

# Human Labour and Alienation

Mulk Raj Anand's Novels

*And as he thought of the conditions under which he had lived, of the intensity of the struggle and the futility of the waves of revolt falling upon the hard rock of privilege and possession, [...] he felt sad and bitter and defeated, like an old man.*

*Coolie*<sup>1</sup>

THE FOLLOWING DISCUSSION OF LABOUR and alienation in Anand's novels is meant primarily as a contribution towards socio-literary investigations of literature and as an examination of the question as to how far the problem of labour — human labour as investigated into by the sciences of economics, sociology or political science — might be the object of literary criticism. The objection may be raised here that problems pertaining to human labour can hardly be of more than a purely thematic interest to the literary critic. To deal with this question adequately, then, will entail the task of touching briefly upon the methodological problems involved and to point out why, according to the definition of the concept of labour as it is understood here, we feel that analyzing the problem of human labour as depicted in literary works may offer an important insight into ideological aspects of such works and also into their artistic achievement.



First of all we shall deal with Marx's and Engels's concept of labour which then will take us to a short account of the forms of alienation of labour as historical phenomena caused by the development of factors of production and the ownership of the means of production. The concept of labour according to Marx, however, bears also on methodological questions,

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<sup>1</sup> Mulk Raj Anand, *Coolie*, ed. Atma Ram, *Mulk Raj Anand — A Reader*, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi 2005, 157

problems of methodical approaches and the purpose of inquiries into the meaning and function of man's cultural products. This means that we shall have to refer to this aspect before our attention is turned to Anand's novels. There are good reasons why this writer has been chosen and we shall try to substantiate this choice in preference to that of any other Indo-English novelist by his unique ideological and artistic position in the field of Indo-English literature, as well as to the fundamental question of this paper.

Marx<sup>2</sup> defines labour as that specific activity of man which distinguishes him from even the most highly developed animals, the primates. In the working process man confronts nature in order to appropriate it in forms useful for his own life. Thus the working process is useful activity through which useful articles are produced. Through labour man learns to control nature and make her serve him. To help achieve this purpose in a more and more perfect manner man develops his means of production, which become more and more refined and complicated the further this process of appropriating nature advances. Labour is the eternal and natural condition of human life and thus independent from any specific form of life. Besides it is a free activity of man because its purposes are determined not by nature but by man himself. Thus labour means self-realization of man, an act of real freedom. Finally, as it is always performed in society, it is necessarily a social activity, though the forms of labour will differ according to the forms of society in which it is being performed. This means that labour is not an unchangeable activity which repeats itself through the same forms but it is a process leading to ever higher forms of activity because it is purposive activity.

Specific forms of labour which developed in the course of history differ in some respect from labour as such and as defined above. For instance, coinciding with the emergence of private ownership of the means of production which will now form the basis of society, classes emerge which participate in private ownership to a varying degree. As soon as man is separated from the means of production, as soon as they are no longer his property he is separated from the most important condition of labour and his work loses the quality of being a free and independent act, an act

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2 All direct references to Marx and Engels are taken from: Karl Marx, *Texte zur Methode und Praxis II, Pariser Manuskripte*, Reinbeck: Rowohlt 1968

G. Klaus & M. Buhr, *Marxistisch-Leninistisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 3 Bd., Reinbeck: Rowohlt 1972

Further references: S. Kaviraj, "Alienation and Literature", *Journal of the School of Languages* (Winter 1973-1974), 1-27

of self-realization. Man's labour has become estranged labour because not he but the owners of the means of production will determine what and how he has to work and to produce. Under conditions of a class-society work will appear as coercion to those who do not dispose of the means of production. Labour can be performed as physical or mental activity. This division develops hand in hand with the emergence of private ownership of the means of production. The two forms of labour become even opposed to each other in antagonistic class-societies where physical labour is reserved for the working-classes and mental labour for the owning classes.

Marx distinguishes several aspects of estranged labour which, however, all derive from its most important moment: man's alienation from the product of labour. After having 'lost' his means of production, including the power of disposing of his own labour, man is forced to work for the owners of the means of production who will determine which articles he will have to produce. The worker thus confronts the products of his own work as alien products; he does not realize himself through his work and in his products because he does not determine the purpose of his activity. His own products rule over him.

Alienation from the products of labour entails alienation in the act of production. Since the worker cannot decide which articles he has to produce the working process itself becomes something alienate to him. He will experience the act of production not as self-realization but as suffering, as a loss of his human nature.

Alienated labour causes man's alienation from the species. Man achieves self-realization as a human being, member of the species, by working upon the material world, nature, in order to appropriate it for his own purposes. The object of labour can thus be called realization of the life of the species. Alienated labour, however, takes man's object of production, nature, from him. Thus he loses the opportunity to develop his faculties and to employ them in a useful manner. Consequently, his essential nature cannot be realized, it appears as something alien to him, merely a means to secure his individual existence. Finally, alienation from the species means alienation of man from man. If man is alienated from his own nature he is also alienated from the human nature of his fellow-beings, a fact most obvious in the existence of antagonistic classes within a society.

