

“Value and Status of Woman with Special Reference to Gauri: An Inspirational Example for Present Woman”

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Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand grew up in that country which is under the fast developmental changes in political as well as social field. It was the time when people of India had united and acquired a meaningful direction under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi for fighting against the social, economic and political exploitation and other evils of society. Anand responded to the call of times with great enthusiasm. He did not focus only on social and political change but also interpreted Indian tradition and culture and tried to reveal its insufficiencies. He believes that the social and political system of India has been degraded and the people of Indian society have lost their faith in themselves rather they started to put faith in *karma* (action) and *kismet* (fate). Anand does not believe on fate so he wants that the people have to learn to oppose “all theories of fatalistic acceptance of God, predestination and determinism” and to recognize that “every man is the master of his own destiny”.

Anand does not believe on ‘art for art’s sake’ but he believes on ‘art for the sake of man’. He knows that the artists and the intellectuals play a pivotal role in the cultural reorientation of societies. Anand’s social experience dominates his writings when he thinks about the projecting of novel as a revolutionary form:

“I am conscious of the need to help, raise the untouchables, the peasants, the serfs, the coolies and other suppressed members of society, to human dignity and self-awareness in view of the abjectness, apathy and despair in which they are sunk” (*Apology for Heroism*: 93).

Exploitation under economical issue

Anand was ardent that females, along with males, should be aware and should learn to write their own destiny by their own hands. They should know that human being can make his own *kismet* (fate). Anand wanted to show the world that, like the heroine of *The Old Woman and the Cow*, every woman can fight against her exploitation in the society just like Gauri has successfully fought against the age-old and traditional customs of her society and snatched her right to live in the same society as an honourable human being.

The Old Woman and the Cow is the very first novel of Mulk Raj Anand which is only the heroine centred novel. Gauri is the protagonist of the novel. Anand disposed all the compassion and commiseration into the novel for woman. The novel is the classical exposition of the status of women in the society. The plot of the novel is structured with the help of some earlier fictions and Indian mythology. *The Ramayana* is the most important myth of India from which Anand has portrayed Sita, an ideal woman. Anand portrayed the sufferings of woman in Indian traditional society. In Indian society, the women are proudly called by some pious names as *matta* (mother), *devi* (goddess) and *Laxmi* (the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity). But if we see in reality and practically, these are only designations and titles and instead of these pious titles, we even do not ashamed from misbehaving them publicly or abusing them secretly. Misbehaving and disrespect of a woman like mother or both of them (parents) is prohibited in every religion and dharma.

There are two important details about Gauri which must be gotten at the very beginning. First, it is found in a backward village which is full of superstitious and orthodox customs. Second, Gauri is a member of a very poor family where there economic exploitation exists, and her hardships collides her life that becomes the major cause of her sufferings. Apart from this, Gauri is uneducated in the village. But all the same, she acquires experiences from the different scenarios of the city where she achieves new light of education from different kinds of people and changes herself in a major way. All these experiences help her to stand on her legs and live alone away from her tyrant husband.

In the tradition of Hindu, cow is a sacred and divine animal. So the metaphor of cow is used in the novel because it naturally brings in reader’s mind the gentleness, the nobility, the obedience, the harmlessness and various other noble qualities which are find out in a cow. Therefore, Panchi compared Gauri with sacred animal. The metaphors of ‘cow’ and ‘holy bull’ reveal the dominant and dominated one. Ultimately the marriage ceremony is celebrated in full Punjabi tradition, although there were some arguments regarding dowry. Groom could not see the bride before she would reach home. As an innocent village girl, Gauri’s conception of the relationship between married couples is broadly based on what she has experienced and what she has gotten from others. The said events in the novel prove that the knowledge of her heritage has influenced her; the fables of gods and goddesses, the stories of legends and speculative myths i.e. *Puranic Kathas*, and lives of saints. Therefore, she believes that her husband is her god and master even though he is harsh and violent to her. She believes that his heart to be won by giving love and affection.

