

NEW FRONTIERS OF ENGLISH – M.R. ANAND’S PURSUIT OF LINGUISTIC FREEDOM

Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand, the towering figure in the field of Indo-Anglian Fiction, drew his inspiration from the reality around him. He was a champion of human freedom who spared no pains in fighting the colonial yoke, highlighting at the same time the ills that afflicted Indian society. Besides, he wanted to remove the scourge of ignorance and exploitation, corruption and hypocrisy from our society and usher in justice and equality. He was faced with the necessity of leavening the English language with Indian expressions to provide a sense of reality to the readers. The linguistic liberties he took with the English language therefore were geared to fulfilling an artistic purpose – that of affecting and moving the reader’s mind by using curves of thought and configurations of feeling through exploiting the resources of an Indian language. He carried out a faithful translation of idioms and performed an experiment in syntax, changing the structure of sentences and imagery that would enable them to render the illusion of reality successfully.

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“Indo-Anglian writers ... may be valued as interpreters and pioneers who brought the techniques of European literature into our country whilst contributing Indian idioms and metaphor to English literature.” -**Mulk Raj Anand**.

Every creative writer renews the language he writes in by coining new words and phrases or even by combining old expressions in unforeseen ways. He creates this freedom for himself, as he finds the traditional language or style inadequate or unsuitable for the ideas, images and feelings he wants to communicate. Mulk Raj Anand was faced with the necessity of leavening the English language with Indian expressions to provide a sense of reality to the readers. The linguistic liberties he took with the English language therefore were geared to fulfilling an artistic purpose – that of affecting and moving the reader’s mind by using curves of thought and configurations of feeling through exploiting the resources of an Indian language. He carried out a faithful translation of idioms and performed an experiment in syntax, changing the structure of sentences and imagery that would enable them to render the illusion of reality successfully.

This kind of artistic liberty goes well with the ideal of freedom that Anand has been trying to achieve. His firsthand experience about the untouchables, labourers and poor peasants helped him become aware of human slavery in all respects. So, almost all the protagonists depicted in his fiction are real characters. In the Preface to the Second Edition of *Two Leaves and a Bud*, he himself admitted the fact :

“All the heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were reflections of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth. And I was only repaying the debt of gratitude I owed them for much of the inspiration they had given ... when I began to interpret their lives in my writings. They were not mere phantoms ... They were flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood, and obsessed me in the way in which certain human beings obsess an artist’s soul. And I was doing no more than what a writer does when he seeks to interpret the truth from realities of his life.”¹

Again, In *Morning Face*, he says, “Now I thought of the same naked sons of the field, untouchables, labourers with whom I had played in Daksa, of how Fazlu, of the quarter acre land near my grandfather’s well, had beaten his son Gama for stealing a carrot and his cousin Harnam Singh had begged my mother for a loan to get his land out of mortgage from the money-lenders, and how even the littlest boys had to wake up at dawn and go digging ditches for their fathers.” (p.499)

It was this intrinsic concern with faithfulness to reality that prompted Anand to largely Indianize the English language by profusely using Indian words or phrases and sometimes by translating them verbatim. This is mostly found in his dialogues which have often an earthly and rustic flavour.

The use of language in Anand’s fiction shows his compassionate objectivity. His language is capable of ascribing a latent psychic cause to the complex pattern of social exploitations. The first three words of a line from *Coolie*, “You unclean boy, look at your hands, they are filthy,” are the focal points of critical attention as they are a fragment of the total syntax.

Since all the fictional situations are located in the rural areas of North India, the folk-idiom could be superseded only at the risk of a loss of recognizable relation to life there. This kind of separation Anand avoids with an explicit artistic faith: “The psychology of Indian-English is rooted in the Indian Metabolism. Most Indians, who speak or write English, even when they have been to Oxford and Cambridge or London, tend, naturally, to bring the hangover of the mother tongue, spoken in early childhood into their expression.”² Anand wishes to mean that the English used by Indians has a special quality of its own and therefore, “Indo-Anglian writers ... may be valued as interpreters and pioneers who brought the techniques of European literature into our country whilst contributing Indian idioms and metaphor to English literature.”³

Anand believes that this psychology could be adequately delivered only by incorporating the flavour, the taste of the native dialect. The following passage from *The Village* shows this: “My son,” said Gujri with an affectionate pout, pouring another glass of whey. “Look, he has come in the heat. And he must be hungry and thirsty. May I be his sacrifice!”

