

Exploration of Social Harmony: The Novels of Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand

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Abstract

Social novels may be termed like propaganda novel, industrial novel, working-class novel, problem novel, proletarian novel and even more as per their contents and themes. Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand experimented with this genre of novel, which is social novel, in order to highlight the complexities of the contemporary Indian society and the social life. Novels of Premchand are the literature for art, rather more for society. According to Premchand, novel plays an important role in formation, all round development and good governance of a society.

Keywords: Social Novels, Society, Harmony, Literature, Gender, Race

The social novel or the social problem or protest novel is a work of fiction in which a prevailing social problem, such as gender, race, or class prejudice, is dramatized through its effect on the characters of a novel. The social problems that are addressed in this form of novel include poverty, conditions in factories and mines, the plight of child labour, violence against women, rising criminality, epidemics, because of overcrowding, and poor sanitation in cities, exploitation of downtrodden in its several form, extortion by money-lenders etc. Social novels may be termed like propaganda novel, industrial novel, working-class novel, problem novel, proletarian novel and even more as per their contents and themes.

Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand experimented with this genre of novel, which is social novel, in order to highlight the complexities of the contemporary Indian society and the social life. Novels of Premchand are the literature for art, rather more for society. According to Premchand, novel plays an important role

in formation, all round development and good governance of a society. Premchand always remained faithful to his commitments for social development, its growth, eradication of inhuman practices, correction of the vices and establishment of the virtues. Being conscious of the social issues of society, he remains ever ready to sacrifice his literary energy and skill for social causes. He is closely associated with his age, visualizes it, thinks for it, works for it and performs for it. The novels of Premchand are the history of his age. We find the descriptions of political, religious, social and economic tumult prevalent in the contemporary Indian society. Karmabhumi was written during 1930-32. It was the age of struggle for independence of our country which was led by Gandhi. The tumults of these years are lively presented in the novel. In Karmabhumi his efforts as a writer of contemporary society is excessively evident. He succeeds in portraying the truth and conveying the related message.

Premchand belonged to the age of Gandhi. At that time Gandhi was endeavoring to

make the country free from political, social, religious and economic fetters. He raised voice against the system and used necessary tools for creating public awareness. In 1930, Gandhi started Civil Disobedience Movement. This was a call for disobeying the unethical and unjustifiable rules of the British government. Besides, issues related to abandon the use of liquor, opium and foreign clothes was also there. During the period there was a call given to the students of the country to stop going to the schools; call to the government servants to resign from their job. These issues have been deeply discussed in the novel; they also make the essential fabrics of the novel. Amarkant succeeds in bringing change in the food habit of the poor untouchables. They stop their habits of eating carrion and drinking liquor. Dr. Shantikumar who is an educated and liberal person campaigns for the entry of untouchables in the temple. As a revolutionist he tries to bring equality and uplift of the so-called down-trodden section of the society. In order to serve the causes of the poor and downtrodden, he prefers to resign from the educational institution where he has been serving. Those days western education or modern education had started deepening its roots in the Indian educational system. Shantikumar and Amarkant are the true representatives of Premchand in the novel who respectively leave their school and the government service in consonance with the essentials of the national movement.

As a realist, Premchand wanted to make social reform and change in the society. He always hit hard the social evils and orthodox beliefs prevalent in the contemporary society. As a progressive

writer, he always fought against social injustice in all forms and attempted to bring justice in life and reformation in society. Being a rationalist, he wrote with revolutionary zeal and vigour. He expressed deep sympathy for the poor labourers, peasants, women and oppressed ones in the middle and lower classes of society. He knew that the modern industrialization and materialism have faith in goodness of man. He asserted that the good ultimately wins over falsehood and evil. He wanted to bring a synthesis between man and society and put forth his concept of an ideal social order where there was equality, justice and love. He was not a mere moralist or a realist, but a reformist. His writing belongs to that unique category of literature which has deeply influenced progressive forces all over the world. His literature is a rare voice against the social exploitation and tragedies of Indian peasantry. His sensitivity is expressed in the expression: "I wonder why the sighs of the poor peasants do not reduce us to ashes. I firmly believe that a person without self-respect and spiritual strength is not fit to be called a man".

Premchand extends the canvas of the novel to the arena of the various princely estates in India in his novel Rangbhoomi. The contemporary India was not a united political sovereign unit as it is today. Those days, there were many estates with their own government and their political heads like the kings of the Rajas or Maharajas. Junior to them in rank and profile were the Zamindars and the landlords. There were the princely estates that had been granted rights by the British government to collect revenue and the taxes from the public. In connection of

collection of taxes from the public, atrocities on them were common phenomena. Since the living condition was not of the desired standard, people could not earn enough to maintain their livelihood; they were unable to pay rent for the plot of land and taxes in time.

Like Premchand, the novels of Mulk Raj Anand also focus on the sufferings, misery and wretchedness of the poor. He portrays the pictures of exploitation of the down-trodden class of the Indian society. Religious hypocrisy, feudal system, East-West encounter, the place of woman in the society, superstition, poverty, hunger and exploitation are the common themes of all his novels. His novels like *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and *The Road* (1961) deal with the contemporary social issues. Poverty, Hunger and exploitation are the major themes of these novels. Anand too was influenced by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. We can mark this influence in the ending scene of *Untouchable*:

Regarding the theme and contents of Anand's novel, E.M. Forster anticipated differing criticism from different class of readers. As such, in his preface to *Untouchable* he wrote: "It seems to me indescribably clean and I hesitate for words in which this can be conveyed. Avoiding the rhetoric and circumlocution, it has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it" (Anand, *Untouchable* 9).

Anand wrote, *The Road*, which is a recurring of the theme already discussed in *Untouchable* about twenty five years earlier. Though the setting and characters

are changed, the theme of exploitation of the low caste by the high caste is the same. Bulandsheher of Uttar Pradesh is replaced by Pandit Suraj Mani. Mala and Rukmini are replaced by Sohini of Untouchable. It is based on the finding of the author that the social scene has not changed till date. Once being asked by Saros Cowasjee as to why he wrote this novel since he had covered much the same ground in *Untouchable*, Anand replied:

Well it was a kind of shock to me when I went to live in Haryana, twenty miles from Delhi, in the human empire of Jawaharlal Nehru, to find that the outcastes not only in South India, but in the mixed north were still consigned to the limbs Hindus would not touch the stones carried by the untouchables to make the road, because the stones had touched by the untouchables. I mentioned this to the great Nehru. He did not believe me. He was quite angry at my mentioning this awkward fact. I said I would prove it him by showing it to him in the "enchanted mirror" (qtd. In Cowasjee 161).

Untouchable and *Coolie* are the novels that articulate the abuses of an exploited class an untouchable Bakha in *Untouchable*, and a waif Munno in *Coolie*. The author performs the voice of the people who form the untouchable caste and tyrannized child labour. The period of 1930's was the seed-time of modern Independent India. It was a decade packed with events, when Raja Rao wrote *Kanthapura*. Anand too, wrote of the people, for the people and as a representative of the people; he ventured in the depth of the contemporary Indian social fabrics.

Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand have succeeded in their efforts to protest the

evils which were corrupting and destroying the harmony of social life.

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