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Craftsmanship of the Stream of Consciousness in Mulk Raj Anand's *Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts*

Dr. Deepa Tyagi
Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
JSS Academy of Technical Education, NOIDA.

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Abstract:

Mulk Raj Anand is often describes as a “committed” writer. Mulk Raj Anand’s shortest novel "Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts", published by hind pocket books (P) Ltd. is only of 66 pages in length. It is a novel of single day span. Anand employs the modified and simplified form of the Stream of Consciousness technique to present a vivid picture of his hero’s mind and the milieu. Anand wrote this during a sea voyage from Tilbury to Bombay Harbour. Anand narrated Nur’s stream of consciousness with the tender memory of his dead mother contrasting it with the memory of the cruelty of his father. To Nur, the traditional religion was nonsensical but he also had a conventional fear to ridicule it. The author explores Nur’s psyche and tries to catch this epiphany when yet he felt frightened of blasphemy was thought that he was being punished by the angel of Death Gabriel, who was sucking his life blood. Overstressed with a mental agony, the young consumptive Nur shared his frustration with his friend Gama. He also shared with Gama his ideas on happiness, death, life etc and talked of Azad the poet. Nur lives only a short time and it is full of misery. Nur begins to die as soon as he is born. Anand considers suffering as an instrument for the growth to awareness.

Keywords: stream of consciousness, congested, hypocritical, evasion, perception, sensuous, unsympathetic reaction, introspection, intellectual.

Mulk Raj Anand is often describes as a “committed” writer. Critics have levelled the charge that Anand had sacrificed his art to propagate his Marxist thoughts. But he preferred himself to be called a ‘humanist’ to a Marxist. His humanity and curiosity places him among the leading novelists of the Indian English Writings. His life Mulk Raj Anand’s shortest novel Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts published by hind pocket books (P) Ltd. is only of 66

pages in length. It is a novel of single day span like *Untouchable* and *The Big Heart*. had been his art but he had never thought of art as separate from life.

Of all the Indian writers who use English as their primary language for creative writing Anand is close to the ordinary Indian life. He translated typical Indian expressions in to English. As an artist he had found a voice for millions of mute suffering human beings. He used English as a means to express Indian themes and the Indian psyche authentically only through the skillful employment of the Stream of Consciousness technique in his novels. Anand employs the modified and simplified form of the Stream of Consciousness technique to present a vivid picture of his hero's mind and the milieu. Anand wrote this during a sea voyage from Tilbury to Bombay Harbour.

The body of death lingered on the sick bed, wrapped in a white shroud....

Walking in a hot sweat from his half-sleep he could see it lying there, on the giant bed in the narrow front room on the first floor of his father's congested two storied house: it was his own body; it looked like a corpse because he had gathered the sheet tight round him at night, and because he was dying, dying of consumption..... And it was being carried through a door to ultimate freedom from this world..... . (Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-8)

It is clear that this passage is to be read as the narration of the scene on the screen like surface of the consciousness of Nur. He could see himself as a corpse being carried to ultimate freedom from this world. It is a moment of vision and insight rather than presenting of an articulated thought. The narration informs us what Nur saw (the body of death lingered on the sick bed...it was his own body) and then moves smoothly to what he felt (he was dying, dying of consumption). The use of ellipses and flow of narration without any full stop are the most obvious signs of being a narration of the character's silent private drama in his consciousness.

The author further tells us that Nur felt afraid at this thought. He arranged himself for the visit of the doctor and recalled the consoling words of his grandmother which supported him in the sea of despair. Nur's mental state was in a conflict, he was tossing between his desire to die and the determination to hold on the life. He was obsessed by the fear of the ghost of his dead mother in burquah calling him as she appeared in his dreams. In fact this was his obsession with the fearful thought of death. His consciousness was continually dwindling between love for life

and fear of death. It was permeated with fearful fancies such as a falling from the terrace of the two storied house- He turned over and felt the tremor of falling from the terrace on the top of the house. Only it was like a fall in a slow motion picture, slipping slowly past every fraction of an inch. If only one could catch hold of the projection of the terrace or if only there was an obstruction on the way one might be saved. Why didn't the Chaudhari have wooden awning built on the top of the windows? They would have arrested the glare of the sun during the day and they would have checked a fall if someone anyone, a child, or, no, a cat fell, or rather if he himself driven by his tortured soul tried to fly out to seek a life elsewhere and his heavy body fell down in the process. (Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-8)