“Other sons of their mothers have also been working in the heat”, said Sharm Singh dryly. And then he turned to his youngest brother and said. “I hope you have cut some fodder for the buffalo, too, otherwise she will dry up soon...”⁴

The italicised phrases in the heat and dry up soon communicate the folk idioms which Anand calls “Indian Metabolism.”

Anand experiments freely with narrative style, dialogue and portrayal of characters. The following passage from *Untouchable* shows this :

‘I said : “Sarkar, I went away after standing outside for some time. I tried to fall at the feet of every passer-by and prayed them to tell to the Sarkar that my child was suffering. But Sarkar, this is the time of kindness. Be compassionate this time. Another time you can even take my life. Only save my child. All night I have been rocking him in my arms, thinking that if he survives the night I shall come and fetch medicine from you with the rising of the sun. Who could have heard my call in the middle of the night if I had come here then?”’⁵

The above appeal of Lakha to save his son’s life reveals Anand’s conscious manipulation of language in an effort to retain the quality of **Punjabi sentence** and **idiom** in English. The expressions are – “tell to the Sarkar”, “only save my child.”, “you can even take my life”, “this is the time of kindness” and “with the rising of the sun”.

The father abuses his son in *Seven Summers* without intending anything violent, “I will break your bones if you don’t stop quarrelling. Haven’t I enough troubles at the office that as soon as I come home you eat my head? You have made my life a misery. I blow my brains out earning a living for you all, and this is the reward I get!”⁶

Anand sometimes translates popular **folk idioms and proverbs**. The following extract proves this: “A double-headed snake!” observed one-eyed Shiva Ram. Nahin, morelike a frog as he came hopping across the ledge from the well,” said Babu.

Anand’s use of “cigrut”, “Govment”, “injar”, “Nihalu”, “Policia”, “Yus” etc. shows his skill in the handling of language. This also proves that Anand has his gaze fastened to the life of his delineation than to his possible readers. However, Saros Cowasjee’s comment on the difficulties accruing from such expressions in Anand’s novels is worth mentioning.

Here are two quotations from Anand. The first is from *The Road*, where a character cries out, “Maro Sale Ko, kill him.” The second is from *The Sword and the Sickle* and reads, “Chal Sale!’ shouted Ram Din, striking Gupta a ‘thappar’ on the head.” The first quotation does not create difficulties ... In the second quotation the word ‘sale’ will intrigue a foreign reader.⁷ Here Cowasjee precisely presents the difficulties of foreigners in understanding Anand’s fiction. She says that a writer like M.R. Anand, who champions the cause of the persecuted class of the society in his novels, is expected to have an interesting narrative style to captivate the readers till the very end. Coolie exhibits Anand’s superb handling of the theme of inhuman exploitation of the innocent adolescent by the feudal society of the pre-independent India through a gripping narrative.

Anand himself gives the reason for using stylistic devices found in his novels. He says, “I found, while writing spontaneously, that I was always translating dialogue from the original Punjabi into English.”⁸

The theme of exploitation of Indians can never be written about without mentioning the variegated vocabulary of the dialectal abuses that Anand translates literally into English to sustain their vernacular flavour. The abuses such as “where have you died?” as Munoo’s aunt usually hurls at him are not so as stinging as those of Bibi Uttam Kaur of Sham Nagar where Munoo works as a boy servant. Her abuses such as – “Vay, shameless, shameless, vulgar, stupid hill-boy! May the vessel of your life never float in the sea of existence! May you die.” Or that of Lady Todar Mal to Ganpat at Daulatpur- “Vay, eater of your masters! You mean one!” or of the Muhammedan sergeant Pande Khan to Prabha Dyal – “Lover of your mother!” and “son of Eblis” are some of the vivid examples of the abuses that the commonplace, unrefined and feudalistic persons of the British India shower upon their weaker fellows of the society colouring the narrative with typical Indianness.

