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### Mulk Raj Anand and Premchand: Novelists with Same Vision and Ignited Minds

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#### Abstract

The article endeavors to work out a comparison between the two stalwarts – Mulk Raj Anand and Premchand in English and Hindi Literature respectively. Both are two towering personalities, symbolizing a whole generation of fighters for freedom and social justice. They, the propagators of Gandhism, are socially committed writers and humanists par excellence. Their writings poignantly project an outraged social conscience and realism. Premchand uses literature for the purpose of arousing public awareness about national and social issues and often writes about topics related to corruption, child widowhood, prostitution, feudal system, poverty, colonialism and the Indian movement. On the other hand, M. R. Anand's novels are deliberately designed to display the suffering and exploitation of the peasants and weaker section. Since the domain of their novels is extremely vast, Premchand's famous novels are *Sevasadan*, *Kayakalpa*, *Gabon* and whereas *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and A Bud* and *Untouchable* are notable works of M. R. Anand. They are the great writers of fiction and the strength of this fiction lies in its vast range, its wealth of live characters, its ruthless realism. Its deeply felt indignation of social wrongs and its strong humanitarian passion.

**Keywords-** Stalwarts, Social Justice, Social Conscience, Realism, Public Awareness

#### Introduction

It is always meaningful to study and interpret the growth of an artist's mind and art in the light of the age in which he lives since a writer is essentially a product of his time. He, consciously or unconsciously, takes up a definite stance on the social, political or other

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problems influencing the people of his age. Asghar Ali Engineer, (1930) “A creative process is the product of the sub-conscious and the conscious process which helps objective reality to be reflected in a work of art. “The novelists who form a distinguished group in the intelligentsia become the beacon of the social and political consciousness of their age.”<sup>1</sup>

The capacity of an author or an artist, in general, is to hold the mirror to life around him. The social, political and economic conditions discover articulation in the literary works of an artist grasps the totality of the situation and sees through all its contradictions without which no target reality is ever established. Whenever found in all their complexities, they furnish a creative artist with massive potentiality. Literature uncovered the contentions, propensities, patterns and drawbacks of an age and creative artists are instrumental in the exploration and interpretation of the various social, political, cultural, and economic aspects of the contemporary society.

The primary half of the twentieth century saw the intensification of the Freedom Movement in India the literary artists also realized that literature also had a vital task to carry out in it. Premchand (1880-1936), a famous Hindi and Urdu author and Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004), a celebrated Indian English novel is are the two journalists whose works faithfully and overwhelmingly exemplify in them the general population’s frame of psyche in the contemporary society as well as speak to the radical changes taking place in the socio-political existence of this nation along with other essayists like Sarat Chandra Cahtterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, G.V. Desani, Aubrey Men on and others Amid the period in which they began their separate literary careers, the Indian culture was reeling under the baneful routine of the British rule which was extremely in each field of life. Being touchy, they couldn’t remain aloof from the voice their profound anguish.

Mulk Raj Anand, whom we may justifiably describe as the grand old man of Indo-Anglian fiction and Munshi Premchand who is deemed to be the father of Hindi novel, are two prominent writers of pre-independent India. Their fiction reflects the poverty of rural India and the social evils prevalent in the early decades of the twentieth century. They felt inspired to combat the injustice and oppression to which certain individual and segments of society were subjected in this respect and oppression to which certain individual and segments of society were subjected in this respect they have strong affinity with Charles

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Dickens. What Charles Dickens did in English fiction, Mulk Raj did in Indo-Anglian fiction and Munshi Premchand in Hindi fiction. They were the angry young men who were not satisfied with the social conditions of their times.

Before Mulk Raj Anand and Munshi Premchand started writing, novel was romantic in mode and it catered to individual tastes and needs. They were the firm believers in 'Art for Life's Sake'. They introduced the elements of realism and favoured the kind of literature which is capable of doing the welfare of the individual and the society as well. They wrote novels and short stories with a reformatory purpose. In their novels their main focus has been on the problems of women, farmers, labourers.

