



Social realism in select novels of Mulk Raj Anand, U R Anantha Murthy and Arundhati Roy: a study

A. Vyshnavi Devi,
Department of English, UPGC, Subedari, Kakatiya University, Warangal

Abstract:

The Indian novel in English began as a novel of social realism but not as a romance or historical romance. The rise of the novel in India was not purely a literary phenomenon. It was a social phenomenon, rather than a mere fulfilment of a social need or desire. It was associated with social, political and economic conditions of the country. Fiction is the off-shoot of the impact of Western literature on the Indian mind. The novel in India was purely a foreign import. The English novelists Henry Fielding, Daniel Defoe and Sir Walter Scott and the English translations of the illustrious European novelists Leo Tolstoy, Honor'Re de Balzac, Fyodor Mikhail, Ovich, Dostoevsky, Victor Hugo and many others apprised the Indian writer with the theme and technique of fiction. Indian writers became aware of the latest achievements of their contemporaries in foreign tongues and produced work of a technically high standard after reading the world's classics in their own language.

Key words: English novelists, hoary tradition, faithful cultures

Introduction

India has a rich and hoary tradition of story – telling, a brilliant galaxy of story – tellers who illumine the pages of her history and literature. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's wife* (1864), which is typical of a transitional period in the history of Indian literature was the first attempt made by an Indian to produce a novel in English. Later the novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Chaman Nahal, Arun Joshi, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Kamala Markendeya, Nayanatara Sahgal, Arundhati Roy, and several others have made their contribution for the flourishing of Indian English fiction.

The Indian English literature has achieved far reaching importance both in

India and abroad in the recent decades. Indian English literature has been called "a Janus-faced literature" born of "a cross fertilization of two faithful cultures" - Indian and European. The Indian fiction in English is now living, developing and evolving literary force. It is also accepted as a significant part of third world or new literatures. Though the Indian novel in English has begun as a 'hot- house- plant', it establishes firm roots in Indian soil.

It has attained a rich growth, mounting extraordinary heights in the context of the contemporary Indian literature scene. The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of many writers whose literary manifesto was to write for social, political and economic purpose. The purpose was not only to throw light upon the social evils and malpractices prevailing in the society in



those days but also to employ fiction to the cause of social amelioration. The proliferation of novel in Indian English manifests itself multifariously encompassing almost every aspect of Indian social life. In the last one hundred years or so, this staggering branch of literature has blossomed like a fragrant flower and has become golden gate for the world to see India through. This literary explosion or renaissance has not been quite evolutionary, but in recent years, it has caused a boom in the realism of Indian fiction writing.

The Indian novel in English began as a novel of social realism but not as a romance or historical romance. The raise of the novel in India was not purely a literary phenomenon. It was a social phenomenon, rather than a mere fulfilment of a social need or desire. It was associated with social, political and economic conditions of the country. Fiction is the off-shoot of the impact of Western literature on the Indian mind. The novel in India was purely a foreign import. The English novelists Henry Fielding, Daniel Defoe and Sir Walter Scott and the English translations of the illustrious European novelists Leo Tolstoy, Honor'Re de Balzac, Fyodor Mikhail, Ovich, Dostoevsky, Victor Hugo and many others apprised the Indian writer with the theme and technique of fiction. Indian writers became aware of the latest achievements of their contemporaries in foreign tongues and produced work of a technically high standard after reading the world's classics in their own language. The literary stature of Indian Novel in English has steadily grown with each successive work of fiction. Indisputably, it has achieved global recognition as a significant genre.

The novels of the 1930's reflected the progressive philosophy of the writers. They were vocal about injustice, cruelty and exploitation that the masses faced. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and Bud* (1938) took the creative imagination from historical romances to social realism. G.V. Deseni's *All about H. Hatterr* (1948) took it further to the psychological probing into individual personality. The Fifties was a period of socially conscious novels such as Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), K.A. Abbas's *Inquilab* (1955) and R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) which were imbued with didactic rumblings in the agonized psyche of the characters. Nayanatara Sahgal's *A Time to be Happy* (1958) traced the development of nationalist movement and the contrast offered by the old devoted nationalists with young pragmatic mercenaries. The Sixties showed the development of psychological novels which highlighted the Indian identity under the onslaught of the cultural influences of the west, while Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) was an attempt on the terrorist movement in India. Bhabani Bhattacharya's *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) and R.K. Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) gave a perspective analysis of the historical process of social changes in India after Independence. Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner* (1968), on the other hand, rendered the alienation of Indian expatriates in the quagmire of inter-cultural flux.

