CHAPTER 2.

INDIANNESS

Amidst the diversity of languages and their literatures, in this vast sub-continent, Indian writing in English has secured a distinct place, and claims a world-wide recognition as a literary genre. It is a voice through which India speaks and is as much Indian as the writing in any regional language. Mulk Raj Anand observes:

'I believe that Indian-English writing has come to stay as a literature of India, because it is based on Indian - English language of the most vital character, like Irish English, American English, Welsh English, Australian English or Canadian English.'

Another eminent Indo-Anglian writer, Raja Rao regards Indian writing in English as a spontaneous process:

'One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that look maltreated in an alien language. I use the word alien. Yet English is not really an alien language to us. We are instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us.'
Although, we cannot claim that English is superior to Sanskrit which marks the first flowering of Indian sensibility, and represents the main stream of Indian culture, yet it has an advantage over it in so far as, 'it is a powerful world language and is today the language of art, science, commerce, diplomacy and intellectual intercourse. And in the context of contemporary Indian politics, that it is not the language of any region, is precisely its strength, and its extraordinary cosmopolitan character -- its Celtic imaginativeness, the Scottish vigour, the Saxon concreteness, the Welsh music, and the American brazenness -- suits the intellectual temper of modern India.'  

The great spiritual leader of India Swami Vivekanand, too, has stressed the importance of this language in these words: 'English language is the most effective instrument for disseminating Indian thought.'  

In fact 'the centre of gravity of English literature has shifted and while we are busy consolidating, a brand new English literature will be appearing in Johannesburg or Sidney or Vancouver or Madras.'  

In professor Iyengar's words 'It is a veritable Suez Canal, between the East and the West -- between England and India.'  

Ram Mohan Roy, Ranade, Vivekanand, Aurobindo, Tilak, Gokhale, Tagore and Gandhi were all builders of modern India, and what they wrote in English is cherished as part of our
national literature. Professor Iyengar figuratively calls
Indian writing in English 'a distinctive literature—a
tree that has sprung up on hospitable soil from a seed that
a random breeze had brought from far afar.' 7 In recent
years in the hands of the great masters such as Mulk Raj
Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao, Indian writing in English
has firmly established itself as one of the significant
literatures of the world, with immense possibilities.

'Indianness' is only natural to every Indian writer
but the exotic influences may affect him adversely. Dr.
Rameshwar Gupta lays down an essential condition for every
Indian writer:

'The aspiring Indian writer must undergo a disciplined
study of the Indian lore: India's religion—myth-art-poetry;
the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the
Geeta, the Puranas, and the rest... and it would betray only
ignorance if one took these works to be sectarian scriptures.
They are rather poetry, sounding basic existential predicaments
and bearing the steady glow of eternal wisdoms. No Indian
writer could ignore such study, 'for otherwise, his genius
would dry for want of nourishment; no imported food ever gave
steady, natural health. Their resplendence will be found
aglow with the Indian hue.' 8

Judged by this test, Mulk Raj Anand has every claim
to Indianness. Perhaps, he is even in a better position because
he has been able to effect a synthesis of ancient Indian culture
and the modern realities of this country.

After he left India for England in 1925 and undertook the arduous philosophical studies at London University, he began to realize the inadequacy of his education and felt, he ought have studied ancient Indian philosophy. In his Apology for Heroism he observes:

'...During 1925-26 I read some of the original classics of Modern Philosophy. For a while, I hungered for the methods of Indian religions and philosophies and wished I had learnt Sanskrit and researched in one of the schools of ancient Indian thought which gave more rounded answers to life's question.'

After this realization, Anand spent everyday hours together in the British Museum library, absorbing the Indian classics in translation. He had, by this time, come to 'think of academic philosophy, as he remarks,

'...mostly as an inconsequential disabuse of terminology expressly invented for the purpose; and I had begun to reach out in all directions for a reorientation, as people do in times of mental and moral stress and confusion. My preoccupation with India, after a period of research, led me towards a rediscovery of Indian ideals.'

