

Anand's idea of Education in Untouchable and Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts

Molla Hafizur Rahaman (W.B.E.S.)

Department of English, Jhargram Raj College, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal

Abstract: *None can deny the importance of true education. Without education nation cannot progress and prosper. In the colonial period education was cunningly given to the children of upper caste and lower castes were not given chance to enter the yard of schools. After independence the situation does not change remarkably. My aim in this paper is to show how Mulk Raj Anand criticizes prevalent education system in his major novels Untouchable and Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts.*

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“Among the Indo-English novelists” observes Anniah Gowda, “Mulk Raj Anand is the most conspicuously committed writer”. As a writer Anand was shaped in the Thirties when several problems bogged the intellectuals. The problem that Anand tried to face as a writer was not strictly a private, but a private-public problem. As it was, Anand found it impossible to maintain aloofness from politics in the post World War Europe. Anand stayed in London for over two decades, from 1924 to 1945, so he was quite naturally greatly influenced by the Progressive Movement in Literature that flourished in Thirties. According to the Progressive writers the Chief function of literature was to mirror and ventilate the hopes, desires and the heart-rendering fundamental troubles of the totalling masses and ultimately assist in the formation of socialist society. The writers of Progressive Movement were responsible for making social realism and tendentious literature of revolt fashionable in both Europe and America. One of the most notable consequences of this movement was a growing reaction of the aesthetic theory of “arts for art’s sake”. Anand has perceived, from the very beginning stages of his awareness of the human predicament, that the writer cannot estrange himself in an ivory tower, he cannot stand on a high perch, but he has to venture into the fierce and raging storm itself, to be with the people to align himself with their countless sorrows and sufferings and their little joys. The main aim of his novel, according to Anand, is to change mankind, and through mankind society. In the choice of themes, therefore, Anand is unquestionably, an innovator. He is the first novelist writing in English to choose as his raw materials the low-class life of the depressed Indian masses. He does not hesitate to turn the floodlight on the darkest spots in Indian life. In his novels, he portrays the doomed lives of the have nots and marginalized. His protagonists – sweeper, a coolie, a peasant, gentle and calm girl- are all victims of exploitation, class-hatred, race-hatred and inhuman cruelty. Anand like Lawrence, Gorky, and Eric Gill, believes that the work of a genuine noble creative writer is inspired by a mission. Anand appears to be in full agreement with Victorian stalwart Mathew Arnold’s dictum that literature at bottom is the criticism of life. He is strongly committed to his creed. His fictional world depicted not the feudal splendors and mysticism of traditional Indian literature, but the hard and suffering lives of the millions of his countrymen. In all his novels Anand appears as a social critic. His writings probe deeply into the social process. Anand’s realism is seen in his portrayal of all aspects of life. He does not eliminate the ugly aspect of human nature from his picture of life. Filth and dirt is as much a part of life as beauty, cleanliness and decency. In this respect, Anand’s work is near allied to the naturalism of Zola and Balzac, the well-known French novelists. Anand’s realism is also seen in his themes. Anand has brought back the Indo-Anglian novel from history and romance to the hard realities of the present, and made it from mere entertainment or escapist light-reading into an instrument of social reform. The purpose of his novels is to focus attention on the suffering, misery and wretchedness of the poor which results either from the exploitation of the underdogs of society by the capitalists or the feudal landlords or by the impact of industry on the traditional and agricultural way of life. In **Untouchable** and **Coolie**, Anand deals with the misery and wretchedness of the poor and their struggle for a better life. His **Two Leaves and a Bud** is an artistic work depicting the widening gap between the haves and have-nots, the exploiters and the exploited, the rulers and the ruled. His **Gauri** eloquently exposes the hypocrisy of the society. It not only voices a strong protest against the ill-treatment of women but also explores through the example of Gauri what woman in India should do for her emancipation. The prime concern of Anand as a social critic in **Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts** is to give a clarion call to the nation to reform its education system.

Anand’s early education was in cantonment schools. The education imparted in these schools was imitative, giving very little idea of Indian tradition, but mainly ‘bastardized’ version of English’ curricula, in

English, with particular emphasis on English history. Ideas, forms and institutions, deliberately calculated to show everything relating to Indian history and tradition as inferior. This had disastrous effect on Anand. In **Untouchable** Anand has shown the deplorable situation of education system in pre-independent India where untouchables were denied to enter the temple of Education. Bakha, the hero of **Untouchable** comes into contact with the 'sons of the babu'. When Bakha hears them to say, 'come, don't you want to go to school! We will be late!', Bakha was thrilled. "The anxiety of going to school! How beautiful it felt! How nice it must be to be able to read and write! One could read the papers after having been to school. One could talk to the Sahibs. One would not have to run to the scribe every time a letter came. And one would not have to pay him to have one's letters written. He had often felt like reading Waris Shah's **Hira and Ranjah**. And he had felt a burning desire, while he was in the British barracks, to speak that fish-mish, fish-mish which the Tommas spoke" But Bakha's dream of speaking like an Englishman remains unfulfilled. His father had told him that "Schools were meant for the babus, not for the lower sweepers". At that time, Bakha could not understand the words of Lakha, his father, but later Bakha "realized why his father had not sent him to school. He was a sweeper's son. He realized that 'there was not school which would admit him because the parents of the other children would not allowed their sons to be contaminated by the touch of the low-caste man's sons" He also realized that the "masters would not teach the outcastes, lest their fingers which guided the students across the texts should touch the leaves of the outcastes' books and then be polluted". Such absurd was the condition of Education in the colonized India. The Education system of that time was marked by absurdity and meaninglessness. It was full of foul belief and superstition. The high-caste Hindu society and the Rulers did not want to spread education among the down-trodden people. Anand here wanted to rectify the prevalent education system of India under colonial regime through Bakha's fascination for education.

