

Theme of Duty, Opportunity and Oppression in Mulk Raj Anand's *Duty*

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ABSTRACT

Duty is marked by a profound insight into the working of the human mind and tells the incident of a policeman on duty that, after being hauled up by his superior, beats a donkey driver. This paper highlights the theme of duty, important features, reflecting his intense immersion into moral predicament and societal outlooks. This paper focuses on the representation of characters caught between personal needs and social responsibility. Anand represented how authority corrupts, particularly when individuals like Mangal use their situation for personal development.

Keywords: Duty, exploitation, opportunity, power, oppressive, problems and compensation

Introduction: Mulk Raj Anand was renowned Indian writer in English. He was born in Peshawar in 1905 and attended the Punjab and London Universities. His first novel "*Untouchable*" published in 1935, was a great success. His other works include "*Coolie*", "*Two Leaves And a Bud*", "*The Village*", "*The Private Life of an Indian Prince*", and "*The Seven Ages of Man*", the last being autobiographical. Mulk Raj Anand is a leftist in politics and he expresses in his works sympathy and support for the downtrodden. So far as his beliefs are concerned, he is a humanist and he believes that human brotherhood and welfare can be and should be achieved without belief in God.

Duty is about Mangal Singh, a policeman who is on duty at Chetpur, a North Indian town. As the story begins, the policeman is on duty at his post waiting to be relieved by another policeman. It is a hot afternoon and Singh is found musing about his own job and its problems. His job as a policeman is hard and demanding. But he is a sturdy Sikh and can withstand any hardship. He says to himself that he is not of the class of the delicate Lallas who wilt under the heat of the sun. He is also happy with his income. Besides he is frequently bribed by merchants who commit petty crimes. "Duty by Mulk Raj Anand is a short story which underlines the value of duty even in the worst of worst circumstances, like extremely hot and cold climate. The story is about a policeman, Mangal Singh, who is posted at a point where a road from the village meets the city road. His duty started at the early hours of the morning. He has already spent around five and half hours at the duty. The season is of scorching summer and the sun overhead is just unbearable" (Book Review).

As Mangal Singh stands musing in this fashion, sun grows increasingly hot and unbearable. His mind becomes drowsy, and his thoughts grow vague and wandering. Falling asleep, he says to himself that even God cannot help closing His eyes for a moment if He was on duty that afternoon. He gets so sleepy, still standing erect by force of habit.

He is suddenly awakened with a jolt. It is the thanedar Abdul Karim. The thanedar is obviously annoyed at the sight of the constable, dozing. He is vexed that his own promotion would be affected if his constables were found by the inspector dozing at the post of duty. He canes Mangal Singh hard and rides away on his cycle. Mangal Singh slumps down in pain and shock. As he sits on the road, coughing and spitting, a man with a herd of donkeys comes down the road, shouting at the animals to keep them together. The policeman runs to the driver in rage and begins hitting the donkey driver with all his might. He vents out all his fury and shame by striking the man insanely.

'*The Duty*' appeals to us particularly for its psychological value. Most of us are like Mangal Singh. When we are offended or insulted by someone above us we hardly bother to ask ourselves why we were so treated. But we bear the grudge and show our anger on those weaker and poorer than ourselves even as Mangal Singh does. "Mangal Singh writhing in pain stands up to balance his turban and asks for mercy. When the Thanedar is gone, Mangal Singh goes back to the post with tears in his eyes. He is at least happy that no one has seen him being beaten" (Book Review).

The thoughts of Mangal Singh at his post of duty: As Mangal Singh stood at his post, he seemed to be very happy with his lot. He was proud that he came from a hard peasant stock and that he was quite fit to discharge the rough duties of a policeman. He compared himself with others less hardy and congratulated himself. Before joining the police, he had wanted to join the army. The army men had certain advantages over the policemen. They had better uniform and free rations. But what was once done could not be undone.

Musing in this position, Mangal Singh considered himself that though he could not join the army, he was compensated in some other form. As a policeman he had a chance of making a little extra money which the sepoy did not have. So on the whole Mangal Singh was a happy and contented man. He was satisfied that a policeman held a high place in the society. He was grateful to the Sarkar for having made this possible. Such were the thoughts of Mangal Singh as he stood at his post of duty before falling asleep.

Mangal Singh's revenge on the Thanedar: As Mangal Singh stood dozing at the post of his duty; the Thanedar Abdul Karim arrived on the scene and saw the policeman taking a nap. He was angered for if any one of his policemen was caught napping at his post of duty he was him-self reprimanded. So he lifted his cane and struck Mangal Singh again and again. Singh took these beatings quietly. Of course he was very much annoyed at the sudden manner Karim descended on him. But he was afraid of his superiors and could not register his protest. So as the thanedar left he stood waiting for his own chance. Presently, he saw a donkey's driver leading a herd of donkeys. Here was an opportunity for him to exercise his own superiority and status. He struck the rustic and his donkeys in mad fury till his stick split into shreds. He took his revenge on the thanedar who had upbraided him for sleeping at the post of his duty.

