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Original Article

Voice of the Subaltern: A Study of Mulk Raj Anand's Coolie

Dr. Sudhir Kumar
Associate Professor of English, Govt. College Narnaul (Mahendergarh)
Email: sudhirkr422@gmail.com

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Abstract:
Mulk Raj Anand's Coolie (1936) is a protest and a social realist novel. This is the outcome to his first and very famous novel, Untouchable. He raises the subaltern's voice through the central figure, Munoo, a young labourer who crosses the rural hills of India and urban industrial centres. This research paper critically evaluates how Coolie reflects subalternity- caste, child labor oppression, economic and how the novelist uses narrative techniques to give voice to the downtrodden, a social-realist novel that foregrounds the voice of the subaltern through its protagonist, Munoo, a young boy labourer who traverses India's rural hills and urban industrial centres. This research article critically examines how Coolie articulates subalternity economic, caste, colonial, and child labour oppression how Anand uses narrative strategies to give voice to marginalized humanity. It is analyzed how Coolie gives a powerful subaltern voice to those people whose history often silences relying on critical theories of Sociolinguistics, postcolonial criticism and subaltern studies. This research paper also studies major critical receipts, situating Coolie within the range of subaltern studies and its consistency importance for studying the voices from the oppressed.
Keywords*: Social-realist, Protagonist, Subalternity, Oppression, Postcolonial, Exploitation.*

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) is considered one of the most popular social-realist novelists in the history of Indian Writing in English. Undoubtedly, most of his novels represent the oppressed and subjugated people, provide them political recognition and moreover, preference to the marginalized and outcast people in society. *Coolie* (1936), his second novel, appears as a compelling declaration of subalternity in colonial India. He analyses the life of Munoo, a fourteen-year-old orphan hill boy, his brutal journey through poverty, labour exploitation, and social hierarchies. 'Subaltern' refers to those people who are politically, socially, and geographically marginalised from presiding power structures. It is analyzed how *Coolie* gives a powerful subaltern voice to those people whose history often silences relying on critical theories of Sociolinguistics, postcolonial criticism and subaltern studies. Moreover, it reveals critical economic, social and colonial hierarchies by showing the silent people who feel suffering under child labor and poverty.

Firstly, it is essential to understand how to study *Coolie* as a subaltern's voice and how Anand establishes his protagonist and setting. The protagonist is dispossessed: an orphan from Kangra, he lacks not only familial support but also protection from systemic inequalities. Anand presents Munoo's condition as deeply rooted in the social structures of colonial India - his exploitation is not anecdotal but systemic. Bina Adhikari critiques *Coolie* from the Marxist perspective and argues that the central theme of the novel is: "the exploitation of the poor and the under-privileged by forces of capitalism, industrialism and colonialism" (Adhikari). She argues that the life of Munoo, as a servant in Simla, as a mill labourer in Bombay and finally as a rickshaw *Coolie* reflects the situation of workers in colonial India. Through this class-struggle narrative, Anand discloses the intersections of capitalist exploitation and colonial power through this class- struggle narrative. Moreover, Adhikari, the widely known critic, underlines the exploitation and discrimination of workers in Anand's *Coolie* as: "class distinction between the wealthy and the needy" and the "significant harsh and miserable life of Munoo" (Adhikari).

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Address for correspondence:
Dr. Sudhir Kumar, Associate Professor of English, Govt. College Narnaul (Mahendergarh)

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"class distinction between the wealthy and the needy"and the "significant harsh and miserable life of Munoo" (Adhikari).

She also highlights that fate is not solely responsible for the miserable plight of Munoo but is structured by social relations but he is a victim of embarrassment, systemic isolation, humiliation, and commercialisation. It is noticed that if Coolie is studied within subaltern studies, it has become very important to draw on the foundational work of Ranajit Guha, whose erudition highlights peasant organisation and self-determination of subaltern classes. While Anand does not clearly line up his works with academic subaltern studies. His narrative style lines up with their concerns. He centres a deprived protagonist, provides narrative and moral force to the poor and provides the materiality of subaltern suffering.

Coolie does not show economic exploitation in isolation but it also implants religious and spiritual analysis that many scholars have clarified through psychoanalytical lenses. R. Esther Reshma and S. Bharathiraja explain in their research article "Religion as an Instrument of Exploitation: A Psychoanalytical Perspective in the Select Novels of Mulk Raj Anand," how religion becomes a means of ideological control. Anand tries to analyse Hindu caste hierarchy, especially the handling of lower castes and shows how religion is employed to preserve social hierarchy.

Reshma and Bharathiraja say that the presentation of Anand on religion is not spiritual purely but political deeply in *Coolie*. Moreover, the religious ideology and caste system divide the colonial and capitalist exploitation that increases marginalization of Munoo. The novel *Coolie* explains how original caste (hierarchies) and colonial capitalism (external power) intrigue to humiliate the subaltern. The East-West experience is also one of the complex aspects in *Coolie*. This novel not only reflects colonial modernity and cultural conflict but social realism through class struggle also. In the study 'East West Encounter in Mulkraj Anand's *Collie*,' it is argued that this novel reflects the barriers between the modern i.e. Eurocentric World and traditional Indian society. The protagonist's shifting from the rural hills to colonial Bombay shows such encounters. Munoo's experiences under British management in industrial settings and Indian working class show how colonial economic systems forced Indian workers.

