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THE PANGS OF SEPARATION, LOSS AND LONGING IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S '*COOLIE*'

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Abstract: The human relations are strung in a bond of love and attachment. There is an existence of feelings in the human world that lead them towards the longings for their loved ones and dear ones. The human existence is barren without a family and friends. A man cannot lead a desolate life. There is no existence of a man if his liveliness is denied. This denial causes in suffering and alienation from the world. The life story of Munoo, an accidental coolie, evokes such estrangement where his existence is questioned. He is burdened by the nostalgia that he is left abandoned and alone in the world. Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* presents such vivid instances that bring nostalgia and melancholy for the readers. The present research paper sincerely endeavors to highlight the pangs of separation, loss and longing in the course of Munoo's life.

Keywords: alienation, loss, abandoned, longing, separation, affection.

Mulk Raj Anand became the voice of the suppressed that were ignored by Indian writers. His novels are realistic and naturalistic and aimed to expose the true stories of the underdogs that were prevalent in the Indian society of the colonial; pre-independent India. The colonial India was, no doubt, an era full of sufferings, exploitation and hardships for the countrymen but not for all of them. The privileged classes included the kings and their upper caste servants, the upper-caste elites such as 'the Lallas; businessmen, the Babus, and the Sahibs from beyond the black waters' (*Coolie*, 3). The real issues were laid in the Indian caste system and the people were engulfed in following its rules. No lower caste folk was allowed to think beyond its boundary. They were all restricted to their limits. Mulk Raj Anand draws his characters from his real life experiences. He decided to write about the persecutors and the exploited underdogs, outcastes who had been denied their existence in natural human world. He was like a revolutionary who was inspired by the Gandhi's and Nehru's thoughts. His works *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) marked him a novelist of the downtrodden. Anand narrated the stories of sufferings and exploitation that revolutionize his works against a set pattern of the society at the colonial India.

Coolie was published after Mulk Raj Anand's first successful and accomplished novel *Untouchable*. *Coolie* is the story of a teenager whose life ends within a span of a year by overwork and malnutrition. The story begins in a small village Kanagra of Bilaspur and ends in Simla. Munoo, a fourteen-year-old rustic boy is handed over to serve Babu Nathu Ram by his uncle and aunt at Shamnagar. He is left orphan by his parents' immature death to his only guardians. Both of them are harsh and neglect at Munoo. They arrived at the conclusion that he should 'begin earning money' (*Coolie*, 2). It is clear that Munoo's prospects are not good at town. He is reluctant but can not resist his guardians. Although his aunt abuse and 'beat him more than Munoo beats his cattle' (*Coolie*, 3), yet his heart throbs for sporadic love of his aunt 'how often she had taken him in her arms and kissed him, and how often he had gone to sleep embracing her' (*Coolie*, 29). Munoo accompanies his uncle barefeet walking in scorching heat to Shamnagar. His feet are sore by blistering after a ten-mile march. His careless uncle scolds him and makes him to walk on warning dire consequences. It is difficult to understand such a harsh treatment levied on a child by his relative yet the poor and vulnerable boy accepts his fate. When his uncle convinces him about the promising life ahead at the Babu's house as a servant; 'Don't forget to do your best for the masters' (*Coolie*, 14). The first scene narrated by the novelist brings melancholy and it is hard to imagine the situation. A small boy eager to learn is handed over and put into the bizzare, dark world of servants. The world of servants is shown ruff and the masters are stiff with them.

