CHAPTER VI
SUMMING UP

In the foregoing chapters, Mulk Raj Anand's novels have been evaluated in terms of narrative technique. The study reveals that there is a rich variety of narration in his fiction and that the appropriateness of point of view in most of his novels accounts for their success. According to Margaret Berry, the 'theory of centers of consciousness' or point of view is crucial to Anand's achievement as a novelist.1 Among the Indian-English novelists, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan stand out for having experimented with different narrative techniques in their novels; others do not present such a wide variety of narrative methods as these two novelists do. For example, Raja Rao's novels are the variations of first-person singular viewpoint only and Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels are written simply from the omniscient author's point of view. On the other hand, Anand and Narayan display their skill in handling all kinds of internal as well as external viewpoints to meet the requirements of the subject matter of their respective novels. To illustrate, Anand uses the autobiographical mode of

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1 Margaret Berry, Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and the Novelist (Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1971), p. 86. Margaret Berry elaborates the point thus:

It may be argued that point of view in the Jamesian sense is not the central issue in Anand's novels since they are Indian works. I believe on three scores, that it is: (1) that the norm is universal, applies to all novels; (2) that in any case, Anand often refers to the novel as a basically Western form and specifically proposes 'Western techniques', e.g. the interplay of character and situation; and (3) that even though 'most Indian' of novels, the works of R.K. Narayan, actually depend for their magic on a center of consciousness...

--- Ibid., p. 105.
narration in his confessional novel, *Seven Ages of Man* (three volumes of which have so far come out and the fourth is in the press), while Narayan uses it in his novel, *The English Teacher* (1945). Again, the former employs the witness-narrator's viewpoint in *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953), whereas the latter does so in *Mr. Samoath* (1949) and *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961). Similarly, the former adopts the epic manner of narration with limited omniscience in *Coojie* (1936), *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942), and the latter uses it in *The Financial Expert* (1952) and *The Sweet Vendor* (1967). Likewise, the former employs neutral omniscience with casual shifts in the point of view, i.e. multiple points of view, in *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960), republished as *Gauri* (1981), and *Death of a Hero* (1963), and the latter uses this technique in *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938) and *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955). Editorial omniscience which is Olympian in scope, does not find favour with either. Above all, their masterpieces — Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) — demonstrate remarkable (though different) feats of narration. In *Untouchable*, Anand effectively uses the Joycean method of stream of consciousness to highlight the problem of untouchability through the inner consciousness of a sweeper boy, Bakha. In *The Guide*, R.K. Narayan intercalates the first person and omniscient narrations to portray the character of Raju, the principal figure, in a three-dimensional perspective — what he was, what he is and what he is
destined to be. Both the distinguished novelists thus project a variety of narrative techniques in their novels to depict the panorama of Indian life as observed by them individually.

Contrasted with Narayan who is regarded as a pure artist, Anand is considered a committed writer:

The most striking and consistent aspect of Anand's literary considerations is his opposition to art-for-art's sake formalism in favour of art-for-the message's sake moralism. This stance is underscored by Anand's frequent references to literature as criticism and as prophecy with intent to effect change.²

In his novels, Anand does not put forward his message directly but indirectly; he does not speak in his own person and seldom addresses the reader as the traditional novelists like Fielding, Dickens, Trollope and Thackeray did. Instead he employs certain characters whose role is to 'speak the wisdom' for which the novel is the vehicle.³ For instance, the poet-editor Iqbal Nath Sarsher of Untouchable builds a strong case for the abolition of untouchability and advocates the introduction of flush system as a means of freeing the sweepers from the stigma of untouchability:

'Well, we must destroy caste, we must destroy the inequalities of birth and unalterable vocations. We must recognize an equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone.... When the sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain Untouchables. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine, will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without anyone having to handle it -- flush system. Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society. ³

² Ibid., p.27.
³ Untouchable, p.132.
Likewise, Sauda of Coolie, Dr. De la Havre of Two Leaves and a Bud, Azad of Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts, Comrade Sarshar of The Sword and the Sickle, Sardar Puran Singh Bhagat of The Big Heart, Dr. Hari Shankar of Private Life of an Indian Prince, Dr. Mahindra of The Old Woman and the Cow or Gauri, Lambardar Dhooli Singh of The Road, Maqbool Sherwani of Death of a Hero, Dev Dutt, Hari Har, Dr. Chunlal Lal and Kedar Nath of Morning Face and Dayal Singh of Confession of a Lover express the views of the author. At places, the element of propaganda becomes too conspicuous to be ignored. That is why M.K. Naik remarks:

