



The element of humanism in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand

Dr. Vikas Shokeen

Associate Professor of English, Government College, Bahadurgarh, Jhajjar, Haryana, India

Abstract

Humanism is a very broad term. It is at the centre of human existence. It is defined as the love of Man irrespective of his faults, weaknesses and impulses. It is a concept where human interest, values and dignity are held dominant. It mainly highlights the activities, achievements, interest of man rather than giving credit to the supernatural powers. In western world people focused on this aspect of man very early. Its roots can be traced to the period of Renaissance. The people started studying, focusing and brooded on the ancient classics who emphasised things human and of this world as compared with the supernal and life of the other world. In totality, humanism is doctrine, it is such a principle which focusses on the achievements, dignity and greatness of man which proves false the older notion that man was wicked, useless, underdeveloped and doomed to destruction both in this life and that come. It forms the base of human civilization which makes human world more meaningful which is based on dignity, morality, rationality and even happiness.

Keywords: Humanism, social justice, social reform, Untouchable, marginalised

Introduction

Humanism is centre to the writing in literature. In fact, it is the central theme of writers. When we view the humanitarian angle in the writings of great Indian writer, Mulk Raj Anand, we find that his humanism makes him a novelist with mission. He strived and focused hard through his writings to highlight the basic and radical problems of the society. That's why the tag of betterment of humanity and improving upliftment of the under-dog of society is often associated with him name. He is pioneer in the cause of humanity; he writes not only for the sake of art or for his popularity but for the sale of man, for refining and for the dormant stores or tenderness in him for his fellow men. He always thrived to achieve the well-being of mankind as a whole in his writings.

Mulk Raj Anand's concern for the weaker section of the society

Mulk Raj Anand considers that a 'truly humanist art is commensurate with the needs of our times'. Anand believes that humanism is the consequence of the awareness of the need to help and improve the status and conditions of the underprivileged, marginalised section of the society. In his writings the welfare of such people is the central theme. This was the philosophy of Mulk Raj Anand that he always thought to raise the condition and plight of the suppressed members of society, the untouchables, the peasants, the coolies and the serfs. He endeavoured to give them human dignity and self-awareness in view of the abjectness, apathy, hopelessness and disappointment in which they were sunk for ages.

It is mainly for this reason that Anand is not liked by such critics who believes in fairy tales' type of stories which are away from the reality and create such atmosphere which amuses the readers or which is far away from the real problems of the world. In his writings Anand particularly highlighted the essential dignity of man and tried to awake the feeling of empathy and compassion in the hearts of people especially for the oppressed, downtrodden and exploited section of the society.

Genesis of Mulk Raj Anand's Humanism

Anand's humanism is not different from the traditional meaning of this terminology. He never expressed different or alienated views of it. He expresses that by humanism I do not mean more of less than what it always meant: knowledge, illumination or enlightenment in the favour of man. His views have been set forward in detail in the work 'The Apology for Heroism' and the essay 'Prolegomena to a New Humanism'. While expressing his view of origin of humanism in India he writes that humanism is not a new concept in Asia, if we think of Gautama Buddha. He at the same time admits that his humanism derives equally from the western Hellenism.

When we try to understand the core of Anand's humanism which is amalgamation of views expressed by different school of thoughts, intellectuals and philosophers. His humanism is the combination of the Hellenic ideas of man; Western School of thought in making this world a better place by utilizing the knowledge provided by science, the Renaissance belief of human development and oriental ideals and attitudes such as the refusal of the supernatural; Buddha's favouring of compassion and empathy; the message of fraternity and refusal of caste barriers as preached by great saints and spiritual leaders; Nehru's affirmation of peaceful co-existence and Mahatma Gandhi's putting end to untouchability.