Here the narration has moved from the scene setting with the narration of the character's actions (He turned over) and feeling (and felt the tremor of falling from the terrace....) into the stream of thoughts narrated in free indirect style. This also leaves ambiguous how explicitly he articulated some of these thoughts to himself. More likely, we should read this as a wordless thought. The beauty of this passage of stream of consciousness narration is also in the indirect reference to the idea of suicide lying in the subconscious of Nur, and which is given in the last lines of the passage.

Nur made an effort to control his thoughts and whispered tiredly to himself, "Life is short and art is long"(Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-12)

This phrase learnt at college symbolises the hypocritical resignation to death as an inevitable truth and acceptance of the insignificance of an individual's life. He expected his grandmother's visit any moment. Here the law of free association of ideas is obvious when Nur recalled that his grandmother had told him lots of fairy tales and he remembered the one she told him after his mother's death. We are given the narration of the fairy story running in the flow of thoughts in Nur's mind. It was nothing but his own pathetic story-from his birth to the day "that was the day he had started to be a 'Master of Arts'....But, oh, why did they drag me into the dust by making me a Master of Arts? (Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-11)

As a matter of fact this self composed line runs throughout the novel as a refrain. It shows that the process of disintegration of his personality had begun in his early childhood itself. In spite of his graduation from the university with the degree of Master of Arts, he never graduated

to life. With the M.A. degree, he found himself in an awkward position. The hope to get a respectable job and his inability to obtain it tormented him. The degree stood as an obstacle even to his going back to his father's profession. Nur's inner-self had wearily protested with these words against the unjust ways of the world. The author continues to narrate the feelings and sensations of Nur in third person point of view of narration as only the variant of the Stream of Consciousness technique-

There was the glow of revelation about them, about the ordinary but natural and expressive sequence into which they had flowed, even though they were born of the doom which set on him. And the memories of the past seemed to come back to him in their track as if they were an 'open sesame' seemed to come back with the force and the vivacity of the rapier's thrust in the raw wounds of his heart. Far from the first cry at birth his life had been pain-marred....(Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-12)

This was the fundamental thought of basic feeling which constituted Nur's consciousness. His mother died when he was only five years old. He spent his childhood craving for the genuine love of mother which was artificially replaced by a step mother whom he never accepted. Nur didn't get a normal domestic atmosphere with love and care of both the parents, thus his psychological growth was affected. Now, when he was grown up, he lamented on the deprived childhood he had spent. Memories of the past eddied his mind and he suddenly had a reverie which is textualised by the author-

"Sh, sh, his mother had warned the world and consoled him, the inconsolable; What is it then, didums, di, di, mother's darling, di, di, di, dum... then he is hungry.... don't cry then, mother's dearest loveliest darling..... he has been neglected then.... my pet.... my darling... don't cry then..." And she had swayed him in her arm, cheek to cheek, flesh to flesh, in tenderness... slow glory of touch crept into the raptures of smiles, bubbling with the joy of being borne and tickled to laughter, as though her love made.

" Oh mother, oh mother where are you now " (Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-13)

Nur recalled the mother's tender words to him in childhood; his own inner utterance to crave for the loving mother is quoted directly with speech marks. Nur's then-felt sensations and feelings at her mother's cuddling and swaying are narrated.

