

## **MULK RAJ ANAND'S PEASANT 'HERO' IN 'LALU TRILOGY'**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A significant part of literary production consists of the rewriting of popular currents or of cultural accounts such as folk tales and myths. These rewritings may take the form of dedicated praise or of critical evaluation. But either way, such acts of literary remembrance contribute in a very specific manner to the ongoing debates and contestations within the political space, especially when the atmosphere is of instability and conflict. By utilising fiction to comprehend the working of politics, this paper intends to locate the archetype of the Jungian 'hero' in Mulk Raj Anand's 'Lalu trilogy', comprising of 'The Village' (1939), 'Across the Black Waters' (1940) and 'The Sword and the Sickle' (1942). It presents the idiosyncrasies of the journey that according to Jung, the hero undergoes, as he strives to achieve the fullest possible consciousness of his personality. This journey, it is emphasised, is analogous to that of the protagonist Lal Singh in Anand's trilogy. The objective is to understand the psychology implicit in the layers of fictional texts, which in turn helps us ease our way into making sense of the political churning in Indian society during the 1930s and 1940s.

**KEYWORDS** - Fiction, Archetypes, Hero, Individuation.

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## INTRODUCTION

The central premise of this paper is that literary texts offer an ingenious means of studying politics - that they open more avenues towards understanding key moments in history than traditional social science methods. They are a storehouse of rich and sophisticated knowledge, embodying truths about a plethora of central social phenomena. Even when fiction writers give a realistic view of the life around, the way they fictionalise these forms of life enables us to approach it from a specific point of view that makes the presented reality constructed purposefully rather than as understood traditionally. Consequently what has been presented does not seem as important as how it has been presented. It highlights the fabricated nature of the reality depicted and tends to make these writings a politically symbolic act. Moreover, a work of fiction is inextricably bound to the social, historical and cultural context in which it is created. A writer belongs to a community, shares a collective space with it, and often deals in his fictional works with a past pregnant with meaning and one that still impinges on the present. Fiction therefore establishes a 'memory of its own' and in the process, preserves the past in the form of narratives (Lavenne, F., Renard, V., Tollet, F., 2005). It acts as a window into the machinations of history and its association with politics. And it is in this manner that fiction facilitates access to the tension and tumult of the momentous events in a nation's history.

To complement the above argument, this paper will utilise the percepts of Analytical psychology as espoused by Carl Jung to understand better the suggestiveness of literary representation, and the forces motivating it. The emphasis here is that human beings have an 'archetypal predisposition' towards certain images and symbols, which are articulated through the fruits of our creative labour. One such archetype is that of the Jungian 'hero', as exemplified by the character of Lal Singh in Mulk Raj Anand's trilogy. This archetype, when examined alongside the contextual political occurrences of Anand, enables us to interpret the events that occurred during the momentous decades of 1930's and 1940's on a much expansive horizon.

## THE JUNGIAN ARCHETYPE OF THE 'HERO'

With the intent of tracing the political and psychological underpinnings of the fictive exercise, this section will explore the concept of 'archetypes' derived from the work of Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung. Jung made the assertion that human personality is primarily organised through archetypal structures. Archetypes, according to him, constitute the framework of the collective unconscious - they are instinctive inclinations to events happening around us (Jung, 1981, Vol.9). They represent a reservoir of knowledge that we inherit upon birth. And yet we can never be directly conscious of them. They are embedded as abiding patterns in the human psyche that become more and more powerful with our evolution.

Archetypes in the collective unconscious manifest themselves through archetypal images - in cultural and religious doctrines, in dreams, visions, literary texts, cinema, etc. These may exist, to

use Jung's terminology, in the 'collective unconscious' or the 'objective psyche' of people, or may even be embedded into the configuration of the human brain. They might seem profound, poignant and universal and can be observed in dreams, art, literature, and myths. We can also observe archetypes when we look at our own lives and the lives of the people surrounding us. By scrutinising what we do and how we understand what we do, we can identify the archetypes that pervade our surroundings. One such archetype, deciphered easily even in our daily lives, is the archetype of the Hero. This section will entail its brief explanation.

