

Coolie: A Saga of Inequality and Exploitation

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Abstract: *The nineteen-thirties were the most confused years in Indian history. It was the time of Indian thrash about for sovereignty and everyone was effected by the blow of this even poetry, drama and novel too. So Anand could not stay uninfluenced by it. He suffered a lot so this made him abhorrence imperialism. He was conscious of the sufferings of our community from dearth and nastiness. No one in India had yet written the classic on this suffering effectively because the realities were too rudimentary for a writer like Tagore. Mulk Raj Anand an immense Indian novelist draws our consideration through his immortal characters Munno and Bakha, from existent civilization. As a novelist he speaks on pragmatism, variance, humanism and exploitations. Anand wrote about real natives whom he knew quite intimately. Mulk Raj Anand awakens social principles by his works. He arouses compassionate sensation of readers for the subjugated and under-privileged, who suffer a lot.*

Key Words: *Pragmatism, Social Conflict, Humanism, Exploitation, Underprivileged.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Indo-Anglian literature or Indian English literature is connected with Indian English writings and is extremely significant part of English literature in the present epoch. Indo Anglian literature or Indian English literature or Indian writing in English is the literature, written by numerous well-known Indian writers in the diverse genres. It includes poetry, prose, drama and novel. Michael Madhusudan Dutt was the foremost prominent Indo-Anglian poet, who gave a new sky to Indian poetry in English language that had not originated in India. After Madhusudan Dutt there came many praiseworthy writers and they also gave a new shape to Indian English literature. All are geniuses in their fields and did the most excellent for their readers. Some worthy names are: Toru Dutt, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Aurbindo Ghosh, Sarojini Naidu, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamla Das, A.K. Ramanujan, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand etc. All the writers of India gave an innovative path, a new uprising and a new amazing world in their works. Poetry in India has an extraordinary position in all the forms of literature due to its deep greatness of sentiment and obsession. But we can't refute that in India the novel or fiction also has an incredible place, because of its treasured creators whose writings are based on realism and have a communal purpose. They wrote not simply for amusement but for some genuine reasons. The Indo-Anglian writers of fiction wrote with a judgment and wish. They choose matter from the authentic life. They all have the essentials of Indianness, patriotism and jingoism, exaltation of India's past and placing nation above all and articulate of the eastern course. According to Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah,

The Indian novel in English has shown a capacity to accommodate a wide range of concerns: in Mulk Raj Anand a humane concern for the underdog or subalterns; in R. K. Narayan the comic modes as equivalent to the tragic in his evocation of mediocrity; and K. Nagarajun surprises by his sensitive handling of the human significance in the religious and stories he has at the same time to use T.S. Eliot's words, 'altered' the 'expression' to accommodate distinct profoundly Indian 'sensibility' in different degrees. Bhawani Bhattacharya and Khuswant Singh in very different ways give us valuable insights into the pathos of economic impoverishment, mal-distribution of wealth and human degradation caused by political upheavals. (14)

2. SOCIAL PROTEST IN COOLIE:

The wider image of Indian English literature can be seen by a study of characters of different writings. The variety has been more widened by totaling of unscathed themes. In this view we can see the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, whose novels are prosperous and ideal mode of authentic India of post colonial period. So far as the themes of novels of Anand are, communal problems, conjugal problems and problems related to human association etc. Anand occupies the analogous position in the empire of Indian writings in English as in Fielding, Richardson, and Sterne in English literature. He stands as a well-developed prop in the ground of novel writings. He wrote in English on Indian themes; Indianness is the widespread distinctiveness of his writings. His works imitate a close similarity between Marx and humanism. He said, 'I believe in man'. This is how he distinct humanism. He kept redefining humans, he never compromise provisions of ideology even at the peril of being called a propagandist. Anand was a humanist in literature. He was a moderate humanist not a doctrinaire Marxist. He was the originator of the progressive writings. Anand's humanism is the chief inspiring force behind his novels. In the account of humanism he is compared to the immense novelist Charles Dickens, who points the life of subjugated very effectively. K.R.S. Iyenger's comment does full justice to the kind of novel Coolie is. Iyenger writes:

If Untouchable is the microcosm, Coolie is more like the macrocosm that is Indian society: concentration gives place to diffusion and comprehension, with several foci of concentration. Coolie is verily a cross-section of India, the visible India, that mixture of the horrible and the holy, the inhuman and the humane, the sordid and the beautiful. The general effect is panoramic, good and evil being thrown together as in actual life. There is no time for us to pause, to think, to judge, for we are constantly shifted. A new situation engulfs us at every turn, and new cruelties and absurdities whirl round us. Village, taluka headquarters, district headquarters, Presidency capital (Bombay), the national summer capital (Simla)-this is a progression indeed, but only spatially, for the human situation hardly alters wherever we may be. Munoo is the exploited one all the time; and his fate is typical of the fate of millions whose only distinguishing badge is patient sufferance. (120-121)

3. CASTE AND CLASS CONFLICT IN THE NOVEL:

Anand awakens social sense of right and wrong and arouses compassionate outlook of his readers towards the exploited and sufferers. Anand's fervor and empathy for humanity is infinite. It is his religion. His commitment to humanism constitutes the very basis on which his novels are built. *Coolie* is the big paradigm in which Anand marvelously presents the rigid realities of lower rank people through a boy named Munoo. Philip Henerson correctly observes:

Coolie takes us into a world in which the comradeship of man exists only among the very poorest people. With nothing to hope for, their common humanity is all they possess. The relationship between Prabha (at heart a coolie), Munoo, and the other factory employees (all hill-men) is one of humaneness. At the other end of the scale we have Ganpat (the frustrated son of a well-to-do-broker), the Todar Mals (essentially Nathoo Ram gone successful), and the police—more a symbol of British oppression than of British justice. Their world is a world of hysteria, one devoid of restraint and self-respect... (168-169)