Reflecting upon Marx's definition of human labour and his discussion of the various aspects of alienated labour under conditions of a class-society, we have to bear in mind that, in order to be able to assess the function of labour in Anand's novels, only one aspect of the problem has been referred to so far: Marx's ideas will help us select those passages in Anand's

novels in which the problem of labour — in particular physical labour — is aesthetically presented in literary form, that is, through character and event. The question still to be answered is whether the concept of labour is of any relevance as a category in literary criticism. In other words, is there a logical correlation between the function of art — here, of literature — and the definition of man through labour?

In a passage on labour to be found in the so-called *Paris Manuscripts* Marx maintains that man as a member of the species behaves as a universal, free being. This means, as compared to animals, man produces on a universal scale; unlike animals he is not just subject to his immediate physical needs and thus is forced not only to reproduce himself through labour but he is able to reproduce nature. He can not only produce articles by imitating the process of work of any species but also produce according to the laws of beauty, that is, the laws inherent in objects. And it is through this activity that man achieves self-realization and forms the world freely and independently according to the laws of beauty.

If this assumption holds true, man's works of art are characterized by their specific form of 'appropriating' reality, i.e. according to the laws of beauty; but they are nevertheless products of human labour: "The evaluation and formation of objective reality (nature and society) according to aesthetic criteria form an integral element or the realization of man's essential faculties (through labour, it should be added, D.R.) and become manifest in all forms and fields of productive activity!"<sup>3</sup>

The subject of art is not an arbitrary one. In literature, we must admit, the most important subject has always been the totality of man's social activities and relations. If the artist 'appropriates' the world aesthetically by depicting man according to the laws of beauty he will do so by presenting man's essential nature, i.e. man as member of the species and that means: in his work.

Whether the term work is to be given a comprehensive and philosophical connotation is a question which would require further discussion. We shall be content to say that such a notion would subsume a definition of work in a restricted and concrete sense. This paper will be restricted to an analysis of those scenes in Anand's novels in which man is depicted performing physical labour. However, we can infer from what has been said above that as long as man's essential nature is not being presented aesthetically a writer's artistic achievement can obviously not be termed completely successful. Yet, this notion should not confuse the critic since he has to deal

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3 Klaus/Buhr, vol. I, 120

with concrete literary works produced under specific historical conditions which themselves have to be taken into consideration when assessing the artistic achievement of works of art.

Though man at work is described more often by Anand than by any other contemporary Indo-English writer, the number of these depictions barely exceeds two dozen and there are several novels without any such scene. This is surprising because the subject matter of almost all novels is the life and fate of either an outcaste (*Untouchable*, *The Road*), lower-caste peasants (*The Old Woman and the Cow*, *The Village*), some of whom lost their land to the landlord or the money-lender (*Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud*), industrial workers (*Coolie*), or craftsmen (*The Big Heart*). All the main characters in these works with the exception of Lalu (*The Village*) and Panchi (*The Old Woman and the Cow*) are forced to sell their labour in order to survive. In the case of Bakha (*Untouchable*) or Bikhu (*The Road*) their social status as outcastes does not permit them to rise in society and to perhaps secure the material means for themselves which might allow them to lead a more independent life. It is the caste system which forces them not only to sell their labour but also to do so under conditions laid down by the Hindu castes. Alienated labour is as much the fate of this social class as is their unalterable economic and social position. Alienation in the act of production as well as alienation from their fellow men is not the result of economic forces as under capitalistic conditions but of noneconomic forces, i.e. feudalism.

A second group of characters in these novels forced to sell their labour are Munoo, Hari (*Coolie*) and Gangu (*Two Leaves and a Bud*), former peasants who could not pay back their debts and high interest rates charged by landlord or money-lender and who were forced to sell their land and search for work elsewhere. While Munoo is made to experience a whole gamut of occupations — he works as a domestic servant in various households, as a market coolie offering his services to anyone, an unskilled worker in a small pickle-factory and a wage-earner in a cotton factory owned by English capitalists —, Hari earns his living in a factory and Gangu on a tea-plantation in Assam.

Anand makes use of these characters in order to illustrate the economic and social changes taking place in India under colonial rule during the period of developing capitalistic methods of production. He shows how a combination of economic and non-economic forces brings about a fundamental change of life to these members of Indian society. In *The Big Heart* yet another group is depicted: the thathiars or the coppersmith community of a large North-Indian town. Ananta, the protagonist of the

novel, and Mehru, a minor character, represent two aspects of labour in this community of craftsmen. While Ananta is presented as a fairly independent worker whose income is based on piece work and who has his own small workshop, Mehru has already lost his independence as a craftsman and has started working as a labourer in a factory which has just started production of consumer goods. As in the two novels mentioned above, Anand presents the processes of change taking place under capitalistic conditions and affecting a traditional type of labour. Mehru and others of his craft indicate the fate of the whole community which even a highly skilled craftsman like Ananta will be unable to avoid eventually.

