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'MUNOO', IS THE VOICE OF UNDERDOG IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S NOVEL 'COOLIE'

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ABSTRACT

The novels of Mulk Raj Anand clearly shows his vast experience of the poor, neglected persons and untouchables who often live in poverty, in social injustice and in cast condemnation. Mulk Raj Anand has intense support for the underdogs because he is a great lover of equality, freedom, and social justice. He is totally against exploitation of the poor, down-trodden and untouchables from the hands of the rich and upper-class people. In writing his novels, he exposes effectively the follies and cruelties of money-lenders, rich people and cruel British rulers. He also opposes the narrow mindedness, slavish nature and silent toleration under the subjugation of the underdog.

Keywords: Poor, Suffering, Coolie, Underdog, Exploitation

INTRODUCTION

Coolie tells the story of Munoo, an orphan. Munoo struggles for his bare subsistence and existence from his early life till his tragic death. Though he is very poor, yet he makes his best efforts to live a hard-working and sincere life. For this, his circumstances compel him to run from place to place for seeking shelter, service and a way to earn his livelihood. Unfortunately he gets dishonor, beatings, abuses, cruel treatment and even workless existence. Munoo, as the early part of the novel shows, is a sturdy hill boy with his strong body and robust health which makes him capable to work hard in household sphere, in a factory, as a coolie in the vegetable market, or as a rickshaw-puller in the ascending and sloping hilly parts of Simla. Though he works hard under all situations with his strong body and sound health, yet he gets only sorrow and suffering everywhere. He is nowhere permitted to stand on his own legs even with his hardest work, much courage and strong will power.

The trait of innocence is very clear from the character of Munoo. It was his innocence which proved the basis of his exploitation by the ruthless masters and mistresses at various places. He could not understand the ways of city life as well as of his bosses, so he had to undergo a lot of sorrow and suffering. It may be easily said that the innocent Munoo fell a prey to the greed, selfishness and cruel ways to his different masters and mistresses. He could not understand the wicked ways of the rich and powerful men, so he had to suffer for his innocence. His poverty as a great hurdle came on the way of his standing on his own legs to support his bare existence. He moved from place to place in search of earning his bread and butter. When he was thrown out of job, he took the work even of a coolie to earn his bare subsistence and worked hard most laboriously and sincerely. In the later part of his life in Simla, he worked hard even as a rickshaw- puller so seriously and laboriously that he felt totally exhausted.

Munoo was a fine young man with the natural trait of fellow-feeling in his character. He felt malice for none but sincere comradeship for all and sundry in an equal way. He had natural sense of fellow-felling when he was working in the prabha factory. He had developed close friendly relations with Hari in Bombay. He remained dutiful and faithful to Mrs. Mainwaring upto the last day of his life because she had saved him from a serious accident. In Simla, too, he was very near and dear to several young ladies and rickshaw-pullers who showed their natural sympathy to him when he was down with the fatal disease of T.B. Munoo is much remembered by all for doing much hard work throughout his life. It was in search of work to maintain his existence that he was compelled to move from his village to different cities like Sham Nagar, Daulatpur, Bombay where he worked very hard. Certainly it was his bare misfortune that he could not stay at one place for his final and peaceful stay.

In the beginning Munoo was just a boy of fourteen years studying in Vth class in the village school. He was tending a happy life in his village but soon hunger, starvation and humiliation overcome. Even in his own village he had experienced some of it through the injustice and exploitation of the landlord and his father had died of bitterness and disappointment. His mother had to work very hard to support the family. Munoo never forgot this life and the suffering of his parents. These things had an indelible impression upon his mind. The real tragedy started when he saw his mother lying dead on the ground. He was ill treated by his uncle and aunt. But he suffered most in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram in Sham Nagar. He was employed there as a domestic servant only for three rupees per month. Bibiji was most cruel and abusive to him. Nobody cared for his delicate innocent emotions. He had to work there from early morning till late in the night and got the poorest food. The condition was so pitiable that even his uncle was not prepared to hear anything from him.

In Daulatpur also, he again suffered in the same way. Though Prabha's wife was kind to him but Ganpat always looked for an opportunity to beat him. He came to beggary when the pickle factory was sold. In the grain market, he was very much disappointed to see a great crowd of coolies, stronger than him. There was cut throat competition between the starving coolies and they worked at the lowest wages. The coolies were lying on the ground in the conditions not suitable even to animals and they were reduced to the level of beasts. Munoo then tried his luck at the Railway station but he was made run from there by the policeman. After his arrival in Bombay, he felt this starvation even on larger scale. The working conditions of Sir George White's cotton mills were the worst. They had to work hard in the suffocating rooms. They were paid the lowest possible wages. They were compelled by the mediators to borrow money and lived in huts, not suitable even for the animals. Munoo found a little solace in Simla at the home of Mrs. Mainwaring. He served his mistress Mrs. Mainwaring most devotedly at the cost of his health. He worked as a domestic servant and a rickshaw-puller. Munoo's extreme poverty, constant changes of job, too much hard work and mental tension brought about his tragic death after his long and fatal suffering from T.B.

CONCLUSION

Anand's humanism makes him a novelist with a mission of the betterment and uplift of the underdogs of the society. In his novels he deals with the misery and wretchedness of the poor and their bitter struggle in life. The basic theme of the Coolie is the suffering and exploitation of the poor. Anand's description of the poor lot of India makes it more impressive. There is the demand for equality and social justice in his novels for those who are poor, neglected, and untouchables in this great country.

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