



A Study Of The Barber's Trade Union As A Modern Short Story

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Abstract:

Beginning of the Modernity in India can be traced back to the date when the Indians, irrespective of sex, age and caste, gathered together alongside the railway route to watch the first railway running between Bombay to Thane. This is the time, approach or curiosity which compelled the Indians to forget their caste, age and gender for a while consciously to watch the train. Many writers have attacked the social evils prevalent as customs in Indian society in their writing but they were the social reformers. Mulk Raj Anand was basically a writer who from his childhood, was witnessing the practices and the conflict between the powerful and powerless. The short story, The Barber's Trade Union focuses on the revolt of a barber boy against the socially affluent people of his village who decline their shaving and hair cutting by his hands.

The chief aim of the paper is to study the short story in the light of modernity. The revolt of the protagonist; writer's support to him in all his plans, lead to establishment of the barbers' union. In the end of the story, the protagonist forms a trade union so that the villagers come to the barbers for shaving and cutting their hair. Earlier the landlord, Panditji, and the jagirdar would ask Chandu to dance to their tune, now Chandu changed the situation in such a way that the prominent people in the village started to visit him or the other barbers for shaving or for cutting their hair.

Key words: Mulk Raj Anand, Chandu, Modern India

Introduction: History of Modern India can not be written without taking into considerations the towering personalities of the modern period in lime light in the field of politics, culture, and social movements. Modern India has been erected on the bricks put by the social reformers and Freedom fighters of the modern times. However, writers have also played crucial role in shaping the modern India in the true sense of the term. Modernity in India, though basically concerned with the evil practices prevalent in India and the efforts taken by the activists to eradicate these practices. The social reformers like Mahatma Phule, Savitribai Phule, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vinoba Bhave and many more will be remembered forever for their contribution in making

the India modern. Mulk Raj Anand is one of the Indian writers in English who tried his level best to bring about positive change in the contemporary society through his pen. He depicted the characters from lower strata of the society and the treatment given to them along with. In his article entitled 'The Story of Experiment with a White Lie' Mulk Raj Anand admits that he would not acknowledge the characters from lower class. In the article he writes, "I am sure whether the *Confessions* of Rousseau, which I had then just read, or some of the books of Russian writers, like Gogol, Tolstoy and Gorky, which I had pursued in India before going to London, were not then forcing me to acknowledge, what most Indian writers of the modern period, like Bankimchandra Chatterji, Ratananath Sarshar, and Rabindranath Tagore, had not accepted in their novels, that even the so-called lowest dregs of humanity, living in utmost poverty, squalor, and degradation, could become heroes of fiction." (K. Naik et al., 1972) His short story, *The Barber's Trade Union* is one of the realistic stories. He describes a character, Chandu, his childhood friend and the treatment given to him by the people from upper strata of the society in the story.

Born in Peshawar in 1905, Mulk Raj Anand is one of the prominent writers of Indian writing in English. He is also known as a social realist and a humanist. After receiving his early education in India, he went to University College, London for his under-graduation. He obtained his Ph.D. from Cambridge University. He spent nearly half of his life span of his life in India and in England. He continued his career as a writer in India when he returned to India in 1946. It is said that most of his novels are concerned with the lives of the marginalized section of the Indian society. Literature, it seems, has been used by him like a medium to present the exploitation of the disadvantaged strata of the Indian Society. As a writer his career has been influenced much by the tragic incident at his home which was caused because of the stricture of caste system that prevailed in the Indian Society.

Objectives of the paper: The prime objective of the paper is to assess the literary contribution of Mulk Raj Anand as modern writer. Apart from the prime objective, the paper is to study the short story as Modern story. Another objective is to study and analyze the story "The Barber's Trade Union" in the light of Modernism and Modernity.

Hypotheses of the paper: It is hypothesized that modernity changed the thinking, attire, attitude, and vision of the Indians. It is hypothesized that Mulk Raj Anand used literature as weapon to attack the social evils and vindicated the modern approach of living. It is hypothesized that Modernity occupied every sphere of the life of Indian Society.

Materials and Method: The short story, 'The Barber's Trade Union' is published by Academic Book Publications, Jalgaon in an edited textbook for the course of F.Y.B.A. English to be taught in the affiliated Colleges of Kavayitri Bahinabai Chaudhari North Maharashtra University, Jalgaon. The book is entitled as "Introduction to Literature: Short Story and Poetry." Textual and descriptive analytical methods have been used for this research paper. **Discussion:** The story, *The Barber's Trade Union* opens with a statement "Among the makers of modern India, Chandu, the barber boy of my village, has a place which will be denied him unless I press for the recognition of his contribution to history" (Patil Anil, 2022). The beginning of the story itself highlights that the story writer, Mulk Raj Anand is telling us the story of a modern barber boy. The narrator tells us the story of his revolt against unjust claim of denying a particular attire. In the

story, Chandu, the protagonist is a barber boy. He is the childhood friend of the narrator. The narrator describes innovative ideas which always haunt Chandu. He works on them because nobody was there to stop him. The narrator calls him genius because he would catch the wasps and take the poison out of their bodies. Among varied fancies, the one Chandu had been possessed with is to wear a dress like Dr. Kalan Khan. He was actually impressed by the attire of Dr. Kalan Khan. He was educated up to fifth standard and thinks that wearing dress like a doctor may not suit him. He asks the narrator for his opinion. The narrator encourages him in this project. The narrator tells ,

