

Re-Reading Mulk Raj Anand's Novel "The Road" In The Post-Colonial Perspective**Dr.Sushama****Assistant Professor****Department of English****Govt.Pt.Shyamacharan Shukla College****Dharsiwa****Raipur (C.G.)****(Received:15June2020/Revised:10July2020/Accepted:22July2020/Published:28July2020)**

Abstract

Growing up during the high day of the colonial rule and writing as a colonial and post-colonial, Anand stays close to the multifarious manifestations of this historical encounter. The colonial experience is a live experience to him, and his writing is therefore linked to this theme directly or indirectly. In 'The Road' Anand returns to the theme of untouchability once again though the temporal locale of the text is shifted to post-independent India. In the course of the narrative, the road however acquires a symbolic connotation. It comes to signify journey, progress and development. In a broader social context, it connects the village to Delhi, the epicenter of power. Bhikhu, the protagonist here, is a new avatar of Bakha of the earlier novel. The tragedy is, the society in which he lives has not changed correspondingly to accommodate the likes of Bhikhu or let them live with dignity and self-esteem. The prime objective of the narrative is to give a moral, liberty without equality is incomplete and devoid of substance. Anand clearly suggests that the constitutional legislation alone does not eradicate the social evils. On the other hand an attitudinal change is imperative to bring about real social change. From this novel a history of the evolution of the subaltern in Indian society can be meaningfully formulated.

Key words : Subaltern, Colonial, Post-Colonial, Progress And Development

Mulk Raj Anand's life can be divided into three periods : the early years in India from 1905 to 1925 ,the years abroad ,from 1925 to 1945 ,and the later years in India from 1946 till his death in 2004 .This division is not merely based on Anand's residence but also on his creative output which coincides with each of the above periods. The first twenty years of Anand's life are important because they serve as a chronicle of various environmental situations and family circumstances which have shaped his outlook on life and have directly influenced his work. The next twenty years have been of greater significance because they reveal his ordeals through which Anand has passed to become a writer. Besides ,they are the record of his associations with

eminent writers of the thirties ,his work with the B.B.C., as well as his fight for India's independence on the one hand and fascism on the other. The years following his return to India from England are equally important ; as much light ,love and hope have permeated through his writings during this period. His dedication to the cause of the suffering humanity ,and his active involvement in the social and cultural life of India ,have secured for him an honoured place among the writers of the present ,and perhaps, have ensured his future reputation as well. Born on 12 th December 1905 at Pehsawar ,in the North West Frontier of India (now in Pakistan), Mulk Raj Anand belongs to the traditional coppersmiths and silversmiths of Amritsar. Although , they were born Kshatriyas, the second highest caste, they were considered low because their profession. His father Lal Chand 'redeemed' this situation to some extent, by matriculating and deserting his hereditary profession. He joined the British Indian Army as a head- clerk in the 38 th Dogra-regiment. His mother Ishwar Kaur, a deeply religious woman, came from a sturdy peasant stock. He was the third among the five sons born to them, of whom four survived. As the head of the family was in the service of the British Government, and had to move from one place to another, young Anand got an opportunity to see various aspects of Indian life, and also the life and manners of the Tommies, from very close quarters. He also observed the conflicts between the two diverse cultures .He says: "So I grew up in a hotch-potch world of which I early began to perceive the inconsistencies."1 The British Indian Schools which Anand attended at Nowshera, Amritsar, and Ludhiana presented the Indian tradition in a distorted way, by giving importance to British history they attempted to show everything relating to Indian history and tradition as inferior. This adversely affected Anand, who "early acquired a bias against all indigenous customs and grew up hating everything Indian "2. Anand grew up through the First World War (1914-1918) which did not happen in India but happened to India. The Indian Liberation Movement was gaining momentum, and in a futile attempt to suppress it, the British resorted to unprecedented brutality .By this time Anand had associated himself with Gandhian non-violent movement. It was in 1919 that the vicious Rowlatt Act, which was imposed on the Indians, tried to suppress ,with brutal force ,the protest movement organized by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Anand himself was given seven stripes of cane on his back at Amritsar, for innocently breaking the curfew. There was also the blood-curdling horror of Jallianwala Bagh. The greatest political reality for Anand is perhaps colonialism. His youthful days coincided with his nation's struggle for liberation from oppressive foreign rule; he grew up

amidst turbulence .Born in 1905,Anand saw his country enter its intense phase of the freedom movement when Gandhi returned from South Africa in 1915.Growing up during the high day of the colonial rule and writing as a colonial and post-colonial, Anand stays close to the multifarious manifestations of this historical encounter .The colonial experience is a live experience to him ,and his writing is therefore linked to this theme directly or indirectly. He writes out of an acute social consciousness that is vitally concerned with politics and society, that is ,with the function of power in a given society and its effect on the moral ,social ,cultural and even aesthetic values of the people in that society. He is convinced of the social obligations of a creative writer that hold that art cannot be divorced from its social functions.

