

## **The Metaphors of Untouchable and Coolie in Mulk Raj Anand's Novels *Untouchable* and *Coolie* and His Sense of Social Justice<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

I have argued elsewhere that Mulk Raj Anand in his first novel *Untouchable* (1935) has shown that none of the western theoretical models of attaining social justice, including the Rousseauistic, the Hegelian and the Marxist models, is appropriate to theorising the tragedy of Bakha's deterministic existence and the stubborn order that is responsible for the creation of the Bakhas of society. Ironically, the "lowest dregs" of mankind in western literatures can at least rebel, but Bakha as an untouchable cannot do so. Munno, the "hero-anti-hero" of *Coolie* (1936), being a Kshatriya by caste, can at least rebel. While Bakha's complicated existence as an untouchable is situated in the *varnashram* structure of Hinduism, Munno's fate as a rickshaw-puller is tied to his dehumanising work as a coolie. The fact remains that both Bakha and Munno are helpless labourers whose work has been permanently devalued and misappropriated. However, Anand stretches the metaphors of untouchable and coolie to suggest that we all are untouchables and coolies. I argue that the two metaphors of untouchable and coolie are universal metaphors of the sociology, history and metaphysics of human suffering and of man's inhumanity to fellow man. Can art fully address the moral problem of human slavery, indignity and suffering? I further argue that Anand elevates the level of discourse to a moral essay on humanism where art is concerned with the truth of the human condition.

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### Keywords

Labour, untouchability, consciousness, justice, casteism, humanism

*Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand's first novel, is a highly charged intellectual discourse on the karmic illusion of work and untouchability, and *Coolie* is a humanistic discourse on the subject of human labour. It may be argued that the central issue in either case is the philosophy of work and that untouchable and coolie are analogical metaphors of human enslavement, subjugation and oppression. While the setting of both the novels is colonial India, the two metaphors as developed by Anand have a much more comprehensive meaning and context, perhaps much too larger than could possibly be carried by the respective narratives or even allowed by the tenuous scope of history. It is indeed true that Bakha, the "hero-anti-hero" of *Untouchable*, is an Indian sweeper and Munoo of *Coolie* an Indian coolie, but they are universal and global figures: the two metaphors provide a poignant commentary on man's inhumanity to fellow man in the history of the human race, especially on the formation of collusive centres of power and the unprecedented complexity of these hegemonic structures in controlling human beings. It must be recognised that Bakha and Munoo are not Promethean heroes, nor do they share any of the characteristics of Carlyle's hero or Nietzsche's superman. Like Blake's chimney sweeps and Dickens's orphans, they are the rejects, the disinherited and helpless victims whose lives and work have been permanently devalued, misappropriated and made into stagnant categories by repressive traditions of history. Ironically, the western philosophical debate on human amelioration and progress and on liberty, equality and justice from Hobbes to Rousseau to Hegel to Marx has apparently failed to find any conclusive answer, if there is one at all, for the Bakhas and Munoo of humanity. Does the discourse in *Untouchable* and *Coolie* suggest that Anand intends to take Bakha and Munoo out of the capitalist hell and plant them in a socialist paradise? The colonial-capitalist hell, it should be noted, has a rigid structure of penal servitude, and, indeed, it should remind one of Michel Foucault's use of Jeremy Bentham's conceptual model of the Panopticon.<sup>3</sup>

For the purpose of the present study, a metaphor may be considered a highly condensed intellectual and analytical view of human experience; it is a poetic statement of sociohistoricity and ideology; and its function is the unobtrusive revelation of discourse, ideology, language and consciousness. Thus considered, the two metaphors, the untouchable and the coolie, are highly evocative of

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<sup>3</sup> In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault uses Jeremy Bentham's theoretical design of modern society as the Panopticon.

