



Indian Culture and Women in the Short Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand

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Indian culture has always played a very important role in shaping the literature of the land. Indian culture is known in lands far and wide for its rich legacy. Indian culture is one of the richest in the world. India is the land of culture. The beauty of this land lies in the fact that it is not one but many different cultures that co-exist here. Not only do they exist peacefully, but they also complement each other. India is a land of various diverse cultures. Its beauty lies in its diversity. India boasts of having one of the world's oldest cultures. Indian civilization is believed to have started over 4,500 years ago, thus making it one of the oldest in the whole world. Many renowned sources also define Indian culture as "*Sa Prathama Sanskrati Vishvavara*", which literally translates to the first and supreme culture in the world. Indian culture is much respected and appreciated worldwide these days.

India is also known for its distinct social structure and way of life. For years, Indian society was male dominated and primarily patriarchal, meaning thereby that it was the males who had control over the major machinery of our society. Women were deemed to be the second gender or the subordinate gender. However, this was the case in almost all the nations of the world in earlier times. Before the reforms that took place, women were often disregarded as the weaker and less intelligent sex. This limited their opportunities and confined them to the four walls of their houses. They were supposed to equip themselves with household work and look after the children and the family. They were treated as mere househelps and were not given an equal status to men. Women were not allowed to gain education, have a career, a profession, or pretty much do anything that involved getting out of the house. They were considered to be the property of their fathers when they were young and as they were married, they were considered to be the property of their husbands. After the death of their husbands,

they were supposed to lead a melancholy life with their heads shaved and they were forced to wear plain white clothes. They were not allowed to remarry and were now considered to be the property of their sons. This is also very ironic as this did not apply to men. As soon as their wife died, they were supposed to get remarried and move on with their lives and not lament over something that they can not change while women were supposed to be in grief for their whole lives after their husbands died.

They were supposed to have no identity of their own and were confined to a very limited life with only the most basic of amenities. They had no say in anything and their issues were not even brought to light and even if some of the rarest ones gained attention, they were brushed off as petty and insignificant. The picture changed with the advent of British rule which brought with it western education, thoughts and ideas. Soon, people started paying more attention and heed to women issues like widow remarriage, the practice of sati, etc. and this led to many social movements by famous social reformers who devoted their entire lives to uplifting women and other underprivileged people. Following these movements, many laws were passed that aimed to better the condition of women. People started understanding the importance of bringing these issues to light as it was not the problem of one or two people but half the population.

Writers have often questioned the place of women in our society and the treatment that is rendered to them by people. It has been a very famous issue and it has been addressed by many famous and well-known writers over time. There are many examples of works that are solely based on highlighting the condition of women in our society and attracting attention to it in an attempt to help women acquire a better position in our society. Such works are appreciated by people all over for their social character and an attempt to change the



existing ways of our society that push some of us toward the periphery while favoring others for no substantial reason. Many writers have beautifully addressed these issues like Arundhati Roy who has very perfectly portrayed the culture of our nation and how it favors men over women. This work has been acclaimed all over the world and it is considered to be one of the most beautiful pieces of literature. This is only one example of the works written to highlight the poor and pitiable condition of women in our society.

Mulk Raj Anand is known far and wide for his short fiction. While many people feel that his works portray the plight and pain of men who are placed at a disadvantageous position in our society, the position of women remains unexplored. He has also paid great attention to the position and condition of women in our society. He highlights the plight of women through his female characters and throws light on the ill-treatment, discrimination, and pain that women have to endure in our society. He highlights the condition and plight of women in rural India or the countryside which he considers to be the real India.

The Tamarind Tree is a very beautiful short story written by Mulk Raj Anand. It highlights the various stages that a woman goes through while expecting a child. This story revolves around the struggle of a woman to give birth and the tree of tamarind reflects the creation and shaping of life in a mother's womb.

The story begins with Roopa, a pregnant woman, scrubbing some brass utensils. Her eyes wander to a tamarind tree in her neighbor's yard and she stops at the sight of the tamarind fruit which is ochre red in color. Her mouth watered at the sight of the fruit as she wished to eat it. She retired from the work she was doing and grabbed a mirror from the alcove. She looked at her dry and pale lips. She wanted them to be as red and beautiful as the tamarind fruit. She knew she craved the fruit because of her pregnancy. She decided to get back to her work as she thought someone might see her and tease her. As she was headed back to the washing area, a wind blew and her headscarf was thrown down her head. Her hair swayed with the wind and so did the branches of the tamarind tree. As she looked at the tree, she started moving towards it as she felt a renewed desire to eat the fruit. But she stopped in her way and told herself that she did not need this as she had already had her mid-day meal. She further told herself that although

her mother in law did not give her any more food than she needed to survive, she was still not hungry and definitely did not need the tamarind.

Birth is another heart-touching story by Mulk Raj Anand. The story starts with the sight of a woman named Parvati. Parvati is in a forest-like area that is far away from the settlement where she lives. Her father-in-law is accompanying her but he has maintained his distance all this while. He walks ahead of her and the only sign of his presence are the angry grunts that he makes every now and then urging her to walk faster. She also made sounds to assure him that she was following him. She started getting tired. Her feet were getting heavier and the bundle she was carrying seemed to have increased in weight. She had started her day early in the morning. She was pregnant. Her stomach swirled as the baby moved inside. She balanced the bundle over her head with one hand and put the other hand on her belly as she walked. She felt a strong pain all of a sudden and she gritted her teeth and clenched her hands as she felt that she was about to faint. Fortunately, the pain slowly passed away. She breathed hard and started walking again. She heard the voice of her father-in-law, telling her to hurry. She answered and told him that she was following him.

