

Portrayal Of Marginalization In Mulk Raj Anand's Coolie

S.Pavith

MA English Literature

Bharathiar University

Coimbatore

Abstract

“All of my plays are about people who have been marginalized... erased from the public record.”

Lynn Nottage

Anand's Coolie is a heart touching novel, which brings out some of the Indian bases like caste system, British rule and its influence and how were people belonging to the lower caste (the dark world) treated. There are plenty of ways in which a person could be marginalized it need not be on basis of colour, religion , caste but there are other factors like enmity, behaviour, character too which plays vital role in suppressing a person psychologically. In this novel we understand how Munoo, the protagonist is ill-treated in spite of the culture differences. The novel reveals the readers to what extend will marginalization take a person's life and thinking. This research article is an attempt on reasoning how cultural marginalization is portrayed in Anand's Coolie and the real setting in an Indian society where racial and class hierarchies imposed by British colonialism have intersected the current system which makes life impossible for Coolie's.

Keywords: caste system, British rule, marginalization, class hierarchies.

Introduction:

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the Indian English fiction writer along with R.K. Narayan, Ahamed Ali, Raja Rao, was one of the first India- based writers in English. Anand is the one of the famous critic writer in Indian English fiction. Anand is not only a novelist and he is also a short

story writer and art critic writing in English. Anand was among those who gave Hindustani idioms to English. In his work he arise our pity among the poor peoples of India by showing a real- life representation of the people. Anand is the first Indian novelist in English who portrayed the real troubled life of suppressed Indians. In this novels, he clearly point out the readers living conditions of people like a sweeper, a coolie, a peasant etc who suffered exploitation condition of poverty and bad actions.

Anand emerged as voice of the voiceless and the marginalized. Characters that are marginalized by caste or class people his major novels. The untouchable sweepers, downtrodden coolies, the debt-ridden farmers, pitiable laborer play prominent role in Anand's fictional world.

Anand was awarded the Silver Wedding Fund Scholarship of 300 pounds a year in the year 1925. The coal miners' strike in Great Britain in 1926 upset the balance of his student life. The repressive measures adopted by the Government to break the General Strike that followed the miner's strike revealed that British government was organized and run in the interest of a small minority. The violent suppression of the majority in Britain was indicative of the kind of suppression the colonial administration indulged in the colonies. To Anand who observed the violence from a close quarter, international Socialism seemed to be the only solution to the problems of the world. Anand noticed that the West with all its wealth and its allegiances to democracy was not free from a discreet despotic mind set. Soon after the strike Anand bought a copy of The Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels and this had a great influence on him. He writes in, Apology for Heroism, that, "a whole new world was opened to me. All the threads of my past reading, which had got tied up in knots, seemed suddenly to straightened out, and I began to see not only the history of India but the whole history of human society in some sort of inter-connection" (1946:67-8). Anand's political ideologies therefore have a definite place in the study of his novels. They arise from his concept of literature that reveals life in all its contradictions. To him, a work of art is first a social event and the duty of a novelist is to create but not to determine.

Human values, culture and socialism:

Anand took up the cause of the oppressed early on in his career that to a large extent influenced his creative pursuit. But many in India have considered his work as propaganda. He found evil and cunning both in the poor as well as in the rich. Although ideologically influenced Anand was concerned about the humanistic values'. He believed in man's latent goodness, which must triumph over evil. According to Anand, Socialism alone can provide the right climate for man's total development. Anand wrote broadly on art and maintained that art did reflect life; but could not be taken as life itself. The fact that Anand himself did not belong to the marginalized sections of society provided him the necessary understanding that there was a distance between art and life. His obligation to his fellow men lies in changing the world, making it a better place for all of us.

Voice and identity for the abused:

Anand's *Coolie* represents the voice of the suppressed and exploited. The Coolie can be seen what Marx and Engels term as: "the lumpen proletariat, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions for life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool..." (1992: 14).