Munoo's dark and desolate life begins. He even toils hard for all the work given to him. He is thrown on stale food, sleeps on the floor with a ragged, old blanket surrounding mosquitoes and a swarm of flies. His life becomes hell at the house under the Bibiji's rules and stern discipline. Many a times he is scolded, abused, treated badly. Yet, he longs for love and 'hoped that she would stop nagging one day, that he would settle down and not feel so much of an outsider in the house'. (*Coolie*, 29) He likes only one person in this house of cruelty the chota Babu; Prem Chand. He understands Munoo's inability to cope up with unfamiliar things and the work in the house. He speaks softly with Munoo and assures everyone not to 'frighten him, or he will make more of a mess.' (*Coolie*, 18) Prem Chand becomes his ideal and hero. When Munoo is hurt with a wound on his head, he is nursed and caressed by this compassionate man. Yet, there is no soothing for him. He often longs freedom from the clutches of the fetters of the house of cruelty. He hates his uncle more than anything else because his uncle beats him on asking for food and his wages. He wants his self-esteem by earning money. Anand's philosophy reveals through his character Munoo that 'caste does not matter. There must be only two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor'. (*Coolie*, 56) He gets absorbed in the reminiscences of his lost parents. He feels warmth at the thought of his mother. Thus, the boy feels alienation and loneliness in the strange world of abuse and scolding. Despite his honesty, he is beaten black and blue by his master Babu Nathu Ram on mistakenly biting his daughter's chick. He escapes from the place. Anand narrates 'A whipped dog hides in a corner, a whipped human seeks escape'. (*Coolie*, 19) After leaving his master's house, Munoo 'longed for silence, he longed for darkness to conceal him'. (*Coolie*, 59)

Munoo accidentally hides himself under the bunk of a train compartment. He is discovered by the passenger; Seth Prabh Dyal who feels tender towards the boy and takes him to Daultpur to work in his pickle factory. He feels affinity with Munoo because he also hails from Kangra and was an orphan. But he changes his destiny and becomes a pickle factory owner with his partner Ganpat. Prabh Dyal proves a benefactor to Munoo. He begins his new life in Cat Killers' Lane. His uncle's promise fails at Sham Nagar yet there is a 'curious flutter of excitement in his heart'. (*Coolie*, 65) He reassures himself by 'stirring of hope for a better life in the new world he was entering'. (*Coolie*, 65) He feels at home with Prabha and his wife Parbati who feed him 'the most sumptuous meal'. His longing returns with vibrantly. He loses himself and pins hopes for better prospects in this strange city of feudals. He longs for content in his master's company as he 'shall be well looked after'. (*Coolie*, 73) He feels grateful to Prabha for having picked up, otherwise he would 'be in train, hungry and lost.' (*Coolie*, 73) Munoo's life in pickle factory was better than his life at Sham Nagar except Ganpat; a partner of his master

Prabha. Ganpath does not like Munoo and thinks that he has ‘a right to chastise his servants if he likes.’ (*Coolie*, 98) Munoo is content with his life at daulatpur’s Cat Killer’s Lane. Suddenly, his master Prabha becomes bankrupt by his partner Ganpath’s mis-handling of the accounts. The police beats him. Munoo tries to prove his loyalty by working as a coolie in the grain market. The stabbing thought reflects his honesty and loyalty towards his master. ‘I can not go home without having earned any money.’ (*Coolie*, 124) Prabha decides to leave Daulatpur leaving Munoo behind because he ‘had not enough money but railway tickets.’ (*Coolie*, 128) The parting of the master and mistress is awful. Munoo deeply suffers by recollection of the vivid reverie of the affection they both showers on him.

‘The memory of the day when he had arrived here came back to him in vivid flashes of lightening, illuminating the gentle face of this woman, defining the evasive, tender smile with which she had made him feel at home. And then he recalled the pressure of her limbs against him when he was ill.’ (*Coolie*, 128)

It is apt to note the pangs of love and longing in the parting situation at the railway station. Munoo is helpless and becomes a forlorn once again in the feudal city of Daulatpur. He tries to find work at railway station as coolie but in vain. He gets connected with an elephant driver of a circus who helps him to earn his bread and butter and asks him to reach at Bombay. He does not want to go back to Sham Nagar and live in Daulatpur ‘both had treated him badly’. (*Coolie*, 145) He hopes to begin anew life at Bombay where ‘rich people who just threw money about to coolies in the street.’ (*Coolie*, 145) He arrives at Bombay with kind help of the elephant driver through the special circus train. He determines to earn his livelihood by working and not to become a beggar. ‘I find the work which brings thirty rupees a month...and did not the coolie in the vegetable market say work was easy to get in Bombay’ (*Coolie*, 148) when he reaches the land of his heart, he is warned by his benefactor. ‘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.’ (*Coolie*, 152)