Gauri does not believe on extremist changes in her life. She believes that she has not born and grew up upon any radical phenomena. So she agrees her position as a woman in the society, but on the basis of little compromise that her husband should

behave her as a wife, treat her with love and respect and not be brutal and fierce. She wishes that there should be kindness and mercy in the heart of Panchi. But all this proves a mirage and the situation becomes vice versa.

Irritation and disappointment grows more and more in the home and Gauri is suggested for remarriage even she is not divorced. But she denies remarrying because her husband is alive. The remarriage might not solve her problems; so she feels that it needs to win her husband's heart. This is only economic problem in her parental home that forces her to remarry even her husband is alive and still is not divorced. The problem of Gauri promotes despondency and poverty in her parental home which seems to be a part of the village scene. Amru, her uncle, is unprincipled exploiter and her mother is one who is being exploited and becomes despaired victim of him. Even though Gauri has been exploited and broken by her husband, mother-in-law, uncle and mother; she does not lose her courage and keeps continue her struggle and bears all such exploitations and finally snatches her rights to live in the same society.

The transfiguration of Gauri lifts her to a high position and renders grain for grinding to the mills of gossip and rumour. Though Panchi agrees to stay with her, he still doubts about her purity. Everyone provokes him by telling that she is not pure; she had been stayed with Seth for several days and had also been assaulted by Dr. Batra in his nursing home. He again gets very much confusion in his mind and cannot resist the ridicules of the people and so that he wants the proof of her purity. Thus, he gives her an opportunity to prove herself a pure woman and save her chastity. She, without hesitation, says, "I have come back to you - as I went away" (*The Old Woman and the Cow*: 262). But Panchi disagrees and says to prove her chastity. This statement proves that Gauri does not go after traditions blindly and becomes so mature to understand if it be accepted blindly nothing except pain and misery would be outcome.

CONCLUSION

Anand wants that every woman should be like Gauri, a courageous and confident woman who strongly fights against her exploitation and gets her value and status as a woman in the society. He points out that at the time of her decision of going away, her face "transfigured from the gentle cow's acquiescent visage of the time when she had arrived at Panchi's house, to that of a woman- with a will of her own, though her heart palpitated at every step" (*The Old Woman and the Cow*: 264). She takes extremely irreversible decision because she had participated with Panchi but she could not live with respect and dignity. And, in the meantime, she gives importance to love and mutual trust instead of married relationship. Since Panchi has no faith and trust in her, she has to decide of leaving him and break the marital bond.

Thus the novel, *The Old Woman and the Cow*, is an ultimate evocation of the social environment of India in which the hazardous powers of heredity and the following of traditions and customs over-shadow all other deliberations. The communal psychology is delineated with experiences by juxtaposing myths and realism. Anand's alembic power is exposed, especially, in assuming the transformation of the whole views of the old myth into present stories of a woman fighting to disentangle herself from the obsolete stubbornnesses of the society, which are uncovered with a remarkable finesse. He has ability to metamorphose the myth to encounter the junctures of the contemporary reality while holding the traditional aroma. As Balarama Gupta asserts a view about the novel in his work *Mulk Raj Anand: A Study of His Fiction in Humanist Perspective*:

"*The Old Woman and the Cow*....is the sole novel dealing with woman and her status in society. It reveals Anand's emphatic plea for the amelioration of woman..... Anand vividly portrays the wretched position of Indian woman in rural society and suggests the changes that are coming about by giving a lively description of heroin's enlightened reaction to traditions and customs corrupted through man's selfishness, ignorance and vested interests" (Gupta: 95-96).

In the end, we can say that Anand wants to see women strong, bold, courageous and capable of raising their voice against exploitation and deprivation. He wants that they must take extreme decisions if they feel that they have been suppressing by the burden traditions and customs of the society. Gauri is the role model for all those women who blindly follow the traditions and customs and silently tolerate the ill-treatment of the society. She is the only inspiration of those women who have lost their dignity and respect in the society especially in family. Therefore, the qualities of Gauri are to be appreciated rather than some other superstitious traditions have been installed in Indian society. Anand wants to convey the message for feminine characters that they should struggle for their status and dignity in the society even if they remain single.

References

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