Coolie is a great work of Anand where exposes the stiff realities of an underprivileged society. The central theme of this fine work is the exploitation of the poor and the subalterns by the forces of entrepreneurship, industrialism and colonialism. Anand through Munoo, a poor and powerless orphan presents these problems. Munoo is a fourteen years old boy who is incapable to find even his elementary privileges to life and contentment. He is exploited and made to undergo till his death. Munoo is not only sufferer of such exploitations. Anand has made an effort to bring out all types of exploitations and defiance of life and happiness of lot of poor, universally in India. According to him the lot of the deprived is equally dejected and depressed whether in rustic or municipal India. The novel opens when Munoo, an orphan is living an tranquil life in his village. He is moderately happy with his friends though he is ill-treated by his uncle and aunt. This effortless and pastoral community is not free from capitalistic exploitations. This exploitation becomes the fortune of Munoo. At a very early age, 'Munoo had head of how the landlord had seized this 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 arm.' Anand's *Coolie* is noteworthy for revealing the sufferings and realism of deprived and working class in India of the thirties. The circumstances of life of the operational class in this country have noticeably improved in present era, but unemployment is certainly a big concern in our times. In this regard *Coolie* is a mirror, a practical work that depicts the misery and the dejection of the common people particularly of the town people and cities. *Coolie* also brings before us the divergence between labour and capital. This theme is as pertinent today as it was in those days and it, has, in actuality, become even more acute, more pressing and more intricate.

4. SOCIAL REACTIONS OF INDIA BETWEEN ELITE AND WEAKER SECTIONS:

Coolie tells a fascinating and exciting story through events and evokes exhilaration. Munoo's reactions to every incident of his life are discussed in detail. There is abundance of alluring discourse and many expressive passages. *Coolie* is also acknowledged as a novel of remonstrance. Anand protests against the consumerist exploitation of the poor and the deprived people in the country, but he never lets his occupation a source of propaganda. He simply gives us pictures of the agony caused by deficiency and redundancy, leaving the readers to draw their own inference. He in a very beautiful way puts across the message of defiance of the right to life and unjust social system through the dismal story of Munoo. His poverty compels him to do apprenticeship at the age of fourteen and to be exploited by his uncle. His only wish is that 'I want to live, I want to know, I want to work.' In his short life, his first bump into with the urban world was in the house of babu Nathu Ram. The lady of that house Bibi Uttam Kaur humiliates him in various ways. From this Munoo learns his first lesson in the harsh school of the modern urban world. Now he has realized finally his position in the world. In Daulatpur he is fine treated by Prabha Dayal and his wife, but their partner Ganput regularly beats him and abuses him. When Prabha Dayal is insolvent by the betrayal of his partner Munoo works as a coolie. There too he finds the cut throat competition and exploitation. Coolies of that time were paid tremendously low remuneration and made to bear extremely profound loads and were physically

abused too. This exploitation is accessible on a much larger and more appallingly in the Bombay phase of Munoo's life. There ill-paid, ill-housed, under nourished and bullied laborers are busted fully both in body and mind as Munoo finds in his friend Hari and in his own adolescence too. From there Munoo goes to Shimla with Mrs. Manwaring, as she wants a servant. She makes him, her boy servant, and rickshaw-puller and there are hints that he is subjugated sexually too.

A profound entrenched feeling of inadequacy to the superior people who live in bungalows and wear Angrezi garments makes him suppurate without mutter. His lot as a rickshaw-puller was dangerous as a consequence of which he dies of consumption at the age of sixteen. All these things are obtainable in this novel *Coolie* by Anand. He also throws light on capitalism, colonialism and industrialism to show how these forces exploit Munoo and his like. There is also a appearance of the fires of mutual detestation by caused politicians, who have their own axe to pulverize. Anand in *Coolie* tells about how the majestic rulers exploited Indians. They not only humiliate the Indians by their contact but also ill-treated them. The policeman, the symbol of British Raj, beats Munoo and scares him away from the railway station. Prabha Dayal, a highly regarded man is hardheartedly caned at the police station for no burden of his. Prabha Dayal is a representation of British cruelty and brutality rather than of British justice, and the Englishman who slaps Munoo simply for looking at him. The head foreman of cotton mills, a meticulously disgusting character is presented as 'massive man with a crimson bulldog face and a diminutive moustache with his gigantic body fully clad in a greasy white shirt, white trousers and a greasy white polo toupee. He refers to Hari as a 'stupid bullock' and he undoubtedly treats the factory employees as if they were animals. He kicks, beats and abuses them at will. Saros Cowasjee comments on it:

The evil that one sees in his poor is the direct result of capitalistic exploitation and the indifference of the British Government towards the lives of millions of its subjects. The same cannot be said of the rich, their greed is needless. There is a lot of difference between Prabha's creditors fighting among themselves to recover whatever they can and the coolies vying with each other to earn a few annas so that they might live another day. (169)

5. CONCLUSIONS:

In order to conclude it can be rightly said that Anand has specified us an authentic portrait of the exploitations of the deprived and the murk sections which was the bunch of the meager in pre-independence India. The conduct is elaborate; the subject matter has been studied from a variety of angles and in diverse societies. The problems, the discrimination and the callousness of colonial statute, have been also uncovered. The deprivation caused as a consequence of contact with the west also brought out. On behalf of this K.R.S. Iyengar praises it and calls it: 'a prose epic of modern India.'

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