

Mulk Raj Anand : 'The Two Lady Rams'



**Discipline Courses-I
Semester-I**

Paper: Indian Writing in English

Lesson: Mulk Raj Anand : 'The Two Lady Rams'

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Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) was born in Peshawar, Pakistan and evidently thus, he hails from India's erstwhile, North-West Frontier Province. His father was a traditional coppersmith, who later joined the army for a living and his mother too belonged to the sturdy peasant stock. This point is of relevance to our understanding of Mulk Raj Anand's work since, "the craftsman's industry and meticulous attention to detail and the army man's dare-devilry and feeling for attention are among the major constituents of Mulk Raj Anand's heritage from his father." What he inherited from his peasant mother is "his commonsense, his sense of the ache at the heart of Indian humanity, and his understanding compassion for the waifs, the disinherited, the lowly, the lost."¹



Picture 1

<http://mulkrajand.bookchums.com/>

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Anand completed his education from Lahore, London and Cambridge and took a Doctorate in Philosophy. Instead of then accepting a Professorship at the Government College or University he took up the profession of writing novels and short stories. Some of the novels written by him are *Untouchable*(1935), *Coolie*(1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud*(1937), *The Village* (1939) and *Across the Black Waters* (1940). Among his collection of short stories, one may mention *The Sword and the Sickle*, *The Barber's Trade Union*, *The Big Heart*, *Seven Summers*, *Private Life of an Indian prince* and *Morning Face*. In the Special Preface that he has written for *Two Leaves and a Bud*(1951), he gives us an idea of the driving force behind his early novels and which perhaps is the underlying concern of some of his later works, as well. He writes "of the pariahs and the underdogs rather than of the elect and the sophisticated: and thus ventures into territory that had largely been ignored by Indian writers till that point of time."²

As a child, Mulk Raj Anand had grown interacting and mixing with the children of the sweepers attached to his father's regiment and "these early playmates and friends became, with the necessary imaginative idealization and transformation, the heroes of

¹ Taken from K.R Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*. 1962. 2nd Ed. (New Delhi & Bombay, India: Asia Publishing House, 1973) 331-32.

² Ibid. p 333.

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his first novels."³ This is the clear reason why Anand avoided romance and sophistication in his works and instead chose to write of the outcastes, peasants, sepoys and working people. But then, this expression came all the more easily and naturally to him since he had grown amidst this setting.

Anand loved his characters and empathized with them, as he had seen the lot of the downtrodden, from close quarters. Nevertheless, for the exploiter he doesn't express dislike or hatred, but rather gives to the exploiter a touch of absurdity and evokes in the readers a sense of pity for him. Anand's acute sense of observation and clear delineation of characters that is evident in his novels is often touched with a strain of poetry in his short stories. The appeal of his work lies in the fact that he can be "amusing, satirical, ironic, tragic, pathetic or farcical" and that "he can present human weaknesses with understanding and sympathy."⁴ He "presents his characters with a lively curiosity and also a deep compassion."⁵ His language too is simple, often with the use of swear-words and expressions translated from the vernacular idiom. Iyengar notes that "as a writer, Anand is often undistinguished, and seems to be too much in a hurry; but often the vitality of his creations, the variegated richness of his total comprehension, and the purposive energy of his narratives carry all before them."⁶

Anand is often considered to be a veritable Dickens for the way in which he presents his characters with depth by depicting their idiosyncrasies with accuracy and fine detail. This was not a formidable task for Anand, considering his day-to-day rootedness with the ground reality and his close interaction with the lower sections of society.

Early Twentieth-Century India: The Formative Years for Mulk Raj Anand

Anand's life can be studied by broadly dividing it into three periods, the first phase of his life was spent in India from 1905-1925; the second phase covers his years spent abroad from 1925-1945; and the last phase of his life was spent in India from 1945-2004.