At such moments, he is no longer a creative artist but a partisan shrilly talking to a brief; no longer a humanist writer with a vision but a tearful humanitarian slobbering over the objects of his mawkish pity.4

In Apology for Heroism, Anand admits that he is a writer with a mission. According to him,

...any writer who said that he was not interested in la condition humaine was either posing or yielding to a fanatical love of isolationism -- a perverse and clever defence of the adolescent desire to be different.5

It, however, goes to the credit of Anand that he does not resort to direct preaching but chooses reliable characters to propagate his views. But it may be pointed out that harangues by such characters as Dr. De la Havre, Comrade Sarshar and Dr. Mahindra do tell upon the artistic value of Two Leaves and a Bud, The Sword and the Sickle and The Old Woman and the Cow respectively.

5 Apology for Heroism, pp.81-2.
Anand's novelettes, especially The Road and Death of a Hero, are, however, marred not by the element of propaganda but by their failure to develop their themes fully. The narratives of these works are kaleidoscopic in nature and these fail to do full justice to the issues undertaken. The problem of untouchability in post-independence India taken up in The Road and the Kashmir problem dealt with in Death of a Hero had rich potentialities for a deeper exploration and, therefore, deserved a better narrative treatment. The narrative methods employed in these works, however, do not cope with the themes fully, nor do these portray the character of their heroes satisfactorily. Bhikhu, the protagonist of The Road emerges as a pale figure because his stream of consciousness is not emphasized to depict his torment as is done successfully in Untouchable to reveal Bakha's sufferings. Likewise, the character of Maqbool Sherwani in Death of a Hero is not developed fully, whereas there was an ample scope for doing so; a few flashbacks could be introduced to tell the reader about his past career and a few more interior-monologues could be inserted to depict his mental state more vividly. A firmer grasp of the narrative techniques of these two works would have ensured a greater structural unity and a deeper aesthetic effect.

Anand's successful novels, viz. Untouchable, Coolie, Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts, The Village, Across the Black Waters, The Big Heart, Private Life of an Indian Prince, Morning Face and Confession of a Lover, owe their success to an adept
handling of narrative techniques. The novelist is aware of the utility of main methods of narration and acknowledges the influence of other writers on his technique. For example, tracing the impact of the Joycean method of stream of consciousness on him, he writes:

In London, when I worked as an assistant in the rare book shop of Jacob Schwartz, I read Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Ulysses and parts of Work in Progress. The 'stream of consciousness' method of James Joyce swept me off my feet. I felt that the application of this technique to the labyrinths and substrata of Indian mind could alone metamorphose the inner realities of our soul. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky had already shown me that it was important to root oneself in the inner casualties of human conflict. Joyce had taken the novel from outside incidents to moral and psychological motivation. In this way, the characters could become more than themselves, deeper, perhaps universal.6

In Untouchable, the soul-drama of Bakha is depicted through his stream of consciousness to attack the social evil of untouchability. The theme is communicated effectively by means of a superb handling of the narrative technique. Unlike Molly Bloom's interior monologue which runs to sixty-one pages on end without any mark of punctuation (towards the close of Ulysses), Bakha's internal monologues are much shorter and, therefore, more lucid, intense and effective. Similarly, the success of Anand's novelette, Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts, depends on the aptness of flashbacks which are perfectly in tune with the dying hero's retrospective moods. "Through the technique of retrospection, or flash-back, Anand gives, like the Greek dramatists, inklings of Nur's past,"

observes P. Varalakshmi. As in *Untouchable* and *Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts*, Anand observes the Aristotelian unities of time, place and action in *The Big Heart* also. Here, through a moderate and judicious use of the stream-of-consciousness technique, the novelist depicts the conflict in Ananta's mind between his love for his fellow coppersmiths and his love of machinery. The hero's murder at the hands of his dastardly friend, Ralia, while the former tried to prevent the latter from damaging the factory machines, is a befitting finale to the events. The theme of the novel -- man versus machine -- is thus effectively communicated through a right juxtaposition of the stream-of-consciousness method and the external point of view of limited omniscience.