Parvati was a simple and kind woman. She was in a lot of pain but she thought of her father in law. She did not want to be a burden on him by walking slowly as she thought that he was already burdened by a lot of responsibilities. He had mortgaged his land to buy the fare to Delhi. She thought that he had been very kind and considerate to her. Little did she know, more than her, he was worried about the son of his son, that she was to bear and this was the only reason behind his acts. Nevertheless, he had been somewhat considerate towards her as when Parvati came to the house as his daughter-in-law, his wife had blamed Parvati for the decline of the family and their fortune when she was on her deathbed. He had disregarded this and he laughed it off. Since then, Parvati wanted to prove his faith in her right by giving him a grandson. She often even looked at it as compensation for losing his wife. She knew this was the only thing that could bring him happiness while he struggled with his unfortunate faith in debt and drought.

Lullaby is another very beautiful story by Mulk Raj Anand. This short story traces the pain and the sense of loss and helplessness a woman experiences. This story gives the readers a theme of



two different types of sleep. The story begins with a lullaby that the mother is singing to her child. Phalini sings a sweet little lullaby urging her one-year-old son, Suraj Mukhi, to go to sleep as she puts handfuls of jute into the machine. As she held him in her arms, she felt the heat on his body mixed with a sour smell. She knew that he was sick. She kept rocking him in an attempt to make him go to sleep. She wondered if he would ever fall asleep as she grew tired. The poor boy was so sick that he had not shut his eyes all day and he had just sobbed and cried.

As she sang to her child, another woman yelled, cursing her, saying who was singing. This woman was a part of a group of women who sang folk songs. They did not like anyone else singing. She was feeding the machine more and more jute and this was producing a lot of smoke. She started coughing because of the smoke as she had let her apron fall loose and there was nothing covering her face, shielding her from the smoke. The fluff was everywhere in the factory she was working in. She could feel it travel down her nostrils and her respiratory tract. She had a silver ring on her neck which had turned green with sweat. She saw the neck-ring and thought that it looked very absurd and ugly on her lean body. This was the reason why she had sold her nose ring as she felt it looked ugly on her. She knew it was a bad omen to take off your jewelry but she did not care. Her baby started crying again and she felt exhausted.

As she was lost in her thoughts, her child started crying again. She had to again feed jute to the machine. Her child kept crying and a woman working next to her yelled asking why she could not keep her child quiet. Again, she started thinking about her lover. She had often seen him in her dreams. She thought that he must be free and wandering in the hills somewhere while she was stuck in this factory with her child. She looked down at her child and saw that his face was very still. He did not move. He did not cry anymore. His eyes were open. She thought it was a good thing and she could peacefully work and feed the machine again. She kept singing to him and she kept doing her work. She looked at him one more time. He was not moving at all. This is when she realized that he had died. She let out a loud and long scream and the woman working next to her asked her what had happened. She just screamed and cried. She beat her chest with her palms. As the other women realized what had happened, they all gathered around her. She cried and cried.

This is how the story ends. It is a very beautiful representation of the struggles of women who face a lot of challenges in living a peaceful life. She wants her child to go to sleep so that she can concentrate on her work. She herself wants to go to sleep so that she can afford the luxury of seeing her lover. In the end, Phalini and Suraj Mukhi find peace in a very strange and absurd manner.

Mulk Raj Anand often writes about the struggles of women who are forced to accept their after fate and suppress their emotions as there is no one to cater to them. They overcome their feelings and emotions and respond in a way that is considered reasonable by society. This way, they are forced to accept their fate and are not even given the room to lament about it. He beautifully presents the emotions of the women, especially jealousy. In his story, *The Silver Bangles*, he tells us about the mistreatment of a sweeper girl out of pure jealousy and misconception. Sajani is the sweeper girl. When Srimati Goppi Goel saw her hands adorned with a silver bangle, she was furious. She was frying some sweet bread in the kitchen to please her husband on the first day of Shraavan. She came to the window of the living room, looking over at Sajani and her bangle. She wanted to see how her bangles would affect her home. She had often seen her husband look at the untouchable girl with lust in his eyes. She believed that she had even caught him red-handed as she had seen him look at her with wet lips. She felt her suspicion was confirmed when the face of her husband lit up to see Sajani and he welcomed her very warmly and sweetly. She looked at Sajani who covered her face with her head cloth shyly. She thought that she was pleased to hear this from her husband.

This way, Mulk Raj Anand has beautifully portrayed the different colors and shades of life of a woman. Women go through a lot in their lives but this is often suppressed and they are forced to hide their pain and suffering. He represents the pain of women through his versatile and vibrant characters. He shows us how the culture of our land has often aggravated the sufferings of a woman as they have been pushed to the periphery. Society forces them to hide their feelings and emotions and live with whatever they have. They are often forced to stay within their limits and accept everything as their fate.



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