

Portrayal of the Voice of Transgression in Mulk Raj Anand's Coolie

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Abstract

This chapter analyzes the narrative of Coolie, the novel by Mulk Raj Anand. The critical perception so obtained is based on the structure of feeling revealed by the major characters. The structures of feeling expressed by the characters often reveal the general resentment in opposition to the dominant socio-political structures and of ideologies which supports the power structure. The novel, Coolie is a discourse on such subversions against oppressive governance and it reveals the politics of the society in a particular age and nation. The analysis in this chapter situates the text in the political situation of its own day and now. Munoo the central character's story invokes a tragic sense of pity and fear.

Keywords: *Hegemony, Transgression, Marginalization, inequalities, Gender Discrimination Oppressive dominant Social class*

Introduction

The basic requisite for existence is freedom of action. As long as Munoo remains in the company of his friends in the hill-country, he enjoys doing actions of his own and he is successful with them. He enjoys schooling. He has acquired a working knowledge of reading, mathematics as well as English. But forces inimical to existences always try to curtail freedom of individual action. They always force a regimentation and collective order. The power operating at the family level and subsequently at the societal or institutional level place individual's action always under the control of external powers. Munoo is taken away from his soil to the city by his uncle Daya Ram. Soon he finds the city so confusing and in disorder. The system has physical civic order and hierarchy but no one there is existentially connected. There is no sense of belonging but every mind there is directed by material goals and the only way to common pleasure is to be cunning, hypocritical and selfish.

Inequality is sustained by constant exhibitionist mind set of the hierarchy in power. They always try to subjugate the class below them with power, pelf and pompous show of their personal appearances and possessions. They try to benumb the awareness to perceive the inequality everywhere and drag the mind to desire the life style of the class in power. Munoo "fell to admiring

his clothes, the high, hard white collar which he wore; the enormous turban wound round a pyramidal kulah of red velvet embroidered with gold thread; the khaki coat with big pockets like money bags; the wide cotton pyjamas and the boots, the black boots” (p.11)

Later, Munoo finds himself unloved, uncared for amidst people with plenty to own and plenty to waste. “He was possessed by sadness and self pity”. His employers did not even ask him to sit down. He was tired and hungry after a long walk through the hills. He thought of a living Indian culture that treated the guests hospitably. “He thought he would be able to sit down... and that he would be given food according to the custom which prevails in all Indian homes of offering food to guests and visitors at whatever time of the day they arrive. Instead he was being asked to go on an errand the very minute he arrived” (p.13). This proves that the system of inequality was heartlessly wiping away established social norms and was usuring in an era of dehumanized culture. The new norms stated “you are their servant and they are kind people”. The idea that the employer is to be considered being kind in employing people to work is a thick description and a hegemony.

The dominant class in the society turns out to be oppressive in dealing with their subordinates and physical abuses are common. The state apparatuses are also employed in the services of the ruling and the rich class. The colonial masters sit on top in the hierarchy breeding inequalities of every kind. Munoo is treated harshly by the lady of the house and even a small childish pranks of Munoo is taken to be serious and immoral by the masters in the house. Daya Ram is a miniature sized capitalist who makes profit by robbing the wages due to Munoo. He is much more inhuman than the Babus. The neighborhood boys too are prejudiced against Munoo on the basis of inequalities prevalent among the Babus - “his master was a slave to someone else” (p.35). Ultimately the society consisted of slaves for someone above them “The bottom would then have been knocked out of his hedonism and he would have discovered the fatuity of his desire to be like his superiors”.

The narrative flags the idea that the society could not find its way out of darkness because the religio-socio hegemony with thick descriptions had been accepted by the people for quite a longtime that things seem to be right because of the idea of fate. Inspire of the ruinous hegemony, people lived on wishful thinking provoked by stories and myths, taught at home and schools or read in books. They “had all been records of the desire for power, the desire for property and the desire for honor of a few chosen men” (p.35). The people have been blinded by the glamour of greatness, the glory and splendor of it. They never perceived that they were “condemned by an iniquitous system always to

remain small, object and drab” (p.35). The only choice of action left for Munoo was to escape from the city. So he gets into a train without a valid ticket and did not know where on why he was on the move. He did not know that ruinous hegemony and the oppressive dominant social classes existed all over the country. The narrative tells how he tried to show his resentment and transgressive opposition to the hegemony. He could perceive the reality. As Munoo says:

“Surely there were many more poor people in the world than rich..... there seemed to be only two kinds of people in the world. Caste did not matter. ‘I am a Kshatriya and I am poor and Varma, a Brahmin is a servant boy, a memial because he is poor. No, caste does not matter. The Babus are like the Sahib-logs and all servants look alike; there must be two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor” (p.55-56).

