

Predicament of Women in the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand

Dr. S. P. Kapade

Associate Professor of English, Department of English,
JDMVPV Shri. S. S. P. Arts, Shri. B. T. T. S. Comm. &
Shri. G. R. P. Science College, Jalgaon

Abstract

The present paper attempts to pinpoint the predicament of women, one of the major themes in Anand's novels. The proposed study seeks to explore Mulk Raj Anand's novels through social context which highly focus on the social issues in Indian social sphere. Woman, according to Anand's humanism deserves to be treated on an equal footing with man. The suppression of women can be overcome only by her economic independence. As we see in the characters, Janki and Gauri, liberated women can be great service to humanity. In Anand's novels we come across quite a few traditional devoted winds like Gauri, Sanju, Parbati and Laxmi. But Anand doesn't make a fetish of this devotion. Anand's heroines are simple sufferings sincere women. It may be Janki, the mistress of Ananta or it may be Maya the widowed daughter of the landlord or even cow-like Gauri, who submit ungrudgingly to the hard merciless bludgeoning's of their fate. Gauri, the heroine of *The Old Woman and the Cow*, however finally rises against the existing conditions and begins to lead an independent life. In *Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts*, Nur's marriage isn't only an arranged one but a forced one, Anand strongly condemns the idea of commercializing marriage in the name of dowry system.

Keywords: woman's predicament, mother's instinct, exploitation, dowry system, suppression, woman's volcanic power.

Woman is often misled by the diabolical code of priest-made laws which assert that her total obedience to her husband alone can guarantee a place for her in Heaven. In *Seven Summers*, we are told about the customary blessing of the father to the daughter, be like Savitri be like the satees of the gurus, loyal to your husband unto death. Woman is made to feel that the devotion she bears to her husband is the be-all and end-all of her life.

In *The Big Heart*, we see that Murlidhar has no consideration for his wife, Gujri. He carries on a clandestine relationship with his daughter-in-law. Anand's novels don't suffer from a dearth of a variety of women characters.

In many novels, Anand shows how motherhood bestows a peculiar dignity on woman and he pays a glorious tribute to the matchless motherly love. The domestic life of, the made for each other—Gauri and Ralia in *The Big Heart* revolves round the question, who should govern whom? When Ralia drags her to the streets by hair, she beats him with a broom.

Woman, in Anand's view deserves to be treated on an equal footing with man. According to him, the long history of the suppression of women continues because man will not admit his barbaric lust for power. The woman suffers at all stages of her life. Education alone can liberate woman. In fact; we should recognize the vital role of woman in the task of reconstruction of society. As a naturalistic humanist, Anand rejects all supernatural thoughts, as sheer myths no longer tenable in modern scientific age. He refuses to believe in God, religion or the ideas of heaven and hell or rebirth.

Sohoni is the daughter of Lakha and sister of Bakha. She is young and beautiful. She is charming and modest, and hard working. She bears her hard lot with a smiling face. As an untouchable, she can't draw water from the well of the caste Hindus. It is her beauty that awakens the lust of Pandit Kali Nath. Her role in the novel exposes the hypocrisy of the caste Hindus, who say that they are polluted by the mere touch of a sweeper, they do not hesitate to embrace a beautiful sweeper girl to satisfy their lust.

Gulabo is superior to the other outcaste in her colony. Gulabo fails to inspire respect in her own son. In many ways Gulabo is realistic, life

like character, women like her are met with frequently in real life. Sohini in *Untouchable* shows great love for her brother. It is said that she feels the mother's instinct to quench Bakha's thirst. Her fine physique and pleasing manners elicit a strange passion in her brother. Sohini's role in the novel is to expose the hypocrisy of the caste Hindus who say that they are polluted by the mere touch of a sweeper, but don't hesitate to embrace a beautiful sweeper girl to satisfy their lust.

Gulabo is a minor woman character in the novel. She is a full blooded and life sized character. She is a realistic, life like character. "She serves the purpose of showing that our caste system isn't a simple problem... it has wheels within wheels".¹

Mrs. Mainwaring is an Anglo Indian typical woman. It is an important character in *Coolie*. She is romantic. A German philosopher fell in love with her, she married Aga Raza Ali Shah. Guy Mainwaring is her third husband. Sheila, the innocent girl is intentionally exploited by Bibiji in the novel. Lakshmi is a typical lady depicted in the novel. Parbati is very different lady but she has wisdom. These women are different from Bibi Uttam Kaur.

Mrs. Mainwaring's flirtations with numberless men can't but bore the discerning reader.

Laila is perhaps the most memorable and poignant daughter figure in Anand's novels. After her mother's death she takes up the responsibility of all household work and goes out to work with the other coolie women. Gangu considers her as a blessing, his wife Sajnu's gift to tend him in his old age, unfortunately she becomes the indirect cause of his untimely death.

We find the female character Maya in this novel. She is a fourteen-year-old daughter of the landlord. When she plays with the young boys of the village, her mother chides her, "Maya, in Maya, eater of your husband. May you wither away? You aren't a child now. You must learn to be ashamed and modest."²

Janki ranks higher than a wife in devotion which is seen throughout the novel. She teases Ananta as a 'machine man'. Janki is more mature and enables Ananta to see his own self. She teases him for his vanity and egoism. Ananta gives her a clear knowledge of famine, war and other kinds

of human suffering. Janki continues Ananta's mission after his death. Janki is really a memorable character. The development of Janki's character is relevant because she takes up Ananta's mission after his death.

