CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

I

Anand and his Critics

As the most authentic portrayer and interpreter of Indian life among Indo-Anglian writers, as a champion of the underprivileged and unprivileged in the Indian social structure, as a compassionate lover of mankind, as a relentless fighter against orthodoxy, exploitation, superstition and hypocrisy, as a maker of the most exquisite poetry of life (that is, the novel), as a pioneer in criticism of art and literature, Mulk Raj Anand occupies a unique place in contemporary literature. He is an exact contemporary of British novelists like Graham Greene, Christopher Isherwood, Anthony Powell, and American novelists like James T. Farrell, John O'Hara, and Robert Penn Warren, as well as of Indian writers like R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabhani Bhattacharya and Nirad C. Chaudhuri. In bulk Anand easily rivals even the most prolific of these writers. He has to his credit fourteen published novels, five volumes of short stories, besides, numerous essays on a variety of subjects and he continues to write. He has a very wide range of interests which covers journalism, literary criticism, editorship, art, philosophy, oriental studies, dance, drama, film, radio, politics and social welfare. Now well past seventy, to quote M.C. Pant, Mulk Raj Anand, 'can look back with satisfaction for having cherished upheld and advocated those finer values so sadly lacking in the world we live in. A major novelist in
his own right, his contribution to contemporary thought has been significant and as an editor of Marg, he has initiated a striking note in modern art criticism. As a humanist he is a rebel against orthodoxy. Thus a man of manifold talents, he has made for himself a notable place in contemporary life and literature.¹

The most spontaneous and ideal mode of expression for him has always been fiction, which according to him 'should interpret the truth of life from felt experience and not from book.'² He says

'I felt that only fiction which is the transformation through imagination of the concrete life in words, sounds and vibrations one may probe into various layers of human consciousness and its various phases. I feel that by putting the desire image before himself, the writer can evolve an organic pattern, showing the efforts of human beings to grow or contrariwise, their inability to develop. The tragi-comedy may thus help one to achieve Karuna or compassion for one's fellow beings or the understanding of life...³

Fiction then, is a means of realistic and naturalistic portrayal of life free from romantic idealisation for Anand. And in this exposition he feels bound to criticise those darker aspects which have been detrimental to his concept of the 'whole man', and to express his own ideas regarding the change necessary. Anand's humanitarian commitment has earned him the stigma of a being a propagandist and has evoked a great deal of adverse criticism. Dr Narasimhiah looks at the case of Anand thus:

'...the neglect Mulk Raj Anand has suffered in India and the English speaking countries, is of the most grievous kind--I said English speaking countries,
because in the countries of East Europe, his stock has always been very high. But popularity in that quarter of the globe has only helped to confirm the suspicion of the West and therefore, of the most Indian critics whose critical modes as well as evaluations are derived from the West, that he is a writer with an or many axes, to grind—the integrity of the writer as writer and not merely as a man with a mission does demand a terrific earnestness of the kind that D.H. Lawrence speaks of: 'I always feel as if I stood naked for the fire of Almighty God to go through me and it is rather an awful feeling, one has to be/terribly religious to be an artist', it is inconceivable how any one could have put pen to paper in the twenties and thirties without reflecting the sense of the age, the spirit of the times that so largely shaped his sensibility.  

Apart from probing the causes of hostile criticism, Dr Narasimhaiah emphasises the fire and the earnestness which Anand possesses as an artist.