When Anand took to the pen Indian life was seething with unrest. The Punjab was the vortex of nationalistic activities and in that province, when he was a boy of eleven, was perpetrated the Jalliwala massacre, the ghastliest act of British repression his original impulse consists in the urgency with which he reacted to the problems facing the Indian society. Anand writes with great gusto and exuberance and his writing quivers with an outraged social conscience tenderness and pity that is something new in the modern sociological novel. His novels are deliberately designed to throw the suffering of the peasants and weaker sections of Indian society in the most lurid relief. His first novel 'Untouchable' introduces us to the world of outcasts, 'Coolie' which followed, is a study of a village lad who goes to work first as a servant in a middle class household, then in a medieval pickle factory, then in Bombay cotton mill and finally as Riksha puller in Simla. "Two leaves and a Bud" tells the story of a peasant and their exploitation by the Assam Tea Planters, and his many short stories are all concerned with problems of poverty and hunger, economic exploitation and class distinction. Thus, he may be regarded as a socially committed writer writing about and attacking the social evils that cause the suppression and exploitation of the poor and weak Anand chose to be the mouth-piece of have-nots and the trodden. The novels of Mulk Raj Anand are in direct succession to the period of Gandhism. In his preface to *Two leaves and a Bud* Anand himself says,

It was natural, after I had probed the soul of the sweeper Bakha in my novel 'Untouchable' and reproduced each wound of the heart and body of the hill boy Munoo in the folk epic *Coolie* that I should record the Journey of the Hillman Gangu through the vicissitudes of his later life, after his eviction from the stony half acre in Punjab.

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The Himalayas and his enticement as an indentured laborer to the tea estates of Assam. All these heroes, as the other men and women who had dear to me, because they were the reflections of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth .... They were flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood. 2

His characters are real and drawn from life he wrote about the people for the people and as the one in charge of the common people. He was at the height of his powers in the thirties. He admits in 'Apology for Heroism' that he is deeply concerned with social problems and that he committed to the eradication of the evils which manifests the modern society. Anand has all along written novels and short stories with a view to teaching men to recognize the fundamental principle of human living and exercise vigilance in regard to the real enemies of freedom and socialism. He has been conscious of the need to help raise the untouchable the serf the coolies to human dignity and self awareness in view of heobjectness, apathy and despair in which they are sunk. He is a novelist who writes with a purpose and that purpose is concerned with social reform.

Then follows a sequence of three novels *The Village, Across the Black Waters* and the *Sword and the Sickle*. Mulk Raj Anand is a writer with deep human sympathies, Ananta the hero of *Big Heart* shares the features of the writer's humanism from the humanistic point of view 'Big Heart' is the best of Anand's novels.

Mulk Raj Anand is a committed writer and humanist par excellence. His novels and short stories- *The Barber's Trade Union, The Cobbler and the Machine, The Rumour, The Gold Watch, Lullaby, Duty, Old Bapu* embody a social conscience and create a social awareness.

Anand is a great writer of fiction. The strengths of this fiction are in its vast range, its wealth of living characters, its ruthless realism, its deeply felt indignation at social wrongs and its strong humanitarian passion.

Hindi fiction was in its infancy when Premchand appeared on the scene. It was mostly concerned with the stories of miraculous happenings. Even the social novels dominated by historical vein which appeared occasionally, had little literary worth. Through his literary output, Premchand gave to Hindi fiction a new social awareness, a new sense of purpose. He brought Hindi novel very close to life with faithful reflection of reality in it. A celebrated author as he was, Premchand had an uncanny desire to mould life in accordance with his

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vision. His sensitivity towards the harsh and ugly truth of life made him a people's writer who wrote about the life of common folk in a language they could understand well. In the words of a critic:

It is with Premchand and his contemporaries, that literature walked out of the opulence of drawing rooms and the lights of civil lines into the bleakness of village 'chopals' and obscurity of small town by lanes. With him, Urdu-Hindi fiction became truly declassified thus paving the way for the school of 'Social-realism' popularized by the progressive writers Association of which he was the first president. (Faiz Mohammad Faiz 1986 p.2)<sub>3</sub>

Munshi Premchand, "the Upanyas Samrat in Hindi literature", invited realism to it. He is a novelist with a social purpose. He never hesitates to hit hard on the social evils like dowry, caste-system superstition, feudalism, corruption, unmatched marriage, suppression, orthodox way of life, exploitation, subjugation of women, problem of widow and tension of joint families etc which characterized the then society of India. Like Lok Manya Tilak and Gokhale, Gandhiji also laid his influence on Munshi Premchand. In order to abolish untouchability he made aggression on the network of the customs and traditions under which this social evil, like leprosy, flourished in society. Such an attitude prevails in most of his novels, stories and other articles and exhibit the form of his ideology on the plight of the Details and downtrodden.

Premchand opined that Hindu society had done injustice to the Sudras. According to him all the man-made differences of caste and class are worthless. In the eyes of God all human beings are equal. So he never compromised with the false notion of taking the downtrodden to be trifling.

