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## DISCRIMINATION AND EXPLOITATION OF LABOUR IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S *COOLIE*

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### **Abstract**

*This paper discusses about a story of the sufferers in Indian society of Mulk Raj Anand's novel coolie. It describes the class distinction between the wealthy and the needy person. The upper-class people abused to lower class people, humiliated them for minor faults and sometimes without any reason. It also explains the significant condition, bitter and miserable life of Munoo, a young boy of the village Bilaspur. The novel portrays the Indian society where social interactions of accomplishment and scarcity determine the life of Munoo, key person of the story. He is like the hero of John Galsworthy, English novelist and is the universal figure who represents the discomfort and measurable life of the poor and down-trodden. There is a human tragedy in the novel caused by the scarcity, exploitation, hunger, selfishness and torture. His life as a labourer in Bombay at the British-owned White cotton mills are described in fourth chapter. Munoo is exhibited as a servant and rickshaw coolie in the employ to Mrs. Mainwaring house, in Simla. A most vivid panorama of life in India of that period can be felt during the period of job searching from his native hills to the cities. It is not the destiny who is responsible for the disaster of Munoo but it is the society in which he is brought-up. He is a victim of social interactions in his life. Coolie represents very sensitive issue in the society where child work is the worst kind of social abuse. Mulk Raj Anand focuses crisis of these innocents in a very sensitive way critically. This article focuses on discrimination and exploitation faced by labour.*

**Keywords:** Alienation, Coolie, Labour, Munoo, Panorama, Victim

### **Introduction**

*Coolie* (1936) is the second work, of Anand written immediately after first novel *Untouchable*. Munoo, the protagonist of *Coolie*, like Bakha of the previous novel, appears as resigned to accept his suffering with Slavish submission, and does not take a conscious and creative role to change his destiny which is expected from a revolutionary character in any protest novel.

The novel *Coolie* is written in modern age. Munoo is the hero of this novel. So his predicament is the predicament of modern man. If Munoo is wing the difficulties, modern man is also facing. Poor people are suppressed by rich people; this is still existing in the society. At this is the cause of the present day problems (Berry 122). *Coolie* is concerned with the consequences of British rule in India with the rigid caste system that bounded Indian society" (Pradhan 39). Coolie means unskilled laborer. Munoo is a young boy from the Kangra hills in Bilaspur who is an orphan and lives with his aunt and uncle. In the beginning of his struggle, they take him to Bombay. Another aspect of the novel is about alienated labour is in the scene where Munoo has to compete with "Swarms of Coolies" (Anand 22).

*Coolie* is an inferior story which concentrates on the circumstances of the needy person and describes the hard case of a labourer in the form of a coolie. It was written at a time when writer all over the world were turning their attention to the evils which the phenomenal rise of the nineteenth century industrial capitalism had produced. Munoo has been presented fully as a victim of capitalism

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and feudalism without showing his effort for a better life. Munoo's beginning is typical of the underprivileged class. Despite the sad memories and the ill-treatment meted out to him by his aunt and uncle, Munoo is happy and contented.

*Coolie* describes the economic exploitation of a fourteen years *Coolie* named Munoo. He lives with his aunt Guiri in a village in Kangra Hills. His uncle Dayaram is a peon in the Imperial Bank of India at Sham Nagar. Munoo's aunt used to ill-treat Munoo in the village, and now in the town of Sham Nagar, Munoo found a mistress who was even more callous than his aunt. Babu Nathoo Ram's wife, whom Munoo addressed as Bibiji, was a very demanding mistress how expected Muoo to work all the time without any rest or pause.