For Jung, the archetypes appear as part of the larger project of unravelling of the plan of 'individuation' for each individual. Individuation involves the attainment of the fullest possible consciousness of one's own personality, and it is approached in a steady, honest, and demanding self-disciplinary manner (Jung, 1981, Vol.8). And the basic pattern of such individuation is epitomised in the Hero's journey. He continually struggles to discover his own emerging identity, in the face of inner conflict - love and duty, trust and suspicion, hope and despair. To quote Jung, "The hero's main feat is to overcome the monster of darkness: it is the long-hoped-for and expected triumph of consciousness over the unconscious" (Jung, 1981, Vol.9, 167). The hero's job is to assimilate all the disconnected parts of himself to become a true Self, which he can then appreciate as part of the whole.

Some of our earliest images and motifs of the hero come from Greek and Roman mythology. Jason and the Argonauts, Caecus and Hercules are prominent examples. Besides there are also characters like Beowulf, Frodo from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* series, and Harry Potter from J.K. Rowling's series of the same name, that provide us with a clear outline of the archetypal pattern of the hero and also an illustrative map of our own journey. Mythologies of the hero are also expressed in comic books and superhero films such as Superman, Batman etc. Most of these heroes exhibit goodness, benevolence, honour and probity. They are often alone in the world in one way or another and may have encountered significant loss. They struggle against negative and evil forces, so as to restore stability, peace and fairness in the world. Each of these characters exemplifies righteousness and justice, and they must face a series of misfortunes and difficulties in order for these virtues to prevail in the world.

The understanding and portrayal of the Hero's traits is different in different cultures. For example, in English culture the hero will be the epitome of self-restraint, a perfect 'knight', whereas in another culture, such as Greek, the hero will be a genius of artifice and deception, a 'trickster' like Odysseus. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the hero is one of the most enduring and pervasive archetypes in our society. It has been in vogue for a long time and seems fated to be around for a long time to come. This is because there is something ubiquitous about the hero archetype. We all have an inner hero and we are all possibly on a journey through life that in many ways resembles the journey of the hero. Perhaps this is why the hero makes an appearance into so many of our movies, music and books.

Any culture's depiction of the hero tells us about what attributes are seen as exemplary, virtuous, and true, and thereby give us an insight into culturally valued aspirations. In the context of our

particular project, we can propose that maybe, through this archetype of the peasant as 'hero', Anand was projecting certain traits that he deemed indispensable in a revolutionary Indian during his times. For him, fiction became the site where he could successfully convey his message without resorting to didacticism. Anand was perhaps trying to provide a common frame of reference to his countrymen, laying out for them a blueprint of the necessary personality traits and ideals, which were the need of the hour in the 1940's. He was inspired by the zeal of turning fiction into something more than mere fantastical stories. An attempt will be made in the next section to locate this archetypal motif of the Hero - driven towards overcoming obstacles and achieving certain goals - in Mulk Raj Anand's 'Lalu Trilogy'.

#### THE SWORD AND THE SICKLE : LAL SINGH'S JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY

Anand's three novels written between 1936 and 1941 - *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) - designated as the 'Lalu Trilogy', aptly reflect the turmoil of an eventful phase in Indian history. Though weaved around the central character of Lal Singh, each novel forms an entity in itself. Conceived during one of the most tumultuous periods in India's history, this fictional series carries within its narrative structure the anxiety and apprehensions of the decisive events of the era. The trilogy attempts to reveal the deepest truth of social reality by highlighting the underlying trends of the progress of social life. It traces the life of an individual searching for a different India, an India free of exploitation, suffering, and classism. This is achieved by showing a transition in the political landscape of Indian villages through the space of three novels - firstly, the village that witnesses the steady decay of old values of the pre-capitalist phase of India's rural life and the tragic ruination of the peasantry. Then, the village that reluctantly partakes in an inescapable war. And furthermore, the village that eventually sees the emergence of a new consciousness and advancement of peasants in rebellion against the oppression by local landlords and imperialist powers (Rajan, 1988). Anand is touched by the hardships of the peasantry and portrays his characters with the deepest humanism. He delineates his protagonist in active engagement with the environment and, through his adventures and encounters, unfolds the history of a whole society.

Lal Singh, the hero - also known as Lalu - is around seventeen at the beginning of the first book - 'The Village' and twenty four towards the ending of the third - 'The Sword and the Sickle'. In a way the trilogy is a tale of the experiences of Lalu during this period of seven years, its scope is so vast that it embodies the major historical shifts of the age as well as the significant determinants of the sociopolitical life of the era. The first book of the trilogy, 'The Village', unfolds both the beauty as well as the misery of the peasants' life in Nandpur, a village in Punjab. It depicts how Lal Singh is embroiled in a relentless struggle against the ruling forces of the peasant society, viz. the landlord, the moneylender and the priest, who are the living representatives of a fading, old order. The fight is so much beyond hope that he takes off from the village and enlists in the British Indian Army.