To sum up: by presenting a number of characters who for non-economic or economic reasons are forced to sell their labour in order to survive, Anand does not only show his interest in their individual fate but also illustrates the economic and social changes taking place in India under colonial rule and the gradual transformation of a feudal society into a capitalistic one. This preliminary insight into a characteristic feature of Anand's novels shows that he is well aware of the function of narrative writing which consists in revealing man's essential nature through the individual case. We shall now investigate the author's manner of portraying individual characters at work so that we may be able to assess the relationship of individual activity and its essential meaning. We have chosen a procedure which will deal with each novel by itself, because we are less interested in a systematic survey of scenes of labour than in a critical evaluation of the literary function of labour within the frame of a fictitious story. To begin with we will analyze two characters who can be considered the owners of their means of production: Lalu in *The Village* and Panchi in *The Old Woman and the Cow*.

At the beginning of the story, Lalu, a young peasant boy and the protagonist of *The Village*, is being shown at work in the fields. (26-31)<sup>4</sup> Here Anand illustrates Marx's definition of (disalienated) labour as an act of man's self-realization in a most convincing manner. Lalu's self-realization is not presented objectively but he is shown as being aware of his achievement. This also proves Anand's own awareness of the important meaning of this experience and his profound understanding of the character of human labour and its essential function for man. More than this, the author's artistic achievement lies not only in mediating his insight through this

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4 The edition of Anand's novels used here is Kutub Popular, Bombay, *Coolie* (n.d.); *Untouchable* (n.d.); *Two Leaves and a Bud* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1951); *The Village* (1954); *The Big Heart* (n.d.); *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960); and *The Road* (1961)

highly individualized character but must also be seen in the fact that he makes him represent a certain historical stage in the development of man in India. This is how Anand proceeds.

Lalu is digging the ditch through which water from the irrigation system is to flow on to his family's fields. It is late in the afternoon towards the end of summer but the sun is still extremely hot in the Punjab at this time of the year. At the beginning the narrator only describes Lulu's actions which claim all his attention: "For a long moment his mind was a blank. He was only conscious of the mounds of moist earth yielding to his blade." (27) But then Anand turns towards Lulu's thoughts which result from his present activity: He contemplates the "peculiar knack" needed to hit straight and the fact that his skill has "not deteriorated through learning" (28) as the elders of the village always maintained. The awareness of the prejudicial nature of the view that physical and intellectual skills and qualities exclude each other — as the example of so many 'educated' city boys seem to prove — reveals that for Anand labour means essentially a combination of hand and brain while he repudiates a decision of labour reserving the manual part for one section of society and the intellectual one for another. Lulu continues: Learning and physical skills would enable him to "increase the productivity of the land, and set the house in order..." (28); "he would prove his worth to them." (29) Lulu's thoughts illustrate the idea that the abolition of the division of labour would enable man to fulfil his needs even more satisfactorily, and of controlling nature and make her yield more to man's will.

There is still another aspect of the relationship of man and nature as manifested in the act of work: man's control over nature is at once self-realization. The writer expresses this idea through a most simple image:

As he began to dig deeper and hacked the earth again and again, till the water flowed through the shapely bed of the ditch, he felt an admiration for the energy that flowed with the laughter of the sun like tingling warmth in his body. (28)

The analysis of this scene has proven the almost philosophical meaning of man's relationship with nature. Characteristically, this does not suffice for Anand's purpose because he is not primarily interested in man as such but in Indian man living during a particular time: While at work Lulu's turban, meant to hold up his long hair which he, as a Sikh, is not allowed to cut, has opened. He reflects on the necessity of upholding traditions and beliefs under changed circumstances. Similarly, thinking about clothes which are not suitable for work makes him impatient with customs and

conventions still in practice. Lalu's feelings and thoughts displayed do not only express his individuality but they reveal characteristics of the society which shaped him and illustrate the dialectical relationship between man and reality.

Anand depicting man at work does not only succeed in conveying a Marxian understanding of the relationship between man and nature and man and society as a dialectic relationship; he not only illustrates the central meaning of work for man but he also succeeds in presenting these ideas through the medium of literature in an aesthetically convincing manner by using the individual case to illustrate the essential nature of man.

There is another, rather similarly constructed scene depicting Lalu once more at work in the fields. (105-112) He is ploughing with the help of his bullocks and then starts reflecting on his work. Wondering about the obedience his bullocks show he ponders on the problem of obedience and submission generally and is reminded of an incident which had occurred only a few days before: after he had had his long hair cut, the whole village community, his family included, punished and humiliated him because of this sacrilegious act. Contemplating on breaking the bullocks' will thus helps Lalu to understand his relationship to traditional society: it is characterized by his complete dependence and society's claim to rule supreme over the individual.

