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SOCIAL REALISM IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S "COOLIE" AND ARAVIND ADIGA'S
"THE WHITE TIGER": A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Mulk Raj Anand the red hot voice of the general population, one who has made an effective social understanding of Mother India. He has indeed deeply felt the pulse of Indian society. Anand is recognized as a novelist for his proletarian humanism, social realism, naturalistic philosophy, innovative stamina and his 'Mulkese' realistic language. He chooses the most minimal classes to represent them in his novels. He argues for the abused, the have-nots, the exploited and the marginalized classes of the society. His second *Coolie* (1936) uncovers the horrible vogue of misuse of the defenceless individuals in the nation under foreign rule. The colonial lords cherish the sense of superiority as a sacred principle. They regard it their obligation to treat the natives as slaves, with racial malevolence exists the keen sense of class division even in the rulers. On the other side Aravind Adiga the Man Booker Prize winning author for his debut novel *The White Tiger* (2008) highlights the core issues of Indian society like identity crisis, social separation, political debasement, class segregation, complexity in the socio-economic, influence of foreign culture and degradation of traditional values and fanatic nature of Indian societies towards the west. The novel explores the issues related to the dull side of Indian village life, their fight for their survival. It is the complete post-mortem of the India's developing nature of the city life. Adiga examines the dark heart of the sparkling India by contrasting the dark and light sides of the Indian societies.

Keywords: Poverty, Discrimination, Ill-treatment, Exploitation, Cruelty, Corruption

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INTRODUCTION

Coolie: The novels of Anand focus both on the social vices bred by pride and power and the political oppressions of the rulers with equal zeal. Anand's great work *Coolie* can be regarded as a definite political end in view. The novel *Coolie*, uncovers the horrible vogue of misuse of the defenceless individuals in the nation under foreign rule. The colonial lords cherish the sense of superiority as a sacred principle. They regard it their obligation to treat the natives as slaves, with racial malevolence

exists the keen sense of class division even in the rulers.

Anand's novel *Coolie* strikingly portrays the picture of society in which the shrewdness of the colonial rule appears in various forms. It depicts the social class distinction between the rich and the poor also exhibits the multicoloured, however tragic and regrettable existence of Munoo. It is a human tragedy caused by poverty, exploitation, cruelty, greed and selfishness. It is not the destiny or Almighty who is responsible for the tragedy of

Munoo, but the society in which he is brought up. The poor are the hungry and sick, weak and helpless at all places whether small towns and villages like Bilaspur and Sham Nagar or in a city like Daulatpur or in a cosmopolitan city like Bombay. They have no feeling of self respect, no dignity. They are chomped from pillars to post and are constrained to live like animals in the most unhygienic environment. They are continually misused and abused and they have been lessened to the condition of 'Subaltern'.

Mulk Raj Anand's second novel *Coolie* portrays the class distinction between the haves and the have not's. The novel is concerned with another class of people, a growing mass of Indian humanity consisting of wage-earning labourers, derogatorily and contemptuously referred to as coolies, who too are socially discriminated and made to suffer indignity, humiliation, mentally and psychologically damaged, no less than the unfortunate outcasts. Mulk Raj Anand presents the sad and pathetic life of a young orphan boy called Munoo, who is despised by the society, rejected by his relatives and oppressed by his masters.

The novel *Coolie* gives a frightening picture of a downtrodden boy Munoo who at his early stage gets into oblivion of his own existence. He could feel of irritation an orphan and Anand could rightly give a heart throbbing description of his mental state and his all activities in a unique way. Anand continued his exploration of the cross section Indian society. *Coolie* is a comprehensive study of the social condition of India. It traces the social and economical conditions of four towns in North Indian. The novel dramatizes with a vivid clarity, the economic exploitation of the poor by the rich. M.K. Naik rightly observes: "The author's compassion for the exploited and downtrodden is pure and intense but does not degenerate into blind hysterics or dull preaching, one aspect of exploitation is presented in coolie, this exploitation of the Indian by the white man and poor by the rich."¹

The novel introduces how Munoo, the orphaned boy under the care of his loveless uncle and aunt, just a little before he is forced to leave his village in the Kangra hills for Sham Nagar. Munoo does not want to go to the town, but he was forcefully thrown out of this paradise at the age of

fourteen by his bullying uncle. Munoo is put in to the domestic service of Babu Nathoo Ram, an employee of the Imperial Bank in Sham Nagar. He is perpetually tortured and ill-treated by his cruel aunt. Munoo says: "For in spite of the fact that his aunt was always abusing him, in spite of the fact that she ordered him about, asking him to do this and to do that, in spite of the fact that she beats him more than he beats his cattle."²