Anand, through his exposition of the Hindu View of Art, began to see the development of Indian thought. He says:

'...And I got to grips with the religious and Philosophical ideas which had survived beneath the debris of all those...
complex and intricate schools of thought which had developed from the Vedas and Upanishads through the humanistic revolt of Buddhism, through the epic and the classical periods, and the codes of medieval times into later schools of Brahminical theism, Vaishnavism and Saktism. 11

Anand's main concern is the welfare of mankind and the alleviation of the miseries of the people all over the globe. This humanistic approach to religion has added a new dimension to it. What Professor Narasimhaih says in this regard is significant:

'Now in the myth (referring to the creative process in Hams Gita) is the conjunction of Brahma and Vishnu or the symbols by which they are known – the Swan and the Eagle – a supreme example of creative principle at work. It is this which we see – it is one way of seeing manifest in different degrees of the major Indian writers of prose and verse, dealt with in this volume. Only one writer, Mulk Raj Anand, seems to work in a social nexus which, even in his case, broadens into a kind of humanism offered by him as an alternative to a substitute for religion. But, he too is, in the main tradition by virtue of an essentially Indian sensibility which largely shapes his work.' 12

The era in which a creative writer lives cannot ignore the impact of various forces which shape the future of man and conjoin to make human history. A creative writer, belonging to any period, more or less reflects the spirit
of the age by extending the accepted tradition with its old
myths or by moulding the environment so as to cohere with the
new myths, which as Anand says: " dimly grow from our hunches
about ourselves — who we are, where we are going, and how shall
we ever get there." 13

The fundamental emotions, urges and ideas do not change
as rapidly as the society progresses. There is always a state
of conflict and flux generating phenomena such as frustrations
maladjustments and difficulties and breakdowns which affect
literature of every age. The main concern of literature seldom
undergoes any change because it is related to human nature.
The difference between the literature of one age and another is
in approach and manner. Commenting on the narrative style
of our times as against that of the Vedic age Anand remarks:

".... as it is the contemporary human situation
we are dealing with, in the environment, changed
by technology, our techniques of writing the novel
are different from the narrative technique of
the Ramayana, Mahabharta, the Tales of Ten Princes
by Dandin, the stories of the Panch Tantra, the
Yog Vasistha and a other Puranic tales." 14.

For instance, in both Mahabharta, and Anand's Across the Black
Waters' the problem presented concerns man, his attempt to be
good rather than great, human relations and the unknown power
that determine the unknown fate. They appear dissimilar
because they are so far removed in time. The analogy between
the two narratives can be extended further; there was chaos
at the time of the war of Kurukshetra, as much as there was
in the Armageddon of Flanders. The choice before Arjun was to fight or not to fight, as it is before Lal Singh, but there is God Krishna to advise the hero of the Mahabharata, whereas the hero of Across the Black Waters, has no such privileged. It was the end of 1914, and the choice was given to the contemporary hero by the new ' Tin Gods ' the ' White Sahibs' who wielded supreme power. Although Arjun is a prince and Lal Singh, a mercenary soldier, their main concerns are similar: ' how to achieve a life worthy of man, how to survive on the human plane, how to be decent ...' 

Anand has, in his confessional novels abundantly used the myth of Krishna's Ras Leela. In one of his letters he has explained his concept of the theory of Anandam through the myth of Krishna's Rasmandala:

' Perhaps the Seven Ages of Man series will achieve a view of life which is optimistic. As I told you, the hero is a new Krishna, oscillating between Asia and Europe. He tries to overcome the torment, brought by European civilization, with its perverted doctrine of knowledge as sin through Christian teaching, and the stresses created for the individual through the renaissance emphasis of man's self-will, as the motive force for action, the conquest of nature and the consequent oppression and suppression of vast peoples under various imperialisms. This individualist European man is being contrasted to Indian Krishna, who inherited the symbolical idea of happiness, Anandam, through the myth of Krishna's
Rasmandala, an endless dance in a circle, of Krishna and Gopis, almost in eternal time. It is true, that the West imposed its sense of historical time on the feudal agrarian masses and we are going about in other kind of dance, of the dog chasing its own tail. But the incipient consciousness of Anandam is there, if we discover our folk and how they have lasted out as parts of nature, not against nature, not conquering it, but reconciling themselves with it. 16(A)

Anand's attitude towards death is based on Indian philosophy of the Vedas and Upnishadas. He adds:

'Our attitude to death also has been and is different. European Christian man was to be redeemed by Jesus, who will intercede on his behalf, before his father, God Almighty. The Indians have considered death as a passing away into the elements, basically, so that their body would become part of the evolution of more life.'(B)

In Seven Summers, Morning Face and Confession of a Lover, this theory has been elaborated quite distinctly. For instance, in Morning Face, Anand traces an analogy between his 'hero-anti-hero' Krishan Chand and the 'Flute Player of Brindaban'. Our modern Krishan, like the God Krishna, has two to mothers, Sundari and Devaki. If Putana gave Him poison through her breasts, the Gopis gave Him their eternal love. Draupadi torments Krishan, out of bitterness of being childless while women like Muntaz and Shakuntala, love him for ever and embrace him. As Kansa tormented God Krishna, the British Sarkar tortured Krishan with seven stripes of cane on his back in Amritsar in 1919. This makes him realize the Buddhist doctrine of Karuna, which is essential for growth. Like the
God of Brindaban, he too, is obsessed with love and even wants to hug the ugly beauty of Helen, the daughter of a clarinet player whom he asks to be his marigold flower. She accepts if only he would be her God. Just as Lord Krishna rescued the people from the wrath of God Indra and the tyranny of Kansa in Mathura, Krishan sets out to rescue the untouchables and the indigent from the wrath and tyranny of the apostles of religion and the exalted rich men.

