

THE RISE OF NEW WOMAN IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S FICTION:

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ABSTRACT:

Modern women seem comparatively highly enlightened and a bit more awakened than ever, of their basic rights which were denied to them long ago in a patriarchal society of India. Today, out of their sheer potential, talent and a better sense of understanding women seem doing exceedingly well almost in all walks of human progress viz - education, job, social service, science, technology, mass media, fine arts, politics, films and to a great extent in some particular games and sports too. This change is visibly not abrupt, sudden and accidental as women have bravely fought against this for centuries amidst all rigid taboos and stereotypes. Briefly speaking, unlike the dark ages, the new woman clad with and trained in new ideas, cultures, philosophies impressions and impacts, is no longer ready to give herself up to her perpetrators.

Keywords: new women, patriarchal, stereotypes, dark ages, philosophies, taboos, impacts and perpetrators

Introduction: Mulk Raj Anand undisputedly enjoys an unrivalled fame as an Indo-Anglican novelist writing in English. Being a prolific writer, he writes superbly on all topics, subjects and matters around him in a swift changing world. The novelist's deep knowledge of and a keen insight into women's lives from across the world has cemented his belief against their traditional rustic image portraying them as weak and subordinate beings. To break the antique myth and many other hypothetical assumptions which constraint women and limit their way but to a household choir, Anand empathically foretells a change in place for them.

What he tends to assert is that today's woman is totally unwilling to suffer, surrender and to weep helplessly? Instead, she is extremely bold, assertive, rebellious, thoughtful, and patient and outspokenly frank in her decisions towards the attainment of a higher goal. Anand's female protagonists under the growing impact of modernity and all its wonders are promptly able to grab the opportunity like a finessing matador. They are very ambitious and have their own aspirations, likes and dislikes to the best knowledge of their mind. Among the other impacts women have aptly undergone these days, Diane Richardson and Robinson in their jointly published book entitled "Introducing Gender and Women's Studies" points out, "woman have no longer to see motherhood, heterosexuality and marriage as the only possible life style and myths portraying happiness as being confirmed within these parameters now exploded." (1972 P, 223)

The aforesaid statement by the critics regarding women seems to invoke a logical discretion as how they at times assume a fierce form to save their existence. Caste, status or one's social background are not merely the sufficient factors which could decide one's true nature. Low heraldry cannot, of course, check one's courage. Rich people often mistakenly forget that the poor too have their self respect, dignity and honour.

Sohini, Leila, Janki, Maya, Draupadi and Gauri are some of the finely crafted women characters of Anand, who typically represent an echo of change in a rotten and traditional social set up fostered and nurtured by the ghost of male chauvinism. Anand's depiction of Sohini in his first celebrated novel *Untouchable* is a revolutionary step in this regard as it elegantly depicts how a low caste sweeper girl shows her real strength and timely presence of mind in dealing with a grim problem of sexual attempt at her chastity by the predator, Pt. Kali Nath, priest of a temple. On seeing her "Sylph like form" as she physically appears to be, no one can guess, she can protest and fight back a difficult moment. But the way she does it all brilliantly through her denial to the amorous intents of Pandit Kalinath is really very commendable and appreciating. The vivacious sister of Bakha, the adolescent Sohini is temperamentally very simple, gentle, mock and kind hearted. But meanwhile, she is equally strong, bold and courageous either. If the bold girl had not shown her courage well in time, the shameless priest of the temple, a born hypocrite, where she had gone to work, could have done even much worse to her. The factual study is an evidence of how young women have hitherto transformed themselves extensively over the time. This also clearly indicates that only assertive persons can take such a bold and frank initiative by overcoming a perplexed ordeal confronting them unexpectedly. Sohini's overt confession to her brother Bakha "he teased me. And then when I was bending down to work he came and held me by my breast" is a revolutionary step taken by her which was almost impossible in the mid 20th century colonial India. This so happened at the time when women were not expected to open their mouth and opposed to any such maltreatment, assault or an attempt of rape set against them by their alleged molesters. Thus, through her protesting zeal and a daring personality, she typically represents those who like herself tend to do something remarkable for their existence amidst of hectic circumstances. K.N. Sinha in his renowned book "Mulk Raj Anand", comments, "like the hero, she is simultaneously a rebel and a victim. Her anguish becomes our anguish her sorrow our sorrow" (1972 – P 25)