Munoo's only consolation in Babu Nathoo Ram's house was the words of encouragement which Bahu Nathoo Ram's younger brother, Prem Chand often spoke to him, he was general referred to as the Chota Babu Another source of consolation for Munoo was Babu Nathoo Ram's young daughter, Sheila, who liked to play with him but who had been forbidden by her mother to play with a servant of the family, one day, Munoo amuse Sheila and she felt very happy. But then she recalled her mother's warning to her with Munoo and she serious. On another day, Babu Natho Ram invited his immediate officer, an Englishman by the name of Mr-England. On this occasion Munoo, not knowing how to handle crockery, dropped a tray thus breaking some of the cups and saucers. After the guest's departure. Munoo was severely rebuked by Bibiji. The climax comes when another occasion, Munoo, has danced like a monkey to amuse Sheila, bit on her cheek playfully and has not only scolded and abused by Bibiji but mercilessly beaten by Babu Nathoo Ram, Munoo now found it impossible to continue serving this family, and so he has slipped away from the house and took shelter in rail way carriage at the local railway station (Khan 92).

Munoo lies under the bunk of a third class carriage. The train is bound for Daulatpur. Seth Prabha, the owner of a pickle factory, accompanied by Ganpat, a young partner in business, wants to drag out his luggage from under the bank but to the surprise of all it is Mumoo who is lying like to bundle and is dragged out. Prabha himself is a Hillman and recognizes Munoo's hill accent. In Daulatpur, Munoo became a servant in Prabha's factory where already there are a few other servants Prabha and his wife Parbati are very kind to the boy who therefore felt gone by the name of Tulsi. The factory has a depressing look but including fairly happy. Ganpat is a harsh and sullen kind of man who ill-treated all the servants and who is especially prejudiced against Munoo because of Pabha's liking for the boys. Ganpat's relations with the neighbors are also not friendly. One day Ganpat has a quarrel with the wife and the son of his neighbor, Sir Todar Mal, and he has got a severe beating from the son Prabha interviewed to save the situation and begged pardon of Sir Todar Mal and this wife. However, Ganpats attitude towards Sir Todar Mal and his family does not undergo any change.

Ganpat at once has guessed that the boy has stolen the mangoes from the factory where heaps and heaps of mangoes are brought daily for the making of pick and jams and he then gives Munoo a beating Prabha does not like the way Ganpat has treated Munoo on this occasion. Subsequently Ganpat, having squandered a lot of money, on a courtesan, and having failed to satisfy Prabha regarding the accounts of the firm because insolent towards Prabha and even began to abuse him though he himself is at fault. Prabha has tried his utmost to appease Ganpat, but Ganpat has gone on becoming more and more insolent and even started abusing Prabha. Eventually Ganpat has left the factory premises, telling Prab ha, that he would teach him a lesson. Ganpat then sets up a factory of his won with the little money which he has in his possession. Prabha now finds it impossible to pay the debts which the factory had incurred on account of Ganpat's waste full expenditure, and as a consequence of it he was reduced to a state of bankruptcy. He has taken on the police station by Sir Toadar Mal's son who had by now become a police sub-inspector. There Prabha has not only abused

and humiliated but cruelly beaten. Prabha has felt ill as a consequence and, after a time, has to leave Daulatpur under the advice of the doctor who said that Prabha must to the hills to recoup his health. Tulsu goes with Prabha and Prabha's wife, while Munoo has remained behind in Daulatpur. Now Minoo, is alone and jobless in Daulatpur.

Munoo now decides to go to Bomboy about which he has heard a glowing account from a fellow-coolie. With the help of the elephant-driver of a circus which is giving its performance in Daulatpur at that time. Munoo manages to travel to Bombay by the good train by which the circus itself travelled to that city Munoo is now all alone in a big city which he has never seen before. With which he has never been acquainted, and which, while offering many grand and thrilling sights, bewildered and confused him. However, he soon becomes acquainted with a factory-worker by the name of Hari whose son he, by a mere chance, saved from being killed in the heavy traffic on a road. Hari has gone to his village to bring his family and has returned to Bombay with his wife Lakshmi and his children, a son and a daughter. It is while crossing the road that Hari's son had been caught in the traffic and had then been saved by Munoo from being run over by the fast traffic Munoo has risked his own life in serving the boy. Hari is hoping to rejoin the factory where he has been working and which he had temporarily left in other to bring his wife and children from the village. Hari tells Munoo that he will try to get Munoo also a job in the factory where his wife and son might also get employment. That night Munoo sleeps on the pavement like Hari and Hari's family and like thousands of other coolies and labourers of the city.

