

In Remembrance

Mulk Raj Anand 1905-2004

Mulk – A Dear Friend

As I pen this name, Mulk Raj Anand, (Mulk as we called him) a number of images flash across my mind. Was he a man or was he a phenomenon? One thing can be said for certain: he lived his life on his own terms – I wonder why God deprived him of completing his century of life?

I had the good fortune of being his personal friend. I cannot remember how it happened but this friendship propelled me into a spate of opportunities to be with him when he met the big and mighty and when he walked to feel the weak and lowly of the society. Whenever he came to Chandigarh, he always found time to turn up in my humble residence, perch himself on his favourite seat in the drawing room, the place of prominence from where he could preside over everybody in the room. Immediately on entering, he would start dilating on the topic he had been ruminating over in his mind, and the knowledge would flow through his vocal chords ceaselessly punctuated with many expletives, and telling everybody how unconcerned they all were about the evils of society and about the lack of positive action on their part. He often asked me, why don't I write a book on Chandigarh and why don't I write papers and so on. I did pen a booklet – Chandigarh, a presentation in free verse – and he listened to it with great patience and said 'we shall publish it via Marg Publications'. He did! But that did not satisfy his appetite and he wanted more and more outpourings from me on the subjects that engaged his and my mind. All this is background to set the ball rolling on the character of the man I loved, and revered and feared. Whenever I was to confront him, I would look forward to a lively debate in which he was the main speaker and if I could butt in a word here and there that would be an achievement. Yet he had great penetration into the character of the persons he met and I feel he loved me too.

My house was also the stage for a lively debate in the presence of artist friends who would drop in to meet him or whom he would ask to come without bothering to tell me that he had done so. On such occasions the words would fly round like the leaves in autumn on a windy day. Such occasions were indeed heady – full of life and excitement, of meaning and creativity. I shall not even try to describe what was discussed. This is only to give a glimpse of his characteristic and overpowering personality. His presence was also infectious – he came like a whirlwind, and when he left there was a palpable vacuum. His passing away has indeed created a vacuum, which does not seem to get filled up.

I think when he wrote his passion flowed through his pen. When he wrote the '*Untouchable*' he must have felt like an untouchable himself. He had shown the

script to Mahatma Gandhi who asked him to improve the original script considerably, which he did. But the script got many rejections from various publishers until the intervention of a kindly mentor (E. M. Forster) melted the heart of a publisher who put it on the market. Since then over 10 *lac* copies have been sold. Many many books have flowed from his pen of which I shall only mention two. One is '*Coolie*' and the other '*Across the Black Waters*'. The first one takes you through the journey of life of a lowly Coolie of which there are plenty in India, and who eke a living out of carrying the loads of peoples' luggage, sometimes people themselves, on their heads, shoulders and backs and receive kicks, and abuse and a few coins in return to keep their body and soul together. When they die, there is hardly a mourner to shed a tear over their death. It is such a poignant tale that one is left lamenting what has civilization done to the lives of its constituents. The book leaves you in a state of stupor for the fates of the deprived and lowly. It is a passionate outpouring from the pen of one who thought that literature is nothing if it does not shake your soul and awakens you to confront the evils of society in which you live.

The second book takes you along on a journey in the company of an Indian soldier in the British army during the First World War. Why is it called '*Across the Black Waters*'? The title itself suggests the deep-rooted superstition in the mind of Indians during those times implying that crossing the sea was to '*kala pani*' (black water). Nevertheless, the young men had to join the British army to earn a living and fight in the ditches dug along the battle lines where the British officers urged them to fight because their salaries support their families back home. Should they shirk, they will lose the benefits and their families will suffer. One is reminded here of Bernard Shaw's saying 'the armies fight on their stomachs'. There is a long poignant description of a young soldier getting shot. That soldier was a good hockey player. His companions feel the loss of his passing away much more for that reason. Those were the days when hockey was, more or less, the national game of India and we were on top of the world in that game.