Human soul cannot be suppressed beyond a certain limit. When water begins to splash from over head and things become quite unbearable, there comes a time the victim sharply reacts to the hostile environment seemingly thwarting her existence. And then a state of rebellion starts with an access to the embittered feelings like jealousy, antipathy followed by a long series of repressing conditions amongst people within a family. In a male dominated society of India, women's role in the house mainly remains proscribed and largely minimal. They are meant to perform only the household chores, and face several inhuman acts like- shoe beatings, a long harangue of filthy invectives, threats, slaps, jealousy and other severe maltreatments from the heads of the family including husbands and in-laws. A tradition wife is fairly expected to bear all this demurely. But in case if she does dare to oppose, she is very much likely to face dire consequences. However, over the last few decades and with the rise of several organizations, commissions and forums pleading

for women, such incidents have seen a tremendous downside. Now for a woman to get marriage is not just a ceremonial toy and a sweet pastime of some happy moments. Instead, she regards it more as an opportunity for her emancipation progress and an exposure hitherto deny to her longer. A husband's egocentric behaviour and the inappropriate conduct by in-laws can become a cause of divorce or separation.

Gauri in Anand's novel named after its protagonist is one such daring wife, who successfully comes out of her customary image and blows a bugle of protest against a corroding domestic violence and an ill-treatment meted out to her by her drunkard husband and her nagging mother-in-law, Kesaro. Slammed by the derogatory epithets such as "a whore from Piplan", 'a filthy woman', a sweeper woman shameless,' by her jealous mother-in-law, the young bride, despite being an illiterate and rustic takes up bold initiatives, finally holds Kesaro's hair bun and thrashes her out of door into the street. For, she has no hope left anymore from her bully husband. He beats her up severely at the fake allegations of his mother. Newly wed-brides are generally supposed to bear such acts silently as doing a protest means their expulsion and an ostracization followed by an impending sharp reaction. But Gauri, unmindful to any such recuperation, slaps Panchi with a tag of warning, "if you strike me again, I will hit you back". (P- 236) Moreover, she leaves him and goes to Dr. Mahindra's hospital and becomes a nurse there. A timid woman in her would have chosen her family again and again despite humiliations. But instead, Gauri chooses a profession to become self-dependent both economically and socially. It gave her an identity; a status and a secured background, the dreams of every beginner. Even a storm of torments can be copped with if one puts a certain amount of courage and the least of one's strong will to fight back .here, Gauri presents a lesson of sheer strength to other victims like herself, who fall prey to the acts of domestic violence and have no way out for recovery. Her protest is not but against Panchi's constant bullying nature. Simultaneously, it raises a question mark on the patriarchal system which promotes male chauvinism by putting women secondary to men almost in all categories of the term. A.N. Krishna Rao in his book "The Indo Anglican Novel And the Changing Tradition", admires Gauri for her revolutionary and innovative zeal,

"On the contrary, she emerges as a new woman holding aloft the torch of a certainly hopeful future". (1972 , P- 40)

Women in Anand's fiction do not merely revolt against their molesters, sexual assaults and customs of patriarchy. They also show disgust towards outworn traditions, rotten taboos and the rigid customs of the past. Veil Pratha, joint family system and confinement within the four walls of a house. They need, instead, an exposure and freedom so that they can be able to live freely and fulfill their aspirations of life. The beautiful world around thrills them and through its unbearable wonders and enchantments attracts them beyond a retreat. Young women have some dreams, desires and a few souring ambitions which they try to fulfill either through a job, education or through their marriage to someone most capable in letting them feel uplifted in terms of everything comfortable and dignified. Draupadi portrayed by the author in his autobiographical novel entitled 'Seven Summers 'A Memoir , is such an innovative bride , who has an insatiable quest for a better and opulent life. A clerk's spoilt daughter and fortunately married to a medical student, Harish, she is more modern than being a traditional wife. She is most visibly a sophisticated woman .Her aesthetic view that life is to enjoy at its best seems to give her thoughts a momentum by which she

rejects and thwarts everything that is customary and conservative in nature. The result is that she does not want to live in a joint family venture. Her constant refrain that 'I want my husband' promotes a nauseating state of unrest and disharmony within the whole family. Harish too has been done his medical course and so she must wait him a little until he finishes his studies and comes back home to stay with her. But instead of having any patience and wait, she spreads bitterness and turns the entire household into a living hell through this childish demand of hers. That is, to get back Harish as soon as possible so that she could quench her desires.