sociohistoricity, ideology and metaphysics. No doubt, untouchable and coolie are allied metaphors of dehumanisation and human subjugation, but it is significant to note that Anand's interest in the plight of the lowest dregs of society, workers, peasants and labourers and in their confrontational struggle further continued vigorously in *Two Leaves and Bud* (1937), *The Village Trilogy – The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) – and *The Big Heart* (1945). Unquestionably, Bakha, Munoo, Lalu of *The Trilogy* and Gangu of *The Big Heart* are victims of their aggressors. "My novels," remarks Anand, "were intended to be different from those of others, departures from the upper and middle section fictions." "I wished to recreate," he adds, "the folk, whom I knew intimately, from the lower depths, the lumpens and the suppressed, oppressed, [and] repressed, those who have seldom appeared in our literature except in Sarat Chatterji, Prem Chand, Bibhuti, Tarashankar and Maneck Bannerji" ("The Sources of Protest" 46). However, Anand's statement must be considered in the historical context of the British colonial governance of India. Whatever inference one might draw from the current assessment of the role of British colonialism and imperialism, the fact remains that the nature of modernity implemented by the European colonisers was a sort of "political modernity."<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the rural constituencies of the Empire remained comparatively undeveloped. In fact, whatever the nature and amount of diffusionism, the striking issue in the politics of the British imperial governance of colonies like India is that the colonial space became the battleground for keeping the colonial native on par with the British working class.<sup>5</sup> Anand recounts his first impression of England: "I had been struck by the peculiar dignity and self-respect with which the porters, sweepers and other workers bore themselves here against the coolies in India who were always being kicked about and intimidated.... I admired the way in which those who did unpleasant work seemed to recognize the dignity of labour" (*Apology* 59). Ironically, however, Anand's impression of the British coolies and other workers turns out to be an illusion. There is hardly any doubt that Anand's social and political thought must be examined against the crosscurrents of major European intellectual thought, especially British socialism, communism and humanism. During his twenty-five-year stay in England, Anand became a part of the 1930s movement, and yet he remained firmly committed to the cause of India's freedom from Great Britain.

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<sup>4</sup> This is Dipesh Chakrabarty's conceptualisation of the practices of the European coloniser: "The European colonizer of the nineteenth century both preached his Enlightenment humanism at the colonized and at the same time denied it in practice" (Introduction 4).

<sup>5</sup> See Gauri Viswanathan's interesting discussion in her essay "Raymond Williams and British Colonialism" about the attempt to differentiate between the high culture of the metropolis and the low culture of the colonies.

In *Untouchable*, the discourse between the young moderate poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar and the barrister R.N. Bashir recapitulates the western and the Gandhian ideologies of social and moral progress. But it is the eloquently crafted philosophical basis of Gandhi's address that dominates the scene. Although one might look at the issue of casteism in its essential context of the vulgarities and misinterpretations of Hinduism, the question remains: will industrial progress and modernity liberate the Bakhas of society from the karmic obligation of cleansing human excreta and guarantee them basic human dignity and general acceptance in the social order without any reference to their birth or heredity? Ironically, Bakha caught in the maze of the Indian caste system cannot even rebel. The destined life of a sweeper is Bakha's karmic and hereditary obligation; even Bakha's dream-world remains tersely defined by the iron hand of destiny. Although Gandhi declares categorically and emphatically that untouchability is "the greatest blot on Hinduism" (146), his moral philosophy seems to be too idealistic to meet the immediate ends of social justice.<sup>6</sup> Some of the legal and social programmes proposed by the poet Sarshar are also equally idealistic. But Forster is quick to recognise the tangle to which the Hindus have unfortunately tied themselves. According to this tangle, those who clean dirt are designated as dirty, impure and hence, outcastes. I believe that the frowning expression, "They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt," should have been unconditionally subjoined to the following statement: "They think we are born as dirt; therefore we are destined to clean their dirt" (79). Obviously, the metaphor focuses on the metaphysics of evil and especially on the nature of the deterministic order: the soul is born into the lowest class because of its basic imperfection, in which case then the life of a sweeper becomes a mode of punishment, a penal servitude. Forster's observation, "Really, it takes the human mind to evolve any thing so *devilish*" (Preface vi; my emphasis), implies that no genuine religion can be the progenitor and enforcer of such a perfidious plan that will classify people as evil, punish them with a life of the lowest existence and deny them any form of release from their destiny. Admittedly, E.M. Forster compliments Anand for his sharper power of observation of Indian