Some typical **abuses and curses** are – “Beware, son of a swine” (Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts)

“Bitch! Prostitute! Wanton!” (Untouchable, p.28)

Eater of dung and drinker of Urine! Bitch of a sweeper-woman! (Untouchable, p. 29)

“You bitch of all the dogs in the washerwoman’s brotherhood!” shouted Kanahiya lifting his double barrelled gun. (“Lottery”)

“Sur ka bacha! Hosh karo!” (“The Terrorist”)

In certain situations, the characters speak abusive terms and hurting remarks. In “A Promoter of Quarrels”, two rustic women quarrelled with each other using the following curses –

“... How dare you talk of me like that! May nothing remain of you! May your face be cursed by the black pox! How dare you say that I have brought diluted milk to the market! How ...”

“And there is in mine, you bitch!’ shouted Basanto. Go like the dog! Come like the cat! Go, go, eater of your masters. May that father of yours die and leave your mother a widow! May you become an orphan! May you all die! I shall buy up Nanak’s shop and distribute sweets when you disappear from this world!”

They might sound odd in English as they are not English abuses. But this unique experiment of Anand commands a wide range of critical acclaim throughout the globe.

So, in Anand’s narration, there are all sorts of tools such as graphic description, abusive vocabulary, situational conversation and sarcastic humour that a mature writer needs to organize a powerful narrative for a serious novel. These technical devices give him the extra edge that elevates him from a mere propagandist of the downtrodden’s cause to the level of a social, reforming novelist whose works are considered as the first grade products of the Indo-Anglian literature of the pre-independent India.

Anand is markedly aggressive in his use of Indian motifs and symbols. Munoo, the protagonist of *Coolie*, is modelled on an orphan depicted in Iqbal’s poetry. Iqbal’s poetry has been sung in Punjab by the bards in almost every village. Bakha, the hero of *Untouchable*, has also a prototype in Upanishadic tales, current in different forms in Northern India. *Lalu of The Village* is based on Raja Rasalu, the hero of adventure stories famous in Sialkot District, to which *Lalu* himself belonged. Anand has translated folktales of Punjab and designed his stories after the folk tales.

Anand in his fiction compares various characters with animals to show the savageness of the struggle in which they are engaged and the deterioration of human values.

In *Private Life of an Indian Prince*, Victor describes himself as a “rat in a hole” (p. 45). He is called a “tiger” (p. 48), “chameleon” (p. 86), “swine” (p. 159) “mongoose” (p. 214), etc. and *Bool Chand* as a “horse” (p. 52), “donkey” (p. 119), “dog” (p. 326), etc.

Ganga Dasi is referred to as a “bitch” (p. 76), “chameleon” (p. 86), “goat” (p. 192), “leopard” (p. 261), “lion” (p. 309), etc.

Sardar Patel is called a “bull” (p. 230), “hyena and wolf” (p. 242), etc. and *Dr. Shankar* a “tortoise” (p. 81), “healthy animal” (p. 120), etc.

The people of *Shampur* are called “snakes and vipers” (p. 254), “Jangli animals” (p. 352), etc.

