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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### INHUMANITY OF MAN TOWARDS MAN WHOSE UNSETTLED EXISTENCE AS NOTHING BUT PATHETIC HUMAN PREDICAMENT AS PICTURED IN M.R. ANAND'S *COOLIE*: AN APPRAISAL

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper attempts not only to project Indo-Anglian literature as a mature and respectable genre of what is called 'Commonwealth Literature' with its inevitable stamp of Indianness but also to comment on the commendable contribution of the novelists like R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, M.R.Anand, Kamala Markandaya to Indo-Anglian Fiction with a focus on the special contribution of Mulk Raj Anand introducing the new wave of idealism and humanism in Indo-Anglian fiction. It neatly examines the inhuman attitude of man towards man whose unsettled existence is nothing but pathetic human predicament which is clearly reflected in *Coolie*.

#### INTRODUCTION

Indo-Anglian literature is no longer a literature of the outhouse; it is now a mature and respectable genre of what is known as Common-wealth literature with its inevitable stamp of Indianness. During the last five decades, it has attracted a great deal of critical attention both from Indian and foreign critics. Novelists like R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandaya, and Anita Desai have made significant contribution to Indo-Anglian fiction. No doubt, Mulk Raj Anand is a pioneer novelist of Indo-Anglian literature. It was he, who, undoubtedly, introduced the new wave of realism in Indo-Anglian fiction with his novels like *Untouchable* and *Coolie*. "These two books," says Sajjad Zaheer, "remain the first among the best in this new people's trend in Indian literature. Mulk Raj Anand, the novelist, short story writer, essayist, art-critic, and the pioneer in launching modern Indian literature on this new road, was born on December 12, 1905 in a Hindu Kshatriya family in Peshawar. As his father, a traditional Coppersmith had to leave his ancestral profession so as to work as a regimental Head Clerk in the British Indian Army. As his father's regiment was transferred from place to place, Anand had to move with him, thereby acquiring new experiences both about Indian and European society. As such, he had known and seen the numerous facets of the rural life of the Punjab and the North West Frontier Provinces of those days.

He had also known and seen not only the grim and sorrowful spectacle of the villagers and the bottom dogs groaning under the yoke of poverty, hunger and exploitation but also seen the humbugs and hypocrites – priests, money lenders, caste-Hindus and officers who took devilish pleasures in sucking the life blood of the underdogs. All his experiences and observations of childhood left an indelible impression on his sensitive child mind and aroused his inborn sympathy for the poor and exploited, the froth and scum of society. His early human sympathies and his talent for minute observation of changing social pattern and life values matured with the advancement of age, and it deeply influenced his making as a novelist. All his characters, both the exploited and the exploiters, are drawn from men and women he saw around him. Commenting on early influences on his characterization, Anand says:

"All these heroes as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflections of real people, I had known during my childhood and youth" (Preface to *Two Leaves and A Bud* 2). The glaring disparities between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots made Anand think about the amelioration of the underdogs and hence he became a champion and spokesman for the cause of the poor and the exploited through his writings in which he out and out led a crusade against all social and dehumanising evils corroding the human world. Anand's close association with the poor and the rural segments of society enabled him to catch the beauty and raciness of the simple and unsophisticated language of poor and illiterate Indians. In order to impart a typical local flavor to English, he did his best to transliterate the native idioms and proverbs into English. Thus, he pioneered the nativization

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technique in Indian English novel. As the first Indo-Anglian novelist to depict the tragic plight of the underdogs of Indian society, Anand writes realistically in his fiction about the doomed lives of the downtrodden oppressed and discussed who are all agonised victims of capitalist exploitation, poverty and inhuman cruelty. Almost all his novels seem to convey the message that the poor lot of the bottomdogs is a matter of economic determinism but it can be reformed by love, sympathy and a humane consideration of man as man. After reading the novels of M.R. Anand, one can be left crying with William Wordsworth: "What man has made of man." In his article, "How I became a writer," Anand himself explains about the source of his creativity:

"All my novels and short fiction arose from a long confession of nearly two thousand pages which I wrote from the compulsion of a morbid obsession with myself and the people who possessed me, deep in my conscience" (P 31).

