

IMAGE OF CHILD IN THE SHORT FICTION OF MULKRAJ ANAND

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The Indian English short fiction has faithfully recorded the challenges and confrontation of values and process of transition and transformation going on in the Indian society. In the discourse on the fate of marginalized communities, the writers were encouraged to represent the sufferings of women and children. Besides social-political awareness, the development of psychology has modified the perception of life. With these changes, there came a wave of children's literature. The representation of the children's world has always been a source of fascination for the writers during all ages and all countries. A large number of novels and short-stories from pre-independence to post-independence India present a vivid account of child life. The writers have taken child characters as an instrument to project the social-vices. And there is a strong affinity of these works with the best in world literature. The short stories of Tagore like *Kabuliwala and other stories*, *Home and the World*, R.K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends*, *Malgudi Days*, 'Vendor of Sweets' present different dimensions of child life particularly the struggle of children against the cramped conventions of society. Where Premchand choose his themes from peasantry and humble folk of Uttar Pradesh, Anand selected themes from day to day expressions surroundings around him and select heroes from his environment. He wrote in an unselfconscious way about what he had seen at first hand in the years of his childhood, boyhood and youth. Both Mulk Raj Anand in English and Prem Chandra in Hindi revolutionalized the well knit pattern of literary aesthetics. They made efforts to make a representation of the social-evils through the consciousness of their child protagonists alongwith their image in Indian Society.

The collection 'The Lost Child and Other Stories' contains thirteen stories in which Anand depicts his profound concern for the life of children with a psychological insight. His stories deal with the emotions, feelings and psyche of child characters. The first story of the collections is 'The Lost Child' that is a remarkable example of Anand's dealing with the psyche

of a child who is lost in a fair. The story is divided in two parts. In the first part the child goes to a fair with his parents where colourful articles of the fair like roundabout *dancing cobra*, *rainbow-coloured balloons*, *Gulab-jamun*, *rasgulla*, *burfi*, *garland of gulmohar* fascinates the child. He is attracted towards the colourful items of the fair. In this, Anand, very beautifully, presents the happy emotions of the child. The child is very excited when he enters into the fair. His attention is captured by the *mustard field*, *a group of dragon flies* and so he legged behind. Then his parents called him. "Come, child, come"⁹ After the call the child runs towards his parents. With these simple incidents of the life of the child, Anand presents a carefree mental state of the child and his concern with the social environment. The child is only enjoying the beauty of the fair. The natural description of the fair portrays a picture of human emotions. Children are very sensitive. Each and every aspect of nature attracts them. The description in the story reveals how the child is eager to have each article that is present in the wordly fair. Yet the child is conscious of the fact that his parents would not allow him to have all therefore without waiting for their reply he goes forward.

The child demands every item of fair repeatedly but parents refuse to buy him those items by making excuses. This reveals the obsessed psyche of the child. Today is the world of pressure and depression. Little children feel pressure of their environment and sometimes become the victim of depression and sometimes fight with their surroundings. What Anand had pointed out in his writings has become the issues of post-colonial India.

The pathos of this short story in planning and execution is superb. The depiction of the child's psychology after he gets lost in the fair has been very beautifully done. The whole story is superb in execution. The contrast in the behavior of the child before he gets lost and after he gets lost is very correctly and psychologically handled. All in all, the story is in all respects superb.

The second story of the collection is '*The Eternal Why*' that deals with the curiosity of a child protagonist. Here Anand reveals the child psychology of questioning. The child wants to know everything. The child is fascinated by the river Lunda. He puts several questions related to the river and his own reflections in the river. Then he saw the people bathing in the river. He questioned,

‘What is that, mother?’ he asked, bewildered. ‘They are the holy man bathing in the river, child’ his mother

answered. ‘They are swimming’.

I want to swim, too’ he said, and almost made towards the water.

No, no,’ said the mother, running after him. Bringing him near her, she began to console him: ‘You are too small to swim yet’

The child was a ‘bit cross’ with his mother for not letting him do what he desires. He wants to know the origin of the river. Like a true little philosopher, he wants to know the last cause of all things.

‘Where does the water go, father?’

‘It goes to the sea, my son’.

‘But it came from the sea, did it not?’

‘Yes my son, it came from the sea: from the boundless, infinite ocean it came, into the vast ocean will it go.’

‘Where is the sea, father?’

It is on the other side of the world, child’. (22)

The child’s thirst is not satisfied he wants to know why is the river this side when the sea is on the other side of the world. The father ultimately has to surrender before the eternal whys of the child.

The story ‘*The Conqueror*’ is the tale of a five-year-old child who is enthusiastic to his goal. It is a small account of subjugation of a younger child by a group of a little senior one. There is a group of bright eyed children with shooting arrows and bamboo bows who were not older than ten and not younger than six. There was a higher peak before them that was their fort which they

have to conquer. This young child of five years of age was disallowed to take part in the battle because 'he was too small.' Anand presents the eagerness of the child.

Anand in a very natural manner expresses the emotions and zest of the child to follow his companions. With enthusiasm the child could not restrain his eagerness and follows them saying 'Wait, I am coming.' All the boys decided the child not to follow them and shouted 'Go back, go back.'

But in the darkness of swiftly approaching night he ran up the hill his bright face showing to his fellows the torchlight of the conqueror.

Anand's one of the best stories in this collecting 'The Barber's Trade Union' deals with the emotions a barber boy of the village. The protagonist Chandu was not good in studies but he recites good poetry. Anand also points out the caste-discrimination in the story. While Chandu was of a 'low caste barber' mother does not allow him to play with Chandu as the narrator belongs to the high class. Chandu wanted to look like Dr. Kalan Khan as he expressed to the narrator.

Even Sahukar insulted Chandu by rebutting him on his disguise and does not allow to cut his hair. Chandu subjugated psyche was realized by the narrator. He suggested him to go to Pandit Parmanand. But Chandu received the same response from him,

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 more?

defiled? You are a high-cast boy. And he is a low-caste

devil! He is a rogue!

But Chandu was not such kind of a boy who could easily be adjusted with the situation. Anand shows that Chandu resisted with the society making fun of the upper-class Sahukar and saved money, bought new clothes and new tools for himself and opened a new shop of barber with his qualities of head and heart.

Thus Anand successfully portrayed the need of children and reflected the mind of children. He authentically portrayed the natural psychology of a child alongwith his social understanding and questioning spirit. He also asserted that all children need concentration and appreciation.

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