

Mulk Raj Anand's *The Road*: A Study in Linguistic Experimentation

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Expression has always been a matter of concern for those Indians who choose English as the medium of their creative expression. They are faced with the challenge to use this foreign language in such a way that it carries the flavor of India and still remains English. Their task is “to encompass the whole gamut of feeling from the beautiful to the ugly, the sublime to the ridiculous, the serious to the comic . . .” (Sinha 120). For this purpose, they are required to forge a language which is essentially English and at the same time appropriate to the Indian socio-cultural contexts. To achieve their objective they have tried to evolve a rich orchestration of thought and expression and have given birth to a language which is now popularly called the ‘Indian English.’

Mulk Raj Anand is one of those Indo-Anglian novelists who “have rejuvenated the English language through innovations, borrowings, and other sources of enrichment” (Sinha 129). His style is said to have its own power and glory and is one of the central issues of critical enquiry these days. Anand, with his down-to-earth language, has sung the choric song of love and fellow-feeling in his novels. His characters, which belong to the down-trodden and underprivileged sections of society, have their own slangs, proverbs, idioms, greetings, sayings, and abuses. In order to express these characters, their behavior, and their way of expression, Anand takes many liberties with the language. In this paper an attempt is made to examine the experiments that he has made with language with special reference to his novel, *The Road*, while references to other novels may find place here and there.

The present paper is an attempt to analyze the linguistic experiments done by Mulk Raj Anand in his novel *The Road*. He was forced by the choice of his medium to communicate in a language which was not his own, the spirit that was his own. English, the language that he has chosen for his creative expression, is of his intellectual make-up and not of his emotional make-up. As a result, he has taken many liberties with the language. To be true to the Indian sensibility that he wishes to express in his fiction world, he sometimes literally translates idioms and proverbs of Hindi and Punjabi into English and at other times misspells the English words. His use of swear words and epithets has attracted the attention of the critics who usually accuse him of vulgarizing the language.

Anand is a social realist and this fact has determined his prose style and language. This forms the basis of his experiments with language which carries a distinctly Indian flavor. Being a North Indian, he is well acquainted with the language and mannerisms of the people who inhabit this region. In order to give his characters a touch of realism, he makes them speak the language that their counterparts speak in their day-to-day life. As most of his characters belong to the down-trodden sections of society, he puts harsh, coarse, crude, but realistic language in their mouths. Flawless English cannot be expected from them.

From the very outset of his career as a novelist, Anand has been an experimenter in the use of language. His unique use of language has attracted the attention of the critics and made Khushwant Singh to name his language as ‘Mulkees English.’ Meenakshi Mukherjee traces three devices used by

Anand in his writings to achieve realism. In Anand's fiction, one finds the literal translation of idioms and proverbs of Hindi and Punjabi, direct use of Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi words, and misspelling of English words.

The language and style of Anand is decidedly different in tone and structure from that of other writers, both Indian and English. The fact that he hails from Punjabi-Urdu-Hindi region of India has affected the language of his works. People in this region make use of various proverbs, idioms, sayings, and greetings. Anand literally translates these idioms, proverbs, sayings, and greetings into English to reflect the Indian way of life and Indian outlook on life. Here are a few examples taken from his novel *The Road*.

A goat in hand is better than a buffalo in the distance. (Anand 21)

He has set fire to all hearts of the village. (25)

Strange, now the ants have got wings. (73)

"Now," put in Bapu meekly, "You are chirping like a sparrow when you dared not speak in his presence!" (74)

A girl is only a guest in the house. (82)

The device of literal translation is present not only in *The Road* but also in other novels as well. Here are a few illustrations from Anand's other fictional works:

Han sister, I hear this girl has rolled many papads. (Anand, *Gauri*, 11)

After eating nine hundred mice the cat is going to a pilgrimage. (188)

Where have you been eating the dirt so long? (Anand, *Two Leaves and a Bud* 165)

Proverbial statements like "Acha, acha, don't eat my head," "He was dead over her," "There is something black in the pulse," etc. flood the pages of his novels like monsoon showers. Such expressions provide a peculiar local color to his writings.