At this point of the novel Anand introduces a new aspect of the character of labour. Lalu's shocking experience proves to be so strong that he is unable to overcome his frustration through work:

He took the curve at the edge of the field and hurried Thiba and Rondu with a fierce push, inspired by the will to forget himself in his work. But his thoughts returned and he was torn and lacerated-full of a bitter hatred for the world. (109)

And later:

He kicked the sod of the dark, moist furrows and looked round to see how much of the field he had ploughed. But his gaze turned inwards and strained to probe the depth of his dreams, in the dense gloom of his head. (111)

Labour can no longer be considered to bring about fulfilment and self-realization because, being always a social act but having lost its social function, it has become meaningless to the individual at war with his society, its values and norms. The alienation from man which Lalu experiences at the same time takes the form of alienation from the process of work.



Anand conveys this idea aesthetically and even makes Lalu understand part of the essential meaning of his experience:

For what was life? [...] To be sure it was not all play, and one had to work. 'But I like work', he thought, 'if they will only love me more, and let me love them, I could soon work off their debts and relieve them of their troubles.' His soul swelled with adolescent exuberance and exultation, and he felt that his battles were half won. But what was the use? And if you couldn't do such a little thing as have your hair cut without being abused and beaten and insulted by the village, how could you do anything that went against their other superstitions? (111)

Precisely at this moment of his life Lalu realizes that he has to find his own way, and, indeed, looking at his further development as it is depicted in the second part of this novel and the following two parts of the trilogy, *Across the Black Water* and *The Sword and the Sickle*, we realize the author's idea of letting us watch Lalu's progress and his efforts to establish a new, more meaningful and more stable relationship between himself and other members of this society.

A final point is to be mentioned about this scene which indicates the change having taken place in Lalu's relationship to nature. While formerly it appeared to be one of harmony, alienation from man entailed alienation from nature — or, as Marx puts it, from the species. Nature appears to be distant, even unfriendly:

And he went forward, dazed with the weight of his own perplexity, breathing evenly in the sunny stillness of the fields where the breeze was turning colder and colder with the damp odour of the newly turned earth, and where the transparent light of the sun shimmered through the elements and sighed among the blades of grass. (112)

We shall now look briefly at the second novel in which a major character is depicted as the owner of his means of production. Though Panchi, the antagonist in *The Old Woman and the Cow*, does not yet have to sell his labour but still owns his fields he is depicted as a completely alienated individual. The only scene which shows him at work in his fields (27-31) is a case in point. While ploughing with his bullocks, he is struggling continuously with them: this takes the form of either coaxing or brutalizing them. Work for Panchi is at once a necessity, a means to make ends meet, and an act of suffering. His thoughts of others, especial of his wife and

relatives, reveal his alienation from man: unlike Lalu he is not concerned about their fate but only about his own. Panchi appears to be highly egoistic, full of self-pity and superstitious beliefs. He seems to have lost his humanity and is presented as a socially isolated person.

Panchi must be considered a unique creation among Anand's characters. Though there is no lack of totally alienated individuals in his novels they are almost without exception members of the owning classes. Since it is in their interest not to change economic or social conditions prevailing in an antagonistic class-society these characters appear to be static, 'one-sided', unchangeable, in short: types. Although they are alienated individuals they do not suffer from alienation as members of the working classes do. As Marx puts it:

The owning classes and the proletarian class are both alienated. However, the owning classes are pleased with this condition and realize alienation as their own power; it appears to them as human existence. The proletariat experiences destruction through alienation.<sup>5</sup>

Panchi, on the other hand, does not belong to the owning classes but has internalized the values and norms of the ruling classes to such an extent that he identifies himself with them rather than with those of his own class. Thus his alienation from man takes the specific form of alienation from his own class.

In the scene depicting Panchi at work Anand succeeds in making transparent a degree of man's self-alienation which leaves no room for understanding oneself or others but will eventually lead to self-destruction, Panchi is the only example of a member of the dispossessed classes in whom Anand shows the full effects of alienation on man's mind, a depiction which reflects the author's insight into a development taking place under conditions of fully developed capitalism which did not yet prevail at the time when this writer composed his work. However, we have to keep in mind that Panchi plays the role of the antagonist in this novel whereas his wife Gauri, being the protagonist, embodies Anand's belief in the strength of man to create conditions under which self-realization will be possible again. Panchi, on the other hand, embodies Anand's fear of a potential development of man in India who will not learn to understand the reason for his suffering.

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5 Marx & Engels, *Werke*, vol.2, 37 (my translation)

Alienation is the fate of those characters that have lost their own means of production and are forced to sell their labour. In our discussion of this group of individuals we shall restrict our analysis to that of Munoo, protagonist of one of Anand's earliest novels, *Coolie*. It is not surprising to find that this work contains by far the largest number of scenes showing man at work, if one keeps in mind that it was written in England in the early 1930s, a period well-known for many writers' commitment to the plight of the working-classes.

