

Mulk Raj Anand as an Artist: His Theory of Novel

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Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand has not formulated any specific theory of fiction. Yet Anand has certain views on fiction—form and content, characters, responsibility of author as an artist etc. Anand calls his views as ‘hunches on the novel’. Novel, for Anand, becomes the most suitable genre for the manifestation of ‘the inner casualties of contempt, hatred, distrust and fear in those who lived in the labyrinths of despair.’ For Anand, novel is not just a reflection of contemporary socio-political and cultural scenario. Rather, the novel should expose the reality and must infuse writer’s ‘desire image’. He found ‘novel’ as the best medium to experience the ‘silent passions’ bursting in the hearts of the ‘suffering people’. Anand does not support the rigid stance of the formalists in fiction writing. Rather, ‘sensibility’ is more important for Anand. This paper investigates nuances of Anand’s theory of novel as reflected in his works.

Keywords: Anand, theory of novel, fiction, art, marginalized.

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand was one of the major Indo-Anglian novelists who received world-wide acclaim, recognition and readership for his writings. Through his profuse literary output his writings Anand emerged as voice of the voiceless and the marginalized. The characters that are marginalized by caste or class people his major novels. The untouchable sweepers, downtrodden coolies, the debt ridden farmers, pitiable laborers, victimized women play prominent role in Anand’s fictional world. He has selected real people as heroes whom he knew intimately during childhood. They are marginalized in one way or the other. He writes about, their life, problems, sufferings and their struggle for existence and identity. Anand voiced those dregs of the society who were deprived of socio-economic opportunities for their sustenance and became victims of

social, cultural, economic and political exclusion. He enacts the tragic life of the oppressed through novels especially *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, *The Road*, *The Big Heat* and *The Old Woman and the Cow*.

Anand's Theory of Novel

Anand has not given specific theory of novel as such like E. M. Forester. As a matter of fact, there cannot be a fixed theory of novel as Walter Allen remarks: "I must say that I'm not yet absolutely convinced that any one theory of novel will cover all those works we count as novels" (qtd. in Sharma 13). This is the reason why different writers have propounded different views and opinions about the form of novel. Anand's ideas about novel as a form of writing are not coherent and sequential. His ideas about novel writing are found scattered in various essays, letters to critics, prefaces to his books, articles in books and journals and lectures. About his own theory of fiction, Anand observes:

"Those people who say I have no theory of fiction are more or less correct. And yet does not need to formulate a systematic theory to write fiction or react to its various expressions, to enjoy its flavors and even to write some criticism of one's own. I have certain hunches about the novel, but I have not put these down in any book or formal essay. Yet I have jotted down several reflections." (*Reflections on the Novel* 49)

But the thoughts are very often contradictory and casual. However, it is noteworthy that unlike many contemporaries and predecessors, Anand has his own views on fiction writing to which he calls 'certain hunches about the novel'. Many of his key ideas about fiction writing are found in his three essays in the form of apologia—"How I Became a Writer", "Why I Write?" and his autobiography of ideas "Apology for Heroism". It is a difficult task to investigate and bring together his ideas that make up his theory of fiction.

Anand preferred 'novel' as a prominent form of expression leaving aside other genres of literature like poetry and drama. The reason behind the choice of 'novel' as the genre for writing lies in his purpose of writing. His is not 'arts for art's sake' but rather it is for life's sake. Anand was often moved by seeing the events of casualties and exploitations in the life of common people. He was 'touched by the *dukha* of a peasant ploughing under the broiling sun' and he expressed requirement of 'human decency or residual humanness'. It was his inspiration of writing. He confesses in preface to the third edition of *Apology for Heroism*:

'It was this core of "human decency" which obsessed me when I began to write about the lives of the "creatures that once men were" in my novels and short stories. They seemed to me to be the victims of circumstances beyond their control'. (n.p.)

