

## The Creative Launcher

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### Ethics without God in the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand

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#### Abstract

Anand's fiction may appropriately be called literature of 'ethics without God' a literature of protest, a kind of literature which he holds in high esteem because it strikes hard at the roots of sectionalism, snobbery, contempt, etc., which cause the modern man's degeneration and despair. His creative writing are doubtless saturated with the element of ethics which is inalienably related to his view of life. A large number of critical studies are available on Mulk Raj Anand, the Titan of Indian English literature and pioneer of Indian English novel. But much remains to be done to bring out exhaustive and composite work on this subject. The present study is a sincere endeavor to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of 'Ethics without God' in his novels. It also aims at presenting an organic character of his fiction and proper appreciation of Anand's genius.

**Keywords-** Critical, Human, Exploitation, Down-trodden

Anand fiction may appropriately be called literature of 'ethics without God' a literature of protest, - "a kind of literature which he holds in high esteem because it strikes hard at the roots of sectionalism, snobbery, contempt, etc. which cause the modern man's degeneration and despair."<sup>1</sup> His creative writing are doubtless a saturated with the element of ethics which is inalienably related to his view of life. He writes, as he says, from "compulsions of a morbid obsession with myself and the people who possessed me, deep in my conscience."<sup>2</sup> His works are not mere exercise of intellectual Marxism, as many believe; but they are a spontaneous expression of a protest against the shockingly sordid and painful spectacle of human misery. Anand's inherent

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sense of justice roused in him, even when he was a child, a protest against God who for no reason singled out his lovely innocent cousin Kaushalya to die later. The young novelist could not compromise with "his father's subservience to the British" and his mother's "faith in ritualistic observance, superstitions and gullibility."<sup>3</sup> It was again this sense of injustice that compelled him to raise his angry voice against the suppression of freedom of thought and expression religious hypocrisy and social repression.<sup>4</sup> In a letter to Dr. S. Nath, Anand wrote- I do not know if you have noticed that there is a vital difference between the traditional choice made for the hero by God as in the injunction by Krishna to Arjuna to fight- to the choice by the hero himself as in Tagore's novels in Sarat Chand Chatterjee and in Premchand, as well as myself, to do what he may decide to do.<sup>5</sup>

The fiction of humanism begins with the choice of the individual to search for his own destiny in the search of himself and in his relations with others. I think that very few literary critics have noticed this difference between the old novel and the new novel. I feel somehow that an Indian student of literature might give attention to this problem of the new morality because the literature of passivity of acceptance of fatalism is likely to give place to the literature of human relations where the sanctions of the character will come by the need to grow into individuals, or not to grow and be frustrated or fail, but all the same, from the urge to attain new consciousness under the conditions of the modern world where democracy makes destination man the ideal of advance towards the future. A committed humanist, he heralds a revolt, a creative struggle of bringing about a new society. He does not indulge in diatribe but makes a constructive protest. With a sense of satisfaction, he recalls:

I certainly felt, in the midst of my poetry and exile, the compulsion that it is better not to win applause by conforming to my establishment, but to face the privileged order, and to claim the right to notice the existence of men like Bakha. And I was determined to take all the punishment of all confrontation... I wanted to renounce those who have for centuries included in the prison of the fourfold order the men whom they also continually destroyed as their enemies by duty. I wanted to reveal how much men had changed from what they originally were the contrast being available in the "noble savage" who accepts slavery because acceptance is the lesser way out, a living crucifixion, or prolonged suicide. I

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wanted to show the vast death of my country before the limping life promised by one legged politics. I wished to abnegate the death, by slow degrees, as in a vast concentration camp, the death through alienation, caused by the need of everyone to earn a pittance from the flunkeys of the few white sahib, the death whose bleached bones were scattered across the landscape in various attitudes of prostration before the tin gods and the clay gods and the brass gods. I wanted to bring to light the ghosts of the "dead souls" murdered without a rite by the Dharma bugs. I wanted to beckon all the phantoms, so that they should haunt the dreams of the half-dead, and awaken them, may be, to the lingering sparks of life... I wanted to burn and shine like: "Tiger, tiger, burning bright..."<sup>6</sup>.

