



About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529
Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Victim Consciousness in the Early Novels of Mulk Raj Anand

Dr. Arshad Ahmad

&

Dr. Gajanan Malviya

Department of English

Barkatullah University, Bhopal(M.P)

To P.K Ranjan's question regarding the sustained popularity of *Untouchable* and *Coolie* Mulk Raj Anand replied that it is because the protest in them has been transmuted into tragedy. It lies in their tragic sense as in Greek tragedy.¹

No doubt, in a tragedy the hero is invariably a victim; a victim of god's hostility as in Greek tragedy, or a victim of one's own weakness as in Shakespearian tragedy. In *Untouchable* Bakha, the hero is left a helpless, hapless lad while Munoo and Gangu, the heroes in *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud* come to the end of their suffering in their death and claim the reader's aesthetic sympathy'. They are doomed not for their fatal flaw nor are they killed by gods for their sport. They are neither men of noble social status nor are they larger than life. They are just pieces of trembling humanity' persecuted by the society for their non-confirmity.

But the important thing is the self-realisation of the sufferer and the consequent revolt which ultimately gets curbed and subdued under the pressure of Circumstances. The chains of caste, money and power are too tough to break, nevertheless, the victim-consciousness dawns upon the sufferer. According to Mulk Raj Anand, the novelist tries not to sit in judgement so much as to understand the motivations deep down in the subconscious minds of his characters.

This victim-consciousness is a common core in Indian English fiction. Kajoli in Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So many Hungers* is a victim of famine and hunger, Nathan and Rukmani in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a sieve* are victims of nature's fury and the landlords exploitation, Ravi in *A Handful of Rice* is a victim of economic exploitation by the rich, whereas Srinivas in *The Nowhere Man* is a victim of racial discrimination and so on. Mulk Raj Anand being a novelist of the common man has both extensively and intensively dealt with the oppression, exploitation and victimization of the lowest, the poorest and the weakest in the society. Meenakshi Mukherjee has rightly observed that Anand's characters fall neatly into three types the sufferers, the oppressors and the good men. Usually the protagonist is the sufferer-in-chief.² No wonder, Munoo, Gangu, Ananta, Nur and Maqbool are driven to death while John de la Havre is dismissed and victor is sent to an asylum. Whether a prince or a pauper, all heroes of Anand are victims. It is their inevitable fate as they affront their destiny and rebel against a malevolent social system. Suffering is truly the badge of such a tribe, says Hari in *Coolie*, 'we belong to suffering: we belong to suffering : My Love.'

In this article we have tried to see Anand's exploitation of the victim-consciousness of his characters in his first three novels-*Untouchable*, *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*. In *Untouchable* in the society segmented into castes, sub-castes and cut-castes. The colony in which Bakha lives is called 'outcastes' colony.' He is treated worse than an animal- chapatis are flung down to him from the third floor, jilebis are thrown at him as a bone is thrown at a dog,

cigarettes are flung at him and even his inadvertently touching a caste Hindu incurs quick anger and filthy abuse. The privileged and callous caste Hindus declare in a dictatorial manner, "They ought to be wiped off the surface of the earth" [56]

That reminds one of the kind of treatment meted out to Indian workers by Mr. Little the British manager in *Coolie* who threatens, "they should all be put up against a wall and shot, the whole damned lot of them." In both the cases apparently the victims take the abuses and threats lying down as they are helpless to retaliate. But at the same time the situation stirs a feeling of protest in Bakha. He lives and learns from the caste bias and the hypocritical social inequities as he comes across a caste Hindu touching a bull out of reverence and then learns about Pundit Kalinath trying to molest his sister Sohini. A Brahmin willfully touching an untouchable to satisfy his lust. The same Bakha is no longer docile and tamed. Hearing of the incident from his sister he bursts out in a rage. "Brahmin dog. I will go and kill him". But in a moment his "clenched fists relaxed and fell loosely by his side. He left weak and wanted support." Again, when his father asks him, "you didn't abuse or hit back, did you?" Bakha replies, "No, but I was sorry afterwards that I didn't"