‘Across the Black Waters’, the second book, begins with Lal Singh's regiment arriving at Marseilles and ends with him being taken captive as prisoner of war by the Germans at Festubert. Lal Singh's harrowing encounters brought about by the savageness of trench warfare, and his exposure to a civilization so far removed from home help to turn into a more mature person with a sharper insight and greater wisdom. He thus effortlessly fits into the new role of leadership that lies ahead for him in the third book, ‘The Sword and the Sickle’.

In ‘The Sword and the Sickle’, Lalu returns to India in 1918, weighed down from his war experiences, and discovers that his land has been confiscated, receives more shocking news about domestic tragedies, and sees that there is turmoil everywhere. He commits himself passionately to the task of organising the peasants by joining the insurrectionist group led by Count Rampal Singh. This pursuit lands him in prison, but the vision of the revolution still tempts his soul. Anand has endeavoured to exhibit the living portrait of an era in all its richness and diversity. It is the story of an individual, of a society, of a nation and a civilisation - all in a state of flux and reflux.

While analysing Anand's rendering of the peasantry in the three novels, we must keep in mind how deftly he has adhered to the classic Jungian archetype of the ‘hero’ through the character of Lal Singh. Through him, Anand has demonstrated that in order to work towards a revolution, the individual should first of all strive for self-control, giving up one's own desires and vanities. He should learn to love and really understand others before any radical venture can be initiated. Along with mastery over oneself, the creation of a feeling of camaraderie and solidarity is imperative. In the novel, Lalu's singular focus is on overcoming barriers and achieving his goals. He recognises that in order to present an unyielding confrontation to tyrannical forces, he must unite with the other peasants. Lalu is conscious of his flaws, accepts them humbly and promptly moves on to rectify them. This is the true quality of the Jungian ‘hero’.

At the end of Anand's trilogy, Lal Singh braces himself to begin a new phase in his revolutionary life. After attempting to reject his peasant heritage, he returns to it, acknowledging that it is a vocation marked by resilience. He comes back to the farming community with the experience he has gained and sets about to work for social change. He furthermore rejects the binaries of ‘intellectual’ and ‘peasant’, for he “recognizes that rural reforms must come from within a community, not imposed from outside, for outside solutions are merely another form of colonialism” (Highfield, 2009, p.129).

The story of Lal Singh as a revolutionary develops through four stages. The first period is marked by the juncture when war is taking place. It deals with Lal Singh's attitude towards participation in the war, his capture by the enemy and his release. The second phase pertains to Lalu's return to his village. The third phase marks Lalu's involvement in the agrarian agitation. The last phase is Lalu's imprisonment, when he has epiphanies about his future and how he could strive to serve his community. This journey of Lal Singh, is the quintessential journey of the archetypal ‘hero’, as delineated by Jung.

## CONCLUSION

Fiction, by its very nature, offers a multitude of perceptions to approach an event or memory. Anand has shown us, through his novels, how fiction can emerge as an insightful medium, well equipped to expose the silent and anonymous forms of class struggle which typify the peasantry. His work has a narrative texture which blends together history, culture, geography, religion, and rituals, all making a bold exploration of the fate of humankind. He has deftly set forth the manner in which social critique can be vocalised through literature, and in particular how it outlines a literary view from below, the attitudes of the lower orders of society, the subalterns, as epitomised in the journey of Lal Singh.

By utilising the novel as an avenue, he has categorically tried to pose an alternative way of looking at the peasants as a revolutionary force. In doing so, he has also brought to life the image of the Jungian 'hero' through Lal Singh. The purpose of incorporating the concept of 'archetypes' into this paper was to explain how certain Jungian archetypes, having universal validity, can be traced in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand and utilised thereby for a better grasp of the context in which he was writing. Jung opined that the hero symbolises man's unconscious self. And so, by placing Lal Singh with the potentiality that determines a hero's stature, Anand has tapped into the unconscious prospects that the peasantry - as a totality - possesses. He has provided us with a medium to understand the machinations of their class, that could not have been accessed through traditional sources only. It cannot be denied that the infinite possibilities of the imaginative medium enabled Anand to take his projection of the peasantry a step further than most social science interpretations. The inherent innovativeness of the creative form privileged the projection of archetypes of the collective unconscious in a manner which has higher penetrability than any social science text.

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