

MULK RAJ ANAND'S *THE BIG HEART*: THE MESSENGER OF MODERNITY

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Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand's fourth novel The Big Heart, well appreciated by readers and critics, brought to him immense popularity and prestige. This classic novel suggests new paths for improving the deplorable condition of Indian society which is gripped in the hands of age old traditions and social taboos that divides society into numerous sections according to caste and economic power. The protagonist of the novel, Ananta, who believes in the science and technology, represents the coppersmith or thathiar class and always makes efforts to uplift thathiars' pathetic condition through the modernity and its invention. He strongly believes that modernity can eradicate weakness from the society and prepares the healthy environment for humanity and its values. His humanistic outlook wants to correct the age old contaminated psyche of human beings through modernity, and supports to exercise the new technology in the profession for getting steady work flow and termination of any kind of discrimination. The present paper is an effort to explore the consequences of time immemorial old tradition, which is the major hindrance to social development, in Indian society and suggests path to eradicate these obstacles from the society. The paper also highlights the humanistic treatment of Mulk Raj Anand for aching heart of thathiars and tries to console them with the aspect of modernity.

Key Words: Contaminated Psyche, Humanistic Treatment, Modernity, Old Traditions, Science and Technology.

There are so many eminent writers in the sky of Indian literature who not only present the social condition of their time but also suggest the suitable ways to correct and eradicate the weaknesses of society. Some of them highlighted through their writings the frustration and suffocation of pre-Independent Indian society which was the result of the existing evils of society. Not only this, the dominating and inhuman attitude of the Britishers, and the rigid Hindu caste system was increasing the suffering of out- caste as well as Indian society. Some

prominent Indian novelists during this period like Bankim Chandra got fame for his romances in the imagination of Scott, Rabindranath Tagore wrote about upper- class gentry of Bengal, Sarat Chandra for middle-class life, and Munshi Premchand presented the condition of Indian peasants and humble workers. But very few novelists of India have established their name and fame in the world of Indo-Anglian literature, and Mulk Raj Anand is one of them who achieved worldwide recognition and attracted the consciousness of every class reader. He has been regarded as one of the founding fathers of the Indo- Anglian literature with Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan. He is known as the champion of underdogs and out-castes because he presents a lively image of India through his creation, and highlights the affliction of the class who is the margin of social parameters. He always condemns Vedantist kind of caste system that divided the Hindu society into four sub-categories- *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra*, and, also, strongly shows his fury against the Vedantic inhuman tradition in which the upper-castes exploit underclass and treat them like animals. His novels always elucidate human exploitation, gender discrimination, humiliation of labourers and sweepers, and pathetic condition of those who are ignored by the society. The pains and miseries of the society affected the sensibility of Anand, and he confesses himself:

There has always been an emergent connection between my life and my writings, throughout my creative career. Most of the critics, who have written about my novels, have not motivated that my fiction arouse from the compulsion of life. (Anand, p.2)

Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao are known as the trinity of Indo-Anglian fiction and have won the Prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for their commendable literary works. Their writings reflect the various conditions of the contemporary Indian cultures because they have deep commiseration with the people and their social issues.

Raja Rao (November 08, 1908 – July 8, 2006) is the youngest of this pioneer Indo-Anglian fiction writers' group. He was a great Sanskrit scholar, and his writings present the realistic and multihued picture of the Indian villages during the Gandhian Age. In his second and philosophical novel *Serpent and the Rope* (1960), for which he won Sahitya Academy Award in 1964, is based on the journey of a young man who travelled abroad in search of his dreams but his journey ultimately changed and proceeded towards search the Guru for the understanding of life. M.K. Naik comments on this philosophical novel "the philosophy is not in the story- the philosophy is the story". (Naik, p. 155) Raja Rao always made an effort to highlight the spiritualism and mysticism of our eternal and age- long Indian legacy in his novels.

R. K. Narayan (October 10, 1906 - May 13, 2001) is a delightful comic writer who had studied about middle class small town in the view of South Indian customs, and had won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1960 for his novel *The Guide* (1958). His fictional town, Malgudi, is well known and appreciated in between the readers of Indian English Fiction. Malgudi is a small town in the southern part of India, having its own middle class world. The

society of Malgudi has been affected by modernity but the cultures and customs of there do not accept the westernisation completely.

