

---

**C H A P T E R - I V**

**CHARACTERIZATION AND SOCIAL THEMES**

---

---

CHAPTER - IV

CHARACTERIZATION AND SOCIAL THEMES

There is an organic connection between character and themes, which, in the case of Anand are social themes. In other words, the critical issues of his novels are invested in characters. His characters represent specific caste/class which become, unlike in other Indo-Anglian novelists, sources of social conflicts. These conflicts, in their turn, give the author an opportunity to moralize or philosophize on the social structure and problem in the Indian situation. This aspect has an added importance because Anand deals mostly with lower castes/class of people and is uninhibited in attributing the social evils to specific caste/class relationships, inviting even the criticism of being incendiary. Martin Turnell writes about the 'characterization' in the following manner :

"A character is a verbal construction which has no existence outside the book. It is a vehicle for the novelist's sensibility and its significance lies in its relations with the author's other constructions. A novel is essentially a verbal pattern in which the different 'characters' are strands, and the reader's experience is the impact of the complete pattern on his sensibility."<sup>1</sup>

In any novel, 'character' is an essential and important aspect. The plot, theme, narration these are other aspects. George Eliot, for example, describes her reluctance to :



"...adopt any formula which does not get itself clothed for me in some human figure and individual experience, and perhaps that is a sign that if I help others to see at all it must be through that medium of art."<sup>2</sup>

She made her characters to fit into the pattern of her own moral universe. Eliot emphasizes the novelist's technique of character creation. William Faulkner says : 'A writer is trying to create believable people.'<sup>3</sup> He suggests that the creation of lifelike characters is connected with the artist's inner life. Francois Mauriac writes to similar effect when he says : 'I am my characters and their world.'<sup>4</sup> Mulk Raj Anand himself admits that 'the characters began to compel me to write them out.'<sup>5</sup>

Mulk Raj Anand is a very conscious writer. His social commitment forces him to write and expose the reality of Indian life. As he writes :

'I am a novelist, a writer of books, of social documents, about a rather neglected country India.'<sup>6</sup>

Mulk Raj Anand may be regarded as a naturalist because of his characterization. His novels deal generally with social problems even though artistic concern is predominant. He supposes his novels as social documents. According to Diana Spearman :

"There are some conditions in which a sociological factor is so important that it overshadows all others."<sup>7</sup>

In Anand's case caste and class are important sociological factors. 'Man is a social animal', any individual activity is social because all men live in a society. And the term 'social' means simply the interaction between individual human beings. They are living within the society and so their circumstance is 'social'. Diana Spearman points out that :

"...literary genius is simply there, as much a fact as that men have always lived in societies. It has consequences just as the social nature of human beings has consequences."<sup>8</sup>

Anand is a literary genius who is sensitive as well as visionary is described as 'socially committed' writer. Anand's characters are not imaginary. These figures are portrayals of the people who affected him strongly in his own life. He himself admits that :

"All these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels were the reflections of the real people I have known during my childhood and youth."<sup>9</sup>

Anand's protagonists in the six novels which I have discussed in the previous chapters such as Bakha in Untouchable, Bhikhu in The Road, Munoo in Coolie, Lal Singh in The Village, Gangu in Two Leaves and a Bud, Ananta in The Big Heart and Gauri in The Old Woman and a Cow are representatives of the lower strata of Indian society.

Modern Indian society is divided into two systems - class and caste. Caste system has survived for centuries and it is the bane of society. Even the greatest of all Indians who rebelled against the satanic system failed to change the Hindu society. The evils of this satanic system are described by Prof.A.M.Dharmalingam as :

"Great reformers and philosophers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jyotiba Phule, Dayanand Saraswati and Gandhiji never carried an assault against the fundamentals. In fact they lived all through in caste and died as high caste men. If one or two of them realised the futility and inequity of caste and declared for a casteless society at the close of their lives, they were murdered by caste fanatics."<sup>10</sup>

Anand's first novel was published nearly sixty years ago. At that time India was passing through transition from feudalism to capitalism. The caste-oriented society had the onslaught of another evil that is Capitalism.