Thus all the literature that flowed from the pen of Mulk picks on the themes of childhood, love, escapades, daring and struggles of life. He brings out the injustices, and frustrations, which all sections of society have to endure. Although he wrote in English, the flavour was always Indian – Punjabi, and even the language of the street. He used the Indian words in his English prose for the simple reason that the English language does not possess an equivalent word.

Mulk made deep forays into the realm of art. He did paint a little, but that is not where he excelled. His forte was understanding and philosophising the nuances of art – Indian art, past and present, European art, Folk art and the art which germinates from the hands of craftsmen. Indeed he had a great feeling for the creativity of the common craftsmen and thought that the essential creativity lies in the hands of the craftsmen. They create without being conscious – and that is great art. He created a theory of perception, analysed how a work of art impinges on the personality and perception faculties of an onlooker that guides an initiate into how one should look

at art. He rose to become the Chairman of the Central Lalit Kala Akademi in which he initiated triennial exhibitions which attracted works of art from all over the world. Awards and recognitions won in these exhibitions set a standard for the aspiring artists and those who won awards, achieved world recognition.

The most significant contribution of Mulk in the field of art was the founding of art magazine called *Marg* sometimes in the 1960s – or was it the late 1950s. This magazine is the mirror of all facets of India art and architecture from times immemorial and has put Indian art on the world map. In fact it is a reference magazine on any subject. Known personalities in the field of art and architecture feel proud if they find a place in this magazine. It is a quarterly publication and each publication is also produced in the form of a book. All the advertised material has to undergo the scrutiny of art appreciation.

While he was the editor Mulk himself visited the places and studied the materials which were to find place in any issue. I had occasions to be with him in Chandigarh when he was collecting on Chandigarh and Amritsar and places in Himachal. His energy was inexhaustible when he travelled to distant places in search for authentic material. Dr. Mulk Raj Anand lead a very simple life. He identified himself with the poor of the country. There was never any ostentation in his dress, eating habits or working. From what I have observed of his working/writing style, he would isolate himself for three days in a week in his cottage in Khandala. He would be totally inaccessible there except to his family or very close friends. He had an armchair on which he would perch himself with a wooden board supported in the armrests on which would be placed the writing material. I believe he always wrote in long hand and seldom, if ever, used the services of the stenographer. I believe that most of the literature that flowed from his prolific pen originated in this manner from Khandala. During the last days of his life he completely retired to Khandala and engaged himself ferociously in writing his autobiographical novels. Unfortunately he passed away before completing this venture. However, whatever material he must have produced (I have not read that yet) must reflect on honest and true account of a life of a rebel lived with intensity and passion.

Besides his cottage at Khandala, he also established an institution 'Lokyata' at the Hauz Khas village, which is part of New Delhi. That is where he stayed when coming north from Bombay, the first stop being Delhi. The actual purpose of this establishment was to provide facilities to the artisans and craftsmen to educate themselves, practice their skills and have an outlet for their creations. The place is inhabited and looked after by Kewal Anand and his family and is a venue for exhibitions and other educational activities. May this institution rise to great heights.

During the 1950s Mulk had the honour of being nominated to the chair of the Tagore Professor of Arts in the Punjab University at Chandigarh. That was the most creative period in the history of the Indian portion of Punjab after partition. Chandigarh was being built and Bhakra Dam was being constructed. Immediately upon assuming the Chair he set about encouraging art activity - Punjab was considered the backwaters of culture. He gathered all the local artists around him

and organised perhaps one of the first art exhibitions in the library building of the University – there was no art gallery in the city then. In a sense it was the start of the art movement in the city. I do not remember all of what was exhibited but what still persists in my memory is the exhibition of clay pots made by common potters, not artists and arranged on tables covered with bright coloured papers. It demonstrated how good art is created from the hands of craftsmen without their being aware of it. Art is not the sole property of the artists. Art is also in the eye of the onlooker who can convert an ordinary object into a work of art through careful presentation in a suitable ambience.