The Coolies as a class belong nowhere; Anand points out even the lower caste rejects and casts away the Coolies. When Munoo arrives in Bombay and goes for a refreshing drink, for which he pays, the moment he introduces himself as a Coolie the proprietor tells him to sit on the floor and not on the chairs; he is treated like a leper. "Oh! Look, Mummy! Our coolies are there cried little Circe. Her mother shushed her and asked her to behave. The sights of the creatures were challenges to the complacency of the ladies and gentlemen who had come for tea" (298). Munoo's experiences as a servant, a factory worker and a mill worker are his class identity. As a servant, he is of the lower class, as a factory and a mill worker he is of the working class; in each he has a productive role whether as a servant or a worker. But as a Coolie his identity is reduced to nothing. In the class system the two extremes of the wealthy imperialist bourgeoisie and the Coolie serve as objects of hope and fear. While each class emulates and aspires to attain the status of next superior class it also harbors a fear of being de-classed. There is an ideological

undercurrent that moves in the entire class system. The imperialist bourgeoisie's fear of the 'native' being equal to him both economically and socially infuses in him a sense of insecurity for which he engages in abuse and exploitation in the name of racial superiority.

Propose of marginalization into writing:

Central to *Coolie* is Anand's humanistic faith that this class-consciousness born of money or social status can have crushing effects on those that are at the lower rungs. We can see in *Coolie* how the evils of poverty and cruelty crush a bud of youth before it could bloom to any extent. Daya Ram, Mr. and Mrs. Nathoo Ram, Ganpat, Chimta Sahib, and Mrs. Mainwaring too, have only contempt for Munoo. They slap him, kick him, and abuse him. Almost at every turn he comes across only pain and cruelty which make his life a painful saga of suffering. He is forced to become a sort of a purposeless vagabond with apparently no control on his destiny. By studying all the above characters, we can say the main character who is Munoo who suffer because he is poor he is coolie and all other coolies also suffer because capitalists and other rich Indians exploits them physically and economically. Munoo is the representative character in the novel. His longing to live, we can see in the novel. Right from the beginning we can say whether in village or at city, all persons who are responsible for the suffering of the character Munoo are the same.

Mulk Raj Anand introduces the economically and socially marginalized sections of society into his novel *Coolie*, making them the focus of his narrative; he declares in *Apology for Heroism* that he could not, of course, sense the suffering of the poor directly because "I had always been comparatively better off. No, mine was a secondary humiliation, the humiliation of seeing other people suffer. I do not know to what extent envy of the rich on my part was disguising itself as a hunger for social justice." Perhaps there was an element of this. Also the inadequacies of our life in India may have contributed something to my pre occupation. But I do not apologize for this because it is not easy in the face of such wretchedness and misery as I had seen in India to believe that material happiness and well-being had no connection with real happiness and the desire for beauty." (1946:76-77).

The novel *Coolie* presents the life of an orphan boy Munoo who is despised by the society, rejected by his relatives and oppressed by his masters. He tries to avail chances of progress but his ill fate produces obstacles in his way. The novel follows the tragic odyssey of Munoo as he finds himself in relation to different strata of society in different locations- the village, the towns, the big city, the hill station and in different cultures each is not free from the ideology of exploitation and suppression. “Vay, are you eater of your masters! Vay, you shameless brute! You pig! You dog!” The storm burst on his head as, hearing no response to her call, she appeared at the door, saw him, and unable to bear the sight, withdrew. Vay, you 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! Why didn’t you ask me where to go? May you fade away! May you burn! We don’t know we are talking on an animal in our employ, an utter brute, a savage! What will the Sahib think who pass by our doors every morning and afternoon! The Babuji has his prestige to keep up with the Sahibs. Hai! What a horrible, horrible mess he has made outside my door!” (17)

Anand introduces different ideologies such as Capitalism, Imperialism, Industrialism and Communalism to show their influence on the dispossessed and socially oppressed. Munoo experiences all the negative aspects of the world. His journey from innocence to experience and from uncultured to culture is mediated through ideologies of suppression and empowerment.

Coolie:

Coolie is one of the classics of Indo Anglican Fiction and it has been called the ‘Odyssey of Munoo’. For as in the ‘Odyssey’ Homer has related the heroic of kind Ulysses, so in *Coolie*, *Coolie* is called epic of social realism as it has all the qualities of great epics though in different ways. According to the ancient Greeks, epic is a narrative poem, longer in scope and size, having a divine inspiration, the characters in an epic poem can be partly human and partly divine. In epics, the action should be complete and grand. An epic hero is not an ordinary person. *Coolie* has the same qualities of epic.

