

**Mulk Raj Anand's Criticism of the Bourgeoisie: A Re-appraisal**  
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The Subject of literature are almost as varied as life itself. The wider the experience of the writer, the richer and varied are the pictures of life projected by him. In this respect Mulk Raj Anand occupies a unique place among the Indian English short story writers. There is hardly any other Indian short story writer in English. Who has covered such a range of contemporary Indian ethos as Anand has done. His about five score stories exhibit an astounding variety of themes representing the diversity of contemporary social milieu and social realities. His unswerving faith in humanism and large-hearted sympathy for the poverty-stricken and cruelly exploited men and women, have made him discern all those forces which thwart human aspirations and infuse affliction in life. Anand's large thematic spectrum reflects the cr attention uelties and imprudent vagaries of the feudal values and traditions, callous greed for wealth, meanness and sensual lust of the bourgeoisie, hypocrisy and superstitions of the religious priests, savage practices of dowry and 'Sati', woes of helpless women, exploitation of the poor peasants and laborers, arrogance of the British rulers and their inhuman repression of freedom fighters, corrupt mal-practices of government servants and politicians, violence of war and riots, ignorance of rural folk and their aversion to machines and modernity. There is hardly any contemporary social problem of abuse which escapes the notice of Anand's vigilant eyes. However, while focusing attention on the darker side of social reality. He does not gloss over the heroism and sense of dignity of poor young men who protest against their tormentors or endurance of women who face their afflictions with courage or express natural affections of their hearts uninhibitedly. In his fables about animals and lyrical stories bearing on the elemental themes such as birth and death, beauty, love, innocence and childhood, Anand lights up those aspects of life which writers often hesitate to touch because of their complex nature. The range and variety of themes of Anand's stories are thus startling.

Mulk Raj Anand has written many stories dealing with the theme of craftiness, avarice, miserliness, dishonesty, sensual lust and double-dealing of the business-men, money-lenders, contractors, village sahuakars and middle-class people. If the senseless vagaries of feudalism arouse the author's ridicule, the

cupidity, meanness and sensuality of the bourgeoisie arouse his wrath and indignation. With a devastating satire he lashes their shams, hypocrisies and greed for wealth. Among the stories bearing on the theme of bourgeois life are Other Stories), “The Two Lady Rams”, “The Thief”, Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts”, “Appearance and Reality”, “Boots” ( The Tractor and the Corn Goddess and Other Stories),

“Immortality”, “Naina”, “Reflections on the Golden Bed” (Reflections on the Golden Bed and Other stories), “The Price of Bananas”, “A Village Wedding”, Death of a Lady” (The Power of Darkness and Other Stories), “The Brothers”, “The Silver Bangles”, Anjali Hasta” and “Torrents of Wrath” (Lajwanti and Other Stories<sup>2</sup>). In the story”A Pair of Mustachios”, WE have already got a glimpse of the cunning and craftiness of the village moneylender and grocer Seth Ramanand who cheats the vain Kahn Azam Khan of all his possessions to appease his false sense of pride. “A confession” exposes a middle class arrogant lawyer Latif who denies proper wages to a coolie and instead abuse and beats him. His sense of guilt, however, pursues him for he says to his friend:

“And now, I don’t know, but I can see  
that coolie arise from behind my head before  
my eyes, his blood-streaked eyes, bending  
over his joined hands, crying and whining  
and protesting like a black wasp into my ear,  
Whining.....”

The story, “A Promoter of Quarrels”, describes how Lalla Nanak Chand, the greedy, dishonest and lewd confectioner, cheats two cowherd women, Basanto and Hero, who supply milk to him. He mixes water in their milk cans surreptitiously and then changes then for supplying him milk diluted with water. He threatens to hand them over to the police and even creates a rift between them by showing favour to the young cowherd girl Hero whom he had earlier tried to entice to satisfy his lust. Hero sees through the dishonesty of the confectioner and is roused to anger:

Her rage stifled her speech. And she flushed  
an indignant red at the callous and deliberate  
roguery of the Seth and the machinations with  
Which he had built himself a protuberant belly  
and a place in the city, for he himself had  
told her some of the tricks of the trade in  
a moment when he wanted to win her confidence,  
and her body, but the dumbness of generations

of servitude prevented her from saying anything

In spite of the anger and entreaties of the cowherd women, the confectioner sticks to his stand and denies them proper price for their milk. They go away cursing him. “There will be no grief at his death, except among the crows”.