Next morning Hari takes his family and Munoo to the Sir George white Cotton Mill where Hari has made to request for employment to an Englishman by the name of Jimmie Thomas, who is generally called the Chimata Sahils by the mill workers. Hari tells him that his wife, his son and they boy Munoo, needs jobs too, and after making some fuss, Chimata Sahib agreed to employ all four of them but on certain conditions which includes the payment of a commission to himself. Thus, Munoo starts working at the will and thought he had no prior experience of this kind or work. He does not find much difficulty in learning it because most of the work has done by the machines and Munoo had only to more a handle. However, on the first day Munoo has saved from being killed by a fellow coolie. Whose name is Ratan and who has looked like a wrestler. But for Ratan's alterness, Munoo would have been caught in a conveyor-between In course of time, Munoo becomes very intimate with Ratan who has helped him and Hari in every possible way. Ratan saves Munoo and Hari from being exploited too much by the English foreman of the factory and by the Pathan who has stood at the gate to make sure that no unauthorized persons entered the factory. However, Hari's son has got injured on the very first day while working in the spinning-shed and touching the belt of a machine about which has no knowledge at all. Hari has to help his son to the hospital, and he thus last a half-day's wages. Then slowly, Munoo's intimate relationship grows on with Hari's wife. But the pall of glom which a cruel and heartless society has inducted in him does not entirely leave him even when he has secured a job in Bombay cotton mill as revealed in the following lines: "If I am ominous, why don't I die? My death would rid the world of an unlucky person. I would like to die. It was better to be dead. Yes, better to be dead. Because this town has turned out wrong ...."(Anand 217). These are the words of a person who had been driven to utter frustration for fault of his.

As Ratan is an independent-minded man and very proud of his physical strength, he always adopts a defiant attitude towards the foreman, who begins to harbour intense resentment against him and who one day dismissed him from his job at the factory. Ratan reported the matter to the Trade Union of which he is a member. In the meantime the management of the mill has decided to curtail the mills working days in order to reduce the wage-bill of the mill and thus to bring down the expenditure in view of the decline in the mill's profits as a consequence of the keen competition the production

of cloth by the various mills, Ratan is the member of the All India Trade Union Congress, but rival Union organized by certain communists has also come into existence consequently, there are Hindu Muslim riots, Munoo takes shelter in a lonely deserted wagon. The night being over he feels empty and lonely. Having a narrow escape from beating and murder has reached Malabar hills but has knocked down by a car (Dhawan 74).

An Anglo-Indian Lady, Mrs. Main warning, is travelling by a Chevrolet Car which has accidentally knocked down Munoo (Cowasjee 78). The boy has been hurt, and has become unconscious. Mrs. Main warning has ordered the driver of the car to lift Munoo from the road and put him in the car. She is going to Simla; and she has decided to take the injured boy with her because the driver has said that the boy is a waif in whom most probably nobody is interested. When Munoo has recovered consciousness of the way, she has asked him who has told her briefly the story of his misfortunes. She then takes Munoo to Simla when he becomes her personal attendant and where, in addition to his duties in her household he also become one of the four Coolies who pulled the rickshaw by which she traveled to the various localities whenever she wanted to visit any place. Mrs. main warning certainly wanted to help Munoo in every possible way and she really showed, grate kindness to him especially because she was a loose woman who had many lovers and who now thought of Munoo as potential lover. But did not realize that, by making Munoo work as a rickshaw-puller, she was subjecting him to great strain. Munoo became very friendly with another ricksow-puller, whose name was Mohan and who had a political background. Munoo felt very happy in the service of Mrs. main warning but he himself also did not realize that he was exerting himself too much in the lady's service. "On his return Bibiji gave him two chapatis and a spoonful of lentils and vegetables. He had to eat low on his hands, being considered too low in status to be allowed to eat off the utensils. The insult stung him. He could hardly swallow his food ....." (Anand 129).