Anand began his studies in British-Indian schools such as the Nowshera Government Primary School and recalled something interesting about them. He says that the education offered in schools like this one, paid scant emphasis to Indian tradition and rather stressed on the English curricula, the medium of instruction being English "with particular emphasis on English history, ideas, forms and institutions, deliberately calculated to show everything related to Indian history and tradition as inferior."⁷



³ Taken from K.R Srinivasa Iyengar, Indian Writing in English. 1962. 2nd Ed. (New Delhi & Bombay, India: Asia Publishing House, 1973) 334.

⁴ Ibid. 356.

⁵ Ibid. 356.

⁶ Ibid. p 357.

⁷ Taken from Margaret Berry, Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and The Novelist. (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Oriental Press, 1971) 11-2.

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Picture 2

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mulk_Raj_Anand

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Anand had clear childhood memories of his grandfather's explanations rendered of the teachings of Guru Nanak, and also of the "family attendance at the Imperial Coronation Durbar in the new amphitheatre of Delhi in 1911."⁸ This latter detail is cited here to make clear Anand's obsession with anything British during his childhood – including British clothing and manners – and his dream to go to Europe one day, when he grew up.

In the year 1925, on the advice of his mentor, the poet, Mohammed Iqbal and with his mother's help, Anand went abroad to study at University College in London and was awarded his Doctorate degree in 1929. One of the shaping influences on him of this period was the British General Strike of 1926. This Strike convinced him of the great divide between the rich and the poor and evoked his concern and sympathy for the underprivileged and downtrodden. This further initiated him to actively participate in the British Trade Union meetings and those of Marxist study circles.⁹

Anand's essential faith came to humanism, as in the process of "re-examining Hinduism, exploring Christianity, studying modern intellectual development" he realized that Hinduism had "tended for a long time to be more and more the social organism of caste and less and less a unified religion"¹⁰, while Christianity too was unacceptable to him. He laid the charge on the intellectuals of Europe for being overly concerned with fulfilling their personal interests and for lacking a focussed vision.

After graduation and having made a trip to India, Anand returned to Europe and devoted his time to the study of art and oriental culture. When Anand returned back to England, his novel The Untouchable, after having been rejected by nineteen companies, was at last published. In the second phase of his life, after 1935, Anand increased his activity and participation, while travelling often to Europe, in areas concerning Indian Nationalism, Socialism and his profession of letters. He is also known to have engaged in historical events like the Spanish Civil War and for being a catalyst in laying the foundation of All-India Progressive Writers' Association. By this time he had successfully completed the first nine of his thirteen novels. His years spent in London made him form associations and friendships with well-known people like Bonamy Dobrée, Anand Coomaraswamy, E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and Pablo Neruda, to name a few from the list.

Anand returned back to India in 1945 and helped found and edit Marg, a magazine of Indian arts and crafts which finds its reception and audience both in India and abroad. Besides his active writing and editing career, Anand is also known for having supported several Indian cultural organizations such as the World Peace Council, the Sahitya Akademi of Letters, the Lalit Kala Akademi of Art, the Sangeet Akademi of Music and Dance, the National Book Trust, the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, University seminars and conferences, the Progressive Writers' Association and the list goes on further.¹¹

Anand's driving faith was that in humanism and his belief in humanism "as a synthesis of the values of East and West, of material and spiritual, of science and art, of old and new."¹² For him the need of the hour was to look at the European and Asiatic traditions

⁸ Ibid. p 12.

⁹ This material has been compiled from Margaret Berry, Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and The Novelist. (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Oriental Press, 1971) 13.

¹⁰ Ibid. p 13

¹¹ Ibid. p 15-6. References have been made from this book.

¹² Ibid. p 18.

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in their totality and to attempt at achieving a kind of synthesis, despite the confusions prevailing therein and to thus aid in building a new India on the principles of the "new values of Indian humanism."¹³

We can understand the scope of Anand's humanism¹⁴ from the following quotation. In Anand's view of humanism:

Literature, music and art are better able to fulfil the needs of our time than religion, and beauty is better worth worshipping than [...] a Deity for whom the sanctions lie in the intuitions of a few mystics [...] the sanction of poetic truth is the highest in our contemporary world.¹⁵

Anand had a deep sense of compassion for the lower castes and outcastes in Indian society, since for him through compassion one can better understand individuals in all their failings and lows of life. This justifies his reason for their realistic depiction through his works, as well.

