



Kindness in the Novel of Anand's Coolie: A Study

¹Simran Chaturvedi

¹Research Scholar, Department of English Literature, Sunrise University Alwar, Rajasthan

²Dr. Nempal Singh

²Associate Professor, Department of English Literature, Sunrise University Alwar, Rajasthan

Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* is a powerful social novel that exposes the harsh realities of poverty, exploitation, and class inequality in colonial India through the tragic life of Munoo, an orphaned boy. The study explores how moments of kindness—though rare—shine amid the cruelty and oppression surrounding Munoo's existence. Characters like Chhota Babu, Prabha Dayal, and Dauda embody the moral and emotional compassion that Anand presents as humanity's last refuge against dehumanization. The paper highlights Anand's deep humanism and his call for empathy as a form of social reform.

Keywords: Mulk Raj Anand, *Coolie*, kindness, exploitation, poverty, class conflict, humanism, compassion, social realism.

Mulk Raj Anand is one of those great novelists with global recognition whose life long efforts have been to probe deep into the soul of men reduced to animals by the inhuman conditions of the society. He uses his telescopic vision as a means of alleviating the sufferings of fellow human beings and presents truths of life in such a way as sincerity is not affected at all. In his view a writer should be a seismograph to observe life and discover in it the essence of human existence. To quote his words., "The novel should interpret the truth of life, from felt experience not from books." Through his novels he has been trying to awaken our sympathy for the poor and underdogs of society which in turn can urge us to take part in the drama of revolt leading to social reform. In his novels we find him cry against the injustice done to the poor and the down trodden. The novel '*Coolie*' is an artistic work portraying very effectively and realistically the gap between the haves and the have-nots, the exploiters and the exploited, the rulers and the ruled.

The action of the novel '*coolie*' takes place in the preindependent India and as such it includes characters both Indian and British. In the opening scene of the novel Munoo, an orphan boy of fourteen years of age is being ill- treated by his Uncle Daya Ram and aunt Gujri in his native village of Bilaspur. His uncle finds him to be old enough to earn his living and so he is employed as a domestic servant by Babu Nathoo Ram, a Sub-Accountant in the Imperial Bank in the town of Sham Nagar where Munoo's uncle works as a peon. He is employed at rupees five per month with the understanding that the amount should be paid to his uncle not to him. Here Munoo is very badly treated by Babu's wife, Bibiji who is



constantly scolding and even abusing him. Here Munoo feels very miserable and his only comfort is in the human treatment he gets from the accountant's brother whom he calls Chota babu. One day, seeing the Babu's daughter Sheila and her friends playing he joins them out of childish instinct and unconsciously bites on her cheek. This leads to the culmination of his misery in that house. Babu Nathoo Ram kicks and beats him savagely. Unable to bear the ill-treatment Munoo escapes out of Babu's house, reaches the railway station and sleeps in the floor of a train, discovered by Seth Prabhu Dayal, an owner of a pickle factory and he takes him to his place, Daulatpur.

In Daulatpur, though Munoo is very kindly treated by Prabha and his wife, he is very badly treated by Ganpat who, on one occasion, gives him a severe beating like his first master Babu Nathoo Ram. Unfortunately for Munoo, his benefactor Prabha is deceived by his partner and his business breaks and they leave Daulatpur. Munoo finds himself all alone in the world. He becomes a coolie in the Grain Market of Daulatpur and a porter at the station. One day he meets an elephant trainer of circus who helps him to go to Bombay. But he cautions him not to expect too much from Bombay. He says:

"The bigger a city is, the more cruel it is to the sons of Adom. the elephant driver said crawling under the buffers of the train. You have to pay even for breath you breath." In Bombay, it is the same story. Munoo feels surprised to see "a coolie lay huddled, pillowing his head on his arm, shrinking into himself as if he were afraid to occupy too much place". He is worried to think where he will sleeps at. Luckily he meets Hari and his wife going in search of a job in Sir George White Cotton Mill with their two children. Hari requests Jimmie Thomas who is employer's agent to engage workmen as if he were a beggar asking for alms. Jimmie Thomas gives them employment not because of any sympathy but because he expects to get his commission and also to charge interest on the loan which he offers to Hari. This state of affairs shows how the poor and under privileged are exploited. It is not only the head foreman of the mill who exploits the needy workers but also the Pathan gate-keeper. There is also a shopkeeper who sells the basic needs of life to those poor workers on credit and charges high rates of interest which further adds to misery. The wretched living conditions of the workers aggravate their misery. Munoo, Hari and his family are given a hut whose "Mud floor was at level lower than the pathway outside, overgrown with grass which was nourished by the inflow of rain-water. The cottage boasted not a window or a chimney to let in the air and light and to eject the smoke." They are forced to live in such insanitary and unhygienic conditions where even animals can not live.