Just like his first novel *Untouchable* which enjoys immense popularity as a document of the injustice of Hindu society committed on the social outcastes, his second novel *Coolie* enjoys popularity as a classic of modern India – a tragedy depicting economic exploitation to the core. The story reads thus. Munoo, a hill boy, leaves his idyllic surroundings so that he may work and see the world. The first contact with reality shatters his dreams. Arriving in the house of a blank clerk, he falls foul of the shrewish and vindictive house wife, and before he flees from his employers' frenzied rage, he has relieved himself near their door-step and thereby lowered their social prestige. Munoo next arrives at a primitive pickle and jam factory in a feudal city where a quarrel over money between his employers uproots him and sends him as one of the workers of the cotton industry in Bombay. Finally, he arrives in Simla as the servant of an Anglo-Indian woman. He dies of tuberculosis which is aggravated by his having to pull the rickshaw for his mistress, "watching the peaceful hills and valleys he had deserted for the plains" (cowasjee). Being a classic of modern India, *Coolie* is, no doubt, a proletarian novel.

*Coolie* is nothing but an attempt to portray the inhuman exploitation of the poor and the laboring class by the industrial and feudal forces of the society. Here the novelist shows how the canker of class system segregates and subjugates thousands of people into perpetual misery and eventual extinction. Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* and *Coolie* are proletarian novels which centre round the predicament of the working class or the underprivileged. He portrays rather artistically the capitalist system of exploitation. Gangu in *Two Leaves and a Bud* and Munoo in *Coolie* stand as the types for the trials and tribulations of the working class under this capitalist system. The introduction of machines in the place of primitive Indian models of production results in social progress and development but mechanization also gives rise to so many other new problems. People are segregated on a new line as capitalists and workers. The capitalists are called the owners of the means of production and the workers are the source for the exploitation of the capitalists. Under the capitalist economy, profit is the main motive force. There is scope for the rich becoming richer and the poor poorer. The economic contradiction between the haves and the have-nots leads to hostile situation. As a result, the workers are impelled to resort to war-path taking cudgels against the rich. In turn, the rich employ diverse means to suppress the labourers. The exploiter and the exploited face each other with venom to destroy the

other. This could neatly be observed in the novel *Coolie*, Anand's second novel consisting of five chapters narrating the life and death of coolie over a period of two years. The novel *Coolie* presents the various experiences of Munoo at the hands of different exploiters in four different places. Munoo, the hero of the novel, is a coolie forced to work even from his childhood. In the whole gamut of his life journey, it is only the exploiters and the places that change, but the exploited remains the same. Munoo's life is a journey from innocence to experience, from idyllic village to the drab city life, from life to death. This journey has a special significance. The evil is widespread and appears as greed, selfishness and inhumanity in their hundred different forms. In his journey from life to death, Munoo plays different roles in different places. At Kangra hills, Munoo looks after the cattle. At Shamnagar, he is a domestic servant in a middle-class family. At Daulatpur, he is a worker in a primitive pickle factory. At Bombay, he becomes a labourer in a cotton mill. And at Simla, he becomes a page-cum-rickshaw puller to an Anglo-Indian woman. As K.R.S. Iyengar aptly remarks,

"With the hero, the hill-boy Munoo we move too, and follow his fortunes or rather misfortunes" (P1).

Munoo is a passive character. Things happen to him. He is drifted by the social evil of exploitation in his native place itself. The village landlord has taken away the five acres of land for his father's debt and for the unpaid rent and the interest of the mortgage. The cruel landlord does not show any mercy even when there is draught and had harvest. Munoo's father dies of shock and disappointment. His mother works hard to bring up Munoo. But after her death his cruel uncle's wife ill-treats him. As a result of this, the cruel exploitation has alienated the poor from their own lands and they become landless peasants and are driven to the urban areas seeking better prospects. In the early, phase of his life, Munoo is affected due to his father's debt. This phase of Munoo's life highlights the plight of the poor peasants at the cruel hands of the rural landlords. The ugly face of feudalism deprives the peasants of the means of their livelihood – the little piece of land. The exorbitant rate of interest charged by the landlords turns the peasants into helpless victims of exploitation.