Anand criticism chiefly revolves round the social theory of the novel. It ranges from the high acclaim of critics such as Jack Lindsay, Herbert Read, Marlene Fisher, Philip Henderson, D.Reimanschneider, Alaister Niven, Margaret Berry, S.C.Marrex, K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, C.D.Narasimhaiah, Saros Cowasjee and Krishna Nandan Sinha who have shown warmth and depth of understanding in their varied approaches to Anand's fiction, to the adverse criticism of Norman Bartlet, Anniah Gowda and Meenakshi Mukerjee. Bartlet, for instance, observes: 'Anand's revolutionary prejudices swamp his talents as a novelist.' Professor Gowda asserts: 'Anand's novels are propaganda, though, as such they
stand quite high.' About the proletarian characters he says:
'these are not in real life, naturally rebellious or questioning.'
There women do not typically shrink in horror from the advances of upper caste men.' Gowda concludes. 'Anand's novels do not ring true.' Why then the critic enquires 'have Anand's novels been so influential and never adversely criticised?' He himself provides the answer that it is due to 'sentimentality and overdose of Karun Rasa which may be unavoidable in politics but should be avoided in literature.' Professor Gowda errs in holding that Anand's novels are 'propaganda' and do not 'ring true' for the simple reason that Anand's novels have the capacity to move like any work of art. Referring to the influences exerted by Untouchable and Coolie on thinking men all over the world Anand writes:

'...many young Africans are reading me and feel that I confirm their familiar feelings. The greatest moment for me was when the Angolian poet Augusto Netto, who had come from the middle of a battle for the liberation of his country to read a poem in Algiers, told me that he had been inspired once to go into action by my book Coolie. In the dynamic world outside India, the human situation confronted by me already has meaning. Stalkey Charmichael of the Black Power Movement told me that his will to murder all the whites of America was stayed by the novel Untouchable.'

Aggrieved by unsympathetic criticism of his work Anand writes:

'Only in my own country, although translated in nine languages the book (Untouchable) has been mostly dismissed as a communist propaganda. Mr Gowda's attack is fresh in my mind and the Writers Workshop as well as the Illustrated Weekly often write two line dismissal
of everything I have written.'

While judging Anand's novels we cannot ignore the premises he has laid down for his work on the basis of his intimate experience of life and manners. He says:

'I believe that literature though universally significant deals with contemporary situation. By this I do not mean that literature is mainly political because by contemporary situation I mean the human and moral situations at any one given time, though now a days deeply affected by politics. Apart from a few periods in Europe when art for art's sake was attempted literature has always concerned itself with human (that is to say moral and social) values. The writer brings his comprehension of the meaning of life and death into his work even when he has not formulated a comprehensive philosophy about the universe and even when he is most egocentric and unconcerned with the common good by the sheer intensity of his feeling (which is the source of inspiration) ...'

Unless the author reflects the spirit of the age in his writings, and unless he keeps pace with the changing conditions of his age, he cannot be true to his vocation as a social novelist. Linked with it, there is another problem—that is of form which has again provoked adverse criticism. Anand does not give it much importance because of his firm conviction that a work of art is primarily a social event depending on sensibility. He declares: 'And if I may venture an arbitrary dictum, I should say that the primary condition of art is not form but sensibility.'

Anand seems to believe that neither style nor form is fundamental to the novel. But this does not mean that his novels are formless
and lack the distinction of style. He himself stresses the need for style if only once in the entire corpus of his writings:

'Of course it is not enough to say something. Everything depends on how one says—how the imagination of a writer can transform the various realities, interpret the characters with insight and connect the poetry and the prose. And certainly there has to be some kind of style.'

We are faced with another question as to how far Anand has been successful in shaping the felt experience in the mould of fictional art. The answer to this question demands a study of his characters. Most of the key characters of Anand are based on real people whom he intimately knew. He observes:

'All these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflections of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth.'

Their transformation into fictional figures has been a very subjective affair as the author himself says:

'The passions which have occupied them were perhaps my own dominant moods, and, therefore, all those characters may be said to be part of the same autobiography of the torments, ecstacies and passions of the last two generations.'

Anand seems to suggest that he has himself gone through the experiences of his characters and the experiences recorded which cover two generations, can be regarded as the experiences of the generations themselves. They convey the real feelings of an untouchable or a coolie or a peasant. Indeed, Bakha, Munoo, Lalu, Ananta
and Gauri appear as real as the characters of Dostoevsky, Emily Bronte and Melville. They are no doubt somewhat larger than life, but art has to follow its own methods. They become archetypes and the impassioned voices of feelings. Their quest is primarily for their identity in the world dominated by wrongs and injustices. In the process of self realization Anand's heroes show a continuous development. As D. Riemenschneider remarks:

'Anand's problem, it seems, is essentially that of the individual's self-realization. Man or to be more correct, the Indian man is confronted with this task within the framework of his own society, which determines the dramatic conflicts of Anand’s novels... If we look at the novels from chronological point of view each character undergoes certain experiences through which he matures. In each subsequent novel, on the other hand, the hero or the main character possesses almost right from the beginning, that maturity with which his predecessor was dismissed.'

