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## Pathetic Plight of the Indian Workers: A Post Humanist Study of Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*: An Appraisal

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### Abstract

Post humanism can be described as a mode of thought regarding the crossroads of the human, the nonhuman, and the techno scientific world that have gained theoretical currency at the end of the twentieth century and the first years of this century. Precisely for the wake left by ecological conscience and environmental campaign to question a role of humankind in Earth's fate. In Asian, African, and Aboriginal thought-embodied in Yoruba, the subcontinent's tribal mythologies, folklore, Native American creation stories, and literatures from these continents-the interdependence of humans with other life forms and the world has long been accepted.

As a movement of theory, post humanism draws on an implicitly Eurocentric tradition of humanism as well as critiques of some of the same, drawn from critical race theory and even such diverse fields as animal studies and social studies of technology. History and literature are indissoluble and in this context, no other novel can be as worth proving as *Coolie*. The period of British Raj in India, which lasted from 1757 to 1947, is often portrayed as a time of great development and modernization. However, this period was also marked by widespread exploitation of Indian labourers who were subjected to hunched working conditions, low wages, and a lack of basic human rights. The British colonizers exploited the Indian labor force by beginning a program of indentured labour. Within this program, Indians were made to work for extended periods at low wages in plantation farms, mines, and factories. Many such workers had been taken to British colonies, such as Mauritius and Fiji and South Africa, to be used in the construction of infrastructure and the extraction of resources. Indian laborers have been employed in detestable conditions. Workers were often exposed to inhuman treatment, like torture and rape. The laborers were subjected to long working hours without a break or a resting period. Workers are subjected to extreme temperatures; many suffer from exhaustion, dehydration, and malnutrition.

Anand's novel *Coolie* is an epitome of such exploitation where Munoo, the protagonist is well associated with the exploitation by the forces such as capitalism, industrialism and colonialism. Munoo represents thousands of labourers who are denied their right to life and happiness. So this paper is a thought provoking attempt to explore the experience of labourers and coolies during the British rule in India.

**Keywords:** colonialism, Exploitation, Exhaustion, Dehydration, malnutrition, inhuman treatment, Capitalism.

### Introduction

A philosophical viewpoint on how change is implemented in the world is called post humanism. It dif-

fers from humanist conceptions in that it conceptualizes and historicizes both agency and the "human." Unlike humanists, who typically believe that humans are autonomous, conscious, deliberate, and exceptional in their acts of change, post humanists believe that agency is dispersed through dynamic processes in which humans participate but do not completely intend or control.

Industrial revolution came in India in the second half of the 19th century much later than in Europe. At the initial stages, cotton and jute factories were built by the Britishers and gradually other industries like mining, tea plantations, railway, iron, shipyards were set up in India. So a large number of new worker and labour class people have emerged in the society. Whether in a little town like Sham Nagar, a rural like Bilaspur, or a large city like Daulatpur and Bombay, these individuals have lived their entire lives subjected to social and economic inequalities, as if their lot is predestined to suffer. Both rural and urban areas of India have equally deplorable and dismal poverty conditions.

The novel *Coolie* provides a powerful representation of the deplorable state of labourers in India during the colonial period. The novel humanizes the struggle of labourers by portraying these issues through the eyes of Munoo, making their plight all the more poignant and compelling. The novel remains a relevant and powerful commentary on the contemporary state of labourers. Marxism is a political and economic theory that seeks to establish a classless society through the elimination of private property and the means of production. Anand, a committed Marxist himself, employs a range of literary devices to convey the tenets of Marxism and its relevance to the struggles of the working class in India. One of the central characters in *Coolie* is Munoo, a young boy who is forced to work as a coolie, or labourer, to support his family.

The main source of agency that deserves the most scholarly attention, according to humanism, is the conscious and intentional human subject. This is in contrast to post humanism. From the Renaissance forward, humanism has been structured as a literary corpus in a number of ways. But in general, humanism characterizes the human as (a) superior to other animals, (b) capable of speech and reason, and (c) independent of nature because of the mind's intellectual powers that control the body.

The nature/culture duality that holds that human civilization is apart from nature is reinforced by humanist presumptions about humans that permeate Western thought. A post humanist researcher, on the other hand, argues against this duality by viewing people as intertwined with their surroundings. Typically, a post humanist communication scholar incorporates research from a wide range of different fields, such as art, architecture, cybernet-

ics, ecology, ethology, geology, music, psychoanalysis, and quantum physics.

