

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

An Assessment Of Eco-Consciousness In The Novels Of Mulk Raj Anand

Mr. Anurag Jadaun, M.A., M.Phil.,
Research Scholar (Ph.D.)

Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research, Chennai-73

Dr. Manimozhi Sayee Kumar,
Prof and Head, Dept of English,

Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research, Chennai-73

Mr. Anurag Jadaun, M.A., M.Phil, Dr. Manimozhi Sayee Kumar, An Assessment Of Eco-Consciousness In The Novels Of Mulk Raj Anand- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(9). ISSN 1567-214x, Key Words: Ecocriticism, Environment, Eco-consciousness and Nature

Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand, one of the literary forces of Indian Writing in English, focuses on the problems of society through utter realism. Meanwhile, he seems to convey eco-consciousness which gets reflected in the texture and background of the story of the novels. His fidelity to real life settings also helps ecocriticism to make itself evident to the readers. Inter-connectedness of the problems of society and portrayal of his characters and description of nature, all seems to swath in one thought of line and displays eco consciousness at every juncture.

Introduction

Twenty first century is already facing an environmental disaster from the pandemic Covid-19 virus which has engulfed more than one million lives till date. In addition to this, there are horrors and threats which are familiar to us such as- nuclear holocaust, chemical or germ warfare, alarming growth of world population, global warming, depletion of ozone layer, cutting of forests, loss of ground water, extinction of plants and animals etc. It is disheartening to see that despite of so many ecological issues, substantially nothing much has been done in the field of English literature. The discipline of English literature, till now, deals with the human value system and in its literary representations it engages our relationship with our surroundings which compliments each other. Though majority of the writers acknowledge the place and appreciation of nature, only a few have displayed eco-consciousness towards the resolution of the environmental issues. Many of the writers have the tendency to avoid the unpleasant reality. The question arises, "Can we ignore the ecological issues which are threat for our very survival?" Today, we have become used to living with the crisis. Glen A. Love in his essay 'Revaluing Nature: Towards an Ecological Criticism' rightly comments, "*We care about these issues, but we do not care enough.*"^[5]

Though Nature has been the part of literary texts in the form of nature writing, regionalism, or interdisciplinary studies, it is to note that insignificant efforts were made to assess its impact on human beings. Joseph Meeker in his seminal book 'The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology' suggests the new reading of literature from ecological view point. He writes:

"Human beings are the earth's only literary creatures... If the creation of literature is an important characteristic of the human species, it should be examined carefully to discover its influence upon human behaviour and the natural environment – to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of mankind and what insight it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us."^[6]

A lot of environmental damage has already been done by human beings and now we cannot afford it to continue. A general shift in eco-consciousness has been taking in the field of literature since 1980s. A few eco-conscious writers have started to contribute and support to give priority to ecological considerations in literature. Merely eco-consciousness among the writers is not sufficient. It also needs to be spread among common man who considers himself dominant and ignore nature and environment. Thinking of human beings that the earth exists for our comfort and disposal alone needs modification. It can be achieved only when they become conscious of their environment. Eco-consciousness among the common man will re-direct their cognizance and actions towards non-humans. So, one of the biggest challenges is to enhance eco-consciousness among the writers and readers for the creation of better environment.

From the evaluation of the works of writers who displayed eco-consciousness in their works, it has been found that they kept ecology in the background and didn't pay sufficient attention to the issues of the environment. Contrary to it, there is Mulkraj Anand who displayed his serious concerns for man, society and nature. It has been a different aspect that eco-consciousness has never been critically assessed, till now, in his works. Anand's few works such as; *Two Leaves and a Bud*, *The Village*, and *Untouchable* are classic example of it. Research scholars have paid attention to socialistic and humanistic elements in their works, but ecological concerns and point of view were always kept at the backdrop. This paper attempts to study overlooked eco-consciousness and the wilderness in the novels of Mulkraj Anand. It also tries to identify the significance of value laden landscape and references to meaningful earth found in Mulkraj Anand's fiction.