Back in those leisurely days' people had enough time for each other. They were more co-operative and believed in the principle 'live and let others live'. Since values mattered more than money to people, it was not a busy and a hectic schedule in one's life replete with a mounting tension, jealousy, malice, hatred, pride and prejudice. But the growing materialism and its inevitable impact on life, everything underwent a sea change. Relations become distant and sympathy, mutual love and respect were replaced by an insatiable thirst for money. There was a time when the whole family would be an inseparable entity in which all the members including man, women and children live happily together. But with Draupadi's open demand to live alone with her husband, Harish, far from the family circle, seems befitting to clearly indicate that old family values are now nearly on brink of collapse. Since the new surge of modernity has crushed and devastated nearly everything to its lowest point, no expectation can be made from people to be more civilized. The words below spoken by Draupadi reminds one of a changed attitude women have undergone these days.

"I want my husband and I cannot wait while he finishes college. Get him a job and give him to me". (P- 67)

Who could have dared to speak such bold words in those times? But this is again the growing impact of modernity on women that they have now started thinking and speaking freely and extensively. Doesn't it sound a little awkward when Draupadi speaks so overtly without any inhibition? Only a rebellious and a more daring woman can be able to articulate like that. Living with her husband happily after marriage is the first prerogative of every bride which no one can snatch it away from her. Thus, after having seen Draupadi's aggression and her assertiveness, it is quite appropriate to say that "no newly married girl in the whole of Hindustan could have outraged the limits of modesty by so open a demand like this" (P-68) Here, Draupadi's mention and the way she reacts becomes a unique case of study because in those days women's speaking so openly against the tenets of a rigid family would have sounded a little bit more awkward. It also seems breaking man's age old myths about women that they are comparatively weak and subordinate to men. Koren Horney's idea in his book entitled "Feminine Psychology" is remarkably notable in this context,

"men have certain fixed ideologies concerning the nature of woman that woman is intimately weak, emotional, enjoys dependence, is limited in capacities for work, even that woman is masochistic by nature" (1967-P,231)

the new women in Anand's novels aspire not only to economic and social freedom, but in terms of their sexual desires too they tend to have complete independence. Nearly across the world women do not feel safe for themselves at their place of work where they face several kinds of threat perceptions regarding their chastity, modesty and self-esteem. They are touched without

consent and if they try to open their mouth to oppose the sinful act, they are most likely to face even much worse consequences from their predators like bosses and owners. But the recently launched "me too" movement by awakened women from different professions and segments of society is a hopeful step forward. It means that up from all fears, doubts, speculations and stigmas, today's enlightened women would vehemently oppose to the ghastly amorous intents and crafty designs adopted by their alleged perpetrators. Figured out in Anand's book "Two Leaves And A Bud", Leila is such a daring and young teenaged girl. Although she is a peasant's motherless daughter and is illiterate and rustic too, yet she is an emblem of a protesting nature. She works with her father, Gangu at a tea estate in Assam like a free bird unmindful and quite ignorant of the feigned antics of the murky world. But this freedom of her is soon crushed by the incorrigible rogue and molester, Reggie Hunt, the owner of the plantation. One day by taking the opportunity in his favour as Leila is alone "plucking the tea leaves", he like a hungry bull, attacks her with a malicious intention of sexual onslaught. To save her chastity, she escapes the site. However, in the tussle that follows afterward, she loses her father who falls prey to Reggie's cruel bullets. But she does not let Reggie come near herself. This is again a bold act of self-manifestation.