Mulk Raj Anand (December 12, 1905 - September 28, 2004) also has woven several novels with the themes of society and its suffering. *The Big Heart* (1945) is a story of the struggle between the old and the new, and between tradition and modernity where the protagonist of the novel Ananta suffers a lot because he believes in the power of modernisation which is essential for development as well as humanity. Beside this novel, he wrote *Untouchable* (1935) which is the result of his keen sympathy with a sweeper boy and downtrodden people. *Coolie* (1936) is the story of Munno an orphan boy who struggles for his livelihood and suffers the communal frame of the Indian society. The novel is an attack on imperialism, capitalism and exploitation of human beings. His third novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) reflects the evil of poverty and cruelty which 'Gangu' faced in a tea state. *The Village* (1939) is a pitiable story of a subaltern sepoy Lal Singh who joins the Army and, therefore, the conflict continues between the theory of *Karma* and theory of God. *The Road* (1961) is again based on caste superiority and obstacles faced by the protagonist after the Indian independence. *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) show the lack of unity and leadership. The autobiographical projection of Mulk Raj Anand can be seen in his *Seven Summers* (1951). The monarchy comes under the sharp criticism in *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953). *Morning Face* (1968), for which he won Sahitya Academy Award in 1971, is a reflection of Indian belief on the traditional practices. The youthful sentimental feelings of nostalgia are expressed in *Confession of a Lover* (1976), and wrote some other short stories which were the result of Anand's consciousness about downtrodden classes.

The basic objectives of these three novelists were; the first for the sake of the society and the second one for themselves. The spirit of nationalism inspired them, time and again, to write for the social equality and, through highlighting the problems of society try to eradicate the evils of society which were against the humanity and its betterment. For this purpose they selected such type of human beings who suffered a lot not because of their mistakes and weaknesses but from the rigid rule and regulations of society as a central character of novel and the whole story went around them.

Mulk Raj Anand was a member of 'Indian Progressive Writers' Association' which was initially formed for highlighting the condition of socially ignored persons through writings, and aware human beings against the pathetic condition and suffering of their siblings. Very soon the aim of this association turned as a movement and rejected the vogue aesthetic theory of 'Art for Art's Sake.' Anand strongly believed that the purpose of the literature should be based on the rectification of the mankind as well as the society and eradication the disasters from society as these act like a curse on humanity. He also condemned the formalities of the literature that hold the art as its inner logic instead of outside focus. For this purpose he refused the old aesthetic theory and created a new theory 'Art for the Sake of Humanity' for his writings through which he presented his socially ignored and poor characters as more powerful than high caste and class people. He also believed that the perfection in the society as well as in human being can be possible through

the art and he always tried to get perfection in his writings for the same. *The Times of India* published his article entitled *Art and Essence* after his death and explained about him:

Perhaps it is an instinctive love for perfection, for coherence, for making things really well when he is doing a job or work, for relating himself to the indefinable source of creation, for getting to the centre of gravity inside himself and for discovering the unknown, outside him, in the light of his own awareness. (*The Times of India*, p.5.)

Mulk Raj Anand presents his anticipation for the modernity and technologies in his novel *The Big Heart* that is well appreciated by readers and critics. His humanistic vision and reformist zeal presents an underclass man Ananta, who is the victim from time immemorial tradition, higher than the upper-class people. The novelist always pours his sympathy on underclass people and bitterness on the ruthless oppressors in his writings. For this social reformist attitude Anand has been called “the Veritable Dickens of the East” (Iyenger, p. 130). By presenting Ananta as a central character of the novel “Anand champions the cause of the downtrodden and the under privileged, and highlights his liberal sympathies and commitment to humanistic outlook.” (Gupta, p. 37-38)

Just like Anand’s first novel *Untouchable*, *The Big Heart* is also based on one day incident of the protagonist which starts from the morning and ends with the evening bringing certain realisation to him. But energy, struggling capacity and direct approach of the protagonist, and the selection of incidents by the novelist makes it different from *Untouchable*, and more noticeable as well as compact than other novels of Anand. The protagonist of *Untouchable*, Bakha, comes to realise at the final episode of the novel that a man can change his condition through his own efforts, and Ananta in *The Big Heart* comes to know with his death only that his staggering work is remaining for future. The novelist successfully maintains the traditional unities of time and place in the novel. Mulk Raj Anand expresses his views for this unique novel with these words, “*Untouchable* is favoured by most people but in spite of proximity, *The Big Heart* is a more mature book and has deeper implication as tragedy, or rather as part of a tragic view of life.” (Cawasjee, p. 55)

The novelist’s outstanding novel *The Big Heart* describes the impact of industrial modernity on the traditional coppersmith community of Amritsar and unfolds its outcome in the scenario of Indian society which was gripped in the hand of age old traditions. The novelist does not change the gloomy surface reality of Indian society which requires the high level of consciousness and conscience to get rid of dark-barren values in order to get new fruitful traditions. The aim of present paper is to reveal the struggle between old and up-coming new traditions, and its consequence on stereotype Indian society which is not prepared to accept easily any reformation easily.

