

## IMPACT OF M.R. ANAND ON MODERN SHORT STORIES

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### **ABSTRACT**

*It goes without saying that Mulk Raj Anand is one of the key figures of modern Indian fiction in Indian English Literature. In fact, he is a writer of miscellaneous interest. His short stories are quite sizeable in number. From the first volume entitled, *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934) to *Lajwanti* (1966) constitutes a major chunk of his themes and concerns which find a long treatment in his longer fiction. Besides, he has also re-told some fairy tales from Indian oral tradition and has written on the art of short stories at some length. Finally, he edited a selected column of his chosen stories entitled *Selected Stories*.*

*In this paper I would like to focus on some of his well-known stories where the old form of the oral short story and the modern variations in European literature are blended. It is normally accepted that Indian English short story is hardly a hundred years old and small beginnings were made in the latter half of the 19th century and early 20th century. M.K. Naik has rightly pointed out: "... the short story of this first phase is mostly artless in technique. Some of them are simply a re-telling of folk tales and legends, many are anecdotal, and the didactic element is very strong in quite a few of them." Similarly, it is believed that Indian English short story came to maturity during the Gandhian age.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Indian English Fiction, Mulk Raj Anand, Short Story, Anecdotal, Fairy Tales*

### **INTRODUCTION**

It goes without saying that Mulk Raj Anand is one of the key figures of modern Indian fiction in Indian English Literature. In fact, he is a writer of miscellaneous interests. His short stories are quite sizeable in number. From the first volume entitled *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934) to *Lajwanti* (1966) constitute a major chunk of his themes and concerns which find a long treatment in his longer fiction. Besides, he has also retold some fairy tales from Indian oral tradition and has written on the art of short stories at some length. Moreover, Mulk Raj Anand has written more than seventy short stories which have been published in various volumes. In addition, he has retold old India tales in two collections *India Fairy Tales* (1946) and *More Indian Fairy Tales* (1961). He edited a selected volume of his chosen stories entitled *Selected Stories* (1977).

In the present paper I would like to focus on some of his well-known stories where the old form of the oral short story and the modern variations are blended in European literature. It is normally accepted that Indian English short story is hardly a hundred years old and small beginnings were made in the latter half of the 19th century and early 20th century. As M.K. Naik has rightly pointed out:

The short story of this first phase is mostly artless in technique. Some of them are simply retelling of folk tales and legends and many of them are just anecdotal, and the didactic element is very strong in quite a few of them (Naik 14).

Similarly it is believed that Indian short story came into maturity during the Gandhian age (Naik 15).

The renaissance of Indian short story is noticed in the stories of Mulk Raj Anand most prominently. His pet theme namely clash between tradition and modernity is available in his short stories without his main defects of propaganda and emotionalism often found in his novels. To take up a few stories, "Birth", for example, is a remarkable story which presents the agony of Parvati, a peasant woman in an advanced stage of pregnancy. Because of poverty she is compelled to do the hard work of breaking stones and is left alone. But her inner spirit holds her and she manages to do the midwifery work all by herself and the baby is delivered. Assured by the vision of Goddess Kali she resumes work and puts the new born baby in a basket. Further, in the story 'Birth', Anand has brought forward the hardship a peasant woman faces in India. In fact, it presents a young simple peasant woman in an advanced stage of pregnancy. The circumstances in which she delivers a child and the feeling thereby aroused in her is very similar to those of Durga's another peasant woman in the story 'Rice' by K A Abbas. If we comprise both the stories we find a strange co-incidence as both are overcast with gloomies, and in the end we find an ultimate comedy. Thus, "Birth" is a very powerful and moving story and leaves its impact on readers.

Many of Anand's stories are typical to his concerns for the deprived people but "The Lost Child" is different and the symbolic story is in the psychological vein. In fact, this is Anand's finest story; however there is an admirable control of both the material and the expression. It is present in the "Barber's Trade Union", and another story. As far as the story "The Lost Child" is concerned, it was first published as a single story. It deals with a very significant theme, namely, the innocence of a child and his sense of security within a family. In fact, the writer presents the scenes of a village fair. The child is delighted and moves in the direction of the swing but gets lost. Others want to help him with the offers of sweets but the lost child cried out, "I want my mother. I want my father." Again, a man took him to the snake-charmer but he refused to listen to his flute. Then he offered to buy him the bright coloured balloons. But each effort to console him failed. Nothing was as important as his parents. Again Anand's 'The Barber's Trade Union' shows his dire commitment to the lower class society. Further, he writes about the social problems in a caste-ridden society and indicates his friends as entrepreneur and intelligent. In fact, Chandu is the protagonist of the story who falls a victim of the feudalistic society. Once in the story he was called, 'the son of a pig' and was commanded.

"Go away you, wine, go away and wear clothes befitting your low status as a barber."

