



A Critical Analysis On The Causes Of Identity Crisis In The Select Novels Of Mulk Raj Anand

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ABSTRACT

In Indian literature, the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao laid the foundation of Indian English fiction. The post-colonial age represented by these three novelists was importantly a quest for identity along various dimensions of socio-political and economic order of India. It is clear that individual's search for identity has been the prime aspect in almost all the novels of Anand. The loss of identity may be a moment of despair for the protagonists but when they re-attain their identity after a long struggle it is a great moment of delight for them. The word 'Identity' finds its origin in the late sixteenth century, (in the sense 'quality of being identical'). This paper explores how Mulk Raj Anand in his novels like *Coolie*, *The Road*, *Untouchable*, *Two Leaves and A Bud* and *The Sword and The Sickle* portrays the real sufferings Protagonists in the hands of upper class and their sufferings represent individuals as well as the society's struggle for identity.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Crisis for Identity, Untouchability, Imperialism, Poverty and Slavery

Rigid Caste and Class System

The Hindu caste system is unique in the world. In the caste division Shudras fall in the fourth category and below them falls the lower most category who are called as the Chandalas and they come under the category of Untouchables. It was believed that mere touch of an untouchable could result in high caste being contaminated, which was given formal sanction in Dharma Sutras. In the words of Apte, (1965) "We see in the Dharma-sutras the beginning of the formal theory of defilement resulting in the taboo of all contact on the part of pure men of the upper castes with an impure man, namely, a member of the lowest caste" (516). Now, coming to the novel *Untouchable*, the protagonist Bakha resides in an outcaste colony with no basic facilities. His occupation is clearing human excreta. The plight of the outcaste people is very pathetic as

shown by Anand. Even if unknowingly they come in contact with the higher community people they have to meet drastic consequences. He buys very cheap sweetmeat and he is in his own world relishing it, he forgets to call out his arrival and accidentally comes in contact with a higher community person and the result is a huge crowd gathers around him and start abusing him. He receives a sound slap from the person he polluted. Shockingly, he is stunned, feels ashamed, what is his crime? What is his identity? A mere untouchable?

The protagonist has a long desire to look at the deities of the temple and does climb and nears the door. According to the holy books a temple can be polluted by a low caste coming within 69 yards of it. The priest of the temple shouts at him for polluting the temple, but when the same priest tries to molest Bakha's sister within the temple premises, he is dumbfounded. And he initiates to enter the temple, later feels guilty of doing something wrong but now he is completely shattered at the behavior of the priest, towards his sister. In the novel, *The Road* too deals with the same problem. The novel *Untouchable* was published in 1935 and *The Road* in 1963. The social issues did not change much even after independence. A resolution was passed for the complete abolition of untouchability, but in the interior parts of our country the social issues still persist.

In the novel *The Road*, the protagonist Bhikhu is also very lively, active and ambitious like Bakha. But he has been able to accomplish many things which remained a dream to Bakha, for example, the basic education that he could procure and Bakha could not though he longed for it very much. Here Bhikhu is a leather worker (Chamar caste) a step higher than Bakha in the hierarchy of the outcaste, but even they are not allowed to enter the temple. In the village, the government's decision to build the road that could connect the city and the village meant prosperity since plenty of milk and vegetables were produced in the village. The landlord Thakur Singh and his men opposed for they could not tolerate the idea of the lower caste like Bhikhu and his friends involving in the construction and drawing income equal to the higher community. They also felt that because of their mere touch while construction, the road will be polluted and hence they can't use the same road for transportation purpose. In the same village Dhooli Singh who is also a landlord is a very kind person who gives all the support to the Chamars which is completely opposed by Thakur Singh. He says with great annoyance to Dhooli Singh that one day you are going to marry your daughter to a chamar and your son to a sweeper woman if you continue this way. Here we find Erikson 4th stage of psychoanalysis theory (ie) industry v/s inferiority, cause Dhooli Singh, Bhikhu and all his men wish to work unitedly as an industry but the behavior of Thakur Singh, his son and the son of Dhooli Singh put them in an inferior stage. Identity crisis can be felt here.