Poverty is a cruel evil which forces Munoo to accompany his uncle Daya Ram to Sham Nagar where the later was working as a chaprasi in the Imperial Bank of Sham Nagar. Daya Ram forces Munoo to become a servant in the household of the Bank's accountant Nathoo Ram. Munoo's salary is Rs.3/- in addition to board and lodging. Even this salary is given to his uncle. As he is tired of the ten-mile walk from Kangra Hills to Sham Nagar, he expects food to be given first. That is the usual custom of the Hindus to treat a new comer. But Munoo is ordered to go to the vegetable market immediately on his arrival. Ignorant of the urban ways of life, the next morning Munoo relieves near the wall of the house for which he is branded a stupid, rustic oaf. Everyone mocks at him for lowering their prestige in the locality. Munoo's impish curiosity about the potencies of civilization and his juvenile delinquency buoyant spirit often lands him in trouble. Laying the table, scrubbing the vessels, sweeping the floor, preparing the beds and getting abuses are his routine. Munoo accepts this domestic slavery without any protest. The rich people like Bibiji, Nathoo Ram's wife, boast of cleanliness and hygiene and expect others to follow this. But they themselves don't follow this.

Bibiji herself pours the egg-boiled water into the tea pot. Yet she commands Munoo to be clean and hygienic. Bibiji under feeds and humiliates Munoo. She hates him for nothing and often showers abuses. Munoo is not allowed to play with her children and join their merry making. Her class-consciousness is revealed in these lines:

“What right has he to join the laughter of his superiors? . . . . .  
What right has he to be in the sitting room?” (Coolie 34)

So Munoo has to confine himself to the kitchen and not to wander in other places. The little pleasures of life are denied to the small boy Munoo. When Munoo reports about his miserable life and wants food, Daya ram has uncle only beats him. Munoo cries,

“Oh, don't beat me, please don't beat me, uncle, I only want food” (P 61).

Instead of being kind and considerable, Daya Ram throws him out mercilessly, asking him to go back and ask Bibiji to give him some food. For the first time, he expresses his anger in these words:

“I will flay him alive .... I will tear him to bits while he is asleep I will murder him” (P 63)

He is horrified by the torrent of abuses by the snobbish women, Bibiji once Bibiji gives two chappatis and a spoonful of lentils and vegetables. He has to eat with his hands, being considered low in status. As the insult stings him, he could hardly swallow his food. Bibiji abuses Munoo; but in turn, she is abused by the judge's wife. The middle class does not hesitate to cringe before their superiors for some personal benefits and crush their subordinates/inferiors to assert their superiority. Anand presents this tendency in his characterization of Nathoo Ram. Once Nathoo Ram invites the cashier of the Imperial Bank, W.P. England, an English man for a lunch with an ulterior motive of getting early promotion, he is clingy, before him. Mr.England feels uneasy and uncomfortable in that Indian atmosphere. Munoo drops the tea-pot due to nervousness. The tea-party ends in a fiasco. So, Bibiji scolds Munoo for what has happened. She slaps and curses Munoo as a boy of ill-luck. They nurse a feeling that after the arrival of Munoo, misfortunes keep coming thick and fast to the family.