Coolie is a serious tragedy of Munoo, Mulk Raj Anand has related the adventure of Munoo. At the beginning of the novel, we find that Munoo, a boy of fourteen years age, is studying in class

V in a rural school in the village of Bilaspur situated on the Kangra Hills on the banks of the river Beas. In the company of his friends he grazes his cows all day. He finds time to sit under the shade of a large Banyan tree to enjoy the fruits of the season. His life in the village comes to an end when his uncle Daya Ram decides to take him to Sham Nagar, a town ten miles away from their village. His uncle, Daya Ram and aunt, Gujri believe that he is quite grown up and therefore should earn his own living. Munoo's father had died of shock and disappointment when he could not pay the debt to the landlord. His mother died working hard to support Munoo. Munoo's life in the village was hard and he could not forget the miserable deaths of his parents. In spite of these sad memories and the ill-treatment of his aunt Munoo is happy and contented. He felt he must get up and rush away somewhere beyond the confines of the street, somewhere where there was a whiff of air to breathe. (192)

Driven by the dire necessity of an independent livelihood, he follows his uncle to work as a domestic servant in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram, a sub-accountant in the imperial Bank of Sham Nagar. But Munoo is badly mistreated by the Babu and his wife and receives no sympathy from his uncle. Munoo is held responsible for the loss of the letter of recommendation that his master sought from the sahib Mr. W.P England. After degrading the master's house, unintentionally, by relieving himself in front it and accidentally hurting their daughter while playing he cannot bear the abuse and beating and runs away and boards a train with no definite destination to go to. In the train he meets a man named Prabha Dayal, who is an orphan and was once a Coolie. But now Prabha is a Seth, the owner of a Pickle Factory at Daulatpur and is in partnership with Ganpat Seth. Prabha takes Munoo with him to Daulatpur and provides him with employment in the Pickle Factory. Prabha feels some affinity with Munoo because they are both orphans and he himself was a hills man from Kangra. Anand introduces in Coolie a complex and exploitative world.

Thus they worked from day to day in the dark underworld, full of the intense heat of blazing furnaces and the dense malodorous smells of brewing essences, spices and treacle, of dust and ashes and mud, which became kneaded into sticky layer on the earth of the passage with the overflow of water from the barrels of soaking fruit, and plastered the bare toes

of the labourers... Only the sweat trickled down their bodies and irritated them into an awareness that they were engaged in a strenuous physical occupation (110).

Indian society - culture of the Rich and the Poor:

'Coolie' presents a comprehensive view of Indian society of the time- the 1930's where the years of tremendous commotion in Indian History. It was the time when the Indian struggle for independence was at its zenith. As a product of his age, Anand had disgust for cruelty and hypocrisy of Indian Feudal life, with its castes, creeds, customs, and restrictive religious rites. Anand contrasts the rich merchants in starched muslins against the dark Coolies in rags, the impressive bungalows of the English residents looks down on the congested slums of the Coolies. The garish opulence exists alongside rampant filth, deprivation and poverty. As soon as Munoo emerges from the station, he is overpowered by the confused medley of colours, shapes and sounds of Bombay's strange, hybrid and complex character. There are Europeans in immaculate suits, Parsis in frock suits and white trousers, Mohammedans in long tunics, Hindus in muslim shirts and dhotis; there are Arabs, Persians and Chinese the road swarming with trams, cars and motorcycles. And ever present are the lepers, the beggars, and the Coolies in the dim damp alleys and slums, filled with the groans of the sick, the starving and the dying. The complexity and diversity of the city gradually disappears subsuming whatever the social background, ethnic, cultural, racial and religious identity one might have and ultimately classifying one either rich or poor. The pickle factory of Daulatpur is now replaced by the Sir George White Cotton Mills where the working conditions are even more grueling and the foreman Jimmie Thomas is more abusive and tyrannical than Ganpat. The world of the poor is one of comradeship surrounded by foul smell, abuse, suffering, torture, exploitation, dust, heat and sweat.