Bakha is the hero of the novel Untouchable. It is the story of day's life in Bakha's life. The 'pollution' scenes stress the evils of untouchability. Anand's social issue is 'untouchability' which highlights suffering, poverty and degradation of a large section of Indian society. Other untouchables are Lakha, Bakha's father, Sohini his sister and Rakha his brother are in the novel. His aspiration at

the end of the novel is a 'hope' of millions of untouchables. M.E. Derrett comments on the sketch of Bakha that, 'the author's identity with his character seems complete, his humanity communicates itself.'<sup>11</sup> At end of the novel the detailed discussion on the solutions of untouchability is an aspect of his humanity.

Lakha, Bakha's father is the Jamadar of the sweepers. He regards the high-caste Hindus as his superiors, his masters and is ever-ready to humble himself before them. He is a typical example of old and traditional values of social order.

Sohini, Bakha's sister is young and beautiful. She helps her father and brother Bakha in their work - cleaning the latrines of the high-caste Hindus. Pandit Kali Nath who is Brahmin and so is a social superior, the temple priest attempts to violate her chastity. The Brahmin priest's lust for her is an ironic event in the novel. Women have no position or rights in the society. They are untouchables within untouchables.

Pandit Kali Nath is the temple priest. He is a representative of those orthodox high-caste Hindus and their hypocrisy towards the untouchables. Many other minor characters from high caste section point out the untouchability and their attitudes towards them as 'dirty' people.

Bhikhu in The Road represents again untouchability, he is a chamar boy. There seems to be a discriminatory taboo against chamars as is evident in this novel. Dr. Ambedkar's analysis of untouchables is that 'there is one taboo against meat-eating. It divides Hindus into vegetarian and flesh eaters. There is another taboo which is against beef-eating. It divides Hindus into those who eat cow's flesh and those who do not.'<sup>12</sup>

In The Road Sajnu, Thakur Singh's son abuses Bhikhu and his fellowmen calling 'cow eating chamar' (p.8) because Hindu shastras taught them that 'the charmakars (cobbler/ chamar) ...are known as Antyajas as well as other who eat cow's flesh.'<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the novel 'caste' plays an important role. Everytime each character is conscious about her/his duties according to Hindu religion. Because all characters suffer by fatalism. In the novel only groups of characters are there, the individual is not important. Saros Cowasjee calls it 'an impressionistic technique.'<sup>14</sup> Because Anand's characters are 'social' characters. Their lives and death depend upon the society. Bhikhu's struggle is not an individual struggle with society. The central characters try to stand up against the cruelty of religion and not take any hurried decision. Untouchables suffer from traditional fatalism. Any revolutionary action against it is impossible.

Munoo in Coolie is shown as a victim of capitalism. His tragedy is very modern in the changing industrial situation. His 'poverty' is a curse throughout his life. He represents the lower and downtrodden poor labourers. As the reviewer of Glasgow Herald put it, 'He is a creation through whom the whole misery of India speaks.'<sup>15</sup> Anand's realistic description of factories and mills in the novel emphasizes his social concern. Ira Morris's comments are very pertinent:

"...his great little novel came into my hands I know almost at once that its author was another of those miraculous creators who can make one feel the beauty and horror that lies beneath life's outer surface."<sup>16</sup>

Other characters remain shadowy but the 'hero' becomes 'the authentic voice of common humanity'. 'Caste' is a unique phenomena but 'class' is universal. For this reason the capitalists both Indians and British are similar. 'Money' is God for them.