Maik Raj Anand's story *Duty* is titled ironically, adding to its significance. Mangal Singh, at the beginning of this story is found a little away from the post of his duty. He is dozing, in the shade, happy and contented with his lot. He is in a strict sense, guilty of breach of duty for which he gets drubbing by the Thanedar, The latter is angry to see the constable dozing in the shade when he ought to have been performing his duty at his post. He is very rough with Mengal Singh, who is relaxing because of the oppressive tropical heat and he is not at his post.

Mangal Singh, being a subordinate man, cannot retaliate though he is insulted and disgraced. The Thanedar has behaved like a tyrant, but the constable cannot hit back. At the arrival of a herd of donkeys with their herdsman right the middle of the road gives him an opportunity to take it out on the poor herdsman! He performs his duty by beating up the donkeys and the herdsman for a very small fault. He has now enforced traffic rules! But he is now even with the Thanedar because he too has behaved like an oppressor.

First a slight negligence of duty, then overdoing his duty like a tyrant, but there is so much corruption in the performance of his routine duties, which keeps Mangal Singh satisfied, though occasionally he regrets that it did not join the army. Duty and authority are close to one another, but his authority leads to corruption and oppression. "Moral of the story is that superior ones try to beat down the inferior ones, be it any place or institution. Also, the call of the duty should not be deterred by weather conditions like heat, rain, cold, etc" (Book Review)

Then there is one more exhibition of duty. As the hurt and offended Mangal Singh stands like an idiot, he sees a donkey driver leading a herd of donkeys and making strange shouts to keep the animals in a herd. Suddenly his sense of 'duty' is roused. In the donkey driver walking on the main road with his herd, he finds a flagrant violation of all civic duty. He beats the rustic again and again even as Karim had beaten his own self only to give vent to his anger and humiliation.

Now, who did his duty? Karim had beaten constable Mangal Singh in irritation that Mangal would affect his own promotion. Mangal Singh had beaten the donkey-driver out of a different kind of irritation. Obviously no one had done his duty and each had acted in a fit of some anger and frustration. In other words both had failed in their duties in a true and real sense. This is highlighted by the evident irony in the title of the story. "The story follows Mangal Singh, a policeman on duty in the scorching heat of an Indian summer, who struggles with the oppressive conditions and his responsibilities. As he drifts into a drowsy state under a tree, he is abruptly awakened and reprimanded by his superior for neglecting his duty. The narrative explores themes of duty, authority, and the harsh realities faced by those in service" (scribd.com)

Mangal Singh: Coward and Bully: The character of Mangal Singh in Mulk Raj Anand's story *Duty* strikes us as interesting for obvious reasons. At first, he appears to us as a brave and tough man eminently fitted to his job as a policeman. He is even proud of this fact and comparing himself with the Lallas who cannot bear the rigour and discipline of the duties of policeman, he congratulates himself on his ability to do any amount of hard work. His unfulfilled ambition to join the army also evokes in us a sort of sympathy for the man. How well and bravely would Mangal Singh have served the country as a soldier? But our impression of the man soon changes when Mangal Singh begins to think of the extra money he can make as a policeman. We know by now that Mangal Singh is not the loyal and duty conscious policeman we took him to be at first but a corrupt constable waiting for his chance to grab any extra money that comes in his way. His respect for the sarkar betrays him further.

Mangal Singh is grateful to the Sarkar only for the cruel power it gives to man like him to harass people. Then his dozing at the post of duty makes him even comic. But the man betrays himself much further in the manner in which he gets beaten by

the thanedar. Of course we do not expect a police constable to retaliate when his superior officer hauls him up for negligence of duty. Yet it is comic to see so brave and hardy a Punjabi to be beaten up by the Muslim thanedar. This is not all. In reality Mangal Singh is a coward and a bully and takes his revenge on the thanedar by beating a poor rustic on his way. All this shows Mangal Singh as a greedy, corrupt, cowardly and bullying constable in which lies the interest of the story.

The theme of the story "Duty" is the littleness of human nature that makes him seek revenge on a weaker person when victimized by a stronger one. We see at a human level what Milton shows in Satan-his ruining Man because God defeated him in battle and drove him and his followers to Hell. The policeman is petty in all his attitudes. He is happy he is a policeman though he would prefer to be a soldier because a policeman he can make money. Don't Munshi and there make u? Such a man when he is thrashed by the Thunder can beat brutally and madly a poor driver of donkeys. Thanedar himself beats Mangal because he will be reprimand and his promotion stopped for the policeman's not being post of his duty. Nobody cares for duty but cares only for his will being and sense of power. Nobody cares for duty but cares only for his own well being and sense of power.