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<sup>6</sup> The Gandhi-Ambedkar controversy still remains unsettled in the criticism of Anand. See my introductory essay "Indian Writing in English: Structure of Consciousness, Literary History and Critical Theory" and "Mulraj Anand: A Reappraisal" in *The Indian Imagination*, especially Gauri Viswanathan's observation, Chapter 1, note 20: "In adopting Gandhi's perspective Anand's narrative alienates and marginalizes the assertion of the dalit will, and totally ignores the debate initiated by Ambedkar" (*Outside the Fold* 220). See also Teresa Hubel's discussion in her *Whose India?* and Kristin Bluemel's discussion in her *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics* (88–93). I maintain that it will be a grave misreading of Anand to infer that Bakha finally accepted the Gandhian position. It is quite true that for Gandhi "Swaraj (self-government) and the abolition of untouchability," as Hubel maintains, "were ontologically linked in his discourse, so much so that one could not occur without the other" (151), but it is incorrect to suggest that "ultimately, Anand is conditioned by the same historical shortsightedness that made Gandhi incapable of seeing limits of his own stance in regards to the untouchables."

social reality, probably better than that of his own in *A Passage to India*. Forster's frank and piercing analysis of untouchability is, one must say, an exuberant endorsement of Anand's presentation of the sociohistorical and religious muddle in which Bakha is caught.

The debate on casteism and untouchability from Gandhi to Ambedkar and to the present times is still very much alive in the post-independence India. It may be argued that the ancient conception of varunashram does not approve the corrupt historical practices of casteism and untouchability. It may be further argued that modern progress will provide legal remedies in achieving social justice and equality. But one may think that the Hindu mind is predominantly caste-conscious, and ask whether it will ever free itself from the theodicy of casteism. Bakha's burning desire to go to school and to become a sahib may be a child's fancy, because his father "had told him that schools are meant for the babus, and not for the lowly sweepers." Bakha had been painfully aware of the absurdity and cruelty of the upper-caste Hindus who have openly and boldly embraced the tradition of untouchability.

The psychoanalytical complexity of Bakha's dream only parodies the western discourse on equality, liberty and justice. The extent to which Bakha's innocence has been violated by social and religious determinism becomes abundantly clear by the ironic enslavement of his desire: all that Bakha dreams is to become a babu or a sahib. Anand's treacherous irony here exposes the colonial-imperialist strategies of doubly colonising the Bakha types. Bakha knows that he is born into a family of sweepers, but he is unable to comprehend the intricate problem of untouchability. He helps people clean their bodies, but he does not understand how his touch will pollute those who profess purity by birth. What manifests in the minds of the upper-class majority is the fear of intermingling and hence of the probable loss of inherited purity. The drastic implications of the Freudian ideas of fear, estrangement and Oedipal impulse are incontrovertibly congealed in the metaphor of the untouchable. Ironically, the temple priest, overpowered by his sexual desire for Bakha's sister Sohini, must have been terribly confused about the meaning of the words "purity" and "defilement." Evidently, Anand has placed the entire problem of the soul's purity and impurity in the midst of the modern discourse, eastern and western, on the nature of man, the origin of evil and class structure, firmly suggesting that British colonial attitudes by and large have endorsed such forms of human bondage.

Can untouchables become "free from the stigma of untouchability" and finally emerge "as useful members of casteless and classless society"? (155). Can Bakha the outcaste ever achieve some sort of "community identity"? Do any of the models cleverly introduced by Anand in the concluding section of the narrative – the Gandhian model that combines the ideal of swaraj and the abolition of untouchability as a single goal, the professed social equality and liberty in western