The decade of the Nineties was the harbinger of more profitable business to the Western publishers and it gave a special niche to Vikram Seth, Shobha De, Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee and they made quick bucks. The Western



readers suffering from the angst of depression and melancholia needing some kind of diversion have turned to Indian novel in English for getting spiritual solace. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and Balraj Khanna's *A Nation of Fools* highlighted their divine propensities. Mistry was a runner up for Booker Award in 1991. Githa Hariharan too hit the buzzer with her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Amitav Ghosh won acclaim for both his fiction and non-fiction.

R.K. Narayan is the conspicuous star in the galaxy of fictionists, by virtue of his achievement. It is certified by the fact that his novels are translated into the major languages of the world, which also indicates his wide popularity the world over. He is one of the founding fathers of Indian English fiction. There is no 'good' and 'bad' characters in Narayan's novels. Human nature is presented veraciously and interestingly and memorably. 'Malgudi' is Narayan's "Casterbridge". In fact, Narayan's main characters take life so seriously that they appear little spiritual and mostly secular. He is a species by himself. He has immortalized himself by the creation of Malgudi, a real life character provided him with the original of *The Guide*, the most popular of his novels. Narayan is a master of realism and angst. His characters and situations, incidents and episodes, are real and true to daily life. Man appears, passes through self-made travails of life, and vanishes into life. That is the central theme of Narayan's fiction. He portrays life as a mighty force to which man has to bow, willingly or unwillingly, his head ultimately and accept it. The achievement of Narayan is that he

effortlessly sustains below the selfish current of the clownish an undercurrent of stainless splendour.

In the novels of Anita Desai, the interior of the human being forms the core of scrutiny. Unlike Ruth Prawer Jhabvala who gives graphic details about reality, Anita Desai is interested in the study of the lives and working of the mind of the characters. The most prominent feature of Desai's art is the delineation of character. She is primarily interested in the portrayal of female protagonists as living in separate, closed, sequestered world of existential problems and passions. Each individual is portrayed as an unsolved mystery being hyper-sensitive, solitary and introspective. The women have their material needs taken care of by wealth and servants, but their emotional needs remain unsatiated. Ruth Prawer Jhabwala is the first woman novelist of Indian English fiction. She has a discerning eye for the changing pattern of Urban life in modern India, especially in and around Delhi. She shows a considerable narrative power in drawing an ironic, comic, yet sympathetic portrayal of the middle classes. She is undoubtedly a very skilful writer of domestic comedy with a penchant for irony and social satire. Her portrayal of India and Indian scene, though marked by detachment, has become somewhat controversial. her stories have appeared in the "Encounter", "The New Yorker" and other prestigious Journals. She gives graphic details about reality.

Realism in art and literature is an attempt to portray life as it is. It shows life with camera fidelity, omitting nothing, that is ugly or painful, and idealizing nothing. To the realists, the artist's main function is to describe as



accurately as possible what is observed through senses. Realism began as a recognizable movement in the 1700's. By the mid 1800's it was a decrement art form. In part realism which has been a revolt against classicism and romanticism is a unique literary phenomenon that never endeavours "to distort life by forcing it to agree with their own desires or with the formulas of art". However in the process of selecting and presenting their material, the realists cannot help being influenced by what they feel and think. Even the most thorough going realism is the result of observations and personal judgment. It is an effect as well as a cause, it is subservient to ideas, to motives of sentiment and principle, and these motives can be of extremely different character.

Mulk Raj Anand certainly enjoys the reputation of being a major figure in the field of Indo- English fiction. Anand is Dickensian in his ultra- sensitivity to the existence of social evils in protean forms. In fact, it is the keen awareness of the human predicament that propelled him into creative writing. Therefore the themes which Anand has chosen for his novels are based on such problems as casteism, and human suffering caused by a variety of factors – political, economic, social and cultural. He says categorically; "I would no longer live by the dead ideas of traditional philosophies, the ritual of the old religions or by the tame words of the classics". He tries to create in the readers an urgent awareness of the dehumanizing social evils to stir the springs of tenderness in them and to activate them for the removal of these evils in order that a desirable, just social order may come into being.

Mulk Raj Anand, the pioneer of Indian writing in English is a unique synthesis of the ideas of such diverse masters as Nanak Iqbal, Marx, Gandhi and Nehru. His humanism is a happy blend of the teachings and insights of these and other thinkers affected profoundly. His contact with European and Asian thought and culture. Anand lived in the midst of intellectual influences like Russell's 'rationalism', Lawrence's Rousseauistic 'Naturalism' Middleton Murry's mystical view of 'the supreme beauty of poetical experience' Mr.Wyndhem Lew's satirizing every one" but all these views failed to impress Anand. He points out that the growth of humanistic values in him was the consequence of the influence of Buddha, Guru Nanak, Ram Mohan Roy, M.N.Roy and Jawahar Lal Nehru.His humanism is the mainspring of his philosophy and life and is largely founded on Lord Buddaha's concept of 'Karuna', the yoke of pity. He sought Buddhist compassion, because he believed that through Buddhist, compassion alone one could understand, the insults men heaped on each other.

