

Coolie: A Novel on class conflict in capitalist Indian Society

Sabitra Bashyal

Teaching Asst. Department of English
Butwal Multiple Campus
Email: sabitrabashyal@gmail.com

Abstract : This paper is trying to focus on the issue of class conflict in capitalist Indian society in different levels. In the capitalist society like that of India the people of working-class were mercilessly exploited. Munoo's story begins in the village where he had been living with his family, there the rich but greedy landlord of village had seized the small piece of land of Munoo's father and his father died of broken heart. In Sham Nagar Munoo was exploited by Nathoo Ram who belonged in dominant class. In Daulatpur the plight of coolies on the street and servant's condition of Prabha's factory show the gap between haves and have not. The condition of coolies in Bombay, mill-workers was miserable. Coolies, their wives and children had to sleep on the pavement of the city because they had no living accommodations. The workers were exploited mercilessly in Sir Geroge White's cotton-mill, they had to live in most unhygienic place. These workers were ill-paid, ill-housed and treated as objects. The capitalists would like to maintain their profits and continue their exploitation to workers. Similarly, Munoo was exploited in Simila by Mrs. Mainwaring sexually and physically. It clears that the exploitation and discrimination of working-class people by capitalists and class struggle between two classes: haves and have not. The British people were all Englishman occupy top position in India. The upper-class Indian have the link between class of Englishman and lower-class Indian. The upper-class people abused to lower class people, humiliated them for minor faults and sometimes without any reason. The working-class people have lost their sense of self-respect and ready to any length to win favor of British officer especially the upper-class Indian were involved in such practice.

Key Words : Capitalism, class conflict, degradation, exploitation.

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* is a novel written in response to colonialism and exploitation. The British colonizers ruled over the India for more than two hundred years and the Indian people fell prey to the exploitation, degradation and inhumanity brought over by the colonial rule. British colonizers lunched industries in India which becomes another tool for them to exploit the Indian working-

class people. European owners of the big industries were the forces of exploitation for poor people. Those European capitalists were not interested to uplift the condition of poor Indian people. The Indian society was beset with rank of poverty, religious problem, social unset. A group of lower-working class people were dying of hunger, starvation and poverty. Capitalism and colonialism taught Indian upper-class people how to exploit each other.

In novel *Coolie*, class conflicts are explicitly manifested in different levels. In the capitalist society the working-class people like Manuoo, Daya Ram, Parbha, Tulsi, Hari, Ratan were mercilessly exploited and oppressed. There was class conflict even in rural society. The rich landlord of the village had seized the small piece of land which Munoo's father Jay Singh owned. The writer mentions the heart broken death of Munoo's father as, "He knew how his father had died a slow death of bitterness and disappointment and left his mother a penniless beggar to support a young brother –in-law and child in arms." (3) After the death of his father mother also died. He lived with his uncle and aunt. His uncle and aunt wanted to send him city Sham Nagar to work and earn money. He was not ready to leave village but he had no choice in the matter, because the decision had already taken by his uncle and aunt. In Sam Nagar at house of Nathoo Ram, Manoo was frequently exploited and dominated by his family members. Nathoo Ram was sub-accountant in the imperial bank. Manoo worked there as house servant. Manuoo was humiliated and beaten by Nathoo Ram's wife. He was not allowed to sit with other family member in hall. He was paid less and treated as an object. Nathoo Ram's wife ordered him as, "your place is here in kitchen! you must not enter the sport of Chota Babu and children, you must get on quickly work in the house." (23) Munoo spent a most uncomfortable night in a corner of the kitchen, the mosquitoes had buzzed in his ears and bitten him. Life for Munoo in Nathoo Ram's house becoming a kind of routine of domestic slavery. So, Munoo stood while Bibiji continued abusing him. She further shouting to Munuoo as, "There is no time to lose since you are being paid good wage, more money than you ever saw in your whole life in village, more money in fact than your mother or father ever saw, it would be worth while for you to do a little work for it." (23) In reality they gave him food hardly enough to keep his body and soul stronger. Even his humble wages of three rupees per month was not paid him.

Once Munoo joined Shila Nathoo Ram's daughter and her friends in their play when Bibiji was not at home. Munuoo bit Shila's cheek playfully and she cried in pain and her friends informed to Bibiji, she became furious with Munuoo and was not ready to listen any words by Munuoo. Later he was mercilessly beaten by Nathoo Ram. Unable to tolerate their torture anymore, Munoo slipped away from the house and went to Daulatpur. In Daulatpur he worked in jam factory but there also he got serious problems. Parbha Dayal was unable to repay loan taken from Sir Todar Mal and he had to leave his factory and went his village. Munoo remained jobless in Daulatpur and faced many problems. Somehow, he managed to go to Bombay. In Bombay Munoo had to work long time most unhygienic place in very poor wage.