The moral values, in the epic period were sanctioned by 'Dharma', born out of a social organisation based on caste, at a time when polyandry and polygamy were in vogue. The characters were drawn from the highest order and were noble, dedicated, and free from all censures. Gods, either guided the whole drama, or intervened whenever necessary, unlike the new god, cash nexus which inexorably governs the destiny of man in this world. There was no tragedy as the distressed characters were usually helped by the gods, as in the Mahabharta or as when Shakuntala was rescued by her divine mother.

The new values of our atomic age have cast aside the outworn customs and dead habits and have ushered in an era in which sectarian considerations and social discriminations are gradually disappearing. The joint family system is breaking down, and marriages which were mostly made in heaven or arranged, have occasionally been replaced by the free choice of love. The fear of the final third world war looms large on every
conscious individual and the rigours of the industrial age have entirely changed the working and living conditions of the people all over the world. The Chemistry of the human body is endangered by the incidence of new diseases like Cancer, through poisonous gases emitted by large factories.

But even in these changed circumstances, the basic human personality remains the same. But in their quest of personal security men and women have resorted to isolationism which has become such a universal phenomenon that the whole human race is involved in it at one level or the other. The question is, how man can keep himself human even if he is involved in life at different levels of sensitiveness, intensity, and truthfulness. It is in this respect that the content of literature never changes.

To evolve an altogether new style suitable to convey the rhythms of their thoughts and bring spontaneity to the speech of their characters, the Indo-Anglian writers take the liberty of experimenting with accepted diction and syntax. This gives a new potentiality to English. Although it is an attempt to find an individual style, in the hands of a skilful writer, it acquires a quality which could be called thoroughly Indian, distinct from those of British or American English. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Bhattacharya, have each successfully evolved a new style for difficult-to-fathom Indian expressions. There are writers like Manohar Malgaonkar and Kamla Markandeya, who write with the uniform ease of
public school English, but it is doubtful whether it is the
most desirable style in fiction where one has to deal with
particular human beings rooted in their narrow regional iden-
tities. 17

Mulk Raj Anand, despite his decision to write his
fiction in English, feels that it is impossible to communicate
his deep thoughts and feelings in conventional British English.
He says: 'I literally translate all the dialogues in my
novels from my mother tongue and think out the narrative mostly
the same way.' 18 In another article, he further elaborates
this point:

'I found, while writing spontaneously, that I
was always translating dialogue from the original
Punjabi into English. The way in which my mother
said something in the dialect of central Punjab
could not have been expressed in any other way
except in an almost literal translation, which
might carry over the sound and sense of the original
speech. I also found, that I was dreaming or
thinking or brooding about two third of the prose
narrative in Punjabi, or in Hindustani, and
only one third in English language.' 19

Anand's prose totally differs from the conversational
prose of his contemporaries: George Orwell, Cyril Connolly
and Christopher Isherwood. His prose, in the essays remained
Macaulayesque, using the sentence of eighteen to twenty words
as against English or American sentence of five, seven or ten words. The influence of the Urdu essayists, Altaf Hussain Hussain Hali, Abdul Kalam Azad and Ahmed Shah Bokhari whom he had read in his early youth also influenced his style. Without bothering whether his Indian writings in English would be accepted abroad, Anand deliberately introduced translations of Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi expressions in all his writings to invest them with an Indian hue.

The following passage from Untouchable reveals the felt experience of the Punjabi in the English language:

When Bakha lies shivering with fever and struggling for life, Lakha, his father goes to the Hakim to bring medicine for his ailing child. As he was a sweeper he dare not enter the Dawai-Khana and so entreats a passerby:

'Babuji, Babuji, God will make you prosperous. Please make my message reach the ears of Hakimji. I have been shouting, shouting, and even asked some people to tell the Hakim Sahib that I have a prayer to make to him ...'.

"Keep away, keep away," said the babu, don't come riding on, at me. Do you want me to have another bath this morning?