Hence, such an encounter isn't so melodious. The novelist highlights that colonial modernity has been failed to boost Munoo but the system of colonial capitalism marginalizes and moreover exploits him. Thus, *Coolie* completely analyses not just capitalism but colonial modernity. The system is not liberating but exploitative. Mulk Raj Anand uses bilingual dialogue, code-switching and code-switching between Hindi and English that is one of the important strategies in *Coolie*. Dileep Pastapure's article 'A Study of Code-Mixing and Code-Switching in Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie'* explores this very exactly. He tries to display how the novelist renews the linguistic structure of subaltern life by implanting idioms, phrases, Hindi words and within English discourses. Hence, this code-mixing and code-switching not only increases realism but also gives voice to subaltern subjectivity:

Munoo and other working-class characters do not speak only in polished English; their speech reflects linguistic hybridity.

Pastapure draws the classification of code-mixing/code-switching using the structure of Hoffman (1991) and displays how the novelist uses tag switching, intra-sentential and inter-sentential in character talk. This linguistic policy appears more than stylistic. It shows social identity also:

the working class in colonial India lived in multilingual worlds, where English (colonial power language) coexisted with native tongues. By representing this, Anand asserts a subaltern voice that resists being fully subsumed by colonial English norms.

The novel, *Coolie,* also signals other forms of gendered and sexual exploitation of subaltern sufferings. Poonam Rani and Pooja Kumari explain how these novels reflect exploitation beyond labour as well as sexual abuse in 'Social Images of Sexual Exploitation and Human Suffering in Mulk Raj Anand *Coolie* and *Untouchable*'. This indicates that the novelist does not confine subalternity to caste and class. Anand also analyses how sexuality and gender define the experiences of the marginalized in a subtle way. Mulk Raj Anand reveals that female character's face exploitation not only in domestic spheres but in social spaces also. Both Rani and Kumari observe that the portrayal of the novelist underlines that the subaltern is not inflexible but their suffering is connected with gendered power. Both conclude that the novelist does not romanticize poverty but tries his best to demonstrate brutal realities including the atrocities of women.

Many analytical reactions to the novel, *Coolie,* have highlighted the class consciousness and determined the picture of exploitation of the novelist. Prachi Priya examines how Mulk Raj Anand describes class very deeply involved with tradition, caste and colonial constructions. She posits that the novel Coolie foregrounds not only the social orthodoxies that marginalize the working class but also the economic poverty. This analysis particularly points out caste discrimination.

Munoo's treatment is not just that of a poor labourer, but of someone from a subaltern caste, subject to upper-caste cruelty intertwined with class oppression.

The novel '*Coolie'* has been called an 'epic depiction' of subjection by many critics. Ramanadham Ramesh Babu and P. Sreenivasulu Reddy proclaim in the article "Mulk Raj Anand's *'Coolie*': An Epic Depiction of Subjugation" that the novelist makes Munoo's suffering archetypal and universal. It is claimed by the critics that the

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novel touches 'epic dimensions,' raising personal sufferings to a broader sense. Subhash Singh tries well to highlight Munoo's undeniable plight in "Study of Tragedy in Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*":
born in the hills and dying in the hills, his journey is tragic in the classical sense (Singh).
Singh observes that Anand uses Munoo to reveal universal moral responsibility and makes readers feel shame for a society that allows such suffering.

Dialogue is preferred by Anand's broader literary legacy. Tanya Gupta's "Mulk Raj Anand: The Influence of His Works on Indian Literature," shows Mulk Raj Anand's narrative strategies and social concerns influenced later generations of Indian English writers. She analyses that Anand pioneered using the English novel as a tool of social protest record but a voice for justice. Mulk Raj Anand questioned the colonial and nationalist literary works by bringing subaltern lives to the literary forefront. His humanistic realism and his compassion for marginalised women, for the protagonist, for exploited labour widened the scope of Indian English Literature. *Coolie* has proved a very effective text for all readers in colonial and postcolonial contexts and it apprises that subaltern voices are not only sufferers but means of moral image.

Collie can be studied as a primary literary performance of subaltern studies. The representation of Anand is closely connected with the concerns of other scholars like Ranajit Guha and his successors who tried to recover the pasts of peasants, workers and marginalized class. The work of Anand is fictional while Ranjit Guha's is historiographical, the political vibration is clearly noticed:
both seek to recover marginalized agency and voice.
The analysis of Mulk Raj Anand of caste and colonial Capitalism reverberates from the postcolonial perspective with the opinion that subaltern voices are not completely silenced but also breathes within the colonial literary sphere. The East-West encounter in *Coolie* emphasises how colonial power is incorporated and countered both culturally and materially. The issues like caste system, child labour, inequality and exploitation remain pressing in twenty first century in India. The novel *Coolie* continues to speak across time and it is not a historical antique, but this is a living text that explains intrinsic violence. For example in Pursuits:
A Journal of English Studies continues to apply Marxist critique to Collie, demonstrating that Anand's work remains fertile ground for understanding class struggle in a postcolonial frame (Adhikari).

Hence, the subaltern voice is not victorious in the sense of classical victory but the life of Munoo ends tragically in *Coolie*. The realism of Anand does not search redemption through nationalism, nor does it offer sentimental closure. It invites the reader to be a moral witness. Anand seeks social transformation, empathy and recognition by reflecting the immediate suffering of Munoo, a subaltern boy.

In conclusion, *Coolie* is a very important reflection of subaltern consciousness through language, analysis and narrative form. It is pertinent as a political allegation and a literary achievement. Anand has tried his best to give voice to the oppressed, the exploited, the subaltern and many more through the story of Munoo.

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