Munoo finds favour with Prabha Dayal, a passenger in the train. Only Ganpat, Prabha’s business partner tried to impute Munoo on the basis of inequalities. Ganpat says that the boy was a stranger and may be a rogue, a thief. Tulsi, Maharaj and Bonga who were not preejudiced found Munoo as an additional work-hand at their jam and pickle factory. People like Ganpat are more dangerous to the progress of the working class who are entrepreneurs themselves. Ganapat’s self agrandizement and cunning, backstabbling attitude brings down the factory, the new venture by the commoners. Ganpat was like a harsh slave driver to Munoo. “Munoo felt oppressed with the presence of the slave driver near him” (p.78). He found a sense of belonging to everyone in the factory except Ganpat. “They were all from the hills and not like the Babu, except master Ganpat, who is a city man” (p.79). This Municipal city too was governed by governing inequities.

Hegemony operates by a system of closures and never allows an opposition, a subversion or a transformation. For it the hierarchy and the dominant social class remain intact. The wishes of Ganpat reveals the mind set of the oppressive societies everywhere. And colonialism has only enhanced or modified the already existing conflicts rooted in inequalities. He concludes saying, “You are not my class. You are coolies and belong to the street and there you shall go. I spit on you. And he spat and shot out” (p.106). The narrative express the state of inequalities and the rich walking amidst with hubris and in ulter disregard for the large number of fellow human beings in want of basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter. Munoo who carried a heavy basket is paid only two paise. He reveals his structure of feeling thus: “Oh God! that bread should be so dear and flesh and blood so cheap!” (p.126).

Munoo feels disheartened at the reality that the coolies and the He tried to suppress the oppressive thought. He saw blankness and the myth that money was strewn about the streets of Bombay sounded hollow in his mind. When he went into a posh eatery wishing to get soda water, he was not treated as a custom. He was looked down by the waiter. He made him sit on the floor and shouted at, "What do you want?". Some men at the table with their tea "looked at him as if he were a leper. The expressions of discrimination were out in the open. The inequality soured the social responsibility of everyone in the society.

The narrative turns its focus on the dissent, opposition and transgression against the capitalist's oppressive culture. The novel portrays the growing voice of the labour, the formation of organized labour-unions. Ratan is Munoo's mentor and "Munoo conceived a wild admiration for Ratan. He had found a new hero. He would try to be like him" (p.195). Munoo learns to socialize with people he met at work and at large. Ratan once was a champion-wrestler. He did not turn into a lawless bully but a real worker and a brave voice for the oppressed workers. When the foreman in the cotton mill acted violently against the workers, Ratan "kept a dignified balance and restraint". And when the foreman beat the mill employees, Ratan said to him, "Sahib or no Sahib. You may be a foreman, but you have no right to beat the mill employees" (p.201). The coolies surely resented their social position and "most of the coolies preferred to go soldiering with the prospect of certain death before them. They all want to die in glory" (p.202).

The coolies and other working-class people and peasants were often more affected by inequalities under the hands of other Indians who pretended to be Europeans. And his heavy work, began to tell upon his health and Munoo often coughed and spitted out streaks of blood. Mohan was right in advising him to leave May's services because he had to attend on her as well as pull the rickshaw. Mohan said that Munoo was slowly dying of consumption as his checks were pale and his eyes sunken. The coolies continue to consider Mohan's words as wild notions. Mohan in turn retorts, "yes fools, you will let them kill you. You are ignorant slaves. How can I drill any sense into your heads" (p.275). The coolies knew that he was a learned man and could not find why he drove rickshaws and lived among the coolies. Munoo felt a "glow of warmth" in Mohan's company. The text states that discrimination on the basis of possession of wealth and the way they exhibited it maintain the class system and Mohan says that it was "a caste system more rigid than ours. Munoo was taken to an isolation hospital because he was seriously ill with consumption, probably a final stage. Mohan came to look after him. He could not walk or stand up or exert himself. He lay on the

verandah of a hut on a low bed covered with thick quilt. Mrs. Mainwaring came to see him with fruits and flowers for a few days. She even nursed him. She wished he would get well soon. Major Merchant stopped her from visiting Munoo by threatening to isolate her too. She had to suffer in silence. His mind was noised with “the fear of dying and the hope of living”. He was waning away from the warm grip of Mohan’s hand. Mohan’s last words were “All right Munoo brother you are a brave lad”. The narrative poignantly ends the innocent life of Munoo.

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