The second episode of Munoo's life starts when he was employed in Sham Nagar as a Domestic servant in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram on five rupees a month. Munoo also feels violently insulted, as he has relieved himself at their kitchen doorstep. His mistress berates him. Anand writes: "Vay, you eater of your masters! Vay, you shameless brute! You pig! You dog! The storm burst on his head as, hearing no response to her call, she appeared at the door, saw him, and unable to bear the sight, withdrew. Vay, you shameless, shameless, vulgar, stupid hill boy.....Why didn't you ask me where to go? May you fade away! May you burn! We didn't know we were taking on an animal in our employ, an utter brute, a savage.....!" (Coolie, P.17)

Anand has painted the true picture of Munoo with the real colour of life. The harsh reality found in the novel. The very subject itself is real. The exploitation and suffering saga of the poor boy is an account of the society where we find this situation in our day to day life. Anand has made the pan picture of the reality in the novel. The use of real language and the translated words gives the effect of freshness and reality. In the house of Babu Nathoo Ram, Hunt and humiliated Munoo is forced to brood over his lot. It is not easy for him to settle down to a 'routine of domestic slavery'. The wild bird of his heart flutters every now and then with the desire for happiness. He finds it necessary on an occasion to ask himself questions about his identity, very much as Bakha does when faced with a crisis. To his question: "What am I – Munoo? He asked himself as he lay wrapped in his blanket, early one morning. I am Munoo, Babu Nathoo Ram's servant; the answer came to his mind." (Coolie, P.46)

The callousness with the hands of Bibiji and the miserable conditions in the house of Nathoo Ram could not bear the protagonist Munoo and he

plans to run away. One day at the twilight hour, when all the members of the household are going anywhere, Munoo takes an opportunity and runs away from the house and finds his way into a third class railway station, where he boards a train to an unknown destination. As T.N. Dhar says: Before he runs away from Sham Nagar, Munoo has learnt his first lessons in the harsh school of the modern urban world.³

Thus begins the next phase of Munoo's life of discrimination, humiliation and victimisation, in the feudal city of Daulatpur. This phase is followed by his experiences in the industrial city of Bombay, as long as this phase continues in which Munoo's life is depicted we find he becomes a real coolie. From the moment a coolie set his foot in Bombay the peasant was drawn into a web of commitments, same as a bee was caught in the web of a spider from which there was no escape. Another social concern of child-labour, not amplified, is reflected in Munoo's desire to engage in all the normal activities of a young boy. The child-labour has attracted a great deal of attention today in our country. In spite of the legislation against it, scores of Munoo's work as domestic servants and are treated shabbily. Anand wanted a better deal for those who for want of money had to bargain their childhood. M.K. Naik comments that: "*Coolie* has an almost epic quality."⁴

Munoo's life begins with his two thousand mile long journey under a malevolent and merciless sun from Daulatpur in the north to Bombay in the south-west. The train in which he travels rushes past the varied and changing landscape of the country, its historical ruins, its desert stretches, plains, rivers, valleys and hills, filling the child like mind of Munoo with wonder, which is still alive in spite of the hardships and humiliations he has gone through so far. The pace of Anand's prose narrative is so modulated as to suit the changing scenes, whether rural or urban, and to bring to life vividly the panorama of country life. The image of Bombay which is really a precious city for the visitors, conjured up by a coolie at Daulatpur has impressed itself so well on Munoo's mind that he is very eager to reach the land of his heart's desire. Almost anticipating what lies in store for him the Good Samaritan the elephant driver cautions Munoo

before he helps him to slip out of the railway station at Bombay: "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, P.177)

Soon Munoo hears the speeches made by the leaders of Red Flag Union. There is little wisdom in Suada asking them, 'Think over what we have said', when all that they can think about is where from there next meal will come. This situation in the novel has many possibilities for propaganda. Anand however, does not yield to the temptation for it. It is unlikely that the novelist would endorse Suada's over simplified view which finds an immediate echo in Munoo's heart. He was much impressed with the speech of Suada: "There are only two kinds of people in the world; the rich and the poor, and between the two there is no connection. The rich and the powerful, the magnificent and the glorious, whose opulence is built on robbery and theft and open warfare, are honoured and admired by the whole world and by themselves." (Coolie, P.266)

After all the communal riots found in Bombay Munoo feels danger and takes to his heels. As he runs up Malabar Hill to escape the cruel action of police, at the meantime he is knocked down by the motor car of an Anglo-Indian lady, Mrs. Mainwaring. Thus the final phase of Munoo's tragedy begins when she takes him to Shimla, as she wants a servant. Mrs. Mainwaring feels compassion for the wounded boy and takes him to Shimla, in the Himalayas, where she is going. As Anand narrated that she is a woman of vast pretentious and had no moral character. At Shimla Munoo becomes a domestic servant and a rickshaw coolie, along with others coolies Munoo accepted it gladly. As we know that the rickshaw pulling is not an easy job, soon Munoo finds it very tough; he struggles and gets seriously ill.