Semantically post-colonialism means something that has a concern only with the national culture after the departure of imperial power. But in actual practice, it has to be understood only in reference to colonialism. Like colonialism, post colonialism is a state of consciousness a crucial stage in the continuum of our cultural process and self-awareness. Colonialism involves two types of imperialism –political and cultural .Therefore, myth and history ,language and landscape ,self and ‘the other’ are all very important ingredients of post-colonialism. Post-colonialism as a concept enters into critical discourse in its current meanings in the late 1970s and in early 1980s. Postcolonial may refer to the status of a land that is no longer colonized and has regained its political independence, for instance post colonial India. Post Colonialism pertains to the set of features such as economic, political, social etc. which characterizes these countries and the way in which they negotiate their colonial heritage; the long period of forced dependency had a profound impact on the social and cultural fabric of society.

In *The Road*, published in 1961, Anand returns to the theme of untouchability twenty five years after the publication of his first masterpiece *Untouchable* in 1935. *The Road* is not a revision of *Untouchable* but a different tale. While *Untouchable* is a study in miseries of the adolescent untouchable Bakha, and his aspirations ,*The Road* is a symbolic story about the struggles of the grown up Bhikhu, whose main concern is not only the emancipation of an individual but also of his class as a whole, through to work. The novel owes its origin to Robert Graves ‘ *Good Bye to All That* & *And it still Goes On* as well as to the author’s own shocking experiences of the treatment meted out to the Harijans in Haryana. He writes : “... it was a kind of shock to me when I went to live in Haryana ,twenty miles from Delhi, in the human empire of Jawaharlal Nehru ,to find that the outcastes not only in South India ,but in the mixed north were still

consigned to the limbo of oblivion. There was something tragicomic to me in the fact that the caste Hindus would not touch the stones quarried by the untouchables to make the road, because the stones had been touched by the untouchables. I mentioned this to the great Nehru. He did not believe me. He was quite angry at my mentioning this awkward fact. I said I would prove it to him by showing it to him in the “enchanted mirror “. I therefore pursued the mirror game at various levels of consciousness of the people, concave and convex, involved in this drama of the road. You will notice ,that ,technically ,it is not a straight narrative ,but diversified by breaking through the obvious planes to the impalpable world of feelings of the characters involved ... I therefore ,tried to achieve awareness of the insulted and injured ,by transcending the first “amazement “ through the dialectic of feeling... 3 The symbolic title of the novel was suggested by Ravindra Nath Tagore’s epigraph :

*“He will pass by the road ,
And I wait for him;
Many thorns prick his feet,
He is covered with dust:
And I die of shame ,
Morn and Eve.” 4*

The road stands for the way which leads a man out of the hell he has built for himself to the realization of a heaven of a classless and casteless society, free from the dead weight of custom and superstition .The symbolic and the humanist contents of the novel have the same inspiration and purpose.

The outline of the story goes like this –the people in the village of Goverdhan produce plenty of cattle milk and large amount of vegetables .But selling them to the city, Gurgaon, is a big problem as there is no transportation facility. The government was aware of this serious problem faced by the villagers, and decides to build a road connecting the city to Goverdhan village. The villagers were very happy since the road only can open doors of economic prosperity for them. Bikhu and other untouchables were also happy for getting chance in the road construction. The landlord Thakur Singh who was a exploiter of poor was unhappy with the idea of Bikhu and other untouchables getting employment in the road construction. The upper caste hindus refused to touch the stones quarried by the untouchables. The caste feeling soars up high. But the village headman Dhooli Singh was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi’s teachings and treats untouchables as harijan –the children of God. He with warm hearts invites untouchables in the road construction.