In Two Leaves and a Bud Anand's social issue is colonial exploitation. He switches in this novel from caste to class in order to investigate the evils of poverty. His British characters are only caricatures. Stephen Spender pointed out, 'they are two flat portrayed and, although they act a great deal, they do not develop.'<sup>17</sup> Anand's social commitment inspires him to show the nonentity of Indians in the British empire as Goronwy Rees writes :



"...his British characters are created out of hate, which is an abstract and generalizing passion, while the Indian characters are created out of love."<sup>18</sup>

The English character Dr. De La Havre is one of Anand's humanistic creed. Gangu is a believer in God and fatalism is representative of 'Coolies'. Their strong belief in the Karma and rebirth make them passive victims. Anand is obviously influenced by Karl Marx. Emile Burns writes :

"...class struggle and with it the setting up of state apparatus to protect the interests of the ruling class came out of a division of human society into 'classes' whose interests clashed in production."<sup>19</sup>

But this class struggle does not provoke any revolution in Hindu India. Gangu, Manoo, Bhaka, Bhikhu - the representatives of Indian society accept the social order because they are poor and uneducated, illiterate who hang on to caste and fatalism. Anand's all characters blindly accept the hierarchical leadership of the Hindu society.

In The Village Anand's characters are Sikh peasants. Hinduism and caste conflict is not here but the religious exploitatin is similar to Hinduism. The priest Mahant Nandgir is similar to Hindu Brahmin. Sikhism is a result of the fifteenth century attempt at a reconciliation of the two religious - Hindu and Islam in India. But this religion is

not without its drawbacks. Lal Singh, a Sikh by birth and he is against the traditional rituals so he gets his hair cut, symbol of Sikhism.

Anand's criticism is not directed against any particular religion. In Untouchables he attacks on Hinduism and the caste system. In The Village he criticizes the age-old orthodoxy of the peasants and their belief in God and Karma theory. The villagers are so fatalistic that it is impossible to change them. Lal Singh's feelings are shattered as he observes the orthodoxy of his father and brother, he thinks :

"...they did not want to think, to feel, to do anything, but relegated the responsibility for all their blessings, on Kama and a God who didn't exist apart from his apostles."<sup>20</sup>

The novel remarkably deals with Indian rural life. The two classes are dominant in the village in the thirties and pre-independent time. The poor peasant folk crushed and exploited by the rich landlords. As Anand writes :

"Indian society has been crushed generation after generation, century after century, divided by caste, by religion, by all the divides and was unable to get together to face any enemy... And when the British came, there were ten thousand or more big landlords..."<sup>21</sup>

Lal Singh is a representative of Indian youth and his family is representative of the Indian peasantry during the thirties and World War I. Lal is as Alastair Niven describes him, 'an Indian Everyman'<sup>22</sup> because he is an embodiment of the small peasant. He is Anand's first actual hero who revolts against the socio-religious system in their peasant society. He is an outcaste for going against certain fixed norms. Bakha was an outcaste by birth, Munoo and Gangu are outcaste by their poverty and Lal Singh's outcaste is his own doing. The Russian critic Y. Tupikova says that, 'Anand presents his revolutionary character.'<sup>23</sup> In the novel his revolutionary actions are getting his hair cut and his eating at a Muslims shop and friendship with Maya the landlord's daughter.

Lal Singh pities his father, Nihal Singh and other villagers for their superstitious nature. Lal Singh's story or rebel is tragedy, because he suffers by his own classmen. He has strong desire to change the life of the villagers if he receives so little love from his parents and the villagers. He sadly thinks :

"...if they will only love me more, and let me love them, I would soon work off their debts and relieve them of their troubles..."<sup>24</sup>

Lal Singh realizes the reality and his 'place' in the society. His escape from the village is very close to Munoo's plight. Munoo wanted to escape from the tyranny of

of his master and from poverty. Lal Singh's plight is to go away from the society who is outcaste and banished for his anti-religious deeds.