“the two Lady Rams” described sht dilemma of Lalla Jhinda Ram, the contractor who rises from a small shopkeeper to be the richest man of the town. He renders sundry services to the British Empire, In recognition of which he is favored with the glamorous title of knighthood by his Majesty the king Emperor. His Majesty’s benign government. however, does not realize the awful domestic predicament into which they will put him by the conferment of the prestigious title on him for he has two wives, the fifty-year-old sukhi and exactly half of her age old young sakuntala, and both of them claim to be designated lady Ram. The quarrel between the two ladies takes a serious turn when Sir jhinda Ram is invited to the Garden Party at the residence of his Excellency the Governor, on the occasion of investiture ceremony. To the great mental distress of Jhinda Ram both the his wives insist on being taken to the garden Party. Though apparently annoyed at the audacity of his chauffeur, his accepts his suggestion and cuts the Gordian knot by taking both of his wives to the party, where the appearance of the two Lady Rams creates quite a comic situation.

“The Thief” is a fine study of the psychology of a bourgeois character in whom the passions of lust for a beggar woman get combined with feelings of pity for her. Ganesh feels a yearning in his blood as he sees a beggar woman in a park opposite his large house. The slippery pads of her buttocks away before his gaze in zig-zags, as she walks away from the rubbish bin to the steps of the status in the park:

The fascination had been overwhelming

From the start, for the first impression of the triangle formed by her things had made his sensations swift, in a giddy wave.

The very sight of the bare breasts of the beggar maid feeding her child, inflames his body “like a slow forest fire, which comes erupting form the roots like smoke by becomes a wild red blaze suddenly in one crucial moment”. He feels the rustling” of a strange song in his ears, the loom-song of dizzy desire mounting to the crescendo of a titanic choir”.

His hapless passion, composed of pity and desire, keeps tormenting him until he decided upon a course of action which might bring him closer to the woman. He steals a bag of grain from the store (where his brother had hoarded them) while his sister-in-law is in the bath room and the boy-servant, Biju, away in the market. As he is carrying the bag towards the beggar woman, Biju returns from the market. Hiding his embarrassment he asks Biju to give it to the beggars in the

park and cautions him not to disclose his secret. In the meantime, his sister-in-law emerges from the bathroom and starts looking for the storeroom key.

When she makes queries, Ganesh blame Biju for stealing the grain. The poor boy-servant, however, does not disclose the secret, even though he is beaten and dismissed from service, Biju has, however, his revenge on Ganesh for on being removed from service, he turns a beggar and sits very close to the beggar woman. Ganesh has the mortification of seeing them together:

His neck twitched more furiously, and his  
Heavy-loaded eyes blinked as if someone  
Were digging pins into them, especially  
Because he saw the servant boy, Biju,  
Seated by her almost as though he had  
taken complete charge of her.

There is a touch of irony in the title of the story for the real thief is Ganesh and not Biju. It is Ganesh who casts his thief-like glances at the beggar woman persistently. The story also contrasts the poor Biju's honesty and simplicity with hypocrisy and meanness of the bourgeois boy Ganesh.

“Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts” reveals that the greed for wealth makes businessmen hard-hearted and callous not only towards other but even towards their own kith and kin. It also highlights the bitter fact that the real talents of a person can never find their free and full growth in a bourgeois society. Nor, the son of a rich confectioner and chaudhri of the market, who has in-born talents of a poet, is compelled by his cruel and hard-hearted father to take M.A. degree and be a high government officer to add to the status of his father. Though nor becomes a Master of Arts, he fails to get a job because of the lack of proper sources. He gets disillusioned with life and feels frustrated. He becomes consumptive and lies dying on his bed reminiscing over his miserable life. His father who has always scolded and abused him tells him in his unsympathetic tone : “you should try and make an effort to get well, as I can't go on breaking myself to pay the Doctor's fees every morning”. That very evening Nor succumbs to his illness.