The landlord Thakur Singh gets angry and conspire against Dhooli Singh for his excommunication by the upper castes hindus and the Priest of the village .Sajnu- the merciless son of landlord set the poor untouchables huts on fire. The village headman's son Lachman who was in love with landlord's daughter Rukmani, also supports Sajnu in the crime to please Thakur Singh and winning his trust to be able to marry Rukamani. On the other hand the village headman Dhooli Singh was in sorrow and pain on the devilish act of his son and Sajnu. He generously offered shelter in his house to the victims but his wife's rude attitude towards freely mixing and supporting the untouchables was very disappointing and disheartening .But somehow he passed this fire ordeal and follows his conscious and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. When the government officials come to know about the conflicts and quarrel among the villagers regarding the road constructions and the mishap of burning of untouchables huts by upper caste boys, they realized that instead of connecting villagers together the road is dividing them. They sent an official order which instructs that untouchability is abolished and anyone can be punished by law if practice untouchability. Soon reason prevails over emotion and Dhooli Singh's son Lachman joins the untouchables in road construction. Sajnu also repent temporarily but after passage of few days became same cruel, rude feudal landlord. So the proposals, Sajnu getting marry to Dhooli Singh's daughter Mala and Lachman to marry Rukmani ended due this incident. Meanwhile the construction of the road was completed and the village Goverdhan was connected with city of Gurgaon.Bhikhu and other untouchables contributed in the labour of road construction.But the entire duration was like a war period. Poor untouchables lost their huts and suffered unnecessarily due to age old taboos and prejudices against them. Person like village headman Dhooli Singh emerged as a savior. Boys like Bhikhu decides to leave the village and go to the city where nobody knows his caste. Although to some extent it might seem that Bhikhu is an escapist since he wants to leave the village because he was very unhappy being treated as an untouchable but it's a new beginning for boys like Bhikhu to create their own identity by expanding their horizons of knowledge and experience. While reading the novel the reader can notice the revolutionary personality of Bhikhu from the very first scene .The character of Bhikhu is unique since he not only revolts against the social justice meted out to him but he was fully aware of his own weaknesses such as lack of education and knowledge to stand firmly against the social discrimination. Thats why he tries to find his own space, his own identity in a big city where people are judged and treated on the basis of wealth and influence. The caste system of

small villages is replaced by the class system. Here it is important to remember Karl Marx who stated that the society is divided into two classes : the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’. Bhikhu and other Untouchables of Goverdhan village fall into the second category of ‘have not’ and The landlord Thakur Singh belonged to the first category of ‘have’. Although all wealthy and influential people were not cruel, such as the village headman Thakur Dhooli Singh was kind and generous towards the sufferers. In India where resources are limited and population is very high, money plays crucial role in anybody’s social status. In ancient caste was the important factor for job/occupation so social status was directly linked with caste and the professions were divided and allotted on the basis of one’s caste. After independence from British rule Indian society was changed due to British influence and poverty. It was a long awaited and much needed change. But the village social structures were rigid. So the process was gradual. Slow but steady change brought the new dawn in life of poor people. It is interesting to note the post colonial effects on the personality of Bhikhu.

Bhikhu’s post-colonial rationality : Bhikhu- the protagonist of the novel “The Road “ is a young leather worker. He lives with his mother Laxmi in a village called Goverdhan. He belongs to Chamar caste, the lowest one in the caste hierarchy of Hindu caste system. In the village Goverdhan the Chamars were called untouchables since their profession was to clean the carcass of dead animals and to use the leather to make shoes. The Chamars accepts the lowest position inherently offered to them by the upper caste Hindus. In the beginning of the novel Bhikhu accompanied his mother to visit the village temple. He knew that the upper caste people will not allow them to enter in the temple. But Laxmi insisted that instead of cursing them Bhikhu should love them and then only he will born in the upper caste in his next life .She firmly believed in the concept of rebirth and caste system. She blindly accepts the various notions propagated by upper caste people regarding their superiority over the untouchables. She even tried to inject the same inferiority complex in her son. Bhikhu’s mother was psychologically colonized by the upper caste people –they were the psychological colonizers. But Bhikhu was not ready to accept this mental slavery .As a child of post-colonial India he conveyed his rational views to his mother .As an obedient son he agreed to accompany his mother to visit the temple but as an intelligent human being he firmly rejects his mother’s beliefs regarding their birth in lower caste.

He was aware of the fact that in post-colonial India money occupied the highest position above all. As compared to money belief systems such as caste, low caste –upper caste, religion are of

less importance. He judged the situations on the basis of rationality. He has experienced and felt the power of money while working on the construction of the road. Caste system was gradually abolished in Indian society. These are the effects of post - colonialism. Since the upper caste Hindu people were colonized by the British Rule in India ,they fought the the war of independence and during the process realized the pain and suffering of untouchables whom they have victimized for centuries in the name of lower caste. Its a power game. Those who have the command and control over the resources believes that they are superior and others are inferior to them. The upper caste people were educated , they had wealth ,knowledge and control on society, therefore they propagated that they are the superiors just as British rulers boasted themselves superior to Indians. Thus while reading this novel The Road, the reader come across many situations where the impact of colonialization was seen in the behavioral patterns of Indians. More then 150 years Britishers ruled India and propagated their culture and language as superior to the native tongue an culture. The same exploitation of native lower people was done by some upper caste people. As Bhikhu and other untouchables were experiencing in Goverdhan village. But the age old tradition was breaking due to the various other survival problems such as poverty, unemployment and population explosion. Thus the novel “The Road“ portrays the social reality of post independent India. And we can mark post-colonial impact on the mindset and behavior of its main characters such as Bhikhu and village headman Thakur Dhooli Singh.

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