Thus, if we find mood of despair and emotions of pity in Tagore and Narayan's stories we find Anand's concern to go beyond this and artistically brings forth the rebellious attitude to bring the change.

Anand is also innovative in stories like "Lullaby" and "A Village Idyll" and these stories are examples of Anand's lyricism. He has also worked on some well-known fables and created new ones where the tractor and the machines are associated with the power of darkness and the energy of the monster. Obviously, in the story 'Lullaby', the readers find themselves emotionally attached to the mother and the child. Anand beautifully wanted to evoke pity and kindness towards Phalini. She is a poor mother employed in a quiet factory. She is singing the Lullaby and feeding the machine with jute. Meanwhile, the child in her lap is dead. The mother bursts into tears when she notices this but the whole factory seems to be indifferent and cruel. Thus, the noise of the machines is symbolised as the tragedy and cruelty. In fact, M.R. Anand's

stories are dealt with the tatter and pitiable condition of down-trodden people. He always tried to draw the attention of readers towards the marginalized people through most of his stories.

As for Anand's typical satirical stories, it is enough to say that they contain criticism of rigid customs and exploitation of women. In this context one can easily cite the story "Lajwanti" in which the heroine is condemned to live a pitiable life after a serious accident. This miserable story of Anand depicts the plight of a married woman. She cries out: "There is no way for me... I am... condemned to live..." (Lajwanti 100). In fact, "Lajwanti" is a heart-touching story of a woman who tries to flee to her father's home in order to escape the brutal and sexual advances of her brother-in-law in her husband's house. She is caught mid-way by Jaswant, her brother-in-law, who forces her to return to her husband's house. However, she is briefly rescued by a woman passing by in a jeep who helps her go to her father's house. Obviously, in the story 'Lajwanti', Mulk Raj Anand focuses on a woman's predicament and struggle to find an identity for herself. He beautifully presented the rigid pattern of social relationship and gender biasness inherent in that feudal society. That is why, almost all his stories are liked by ordinary people.

Moreover, the range and variety of Anand's short stories are evinced not only in mood, tone and spirit –but also in locale and characters, form and style. While both the village and the city get almost equal representation, the men, women and children that move through these narratives come from different strata of society. Anand's forms draw upon fable, the parable, the folk-tale, the bardic narrative and sometimes even the well-made story and style look light-hearted and indignant. In fact, Anand is admired for his novels and short stories, which have acquired the status of being classic works of modern Indian English Literature noted for their perceptive insight into the lives of the oppressed and their analysis of impoverishment, exploitation and misfortune. He is also notable in story writing as he was the first writer who introduced Punjabi and Hindustani idioms into English and was a recipient of the civilian honour of Padma Bhushan.

"The Barber's Trade Union" is yet another story taken from his selected short stories in which we have the theme of class, appearance, admiration, respect, control and freedom. The story is narrated in the first person by a young unnamed boy and after reading the story, the reader realises that Anand may be exploring the theme of class. Chandu is the central character of the story and he belongs to a lower caste. In the story he is being judged solely on the fact that both he and his father are barbers. In the story we also find that Chandu is changing his clothes to a style that he prefers. This is also frowned upon by the upper caste in the village. This may be important as those of upper caste may be suggesting that Chandu being of a lower caste has no right to dress as he does. Some readers may find it unusual considering that Chandu is only trying to improve his appearance. However, it is by improving his appearance that others feel threatened and as such alienate Chandu. In this way Anand has tried to show the realities of the society. He observed the pitiable condition of the oppressed and suppressed from very close and expressed it in his stories in an elegant manner.

Apart from it, there is also another story taken from his selected short stories named "The Gold Watch" in which control, innocence, anxiety, disappointment, change and connection are the themes. Srijut is the central character who has to retire, though he does not want to do so. This may leave some readers to suggest that Srijut has no control over whether he should retire or not. In the story Anand may be suggesting that many people due to their position in life have no choice but to follow the path that is dedicated to them by their employer. Anand may also be exploring colonialism and its effect. In fact, not only India was ruled by the British but the lives of each Indian like Srijut were also ruled by the British.

To sum up, Mulk Raj Anand is a born story-teller with a wide range of themes and he justifies his faith in experimenting with the technique of moral short story by blending with old fables in the psychological context. Even though he is a committed writer, his stories are enough to stand on their own merit. He has presented a very true picture of the unjust society prevailing in our country. The exploitation and plight of the poor and helpless people are the major aspects of his short stories. In fact, he is keenly aware that the ancient Indian folk tales, despite it is highly finished form, it doesn't embody modern sensibility. He has evolved a new pattern for his short stories which look quite appealing to readers. Catering to the needs of the modern reader replaces didacticism and allegory by lyricism and generalization of universal truths. He creates a new kind of stories which extend the old Indian form into the modern age. Certainly, he is still alive among us through his memorable stories.

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