Anantha Murthy began his career as a Lecturer in English in 1956 at Mysore University and later he became a professor. He is a distinguished scholar and has taught at various universities in Europe and the United states. He has served as a visiting professor at the Cornell University (2001), University of Iowa (1975), Shivaji University, Kolhapur (1982), University of Tübingen, Germany (1992), University of Pennsylvania (2000), University of Hyderabad (2001), and many other Universities. During the period 1987 to 1990, he served as the Vice-Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. Besides, he has also served as the



chairman of the National Book Trust of India at Delhi in 1992 and 1993, Indian Institute of Social Sciences in 1998 and The Film and Television Institute of India at Pune in 2002. He was the president of the Sahitya Akademy from 1993 to 1998. Anantha Murthy's creative genius is reflected in his prolific writings. Majority of his writings is in Kannada. His works can be classified into stories, poems, novels and essays. He began his literary career in 1955 with the story volume, *Endedhigu Mugiyoda Kathe*. Other story collections include works like *Mauni* (1967), *Prashne*(1962) *Akasha Mattu Bekku* (1983), *Mooru DasaKada Kathegalu*(1989), *Suryana Kudure*(1995) and *Aidu Dashakada Kathegalu*(2001).His poetry collections like *Mithuna* (1992),*Ajjana Hegala Sukkugalu* (1989), *Padyagalue* (1967), *Eevareginal Kavithegalu* (2001), have gripped the imagination of the readers. His essays include *Prajne Mattu Parisara* (Literary and Philosophical essays) *Samakshama* (essays on politics, culture, society, literature, *Yuga Pallata*(essays), *Abhinava*(2001) *Kannada, Karnataka* (Selected essays 2001). His novels include *Samskara*(1965), which has been translated into English, Russian, French, Hungarian, German, Swedish, Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu and Gujarathi, *Bharathipura* (1974) *Divya* (2001) and others.

Anantha Murthy has delivered lectures on politics, culture, literature, art and a number of other issues. He delivered a lecture on "Culture and Destiny" at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, "Indian Literature", at the University of Madison and Chicago in 1985, "Indian Society, culture, politics, and Literature" delivered at the university of Birmingham, Alabama in 1987,

"Colonialism and Indian Literature" delivered at University of California, "Art in the Modern Age" at Bangalore University in 1989. He has served on many important committees as Member Chairman. He has interviewed many celebrities for television and documentaries.

Untouchable and the Road

Literatures in general and novel in particular seem to amalgamate in itself two main ingredients - the individuality of the novelist and his literary milieu. One of the main duties of great writer is to represent the society and its various influence in his art. In other words, literature and society are the two facets of the same coin; they are interwoven both internally and externally. Indian fiction in English is said to be dominantly got recognized with Mulk Raj Anand. Among various Indo-Anglian novelists, Anand occupies an enviable position. He is said to have modernised the Indian novel. His love for novelty and originality enabled him to carry the tradition of Tagore and Premchand, Bankim and Sharat Chandra to new heights. In all his novels he appears as a social critic. The society, he has seen and observed in the field of his work is a social reality. When we read his novels, we find the large majority of the questions raised by him are social questions., Questions of tradition, norms and genres, etc. His purpose in writing fiction has been to focus on the miseries of the underdogs of society caused by the exploitations of the capitalists or the feudal lords or by the impact of Industry on the traditional and agricultural way of life. Anand is an objective delineator of Indian social reality and has dealt extensively in his novels with the most vital aspects of



Indian life in all its social, political, economic and cultural manifestations. Though his novels are written in English they form an integral part of the significant trend of social realism in the Indian novel. His ideology is imbued with an acute social awareness and a distinctive sense of responsibility towards life. He desires a radical transformation of the Indian society and depicts the multiple tensions existing at various levels as between the feudal orthodoxy and bourgeois progressivism or between capitalist acquisitiveness and socialist collectivism. His novels encompass the wide spectrum of class and caste hierarchies from the highest princes and Brahmins to the lowest coolies and untouchables.

