



## GRIEF AND STIGMA OF BEING ALIVE FOR A COLLIE AND A DALIT – DEPRIVED OF COMMISERATION- A LOOK INTO THE CHARACTERS OF MUNOO AND BAKA

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### ABSTRACT



Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) along with Raja Rao and R K Narayan crafted the canon of Indian English Literature with his adept pen portraying the Indian society with its deep rooted caste system and practice of labor exploitation. His novels like 'Untouchable', 'Coolie', 'Village', 'The Road', 'The Sword and Sickle', 'Two Leaves and a Bud' reflect the very fabric of Indian society on which reader can see the plight of millions whose destiny and identity is not self made but carved out by the 'Privileged few'. The Cry of the marginalized, the tears of the stigmatized are clearly mirrored in his works.

The misfortune of the underprivileged occupies the much space of his works. His characters like, Baka, Raka, Laka, Sohini, Pundit Kalinath, Munoo, Babu Nathu Ram, Premchand, Bhiku synchronized themselves with the real life experience of the Dalits, and underprivileged, unskilled laborers and economically backward classes in India. At some juncture we can find Anand being allegiant to communism and socialism but it is insufficient and biased if we compartmentalize his work into any strata of social practice or theory.

My paper deals with the character of Baka and Munoo from the novels untouchable and 'Coolie' respectively, the former is a Dalit stigmatized and predestined by the tentacles of caste system, the latter's life is capsized by the identity of a coolie deprived of dignity of labor and chance of getting any economic succor.

**Keywords:** *Stigma Of Casteism, Identity, Class Demarcation, Interpellation, Reification.*

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The novel *Coolie* centres round the character of Munoo. It is written in the year 1936. The principle character Munoo is an unskilled labour who even lacks the awareness of what it actually looks like being with the identity of a coolie. He has just entered teenage having no sense of exploitation which awaits him. The novel begins when he was fourteen years old and ends at his fifteenth year.

At this tender age he sees life with fullness of consequences of British rule, rigid caste system, labor and economic exploitation. Having lost his parents at his early childhood, he lives under the reluctant guardianship of Uncle Daya Ram and aunt Gujri at Shyam Nagar in the lap of Kangra Hills. Responsibility of feeding him was felt as burden by uncle and aunt and consequently he was left to his own fate. Munoo's identity is framed when he says 'I am Munoo, Babu Nathu Ram's servant' as he was employed and assigned job of domestic servant at the discretion of his master.

Munoo could not understand malignant logic when he was not offered a seat to enjoy his cup of tea. The identity is given not demanded or not supposed to be deserved. Being a coolie he is destined to live a life of an unrespectable, underprivileged youth. Roti, Kapda, Makhan go serially in their importance for an individual to sustain life. For a coolie, more often than none Roti itself becomes a prized possession leaving aside kapda and makhan. Babu Nathu Ram's wife Sheila did believe that a servant had no right to play with the children of his master that led to comment "Oh look, mummy! Our coolies are there, cried little Circe"

When daughter is injured Sheila immediately reacts violently and makes Munoo responsible for her tears ignoring the swelling tears of betrayal of sense of service and loyalty in his eyes.

'Interpellation' is a concept developed by Lewis Althusser which places an individual in his/her of determined place which is aided by the ideology prevailing and social energy circulating in a social setup. Althusser goes further to say that 'Ideological State Apparatuses' and Repressive State Apparatuses' provide a privileged space for dominant ideology. In India where caste system is rooted to its core since centuries, the dominant ideology is propagated and makes others venerate it of which

the mechanism is successfully maintained by the upper caste with the help of religious sanction and cultural artifacts.

Munoo as unskilled, socio-economically deprived subject, Baka on the other hand stung by the poisonous tentacles of caste system are not free from being the subservient subjects of the dominant ideology. Munoo recognized with the profession of a servant, every one deprive him of his due dignity. Individuals are recognized by their profession in big cities yet professional commitment does not bring any due recognition but nature of profession one is involved in.

Munoo observes " I am kshatriya and I am poor, and Verma a Brahmin is a servant boy, a menial, because he is poor. No, caste does not matter, the babus are like the sahib logs, and all the servants look alike.

Reification is a Marxist term which denotes objectification of social relation and of those subjects which involved in it, here subjects are transformed into objects. Commodity consciousness (Fetish) relying on machine line of production for profit making leads to reification of the individual who works and invests his energies along the chain of production. Reification quickens the process of alienation in which worker/producer of goods/provider of the services no longer feels himself attached to the produce as the value in whose production he is involving. Munoo and Baka due to their social status, economic lag, their services, their value creation is separated from them. The end production is given importance not the producer of it. People need them yet they deliberately do not recognize them. Baka and Munoo are objectified, they are reified.

'The bigger the city is the more cruel it is to the sons of Adam'- industrialization, urbanization led to the creation of wealth and draconic economic exploitation. Rich are enjoying the fruits of wealth creation and poor are busy with creating fruits of wealth. Baka receives the curse "Perish and die" when house wife thinks that he defiled her house standing at her threshold. Even his presence in front of a house is taken as desecrating it. Yet Sohini is needed for Pundit Kali Nath to satisfy his physical hunger. The irony is intensified when we compare



Baka's existential dilemma with that of sohini, when Pundit Kali nath wanted to molest her irrespective of his caste conscious ritualistic life, at another hand Baka's shadow is felt as defiling a house which is made with bricks and mud.

At another instance "keep to the side of the road, you low-caste vermin! He (Baka) suddenly heard some ne shouting at him. Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach is the comment on Baka's presence on the road he sweeps. An upper caste man unnoticingly touches Baka and scolds him. Baka as an 'Outcaste' must raise his voice that he is untouchable beware of his presence. Injustice finds its full presence in the episode. Baka could not understand the nature of mistreating him by the upper caste Hindu.

The learning resulted in "posh keep away, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper, coming", there is no respite, no escape, no deliverance for the out caste Baka, he could not marry a washerwoman's daughter even though he intensely loves her as the hierarchical caste system had rotten the strata of outcastes.

Baka and Munoo both are subjected to both verbal and physical abuse.

"Why are we always abused?" is the question that comes from the bottom of Baka's heart, the answer he could not find. Munoo has to die a premature death at his age of fifteen, Baka has to live with the life of imagined better future, knowing nothing when will they come.

## CONCLUSION

Grief and Stigma of being alive for a coolie and a dalit annihilate the desire live a purposeful, dignified life in a society where identity of an individual depends on his caste not on his character as meaning of life is vested in the interest of a selected few but not recognized on par with the downtrodden.

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