

THE SOCIAL REACTION AND CROSS-SECTION OF INDIAN SOCIETY IN ANAND'S *COOLIE*

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Abstract

This Article presents the social reaction and the cross-section of India between the downtrodden and an elite section of the society that was beautifully portrayed by Mulk Raj Anand in his novel *Coolie*. Mulk Raj Anand's stories are depicted as a realistic and sympathetic portrait of the poor in India. He is known as Charles Dickens of India. Anand highlights the class-conflict between the rich and the poor in his novels. Anand wrote many novels and short stories; to achieving social and economical justice are themes. Equality is his goal; his humanism is a combination of scientific humanism of the West and the "Buddhist Karuna". In each of his novels, he explores one level of social injustice or depravity.

In *Coolie* it is economic depravity. Anand's *Coolie* gives a frightening picture of a downtrodden boy Munoo who at his early stage gets into oblivion of his own existence. He could feel of irritation 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 cross section Indian society. *Coolie* is a comprehensive study of the social condition of India. It traces the social and economical conditions of four towns in North Indian. The novel dramatizes with a vivid clarity, the economic exploitation of the poor by the rich. Munoo is a stark symbol of exploitation. The system destroys him cruelly, Anand presents a cross-section of the Indian society with various kinds of poverty; these are rural poverty as well as urban poverty. Anand demonstrated large degree of social commitment, for him, social idealism is the basis of his art. For him art is committed, it has a purpose. It reforms the society. It becomes a means for social transformation.

Key words - social and economic injustice, Equality, humanism, downtrodden and exploitation

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the big three of Indian English fiction along with R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Anand is the most famous creative writer in Indian English fiction. The novelist Anand is similar to Dickens, Hardy, Tolstoy, Munshi Premchand and Chinua Achebe, who have on a large scale concentrated on the problems of their respective societies. Anand is also a short story writer and art critic writing in English. Anand was among those who gave Hindustani idioms to English. In his works, Anand showed a real-life representation of the poor of India which arouses our pity.

Anand is likely the first Indian novelist writing in English who depicted the real troubled lives of the suppressed Indians. In the novels of Anand, we can see that he points out to the readers the living conditions of people like a sweeper, a coolie, a peasant, etc. who suffered exploitation, conditions of poverty and bad actions. Anand included the lives of the unlucky ones in his works. His great sympathy and intensity of narration produced exceptional vigor in his novels as in the novels of Marxism Gorki.

Mulk Raj Anand has a particular ideology in his fiction. His ideology is called humanism, love of man in his central passion. He has also equally influenced by both the Western and the Oriental thinkers. He has greatly influenced by the Marxist thinking. He was easily attracted by the realist philosophy of the West. There are three Indian influences on him. They are from the Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. From Gandhi, he learnt the values of practicing an ideal life leading. Tagore's vision of an integrated personality, influence in realizing his characters. He practiced the "Buddhist Karuna" in his characterization.

He loved his characters with a deep sentimentality of feeling. His men and women are called the "noble savages". His characters are fight against an inhuman system and historical injustices.

Anand demonstrated large degree of social commitment, for him, social idealism is the basis of his art. Even in a random reading of Anand's novels, the reader becomes immediately aware of such problems as 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. In each novel, he takes one social problem. He studies the problem of untouchability in his novel, *Untouchable*. In this novel Bakha is small boy, he feels unhappy because of social discrimination. *Coolie* is a comprehensive study of the social condition of India. It traces the social and economical conditions of four towns in North Indian: Shampur, Daulathpur, Bombay and Simla. The novel dramatizes with a vivid clarity the economic exploitation of the poor by the rich.

Coolie is a grim tragedy of Munoo, the novel starts in Shampur and ends in Simla with his death. The story takes place in a picaresque manner. It starts in Shampur, Munoo is an orphan. Munoo's life is full of sufferings and in the beginning of the novel itself we can see how his aunt Gujri ill-treats him. Anand writes: 'Munoo ohe Munooa!' she called again, exasperated and raising her voice, this time, to the highest pitch to which, in her anger and hate, she could carry it: 'Where have you died? Where have you gone, you ominous orphan? Come back and begone!' The piercing soprano resounded through the valley and fell on Munoo's ears with the deadening effect of all its bitter content.¹

Munoo is sent to Shampur along with his uncle. His uncle is messenger in the Imperial Bank. Munoo becomes a servant in the house of Nathoo Ram, an officer of the bank. He is treated in very shabby manner. His aunt ill-treats him. He suffers much in her hands. She does not give him proper food. He is tormented with punishment endlessly. When he can not bear it any longer, he leaves the house. If his aunt Gujri and Uttam Kaur had not ill-treated him, his tragedy would

have been avoided. In the novel, Munoo meets cruel and bad characters besides good characters like Prabha Dayal and his wife in Daulatpur, Chota Babu in Sham Nagar and Ratan in Bombay. Here is an example of the goodness of Prabha Dayal. When Munoo first met Dayal, the latter ignoring his partner Ganesh's advice, patted Munoo on his back and said: 'Come, come now, be a brave lad. Wipe your eyes. We will take care of you. Look, we are almost nearing Daulatpur!' 64

He boards a train to an unknown destination. He meets Prabha, a good man; he gives Munoo some work in his pickle factory. Munoo, who as compelled to labour in a pickle factory and who accepted his lot with fatalism peculiar to the Indian peasantry, urged him to write Coolie. It is real and social realism is pillar of the novel. Mulk Raj Anand uses literature as a means to modify society has led critics to dub him as a propagandist despite his repeated emphasis on the fact that India context demands art with purpose.