The Earlier phase of his vocation as a novelist, Premchand's main preoccupation was with the social abuses which had so grievously debilitated the Indian society. His early works were mostly concerned with the conflicts in the ranks of the middle-class society. His early works were mostly concerned with the conflicts in the ranks of the middle-class society and he stood for the urgent reforms. Premchand was also well aware of the intense. Pitiably conditions of the poor and the middle class India women because of centuries of subjugation to orthodox beliefs and male domination. Right from the early nineteenth century, the position of Indian women became as matter of main concern for the social reformers,

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intellectuals and conscious citizens. Many of Premchand's novels bring out the glumness that had filled the lives of Indian women subject to the oppression of the ruthless society.

As a keen observer of life, Premchand was mindful of the utter woeful predicament of the Indian women due to some dreadful practices like untouchability, child-marriages, dowry and sex-abuse. Therefore, they were subject to intense agony:

During the period when Premchand wrote, the matrimonial system of Hindu society had become so polluted and hopeless that any reform seemed nearly impossible. Very rarely could parents welcome a daughter, mis-matched marriages were quite common since some parents were compelled to marry their young daughters to old men. Some were forced to die in agony and desperation as there was no scope of having an equal match (Pramila Batra 2001, p.no. 45)<sup>4</sup>

Premchand has written approximately one dozen novels and every piece has some features of its own. In some of them he has presented the problem faced by the weaker section of society. The reality of the downtrodden lives as described in these novels can melt any tender heart. *Rangbhumi* (1925), *Kayakalp* (1939), *Karambhumi* (1929) and *Godan* (1936) belong to the same category and picturized the problems and sufferings faced by the marginalized community. But the entire narrative of none of these novels centers round the downtroddens only but makes a fierce attack on some other social problems also and attempts to search out remedies for them. Besides these novels the short stories like 'Thakur KaKua / Tha Thakur's Well', 'Ghaswali/The Grass cutter, Sadgati / Salvation, Mandir/Temple Kaffan/The Shroud, Doodhka Dam/The Price of Milk, 'Sudral/ The Untouchable, SaubhagyakeKorhe/The Lashes of Fortune, Muktimarg/The Road to Salvation' etc also present a pathetic glimpse of the pitiable life of the discarded poor ones.

Thus Mulk Raj Anand and Munshi Premchand attacked marginalization and cultural identity in Indian society evils in the national interest, but their ways differed. Despite so many common grounds, they approached the problems in different ways.

The characters of both these writers are confronted with the crisis of identity. Anand's first novel, *Untouchable* (1935) describes a day in the life of Bakha, a scavenger. In a single day he is slapped, abused and scolded by upper caste people and his sister is tried to be molested by a priest. In all these incidents he faces a crisis of identity. Munoo, the protagonist of *Coolie* (1936) moves from village to town, from town to city and then to the mountains

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seeking his identity and in this struggle he finally dies. Gangu, the hero of *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) becomes a victim of man, God and civilization. His wife dies due to the lack of medicine facilities. Even Gangu himself is killed while trying to save his daughter from being defiled. His entire life is a saga of struggle and every moment he tries to safeguard his identity but fails. Anand's women characters also share the equal identity crisis. It is in *Old woman and the cow* (1960) that we find Gauri struggling against all odds to secure her identity and finally she succeeds in regaining it. In this novel we find the whole process of the change of a woman from a puppet in man's hands to the state of an independent woman who asserts her equal rights with man and demands recognition and her separate identity.

Similarly in the novels of Premchand too, we find his characters struggling and suffering for identity. In his *Godan* (1936) we find Hori working hard day and night to improve his economic condition and make identity of his own. But due to social leeches which suck his blood continuously, He does not succeed in his efforts and finally dies in his struggle for securing his identity. In *Rangbhumi* (1924) Surdas, a blind and Dalit beggar, fights not only for his individual identity but also to secure the identity of all the villagers. John Sewak takes his land by force and builds a cigarette factory there. For Surdas losing his land and cottage means to lose his identity. He plays his role boldly on the rangbhumi (stage) of life and sacrifices himself for the sake of others. In *Kayakalp* (1939), Burha Chaudhary along with other chamars who are troubled due to the exploitation by the king and the forced labour, wage a struggle against him only because they are conscious of their identity. In *Sevasadan* (1918) Suman, like Anand's Gauri struggles hard against the heavy odds of life to secure her identity. Being tired of her husband's injustice, she struggles in such a mean profession as prostitution. But ultimately this fallen woman succeeds in leading a meaningful life of sacrifice, selfless service and dedication after joining Sevasadan.

Thus, these essayists have delineated remarkable correspondence as far as their thematic preoccupations and destinations are concerned. In the internal realms of their realism there can be seen an anguish of soul-debasing curses of poor people and enduring Indians. They have portrayed the contemporary reality as well as composed against all sorts of reactionary inclinations of their age and in this way made a solid analysis of the situations. Each item and each character of their fictional world appears as the genuine replica of the real world encompassing them.



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