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**AN ASSEMENT OF THEMATIC OPTIMISM IN THE NOVELS OF
MULK RAJ ANAND**

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Abstract: Mulk Raj Anand, one of the pioneer authors of Indian Writing in English, highlights the problems of underprivileged and the poor of Indian social system. He presents a plethora of images which are realistic representation of the condition of the downtrodden. His characters are usually trapped between the poverty and atrocities of the dominant class. He exposes the faults of decomposing contemporary Indian social system and ultimately gives hopefulness that one day social amelioration will take place. Despite of gloomy atmosphere of his novels due to the exposition of problems of the poor, the theme of his novels offers a vibrant optimism for the future.

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the established and most accomplished Indian novelists writing in English. Generally, he is known for his writings originating and dealing with the lower strata of society. His main concern seems to highlight the issues of the poor, labour class workers and the rustics who have been left to live under the suppression of the established authority. However, it cannot be deducted from all this, that he deals only the seamy side of things. Anand portrays the life as it exists in the world. A serious study of his novels unfurls different layers of meaning hidden in it. His novels transcend time and space and leave a lasting impression on the psyche of the readers. One of the remarkable attributes is to be noted here is that though his novels are filled with the occurrences which leads to tragic end, his hero displays a parallel optimism which stirs a desire in him to live and struggle further. Optimism is an approach which displays a belief or hope that the results of some specific endeavor, or outcomes in general, will be positive, favourable and desirable.

Anand believes in the philosophy of humanism which recommends to treat all with equality irrespective of any division of class or creed." He aspires for world where, "One constantly

search for balance between the inner and outer and thus enables one to be hospitable to life on all its levels, from the most exalted lyrical experience to the most degrades human condition.” [9] In his novels he always attempts to present the inequalities and tortures which arises due to lack of humanistic attitude. But he is always positive and optimistic about the world order and hopes “to believe the kind of illumination from the point of view of man, the kind of illumination of world I hope for.”^[9]

Anand does his best in painting realistic and faithful images true to the life. His heroes are discontented individuals who try to revolt against the existing system. The hero of Anand’s novels is usually torn between the social mechanism of exploitation and low awareness of the underprivileged. While going against the system the heroes find themselves breaking down under it, but at no point the hero surrenders himself rather stirs himself in this materialistic society. He struggles at his best to come out of situation and displays the positive optimism toward the life. It must be acknowledged that the inherent feeling behind the struggle is always optimism which motivates an individual to carry on his fight for his very survival.

Struggle for survival, for freedom and for life are the main tenets which carry on a desire to move and live further in the characters of Anand’s novels. In *Untouchable*, Bakha finds himself captured under the shackles of casteism which has classed him as ‘Untouchable’. In the compounds of barracks he realizes that he has lost his freedom which he used to enjoy during his childhood. He doesn’t lose hope and carries on further to find the answer of it. PK Rajan rightly remarks, “It keeps him passive and inactive; but it doesn’t throw him into despair, it keeps the glow of hope alive in him.”^[1] As Anand circuitously submits three possibilities which may bring change: Christianity, Gandhism, and Modernization, Bakha decides to explore about the machine which could bring changes in the lives of the outcastes. Though Bakha remains extremely submissive, and inactive, he hopes for a change to descend upon the problem of untouchability.

Anand seeks to enlighten prospects of progress and modernity. He exposes the faults and detrimental aspects of the decomposing Indian social system. He imbibes a modern way of thinking and thus seeks a better world for all of humanity. He with his utter optimism craved that one day better living conditions and better opportunities would be provided for under privileged. As in *Untouchable*, he hoped that the advancement in technology like flush system would eradicate the problem of untouchability in India. If it happens, Bakha would get rid of the practice of removing human waste manually. Anand displays his mental state of affairs by clubbing realism with optimism towards life. He optimistically hope that one day would come when Bakha would not be shunned due to his caste affiliation and would be considered at par with the privileged upper caste of the society.

Anand’s next hero, Munoo in *Coolie*, too characterizes his quest for freedom. He asks himself about the questions of his own identity and carries forward his struggle for freedom. He asks himself, “What am I –Munoo?” and “Why am I here in this house?”^[2] And then he realizes his status in the prevailing social order. Initially he took it for granted but later he enhances his level of consciousness and displays maturity to understand the truth that ‘money is indeed everything’. [2] He faces hardships at all the places by doing various jobs. Though he meets with tragic end, he never gives up his journey of struggle for living and for survival. Moreover, Sauda, one of the members of the Union Executive Committee, voices against the exploitation and says, “Stand up then, Stand up for your rights, you roofless wretches, stand up for justice! Stand up, you frightened fools. Stand up and fight. Stand up and be the man that you meant to be...”^[2] The crowd recited after him, “We are human beings and not soulless machines, we want the right to work without having to pay bribes”.^[2] One can sense

the optimism which sparks a desire within the characters of the novel that they can explore themselves despite of living in this tyrannical world. It is a different issue that because of their lower economic position they either failed to succeed or meet with tragic end.

Despite of his suffering Munoo maintains his equanimity and attempts to live his life in cheerful and optimistic manner. He switches over from one place to another in order to find a better place to live and work. However, the materialistic world comes between his optimism and expectations of life. When Munoo is rebuked at a shop where ordered a drink to satiate his thirst, he says to himself, “ I let him put me in my place as a Coolie, but I was paying for the soda water and I am not an untouchable. I am a Hindu Kshatriya, a Rajput, a warrior.”^[2] Thus like a hero, Munoo tries to convert his negative emotions into optimism of thought and strengthen in gaining his self-respect.