Mulk exerted full force at his command to get a proper Art Gallery as an essential ingredient of the department of Fine Arts in the Punjab University. This gallery may be said to be the finest place for exhibitions of paintings, drawings and sculptures and for holding artists' meetings and workshops. Since then many art galleries have come up in the city – Govt. Museum and Art Gallery, Govt. College of Art, Punjab Kala Bhawan to mention just a few. Thus cultural life of the city has bloomed into vigorous life and there is constant art activity in one place or another, besides seasonal festivals during which workshops and children painting competitions are also held.

Mulk was not the usual type of an orator. He generally did not make formal speeches but when he was called upon to speak he regaled the audience with a number of anecdotes from his life experiences. He spoke about how he was asked by Mahatma Gandhi that he would have to clean the latrines of the residents if he wished to stay in the Ashram. He often sided with the students when the Wardens of the boys' hostel complained that the boys gazed at their wives from the balconies of their hostels – he said, 'I hope the wives are worth looking at'!! During such anecdotes he would come forth with flashes of meaningful utterances, calling upon the audience to direct their energies towards creative work for the uplift of the downtrodden.

Throughout his life, he was a fearless crusader, and committed to a simple but dignified life. Whatever distinctions he received were entirely due to merit. He never approached anybody for any office for power. This is what gave vitality to his personality right up to the last day of his life. It can be said that he died in harness even if he passed away just a few months short of a century. May his soul rest in peace.

Aditya Prakash, Chandigarh.

Mulk Raj Anand - Citizen of the World with roots in the Punjab

Mulk Raj Anand, who died at the age of 99 last year, was an internationally known Punjabi novelist writing in English. Apart from his literary achievements, he was one of the founders of the progressive writers movement in India along with Munshi Prem Chand and Sajjad Zaheer. He smuggled from London previously inaccessible Marxist literature to a whole generation of Punjabi political activists of Lahore and

after 1947 was instrumental in establishing an infrastructure of national academies of literature and arts at the behest of Nehru. He was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize and visited the Soviet Union 28 times. He was chairman of Lalit Kala Akademi (the Indian Academy of Arts) and National Book Trust. He founded and edited *Marg* (The Pathway) a high standard arts magazine. He was Tagore Professor of Literature and Arts at Panjab University Chandigarh and the Institute of Advanced Study Shimla during the 1960s.

Born in Peshawar to a Sikh mother from Sialkot and Hindu father from Jandiala Guru, he attended Khalsa College Amritsar and after graduating from Punjab University in 1924 sailed to England 'personally inspired' by Iqbal, the poet, to study philosophy at Cambridge University. He received a PhD in 1929 from University College London on *Bertrand Russell and the English Empiricists*.

While in London he was friends with George Orwell, TS Eliot, Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, Herbert Read and EM Forster. The latter prefaced Anand's first and best-known novel *Untouchable* (1935) which was issued as a Penguin Modern Classic in 1986. This novel, and *Coolie* published the following year, was pioneering realist literary works on the plight of the downtrodden in Indian society. Over the years he was to write more four novels and his seven-volume autobiography *Seven Ages of Man*. His published many books on the arts including *Persian Painting* (1930), *The Hindu View of Art* (1933), *Homage to Tagore* (1946), *Homage to Khajuraho* (1960), *Is There a Contemporary Indian Civilisation?* (1963), *Indian Ivories* (1970), *Ajanta* (1970), *Maharaja Ranjit Singh as Patron of the Arts*, 1981 (ed.) and *Amrita Sher-Gil* (1989).

Reviewing his autobiography Khushwant Singh had remarked on his 'Punjabi-English' that Anand should have better written it in Punjabi. There was some truth in this sarcasm which so many Punjabi authors writing in non-Punjabi languages dared not face up to including Singh.