In the novel *Coolie* caste is relatively not important. The protagonist Munoo is a young innocent boy who is forced to leave his village in the Kangra valley to become a servant, laborer, a rickshaw puller and ultimately crushed by the same selfish world when he was only a bud. By birth he is a Kshatriya, from the warrior caste, a brave boy who is compelled to work as a coolie. His father died out of poverty, when he was an infant. His mother worked hard to feed him and her brother-in-law who was also very small then. Later his mother also faces a slow death. Here Munoo as a small boy suffers a lot at the hands of his uncle and aunt. His aunt and uncle continuously pester him to move out of the village and go to Babu Nathoo Ram's

house. Initially the innocent Munoo felt happy that he could escape from the evil clutches of his aunt Gujri and enjoy work in a new place. But after he reaches Nathoo Ram's place, he is told by his uncle that he is employed as a servant and he has to do his best in their house. He further says, 'You are their servant and they are very kind people'. After hearing this, tears gush in Munoo's eyes and he realizes his status, i.e., servility is his identity. Here we see that caste does not play the major role, but class, his poverty has deprived him of his identity. Even in Nathoo's house, he is disallowed to mingle with the other members of the family, he feels lonely, at that moment Munoo thinks about his mother, those intimate moments. Here we find the 6th stage of Ericson's theory (ie) intimacy v/s isolation. In this situation, Munoo recalls the warmth and affectionate moment with his mother and now suddenly he feels all alone in the world very much isolated from everyone, his village, his friends and everyone there.

Subservience of the protagonists

This is the next cause for the crisis of identity. Subservience is the submissive character of the protagonists in the novels of Anand. Coming to the novel *Untouchable*, we find the protagonist Bakha who keeps on searching for self-identity within the very structure of the society that has eliminated the possibility of his having one. Even to get the daily food, the subalterns have to do all sorts of unpleasant jobs that the people of higher community ask them to. Even after doing all that job the food is mostly thrown at them like animals. These people receive it without any murmur. Assimilating such things, Bakha lifts the dried piece of bread flung down at him very quietly and moves since the stamp of untouchability and servility that hung on him has made him dumb and submissive with no salvation for his identity crisis.

In the novel *The Road* we see the same incident of slap that Bakha receives for accidentally coming in contact with a person of higher community. When Bhikhu accepts the water in a brass tumbler from Rukmani, he is slapped by her brother for defiling the tumbler. Like Bakha, Bhikhu too has a momentary thought of retaliating but his servility status pulls himself back from doing so. Here, their identity is shattered. Further in the novel *Coolie* the protagonist who is very innocent child is not even aware of the way he is exploited. He asks himself as to What am I, I am Munoo Babu Nathuram's servant. He literally accepts his identity as a servant, a slave in the very beginning of his series of miseries.

In the next novel of Anand, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, the plight of the workers in the tea plantation estate of Assam is portrayed in this novel. The protagonist Gangu has lost his land and hut to the cunning money lender Seth Bashir Dass, in his village. Later, Buta another villager promises own land and accommodation in the tea plantation by the English people of Mac Pherson Tea Estate. Gangu trusts Buta completely and accompanies him with his whole family. After reaching there, he comes to know that the Tea estate itself was a prison without bars and there was no escape from the place, no matter whatever be the reason. In this way, Gangu had lost his identity in his village. Actually, believing Buta's words he thought that he could regain his identity. But that again remained a question mark. And then, Gangu all alone earned eight annas, but here his whole family slogged but earned less than eight annas at the week end. So, this is the way, the whole family submissively bore all the torture at the hands of the plantation masters. At one

stage, Gangu loses his wife due to cholera and he was unable to arrange even for her funeral since he was penniless. Hence, he goes to the plantation owner for money but he only receives kicks. The kicks had bruised his body that did not hurt him, but the humiliation of having always to lower his eyes before the person who had beaten him was very intense. So, in this way, his identity is totally shattered. Here we see the 2nd stage of Erikson's psychology theory autonomy v/s shame & doubt.

