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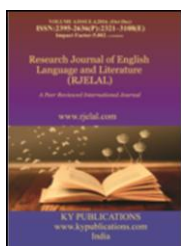
INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

## VOICE OF THE VOICELESS THROUGH THE VOICE OF MULK RAJ ANAND IN "COOLIE"

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### ABSTRACT

Though there are several legislative measures that assure certain minimum wages and better service conditions to the workers and the coolies, their social and economic condition is, even today, far from satisfactory. Mulk Raj Anand wishes for the upliftment of the underprivileged, both socially and economically, finds expression in some of his novels, mostly in *Coolie*.

Key words: Poverty, exploitation, underprivileged and downtrodden.

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Anand's preoccupation with the theme of exploitation derives from his experience in the rural life of the Punjab and elsewhere in India. He has seen the poor peasants naked but for the loin clothes, groaning under extreme poverty, and insulted and exploited. His sympathy for such poor and oppressed people is so deep and sincere in his *Coolie*. He almost cries with anguish against the injustice and cruelties inflicted upon them.

Anand's *Coolie* is about a class-ridden society. In this society or world of the coolies, the sufferers are subject to more rigidity and deprivation. The focal point in *Coolie* is always Munoo the coolie, who has no such assurance. He drifts from place to place, job to job and thus he is virtually rootless, incapable of finding a place for himself in society.

Anand portrays in *Coolie* that the sufferings, torments and uncertainty of the underprivileged that have to accept subhuman existence. The protagonist of *Coolie* is modelled on one of Anand's childhood playmates, who worked as a boyworker in a pickle factory. The protagonist Munoo is a young boy of fourteen, studying in the fifth class, who is forced to leave his Kangra village home, to become first a domestic servant and then a labourer, a coolie

in various cities and finally back to the Hills of Simla where he dies of consumption.

Munoo's life in the village is not happy because of the cruel treatment he receives from his uncle and aunt. Munoo remembers how his father has been exploited by the landlord who seized his five acres of land because the interest on the mortgage covering the unpaid rent has not been paid by Munoo's father when the rains had been scanty and the harvests bad.

Anand portrays the exploitation of the workers by the native employers in the factories of Daulatpur. The pickle factory of Prabha and Ganapat looks like an inferno. The old women workers, engaged in peeling apples, have to do their job in the caverns of the factory. The coolies are huddled against each other when they are sleeping. The factory itself is an outhouse converted into a factory which has no chimney even. The smoke from the factory is a health hazard to the workers as well as to the neighbours, and what is more pitiable is that the health authorities are lethargic to such unhygienic conditions.

Inside the factory, absence of sufficient air and the hotness of the sunlight coming down from the corrugated iron sheets aggravate the condition

by adding excessive heat to the smoke exuded from the huge steaming cauldrons and ovens. The coolies working in the factory look like animals. The pungent smoke chokes and smothers the coolies, irritating their throats and spoiling their ear drums. Thus, Anand shows how in the moneyed society, rich people's success in their business is counted only by means of the profit they earn and not by the means adopted by them to earn such profit. They earn money by exploiting the coolies who are forced to work in the factories where sanitation and life-security are given least importance.

The incident in a grandiose hotel in Bombay, where Munoo is asked to sit down on the floor to drink a bottle of soda water shatters his hope. When a clean-clothed rich man in the hotel looked at him as if he were a leper, Munoo feels wild with rage, but tries to still his mind by acknowledging the superiority of rich people, whom he has always been told to respect. Though he wants to sip the soda slowly and enjoy the full flavor of the drink, he gulps it down as fast as he can to leave the place urgently to avoid the men in the place who are staring at him. This consciousness of his low position makes him nervous and feels extremely guilty for having been introduced into the world of the rich.

Anand pictures vividly the pitiable condition of the coolies in the city. The coolies sleep on pavements and shop boards is a familiar sight in cities like Bombay. They have to find some place in the streets where shops close early and the boards are empty.

*Coolie*, class division is treated in detail is the story of Munoo, an orphaned village boy from the Kangra hills, who sets out in search of a livelihood. His several roles include working as a domestic servant in an urban middle-class family in Sham Nagar; as a worker in a pickle-factory and a coolie in the bazaar in Daulatpur; as a labourer in a cotton mill in Bombay; and as a rickshaw-puller in an Anglo-Indian household in Simla – a job, the rigours of which bring on swift consumption and an untimely death.

The central theme of the novel is the tragic denial of the fundamental right to happiness to a simple, landless peasant. The terrible destiny of being a victim of exploitation is indeed Munoo's lot.

Anand presents the problems of the poor and the downtrodden with sympathy in his novel. His allegiance to the cause of suffering humanity is obvious. He agrees that life on earth is full of suffering and struggle for the poor and the downtrodden. He takes up the cudgel against this cruel society that harbours both the privileged rich and the underprivileged and disadvantageous sections. He writes about the suppressed humanity with a firm conviction. He wishes the common man to raise himself to tremendous heights of dignity and redeem the world from its misery and pain.

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