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An Analytical Study of M.R. Anand's The Silver Bangles

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Mulk Raj Anand, in his stories, has touched the common aspects of woman life particularly of the poor, miserable and low class people of his times. His Silver Bangles, Lajwanti, Torrents of Wrath and The Hiccup depict the plight of woman in one way or the other. Lajwanti is a well known story of a low caste but chaste and faithful woman Lajwanti. In the absence of her husband, Balwant, Lajwanti is tortured and almost forced to surrender to her lustful brother-in-law Jaswant. She tries to save her from the lascivious Jaswant but at the end she finds herself helpless as she is not supported even by her own parents and is forced to do what her parents-in-law want.

Anand’s other story Torrents of Wrath presents the pitiable condition of the poor, untouchable wretch Sukhi. The flood and heavy rains have destroyed the life of the poor Sukhi. She survives with some little poor pets. She bears the hunger and thirst but she begs pity of the Seth-man Chand Bania, “Give a few grains for my birds, Sethji, and for the little mouse …… I will work in your house as a maid.” But the greedy and selfish Seth does not melt. Man Chand Bania with the help of the Policeman kills the poor old woman. The Silver Bangles is one such short story which deals with the life of a sweeper girl at the house of a rich family of Mr. Goyal. In 'The Silver Bangles,' Sajani, a good looking sweeper girl, who was given silver bangles on her betrothal by her mother, is unjustly accused by the lady of the house, Mrs Goyal, of having stolen the bangles. At the end of the story it becomes clear that Mrs. Goyal who is sexually frigid is actually jealous of the attraction her husband feels for the sweeper girl. Her accusations at Sajani are aimed only to hide her own sense of inferiority against the 'untouchable beauty.' The ending of the story is as effective as is its beginning. It reveals the working of a mind ridden with superstitions.

Anand’s ‘The Silver Bangles' presents the painful story of Sajani, the sweeper girl, who like other women in the society, wants to live a life of self respect but is thwarted at every step. Sajani is a beautiful, good natured and well behaved sweeper girl. Though she cleans the houses of the upper class people as a sweeper, but due to this she should not be treated as a neglected and miserable creature. Shri Ram Goyal, the master of the house, greets Sajani on her arrival with kindness and smile but his wife Gopi Goyal does not like it for he suspects illicit love between Sajani and Shri Ram Goyal. Shrimati Gopi Goyal believed that her husband had deposited bits of his poetaster's soul in her every time he had come near her. And she did not want to allow any of this deposit to be left anywhere else, especially in
the body of Sajani, to whom he had already addressed his insinuating love words, in that half-
 joked, half embarrassed manner of the heart-
 squanderer, even as he deposited on the palm of
 the weaker girl's hand occasional tips of money.

 It is true, Shriram Goyal is attracted towards
 the weaker girl but he also has the feeling of
 charity and compassion towards the poor in his
 heart. When Shri Ram Goyal puts a coin on the
 palm of Sajani, Smt. Gopi Goyal "felt like
 upsetting the cauldron of boiling butter on the
 heads of the two lovers." Gopi Goyal can't
 tolerate the good looking Sajani as she
 comments: "Did you notice the silver bangles on
 that low woman's wrist! How she preens herself
 ...... I wish her mother would come to do our
 house and not this film star." One other common
 aspect of human life has also been touched in
 this story by Mulk Raj Anand. Jealous nature of
 one woman towards the other due to some good
 features particularly the physical beauty is seen in
 the works of different writers- both Indian and
 British. Physical beauty is a great gift given to
 human beings by God irrespective of caste, creed
 and category. Smt Gopi Goyal is not so charming
 and attractive as the weaker girl Sajani is
 endowed with this grace of God. It is also a
 common human nature that human beings feel
 attraction towards the opposite sex. The main
 thing remarkable here is that in the matters of
 attraction and love, caste, age and category is not
 considered. It is due to this that Mr. Shri Ram
 Goyal, the husband of Smt. Gopi Goyal is
 attracted and influenced by the physical charm
 and good nature of the weaker girl Sajani and
 Smt. Gopi Goyal easily falls a victim of inferiority
 complex.

 But she knew that her husband would stave
 off any direct words with the evasive calm of the
 practiced hypocrite in some neat little phrase
 from the poem. To be sure, even without her
 uttering a sigh, he had scanned her spying figure
 behind the jalled window and recited a made-up
 verse: "Ah, between me and this bird here, there
 stands the shadow of despair..." She further asks
 her husband about what he was talking about
 and was he not going to get ready to go to office?
 The shrillness of her voice compelled Shri Ram
 Goyal to be sweeter still: "In this opaque heart of
 mine, there is only poetry but no office I hate the
 outline of that prison..." Poetry will not give us
 bread!..."

 'You have burnt every second poora for the
 one you have made- and anyhow they are all
 cold,' Shrimati Goel said. 'Let me make them...' She
 said this to Munchu, as she really wanted to
 admonish someone just now. And as though this
 irritation with the servant boy had heightened her
 devotion to the fictional image of her husband,
 she burr-buried: 'I am burning'. Actually, the hot
 glow of the fire in the earthen chulha had induced
 heat in her body, which she mistook for the
 warmth for him. She paused for a moment, put all
 the pooras in the pan, back into the pan sizzling
 with hot butter, and then craning her head to see
 if she had addressed his remarks to her or to
 Sajani. She found that the weaker girl was, in
 fact, in the room where he confronted the looking
 glass.

 The silver bangles are gifted to Sajani by her
 mother on her betrothal but Gopi Goyal, upper
 class housewife filled with the feeling of remorse
 towards the good looking weaker girl charges
 her, 'Which lover has given them to you?'
 Sajani tries to convince Gopi Goyal of her
 honesty but the latter is adamant to accuse the
 weaker girl. She stirred the hot oil with the
 perforated spoon and, with a histronic ability far
 in excess of her usual placid manner she asserted:
 "Already, we are one, my life... Already, you have
 changed me, from my shyness into a wanton...
 Like Mira, I am the Gopi of my Krishna..." 'Oh
 why, oh why, oh why...' Shri Ram Goyal intoned
 the words, trying to clothe the atmosphere with
 the aura of a bluff, because he was waiting for the
 moment when he could meet Sajani's eyes just
 once before going to the office, so that the day
 should pass happily, poetically, especially in this
lover-like weather, when the clouds hovered over the town, spreading the cool of heaven everywhere and making the green parrots fly.

At this moment, she saw Shri Ram Goyal pressing a ten paisa coin on the palm of Sejani. Actually, he had merely placed the coin on the sweeper girl’s open hand and not pressed it. But the insensate imagination of Shrimati Goyal fancied as though this act of charity had established the connection of love between those two in a final and clear manner. She even thought that she had seen them exchange glances which were like shooting stars. From the hot air of the kitchen, the blue anger of Shrimati Gopi Goyal travelled like sparks of fire and thus hung in the atmosphere like festoons of smoke over the trembling figure of Sejani. She tried to explain to Gopi Goyal. ‘My mother brought the silver bangles— they are the first offering for my betrothal! And then she looked up to the mistress with her nose bedewed with perspiration, her frank forehead clear, and her eyes filled with tears of innocence accused of guilt by someone. Lies won’t help to make you people honest!’ charged Shrimati Gopi Goyal. ‘Let me see if these were not stolen from my house: “How can I be sure that this profligate husband of mine, who is so generous to you, has not taken them out of my box of jewellery and given them to you!’ ‘Bibiji’, protested Sejani.” Shrimati Goyal answered without listening: “I know the kind of lovers who look separate, but are drawn by the invisible words of mock poems, and who indulge in all the extravagances of connection, without an embrace…”

‘I only like to hear Babuji talk’ the girl said. ‘He is a learned man and speaks so many fine words…’ “Don’t you be familiar with me and talk of his fine words you like to hear!!! Only take off those silver bangles which he has stolen from my box and given to you!” The perfume of Shri Ram Goyal’s words evaporated before the disillusioned gaze of Sejani. She realized that she should never have uttered her admiration for the Master of the house. Their eyes had once met. But she was not guilty. Her head swirled. And she crumpled up in a soon on the floor. At this Mrs. Gopi Goyal said:

“Get up and go out and don’t you come into this house again. You have raised your head to the sky low people, wearing silver bangles!!! Don’t you know that the untouchables in the south are not supposed to wear silver at all… And you go posing like a cheap film star… Go die!”

The orthodox nature of Smt. Gopi Goyal is not new and different from the traditional woman of the ancient times. Since the ancient age till the twentieth century the caste discrimination has been a major issue of the Indian society. The upper caste people whether poor or rich, week or strong, dull or intelligent and active or inactive are not ready to keep pace with the low caste and downtrodden class of Indian society; they think themselves superior only on the base of their superior caste. If we see it on human grounds, we cannot make any difference between castes. Here in this story Smt. Gopi Goyal is an example of woman who feels jealous of the beauty and charm of the servant girl whom her husband likes and cares much. It is due to this that Smt. Gopi Goyal is always suspicious of her husband.

Sejani had lost the use of her muscles, but not of her heart. She began to sob as she huddled in a corner of the verandah. But each movement of her throat was like a knife jab, bringing more sobs, as though the fainting fit had been succeeded by hysteria, the sobs welling from the belly where lay years of humiliations, now thrusting up like daggers on her sides. The sorrow of the sweeper girl made Shrimati Gopi Goyal angrier. “Go, get out and never enter this house again! Thief! You have not only stolen the bangles, but also my…”

Thus the efforts of Sejani to identify herself with the common women of society fail. Gopi Goyal is so envious of the charm and beauty of the sweeper girl that she charges her of theft and blames her husband too: “Let me see if these
were not stolen from my house …this profligate husband of mine, who is so generous to you, has taken them out of my box of jewellery and given them to you.” “But Mulk Raj Anand shows the honesty and fairness of the sweeper girl in these words: “And then she looked up to the mistress (Gopi Goyal ) with her fine nose bedewed with perspiration , her frank forehead clear, and her eyes filled with tears of innocence accused of guilt by someone.”

The ending of the story is as effective as its beginning. It reveals the working of a mind ridden with superstitions. Mrs. Goyal suspects that she may lose her husband to Sajani. So she refrains from uttering the dreaded words even in her most unguarded moments. “Sajani bears the humiliation in silence and lowers her head “as a dove up dives off the earth to fly across the valley, threatened by a rough wind…”

In some of his stories, Mulk Raj Anand has presented situations when the innocent, virtuous and honest persons are accused and humiliated on false charges. In Lajwanti, Jaswant levies false charges on Lajo because in absence of his elder brother Balwant, Jaswant wanted to have illicit relations with Lajo. Lajwanti, though she is honest and belongs to a very low poor family, but she is a woman of strong character and she does not yield to the lustful moves of Jaswant. Here, in this story Sajani, the sweeper girl is honest, good natured and sincere. The only fault of her part is that she is more beautiful, charming and attractive than Smt. Gopi Goyal the mistress of the house. Though she does not make any move towards Shri Ram Goyal but she gets sympathy and love of Mr. Goel. Smt. Gopi Goyal has noticed her husband’s inclination towards Sajani on many occasions therefore she becomes suspicious of the illicit relation between the two. Moreover Mr. Shri Ram Goyal, though he has sympathy and attraction towards Sajani, considers much for Sajani as he knows that she is poor, needy and servant girl. He is kind and affectionate towards the servant girl as the master of the house. Thus, Mulk Raj Anand has presented in this story the typical features of the contemporary society of his times. The exploitation, torture and humiliation of innocent, honest and virtuous woman by the elder female members of the traditional Indian families are another aspect of Mulk Raj Anand’s short stories.

Books Consulted:
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