



Research Paper

## Social Realism and the Struggle of the Marginalized in Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*

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### Abstract

This research paper explores the social realism in Mulk Raj Anand's seminal novels *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*. Anand poignantly illustrates the grim realities of poverty, exploitation, and social injustice that define the lives of India's marginalized communities. His narratives serve as a scathing critique of class hierarchy, capitalist oppression, and colonial exploitation. Drawing from personal experience and the socio-political milieu of pre-independence India, Anand's fiction is a medium of protest—an urgent call for social change. Both novels shed light on the systemic mechanisms that degrade and dehumanize the poor, ultimately affirming Anand's belief in the inherent dignity and equality of all human beings.

Mulk Raj Anand, one of the pioneering figures of Indian English literature, is known for his deep engagement with the social realities of his time. Through his novels, Anand gives voice to the voiceless, highlighting the plight of the downtrodden in a rigidly stratified society. His works, particularly *Coolie* (1935) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), are emblematic of his commitment to social realism—a literary approach aimed at representing the world truthfully, often focusing on the lives of the working class and oppressed.

*Coolie* presents the tragic life of Munoo, a poor hill-boy forced to work from a young age due to extreme poverty. Munoo's journey through various forms of labor—as a domestic servant, factory worker, and rickshaw-puller—reveals the brutal exploitation suffered by millions of Indians during colonial times. His premature death at sixteen is not merely a personal tragedy but a reflection of the systemic neglect and abuse faced by the laboring class.

Anand portrays poverty not only as a personal misfortune but as a societal failure. Munoo is subjected to discrimination, overwork and humiliation at every turn, reflecting the caste and class oppression that was endemic to Indian society. Anand's treatment of the legal system, particularly the wrongful arrest and abuse of the honest character Prabha, underscores the bias of institutions that serve the interests of the wealthy.

The novel also captures the plight of the urban poor in Bombay, where the underprivileged live in deplorable conditions, devoid of dignity or hope. Anand's realism is vivid and unflinching, portraying the squalor, disease, and helplessness that dominate the lives of the poor in both rural and urban India.

In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Anand shifts focus to the condition of Indian plantation workers in colonial Assam. The protagonist, Gangu, is a symbol of the oppressed peasantry. Driven by drought and famine from his native Punjab village, Gangu seeks a better life on a British-owned tea plantation. Instead, he encounters brutal exploitation, racial discrimination, and ultimately, death. The novel also provides a searing indictment of British imperialism and capitalist greed. The plantation system, though located in India, is controlled by British colonists whose primary concern is profit, not human dignity. The coolies are treated as expendable commodities, subjected to physical abuse, overwork, and racial humiliation.

Anand also explores the racial hierarchies that compound economic injustice. The white overseers and planters enjoy unchecked power, while Indian laborers are denied basic human rights. Gangu's passive endurance and ultimate sacrifice evoke the suffering of millions who were caught in the oppressive structures of colonial capitalism.

Both *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud* reflect Anand's deep concern with social inequality. His characters are not merely individuals but representatives of larger social classes. The novels examine themes such as child labor, caste and class discrimination, communalism, industrial exploitation, and the failures of colonial governance. Anand's mission as a writer was to humanize the poor and challenge the structures that perpetuate their suffering. His novels are acts of resistance, combining personal empathy with political critique. Anand does not seek to evoke mere pity but to awaken a sense of justice and solidarity among readers.

By writing about the "untouchables," laborers, and peasants, Anand fulfills his vision of literature as a transformative force. He believed that the purpose of the novel was not only to reflect life but to improve it. *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud* remain enduring works of social realism, grounded in a humanistic ethos that transcends time and place.

### Works Cited

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