Anand candidly wrote about the poor with whom he was most familiar. True, he immersed himself "in the sub-world of the poor, insulted and the injured, through continuous pilgrimages to the village, the small town and big town bastes of our country."<sup>7</sup> He abhorred all sort of distinction of caste, creed, class, status, the outworn and outdated tradition and conventions. Realizing the importance of this role ad responsibility at a turning point of India's history, he was determined to become "the fiery voice of the people, who through his own torments, urges and exaltation, by realizing the pains, frustration and aspiration of others, and by cultivation his incipient powers of expression, transmutes in art all feelings, all through, all experience..."<sup>8</sup> Unlike his great predecessors like Tagore, Sarat Chandra and Munshi PremChand, the champions of the humble and peasantry, Anand, with his characteristics doggedness delved deep into the depth of human consciousness of the lowly, the squalor and ugliness of human life, against a background of taboos-ridden society and its callous laws. Significantly enough, Anand, more than any other Indian writer, had felt on his pulse the fate of the underdog and the underprivileged, who, before him remained mostly unnoticed in Indian literature. Anand was much pained to see of man-made laws, the scheme of cruelty and exploitation, the decadent and perverted orthodoxy that held Indian in its devilish grip. But it would not be wise to put labels on Anand's writings, as he is genuinely humane. Incidentally, the proletariat in him had all the courage to protest against the odds of the prevailing social order of his times. He very well knew that "that struggle requires the courage to say the unmentionable things the unconventional truths, the recognition of our

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civilization."<sup>9</sup>

Untouchable and Coolie, the two early masterpiece his deep "journey away from Bloomsbury literary consciousness to the non-literary worlds, whose denizens have always been considered 'vulgar' and unfit for the respectable worlds."<sup>10</sup> In these two books he identifies himself with the despair, helpless, agony and misery of his protagonist like Bakha and Munoo whom he elevates to the status of hero's of fiction from the darkest pits of poverty, squalor and degradation. Strikingly sincere in his portrayal of truth about of life from felt experience and not from books."<sup>11</sup> A committed humanist he found fiction as the most appropriate vehicle of his genuinely new ideas and realities. He writes: I felt that only through fiction, which is the transformation through the imagination of the concrete life in words sounds and vibrations one may probe into the many layers of humans consciousness in its various phases."<sup>12</sup>

*Untouchable* (1935), which "poured out like hot lava from the volcano of Anand's "crazed imagination",<sup>13</sup> despite the best efforts of scholars like Bonamy Dobree, Maurice Brown and others to seek a publisher, was rejected by nineteen publishers for "too much misery evil and degradation in it."<sup>14</sup> E.M. Froster, whose "Preface" to the novel made the book acceptable to a publisher has without rhetoric and circumlocution, praised Anand for "directness of the attack"<sup>15</sup> and has frankly brought out the fact that Indians..." have evolved a hideous nightmare unknown to the west: the belief that the products are ritually unclean as well as physically unpleasant and that those who carry them away or otherwise help to dispose of them as outcastes from society. Really it takes the human mind to evolve anything so devilish. No animal could have hit on it."<sup>16</sup> Anand was hailed for portraying the stark realities of poverty dirt and squalor that engulfed the millions of silent sufferers and for his sincere protest against such an infernal system.

The story of Bakha a scavenger, a descendant of "the weakness of the down-trodden, the helplessness of the poor"<sup>17</sup> embodies Anand's vehement protest against the indignant four hold Hindu caste system which kills the valiant, the beautiful and the glorious; in the midst of his spiritual conflicts and emotional crises the sweeper-lad wishes to dress himself like a "gentleman" in the "fashun" of Tommies. He is noble healthy and vibrates with life just in contrast to his dirty profession and appallingly sub-human status. The graphic description of Bakha's morning and