Besides translated proverbs and idioms, Anand uses folk songs literally rendered into English from Hindi and Punjabi. The folk songs are the basic feature of the culture of Punjab. These are associated with the lives of the people of the region, from their birth to death. Through these folk songs people give vent to their feelings and emotions, joys, and sorrows. Anand adopts this rich tradition of Punjab, translates these songs into English and puts them into the mouths of his characters. For instance, Bhikhu, the protagonist of *The Road* mumbles,

Says Kabir, listen devoted ones! . . . the simple truth is this: stand! Stand in wonder before the manifestation of God in the world! Before the earth-existence. On which dew-drops glisten like jewels! Before the blue heavens on which the sun rises and sets. Worship Him, the Light . . . (Anand 8-9)

But after a moment, Bhikhu brushes away the thought of God from his mind and starts mumbling in this way: "Work, work, devoted ones, for through work, all sins are washed away, by the earth and the sweat!" (9-10)

A marriage in Punjab provides a rich occasion for the use of folk songs. The friends of the bride ask the bridegroom to recite some couplets known as 'Chhands.' While describing the scene of Panchi's marriage in *Gauri*, Anand translates these 'Chhands' into English:

Chand prage aiye jaiye
Chand prage ring
Our girl is being married off
Who will the cattle home bring. (29)

Chand prage aiye jaiye
Chand prage apron,
Let the girls understand now
There is to be no more fun.

A reader who is acquainted with Punjabi ethos and culture is likely to appreciate this sort of translation. The mere reading of these lines is enough to carry him to some wedding being performed in Punjab.

Allied to this device of translation is Anand's use of Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi words directly in English. His copious use of words from regional languages takes him nearer to his avowed purpose of evolving a language which is nearer to the thoughts and feelings of his characters. Actually, Kipling was the first one to make use of such Indian words in his novels and short stories. 'Mem Sahib,' 'Burra Sahib,' 'chota peg,' are some of the Indian words found in his works. But while in Kipling, there is a limited use of such words, in Anand almost every page is replete with them. 'Sarkar,' 'mistri,' 'hooka-paani,' 'kalyug,' 'atma,' 'parmatma,' 'Bhagwan,' 'mussulman,' 'hookah,' 'charpoy,' 'budmash,' 'puja,' 'bijli,' 'bapu,' 'charanmat,' 'Ishwar,' 'Paremshwar,' 'chillum,' 'thali,' 'kichri,' 'chulha,' 'dupatta,' 'garbi,' 'deohri' etc. are some of the words used by Anand in his novel, *The Road*.

Indians have their own unique way of expressing politeness. Anand being a realist takes note of this feature and makes his characters utter words like 'Sarkar,' 'Maharaj,' 'Mai-baap,' 'Badshah,' 'Huzoor,' 'Sahib,' 'Chaudri,' etc. while talking with their superiors. This excessive use of polite words is mainly due to Indian socio-cultural context where the people have been ruled for centuries either by the Muslim rulers or by the British. This serfdom of many centuries has affected their collective consciousness.

Another significant aspect of Anand's style is the use of Punjabi expletives like 'Bale-bale,' 'Hain,' 'Hai,' 'Che.' The use of such words becomes indispensable for Anand because he wants to delineate Punjabi sensibility. There are no such words in English language to communicate the sense conveyed by these words. The following dialogue between Mala and her mother from *The Road* best explains the use of expletive 'Hain':

"Mother, Lachman and Sajnu have set fire to the houses of chamars."

She cried.

"Hain?" (52)

In order to provide a local color to his novels, Anand even transliterates the words of address. His characters make use of words like 'Oh,' 'Vay,' 'Ni,' 'Arre,' 'Oye' while calling someone. Here are a few examples from his novels:

“Oh Sajnu, fetch the hookah for Diwan Sahib.” (Anand, *The Road* 73)

...

“Oh Bhikhu, come, demon of work, these boys will leave nothing for you.”

“Come ni, Leila, come vay Buddhu, fetch me a couple of bricks and some mud.” (Anand, *Two Leaves and a Bud* 35)

In India, women usually do not utter the name of their husband. In order to show respect, they talk about their husbands in plurals. In order to give a realistic touch to the language of his characters, Anand makes his female characters speak words like ‘they,’ ‘them,’ ‘theirs,’ etc. while talking about their husbands. Both Mala and Rukmani in the novel under discussion, use the word ‘they’ while thinking and talking about their would-be husbands. Even in her dream, Mala uses the word ‘they’ for Sajnu, her would-be husband:

Suddenly, the edge of a dream, which she had had the previous night, assailed her. She recalled that she had been asking in this dream for water, even as she had asked for it as a child when she was thirsty. Mother was no where within sight. Only ‘they’ was standing with open arms to embrace her. And she had stretched out her hands for water. But ‘they’ did not give the water only gathered her in arms. And she nearly died of thirst, even as she leaned on one side with her hand, cupped under the mouth to receive water, while ‘they’ came and tore the dupatta from her head. (Anand, *The Road* 79-80)

Even Rukmani’s case is no different. While Lachman, her would-be husband, leaves her parents on account of fire incident and joins his father, Rukmani feels disturbed. Anand describes her feelings in this manner:

She was choking with rage, against father and brother for bringing about the catastrophe and thus forcing out ‘they’ to his father. More than these two men, the image as ‘they’ would caress her someday, had held her emotions secretly in thrall for months. (Anand, *The Road* 64)

Similarly, in Anand’s fictional world the word ‘brother’ indicates friendship and the expression ‘mother-father’ is used to address a socially superior person. Such expressions may appear shocking to a reader who is not familiar with Indian ethos and culture. But an Indian is fully at home with these and even enjoys them.