As regards the epic manner of narration, Anand traces the impact which some books had on him:

In my case, it was the reading of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, during a short term in jail, that awakened me to the possibilities of the epic novel... Later, I read Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* and was overwhelmed. During those years I had also been reading the epic satirical novel, *Fasane-i-Azad*, written by an Urdu writer, Ratan Nath Sarshar. The epic nature of all these novels convinced me that the miscellaneous life of northern India, which I knew, could only be rendered up in an epic.

In *CooIie* -- the prose epic of modern India -- Munoo is the centre of consciousness. It is through his experiences that Anand depicts the plight of destitutes in India. The rough deal meted out to


the domestic servants and coolies is illustrated by the hero's misadventures in the picaresque manner of *Huckleberry Finn*. The social and economic oppression of the poor in a capitalistic society could not be dealt with more effectively. Similarly, in *The Village*, it is through the protagonist, Lal Singh, that the plight of the Indian peasantry and recruits is highlighted. The exploitation of the ignorant and simple-minded Indian peasants at the hands of greedy money-lenders, crafty lawyers, callous landlords, lecherous priests and high-handed bureaucrats is depicted from Lalu's angle. His harassment as a recruit at the hands of Lance Naik Lok Nath clearly indicates the humiliation Indian recruits are subjected to. Likewise, *Across the Black Waters* deals with the theme of the tragedy of war through Lalu's bitter experiences as a soldier fighting in France during the First World War. The epic manner, with the hero as a centre of consciousness, is most suitable for projecting the horrors of warfare.

Anand's use of the first-person witness-narrator's point of view in *Private Life of an Indian Prince* accounts for its success. The choice of Dr. Hari Shankar as a narrator is judicious; no other character in the novel can prove a reliable narrator. Maharaja Ashok Kumar alias Victor or Vicky, being a neurotic, is unfit to relate his own misadventures. Similarly, neither his mistress, Ganga Dasi, nor his Tikyali Rani, Indira, is able to tell his 'inside story' objectively, authentically and convincingly. Dr. Hari Shankar, being the Maharaja's personal physician and close associate, has an access to his private life and he, being highly
educated, is competent enough to narrate the story of the Maharaja's degeneration from eccentricity to lunacy. The novelist, however, takes care to assert in the "Author's Note" prefixed to the novel that the narrator's "I" does not stand for him. Knowing that the novel is the outcome of a personal tragedy in the life of Anand, Saros Cowasjee rightly observes that Hari Shankar is the rational side of the author analysing his irrational side as seen in Vicky.

To understand Anand's fiction in general, and his autobiographical novels, in particular, it is essential to know that in 1926 he had written a confession at the behest of Irene. She had asked him to put down the story of his life, modelled on Rousseau's Confessions, which she had given him to read. She had even promised to marry him if he could find a publisher. As the publishers rejected the draft, he started writing his novels, choosing incidents and characters from his confession. In his reply to a questionnaire, Anand writes:

I...began to write a confession of my own, beginning with the traumas of early childhood to boyhood through adolescence, with intense self-examination and a critique of all the deadenings, decay and torpor of Indian civilization, broken into smithereens by alien operations, decimated and left to fester in a whirlpool of miseries, weakness and despair. The resulting narrative of a 1000 pages was refused by the publishers I showed it to, as very few people in the West were interested in the truth about the subject peoples.... I turned one of these parts of my drama into a novel called Bakha...9

Since the source book of all Anand's novels and short stories is the 'confession' written by him at the beginning of his career as a writer, there are quite a few repetitions of characters and episodes in them. Again, in writing his 'confession', he was influenced by Mohammad Iqbal's long poem, Asrar-i-Khudi (Secrets of the Self), and Joyce's novel, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. In his latest book, Conversations in Bloomsbury (1981), Anand reproduces his conversation in which he acknowledges the impact of these two books on him:

...I think A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is marvellous. It approximates to the ideal of the poem of Mohammad Iqbal Asrar-i-Khudi -- Secrets of the Self.... James Joyce ruthlessly exposes himself and the Irish. In the very first word, he shows what a child feels....

