every section of the society. He paints life as he realizes it. Anand is a humanist by heart mingling in his humanism the elements of Renaissance, Hellenism and the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, Nanak, Kabir and Mahatma Gandhiji. Humanism is his religion. A Humanist is at best a reformer who tries to maintain equilibrium, balance of mind and decency in his own behaviour. For achieving his destination in literature, Anand has employed conventional as well as unconventional techniques

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in his novels. The use of 'Stream of Consciousness Technique', 'Interior Monologue', 'Flashback' and 'Direct Objective Method' is superb in his famous novels. He emphasised on the didactic quality of Art. His use of irony blended with humour is remarkable.

In *Untouchable* (1935), Mulk Raj Anand shows that untouchability is a social problem. The novel deals with the life and misfortunes of Bakha, an humble scavenger. He faces humiliation at every step of life. He is not permitted even to walk freely on the streets. Brahmins and Kshatriyas ill treat him. The writer is very sensitive towards these creations of Almighty. A sensitive reader's soul revolts against such poignant treatment of the sweepers. Some characters show a little bit sympathy to him. Muhammadan Barber believes in equality and is free from any kind of prejudice. When Bakha asks for a piece of coal to light cigarette, the Barber replies:

Bend down to it and light your cigarette, if that
is what you want to do with the piece of coal.

In such a cruel universe, such remark fills the heart of Bakha with a feeling of respect for Barber. This is the feeling of very heartily tenderness and also a feeling of pity and compassion shown towards the discarded and humiliated one. Havildar Charat Singh is another considerate personality. He presents a hockey stick and offers tea to him. Irrespective of the below status of Bakha, Havildar Charat Singh adopts a sympathetic attitude towards him. Mark such consoling statement of Charat Singh:

Drink it, Drink the tea, you work hard, it will
relieve your fatigue.

Such type of attitude, Anand expects from each and every humanbeing towards suppressed ones.

In *Coolie* (1936), Munoo is the protagonist of the novel. He is an orphan, his entire life is a saga of miseries. This novel tackles issues above caste and creed. Munoo contemplates his position:

I am a Kshatriya and I am a poor, and Verma, a Brahmin is a servant boy, a menial, because he is poor. No, caste does not matter. The Babus are like the sahib logs, and all the servants look alike; there must only be two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor."

This depicts his lamenting heart in the house of Babu Nathu Ram. Everywhere, he is maltreated by everyone. Later on, he finds a mother and father in Prabha Dayal and Parbati. Munoo feels comfortable with them. How sarcastically, the writer wrote:

It was the most sumptuous meal he had eaten
since the feast on the death anniversary of his
mother and father, which his aunt had given
three months before he left the hills.

The position of Munoo is really pathetic and forces us to brood on these ugly but real features of life. In such type of critical situation, positive and sympathetic corners of the people like Prabha Dayal and Parbati, author wants to sow in the hearts of other rich people also towards poor ones. All the barriers are broken to pieces when they wish to adopt Munoo as their real son. "Help to miserable ones" such is the noble mission of the writer which made his position remarkable in the Indo-Anglian Literary galaxy.

Besides these, another novel "Two Leaves And A Bud" (1937) is an epic novel. It depicts the miserable lives of the workers on the Tea-Plantation of Assam who are permitted to pluck two leaves and a bud day in

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and day out. M.K. Naik has stated: "Two Leaves And A Bud" presents the theme of the exploitation..., since in the earlier novel, the scene shifts from one stratum of society to another, while in the later work, the entire tragedy is unfolded against the background of the tea plantation which is microcosm in self, a world in which British officials and their Indian subordinates on the one hand and the indentured coolies the other are ranged in two separate camps of the exploiters and the exploited."

The novel presents the miserable life of peasant turned labourers working in Assam Tea-Estates owned by the Britishers. The novel portrays the exploitation of the under privileged class. Gangu, the protagonist is a prey to capitalism. He comes to open a new chapter of life but ends it up by losing his life. Anand himself has remarked about this novel: "And yet I feel that this book had to be written, because what I had to say in it was deep in me from the days when I lived for a while near a plantation in Assam and visited Ceylon and saw the inhumanity and barbarism prevalent there, with the consequent dehumanization of the colonials involved in the process."

Gangu, the main character of the novel could not make the payment to his debt to moneylender. Consequently, his land has been captured by him and Gangu has been forced to leave his village with his family. When he started his new life in Tea-Estate, his wife falls ill due to cholera and his daughter Leila is seduced by Reggie Hunt, the assistant manager in the tea-plantation. Gangu is killed by Hunt. The injustice of the British Raj, the misery and suffering of the Indian masses are all unveiled. In such a hostile universe, Dr. De-La-Havre, a British Physician comes out as an idealistic and a sympathetic doctor. He feels pain to see the heartless exploitation of the Indian coolies at the hands of the British managers of the Tea-Estates in Assam. The writer wants to make every one realize as how so many Gangus are everyday murdered in such a cruel universe of Rich. Death is inevitable, it does not make any distinction between rich and poor so why this struggle and fight? Gangu is undoubtedly one of the most powerful compassionate characters who leaves a vacuum in our hearts.

Mulk Raj Anand's other novels like "Village" (1939), "The Sword and the Sickle" (1942), "Morning Face" (1968), "Confession of A Lover" (1976), "The Bubble", (1984), "The Private Life of An Indian Prince" (1953), "The Death of A Hero" (1964) reveal the miseries of poor and suppressed ones. Anand was very serious about eradicating feudalism from the society. He wished to set up socialism in the country. Anand realizes that, "The deepest socialism is the only base for perfecting the deepest human personality that two should be mutually inclusive and that is only by combining the two that a richer and more stable civilization will arise. Socialism alone can restore dignity and real freedom to everyman because it ensures him economic freedom, real democracy."

Anand visualizes a society where the poor and rich could live equally. He rejects all kinds of spiritual orthodoxies. In all his novels, he raised various social, political and economical issues of society. He painted the very harsh picture of society with original colors. Sajjad Zaheer states: "Anand is not only an art critic and philosopher, but also an active fighter for the modern movement in our country. But he is more than even these. He is a wonderful human being, a loyal friend, a versatile conversationalist. As a good and life long friend and colleague of Anand, I am always pointing to him his faults also: "My dear Mulk Raj Anand you wrote too much; you don't give yourself enough rest: you are sometimes composed and electric. He listens to my advice and my criticism with impatience laughs and goes his way."

To sum up, Mulk Raj Anand speaks of the revolutionary aspect of art. His interpretation of India is based on realism. He beautifully depicted in his literary pieces that social, economic and political freedom is

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the birth right of all men. In his novels, he reveals the dreary face of modernity. He never tries to mystify the readers but directly touches the core of the subject and suggests solution in simple and original form. His commitment to human values is commendable. Really, Mulk Raj Anand's novels touch the heart of the readers because all his novels are the true portraits of the inner emotions of his own heart. Undoubtedly, Anand is a precious gem in indo-anglian galaxy of literature due to his unique contribution.

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