thought as outlined by Bashir, the Christian idea of salvation by conversion as propagated by Colonel Hutchinson and the poet Sarshar's harangue, especially his plea for industrialisation – provide any final answers to Bakha's miserable situation? Does Bakha share Gandhi's plan of integral progress and his unfailing optimism or the erstwhile determinism deeply embedded in the fundamental assumptions of the caste system? The irony is that none of these models provides any hope for the realisation of freedom and identity. One must not forget the intensity and magnitude of Bakha's despair at the end of the narrative. It is this undecidability, a sort of aporia, that unobtrusively sharpens the meaning of the metaphor of the untouchable. Bakha may very well try to cleanse his soul as adjoined by Gandhi, but the question, "But shall I never be able to leave the latrines?" (157), constitutes the ineffable centre of the discourse and still remains unanswered. Bakha's stark disappointment should be weighed against the illusory hope extended by the poet in the efficacy of the machine: "Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of casteless and classless society" (155). But the poet's resplendent vision of the abolition of untouchability and the formation of civil society is dependent on industrialisation – and hence on the full application of modernity. One can readily see Anand's subtle irony here – and E.M. Forster seems to join Anand – for any such programme of installing flush systems will depend on the British colonial regime's policy of modernising India. Anand must have been apprehensive of the limitations of western experiment when he put these words in Bashir's mouth: "In fact, greater efficiency, better salesmanship, more mass-production, standardization, dictatorship of the sweepers, Marxian materialism and all that!" (155). The tragedy and the stunning paradox are frightfully complex in Bakha's reflective ambivalence – that he will no doubt purify his soul but remain permanently entrenched in the business of cleaning latrines. One might ask if Anand is attempting an assimilationist technique whereby all these various ideologies will be conceptually integrated in Bakha's mind.

In *Untouchable*, Anand declares, "I meant to recreate the lives of the millions of untouchables through a single person" (qtd. in Rajan 102). Bakha as a universal representative of all untouchables has been slapped on his face by an upper-caste Hindu for polluting him by his touch. This slap on Bakha's face, continues Anand, is symbolic of the insult "as in Dostoevsky's *Insulted and Injured*...." Like other untouchables, Bakha has been persistently abused, humiliated and rebuked. One must not forget the abusive name-calling at the temple and also the pernicious charge of defilement of the temple by the priest who had molested Sohini (60-64). But it is the slap on Bakha's face that immediately awakens in him the truth of the wretchedness of his humiliating and repelling existence as a sweeper: "For them I am a sweeper, sweeper – untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!" (52). The words "sweeper" and "untouchable"

are conjoined linguistically and metaphorically to give rise to feelings of shame and disgust. Does Bakha's – and for that matter Munoo's – work have any dignity and pleasure of fulfilment? Does Bakha's work have any real value, social or economic? According to Riemenschneider, Bakha's work of cleaning latrines falls under the category of estranged or "alienated labour" that is forced upon him, but most certainly it is devoid of any true pride, happiness or gratification. His work has no genuine economic productivity, nor can its economic value ever become negotiable. On the contrary, it creates feelings of mass displeasure and pain resulting from humiliation and degradation of the nature of his work. But it is the mental recognition of his lowly social status as an untouchable that sharpens the metaphorical significance of the word that categorises him. One wonders if Bakha at this level of mental recognition would turn into a radical rebel. Or, will he become an intellectually and morally enlightened person who will be able to assimilate the menial character of his work into his larger vision of the improvement of the human condition based on love and hope? Evidently, we are gradually moving toward Anand's vision of progressive humanism.

Whatever the origin of the tradition of the caste system or varanashram in Hinduism – the tradition as defined by Manu or the tradition engendered over the years by serfdom that is supposed to have given birth to the sophisticated structure of casteism – the fact remains that casteism has emerged as a form of cursed human bondage.<sup>7</sup> "The sweeper," remarks Forster, "is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion" (Preface vi). It is the permanence and the irretrievability of the bondage coupled with the resulting social contempt that define the moral protest. The untouchables, as a class, were cast out of the four-tier division of the ancient Aryan society, although it must be recognised that original paradigm of the fourfold division, like Plato's threefold division of society, was an idealistic conception intended to test the spiritual and intellectual abilities of its citizens. But it was not intended as a hereditary division. In the historical practices of the Hindu social structure, the lowest dregs were segregated, as were the Calibans, the lumpens, the destitutes and the dispossessed. Fredric Jameson in his discussion of *misérabilisme* or dirty realism refers to the sociopolitical process of creating the "social other" and consequently of ghettoisation – the systematic attempt to create "forbidden spaces" (150-51) for the contemptible sections of the proletariat. The untouchables in ancient Indian society were not only ghettoised but also were expected to perform menial tasks for the upper-class gentry. Of course, the poignant irony is that Bakha is a slave of slaves.