And when entreaties fail to get him a hearing from the Hakim, he runs back home to see his dying child. But as his condition has grown worse Lakha runs back to the Hakim's dispensary, falls headlong at the Hakim's feet and pathetically implores:
'Hakimji I shall be slave all my life. The meaning of my life is my child. Hakimji, take pity, God will be kind to you.'

'Bhangi, Bhangi!" There was an uproar in the medicine house. The people began to disperse hither and thither as the Hakim's feet had become defiled. He was red and pale in turn, and shouted at the highest pitch of his voice: "Chandal! by whose orders have you come here? And then you join hands and hold my feet and say you will become my slave for ever. You have polluted hundreds of rupees worth of medicine. Will you pay for it?" 20

Any epoch making experiment is not usually accepted without much opposition. It was so with Anand's. His new Indian, realistic style was attacked as "bland, self-conscious, crude and ludicrous". To these charges levelled by Indian critics, Stephen Ignatius Hemenway rightly replies:

'Since his (Anand's) simple rustic characters are for every pelting each other with courses and complaints, it is essential for Anand to capture the fire in their voice." 21.

Anand gives a specific Indian touch to his writing by literally translating Indian phrases into English. For instance: 'There is no talk" (It does not matter,) or "Is this any talk?" (How useless it is!)" Are you talking true talk? (Are you speaking the truth?) This is how he translates some idioms:"

"There is something black in the pulses (There is something wrong)" (Confession of a Lover, p. 363)
idioms to give their writings a pleasing Indian aroma. For instance:

"When an ant grows wings and starts flying, in the air, it is not far from its doom." (A Goddess named Gold, p. 128)

Anand uses certain phrases in a complimentary sense in a peculiar Indian way, such as "They" and "Their" used by a wife while referring to her husband. For instance:

"Mother", "They" lost "their" temper because 'they' 'was' pressed from every side," Gauri explained. (The Old Woman And the Cow) (p. 111)

Colourful swear-words are so numerous that a dictionary of such words can easily be compiled: 'Son of a swine, Illegally begotten, Rape-mother, Rape-sister, 'Eater of your master' etc.' Pronunciation of some English words is also changed to give them an Indian flavour. For instance,

'Amreeka, Injan, gorment, getreman, laften gorner etc.'

Kushawant Singh accuses Mulk Raj Anand of inventing what he calls 'Mulkese'. But this charge is untenable, for it is a distinct Indian style suited to the literature of the land.

Meenakshi Mukerjee, also approves of the use of such idioms and phrases. She observes:

'If idioms and phrases and proverbs must be used in Indo-Anglian writing, it seems more appropriate to use the genuine Indian ones than effectively employ the out of the date copy-book English phrases.' 22
Even in the use of imagery Anand conveys an unmistakable Indian poetic flavour. For example: when the mother is lulling the child to sleep she hums a tune which is thus represented:

'The soft sighing music of the chant flowed indolently at first, breaking here and there like the incense wafted in a censor' (Seven Summers, p. 54). To sum up the essential aspects of 'Indianness' we can refer to the foreword to Raja Rao's Kanthapura.

'The tempo of Indian life must be infused in our English expression, even if the tempo of Irish or American life, has gone into making theirs. There must be something in the sun of India, that makes us rush and tumble and run on and our paths are paths interminable. The Mahabharata has 214,778 verses and the Ramayana 48000. Puranas there are endless and innumerable. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous 'ats' and 'ons' to bother us. We tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode and whenever thought stops our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was, and still, is the ordinary style of our story telling'.

In Anand's Indianness is inherent a universal quality which he calls 'Comprehensive Historical Humanism' which embraces not only Indians but the people all over the world. And it is the function of literature and the responsibility of a creative writer to usher in the Buddhist doctrine of Karuna for a splendid and peaceful coexistence of the human race. Anand observes:
Our world may be full of raw people, of wretchedness beyond wretchedness, of tragic conflicts and breakdowns. But we seek to extend the boundaries of literature beyond pure literature and this is perhaps the very world in which we can bring Karuna or compassion of our old humanisms to bear on our new humanisms. 24

NOTES And References:


2. Ibid., p. 70.


4. Ibid., p. 9.

5. 'England is Abroad', Times Literary Supplement, April 18, 1958.


7. Ibid., p. 15.


10. Ibid., p. 38.

11. Ibid., p. 38.


13. Mulk Raj Anand, 'Old Myths and New Myths: Recital Versus Novel,'
15. Ibid., p. 30.
23. Pigeon Indian, The Karnatak University Journal, p. 84.
24. Ibid., p. 89.