CHAPTER 3

Anand's Humanism

I

'More than all else do I cherish at heart that love which makes me to live a limitless life in this world.'

-Kabir

Anand, however cherishes the same spirit of love for the oppressed humanity everywhere on this Globe. He declares: 'As a writer I have tried to drink from the sources of love in our people, and give them my own exuberant passion, by joining in the 'burning and melting' that goes on in life at its intensest.'

In novel after novel Anand has revealed a consistent attitude in his deep feeling for the poor and the exploited and this has come to be known as his humanism. It is based on Protagorian dictum, as Anand himself says, '...throughout my own life I have been addicted to the ideal of Protagoras (500 B.C.) "Man is the measure of all things".'

He has however, given a new dimension to this concept of humanism by enriching it with the elements of 'Bhakti Yoga'. His humanism is the subject matter of his Apology for Heroism, which is an essay on his search for faith, and of Is There a Contemporary Indian Civilization, which treats his humanism as a synthesis of values which man must struggle to achieve. Yet another exposition is to be found in 'Prolegomena to a New Humanism' the first essay in Lines Written to an Indian Air. It also figures in some of his correspondance.
Anand received the first impulses of his faith which later developed into what he calls 'Comprehensive Historical Humanism' from his maternal grandfather Nihal Singh, who had accepted the service of others as a way of his life. Later, L.R. Puri, his teacher of Philosophy, was also considerably responsible for inculcating the spirit of service in him:

'I remember for instance, how when he told me about the Sikh doctrine of Bhakti, devotional worship and service of others, as a way of living, I was much more inclined to listen to him than I had been when a maternal uncle of mine had talked to me about it.'

But it was only in 1943 that he first defined his humanistic creed in 'I Believe in Man' an essay included in In Search of Faith. This was followed by expositions in other works later on. In the 'Prolegomena' Anand defines humanism as, 'an enlightenment in the interest of man, true to his highest nature and his noblest vision.'

In Is There a Contemporary Indian Civilization? Anand sees it as 'the acceptance of men as the centre of all our thinking feeling and activity, and the service of man for the greater good of all humanity, in the material world, under the sanctions of imagination, reason and creative democracy to evolve individuals potentially equal and free....'

In this book, Anand also lays down the chief tenets of his humanism, which in brief are as follows:

1. Man is the centre of all things.
2. Matter precedes mind in any metaphysical attitude towards
This insistence on the primary of man, however owes as much
to his Indian heritage as to his European literary background.
Differentiating his humanist philosophy from those of Gandhi
and Tagore Anand observes:

'The humanism which I prefer does not rest on a divine
sanction, as does the mystical humanism of Gandhi or
Tagore, for instance, but puts its faith in the creative imagination of man, in his capacity to transform
himself, in the tireless mental and physical energy
with which he can, often in the face of great odds,
raises himself to the tremendous heights of dignity
and redeem the world from its misery and pain.'

Anand sees the entire human history as 'a record of struggle
of man
for power and glory and wealth, with the vast bulk of humanity
merely figuring as pawns in the hands of a few, while any attempt
at a honest living in the present and the future would have
to include the wellbeing of the many.'

It is the humanistic outlook that makes Anand perceive
the poverty and squalor which surround our people almost like
an unbreakable circle. As a reaction to this, and prompted by
a genuine sympathy for the poor, Anand ventures into a territory
hitherto unknown to the literature of India. He says: 'No one
in India has yet written the epic of this suffering adequately
because the realities were too crude for a writer like Tagore
and it was not easy to write an epic in India while all the intricate problems of the individual in the new world had yet to be solved.'

Anand's conception of 'comprehensive historical humanism'
envisages the synthesis of the entire European and Asiatic traditions, and stresses the need for togetherness of man everywhere in this world, in order to evolve a better world order, based on respect for man as man. His preoccupation with man urges him to lay down his premises as a writer. He says:

'And as my media as a writer were the memory, and imagination, and the substance of my work, the whole my varied experience, the theme of my work became the whole man and the whole gamut of human relationships than one single part of it.'