Gauri is the central female character in *The Old Woman and the Cow* novel. She is undoubtedly one of the most memorable female characters in the whole range of Indian fiction. Gauri symbolizes the strength and purity of Sita. She is the epitome of excellence, strength and virtue. This novel creates the legend of a heroic peasant woman in a small village. The old Woman and the Cow is Anand's only novel to focus centrally on a female character Gauri. Gauri is bold creation of Anand. She is a new woman. Man is the master of his destiny. Gauri does so. She resembles Ibsen's Nora. When Gauri's husband Panchi hits her, "Gauri retorts: if you strike me again, I will hit you back."³

Her brief experience as a self-reliant nurse and the guidance of Colonel Mahindra give her the necessary courage. Her profession in the context of woman's predicament in India is a tremendous act of protest.

Gauri's character reveals that man's ideas and actions in respect of woman are still primitive. Gauri's entire life is a sad tale of woe and suffering. Her husband suspects her chastity for she lived some days with the Seth and Dr. Mahendra and hits and orders her out. Gauri is no longer the meek old creature to accept this sort of treatment unprotestingly. Her reaction is in fact symbolic of modern women, keenly conscious of her rights and potentialities. Gauri clearly shows that however much she may love her husband she can't stand his cruelty.

The old Woman and the Cow is a study of the condition of helplessness of a Hindu woman. Early in her girlhood, she is dependent on her parents, and after marriage, she becomes the property of her husband, to be ill-treated or exiled by him for no fault of her own. In this novel the cow-like, submissive Gauri, after her marriage, is sold away by her mother under economic duress, of course, to a rich Seth. After her adventure outside, Gauri returns quite chaste to her husband's house, only to be exiled again like Sita, the queen of Rama, for fear of wagging tongues of the village

Noor is a dear sister to Maqbool. Noor is all admiration for the hero in her brother and his love for the weak. She defends him and his principles when her parents accuse him of disobeying the strict will. Right in the jaws of death Maqbool's mother remembers her tenderness and love and tries to conjure up in his mind. Her image simultaneously arouses in him strength and self-belief. When he dies, he is hopeful that Noor will continue his mission. Noor appears a meek and tender girl, through her character, Anand shows woman's volcanic power. Krishan's mother thinks of offering oil to the demon of Tuesday. To cure her son of his fever, she invites Pandit Bhola Nath, the Brahmin family priest, to good food. Anand gives an elaborate description of the superstitious behaviour of Krishan's mother.

Rajesh K. Pallan has highlighted the mother and son relationship vis-à-vis Krishan Chander, his mother and Devaki, His progress from childhood to adolescence from innocence to experience is evidenced in his sessions of calf-love for Devaki, the aunt, Mumtaz, his brother Harish's mistress, Shakuntala, the wife of Doctor Chunilal, and Helen the clarinet player's daughter.

The most important and obvious principle of Anand's humanism that finds amplification in *The Old Woman and the Cows* his strong plea for the recognition and acceptance of women's rights. We get Panchi's attitude towards his wife. "There was the prospect of the prize of a girl- a girl whom he could fold in his arms at night and kick during the day."

Anand gives a realistic picture of the suffering Gauri, a good and honest woman, compared to a cow, for she is the very picture of patience and sacrifice. The entire tale is realistic. The characters aren't only true to life but also reveal Anand's humanist ideas. Anand portrays the wretched

position of Indian woman in rural society and suggests the changes that are coming about by giving a lively description of the heroine enlightened reaction to tradition and custom corrupted through man's selfishness, ignorance and vested interest. Gauri symbolizes the strength and purity of Sita. If Gauri is modern version of Sita Panchi is Ram lost. The novel suggests continuous parallels and links between the primitive path and desolate present and thereby presents the most absorbing image of the human condition. It is the only novel which Anand spins the plot around a woman character. *The Old Woman and the Cow* along with, *The Big Heart* has come to represent, "The high watermark of Anand's fictional genius." This is partly because of the successful woman portraits in these novels. But the novel remains one of his strongest works. The Ramayana story helps to shape, *The Old Woman and the Cow*.

Thus, Mulk Raj Anand has also focussed sufficiently on the cultural mind set of our traditional society which is imbued with bias for the female gender. We can find many instances in Anand's novels which depicts the predicament of women in male dominated social structure. She is blamed, cursed, insulted and rejected as a major cause of ruin. Many rules have been set to control her. She is convinced that she can exist only within her relation with her male counterpart. The novel is trying to depict the predicament of every woman in manmade culture which is set during the period of Mahabharata or before it.

Works Cited

- Mulk Raj Anand *Untouchable* London: Penguin, 1940 p. 10
Mulk Raj Anand *The Village Trilogy*. Bombay: Kutubpopular, 1960 p. 75
Mulk Raj Anand *The Old Woman and the Cow* Bombay: Kutubpopular, 1960 p. 283
Naik M.K. *Mulk Raj Anand*. Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1960 p. 05
Pallan, Rajesh K. *The Use of Myth in Mulk Raj Anand*. Delhi: Abhinav Publication, 1986. print. p.95