In the final chapter Munoo finds himself in Shimla. Many critics have criticized the over emphasis on Mrs. Mainwaring, who is a minor character in the novel; adding that the accident is not in harmony with the flow of the narrative because all of a sudden Munoo emerges from the bloody communal riot in the mill into the caring arms of a memsahib. This can be taken as an act of destiny, contradicting Anand's disbelief in God, providence and fate. But Anand is able to

take Munoo away from the harsh life in the city and brings him back to the hills to regain his identity where his life finally ends under the strain of pulling his memsahib's rickshaw. It is the correct finale to the concerto: the boy who has come from the hills sees the world and goes back to the hills to die thereby ensuring a narrative circularity in the novel. *Coolie* resembles *Hard Times* because it offers searing and stark details. When Munoo is torn from his moorings, his feeling of nostalgia for his lost world is not without delight, And through the tears, he could see the high rocks, the great granite hills, gray in the blaze of the sun and the silver line of the bees. (24)

Munoo's background revolves around him being an orphan bullied by his aunt; his childhood in the hills abruptly ends in the beginning of the novel itself when he is taken to Sham Nagar. Prabha is a coolie from the hills and Hari a villager working in the Bombay Textile Mill. Whereas we are given a detailed description of Mrs. Mainwaring's childhood, her struggle as an Anglo- Indian and her sordid history with men. But through her Anand gives a subtle comment on the conflicts of the Anglo- Indian community and their culture that belong neither here nor there, not being able to identify with the native nor being acceptable by the English. Mrs. Mainwaring lacks a sense of belonging and throws herself to everyman who comes her way because of this lack; she seeks a sense of belonging if not to a community then at least to someone.

Conclusion:

Coolie is ideologically loaded for it draws its strength from Anand's social commitment. British imperialism transformed the traditional economy of India into an industrial economy. Furthermore it considered India as a vast market for its own industrial goods. Thus the Imperialist system is identified with an oppressive capitalist system in which the bourgeois rule the roost. Indian aristocracy and the feudal class are bought over to side with the Empire and the old feudal caste system is replaced by the class system based on capital and industrial productivity. Anand finishes up the novel on a tragic note: "But in the early hours of one unreal, white night he passed away- the tide of his life having reached back to the deeps"(282).

Anand is realistic that the old caste system cannot disappear overnight even if it has been simply overwhelmed by the rapid introduction of industrialization. The parasitic residues of the old system has mutated and morphed themselves into the class system. In Munoo's consciousness the notion of caste is still there but even a young mind like his has been able to comprehend the powerful class system of rich and poor that overshadows the caste system. But as the scene shifts from the small town of Sham Nagar filled with the lower middle class such as assistant-accountants to the urban towns of Daulatpur to the city of Bombay and finally, to the hill station of Shimla, the ideology of the imperialist bourgeoisie and the elements of the old caste system become more and more subtle, rigid and at the same time more degenerate.

Within the middle and the lower classes, there are sub-classes based on culture, income and within these sub-classes there are caste and religion division. The mill workers in Bombay Textile Mill belong to the working class but even among them there are Hindus and Muslims. In Shimla Mrs. Mainwaring faces the prejudice against the Anglo- Indian community from both the English and the Indians to the extent that even the Coolies' advise Munoo to leave her service since she is not a 'pukka' memsahib. Mohan comments that the English have a, "caste system more rigid than ours. Any Angrezi woman whose husband earns twelve thousand rupees a month will not leave cards at the house of a woman whose husband earns five hundred the rich don't really want to mix with each other" (314).

Thus the changes that took place in the Indian society did not completely wipe out the old feudal system although the class system replaced the caste system yet there remained traces and residues of caste sentiments if not caste structure. And these sentiments clung parasitically to the ideology of the class system of the British imperialists disseminated through their educational and religious institutions, the ideology of the 'Other' attributing in priority and savagery to the 'native'. This mechanism of theorizations was employed by the middle class to the lower classes of Indian society. The lower classes, in particular, the Coolies fall prey to this new and even crueler social stratification that carried both the caste and class sentiments. Coolie gives a voice to the predicament of the mute humanity in vicious circumstances; the pattern is a part of the social and spiritual evolution in the consciousness of the author.

Mulk Raj Anand depicts that the realistic picture of poor Indians where the mass suffer from exploitation. Being an author of the marginalized people has significantly managed the towns, with the compelling neediness, with vagrants, untouchables and urban workers. He depicts in his book that the Indian life is that of outcastes, labourers, the discouraged and persecuted one of the society.

This research article was an attempt on reasoning how cultural marginalization is portrayed in Anand's *Coolie* and the real setting in an Indian society where racial and class hierarchies imposed by British colonialism have intersected the current system which makes life impossible for Coolie's and how is the life of the protagonist Munoo, the protagonist is ill-treated in spite of the culture differences.

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