

The Unbecoming of a Postcolonial Subject in Mulk Raj Anand's *The Bubble*

Bhargavi Jha

Abstract

The eerie texture of self, being and identity formation has always been at the locus of all philosophies. Plethora of philosophical dialogues and discourses has been intertwined to understand the rubrics of self and being since time immemorial. Contemporary and Postmodern era encompasses a fractured and hybrid self which is to be explored through the process of formation of a subject. The paper underscores a classical western genre of *Bildungsroman* to explain the process of formation. In postcolonial era, formation of self subsumes class, cast and gender as paramount factors. The paper analyze those factors in detail which are responsible for the development of a postcolonial protagonist in contemporary India. The classical genre of *bildung* formation does not justify the contemporary Indian subject in totality, thus the paper suggests a Dissensual *Bildungsroman*, as a new perspective to the genre.

Key Words: Bildungsroman; Dissensual; Identity; Postcolonial; Self, Subjectivity.

Since pre-Socratic era, ontological realities and process of epistemology has been a medium to understand self, subject, subjectivity and human existence. Literary criticism, literary theories and genres too explore the ways to decode the complex rubrics of self, being and human existence. The reality of the contemporary modern world underlines a fracture, aporia and rupture within the discourse of self and subjectivity. India as a third world country with its colonial history and cultural differences records unique and unparalleled plot of self and subjectivity. I propose that postcolonial life narrative renders a new form of individual development which has not been much recognized in the contemporary world. Postcolonial life writing records the quest of self-making and desire of identity which in some cases, is smothered under the conservative and orthodox social sys-

tem. Here, identity is pre-determined with no authority and agency to intervene in between.

Post-Colonial narratives has made an attempt to recuperate the pre-colonial language, traditions and knowledge system from the shadow of colonial sponsored literature. All post-colonial writings have some thematic commonality such as use of allegories, celebrating the struggle, magic realism, discontinuous narratives and exile (in some case, specifically in black community). Post-colonial narrative is an attempt to 'decolonize' the established cultural, political and social conventions. Althusser in '*Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus*' (1970) argues that colonizer, through apparatuses, construct the ideology of a colonial subject. Structuralist has a different stand point, as Said exposes the aspect of textuality, where concept of 'Europe and Other' is entertained. Post-structuralist explores a contemporary idea of 'free play' where no culture and tradition is considered to be original, only an hybrid form of culture and language is prominent which is supported by Homi J. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak.

Postcolonial writing includes dialectics of modernism and Anglo-Indian writers conflates western knowledge and eastern form. Pre independent themes of colonial India were more engrossed in nationalism, industrialization, Gandhian ideology and poverty but post-independence a shift was witnessed from social realism to psycho-social themes. , R.K Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk raj Anand are the trio stalwart modernist Indian writers. Mulk Raj Anand is a writer who witnessed both lives of colonial and post-colonial India. S.C. Harris claims in *Indian and Western Writings in Dialogues* (1982) that dominant motives of Anglo-Indian writings were imbricated with conflict between the traditional self and modern ego, between Indian absolutist interpretation of cosmos and relativist interpretation of scientific Marxism, between ideals of submission and social justice. Anand's approach is considered to be Humanist Marxism. He does not glorifies psychosocial life of India vigorously rather K. Nagrajan cites, Anand "sees life in raw and expose it mercilessly". He pre-eminently exposes the outcast tradition, cast system, patriarchic in Hindus, place of woman in the society. His writings like *Untouchables* and *Coolie* has been appreciated worldwide, wherein the hardships of subjugated is expressed. His *Series of Seven Ages of Man*, have autobiographical elements which provides us with an incisive understanding of psychological journey of the writer.

Cast system, erroneous ideology of Brahman society, discourse of untouchables are the pre-eminent concerns of Mulk Raj Anand. In illuminating the obfuscating and horrifying spaces that define the destiny of cast-out people, Anand, K.D. Varma asserts, challenges the moral conscience of the upper-caste Hindus for castigating and subjugating a segment of community.