Anand further narrated Nur's stream of consciousness with the tender memory of his dead mother contrasting it with the memory of the cruelty of his father. Nur was aware that his mother was remote, buried under the mound of earth in the town-cemetery outside Lohgarh gate and his stream of thoughts turned towards the memories of his fearful experiences of being in that area. The sweet reminiscences of his mother's caress faded into fearful memories of his visit with his grandmother to the 'Pir'. The author gives a description of this memory which occurred on the surface of the stream of Nur's consciousness-

He remembered the horror of a moment when his grandmother had taken him there and he had seen a skull beside a crumbling mound in the empty sockets of which millions of ants were crawling. He had wondered whether his mother had become an ugly demon with a malevolent steady stare in the pits of her head and a terrible changeless grin on the trusted teeth exposed from hard indrawn lips under the burquah as she appeared in his dreams...

'But surely she wasn't eaten by the worms...No, no, not his mother... though why not?'

He jerked his body and compressed his lips so that he shouldn't moan, should not even sigh [...] 'No, no,' he muttered, I don't believe in attaining freedom from earthly bonds; I want to be free to live-and suffer.... (Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-14)

Here, the vision and images in the mind of the character are textualised vividly in the free indirect style of presentation of thoughts alternating with the psycho-narration of non-verbal insight ('He had wondered...'). The layers of Nur's consciousness are revealed here. Dorrit Cohn says"... psycho-narration may be regarded as the most direct, indeed the unique path that leads to the sub-verbal depth of the mind." (Transparent Minds-56)

This passage also exhibits the subtle movement of Nur's mind in movements of entrapment and denial with pattern of repetition and evasion (No, no, not his mother.... though why not?). The faculty of logic and reasoning compelled Nur's mind to accept the reality which he was trying to evade of thought-stream of the character, the activity of mind of panicky evasion that is creating it is also suggested. Obsessed by the thought of death, he made a heroic effort to cling to life. Nur's awareness to his sufferings and imminent end, and his determination to live, both are reflected to this soliloquy.

To Nur, the traditional religion was nonsensical but he also had a conventional fear to ridicule it. The author explores Nur's psyche and tries to catch this epiphany when yet he felt frightened of blasphemy was thought that he was being punished by the angel of Death Gabriel, who was sucking his life blood. Nur had the impression as though someone was watching him, someone unseen, who could read his secret thought. This pathetic feeling is very effectively traced by Anand. He tells us that Nur's senses looked for in their respective subjects to confirm the doubt, the heard voice of the Mullah calling on the faithful to pray entered into his consciousness. It provoked him to anger and in a soliloquy he expressed this anger and hate for a dry as dust formalist fed by the foods of charity" Dur, dur, dog,...Call the faithful to prayer, call them to prayer, dog! I hate you all. To incur your wrath I spit on your face and I spit on the face of your God!" (Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-17)

These spoken words present psychic processes and reactions in the mind of the character as the variant of the stream of consciousness. This thought stream was disturbed by an attack of choking cough and the arrival of Nur's grandmother. On her suggestions to open the window of the room, Nur muttered to himself, 'No, I might be tempted to fly out of the gates of my prison.' (Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-18) This figurative expression of death-wish can also be taken as the internal speech of Nur. The impressions of his grandmother of Nur's consciousness are given by the author in the third person point of view of narration. Nur pitied and hated her always. He had never forgiven her for the wrong she had done to him in allowing his father to marry again. The prolonged weariness of five bed-ridden months had aroused in him tenderness for her devotion. He had sometimes given her the place of his dead mother yet the bitterness of all his sufferings persisted in his consciousness-

Under the pupils of his eyes, he saw himself in the ecstasy of his own obstinacy, exulting in his aloneness.

"They all tried to oppress me, they have broken and crushed me and left me destroyed and now they make a fuss of me and fetch me medicines and run here and there trying to save my life, the hypocrites!" (Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-20)

This utterance occurs parallel with his sensuous perception of his surroundings and his room arrangement. He felt weak and depressed that he could never get up and escape from the

sordid reality of his home into the world of glamour, of tall mirrors and gilded furniture depicted in cinema. With this hopelessness, for a moment Nur lay motionless and apathetic like a corpse and withdrew into himself. In his solitude, he again indulged in introspection where he could see his own faults, his self-love, his ingratitude to grandmother, his malice to stepmother and his pride of his knowledge of books. The author tells us only that 'all danced their ghostly dance before his weakened conscience', (Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-21) leaving all up to the imagination and understanding of the reader to comprehend the complexity of the human mind conjuring up various images or recalling past memories or something else.

