

POVERTY, SUFFERING AND CHILD LABOUR TRACES IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S *COOLIE*

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ABSTRACT

Coolie is Mulk Raj Anand's second novel which depicts injustice, violence, discrimination, subjugation, suffering, child labour and many other things. This paper views the Poverty, Suffering and Child Labour issues encountered by the protagonist Munoo. It was 1930, which was the year of civil disobedience and India was in her way when more or less all literature concentrated on Independence struggle. Anand wrote twelve books and seventy short stories among which Untouchable and Coolie are so remarkable in bringing out the downtrodden and poor working class section. Here, the protagonist encounters discrimination and subjugation wherever he migrated and finished his race without any recognition. Coolie concentrates on the themes of poverty, suffering and child labour. Being an orphan, the protagonist is ill-treated and subjugated all his life. In our culture, there are several Munooos who are insulted, humiliated and exploited. Poverty, suffering and humiliation are inevitable to him everytime. Poor Munoo had to face starvation that is no one to feed sufficient food to eat which led him to become sick. The novel portrays the life of urban people who strive for their livelihood and never cared for others. It is an attempt of a young lad who expects love and care from the people around him and crosses his childhood to fight against poverty.

Keywords: Poverty, Suffering, Child Labour, Discremination, Subjugation, Mulk Raj Anand

I. INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand, a revolutionary, committed novelist produced a indelible marks in Indian English Novels. He contributed more than a dozen novels and seventy short stories. Besides, he wrote essays and articles whose works received a notable critical attention of the learned people from all parts of the globe. *Coolie* is one of the most interesting novels in 1930s which denotes the life of the protagonist Munoo as a victim of poverty and suffering. Anand concentrated on the themes on East and West, injustice, discrimination, subjugation, poverty, and status of women, superstitions, hunger, exploitation and other notable themes to address needy society.

India received a considerable audience from English speaking crowd and he was considered as one of the most respected Indo-Angilian writer. *Coolie* is an expression upon discrimination, subjugation, poverty, suffering and the aspects of class struggle. Child subjugation, starvation, social injustice and the consequences of discrimination between the poor and the rich are portrayed. Munoo who is under-privileged is exploited and made to migrate place to place without any recognition. He is an orphan and particularly does not have any assets, ultimately receives no support from anyone. Poverty and suffering are very light words to express his agony as he was denied all rights of happiness or enjoyment from the childhood. It was during the British Raj, but whoever rules India, India is not free from oppression and social discriminations. Anand draws our attention in raising the real-life conflicts of the needy poor. Indians suppressing Indians in the name of caste is ridiculous truth to be observed. He conveyed certain social evils and real conditions of people through his characters like

untouchable sweepers, coolies, the debt-ridden farmers, labourers, victimized women and scavengers. Undoubtedly, it's an epic of the poor and has a history that it has been translated into 38 other languages.

II. POVERTY ISSUES IN THE NOVEL

Coolie is a true evidence of poverty and suffering of the poor in the society. We see Munoo, a boy of 14 years who is studying in Bilaspur situated on the Kangra hills near the banks of a small river Beas. But, the beautiful location does not attract our mind as the poverty of the poor hides everything to our eyes. Munoo's father dies; his mother had to shoulder the domestic needs. Their lands were usurped by the land lords where they mortgaged their property. His mother also dies and helpless Munoo moves to uncle's house. Then, he meets with a social injustice when he meets Prabha in the train. Being an orphan like Munoo, Prabha took him to a pickle factory as a worker. Prabha's wife is kind and treats him well. But, Prabha's partner Ganapati was dangerous and Munoo leaves. He goes to work in a railway station to work as a coolie but driven out from there. Anand writes of the real world of the lowest men in society. His approach to the social injustice is quite authenticating. It appears that he express his disgust at the discrimination and exploitation of a young orphan here. Munoo moves to Bombay by train with a mahout to get food by exposing the indifference of the high caste. Everyone in the society is responsible for the tragic moves in the life of Munoo, as he is turned out to be a victim of our social system. His pathetic journey represents the downtrodden coolies of the land. Next, he joins Sir George White Cotton Mills with the help of Harihar. His exploitation and discrimination occurred him here also. He encounters strikes, killings and poisoning and all senseless killings. The poor man's life is determined by the forces of subjugation and exploitation and the writer

uses his understanding and imagination to explore a real life situation. Munoo, a bud boy, who wanted to live by hard work but is beaten, slapped, abused and crushed at a tender age and dies at the end.

III. SUFFERING ISSUES IN THE NOVEL

Anand's *Coolie* showcase the sufferings of Munoo, the *Coolie* reaches to an epic dimensions and a remarkable attention of the globe. Munoo, the protagonist character in the novel is a poor boy of fourteen who meets with ill treatment of his uncle and aunt, his life is one of miserable longing for happiness. It is a story of cross-section of India, bombarding a poor boy with starvation and suffering and we are constantly shifted to other locations. Anand explores, "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 been scanty and the harvest 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 young brother-in-law and the child in his arms." Poor mother tried her level best to bring her son but she could not live a long life and passes away. After his mother's death, he is left to the care of his uncle and aunt while we move across new situations at every turn, new ill treatments, and new subjugations.

The ill treatment which he is given at his uncle's house, is comparatively is no big issue as he has to tolerate several cruelties by unknown people in future. He is taken down to Sham Nayar and asked to work for three rupees per month as a servant at Nathoo Ram's house. His wife is quarrelsome and tortures Munoo in the form of making him to work day and night without

proper food. Anand in his words, points it, ““Munoo ohe Munoo!’ she called again exasperated and raising her voice this time, to the highest pitch to which in her anger and hate, she could carry it; where have you died? Where have you gone, you ominous orphan?” Instead of helping him, his uncle and aunt wanted to use him as money making machine. He is starved and passes through as a slave from place to place. When he expects support from uncle, he too beats him without showing any humanity. One can state without any doubt, he is despised by the relatives, rejected by his simple masters who behaved like tycoons and despised by the society. We are exposed to contemporary Indian society and the miserable conditions of coolies in India. Munoo passes through country life, the life in slums, hill station and a big commercial city where he himself occupied corners of houses and corridors of city for his stay. The poor wants to live and the society does not allow is the scene. Kindness and love for fellow being is the only solution to the poor and needy.

IV. CHILD LABOUR ISSUES IN THE NOVEL

Coolie represents the cruelty of child labor and child subjugation. The novel explores the abusing of helpless children and exploiting them in unrighteous ways in our soil. Poor children lose their precious childhood and have to work to fill their belly. Instead of helping them to escape starvation, everywhere society misuses them to get work and cheats by giving a roof over their head. Munoo wanted to escape from the modern world every time which was cruel for him. He ran till his life and his life projects a strong comparison between the poor and the rich. He played on the roads seeing the attraction of the world but no way to experience pleasure in his life. Even the circus, he wanted to see through hole and enjoy with

the help of a mahout. He wanted to join that mahout, then to a pickle factory, then to a cotton mill and at last to the grave. Very few people were cordial to him in his life journey.

V. CONCLUSION

Mulk Raj Anand attacks society and selfish minded high class for treating the poor poorly. He wants the world to be a world of freedom and equality where human potential can flourish and humanity exists. *Coolie* also concentrates themes like denial of rights, exploitation of the under-privileged, the impact of capitalism, Indian social system, subjugation, discrimination and East-West confrontation. It is a record on aspects of class struggle, social injustice and psychological conflict between communally divided upper and lower class people. We exactly see the contemporary Indian society and real world of poor men in the society.

Humanism and kindness towards the poor would be the solution to the issue.

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