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<sup>7</sup> For the moral and ideological basis of the Hindu caste system, see Ramakrishna Mukherjee's *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company*.

The untouchable or the Indian nigger is a compound metaphor that combines the moral and metaphysical assumptions with economic, political and sociological realities. But one might argue that considered in the context of the nineteenth-century debate on racial hybridity and anthropological and scientific theories, such as social Darwinism and interracial sexuality, the anxiety of the early Aryans to preserve their racial purity had led to the walled separation of castes and particularly to the exclusion of the members of the lowest caste and the outcastes.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the caste issue has been considered the logical equivalent of the racial issue and the gravest fear underlying the separation of castes is one of miscegenation. It should be remembered that Sohini, the subject of the forbidden copulation, is the daughter of an untouchable.

One might therefore ask if the two metaphors, the untouchable and the coolie, sustain their meaning and universality outside the Indian space, the third-world geomoral structure, encompassing both the colonised and decolonised spaces. One might also ask if the detestable spaces in communities created by the politico-economic power and its collective hubris can be renovated and reintegrated in the structure of a civil society. There is no doubt that in the portrayal of Bakha, Anand has gone to the lowest depths of a social order where one has a clear glimpse of the fixed and stagnated reality resembling Dante's hell. The metaphors of the untouchable and coolie belong to fixed categories, permanently assigned spaces at the lowest rung of a civil structure with one distinct difference: while a coolie may participate in the modernist and postmodernist processes of evolutionary progress, an untouchable despite his education remains permanently fixed to his station. Since the knowledge gained by a coolie and an untouchable belongs to this fixed station of reality, its scope and value are characterised by stagnation and fixity. Ironically, however, it is only the dominated and the colonised other who are charged with stagnation and fixity.

Do Bakhas and Munoos, the lowest dregs of humanity, have any consciousness? What is the value of their work? In Hegel's philosophy of the master-slave relationship, the consciousness of the worker, because of his commitment to work, is supposed to be superior to that of his master.<sup>9</sup> According to Hegel, "Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness" (qtd. in Taylor 152). Since the world of material reality is basically created by the slave, the master simply remains a consumer, an outsider. In the dialectic of the master-slave relationship, the slave realises his self-consciousness and gratifies his desire by annulment of the otherness or foreignness but only in the object-world of

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<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to Robert J.C. Young for his discussion of racial hybridity, caste system and sexual identity in his *Colonial Desire*.

<sup>9</sup> For most of the ideas on Hegel, I am indebted to Charles Taylor's *Hegel*. For the references to Marx, I have drawn freely from Avineri's *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*.



materiality. Thus, it is only through the discipline of work that the slave as knower and the creator of the object world learns to recover his consciousness into a structure of conceptual and symbolic thinking. Evidently, Hegel is defending the ethical formulations of work ethics in Christianity and in Romanticism. But Marx, despite his indebtedness to Hegel for dialectical thought, takes a drastically different position in his conception of dialectical materialism: “Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process” (391). Here is Marx’s more direct statement quoted by Anand in *Apology*: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness” (183). Thus consciousness in Marx’s philosophy of cultural materialism is dependent upon material conditions. In other words, it is the base, the economic development, that will determine the superstructure and the quality of one’s consciousness. Are Bakha and Munoo Hegelian or Marxist figures? Are their consciousness superior to those of the upper classes? One may remember that Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* calls the aristocrats the barbarians and the bourgeois the philistines. How can the barbarians and the philistines, the perpetrators of anarchy, be supposed to have better consciousness? For Arnold, it is the awakened populace, the working class, who have better consciousness and who are the arbiters of an ideal classless society.<sup>10</sup> One must also remember Wordsworth’s presumptive thesis about the superiority of the consciousness of his fishermen and leech-gatherers.<sup>11</sup> Bakha has no doubt a cleaner and more authentic consciousness, but the irony is that he is unable to develop any sense of Hegelian identity. However, Bakha does see the unbridgeable gap between the two worlds – his own world of servitude and the exalted world of the master – wondering if any progressive plan of restructuring a new social order will recognise the need of uniting the two worlds.