The social realism of Anand has been commented upon but it is worthwhile to recapitulate its significant elements; the social stratification manifesting itself in the caste system; the misdirected zeal of the traditionalists in emphasizing the 'spiritual' to the exclusion or detriment of material well-being; and the deliberated stress on individual salvation divorced from social realities; the socio-economic system which perpetuates class differences in an hierarchical set-up buttressed by religious fundamentalists with their theories of karma and rebirth; the greed of a few to subjugate and exploit other people manifesting in a capitalist ethic and in imperialist colonialism. Anand's Untouchable deals with the curse of caste system.

The rigidity of caste system set in an indignant revolt against it. The people's urge for a change in its rigidity is reflected in the rise of reformatory movements like Buddhism, Jainism and rationalist school of philosophy as that of

Carvaka in the sixth century B.C. Buddha's emphasis in his teachings on goodness of action rather than on chance of birth attracted the depressed classes to Buddhist fold. The social and spiritual equalities promised in Buddhist fold endeared Buddha to the masses, because the authors of Dharma-Sutras had condemned the outcastes to deplorable existence. So much so, that they had evolved 'the theory of Untouchability'.

Bakha's association with British soldiers has awakened him to a consciousness of new realities. In his life of eighteen years he has been treated like a human being only by them. In a reference to the novel, V.G. Kirnan says that the Tommies "were in a rough way much friendlier (to Bakha) than his own highcaste countrymen". This has given Bakha an awareness of his individuality and he naturally strives to assert himself; and is thus different from his fellow castemen. Though not metamorphosed altogether, still abject, too ready to gravel, he can think condition and an awakened consciousness gives rise to the 'action' of the novel. Anand commiserates with him in his sufferings but is happy to find that Bakha can think and question, and this predicates the possibility of a change. This change has been taking place on different levels in society and even Bakha has sensation of it, though he is little aware that he is both the object and the instrument of his process of change.

Bakha feels that the poet is closer to the heart of the problem because dungcleaning which brings indignity to the man is performed by a machine. The problem of Bakha involves an essential question of recognition of his social status. This is what R.T. Robertson calls 'the central paradox of the novel'. Bakha



is craving for an identity with his culture. But he "is both isolated from and bound to his culture: it will not allow him fully to participate in the society and it cannot release him from it because of the essential service he performs for it". The infamy and dishonor associated with his dung-cleaning profession is no longer tolerable. The poet's suggestion of the flush system pleased him very much. Saros Cowasjee observes: "But the mention of a 'machine' which clears dung and which would enable a sweeper to change his profession so that he would no longer be thought of as an untouchable grips his attention."

The God of Small Things

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a polysemic novel which can be interpreted at several levels. It may be said that the novel is a satire on politics attacking specifically the Communist establishment. It may be treated as a family saga narrating the story of four generations of a Christian family. It may also be treated as a novel having religious overtones: One may also call it a protest novel which is subversive and taboo-breaking. It may also be treated as a love story with a tragic end. The novel gives good dividends if studied from the viewpoint of childhood experience. In terms of stylistic experimentation, it is the boldest novel of the Nineties as *The Midnight's Children* was of the Eighties. *The God of Small Things* throws light upon hierarchical structures of power, and oppression at various levels in patriarchal societies. Arundhati Roy explores how these differences of caste, class, gender, race, function through social institutions and the way they affect human interactions and relationships. The novel really created a stir when it

first appeared and when it specially fetched the prestigious Booker Prize for literature. The theme of the novel, indeed, touched the hearts of all critics across the world while its language annoyed their concept of standards. However, like Mulk Raj Anand in his *Untouchable*, Arundhati Roy's fresh perspectives on an age-old tradition created waves as rebellion against the social injustice meted out both to the down-trodden and to the women. In this way, Roy using her lively original language, sensitive poetic style, deep feelings, shocking emotions and a novel approach, has really achieved a mark of eminence in helping us to overcome 'man's inhumanity to man'.

One of the dominant socio-political concerns in Arundhati's novel is the rigid caste-structure to be seen in India. This caste-oriented rigidity sometimes plays havoc with the innumerable innocent lives. The 'bigness' of 'big things' and 'big people' should be read in their generous and compassionate understanding of 'small things' and 'small people'. Unfortunately, in the present-day Indian society, this is not to be, and the inevitable consequence is tragic and claustrophobic. The weaker sections of our society—like the paravans. The scheduled castes and the have-nots—inescapably suffer a good deal in the process of caste-stratifications.