This see-saw of anger and resignation ensues from his awareness of the human predicament in a given society. This leads the hero to self-realisation in the social situation and his final resolution. Even in his helplessness Bakha is not like his father, Lakha who says, "No, no, my son, no. We can't do that. They are our superiors. They are our masters. We must respect them and do as they tell us'. Rather he hopefully goes on groping for freedom in a rigid caste system. He has hatred for his own town and love for the world to which he looks out. His impulse to create a new harmony, frowning upon the familiar, makes him a visionary who has a dream of a new social order based on moral justice and love for all. By the evening he has three possibilities open to him-Christianity, Gandhism and Modernization. The wiser Bakha opts for the third as the best course, doubtless the novelist's desire image.' Thus, Anand has very beautifully depicted the interaction between the hero's consciousness and the social situation, "how consciousness develops through the events and how the course of events in turn, is influenced by the consciousness."³

In *Coolie*, however, the victim-consciousness is as usual, though the victimizing forces have a different form. Here, it is not caste but capitalism, the cash-nexus that crushes the poor. Perhaps Anand wants to show the comparative destruction potential of the two evils and suggest that one can survive the tyranny of caste but not the tyranny of money.

Munoo belongs to a high caste but poor class. The fact that he is a worse sufferer than Bakha testifies to the grim reality that caste is no insurance against economic exploitation. A waif that he is, Munoo serves as a domestic servant in a bank clerk's household, a worker in a pickle factory, a factory worker and a servant of a half-caste woman at Shimla. He has to compromise with living in slums, sleeping in the streets, and even starving, not to speak of the abuses and indignities showered on him as part of his usual fare.

Munoo's harrowing experiences in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram prompt him to ask himself, 'who am I-Munoo? Why am I here in this house?' Till then he compromises with his

suffering taking his identity for granted. He regards himself as “an ineffectual pawn on the chessboard of destiny”. [47]. A little further thinking convinces him that caste does not matter. “ I am a Kshatriya and I am poor, and Verma, a Brahmin, is a servant boy, a menial, because he is poor. No, caste does not matter there must only be two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor”[56]

This is how the victim rationalizes his suffering until at last he can endure no more. Munoo’s beating proves the last straw and this “abject victim” recognizes his instincts and rebels. He runs away only to land into the inferno, a pickle factory at Daulatpur and then to “the valley of the shadow of death,” Sir George White Cotton Mills in Bombay. The mills are a ruthless means of exploitation of the workers, who look “dried up, shriveled, flatfooted, hollow-chested, hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed” [p.261] race of men. These giant mills have created the monsters of capitalists who virtually suck the blood of the workers “where sheer survival must be looked upon as a triumph of the spirit, the very will to live must be reckoned a strength.”⁴ The exploitation of the workers is compounded by the corrupt colonial rule which spares none. Munoo feels like a trapped animal, weak and helpless. Even the trade Union leader, Ratan fails to ignite his ego. In his despair he wished, “ I would like to die” and not to fight like a hero. Exploitation and suffering has killed his natural instinct to react, to fight and to claim his right as a human being.

A defeated and broken Munoo escapes to Shimla where as a servant and rickshaw puller of Mrs Mainwaring, he dies of consumption. His “death completes the hero’s victimhood.”⁵

Munoo is Anand’s anti-hero as there is hardly anything heroic about him. But then, character is not the focal point of the novel; the nucleus of the theme being overall exploitation of the poor by the rich. Had the novelist meant to highlight the personality of Munoo, his character would have been dynamic, rebellious, uncompromising. At least he would have died fighting like Ananta in *The Big Heart*. In Dickens’ *Great Expectations* Pip overcomes his suffering, so does Kipling’s *Kim* as the novels are character-based. Besides, these two heroes have god-fathers, a convict and a lama respectively to foster their wards. In the particular Indian context “ the individual tends to turn inwards in quest of his own safety, pleasure or integrity, when all around is violence and greed and fear.”⁶ That Victim Consciousness in the Early Novels of Anand explains why Munoo is even less assertive than Bakha.