The fact remains that both Bakha and Munoo are slaves, and their tragic existences are controlled by the baggage of work. While work in the Hegelian sense must engender transforming presence and universal consciousness, in the Marxist sense, however, it must be valued in terms of its contribution to material progress. In the case of Bakha especially, it must be recognised that since bhanghis (sweepers) are permanently dissociated from the structure of a civil society and since they are unpropertied and without any authoritative status in the social order, the Marxist conception of a worker, a proletariat, and a master is not fully applicable to the intricate structure of the Indian caste system. It must be readily admitted that both Bakha and Munoo are tragic figures of history because they are unable to free themselves from the repressive tyranny of history and tradition. The

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<sup>10</sup> See Arnold’s lucid exposition of classes in his *Culture and Anarchy*, Chapter III.

<sup>11</sup> See Wordsworth’s argument in his “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.”

argument about the quality and the level of Bakha's and Munoo's collective consciousness remains unresolved; is this consciousness superior to that of their masters?

Here a mention must be made about Anand's long-standing association with British socialism, Marxism and other progressive movements of the thirties.<sup>12</sup> Like all progressive liberal writers, Anand was deeply searching for theoretical models that would resolve the problems of human suffering, poverty, dominance and exploitation. One must understand the consequences of the repressive dominance superimposed on India by the colonial-imperial structure of the British Empire. Do Bakhas and Munoo's have natural rights – human rights – bestowed by a social structure that is the product of colonial and neocolonial legacies of control, power and subjugation? Anand has categorically denied that he is a communist, but he was dubbed a “social realist,” a label from which he tried to disassociate himself immediately on his return to India. I have dealt with this subject elsewhere,<sup>13</sup> but I must reiterate that during his twenty-five-year stay in England, Anand firmly believed in the philosophies of progressive socialism and later of humanism – not scientific or rational humanism but “neohumanism” (Anand's term). In *Apology for Heroism*, Anand categorically states that, like all other progressive liberals, he accepted Marxism, “but considered humanism, the view of the whole man, as the more comprehensive ideology” (185). Anand had accepted Marx's basic hypothesis, “that social existence determines man's consciousness,” but he maintains that he came “to socialism through Tolstoy, Ruskin, Morris and Gandhi... as an ethical creed, in so far as it was a protest against misery, ugliness and inequality” (184-85). Anand declares categorically, perhaps after Morris, that “socialism implies a spiritual change...” (167). Anand's conception of the “whole man” includes not only the world of desire, but also the risen consciousness that includes some of the most important human values – karuna (compassion), bhakti (devotion), love and truth.

It is indeed remarkable to note that Anand in placing the two metaphors in the centre of the western discourse has created a confrontational position very much like the one created by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*. I mean the inseparableness of the historical, economic, philosophical and moral issues from each other.<sup>14</sup> Although both Bakha and Munoo are labourers, it is Munoo's case in *Coolie* where

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<sup>12</sup> See Saros Cowasjee's treatment of Anand's association with the British liberals of the 1930s in his *So Many Freedoms*, Chapter 1. Also see my essay “Ideological Confrontation and Synthesis in Mulk Raj Anand's Conversations in Bloomsbury.”

<sup>13</sup> See my essay “Mulk Raj Anand: A Reappraisal.”

<sup>14</sup> See Brook Thomas's essay “Preserving and Keeping Order.” Also, see my essay “Indian Writing in English: Structure of Consciousness, Literary History and Critical Theory.”

Anand shows his consummate skill in the effective use of history and ideology to construct a highly evocative and extremely analytical metaphor from one of the most ordinary experiences of common life. He had done the same in the creation of Bakha, who has been ceaselessly pitted in the archetypal conflict between himself and the tyrannical society. Munoo has gone through different positions before embracing death: as a domestic servant, as a factory worker in Bombay, and finally as a rickshaw-puller in Simla. It could be argued that Coolie is Anand's youthful romance with British socialism and Marxism; the narrative and the central metaphor of coolie challenge the European political and economic thought. One might ask if Mill's conceptions of utilitarianism and liberty have any relevance to the Bakhas and the Munooos of the world as well as other repressed denizens of the colonial spaces.<sup>15</sup> What liberty and whose liberty? One can hardly forget E.M. Forster's candid admission about English liberty: "It is race-bound and it's class-bound. It means freedom for the Englishman, but not for the subject races of his Empire" (*Abinger Harvest* 64). "Colonialism," remarks Young, "was a machine; a machine of war, of bureaucracy and administration, and above all, of power..." (98). It must be noted that the last two stages of Munoo's journey conclusively show that the British colonial governance of India is largely responsible for the creation and perpetuation of slavery, poverty and suffering. It is at this point that one finds Anand almost aligning himself with Conrad's central thesis in *Heart of Darkness*: the entire issue of colonial imperialism turns out to be a nightmarish moral predicament in the figure of Kurtz.

