
Research Papers



The problem of technique in the stories of Mulk Raj Anand

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Abstract

The modern short story in English is of recent origin and the Indian English short story is even less than a hundred year old. It is a different matter that Indian has a very old tradition of short story in the form of folk tales, fables & legend. Hence, the modern Indian practitioners of short in English have not failed to benefit from this rich heritage.

Perhaps the early writers have suffered from the twin vices of sentimentality and didacticisms which have marred some of the early stories of pre-independence phase. But behind this drawback historical background is also accountable to a certain extent. Moreover, the early Indian practitioners of English short story were also exposed to the new development in this genre and were introduced to the stories of foreign masters like Maupassant, O.henry , Chekhov ,mulk raj anand was encouraged and fascinated by the western experiments in short story which was gradually taking roots and coming in its own M.R.Anand was in direct touch with now writers like Virginia wolf ,T.S.Eliot and of course E.M.Forster ,the great patron of Indian writing in English.

Though mulk raj anand is mainly known as a novelist of considerable fame, yet a close examination of his short stories published in number of volume would show that his stories

present a refreshing aspect of his literary personality. His stories are varied in theme as well as technique and they work he written. Even a casual look at them will show that he has made dexterous use of irony, myth, and symbol, lyrical and dramatic mode by turns and produced the desired effect on his readers through this conscious artistry.

Since anand has written a large number of stories differing in mood and tone, it is convenient to group his stories from the point of view of thematic pre-occupation. Firstly, there are a few lyrical stories where mulk raj anand either enters the inner recesses of a child's world or examines the inherent strength of womanhood. In contrast to these imaginative stories there are some starkly realist studies of ordinary man and woman, liable to be crushed by overwhelming force. Secondly, in another group of stories, anand seems to be appreciating the social pressure and new winds of change interacting in modern Indian. Lastly, there

are some stories of pure fun and farcical exaggeration. Certainly Anand's range and variety are evident not only in terms of mood, tone and spirit but also in terms of style and technique.

In this context, a close examination of some of Anand's successful stories from each genre is certainly called for. "The lost child" a justly famous story, merits serious attention in this context. The child is lost in the toys in a nearby shop. At this moment the child realizes his isolation and cries out in despair "I want my father, I want my mother" certainly the story has allegorical signification and the child's fall is symbolic of Adam's fall from paradise because of his inordinate temptation and transgression. Certainly the story has succeeded in its avowed aim because of a proper selection of form of the parable and the evocative prose style. It is tempting to compare this story of Anand with a well known story of Graham Greene on the similar theme. The story in question is of course "the basement room". Certainly Greene is interested in demonstrating the damaging impact of a traumatic experience on an impressionable child. By contrast Anand seems to be catching a moment of significance and consequently his story appeals more and endures better. Similarly some of other forays of Anand into the realm of child's consciousness have also turned into moving short stories. "The conqueror", for example, is yet another powerful story where a five year old child takes up the challenge thrown by the other older boys and in a spirit of bravado the child here tries to climb a hill. This story again is a highly successful attempt of Anand in presenting the invincible human will represented by the child hero. Incidentally this story invites comparison with another well known modern English story namely "the vertical ladder" by William Samson.

Anand is also known for his remarkable studies of female characters, who are victims of suffering and injustice and get somehow she possess unlimited capacity for endurance, fortitude and faith which sustain them even in the hour of grim crisis. Among such stories a few stand out. "A dark night" in particular is a heart-rending tragedy of a young woman whose husband is out in the city at a time when the whole city is the grip of communal frenzy. Anand has beautifully reproduced the anxiety and misgivings of the waiting house wife who is quite tense apprehensive while her infant sleeps peacefully in the cradles. Her feelings alternate between hope and despair and the house of waiting become particularly weary and unending. The success of

the story due to Anand's brilliant reproduction of the agony of waiting, the darkness of night, the sleeping child, and the mutilated dead body of the house holder and above all the presentation of turmoil in the mind of helpless house wife. All these taken together build up a proper tragic atmosphere, reminding one of the fatalistic Greek tragedies "birth" is at once a realistic and poetic account of the delivery of a child on a highway near the ridge road in Delhi. The protagonist of the story is a familiar figure, a female laborer who is also an expectant mother and is engaged in the job of breaking stones. The success of the story lies in Anand's beautiful sensuous and evocative prose style which proves her mental state and adequately conveys her feelings and agonies. The whole story is remarkable for Anand's poetic prose which takes on the rhythm of poetry and offers rare insight into the psychology of a working mother. Like "birth", "lullaby" is yet another powerful and moving story of suffering of Indian woman Phalini whose lullaby in a heartless city turns into a heart-rending cry. The success of the story is once again due to Anand's creation of a proper atmosphere through the refrain of a lullaby and the effect of contrast is produced by a faithful depiction of the heartless city and its environment.

"The barber's trade union" the title story exemplifies a typical modern short story of character. It's an example of a well-made story which merits attention for reasons of technique, if not for anything else. The story deals with the transformation of a traditional barber boy Chandu into a crafty labour leader. The point of interest lies in the manner in which the boy moves away from his traditional assigned function to become a cunning political activist. In the end, Chandu organizes the barber's trade union and starts a saloon there in. Apparently the story has been written in a low-key and in the manner of comedy but Anand's satiric intent and irony are quite evident. Chandu is then Anand's symbol for modern ideas and defiance of old custom and conventions. Chandu's success at the end may be regarded as a comic gesture of defiance but in terms of Anand's concept he is an embodiment of a modern short story with a well marked beginning, middle and end. It is, however, plot oriented story with central focus on Chandu's development into a trade union leader of his fraternity. In the similar vein Anand has written stories like "the power of darkness" and "the tractor and the corn goddess". While in the first story the of modern science, in the "tractor and the corn goddess" he seems to be caring further

the theme of progress through the myth of science in a more acceptable manner. In the first story one, therefore watches the dramatic confrontation between the force of orthodoxy and those of modernity,

In short, anand's stories exhibit enough variety in terms of technique and style, not to mention his wide ranging themes. He has even tried fables and allegories in the stories like "a true story", "five short fables" and "the reflections on the golden bed."

Notes and references –

1 Mulk Raj Anand, "The Barbar' Trade Union and Other Stories," *The Lost Child*, Bombay, Kutub Publishers, 1959, p-73.