Munoo's experiences serve to powerfully indict a capitalist system: it forces all people to work a long time with low wages as a means to survive. Anand uses Munoo's story so that the readers can see just how inherently false capitalism is for it promises riches and social mobility when, in point of fact, it only enforces inequality and oppression. On the other side, through Munoo's struggles, Anand also emphasizes that collective action by the working-class people is fundamental. He stresses that workers must unite and fight for their rights rather than falling prey to the divide-and-conquer tactics of the ruling class. This is a classic feature of Marxist theory, which focuses on the power of collective action and the working class as a revolutionary force capable of bringing about social change.

In addition, Anand raises imperialism and colonialism as reasons behind the extension of the capitalist regime in India. He emphasizes the fact that Indian labor is not exploited through local economic policies, but represents an expression of a larger economic global system wherein Western nations' interests are kept before those of the developing nations and corporations. This critique of imperialism is another strong element of Marxist theory that understands colonialism as an instrument of economic exploitation for the continued reinforcement of capitalism. The novel testifies that the ideology is as valid now in the pursuit against social and economic inequality. The suffering of the Indian labourer starts from Warren Hastings when he brought the idea of 'Quinquennial settlement', which means an agreement between five years concerning the land that increased the revenue amount in the year 1772.

As a result of the system a ruling zamindar class landlords emerged in the society. These zamindars are often found to exploit his subjects who work as coolie or labourers for them. This exploitation becomes worse when the English Indigo planters force poor farmers and labourers to cultivate Indigo instead of food crops against their interest. D.R Gadgil in his book 'Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times' stated that the dramatic economic result of establishing British rule in India is the destruction of handicraft industry. The construction of the Indian railways serves as one of the most prominent examples of the exploitation of Indian labourers during the British Raj (Gadgil 23).

The British government initiated the construction of railways in India in the mid-19th century to transport goods and people across the country. However, the constructions of these railways are carried out at the expense of Indian labourers. The workers who build the railways are subjected to

deplorable conditions. They are forced to work for extended periods in hazardous circumstances without any safety equipment. Many workers get injured or perished during construction, leaving their families without any compensation. They are paid low wages and don't receive any benefits such as healthcare or pensions. Due to such injustices workers from Karachi North Western Railway Factories revolted in 1917. The conditions of Indian labourers in the textile industry were no better.

The Madras Labour Union was founded in 1918 by B.P. Wadia, with the aim of improving the working conditions of laborers in Madras (now Chennai). The union fought against low wages, long working hours, and the exploitation of workers. All these protests help Anand to mold his research on *Coolie*. The British Raj also exploited Indian labourers to extract resources from the country. The extraction of resources such as coal and iron ore was carried out at the expense of Indian labourers. The workers were subjected to perilous working conditions with little or no safety equipment. They were paid meager wages and did not receive any benefits.

The destitute conditions of Indian laborers under the British Raj were not restricted to their workplace. The British government had imposed exorbitant taxes on the Indian people, and Indian goods, which made it a bit difficult for them to earn both ends. B.D Basu's 'Ruin of Indian Trade and Industries' depict the British Government forced heavy taxation upon Indian commodity so that they could not beat the British Commodities in India as well as European markets. Labourers have to live their life in untidy and congested place as there was proper supply of purified water and basic medical facilities to the workers also.

The exploitation of Indian laborers during the British Raj had far-reaching consequences. It caused widespread poverty and deprivation, leading to the decimation of Indian industries and left behind the infamy of the Bengal famine of 1770 and 1943. The exploitation also created long-standing resentment toward the British colonizers, ultimately leading to the struggle for Indian independence. Representation of the then pathetic conditions of workers through *Coolie*: *Coolie* is an excellent novel to represent the worst state of Indian laborers in the colonial times in multi-levels. The story is mainly about Munoo, who had to be sent to Amritsar as a coolie because of circumstances compelling him to move away from his village. This novel mainly elaborates the life struggles of Munoo and many other labourers, unveiling the reality of those times. This novel narrates the deplorable situation of the labors in various manners. The laborers are portrayed as exploited by their employers who pay them a paltry wage

and compel them to work in conditions of inhumanity without rest or break. Their efforts go unrewarded, and Munoo is a case in point, who carries heavy loads on his back for a pittance. He is often beaten and humiliated by his employer.

This novel does highlight social inequity; laborers who toiled much were looked at as lower entities by the nobility. That is, those laborers existed just as any tools used solely for the richness of a high status being; Munoo happens to be this poor low stratum and more vulnerable to this sort of high hand of some upper casters, discriminating him as from their respective groups. Further, *Coolie* gives us an idea about how the workers stay in unhealthy environments with over-crowded living, and their inadequate access to various basic requirements of life.