“Appearance and Reality” describes the discomfiture of Sir Hasan Ali, the head of one of the biggest carpet manufacturing firms of Amritsar and Vice-President of the local Municipal Committee. After being made a knight Commander of the Star of India, he goes to a trip to England at the age of sixty and gets English dress stitched for the purpose. While on board the ship he strains himself to behave like an Anglicized India. In a boat carrying the passengers ashore to Gibraltar, he is befriended by a suspicious looking South Indian or Ceylonese Samuel Vijayaragavacharia who wins Sir Hasan's confidence by

tickling his vanity and telling him how his (samuel's) friend the Agha Khan has praised Sir Hasan as one of the older Muslim statesmen of Northern India. On reaching Gibraltar Samuel tempts Sir Hasan to visit a Pleasure House in his company. Though a devout Muslim Sir Hasan suppresses his qualms of conscience and goes with his companion to enjoy the company of European Houris.

Next morning when Sir Hasan wakes up from his sleepy stupor he finds himself lying in a side street stripped off his outlandish outfit, passport and whole money. The Spanish gendarme whose help he seeks suspects him to be a rogue and throws the knight commander of the star of India into a dark cellar. An enquiry in the afternoon, however, reveals his identity and he is released. Having lost his jacket and trousers, he feels great embarrassment when he is taken to the house of the Governor of Gibraltar. "His small, humble soul shrank at the prospect of having to keep up appearances again...."

The mock-heroic vein dominates the whole narrative.

"Boots" is the pathetic story of the young widow of a soldier killed in the war. The poor widow Gobindi prizes the artillery boots of her dead husband Jai Singh as her most treasured possession. She keeps them as memento of her husband. Seth Milap Chand, the hard-hearted and callous moneylender, however, deprives her of these boots when her house is auctioned. As Gobindi tries to hide them, the Seth shouts:

"Thies: the daughter of a bitch: what were you stealing from here: open the bundle. and those boots--- my son Gulzari Lal wants those:"

The words stabbed Gobindi's soul and she fluttered under the head cloth like a wounded bird, uttering hiccupping cries and sobbing even as she fell on her bundle.

Written in a mock-heroic vein "Immortality" projects the uproarious chronicle of Sir Chaman Lal, a Barrister-at-Law of the Honorable Society of Inner Temple and ex-Lord Chief Justice of the Oudh High Court, one time Councilor of State and Law Member of the Government of India. Sir Chaman Lal, the son of a poor Brahmin cook in the household of a Sikh lawyer of Amritsar, is a self-made man. As a boy he studies on a monthly stipend from the ardent missionaries. Luck, however, favours him and he rises to high positions one after another. Once as a Vice-President of the Municipal Committee in Lucknow, he gets his statue installed in the little garden by the post office in Lucknow. When he retires and grows old, he thinks of making himself immortal. His quixotic quest for immortality results in his insisting against

the wishes of the people and high officers of the town, on washing every day his own statue to save it from being made dirty by crow and on putting a pair of spectacles on it, as soon as he himself starts wearing glasses though the spectacles get stolen as fast as they are replaced.

“Naina” describes the tension of Naina, a beautiful woman with big black eyes, who has to put up with ever demanding passions of her husband, Prakash, a crude businessman and blackmarketer. Consumed by his open-mouthed lasciviousness Prakash though married to Naina, runs after every woman and any woman who can fall a prey to his sensual desires. His possessive bourgeois mentality makes him crumple Naina in his massive arms and bear her to the bed even when she is emotionally disturbed by the death of a labourer whom she has seen falling down from a high building.

