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## THE TREATMENT OF EXPLOITATION AND POVERTY IN *COOLIE*

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**Abstract:** Mulk Raj Anand was arguably the greatest exponent of Indian writing in English, whose literary output was infused with a political commitment that conveyed the lives of India's poor in a realistic and sympathetic manner. The novels of Mulk Raj Anand touch the surface of postcolonial methodology to evolve new perspective for giving the term "other", "hybridity" and "suppressed class". He was a pre- and Post-Colonial writer who projected the true image of India and tried to establish its cultural identity by highlighting the prevailing inequality.

**Keywords:** Post-colonialism, Exploitation, Munoo, Coolie.

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**Introduction:** Indo-Anglican novels were mainly based on history or romance but Anand's purpose in writing *Coolie* has been to focus attention on the suffering misery and wretchedness of the poor and the underdogs of the society caused by the exploitations of the capitalists, the feudal lords or by the impact of industry on the traditions and agricultural ways of life and poverty. Through this novel, Anand condemned some of these social, political, ethical and moral practices which result in the oppression of the poor and the downtrodden. He not only interpreted the soul of India, the real India of the villages to the West but also convincingly made known to the colonial rulers the debilitating effects of their presence in India. *Coolie* is an attempt to present a post-colonial analysis of the tragedy of Munoo.

The major features of post-colonial literature are the concern with place and displacement, poverty, exploitations, cruelty, greed, selfishness, caste suppression, alienation of vision, crisis of self-image, dislocation resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation or 'voluntary' removal as indentured labour, conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture etc. These features make *Coolie* a post-colonial novel.

*Novel* portrays the class distinction between the rich and the poor and depicts the sad and pathetic life of Munoo, a young boy of village Bilaspur from the Kangra Hills of Himachal Pradesh. *Coolie* is a human tragedy mainly caused by poverty and exploitation. It is not fate or Almighty who is responsible for the tragedy of Munoo, the hero of the novel, but the society in which he is brought up. He is a victim of social forces in his life like the tragic heroes of the great novelist Galsworthy. Munoo, the hero of the novel is a universal figure who represents the miseries of the poor and the down-trodden. Social forces of exploitation and poverty determine the life of Munoo in the novel.

The novel represents the Indian society. It gives a glimpse of country life, town life, the life in slums in

an industrial city as well as on a hill place Shimla. The story begins in a hilly place, develops in Sham Nagar and Daulatpur, gets momentum in Bombay, and then finally ends in Shimla. David Cecil observes: "A struggle between men on the one hand and on the other, the omnipotent and indifferent fate is the interpretation of human scene". *Coolie* is a true manifestation of misery of the poor in the society. The novelist wants to talk of the real world of the lowest men in society. His approach to the social problem is quite realistic. He is a social realist and uses his insight to be conditioned by the time, place and circumstances of the age.

Like his first novel *Untouchable* (1935), his second, best powerful novel *Coolie* (1936) describes the economic exploitation of a fourteen years old coolie named Munoo. Anand is a sworn enemy to all kinds of exploitation, be that economic, social or political. According to him first and strongest type of exploitation is economic. Economic order that existed in the pre-independence India and whose remnants are found even now to some extent, allowed untold wealth and power to be concentrated into a few hands. The central theme of the novel is the tragic denial to a simple, landless peasant of the fundamental right to happiness. One can see that, these powerful capitalists and zamindars could dictate very harsh and humiliating terms to the many poor. The rich and the powerful had full liberty to exploit the poor and to grind them mercilessly under the wheels of economic monopolies.

Munoo is ignorant of urban ways of life. He relieves himself in the drain outside the kitchen. Bibiji sees Munoo reviewing himself and she raises a hue and cry against him by saying: " Vay shameless, shameless, vulgar stupid hill boy! May the vessel of your life never float in the sea of existence! May you die! What have you done? " ( 28). The passage clearly shows the cruelty of Bibji to Munoo. The breaking of China on the occasion of the visit of Mr. W.P. England to Babu's house brings disgrace to Munoo. He sobs and cries. He complains of his ill-treatment

to his uncle but his uncle instead of giving the words of consolation, warns him not to continue his mischievous tricks. One day seeing the Babu's daughter Sheela and her friends playing, Munoo joins them and tries to make them happy by performing a monkey dance. Sheela tries to drag him and Munoo unconsciously bites her on the cheek. Babu slapped Munoo on the cheek with his thin bony hand and kicked him with his shiny black boots.

The coolies were made to carry excessively heavy loads, they were abused and beaten and turned out of jobs at the whims of the traders. Munoo sleeps on the boards of a closed shop and early in the morning he goes to the railway station to work there as a coolie. The policeman chases him away for he has no licence and cannot work there. Munoo escapes in the hope of a better life in Bombay. He had heard that it was a city where dreams were fulfilled. Munoo ran away in terror till he reaches the Mal Road, bordered with English shops and Bungalows on both sides. It is an entirely different world for Munoo to realise. The wealth and elegance of the English part of Daulatpur is thus used by the novelist to heighten by contrast the poverty and degradation of the teeming millions of India. He walks along the road fascinated.

