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Thematic Concerns in Mulk Raj Anand's *The Lost Child and other stories*

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Abstract: Mulk Raj Anand is an artist filled with the fragrance of reality and the needs of ideals. The cosmos of literature and the scenario of our country are garnished with his superb presentations of the portraits of Indian life and customs. We find the customs, traditions and cultures reflected in a very apt way in his writings. The History of Indian English Fiction has witnessed the shining of his brilliant production in the form of an authentic study of human conditions and human necessities. If we think of his age, we see that he belongs to a different age but in the treatment of subject-matter, he is very modern even more advance than the people of our age. The philosophy projected is very genuine and sublime. What we talk today and think of discussing so many things at present times, he has described almost everything in his writings before such a long time.

Keywords: Indian English Fiction, Mulk Raj Anand.

Anand and his great contemporaries R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao have done great contributions in the field of fiction writing. All the three writers are very significant in making Indian English fiction a thing of beauty and a joy forever.

> It was these three who defined the area in which the Indian novel was to operate. They established the suppositions, the manner, the idiom, the concept of character, and the nature of the themes which were to give the Indian novel its particular distinctiveness. (Walsh: 247).

The social concerns that we find in his presentations are very significant in terms of a balanced social life. Unless the ideas are used in practice, the society would not be an ideal one. When we put a glance on his literary wealth, we come across a good number of diamonds glittering and showing a way to the people of every age and every clime. We may make a mention of his important books like *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, *The Village*, *Across the Black Waters*, *The Sword and the Sickle*, *The Big Heart, Seven Summers, The Private Life of an Indian Prince, The Road, Confession of a Lover, Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi, The Lost Child and other stories* and *Nine Moods of Bharata: Novel of a Pilgrimage*. Most of the works are directly related to our day-to-day life. The persons and their descriptions are very living in their treatment in these books. The handling bears a fragrance of our country in a very native way. The situations and circumstances are essentially Indian. He seems to be a guide to the coming galaxy of future writers.

> Mulk Raj Anand is the first writer to give the Indian novel in English a definite tone and texture. He explodes the myths that afloated abroad about the Indian of the Yogis, Sadhus and Beggars and an earthy presentation of human conditions in the Indian society. (Saleem: 13).

The Lost Child and other Stories is his brilliant collection of short stories providing a very fine understanding of life, putting forward the basic philosophical facts of human situations. The book contains thirteen stories, and at this point of time we may say that each of the stories is very much different from others and at the same time it is equally true that the whole chain of stories is something and somewhere tightly knitted. The title story, that is, 'The Lost Child' is very much absorbing, and as we commence to read it we do not find ourselves in a condition to have a stop without its completion. It starts in a very attractive way:

> It was the festival of spring. From the wintry shades of narrow lanes and alley emerged a gaily clad humanity, thick as swarm of bright-coloured rabbits issuing from a warren. They entered the flooded sea of sparkling silver sunshine outside the city gates and sped towards the fair. (Anand: 09).

It presents a very simple story of a child who is presented before us as a common child having desire to have simple things like toys, sweets, balloons, and other articles found in fairs. The child goes to a fair with his parents. He demands everything, and gets nothing. With the development of its plot, we come to know that his parents are very much conscious of him, and after every pause both of them call him to walk with them. But most of the times, we see him left behind. And a moment comes where he really gets missed. Suddenly he comes to know that he has missed his father and mother. Mulk Raj Anand has described everything with minute carefulness. The condition of the child becomes quite pathetic, and now he does not like toys, sweets and balloons anymore. This simple story puts forward a deep and profound message to the world. The character of this child is quite typical. We do not think of the great and central essence of life. Instead of it we remain indulged in mundane activities. And a time comes where we understand our being failure, but at that moment we cannot retreat. The same thing happens in our life as we all get engrossed in the web of insignificant things, forgetting the aim of human existence. Anand, in the story makes the child's condition symbolic of the circumstances of common men. The common man is always busy in the pursuit of physical comfort and fragile achievement. He does not care for the permanent thing that is capable of making him a real human being. Next to it, we have yet another short story captioned 'The Eternal Why' that presents again the story of another kid who has been seen in a boat in the river Lunda with his father and mother. On surface level, it may be said that it is a tale telling the tale of pure innocence and simplicity. But on a different ground, it is very much philosophical as the child has always something in his mind. While roaming on the boat his curiosity makes him aware of a lot of new things and to quench out his thirst he interrogates a lot. When we consider our whole life, we come to the conclusion that it is too a series of interrogations and ultimately we cannot have the final answer of our questions that has happened with this child. When he gets the rejoinder of a question, he puts something different. The river, water, clouds, sea and whirlpool have highly philosophical interpretations implemented in the story. When the child sees a whirlpool, he feels:

> There was a difference, but the dimple in the pool persisted, like the dimple on his mother's face. This mark on the dark, leonine, imperious stream persisted, the mystery of the river's soul, so like the mystery of woman's soul, innocent, simple, yet in the end subtle, mysterious, unknowable, perhaps even capricious. (Anand: 22).

A Confession and *Lullaby* are presentations of contrasting human beings. As we make our progress in both the stories, we find ourselves among persons having different social and economic levels. The upper echelons of the society always maltreat the lower ones. They have nothing to do with the emotions and sensibilities of the poor and underprivileged section. We see in the first story that the central character is Latif, and by profession he is an advocate and Municipal Commissioner. The very title of the story is very attractive, and the confession that we get here is the incident that takes place in his life one day. His impudent and impertinent behavior with a coolie, and his subsequent attitudes force him to feel a sense of guilt. At the time of his misbehavior he does not feel it. But after this, it is prevailed upon him, and all the time it seems to him that he is being threatened by him. Moreover, it does suggest that in the heart of our hearts we really feel the guilt. In the latter story, we see that a woman is doing her work, and making her child calm. All the time she is working in a factory producing jute. But at the same time, she is with her child in her lap, and she is singing lullaby to comfort her child. A lullaby is made to provide a child sound sleep and rest but here the lullaby does not give the child a sound sleep. Instead, the child dies leaving the mother in mourning and sorrow. The story makes so many things clear in a very sharp way. The dowry system, the wretched condition of an Indian woman with a child, the bad tempers of factory owners and their atrocities, all things come in proper shape and design before the readers. This simple tale also elucidates the presence of inequality prevalent in our society. Mulk Raj Anand presents the nerves of individuals in a very convincing manner, and his treatment of human temperament makes his art a superb literary exercise. By the means of his writings, Anand elevates the level of his readers in different ways. His fictions and other literary gifts are really unique in the direction of our uplift.

> It seems that with the advent of freedom, Anand wanted to devote himself to the rediscovery of India's artistic heritage. After freedom, he decided to be an art critic. In the first issue of 'Marg', published in October 1946, Anand wrote: The impact of English domination has created a slavish mentality in some and chauvinistic isolation to the others, so that our ideas and values are an ill-assorted array of forms and conventions of the old, India and modern Europe hardly displaying any attempt at a self-conscious synthesis or any genuine sense of direction. (Karnani: 116).

The simple looking stories are very simple in reading, but the stories have deep penetrating implications and suggestions. The message that we get throughout the collection is of supreme importance, and almost all the stories are able enough to give us something to meditate upon. We feel the ethos and incense of our own soil and own culture, and what Anand presents is just the daily-going happenings and incidents. While discussing this aspect, we may make a mention of his another story