World had encountered many movements but Indian revolution for freedom was unparalleled, it was 'neither a bloody revolution nor an armed struggle for power. But it certainly demanded of all Indians a radically new approach to life. It was an emotional as well as an ideological experience spread over a much longer period of time than any other nationalist revolution in world history. Mostly the Gandhian ideology had been the prime mover'. Gandhi reoccurs in these novels as he being the most potent force behind the entire movement, but presented and used in different ways, according to the writer, sometimes as an idea, a symbol, as tangible reality, and benevolent human being. For instance, Mulk Raj Anand never idealized Gandhi.

A post-colonial subject encompasses a fractured and hybrid self with the baggage of cast, class, religion and a colonial history. These factors leads to the subjectification of a subject and only making choices and decisions with due course of time would lead the development of self in an Individual, this process of unbecoming is exemplified in Euro-American text categorized as *Bildungsroman*. The plot of *Bildungsroman* portrays a young man going through the world experiencing tribulations which further helps in his development of self. Pramod K. Nayar suggests that the postcolonial life writing genre can discern the functional equivalent of the *Bildungsroman*.

Bildungsroman deals with the process of education, growth, development and maturity of the protagonist. The study intends to examine how the change in the factors determining the process of formation as far as some modern novels of India are concerned. Further, how the protagonist attains the sense of self and subjectivity and constitutes his or her identity and finally gets interpellated into a subject. There are three variants of *Bildungsroman*; *Entwicklungsroman*, *Erziehungsroman*, *Kunstlerroman*. *Entwicklungsroman* as Jerome H Buckley in his book *Seasons of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (1970) asserts that "it is the chronicles of a young man's general growth rather than his specific quest for self-culture" (25). An individual as a mere product of the social and cultural apparatuses without any desire and quest of finding one's own self. The second is *Erziehungsroman*, Buckley expounds that "it emphasizes on youth's training and formal education" (13). In this second form the individual finds its identity in relation to the society, culture, religion etc. He/ She understand the rubrics of structure and order. The confinement of structure leads the individual to a rebellious attitude. The third form is *Kunstlerroman*, where the *Bildungsheld* drops its self and a universal artist take shape.

The Bubble is an odyssey of Krishna who tries to establish himself as a writer on a foreign land, London. Autobiographical element in the novel *The Bubble* draws it towards the classical genre, *Bildungsroman*, a journey and a process of self-acculturation. Krishna Chandra is the *bildungsheld* in the

text. The significant features of *Bildungsroman*, a modernist genre, subsumes a rebellious attitude against the dominating norms and figures (in India, specifically father), exile from home, alienation in foreign land, more than two love affairs, in a search for self-acculturation, attaining of the aesthetic self or 'desired image' according to Anand. The text is written in series of letters addressed to Noor, a friend in India.

Mulk Raj Anand influenced by western structure of thought renders a Freudian and Marxist structure to the text. Krishna's father becomes the pre-eminent reason to leave house. His fathers too much inclination towards British people, wanted his son's life also devoted to British Raj. Anand's turbulent childhood, anguish against atrocious British rule contrived his childhood and adolescence. 'Child is the father of man' which contrives the adulthood and an anti-empirical streak in Anand's writings. Western conceptualization of *Bildungsroman* subsumes to move out of community to find oneself, in a contrast, in Indian context protagonist becomes inextricably attached to his/her community. Krishna's connection with his Indian community makes him alone and terrified, on the foreign land. Krishna in his letters addressing Noor, expresses:

Oh, Noor, Noor, My Beloved Friend- Why did I have to leave you all and come away.' The answer emerges faintly in my callow soul: "Krishna you wanted to come and find out what life is all about. You have come on a philosophical quest. But exile is kind of death of oneself and other people! I feel every one you have died somehow.(3)

Krishna gets influenced by western philosophy but also endeavors to find 'I-am-ness' in those philosophies. Western philosophy of life is accepted by the protagonist but like an Island surrounded by the water of nostalgia and inextricable memories of native place and culture..Iqbal's concept of self and Rumi's coming over of life-chaos through loving, Christian believe of Judgement day which superseded Iqbal's idea of everyday being a judgement day. Krishna find himself in a conflict and flux, as eastern and western philosophies of life are very much different.

