



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 8. Issue.2. 2021 (April-June)

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

MULK RAJ ANAND'S 'COOLIE' AS VOICE TO EXPLOITED STRATUM

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Article information

Received:23/5/2021  
Accepted: 28/6/2021  
Published online:30/06/2021  
doi: [10.33329/ijelr.8.2.215](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.8.2.215)

ABSTRACT

Mulk Raj Anand is considered as one of the ground-breaking Indian English writers who created a master piece *Coolie*, as a protest novel which is a sequel to his first novel *Untouchable*. The author attempts to interpret and condemn the plight of humanity situated on dissimilarity existing among the rich and the poor. The novel parades the discontentment towards man's exploitation of one another for power, money, fame and many more. Exploitation has a firm rooting within the society where many of the members of the society are getting exploited or manipulated for the benefit of others. It can be simply surmised that they are exploited without getting right compensations, besides being exploited physically, psychologically, and emotionally. Mulk Raj Anand exhibits his understanding of how people suffer from poverty, around the nation, with a focus in local regions. Exploitation, poverty, industrialization and communalism are the thematic concerns of his fiction. *Coolie* has been compiled with the backdrop of economic and social exploitation of the lower class sections by the dominant sections in an inhuman way. The protagonist in *Coolie*, Munoo goes through a roller coaster ride of life facing all the disturbances and injustices of the world which can set an example for exploitation of the poor by rich. His agony earns epic magnitude and universal implication in the novel and stands as a reflection of the communal discriminations and inhumanity.

**Keywords:** Exploitation, dissimilarity, humanity, labour, poverty

The novel *Coolie* focuses on the unfortunate and empyreal states of human experience. The author reflects on the life of Munoo in a debased community as an insubstantial and defenceless being in a preponderantly unreceptive world. The calamity pertaining to Munoo is a condemnation related to the immoralities as part of capitalist economy forced upon downtrodden sections of the society. The main objective of the novelist is to elicit the scruples of human compassion against the pitiless development of the feeble, but not to paint a picture of gloomy image of life. The novel concentrates on depicting the inhuman dimension as the novelist interprets them.

Anand partakes the profound understanding of life and expresses deep concern for the destitute and portrays life in two of his much-appreciated novels *Untouchable* and *Coolie*. *Coolie* assimilates a deep rooted form of humiliation in life, more intense than its precedent work, *Untouchable*. The story moves around the life of main character Munoo, from a small village moving to town, from there to metropolis, and from metropolis to the mountains. His transition of experience from one place to another with different life styles from village to mountains is the crux of his life and the novel as well. And eventually this traverse acquaintance has swept off

his day of reckoning. Structurally, in comparison with *Untouchable*, *Coolie* was less strongly interweaved as it has a modified variety of reliability. Its wobbly, bird's-eye construction, with huge assortment around personalities and events, symbolizes a wide-ranging reflection of life itself. Looking at the instability in cadence the novelist gives it a momentous look.

Anand revels in portraying of the universe of visual aspect, immersing wholly into a sort of poetic enchantment, liberating linguistic communication. Nevertheless the author scuffles to strike the new Indian English parlance prolongs, predominantly when he wades through the state of affairs of events in accelerating the pace of the plot line. *Coolie* is a milestone in Indo-Anglian fiction which encapsulates the life of Munoo ridden with tragic events of extreme nature. The ill-fated orphan has been distant from his relatives from whom he never got the affection he needed at that young age. He takes up the job as a household retainer at the house of a clerk who works in a bank. Munoo envisioned that he would have a peaceful and comfortable life after starting life afresh, but unfortunately it never came true.

### Subaltern Dimension

Mulk Raj Anand's approach towards oppressed sections has affected large part of his career extensively but it could be surmised that it was author's personal agenda. Having found the discrepancy among the approach towards differences between rich and poor made him a target even by All India Progressive Writers Association which is Marxist-oriented and they derided him in 1949 as a result of his ideology. Even though Anand shows inclination towards the ideology of communism, yet his main focus has been on human values rather than differences between rich and poor. He held the strong conviction in man's suppressed goodness and believed that ultimately good would triumph over evil. The author opines that appropriate solution for men over progress can be given at the backdrop of Socialism. In this way Anand's humanistic development has found its root in Marxist thought and approach. His works had a strong resemblance and close affinity with Humanism and Marxism. Anand's writing holds a lot of reflection on reality and are treated in an artistic way. He being a drawn from a non-marginalized section of society, had wide understanding of the nuances of society amid art and life. Political touch never loses its share in Anand's novels.