Furthermore, Anand's humanism demands that we must divert our sympathy to 'the last member of the society, towards the weak and the fallen and the underprivileged everywhere.' However, Anand does not allow his judgement of human nature to be clouded by his sympathy for the indigent and the weak. He is wide awake to the evils and shortcomings of human nature. He emphasises:

'But mercy and generosity and love for humane causes ought not to blind us to the evils, the falsities and stupidities that prevent good-will from emerging among human beings.'

Man's self-centredness and his love of power and greed come in the way of his achieving the highest values of life. Our author points out:

'The naked struggles for power and similar desires overcome man's subtle love for goodness or the desire to be good itself becomes so wrapped up in pious phrases that the urge to rise to the highest pinnacles of human achievement lapses altogether.'

The difficulties of human beings are brought about by
the decay of human values caused by adherence to worn out myths. The conflict between spiritual and material values, between inner and outer selves, must be resolved for the good of humanity, as they are only different aspects of the same reality. Anand explains the causes of the present despair and chaos prevalent in the world we live in:

'If the human being is today submerged in a welter of chaos, so that he is hardly able to keep his tuft knot above the water, that is due rather to the fundamental human crisis in which he is involved and the purification of his mind, that is to say, to his lack of ideas and the ability to act on them in bringing about the institutions which may produce a new order out of chaos than to his loss of humanity and courage.'

He also emphasises the need for integrating ideas with actions so that one becomes an example not only to one's contemporaries but also to the posterity:

'I repeat then, the first hypothesis for a new condition of life is respect for man, not necessarily as a unique individual but as a man, and the encouragement in him of all the qualities which go to make him a living, kicking, vital human being, devoted, sincere, creative, an example in so far as he acts on his ideas.'

Perhaps the most important trait of Anand's humanism is the medieval concept of Bhakti expounded by Kabir, NanaK, Hafiz, Rumi and other mystic saints and poets. All these found the manifestation of the Absolute in the common man, and devoted themselves to his service. Anand strips off the religious elements inherent in this concept of devotion which makes his own attitude appear
like Western humanitarianism. But he maintains the essential Indian characteristics of his humanitarian philosophy by investing it with the Buddhist concept of compassion or Karuna or tenderness. He makes his own concept of Bhakti quite comprehensive, through a synthesis of the values of the East and the West. The doctrine that emerges from this synthesis has a universal implication. Anand asserts:

'I was deeply impressed by the Christian conception of the development of human personality through unselfish service, but this was only a confirmation of the Hindu doctrine of 'Bhakti'- devotion through works.' 17

But Anand cannot acquiesce in the idea of a personal God as laid down in Christianity. He also rejects the Christian theory of sin and punishment and prefers the Vedantic ideal. He says:

'But to me the whole presumption about man being born in sin, which lay at the root of Christian ethic, seemed obnoxious. For whatever criticism may be levelled against the Vedantic Absolute, who is above all human considerations of morality, there is in the Hindu and particularly in the Buddhist view, an insistence on light and knowledge as against the Christian insistence on darkness and sin. Gautam became the 'enlightened one' when he attained the highest state, whereas from the start Christianity seemed to condemn human beings to an abject and ignominious position.' 18

Extending the concept of Bhakti, nineteenth and twentieth century social reformers of our country link religious devotion with social service. Swami Vivekanand exhorts people thus,

'May the suffering millions be the object of worship to you; may the illiterate mass be the object of reverential service to you.' 19
Mahatma Gandhi declares: 'I am endeavouring to see God through service of humanity, for I know God is neither in heaven nor down below below, but in everyone.'