In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, when Gangu catches fever, he thinks, “I should not die till Leila is married and Buddhu has grown up.”^[3] When Gangu suffers from fever and fears death, he does not want to die as he realises that his children are small and he hopes to support them in future. After the death of his wife, Gangu is under debt but he is determined to earn some surplus money by agriculture apart from the job allocated to him at the plantation. When a person’s wife is dead, he becomes hopeless. Gangu, on the other hand, displays his ‘wild urge to live’^[3] even after the death of his wife Sajani. Optimism instils an activity of will and subsequently, Gangu initiates the farming process. He starts working hard in the allotted land with the hope to cultivate good crop and pay off the debt shortly. He wishes to marry his daughter one day and shows progressive attitude towards life.

In *The Village* Lal Singh opposes his father’s decision of borrowing money for meaningless ceremonies being observed during marriage. He optimistically thinks, “His family could start anew, fair and square, free of the obligations on previous mortgages of land and jewellery, the ten acres they had could be made to pay even when prices are fallen.”^[4] Anand’s character Lal Singh is remarkable who revolts against the socio-religious system of his society when he gets his haircut at the fair. By doing so he goes against the established cultural norms. He attempts to identify himself when he says, “What is my destiny in this place?”^[4] And subsequently he joins the Army in search of his destiny. It is to be noted here that Anand becomes explicit in the portrayal of Lal Singh who dares to go against the established religious culture by getting his hair cut, and also falls in love with Maya who belongs to a higher strata of society. Lal Singh’s father Nihal Singh is also an epitome of optimism, which he displays through-out the novel. While discussing about the land suit pending at the court, Nihal Singh says, “There must be justice in the world. And if I don’t get the suit about my land settled in the lower court, I shall take it to the high court, and if it is not settled there, I shall appeal to the highest court of God. I shall never give in. For why should I abandon what is mine?”^[4]

Lal Singh who also figures in the novel *The Sword and the Sickle* chooses the task to change the world around him. Though he realizes that it is collective responsibility which may bring the process of change. He adopts Gandhism and starts with non-violent revolution for change. It is noticeable that it is optimism for change, which derives Lal Singh to carry on his struggle. In his novels, Anand presents myriad of situations where he places the character amidst socially and economically powerful people. Despite of the awareness of the probable result, his characters show the optimism for life which motivates them to live life. None of them surrenders himself and does any suicide.

Anand’s novels are not pessimistic but the just opposite of it. A pessimist usually repudiates hope. On the other hand, Anand’s fiction is marked by the positivity which contain

in itself many flashes of optimism. He instils faith of optimism in his characters who transport it along with them everywhere. His Characters imbibe in themselves a current of optimism which keep them active to transform material things. Though his characters are optimistic, they don't succeed in their efforts because of power struggle between the social forces. However, they contain inherent positive viewpoint towards their actions.

Inherent nature of man is optimistic. Whenever a man gets stuck somewhere, he doesn't get into depression. It is the tendency of human beings to try and to come out of difficulty. There are very few who commit suicide under difficult times. Otherwise, man struggles at least for his survival. Following this criterion of living life, Anand is truly a realist who presents before us a gallery of characters who faces the difficulties during their journey of life and they do not surrender. Social problems permeates everywhere in the world but man has to counter them with his fullmight. Anand consciously chose his characters who were victims of inexorable social, economic and political order, and present them in their nakedness to the readers.

In the novel *Death of a Hero*, Anand narrates the story set in Kashmir which is invaded by Pakistan with the intention to seize Kashmir by force. The houses of all, irrespective of religion, are set on fire by fanatic forces. The character Maqbool Sherwani, an ordinary worker of the Kashmir National Conference understands the narrow-mindedness of the invaders. He fights against the invaders with the aim to uphold the spirit of secularism and nationalism. It is Maqbool's optimism which instils a sense that he must fight against the fanatic forces in order to save the life of the people. He dies during his struggle. If he were not wrapped in optimism he could have run away from the scene and saved his life. It is man's optimism towards life which motivates him to struggle further for the achievement of his goals.

Anand believes in man's capabilities that a man is able to grow in his life from the bottom to glorious heights through his constant exertions. He believes in the indomitable spirit of man and as a result it makes Anand optimistic about the future of mankind. In the novel *The Big Heart*, he writes, "Actually, no one can wipe out the whole of humanity. Only certain men can destroy the will of God by pilling terror upon terror."^[6]

Anand's masterpiece 'The Bubble' is autobiographical in nature. It explicitly deals with the emotions and experiences of its main character Krishan who becomes the spokesperson of Anand and unfolds the frustrations he faces during his struggle for life. However, on the other hand, he looks at life with hope and harmony.

Anand is a strong believer of the doctrine of social revolution. He believes that the social revolution is only possible by upholding to socialistic pattern of society. It is pertinent to mention that only an optimistic person can think of the revolution or change in the society. Though his heroes are unable to fight in an organised manner against the oppression, they counter the problems boldly, and emerged as buoyant conqueror. They are not able to fight because they are pursued by economic and social forces which toss them to get crushed. However, Gangu's death, Bakha's return, and Ananta's death don't suggest a pessimistic acceptance, rather it flags the optimism for the future. They represent every human being who wants to widen his horizon. They struggle to establish meaning through optimism and through his consciousness. Anand seems to propagate his philosophy of human life in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, wherein de La Havre, as a mouthpiece of Anand, says, "Man has still to fight for his place in the universe; if he fails in his fight, he will be exterminated, like the mammoths And the worst that our race has to fear is defeat and extermination."^[3] And finally he exhibits optimism of thought, "The best that it has to hope for is to become a

stepping stone on the road to a higher and more cultured human being.”^[3] Thus, Anand’s novels present humans struggling against the powerful forces of society. And they are able to fight just because of their optimism of thought. And it is mere optimism only which enables his characters to see a ray of hope in the future.

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