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evening rounds of regimental latrines, his deputizing for his father's job in the town, the insults heaped on him for not announcing his approach, the molestation of his sister Sohini by the devil incarnate, hollow-cheeked Pundit Kali Nath, the flinging of the bread on the brick pavement near the gutter to be picked up by him- all these present a world of untold horrid miseries and humiliations. Anand's rage against the high caste Hindus who have cleverly condemned a whole community of people, is evident. "Noble savages" like Bakha and Munoo are not permitted to give vent to all the latent potentialities of manhood in them. Bakha's sincere craving for "Red Lamp" cigarettes, trousers, puttees, sola is an unconscious reaction against the life that has been forced upon him by his "smoky world refuse." His traumatic experience, when he gets a slap for polluting the caste-Hindu by his unholy touch followed by the crescendo of "Dirty dog! Son of bitch", forces him to delve deep into his conscience, the very truth of his existence. He realizes his fate: "untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!"<sup>18</sup> And so long as he continues to clean the latrines, he will never get rid of this label: They think we are dirt, because we clean their dirt."<sup>19</sup> He occasionally stirs out of his humility and is on the point of revolt, but the sparks of his angry voice are hushed by his realization of harsh realities.

The novel proposes three probable solutions to Makha's problem of cleaning the latrines: he can accept the kind offer of the Salvation Army Chief, Colonel Hutchinson: he can take comfort in Gandhi's mild reprimand of caste-Hindus and the eulogy of untouchable as Harijans (sons of God); he can hope for new life with the introduction of 'the machine', suggested by the poet. The last (the machine), an obvious reference to the flush system, appeals to him and he wishes to know further about it.

Anand's protest against the miserable life of the untouchable acquires a new significance in the context of numerous recent incidents of atrocities, committed by the caste Hindus on the Harijans. How they are burnt alive, killed in cold blood, deprived of their land and house-is a sordid story with no parallel in history to match it. It is a matter of great irony that most of the political parties in India have professed at one stage or the other to be true Gandhians but little substantial has been done for the emancipation of untouchables. Practice of untouchability has been made a crime under the Indian Constitution but still there are millions of untouchables who

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have to depend on the dirty job of cleaning the latrines for their bread. Political promises to ameliorate their sufferings are just a lip service, as nothing very concrete has been done to introduce flush system in all cities and villages of the country. India's present predicament, after fifty eight years of independence is a vindication of Anand's vivid imagination.

In the matter of religion, Anand has always vehemently protested against the mystic origins and myth making. He recalls his first sharp reaction to the merciful God on the death of his innocent cousin Kaushalya at the tender age of nine. He wrote a letter to God but all in vain:

But God did not answer my protest. So I have tended to regard Him, since then, as the enemy of mankind. In fact, from that time my belief in the man with a big beard sitting on the top of the sky, determining the fate of everyone has been shaken more or less completely.<sup>20</sup>

Bakha was impressed by the Christian missionary Colonel Hutchinson, but he rejected Christianity for its unscientific creation of myth and its view that man is a born sinner. Naturally, Anand made humanity as his chief concern. The gospel of Christ, as in *Untouchable*, does not interest Bakha. He raises a volley of questions about the identity of "Yessuh Messih". Hutchinson's devotional songs fail to arouse Bakha's emotions, since Christianity does not appear to touch the fringe of his problem. Theology does not satisfy him and the temporary charm of sahib's company soon evaporates. The Colonel makes a muddle of the whole thing. Hinduism also, with its network of castes, its mysticism and illogical and blind faiths, has been severely opposed by Anand. Bakha's visit to the temple is much revealing. The author gives a strikingly realities analysis of Bakha's mental conflicts and spiritual cries, when he is filled with awe at the sight of twelve-headed and ten-armed gods and goddesses of the Hindus. The invocation of different gods and goddesses "(Ram, ram, Sri Hari Narayan, Sri krishna", "Hey Hanuman Jodah, Kali Mai", "Om, Om Shanti Deva)" appears to draw him towards the temple and the temple "seemed to advance towards towards him like a monster, and to envelop him." Anand frowns at the religion that does not allow its devotee to have a free access to his deity. The low hoarse cry "Poluttred, Polluted, Poluttred" rudely shakes him, for, to his amazement, he discovers that his entry has defiled the temple of his deity. He is dazed and his blood is congealed. His discovery of the

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priest's attempt to molest Sohini rouses not only the hero in him to strike back, but also his indignation at the cold lifeless gods who fail to protect an innocent girl from the innocent advances and lusty clutches of a devil. Anand mocks at the hypocrisy and hollowness of Hindu religion for its curse of "pollution by touch" which baffles all reason, sensibility and good sense, in contrast to the stream, relieving in the open, swindling by the moneylender as Ganesh Nath does, and manipulation of scales by the confectioners.