'I have already begun a confession about my childhood', I said, 'about my mother and playmates...' I blushed because I had decided in secret to emulate Joyce's example. I had taken inspiration from his self examination.10

With the publication of Untouchable, Coolie, The Big Heart etc., Anand earned world-wide reputation as a novelist. So, he seriously took to the writing of his confessional novel, Seven Ages of Man, in parts. Three volumes, viz. Seven Summers (1951), Morning Face (1968) and Confession of a Lover (1976), have already appeared, the fourth, Bubble, is under publication and the drafts of the remaining three volumes are yet to be finalized. Despite many similarities between the hero-narrator, Krishan Chander, and the novelist himself, Anand resents the labelling of his autobiographical

10 Conversations in Bloomsbury, p.13.
novels as autobiographies. These are visionary novels in the same way as Tolstoy's *Childhood, Boyhood and Youth* and Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are. In the dedicatory note given at the beginning of *Morning Face*, Anand makes it amply clear that Krishan Chander is not to be mistaken for the author. There is, however, a striking resemblance between the two. For example, Krishan, like Anand, suffers from two or three serious illnesses during his childhood as described in *Seven Summers*. Likewise, Kaushalya's death proves a turning point in Krishan's life (as told in *Morning Face*), in the same way as the death of Anand's own cousin Kaushalya did. The evidence of this fact is found in Anand's article "Why I Write?". Similarly, in *Apology for Heroism*, the author refers to eleven stripes on his back for his inadvertent breach of the curfew imposed on Amritsar after the Jallianwallah Bagh tragedy and Krishan recounts the same incident in *Morning Face*, only reducing the number of stripes to seven.

Again, in *Confession of a Lover*, Krishan is influenced by Annie Besant's lecture at Khalsa College, Amritsar and Anand mentions the same in his book *Conversations in Bloomsbury*. It is for these reasons that Alastair Miven remarks:

> Anand has only rarely written about himself in a direct way, though informed readers of his novels will recognize incidents from his youth or aspects of his personal experience.... *Seven Summers, Morning Face* and *Confession of a Lover* explicitly evoke the author's past. 

Robert Liddell rightly points out that "for all their likeness to real people, fictional characters are not real people, they do not have to function in life, but in the novel, which is an art form." 12 Krishan Chander, the hero-narrator of Anand's autobiographical novels, may thus be called the fictionalised version of the author. Of the three volumes published so far, it is in _Confession of a Lover_ that the first-person singular narrative is the most effective. Episodes in _Seven Summers_ and _Morning Face_ are not so well-knit as these are in _Confession of a Lover_. Besides bringing about structural unity, the "I" in the third volume ensures greater thematic unity and hence better aesthetic effect than the previous two volumes.

As regards the employment of multiple points of view in _Two Leaves and a Bud_, _The Old Woman and the Cow or Gauri_, and _Death of a Hero_, it may be said that though the shifts in the point of view are justified to depict the problem in each case in all its perspectives, yet a lack of coordination among the various viewpoints in these novels renders these not very successful. Gangu, the ostensible protagonist in _Two Leaves and a Bud_, does not act as the centre of consciousness as his counterparts — Bakha and Munoo — do in _Untouchable_ and _Coolie_ respectively. True, life on the Macpherson Tea Estate is depicted from all angles, yet abrupt shiftings from one character to another adversely affect the structural unity of the novel. Similarly, in _The Old Woman and the

Cow, Gauri's sufferings are viewed from different angles, yet a
greater effect would have been achieved if the novelist had made
the narrative look a connected whole. Death of a Hero also
suffers from a lack of organic unity because of sudden shifts
in the viewpoint.

Anand's successful novels thus stand the test of narrative
technique: the right employment of point of view in these makes it
possible for the author to effectively communicate his themes to
the reader. Barring a few technical lapses here and there, his
novels generally show that different narrative techniques in these
are in consonance with the vital needs of the subject-matter. To
extol his themes and to condemn his art is an error of judgement;
H.M. Williams makes this very mistake when he remarks:

Anand's novels are far from perfect as works of art,
but their passionate realism is arresting in a
powerful, if crude way, and they remain compulsive
(and occasionally repulsive to the tender sensibility)
reading to this day.13

The thesis proves that the themes of Anand's novels appeal to the
reader because of his "intentional" and successful handling of
different narrative techniques. In his own words:

One use of your thesis may be to indicate to my
critics that I did have deep concern about finding
the kind of form necessary for each novel.14

14 Anand's letter to me, dated October 1, 1981.