Arundhati Roy depicts Ayemenem, where the moss green Meenachal river flows, through the town and the canals rowed by women and children on their way to market, and forms a backdrop which is far removed from the tumultuous happenings of other modern novels. Her references to food, clothing, landscape, political climate at that time, all



references to the region are exploited for non-regional purposes. It is out of this adroit use of regional touches that Roy creates a universal story of love and tragedy told through the eyes of seven year old twins. The style is one of an extremely self conscious person who has extraordinary control over it and the language she uses is full of literary allusions. Roy's humour and feel for the language brings out the irony and pathos in the novel. She twists the language to suit her own story telling. She has invented a new idiom and vocabulary to tell the story of Mammachi, Sophie Mol, Estha, Rahel, Ammu and Velutha.

Conclusion

Anand elaborately describes the pernicious effect of caste fanaticism, as he is concerned with the actual state of affairs. *Untouchable* and *The Road* show his anguish and protest against certain social evils like caste system, exploitation, superstitions etc., and these are presented so well that they sink deep into the minds of the readers with ease. The behaviour of the caste Hindus become the greatest subject matter of study for the novelist. Anand's *Untouchable* mirrors the inhuman and heartless attitude of the merciless caste Hindus. It is an attempt to project the humiliation and agony faced by a subaltern in the Indian society which is divided into the graded inequality and hierarchical anarchy; where the tall claims of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" have proved to be merely a utopian dream. Anand has railed upon this centuries-old, and deeply-rooted inhuman practice which has denied a subaltern 'Dalit' a right to be a fellow human being, a 'touchable'. The novel is a remarkable piece of art for the convicting photographic fidelity of the

pictures drawn, cumulative ferocity and force of detail, and an uncanny accuracy of facts which combine to project "a picture that is also an indictment of the evils of a decadent and perverted orthodoxy".

Bakha is objective enough to realize the merit of some caste Hindus just as he is pained by the unclean nature of his own brother Rakha. But incidents like Bakha's accidentally touching a person and thereby polluting him and Kalingath shouting "polluted" in order to escape from dishonour are the major focus of the novel in which the protagonist is placed in a state of agony and shame.

The novelist knows that education is necessary for emancipation of men like Bakha from the social evil of untouchability. Their degradation is due to lack of education and their lack of education is due to the planned conspiracy of a corrupt religion. He thinks that the liberation of the depressed classes depends on their attitude to life. The salvation of the depressed classes is connected with their mental power to emancipate themselves from the cleverly advocated beliefs of Karma and fatalism by the caste-Hindus. If there is no critical growth of awareness in the depressed class, it will not pave way for their bright future.

The conventional Indian ethos is being subverted and redefined by the voices of the Subaltern. Dr. BR Ambedkar described "India is a multi-storeyed building without the staircase where the life on each storey remains untouched by the life on the other. He further had compared the nation with a dilapidated structure in need of the rebuilding not Just a white wash" (Rang Rao vii). There



have been no efforts, what so ever, towards rebuilding the Nation, except, perhaps as tactical devices of political gain. Anand says that “we must destroy caste, we must destroy the inequalities of birth and unalterable vocations. We must recognise an equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone”.

References:

1. Ambedkar, B.R. Ed. Keer Dhananjay, Dr. Ambedkar Life and Mission popular prakashan, Mumabai, 2003. 92-93.
2. Vivekananda, Swami. Caste, Culture and Socialism, Culcutta: Ashutosh Litho Graphic Co; 1983. 10.
3. Sharma, K.L. Perspectives on Social Stratification Published by Rawat Publications, Jawaharnagar, Jaipur, 2010. 184, 196, 202.
4. Ghoshal, U.N. “Social Condition” RC Majumdar, (Ed), History and culture of the Indian people, The classical Age, Vol.III Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya bhavam, 1970. 662-63
5. Kohli, Suresh. A Fresh Appraisal, The Road Ed. Dhawan R.K. The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand, 209.
6. Anand, Mulk Raj. The Road, New Delhi; Sterling, 1987. 45.
7. Rao Anupama, The Caste Question, Dalits and the Politics of Modern India, published by permanent black, Raniket, second impression, 2012. 237
8. Anantha Murthy U.R. Samskara, Published by R. Dayal, Oxford University Press New Delhi 1978. 56, 57.
9. Balvannanadhan, Aida. Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things, A Study in the Multiple Narratives, Published by Prestige Books, 2007. 57.
10. Bharat, Urbashi. History Community and Forbidden Relationships in The God of Small Things, Arundhati Roy the Novelist extraordinary. Edited by R.K. Dhawan, Published by Prestige Books 1999. 91.
11. Roy, Arundhati. The God of Small Things. Indian Ink, New Delhi, 1997.
12. Anantha Murty, U.R. Samskara. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1986.
13. Anand, Mulk Raj. Untouchable. published by Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2001.