entitled 'The Terrorist'. It is quite a new approach of Anand as it is filled with the grandeur of patriotism. It makes very clear the scenario of India when it was under British control. The two veins of freedom fighters including the peaceful aspirants of freedom and the patriots with strong ways of attacking the foreign regime are visible in the present piece. The caption of the title suggests something very different from his other pieces, but while going through it we find ourselves in the mind of a youth who is full of energy and vigour and enthusiasm for his country. The character wants to see his country free from the alien rule, and that is why, he is ready even to smash his own life. He has high opinions for sacrifice and martyrdom. The author makes a psychological study of the central character, and it is this reason that we see and feel the concerned situations in a very practical way. In the story, we discern that somehow, he gets success in entering the Legislative Assembly buildings and there he comes to find so many English officials and Indian citizens whom he does not like. He tries to throw bombs, but before the success of his plan, he gets caught red-handed. And what happens next is not needed to express in words. This highly meaningful story of the writer is competent enough to portray the whole development of our freedom movement. Through the eyes of the protagonist we may have a full knowledge of the real happenings of those days full of hardships and misery for the Indians in their own country. The complete image of India at that time comes before us in a moving way. Actually, Mulk Raj Anand belongs to that age when our country was facing a lot of difficulty and disturbances due to the British Empire and he has witnessed it, and he has also tried to show us those situations through these thought-provoking short stories. Anand has a deep knowledge and experience of all the fields. He uses every kind of backgrounds for his literary pieces. We find the treatment of social as well as political, religious as well as economic themes quite deliberately inculcated in his short stories. 'Mahadev and Parvati' is another story describing the ills done on the pretence of religion. It takes us to the land of Allahabad, the city of *Sangam* and *Prayag* where *Kumbh* Fair is held at the interval of every twelve years. The people of religious leanings visit the fair whole-heartedly and want to be free from their sins and vices. Mahadev and Parvati is a married couple and after travelling a long distance, they come for purification. But in the due course a scene is created by the priest and his tout by demanding rupees one thousand. As the story develops we see that he does not get ready to give such amount to them, they steal their whole money from his pocket. Mahadev and Parvati become helpless and hopeless. It is not only the case of this couple only. Actually, it is the case of so many pilgrims everywhere. The innocent ordinary persons remain unaware of so many things, and consequently, they become the victims of situations. If people are not careful, the same situation they would have to face. This interesting story gives us a message to be careful at such places, and suggests using our mind in a right way. The characters feel that they are being sacred and pure, but really they are prone to be looted by the evil ways of people. In this case, religion is not attaining its perfect aim and objectives. 'Eagles and Pigeons' is a story delineating the theme of war and bellicose turmoil. It is in epistolary form, and the central character Ghulam Mustafa has

written a letter to his parents. The complete letter is the story, and in the story we come to know that 'pigeon' is the symbolic representation of simple and innocent persons where as 'eagles' symbolize the big guns responsible for wars. The character is in a foreign country, earning his livelihood where he witnesses the war, and luckily he gets saved while so many of his colleagues die. The story is a very pathetic description of the concerned situation, and here Mulk Raj Anand feels the same for our country and desires for free India. The central character speaks:

> But our victory is in our own hands, Father, and we have to unite and work for it, with steel courage and iron determination. For freedom does not fall like manna from heaven; it is born of struggle without fear. If our own Raj comes I hope all debts will be cancelled, so that I can return home, for farming is best, trades next, service is poverty, and beggary worst of all. (Anand: 120).

Anand in his short stories too, has discussed the ill-effects of caste-systems, and made very clear that the upper class needs more the lower castes. 'The Barber's Trade Union' is such a story dealing with the life of Chandu, the son of a barber. Chandu is the person who does all the works of a barber in the whole village, but still the upper class has no likings and pity for him. When he dresses well, the other persons do not appreciate it, instead he is said that he belongs to a low caste, so he should reveal his status even by his dress. He leaves the work in the village, and makes a barber's trade union to reply such persons, and in this way he gets the desired result. This simple story sometimes amuses us but most importantly, it invites our serious attention to the evil ways of our society. Every person has special significance, and we do not have any right to snatch the human rights of others. The story-teller is very convincing while portraying the image of such characters like the barber boy. Anand's short stories are literary exercises full of manifold designs. There are moments where we find ourselves in the world of practical realities of human life. Sometimes, we view the world and dreams of small children, and again there are instances where we find ourselves among the characters struggling for their survival. *The Lost Child and other stories* are actually the creative vision of Mulk Raj Anand, and these short but meaningful outputs are apt and suitable in our present day scenario too. Its relevance may be got very easily as the theme are still felt in our life. Most of the stories consist of single incidents or singular aim, and it is significant to state that only an incident or a single trait of its characters plays a pivotal role in the formation of the whole chain. Anand, the versatile artist knows very well that these are the ways of human life, and human life has to undergo these ways in all ages, all times, and in all circumstances.

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