In *Two Leaves and a Bud* again, the hero Gangu and what Harvey calls the ficelle, John de la Havre, are victims. Gangu, a victim of poverty and money-lenders in his native village in the Punjab is lured away to Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam where he lands, as it were, from the frying pan in the fire. The white man’s plantation is a veritable hell. “ This prison has no bars, but it is, nevertheless an unbreakable jail”. As in *Skeffington Coffee Estate* in Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, so this tea plantation the exploitation of Indian coolies by British imperialism goes on unabated. Not only Gangu, but all coolies invariably, are subjected to inhuman habitation in damp dingy huts infested with germs. They are exploited physically, economically and even sexually. The work is hard and the payment poor. The coolies are regarded as sub-human, as beasts of burden.

In this novel the jungle itself is an instrument of victimization as it is a 'netherworld,' the abode of the two-horned Yama, the God of Death. Gangu is soon disillusioned to see the coolies being made victims of graft, usury and exploitation both by Indian agents and the British masters. He is paid only three annas for him, two annas for his wife and daughter and three pieces for his child whereas in the village he earned eight annas a day. Very soon Gangu has an attack of malaria. Then, as a bolt from the blue his wife Sajani dies. And the worst of it, the planter Mr. Croft-Cooker refuses to advance a lone to cremate his wife. But, perhaps the cup of his misery is not yet full. Gangu is fined rupees fifty on the charge of having led the coolies to represent before the Burra Sahib. And to mark the catastrophe, he is shot dead by Reggie Hunt who is out to molest his daughter Leila a victim like Seetharam in Kanthapura who is shot by the Sahib for refusing to send his daughter to him.

Two Leaves and a Bud is a tale of a series of misfortunes and atrocities that happen to Gangu and other central characters. Gangu helplessly suffers them as part of his destiny. But even a worm turns. And Gangu is prepared to say 'no.'

The indifference of fatalism in him, which had sprung not so much from a belief in God, but from years of suffering seemed to give place for a moment to a homicidal fury which glistened with the spirit of retaliation.

And he lends the possession of coolies to Mr. Croft-Cooke. But "a tremor of weakness travelled down his spine". Again, hearing from Narain about some coolies who were earlier determined not to return to the tea gardens, Gangu says, "if only I could feel like him". The same Gangu "agrees to pay the fine of rupees fifty and accepts everything else without even so much as a gesture of complaint". He rather cries helplessly, "Lord, God, deliver me. Save me from the wrath of my enemies. My wife is dead my children are young and my heart is weeping".

Gangu's oscillation between anger and despair shows the ambivalence of the heart and the mind. His instinct eggs him on to rebel and he does, but his victim position overpowers him. Mulk Raj Anand seems to suggest that the evil of colonialism spares none, not even a colonizer like John de la Havre or, for that matter that villain Reggie who has not a single admirer among his own people. The victimizer is a victim himself. In this didacticism we can see the novelist's intended triumph of human understanding. Anand's victims have both a topical and sociological significance as they are all victims of a recalcitrant society.

Works Cited:

1. Rajan, P.K., "A Dialogue with Mulk Raj Anand," Studies in Mulk Raj Anand (Delhi: Abhinav, 1986), p. 113.
2. Mukherjee, Meenakshi, The Twice Born Fiction (Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1974), p. 75.
3. Rajan, P.K, op. cit., p.16.
4. Narsimhaiah C.D., The sam and the Eagle (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1987), p.119.
5. Harrex, S.C., The fire and the offering (Calcutta: Writers Workshop,1977), p. 97.
6. Anand, Mulk Raj, Apology for Heroism (Delhi : Arnold Heinemann, 1986), p.88.