In *Untouchable* and in *Morning Face*, Anand uses fire-sun-light complex to show the inner struggle of the characters. In *Untouchable*, Bakha manages to start a “blazing fire”, when Sohini fails to light a fire. (p. 12) As Bakha stands ‘in the sun’, the idea comes to him to request the son of Babu for teaching him English. (p. 27) The landscape under the sunny sky is “so transcendently blue and beautiful” that Bakha “felt like standing dumb and motionless before it” (p. 75). In *Morning Face*, the “shooting comets” of the narrator’s “rebellious spirit” mix with the darkness of the night (p. 172). When he makes a bodily contact with *Buddhu*, he is drowned in a “roaring fire” (p. 189). His thoughts and fancies are indistinct in the “twilight” and “half-light” (p. 220). The “little suns or the lamps, which the

new light of Gandhi had lit” inside him and other nationalists meet the full glare of the outer sun which was said never to set on the vast confines of the British Empire!” (p. 523)

In his “Pigeon-Indian”, Anand undertakes to interweave Punjabi and Hindustani words into English. To incorporate folk consciousness in his writings, he employs various devices. He uses Hindustani, that is, a form of Hindi with a considerable mixture of Persian and Arabic in his novels. In *Seven Summers*, Ganesh’s father says to him: “Ohe, don’t go about listening to gossipThe Saaib logs are very strict.....”⁹ There is an abundance of ‘Ari’, ‘Vay’, ‘Wah’, ‘ohe’, ‘Hazoor’, ‘Sarkar’ ‘Maharaj’, ‘ri’, etc. in conversations. In *Across the Black Waters*, Subah said: “Ohe! Leave such talk, come drink up and let us have some more, and let us go and be happy.”¹⁰

Anand adopts the same practice in his short stories too. The following extracts from “The Parrot in the Cage” proves this.

“Mai, you are dreaming! You have gone mad!” The gram stallkeeper said. ‘Go, go your way to the town, you may get some food at the Durbar Sahib temple. You won’t get anything from the ‘Dipty Collator ...’ ‘Vay, Jaja, eater of your masters!’ She shouted bitterly. Such commonsense as that of the complacent gramseller seemed to break the pitcher of her hopes. And she moved like a cow in defiance at the end of her speech.”¹¹

Anand often uses “translations” of idioms, usages and proverbs to give a ‘feel’ of life in India. Some examples follow - “The camel went in search of horns and lost his ears”.¹² “The Thief turning sheriff.”¹³ “Test a friend in trouble, a cow in February and a housewife when there is nothing left in a barn.”¹⁴

The villagers in Anand’s novels convey their beliefs and attitudes through their typical mode of speech. A woman in *The Road* refers to her husband as “they” and does not mention his name. Anand says: And Sajnu had walked by the house with “them” and she had stolen a look and nearly met “their” eyes (p.37). The husband usually mentions his wife as his “other self” or “the mother of my child” or “the owner of my house”. The villager swears by his parents when he says something definite or determined:

“I wouldn’t be my mother’s son if I don’t offer hospitality to you”.¹⁵

“I am not the son of Tote Ram, the Chaudhri of barbers, if I can’t arrange a match for that beautiful girl”.¹⁶

Anand also Indianized some words to popularize his theme. The words are ‘burr-burr’, ‘daktar’, ‘daktor’, ‘git-mit’, ‘kaleg’, ‘tom-tom’, ‘wulcome’, ‘yas’ etc.

Among the techniques Anand uses to Indianize English are code switching and code mixing. Code switching is the use of a non-English word or phrase in an English sentence, often followed by its English rendering. This facilitates understanding on the part of the reader, retaining at the same time the original flavour of the native tongue.

“Chal ! Chal; Mad woman; you will have to go”. (Gauri, p.117)

“Maro Sale Ko! Kill Him!” (The Road, p.110)

“gong-like voice calling, ‘Ohe Khol, ohekhhol – open the door!’ (‘Man Whose Name Did not Appear in the Census’, p.138)

“But where is the izzet...?Where is your dignity?” (Coolie,p.252)

“Ohe, dur, dur, dog!’ he shouted to scare the dog away” (The Village, p.35)

Code mixing involves the insertion of a word or phrase from the speaker’s mother tongue in the midst of a sentence in English without any explanation. It is also employed when English (or other foreign) words are used independently in a largely vernacular language .