“ONE day I was thrilled to find Chandu at the door of my house in the morning He was dressed up in a white turban, a white rubber coat – a little too big for him, but nevertheless very splendid- a pair of pump shoes in which I could see my face reflected in clear silhouette. He had a leather bag in his hand He was setting off on his round, and had come to show me how grand he looked in his new outfit.” (Patil Anil, 2022)

A barber boy in a doctor's dress caused a havoc in the upper-class people in the village. In modern times everyone has the right to choose one's own clothes. The Upper caste people: burly landlord Bijay Chand, Tanhu Ram the Sahukar of the Village, and Pandit Parmanand mocked at his outfits. They annoyed on him for wearing the dress like a doctor. They prohibited him to enter their house until he does not wear a befitting dress to a barber's boy. They shouted at him and advised to change the attire. The caste-system of India had drawn the thick lines of rules and behavioral patterns for people of different castes and businesses. The Indians accepted the modern thoughts because of education. It is that means which made all the people aware about their human rights. Though Chandu was not learned beyond fifth primary class, his act of teaching lesson to the orthodox people in the story, has a touch of modern thinking. Education played a role of ladder for all those who were crushed under the customs and tradition in the name of culture and religion. Even Pandit Parmanand asserts and interrogates, “You boys have been spoiled by your school education. It may be all right for you to wear those things because you are going to be learned man. But what right has that low caste boy to such apparel? He has got to touch our beards, our heads, and our hands. He is defiled enough by God. Why does he want to become more defiled? He is a rogue!” (Patil Anil, 2022)

The trio: Bijay Chand, Tanhu Ram and Pandit Parmanand have their sarcastic and insulting remarks for Chandu. Bijay Chand says, “Go away, you swine, go away and wear clothes befitting your low status as a barber----- You son of the devil! You will defile my religion.” while Tanhu Ram shouted at him, “Get away!, Get away! You useless one. Don't come any nearer, or we will have to treat the whole house with the sacred cow dung to purify it.” (Patil Anil, 2022)

All the three people scorn at his apparel and scold him, curse him and blame him for defiling their religion. Pandit Parmanand vindicates suchlike dress for the narrator but for a low-caste boy it is prohibited. Helpless Chandu finds alternative for this and he decides to teach lessons to all the people. Chandu proposed the idea of opening a trade union at a special meeting of his fellow brothers. Since then, all the villagers had to visit the barber's shop in the bazaar. Chandu and his mother, both did not surrender to the village elders. Finally, Chandu opened his own shop in village, right at the head of the bazaar.

Modernism: While highlighting the feature of Modern Age H. D. Sharma and M.S. Bhatnagar in the preface to the book, *Modern English Literature: 20th Century* write,

“The most important characteristic of Modern Literature is that it is opposed to the general attitude to life and its problems adopted by the Victorian writers and the public which may be termed “Victorian.” The young people of the present century regarded the Victorian Age as hypocritical, and the Victorian ideals as mean, superficial and stupid. This rebellious mood affected modern literature, which was directed by mental attitudes, moral ideals, and spiritual values.” (D. Sharma & S. Bhatnagar, 2008)

The striking feature of the modern literature, as highlighted above, is opposite to the general attitude to life and its problems adopted by the old people. The trio- Bijay Chand, Tanhu Ram and Pandit Parmanand in the short story represent the authority which symbolizes the traditional approach and Victorianism while Chandu, the barber boy stands for the revolt and Modernism. He chooses the option to open his own saloon shop instead of home visit to the upper caste. His establishment of the trade union for the barbers symbolizes modernity in this sense.

Dr. Thorat and others describe the term Modernism in their book, *A Spectrum of Literary Criticism*. ‘Modernism’ according to them, “is generally used to denote all kinds of experiments and innovations brought about in literature in the 20th Century. Though a specific period in literary history can not be assigned to modernism, yet a period about thirty-five years beginning from 1910 to the end of Second World War could be limits within which it had its sway.” (Thorat et al., 2001) The story has been published in the year 1944 which marks the period as modern one. Anand tried to depict the reality of the time; raised a question to the system and did not answer it.

Conclusion: The story, *The Barber’s Trade Union* is the realistic delineation of the incident in the life of Mulk Raj Anand. The first World War, The Second World War and Indian Social Reform Movement in India laid the foundation of Modern Era because the human being came in the center at this time. Mulk Raj Anand’s realistic presentation of Chandu and his protest in the story describes that feature of modern hero in Chandu. Hence, we can call the story a Modern Short Story. Mulk Raj Anand, hence is treated as modern in his approach. Putting their opinions about literary tendencies as the feature of Modern Age Sharma and Bhatnagar write, “The literature of the Modern Age is governed more by realism than romance. The present age is essentially an age of realism in life and literature.” (D. Sharma & S. Bhatnagar, 2008) The focus on the realism in the story makes Mulk Raj Anand a modern writer. The realistic elements in the story makes the story modern. In his meeting with Mahatma Gandhi what Mulk Raj Anand told Gandhiji about his writing of novel is, “I believe in posing the question rather than answering it” (K. Naik et al., 1972) He has just posed the question of humanity in this way by delineating the portrayal of Chandu, though it is not a novel. Modernism changed the thinking of only those who were sufferer and exploited. Anand has been modern since he dared to draw Chandu and stand by his side. Modernity in India truly adopted only by the powerless and the powerful denied it as it bestowed rights to the underprivileged.

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