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SOCIAL REALISM IN THE NOVELS OF MULK RAJ ANAND

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Social realism was a trend in American art, which emerged in 1930, when painters started treating themes of social protest in a naturalistic manner. American life was categorized as American Scene painting; the Aschan School painters presented commonplace and unglamorous realities of city life ; John Sloan, Robert Henri, George Bellows and George Lucks painted the scenes of everyday life. Reginald Marsh did not belong to the Aschan School, yet, when he took lower Manhattan and the Bowery as his themes, the tradition of social realism was continued by his works. Later on this tradition was visible in caricatures also a good example of William Gropper's powerfully simplified caricatures of American public life is "The Senate" (1935; Museum of Modern Art, New York City). Jack Levine evolved a more sophisticated expressionist technique exemplified in "The Feast of Pure Reason" (1937; Museum of Modern Art). Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, John Steuart Curry, Edward Hopper; and other Regionalist painters, all dealt with everyday life in their works, but in a romanticized way that was basically incompatible with explicit social protest or criticism.

It should be kept in mind that romanticism stands for hiding 'the stark realities of life in a dream like haze', while realism admits no dreams and presents 'life in a grim nakedness without poetic drapery'; at least this was the attitude of Gustave Flaubert, Stendhal and Balzac, when certain major novelists of the 19th Century, particularly in France, reacted against romanticism and replaced it with realistic irony, which later on became the foundation stone of social realism. In England, George Eliot, in her novel, Middle March (1871—72), viewed human life grimly, with close attention to the squalor and penury of rural life. She does not accept any notion of Divine Providence, but her work is instinct with a powerful moral concern. In Hardy's novels, pessimistic determinism, reducing human character to pain, frustration and impotent anger, was appropriate to an age that knew no major oppressions. D. H. Lawrence was first recognized as a working class novelist showing the reality of English provincial family life. Amongst Indo-Anglian Fiction writers, the pioneering attempt was done by Mulk Raj Anand, a committed writer, who fulminated against class and caste distinction in a series of novels, such as Untouchable , in which the protest of a scavenger boy Bakha against the evil tradition of

untouchability in Indian society has been highlighted and a dim hope of Gandhian way to the solution has been hinted at; the Coolie, dealing with the Odyssey of a child labourMunoo; Two Leaves and a Bud, depicting the plight of workers in a tea-plantation; and The Big Heart presents a vivid picture of the strata of a society with stark realism, from which the Anand himself hails. This "is one of the most endearing of Anand's novels, for it succeeds, albeit in a limited measure, in projecting the miserable plight of India's 'lost generation'."[2]

The word 'Utopia' was coined by Sir Thomas More to indicate an imaginary, idealistic island where society lives in harmony with government and everyone is free from poverty, tyranny and war, in his Latin book, De OptimoReipublicaeStatudeque Nova Insula Utopia (Circa 1516), now known more commonly as Utopia. Etymologically, the term is derived from two Greek words "no" (ou) and "place/land" (topos), thus, meaning "nowhere" or literally, "no place/no-land". According to another interpretation, it may owe its origin to two Greek words "good" (eu) and, again, "place/land" (topos). Thus, the two Greek neologisms were meant to suggest, at one and the same time, outopia (no place) and eutopia (good place). It should be kept in mind, however, that, in the original sense, the modern connotations, associated with it, will be found untraceable.

'Utopia', in the modern sense of the term, means the human efforts to make a better, and perhaps a perfect society. It may refer to a vision, which may radically change our world, commonly termed as a utopian vision or idea. The word 'Utopian', in its negative sense, may suggest discrediting ideas as too advanced, too optimistic or unrealistic, impossible to put on the surface of reality; it is in this sense that Marxists use such expressions as "utopian socialism." The positive aspect aims at describing extant communities founded in efforts to make a better and perfect society; although some utopias have been described in detail to show a level of practicality; that is why the term "Utopia" has become applicable to notions that appear to be too optimistic and idealistic for practical application.

The credit of interpreting the term 'Utopia' in a literary sense, associating to the craft of fiction, is due to M. H. Abrams, who says:

> . . .the term Utopia has come to signify the class of fiction which represents an ideal political state and way of life. The first and greatest instance of the type was Plato's Republic, which sets forth, in dialogue form, the eternal idea of a commonwealth that can only be distantly approximated by political organizations in the actual world. Most Utopias, since Plato's beginning with that of Sir Thomas More, represent their ideal place under the fiction of a distance country reached by some venturesome traveler. There have been many Utopias written since Moregave impetus to the genre, some as mere Arcadian dreams, others as blue-prints for social and technological progress. They include Francis Bacon's New Atlantis (1627), Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward (1888), William Morris' News from Nowhere (1891), and James Hilton's Lost Horizon (1934).
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> The Utopia can be distinguished from representations of imaginary places which, either because they are superior to the real world or manifest exaggerated versions of some of its unsavoury aspects, are used primarily as vehicles for *satire* on

> human life and society: Swift's Gulliver's Travels (1726), Samuel Butler's Erewhon (1872).[3]

The above interpretation of 'Utopia' is to explain positive utopia. Another word 'Eutopia' is also used at par to the regular use of the word 'Utopia'.