Munoo coughed and spat out blood, his friend Mohan at once carried him home. By the orders of the Health Officer he was admitted to a segregated hospital on the slopes of Chota Shimla. He died by clutching the hands of Mohan at the age of sixteen, freed from the life of wretchedness, abuse and poverty. He is a tragic hero who receives inhuman and repelling treatment from his Indian masters, the foreign mill owners, compatriot coolies

and his unborn dream world was permanently buried in the earth. Such is the realistic story of Munoo, the coolie. Saros Cowasjee comments: "The magic of the book is in Munoo's innocence, in his naive warm heartedness, his love and comradeship, his irrepressible curiosity and zest for life. He belongs with some of the most enduring juvenile characters in modern literature: with Victor Hugo's '*Gavroche*' and Dickens *David Copperfield*'. And through him the whole misery of India speaks."⁵

The White Tiger: Aravind Adiga took some stocky issues in his debut novel, *The White Tiger* where he talks about the division of social groups, upper class and lower class, the cultural imperialism of western world. The writing skills of Adiga in the novel not only entertain us but also give a pause of thought. The novel highlights the core issues of Indian society like identity crisis, cultural discrimination, political corruption, class discrimination, complexity in the socio-economic, influence of foreign culture and degradation of traditional values and fanatic nature of Indian societies towards the west. The novel explores the issues related to the dark side of Indian village life, their struggle for their survival. It is the complete post-mortem of the India's developing nature of the city life.

In the novel *The White Tiger* Adiga illustrates the fall of values in Indian life through the story of the protagonist. Adiga has divided India into 'India of Darkness' and 'India of Light'. Adiga explores the dark heart of the shining India by comparing the dark and light sides of the Indian societies. Corruption, bribery and exploitation in the name of the politics and religion are the common things in Indian society. The central character Balram is a product of the Darkness who becomes a murderer and goes to the south to become an entrepreneur. He tries to convince the Chinese premier by his letters. Balram says: "Please understand Your Excellency that India is two countries in one: an India of Light and an India of Darkness."⁶

Adiga goes into some specifics on the socio-political structures in India. His narrator's village Laxmangarh, was essentially dominated and oppressed by four rich men, each named for an animal, each taking a piece of every bit of labour

and product in their respective domains. The novel begins with the strong note and the novelist shows the realism of poor India with the heart touching words of Balram: "Apparently, Sir, you Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect, except that you don't have entrepreneurs. And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, does have entrepreneurs." (TWT, P.4)

It is in this dark India that our White Tiger, Balram Halwai the son of a rickshaw puller, comes from the social underclass of India. Sharing his father's dream of having a good future, Balram progresses through the school well, but discontinues to earn to make his families both ends meet. As a boy he is made to leave school and aid his brother Kishan in work at the local tea shop. The novelist in reality describes the poor people are not capable of continuing their education because of poverty. In this novel Balram calls himself as 'half-baked' because his education was interrupted by family obligations. He says: ".....all these ideas, half formed and half digested and half correct mix up with other half-cooked ideas in your head, and I guess these half-formed ideas bugger one another, and make more half-formed ideas, and this is what you act on and live with." (TWT, P.11)

Balram feels that there are two India's the impoverished 'Darkness' of the rural inner continent, and the 'Light' of urban coastal India. A mechanism that he dubs the 'Rooster Coop' traps the Indian underclass in a perpetual state of servitude. It involves both deliberate methods used by the upper class and a mentality enforced by the underclass on itself. Balram's father died from tuberculosis in a decrepit village hospital, where no doctors were present due to abundant corruption within all the government institutions in the Darkness. The death of Balram's father appalling reality, the fact that nearly thousand Indians, most of them poor, die every day from tuberculosis in India. People in rural India are denied decent healthcare and education. Balram's voice shows the economic inequalities of contemporary India when he says: "A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank.....The story of a

poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen." (TWT, P.26)

