

VOICES OF POOR IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S *COOLIE*

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Abstract:

Mulk Raj Anand is a great humanist. His insistence on the dignity of man irrespective of caste, creed, and wealth, his plea for the practice of compassion as a living value, his conception of the whole man, the profound importance he attaches to art and poetry as instruments for developing whole man, his crusade against superstition feudalism and imperialism- these are some of the chief characteristic of humanism. Like a true humanist, he rejects God, Fate, Religion, Past and Future. He behaves in the supremacy of man. He does take cognizance of man's greed, lust, selfishness, cruelty, and insensitivity. He has however a genuine respect for man, love for him, and faith in his ability to live a life full of dignity. Mulk Raj Anand is a novelist of the poor, the down trodden, the under privileged section of India's teeming millions. Broadly speaking, his themes of poverty, exploitation, class-consciousness, racial relations, capitalism, racism, hunger.

Keywords: *Living value, superstition, feudalism, insensitivity, class consciousness.*

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand, the champion of the under-dog exposes social hypocrisy and taboos, class exploitation and exposes class exploitation and class struggle, social and economic injustice and the inhuman atrocities of the erstwhile British rule in his novels. He learnt the technique of realistic portrayal from eminent masters of Indian fiction like Tagore, Bankim Chandra, Prem Chand and Sharat Chand and European novelists like Chekhov, Flaubert, and Tolstoy. He is a minute observer of life, society and human character and does not leave even the ugliest and most impalpable situations aside. Everything latrines, dirt, squalor, beggars, poverty, and disease is beautifully described in his works. He sees both the seamy and ugly side of life minutes and portrays them realistically.

Individual unhappiness

Coolie is an Odyssey of Munoo, an orphaned village boy from the Kangra hills, who sets out in search of a livelihood. His several roles include working as a domestic servant in an urban middle class family in Sham Nagar; as a worker in a pickle- factory and a coolie in the bazaar in Daulatpur; as a laborer in a cotton mill in Bombay; and as a rickshaw puller in an Anglo-Indian house hold in Simla a job, the rigors of which bring on swift consumption and an un timely death. Happiness is denied to these individuals, Munoo by the forces of exploitation, capitalism, industrialism and colonialism. Before the Sham Nagar episode Munoo realized finally his position in the world. He was to be 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, object and drab" (p.51). There must be only two kinds of people in the world- the rich and the poor.

But the Sham Nagar episode is only the first act in the tragic drama of exploitation. It is his stint at the Sir George White cotton Mill in Bombay that exposes Munoo to the full force of modern capitalistic machine. The factory is a huge octopus with it numerous tentacles clutching the laborer in its deadly grasp, slowly paralyzing and poisoning him. The British Management offers no security of tenure and effects retrenchment summarily; the British foreman is at once the recruiting authority, and landlord who rents out

ramshackle cottages at exorbitant rent, and also a money lender all rolled into one; the Pathan door-keeper practices usury with even more drastic method; the Sikh merchant puts his monopoly as the authorized dealer in the Mill-workers' colony to full personal advantage. The ill paid, ill-housed, undernourished and bullied laborer is broken, both in body and mind, as Munoo finds his friend Hari is though his own youthful vitality save him from this ultimate fate.

The third and final act of Munoo's commence when Mrs. Main warning, whose car knocks him down, takes him to Simla, as she wants a servant, his own wishes in the matter being, of course, of no consequence. A "deep-rooted feeling of inferiority to the superior people who lived in bungalows and wore *Angrezi* cloths," (p.324) 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. Thus the central theme of the novel is the denial of happiness and honorable livelihood to Munoo, leading to his tragic end. He is not the given chances of living though he has a zest for life. The social pressures make him a man of broken body and spirit.

Protest

The above discussion automatically leads us to accept coolie as a novel of protest against the forces of exploitation and injustice. Munoo is an innocent child who might grow into a man of potentialities but who is a nipped in the bud and dies. He is a victim of social forces. The tragic denial of life to Munoo is caused by his poverty. Poverty is the sole cause of his tragedy; it is his tragic flaw.

Class-Consciousness

Class-Consciousness is also the major theme of the novel. Whether there were richer or poorer people, there seemed to be only two kinds of people in the world. Cast did not matter. The Babus are like the sahib-logs, and all servant look alike: There must only be two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the powerful, the magnificent and the glorious, whose opulence is built on robbery and theft and open warfare, are humoured and admired by the whole world, and by themselves. You, the poor and the humble, you, the meek and the gentle, wretches that you are, swindled out of your rights, and broken in body and soul, you are respected by no one and you do not respect yourselves (p.75).

Personal Relationships

Coolie is also a novel dealing with personal, human relationships. Munoo wants to have good relations and links with the rest of humanity despite economic or racial considerations.

- (a) *Servant Master Relationships* These relationships are developed through the relation between Munoo from Nathooran and his wife Bibi Uttam Kaur who over works Munoo from morning till night, starves him, abuses him and beats him for no real fault of his. His life at their house is hellish, and unable to endure it he runs away.
- (b) *The relationships between the rulers and the ruled*- This relationships is developed between the colonialists and the colonized through the English Inspector of Police at the Railway Station who beats Munoo as he works on the railway station as a coolie. There is an Englishman who slaps Munoo merely because he had dared to look at his face.
- (c) *The relationships between the oppressors and their Indian agents*- This is developed in the novel through the episode of Mr. England's reception by Nathoo Ram, Prem Chand, Daya Ram, etc. England, to Nathoo Ram's great disappointment, accepts nothing but a cup of tea. The episode illustrates Anand's conviction that the British Government not only exploited the country natural's resources but debased the character of those Indians who were in its service. They encouraged, rather created a class of sycophants and flatterers.
- (d) *Other Relationships*- Similarly, other relationships between the poor and the rich, between friends and children, between the Hindus and Muslims, between the employer and the employees, between the workers and the factory-owners are also depicted in the novel.

Contrast between the rural and urban world

The contrast between the rural and the urban worlds is also present in *Coolie*. It depicts the world of village life where people are full of romantic visions regarding the city life. However, the reality is grim. When Daya Ram leaves him behind at the house of Babu Nathoo Ram, Munno realizes the tragedy of the situation. He comes to know fully the urban world of bogus sophistication when he relives himself outside the walls of the house of Uttam Kaur. Munno then realizes the difference between the urban and the rural worlds as he has been humiliated by Uttam Kaur for his misdeed.

Conclusion

Thus the present study analyses that voices of poor have been fused in *Coolie*. But it is the theme of exploitation which is dominant. As mentioned by Dr. A. V. Krishnan Rao, "*Anand studies man as a victim of the irrational systems and the in human cruelties of society.*" In the novel, we find exploitation in full swings at all levels: village, family, individual, factory and mill. Munno's life begins and ends with the keynote of exploitation. Besides exploitation, the novel also deals with communalism and racism and the contrast between the words of the rich and the poor, of the subjects and the rulers, of the village folk and townsmen. Munno is presented as a passive victim of all these forces prevailing in the Indian milieu. But Anand's approach in fighting against exploitation and oppression is not negatively is not a cry in wilderness. It is purposive and positive which has made some critics call him a propagandist. Humanism is the essence of Anand's message in the novel.

Reference

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