“Reflections on the Golden Bed”, describes the career of Lalla Ram Narain in his steady and expansive pursuit of wealth. Rising from a commoner’s state to the dizzy heights of fortune, he fails to keep his felicity forever. In the course of his business career, he has been, successively, a cloth merchant, banker, and contractor. Every time he faces bankruptcy, he manages to rise like the phoenix from the ashes. However, at times he is burdened with the feelings of unhappiness and deep concern. Hoping to appease his tormented mind, he sees an astrologer who tells him that lust for gold is the cause of his all worries. It is the fear of losing money that is at the root of his sorrow. He is advised to invest his entire fortune in the making of a golden bed, studded with costly jewels. The work accomplishes. Keeping a watch on the golden bed becomes shone, and the rubies filled his heart with new red corpuscles of blood. There was an incomprehensible change for the better in his whole orientation toward existence”. Thieves, However, steal a ruby out of the embossed bed, and his assurance about preserving his wealth dwindles. Intensifying his vigil, he cuts himself adrift from the mainstream of life.

what was he to do? Was there no way by  
which he could ensure the safety of  
Indescribably beautiful monument to his industry  
and pain, his golden, bed in which all his  
Wealth lay concentrated?

He thinks of keeping it safe in the vaults of a bank but fears the bank may fail or the atom bomb in the wake of impending war may destroy it. He then thinks of getting it insured but realized that no Insurance Company in the world will take the risk involved. He at last decides:

No, it is impossible. The only thing to  
do was to keep it under stricter control,

to be more vigilant.....so he began to  
Spend longer hours in bed.

The arrangement continues for a while, but soon his health fails and he is confined to his bed. Eventually, he goes under, meeting inglorious death. Lalla Ram Narain is truly a modern version of king Midas, a symbol of unashamed greed for wealth. The cupidity of the old miser, his fears and torments, and his ignominious death make him a tragi-comic figure.

“The price of Banana” exposes the meanness and miserliness of the businessmen. A seth, class in a white Muslim dhoti, a delicate ‘Lucknow’ tunic, and an embroidered boat cap on his head, comes up towards first class compartment to board the train at the platform of Faizabad station. To his great discomfiture, however, a monkey snatches his embroidered cap and climbs on the neem tree. He tries his best to coax and lure the monkey to retrieve his cap. While the passengers and onlookers on the platform enjoy the fun of the trader’s embarrassing predicament, a fruit vendor throws a couple of bananas before the monkey and recovers his cap. When the vendor asks the Seth for the payment of two annas as the price of his bananas, he reluctantly throws one anna towards him. He pays no heed to the vendor’s entreaties for proper payment. When a passenger asks the miserly seth for paying one anna more, he replies shamelessly: “You don’t know, Sahib, you don’t know these bud mashes; They are in league with the monkey: Bananas are two a pice: Fancy asking for an anna for one rotten banana:”.

“Death of a Lady” is a satirical study of a person’s greed for wealth. It highlights to what a limit a person’s cupidity can go. Even when Lady Bhandari, the central character in the story, is at the point of death, she thinks of nothing else but her buried treasure which does not want to fall in any one’s hands: “They all had their eyes on her one crore.....But she had been shrewd. Neither to the Congress Sarkar would it go in death duties, as the white caps had never asked here to any parties since the British went, nor to those drunken louts who called her ‘old witch, fit for the rubbish heap’”. Suspended between life and death. she alternates between reveries about her treasure and hallucinations of death, Her beloved dog, pluto, whom she has treated like her beloved son: “Pluto...Plootie...Putor, my only sn”, appears to her as messenger from death’s kingdom: “Hey Ishwar, Rabba.....not yet: I pray to you.....Sukhi sandi....what a thought: ja, ja, ja,----go from here....Dog....Dure, dure, kutia:..... you and your master yama, who have come to fetch me”. she desperately clings to life even in the face of death:” Not yet, I have not revised my will”.

Lady Bhandari thinks of the wicked deeds of her husband Ganpati Rai who gave bribes to the white Sahibs and evaded taxes. She, However, prays to God to

absolve her for own role in the dishonest deeds of her husband because being a wife she only tries to protect her husband's interests. Left to herself she says:

“I would have donated a temple as big as  
Birla Mandir, if there had been time but  
thieves, not I...spare me, I pray to you  
on my bended knees....”