Anand was a prolific letter writer and I too have quite a few letters from him in my collection. In 1982 I recorded his long interview [*Shakti*, Aug-Sept 1982] on some pertinent questions of Punjabi identity, writing in English etc.

On the question asked in Punjabi of Punjabi nationality issue he had to say in English:

The Punjabi sensibility is not a fixed notion like that of the British nation...The Punjabi nation comes to the surface when the Khalistanis assert their own ideas of Khalistan. Punjabi sensibility is inheritance of Punjabi culture. This culture became tender and full of love through Guru Nanak and the Sikh movement. This movement represents the ethos of the previous centuries also the period of Baba Farid...But it was a great mistake of the Hindus to declare in 1948 that their mother tongue was not Punjabi. That was their attempt at the instigation of the British and Hindu chauvinism to try and capture a position and power in whole of the northern India as the precursors of the Hindu *raj*...I squarely blame this

community [Hindu] for having brought on the Khalistani movement.

The Punjabi Muslims were carried away by the economic situation under the British rule. The British were against them because of the mutiny and Hindus and Sikhs were preferred in the services. The phenomenon of Hindu-Muslim antagonism was skin deep; actually however from Iqbal to the most important nationalists like Kitchlew the question of Hindu-Muslim did not arise until the first Round Table Conference... I think Pakistan was mainly the result of the economic pressures and demands of the Muslims for a fair deal [to enjoy the fruits of state power which meant jobs, position and money]. All the religious movements of modern Punjab are at least 80% dominated by cash nexus concentrations.

On his choice of writing in English he said:

The question of language is bound with our national history... Even Puran Singh started writing in English first. He was the writer of the Punjab in English language first if you like. Bhai Vir Singh was a different case. He belonged to elitist section of the Sikhs. He did not express the sentiments of the Punjab but of the Sikhs only. I owe to Puran Singh more than I owe to Vir Singh.

Punjabi is my mother tongue. I think in Punjabi mostly and then transliterate or transcreate in English. The reason my novel *Untouchable* was turned down was that it was in Punjabi-English. I frequently use Punjabi vibrations. Vibrations of the characters of my landscape, my region could only express themselves in the versatile movements of the Punjabi speech. I could not perform an operation on my mother's mouth to make her speak like an English woman as do other writers.

In spite of such profound insights, post-1947 generation of Punjabi writers were not influenced by Anand's writings, the main reason being that unlike Lahore, East Punjab had no cultural centre and many Punjabi stalwarts like Anand made Delhi and Bombay their home and thus remained aloof from their roots. The mutual loss was immense.

He is survived by his wife Shirin and daughter Sushila from his previous marriage who authored an authentic biography of Duleep Singh *Queen Victoria's Maharaja*.

Amarjit Chandan

Mulk Raj Anand writer; born December 12 1905 Peshawar; died September 28 2004 Mumbai

Pritam Singh 1914-2005

A Printer's Mark on History

Pritam Singh, who has died aged 91 after a prolonged illness, was a first rate Punjabi publisher. His life is arguably the history of Punjabi printing, journalism and publishing in the twentieth century.