Anand seems to have derived much from Gandhiji's concept of devotional service to the poor. In Gandhiji's reply to his own question: 'Oh, God! How shall I serve the people now? Wipe every tear from every eye,' lies the essential quality of Anand's humanism. In a letter to this writer Anand voices a similar deep concern for the underprivileged of our country. He writes:

'...from my point of view the people have been left behind and the power struggle goes on for a parliamentary democracy which may give more wealth, position and privilege to the educated elite, but will not benefit the folk. There has to be many fratricidal situations between the different predatory groups before they suddenly realise that seven hundred thousand villages have been left behind.

This realisation makes me somewhat sad and saps my strength. I would like to have seen some alleviation of the misery of the people in my own life time. Who knows what will happen?'

In Is There a Contemporary Indian Civilization?, Anand emphasises the three traditional values namely, 'Universalism' 'Intolerant-tolerance' and 'Compassion'. About universalism he says:

'Hindu universalism originated in Vedic sensitivity to the greatness of the cosmos, absorbed Buddhist and Jain humanistic awareness of the dignity of all life, took invaders from many directions, even among Muslims maintained constant intermixture and fraternization at the lower levels, and today, is assuming to
itself the science of the West. From this universalism springs the doctrine of co-existence, the attitude of human family as one."²³

This universalist attitude is the most significant gift of the medieval period of our history to the world.

The second value 'intolerant-tolerance' says Anand, 'means to me non-acceptance of fanatical, partisan assertions, with a kind of good humour, without fighting back with one's own assertions.

The third value, compassion, is very widely used in his fiction and other writings. In fact the whole of the writer's personality is revealed through this eternal human value. He observes: '...whatever be the shortcomings of the contemporary culture of India, one thing about it is certain: it is full of the ancient tenderness, still full of its old infinite kindness.'²⁵

Compassion for Anand is the most powerful instinct that makes him probe into the causes of human misery. And he finds that the best remedy for all human ills is tenderness or love. He says:

'As I set out to recall the lives of the human beings I had known, the most important fact that struck me was not so much the passion of religion, or ambition among men, as the insults they heaped on each other, the pain they extracted out of each other, and I sought Buddhist compassion through which alone one could understand this.'²⁶

Anand believes that compassion is as essential for the growth and development of man's personality as devotion or enlightenment. He sees the divine spark of conscience even in the worst villain. From this very attempt at tenderness," he believes, 'will spring
the dynamics of the new life, a new humanism which is the centre and root of all human living. Anand explains:

‘For it will bring a realization of the dignity of manhood, of the urge for man to rise to the full heights of their individual and collective genius from the mutilations and frustrations they have suffered so long... And from this follows a new and a different way of living. From this follows a sense of dedication and service, not to some abstract god or symbols but to other human beings, the flame of life in them.’

Thus, above all, ‘it is the down-trodden people who evoke the deepest compassion. Anand is so greatly moved by the wrongs done to them that he declares:

‘I shall not rest until my dying day and shall raise my voice against inhumanity.’

III

Anand’s humanism is built on firm foundations. He does not believe in life beyond death, the immortality of the soul and its blissful existence in the world of imagination. He intensely loves the green earth and the life on it. But he also very keenly realizes the transitoriness of human life and holds that we should make the most of our brief sojourn on earth by dedicating ourselves to the service of our underprivileged brethren:

‘Thus alone will life be worth living, by an insistence on the values of this world as against the next one, of the here and the now as against the never-never-to-be-here-after, on man and the values he evolves in
his relations with other men rather than on the redundancies of religion and power politics which have ceased to mean very much. For it is by this shifting of the emphasis from the dark mysteries, so carefully obscured and made darker by churches and priests, to man and the universe he inhabits, by the reassertion of man and his powers of imagination and vision, that the new life will be revealed which is to be lived.\(^{29}\) He adds:

"Since it is a short life that man lives, life becomes the dearest possession of man, the most sacred thing, a gift not to be wasted, so that the perfection of oneself and of the universe in which one lives becomes the highest value; the greatest achievement of man consisting in his capacity to say to himself at the end of his career, in the words of a great philosopher of the new world, "All my life and all my strength were given to the finest cause in the world—the liberation of mankind."\(^{30}\)

Although Anand subscribes to Dr Radhakrishnan's noblest efforts\(^{2}\) to link up spiritual philosophy with life's problems, he in general, disapproves of mysticism and observes:

"But I believe that the central truth of mysticism leads away from life, in so far as the mystic resorts to the one way traffic with God. No one can come back to tell us what is at the other end. On the other hand I feel that the two way traffic of the artist, to and back from God, by which I mean the attempt to plumb the depths of the soul to receive insight into the elements of truth, goodness and beauty, may lead to the heightening of the creative spirit..."\(^{31}\)

Charity does not consist in giving alms, over-feeding the fat priests and resorting to fasts and prayers mainly to secure divine
pardon for one's own crimes, but in dedication of oneself to the alleviation of other people's pain. It is then, says Anand, the human and intimately personal life of man that is more important than that of the sage, and, apart from the struggle to attain an integrated outlook through which the meaning of life may be understood, tenderness or sympathy with one's fellow beings becomes the ultimate ideal.  

IV

Anand strongly repudiates the theory of Karma or Fatalism. If he makes use of it in his novels, it is only to expose the futility of a fatalist attitude of the people of our country, and the evils associated with it. This widely prevalent belief in Karma engenders selfishness, makes man weak and inactive and divides him from his fellow creatures:

'The average Hindu imbued with the idea that his Karma is his own, and has very little to do with the Karma of other people, tends to seek his own personal salvation rather than help others in their distress, as does the average Christian.'  

Another limitation of the theory of Karma is its denial of the organized life of a modern state like the socialist state in which Anand believes.

For the same reason Anand rejects Dharma. It tends to concentrate on the salvation and interests of the individual only. It also makes one orthodox, superstitious and cowardly. Anand, therefore holds that Karma and Dharma are at best of questionable value, and at worst instruments of exploitation.
V

On the other hand Anand gives great importance to the role of poetry in moulding the human personality. He makes us recall Matthew Arnold who said, 'More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us...,' when he asserts that 'poetry and courage are the ethos of our efforts to build the tentative hypothesis of a new contemporary Indian civilization.'

In his humanism 'literature music and art are better able to fulfill the needs of our time than religion and beauty is better worth worshipping than a deity for whom the sanctions lie in the intuitions of the few mystics...the sanction of poetic truth is the highest in our contemporary world.'

Literature and art, apart from being the expressions of universal truth, give inner happiness and courage to their votaries. Anand says:

'My own personal gain has been that much inner happiness has come to me through the very act of creative writing which has sustained me in the face of the tragic events of our time, because in absorbing life one understands its disequilibriums and, through that consciousness, to reach relative equilibriums.

That is why I have always considered literature and art as the instruments of humanism.'

VI

Evidently Anand believes that the present crisis in human civilization is due to the technological development. Man's
virtues and vices depend on the social institutions he evolves. In view of the fact that the progress of science has brought about immense good as well as immense sufferings, socialism alone can remedy man's sufferings and restore his dignity and freedom. Socialism is the only answer to social and economic problems not only in our own country but also in the whole world. He says:

'I believe that the deepest socialism is the only basis for perfecting the deepest human personality, that the two should be mutually inclusive, and that it is only by combining the two that a richer and more stable civilization will arise...socialism alone can restore dignity and real freedom to every man, because it ensures him economic freedom and renders him able to fight for political and cultural freedom, i.e. real democracy.'

Anand regards India as a kind of laboratory where a new human society will take shape. As Margaret Berry puts it:

'Humanism, then, is Anand's faith; India, its proposed laboratory and hope; democratic socialism, its political context. Bhakti-Yoga is its characteristic dynamic and excellence.'