Anand as a Writer: His Inner Faith

Mulk Raj Anand considered literature at one level, as a weapon in his hands to attack any social, political or economic institution that could injure human freedom and equal opportunities for all. At the other level, he understood it to be "the purveyor of a new vision of society: an international brotherhood based on humanist and Socialist ideals and constructed through *bhakti-yoga*."¹⁶

He felt that literature had the potential to induce and effect change in the world around us and he underscored the relevance of literature as criticism. One of the most striking features "of Anand's literary considerations is his opposition to art-for-art's sake formalism¹⁷ in favour of art-for-the message's sake moralism."¹⁸

After the year 1945, entering the third phase of his life, Anand's literary theory, if not always his practice emphasized humanist-oriented values. His humanist view of literature gave centrality to lowly people or the downtrodden and stressed more on content rather than form with a sharp, forceful attack on Indian social, political and economic institutions of the time, when they denied freedom and dignity to humanity.

In his style of writing, he tries to blend realism with romanticism, by both imitating characters and situations from life, and thus reality as it were; while yet culling to his mind a lot from his imaginative, visual faculties. In this new brand of realism, that he terms "poetic realism", also understood now as "neo-realism" there is an evident "combination of objective and subjective factors and a seeking of realities behind nature."¹⁹ Anand found fault with Western and European writers for limiting their views and ideas to mere facts, for copying or imitating from living models and for a direct, unmediated imitation from nature. Considered from the 1945 perspective, with rapid

¹³ Ibid. p 18.

¹⁴ "Humanism, then, is Anand's faith; India, its proposed laboratory and hope; democratic Socialism, its political context. *Bhakti-yoga* is its characteristic dynamic and excellence." Ibid. p 19-20.

¹⁵ Ibid. p 19.

¹⁶ Taken from Margaret Berry, Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and The Novelist. (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Oriental Press, 1971) 27.

¹⁷ Anand's consistent disavowal of formalist art and his preference for "moralist or didactic or propagandist art nevertheless undergoes shifts of emphasis, passing through three stages, not mutually exclusive: a brief, relatively unimportant idealism, followed by revolutionary socialism, thence broadening into [...] 'comprehensive historical humanism'. In this last phase, Anand's Socialism continues to draw him toward external, group, class-oriented depictions; his humanism impels him toward internal, individual, psychological analysis and concern with intimate human relations." Ibid. 27.

¹⁸ Ibid. p 27.

¹⁹ Ibid. p 34.

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changes across the globe and the World War II scenario, he believed that the social realism of the West in the thirties was a complete failure for the reasons cited above and made a strong case for "poetic realism" which in contrast to it "is pervaded by what he calls variously the desire image, the flight of winged facts, the romantic will, and revolutionary romanticism, seeking to change life in accordance with 'the inchoate urges of the body-soul'."²⁰

He believed that as a writer he was invested with a responsibility towards society, which was:

the real courage to create a literature of protest, which can reveal the insults, humiliations and injustices sought to be perpetrated in our society by the inheritors of privileges who seek everything without offering sacrifices equal to those offered by less privileged people.[...]

Our fraternity is not exclusive with the writers of our country, but also with the writers of the world who are struggling to promote understanding among the peoples of the world.²¹

Anand believed that there needed to be a synthesis or fusion between the ethos, values of India and post-Renaissance Europe, where the idealism of the East combined with the realism of the West for the betterment of humanity, granting freedom and equality to all. This was an essential part of what was above mentioned as his belief in "comprehensive historical humanism."

Analysis of 'The Two Lady Rams'

Now that we have studied in some detail about Mulk Raj Anand, his life and his belief systems, let us now move on to an analysis and understanding of Anand's short story in the syllabus namely, 'The Two Lady Rams'.