Known in Punjabi circles as Bhapaji, Dear Elder Brother, Pritam Singh was born in 1914 in Talwandi Bhindran in Sialkot district in western Punjab. After primary education in Arya School in Ganji Bar, he at the behest of his *halvai*, the sweet meat maker, father started working as a *muneem*, accountant and later as a *granthi*, Sikh priest. For a while he was attracted to the Namdhari sect of Sikhs. At the age of 18 he was earning Rs 8 a month as a printing press compositor in Guru Khalsa Press Amritsar run by SS Charan Singh Shaheed, who edited a popular satirical Punjabi weekly *Mauji* (The Joker) and printed *gutkas*, pocket size Sikh prayer books. The treadle machine run on steam had just taken over the litho press and lead type had replaced Punjabi calligraphy. Then he moved to Lahore to work in daily *Akali Patrika* edited by Sajjan Singh Margindpuri. After working with Hira Singh Dard in his Phulwari Press, who edited and produced a Sikh-Marxist literary monthly *Phulwari* (The Flower Garden), he moved to Preet Lari Press run by Michigan-educated Gurbakhsh Singh, father of modern Punjabi prose and editor of *Preet Lari*. Apart from the magazine Gurbakhsh Singh published books as well. Their collaboration went through ups and downs starting with a happy and creative life in Preet Nagar and having to go through the turbulent time of Partition in 1947, when they were displaced to Delhi. Under the patronisation of Mohinder Singh Randhawa, the then Commissioner of Delhi, who provided them resources to resettle, they took root again. In 1949 Gurbakhsh Singh moved back to Preet Nagar, a model town he had built on the Indo-Pak border, but Pritam Singh stayed behind in Delhi and started his own printing press and publishing house, Navyug, which flourished in no time through his hard work.

Then for four decades onwards Pritam Singh published all the leading Punjabi authors. He produced books with a passion and taste still unmatched in Punjabi publishing. He started a top class Punjabi literary magazine *Arsee* (The Mirror) in April 1958. It ceased publication in 1995 because of Pritam Singh's age and poor health. All the Russian literary classics and even crude Soviet propaganda in Punjabi translation was printed at Navyug Press situated in the heart of old Delhi.

Soft spoken and khadi-clad Pritam Singh epitomised the best traits of Sikhi including the Namdhari and Communist movements in the Punjab. Balwant Gargi, who wrote pen sketches of his contemporaries, said that Bhapaji was too gentle to be written on.

His wife Daljit and their youngest daughter Ashma predeceased him in 1992 and 1998 respectively. Daljit had collected the maximum number of signatures for World Peace Appeal in 1952 and won Golden Dove trophy though it was never delivered to her by the Russians. Pritam Singh's other two daughters survive him

including the Delhi-based academic sociologist Renuka Singh, a disciple of the Dalai Lama.

Amarjit Chandan

Bhapa Pritam Singh Punjabi publisher; born Talwandi Bhinder Sialkot Punjab 14 July 1914; died New Delhi 30 March 2005

Anwar Ali 1922-2004

A Caricaturist of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Anwar Ali, Punjabi writer and cartoonist, has died aged 82. The start of his professional career and creation of a new confessional state of Pakistan happened at the same time. As a cartoonist in the *Pakistan Times* and as a writer he caricatured and chronicled the early socio-political history of the Islamic Republic.

Anwar Ali was born in 1922 in Ludhiana an industrial town in eastern Punjab. His father Akbar Ali was a *dak babu* post office clerk who could afford to send his son to further education at the local Government College established in 1921 where eastern Punjabi Muslim, Hindu and Sikh zamindars' sons were educated. Ali's many contemporaries later rose to become top army officers, bureaucrats and judges in Pakistan but he always mentioned with pride two names - Abdul Hayee Sahir Ludhianvi, the poet who left Pakistan in 1948 to make the independent state of India his home, and Har Kishan Lall, the painter (see Obituary *IJPS* 9:2). Till their deaths the best friends remained in touch only through letters.

At college Anwar Ali was a make-up artist in the dramatics society. He displayed caricatures of his classmates on the notice board signed as *Gumnam* (nameless). Under the same pseudonym he wrote poems for the love of a Sikh classmate. Once the white Principal gave him cash award instead of a reprimand for a caricature of him. Ali was to again use this weird pen name after many years writing for the *Frontier Post*. Ali's first cartoon appeared in the *Dawn* then published from Delhi, when he was working as a military accountant in Shimla.