Peter Burra's review of *Coolie* emphasises the universality of the metaphor of "coolie." The coolies declare in unison that, because of the "big sahib's greed" (228), they remain "poor nigger[s]" (227) and that they permanently "belong to suffering" (215). The principal interest of the English factory owners and the British subjects residing in India during the colonial era was not the welfare of the labouring class but the availability of the cheap labour of the Munooos. After all, India as a rural constituency of the British Empire must engender possibilities of economic advancement of the metropolis and, consequently, the strengthening of capitalism. Marx, as a student of history, had seen this extended analogy between capitalism and colonialism. In fact, Marx in his analysis of the British rule in India maintains that imperialism is "the highest stage of capitalism" (Avineri 171). It

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<sup>15</sup> See Mill's Introduction to "Liberty" where he openly and fearlessly defends his exclusion of the "backward states of society" and the "barbarians" (13). Also, see Alan Dershowitz's remarks about Mill's acceptance of colonialism as a basis for exclusion of the erstwhile colonies of the British Empire from the purview of his suppositions in "Liberty." The presumptive thesis of his essay "Utilitarianism" – the greatest good of the greatest number – and other major presumptions also remained dysfunctional in so far as India was concerned, although India, as Eric Stokes argues in his *English Utilitarianism and India*, was the testing ground of Bentham's philosophy of utilitarianism. Also, see my essay "Indian Writing in English: Structure of Consciousness, Literary History and Critical Theory."

may be argued that the true significance of the analytical metaphor of the coolie finally centres on moral grounds. Do economic advances speed up the pace of rebellion? Does genuine rebellion originate from its basic roots of poverty? In this respect, then, will the wealthier classes of people or nations be always interested in perpetuating poverty? To what extent can a group of people or a nation for that matter dehumanise another group or nation and keep it in permanent servitude for its own economic good, pleasure or comfort? The actual obliteration of a class or group of people may not be necessary because, in that case, there will not be any beneficiary of pity and anxiety. Indeed, although Munoo's death is a stern and tragic reminder of man's inhumanity to man, the ethical and sociopolitical debate on poverty and destitution is hardly concluded.

Anand has repeatedly said that he wrote *Coolie* in response to Kipling's *Kim*.<sup>16</sup> Kipling's hero Kim, a child-hero, can knock down the giantised figure of a pathan and become an active pillar of the colonial empire. It should be remembered that both Kim and Munoo are orphans. But Anand's Munoo is a realistic hero, a tragic hero, a "hero-anti-hero"; he is fashioned after the English romantic child-hero whose innocence has been violated and whose direct confrontation with the life of continued exploitation, starvation and poverty proves to be fruitless and unproductive. After completing the full circle of his journey, Munoo finally comes back to the hills; Mrs. Mainwaring, a Eurasian, brings him as her servant to Simla, where he works as her rickshaw-puller. Essentially a hillboy from Kangra valley, Munoo travels to Daultpur and from thereon to Bombay and has had varied experiences, ranging from a domestic servant to a factory worker to a coolie and to a rickshaw-puller. It is during his work as coolie where he encounters challenging problems of a fierce and ugly competition with other coolies and is finally hurt by a car driven by Mrs. Mainwaring. In the story, Munoo receives inhuman and repelling treatment from his Indian masters, the foreign mill owners in Bombay and his compatriot coolies. Thus, Anand presents a vivid picture of human misery – poverty, exploitation, hunger and disease. Munoo's experience as a child-servant is as disgusting as his other experiences. Indeed, the story of Munoo is a study in human suffering. It should be remembered that Munoo, being a Kshatriya by birth, does not carry the same baggage of untouchability as does Bakha. But Anand has successfully shown that his sufferings result from the combined forces of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and feudalism. Since the confrontational life in Bombay is centred on his direct experience as a worker, a labourer and a coolie, Munoo now knows the meaning of poverty, suffering and wretchedness. One of the most moving scenes in Bombay is the existence of pavement-dwellers and of poor workers who live in hutments with dirt, filth and unsanitary conditions around.