The title itself sounds a bit hilarious with the word Lady prefixed before the name Ram, and it does seem like a strange concoction. As we read the story further, we understand that Lalla Jhinda Ram, who was an ordinary shopkeeper had married two women, Sukhi and Shakuntala and was almost forced to call both of them "Lady Rams" to placate the raging bitterness and high-blown war between his two wives. Incidentally, he had acquired the status of a knight in lieu of the "services rendered" by him to the British Raj. Evidently then the question was of naming one or both of them "Lady Rams". Naming the younger wife Shakuntala alone as Lady Ram, would only have spelt disaster for him, from the elder wife, Sukhi.

To elucidate the background to Jhinda Ram's life in more detail, it may be mentioned here that the elder wife, Sukhi, connoting "sukh" or "comfort" to the husband was barren and thereby unable to perpetuate his race by giving him a child, so he married Shakuntala. While the first wife brought along with her a big dowry and gave "financial push to the ordinary shopkeeper Lalla Jhinda Ram – the dowry became the launching pad of Jhinda Ram's social success."²²; the younger wife Shakuntala introduced romance in his life, reminiscent of the historically famous King Dushyant-Shakuntala legend, where the king "forgot all sense of propriety of Kingly behaviour and spent time with the young Ashramite incognito."²³

The technique used in the story is that of the mock-heroic, whereby seemingly absurd situations are presented in a heroic and grandiloquent way thereby imbuing them with hilarity and ridicule. The theme of the story that remains in focus, throughout our reading of it, is that of the colonial master and the colonial subject. The author is

²⁰ Ibid. p. 34.

²¹ Margaret Berry, Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and The Novelist. (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Oriental Press, 1971) 37. From "The Task Before the Writer." *Indian Literature*, VI, No. 1 (1963), p 77.

²² Taken from Mulk Raj Anand, Introduction, "The Two Lady Rams". Interventions: Indian Writing in English, Ed. Anand Prakash. (Delhi & Kolkata, India: Worldview Publications, 2013) 5.

²³ Ibid. p 4.

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contemptuous of the colonial master and has a defined dislike towards him. However, the authorial stance expresses the author's dislike of the British regime and its state functionaries in India, couched in an inflated language, to heighten the effect of the ridicule that he intentionally targets at them.

The colonial regime had conferred the title of knighthood to Jhinda Ram, elevating his social rank thereby to that of the elites, "in recognition of his sundry services to the British Empire."²⁴ Clearly "His Majesty's Government" – as it is referred to in the text – had not foreseen the terrible predicament that this would put Jhinda Ram into. The crisis emerged since both the wives insisted on being given the title of Lady Ram. The trouble escalated with the news that for conferring Jhinda Ram with the title of Knighthood, "there was an invitation to attend the Garden Party which was to be held the next day at the residence of His Excellency the Governor, specially for the ceremony of investiture of all those dignitaries who had been granted titles, medals and scrolls of honour."²⁵

The problem being that the invite was for Sir Jhinda and Lady Ram and as the knight, Sir Jhinda only asked his younger wife, Shakuntala to get dressed in a new sari for the occasion, the elder wife fumed when news of this apparent discrimination reached her ears, through the servants, in the women's quarters where she lived segregated.

The animosity and bitterness between the two wives only worsened and took the shape of a veritable war as "trenches were dug", "barricades raised" and "if there was no gunpowder used, it was only because women in India have not yet learnt all the tricks of Al Capone as the men have through the talkies."

The mock-heroic style is built into the narrative as a domestic fight between the two wives reaches the level of a war, with the use of war terminology, to heighten the effect of the ludicrous in the narration of the event. An insignificant, trivial event as this being scaled to the level of a war, of some consequence, gains the attention of the readers furthermore with the use of war-related terms to remind us, "that despite being a routine affair, war is a rising of passions on a grand scale."²⁶ The use of the war metaphor confuses the reader for a moment, with the use of expressions like "unwritten agreements were violated", "malicious gossip campaign", "partisan servants or relations", "Sukhi outflanked the wall", "She resisted like a tiger and, upturning the table in the living room, barricaded herself there and waxed eloquent about the misdeeds of Sir Jhinda and Lady Ram all day",²⁷ but then the narrative shifts back to the necessity of settling the discord within the family, with a sense of urgency.