He joined the *Pakistan Times* when it was launched in February 1947. The paper was owned by a veteran leftist Mian Iftikharuddin and edited by Faiz Ahmad Faiz, the poet. The cartoon character *Nanna* (the Little Boy) soon became popular and Faiz reserved it for the back page saying – it goes too hot for the front page. Ali's political cartoons appeared on the editorial page. Soon General Ayub Khan's military takeover in October 1958 disturbed all journalistic pursuits. As it happens in the military regimes the Press was its first casualty. *Pakistan Times* and other publications of Progressive Papers Ltd were taken over and its editor Mazhar Ali Khan immediately resigned. Ali stopped contributing political cartoons saying that without politicians there could be no political cartoons. But he continued with the *Nanna* series, though he couldn't help commenting on the political situation at the

time – Nanna was born not with a silver spoon in his mouth but with a thermometer. He always suffered from election fever.

Anwar Ali worked for the *Civil & Military Gazette* in 1962 and rejoined the *Pakistan Times* a year later on his own terms as Art Editor with more editorial freedom. During this difficult phase in his life he turned to writing in Punjabi. It must have been his conscious decision not to write in Urdu the official language of Pakistan and so close to the heart of the establishment. He produced three books *Kalian ItaN Kaley Rorh* (lit. a folk song refrain praying for rains– Black Bricks Black Stones) *Noori*, and *Guachian GallaN* (Forgotten Autobiographical Tales). His classic short story *Gurh dee Bheli* is in his first collection and the book is part of the Punjabi Master's degree syllabus in Punjab University. It is the story of a crafty *maulvi* (Muslim priest) who from a small time dealing in oil and hides in Ludhiana rose to be an influential politician in the new country of Pakistan. He is one of very few who shared the cake. Avoiding all the set situations of Partition literature, Anwar Ali, as in his cartoons satirises the ideology of Pakistan.

Anwar Ali, in a letter dated 4 December 1996, wrote to me: 'I started writing stories in Punjabi in the late 60s. But have written by fits and starts. About 1947 I have talked but have not been able to make a full statement nor have felt competent to do so. My story *Kaliye dee Kahani* is a bit superficial. I am working on a new book but it does not promise to end. I do not know if it ever will. Mostly it is about myself; it passes from front to back from within '47. It is neither a story nor history.' Kalia was Ali's childhood friend. Muslim rioters shot him dead in Karimpura Lahore in August 1947 and his bullet-ridden body's photo was taken by none other than Faiz.

I met Ali once at his house in Lahore in 1998 during the days of Ramzan fasting. He had kindly permitted me to include his classic Punjabi short story *Gurh dee Bheli* (A Piece of Jaggery Cake) in the collection of Punjabi literature on the theme of Partition that I was editing with Professor Gurinder Mann, then in Columbia University, though the book never saw the light of day. In his austere studio surrounded by minimal furniture, unused paper shelves, stacks of film cans and a huge cumbersome metal structure meant to make cartoon films he spoke softly in a whispering tone. I had touched his raw nerve by mentioning the very name of Ludhiana. Neatly dressed and with his neatly combed hair parted in the middle as his mother would have done when he was a little boy he sounded withdrawn. One of his pictures I took that day sums up his mood – he is sitting on the chair looking at the ceiling thinking nothing. Still I wonder why out of the blue he told me – *aseeN jee julahey huNdey aaN* – I belong to the low caste of weavers. Did he mean to emphasise his affinity with the Sufi poet Shah Hussein (1538-1599) of the same caste or the inhuman aspect of caste-ridden Punjabi society or did he mean that he was plain naive in the folk idiom? Pointing towards the metal structure he again told me matter-of-factly – With it I made a cartoon film on family planning for the state department. I didn't ask him whether he had included his cartoon in which a beggar

couple converse against the backdrop of a hoarding showing a well to do happy family with two children – Can we plan to have another earning member?

His four sons and two daughters survive him. One of his sons, Ajaz Anwar, is a painter and art teacher.

Amarjit Chandan

Anwar Ali, Punjabi writer and cartoonist. Born 18 April 1922 Ludhiana; died 27 November 2004 Lahore