The first striking characteristic of the scenes depicting Munoo at work is the portrayal of the protagonist as a person for whom work is not an isolated act considered only as a means to secure his survival but as a social act: Munoo is always concerned either about the welfare of others (Prabha and his wife, Hari and his family) or about the way they react and behave towards him. He seems to realize more instinctively than consciously that it is through man's labour, understood as social activity, that the individual might prevent alienation from his fellow-men. In this context it is worthwhile to point out that Munoo meets people who accept him right from the beginning, like Sheila and her uncle Prem, Prabha and his wife, Hari and his wife, and their mutual friend Ratan, and even Mrs. Mainwaring, Munoo's last employer. On the other hand, there are those characters who try to teach him his place as a coolie like Bibiji and her husband; Ganpat, Prabha's business partner, or the manager of the cotton mill. The social context of Munoo's life as a worker sketched here is important because it is inseparable from the process of work itself: human attitudes and relationships are shaped and influenced by labour and must not be considered as completely independent of it. It will be one of the aims of the following discussion to point out how so-called moral — or less moral — attitudes of people towards Munoo are a reflection of their own notions of the function of labour. The scene describing Munoo at work in the household of Babu Natoo Ram, an employee of the local British-owned Imperial Bank, could be called a presentation of the initiation ceremony into alienated labour about which a young boy has not been taught the essential difference between play and — alienated — labour. He is still unaware of his economic and social position and reacts towards his new tasks in the only manner known to him through experience in his home village where "he remembered that he had often volunteered in a rush of sympathy to sweep the floor, to treat it with antiseptic cow dung and to run errands for [his aunt]." (31) Apart from being still too young to have disciplined his hands to the adequate performance of menial jobs" (31), as Anand puts it, he is faced with so many new impressions that he

is unable to distinguish between his duties and those activities he likes to perform. Besides, he neither really cares to fulfil his duties 'properly', as his employers expect him to do, nor does he miss an opportunity to help or entertain others if he feels that he will make them happy.

Anand conveys Munoo's 'lack' of insight into the necessity of executing his duties in a manner expected from him by portraying his actions as having no effect on him, as being something indifferent to him. Two more literary devices contribute to the impression that Munoo is not affected by his work: the detailed description of Babu Nathoo Ram's household and the space devoted to Bibiji's curses and complaints about Munoo. By giving much importance to these aspects of Munoo's life Anand shows that work is of less importance than the conditions under which Munoo is working, in particular the relationship between employer and employee.

There is, for instance, Bibiji, his employer, who is presented as a completely alienated person. She constantly tries to teach Munoo his place as a servant, but she also complains about her own work: "When will I get some rest! I slog, slog all day! I can't even get time to dress. Or to sit down with the neighbours for a chat. Or go to the shops." (14) Work to her is a burden which keeps her away from those activities which would give her fulfilment.

Munoo, the employee, on the other hand, has not yet experienced the alienating effects of work. It is only later that he begins to realize his social status in the family. Though the function of work dawns upon him at this moment, he is unable to fully understand its importance. Answering his own question as to why he is in this house he replies: "Because my uncle brought me here to earn my living ..." (36) The author adds: "It did not occur to him to ask himself what he was apart from being a servant, and why he was a servant." (36) Two scenes showing Munoo at work in a pickle factory (74-81; 88-90) add new touches to the aspect of labour discussed so far. Ganpat, one of the owners, does not hesitate to beat his workers if they are not quick enough. However, a more important aspect is Anand's description of the working place itself. Through its smallness, darkness and filthy condition, the stench caused by the ingredients used for the pickling process and the fumes of the fire, the depressing appearance of the workers themselves is intensified: they are either old and worn out by work or seem generally to be more inhuman than human and damned to spend their lives shut off from light and air. Munoo himself is shown as an outsider, an observer of the scene going on day in and day out. He neither interferes nor does he seem to have established any real contact with the labourers. He can only compare his present experiences with those in Bibiji's household,

and this in turn increases his fatalistic approach to life: “It is sad that my good luck in finding work so easily should be spoilt by the presence of a cruel man.” (75) Ganpat reminds him of Bibiji when he curses his labourers and accuses them of enjoying a holiday while he and Prabha were away to sell their products.

In the second scene taking place at the factory, Anand uses different narrative means to present men at work suffering under the conditions of labour. First he gives a short descriptive analysis of Ganpat’s ‘fate’, his loss of income and his subsequent efforts in re-establishing his former economic and social status by over-emphasizing his role of employer. The writer confirms our impression of Ganpat’s alienated nature.

Later, Anand uses the summary to indicate that “the only thing that relieved [Munoo’s] fits of depression,” — that is, “the comradeship which existed between him and the other coolies” (89), is of specific importance for Munoo’s further development. Beyond this function, the experience of comradeship is given a deeper meaning because the labourers are shown as men realizing instinctively — though not consciously — the objective reason for their experience: the exploitation of their labour. Anand’s coolies certainly do not know why “they would all fall to singing” (83), or does Munoo understand why, after singing with the others, he “regained the wild freedom of his childhood,” or would want “to be a man, to flourish in the true dignity of manhood.” (90) Yet the description of the labourers enjoying their freedom for a short while and the reference to Munoo’s hopes and wishes must be considered an aesthetically convincing presentation of men’s instinctive struggle against alienation. Anand does not stretch the authenticity of his characters, and makes Munoo react and feel according to his dispositions and the grade of his insight into his own status.

