

The Expression of Human Miseries and Sufferings in Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*

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Abstract

Anand was the great Indian novelist. He describes real social customs, manners, and way of life which are distinctive of life in the Punjab because he was raised in it. He inherited an indelible impression of Punjab. Anand's subject has never been lavish and posh romance of affluent society. Anand focused on cruel veracity of life. He distorted mere amusement into a tool for social change. This study is focused on miseries and the sufferings of the Indian people in a large number. The novel, *Coolie* represents the suffering and exploitation of the coolies of India.

Keywords: Suffering, misery, exploitation, capitalism, feudalism

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand was the great Indian novelist, art critic, essayist, short story writer, who was born in 1905 in Peshawar, now in Pakistan. Anand is a "novelist in a hurry" whose output includes both fiction and non-fiction writings. Anand describes real social customs, manners, and way of life which are distinctive of life in the Punjab because he was raised in it. He inherited an indelible impression of Punjab. Anand's subject has never been lavish and posh romance of affluent society. Anand focused on cruel veracity of life. He distorted mere amusement into a tool for social change.

Anand's *Coolie* was published in 1936. The novel was entitled as *Musings on Munoo* before it was published. The central character of the novel, *Coolie* is Munoo, who is one of the childhood playmates of the novelist. Munoo was a worker in a pickle factory.

Research Problem

A statement of research problem is led to deeply study on hunger, poverty, and the suffering of the Indian people in a large number of novels and short stories. The writer himself has seen this situation when was a childhood and it left a big conception on his mind which resulted in *Coolie* tale of suffering and exploitation of the coolies. In the novel *Coolie* portrayed the suffering and the exploitation of protagonist, Munoo.

Research Methodology

The present study investigated literary texts of Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*. The text was selected to represent different views and narratives of human sufferings.

Textual Analysis

Munoo is the central figure in the novel. He is a boy of fourteen, living under the shadow of the ill-treatment of his uncle and aunt. Despite all this, he is a content with the idyllic happiness. He grazes and cattle and plays with companions and enjoys the juicy mangoes. However, he has seen the people dying of hunger and the starvation. He knew how his father and mother died. His land was seized by the landlord; he could not pay the interest on mortgage due to scanty rains and the bad harvest. The most horrible was the sight of his mother's death. The vision of her as he had

caused death to befall the ground, with the ghastly and yet set expression on her face, had left an indelible mark in his sub-consciousness that carried the full weight of its tragic implications.

Munoo has been taken from the village to the town of Sham Nagar by his uncle in order to work as a worker in Nathoo Ram's house where he receives ill treatment in the house. Ram is a sub-accountant in the branch of imperial Bank of Sham Nagar. His mistress is a shrewish, quarrel some woman, who employs the boy at Rs 5 per month. She ill-treats Munoo. She takes hard work from him. He was engaged in the work from morning till night. She gives him very poor quality food to eat, sometimes stale food. He is starved. Nathoo Ram always showered torrent of abuses and curses on his head without rhyme or reason. They also beat him severely. When, he complaints to his uncle, he instead of showing love and sympathy for the boy, beats him mercilessly, and he even does not give him any money to take food. His uncle said to him that he has neither money nor sympathy for him. Hence he threw him out from the house. He was so badly treated that he had hatred for him. There is none in his life now. He is alone and alone and he runs away from his callous and inconsiderate uncle and mistress.

Munoo has left the hellish place of Sham Nagar and come to Daulatpur. This is the next phase of his life. This place also could not evaluate him and he is again in the grip of heavy circumstances. Munoo is worked in a pickle factory, the owner of Prabha and his wife have a soft corner for the boy but Ganpat, the other co-partner of factory treats him badly and because of his bad character he cheats Prabha Dayal and he is decreased to beggary. Later, the pickle factory is completely vended out. He is destiny to work as a coolie. This is an indication of its status as a sheer beast of burden – it represents that first in the grain market and next in the village market. In the market he saw the naked starving conditions of the coolies who are competing with one another for jobs at extremely low wages.

