

COOLIE: A SAGA OF DESTITUTION

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Abstract

Present article deals with Mulk Raj Anand's second novel, Coolie published in 1936. The novel delineates the suffering of Munoo, a fourteen years old orphan boy who moves from one place to another in search of love, care stability and prosperous future. Anand portrays the life story of Munoo, an innocent boy who dreams for happy life. Unfortunately his life becomes a saga of destitution and finally he dies of tuberculosis. Coolie represents socio-political structures of human oppression and subjugation, enslavement and domination. Anand's sympathy for the unfortunate poor, the disinherited and the victimized has been reflected in the novel.

Key words: Oppressed, deprived, misery, poverty, exploitation, suffering, loneliness

Objectives:

- To study the human relations among people belongs different classes.
- To examine the social and cultural life of Indians under British Raj
- To investigate the psychological suffering of an orphan boy.
- To evaluate the theme of the novel.

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Mulk Raj Anand is best known for his minute observation of social, political, economical and psychological culture of India. His writing explores the exploitation of downtrodden, deprived and poor people. Racial exploitation has been explicitly discussed in his writing. Slavery, poverty, hunger, oppression, suppression, harassment, mute sufferings are the predominant themes in his writing. He depicts the dark corners in Indian society. He deals with the problems of socially and economically deprived people and their efforts for the survival. The present article deals with Anand's second novel *Coolie* published in 1936.

The novel delineates the suffering of Munoo, a young orphan boy who moves from one place to another in search of love, stability, protection and love. His destiny leads him from a village to city and again back to village. Munoo has a short life span in which he works as a servant, coolie, and factory worker. He experiences evils of British Raj such as exploitation, police brutality, caste strife and communal riots. Anand criticises British rule in India and Indian caste system.

Munoo is the representative of child labours, exploited by their masters. He is the representative of orphans whose relatives reject the responsibility of such children for the sake of their happiness. Munoo represents all such helpless, innocent, lonely, victimized children who has to strive on their own for survival. *Coolie* is Anand's comments on cruelty of man to man.

Munoo is a hill-boy. He lives in the Kangra valley. He enjoys going to school, playing with friends. His father dies at the time of his birth and then after his mother. He lives with his uncle Daya Ram, a chaparasi of Imperial Bank of India. His uncle and auntie want to send him at city to earn money so that he can start his own living. Munoo has dreamed the wonderful things which the village people speak about the city life. He has attraction of silk clothes, delicious food and rich life. Daya Ram sends Munoo at Babu Nathoo Ram's house as a servant. Babu Nathoo Ram works as an accountant in Imperial Bank. Munoo's life in his house is an example of

domestic slavery. His wife often abuses, cursed, humiliates and beats Munoo. In response to this, there is only a lonely song, a melancholy wail, and a question ‘ what life in this woman’s house would prove’ (*Coolie*:143). Munoo an innocent little boy who is not much aware about city manners and rich life styles finds himself confused. Whenever he curiously asks questions his master’s wife becomes angry and abuses him. If he complains about his sufferings, and physical harassment to Uncle Daya Ram, he advises Munoo to do his best for the masters as he is their servant and they are big people. He blames Munoo for his insincerity and dishonesty. The life as a domestic servant gives miserable experiences to Munoo. He desires for happiness. He finds himself imprisoned in this cage. He wants to flutter his wings. But being weak and oppressed under burden of his masters he tolerates this torture. While describing this psychological suffering of Munoo, Anand writes: ‘The boy’s soul surged up in rebellion and hate, in hate of which he had not thought himself capable. He was startled. But he dared not revolt.’ (*Coolie*:187)

One day while playing monkey dance, unknowingly he bites his master’s daughter Shaila. This makes his masters and his wife furious. Without listening a single word they mercilessly beat Munoo. Munoo requests to forgive him but his master beats him severely. After that, Munoo runs away and reaches at a station. He has a fear of being caught and taken back. He meets Prabha Dayal and agrees to go with him.