Munoo's stay at Nathoo Ram's house is one of suffering and agony. “It actually proves to be a mad-house and people are cruel, because they cannot be happy. Only the Chota Babu is kind, for his disposition is to be happy and given happiness” (Iyengar 341). A crisis comes in this life of domestic slavery. In an emotional excitement in a dance, Munoo bites Nathoo Ram's little daughter's cheek. Bibiji and Nathoo Ram shower blows on Munoo. Quite unable to bear all these humiliations Munoo escapes from this domestic inhuman slavery and then boards a train without any idea of destination. He dimly recognizes the fundamental relationship that exists between man and man in this world. He exclaims:

“There seemed to be only two kinds of people in the world. Caste does not matter. I am a kshatriya and I am poor, and Varna, a Brahmin, is a servant boy, a menial, because he is

poor. No, caste, does not matter. The babus are like Sahib-dogs and all the servants look alike. There must be only two kinds of people in the world” (P 69). He comes to the realization that money decides the relationship between man and man and realizes his predicament by thinking that money is everything in the urban world. Anand against illustrates how even the law is against the boy by narrating another incident in the life of Munoo. The law enforcing police at the railway station chases him away for not having a license to work there as a railway coolie. The law compels the poor to get license even to be coolies. Daulatpur proves to be a contrast between the poor and the affluent. Sometimes, the poor only helps the poor. The elephant driver of the Tara Bai circus is kind enough to help Munoo to see the circus special train to Bombay. Munoo's misadventure in Bombay proves that Bombay is a place of nightmarish experience as warned by the elephant driver. He warns Munoo,

“The bigger the city is, the more cruel it is to the sons of Adam ... You have to pay even for the breath that you breathe” (P 77)

Good and evil are thrown simultaneously, but again the evil gains the upper hand. Bombay really plays havoc in the lives of coolies. Anand, through providing solutions for the amelioration of the underdogs, brings premonitions to foretell what is in store for Munoo in Bombay by narrating how a crow snatches away the piece of bread that Munoo holds in his hands to eat. The city people disregard the rural folks. When Munoo asks for a bottle of soda water to quench his thirst, some of the customers taking tea at the shop look at him as though a vermin. The waiter looks at him, a significant glance half in mockery and half in contempt. Munoo is made to sit on the ground, and is charged two annas. He feels insulted and humiliated and comes out in anger. He feels:

“I should have fought if he had dared to turn me out or abused me” (P 182)

Truly speaking, the coolies are landless and homeless people who possess only their hands (labour) to sell. But the supply of labour is so high that they offer themselves for low wages for any available work in the cities, in the factories, in the market, etc. These money minded employers underemploy them. If the labourers demand high wages, they would pretend like Jimmie Thomas, the head foreman in the said Mill, who says to HariHer,

“Stupid bullock!  
There are no jobs here”(199)  
Due to their poverty, HariHer bags to Jimmie Thomas,  
“You are the giver of food to the poor, Sahib  
You are the mother and father. You can make room for us” (199).

Jimmie Thomas, a greedy and arrogant mechanic from Lancashire, ate up a substantial portion of the workers' wages by employing all while means. Jimmie Thomas exploits the poor by appointing them for low-wages, lending money at an exorbitant rate of interest and also giving his huts on high rents. Jimmie employs HariHer and his family and Munoo as workers with low wages. Jimmie exploits the workers by forcing them to accept the loan lent by him at high rate of interest. He would say,

“And now, I suppose you have no money.

I will advance you ten rupees at four annas in the rupee, which sum I will add to the regular monthly commission you give to me, Agreed?" (P 200)

The fear of losing the job makes them accept the loan even though the gate-keeper Nadir Khan comes forward to land money at two annas on a rupee. Sometimes, Jimmie shifts workers from one job to another with the intention of extracting money from the workers, as their job depends on his will and wish. He is really a successful exploiter. Prof. M.K.Naik, in relation to the uncertainty of job, says:

"The British management offers no security of tenure and effects retrenchment summarily" (P41)