After having been at the receiving end of Sukhi's violent behaviour, abuses and curses the whole day, the knight Sir Jhinda decided to put an end to it by treating his young love with "the true sense of chivalry"²⁸ and dragging the elder one, Sukhi by her hair, to her part of the house. He tried to get some help from the Governor or A.D.C., but to no avail, since at the gates of the Government House the sepoy stationed to keep guard said that, he had strict orders that no one should disturb the Lat Sahib's siesta.

Finally, Sir Jhinda Ram's chauffeur who had been a witness to all the events that had transpired into the shape of an ugly war at his master's house offered to give a solution to placate and resolve the reigning crisis. With a certain amount of tact and double-dealing he approached each wife separately in her respective quarters and managed to convince each of them that, she alone was to attend the garden party. The younger wife, Shakuntala "had already been confident about her husband's choice, but Sukhi's vanity was tickled by the special emphasis that the chauffeur laid on the Master's ultimate choice of her."²⁹ By thus impressing on each wife individually that she alone was chosen

²⁴ Taken from Mulk Raj Anand, "The Two Lady Rams". Interventions: Indian Writing in English, Ed. Anand Prakash. (Delhi & Kolkata, India: Worldview Publications, 2013) 8.

²⁵ Ibid. p 9.

²⁶ Taken from Mulk Raj Anand, Introduction, "The Two Lady Rams". Interventions: Indian Writing in English, Ed. Anand Prakash. (Delhi & Kolkata, India: Worldview Publications, 2013) 6.

²⁷ Ibid. p 6. Reference has been made from here.

²⁸ Taken from Mulk Raj Anand, "The Two Lady Rams". Interventions: Indian Writing in English, Ed. Anand Prakash. (Delhi & Kolkata, India: Worldview Publications, 2013) 12.

²⁹ Ibid. p 13-4.

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to go for the garden party with Sir Jhinda Ram, the driver provided his master some peace to have his meal and to get ready for the occasion, without the trouble of having to deal with either of his wives. Both the wives appeared in their flashing saris and after all the dressing-up ritual none of them considered having her "prolonged toilet"³⁰ ruined for the day. Thus with the aid of his driver, Sir Jhinda "bundled them"³¹ into his car and sped off for the party at the Government House.

The unexpected arrival of Two Lady Rams instead of one did not cause a flutter or lead to any untoward incident, during their reception at the Government House by "His Excellency and Her Excellency."³² Rather, they were both complimented for their wonderful, dazzling saris by Her Excellency, The Governor's wife, and His Excellency conferred Sir Jhinda Ram with the title of "the Star of the Knight Commander of the Indian Empire."³³

The story concludes happily on the note that from that day onwards Sir Jhinda and the two Lady Rams were "a familiar feature of all ceremonial occasions" held in the capital, for as it is said, "they are three staunch pillars of the Raj which has conceded to them privileges unknown in the annals of the Angrezi Sarkar of India."³⁴ Interestingly enough, the three pillars of the British Raj were the civil service, the army and the police. To liken Sir Jhinda and his two wives to the pillars would be to underscore the ground reality of the British Raj and the fact that the British "could not have made their footing in India without" their share of Indian collaborators. It is "with the help of its Indian collaborators that the British empire was able to enslave the subcontinent." To maintain its continued rule, the British Empire established "a hierarchical network of local traitors [...] The chief traitors were rewarded by appointing them as the Nawabs and Rajas. These urchins were responsible for implementing the British agenda of loot and plunder [...]. The verified and proved servants of the empire were brought up and trained to help administer the governmental affairs. This trusted class of the servants of the Empire, over a period of generations, were elevated to provide the bulwark for the British Raj in India." [Click here](http://www.viewsandpreviews.com/india13.html) (Taken from <http://www.viewsandpreviews.com/india13.html>)

Accessed on 24/10/2013 at 2:30 pm.)

