

Mulk Raj Anand as a Post - Colonial Writer With Special Reference to his Novel 'THE ROAD'

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Growing up during the high day of the colonial rule and writing as a colonial and post-colonial, Anand stays close to the multifarious manifestations of this historical encounter. The colonial experience is a live experience to him, and his writing is therefore linked to this theme directly or indirectly. He writes out of an acute social consciousness that is vitally concerned with politics and society, that is, with the function of power in a given society and its effect on the moral, social, cultural, and even aesthetic values of the people in that society. In The Road, published in 1961, Anand returns to the theme of untouchability 25 years after the publication of his first masterpiece in 1935. The Road is not a revision of Untouchable but a different tale. The Road is a symbolic story about the struggles of the grown up Bhikhu, whose main concern is not only the emancipation of an individual but also of his class as a whole, through devotion to work. The novel owes its origin to Robert Graves 'Good Bye to All That' and it Still Goes On' as well as to the author's own shocking experience of the treatment meted out to the Harijans in Haryana. Anand felt the need to make untouchability the point urgently, being a personal witness to the discrimination and humiliation to which Harijans were subjected in a remote village of Haryana. In the course of the narrative, the road however acquires a symbolic connotation. It comes to signify journey, progress and development.

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power in a given society and its effect on the moral, social, cultural and even aesthetic values of the people in that society. He is convinced of the social obligations of a creative writer that hold that art cannot be divorced from its social functions. He is a spokesman for art for people's sake and he wonders "What is a writer if he is not the fiery voice of the people" This conception of the artist's active public role is elabo-

ly treated in his non-fictional work, *An Apology for Heroism* (1946). Anand firmly believes that a writer in an emerging society has multiple roles to play. A writer should become a teacher, guide, mentor, reformer and conscience keeper of the race. Anand like Achebe the African novelist, consider the pedagogic function of literature the most important.

The most urgent task a writer in colonial society must address is the restoration of human dignity. According to Anand, a writer in a colonial society should help to exalt men to the full heights of their dignity, to enrich them with necessary spirit to tackle the tasks before them.²

A creative writer Anand holds, should infuse confidence into his fellow men, and help to hold their heads high. He clearly states the social responsibilities of an artist in the present age in the following words.

One of the first things to be done in the modern world is to educate people to place the vast accumulation of knowledge collected in the researches of the past at the disposal of everyone so that man can thereby learn to recognize the fundamental principle of human living and exercise vigilance in regard to the real enemies of freedom and socialism.³

It is important to note in this context that Anand's programme for decolonization does not stop with the achievement of political independence of the state, but insists on complete realization of individual autonomy in social, religious, cultural and psychological terms.

Anand is particularly sensitive to the role of a writer in a transitional society. A writer living and writing in a society fighting for freedom from the shackles of

an alien power, has to march in the vanguard of the liberation movement. He should, in fact, help men to take part in the drama of revolt from which emerges the new society.⁴

Anand's poetics of protest that projects

the writer as a revolutionary bears the unmistakable impact of Marxian thought. But more importantly, it is a part of the post-colonial rhetoric that emerged during the period of independence struggles, or 'Fighting Phase' to use Fanon's terms 'in these colonized societies. The post-colonial writers in this phase, as George Hamming of the West Indies forcefully argues, were fully conscious of their role in 'the shaping of national consciousness, giving alternative direction to society'.⁶ Anand takes his position firmly along the same line of thinking being certain that 'any attempt on his [the writer's] part to shirk the responsibility is betraying his own power and the acceptance of mental and spiritual death'.⁷

Political movement for liberation, Anand holds is never complete unless accompanied by social reformation and cultural revival. He rightly foresees the possibility of nationalism slipping into chauvinism and he therefore works against a blind return to the past. He is alert to the investable changes caused by colonial contact and is aware of the inescapably hybrid nature of post-colonial reality.