The management does not take care to provide living quarters, medical aid, good uniform dress, canteen service, leisure and entertainment etc. for their workers. The British foreman is also a landlord who provides small ramshackle huts, where privacy and sanitation are unheard of things, at heavy rents. He takes the labourers for granted and tells them to occupy a hut at the head of the Sahib's lane for which the rent is three rupees a month. Further, he demands periodic appeasement if a coolie desires, further continuance of job in the mill. These poor workers are exploited by the rich Sikh grocery merchant also, the monopoly trader of the area. He sells the items at high prices, underweighs the goods and sells provisions on credit only at a very high rate of interest, an anna on a rupee on things bought on credit. As the workers depend on this trader for their grocery, they are heavily in debt. So, the cruel trader ill-treats and insults them. Shambu, a coolie, comes to the trader to sell his two fowls. He wants to sell them for cash and rice. The cunning merchant snatches them and sells them to the bearer even before fixing the price. Shambu demands a just price. The Sikh offers two annas each and a seer of rice. Shambu's repeated demand for a just price irritates and enrages the Sikh who kicks the coolie with a wooden spoon. The foreman Jimmie has the power to cut the wages of the workers in the mill. The workers could not make a protest or a revolt. The condition in the factory is neither congenial nor hygienic. The factor has no facilities of canteen or first aid. Yet the workers are forced to work for eleven hours. Such a condition proves life a drudgery and the factory a hell. Indeed, the vivid picture of the coolies brings out the inhumanity bred by avarice and cash-nexus.

M.R.Anand, by portraying the Red Flag Union coming to the rescue of the workers, asserts his intention that the only solution for the betterment of the labourers is the Marxism way to unite, to struggle and never to yield to the forces of exploitation. Thus, the life of Munoo in Bombay is more harrowing than his earlier existence in Nathoo Ram's house. To escape from the rioters, Munoo flies to Malabar Hills. Munoo, being tired, dazed, hungry and sweating under the heat of the Sun, is walking along the streets. He is then knocked down by a speeding car and he falls in the hands of Mrs.Mainwaring, an Anglo-Indian woman who takes him to Simla in her car fearing reprisal from the rioters.

Mrs. Mainwaring is a voluptuous pout, smiles and giggles at Munoo. She needs a page boy and a rickshaw pillar for her. Whenever she goes out for shopping and pays social visits, Munoo has to draw the rickshaw on the Simla roads. Rickshaw pulling put a severe strain on his lungs. Munoo is mentally and physically broken. Thus, over-work and exploitation have a telling effect on the health of coolies like Munoo. Another rickshaw-wallah, Mohan befriends Munoo and advises him to look after his death first. Mohan suggests that Munoo returns to his native place to annihilate the landlord to recover his lands. Munoo over exerts himself and Mohan at once knows that he is suffering from consumption. At his condition is serious, he is taken to the hospital in Chota Simla. Being kind, Mrs. Mainwaring frequently visits the hospital bringing him gifts of fruits and flowers. Despite all possible treatment, his condition has worsened and one day in the early hours of the night, he breaths his last in the lap of Mohan. Death for the coolies is a release from misery. Death cannot frighten the poor; it is life that is a threat and death is a release. In fact, his physical death is not the real death, for he is already rendered lifeless and died spiritually. All these bouts of exploitation at various places grind the hero to dust because of his low-born and low economic condition. In this way, the inhumanity of man towards man gets reflected rather beautifully in this novel *Coolie*.

To conclude, it may be held that Munoo a passive character moving from place to place from the Kangara Hills down to the plains of Bombay and back to the Punjab Hills. At each place, he is made to realise his pathetic human predicament – an unsettled existence. He becomes almost a rootless individual – unable to find a place for himself. He is everywhere as the scum of the earth when he stands in front of a Sikh's shop, as a leper when he buys a soda and is cursed beyond measure by the cart driver. He is, at every turn of his life, ruthlessly exploited and externally indebted. William Walsh aptly says that "Munoo's victim role brings home to one the passive quality of the Indian poor in what Anand shows to be a markedly static and hierarchical society" (P 64). Thus, as a creative writer Anand observes the events that take place in the society and transforms them into artistic experience and shows that the novel *Coolie* is concerned not with the life and suffering of some particular individual but with the life and sufferings of untouchables or coolies as a class. In a word, Anand's humanism makes him use his art for the service of humanity.

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