Anand wrote most of his novels in the mid of twentieth century when introduction of machines had begun in the industries and it started to affect both the industries and the workers. Due to its remarkable contribution in rise of production, factory owners were lured to set up of more machines. On the other hand, it developed psychological fears in the minds of workers who were scared of job loss and increasing apathy of the owners towards the workers as factory owners were now less reliant on the workers. An industrial unit worries much about the production and less it considers the effects of machines on the environment. Industrial corporations usually has nothing to do with the issue of environmental protection. Being a business man, factory owners have been ignoring the welfare of its workers and environmental aspects. Environment consists of both nature and man. Nature encompasses in itself all animals, flora and fauna while man stands for the whole mankind who rely on nature for its survival. The relationship of man and nature is of two way. Man's actions affects nature and it is vice versa. Though

nature bears the weight of our activities, renews itself in the long run. But nature also affects man and his culture. Many of the writers portrays man, nature and culture as separate entities but in fact they mingle like water and soil in a flowing stream. Defying this theory of separate entities, Anand has as an inclusive approach which reflects man, his culture and nature merging together and becoming one. He expresses his eco-consciousness by raising the issues of the environment and deals with it from different angles. All the components of the environment get their suitable place. Concerns of the man get exemplified in *The Big Heart* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*, and issues pertaining to the culture are projected in *Untouchable*. And the effects of culture on man are described in *The Village*.

Literary critics claim that nature writers often turn inward to express the elevated states of consciousness within themselves. Anand uses this device to show the battle of the mind of the characters. His characters turn inward to express their psyche and enter into the world of Nature. In *Two Leaves and a Bud* Gangu, while thinking of approaching age, envisions Yama, the God of Death. The vision of Yama is not as simple as quoted above rather Gangu enters into the world of Nature and visualises:

“teeming thick with a vegetation that seemed to suffocate the very air around it, and to spread a grisly, green chill across the sky. The demons, the tree-spirits, the wild lions and elephants and bears, the reptiles, chameleons, lizards and dragon-flies with which his imagination had always peopled the forest, swarmed in the murky waters of hell, as in the pictures of the netherworld he had seen, with the two horned Yama, the God of Death, towering supreme, a skull in his left hand and a sword in his right.”^[1]

In the novel *The Village* Lal Singh, while thinking to increase the productivity of the land and to prove his worth, gets inward and enters into the realm of nature. *‘He could see in his mind’s eye the rich corn rustling beneath the blazing sun, and the slashing blade of his scythe reaping the crop in April, and his mother making bundles of the stalks to carry away.’^[2]*

Anand like a nature writer carries his characters to the world of nature and turn them inwards so as to expose their mental state and psyche. Anand uses imageries of nature to show the hidden and secreted world of his characters.

Rise of industrialism has changed the trends of living among the human beings. Man has stopped living in nature for two reasons; first, to avoid the nature clad in tooth and claw, and the second, his preference for physical comfort. Rise of industries enabled man to be financially strong and he started to live in the houses which are endowed with modern technological equipment. It has made the life of man more comfortable than that of the life of a man living into the nature as he has to face the physical discomfort while fighting the furies of nature. Modern man’s confinement to their houses has distanced them from the nature. For modern man nature is incomprehensible as he is unaware of the connection with the nature. As far as Mulkraj Anand is concerned, he presents his characters who are living among the nature and facing its furies. His characters also comprehends the beauties of nature in a progressive way as a part of living eco system. They adjust themselves with the nature and try to create a harmonious relation with the nature. Though the characters get attracted towards the luxuries of life, they prefer nature as their destination which soothes them and provides relief from the commotion of life. Lal Singh finds pleasure and a strange tenderness in him when he looks at the

'sun winking on the farthest fields, and gleams of pink shooting from the grassy meadows at the foothills of the hills.'^[2] He, further, acknowledges the joy and glory which he gets amidst the nature:

It was such a joy to awake to the stillness of the grey dawn and walk out through the dew drenched fields, still lying under a misted sheet It was sheer delight to bathe at a running well, groping across his body by the soft glimmer of a lingering moon and the occasional sparkle of a dying star.'^[2]

Man, culture and environment are inter-connected and inter-dependent in many ways. Man relies on nature for its survival which include oxygen, water and food. Nature provides human beings a number of food options in the form of vegetables, grains, fish, and animals. Consumption of these by human beings also helps in maintaining the equilibrium within the nature. But faster growth in human population has raised the concern among the environmentalists as it is creating imbalance in the environment. Environmental resources are declining and competition has increased for acquisition of land and water resources not only between the peoples but also among the states and common man. Disputes over land is one of the issues which has affected majority of the rural population of India. Loss of land has pushed the farmers into financial crisis which forces them to take loans and suffer rest of the life as loan never ends due to higher interest rates and low income of farmers. If a farmer avoids loan, he has to give up his land and live in poverty. Some of the farmers move to the town for better employment opportunities.