Consequence of this overexertion was that Munoo contracted tuberculosis though it was only after the disease had become fairly advanced that Munoo came to know of it. Actually, it was Mohan who made the discovery about Munoo's disease. One day Munoo became seriously ill. Mrs. Main warning summoned the doctor to examine him. This doctor was Mrs. Main warning's lover at the time; and he told her that the boy was suffering from consumption and that she must not go near him so frequently as she was doing. After a few more days, Munoo died, and that was the end of Munoo's misfortunes also. Munoo was hardly sixteen, when he died. he had died within just two years after leaving his village. "Why, why is anyone superior to another? Why are we all sinners? ....." (Anand 125).

In the second section of the novel, Munoo's experiences as a domestic servant and his thoughts on various occasions have convincingly been described. Munoo's reactions to Bibiji's ill-treatment of him, his reaction to Prem Chnad's Kindness, and his sense of humiliation on being beaten severely by Babu Nathoo Ram are among the high-lights of psychological analysis here. Any young boy of Munoo's age would feel as Munoo does on these occasions though only a self-respecting boy would feel so miserable as to run away from his household. But, of course, there is plenty of outward action in this section and a lot of conversation too. Bibiji's use of abusive words for Munoo deserves special mention here. Mr. W.P. England's visit to Babu Nathoo Ram's house and what happens on this occasion add greatly to the interest of the story as does Munoo's fight with two other servants.

In the third section that follows, Munoo is living in Daulatpur as protegee of Prabha and Parbati and also as an employee in the pickle and jam factory which is owned jointly by Prabha and Ganpat. This section contains several events which include Ganpat's ill-treatment of Munoo and the other servants, Ganpat's quarrel with Sir Today Mal's family, the beating which Ganpat gets from Ram

Nath (the son of Sir Todar mal), Ganpat's treachery towards Prabha and Prabhs's bankruptcy, and Prabhs's departure from Daulatpur with his wife and the servant Tulsi.

In the next section Munoo's life in Bombay has been described; and the same techniques have been employed here too. The external event includes Munoo's saving the life of a child, his getting work in a cotton mill, his forming friendships with Hari and Ratan, his visit to prostitute's quarters in the red light area of the city, the turmoil at the cotton mill and the communal rioting which follows, and so on. In the final section of the novel, too, we have the same narrative devices. In Simla, Munoo begins to live as a portage, and also as a domestic servant, of an Anglo-Indian woman, Mrs. Main warning. But here he has also to work as a rickshaw-puller.

Coolie where Anand shows himself to be one of the first of Indian minters to look on the savagely neglected, despised and maltreated Indian labourer with an angry lack of resignation. The novel combines an acid origination at the condition of the poor with a Dickensian vivacity in physical resignation and a delicate sense of the psychology of Munoo, the Irait hero, in particular of the rhythms of his growth from child to adolescent. His story resembles with "Charter Dicken's Oliver twist" (Walsh 132).

## Conclusion

Coolie regarded as a social tragedy, presents a tragic character who inspires pity but fails to give a direction to the suffering class people who need an awareness and consciousness regarding the reasons of their perpetual suffering and alienation. Munoo does not give any message to such people who want to know what they can do to change the causes of their distress and alienation. Though Anand must have been very much aware of the basic teaching of Marx that the "philosophers have only interpreted to world: the point is to change it", he had refrained himself using an ideological framework directly. It is this factor which is mainly responsible for Munoo's long suffering character throughout the novel. As analyzed already, Munoo plays no creative and conscious role for the liberation of himself and others like him, His innocence and passivity have become complementary features in the novel. The most puzzling aspect of the novel is that in spite of having realized his social position, Munoo does not strive to get rid of the exploitative situation and fails to inspire the working class people through his spirit less role. Munoo's picture as an enduring character acting as a pawn in the hand of fate is relay a big question which makes us to feel that Anand was more overwhelmed by Gandhian and Nehruvian out look that that of the Marxist approach when he wrote his novel.

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