In the novel *The Sword and the Sickle*, patriarchy plays a major role. The protagonist Lalu Singh has to face the fury of his father since his haircut is assumed to be a terrible insult to his religion. Lalu is very much shocked to realize that he is also a victim of the age old inheritance.

Social, Economic & Political Exploitation

In *Untouchable*, we find the outcasts are exploited economically by almost all of them. The sweetmeat-seller manipulates the scales and cheats them knowing that they will not open their mouth against them. In *The Road*, the temple priest says that the downtrodden are punished by their karma and it is their fate to work among dust and flies. Therefore, their suffering is considered as their punishment. They distance themselves from the subalterns but never hesitate to molest their girls. In addition, Munoo in *Coolie* longs to venture out into the world but ultimately goes through series of exploitation. For example, at Nathoo Ram's house he slips the tea tray and for which he is slapped and abused very cruelly. Therefore, he feels very dejected & disappointed. And then, he goes to his uncle's house to find some solace and narrated the incident. On the contrary to his expectation, his uncle does not pay heed to him, instead he too beats him mercilessly. Here the 1st stage of Ericson's theory is applied. Finally, he trusts his uncle and leaves his village, but later after being deceived by his own uncle he feels shattered, he is betrayed by his uncle.

At that time, Economic exploitation springs from the political situation of India that was under the British imperialists. The coolies were exploited by the British Industrial Capitalism. Mr. Reginald White, President of the Cotton mills, Mr. Little, the Manager, Jimmy Thomas the foreman are the British exploiters. They exploit by instructing the mills to go on short time. Already the coolies were earning very meagre wages that was very insufficient to fulfill their hand to mouth and now it became more miserable. Here, Munoo though very young was very industrious to work hard with the machines, but he was restricted by the British exploiters. Here we see the 4th stage of Erikson's theory, Industry v/s Inferiority.

And then, in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, we find the severity of capitalism combined with colonialism. The protagonist Gangu, a middle-aged man could be called an improved version of Munoo. His love for land brings about the tragedy within a year of his arrival in the tea estate. He dies in the hands of Reggie Hunt. In this novel, the sexual exploitation is delineated as a common factor in the tea plant. Not a single woman could escape from the lustful eyes of Reggie Hunt. In *The Sword and the Sickle* also one can find the exploitation of Indian peasants by the British Colonialists and the Indian Landlords. Actually, the background of this novel is a transition period in the history of India both politically and socially.

Mulk Raj Anand has portrayed the burning issues of the peasants in Punjab. Lalu the protagonist joins the German soldiers in the World War-I expecting a piece of land and a good medal as they had been promised. But after the completion of the War, Lalu was sent back without the rewards he was promised. Here we see the 1st stage of Erikson's theory Trust v/s Mistrust. So, this the way he faces identity crisis.

Imperialism & Colonialism

The novel, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, is the severest condemnation of British Colonialism among all the novels of Anand. The Britishers' economic policies clearly imperialistic and they were mostly exploitative and suppressive and well designed for ethnic subordination. The indentured coolies of the tea plantation went through political and legal domination, racial and cultural inequality in the hands of the colonizers. It was only Dr. Havre, the voice of Anand, a Britisher who felt pity over the plight of the coolies. In fact, it was only Dr. Havre who initiated the coolies to protest against the Imperialists. As a result, Gangu and his other counterparts take a march to Reynold's house but they are stopped by the colonizers who were very powerful enough with their ammunition. Here we see the 3rd stage of Erikson's theory. Initiation v/s Guilt.

In *The Sword and the Sickle* apart from the exploitation of the landlords & moneylenders, their hardships are augmented by the colonial exploitation. The imperialist power was very much aware of certain cash crops that produced great wealth and also helped to fuel the empires of Europe. To match with the imperial system, the traditional indigenous agricultural methods were transformed. The peasants have been the victims of exploitation by the colonialists, landlords and moneylenders.

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