Frank Moretti notes that a tension between self-determination and social integration are key to classical *Bildungsroman*. A *bildungsheld* who's internal development is linked to the social requirements. Moretti also describes that many obstacles in the way of *bildungsheld* are incorporated to ruse his personality. But in many cases the narratives of growing up holds an integration but does not fulfilling the ideals of traditional *Bildungsroman* as Slaughter suggests. Gregory Castle argues in *Reading the*

Modernist Bildungsroman, the failure of traditional notions of *Bildungsroman* proves to be the new form of *bildung* in postcolonial narratives. This, Nayar articulates, 'Dissensual *Bildungsroman* portrays a self that has not been allowed to grow due to the social contexts it finds itself mired in'. Dissensual *Bildungsroman* projects the dissonance between self-determination and integration. Classical *Bildungsroman* celebrates trials and circumstances as an opportunity to shape the self and subjectivity whereas on the contrary, postcolonial *Bildungsroman* in Indian context cast, class, gender, and other forms of structural inequality creates the lacuna where identities are pre-determined with no agency to intervene in the process.

Dissensual *Bildungsroman* maps the obstacles in the journey of a *bildungsheld* which refuse any integration to the social context by refusing any sense of self and subjectivity and this dissonance itself leads the making of a subject. The social integration, central to traditional *Bildungsroman*, incorporates the commonality of suffering and shared history of colonization and social injustice.

The novel is stretched in nine parts such as The Exile (letters to Noor), the Ascent of Mount Snowdon, Babes in the wood, Thieves of Fire (Dairy of journey to Paris and back), Conversation in Bloomsbury, Dublin Dairy (paly boy of western world and Deidre), Journal to Irene, A Letter from Father, A Letter to Father, A Letter to Irene.

In postcolonial narratives childhood experiences are taken into consideration for the formation of a subject. *The Exile* contains Krishna's encounter with the foreign world where he found himself in an unfamiliar world. The feeling of being away from his native land and community had uncovered the questioned of identity. On his journey to find his philosophical self, on foreign land, now strives for the lost sense of identity. Krishna in his letter to Noor expresses his feeling of shrinking: 'Oh Noor, Noor, My Beloved friend- why did I have to leave you all and come away'.

Classical *Bildungsroman* only depicts the journey of a young individual whereas Postcolonial narrative inculcates childhood memories of the *bildungsheld*. The agonies and pain from a colonial master becomes an inseparable part of *bildungsheld* memories. In an odyssey of subject formation Krishna notes his intrinsic fear from the white masters, Krishna on his way to find his friend Tochi's address encounters a white policeman, the childhood fear erupts, he says

I bowed to him, the old fear of the exalted white sahebs in India creeping up from my frightened soul before this burly constable, who unlike the Tommies smiled under his brief moustache'. 'In my childhood in the

cantonments I had once been threatened with a cane by Captain Cunningham, adjutant of my father's regiment, for staring at him. (6)

Dissensual *bildungsheld* does not recommend the universal idea of self and subjectivity, his colonial history which has ruse his childhood and youth, the only identity he prefers is in connectedness rather than oneness. Krishna comes across flux between his Identity which has a colonial past and history of torture.

Krishna's meeting with Indians in London, now a brown Englishmen, Indian students whose identity as an Indian were considered to be inferior and the fear made them 'tight mouthed and remote, even though Krishna addressed them in Hindustani'. Professor Dicks, under whom Krishna would pursue his PhD, behaviour towards Krishna was insulting, the professor consider Indians as incorrigible and Indian Culture as Mumbo-jumbo which had smothered Krishna's sense of Self. Eventually he manages to get enrolled under Professor Dicks. Anand in the first part purports Krishna's dissonance towards the English culture and his struggles with an Indian Identity, to find a rented room. Krishna's 'I-am-ness' as an Indian and Hindu is reflected in every understanding of western philosophies of Descartes, Hegel, Carlyle.

