Summary

Of
Ph.D. Thesis
THE ELEMENT OF COMPASSION IN THE NOVELS OF MULK RAJ ANAND
Submitted for the award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
ENGLISH
By
Sharda Singh
Under the Supervision of
Dr. Jagdish Singh Somvanshi
Reader and Head
Department of English,
Shri Agrasen P.G. College,
Mauranipur, Jhansi (U.P.)
Bundelkhand University, Jhansi
2007

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004), a prolific writer, a great thinker and a philosopher of humanism, revealed in his own characteristic way, various possibilities of Indian English fiction. This fiction has been
shaped by what he himself calls “the double burden on my shoulders, the Alps of the European tradition and the Himalaya of my Indian past.” It is, undoubtedly, from the European tradition that he derives his fervent socialist faith and his vision of a modern egalitarian society. His numerous novels form a fictional chronicle in which his eclectic humanism and humanitarian compassion for the underdog are persistent themes.

Anand’s close friend, Sajjad Jahir, maintains that he was “not only a writer, not only an art critic and a philosopher….but an active fighter for the modern movement in our country.” Greatly influenced by his mother, Ishwar Kaur, and Gandhiji, Anand had an insatiable thirst for knowledge which led him to study Shakespeare (1564-1616), Dickens (1812-1870), Thackeray (1811-1863), Goethe (1749-1832), Victor Hugo (1773-1828), Heine (1797-1856), Mazzini (1805-1872), Gorky (1868-1996), Proudhon (1809-1865), Marx (1818-1883) and the English romantic poets. He also read the Urdu poetry of Ghalib (1797-1869), Meer (1723-1810), Hali (1837-1914), the Persian poetry of Saudi Hafis, Iqbal (1877-1938) and the epic novel *Fasana-I-Azad* by Ratan Nath Sarshar (1847-1902).

The role of Anand’s mother proved a *motif* to his original thoughts and writing. She contributed to him the image of every woman who is “Mahalaxmi, Mahakali and Mahasaraswati.” So far as Gandhiji’s impact is concerned, he once wrote in a letter:

“Gandhi’s impact on ideas only. Look for the fears, the inhibition …and the cowardice against the cruel men, women, impure purists, who concealed their hollowness behind the show of strength? In the novel one does not embody ideas but feelings, emotions and passions.”

He further writes that in “all my characters in all novels, I have tried to bring his tenderness, and all my *Karuna*, to bear on life, in the concrete human relations”

A major figure in the field of Indo-Anglian fiction along with Raja Rao (1908-?) and R.K. Narayan (1929-2002), Anand has to his credit sixteen novels, twelve collections of short-stories and more than twenty five books on art and other general subjects and hundreds of articles. He is Dickensian in his ultra-sensitivity to the existence of social evils in protean forms. In fact, it is the keen awareness of the human predicament that propelled him into creative writing. Therefore the themes which Anand has chosen for his novels are based on such problems as casteism and human suffering caused by a variety of factors – political, economic, social and cultural. He refuses to accept “this tenancy on the earth as a death on the instalment plan.” He says categorically:

“I would no longer live by the dead ideas of traditional philosophies, the ritual of the old religions or by the tame word of the classics.”
Anand tries to create in the readers an urgent awareness of the dehumanizing social evils, to stir the springs of tenderness in them and to activise them for the removal of these evils in order that a desirable, just social order may come into being.

A champion of the downtrodden, Anand reveals in his novels, a triune institution of the inhumanity of man, his exploitative nature and his possible redemption. He rejects all institutions in favour of man. The protagonists in his novels belong either to the class of the suffering (Bakha, Munoo, Gangu) or to the sensitive group of people who suffer seeing others suffer (Lalu, Ananta). He takes care to look into the emotional problems of these human beings who are perhaps non-entities in the eyes of society. Anand is aware of the great potential which often remains unrealized as they are trapped by a callous society. In their struggle to free themselves from this situation and create an everyday life for themselves, they become heroic. The following synoptic analysis of Anand’s novels quite clearly throws light on his concerns.

Anand’s first novel, Untouchable (1935), describes an eventful day in the life of Bakha, a young sweeper from the outcastes’ colony of a North Indian cantonment town. This particular day brings him his daily torments and more, but in the end it also suggests three alternative solutions to his problem: a missionary tries to persuade him to embrace Christianity; he listens to Gandhiji who advocates social reform; and he also hears of mechanized sanitation as the only answer possible. The novel ends with Bakha “thinking of everything he had heard, though he could not understand it all.”