Anand was influenced by the philosophy of Gandhiji. So, he selected his protagonist from the lower strata of the society and painted real India through his humanistic brush because, just like Gandhiji, he also believed that the people of real India neither reside in big bungalows, palaces nor they spend their lives luxuriously, but dwell up in villages, poor huts and slums. Real India can be found amidst untouchables, coolies, landless peasants, exploited

wives and homeless princes. He never pursued the oriental philosophy, mysticism and magic as many of his predecessors had done and these things make him different from the other writers. He made these victims of society more powerful with every preceding novel, and through every character he tried to represent the miseries of their gender, caste and class in which they suffered. Walter Allen comments on it,

It is only, through his characters that the novelist can succeed in what is his main social- as opposed to aesthetic-function, which is to awaken.... 'sympathetic comprehension' in our readers. (Allen. p.17)

Anand selects a lower class coppersmith man Ananta as a central character of his novel *The Big Heart* who resides in *Billimaran* or the Cat Killer's lane in Amritsar, where several traditional coppersmiths have lost their employment due to the arrival of the Machines and the setting-up of new factories. The capitalists have compelled the unemployed and starving craftsmen to accept the exploitation and dictatorship from them if they really wanted to keep their body and soul together. Ananta is the younger replica of Anand who is aware of the immense potentiality of machines, and not fully against the setting up of factories and machines, but completely in opposition of the ownership of that production which is utterly based in the hands of the capitalists. Moreover he believes in the change of old custom with new one because new custom inculcates a wide range of notion in human beings for making a healthy and social environment for livelihood which works as a panacea for economic disparity. Ananta's song in the novel reveals the beliefs of Anand:

This is the machine age, sons,
This is the machine age.
We are the men, who will master it,
We are the new men of the earth of all the evil old, ages! (*The Big Heart*, p. 19)

The novelist tries to highlight the encounter between two generations in the novel which are dependent upon old tradition and modernity respectively. Ralia is a character who belongs to the old generation which is represented by the traditional class and believes on God as well as fate but, in its counter, Ananta belongs to the younger generation which is devoted to modernity and appreciates the new industrial power. The clash between these two young men produces the final tragedy in the novel. Anand writes about this struggle in the 'Author's Note' of novel, "*The Big Heart* is written from the torment of living between two worlds, one not quite dead and the other refusing to be born" (p. 14). The novelist believes in the science and prefers to use it as the chief instrument for making a better world for everyone. His humanistic approach which condemns the weakness of tradition, and presents the worth of science and technology are reflected from the novel.

Ananta, also known as the 'Machine Man', is the most freethinking member of his community who returned back from the big city like Bombay and Ahmadabad after getting the knowledge and experience of science and technology. His optimistic outlook is totally different from his companions. He does not blame the machine for snatching away traditional occupation of his innocent companions but he believes that science and technology are not

meant to ruin the human beings and, in lieu of this, it is merely a neutral instrument that gives quality result after the correct use of it by human being and says “machines don’t think or feel, it is men who do.” (p. 40) The Poet Puran Singh Bhagat, a close friend of Ananta, supports and admires the positive outlook of his friend. He also believes in the quality of machines like his friend and shares his supporting views with him with these reserved words, “.....if you have the controlling switch in your hand, you can make the machine a slave rather than your master. It is that switch or destruction.” (p. 90) Ananta’s natural high spirit and earlier experience of the ‘Trade Union Movements’ have made him an inborn rebellion. He admires the machine as a precious gift of science because his vision is influenced by the modernity and technology of the West, and through this vision the severe old traditions can be replaced with new modern customs and traditions which are beneficial for humanity. He says to his companion Janki about his aspiration for the West:

I should like to go to Vilayat one day and see what conditions are like there.....I should like to see those steps which walk, and railways which run in the bowels of the earth. I should also like to go and see the giants of Ross.....They have learnt to grow wheat in the snow fields and extract power from coal in the earth without any one having to go into the mine. In all those things the earth is coming to be more and more like heaven. (p. 78)

The above aspiration of Ananta clearly reveals his belief in modernity and technology, and without it any society cannot leave its old customs and taboos which creates a suffocating atmosphere for human beings. It opens the new horizons of humanity for an underdeveloped country to become a developed country for everyone to live without any controversies. It also gives a steady work flow and creates new paths for everyone to acquire a suitable work for livelihood according to their own interest.