For instance, Ananta in *The Big Heart* begins with an awareness of the importance of love and unity in bringing about revolution something which his predecessor Lalu learnt after a great deal of difficult experience in the war.

Anand’s minor characters have a kind of Dickensian flavour. They represent certain specific aspects of nature. They come close to Forster’s definition of flat characters who 'are like little luminous discs of pre-arranged size pushed hither and thither, like contours across the void or between stars.' They come alive because of some deft touches and often become delightfully comic.
as in Dickens.

Commenting on Anand's characterization Dr Krishna Nandan Sinha remarks:

'The crowded world of Anand, then is various, autonomous satisfying and complete. It is peopled with concrete, differentiated figures, not with mere phantoms. This world in Faulkner's phrase 'offers a keystone to the universe' and, therefore, has the right to live as long as the humanity lasts.'

Dr Iyengar in his appraisal of Anand discusses the charge of propaganda. He also comments on Anand's characterization as follows:

'As a writer of fiction Anand's notable marks are vitality and a keen sense of actuality. He is a veritable Dickens in describing the inequities and idiosyncrasies in the current human situation...of Anand's early novels at least it can be said that they come fresh from contact with the flesh and blood of everyday existence. He has no laborious psychological or ideological preoccupations, and he is content to let his characters live and speak and act...'

II

Summing up

Anand's contribution to Indo-Anglian literature is indisputably significant. He has enriched as very few have done, by giving it the best part of his mind and soul. His fictional art according to Dr Harrex is an experiment in different styles of poetic realisms: 'classical realism in Untouchable, and The Big Heart; naturalistic realism in Coolie; intellectual realism in
Two Leaves and a Bud, epic realism in the trilogy, romantic realism in Seven Summers, psychological realism in Private Life of an Indian Prince, folk realism in The Old Woman and the Cow and moral realism in The Road and Death of a Hero. 17

He is the first Indian author in English to ransack the entire hell of the degraded humanity for creating archetypal characters and situations in his fiction. A study of Untouchable and Coolie shows how much of unexplored and neglected material has gone into the making of these most successful novels. He is the first Indian author to explode the myth of our cherished ideals of seeking contentment amidst poverty, suffering and spirituality. All his novels stir our conscience by their relentless exposure of the grim realities of Indian society. He has presented to the outside world a realistic portrait of misery, the exploitation, hypocrisy and/superstitious beliefs of our people. But he has also a firm faith in the capacity of man to rise and shake off age-long suppression and ignorance. The optimistic note of hope and belief in a bright future is unmistakeable in his confessional novels. His understanding of his people and his country is too deep to give way to mere speculation and idealism, though he has a clear conception of a just society, the futility of war, and the importance of love and unity in bringing about a new world. For instance, The Big Heart projects with full force the dynamic possibilities brought about by the expanding industrialization. No area of Indian life escapes the attention of this deeply involved social novelist. Furthermore, it can be asserted without hesitation, that Anand is the first Indo-Anglian
novelist to champion the cause of the poor, the suppressed and the unprivileged and to rebel against injustice of every kind. He is very much like Charles Dickens in this respect and the 'true voice of feeling' is as evident in him as in the great Victorian master. To quote Sajjad Zaheer of the All India Progressive Writers' Association:

'For the first time in our literature the most downtrodden and the most exploited section of Indian humanity was depicted with pitiless realism and deep sympathy as the central figures of Indian life...Since then, of course, during the last thirty years many more novels and short stories have been written by Indian progressive writers, which have the life of working people -- the peasants, workers, lower and the middle class as their themes... But these two books (Untouchable and Coolie) remain the first and among the best in this new people's trend in literature. To Anand belongs the honour of being the pioneer, the first in launching modern Indian literature on this new road.' 18