The term 'Dystopia' is suggestive of a negative utopia. Explaining the concept of 'Dystopia' Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz remark:

> The term *dystopia* ("bad place") has lately been used to designate an anti-utopia, a place marked by extreme mechanization or authoritarianism. George Orwell's 1984(1949) and Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1932) offer such grim visions. In their critical tone dystopias have something in common with such satirical fantasies as Swift's Gulliver's Travels(1726) and Samuel Butler's Erewhon (1872), whose title is an anagram for "nowhere." These works offer more general criticisms of mankind or more specific criticisms of then contemporary institutions. Works of **science fiction**, extrapolating from current tendencies, may present either attractive or disturbing pictures of future worlds.[4]

Another related term is "Heterotopia", which means the "other place", which suggests a combination of real and imagined possibilities, presenting a mix of "utopian" escapism and turning virtual possibilities into reality; e.g. Samuel R. Delany's novel Trouble on Triton, which bears the sub-title An Ambiguous Heterotopia, highlighting that it is not strictly utopian (though certainly not dystopian). Several conflicting perspectives on the concept of utopia have been mentioned in the novel. Recent coinage is "Ourtopia", combining the English 'our' with the Greek 'topos' to give 'our place'—the thing of ultimate propinquity to a utopian planet that is actually attainable. Arcadias and Cockaynges are sub-categories, but of lesser significance, the credit of such categorization goes to Ruth Levitas.

For a student of English literature, Utopia, in its concept, analysis and explanation, remains incomplete unless it is substantially referred to Sir Thomas More, who, in his monumental magnum opus, written in lingua latina, under the title De OptimoRepublicaeStatudeque Nova Insula Utopia, depicts a rationally organized society, through the narration of an explorer who discovers it—Raphael Hythlodaeus. As indicated by the title, it is self-evident that the book, being based on Plato's Republic, is a perfect version of the Republic where the beauties of society, such as equalism and a general pacifist attitude, reign, notwithstanding the fact that its citizens are ready to fight also when war becomes a necessary evil; social evils e.g. poverty and misery, having been obliterated in all their totality, the ideal Republic has few laws sans advocates, and citizens are rarely sent to war; however, if the need arises, mercenaries are hired from war-prone neighbours, in the expectation that such hired soldiers would be killed, ridding the world of a parasite. More's commitment to Christianity is also reflected in Utopia, as the popular credulous unity is achieved through a dictum that a faith in a Supreme Being leads to a situation in which a priest administers the island's religious affairs; amalgamating a belief in what essentially the Christian afterlife is mandatory; not only this, utopians have accepted Christian doctrine, when introduced to such by European visitors,

but the communism of property also has been extended by the author, who, reflecting his familiarity with the early Christian society described in the Biblical Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2.44-45, 4.32-35), condemns and makes severely culpable the vices despised by the Catholic Church such as pre-marital sex, prostitution, adultery, gambling, theft and drunkenness. More's book, having reached high popularity, the term "Utopia" became a byword for ideal concepts, proposals, societies; the Utopian authors envisage that faults in existing societies could be eliminated in social infrastructure, which favoured their principles; this leads to the idea that the innovations portrayed in utopian visions are usually radical, revolutionary, inspirational or speculative.

Expressing his view points about originality, social civilization, ideal polity and dreamlike vision, presented in More's Utopia, W. J. Long puts forward:

> More's Utopia, published in 1516, is a powerful and original study of social conditions, unlike anything which had ever appeared in any literature. In our own day we have seen its influence in Bellamy's Looking Backward, an enormously successful book, which recently set people to thinking of the unnecessary cruelty of modern social conditions. More learns from a sailor, one of Amerigo Vespucci's companions, of a wonderful kingdom of Nowhere, in which all questions of labour, government, society, and religion have been easily settled by simple justice and common sense. In this *Utopia* we find for the first time, as the foundations of civilized society, the three great words, liberty, fraternity, equality, which retained their inspiration through all the violence of the French Revolution and which are still unrealized ideal of every free government. As he hears of this wonderful country More wonders why, after fifteen centuries of Christianity, his own land is so little civilized; and as we read the book today we ask ourselves the same question. The splendid dream is far from being realized; yet it seems as if any nation could become Utopia in a single generation, so simple and just are the requirements.[5]

In order to comprehend the multidimensional implications connoted by the term "Social Realism", it would not be inappropriate to note with surprise, that, the term 'realism' was originated from the nomenclature, which now it tries to stand contrary to; that the genesis lies in Platonic concept of Philosophical realism, in accordance whereto the Greek philosopher holds the view that 'Idea is the Ultimate Reality', a maxim which, later on, was known as Idealism; thus drawing a line of demarcation between the former that presented the world as it ought to be, and the latter displaying as it really is. Thereinafter, realism as a movement came as a reaction related to objective disinterestedness, as opposed to the subjectivity of egotistical sublime preached by Romantic literature; further it is strange that realism became a vitalized expression of what was known in 2nd century A. D. as the *voxpopuli of proletariatus* from which the seeds of Romanticism were sprouted; at least this is the trans-etymological suggestion of realism, which is used "to designate a way of representing life in literature which was popularized by the above mentioned movement (a literary movement of the nineteenth century)."[6]

In connection with exploring social realism, it is essential to differentiate it from socialist realism, a term used in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, notwithstanding the fact that social realism is not an official art, thus allowing perfect probability for subjectivity; however, following another view point, it becomes evident that socialist realism has become significant as a specific branch of social realism.

As the egotistical sublime of Romanticism had become hyperbolical of idealism, the Industrial Revolution, with all its evils, became apparent; the upper classes, having become prone to their pecuniary display, owing to the growth of urban centres resulting into the growth of the plight of slum dwellers, social realism emerged with a new sense of social consciousness; there came social realists who pledged to fight the beautiful art; who focused on the ugly realities of contemporary life, sympathizing with the working class people; it was an altogether different matter that the public was outraged by social realism, because they were unaware of how to look at it or what to do with it.

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