Anand has a purpose to write his novels. He writes; "I feel that, only in fiction which is the transformation, through the imagination, of the concrete life, in words, sounds and vibrations, one may probe into the many layers of human consciousness in its various phases." 136 He treats Munoo as his own son. Munoo finds that if Prabha is a truly kind and generous man, Ratan has a streak of heroism. Both these characters make Munoo's worldly happy. In an otherwise sad world, of cruelty and brutality, only Ratan and Prabha symbolize some good qualities but due to the force of circumstances, Prabha is forced to sell away his factory.

He himself leaves Daulathpur in utter poverty. In the words of C.D. Narasimhaiah, "The situations Anand creates are convincing on the whole and reveal aspects of life hitherto generally kept out of fiction as though are tabooed from it." 242

Thus once again Munoo's life becomes dangerous. Then Munoo reaches Bombay along with a circus troupe. Munoo becomes a worker in a cotton mill. After a trade union strike, he loses his job. He reaches Simla after, a road accident. Mrs. Mainwaring, an Anglo-Indian takes pity on him. She takes him to Simla and he becomes a servant in her house. For the first time in his life, Munoo is very much happy. Mrs. Mainwaring love for Munoo in Simla is a mixed one; she loves him for his native and uncorrupt innocence. Munoo's happiest life is in the house of Mrs. Mainwaring, but this is very short period of his life. But it is also a tragedy that his health fails here; his final stage of a rickshaw puller is that most gruesome part of his story, this very difficult job for him. He has all along been doing many kinds of jobs, but for pulling the rickshaw he has no stamina. He gets consumption and finally dies of it; this is the tragedy of his life.

The lives of Munoo, Gangu and other coolies give easily understandable demonstration of the crushed humanity throughout the world. They do laborious work, yet, they get abuses and good thrashing. They have skeletal bodies which show their poor condition under white reign. Even the mothers with new born babies are denied their right to suckle their babies. Here, the author Anand shows the madness of men who go after money like anything which shows the callousness of colonial monsters.

The severely damaged lives of Munoo and Gangu are strong representation of capitalistic power. Through the lives of Munoo and Gangu, Anand shows the not so wonderful side of life under the capitalists. Anand brings into prominence the pain of Munoo who is without his parents because of capitalistic suppression. His parents were sufferers of it and throw him into a life of misery. Anand shows how Gangu is in penury under capitalistic suppression. Gangu loses his means of living under its powerful hold and he has to work hard to make both ends meet.

With the help of his novels, Anand portrays the outcastes' intense struggle with the suppressing forces. Of these, only the rebel Bakha succeeds to a significant little. Bakha and

Munoo stands for the the two faces of the archetypal figure of the dispossessed but undefeated outcastes or the untouchables that could be found in all of Anand's novels. The misery and unhappiness of the poor and their attempts to get better lives can be seen in *Untouchable* and *Coolie*. The tale of the pitiable conditions of Munoo and Bakha serves the good intention of arousing the conscience of the educated Indians to the economic and social injustices in India. Anand was well familiar with the life of the untouchables and Bakha has been based on one of his playmates. The high caste Hindus were polluted by just an untouchable's touch like Bakha. But we can see that those like Pandit Kali Nath do not hesitate to molest an outcaste girl like Sohini.

In this long saga of tragedy, Munoo is the victim; he is a transient victim of circumstances, he is an innocent victim. He is intelligent and keen participant in his life. Anand draws him in abundant sentimental detail as a sensitive boy. He is also imaginative, duty-bound, sincere and hard working young boy. He is a symbol of grim innocence and naiveté. He moves in this novel, from innocence to a little experience. His death of consumption is symbolic of the positivity of life to a poor boy. He is a victim of impersonal forces. In spite of all the negative and destructive forces of life, he keeps that pure innocence, his native innocence remains unaffected. He enjoys life in a full measure. He does not become a fatalist but he merely keeps that sense of innocent boy at the world like Bakha, in untouchable, he is a living characters. He is inactive, but not passive in his mind. He has the potential of a real hero. But he is destroyed by the system.

