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**plot summary and brief analysis of**Coolie**by Mulk Raj Anand.**

Coolie, by Mulk Raj Anand, was first published in 1936 and helped to establish Anand as one of the foremost Anglophone Indian writers of his day. Like much of his other work, this novel is concerned with the consequences of British Rule in India and with the rigid caste system that structured Indian society. “Coolie” is a term for an unskilled laborer, though it can also be used as a pejorative. Anand’s novel tells the story of Munoo, a young boy from the Kangra Hills in Bilaspur. He is an orphan who lives with his aunt and uncle; however, early in the novel they reveal they can no longer support Munoo and insist that he get a job. This is the beginning of a journey that will take Munoo to Bombay and beyond, but it also marks the end of his childhood.

With his Uncle, Munoo travels to a nearby town where he finds a job as a servant to a bank clerk, Babu Nathoo Ram. Munoo is mistreated by his master’s wife but he admires his master’s younger brother, Prem Chand, who is a doctor. Babu Nathoo Ram himself is something of a caricature; a typical example of a Middle Class Anglophile who has internalized the values of the colonizer and firmly believes in the supremacy of white people. A great fuss is made when the aptly named Mr. English visits the bank where Babu Nathoo Ram works, but Anand uses this episode to undercut the apparent superiority of the English. When Prem Chand enquires about the best place in Britain to further his medical training, it is revealed that Mr. English is uneducated and doesn’t know.

After accidentally injuring Sheila, Babu Nathoo Ram’s daughter, Munoo is beaten and decides to run away. He makes it as far as Daultapur, where he is taken in by Prabha, who runs a pickle factory. Prabha and his wife are kind to Munoo, although the work is hard. Throughout the novel, Anand points to the way the lower classes are exploited by those above them, with Munoo being the ultimate example of this exploitation. Here, he shows how Prabha must appease his neighbor, the Public Prosecutor Sir Todar Mal, with free pickles and jam to prevent him having the factory shut down because the smoke irritates him. Ultimately, however, it is Prabha’s own business partner, Ganpat, who cheats him and leaves him bankrupt, suggesting a lack of class consciousness or solidarity.

When Prabha loses the factory, Munoo is left to fend for himself once again. He meets an elephant driver who is travelling to Bombay with a circus and decides to join them. At first, Munoo is delighted with Bombay, but he soon realizes that, even here, “coolies” must sleep on the streets. He finds work at Sir George White’s cotton mill where he meets Ratan, a man he comes to idolize. Ratan is a wrestler and a member of the worker’s union, a man who has chosen to fight his masters and reject the exploitative conditions in which he labors. The optimistic possibility symbolized by Ratan is short lived for Munoo, however, as a riot breaks out during a workers’ strike and he becomes lost.

While wandering the streets, he is run over by Mrs. Mainwaring’s car. As compensation, she hires him as a servant and takes him to Simla. Mrs. Mainwaring offers insight into another dimension of Indian society. She has English, as well as Indian, ancestry, and longs to be accepted by English society. As a result she travelled to England and married a young English soldier. Her desire to be recognized as English can also be read as a desire to be recognized as white, with all of the privileges that accompany whiteness in colonial India, privileges that Munoo will never enjoy. Despite the kindness that Mrs. Mainwaring shows him, Munoo contracts tuberculosis and dies, aged just fifteen.

Coolie is a devastating account of the poverty and exploitation faced, not just by Munoo, but thousands like him. Anand shows how the racial and class hierarchies imposed by British colonialism have intersected, or overlaid, the existing caste system to make life impossible for “coolies”. Munoo has no real control over his life; over the work he does or where he lives or how he is treated. As he moves from one place to another in search of a job or a home, he moves from one tragedy to another. In his travels and through the various people he meets and is employed by, he is exposed to the multiplicity of life in India which is made vivid by Anand’s prose. If the novel’s portrait of Munoo’s life raises difficult questions about Indian society, Munoo’s death raises the question of whether there can be any future for a “coolie” if nothing changes.