After the father's death, Kishan got married and moved with Balram to the city of Dhanbad to work. There, Balram decided to become a chauffeur, and raised money to take driving lessons from a taxi driver. Nagendra Singh points out: "Balram is sharp and smart and in a few years time realizes that he doesn't really make a good servant. He decides to become a driver and finds work at the landlord's house in Laxmangarh. His work with the family takes him to Delhi where a series of events and an inherent feeling of cynicism and disenchantment make him realize that he might be stuck in the life of servant forever."⁷

As a driver in the Stork's household, Balram lived a stable and satisfactory life. He wore a uniform and slept in a covered room which he shared with Ram Persad. Their Balram describes at length the corrupt nature of politics in the Darkness. A politician known as the Great Socialist controls the Darkness through election fraud. The Stork's family, involved in shady business dealings in the coal industry, must regularly bribe the Great Socialist to ensure their success. As part of these political manoeuvrings, Ashok and Pinky Madam made plans to go to Delhi for three months. When Balram learned that only one driver would be brought with them, he spied on Ram Persad to discover that the man was secretly a Muslim who had lied about his identity to gain employment. Once his secret was out, Ram Persad left, and Balram was brought to Delhi as the driver of the Honda City.

Balram considers Delhi to be a crazy city, rife with traffic jams and pollution, and with illogically numbered houses and circuitous streets that are difficult to navigate. Ashok and Pinky Madam rented an apartment in Gurgaon, the most American part of the city, since Pinky Madam hated India and missed New York. Balram lived in the servant's quarters in the basement of the building. Teased and ostracized by the other servants, he nevertheless found a mentor in a fellow driver, to escape the teasing; Balram chose to live in a tiny, decrepit room swarming with cockroaches. Balram tells about lives of servants in Delhi: "I don't know how buildings are designed in your country, but in

India every apartment block, every house, every hotel is built with servant's quarters - sometimes at the back, and sometimes underground - a warren of interconnected rooms where all the drivers, cooks, sweepers, maids, and chefs of the apartment block can rest, sleep, and wait. When our masters wanted us, an electric bell began to ring throughout the quarters; we would rush to a board and find a red light flashing next to the number of the apartment whose servant was need upstairs." (TWT, P.130)

During their stay in Delhi Balram takes them to shopping plazas and also carry their shopping bags when they come out of the mall. Here we find the harsh behaviour of rich class towards the poor servants is shown when Mongoose lost the coin while getting out of the car. He calls Balram: "Get down on your knees. Look for it on the floor of the car. I got down on my knees. I sniffed in between the mats like a dog, all in search of that one rupee. 'What do you mean, it's not there? Don't think you can steal from us just because you're in the city. I want that rupee.' That's how you corrupt servants. It starts with one rupee. Don't bring your American ways here where that rupee coin went remains a mystery to me to this day, Mr. Premier. Finally, I took a rupee coin out of my shirt pocket, dropped it on the floor of the car, picked it up, and gave it to the Mongoose." (TWT, P.139)

Besides that the Mongoose returned to Dhanbad, leaving Ashok as Balram's sole master in Delhi. One night, a drunken Pinky Madam insisted on driving the car, and she accidentally killed a child in a hit-and-run. The next morning, the Mongoose arrived and announced that Balram would confess to the crime, and serve jail time on Pinky Madam's behalf. Balram was terrified by the prospect of going to jail, but was relieved when the Stork arrived and casually mentioned that they had gotten out of the incident through their police connections. Hear Adiga describes how the poor people were easily motivated by the rich; it is why because of their poverty, which is the main concern of our country. In this connection as A.J. Sebastian points out: "He has to suffer humiliation in the hands of his masters with ever increasing routine duties which climaxes in his being blackmailed when Ashok's wife Pinky kills a man in drunken driving. He was forced to sign a

statement accepting full responsibility for the accident.”⁸

The suppressed class finds itself trapped in constant mental pressures that shape their needs and desires. This class has to work under elite class regardless of their personal demands and satisfaction. Same is the case with Balram, he is a type of servant to Ashok although he earns money with his own efforts, and he does not take charity from his master but the attitude of society forces him to believe that he is no more than an animal to his boss. The following lines have symbolic significance: “When master and driver find each other’s eyes in this mirror, it swings open like a door into a changing room, and the two of them have suddenly caught each other naked?” (TWT, P.199)

A few days later, Pinky Madam found Balram and asked him to drive her to the airport. With this abrupt departure, she ended her marriage to Ashok. When Ashok discovered that Balram took her to the airport without informing him, he furiously attacked the driver, who defended himself by kicking Ashok in the chest. Dealing with the divorce, Ashok began to live a debauched lifestyle, frequently getting drunk and going out to clubs, while Balram cared for him like a wife. Ashok rekindled a relationship with his former lover, Ms. Uma. Their relationship grew more serious, but he remained anxious about telling his family about her. Meanwhile, on his family’s behalf, Ashok frequently collected large sums of money in a red bag, using it to bribe government ministers.

