

Caste And Class Conflict In Mulk Raj Anand's: Coolie

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-----Abstract-----

From the time immemorial Class Conflict has been one of the major themes of literature. Class conflict is a term long-used mostly by socialists, communists, and many anarchists, who define a class by its relationship to the means of production--such as factories, land, and machinery. Mulk Raj Anand's stories depicted a realistic and sympathetic portrait of the poor in India. He is known as India's Charles Dickens. Anand highlights the class-conflict between upper caste people and lower caste people in his novels. Mulk raj Anand's 'Coolie' gives a chilling picture of a down trodden boy munno who at his early stage gets into oblivion of his own existence. He could feel the itch of an orphan and Anand could rightly give a heart throbbing description of his mental state and his all activities in a unique way. Anand continued his exploration of the Indian society in the form of class and caste conflict. This paper presents the Class conflict between the downtrodden and high class Hindus that was beautifully portrayed by Mulk Raj Anand in his novel Coolie.

Key words: Class Conflict, Upper caste people, Lower caste people, Mulk Raj Anand

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand was one of the triumvirates who inaugurated the new section of writers of fiction along with R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Anand is a novelist of urgent social concerns and preoccupations, and the social impulse is at the heart of his writings. He is considered the Messiah of the downtrodden, the unwanted and the unloved. Even in a random reading of Anand's novels, the reader becomes immediately aware of such issues as the tyranny of the caste system, its injustice, and its social, moral and economic consequences, class conflicts, exploitation of various kinds of the poor by the rich, quest for identity, search for freedom, etc. Under colonial rule, a number of social and economic changes took place and as a result a feudal society was gradually transformed into a capitalistic one. The class system in India has turned out to be a new kind of caste system. It is built on the cash nexus on which it thrives. It has created a society much more complicated and devious, and in some respects more rigid than the one created by caste. Therefore it has become a very powerful divisive force, far more damaging to social cohesion than caste, as it has tended to segregate people into the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots.

Coolie is one classic example of the story of the underprivileged class of the society and of the oppressed people who cannot even make both ends meet. Its appeal is so much innate, humane potential and wide extensive that has designed it purposive to be translated into more than 38 languages of the world. It has earned for Anand a global reputation as one of the prolific and prominent English novelists. The story is told from the eyes of the narrator and brings to light the inevitable and hidden evils of the Raj, right from exploitation, caste ridden society, communal riots, and police injustice. The novel takes us to different places and cities showing the inhuman and degrading treatment that the poor Munoo gets at the hands of the socially, economically, and politically affluent and higher classes of Indian society and how he copes with all circumstances alone. Anand was able to strike a cord in the hearts of the conscientious Indians with the beautiful and real to life portrayal of the down trodden masses of Indian society, the so called have nots. Mulk Raj Anand was much appreciated and recognized for this novel and was one of those people who were highly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. And this influence is clearly seen in all his works including Coolie. True to his Marxist spirit, he always portrayed the real India, and more specifically the poor India. Though the novel is historically located in 1930s, it continues to enjoy the same contemporaneity in the present century India.

Munoo is the protagonist of this novel *Coolie*. Generally the protagonists of the novels of Mulk Raj Anand are from dirt and dust; they are too meek to report against the evil forces which tend to suppress them and their like. These hero-antiheroes, no doubt, are endowed with certain admirable qualities of the head and the heart; but the cruel, irrational social forces hamper the proper development of these qualities. The diligence, intelligence and sensitiveness of these characters are awfully suppressed that they can never gain confidence to wage a fight for their cause. They, however, do sensitively feel the torture of the unjust practices, but the reaction is limited merely to their acknowledgement of the social status which they are doomed to accept without a hope for emancipation. The knowledge of their helplessness against the establishment, social set-up, traditions, taboos and customs makes them writhe with acute mental agony. They can do nothing but accept their faith.

The summary lines of *Coolie* delineate a bohemian life saga of an adolescent hill boy Munoo. An idyllic life in the Kangra hill with friends and relations seemed to be short lived as Munoo's guardian and uncle Dayaram, at the instigation of his irate wife, drags the orphan to town to eke out his living. The orphan boy Munoo runs to avoid every place of cruelty in search of happiness and everywhere he is suppressed. He is aged fifteen and he does various jobs at Daultpur, Bombay and Simla. He dies of tuberculosis in the end because of poverty. Munoo is exploited greatly in one way or another, by one person or another. Munoo universally symbolizes the suffering of the oppressed and those taken advantage of. Suppression takes major role in *Coolie* to show how pathetic the lives of the Indian people are under the suppressive forces. Through his saga of suppression, Anand shows the decline and upturn in the life of Munoo. Munoo's uncle and aunt consider him as a machine for obtaining money. Munoo willingly receives his role as a slave and agrees to go to town with his uncle. At fourteen, Munoo is forced to work in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram, a worker in Imperial Bank in Sham Nagar. Munoo's romantic views are destroyed by the wife of Babu Nathoo Ram. This lady is not good-natured and always abuses and curses him without any reason. Anand's Munoo is denied happiness. Munoo is humiliated for relieving outside the wall and abuse is showered on him. Munoo suffers physical and mental torture and this shows suppression in the form of child labour. Even at the tender age of fourteen, he is not provided with the basic necessities.

Munoo is, in fact, a burning symbol of millions of unfortunate souls like himself – lost and bereft, abused and down-trodden. If Anand hints at the gradual break-down of the caste system, mainly through the British, in *Untouchable* and *Road*, he shows in *Coolie* how it is replaced by class system – an evil no less vicious than the former – an awful result of social revolution fermented by the twin forces of industrialism and the cash nexus. Central to *Coolie* is Anand's humanistic faith that this class-consciousness born of money or social status can have crushing effects on those that are at the lower rungs. We can see in *Coolie* how the evils of poverty and cruelty crush a bud of youth before it could bloom to any extent. Daya Ram, Mr. and Mrs. Nathoo Ram, Ganpat, Chimta Sahib, and Mrs. Mainwaring too, have only contempt for Munoo. They slap him, kick him, and abuse him. Almost at every turn he comes across only pain and cruelty which make his life a painful saga of suffering. He is forced to become a sort of a purposeless vagabond with apparently no control on his destiny.

By studying all the above characters, we can say the main character who is Munoo who suffer because he is poor he is coolie and all other coolies also suffer because capitalists and other rich Indians exploits them physically and economically. Munoo is the representative character in the novel. His longing to live, we can see in the novel. Right from the beginning we can say whether in village or at city, all persons who are responsible for the suffering of the character Munoo are the same. Moneylender seized all property of Munoo's father and his mother. His father died of shock and Munoo became orphan. He worked in textile factory. There also capitalists exploited him. Anand depicted the real condition of downtrodden workers of the society. Anand also shown how a lady exploits Munoo sexually and because of extra work of pulling rickshaw and sexual exploitation, Munoo died. In *Coolie* Anand has shown extreme suffering of the characters like Munoo, Hari-Har and Prabh Dayal.

II. CONCLUSION

Anand suggests that a little more sympathy and a little more tenderness on the part of the society could have turned Munoo into a happy individual, and also averted his tragic end. There are many writers in Indian Writing in English who have dealt with the theme of untouchability and segregation. But nobody has been able even to come near Mulk Raj Anand. With his literary power and perspectives he has tried his best to spring up the healthy human values and radical social transformation in our human society in which the haves and have nots both can enjoy happily the bliss of human life on the same footings and fraternity peace, love and justice.

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