In *Coolie* (1936), the macrocosm of real India, Anand presents, as John Lehman puts, "... not the feudal splendours and feudal mysticism of traditional Indian literature, but the hard and suffering lives of the millions of his country's poor."<sup>21</sup> Munoo's forced journey-from his idyllic surroundings through the madhouse prison of a shrewd and vindictive housewife, the wife of bank babu, the short respite at Daulatpur under the roof of Prabha, the sordid cotton industry of Bombay and lastly the crazy, yet comforting world of a highly immoral and pretentious Anglo-Indian woman in the tranquil hills and valleys with death following on its heels- is veritably a ceaseless quest for happiness. Munoo, the coolie, has been humanized and is assigned a place in serious literature by Anand, and he represents millions of coolies, not only in India but all over the world. He is an object of exploitation in one way or the other and he has to bear his misfortunes with a patient shrug. "The wild bird his heart fluttered every now and then with desire for happiness." Anand indicts the new value of the so-called social order for its selfishness and sadistic cruelty. Munoo is thoroughly convinced of his inferiority, and the soul of a servant is instilled into him. In a rage, he bursts out: The babus are the Sahib-logs, and all servants look alike; there must only be two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor."

The novel is a sincere protest against the emergence of a new world of money, wage-slaves, distinction of class and status and man's haunting loneliness. Anand discovers to his shock that the coolies like Munoo are completely beaten down by the curse of money-power in the iron age. The mean prevailing social order and the new values created by this new civilization strike at, as in the case of Munoo, the instinctive natural warm heartedness and spirituality that underline the real zest for life. Its internal effects lead to tragic waste and suffering and the individual is not able to redeem himself from the clutches of hard possessiveness and a soft



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emotionalism. Even the best moments of Munoo's life are married by the thought: "We belong to suffering! We belong to suffering! My love." They are born to suffer and 'blush unseen'.

The introduction of machine increased production but it gave birth to the problems of employment, slum areas, lust for wealth, colonial imperialism and, above all, the conflicts between the labour and the mill-owners, followed by strikes and lock-outs, trade unionism, psychological complexes and emotional sterility. Anand discovers in the life of coolies a real world of shocking miseries and a strange race "shivering weak, bleary, with twisted, ugly back faces, black filthy, gutless, spineless, vacant looks, idiots, looking at the smoky heavens. With horrible unexpressed pain, large write on their faces. The crushing weight of machine-civilization causes a fearful conflict of master-servant relationship. Even the primary emotions of love are adversely affected, as the workers are stuck in the mud of contentment. The sharks, bulls and bears of industrial world exploit the coolies, lack of resistance, wit and courage. A life, like that of Munoo, deprived of its courage and healthy passions, cannot produce anything creative. The professional Trade Union leaders, the modern judas, who sing to the temper of capitalists, like Lala Onkar Nath, further increase the sufferings of the coolies. Love of money, which is a natural corollary of industrial life, has dehumanized man. It has robbed him of his passions and given him the numbness of iron. Even Munoo's uncle Daya Ram becomes victim of the lure of money, with his characteristic Hillman's tender emotions hardened and dried up. He wants to keep the wages of Munoo to himself and leaves him to mercy of the ill-tempered, selfish and vindictive woman, to be crushed to death like his mother, who "moved the mill stone, round and round, till she had languished and expired." He gets blows on his ribs for hunger, and ragged tunic for his clothes. Daya Ram's love of money and the sense of inferiority, during the service, chills all his warm-heartedness.

A large number of critical studies are available on Mulk Raj Anand, the Titan of Indian English Literature and pioneer of Indian English novel. But much remains to be done to bring out exhaustive and composite work on this subject. We sum up that the present study is a sincere endeavor to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of 'Ehtics without God' in his novels. It also aims at presenting an organic character of his fiction and a proper appreciation of Anand's genius.



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