

Outthrust of Dalit Consciousness in Select Novels of Mulk Raj Anand & Mahasweta Devi

R. Abirami, M.A., M.Phil., DCA

Assistant Professor of English, Senthamarai College of Arts & Science
Ph.D. Research Scholar in English, EMG Yadava College for Women
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai - 21

Abstract

“Dalit literature is marked by revolt and negativism, since it closely associated with the hopes for freedom by a group of people who as untouchables, are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality” (Mukherjee 1). Dalit writing is a post-independence literary phenomenon. Dalit literature has its own significance. Dalits were always considered as marginalised people, oppressed and others by the Indian society. Inequality is the root cause for this marginalisation. The word Dalit is not new to us, it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of “depressed classes”, a term the British used for what are now called the Scheduled castes. The word “Dalit” has originated from Sanskrit ‘Dalita’ which means ‘oppressed’. Dalits have various names in different parts of India, such as ‘dasa’, ‘dasya’, ‘raksasa’, ‘asura’, ‘avarna’, ‘nisoda’, ‘panchama’, ‘chandala’ etc., There are varieties of nomenclatures such as ‘untouchables’, ‘harijans’, ‘weaker sections’, ‘atishudras’, ‘dalits’, ‘depressed classes’, ‘others’, ‘servile classes’, ‘avamas’, ‘antyajas’, ‘scheduled castes’. Mulk Raj Anand novels reveal consciousness for the Dalits all over the places. Mahasweta Devi is very much committed to society, and she hopefully tried to remove the evils of the society for the oppressed and the downtrodden. This paper attempts to give the Dalit consciousness in the select novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Mahasweta Devi.

Keywords: Mulk Raj Anand, Mahasweta Devi, Dalit consciousness, untouchables, sufferings, underclass, subaltern, marginality, aloofness, suppressed, discrimination.

Mulk Raj Anand was born on December 12, 1905 at Peshwar and died on September 28, 2004 at Pune. He was a prominent Indian author of novels, short stories and critical essays in English. He is very much known for his realistic and sympathetic portrayal of the poor in India. He was the son of a coppersmith and he developed himself with more positive thoughts. He always used to help the poor and the downtrodden. Anand a famous writer who gained his world-wide recognition for his novels *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936). Anand wrote other novels and short-story collections and also edited numerous magazines and journals including MARG, an art quarterly that he founded in 1946. Prose fiction in English began in 1902, the most important novelist during this period is Mulk Raj Anand, who fulminated against class and caste distinction in a series of novels such as, *Two Leaves and A Bud* (1937) and *The Big Heart* (1945).

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Mahasweta Devi, a prominent Indian Bengali fiction writer and social political activist who immersed herself in the lives of India's poor and marginalized as she chronicled the injustices against them in fiction. She was born on Jan 14, 1926 and died in Kolkata on July 28 at the age of 90. In more than 100 novels and short-stories she wrote of India's tribal communities and Maoist rebels, prostitutes, nomads, beggars and labourers. Her writing addressed one single word that is "injustice". G.N. Devy, a writer and activist who worked closely with Ms. Devi said, "Wherever she saw what she thought was injustice, she plunged into the struggle and never looked back". She had written her works mainly in Bengali but incorporating tribal dialects. Her works has been translated into English, Japanese, Italian, French and several Indian languages.

At the age of thirty, Mahasweta Devi wrote her first novel *The Queen of Jhansi*. Devi spent most of her years in documenting the life among India's tribal communities. She championed the cause of 25 million tribal people in India, who belong to approximately 150 different tribes. Her writing reflects the ugliness, squalor and misery in the lives of the tribal people.

Mulk Raj Anand and Mahasweta Devi, have some similarities in concern with the society. They both gave voice to the sufferings and the oppressed conditions of the downtrodden. The following works gives the brief note in the select novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Mahasweta Devi.

Anand's third great novel, *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) was published in the year 1937. It gives us the pathetic conditions of the labourers in the tea plantation of Assam. Anand's furious attack was targeted on the British masters of the tea plantations. The novel presents both the planters and the labourers with their life combined with nature. *Two Leaves and a Bud* mainly denotes the class conflict between two groups the British heartless masters and the innocent poor Indian coolies. Gangu is the protagonist in this novel, he suffers throughout the novel in all the circumstances. This novel also has the element of friendship, love through the characters of Narain, Dr. Havre and Barbara. The novel is rich with the harsh and forced activities of the British masters. Gangu and his family faces all sorts of troubles and they didn't move with the regular life patterns. "class" and "caste" system is a greatest evil which prevails in this novel.

Many a critic come together and criticizes the efforts of Anand, S.C. Harrex says, "*Two Leaves and a Bud* fails to integrate philosophy and drama in an artistically satisfying way." (9). Saros Cowasjee, though he tries to prove that Anand's presentation of life in the tea plantations is based on facts and that he does not exaggerate the cruelties meted out to the laborers in the tea plantations, comes out with a general remark that in fiction, straight facts in themselves

mean little, and they must always be subordinate to the main interests-character and the story.” (10).