The story of their exploitation does not end here. The Bombay episode is the most important in the tragic drama of exploitation practiced in industries in England. The industrial exploitation by the British, illustrated with special reference to the workers in Sir George White Cotton Mill seems to be a politico-economic extension on a much wider scale, of the economic exploitation of the working classes by the ruling classes in England.

Social forces of exploitation and poverty determine the life of Munoo in the novel. It is a powerful indictment of modern capitalistic society and its tragic exploitation of the poor. Industrialism and capitalism are not the only forces which exploit Munoo's life. The entire novel is a story of Munoo being knocked from one end to another by his tragic fate like a shuttle cock. The novel is a sad commentary upon the status of Indian society where man is not judged as man but is judged on the basis of class. The chief concern of the Cotton Mill is profit. Munoo is also exploited by Mrs. Mainwaring in whose service he dies. It is Munoo's death relieves him of the social cruelty and exploitation and poverty.

*Coolie* has been interpreted by critics in different ways. It exposes poverty and exploitation. It is a typical novel of the oppressive trend in naturalism and contemporary national ideas. In his depiction of the harsh life of the workers Anand unmistakably feels strongly and sympathetically for this class. Besides this display of affiliations, his introduction of

the communal riots is meant to underscore the communication that capitalists and British imperialists both use communal differences to divide and rule. The exploitation of the underprivileged is presented in depth in the novel and picture is drawn with vividness. Actually the industrial city with unhygienic chawls, with its disputes between the capitalists and the labourers of the textile mill, and with its loud voiced trade union leaders, is realistically described.

He dies of exploitation, poverty and hunger. If the poor are treated humanely, most of the problems related to them can be solved easily. Humanism is the only solution to these problems. Displacement, colonialism, capitalism, industrial exploitation and human tyranny had taken its toll on Munoo. Anand ends the novel in these words: "Munoo felt the warm blood in his veins like a tide reach out to distances to which it had never gone before. But in the early hours of one unreal white night he passed away the tide of his life having reached back to the deeps".

Actually the story of Munoo is quite essentially the story of every exploited individual of his life are intended to show the pitilessness that lies embedded in the lives of millions of people who are condemned to lead a life of an ending saga of social depredation. Anand believes that poverty by itself is a cruelty perpetuated by the "nouveau riche". Munoo becomes the victim of exploitation and people like Daya Ram, Ganpat, Chimta Sahib and Mrs. Mainwaring exploit him, through occasionally they try moderation, if not total antipathy towards the 'have-not's'.

Munoo is a victim of poverty, exploitation, man's greed and selfishness. Just at the beginning of the novel we find that Munoo is excited about the life in cities merely because he does not know the wicked ways of the world. Poverty and exploitation are the two major factors which bring sufferings in the lives of the poor in the society.

*Coolie* has been interpreted by critics in different ways. It is a typical novel of the oppressive trend in naturalism and the contemporary national ideas. It is epical and colourful. It is a true picture of exploitation of the poor and emerges as a powerful tragedy.

Anand dramatized in *Coolie* the evils of poverty, exploitation and cruelty that crush a bud of youth before it can bloom. The novel is a sincere protest against the emergence of a new world of money and exploitation and class distinction. It shows how coolies like Munoo are completely beaten down by the curse of money power in the Iron age. As in the case of Munoo, the prevailing social order and the new values created by the modern civilization sap the natural warm-heartedness and the zest for life of an individual and lead to his tragic waste and suffering.

Munoo is not able to redeem himself because he is made to think that people like him are born to suffer. He expresses himself: "we belong to suffering! We belong to suffering".

Anand universalized the individual tragedy of Munoo. He presents as Munoo as victim of irrational system and the inhuman cruelties of society. What happens to this obscure hill boy is by no means an isolated example of human suffering and exploitation. Munoo's destiny symbolizes the tragic situation of the poor and underprivileged who in themselves are not responsible for their suffering, but who are, all the same, victims of ruthless exploitation.

The novel is remarkable for its humanism, for its indictment against society as a whole- a society that breeds such prejudices and cruelty, for its realism and narration. Thus Anand gives a universal touch to his basic theme. Munoo is sacrifice to the remorseless

cruelty and exploitation of industrial colonial society. With his irrepressible curiosity and his zest for life he is among the more juvenile characters- Mark Twain's Huck Finn and Dickens' David Copperfield.

We see simple souls pitted against the soulless poverty of industrialisation or labour or priestly exploitation or individual selfishness. The novelist show how Munoo makes struggle for a better life, but poverty poses obstacles in his progress in life. Poverty is an evil itself and Munoo is victim of this evil of poverty. Poverty is the root cause of exploitation. Poverty, exploitation and misery go hand in hand in society. Munoo is a universal figure and only a discarded victim of our society. The novel is the reflection of the people of the real world. The theme of the novel is purely the realistic picture of Indian society or miserable condition of poor people.

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