### Voicing the exploited

*Coolie* gives voice to the underlying and subjugated. In the words of Marx and Engels,

"the lumpen proletariat, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions for life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool..." (14).

Though the original meaning of the word 'coolie' is nowhere exactly pointed out by Anand, yet it refers to those people who are exiles and not accepted as part of the society. The better example can be taken from an incident from Munoo's life where he is asked to sit on the floor when he introduces himself as 'coolie' at a hotel after coming to Mumbai: "Oh! Look, Mummy! Our coolies are there cried little Circe. Her mother shushed her and asked her to behave. The sights of the creatures were challenges to the complacency of the ladies and gentlemen who had come for tea" (*Coolie* 298).

Munoo, the protagonist has always carried the identity of a labour, worker and servant rather than by his name and his place where he hails from. The author gave a very convincing figurative comparison between dominated and downtrodden as objects of hope and fear respectively. On one side each class challenges and yearns to accomplish the eminence of being the next supreme class, who predominantly damages and overpowers like the suppressed section like their predecessors. On the other hand it also harbours a fright of being de-classed. As a resultant product of ideological differences, among classes which were seen as economic, an instance is the rise of Prabha in the novel from a coolie to Seth. Undoubtedly there is a flow of ideological approaches that budge in the entire class system. Insecurity among the imperialist bourgeois is that they will be branded equal is clearly visible in their actions. The fear of growth among the two contrasting sections, both economic and social, is evident in their behaviour towards the downtrodden in the form of exploitation under the roof of racial dominance.

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**Indian writing with a glimpse of marginalized section**

Anand's focus in this narrative masterpiece was socially and economically marginalized sections of society. He was conscious of the discriminations existing among the classes. And he himself was aware that he belongs to the non-marginalized section and writing about the opposite side of the line can result in criticism from both the sides. He proved himself to be an empathetic human through his writings. Without hiding in the shadows of economic and social pressures he was able to bring out the bitter truth about the atrocities exercised on the lower class by upper class. Many of his community people expected that he would be writing with a bourgeoisie point of view. Thus he states in *Apology for Heroism* that he could not sense the suffering of the poor directly because:

I had always been comparatively better off. No, mine was a secondary humiliation, the humiliation of seeing other people suffer. I do not know to what extent envy of the rich on my part was disguising itself as a hunger for social justice. Perhaps there was an element of this. Also the inadequacies of our life in India may have contributed something to my preoccupation. But I do not apologize for this because it is not easy in the face of such wretchedness and misery as I had seen in India to believe that material happiness and well-being had no connection with real happiness and the desire for beauty. So I sought to recreate my life through my memories of India in which I grew up, with a view to rediscovering the vanities, the vapidities, the conceits and the perplexities with which I had grown up, indifferent to the lives of the people around me. I felt guilty, for needless suffering was no matter for complacent pride or gratitude (*Apology for Heroism* 76-77).

Anand's communal obligation makes *Coolie* ideologically encumbered. The credit for transforming India from a traditional economical state to industrial as it holds the major market for industrial goods goes to East India Company and their ideas of income generation. Till then, Capitalists had the upper hand over the lower sections in this imperial kind of governance. There was a swift change in the air of class classification with the new phase of approach. With the collaboration of Indian aristocracy, with feudal class in relation to the Empire, old feudal caste system has been substituted by the class system emerged out as part of industrial production. The impact of Colonialism made India to transform itself from ancient economic structure to new economic as well as social structure.

The author was realistic enough to realize that changing the old system was not going to happen overnight in spite of the advent of industrialization. Instead of complete disappearance they shifted the shape and altered themselves into the new class system which took its birth with industrialization. Even as a kid Munoo was always aware of the fact that poor are not respected equally with the rich and class system does exist. In contrast to the popular belief that urban areas also reflected the class system which was a draw back to the progress. His dreams of settling in a Hill station where he thought he could escape the dominance of the bourgeoisie class were far from reality. Whether it is a petite town of Sham Nagar or urban towns line Bombay or the hill station of Shimla; they all still hold the old caste system with more rigidity. Based on the economic structure the classes have been sub-divided as well as caste and religion divisions. Not only rich and poor but also nationality differences had a special mention in Anand's masterpiece, witnessed through Mrs. Mainwaring. She was a victim of intolerance in opposition to the Anglo-Indian community exhibited by both the foreigners as well as Indians. Munoo was even asked to run off from serving at her house as she was not a 'pukka' memsahib. In this way Anand in *Coolie* brought the undermining oppressions against the downtrodden with a unique and uncontroversial way.

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