He takes a position eclecticism and recommends that modern Indian writers would have to look at the whole of the European and Asiatic traditions, compare and control them, try to achieve some kind of a synthesis even through the wetter of confusion and get to build the new India.⁸ Anand's concept of cultural comparativism stated directly thus sounds Eliotsian in its thrust, but it does anticipate the much sophisticated concept of cultural hybridity later developed by Homi Bhabha. When Bhabha states that the "very idea of pure", 'ethnically cleansed' national identity can only be achieved through the death literal and figurative, of the complex inter-weavings of history, and the culturally contingent border lines of modern nationhood"⁹ he is of course further refining the notions of eclecticism and synthesis, and evolving new 'paradigms for reading the post-colonial

predicament. (difficult or unpleasant situation).

According to Anand, the writer records and interprets the world of social relations; he provides historical continuity and he acts as an orbiter of social change. In order to do so he should be alert to the complex operations of political and social forces, and react sensitively to all the myriad changes occurring simultaneously in the world around him.

As Anand himself puts it:

I was committed to the historic process and to the appreciation of culture as efflorescence of all the contradictory impulses of civilization, which formed a loose kind of pattern. For it seemed to me that the historical approach was the best yard-stick which had so far been discovered.¹⁰

This preoccupation with history is a dominant trend in all post-colonial writing and it often acquires the nature of being an alternative discourse offering a variation to the official accounts of history. In fact post-colonial function offers an invaluable archive of indigenous historiography. Anand's work exemplifies this trend: he is not interested in providing yet another saga of the heroism of the nationalist leaders adding to the nationalist discourse of history. His novels cover a major part of the colonial history of India tracing the emergence of modern India, and they touch upon all the important social and political events of the first half of 20th century, such as land reform of the British, the spread of industrial capitalism, repercussions of the World War on Indian economy, the Indian Freedom Movement, spread of terrorism in post-war India, the partition of India and the abolition of princely states. These events are important to Anand not in themselves but in their relation to the life of the common people. It is important to note in this context that the principal actors in Anand's fictional world do not come from the dominant groups of the indigenous society but the subaltern classes and groups such as untouch-

ables, coolies, farmers and industrial labourers. It is history as it affects these large masses that is narrated in Anand's texts. History here is not the representation of the glorious achievements of the heroic, but recordation of the suffering of millions of poor and helpless people who had no place in earlier, elitist historiography.

Anand is conscious of the distance that exists between him and the people whose lives he has tried to portray. He says: 'I could not of course sense the suffering of the poor directly because I had always been comparatively better off. No, mine was a secondary humiliation, the humiliation of seeing other people suffer.'¹²

He, therefore, uses a variety of strategies in order to create a space for the subject position of his subaltern characters. Not that Anand always succeeds in doing so, but he certainly deserves credit for being a trend-setter.

Anand's focus is specifically on La conditione humane and he himself describes his perspective as broadly "humanistic". Normally it is difficult to pin down an author to a particular point of view. In Anand's case, however, there exists sufficient evidence to ascertain his world view. There are two detailed statements: *Apology for Heroism and Prolegomena to New Humanism* (1949)¹³ besides a number of other articles which set forth the core of his philosophy and define his perceptual stance in fairly clear terms.

Anand sums up his philosophy of humanism in the closing lines of *Apology*: "I believe in man." He traces it to his close contact with the deprived classes of modern India on the one hand and, on the other, his philosophical training abroad. He has evolved his own theory of humanism blending the varied influences from the two traditions - Oriental and Occidental - to which he is a cultural heir. Anand's search for values which began with his discontent with the existing social, cultural, political and religious systems, finally culminates in the formulation of what he

calls "new humanism." He does not believe, he inherited much by way of religious beliefs from either of his parents. To his father, religion was a matter of mere convenience; and the whole array of gods that received the daily prayers of his mother did not appeal to Anand, either. His interest in philosophy began during his research at the London University. His study of Western Philosophy and his familiarity with Occidental thought, his fascination for European Atheism, all these contributed to his creed of humanism. To these numerous influences, he adds the Buddhist principle of Karuna and makes the essence of his philosophy as "compassion". Anand believes that compassion is the most essential virtue required of a human being and it is the lack of tenderness that is responsible for the human predicament in the modern world.

