



## **Art of characterization: A comparative study in the selected novels of Mulk Raj Anand & Raja Rao**

**Margret Sophy**

Research Scholar, Department of English, Himalayan University, Arunachal Pradesh, India

### **Abstract**

Two of the triumvirate of the pioneer Indian novelists in English are Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. In their novels it is evident that they present a departure from the tradition of Indian fiction which is a common characteristic in the novels of the major trio. Till then the bottom dogs had not been allowed to enter the pages of the novel and act as protagonists. Mulk Raj Anand's characters are both types and individuals. Raja Rao's first novel (1938) is the story of a village in south India, he named it Kanthapura. He allowed the poor and the underdogs to enter the pages of his novels. In this paper I shall try to do a comparative study of the art of characterization in the selected novels of Mulk Raj Anand & Raja Rao. Characters of Mulk Raj Anand are remarkable for intimate touches of exultation of the exploited. He has written about the suffering and tragedy of the downtrodden and the poor whom he has actually seen and known from his childhood and youth.

**Keywords:** characterization, underdogs, exploited, protagonist, dominant

### **Introduction**

In portraying characters under the yoke of suffering, Mulk Raj Anand skillfully employs the technique of the inner working novelist, and aims at exploring the intense sufferings of their souls. He attempted to introduce the downtrodden in the realm of novel and this is a memorable contribution to Indian English novel. He creates a traditional caste ridden Indian village which is away from all modern ways of living. In the village Sudras, Pariahs are the so called marginalized. His characters are from the lower strata of society, like the sweeper, the peasant, the plantation labourer, the city drudge, and the coolie, and he treats them with sympathy and respect as human beings. Mulk Raj Anand remarks: The passions which have occupied them were, perhaps, my own dominant moods, and therefore, all those characters may be said to be part of the same autobiography of the torments, ecstasies and "passionate consciousness" of the last three generations [3]. Anand's characters depicted a realistic and soulful portrait of the poor in India. Anand himself was initiated into the literary career by a family tragedy, instigated by the rigidity of the tiring caste system. His first prose essay was a response to the suicide of an aunt, who had been excommunicated by his family for sharing a meal with a Muslim. His first novel, "Untouchable", (1935), was a stark reflection of the day-to-day life of a member of India's untouchable caste. The book was widely acclaimed and Mulk Raj Anand was hailed as India's Charles Dickens [4]. In the 1930s and 1940s Mulk Raj Anand divided his time between London and India. He joined the struggle for independence, but also fought with the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. After the war Anand returned permanently to India and settled in Bombay. According to Prof. C.D Narasimhaiah, "the Indian novel in English has shown a capacity to accommodate a wide range of concerns, in Mulk Raj Anand a human concern for the

underdog, not just a pre-occupation with economic determinism [5]. His second novel "Coolie" depicts the plight of India's poor, through the picture of a 15-year-old boy, trapped in servitude as a child laborer, who eventually dies of tuberculosis and is really a character to be pitied up on, as he enlivens the real Indian citizen under British colonialism. Raja Rao recaptures a wide range which has been more widened by inclusion of untouched themes and characters. In both the writers we can see a common as well as unique ability to bring about a pictorial presentation of the vivid characters of leadership qualities, but always underemphasized or rather we can simply summarize and say that these characters were forbidden to grow, and bring light to their lives, as in reality the Indian folks were underestimated by the masters and mistresses of the age. Here Mulk Raj Anand's zeal for overemphasizing the picture of exploitation, to some extent damages his art and vision. By the end or at the final part of the novel, where Shimla scene is introduced by the hackneyed, device of accident is poor. This part of the novel gives the impression of being sketchy, hasty, and it is slightly unconvincing. Now I would like to look into the art of characterization through the eyes of the protagonist of the novel Coolie by Mulk Raj Anand.

### **Munoo**

Munoo is a universal character, larger than life, symbolizing the suffering and misery of the downtrodden and exploited masses of India. Munoo wishes to belong to the world of the upper strata of society. His mistress is kind to him but her coquetry fires his adolescent passions till he crumples at her feet in an orgy of tears and kisses. Munoo is a character, trying to stand against all odds, holding the position of ignorant and poor. He fails to endure his illness for long and breathes his last in the arm of his friend, Mohan when he is

hardly sixteen years old. The fate of the poor Indian folk is described so emotionally in the character by the novelist: A downpour and he began to doubt if he would ever get well. He felt exhausted and lay weary and apathetic, looking at Mohan frank eyed and helpless, clinging to him as if the mere touch of his friend's body would give him life 'All right, Munoo brother, you are a brave lad,' Mohan assured him. Munoo clutched at Mohan's hand and felt the warmth blood, in his veins like a tide; reach out to distances to which it had never gone before. But in the early hours of one unreal, white night he passed away the tide of his life having reached back to the deeps <sup>[6]</sup>. The novel is a veritable saga of unending pain, suffering and prolonged struggle of an unsuccessful human being treated unlike one, punctuated only occasionally by brief moments of relief and hope. K.K Sharma's opinion: Coolie is a sincere protest against the emergence of a new world of money and exploitation and class distinction. It shows how Coolies like Munoo are completely beaten down by the curve of money, power in the Iron Age <sup>[7]</sup>. 'Munoo' is a representing character of the whole of the down trodden. Coolie who is cruelly victimized and forced to suffer mainly because of wicked propensities of the adult world, the protagonist Munoo, is an orphan moves from place to place from the village to the town, from the town to the city and then to the mountains through a video vision of the varied scenes and sights of India, in search of livelihood driven by hunger, till he finally meets with his doom. The adventures are presented in a picaresque manner; the orphan boy is not a rogue but the victim of world's rogueries. The chain of incidents joined together keeping Munoo as its unifying figure and most effective character of the whole of the work succeeds in rousing the reader's human feeling for the poor and the oppressed. Poverty which gives birth to exploitation is the root cause of Manoo's tragedy. Even in search for bread to him in a world where poor man's flesh and blood is treated as cheaper than bread, makes him restless and forces him move from place to place and finally fall into the clutches of death <sup>[8]</sup>. Munoo is a character of characteristics, of various and vivid personalities, made to pass through diverse situations, as a domestic servant in an urban middle class family of Nathoo Ram in Sham Nagar, as a child labourer in a small pickle factory and as a coolie struggling for work in the city market in Daulatpur, as a worker in a cotton mill in Bombay and as a rickshaw puller in Shimla. The plot of the novel is episodic in character. It is a chain of incidents joined together keeping Munoo as its central figure. But the portrayal of English characters, especially in the Bombay chapter is captivating. The crowning glory of characterization in the novels of Raja Rao is that he has taken pain, thought summarily to humanize his characters even though they are minor in appearance. But the overall impression that one gets, of his novel-Kanthapura, is that it is a sensitive and impressive work. It remarkably succeeds in rousing our human feeling for the poor and the oppressed and it possesses enough energy and fire, to enkindle our soul to work for a society, where compassion and kindness would be an unwritten law <sup>[9]</sup>. He has lent identity to the characters by giving them tell-tale names like Corner house Moorthy, Gold -bangle Sommanna, Water fall Venkamma, Nose-scratching Nanjamanna etc. The crowd of characters he introduces to the readers includes the varied names as they

are made very distinct in appearance. K.R.S. Iyengar praises it, and calls it: "A prose epic of modern India..." Anand's social concern is evident in his downright castigation of the "tradition bound society" <sup>[10]</sup>. The Road is merely an amplification of theme of Untouchable, now viewed from a different angle and incisiveness. Bhikhu, like Bakha, is the victim - hero, who is tried and tested by the antipodal caste distinctions and discriminations. In The Road, art and idea do not intermingle altogether well. The main defect in the novel is the weak characterization, the protagonist; Bhikhu fails to emerge as the hero. All the enthusiasm and energy is derived from another character, Dhooli Singh, who actually appears to suppress the character of Bhikhu <sup>[11]</sup>. Further the stage is cramped with the introduction of too many characters, which divert the attention from the central character. Anand is concerned with the capitalist nature of the white characters that belong to the class of oppressors. Edward Burra, a well known critic says, The English occur only as minor characters and are described mostly with an inclination to caricature in fact precisely as they must appear to Indian eyes. It would have been false to Anand's purpose to describe them otherwise. The author has strategically placed these minor characters as instruments in the plot to add variety to the story, support the development of the main character, and also to accentuate the overall theme of the novel -minor characters are essential to the progression of the plot because it is through minor characters where foils to the main characters are aroused. In some cases, characters exist largely for the purpose of moving the story along from one plot point to the next. The characters themselves, therefore, are only sketchily conceived; it is their actions that matter. These types of characters were created to propel the story forward. Some stories are built around a time, place or situation that requires certain types of characters to be present.

Kanthapura lacks an effective characterization Raja Rao has not paid particular attention to the character-delineation here. It has no individualized character. Characters in search of self on various levels offer the major fictional foci and energies. More often than not they must contend with change arising from the pressure of events or the challenge of understanding the ethos of another culture. Raja Rao has presented a distinct picture of women characters even though minor in the novel. He shows a difference between the intellectual belongings of French and Indian women. The other side of the coin is the depiction of Indian women characters by Raja Rao that are shown living in complete surrender and submission. Raja Rao has vividly highlighted the higher position of the woman in Hindu mythology but at the same time they suffer in male dominating society in one or another way. Raja Rao has described the characters of Savithri, Madeleine Jaylakshami, Suzanne and Murielle with a psychological insight. He depicts the female characters with an understanding of the feminine sensibility. Raja Rao describes the different aspects of Madeleine's character, her moods, attitude, her perception of life, which render individuality to the character.

While studying Indian literature of the early twentieth century, one comes across the important Indian novelists Mulk Raj Anand & Raja Rao. Their novels are still esteemed because of the unassuming characters of the real life. Primarily, the novels owe their importance and famousness to the pressing

political and social issues of the period, when the authors started their writing careers. For this reason, these authors have been placed among the foremost writers of the world. Rao belonged to the “nationalist intelligentsia” of India<sup>[12]</sup>. As a member of this social group of people, and also as a writer, Rao attached importance to Indianness in his Indian characters. Therefore, he presented the complexity of the Indian village and embedded fables, legends and well defined characters efficiently in Kanthapura. Moorthy also strives for upholding traditions of ancient India, for he arranges meetings in the evenings, when an invited story-teller honors different Hindu Gods in his tales<sup>[13]</sup>. The Serpent and the Rope written by Raja Rao in 1960, is a story of a search for spiritual truth in Europe and India. It established him as one of the finest Indian writer and designer of verity of characters. The Serpent and the Rope was written after a long silence during which Rao lived India. The work also dramatized, while he used live like characters, the relationships between Indian and Western culture as well. Ramaswamy, a young Brahmin studying in France, is married to a French college teacher, Madeleine, depicts a contented and free individual, who sees her husband above all as a guru. As Ramaswamy struggles with commitments imposed on him by his Hindu family, his wife becomes a Buddhist in her spiritual quest and renounces worldly desires after the death of their little son Pierre. She leaves her husband to find her own true self and also metaphysics of death. This leads to an inner truth of life. All human being need some space in life and the story depicts about that space. The entire concept of Karma, the twice born and eternity all are dragged into the tale. And, in this connection, he muses over Little Mother, his 26-year-old step-mother, and over his half-sister, Saroja, on whom the adoring son and brother has an Oedipal and incestuous “crush”<sup>[14]</sup>. The Serpent and the Rope has so many tangled ideas, that it becomes difficult to even present a summary of Raja Rao's stream of thought. Serpent and the Rope' comprises of a number of layers within it. Every time one reads it, a different layer reveals itself and the mastery in the art of characterization makes it enjoyable to read. This is not a book of a characters shining brightly. It's about the search for meaning and wisdom. The characters of it are accompanied by a feeling of religiosity were one finds the fulfillment of the incarnation as human being as a result of the karma of the past life. Each character is free being, respected and revolutionized and are outfitting to the story and contributes to the development of the plot.

Mulk Raj Anand's commitment to reveal the deep-rooted social malice in the Indian society made him to create Bakha. He wanted to show the youth's unique sensitiveness; against the people of the upper caste who thought merely touching him is degradation. He meant symbolically to show that such small tenderness among people in private life or the catharsis of human existence. E. M. Foster in the preface of *Untouchable* observes that: Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand, sometime weak, and thoroughly Indian. Even his physiques distinctive, we can recognize broad intelligent face, graceful torso ... as he does the nasty job or stumps out in artillery boots, in the hope of a pleasant walk through the city with a paper of cheap sweets in his hands. Anand with his remarkable skill portrays Bakha's

helpless, frustration, anxiety and agony to the degree that he has become embodiment of his own creation or in other words the creator and the creator co-mingle at one point<sup>[15]</sup>. Through the character Bakha in *Untouchable*, Anand highlights the condition of inhumanity faced by the marginalized in the society. The untouchable covers the event of a single day in the life of the low caste boy Bakha, in the town of Bulashah. Anand describes Bakha's morning round duties with a painstaking particularity, bringing out both the efficiency with which the boy does this essential service and callousness with which the beneficiaries receive it. Bakha is not only efficient in his work but also does it with full dedication: For although he did not know it, to him work was sort of intoxication which gave him a glowing health and plenty of easy sleep. Even though the violent exertion of his limb was making him gasp, he worked on continuously, incessantly, without stopping for breath. Bakha had very strong desire to study<sup>[16]</sup>. Anand also exposed the double standard of society where on, one hand people are polluted by the shadow of untouchable on the other hand they don't hesitate to try to molest the untouchable girl. 1<sup>st</sup> May 1935, was welcomed by a few but criticized by many. Several news-papers in London criticized it as ‘a dirty work’. E.M. Forster anticipated such criticism in his preface to *Untouchable*. He says; it seems to me indescribably clean and I hesitate for words in which this can be conveyed. Avoiding the rhetoric and circumlocution, it has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it (*Untouchable* 9). The novel gained popularity among the Western readers slowly but surely<sup>[17]</sup>.

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