Mulk Raj Anand always highlights the suffering and plight of the under-class and caste people in his writings who are in the fringe of social stratification and compelled to do menial jobs. In *The Big Heart*, the novelist not only emphasises the positive outcomes of the machines and technologies but also presents its dark aspects due to arrival of modernity and technologies resulting into disgusting traditional craftsmen who are getting jobless and suffering a lot of exploitation from the capitalist class. The important dealers like Lalla Murlidhar and Seth Gokul Chand had brought the shares of the factory and, as the result, some of crafts-persons, who were the only source of earning in their family, are compelled to perform their occupation in a very small amount of wage. Ralia and Viroo represent the underclass that has lost its traditional occupation due to technology and modernity, and is having repugnance and animosity towards machines. The height of Ralia’s hate and anger is examined by the fact that he hates Channa for just being a foreman in a factory. Ralia exposes his rage about machines:

Yes, machines, machines, machines-puff, puff, puff, grrr.....yes, May I rape the mother of the machine inside the, machine!.....Grrr.....They roar and spit. They squeak and they squeal! They talk chapper, chapper like Channa.....They are the machines! Each one of these men there is a machine!

That chapper, chapper Channa and all those boys working on those are machines! (p. 33)

And in his false alarms, he hates the spirit of Industrial Revolution too which was started from England and, by and by, spread every corner of the world. This revolution enhanced the urge of power and resulted into the invention of the dangerous weapons that were against the ideal of humanity. He also dislikes the Europeans for the revolution which prepared death-defying machines like arms and war planes, and believes that machines are made for destruction and a source of disappointment as well as frustration. He again shows his anxiety:

.....engine of destruction, the bird of steel, which excretes bombs and urinates bullets! All made in Vilayat! The guns! The rifles! The machine-guns! All the Devil's instruments for destruction. (p. 59)

Mulk Raj Anand inculcated an attitude inside his personality, that is full of love and sympathy, which is reflected in his writings too for the underclass people who compel to live their lives under the poverty line and lead a life without any future. He was the first author in the history of Indo- Anglian fiction who found himself with the weak, vulnerable, hatred and insulted poor people. And his quite a lot of novels highlight the condition of those people who are ignored by the society and its rigid ethnicity. He writes about the principle of art and fiction,

Certainly, literature, music and better able to fulfill the needs of our time than religion, and beauty is better worth worshipping than God or a Deity for whom the sanctions lie in the intuitions of a few mystics. For in art the creative imagination of man transformations the abstractions, justice, love, hatred, evil, etc. by passing them through the experience of the individual. (Anand, p. 5-6)

The breeze of science and technology affects coppersmiths or *thathiars* as well as their society. On one hand, consistence transformation in *Kucha Billimaran* or Cat Killer's Lane, known as the heart of Amritsar, indicates that the Indian society is trying to get rid of old values and traditions, and proceeding towards the shining future of modernity. And the other hand, the blow of capitalism, which is the result of modernity, raises the price of raw materials and creates a great social difference in the coppersmiths or *thathiars*' colony. This new high prices were the subject of suffering for common *thathiars*. The poor *thathiars* were unable to purchase the things for their traditional work and compelled to leave their old-fashioned jobs. Instead of selecting new technology for their profession, some of them, opt the clerical job in the offices, some in the industries as labourers and the others do not change their profession and remain traditional coppersmiths. And this colony becomes "a melting pot" where "the rich few, very few, and the starving many." (Narasimhaiah, p. 131)

The novel also throws light on the realistic picture of society's indifference towards its discriminated and poor siblings which was the result of old traditions. Anand presents the pathetic condition and hunger of the poor class of society through the '*Puri*' incident. The generous protagonist Ananta throws four '*Puris*' towards the poor hungry beggars and they rush towards the stinking rubbish heap on which those four '*Puris*' had fallen with fighting loud curses and abuses for collecting those '*Puris*'. The main aim of Anand through this

incident is to illustrate the hardness and apathy of old traditional social parameters that create numerous sections in the society according to their economic status and prepare inhuman environment for those who are in the lowest class of this social hierarchy.

