

## **“THE IMAGE OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD IN MULK RAJ ANAND’S GAURI”**

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**Abstract:** In literature, the personality of the traditional woman and the woman with the modern outlook has been presented in an exclusively male oriented culture. The traditional woman has been left with no personality of her own. She even glorified the suffering that was inflicted upon her by the male, whereas women with the modern outlook endeavor to come out of the suppression and begin to view her independent existence. This over changing reality of life reflects itself in contemporary literature. The position of woman in society is no exception to this fact. In Mulk Raj Anand's writing one gets a realistic picture of the position of women, of behavior and personality of women in Indian society. The feminist perspective offers a fresh look at the narratives dealing with women in modern society. In the novel “*Gauri*” Anand shows that women should also learn to master their destiny. The novel presents its heroine who fights the age old traditions and strives to get her due in society. Anand gives a realistic picture of the inevitable struggle of women against the degradation of the female by male chauvinists. It not only voices a strong protest against the ill treatment of women but also explores through the example of Gauri as to how women in India can work for their emancipation. Gauri is an embodiment of the Indian womanhood. She symbolizes the value of silent suffering. She suffers from her husband who is highly egoistic and superstitious. In her altered view of man-woman relationship, she gives importance to love, faith and mutual trust. Her march towards the town is indicative of her journey towards self-esteem and self fulfilment.

**Keywords:** Protest, Self-esteem, Self-fulfilment, womanhood.

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**Introduction:** In literature, the personality of the traditional woman and the woman with the modern outlook has been presented in an exclusively male oriented culture.

“According to the double standards of morality man is free from any responsibility: no one asks him or blames him for any illegal action because he is superior..... In the patriarchal society woman is tamed to obey their husband and follow all norms unconditionally.”<sup>1</sup>(Ahmed,76).

The traditional woman has been left with no personality of her own. She even glorified the suffering that was inflicted upon her by the male.

“In the patriarchal system men were bread winners while women stayed at home, cooked food and looked after children. Their chief role was to manage domestic work. There was no question of any profession.”<sup>2</sup>(Hosain,10)

But woman with modern outlook endeavor to come out of the suppression and begin to view her independent existence. The over changing reality of life reflects itself in contemporary literature. The position of woman in society is no exception to this fact. The status of women throughout the world has been undergoing a rapid change during recent times. In Indo-Anglian literature, especially in the writings of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Anita Desai, Kamla Markandaya, Bhabani Bhattacharya and others one gets a true and realistic picture of position, behaviour and personality of women in Indian society. The feminist perspective offers a fresh look at the narratives dealing with women in modern society.

Often women are shown to be defined as the center of culture but in reality they are still imprisoned within the walls of her family and shackled by tradition.

“The attitude of considering women as inferior has biological reasons. Women bear children. They are physically weaker than men. Child rearing and bearing are their priorities.”<sup>3</sup>(Hosain,11)

Indian novelists from time to time have conceived a new image of woman in their narratives. She is manipulated by the novelist as a symbol of romantic sensibility amidst simultaneous idealization or as an agent in the author's quest for psychological insight and awareness. She is also shown as capable of resolving the age-old conflict between tradition and modernity. Now woman is no longer a paragon of virtue and chastity to be extolled by poets and philosophers but as a vibrant and confident protagonist which gives Indian fiction and Indian womanhood a new role models to emulate. The changing role of Indian woman in modern society has been a favourite theme with writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Anita Desai, etc.

Mulk Raj Anand is a celebrated Indian novelist with global recognition. While going to the very root of the degraded social and political system, Anand found that his countrymen still were governed by medieval thoughts and were reluctant to welcome new way of life. Anand as a young writer felt that nothing short of a “total re-orientation of one's outlook on history”<sup>4</sup> (Anand, 52)

could help. In other words, every Indian should recognize the potential inside. In his writing, Anand incorporated and dramatized these vital issues with a clear vision. In novels like “**Gauri**” Anand shows that women should also learn to master their destiny. The novel was first published in 1960 under the title “**The old woman and The cow**”. The novel presents its heroine who fights the age-old traditions and strives to get her due in society. According to Pramila Paul, Anand emphasizes “the need for locating our society in the modern world”<sup>5</sup> (Paul, 12)

In “**Gauri**”, Anand gives a realistic picture of the inevitable struggle of women against the degradation of the female by the male chauvinists. It not only voices a strong protest against the ill-treatment of women but also explores through the example of Gauri as to how women in India can work for their emancipation. Gauri is a victim of the dichotomy where woman is worshipped as a goddess as well as whipped as a slave. Gauri's mother had advised her to be like Sita of the Ramayana. The Indian woman is not only married into a family but also into her community. She has to find her fulfilment in her family only. The joint family system is an archaic form of social organization in which woman is controlled through different roles she has to play. This is realistically portrayed in the novel “**Gauri**”.