Summary

Through this it is hoped that a fairly comprehensible reading has been provided, starting with Mulk Raj Anand's life, the shaping influences on his life and the socio-political-historical forces that had a deep impact on his thinking and ideology, essentially with his underlying concern and understanding of humanism. This background was meant to lay a foundation to then grasp more effectively his short story, "The Two Lady Rams" which is a part of the syllabus. When we read the story we are better able to understand the subtler nuances of Indian writing in English along with being able to perceive the deeper politics of what it meant to write in a language which was not the writer's, to an extent for aiming at a wider audience and at another level what can be understood in a post-colonial world as "writing back to the empire" with a level of ease and comfort, while yet managing to maintain the flavour of Indianism in it.

Glossary

1. Al Capone: Reference is here made to the movies based on him. Al Capone (1899-1947) "was an American gangster who led a Prohibition-era crime syndicate. The Chicago Outfit, which subsequently also became known as the 'Caponese', was

³⁰ Ibid. p 14.

³¹ Ibid. p 14.

³² Ibid. p 14.

³³ Ibid. p 14.

³⁴ Ibid. p 14.

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dedicated to smuggling and bootlegging liquor, and other illegal activities such as prostitution, in Chicago from the early 1920s to 1931."

(Taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Capone

Accessed on 24/10/2013 at 2:10 pm)

2. Animosity: A spirit or feeling of strong hostility.

3. Annals: 1. A narrative of events year by year. 2. Historical records.

4. Art-for-art sake: It "is the usual English rendering of a French slogan from the early 19th century, '*l'art pour l'art*', and expresses a philosophy that the intrinsic value of art, and the only 'true' art, is divorced from any didactic, moral or utilitarian function. Such works are sometimes described as 'autotelic', from the Greek *autoteles*, 'complete in itself', a concept that has been expanded to embrace 'inner-directed' or 'self-motivated' human beings." (Taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_for_art's_sake

Accessed on 24/10/2013 at 1:50 pm.)

5. Barren: Unable to bear young.

6. *Bhakti-yoga*: It "is a spiritual path described in Hindu philosophy as efficacious for fostering love of, faith in, and surrender to God. It is a means to realize God, and is the easiest way for the common person because it doesn't involve extensive yogic practices." (Taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhakti_yoga

Accessed on 24/10/2013 at 1:40 pm.)

7. Confer: Grant or bestow (a title, degree, favour, etc).

8. Couched: Expressed in words of a specified kind.

9. Dare-devilry: Recklessly daring.

10. Formalism: It is "an instance of rigorous or excessive adherence to recognized forms." (Taken from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/formalism>

Accessed on 24/10/2013 at 1:47 pm.)

Formalism in the context of art implies "that a work's artistic value is entirely determined by its form". (Taken from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formalism>

Accessed on 24/10/2013 at 1:45 pm.)

11. Humanism: An outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters.

12. Idiosyncrasies: Anything highly individualized or eccentric.

13. Incognito: With one's name or identity kept secret.

14. Indianism: A word or phrase characteristic of English as spoken in India. (Taken from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Indianisms>

Accessed on 24/10/2013 at 2:35 pm.)

15. Inflated: (esp. of language, sentiments, etc.) bombastic.

16. Investiture: The formal investing of a person with honours or rank, esp. a ceremony at which a sovereign confers honours.

17. Outflanked: To outmanoeuvre (an enemy) by extending one's flank (the side of the body between the ribs and the hip) beyond that of (an enemy).

18. Pariah: A social outcast.

19. Purveyor: Act as supplier.

20. Realism: (In art) fidelity of representation, truth to nature, and insistence on details; the showing of life as it is without glossing over what is ugly or painful.

21. Reminiscent: Tending to remind one of or suggest.

22. Sepoy: A native Indian soldier under European, esp. British, discipline.

23. Siesta: An afternoon sleep or rest esp. in hot countries.

24. Sundry: Various; several.

25. Talkies: A film with a soundtrack, as distinct from a silent film.

26. Underdog: A person who is in a state of inferiority or subjection.

27. Urchin: A mischievous child, esp. young and raggedly dressed.

28. Veritable: Real; rightly so called.

29. Waif: A homeless and helpless person, esp. an abandoned child.

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