
DEPICTION OF CHILD SUFFERING AND EXPLOITATION IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S COOLIE

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Abstract:

Mulk Raj Anand has given a voice to the voiceless marginalized section in the society. He writes about the oppressed, suppressed, exploited and humiliated people who face social, political, economic and cultural exclusion. In *Coolie* (1936), Mulk Raj Anand dramatizes the tragic life of the marginalized class i.e. the poor in the society. It is a suffering saga of Munoo, an orphan boy who performs various jobs as a domestic servant, coolie, and rickshaw puller. He struggles in the life for food, shelter, identity and sympathy and finally dies of consumption. The poor are often looked down upon by the rich as worthless, having no existence and significance as human beings. The marginalized often suffer at the hands of cruel forces in the society and have no identity of theirs. In the novel, the miserable coolies like Munoo and the like represent the margin and the capitalist and evil forces stand for the center. Throughout the novel, Munoo faces humiliation and oppression. In the novel his uncle, Daya Ram, masters—Babu Nathu Ram and his wife, Ganpat, Chimta Sahib and many others have only contempt for Munoo. They slap, abuse and kick him.

Keywords: Capitalist, hatred, coolies, marginalized, exploitation.

Introduction:

Mulk Raj Anand was one of the major IndoAnglian novelists who received world-wide acclaim, recognition and readership for his writings. Through his profuse literary output his writings Anand emerged as voice of the voiceless and the marginalized. Characters who are marginalized by caste or class people his major novels. The untouchable sweepers, downtrodden coolies, the debt ridden farmers, pitiable laborers are depicted beautifully. Mulk Raj Anand becomes more aware of the exploitation of untouchables and workers in India when he sees in England that the labourers and other menial workers have a sense of self-respect and dignity which was completely denied to their Indian counterparts. The contrast opens his eyes still more, "The coolies in India were always being kicked about and intimidated by some high-caste or high class person, and were therefore, often abject in their humility".(59-60) Anand's stay in a Christianity-dominated country like England does not, however, blind him to the exploitation of the untouchable's poverty by the Christian missionaries in India to convert them to Christianity.

He says: The few Indian converts to Christianity I knew were either the regimental bands-men or untouchables in Church Mission School, who seemed to have been attracted by offers of scholarships, clothes and superior status which the Sahib's religion conferred rather than by any curiosity about, or love for, the teachings of Christ. (Apology,34-35).

Anand had firsthand knowledge of the exploiters and the exploited. In his childhood he freely mixed with poor peasants and the underdogs. The abject misery and helplessness of the peasants filled him with utter disgust. He became impatient and grew critical about the very foundation of Indian society. Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* is a realistic novel and a number of themes and ideas have been woven into its structure. However, the central theme of the novel is the exploitation of the poor and the under-privileged by the

forces of capitalism, industrialism and colonialism. This theme has been dealt in depth with reference to the protagonist Munoo, a poor, helpless orphan, who is denied his fundamental right to life and happiness. He is much exploited and had to suffer, till he dies of tuberculosis. And Munoo is not the single victim of such exploitation, the novelist makes it quite clear, that such exploitation and denial of life and

happiness is the lot of the poor everywhere in India, whether in a village like Bilaspur or small town like Sham Nagar, or big cities like Daulatpur and Bombay. The lot of the poor is equally wretched and miserable whether in rural or urban India.

The novel Coolie opens when Munoo is an orphan of only fourteen years of age. In the rural nature surroundings of his native village, he is quite happy with his playmates even though he is ill-treated by his aunt Gujri and his uncle Daya Ram. But this simple rural community's not free from capitalistic exploitation. Being a victim of exploitation seems to be the terrible destiny of poor Munoo, for even at this early age:

He had heard of how the landlord had seized his father's five acres of land because the interest on the mortgage covering the unpaid rent had not been forthcoming when the rains had been scanty and the harvests bad. And he knew how his father had died a slow death of bitterness and disappointment and left his mother a penniless beggar, to support a child in arms.(Coolie, 2-3)