Viewed from typological configurations, Gauri combines in herself the traces of divine figures from Indian mythology. She is Shakti, kali, Sita and Mohini. Woman in the modality of kali is annihilator, woman as Shakti shows her prowess. In her fury she becomes Kali. These are archetypal experiences of which the Indian woman is constantly reminded. Within the framework of the traditional society lies the reality of a woman's life. Gauri has to stand the acid test (agni-pareeksha) to prove her purity. Historically the feminine mystique trains a woman to imbibe the spirit of subservience and to find the salvation by serving her man till the end of her life. Gauri is such a woman who is born and brought up in a traditional setup. She accepts self effacement as her destiny.

Gauri is an embodiment of the Indian womanhood. She is the facsimile of an Indian woman symbolizing the value of silent suffering. Her devotion and ardent love for her husband Panchi makes her mind oscillate between two extremes. She suffers because her husband Panchi is highly egotistic and superstitious. Anand has exploded the menstruation taboo in this novel. He depicts a woman in rural India who “has been considered untouchable during her period, isolated and given food away from the kitchen, and not allowed to contaminate.”<sup>6</sup>(Gauri,41)

He has used the proverbial “dark room” to which Gauri often retires and curls upon a small string charopai throughout the day during her menstruation, and after her quarrels with Kesaro and Panchi. Anand wants to suggest that women are often victimized for breach of this stupid convention that forces them during their menstruation into isolation as untouchables.

Having suffered considerable setback during the period of her separation from Panchi, she manages to come up dry out of deeply troubled waters. It enables her to shed her initial garb of coyness and brave the struggle of life fearlessly and courageously "like Hardy's Tess she has by now abandoned the Gods of her religion and yet she seems predestined by a malevolent fate to attract the attention of those she would most dearly wish to resist."<sup>7</sup>(Niven, 108)

Even then she fights bravely and treads safely, be it the immodest inclination of Seth Jai Ram Das to whom her own mother had bartered her for a handful of rupees, or Dr. Batra-an assistant doctor in Colonel Mahindra's hospital.

Gauri returns from the hospital as an educated individual and straight away discards the purdah and its stupid conventions. She quotes Colonel Mahindra ".....education will make us master of our destiny..."<sup>8</sup>(Gauri, 240)

The process of metamorphosis which Gauri undergoes gets accomplished at this juncture. Once again Gauri has to collect the remnants of strength in her, brace herself and step out never to come back.

"She wiped of her eyes with the pallav of her saree, lifted her head and walked on, without looking this side or that."<sup>9</sup>(Gauri, 264)

The acid test of this transformation in her comes out when Panchi drives her out of the house once again, his mind poisoned by malicious gossip. She does not, as she has done earlier, go out as a helpless, forsaken creature, but as a woman conscious of her rights and confident of herself.

Now Gauri prepares herself for the new struggle against the system, and this transforms "a cow" into "a tigress". In her altered view of man-woman relationship, Gauri gives importance to love, faith and mutual trust. She has gained a new awareness and so rejects the world a narrow orthodox beliefs and accepts the modern way of life. Her passage is from the abstract to the concrete, from traditions to modernity. Her decision to cross the manmade barrier is an indication of woman-lib of which Gauri becomes a forerunner.

Thus the study of a novel shows the author's indictment on a society which denies human rights to a woman. Gauri embodies faith in the strength of woman whose goal is self-actualization. Her march towards the town is indicative of her journey towards self-esteem and self fulfilment. Here Mulk Raj Anand delineates the process of the emergence of modern Indian woman. The female attains a titanic womanhood, realizing that she is not a mere 'femme fatale'. It is this wider embracing concept of love and individuality that would enable the Indian woman to emerge from her deprived state to orient herself. Character like Gauri illustrates the various ways of coping with contemporary reality.

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