Mulk Raj Anand's characters are known as real life characters because he has selected these from his childhood memories and his experienced life. The suffering of sweeper boy Bakha, his childhood friend, helped him to write *Untouchable* (1935). And just like the same, the sufferings of the childhood playmate, Munoo, who was compelled to do labour in a pickle factory and suffered a lot by the notion of fatalism in the Indian society, provoked him to write *Coolie* (1936), and presented the evil face of class system which is not fruitful for under class and downtrodden people. Premila Paul observes about the novel, "Munoo represents the disinherited and the dispossessed of the earth whose tragic life indicates inhumanity of man to man." (Paul, p. 5) The pain and suffering of the coolies and labourers in the Skeffington Coffee Estate in the British rule forced him to write his third novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937). This novel is different from his preceding novels, *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, where tragedy was born through an individual, Bakha and Munoo respectively, but *Two Leaves and a Bud* is the "theme of conflict as a group experience" (Lindsays, p. 15- 16). Anand's personal experience about Industrial Revolution in England helped him to write *The Big Heart*. Even, he presented such kind of revolution in his novel through his protagonist Ananta who participated in the Trade Union Movement in Bombay which shaped his notions and increased his belief in revolution. The novelist shows different types of Indian Consciousness towards the machine and technology through Ralia, Viroo, Ananta and the Poet Puran Singh Bhagat in this novel. Ananta also suffers due to the arriving of machine and technology but he knew the advantages of this and tries to convince his colleagues that the functioning bodies are more responsible for the oppressive set-up than the new technology. He knows that the *thathiars* "could not win bread separately but together" and for this he has to "form a union and help them to come through." (*The Big Heart*, p. 68) He tries to convince Ralia for revolution with his pragmatic attitude and says that if they do not accept modernity, several ways would open to die for poor men, "death by the indifference of the capitalist", or "death by the war of the capitalists" or "death by revolution against the capitalists." (p.121)

Mulk Raj Anand's humanistic approach, which believes in the unity of human beings, makes Ananta different from his other characters of the novel. Ananta believes in the ability of the workers and thinks that they contain the strong ability not only to get the mastery over machines but to use the machines as a revolutionary material for the betterment of humanity as well as the future of the country because revolution is the only medium through which the old trends can be replaced with new one, and suggest the right solution for the problems of a community and human beings also. He trusts on the revolution. And his rage for capitalist class clearly reflects when he says to other *thathiars*:

When we *thathiars* begin to handle the machine we shall soon show them! We need not become slaves to the profiteers or the machine. We are men. We are men. We will make a Revolution. (p. 85)

Ananta understands the suffering of *thathiars* and also knows in which direction the mass action would go. He always works for the welfare of workers and tries to enhance co-operation and unity among them for shaping their own destiny through machines and technology. But, in the last episode of the novel Ralia, who was misguided and provoked by Satyapal, enters the factory with “lifting the hammer in his hand” to destroy the machines, and shouted in his insanity, “I shall show you who is the master, those machines or I.....I will spit at those machines, I will destroy them, I shall wipe them off the face of the earth.” (p. 218) Ananta comes forward to console Ralia and tries to stop him but he wallops his head “on the broken part of a machine with a maniacal fury, till Ananta skull cracked like a pitcher, and a stream of blood shout out in thick spurts” (p. 219) and after few seconds Ananta closes his eyes having the aspirations of modernity and technology.

Mulk Raj Anand’s deep knowledge, sensitive and humanistic attitude for the living condition of the labourers and workers provoked him to write *The Big Heart* in the more expressive way than other writers. H. C. Harrex comments, “Anand’s characterisations within the proletarian campus are strong varied and challenging.” (Harrex, p.144) The only aim of life of the novelist is to uplift the life of downtrodden and underclass people from their squalor through the humanitarian outlook which believes in science and technology, and makes these people strong dissenter against the old traditions.

In the every episode of the novel the novelist presents Ananta as a natural leader and portrays his character with the different hues of courage, conviction, activist outlook and philanthropic mind-set. He always believes in the workers’ welfare which lies in the unity and combined action of workers. His death is not the victory of his opponents like Satyapal, Hans Raj and misguided Ralia but it is a victory of a martyr protagonist who lost his life in the hope of bright future for human beings which is possible by the removal of old traditions and social taboos. G. S. Balarama Gupta highlights this martyrdom is “suggestive of further action that will possibly taken up by men like him for eventual freedom of the oppressed brethren.” (Gupta, p. 43)

The Big Heart is not only based on the struggle between tradition and modernity but it also presents the man’s inhumanity to man. The novel also reveals the negative consequences of old and rigid traditions which have ruined the progressive outlook of society. It is clearly observed through every episode of the novel that there is no white to exploit the black but rich class from the black is eager to exploit, and ready to get down his innocent and unfortunate brothers due to the existence of age old traditions. Ananta gave his entire life for the awakening of society to establish the outlook of equality and tried to terminate these gloomy traditions from the society as a social reformer. His death is not the end of humanistic views but unlocks the new notions for the welfare of society which is based on science and technology, and leads modernity to flourish the new aspects for human life.

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