Finally deciding to break free of the Rooster Coop, he sees Ashok with red bag, full of money to be paid to the corrupt politicians in the city, his loyalty vanishes and he immediately decides to kill Ashok. His lust for money and desire to become rich blinds him. Balram fashioned a weapon from a broken whiskey bottle, and lured Ashok from the car. He rammed the bottle into Ashok’s skull, and then stabbed him in the neck, killing him. He stole the red bag, filled with 700,000 rupees, and escaped to Bangalore. After the act Balram says: “I was blind. I was a free man.” (TWT, P. 286)

In revenge for his actions, the Stork’s family likely murdered all of Balram’s family, though Balram remains unsure of their exact fate.

Nevertheless, he chose to commit the murder knowing this was a likely outcome. In Bangalore, Balram found great success. He launched a taxi service for call center workers, which he calls White Tiger Technology Drivers. By bribing the police, Balram was able to gain influence and make his business successful. Demonstrating how far he has come, he is able to cover up a fatal accident through his connection to the authorities. He considers himself to be a quintessential entrepreneurial success story that represents the future of India, and presents himself as such to the Premier.

Poverty results in dishonesty, bribery, corruption and immoral behaviour. The lack of money turns everyone bad in this novel. Adiga gives the readers many instances in this novel how human beings react to the condition of money. After coming to Bangalore, he performs the last rites for the family members so that they may not come in his dreams. He prays for all his aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces and even the water buffalo. He imagines the soul of his brother Kishan and granny Kusum and prays to let him live in peace. He doesn’t wish to live with the burden and hence severs himself from his family by performing the last rite. Simmi Gurwara says: “He is a white tiger who neither has a family nor friendship because it will not be safe for him from the point of view of his position of being the boss. He is a real entrepreneur who does not have the word 'sentiment' in his dictionary.”⁹

Thus, the picture Aravind Adiga paints of India in *The White Tiger* is of an about primitive society masked as a democracy. On the off chance that even a tenth of what Balram portrays as typical working business is real and there is no motivation to accept something else, then India’s financial wonder is as much a lie as China’s. The country might have gained its independence from the British at the end of the 1940s, but the majority of the people in India are still caught in subjugation. *The White Tiger* is a portrayal of the social and financial inequalities of contemporary India. It is an infiltrating bit of social critique, sensitive to the dissimilarities that endure regardless of India’s new prosperity.

Comparison: Mulk Raj Anand and Aravind Adiga play a very important role in the development of Indian English fiction. Mulk Raj Anand through his works gives us a clear picture of social injustice during the colonial rule; on the other hand Aravind Adiga also throws light on these social issues of the country through his novels. The main concerns of both the novelists are how these social, political, traditional etc. issues of the country will be brought out. The present paper is a comparative study on the basis of social realism in Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*.

In *Coolie*, Munoo is the orphan boy and was forced to leave his school at the early age and was asked for work because of his poverty, and then he was sent to Sham Nagar as a domestic servant, where he feels cruelty and humiliation and runs away for his escape. He finds a safe place in Prabha Dayal's house, but soon Prabha was ruined by the 'goat-face' Ganapath which ultimately effects on Munoo and his likes. Munoo goes in search his livelihood in many places like railway station, grain market then Bombay cotton mills but finds no escape. Finally he was hit by a car of English lady; she takes him with herself to Shimla where Munoo was a domestic servant, then a rickshaw puller. The hard working causes tuberculosis on Munoo's chest and he died at the age of sixteen.

Same in Adiga's *The White Tiger*, Balram an orphan boy was called to stop his education in his early age and start working with his brother in a tea shop. After the death of his father, his brother got married and he was sent to the Stork's house in Dhanbad as a servant. In Dhanbad Balram wants to learn driving he did it and became a driver of Stork's family. The son of Stork's Mr. Ashok and his wife Pinky Madam plans a trip for Delhi, and Balram takes a chance to go to the big city of his country. In this trip Balram was humiliated and exploited by the hands of his masters so many times, same as Munoo was exploited and humiliated in the Nathoo Ram's house. Besides this Balram was sometimes different, he not only wants to escape from the darkness to light, but also become a good entrepreneur. On this occasion, Balram murders his master Mr. Ashok also stole his bag which is filled with 700,000 rupees, runs away to Bangalore. Balram becomes an

entrepreneur with the name of Ashok Sharma, but with this criminal act he lost the lives of his whole family.

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