Many painful memories of the severe physical punishment given by the masters came in his dream along with the memory of his father's unsympathetic reaction to his sufferings. All his young life seemed a spider's web of crimes, both his own and those of others. Anand skilfully utilises stream of consciousness technique to explore very essence of life and personality of Nur in these activities of mind,

He was swaying up and down, reading the Suras aloud by the light of the cotton wick soaked in olive oil in the earthen saucer lamp in corner of the mosque, the Koran laid on a book-rest before him, when he felt himself dozing from the fatigue of a long day. Suddenly, from the darkness behind him, there was a kick in his ribs and Maulvi Shahab-Din stood, caressing his beard and shouting..... All his young life seemed a spider's web of crimes, the skein composed of faithlessness, evil deeds, blunders, brutalities in word and deed, both his own and those of others wrapped around him... And as he tortured himself by self accusations, his physical strength seemed to fail.... (Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-24)

Catching 'the movie in brain' of his fictional character, giving an intimate access to his private thoughts the description of the reverie continues running over about 185 lines.

The last portion of the dream connects Nur's internal world with the happenings of external world where his old school-mate Gama, now a tonga-driver had come to visit him. The thought pattern in Nur's consciousness was now governed by his memories associated with Gama in old school days. Both the friends shared their common memories about Master Kanshi Ram, who made immoral suggestion to Nur and being failed had beaten him. Nur had got him threatened by Gama. Nur was prone to indulged again and again in recollective thoughts of his

lonely young days when he was obsessed by the desire to grow up as quickly as possible. He had wanted the dignity of age.

Overstressed with a mental agony, the young consumptive Nur shared his frustration with his friend Gama. He also shared with Gama his ideas on happiness, death, life etc and talked of Azad the poet. Nur's friendship with Azad was among the few treasured memories of his past. He told Gama about the tragic life of his friend and acknowledged his debt to Azad, who initiated him into the mysteries of poetry and philosophy. During this conversation, Nur was constantly aware of Gama's jealousy for Nur's friendship with Azad. Different memories kept coming into Nur's consciousness related to their friendship. Here and there in this scene, we also have writer's attempts as tracing the inner thoughts of Gama-

Gama bent his head with the silent shame of a memory of a year ago when he himself had mocked at Azad crying out in the bazaar, "Hai, Babuji", with a rude simulation of the tone of a lover sighing for his beloved. (*Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-35*)

In Nur-Gama scene, along with the interior monologue and narrated stream of consciousness, the author successfully uses the device of a confident and collective dialogues to reveal the thoughts and feelings of the hero-his anger on the vanity, hollowness and futility of the modern education system, This device turns out to be a variant of the Stream of Consciousness to unravel the hero's mind and thereby avoiding many lengthy and inartistic uses of monologues, soliloquies of omniscient narration. Gama's attention was drifting but Nur went on as if he were talking about to himself.

Another aspect of Nur's stream of consciousness, the sensations, feelings and visions are presented in adjacent passage in a narrated style. When Anand writes, "His eyes saw the injustice of it all and welled with tears", (*Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts-63*) what does this seeing mean? It is probably a moment of vision or inside. It is a combination of fleeting visual image, diffuse feeling and truncated verbal thought. This sort of indeterminacy is strength of consciousness style, which leaves so many subtleties of human mind upon reader's intuition.

Nur lives only a short time and it is full of misery. Nur begins to die as soon as he is born. Anand considers suffering as an instrument for the growth to awareness. Man is inclined to learn more from suffering than from success. Nur is enabled to probe into his soul and society only

during his bed-ridden days of five long months. The M.A. degree instead of giving him comfort and happiness forces him to intense feeling of agony as he versifies, “Why did you drag me into the dust by making me an M.A.” It artistically presents the futility of modern education. The tragic spectacle in the life of an intellectual is portrayed successfully by the technique of the Stream of Consciousness which presents the great drama of self-consciousness through the memories of the bed-confined hero.

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