We are made to face yet another aspect of alienated labour in the scene where Munoo has to compete with “swarms of coolies” (122) at the vegetable market. The author is not primarily interested in competition as a characteristic feature of class-society but in its consequences for Munoo’s psyche and his social relations. The only chance to find a job is outwitting his competitors, because he is physically too weak to impress a potential employer as a good labourer. Munoo employs his wit and proves to possess profound insight into the psyche of people: he either spreads the rumour that the market will be closed on the following day or uses an especially cultivated pronunciation of the word ‘mother’ when addressing elderly ladies in asking them for a job. However, his idea of preferring to work for elderly ladies proves to be a failure because in them he meets his equals, a rather tough-bargaining, miserly group of employers. The touch

of humour presented in these encounters cannot hide the ugly fact that work under these conditions is not only humiliating but alienates Munoo even more from man and himself.

Having reached Bombay where he meets Hari and his family, a disowned peasant looking for work at a factory, Munoo is made to experience industrial labour under capitalistic conditions. Here alienated labour rules their lives absolutely. When Hari and his wife Lakshmi hear the factory whistle in the morning, their nerves are set on edge and the fear of being late and losing their jobs makes them behave like automatons and not like members of a family. (175-176) Working conditions are much the same as those which Munoo experienced in the pickle factory, if not worse: Chimta Sahib, the English manager, curses and beats the coolies freely, the deafening noise of the machines, the stench of cotton and oil and the unbearable heat of a summer's day in Bombay are even worse than anything Munoo has experienced until now. Besides, while the work he performed so far still seemed to be a challenge to his skills, the mechanical and repetitive action he is now made to perform increases his suffering. The incident of his cotton shirt being snatched by a machine and torn into shreds appears to be symbolic of Munoo under control of those who force him to sell his labour.

Capitalistic conditions do not only bring about the alienation of man in the process of work, they also prevail during the period of reproduction of his labour: there is just one water pump for hundreds of coolies, "not a canteen, nor a cookshop, nor even a confectioner's shop" (181), and, of course, there is no doctor at hand in case of accidents.

Conditions of labour at this cotton factory in Bombay are also the cause of man's alienation from man. When Hari informs Munoo that his little son was injured by a machine, "Munoo felt hard and could not sympathize. He just looked blankly into Hari's face and remained dumb, as if now his heart strings had contracted." (181) However, what follows is perhaps more important for a critical judgement of Anand's achievement than the almost naturalistic dimension of his description of the coolies' exploitation. Munoo's lack of feeling for Hari proves to be of a temporary nature only: "[his] heart went out of him. He felt he must go and bear the child to the hospital." (182) Still, his reaction is, rather, an instinctive one, because he is unable to see the real reason for his indifference for Hari's suffering. Rather, a more specific form of alienation is revealed in his self-accusation that he, being an orphan, must have been the cause of Hari's bad luck. The hold of Hindu superstitions, or, to put it more properly, the influence of Hindu ideology — that is, of the owning classes and their ideologists — on

a coolie's mind is so strong that he is unable to recognize the real cause of man's suffering and man's alienation from man. Capitalistic labour conditions and an ideology derived from feudalism are responsible for Munoo's false notions about himself and his social relations. He seems to be bound to a vicious circle:

the tiny skiff of his soul tossed to and fro on the soft, sun-speckled edge of this foam, as if it were a small point struggling in vain to cross the river, and as if it were threatened with extinction by an unforeseen storm. (82)

While the aesthetic presentation of Munoo's alienation and his suffering has been convincing until now, the conclusion of the scene cannot be described as artistically successful. While Munoo is portrayed as the victim of capitalism and feudalistic ideology, at one moment he is suddenly made to remember his wishes and hopes for a better life. (183) It is less Anand the Marxian thinker who was perhaps urged to add such a 'positive' outlook to this scene than Anand the humanist whose humanism, as M.K. Naik concludes in his critical appraisal of the author, is eclectic and tries to combine ideas stemming from very different ideologies.<sup>6</sup>

This conclusion is confirmed if we look at the only scene in Anand's novels in which the relationship between capital and labour is presented not as one embodied in the relations between single individuals but masses of workers and their leaders on the one hand and the management of a capitalistic enterprise on the other. (219-226) After short-work has been announced, workers and trade union leaders meet to discuss how to react to this provocation. Several positions are presented; first of all there is the attitude of the majority of the coolies who by all means want to work, regardless of the terms of labour offered by the employers because lack of work means starvation or, even worse, death by hunger. Then there is Ratan and a group of trade-union leaders who are able to analyse the relationship of capital and labour in general and also the particular situation at hand. They appeal to the emotions of the masses, the day-to-day sufferings experienced by them as exploited labourers, and they are well on their way to winning back the support of the majority after the president of the trade union had gained points when he suggested that his organization, the AITUC, would try to work out a compromise between the workers and the management. Anand seems as much set against this line of approach as the masses of the workers, who unite in a chorus and shout the charter of their demands from the management. Before any decision can be taken,

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6 M.K. Naik, *Mulk Raj Anand*, New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann 1973, 16

the rumour spreads that Muslims have kidnapped Hindu children, and the gathering of workers splits up into two religious communities fighting against each other instead of uniting their efforts against those who exploit them materially and ideologically.