The pains of Munoo, and the pains of other workers agonizing. Really, they are decreased to the level of beats. Anand describes their bad condition:

The square courtyard, flanked on all sides by love and mud slaps flimsy huts and the tall five stored houses with variegated cement facades, arches colonnades and cupolas,

was crowded with rude wooden carts, which pointed their shafts to take the sky like so many crucifixes, crammed with snake-horned bullocks Pressed against these were the bodies of the coolies, coloured like the earth on which they lay snoring, or crouching round a communal hubble-bubble, or shifting to explore a patch clear of puddles, on which to rest. (146)

Saros Cowasjee says that;

The word here is pressed. The courtyard belongs to the animals, and the author describes them first. Pressed against them are the bodies of the men. The implication is not simply that the two huddled together, but that man has stolen into the animal world and carved out a niche for himself. The colour of their bodies mingles with that of the earth. (201)

Munoo is paid low wages in the vegetable market and he sees here that there is shift competition from numerous starving coolies like him. After that he attempts his fate at the railway station, at same time he had no licence which is required for every coolie. The police makes him go away and he flees in panic and is met by a compassionate elephant driver who assists him, eventually arriving in Bombay with the help of the elephant driver.

In Bombay, Munoo witnessed starvation and poverty on large scale and his experiences in this mega city are harrowing and heart rending. Cowasjee writes that “the life and hardships of the poor remain the same; the change is one in scale mostly: the larger the city the more ruthless the exploitation and the greater the human misery.”(202)

Anand employs coolies as “in a corner a coolie lay huddled, pillowing his head on his arm shrinking into himself as if he were afraid to occupy too much space” (191), “an emaciated man, the bones of whose skeleton were locked in a paralytic knot” (198), “the rotting flesh of a leper who was stretching his bandaged arm and legs a warning all passers” (200) - by and “a bare body rolling in anguish and slapping itself on the knees to the accomplishment of foul curses.”(203)

The most agonizing situation occurs when a half-naked woman talks to Munoo and Hari and ask them to stay at night. She speaks to them in suppressed voice, “my husband died there last night” (202). He said Hari “We will rest in his place” (202). These statements reflect the person condition of the people. C D. Narasimhaiah says that: “I see in these simple sentences the wisdom of an old living culture which sustained our peasantry through centuries of misery and is manifesting itself now in an uprooted peasant in search of factory job. Death had ceased to frighten the poor – they are past all fright; it is life that is a threat, and death is release as Hari puts it.” (202)

While sojourning in Bombay, Munoo came across the beggars, the sick, the lepers, and dying and wretched condition of the workers and the coolies. They are all degraded and demoralized. They cringe before Jimmie Thomas because they are afraid of being dismissed from the job. They also give commissions and fruits to him so as to take their jobs secured in the factory. They have to tolerate bitter humiliation. They also cringe before the *banya* from whom they buy provision on loan, and hence their exploitations by all possible crooked ways at the zenith.

At last Munoo who spent his life in Simla where he is employed as page-cum-rickshaw puller of Mrs. Mainwaring. He has not only to do domestic work but also to pull her rickshaw, whenever the *memsahib* would like to go or wherever she wants to go. Besides, she also uses him

sexually. Hence his health is aggravated and he begins to cough out blood. And finally, he dies in the arms of his friend Mohan at the age of sixteen. His miserable life comes to an end as a welcome release.

Conclusion

The suffering of Munoo is the suffering of thousands of Munoo across universe. The life history of Munoo is full of miseries. He finds nowhere any silver lining in the dark cloud. He is hitting from pillar to post, is over- worked and abused, and treated merely as animal, illness, and suffering. Munoo is a significant figure in the universe, larger than life character, and holds representation of misery and hunger millions of his nation. In fact, the starvation compels the rural masses to migrate to city in the hope of better life. But they got nothing except sufferings and miseries to a great extent. The novelist stresses the universality of Munoo, therefore he called his novel *Coolie* not *The Coolie*.

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