The glorious ideals of humanism cannot be realized without struggle and suffering. Anand says:

'All moral values then become revolutionary values, the values of revolutionary life. All revolution can be seen, in this sense, as a need for togetherness, as the attempt by men to resolve, in common with other men, the social and moral ills of society—it becomes a need for brotherliness, for tenderness among men as against the time when you couldn't hold Robinson's hand.'
It is only in the unity of the intelligentsia of the world that there is hope for a new happy world:

'I believe it is only the coherence and unity of the enlightened peoples of the various countries, in voluntary organizations based on a minimum basis of common aims, and a broad common philosophy, that can achieve the new way of life in our time, or prepare the way for it.'41

VII

The impact of Marx, Tolstoy, Morris, Ruskin and Gandhi have gone a long way in shaping Anand's humanist philosophy. Following Marx's dictum, 'Philosophers have so far interpreted the world, the thing is to change it', Anand has been ceaselessly working hard for more than five decades to alleviate man's sufferings through his socialist writings. Dr Cowasjee is of the view that 'as Anand sees it, Socialism alone can provide the right climate for man's total development. Thus Marxism is the very cornerstone of Humanism, though Humanism is a term broad enough to encompass much else besides.'42 But Tolstoy, Morris, Ruskin and Gandhi moderated his Marxist leanings. Anand never committed himself to any political creed, but always kept an open mind. His strong faith in liberal humanism saved him from a total commitment to any doctrine.

Anand's mental make up and his humanistic attitudes establish a close affinity between him and Jawaharlal Nehru. About Nehru's influence on him M.C. Pant suggests: 'His concern with Nehru and things associated with that name are cardinal principles of
faith with him.\textsuperscript{43}

As Dr Krishna Nandan Sinha says Anand 'does not merely echo the concept of European Hellinism or Renaissance humanism but offers a kind of blueprint for the solution of the presentday ills in the light of the modern experiment.'\textsuperscript{44} Anand has definitely extended the territory of Renaissance humanism. Apart from the removal of poverty, class and caste distinctions, capitalism, hypocrisy, superstitions, effete conventions and dogmas, Anand is for a new educational system and emancipation of women and their respectable status in society.

In conclusion we may say that the main impulse behind Anand's creative efforts, has been his humanist philosophy and his dedication to it. He significantly observes:

'I have indicated that compulsion to write, was in my case the choice between life and death, the quality of love the values which make man human--for consciously and unconsciously oscillating between Asia and Europe I had evolved for myself the philosophy of synthesis in what I call my comprehensive historical humanism.'\textsuperscript{45}

References:


4. Ibid., p. 18.
7. _Apology for Heroism_, p. 96.
8. Ibid., p. 96.
9. Ibid., pp. 58-59
10. Ibid., p. 61.
11. Ibid., p. 78.
12. Ibid., pp. 96-97.
13. Ibid., p. 97.
15. Ibid., p. 96.
16. Ibid., p. 102.
17. Ibid., p. 46.
18. Ibid., p. 45.
23. _Is There a Contemporary Indian Civilization_, p. 37.
26. _Apology for Heroism_, p. 78.
27. Ibid., pp. 118-119.
29. _Apology for Heroism_, p. 103.
30. Ibid., pp. 103-104.
31. Ibid., p. 136.
32. Ibid., p. 137
33. Ibid., pp. 134-135.
34. Quoted by Margaret Berry, in Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and
35. Is There a Contemporary Indian Civilization, p. 207.
36. Lines Written to an Indian Air, pp. 5-6.
40. Apology for Heroism, p. 110
41. Ibid., p. 118.
42. Satos Cowasjee, So Many Freedoms: A Study of the Major Fiction
43. M.C.Pant, Mulk Raj Anand--The Man' Contemporary Indian Liter-
ature, p. 16.
p. 23.
45. Mulk Raj Anand. 'How I became a Writer', Contemporary Indian