Poverty compels Munoo like David Copperfield to be apprenticed to life at the age offourteen, and to be exploited even by his uncle. His expectations are extremely modest. His first encounter with the urban world is in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram, Sub-accountant, Imperial Bank, Sham Nagar. He makes a wrong beginning for he relieves himself near the wall of the house and is branded as a stupid rustic loafer. The lady of the house, Bibi Uttam

Kaur, a snobbish and suspicious termagant, under-feeds, nags and humiliates him, and his uncle takes away the poor three rupees which he earns. All this, however, fails to dampen his high spirits completely and it is finally this "living vitality," and "irrepressible impetuosity" which drive him away from the house as, one day while dancing a monkey-dance, he bites the daughter of Bibiji to make the whole thing more realistic. Before he runs away from Sham Nagar, Munoo has learnt his first lessons in the harsh school of the modern urban world. He has realised finally his position in the world. He was to be a slave, a servant who should do the work, all the odd jobs, someone to be abused, even beaten. He was condemned by an iniquitous system always to remain small, abject and drab, "There must be only two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor." (Coolie,54) he thinks.

The Sham Nagar episode is only the first act in the tragic drama of exploitation. In Daulatpur while he is well-treated by Prabha Dayal and his wife, he is ill-treated by Ganpat who frequently beats him and hurls abuses at his innocent head. When Prabha Dayal is ruined by the treachery of his partner and the factory is sold out, Munoo works as a coolie to make both ends meet. He finds that there is cut throat competition, and the corn traders exploit the situation. The coolies are given very low wages, are made to carry excessively heavy loads. They are abused, beaten and turned out at the least mistake, and sometimes only at the whim of the trader. They are treated as vagabonds and are entirely at the mercy of the forces of capitalism represented by the traders. Munoo is not alone; he is only one out of the countless victims of such exploitation.

Industrial and colonial exploitation is depicted on a much larger and more terrible scale in the Bombay phase of Munoo's life. Here big industry and its owners are the forces of exploitation. Munoo takes up service in Sir George White's Cotton Mill and is exposed to the full force of industrial and colonial exploitation.

The final act of Munoo's tragedy starts when Mrs Mainwaring, whose car knocks him down, and she takes him to Simla. She made him her servant, but his own wishes in the matter being a servant, was not real. She makes him her boy-servant, her rickshaw-puller and there are hints that he is exploited by her sexually also. A "deep rooted feeling of inferiority to the superior people who lived in bungalows and wore Angrezi clothes," makes him accept without murmur his lot as a rickshaw-puller, as a result of which he dies of consumption at the age of sixteen. Capitalism, colonialism and industrialism are not the only forces, which exploit Munoo and other workers.

Anand depicts the nexus of social exploitation no less than Dickens does. In the novels of both writers exploitation is depicted in a realistic way. Anand retains this objectivity and balance that save the book from sentimentality and dry moralizing. There is no tear-mongering here over the bottom-dog and his pitiable condition, no tearing of the hair over the lot of the down-trodden and the oppressed. The author's value judgments are mostly brought home through action and situation, except in the concluding pages where the poet in his long harangue on the caste-system suddenly seems to become the mouthpiece of the writer himself. In the major part of the book, however, the pathos of the untouchable's plight is exposed through telling incidents such as the pollution episode in the market, the molestation of Bakha's sister Sohini, the incident at the well and the like. The writer's compassion for the exploited and the down trodden is pure and intense, but he does not degenerate into blind hysterics or dull preaching or inartistic sermonising. The exploitation of the under-dog here the untouchable-fires the novelist's imagination and the result is splendid artistic achievement. Objectivity, balance, and realism characterise Anand's treatment of the theme of exploitation and injustice. In this way he has successfully used the novel-form as an instrument of depicting the real condition of human beings.

Through Munoo, Anand brings out the pathetic life of the poor. Coolie, though written before approximately ninety years ago, proves its relevance and authenticity in the present context that witnesses a vast gap between 'the haves' and 'the have-nots' in the society and the failure to bridge the gap between these two classes.

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