Anand presents a cross-section of the Indian society with various kinds of poverty. The social realism is also seen in the poor condition of Indian laborers. It is real as the starvation was felt by Munoo is one of the ironical comment on the agriculture based nation – India. Munoo has been picked up by Seth Prabha Dayal who has come to own a pickle factory in Daulatpur. Here Munoo is fed well on arrival, and Mulk Raj Anand ironically remarks: "It was the most sumptuous meal he had eaten since the feast on the death anniversary of his father and mother, which his aunt had given three months before he left the hills". 228

This is rural poverty as well as urban poverty. Munoo begins his life in start rural poverty. He is an orphan; he is poor and unwanted at home. So, he is sent to Shampur his poverty becomes even more acute. He is treated in an inhuman manner. His simple habits are hated by the urban people. His endless misery in the urban setting begins here. If there is at least some emotional attachment in his rural life, urban life is cruel and unhelpful. His life in Daulathpur was some moment of happiness. Prabha is another man; he also has innocence like Munoo. He is too naïve for Ganpat. Ganpat is the typical symbol of acquisitive wealth. Munoo's only moments of happiness are at the narrative end. His life in Bombay is at the height of urban cruelty, life in Bombay is wild life survival of the fittest is the law, survival is the biggest goal. Hari, Ratan and Munoo dramatize various forms of survival methods Hari is an old man. He is a coolie. He is in search of a house for his wife and a child. He love for Munoo shows a true companionship in a cruel world. Ratan is a typical fighter against any kind of injustice strength. So his relentless struggle becomes an unending story of heroism. Munoo's idealistic mind finds natural friendship with the heroism of Ratan. Ratan and Munoo become natural friends.

Anand writes this novel in a picaresque manner. Here Munoo moves in a variety of situations and places. A cross-section of Indian life is shown poverty and brutal exploitations are qualities, there is no place for innocence or any kind of sympathy Anand describes Shampur and Daulathpur in a realistic way. The cruelty of the Bombay life is dramatized in it's the extent. The economic and the political exploitation in Bombay are fully dramatized.

All in all, Munoo gets our natural sympathy, he is “a noble savage” like Bakha, and he gets our pitiful love and admiration for heroism, through destroyed by the cruel system. Anand explores the miserable condition and relationship of master and servant like that which existed between Nathoo Ram and Munoo or between Mr. W.P. England and Nathoo Ram. He censures all relationships that are inhuman, unhealthy and meanly submissive. Philip Henderson observes: Coolie takes us into a world in which the comradeship of man for man exists only among the very poorest people; with nothing to hope for their common humanity is all they possess.²¹⁵

Conclusion

Anand as a social realist, critic, and he is against injustice in society. He speaks for the unlucky people. He openly reacted to various kind of suppression which had created problems in the people's lives. As a fiction writer, Anand has been noticed for vitality and keen sense of actuality. Anand selects from the lower section of the society those with pureness and innocence and gives full life and blood to them. His novels mostly portray the tragedy of those free from moral wrongs under external and wicked forces.

Anand rises in value because of his love for the enslaved mankind. His novels are an eye-opener to our community. Anand understood the degree of pain and suffering of his fellowmen. Anand is the champion of the suppressed, that is, he fought for the good of the suppressed. He has always written to stress man's worthiness for respect and to generate pity and love for the underdogs and downtrodden.

Anand is a humanist and he is a writer with a mission which is to write for the good and development of the oppressed people of the society. He writes for the sake of man, for cleansing and making him noble and for leading him into action calculated to achieve the welfare of everyone. Anand's humanism is the focal point of his fiction. He is almost as great as Dickens. The people of the lowest class of the society in India are the central characters of his novels—a sweeper, a coolie, a labourer, a villager, etc.

Anand wanted to eliminate social problem by criticizing it through his novels. This makes him a novelist of the lower class. Each and every novel and short story created by him show that his main purpose is to bring into prominence the different social problems of Indian society. Anand is for the scientific and technological development because he sees in it the plentiful potentials for solving our socio-economic problems. In *Untouchable*, the problem of untouchability is sought in machines as it creates new labour system and destroys the caste system where all people are not equal and some are suppressed. The sociological concern of poverty, suppression and corruption are shown in *Coolie* and *Untouchable*. He wrote *Untouchable* on the theme of untouchability and *the Coolie* presents the tragic situation of the coolies.

Most of Anand's heroes are poor suffering people. Characters belonging to the other classes, that is, the middle class and upper class also make appearance but they are the object of his social satire. It is the suppressed persons -- a Bakha and a Munoo – who have sympathy on their side. The sweeper, the peasant, the plantation labourer, the city drudge all come out alive from his novels anguished and hungry. With these characters, Anand started the literature of the suppressed.

Anand intensified his efforts to demonstrate the current tragic state of taming millions, conflict within the class and defend the propaganda against him. His commitment to humanism can be seen in his treatment of the theme of hunger, poverty, etc. Anand has presented

unforgettable scenes. We cry when we find Anand's victims are intensely pained and denied even the basic requirements of life.

Munoo is born an orphan, lives an orphan and dies an orphan. He only thinks of seeing before he dies. His story ends in an anonymous and insignificant manner, but Anand draws him with abundant sentimentality. Munoo is a stark symbol of exploitation. The system destroys him cruelly. 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. Anand has tried his best to spring up the healthy human values and radical social transformation in our human society.

Refecences

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