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<sup>16</sup> See Anand's letter of January 12, 1997, to me, which is included in "Reminiscences," where Anand gives the background of his decision to write the novel *Coolie*. It all started with T.S. Eliot's praise of Kipling's hero Kim.

Anand's caustic irony in portraying the work of the rickshaw-pullers to transport the British sahibs and memsahibs up and down the hills in Simla only sharpens the centrality of the meaning of the metaphor of coolie – "For India was the one place in the world where servants still were servants..." (277). The souls of the rickshaw-pullers loudly echo human cruelty, exploitation, subjugation and social injustice. The incantation uttered by the Bombay coolies, "We belong to suffering! We belong to suffering!" (215), is fully reverberated by the destitution and misery of the rickshaw-pullers of Simla. Anand puts the entire issue of the exploitive use of labour in a direct moral context: "Old Gandhi refused to ride in a rickshaw as, he said, it hurt his soul to have to be borne in a carriage driven by human beings" (262). Finally, Munoo dies of tuberculosis in Simla – unsung and unknown but freed from the life of wretchedness, abuse and poverty. Whereas Bakha's world of desire remained repressed, Munoo's unborn dream-world was permanently buried in the earth.

Did Bakha and Munoo fight for an established cause? What are Anand's motives in creating these two universal archetypes? Can the Bakhas and the Munoo's of the world ever recover their lost human dignity within the Indian space and outside of it in other spaces in the universe? Is Anand's objurgation of casteism, capitalism, feudalism, colonialism and imperialism inspired by his optative vision of hope in man's ability to reconstruct a new social order? It must be understood that both Bakha and Munoo are sufferers and not rebels, that the novel *Untouchable* had the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi and a laudatory introduction by E.M. Forster, and that the novel *Coolie* was received enthusiastically by almost all British liberals. It must also be noted that, whereas Bakha's work as a sweeper cannot be valued and negotiated primarily because of the politics of Hindu casteism, Munoo's work as a servant, factory worker and coolie is fully negotiable in the context of material production. These two novels alone had given Anand the status of a revolutionary novelist. Anand fought persistently and uncompromisingly for equality, liberty and justice, and for the basic human needs in the newly emerging civil structures of colonial India and post-independence India. In fact, Anand maintains that the new humanism must include the fundamental human values of "the Buddhist karuna or compassion," bhakti and truth and a deep commitment to the ideal of human dignity. Can one's sense of social and public good and, hence, of social justice be directed by one's sense of moral good and the truth of the human condition? Niven's contention that Bakha's disgust – and Anand's own disgust for that matter – has only the "ideological solution" (50) is apparently not supported by Anand. The stringent irony in Bakha's examination of the various sociopolitical and philosophical models as possible options is that none of these will guarantee true freedom and identity to marginalised groups of people within a civil society. It is somewhat ironic that both the metaphors of untouchable and coolie do not allow Hegelian

reversal from a slave to a master. One's consciousness, Anand seems to affirm, derives its residual strength and transparency from a conflation of the ideological-materialistic base and the moral base. "The necessity for the recognition of the world human values," remarks Anand, "[is] the cornerstone of humanism" (*Apology* 190). And Anand asserts categorically and unapologetically: "There is no doubt in my mind that, among the fundamental values, the dignity of man is the highest" (202). Does Anand's neohumanism mark distinct advancement over socialism and Marxism? What structure of civil society will guarantee the Bakhas and the Munoos their basic human dignity? There is however another way of looking at the nature of problem in Narasimhaiah's piercing observation: "The untouchables, Anand's art has made us see, are not Bakha and his sister but those others who called them so" (22).

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