Anand very astutely draws out the growth of a subjects through the consecutive parts of the novel. The 'immanent critic' takes a close observation to his subaltern identity. Krishna goes out of India, becomes an exile to test himself but his connectedness to the colonial subject of India transformed his search of 'I' into 'we'.

The second part *The Ascent of Mount Snowdon*, the setting is of North Wales. The rural atmosphere makes him remind his own country, and he found some space to re-discover the irreconcilability of eastern and western philosophies, he too found western philosophy as pale, except that of 'Descartes I think therefor I am', but his assertion about exigency of human will prompts him to include 'I am therefore I think'. He realizes freedom of choice can help him in the process of 'becoming'.

His encounter with Lucy gray in North Wales, a pure and innocent woman but her adoration of Budhha irks him. Budhha symbolizes escape and negation according to Krishna and he believes in struggle for liberation and endeavored to make an authentic existence. The third part of the novel describes the importance of body in formation of a personality. The body according to Krishna is, on which the mind rationality is based upon. This part records Krishna association with Irene, an independent soul. Her company strengthen his quest towards reality principle of phi-

losophy and pleasure principle of poetry. Though her body attracted him but wasn't a hindrance in his journey on attaining self. The fourth part of the novel describes his journey to Paris and back. The fifth part records his encounter and interaction with many luminaries. This interaction made him realize the hullabaloo of Indian thinkers is Bloomsbury group which was devoid of any real problems of India. Meanwhile the Irish struggle for their country fires his spirit and a longing for his native county and the citizen.

The sixth chapter of the novel incorporates Krishna's engagement in self-realization. He says:

Somehow my narrative is creating a kind of recognition of personal identity from among my many selves, and the fire from within is lighting up the seven colours of the rainbow, of my imagination as an eight colour. Strange how putting something down some of the conversations I have had in London had revealed to me how some of these words become sparks. Our ancients said man becomes Isvara, God, and thus burn out the deadness. I have found that since I began to enter the intimacies of inner feelings, writing has become a fire which is destroying the falsities and lighting up the mind as though through my meditations on paper. (467)

Irene's affection towards her country and her active participation in the Irish revolution spurts enthusiasm into Krishna about his own colonized country people. Irish revolution created a sense of responsibility and reality, in Krishna, regarding suppressed and subjugated. His creation of Bakha, an insulted and injured, made him see beyond the philosophies, propagating self-attaining as a universal phenomenon. This part records Irene going to jail and Krishna left in the state of delirium. The following part records his confessions to Irene in a form of Journal. Part eight and nine records series of letters Krishna received and sent to his father. This part renders sentimental contradictories between father and son. The last part records his last letter to Irene and his journey back to India.

Classical *Bildungsroman* celebrates engagement of individual to the society and father figure, or any authority becomes a bridge to this relationship. On the contrary postcolonial *Bildungsroman* rejects any established authority. Development in postcolonial *bildungsheld* is hindered by these authority and father figures. Colonial injustice to the Indian citizen ruse the personality of the individual. Subject formation in *bildungsheld* of the novel is attained with his realization of his identity and community which

is tortured by the British Empire. *Terra firma* of subject formation in post-colonial context is shared agony and pain. The choice of identification with the fellow- victims of colonization made Krishna discover his subject-hood. He mentions the Jaliawala mass murder repeatedly which explains his agony against the British Empire.

The classical notion of *Bildungsroman* cherish integration which is partly achieved by the education, but education in colonial India was sponsored by the British to produce more brown English. The education system becomes an apparatus of suppression and slavery. British -Indian universities subsumed most of the western oriented knowledge. The education found him no ground for his development of subjectivity. Krishna believed his coming to London will provide him an understanding of his self but the aloofness of British people only made him aware of his difference as an Indian. In postcolonial *Bildungsroman* the theme of education invokes 'knowing subaltern'. The sense of dignity, freedom, humanism are not conceived through formal education rather it is nurtured by Gandhian idea of freedom. So, I propose that education in postcolonial narratives is merely a 'discourse of compensation' as supported by Pramod. K. Nayar. Leading ideology of Gandhi and active participation in revolutions carve the journey of a postcolonial *bildungsheld*. Krishna found western philosophies imbricated with idea of harmony and universality, which lacks sense of reality.