Most of Anand's important works deal with the colonial India, but not much has happened since independence to reduce their social relevance. Even when a just classless and casteless society is established in India, Anand's significance and stature can be expected to remain the same, as he is neither a propagandist nor a pamphleteer, but a poet of human misery, hopes and aspirations. The humanistic and artistic aspects have enough strength in them to make him endure even when his social relevance will be of historical interest only. Once again we are reminded of Dickens. Commenting on Anand's humanism P.K. Dutta observes:
Rabindranath's humanism inspired him to touch all the strings of life, to compose a universal symphony of music. Throughout his human experience, he maintained an outlook of lofty detachment. Anand believes in the universal brotherhood of man, but he cannot sidetrack the agonies of our complex earthly existence. He had to experience with suffering humanity, all their frailties and shortcomings. And in a more realistic sense.

It can be safely affirmed that Anand's feeling for the poor and suffering has lasting and universal significance which is necessary to give a writer the 'accent' of a classic. In the course of this study an attempt has been made to bring out the artistic abilities of Anand, though it is not central to its objectives and scope. Anand's narrative ability cannot be questioned. He employs both the descriptive and dramatic methods competently as it has been pointed out. His capacity to create atmosphere and evocative background is quite considerable. Some of the descriptions of nature can do justice to a Hardy in their power and beauty. Though it would be too much to claim for him the boundless imagination and range of Dickens, Anand has a portrait gallery which is rich enough to compare favourably with those of many major novelists. While his characters are essentially meant to be types and representatives, Anand endows them with life and credibility by giving them individuality.

Berry Margaret, summarising Anand's achievement as a novelist stresses on the following qualities of his novels:

'It is a witness they offer of India's agonizing attempt to break out of massive stagnation and create a society
in which men and women are free and equal, in which they can, therefore, live dynamically and creatively.
It is the testimony they give of a generation of Indians familiar with the best and the worst of the West and with the best and the worst of India.
It is the evidence they afford to the modern educated Indian's struggles to identify himself and his country in the context of modern world society and to find roots that yet live in a mouldering heritage.
It is the search they pursue for a center, a principle of unity, which the West theoretically has found in the virtue of charity and which Anand knows as Bhakti.
The critics can only regret that with such noble matter Anand's considerable talents and energies should so early and so long have operated in the restrictive climate of a doctrinaire aesthetic. 20

What Margaret Berry thinks a drawback of Anand is really his strength as a writer. He is no escapist, and as a writer he nobly bears his responsibilities to safeguard the interests of the underprivileged class of our society, and elevate them to the dignity of human beings. He is deeply concerned with man's yearning for freedom from various kinds of oppressions, and the necessity of truth and love in life for human renewal. Hence as Dr Satyanarayan Singh significantly observes:

'There is I think, a need for re-appraising our critical values with reference to the literature produced in India...Indian evaluation of Anand in some measure appears based on certain assumptions or theories of the novel form alien to his highly changed atmosphere. It is not correct to fit this novelist into the known categories of English fiction, and test him by the norms and criteria set by others, writing in a different social.
life milieu, and expressive of their individual/responses. Criticism which leans heavily on obiter dicta of certain fiction-theorists cannot get to grips with the intrinsic texture and excellence of the work. While absorbing the insights into literature of great writers, the critic should creatively respond to a work of art and be able to discriminate the nature and quality of the writer's achievement. Any rigid adherence to a set of literary beliefs might hamper one's communion with the spirit of works which have their own diffusions. 24

Anand's panoramic view of life has led Jack Lindsay the most profound critic to observe:

'...I see Anand as having made a great contribution to world literature in Indian terms. True in order to gain his spaciousness of vision he needed his period in England, his struggle with the tradition of European philosophy. But he never lost his essentially Indian character in thus widening his intellectual understanding and enabling himself to see the Indian heritage, the existing Indian situation, in terms of a world-focus.' 22

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Notes and References:


3. Ibid., p. 252.


10. Ibid., p. 68.