In most of his writings, he has talked about the lives of these underdogs and disadvantaged people whom he calls 'creatures'. Anand clarifies in the preface to *Apology for Heroism* the purpose of his writing very clearly. He says:

'I wanted to reveal the inner casualties of contempt, hatred, distrust and fear in those who lived in the labyrinths of despair; perchance I could incidentally show that they too wanted to be free, to expiate themselves from their guilt, to choose between good and evil through their

sufferings.’ He dreams of freedom for these people. His purpose in writing fiction has been to bring out the suffering, misery and wretchedness of the poor and the underdogs of society caused by the exploitations of capitalists or the feudal lords or by the impact of industry on the traditional and agricultural way of life. He clarifies the reasons for this preference of choice in his own words:

“The form of creative writing, which is novel came to me much more naturally than any other form, because through this I could live through the experiences of other people and realize what silent passions burst in their hearts, what immediate and ultimate sorrows possess them, where they want to go and how they grapple, in their own ways, with their destinies. I have tried in this sense to express my passionate love for the suffering people, in spite of the misunderstanding and the ridicule of those who are better situated in social life and call my pre-occupation with the outcastes, the disinherited peasants, and the eternally wronged women as a morbid, sentimentalist preoccupation with these ‘ignorant people’.” (Apology 198)

Basically Anand was a humanist at heart. He wanted to write about inequities, inadequacies and idiosyncrasies in the life of the lowly and the lost subjugated under the brutal social system. He found novel as the best medium to experience the ‘silent passions’ bursting in the hearts of these ‘suffering people’. Anand does not support the rigid stance of the formalists in fiction writing. Rather, ‘sensibility’ is more important for Anand. While reviewing Henry Greene’s *Loving in Life and Letters*, Anand clears his stance on form- content relationship. He says:

“...if I may venture an arbitrary dictum I should say that the primary condition of art is not form but sensibility” (qtd. in Ramakrishna 6).

‘Anand’s own sensibility finds expression through the specific form of writing that he adopts in his work. A significant aspect of the form in his fictional composition is the stream of consciousness technique, even though he cannot entirely be identified with the Joycean school’ (7). The novel, according to Anand, differs from the tract in that it is more human, it has greater scope to delineate contrary emotions; it has a lesser possibility of becoming biased; it makes a ‘concrete’ and not a ‘general’ statement: it only poses the question, but does not answer it (*The Story of My Experiments With a White Lie* 11). Anand differentiates between the modern novel from the novel written in the earlier times. While the novel in the previous centuries was obviously concerned with moral values, the modern novel focuses on the individual’s psychological life and motivations (*Old Myths and New Myths* 32).

The novel in Anand’s opinion is the “most human of European forms of creative literature” (*Note on Modern Indian Fiction* 8:1, 47) He describes its (novel’s) true nature as a dramatic representation, through space and time of the internal changes in the lives of characters (Sharma 14). Like others, Anand does not think novel as a reportage about social condition ; nor it is meant to phantasmagoria of psychological states of a character; nor it is written to provide escape and relaxation to the tired civil ladies and gentlemen of the cities living in civilized area (*Apology* 127). As a matter of fact, the novel should expose the reality. Anand believes in realism but that too ‘poetic realism’. It should not be literary photography of life. The artist must

infuse his 'desire image or the romantic will' in writing (128). Having humanitarian attitude towards life and people, Anand insisted on a synthesis of the values. For the evolution of a new kind of revolutionary human, he desired a truly human view of experience, a view of whole man. For these reasons, Anand stressed 'the need for a truly humanist art commensurate with the needs of the time, dominantly in the search of freedom as the highest aspiration' (129). In human society, the writers always fulfill a great deal of function. The writers express his or her unique vision and attitude towards life. He communicates deepest urges to other people; he tries to intensify his /her awareness by way of confirming and heightening their observation. The writer stands as an interpreter of one soul to the other by revealing the unity in human nature. He creates real bond of sympathy between nation and nation, one people and another. Any genuine artist or writer succeeds in carrying out this significant task. In fact, a writer encompasses the whole of life. He aspires to attain a more balanced perspective of life and to reach the apogee of human development. Anand also believes that 'the writer alone, if he is honest and brave, is in a position to understand the world qualitatively, to perceive the most delicate processes of human sensibility on the aesthetic as well as the cognitive and conative planes'(130).