Anand probably chose this solution because he wanted to point out how strong the hold of religion on Indians was at the time when the events are supposed to have taken place; besides, the historical development in India has certainly proved that he was right in that a portrayal of Indian workers acting consciously as a class rather than members of religious communities or castes would have revealed a dogmatic attitude on the part of the author. Still, choosing this solution appears somewhat defeatist because it suggests that alienation of man from man having taken the form of religious fanaticism and communal enmity is not only inevitable but that a fact like proletarian experience and the creation of a proletarian public seems generally impossible. It is logical then that Munoo, affected by the course of events, is separated from his friends and colleagues and is forced once more to face the hardships of life by himself. More than that, he begins to identify himself more and more with the norms and values of those who employ and rule him, though at times he still realizes instinctively that this does not mean self-fulfilment.

It is no easy task to state in a few sentences how far Anand succeeds in *Coolie* in conveying not only the various forms of man's alienation but, more important, a perspective of overcoming alienation caused by capitalism. Though, as we have said above, the historical conditions referred to and, we should add, the selection of a character like Munoo as the protagonist of the novel, inherently restrict a 'positive' perspective, we must admit that Anand succeeds less in advancing a philosophically and aesthetically convincing 'solution' than in presenting the essential function of labour and the various forms of alienation in this novel and elsewhere.

India, with its different methods of production which exist side by side, is depicted from a different angle again in *The Big Heart*. Expressed in terms of human labour, it is the transformation of the period of manufacture to that of industrial capitalism on which Anand focuses his attention. Ananta, the coppersmith, who owns a little workshop and lives on piece-work, is still engaged with manual production, which is gradually being replaced by industrial labour. Here, Mehru, a skilled worker and former coppersmith, has found work in a factory recently established by the head of the guild of thathiars or coppersmiths and the head of the "utensil sellers community."



Strange though it may appear at first, Anand is not interested in describing the extent of alienation in the work process as it is experienced by Ananta on the one hand and Mehru on the other. It is rather the degree of alienation of man which characterizes those scenes in which the complexity of labour is depicted; and, paradoxically, alienation seems to have affected Ananta and his employer more deeply than Mehru and his 'superiors.' While Lal Chand, who gave Ananta the order to make a large copper cauldron, is only interested in lowering the coppersmith's wages and in increasing his own profit, Ananta is dumbfounded that the head of his own community has taken to acting as capitalist rather than a brother-thathiar. He is unable to establish communication with him, and in the end Ananta says bitterly: "I had better go home and change my profession." (101) Through these words, though hardly grasped by Ananta himself, the author shows us that a change in the relationship of man and working process has already taken place. The idea that a craftsman achieves a realization in the product of his labour has long been false.

This conclusion is confirmed when we look at the very first scene of *The Big Heart*: Ananta is working upon a large cauldron "imprinting evenly spaced rows of bright moonstrokes" on it. (11) However, he does not concentrate on his work; it is rather a mechanical action which he performs deftly and quickly while his thoughts have turned towards the nightmare he had had the previous night. An explanation for Anand's procedure may be found when we look at the central conflict in the novel: it is caused by the opening of the factory and the consequent loss of work for many coppersmiths. The depicting of Ananta at work and selling his cauldron reveals that Anand does not look back nostalgically to a period when man achieved fulfilment in the production of articles. On the contrary, the author tries to convey the positive meaning the introduction of industrial labour may have. And this may explain why Mehru, working at the factory now, is less affected by the alienation than we should expect. It is true that he is discontented with his work: the machines frighten him, his work as a sweeper and, soon afterwards, as a labourer performing the most simple and boring actions serving a machine, make him recall the more satisfying work in his own shop. However, his thoughts turn to his time off and he imagines what complicated and useful articles he could produce then so that he would really find satisfaction in his work. Besides, the mechanical work done at the factory gives him time to turn his attention to his relationship with others. Although there is the fear of losing one's job and also envy and the attempt to exploit each other, we feel that Anand realizes the historical necessity of replacing outmoded

methods of production by more modern ones. At the same time, he sees a chance for man to use these methods of production to his own human advantage by, for example, trying to overcome alienation from man and from the work process. Anand's historical views, then, prove to be of a dynamic character but, again, potential 'solutions' of man's alienation are made a task of the individual's goodwill rather than of man's efforts to understand the essential relationship between capital and labour in a capitalistic society.