Anand disapproves of the Hindu philosophy of fatalism and the Christian doctrine of predestination. One of the characters in Anand's *Heart* voices his maker's theory of man:

"Men are the makers of their own deeds, the makers of their own character, good or bad, and they are shapers of their own destiny."¹⁴

Anand generally seems to reject an intellectualist approach to social problems and insists on a need for action rather than theorising. He, therefore, argues for purposive art. He urges the need for active intervention and reformation of the existing socio-political situation. In doing so, Anand is unconsciously restating the Gita's tenets of the path of action or Karmayoga. It is important to note that Anand studied *The Gita* right from his childhood or otherwise. However, even as he confesses his debt to a variety of influences, he does not mention *The Gita* among possible influences.

Anand primarily focuses on the nature of human relationship and points out how man himself has ruined the peace in the world. He makes a plea for the reconstruction of a better society based on human values and inhabited by whole

men. Anand's theory of humanism emphasizes the importance of man, displays profound respect for man and strong faith in human capacity to set things straight so, literature, in Anand's hands, becomes "a humanistic art commensurate with the needs of time." ¹⁵ Since Anand has labelled himself "a humanist", critics often placed him in the tradition of western liberal humanism, ignoring Anand's debt to the non-western sources of thought. As such, Anand's writing perceived as imitation of Western discourse did not come in for serious consideration as post-colonial discourse. It is, therefore, important to relocate Anand in a sort of hybrid space characterized by cultural ambivalence and look at his work as a reflection of this typically post-colonial situation.

In the light of such clearly delineated views on the nature of fiction and the social obligation of artists, Anand's novels can be termed 'political' not only because the matter they investigate is of political nature, but because they reflect his commitment to reorganize the imbalance in personal and social relationships engendered by a colonial history. Anand's emphasis on socio-political praxis as the appropriate context for exploring the peculiarities of individual experience, and his preoccupation with fiction as an instrument of social transformation shape the distinctive features of his art. In his novels, individual human experience is always circumscribed by historical and political circumstances. Political events are linked to the development of plot and character in fact; character and action frequently embody the problems of social and political confrontation around which the plot develops. This allows him to portray the complexities of the entire society within the parameters of personal and social relationships among a representative community.

Anand's fiction typically presents the complexity of the warring elements in contemporary society. In his work, the conflicts are not re-

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solved decisively, but the possibility of a solution in future is hinted at. Any conflict involves two groups of institutions. So also in Anand's novels two polarities are introduced and all the characters fall into either of the groups. In Untouchable the conflict is between the caste Hindus and the Untouchables; Coolie presents a class struggle between the haves and the have-nots; Two Leaves and a Bud deals with the confrontation between British plantation owners and the Indian labourers; Lalu Trilogy portrays different stages in the Indian struggle for freedom; The Big Heart fictionalizes the conflict between capitalists and industrial labourers; Gauri elaborates female protest against male domination; and so on. However, it takes the form of exploitation of a less fortunate and less privileged group by a more powerful and privileged set of individuals. The two groups involved, therefore, turn into victims and victimizers, and the writer's

sympathy for the former becomes obvious.

While presenting and elaborating the theme of conflict in the different facets of human experience, Anand never loses an opportunity to portray the conflict basic to his contemporary society—the colonial conflict. The relation between the white master and the native, the predilections and prejudices that colour this relationship and the ultimate dehumanization such a relationship results in—all these issues figure prominently in Anand's fictional work. It is not mere political freedom that man has lost in the empire but psychological freedom to think independently. Anand offers a careful evaluation of the social laws and values that perpetuate a colonial mentality, and underscores the urgency for making a new social order. Colonial experience thus informs and shapes the contours of fictional trapes in Anand's work.

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