After Independence, British leaves India. So the British education policy must have to undergo change. British utilized education just as a tool, but the policy makers of Education in the post-colonial India tried their best to make education free, free from all aspects. They understood, no doubt, the great value of education. They thought without education Indian nation can never prosper. That is why they formed many universities all over free India. They modify the syllabus of the universities. The aims of education also changed in a changed country. But still, there were many shortcomings, faults in the post-independent Education policies which Mulk Raj Anand artistically and poignantly points out in his celebrated short novel **Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts**.

The protagonist of **Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts** is a T.B. patient of name, Nur, who has been an object of frequent ridicule among his near and dear ones. They sneered at him saying, "there goes Nur, the son of a confectioner, who is M.A. Pass, but who sits idle, with one hand on the other, and kills flies because he can't get a job..... He fancied himself a Babu, but now he has come down to his real state, became a coolie." For the past five months Nur has been bed-ridden. Death lies on him, like an untimely frost "From the first cry at birth his life had been pain-marred". His mother died when he was only five years old. Memories of the past eddies his mind and he suddenly recollects the days when his grandmother took him to the burial ground of his mother. In the remote past, he had seen many fearful days. The punishment given by the teachers frightens him. Nur recollects how gigantic, padded-faced, wry-mouthed Chaudhuri always terrified Nur like a Nero. As Nur dreams of the horrible school days, his old schoolmate, Gama, now a tonga-driver visits him. They discuss the uselessness of the modern system of education and comment on the malice of their masters. Nur tells Gama the first line of a poem he has framed in his mind: "Why did you drag me into the dust by making me an M.A.?" This very line of the poem clearly expresses the uselessness of modern education. It explicit Nur's inner conflict and pain after passing M.A. Through this line Anand indirectly exposes the valuelessness of modern education which does not assure suitable service for the countless educated youth like Nur. All his knowledge about Goethe, Shakespeare, Dickens etc fail to give Nur financial security. Nur also expresses his father's hopes and dreams about Nur's future. Nur's father wants him to apply for admission to all Government services one after another for he places too much reliance on his master degree. When Nur is suffering from serious incurable disease, his father angrily quoting the names of young men who could become big officers after getting degree and questions his son's failure: "The son of Sheikh Pir Boksh has become a deputy collector, why cant you? The son of Sarder Kalyan Singh has become a Sub-judge, why can't you? various formulations of success created by people like Dale Carnegie have made the state of failure almost a crime among man. Success is what Nur's father aims for, and it is the dream of success which ensnares Nur and his father like willy Loman of Arthur Miller's **Death of a Salesman**. Nur like his creator, Mulk Raj Anand is a victim of an ill-framed system of education. Education of Nur put emphasis on English history, ideas forms and institutions. It was not at all close to life. It keeps the realities of life at bay. The entire education policy was exam-oriented and attending classes was only for getting good marks. The education of Nur ignored the proper all round development of Nur but paid attention to examination and degree. In **Apology for Heroism** Anand recollects, "Our appointed task, according to the Syllabus, was to mug up professor Sharma's two elementary text books on Logic and to cram Professor J.M. Mackenzie's **Outline of Ethics** for the First of Arts

examination. The method of teaching adopted by our lecturer was to read these books aloud to us, chapter by chapter, asking us to underline various passages for cramming with a view to vomiting them out in the examination hall. We did not explain what logic was good for and why ethics was necessary; he merely paraphrased the difficult English of the texts into his idea of simple English.”

Anand has realized after graduation that the educational system in which he had been nurtured was false, stupid and barely adequate even to fulfil the standards set for subordinate services for which it was a kind of recruiting ground. The system of education which turns millions of youths in this country into educated illiterates angers Anand and he transfers this anger on to his character Nur, who through his interior monologue, stream of consciousness and recollective dialogue with his old classmate Gama exposes vanity, hollowness and futility of the modern education system. The objectives and aims of true education presented by R.N. Tagore was completely absent in the education Anand and contemporaries received. In a letter to Saros Cowasjee, Anand wrote: “The destiny of Nur become to me symbolic of the youth of India, who are condemned to earn the degree of Master of Arts for respectability. The poetic talent is denied. And the poets accept in our country, this condemnation and are contempt to weep away.”

Nur's only desire in life was to become a confectioner. But taking no note of his son's desire, the Chaudhuri sends his son for college education and thus Nur obtains a post-graduate degree. It brings great hopes to his father that soon his son would be a good officer. But M.A. Degree does not help Nur anyway to climb the rungs of the social ladder. Nur, with the process of time becomes an object of ridicule and laughter. The degree itself stands as an impediments even to his going back to his father's profession. Disappointments surround him and he becomes bed-ridden with consumption. Nur, affecting a learned voice says: “What is there in Education, brother?” He also affirms: “Education, Education, brother-education means wisdom, wisdom means the correlation of the growth of body and mind; the correlation of the growth of body and mind is achieved through knowledge; and knowledge is power, if you have enough recommendations, that is”. Anand here also vehemently opposes the barbaric method of teaching. In his book, **On Education**, Anand writes: “Suppression, repression and cane driven sense are not education at all.” Anand is for liberal education which would ensure ‘learning by playing’, learning by doing’, learning by seeing’, learning by experimenting’ and so on. Anand strongly believes that the education will be useful and fruitful only when children could feel joy and happiness in going to school and could get inspiration and illumination by attending classes. Education must have to become life-centric, pupil-centric instead of lecture-centric. Anand's this view about education has been strongly followed by the post modern academicians of free India and one can easily discern it if one glances at the Primary and Upper Primary schools of India.

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