“Chalo! Chalo!’ the lean young man in homespun hurried them”¹⁷

“He put my brief -case into the tonga and, without salaaming or anything ...” (A Confession”)

“Chal Sale!’ shouted Ram Din, striking Gupta a thappar on the head” (The Sword and the Sickle p.6)

“Most people give me a tip but you look like a Kanjus Sahib, so I shall be content if you give me my wages” (“A Confession”, The Barber’s Trade Union and Other Stories, p. 98)

Both code switching and code mixing may be done either to offset the absence of an equivalent expression in the English language or to represent certain shades of meaning not available in English.

Again, Anand provides descriptions and hints in between dialogues to help our understanding. As in:

“Look out, you son of a donkey?” shouted the young man who sat astride it. Munoo stepped aside and escaped from being knocked down into the gutter.

“Ohe, illegally begotten; you will get killed, idiot;” A tirade of abuse descended on him from his uncle, who had rushed back.¹⁸

The extent of lexical borrowing in Anand’s fiction is very broad and includes a large stock of indigenous words relating to caste and community names, dresses, domestic items, eatables, ornaments, occupation groups, vehicles, vegetation, etc:

- 1. Caste and community names:** “bania”, “bhanggi”, “chamars”, “dhobi”, “fakirs”, “goras”, “mussalman”, “pathans”, “sahukars”, “seths”, etc.
- 2. Dresses:** “dupatta”, “kurta”, “purdah”, “pyzama”, “salwar”, “topee”, etc.
- 3. Domestic items:** “chappals”, “chilum”, “chula”, “hookah”, “kajal”, “lathi”, “pandal”, “prasad”, “sindhur”, “thali”, etc.
- 4. Eatables:** “Biris”, “biriani” “burfi”, “chapatis”, “dal”, “gulab-jamun”, “jalebi”, “kabab”, “ladoos”, “pakoras”, “pan”, “pani”, “parathas”, “pilao”, “puris”, “rasgulla”, “samosas”, “sherbat”, etc.
- 5. Ornaments:** “hansli”, “mukat”, etc.

6. **Occupation groups:** “*afsar*”, “*babus*”, “*Chaprasi*”, “*chowkidar*”, “*dai*”, “*hakim*”, “*majdoors*”, “*malik*”, “*policia*”, “*purohit*”, “*Rajah*”, “*raja*”, “*sahibs*”, “*shikari*”, “*zamindar*”, etc.
7. **Vehicles:** “*buggi*”, “*gari*”, “*ikka-yekka*”, “*phut-phutti*”, etc.
8. **Vegetation:** “*gulmohar*”, “*jaman*”, “*neem*”, “*pipal*”, “*siris*”, etc.

Anand uses many Indian words, which are naturally inflected with morphological devices of English. He uses suffixes, ‘s’ or ‘es’ to make the Indian words plural as in “*Sahibs*”, “*bibis*”, “*seths*”, “*babus*”, “*fakirs*”, “*bhuts*”, “*amlas*”, “*kormas*”, “*kababs*”, “*lathis*”, “*badmashes*”, etc.

In his fiction, Anand uses articles before some words borrowed from Punjabi and Hindi. They are - The narial hookah, the machan, the bhanjis, the dhobis, the goras, the hakim, a neem, a babu, a shikari, a zamindar, a lakhpati, a mali, an ikka, a gari, the sarkar, the begari, the jemadar , etc.

He also incorporated some part of a phrase to give his theme an Indian complexion, like- “the local *ashram*”, the holy *math*, the head *chaprasi*, the old *shikari*, the fat *mullah*, the old *dai*, the coronation *darbar*, on the *chulas*, on a *charpai*, of *birianis* and *pilaos*, the rice *khichri*, the empty *khud*, or *biri*, etc.

Thus, Anand uses, in his own inimitable way, a wide range of Indian words and phrases in most of his writings. The freedom of expression that he exercises might at times seem to be rather stridently voiced; however, on a closer look, the reader realises that this sort of device helps project a faithful picture of Indian life, with all its squalor, turmoil and also broad-heartedness.

NOTES & REFERENCES

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