Munoo, Hari and other coolies continue to work in the Cotton Mill suffering patiently all the exploitations of their employer. But the dirty living conditions, regular cuttings from the low-pay given to them on one pretext or another and the dismissal of Ratan force the Trade Union leaders to go on strike. Here Munoo is very much impressed by Dauda's speech, the communist leader. He says:

"There are only two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor and between the two there is no connection."

This is what Munoo had realized when he was working as a domestic servant in Babu



Nathu Ram's house.

The contrast between the rich and the poor is further emphasized when Munoo goes to Simla. He finds only two kinds of people: the Sahib Logs and the coolies. In Simla, Munoo develops tuberculosis on account of excessive physical labour and "in the early hours of one unreal, white night he passed away." In Simla, Munoo is not deliberately exploited as had been the case, but he is certainly subjected to excessive hard work by Mrs. Manwaring who does not feel the disastrous result of this toil upon Munoo's death. Munoo dies a premature death caused by poverty and hard labour. As Saros Cowasjee observes: "Munoo is beaten from pillar to post as millions are beaten even today."

The novel coolie gives a faithful picture of the exploitation and misery of the underprivileged and the novelist's dissatisfaction with a society whose utilitarian concern unscrupulously massacres social morality. Anand's anger is at its height when he deals with Munoo's experiences in Daulatpur and Bombay respectively. Whatever happens with the employees in the pickle factory at Daulatpur and in Sir Geroge White's Cotton Mills clearly indicates that the bullocks that plough the field or pull the cart, the elephants that lift huge logs of wood in the forest, the asses that carry large bales of clothes of the washer man, and even the machine that works for hours in a factory get rest but not the labourers who toil hard and sweat for a mere subsistence wage. They bow before employers like Chimta Sahib to be rewarded with abuses, threats, kicks and thrashes and accept all that as a part of their lives. The communal riots that occur during the strike clearly show the policy of 'divide and exploit' in the name of religion.

Only the last phase of his life in Simla provides him opportunity to regain some of his identity before he coughs his lungs out pulling rickshaw for his mistress.

The life history of Munoo is the life history of starving millions of India's poor not only in the thirties of the twentieth century but also of the twenty first century. They are beaten from pillar to post, are over worked and insulted and are an object of exploitation in one way or another. Anand hits hard at the inhumanity of human beings against poor and down-trodden. His lashing tongue spares nobody when he exposes the cruelty done to poor of the society at the hands of the rich and the powerful, the magnificent and the glorious whose prosperity is built on robbery and theft. He seems to be protesting against the emergence of a new-world of money, a distinction of class and status, and man's haunting loneliness that prepare a chain of struggle and constant suffering.

The novel 'Coolie' seems to be highlighting the fact that class system is much more cruel and a greater evil to humanity than caste system or anything else in the world. It segregates human beings into two making the rich, richer and the poor, poorer. The rich low-caste may be better placed in society than the poor high-caste. They do not get sympathy and consolation from any corner and suffer perpetually. In this inhuman world a poor man's flesh and blood is treated as cheaper than bread. The power of money corrupts a man so much that he dares purchase a human being and totally subjugates him. In the novel we come across the people who have plenty of food but no appetite; the rich who are restless in their Dunlop beds



as well as the wretched ones like Monoo. Ratan. Hari and Laxmi who enjoy peaceful sleep on the bed of stone slab and pillow of brick but do not have sufficient food and move restlessly from one place to another.

- Throughout the novel the novelist has focussed his attention on the suffering, misery and wretchedness of the poor and the underdogs of the society caused by the exploitation of the capitalists, or by the impact of industry on the traditional and agricultural way of life. He appears as a crusader against injustice of every type. He vehemently exposes the hard heartedness, the greed, the hypocrisy, the arrogance, the selfishness and the meanness of all those agents of cruelty and exploitation. Munoo is not their only victim. Ratan, Hari, Laxmi, and numerous others are shown in the grip of these exploiters struggling patiently for their survival. The incantation of Laxmi, “We belong to suffering! We belong to suffering!” is the incantation of millions of coolies who struggle for existence but their fate would be the same as that of Munoo.

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