Munoo, for example, shares a small dark room in an overcrowded tenement building in which he passes his days facing disease and death. Most laborers were not educated and technically skilful. Here, Anand brings out the pathetic condition with minute details. The laborers in the novel are depicted without education and also illiterate about basic literacy skills. Their inability to read or write renders them powerless before those in a position of power. For instance, Munoo is not literate enough to be able to read the contract signed with his employer, and the terms and conditions he has agreed upon are not in his knowledge.

Munoo's story is a vibrant and emotional narration of the life of a coolie, the harsh realities that surround it, and the greater social and political issues that are going on in India at that time. The novel starts off with Munoo as a young boy in a small village in Punjab, staying with his mother, sister, and two brothers. Munoo's father had died when he was still young, leaving the family in a state of extreme poverty. Munoo wanted to help his family survive and so he sets out on a journey to find work as a coolie in the city of Amritsar. Munoo's life experience as a coolie, describing the long days of gruelling physical work, constant terror of being tortured and exploited at the hands of employers, and discrimination and hostility towards low caste laborers such as him are all documented by the novel. Munoo's story is of strength and persistence in the face of incredible adversities and how the Indian masses displayed remarkable grit and resilience under these circumstances.

The novelist puts emphasis on exploitation of Indian labourers by the British employers and ways in which a colonial system fostered a perpetual cycle of Indian poverty and subjugation. Anand goes on to highlight the deep prejudices and caste lines that existed in Indian society at the time, and how it affected the everyday lives of Munoo and such people. The power with which

Anand tries to depict how life as a coolie drags Munoo through the toughest grind of body and soul comes across as truly poignant. There are long hours of manual labour coupled with an ever-present fear of abuse, which leaves Munoo physically wrung out and emotionally scarred. The vivid descriptions of Munoo's hardships by Anand evoke a very strong sense of empathy in the reader and show the incredible strength and resilience needed to survive such difficult circumstances.

Despite all this, Munoo is not willing to give up on the life he is determined to have. He is very compassionate and caring, and so he easily connects with the coolies as well as with the prostitutes who stay nearby the coolie lines. The relationships that Munoo shares with these characters create a strong counterpoint to the cruel realities of life as a coolie and show the need for human touch and sympathy when dealing with harsh conditions. Among the most poignant scenes in the novel is when Munoo meets his mother and siblings who, like him, have also traveled to the city in the hope of securing work. Munoo is elated at seeing his family again, but he is crushed to find out that his brother has become addicted to opium. It is the common problem with coolies who, in order to forget the agony of their body-labour, indulge in this drug. This moment depicts how colonialism destructively impacts Indian society and how exploitation of laborers leads to vicious cycles of poverty and addiction.

The labour is the underlying factor in the novel *Coolie* and from this perspective *Coolie* is a powerful and thought-provoking exploration of the experience of a coolie in India during the colonial era. When the man loses his means of production he is forced to work for the owners who determine which article he has to produce. The man is unable to realize himself through his work and in his products for he has no power to determine the purpose of his activity. He doesn't have self-realization in his act of production, rather they feel suffering, as a loss of his human nature.

The experience of Munoo at Sir George White's Cotton Mill is the symbol of alienation of labour which takes place under capitalism. The working conditions of the coolies and their living also help produce alienation between one coolie and another. Anand's vivid and emotional portrayal of Munoo's struggles highlights the incredible strength and resilience required to survive in such difficult circumstances, and sheds light on the broader social and political issues facing India at the time.

A reassessment of conventional humanistic myths, such as the idea that humans are the center of the universe or that non-living materials and other living creatures are instrumental, is required by Euro-American post humanism. The decentring of

the human and the demonstration of the interconnectedness, mutual dependence, and coevolution of all matter-whether it be the influence of technology on people or the animal forms on Earth-are contributions of post humanist thinking. Gender, sexuality, social interactions, families, and communities have all changed as a result of the advent and widespread use of technology. Post humanism destroys the Nature/Culture dualism that is ingrained in the Euro-American history. It argues that technologies and humans co-evolve in the same way that humans and nonhumans do. Examined are the prospects for human enhancement, the development of artificial intelligence (AI), and the moral ramifications of these developments for individuals, the legal system, concepts of "personhood," and social order. Popular culture, performance arts, and architecture have all embraced post human concepts.

Last but not least, post humanist philosophy views plants and animals as human companions, and a growing body of research examines "vegetal thinking," animal behavior, and the connections between people and non-living objects as well as other living forms. Therefore, Munoo's story is no single story, and through his story Anand draws attention to the exploitation of all Indian labourers by British employers, the deep-seated prejudices and caste divisions within Indian society, and the destructive impact of colonialism on Indian culture.

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