Bakha (*Untouchable*) and Bikhu (*The Road*) represent the group of labourers mentioned first, the outcastes. It is Bakha's duty to clean the primitive public latrines situated close to the outcaste colony of a small North Indian town. He does his work in a manner so efficient that to the onlooker he appears almost too intelligent, too superior for this sort of activity. (7-11) Labour as described here, is at once part of a man's life and something separate from it, an activity which remains alien to him. Anand compares Bakha's working with the movement of a wave: "he seemed as easy as a wave sailing away on a deep river" (7); and, expressed once more in a less metaphoric manner: "though his job was dirty he remained comparatively clean. He didn't even soil his sleeves." (7) But this is only part of Bakha's reality. His labour is intrinsically connected with his social station. One of the officers Bakha serves, a high-caste Hindu, presents him with a hockey-stick, and this evokes the habitual, almost inborn "trait of servility in Bakha." (8) Social status and labour define his relationship to caste Hindus and serve him to identify himself. Though Bakha seems to be in harmony with his work, "he slowly slipped into a song [...] and he went forward with eager step, from job to job, a marvel of movement, dancing through his work" (8), Anand takes pains not to mislead us about Bakha's attitude towards his work. He does not want to tell us that there is dignity even in the meanest labour: "A soft smile lingered on his lips, the smile of a slave overjoyed at the condescension of his master, more akin to pride than to happiness." (8) Bakha is not really anxious to do more than is expected and would like to have a different job: "he preferred to imagine himself sweeping the streets in the place of his father. That is easy work, he said to himself." (10) And it turns out in the end that the impression of efficiency and concentration Bakha creates is nothing else but the outward manifestation of his efforts to suppress the thought of his work; as Anand puts it at the end of the scene:

he worked unconsciously. This forgetfulness or emptiness persisted in him over long periods. It was a sort of insensitivity created in him by the kind of work he had to do, a tough skin which would be a shield against all the most awful sensations. (11)

It is Anand's purpose to show that even a person belonging to the lowest social class is essentially a human being who suffers from having to perform alienated labour forced upon him by caste society. The seemingly 'unconscious' attitude to alienated labour expressed by Bakha, either through suppressing any thought of it or through performing it in a most mechanical manner, is the author's literary means of conveying his purposes.

The theme of solidarity and self-realization through labour — though hinted at already in *Coolie* — is taken up once more in *The Road* and is developed here in a more convincing manner. Untouchability was abolished by law after India had become independent. Bikhu, a young outcaste boy is thus given better chances than Bakha to overcome the exploitation by the higher castes. Besides, the government tries to improve the lot of the outcastes by offering them work in government schemes: they help break the stones needed for the construction of a road which will connect their village with the city of Delhi. This in itself is to be understood as a symbolic act opening the Indian village to the world and asking caste and outcaste inhabitants of the village to share alike in the work. Bikhu realizes that because of the opposition of caste Hindus their work might not be finished and the chance of starting construction of the road may be foiled. (86-88) However, the outcaste women offer their help which is gladly accepted by the supervisor and the men and now all hope to finish their work in time.

Labour as described here is given the function of — literally as well as symbolically — liberating man from his bondage, from being forced to live an alienated life. To take part in this work is a free decision of those who accept the offer, the work process itself a realization of man, because through it he will produce something which is useful to him; labour, indeed, has won back its essential function of being useful activity in the sense Marx defined it. But labour here also means realization of man as member of the species: all alienated relationships can be overcome, those between different social groups as well as those between the generations or sexes. The strength solidarity created is even noticed by caste Hindus. (88) In Bikhu, this feeling of victory is made manifest when he is described as having become one with his work and the lives others. (107) Neither his

mother's prejudices nor, in the end, those of a Hindu boy of his age can take away this experience of self-fulfilment. (108)

It is in this short novel that Anand, more than in any other work, has found a more profound insight into 'possible solutions', of overcoming alienation. That this does not mean that he is an idealistic dreamer becomes clear when we look at the conclusion of *The Road*: Bikhu is depressed that the prejudices of caste Hindus still exist and will continue to make human beings like him suffer. What is important, however, is the fact that Anand here does not sacrifice a philosophically tenable 'solution' for a naturalistic depiction of his story as he did in *Coolie*. On the other hand his dream has the power of potential realization. Although the novel as such has not been considered artistically successful by most critics, we must admit that Anand, philosophically speaking, has achieved more in those passages depicting man at work than in many others which are integral parts of more successful literary works.

Concluding, we can say that the author shows throughout a profound understanding of the character of human labour and the various forms of alienation which are caused by specific historical conditions and determine the relationship between man and his work. Altogether, he succeeds in presenting this theme in a manner that is aesthetically convincing. It is only in one of his more recent novels that a more comprehensive treatment of this theme can be noticed, and, although its artistic execution may not be altogether successful, the meaning labour is given in *The Road* indicates that Anand has achieved an even deeper insight into its complexity.

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