Prabha Dayal is a good hearted person. He is coolie by birth but raises his status as pickle factory owner. He starts business in partnership with Ganpat. Munoo’s life becomes happy with Prabha Dayal and his wife’s love and care. But these happy moments do not continue for a long time. Ganpat betrays Prabha Dayal which makes Prabha Dayal bankrupt. Police catches him and beats him to confess the truth. Though Prabha Dayal tells the truth, nobody listens to him and continues bow after blow. It makes Prabha Dayal ill and pale. Anand through this incidence throws light on brutality of Police Raj. Munoo starts working for his master and mistress. He joins coolie to earn money. Munoo’s experience with coolie explores the bitterness of their life. Anand writes:

‘For there were swarms of coolies about. And, urged by the fear of having to go without food, driven by fear, they rushed frantically at the shops, pushing, pulling, struggling to shove each other out of the way, till the merchants’ staves had

knocked a hillman's teeth out or bled the sores on a Kashmiri's head. Then they would fall back, defeated, afraid for their lives and resigned to the workings of fate, which might single them out for the coveted prize of an anna job.' (Coolie:252)

For shopkeepers, all coolies are a nuisance, rude, uncouth, dirty people to be rebuked, abused or beaten like the donkeys which brought the weights of vegetables to the market morning.

As Prabha's health has not been recovering doctor advises him to back to his hill. It causes Munoo's parting with a good hearted man and the end of his happy life. Then Munoo reaches at Bombay with the help of an elephant driver. He joins factory as a worker with Hari. He starts living with Hari and his family. He impresses by Ratan one of the factory workers who is an independent minded person, a wrestler. He does not bow down to salute the foreman. He has the confidence of his own personal strength and the strength of the union.

Anand depicts the miserable life of factory workers through Munoo's encounter with them. While portraying their exploitation, Anand raises questions:

'Do not all the insults you people suffer rouse you from apathy to which you have succumbed? Does not all the misery, all the degradation you suffer, rouse you to indignation? I tell you that they have ground you down, they have tortured your lives enough!' (Coolie: 342)

Anand depicts the reality of British Raj which caused the misery in the life of low caste people. These big employers take away all that is produced by these factory workers to their country and give workers little money with which they can hardly pay the rent, buy food, clothes or pay their debt. These workers are roofless, riceless. Anand describes them as spinners of cotton, weavers of thread, sweepers of dust and dirt, the workers, the labourers, the millions of unknown who crawl in and out of factories every day, coolies, miserable creature etc. They have bones without flesh, souls without life.

Once Hindu-Muslim riot begins and the life becomes unsecured in the hands of religiously fanatic people. While running to save his life, Munoo knocked by the car of an

Anglo-Indian woman, Mrs. Mainwaring. She takes Munoo to Shimla as her servant. At the end Munoo dies of tuberculosis.

Coolie is a story of an oppressed and over cast Munoo who struggled lonely for the betterment of his life. By nature he is not passive. Munoo's this desire to revolt against his oppression has been suppressed by his masters. He consoles himself by insisting that he is not untouchable. He calls himself a Hindu Kshatriya, a Rajput, and a Warrior to get the strength to fight against the adversities in his life. The evil experiences he has in his life, make him suspect about being ominous. He feels himself unlucky for others as his parents died after his birth, Prabha once most successful factory owner becomes bankrupt after his meeting, Hari's son's hand injured after he accompanies him. Munoo also has questions in his mind about good and bad people. He has no answer of why some men are good like Prabha Dayal and an elephant driver while other are bad like Ganpat and police men who heat him at the railway station. Munoo realizes that there are only two kinds of people in the world- the rich and the poor and between the two there is no connection. The rich, powerful, magnificence and glorious people are honoured and admired while the poor, humble, meek and gentle wretches are denied to their rights, broken in body and soul, humiliated by others and even not respected by themselves.

Thus, *Coolie* is a saga of destitution. It describes the evils of exploitation. It represents socio-political structures of human oppression, subjugation, domination and enslavement. Anand's sympathy for the unfortunate poor, the disinherited and the victimized has been reflected in the novel.

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