Soon his life is introduced with the commotion of Bombay city. Its capitalistic attitude shatters his dreams and feels it with gloom and depression. He spends his life as a laborer on mean wages at a cotton mill. He gets acquainted with Hari, his wife Laxmi, and Ratan; a wrestler. His life is full with tedious and harmful effects on his body. He works in one of the biggest cotton mills in India; Sir George White Cotton Mills. He is hired on seven and half rupees a month. His dreams are shattered that he hopes for the prospects of better life from Sham Nagar and Daulatnagar. There is absolute depression within his heart on finding his life in the city of his dreams. Yet, he decides to give a fight with all his power and begins new journey in the factory. He doesn’t lose the opportunity to explore the nuances of modernization throughout his tour with his friend wrestler friend Ratan. It is ecstasy for him; a treat to fulfill his thirst of collecting reveries and keep them in his heart forever. It is a powerful imaginary world which he witnesses becoming true by its concreteness. He wanders on holidays. His life is disrupted by the strike and the communal fight fired by the capitalistic world among the coolies. There is Hindu-Muhammadan fractions on accusing each other for kidnapping of small children and the riot begins between the two communities. He seeks shelter but it seems that it would engulf all those innocent and the children of Adam within its ravage. The pathetic life tries to consume his own but he escapes by his fate. He asks himself, ‘Has my end come now?’ (*Coolie*, 241) despite his strong will-power, ‘Let come what may.’ (*Coolie*, 242) He is again lonely and guardianless in the big city. His life resumes to its lone routine and there seems no existence of his being.

‘The essential loneliness of the soul, that apartness which he had succeeded in shattering by his zest and enthusiasm for work and for entering the lives of others, by the natural love he felt for others, that loneliness mingled with the thought of worklessness, foodlessness, aimlessness.’ (*Coolie*, 244)

After the riots settle peacefully, the normalcy seems to gather. He needs only two times food, shelter and work as he is born to toil. Munoo feels defeated, mentally and physically broken by the promises of the city of dreams. The destiny has different plans for him and he is knocked down by a car of Mrs. Mainwaring. She takes him Simla to keep him as a servant and a rickshaw coolie. He finds her house perfect for his existence. He gets plenty food and care under Mrs. Mainwarings observation, 'she was very kind to him.' (*Coolie*, 266) It is Simla where his soul rests and relaxes in peace. He likes and love the life in Simla. Munoo discovers streaks of blood coming out from his mouth. He does not want to die of consumption. He longs for the advice of his friend. He is admitted finally in a hospital; 'a segregated three-roomed hut.' (*Coolie*, 280) His is caught up between 'the fear of dying and the hope of living.' (*Coolie*, 280) His friend Mohan often visits him at his bed. He longs to get ready for a long walk straight to Bombay to meet his friend Ratan and start afresh life. At last the consumption steals his last breath. The story of ill-fated boy who begins to adore life reaches 'back to the deeps.' (*Coolie*, 282)

Munoo is separated from his parents in an early age, sold on mean wages by his guardians on three rupees a month, scolded and abused by his masters, caught by some kind benefactors, exploited by the capitalistic world, finally gets love and human treatment from a woman and at last meets his end. All the threads are woven together by the author in a seamless manner. The exploitation of child labour, starvation, hunger and malnutrition all find place in this saga of colonial India. It is like an exhibition of poverty and hunger. There is no pity nor love but a horrendous affair full of torture and agitation for the children of Adam. The journey of homeless and lonely inquisitive boys like Munoo has its pivotal role in awakening to root out the deep rooted social evil against the orphan children who sold and bought on meagre wages. The constitution of India makes all these services illegal having strict vigilance. There is no ultimate solution to the problem but surely, Mulk Raj Anand gives a voice to the unheard voices. The voices of separation from their roots, the loss of humanity and the longing for love would, no doubt, be heard and sung through the literature of the world.

His expectations from his life are not materialistic but childish desires. He just wants to be treated lovingly and humanely which is often denied to him. He wants a peaceful and happy life which he often finds in his work. His hopes, desires are all stolen away by the fate. His death raises questions about the heavy load of brutal life that is pressed upon him one after another. The present research paper is concluded on one note of hope for all the sons of Adam like Munoo that they should be treated humanely and sympathetically.

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