Anand's idea about the aim of work of art is somewhat different from Aristotle's theory of catharsis. In *The Poetics*, while defining tragedy, Aristotle writes that the function of tragedy is to arouse the emotions of pity and fear, and in this way to affect the catharsis of these emotions. Anand believes that the novel is cathartic in its effect. For catharsis, Anand uses the word *karuna* or compassion. Anand perceives *Karuna* in the following way:

Then the Buddhist *karuna*... a tender recognition of the essential similarity, both in strength and frailty, of human beings, becomes for me the pervasive starting point of comprehension for each feeling, wish, thought and act that constitutes the world behind the scene of the human drama, from which catharsis or ultimate pity may arise."(199)

While describing the origin and development of the Indian novel, Anand clarifies in the chapter 'The Yoke of Pity' in his published lectures entitled *A Novel Form in the Ocean of Story* and says: "This concept of *karuna* or compassion came to men and women in travail as the first enunciation of expiation through art, centuries before Aristotle's famous *Katharsis*" (qtd. in Sharma 16). Anand's idea of catharsis is different from that of Aristotle. Anand's concept of *karuna* or compassion implies "expiation through art". Anand is of the view that man does not suffer from tragic flaw, as Aristotle maintains, but his destiny is controlled or shaped by society, especially by his heredity and environment (Sharma 16). Aristotle writes about the feelings of pity and fear aroused by the suffering of the protagonist because of a tragic flaw whereas Anand's concept implies sympathy for those who suffer for no fault of their own. Their destiny is largely controlled by social forces beyond their control. His tragic heroes like Bakha in *Untouchable* or Munoo in *Coolie* suffer not because of their tragic flaw. They are victims of the society. They suffer because of the society. Man strives hard against his destiny and consequently suffers a lot. But his sufferings if presented by the novelist artistically and sincerely arouse undoubtedly *karuna* or compassion.

Anand believes that a novel can perform a great function by creating wider consciousness among the readers by arousing compassion. Though, a novelist does not offer solutions, he brings

cathartic effect to the readers. Readers can identify themselves with the suffering of the characters dealt by the novelist. About such catharsis of emotions through a novel, Anand says: “The novel is not quite meant to offer solutions: creative works offer appeasement or catharsis through one of the moods of *Navarasa*. In the case of most of the stories and novels of mine, it is *Karuna Rasa*. This may have some affiliation with compassion implicit in the Jataka stories of the Buddha” (qtd. in Arora 11). Anand does not believe in the dictum of ‘Art for art’s sake’, rather he asserts that ‘Art is for life’s sake’, for the human progress. Literature should be used as a means of alleviating the sufferings of fellow human beings. Anand states: “. . . any writer who said that he was not interested in *la condition humaine* was either posing or yielding to a fanatical love of isolationism—a perverse and clever defense of the adolescent desire to be indifferent” (*Apology*, 123). He regards those artists who believe in escapist literature as ‘whores of literature’. Such artists, according to Anand, fail to perform their function, namely, to reform society through revolution. He very vehemently discusses the responsibilities of an artist:

So that whether we take the task of destroying the spurious elements of contemporary civilization or of reconstructing the future society, the creative artist occupies an important role in both spheres. And any attempt on his part to shirk responsibility is a betrayal of his own powers and the acceptance of mental and spiritual death. Above all, it is a betrayal of the common humanity to which he is committed as an individual born to live in community with other individuals, a denial of all human relations, a secession from society. (136)

Any art is more or less a reflection of the time, place and circumstances of the period in which it is created. Anand is opposed to the stance of formalists or aesthetes who propose that art, though influenced by life is essentially governed by its own inner logic, and not by outside forces. He believes that every artist is a committed artist, because the aim of art is to achieve integration, that is ‘to effect connection’ between man and man, and between the individual and the world. The artist should incorporate his message in his creative work without distorting its artistic integrity. The creative writing is not merely a realistic depiction of life; but it is a manifestation of an impressionistic vision, that is ‘the desire image’ of the writer.

Conclusion

Although Anand does not propound any definite theory for fiction writing, his fictional works do not show any lapses in case of thematic or structural make up. On the other hand, Anand appears a trail blazer by making the underdogs and the marginalized people as his protagonists in many novels and short stories. His purpose in writing was to sensitize the society about the suffering lives of the underdogs. He often talks about the ‘whole man’ and dreams of ‘freedom’ for them. Freedom for Anand becomes the highest aspiration. A significant aspect of the form in his fictional composition is the stream of consciousness technique. Anand’s idea of catharsis is different from that of Aristotle. He substitutes catharsis for ‘karuna’. Anand’s concept of *karuna* or compassion implies “expiation through art”

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