Even while dying she does not want the nurse or the doctor attending an hen to be paid more by way of their fees. Her words are:”Give Doctor forty-not sixty”.

In “A Village Wedding”. the filthy money living shopkeeper” Prithvi banya takes away the marriage party of his son from the house of the bride without solemnizing the marriage because he does not get the dowry demanded by him from her father.

“The Brothers”. shows that human relationships do not count in a bourgeois society. A brother does not hesitate to get his own brother killed to grab his share of property to satisfy his lust for wealth. Lalla Lekh Raj who shares a jeweller's shop with his elder brother Lalla Hans Raj, takes the latter to the ayurvedic Doctor, pandit Prakash Shastri, for the treatment of his heart trouble. He is, however not interested in the recovery of his brother for he has an eye on his property. He dreams to reach the pinnacle of glory as a wealthy man and “to be equal to Nanubhai Jeweller and set up a store in Mahatma Gandhi Road...”. Even earlier he had tried to get his elder brother killed in a car accident. How seeing the chances of the possible recovery of his brother by the skilful hands of the Doctor, he tries to connive with the doctor to get his brother killed by his medicines:

“Panditji, do you not believe in mercy—  
I Mean, My brother is suffering so much.... And  
life is not worth living in our house-hold,  
although we have no shortage of wealth...Can't  
you make God call him to himself by some medicine  
which may slowly burn away his pain----and----“

Failing to lure the doctor to his side, he gets his brother poisoned.

In “The Silver Bangles” Shri Ram Goel, a lewd bourgeois character, feels attracted towards an untouchable sweeper girl, Sajani. He often throws his lascivious glances at her and given her small coins of money to entice her. Sri Ram Goel's sexually frigid wife suspect his husband's evil designs and gets jealous of Sajani. one day as she sees the sweeper girl wearing silver bangles presented to her on the occasion of her betrothal by her mother, she accuses her for getting them as a gift from her husband:

get up and go out and don't you come  
into this house again. You have raised your



head to the sky---low people, wearing silver bangles: : : Don't you know that untouchables in the south are not supposed to wear silver at all... And you go posing like a cheap film star.....go, die:'.

The story, “ Anjali Hasta”, describes the sensual passions aroused in a highly educated, England returned young man of middle class society, Sunderlal Misra, as he watches the seductive movements of a devadasi girl Geeta performing a mixed Bharat Natyam and Kathakali dance. Like Ganesh in “The Thief”, he hungers for her body:

He was now sure that, not far from the gaze of the member of the audience, there was, in the caverns of his body, the colour of desire for the girl herself a whisper in the tormented flesh, urging his to wrap her body with caresses.

“Torrents of Wealth” exposes the avarice and hard-heartedness of village grain-seller, Mam Chand Bania. Sukhi, the old refugee cobbler woman, who has lost her son and daughter-in-law in the floods, begs from the shopkeeper few grains for her pets ---a mangy black dog, two coloured sparrows in a cage and a mouse in her beg. When the miserly shopkeeper pays no heed to her pitiful entreaties, she tries to pick grain from his baskets. Frightened of the consequences to his religion by the leather worker's touch, he calls the policeman who hits Sukhi and her dog. The poor famished creatures die of the assault on them. The policeman throws their bodies in flood water.

Anand's humanism inspired him to contribute his own share to the liberation of making and redemption of the world from misery and pain. He therefore decided to be a writer to communicate the truth of human relations and to establish the solidarity of people by connecting them in the bonds of love. He chose fiction as his favorite literary form for it was the most suitable medium to reveal the true nature of man and expose his weaknesses which obstructed his proper communion with his fellow men and checked his growth to higher levels of human consciousness. To convey his world view of humanism more effectively he chose to portray the characters of the lowest strata of India life ---untouchables, coolies, peasants and laborers—as the main protagonists in his novels and short stories. Through his portrayal of the under dog and the exploited members of the society he wanted to prick the conscience of the people and inspire them to work for the alleviation of pain and its expiation.