Another feature of Anand’s English is the misspelling of English words. Many English words have become naturalized in Indian languages but their pronunciation has changed. Anand misspells these words to be realistic. He uses ‘afsar’ for ‘officer,’ ‘genterman’ for ‘gentleman,’ ‘gorment’ for ‘government,’ ‘Amrika’ for ‘America,’ ‘notus’ for ‘notice’ etc. in his works.

In Anand’s novels, there is another device of interpolating Hindi and Punjabi words in English. For instance: “Maro sale ko, kill him.” (Anand, *The Road* 95) and “I say it is only roads and roads and more roads and Bijli – that will bring prosperity” (21).

As is commonly done in many Indian languages, Anand sometimes forms interrogative sentences by adding a mark of interrogation to a statement. A few examples are:

“That was father?” Rukmani asked from the open kitchen. (Anand, *The Road* 26)

“I hear Bapu is ill?” Sajnu said as he entered the courtyard of his father’s house. (88)

Another peculiarity of Anand’s style found especially in *The Road* is his use of the epithets before the names of almost all the characters. He mentions his characters as ‘Fox-Face Daya Ram,’ ‘Cowherd

Mahesh,' 'Cock-Eye Ram Nivas,' 'Dumpling-Nose Lambardar Dhooli Singh,' 'Tomato-Face Landlord Thakur Singh,' 'One-Eyed Shiva Ram,' 'Old Bapu' and 'Drunkard Sankar.' These epithets help Anand to describe the physical appearance, the profession, and the habits of his characters.

No other aspect of Anand's language has attracted so much attention of the critics as his use of swear words and swear terms. Critics accuse him of vulgarizing the language. In India, people do make use of such expressions in their day-to-day life, though they do not mean them. In order to be true to Punjabi sensibility, Anand makes use of expressions like 'rape-sister,' 'rape-mother,' 'prostitute,' 'lover of your mother,' 'brother-in-law,' 'ill-begotten son of a shameless mother,' 'son of a swine,' 'bitch' etc. in his novels. The following utterance of Buta Singh from the novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* is a case in point: "I am not the son of Tota Ram, the chaudri of barbers, if I can't arrange a match for that beautiful girl" (Anand 08).

Meenakshi Mukhrjee remarks in this connection, "The Punjab peasantry with whom Anand's best works deal does have a large repertoire of swear words in its ordinary conversation. It would be hypocritical to bowdlerize their speech merely because these might appear strange in the English language" (172). Another critic points out, "The abundance of abusive terms may jolt a foreign reader. But such terms find a place in the peasant idiom. For a reader of the region these are perfectly at home . . . We should learn not to be shocked by swear words, which abound in Anand's novels, and must abound if they are to reflect the life faithfully" (Ram 170). Any attempt to deviate from the language of the people might have made Anand's novels look artificial.

Now the question arises to what extent, Anand's experiments with English language and the liberties he has taken with Indian words, idioms, and proverbs are successful. A limited use of such expressions which are characteristic of the culture or outlook of the characters is a welcome device. They enliven the dialogue and give a local color to the writing. But in Anand there is an excessive use of Indian words and proverbs, and excess of everything is bad. The ideas they try to convey can be expressed effectively by accepted English expressions. Moreover, Indo-Anglian writers write primarily for foreign readers and use of Indian words poses a great problem for them. As far as Anand's use of Indian words like 'Chal,' 'Ni,' 'Haan,' 'Arre' along with English words in sentences is concerned, it does not serve any valuable purpose. When the story is written in English about Indian situations and Indian characters, we have naturally to assume that the characters speak English language.

Notwithstanding all this criticism, Anand's language is one of the charms of Indo-Anglian fiction. Undoubtedly, he has been severely criticized for his copious use of Indian words. But then there are writers who make use of Latin, French, and Greek words in English and critics do not mind their use of such words rather they appreciate it. One wonders, why they are so much allergic to the use of Indian words in English. After all they are there to serve some purpose. Since the choice of words and expressions depends on the interpersonal relationship between the addresser and the addressee in a particular cultural setting, there are bound to be differences in the expression of Indo-Anglian writers and British writers. So long as there is a rich orchestration of thought, feeling, and expression, there is no harm in using the Indian words and proverbs. And in Anand's novels, his language is fully in harmony with his characters and situations. So in this respect his experiments with language can be described as successful ones.

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