

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

THE PICAESQUE ADVENTURES OF MUNOO IN "COOLIE" BY M.R ANAND

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ABSTRACT

Coolie is one of the most famous novel of Mulk Raj Anand, was published in 1936. Which portrays the picaresque adventures of Munoo, a young boy compelled to leave his hill village to defend. His journey takes him from home to towns and cities, to Sham nagar, Daulatpur, Bombay and Simla working as a servant, factory-worker and rickshaw driver. It is fight for the survival that illuminates, with raw proximity, the grim fate of the masses in pre-partition India. Through this novel, Mulk Raj Anand has concentrated on a social misery caused by inhumanity, selfishness, cupidity, poverty and exploitation. Munoo, the protagonist of the novel is a central figure representing the miseries of the poor and downtrodden. He had experienced many painful situations and encountered callous adventures in his life.

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INTRODUCTION

Munoo. He is the protagonist or the hero of the novel. Of course, he does nothing that is really heroic, and we use the word hero for him only because he is the main character and the entire story centers round him. He is only technically the hero and Anand has shown that even ordinary fellows like (in *Untouchable*) and Munoo can be projected as the central character. Munoo is fourteen years old lad, living in a village of Kangra district. His parents had died when he was yet a small boy, and he had been living with his uncle (Daya Ram) and his aunt. He was studying in the fifth class in the local school, but in his spare time he had to graze the cattle by the side of the river (Beas) which flowed at some distance from the village. Although Munoo would have liked to complete his school education, his uncle and aunt decided that the time had come when Munoo should start

earning his own livelihood and not continue as a burden upon them. Daya Ram was working as a peon in the Imperial Band in the town of Sham Nagar at a distance of several miles from the village, and he lodged there also in the quarters provided to its lower employees by the band. In accordance with the decision of his uncle and the aunt who had always been unkind to the boy and used to scold him frequently, Munoo was taken by his uncle to Sham Nagar for employment as a domestic servant in the household of Babu Nathoo Ram who was a sub-accountant in the same bank in which his uncle was a peon. One day Babu Nathoo Ram invited his immediate officer, an Englishman by the name of Mr. England, to tea at his house. On his occasion Munoo, not knowing how to handle crockery, dropped a tray thus breaking some of the cups saucers. On this incident Munoo was severely abused by Bibiji, Babu Nathoo Ram's wife. Since

then he gets started facing many painful adventurous incidents in cities and towns like Daulatpur, Bombay and Simla.

Munoo's Adventures in Sham Nagar as a Domestic Servant

Munoo works in different capabilities and at different places. In his village he grazes cattle, besides attending school. There he has also to endure the ill-treatment, including hard words and words of abuse, by his aunt. Then he has to go to the town Sham Nagar against his own will, to earn his livelihood by his own exertions. He becomes a domestic servant in the household of Babu Nathoo Ram where he receives from him is certainly an adventure because of the ill-treatment which he receives from his mistress whom he addresses as Bibiji in the usual Indian fashion. This woman is even more Munoo's only compensation here is the kindness of Babu Nathoo Ram's younger brother, Dr. Prem Chand, and the sportive spirit of the girl Sheila. His adventures in Sham Nagar include his fight with a couple of other domestic servants working in the same locality where Munoo works. In this fight Munoo shows the true spirit of a Kshatriya, though he gets badly hurt. When one day Munoo is severely and cruelly beaten by Baby Nathoo Ram for an indiscretion which he has committed, Munoo finds it impossible to continue living and working in this place. In order to overcome his sense of degradation and humiliation, he runs away from his employer's house where he had realized the truth of his uncle's words that money was everything in this world, and where he had also come to the conclusion that there were only two classes of the people in the world, the rich and the poor. Munoo belongs to the poor class of people and even his superior caste cannot make up for his lack of money.

Munoo's Adventures in Daulatpur

Munoo now finds himself in Daulatpur where he gets a job in a pickle-and-jam factory owned jointly by a kind-hearted man, Prabha, and an evil man, Ganpat. Life here is another adventure for Munoo. While Prabha is very kind and affectionate towards him and towards the other servants as well, Ganpat treats all of them most harshly and callously. On two occasions Munoo receives a severe beating from Ganpat. The factory itself is an unwholesome

place where Munoo and the other servants feel miserable. Then circumstances take an ugly turn, and Munoo is bereft of the patronage of Prabha and his wife Parbati. Now Munoo has to look for work as a coolie in the Grain Market, in the Vegetable Market, and at the railway station. Competition at all these places is very stiff because of the availability of a multitude of coolies and the unavailability of enough work. One of Munoo's adventures here is an encounter with a yogi who turns out to be a scoundrel.

Munoo's Adventures in Bombay and Simla

From Daulatpur, Munoo travels to Bombay with the help of the elephant-driver of a circus; and life in Bombay is a greater adventure than it was anywhere before. Munoo's experiences at the Sir George White Cotton Mill in Bombay are most depressing; and the conditions of life for the mill-workers are very sordid, almost inhuman. One of Munoo's adventures in Bombay is a visit to a prostitute in the Red Light area of the city in the company of his friend Ratan. Ultimately when a communal riot breaks out in Bombay, Munoo almost gets killed by two Muhammadans. He has a narrow escape from the Muhammadans but he is knocked down by a passing motor-car which then picks him up and takes him to Kalka from where he travels to Simla, Munoo contracts tuberculosis because of the excessive strain to which he is subjected in the course of his work as a rickshaw-coolie and, after a time, he dies in hospital.

Munoo Not a Really Adventurous Kind of Man

This account of the experiences and adventures of Munoo at various places like Sham Nagar, Daulatpur, Bombay, and Simla clearly shows the picaresque quality of the novel. However, we must here note that Munoo is not the kind of protagonist who generally figures in a picaresque novel because there is nothing really adventurous about Munoo's mental make-up. Munoo certainly meets adventures; but he is not himself an adventurous young man. He does not seek adventures, and he does not put up a fight like the protagonist of a picaresque novel at any point except once when he comes to blows with two fellow-servants, Varma and Lehn, in Daulatpur. Far from putting up a fight against anybody, he does not

put up a fight even against the adverse circumstances of his life. Nowhere in the course of his journey or his stay at any of the places mentioned above, does he rebel against the unjust social and economic system of which he is a victim. He is a totally passive character who submits to the adverse or hostile circumstances instead of revolting against them. He is even more passive than Bakha in the novel *Untouchable*. His revolt remains confined to a few thoughts of discontentment at almost every place where he lives. The label "picaresque" can, therefore, be used for the novel *Coolie* only in a very restricted sense.

Conclusion

These are, then, the adventures of the protagonist. But the author has given us in this novel not only an account of Munoo's adventures, but also many vivid pictures of contemporary social conditions, more particularly the conditions of the life of millions of poor, unemployed, under-employed, and under-privileged classes of Indian society. It is this which gives to this novel a panoramic quality. Which also gives us a delineate picture of a cross-section of India, the visible India, the mixture of the horrible and the holy, the inhuman and the humane, the sordid and the beautiful, with good and evil being thrown together as in actual life. Like Munoo there are millions of people in India starving for food and facing innumerable challenges in their lives. But on one day they may be great, hence the social system in India makes the richer becoming rich and the poorer becoming poor, they all belong to suffering.

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