Leila's timely response to the imminent peril she was about to risk herself in and thereby being able to save herself from the worst is enough to tell about her. She fights unto the last and sets an example of an exemplary courage, motivation, inspiration and sacredness. Reggie is an omnipotent devil. He is challengeable authority and a namesake of dread and fear by himself. He is rich and extremely spendthrift, who can do anything, can adopt any measure to woo over a woman's favour. And winning the young beauty at the cost of money and muscle power would not have been a herculean task for him. Yet still he fails to execute his crafty designs into action. This elegantly shows that like Gauri, Sohini and other women protagonist of Anand, Leila stands triumphant through all temptations and attempts. However, it is also interesting to note that Anand through Leila and similar other bold women characters tends to register his own surging protest and boiling anguish against the then entire British establishment in charge of the Tea Estates in Assam, where acts of sexual assaults and molestations were commonly widespread. Also, Leila's anecdote presents a brave story of how she fought and saved herself from the brutal clutches of Reggie Hunt. The young girl of her age would have hardly been able to liberate herself from the curse of patriarchy. The novelist In the reported journal "Monthly Review Press" corroborates the fact more clearly,

"The whole revolt of women in the world is an assertion of the feminine principle, which men have neglected and ignored and suppressed". (1973- P, 10- 12)

Tennyson once said "old order changeth, yielding place to new". This seems casting its effect well in recent times. People should not be victimized for the rotten customs which could have been wiped out earlier. Love marriage and widow re-marriage both were considered as immoral and indecent acts. And patriarchal society would never allow this choice to flourish and nourish. But before one good custom should corrupt the world, it is better to rise on time against its spread. Elopement is still deemed by many as an unsocial act. And the persons involved in this arbitrary activity are either boycotted socially or are burnt alive or they have to face the horror of honour killing.

Even parents quite often leave their loving offsprings to their fortune. Nonetheless, despite these

and more restrictions some women remain unmoved and wish to go ahead fearlessly. Besides, amidst some hesitations, rumours and speculations, they also begin to oppose the traditional code of arranged marriage, appearing in a new journey of life hitherto quite unimaginable in a tabooed society. Daughter of a reputed landlord, Harbans Singh of Nandpur village in the North-Indian state of Punjab, she prefers elopement to a forced customary arranged marriage because she loves her bold fiancé. Lal Singh, a war hero and runs away with him. This way, Maya is a staunchly revolutionary as she not only thwarts concept of forced marriage in which she is thrown by her proud parents against her sweet will, but also brutally kills her first husband to live like a free bird with the person she loves more than herself.

The brutal act of honour killing is not totally acceptable and can not be allowed in a civilized society. But it also parents a lesson that girls ought to be asked about their choice well before they are forcefully thrown into any marriage against their will. Only a great novelist like Anand could have provided his readers with such an amalgamation of mixed reactions in his literary works. Premila Paul in her outstanding book "The Novels Of Mulk Raj : A Thematic Study," observes, "He talks of the Indian society caught up in the march of evolution and subjects to pressures both conventional and contingent." (1983 – P, 8-10)

The bugle of change heralded by Sohini, Gauri, Leila and others is further carried over by Janki, a woman character figuring out in Anand's novel "The Big Heart," she too sharply revolts against the established social codes. Being a non-conformist by nature, the bold heroine of Anand is very open-hearted, outspoken and immensely frank in her decisions and manners. She openly lives with Ananta without a legal marriage, even unmindful of any social condemnation for this brave act of hers. An inflexible society considers the unfortunate state of widowhood as 'defiled' and 'ominous'. Consequently, the helpless widows become subject to an endless saga of miseries and sufferings. But Janki, instead of feeling any such state of anxiety and melancholy, to be condemned, doomed, lonely and forlorn, she unhesitatingly prefers to go for a second marriage and chooses Ananta as her life partner through an open live in relationship. In those days during colonial India such daring acts were but rarely heard found. Fighting set stereotypes and all its horrors is normally uneasy. Only a few innovative people have the courage to do so. But Janki takes the initiative despite being a patient of dreadful tuberculosis. It is, finally, her strong nerves which determine her triumph over the cruel world and its malicious people around her. Hence, to quote K. N. Sinha's words that 'her frailty has beneath it a reservoir of strength' is a befitting explanation in this context.

What makes the above discussion so relevant after having the fact based study is that women in Anand's novels come under a heavy sway of growing modernity. Unlike the hazy past they are now more prompt, aggressive, and repulsive and awakened than ever. Nothing prejudiced or rotten can check their way out as like a committed explorer they are most likely to go to any extent to efface themselves and doing their possibly best in terms of everything they wish to attempt. What comes out after a serious debate here is an optimistic sign for women of 21st century India.

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