



CAPITALISM AND INDUSTRIALISATION : COMPARING ANAND'S MUNOO OF 'COOLIE' AND CHILD LABOUR IN TODAY'S WORLD

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Abstract : Mulk Raj Anand is one of the greatest writers of Indian English Literature. His novels have struck a chord with the readers. He was quite disturbed by the social scenario prevailing during his times. He ensured to touch these topics in his novels and through his works he portrayed the social evils prevalent in the society. Without being preachy he presented in his stories the plight of the downtrodden. Be it his short stories or his novels, the protagonists of his stories were the downtrodden or the oppressed lot. Though the sufferings of the underprivileged is not a unique theme, yet the way in which Anand has presented his novels is noteworthy. *Untouchable* was his first major novel. Bakha, the protagonist of the novel, is a sweeper and the novel is about just one day in his life. Through the events unfolding from morning to evening, Bakha faces lot of humiliation, oppression and is traumatised because of his social background. In his second novel *Coolie*, Anand rebels against child labour and capitalism. It is one of the most heart wrenching novels wherein Munoo, the protagonist, is a child of fourteen years and yet he has to face the wrath of the society. He is a Kshatriya by birth but because he is born in a poor household he suffers till the end.

KEY WORDS - Oppression, Capitalism, Child Labour, Feudal life

INTRODUCTION

This character has created a profound impact on the readers as Anand has used humanism to bring Munoo to life by exploring his adolescence, innocence and how his life is crushed to death in the end. This saga of misery compels the readers to empathise with Munoo and also to ponder over the facts regarding the exploitative system that victimizes him.

Munoo faces varied experiences when he works as a servant or a factory worker yet he is referred to as a coolie, the term which reduces and diminishes his identity to a nobody. The transitions in his life from his days in the village of Bilaspur, to Bombay and then finally Shimla is filled with exploitation and suppression. The different ideologies like Capitalism, Industrialism, and Communalism have been introduced in this novel and the negative impact that they create on the socially oppressed lot.

Munoo is a young boy, fourteen years old, who is badly mistreated by Babu Nathoo Ram and his wife. The poverty and dire necessity to have an independent livelihood compels him to work as a domestic servant at Babu Nathoo Ram's place. It is heart wrenching for the readers to read the way in which Anand has narrated Munoo's ill treatment in the household. This compels the readers to think of how inhumane can people be while interacting with a teenage boy. Empathy and humanity does not exist in their life due to which they ill treat others.

Munoo is a victim of the cruel and hypocrite Indian feudal life. His village life is not free from exploitation and he is deprived of the basic necessities due to the scheming landlord who is responsible for his parents' death and he is at the mercy of his uncle and aunt. Gradually Munoo realises that there are only two kinds of people in the world – the rich and the poor. He remarks, "I am a Kshatriya and I am poor, and Varma, a Brahmin, is a servant boy, a menial, because he is poor. No, caste does not matter. The babus are like the sahib logs, and all the servants look alike..." (69).

Munoo's encounter with city life too is not devoid of hardships. Though Seth Prabha Dayal is very considerate and kind towards Munoo and his other co-workers, the other partner of the pickle factory, Seth Ganpat is a tyrant. He is abusive and inhuman in nature.

In this novel Anand has described the complexity of the world wherein the oppressive capitalism has made even children full of prejudices and hatred for each other. Their innocence is lost as they blindly emulate the elders and behave with shrewdness and vengeance. The coolies are treated like beasts of burden and made to work for long hours in hazardous environment irrespective of their tender age.

In the final phase of the novel, Munoo comes to Shimla with Mrs. Mainwaring, who saves him from the police. But the readers are shocked to read that she too is selfish and exploits Munoo. He feels that his struggle may have come to an end when he reaches Shimla. But on the flip side it in fact results in his death.

The question that arises in the minds of the readers is – ‘Is a human life not worth any kind of empathy, humanity? Is it appropriate that a young boy of fourteen is subjected to these kind of sufferings that it ultimately claims his life? Isn’t a child of Munoo’s age and likewise not entitled to a life of beauty, innocence. Has capitalism, industrialisation and feudal caste system made the society so inhuman? Isn’t this situation relevant and prevalent in today’s time as well?’

Even today, child labour is a cause of major concern for the Government as there is no exact number of children who are forced into child labour. As per the Campaign against Child Labour (CACL), 2011, there are 1.26 million child labourers in India. The forever increasing gap between the rich and the poor, the privatization and neo-liberal financial policies have caused a certain percent of population out of service and deprived of the basic elementary needs. This directly affects the children as then they are forced to take up work to fend themselves and their families. The most disturbing part is that the actual number of child laborers never gets disclosed even when they are made to work in dangerous situations despite the laws which have failed to protect them. The children are made to work as domestic workers in urban areas with minimal wages and no proper food, at times they are even subjected to physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The Ministry of Labour has termed child labour as the most hazardous menace. It is observed that child labour is high among SCs, STs, OBCs and Muslims. Due to the ineffective implementation of laws and administration, child labour persists. The parents who are trapped in debts, unable to repay the interest force the children to work and without understanding the importance of childhood, they prepare their children to undertake rigorous tasks. Many children help their parents on fields and there are many who are not able to access school and so start working as labourers either in fields or factories in order to help their parents in earning a livelihood. Though Government is trying to improve the conditions by reducing their working hours, fixing up minimum wages and also providing health care and education to children belonging to such categories, yet there is no significant change in the scenario, and the exploitation continues.

Despite the time leap between when Mulk Raj Anand, wrote his novel ‘Coolie’ and described the oppressive capitalist system in a very realistic manner till the current day, it has been observed that these questions remain largely unanswered and unresolved.

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