The significant features of Anand's Humanism

Mulk Raj Anand believes in this physical life of man. He doesn't believe in the concept of supernatural or superhuman concept of man. He signifies the concept of whole man and put emphasis on the very existence of man. He never advocated or rebuff the belief of religion. According to Mulk Raj it varies from person to person and left the preference to individuals. His vision of humanism was an idealistic one. He believes that man can achieve his ideal of full and contented life in this world by giving importance to the new ideas and embracing education. He also spoke in favour of art. He asserted that art which works

in the favour of man, is truly humanistic and hence a valuable ally in the struggle to achieve the ideals.

Mulk Raj humanism was different and unique than other intellectuals. He stated that man's highest and foremost duty is to realize his full potential for a complete life. This noble cause can be achieved when man believes in equality, brotherhood and recognises the right of every person to enjoy social, political, religious and intellectual freedom. He presented that there are numerous hindrances in the path of man to achieve the goal of humanism. There are different types of forces which act as impediments in achieving the higher state of humanism. The barriers which keep man at length in achieving this, can be in many forms. The different barriers that separate men are culture, religion, language, ethnicity, caste, creed and nationality. They can be in the form of exploitation of man by man such as communalism, feudalism, capitalism etc. He stated that in order to achieve that higher form of humanism these types of forces must be annihilated.

Empathy and compassion, the central traits of Humanism in Anand's work

Humanism is centre to the writings of Mulk Raj Anand. It is manifested in all his writings. In the works like 'Two Leaves and a Bud', 'Coolie' and 'Untouchable' are some worth to mention. In these works, the novelist vividly portrays the pitiable, grim side of the life of marginalised section of the society. It is apposite to mention that apart from these, in almost all his writings he never deviated in mentioning this characteristic of his writing style. This subject matter is reflected in all his major works where he penned down the hardships faced by the peasants, workers, poor people, uneducated simple folk who are powerless to fight superstition and social restraints imposed on them by the powerful, influential, rich people. They struggle to fight against such practices in order to aspire for a better and harmonic life.

'Untouchable', which is viewed as socially conscious novel and another great work, 'Coolie', which tells the story of an orphaned child Munoo, is a political conscious novel. The story of Coolie is a story of such boy who was the victim of circumstances and his low birth. He is exploited from his time he leaves his village in Punjab till he dies in Shimla. This story presents a panorama of such boys who face such treatment in the country at the hands of such people who consider themselves not less than god. In another notable work of Anand i.e. 'Untouchable', the humanistic side of another marginalised and downtrodden section is presented through the character of Bakha, a sweeper boy and his experience in the course of single day in the town of Bulashah. Bakha is representation of the whole class of those Indians who are suffering from ages. His anger can be best judged when he comes back home and says to his father: "they think we are dirt because we clean their dirt."

Both these prominent works highlighted the major two problems of our country- Untouchability and the economic-social problem. It cannot be denied that these two novels served the purpose of arousing the conscience of people of India. Anand through his works tried to raise the voices against the social injustice met to such people of society who were not even considered human beings from ages. In another prominent work, 'The Road', he raises the issue of injustice through the character of a chamar boy, Bikhu. This work once again deals with the problem of caste system in

our country. It again highlights the social injustice and oppression faced by a low caste labourer. Through this work Anand evokes the realism of social injustice and suffering met to the lower classes.

Mulk Raj Anand- a proponent of Humanism

There can be no doubt that Mulk Raj was among the greatest proponent of Humanism. This is central theme of his works. He always tried to raise the issues of social injustice, inequality, difference between rich and poor, caste system, exploitation, focus on the underprivileged and dignity of all the individuals in his works. He was critique of such practices which are creating disharmony and feeling of enviousness among the people for ages. He is often considered as a champion, a social reformer who wants to bring change in the society through his works. He relentlessly attacks social injustices aiming to expose their dehumanising effect.

Anand always thrived to use art for the service of humanity. He always tried to pave way for betterment of human life. He himself asserted that "all the heroes, as other characters who have emerged in my novels and stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflection of the real people I had known during my life. And I was only repaying the debt of gratitude I owed them for much of the inspiration that had given me to mature into manhood when I began to interpret their lives in my writings. They were not mere phantoms, though my imagination did a great deal to transform them."

References

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