

## A Tribute to MulkRaj Anand

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As I think of Mulkraj Anand, what comes to my mind is the unforgettable image of the lost child who in , in his creation in his very story he published in 1927, *The Lost Child* which has gone into the repertoire of great short stories of the world. The hope and desire ,the despair and lostness and yearning for love characteristic of the child in the story are writ large on his vey face, in his sad expression and in the very twinkle of his eyes. The child archetype is present in Bakha of *The Untouchable*, Munnu of the *Coolie*, Ananta, Raliaram of *The Big Heart* Krishan Chander of the *Confession of a Lover* and likewise his other protagonists of his novels. These protagonists find

themselves is trajectory of self-definition through experiences of intense desire, unrelieved despair, inwards loneliness and alienation.

I remember the year when I met Mulkraj Anand along with my friend who was carrying his research project on him. I was with him for half an hour and was a silent spectator; my friend interviewed him. He interviewed him for hardly five minutes. Rest of the time was utilized by this doyen of English Literature. During this observation , he said," I come to writing novel through the conversion from a very smart young brown Englishman in the twenties to becoming an Indian in Gandhi's

Ashram on the banks of Sabarmati. There I learnt to love poor, the disinterested and the voiceless. What I could gather now in this meeting was the rejection for those who had concealed hate.

Looking back on how the words he has written came through in his fiction, I feel that the deeper urgings were from the wish to communicate and be understood, which is essentially the desire to be loved. And if affection is the motive force behind poems one writes, even in prose, then it is from the heart which feels, emphasizes for those who are in pain, often not knowing why they suffer. Those of us who bear the yoke of pity have felt catharsis in compassion.

In the Brihadaranyak Upanishad, a devotee asks the sage: What may do I with my life? The sage answers: Ask yourselves who am I? Where I have come from? And where I

am going? Mulkraj had this kind of quest for realities who was working with the maximum in his mind: "one cannot grow into holiness unless one understands realities and exercises of all the falsities, lies, hypocrisies from one person. It seems to have begun writing a confession to ask himself, who is he?"

There were a million social evils that beckoned the intellectual's attention and creativity was to be tapped into this social purification process. Anand looked upon untouchability as the prime scourge of Indian society. There is renewed interest in the subaltern and the dalit writing in India these days. However, it needs to be remembered that next to Mahatma it was Mulkraj Anand who reached out into the heart of the less articulated virtues of the poor and the lower caste with a sensitivity and genuineness. Anand gestured loudly a

world into being that was peopled by the coolies and the scavengers. Suffice it is to say that he welded their woes and miseries into magic narratives in the language of colonizers. We could perhaps critique the authorial intentions in his work, and even raise questions about his implied upper middle class readers by virtue of the language he chose to write in. And yet in the final analysis Anand remains the novelist of the people of India.

With Anand's *Untouchable*, says M.K.Naik in his recent book, *Twentieth Century English Fiction, the Indian English Fiction* becomes truly experimental in technique. It is a strange fact one could describe Anand's books in such words even after so many years. Fiction and art have undergone much change over the years. And yet that Anand

is still read with sufficient interest goes to prove his value and uniqueness

The achievement of Mulkraj Anand as a novelist in Indian Literature has a three-fold significance. First, he is the forerunner of the protest novel in India and the third world, with the underdog in society at the very centre of the narrative, delineating the suffering of the poor in a colonial situation, projecting the hope of change at hand in terms of desire image. In this respect, his early works become archetypal in nature, ushering in same tradition only not in Indian languages but in other countries of the world too. Secondly, his pioneering work is a significant contribution in the making of English in India a powerful medium for creative expression. Through a dexterous appropriations of English languages and imaginative handling of the European novel,

he meets the formidable challenge of expressing the intractable reality of Indian life through an alien tongue, and emerges as one of the foremost makers of Indian English. The experiment he initiated with partial success in his fiction has been continued with great daring by writers like Raja Rao and G.V.Desani and present day novelists like Salman Rushdie and Arundati Roy.

Thirty, Anand's search for genuine Indianness on the level of form, by incorporating the traditions of moral fable, parable, folktales etc, and by assimilating various other elements of Indian story telling tradition, enable him to try to forge a truly Indian novel form. His novels epitomize his journey towards an Indian form of novel. Indian novel as a genre is today an integral part of the general

tradition of Indian literature rather that of the English tradition.

To conclude, I should say that a writer he could become an authentic voice of a great epoch in Indian history. True, he could not creatively respond to the bewildering configurations of changed reality in post-independence India with the same vigour with which he confronted reality in his early fiction. But his accomplishment, as it entitles him to secure and coveted place in the history of Indian English Literature. He remained a true humanist. In Apology for heroism, he holds" I believe, first and foremost, in human being, in man, in the whole man. He was committed to the ideals of justice, human rights, pacifism, modernity, democracy and socialism and sternly opposed to all forms of religious orthodoxies, fundamentals and pacifism.

And he always kept the fire of hope alive in  
his heart in the midst of all adversity. Let  
me conclude by quoting Anand's ne year  
thought published in the journal of  
literature and Aesthetics:

Men and women grow old if they give up  
their dreams

The soul shrinks when one's ideal shrink

One remains young if one has faith, but

One becomes gray with doubt

Life is in the struggle to live against odds

And to live without concealed faith