In his two chronicles of coolies – Coolie (1936) and Two Leaves and a Bud (1937), Anand turns to the lot of another class of the
underprivileged. **Coolie** is pathetic odyssey of Munoo, an orphaned village boy from Kangra Hills, who sets out in search of livelihood. His several roles, including those of a domestic servant, a coolie, a factory worker and a rickshaw puller, take him to various places from Bombay to Shimla until swift consumption brings his struggles to an untimely end. The novel is an indignant comment on the tragic denial to a simple peasant of the fundamental right to happiness. Munoo and his fellow coolies are exploited by the forces of industrialism, capitalism, communalism and colonialism. With its constantly shifting scene, its variety of characters from all classes of society and its wealth of eventful incidents, **Coolie** has an almost epic quality. However, in his crusading zeal, Anand neglects Munoo’s minor development altogether, and its last part of the narrative relies excessively on chance.

Humanitarian compassion distorts action and character even more disastrously in **Two Leaves And A Bud** (1937). The locale here is a tea plantation in Assam to which Gangu, a poor Punjabi peasant, is lured by fabulous promises. Compelled to work in unhygienic conditions and starved, he is shot dead by a British Officer, who tries to rape his daughter.

A luckier Punjabi is the protagonist of the ambitious trilogy - **The Village** (1939), **Across The Black waters** (1940) and **The Sword and The Sickle** (1942). The first novel in the series offers a realistic picture of life in a typical Punjabi Village in early twentieth century seen through the eyes of young Lal Singh, who is an insider turned outsider, as he is a rebel against all the village mores which he finally escapes by running away.
Across The Black Waters (1940) shows Lal Singh joining the army and fighting in Flanders in the First World War (1914). It is perhaps the only major war novel in Indian English Literature, inviting comparison with All Quiet on the Western Front and The Red Badge of Courage. It has the same open eyed honesty and deep compassion.

The last volume of the trilogy, The Sword and The Sickle, comes as a sad anti-climax. It is an extremely confused book. It shows Lal Singh returning home from the German prison, hobnobbing with the communists and ending up in prison again. In his picture of both Communism and Gandhism, Anand resorts to cheap irony (the Communists especially are shown to be a crowd of clowns), thus depriving Lal Singh’s quest for any possible seriousness.

The Big Heart (1945) Anand’s last novel before Independence, is one of his better efforts, though marred at the end by compulsive preaching. Ananta, the young coppersmith, called “Big Heart” owing to his generosity, aggressively champions the machine and modernity in a traditional society and finally pays the price with his life. The novel has perhaps a special niche in the heart of its creator, since it presents an intimate picture of a segment of society to which Anand himself belongs, and Ananta is perhaps the best realized of Anand’s heroes.

Seven Summers (1951) was Anand’s first utterance after Independence. It is an engaging fictional account of his childhood and the first of a long projected series of autobiographical novels with Krishan Chander as the protagonist. Another attempt to achieve a personal catharsis was The Private Life of An Indian Prince (1953), in which the hero has a nervous breakdown. This controversial novel is a pathological study of a neurotic Maharaja.
Anand returned to his peasant in *The Old Woman and The Cow* (1960). The ‘Cow’ is Gauri, a simple peasant girl forsaken by her husband. She is actually sold to a rich merchant by her mother, whose logic is reminiscent of that of Hardy’s peasants. Gauri escapes, becomes self-reliant and is transformed into a veritable tigress. This is a neat reversal of the age-old Sita myth in the modern context.

Anand’s next novels, *The Road* (1961) and *The Death of A Hero* (1964) show how he has never been able to sustain his art at a consistently high level. *The Road* is a rehash of the untouchable theme, and *The Death of A Hero* is a short novel on a Kashmir freedom fighter.

In the Seventies, Anand returned to the autobiographical vein, which he first exploited in *Seven Summers* (1951), *Morning Face* (1968), and *Confession of A Lover* (1976) are parts of a long fictional autobiography reportedly planned in seven volumes. *Morning Face* covers the period of the hero’s school days and adolescence and the story of the growth of Krishan Chander’s mind, especially his sharpened political awareness- is evocatively told. Though it lacks the freshness of the much shorter *Seven Summers*, *Morning Face* is an authentic document of the revelation of a mind and its milieu. In *Confession of A Lover*, Krishan Chander goes to college, has an unsuccessful love affair with a young married Muslim girl, dabbles in poetry, journalism and politics and at the end leaves for England.