Knowing subalternity is the key element in postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, where the *bildungsheld* becomes conscious agent. Nayar puts it, in knowing subalternity, 'the emphasis is on the historical consciousness, political awareness, advocacy, self-reflexivity and self-critique among the victims of disfranchised'. Knowing subalternity carves the citizen-subject. A citizen-subject is the one who escapes the subjectification to others but still not a sovereign subject. A citizen-subject is not a subject reduced to slavery but still he/she is deprived of freedom to choose an imagined life plot. The citizen-subject realizes him/her being a part of the community and knowing subalternity is the emergence of sense of community which illuminates the voice of protest within the *bildungsheld*.

The Dissensual *Bildungsroman* represents the lacuna between the proposed law of equality by the state and its actual experience in the society by the victims. Anand represents this disparity through Krishna's agony as an Indian surrounded by white who believe themselves to be very humane and appreciators of freedom to all human beings.

I propose that India is a country with layers of identity, only one mode of identi-

ty cannot survive the varieties Indian society projects. Traditional mode of aesthetic attainment does not entertain the interpellation of subjectivity in Indian context with its colonial history and cast, class, cultural and gender differences. Dissensual *Bildungsroman* records these disparities and various forms of suppression which defines the personality of an individual. We see Krishna as emerging citizen-subject as becoming the part of the process of protest.

Eighth part *A letter from Father* to son Krishna reveals that Krishna's friend Noor to whom he sent letter, died of T.B. Krishna's father believes his letter to Noor made Noor to dream and worry about something he can not have as a confectioner's son, as Imperial Forest service was only for rich kids. Postcolonial *Bildungsheld* has a rebellious attitude towards any authority specially the father figure. The letter from his father only projected his anger towards Krishna and his modern thinking. His father's picture of a son was to get married to a girl not educated much (arranged by parents) and son having a job under the British Sarkar.

The following part *A Letter to Father* of the novel, is about letters Krishna send to his father. The letters clearly shows his suffocation from the cultural norms which has been forced upon him. He rejects to surrender to his father's conservative and orthodox believes. He informs him about his thesis submission and his decision to join Gandhi and write a novel on Bakha an untouchable. He says:

in my confession I am trying to discover my lost innocence, the flow of love for everything in life, all that choked our breadth as children, the don'ts imposed by our elders and Dharma bugs. (588)

He justifies his participation in the freedom revolutions and slams his father to become the kind of man who looked only to the honours offered by Sarkar. He describes physical torture as reason of him being a rebellion. Where classical *Bildungsroman* negotiates the epistemological transformation, postcolonial *Bildungsroman* represents an ontological realities and experiences which ruse the process of subject formation.

This part also reveals his encounter with his true nature of non-violence, he confesses that the torture of British rule inculcate the feeling of revenge but his mother's teaching made him realize his true nature. The society with White as masters, the colonized *bildungsheld* only incurs insult as "black men who squat on the ground".

The postcolonial narrative has a sense of collectivity and narrator acquire a position of citizen-subject who advocates reform. P.K. Nayar suggests that "where we see the post colonial's knowing subalternity as the condition in which the political conscious advocate of social change and the

claimant for the human and communitarian cultural rights emerge".(109)

The connectedness to the native caters a sense of self in a Postcolonial *Bildungsheld* which is quite contrary to the traditional conventions of the genre. Krishna continues his journey as a poet to the unheard and unvoiced. Krishna conceives a sense of self in connectedness to the victims and natives, he asserts

when the self becomes too much with you try the following recipe. Recall the face of the poorest and the most helpless man you have seen, and ask your self, if the step you contemplate is going to be any use to him...than you will find yourself and your doubts will melt away. (594)

The autobiographical elements emphasize its validity as a *Bildungsroman* Novel. Mulk Raj Anand got his Ph.D. degree from Cambridge university in London and afterwards came back to India. His other writings include *Untouchables* and *Coolie* which narrates the story of a subaltern. Moreover *The Bubble* is a part of his autobiographical journey entitled *Seven Ages of Man*.

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