"And it was the blessing of the Gurus, as there was little chance of earning any extra money in the military"(Naik M K, 45) The passage forms a part of the happy thoughts that cross Mangal Singh's mind as he stood at his post of duty. "Duty is portrayed in the context of social justice the responsibility of society and individuals to recognize and alleviate suffering" Before joining the police, Mangal Singh and wanted to join the army because the sepoys had better uniforms and had free rations. But somehow his desire had not materialized and Mangal Singh had joined the police force. But he was not sorry. There was bribery all round. The army career did not provide this opportunity. A typical Sigh, he thanks the Guru. The reference to the Gurus should have been avoided in this context, because it is provocative though not conventional. The police service had its own compensation. A policeman could make some extra money which the sepoy could not; So Mangal Singh felt that he was lucky.

"And the Sarkar is truly powerful. Like Alamgir it leaves neither fire in the hearth, nor water in the jar, to bring a man to justice" (Naik M K ,45)

Standing at the post of duty, Mangal went on thinking about his good lot. Though he could not fulfill his desire of joining the army he was not in any way worse in the police service. A police man enjoyed a great authority and was respected and dreaded by everyone in the village. People had a great fear of the Sarkar of which the policeman was the representative. So Mangal Singh mused. He was overwhelmed with a sense of admiration for the Sarkar. The Sarkar was the emperor Alamgir. It could force anyone to humility and obedience. It was when Mangal Singh was lost in these thoughts that he fell asleep and was beaten up by the thanedar Abdul Karim,

"If a god should be standing here He could not help closing If a god should be standing here He could not help closing His eyes for a minute, he felt"(45)

This thought of the constable Mangal Singh gives a comic touch to the character of the police constable. The heat and dust of the tropical sun was oppressive and beastly. It was not a comfortable job to stand continuously in the sun. As he stood at his post of duty, happy with his lot and proud of his sturdy constitution, Mangal Singh felt sleepy. He began to reason within himself that if god stood in his place He could not have helped closing His eyes for a minute. So thinking he goes to sleep even as he stands, out of sheer force of habit.

It is amusing to see Mangal Singh falling asleep in such a manner after all his pride in being a sturdy man with a capacity to bear any hardship.

"I will be reprimanded and my promotion stopped, you swine!"(Naik M K, 46)

These are the words of the Thanedar Abdul Karim who is cursing Mangal Singh, a police constable. The offence of Mangal Singh was not serious. He had left his post of duty and was dozing in a shade as the after-noon was very hot. The Thanedar happened to pass the road in the course of his inspection. Abdul Karim, the Thanedar was harsh and rough if not oppressive. He caned constable to wake him up Beating, of course, must be accompanied by curses. The Thanedar called him a swine, which is a typical Indian corse and said that he could have to suffer for the negligence of day by the constable. The Thanedar would be reproved by the D. S. P. for not performing his duties of inspection properly. The D.S.P. would also stop the promotion of the Thanedaran a punishment. That was his fear.

"For if the peasants offered token of grain and butter and sugar to the Munshi at the customs house, then why not to the police?"(Naik M K, 46)

Mangal Singh, the policeman on duty at the point where the branch road from the village of Vadale enters the Mall Road of Chetpur, to avoid the heat of the sun takes shelter under the little foliage of a Kikur tree. He broods over his own life wishing he were a Sepoy. But being a policeman has an advantage. He gets extra income from different kinds of criminals. But why not? If the clerk at the customs house can receive grain, butter etc. from the peasant, why am a policeman?. Mulk Raj Anand shows the wrong kind of logic with which people who receive bribes justify themselves. You son of a god" hissed Mangal as he struck again and again harder and harder as if he had gone mad.

"you son of a god" hissed Mangal as he struck again and again harder and harder as if he had gone mad" (Naik M K, 47) Mulk Raj Anand shows the typical human psychology of a man struck by somebody striking somebody else because he cannot hit back his superior in power or position in the behaviour of Mangal, the policeman who strikes an innocent person driving his donkeys in a brutal manner. Mangal strikes him madly because he has been struck by the Thanedar. "Anand's portrayal of duty goes beyond the conventional. He questions blind adherence to societal norms and advocates for a more compassionate and just understanding of one's role. This critical perspective makes his stories resonate even today, as readers confront similar questions about their responsibilities in a rapidly changing world" (<https://xpdf4u.com/reviews>).

CONCLUSION

Duty centers on policeman Mangal Singh, who symbolizes corruption, presentation his job as a chance for bribes and power over the poor, distinct with real duty. The story portrays the brutality, the inhuman cure of the policeman when they strike at people with or without reason. Mulk Raj Anand presented theme of corruption, control, power, obligation, greediness, self-interest, duty and self-importance. Mangal aims the less privileged for exploitation, viewing how the system oppressed them.

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