There were large number of Indian and British people in relationship while working in different fields. Similarly, Sir George White's cotton mill was the symbol of western exploitation through the use of machinery superior technological skill. The workers in these factories were helpless, hopeless and desperate. They suffered from exploitation, poverty, disease, dehumanization and humiliation. Among workers Ratan was the only one worker to challenge the mistreatment and exploitation so he was dismissed from his job. Then Ratan reported the matter to the Trade Union of which he was member. Later, Sauda Muzaffar and Jackson members of The Red Flag Union were also presented. Both unions had decided to cooperate with each other on the occasion in the interest of the workers. In this situation member of Red Flag delivered the speech as, "There are only two kinds of people in the world; the rich and the poor, and between the two there

is no connection. The rich and powerful are honored and admired by the whole world and by themselves. You, poor and the humble, the meek and the gentle are swindled out of your rights, and you are respected by no one. Stand up, then, stand up for your rights, you rootless wretches. Stand up for justice.” (233) The urges the workers to demand their right from the management and advise them strongly to go on strike. Meanwhile, the management of the mill spreads a false rumor to bring about a division among the workers, created rumor that Hindu child had been kidnapped by Muhammadans in the city. This rumor created a great communal disturbance which diverted the attention of the workers from the strike to the religion fraction among themselves. The number of people in the huge gathering are killed and many wounded, but somehow Munoo was able to escape of being killed.

The exploitation of industrialist and over work not only made the workers life miserable but also dragged them towards corruption and moral degradation as well. So, whenever the workers got day off, they drank alcohol and went red light districts to have some fun and pleasure. Munoo was not victim of poverty also a victim of sexual exploitation by Mrs. Mainwaring. He came in contact with Indo-British woman when her car knocked him down and he was taken to Simala, where her home was, attracted towards the boy of sixteen and used him sexually. He was made her rickshaw puller, over worked in home he died in his young age.

Class conflict and Indian society

This paper concerns with the issue of class conflict between upper class capitalist colonizers, upper class Indian people and lower- class people. In Daulatpur the plight of coolies on the street shows the gap between haves and have not. In Daulatpur Munoo became a servant in Parbha's factory where already many workers had been working. But there Parbha also was in problems because he did not have sufficient money to run factory, he had taken loan from his neighbor Sir Todar Mal. So, he always exploited and humiliated to Parbha. Although Parbha was kind person but his business partner Ganpat was harsh and sullen kind of man who ill-treated all the servants. Most of the rich and prosperous people of Indian were exploiting to lower- working class people by taking some more power strength and power from the colonizers who were rich. Telly in his essay *Coercion, Capital and European State* says, “Capitalists then are people who specialize in the accumulation, purchase and sale of capital. They occupy the realm of exploitation, where the relations of the production and exchange themselves yield surpluses the capitalist have often existed in the absence of capitalism, the system in which wage- workers produce goods by means of materials owned by capitalist.” (256) With the introduction of industrialization in India many factories were established. A large number of labors got chances to sell their labor and earn wages. But with the passage of time labors did not earn that much wages which they expected to earn. The factory owners exploited and sucked their blood. A group of lower- working class people are dying of hunger but capitalists are simply disinterested. When Munoo's father's land was seized by the rich but greedy landlord he died of broken heart. This incident shows that there was class-conflict even in rural society. In Sham Nagar at the house of Nathoo Ram, Mnuoo was treated very badly. The plight of coolies in Bombay was also very miserable. The condition of workers in Bombay were very critical. They have no homes, stayed very unhygienic and suffocative place.

Their accommodations were on roadside and which street was full of urine and dung. The cotton mill owner Sir George White exploited his workers mercilessly. This situation was created there because of the structural cause or system of capitalist exploitation.

Sociologist Marx states, “The bourgeoisie has centralized means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands.” (528) When the colonial government established the large number of factories, where huge numbers of Indian workers were employed. Labors in India were cheap, they were ready to do any work even if they were paid less than they deserved. They were paid less wages and this labor exploitation is the best gift for capitalist. Labors were always in difficulty to maintain their hand to mouth. They were in below poverty line. Marx further says, “The correlative of this is the oppression and exploitation of the working classes. In proportion as bourgeoisie i.e., capital is developed, in the same proportion is proletariat, the modern working class developed; a class labors, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labors increases capital.” (528) Poverty terror, urban ugliness, exploitation, starvation lawlessness, malnutrition is some of the main problems of capitalism. The capitalist only centralized on production resources of city. They never uplift the economic situation of working-class people. Capitalist were more preoccupied with their personal cares and concerns. Beside this they were far more self-centered.