The Big Heart (1945) is Anand’s seventh novel and also a great novel. It deals with a small community of coppersmiths of Amritsar, who suddenly come to face with machine civilization. The basic conflict in *The Big Heart* is between tradition and modernity. It also deals with the conflict between the hereditary coppersmith and the capitalists. The novel shows us the changing social reality of India. Ananta the protagonist is a coppersmith by profession. It records the events of a single day in the life of Ananta and he is a man of big heart. Ananta returns to his home-town of Amritsar after having worked in Bombay and Ahmadabad. He lives with a woman named Janaki who is consumed by tuberculosis. Premila Paul says: Janaki is a similar non-conformist woman (12). Ananta starts his own factory and considers himself superior that it is a precious gift of science. He has a strong belief in the machine age, where he thinks unity of labourers begins here. Ananta’s co-workers hate industries because of machines. At one instant he killed his co-worker Ralia because he didn’t want to lose his trade. Mulk Raj Anand here very strictly against to the caste divisions, and he wants to have the acceptance of machines and the unity of labourers, the situation of poor and the emergence of machine age is clearly evident through this novel.

The Private Life of An Indian Prince is a novel by Mulk Raj Anand, and it is published in the year 1953. Through this novel Anand gives us the most impressive and important elements. This novel tells us the abolition of the princely states system in India. The novel has an autobiographical tone. *The Private Life of An Indian Prince* was launched by the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in the year 2004. Anand gives us the deep study of human nature through this novel. Maharaja Ashok Kumar of Shampur asserts complete independence for his small hill-state rather than join the Indian union. He is encouraged by his mistress Ganga Dasi, an illiterate hill-woman. To feed his mistress greedy, he wrests large sums of money from his starving peasantry. At once instant he loses both his princely states power and his mistress. Later he exiles to London there he seduces a shop girl with all his former princely elegance, but he was still in love with his mistress. This in the end led his downfall from the kingdom.

The novel *Old Woman and The Cow* (1960) shows us the plight of women. Gauri is the protagonist of this novel. She suffers a lot in all circumstances in which she moves on. Gauri struggles for her own identity and she was treated as a subordinate woman to a heartless man Panchi. Gaur’s mother Laxmi becomes a victim and this novel also shows us how woman are just considered as an mere object of desire by men. In the beginning of the novel Gauri is projected as a calm woman and silently she is suffering under the hands of her mother-in-law and her husband Panchi. Gauri was tormented for dowry and later she was driven out of the house, she was trapped in the evils of patriarchy. Gauri by her character docile and devoted

wife was finally tortured by Panchi in all aspects. Laxmi sold Gauri for money. In the end she explores as a brave, bold woman and a unique woman in the novel.

Mahasweta Devi's *The Queen of Jhansi* was published originally in the year 1956 in Bengali is a reconstruction of the life of Rani Lakshmi Bai. Later it was translated into English. *The Queen of Jhansi* remains the India's most important historical figures, a legendary heroine who led troops against the British in the uprising of 1857, now widely described as the first Indian War of Independence. A spirited young woman warrior who died on the battlefield but lives on in the minds of an entire people. Mahasweta Devi's first book is a work that defies categories, simultaneously a history, a biography, and a personal statement that says as much about the author as it does about her subject, a valuable contribution to the reclamation of history, and historiography, by feminist writers.

Lakshmi Bai the Rani of Jhansi was the queen of the princely state of Jhansi in North India. She was one of the leading figures of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and became a symbol of resistance to the British Raj for Indian nationalists. The Peshwa called her "chhabili", which means playful". According to Vishnu Bhatt Godse the Rani would exercise at weightlifting, wrestling and steeplechasing before breakfast. An intelligent and simply-dressed woman, she ruled in a business-like manner.

Mother of 1084 is a Bengali novel written by Ramon Magsaysay Award winner Mahasweta Devi. *Mother of 1084* was a political analysis in the 1970s West Bengal. It was written in 1974 on the backdrop of Naxalite revolution in the Seventies. It is a story of a mother whose son, corpse number 1084 in the morgue, was brutally killed by the state because of his ideology of advocating the brutal killing of class enemies, collaborators with the State and counter-revolutionaries within the party. The story begins on the eve of Brati's close accomplice and tries to justify Brati's actions and his revolutionary mentalities. Throughout the story she is portrayed as a strong woman who fought against the odds. She is advised to forget her son. It's a story of a mother as she relives years later the death of her son in the political upheaval that left almost no home untouched.

The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh shows the lives of the underdogs, the Lachhimas, the Rukmanis, the Mohors and the Haroas as a contrast to the lives of their all power overlords the Medinas and Ganeshes. Lachhima, whose leashed bitterness anger of a lifetime against Medini and Ganesh is liberated at the end of the novel when Ganesh begs her to save his life, decides to save him, but on her own terms. The title of the work itself becomes a tool for subversion in this sprawling novel which takes the reader through a multi-layered narrative into the socio-economic malaise of post-independence rural India. Mahasweta Devi's corrosive humour and cryptic style are at their best as she takes on issues of agrarian land relations, inter-caste violence, so-called rural development and the position of women in rural India. As Simone de Beauvoir states; "One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman." (The Second Sex 301)

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