In *The Bubble* (1984) fourth in the series of his autobiographical novels, Anand presents the young man, Krishan Chander Azad, pursuing a doctorate under the guidance of Prof. Dawes Hicks. In this novel we find that Krishan wants to transcend the blindness around him and see what has been buried inside him under the debris of the broken spirit.
This survey of Anand’s novels reveals that the strength of Anand’s fiction lies in its vast range, its wealth of living characters, its ruthless realism, its deeply felt indignation at social wrongs, and its strong humanitarian compassion.

It is an incontrovertible fact that Anand never loses sight of his deep concern for the suffering mankind. Tenderness or “Karuna” is the very essence of his humanism. G.S. Balarama Gupta has rightly commented:

“It is this love not for oneself or one’s own, but for the entire mankind, transcending all constricting limitations of caste, creed and economic or social status, land all geographical boundaries of nations, all of which are man made – that is at the root of Anand’s philosophy which animates all his activities, including his prolific writing.”

It, therefore, seems quite pertinent to work on “The Element of Compassion in The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand” for my doctoral dissertation. Compassion, which Edmund Fuller defined as, “the sharing of a sorrow, a pity and sympathy, a desire to help, feeling another’s pain or plight as if it were one’s own, seeing those in chains as bound with them” forms warp and woof of his fictional writings.

I have conducted the present study in the following six chapters for my doctoral dissertation:

**In Chapter - I**

I have discussed in detail the concerns of compassion and its role in shaping the vision of a creative artist. An effort has been made here to fix the parameters of the proposed study.
In Chapter – II

I have discussed Anand’s social out castes: Sweepers and Coolies. I have analysed here Anand’s four novels- the first two concentrating on sweepers Untouchable (1935) and The Road (1961) and the other two- Coolie (1936) and Two Leaves and A Bud (1937) on the chronicles of coolies.

In Chapter - III

I have examined The Lalu Trilogy. Here I have tried to probe three novels of Mulk Raj Anand’s The Village (1939), Across The Black Waters (1940), The Sword and The Sickle (1942).

In Chapter – IV

I have discussed the autobiographical novels of Mulk Raj Anand. The novels are Seven Summers (1951), Morning Face (1968), Confession of A Lover (1976), The Bubble (1984) and at last Private Life of An Indian Prince (1953).

In Chapter – V

I have discussed those pre and post Independence novels which form a class in their own ways. Such novels are Lament on The Death A Master of Arts (1939), The Big Heart (1945), The Old Woman and The Cow (1960) and Death of A Hero (1964).

In Chapter – IV

In conclusion, I have affirmed that The Element of Compassion in The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand is an incontrovertible fact. Anand never loses sight of his deep concern for the suffering humanity. Tenderness or Karuna is the very essence of his humanism. A hypocrite
and proud person can not be compassionate and merciful towards others which Anand never was.

Anand has probed deep into human problems-both social and psychological and has artistically realized them in his novels. He does not try to mystify the readers but goes straight to the core of the subject and suggests solution in simple terms. He has no mixed mercenary motives behind his creative writings. On the contrary, his novel and fixed motive of artistic interpretation of human problems strengthens the quality of his novels. He had presented social evils in myriad manifestations and has covered many different layers of human experience in his novels. His wide reading and excursions have enabled him to view humanity at large in a proper perspective. His close association with the suffering folk has given his novels an intimate quality of really felt life. His commitment to human values is deep and abiding. His passionate recording of the events confirms the authenticity of his fiction. When some works of art tend to inform and others try to reform, Anand’s novel aim at transforming the very ways and attitudes of the readers. There is no denying the fact that Anand’s novels touch the reader’s heart because they are the true expression of the inner feelings of his own heart.

Thus it can now be said for certain that Mulk Raj Anand is a committed creative artist who called upon his fellow creative writers to shift their emphasis from. “evasions for easy sales, fake fame and cheap popularity to genuine passion.” His novels forcefully reveal his passionate concern for the poor and the oppressed and his deep and abiding commitment to human values.

❖❖❖