There was one flattering and sycophantic class of people in India who used to terrorize and exploit to other innocent, ignorant lower class working people. Baboo Nathoo Ram arranged the tea party of Mr. England and irritates him by his embarrassing flattery and cringing. Similarly, Rai Bahadur, Sir Todar Mal, a retired public persecutor exhibits the same embarrassing flattery in dealing with Dr. Edward. But these Indians were merely degraded in service of English men. The lower-class Indian were exploited both by the Englishmen and also upper-class Indian. Munoo’s father was exploited by rich landlord at village, Munoo was exploited and dehumanized in the house of Nathoo Ram. In Daulatpur coolies like Tulsi, Maharaj, and Bonge, were exploited and dominated by Ganpat. In Bombay Munoo and other workers Hari, Ratan and Laxmi were exploited by industrialists Jimme Thomas and Sir George White. So, Marx claims, “The history of class conflict from the ancient times between slaves and freeman, patricians and plebeians, lords and serfs. The major class conflict in modern time is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat of industrial working class.” (530) Ratan the only one person who challenged the mistreatment and exploitation by factory owners. But soon he was dismissed from his job. He described the owners of the mill as robbers, thieves and said that capitalist are blood sucker. Marxism believes, “The exploitation of social class by another is seen especially in modern industrial capitalism particularly in its unrestricted nineteenth century form. The result of this exploitation is alienation, which is the state which comes about when the worker is de-skilled and made to perform fragmented, repetitive tasks in a sequence of whose nature and purpose her of she no overall grasp.” (151) Workers were in Sir George White’s cotton mill as spinners of cotton as the weavers of thread; as sweepers of dust and dirt as the labors, and as the coolies. Sometimes even labors visited to the red-light district to have some enjoyment and recreation. The over work in the factory has made their life hellish. The extreme exploitation by industrialists not only makes the worker’s life miserable but also drags them towards corruption and moral degradation.

William Outhwaite in his book *Social Theory* mentions the Mark’s view from *The*

Communist Manifesto as, “The conflict of interests is obscured by what they called “ideology” in this case, in particular, the ideology of a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work. Workers who are paid the ‘rate for the job’ don’t realize they’re being exploited.” (24) In the industry workers suffer from all kinds of miseries but the owners of factory always turn a deaf ear to their demands. Capitalists do not show any concern to the demands and rights of the workers. In Simla Munoo became servant of rich Indo-British woman Mrs. Mainwaring, where he was the victim of sexual exploitation by her. So poor Indian working-class people were even not free from the sexual exploitation.

Conclusion

Long time Indian society was captured by British government these British capitalists were disinterested in the wretched plight of Indian people. Terrible wretchedness in the plight of working class poor Indian people surrounded the country. But no initiative was taken against those problems. Between masters and servants there was constant conflict. Masters exploited slaves beyond any mercy. There was conflict between landlords and peasants. There was conflict between poverty and prosperity. Poor workers were exploited to the extent of shocking cruelty. They were paid less so their life was always in lackless. The Indian workers were subjected to follow the order of the colonial capitalists. When poor worker Ratan demanded for rights of workers, the management of factory dismissed him from job. Not only this much the management of mill spreads a false rumor to bring about division among the workers. The rumor was many Hindu kids were kidnapped by the Muhammadans workers. So, there was murderous conflict between Hindu and Muslim. This Hindu and Muslim riot engineered by the capitalists. Mrs. Mainwaring made Munoo her home servant and rickshaw puller. But poor Munoo sexually also exploited by her in his immature age. In capitalist society poor working-class people were not given any chance to speak, their voice was suppressed. Munoo and others like him had no any option to have better life. They were helpless, hopeless in the face of colonial capitalist machinery of oppression and injustice.

Works Cited

Ananda, Mulk Raj. *Coolie*, Penguin Books Ltd, 1945.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory; An Introduction of Literary and Cultural Theory*, 3rd ed. Manchester University Press, 2010.

Habib, M.A.R. *A History of Literary Criticism; from Plato to Present*, Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Outhwaite, William. *Social Theory*, People Book Ltd. 2015.

Tilly, Charley. “Coercion, Capital and European States.” *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, Edited by Craig Calhoun, Joseph Gerteis, James Moody, Steven Pfaff, and Indramohan Vivek 3rd ed. Wiley Blackwell, 2012.