The reviewer of Southport Guardian calls Lal Singh a 'unique character'<sup>25</sup> because, Anand's earlier heroes accept passively the domination of society. Lal Singh shows an individual can live without the burden of social orders and the religious ideas. As D.Riemenschneider points out :

"Anand assumes a very new approach to the whole problem, a reconsideration of what man really is and how he can determine his destiny."<sup>26</sup>

Lal Singh knows his limitations and strength. He is very conscious person and able to take right decision at right moment. So he leaves his village in search of his destiny. Munoo and Gangu are weak-minded persons. Lal Singh's villagers are weak before him, they are helpless and exploited in the landlordism. Lal Singh is one of them even then he stands against the society. His revolt is against the peasants and against the landlords. Lal Singh's rationalism is a positive point of his personality. The landlord is Sardar Bahadur Harbans Singh. The money-lender is Chaman Lal and Mahant Nandgir is a priest and drug addict supposes himself a saint. All these appear in the novel as villains and exploiters. Saros Cowasjee comments :

"Lalu remains the angry young man in the novel, commenting bitingly on the priest's lechery, the money-lender's dishonesty, the landlord's greed and the villagers' own naivety and stupidity."<sup>27</sup>

The landlordism is a cruel pattern of exploitation of the peasants. It divided Indian society into two classes - the rich and the poor. Lalu's dream is to 'reform' this pattern. This idea is developed into other two novels of this 'trilogy'.

Ananta in The Big Heart presents a modern city labourer who knows the rights and previledges of workers union. His murder is not an end of trade union but he creates the inspires a new generation of educated and conscientions workers. For this effect 'martyrdom' is an essential action. As K.N.Sinha points out :

'The Big Heart wages a relentless war against tryanny and exploitation but has to pay the price-death.'<sup>28</sup>

Anand's mouthpiece is a poet, Puran Singh Bhagat a learned young person who believes that a revolution alone can bring some happiness to the modern man. But he is a poet and a dreamer so he too fails in doing any revolutionary action as he himself admits, 'action is difficult to a scholar'.

In The Big Heart caste-conflict is represented by group of two communities : Kaseros and Thathiars -

sub-castes is Kshtriya varna. Nesfield's opinion that 'caste is a matter of profession'<sup>29</sup> is true here. Many castes take their name from their traditional occupation. Kaseros are dealers of utensils and Thathiars are artisans, craftsmen, who do the dirty work of making utensils. Consequently, Kaseros are rich people in the society. The well established Kaseros decide to use machinery and open a new factory. The rise of industrialization in India makes the caste conflict more complicated.

Gauri in The Old Woman and the Cow is a realistic description of a mature woman. This novel deals with a woman as its central character. Women are a class by themselves in our society. They too are suppressed and downtrodden. They suffer as much as the untouchables. Her position in the society is only 'Panchi's wife', a peasant woman. After her marriage she is condemned by her husband for her 'inauspicious feet'. Her mother sells her for the mortgaged cow Chandari. Dr. Colonel Mahindra offers her a job in his hospital. Panchi brings his wife in the village but the villagers spread gossip about her purity and poison Panchi's mind against her. Panchi again banishes his wife. In the beginning Gauri supposes him her master and lord. But now she realizes that he is a 'coward and selfish' person. She struggles to liberate herself and her 'woman' class from the inhumanity of male-dominated class.

From foregoing discussion, it is clear that Anand's main concern is with the evils of castes and class distinctions in the Indian society. Women in his novels are a class by themselves, and so Anand may be described as a champion of the downtrodden (dalit) masses in Indian society. He writes about them as an insider because he himself belongs to a caste, coppersmith at least one rung lower than the privileged caste among the Hindus. Anand is different from his contemporaries like R.K.Narayan, who writes about 'human comedy' and Raja Raj who writes about metaphysics.

Anand's characters belong to various religion, classes and especially divided into castes and sub-castes. The class/caste conflict is an integral part of Indians. While some people are in the class conflict or in poverty, the others quarrel over 'caste surplus'.

\* \* \* \* \*