Anand gives reference to it in *The Village* wherein agriculture land of Nihal Singh has been usurped by the village landlord and the suit is pending in the court. Nihal Singh has to pay the advocate frequently, but no progress seems to happen in this matter. Loss of land has cut short his agriculture income that is another financial blow on him. Similarly, in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, the farmer Gangu and his family suffers the fury of the flood when his whole harvest get destroyed. Gangu's brother has to take loan, and fails to pay it back. Unpaid interest of Gangu's brother is imposed upon Gangu being in a joint family and he has to attach his hut and land as a free gift to the Seth Badri Dass. Having been homeless, and landless Gangu moves to Assam Tea Plantation with the hope of better livelihood. During his stay in tea plantation Gangu suffers the worst as his wife dies due to cholera which spread because of the contaminated water supply provided to the Coolies. Despite of being aware of the root cause of the disease, the owners of tea plantation don't try to rectify the water supply and leave the coolies to suffer and die. Environment gets affected by the ways of living of the man. Poor sanitation, disease and death affects the environment. Inter-relatedness of the environment and the man is to be noted here. The land, is a part of the earth, affects the man as it becomes the cause of poverty and death. The whole cycle is an organic whole and inter-related. Poverty results in lack of necessities and led the farmers to take loans in order to fulfil their needs. Lalu in *The Village* displays self-awareness about the fortunes of the contemporary poor peasants whose fortunes were declining through debt and mortgages and the seizure of land by the landlord. Gangu and Nihal Singh both are the victims of the stringent land rules of the contemporary India. India had been by and large an agriculture country. The laws pertaining to the land were framed purposely for the landlords and owners of big states. The condition of the peasants was extremely miserable as they had to depend on nature and environment for tilling the land and production of harvest. Bad crop often put them in debt. The

laws related to the land were in favour of the landlords and money lenders. The village Sahukar and the Baniyas often misused their power, which was awarded to them, over the illiterate peasants who had to borrow money for various purposes. Money lenders charged exorbitant interest and demanded gold and ornament as pawn before he handed over the much needed money to the peasants. Gangu becomes victim of the system when he borrows money to meet the funeral expenses of his deceased wife. Similarly, When Nihal Singh approached Seth Chaman Lal for a loan the latter straightforwardly demands both security and regular interest saying, “*But I have the grain for a security, though it hardly seems worth ten rupees.*”^[2] Mulkraj Anand clearly writes in *The Village*, “*And the peasants were an easy prey – such fools, poor, ignorant, groping fools and the whole cause of their ruin was debt.*”^[2]

Thus, Anand displays eco-consciousness in his novels which gets reflected in his description of nature, portrayal of characters who seek comfort in nature and in projection of social problems which either emanates from unhealthy environment or led to possible polluted environment. Adopting an inclusive approach he projects man, his culture and nature merging together and becoming one. He showcases the human greed which makes earth uninhabitable. His eco-consciousness is unparalleled in terms of discernibility. Though it runs at the back side of his scheme of things, it makes its way through the projected problems.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Mulk Raj Anand, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Kutub Publishers, 1936, 1946 First Indian edition, Bombay
2. Mulk Raj Anand, *The Village*, Kutub Publishers, 1939, 1954 First Indian edition, Bombay
3. Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable*, Hutchinson International Authors Limited, 1947, London
4. Mulk Raj Anand, *The Big Heart*, Vision Books Pvt Ltd, First published 1945, New revised print edition 2015, New Delhi
5. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, *The Eco Criticism Reader ; Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, 2004, The University of Georgia Press, London
6. Joseph W. Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival ; Studies in Literary Ecology*, 1972, Scribner's, New York By- Under the supervision of: