

International Multidisciplinary
Research Journal

Golden Research
Thoughts

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2231-5063

Golden Research Thoughts Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial board. Readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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IS MULK RAJ ANAND AN EXISTENTIALIST?

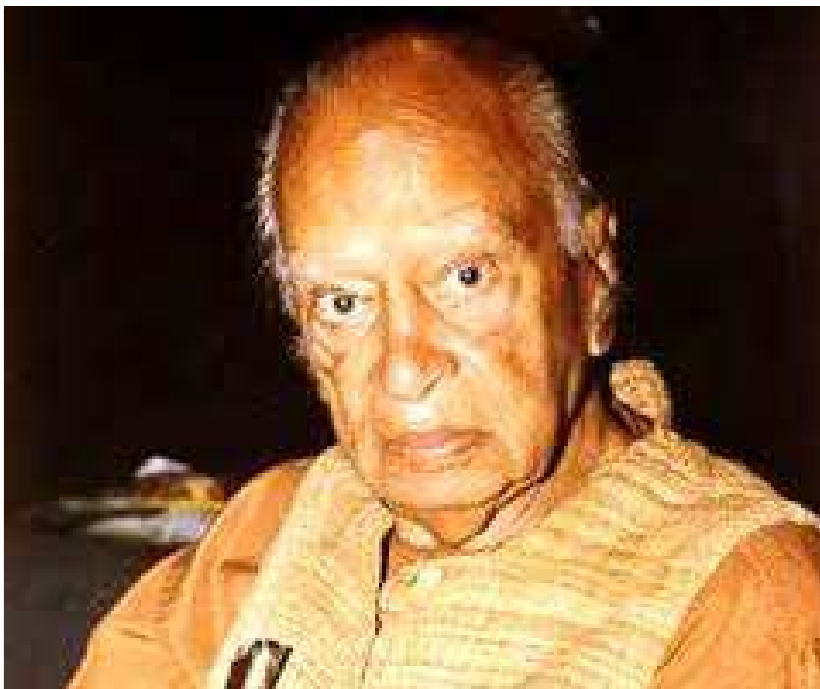


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Short Profile :

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ABSTRACT:

Mulk Raj Anand is a celebrated Indo-Anglian novelist with a global recognition. The world Mulk Raj Anand knew best was the micro cosm of the outcast and peasants and soldiers and working people. One of the major concerns of Anand is to highlight the cause of the deserted ,marginalized, oppressed and have-nots. My aim in this paper is to show how the heroes, the Gods of loss ,the Gods of small things of Anand struggle for existence in heartless caste-ridden Hindu societies where worshipped gods of the Hindu Temple are distressingly helpless to show them the right path for their survival as human

being.

KEYWORDS

Indo-Anglian novelist, marginalized, oppressed, existence, survival.

INTRODUCTION:

Existentialism as a literary critical term is chiefly a twentieth century European philosophy. The roots of Existentialism lie in the nineteenth century questioning of religion and the meaning/ existence of God, especially in the works of the great Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard and the German philosopher Nietzsche. Kierkegaard was a devout believer of Almighty God. Kierkegaard's school of Existential philosophy strongly stressed the idea, "That in God man may find freedom from tension – for in him the finite and the infinite are one". Kierkegaard, the follower of Christian Existentialism believed that only God may free man from suffering, loneliness and pain. Kierkegaard did not want to be a philosopher in the traditional Hegelian sense and he did not want to preach a Christianity that was an illusion. "But he had learned from his father that one can do what one wills". But the atheist Nietzsche questions religion in his *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883-1885); Thus spake Zarathustra, (1886) when he declares that "God is dead" for modern humanity. Nietzsche discards all belief in any metaphysical realities like God and Heaven. Nietzsche expresses an important view in which the traditional divinity that had provided a transcendent and absolute meaning for existence is either completely unknowable to or totally absent from the human sphere. Nietzsche, one of the followers of aesthetic existentialism, believes that the individual is alone in a godless universe. The basic human condition is one of suffering and loneliness. Man has no reality if he thoughtfully follows all social law, convention and traditionally practiced religion.

Almost all the major novels of Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2002), a celebrated Indo- Anglian novelist with global recognition, point up the limitations of human life without choice of action and touch on the philosophical implications of human misery and pain. Anand's heroes like Bakha (*Untouchable*), Gangoo (*Two Leaves and a Bud*), Munoo (*Coolie*), Nur (*Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts*), Gauri (*Gauri*), Ananta (*The Big Heart*) and Lal Singh (*Village Trilogy*) protest strongly against many foolish, baseless, absurd and meaningless conventions and thereby they are unconsciously disciples of Nietzsche's and Jean Paul Sartre's school of existentialism, certainly not the followers of Kierkegaard's school of existentialism.

Anand's *Untouchable* records the helpless and deplorable situation of Bakha, the hero of the novel, an untouchable in a high caste Hindu society. The first traumatic experience for Bakha is that of accidentally touching a man in the bazaar while going to clean the temple-court-yard. The Lalla who is 'polluted' continues to bombard abuses on Bakha. Soon he is encircled by men who have gathered to know what the uproar is about. The crowd which presses round him, is without a shadow of pity for him. When Lalla is tired of shouting at the defenceless, hopeless Bakha, he gives a sharp, clear slap at him as a punishment for his 'damned impudence'. Bakha recognizes with a shock his social position. Then conscious of his position, without failing he shouts aloud the warning words to announce his approach: "Posh, posh, sweeper coming." His pace quickens. Within a short time Bakha reaches the temple court-yard. He begins to sweep the area. Bakha becomes suddenly curious to see what is happening inside the temple, the abode of gods who are the savior of humanity. With due respect he tried to reach near the gods, but his social position prevents him entering the temple. Temple, the place of worshipping gods fails to save Bakha from severe humiliation. The unfailing sense of direction of his inner impulse leads him though the temple steps towards the entrance door of the temple. Just then he hears a thundering sound: "Get off the steps, scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our temple! Now you will have to pay for purification ceremony. Get down, get away, dog." Bakha ran down the

steps, past the priest below him, to his sister, Sohini who is molested in the temple by the temple priest pundit Kalinath. These incidents make his blood boil. He feels a wild desire to retaliate. And yet there is a futility written on his face. He knows that he will not be able to overstep the walls which the conventions of his superiors have built up to protect their weakness against him. Bakha is alone and helpless in the godless society. Even gods fails to protect the sanctity of Temple and dignity of Sohini. The gods of the Temple are no doubt powerfull enough to protect and save the helpless Bakha and defenceless Sohini but they remain mum. Their such strange attitude towards the social victims vividly opposes the doctrines of 'Kierkegaard School of Existential Philosophy' which emphatically expresses the idea that 'in God man may find freedom from tension' But Anand's hero, Bakha and his sister Sohini get no assistance from gods who were sincerely worshipped in the Temple.

Anand's *Coolie* which has been called 'an epic of misery', 'the epic of modern India' and the *Odyssey of Munoo, the coolie* presents a chain of adventures in a picaresque manner. But Munoo, the hero is not a rogue. He is only a victim of the heartless world's rogueries. His search for bread, in a senseless world where poor man's fresh and blood is treated as cheaper than bread, makes him aloof, restless and forces him to move from Bilaspur to Sham Nagar, from Sham Nagar to Daulatpur, Bombay and Simla. Munoo certainly serves here as a symbol of Anand's dissatisfaction with a society whose utilitarian concern unscrupulously massacres social morality. The coolies as depicted in the novel are united by a common feeling of misery and hunger. It makes them forget the sophistication of religion, caste system and untouchability and helps them to live in fraternity. They united and agitated for their existence. The communal riot that occurs in the novel, directly exposed the bad effect of British divide and rule policy. The capitalistic exploitation is so formidable and fierce that religion proves ineffective to protect the lives of the general ordinary people. Orthodox fanatics are killing people shouting "Allah ho Akbar" or "Shivaji Ki Jay". Religion whose chief function is to give solace and peace, destroys valuable lives of men indirectly influenced by cruel capitalistic force. *Coolie* is a passage to India, a country made weak by capitalism and religious fanaticism.

In writing *Gauri* Mulk Raj Anand was greatly inspired by the Russian Poet Nicholai Nekrasov's *The Peasant Woman*, the story of Sita in the *Ramayana* and the writings of Ali Sardar Jafri. This novel, no doubt, ventilates Anand's indisputable concern for the suffering humanity of India. The novel depicts the deplorable condition of woman whom we call 'Mata' 'Laxmi' and 'Devi' and we also claim that our society has always been given due respect to women. At the sametime, we also beat them, set them ablaze or turn them out of the house. Anand's *Gauri* eloquently exposes the hypocrisy of our society. It is a story of Gouri's suffering, struggle and her emancipation. Here we also find many existential elements. According to 'Christian Existentialism', God is the supreme authority to free man from suffering. *Gauri*, the chief protagonist of the novel *Gauri*, like all village women believes in Karma. But the education she has received by coming in contact with the enlightened Dr. Mahindra makes her realize the foolishness of believing in it. She expresses her view to Rafique Chacha quoting Daktar Mahindra: "Where there is poverty, there is a money-lender, a priest and a landlord- and God is always on their side". The villagers are blinded by superstition and they mistake superstition for religion and so religion fails to do its performance perfectly. *Gauri* is victimized by superstition. Panchi who is in the beginning proud of *Gauri*'s gentleness, meekness, calmness and innocence, forms a completely different picture of her under the influence of superstition (religion) planted in him by Kesaro: "She has ruined me..... My aunt Kesaro is right when she says that this bride is the incarnation of Kali, the black goddess who destroys all before her, who brings famine in her breath and lays bare whole villagers.

Like Kali in the temple of Dharmasala, who wears a garland of skulls round her neck...", Anand's message in Gauri is explicit in the speeches of Dr. Mahindra. Towards the end of the novel, Anand seems to appear under the mask of Dr. Mahindra for the sake of airing his views. "Our Dharma is feeding the Brahmins and paying interest to the Banias. And ill-treating the untouchables. And Vinoba can convert a good man here and good man there. And some tigers may learn to eat vegetables. But can you tell me of how many sons of ministers have given away their lands to the poor at the bidding of Vinoba?" Gauri here symbolizes the strength and purity of Sita. The cow-like gentle Gauri presented in the first chapter, undergoes epic transformation mainly through suffering and at the end of the novel, she acquires the right path of her life, not following the teaching of conventional religion but obeying the advice of Dr. Mahindra. Religion fails to give her emancipation.

Anand has shown, in his novels that suffering is an instrument for the growth to awareness. Man is inclined to learn more from suffering than from entertainment. Nur, the chief protagonist of Lament on Death of the a Master of Arts, is able to probe into his soul and society only during his bed-ridden days of five long months. According to K.N. Sinha, "Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts bears a close resemblance to what is designated as existential arts. It points up the limitations of human life without choice of action and touches on the philosophical implications of human misery and pain. The novel clearly demonstrates that the human condition itself is perilous and that erosion of contours is inherent in existence." As against this statement made by K.N. Sinha, it may be interesting to quote Anand's own comment about this novel given in one of his letters to Saros Cowasjee : " I admit the novel is morbid, but then so is all truth, and my crime is that, though the hero goes into the night, I still try to give hope of the poetry of innocence of Nur's wife, of the mad Azad and even grandma's sentiments become a redeeming feature". " You see, I am not an existentialist, I still believe in human beings". Anand's denial of his being an existentialist is ambiguous. Existentialism has various 'schools' and they differ markedly in doctrine and attitude. Anand is certainly not an existentialist of the Kierkegaard school which gives great value to God. But Anand is certainly an existentialist of the school of Jean Paul Sarte and Martin Heidegger which proclaims that man is alone in a godless universe. Almost all the main characters of Anand's world (Bakha, Munoo, Gangu, Ratan, Gauri, Nur) are alone in their struggle for existence. In this godless universe Anand's protagonists fight their own battle of lives without any assistance from gods who are mute spectators of their life struggle.

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