

# THE UNHEARD CRY: SUPPRESSED VOICE AND SUBJECTIVITY IN COOLIE

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## Abstract

*Mulk Raj Anand's Coolie (1936) narrates the poignant tale of Munoo, a young boy grappling with the harsh realities of a rigid caste system and class oppression within a colonial context. While numerous analyses of the novel have emerged from Marxist and postcolonial perspectives, this paper employs a psychoanalytic lens to uncover the profound psychological scars inflicted by systemic exploitation. By integrating the theories of Sigmund Freud and Frantz Fanon, the analysis delves into how trauma, repression, and fear shape Munoo's mental state. His continuous experiences of displacement, humiliation, and violence culminate in a loss of self, leading to eventual mental collapse. The novel serves as a critique of colonial capitalism and explores the ramifications of social injustice on the psyche.*

## Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* critiques the detrimental impacts of colonial capitalism, caste oppression, and child labor in British India. The narrative follows Munoo, a impoverished village boy, as he navigates various forms of labor—beginning as a domestic servant, transitioning to a factory worker, then a rickshaw puller, and ultimately succumbing to tuberculosis. His death signifies more than a mere physical demise; it embodies the profound psychological deterioration resulting from unrelenting poverty, alienation, and violence.

While frequently interpreted through a Marxist framework that emphasizes class exploitation, *Coolie* also presents rich avenues for psychoanalytic inquiry. The trauma Munoo endures extends beyond economic or physical suffering; it deeply distorts his identity and emotional landscape. His continual repression of fear, yearning for love, and grappling with grief unveil significant psychological wounds. Through Freudian and Fanonian concepts, this paper posits that *Coolie* illustrates how trauma and repression obliterate the self—a narrative of a boy whose mind is silenced long before his body succumbs to illness.

## Theoretical Framework: Freud and Fanon

Freud's psychoanalytic theory offers valuable insights into Munoo's inner world, particularly concerning trauma, repression, and the unconscious. Repression entails the act of burying painful memories or emotions within the unconscious to evade distress. However, Freud asserts that repressed feelings often resurface in distorted forms, such as anxiety or peculiar behaviors.

Frantz Fanon's colonial psychoanalysis broadens these concepts to encompass the mindset of colonized individuals. In his writings, Fanon elucidates how colonialism not only physically exploits individuals but also instills feelings of inferiority, shame, and self-loathing in the oppressed. The colonized individual internalizes their marginalization, leading to confusion about their identity.

Examining *Coolie* through these dual perspectives reveals it as not merely a narrative of social injustice but as a portrayal of a child's psyche disintegrating under relentless psychological trauma, devoid of opportunities for healing, love, or safety.

## The Child Psyche: Innocence and Early Trauma

Munoo begins the novel brimming with life, curiosity, and aspirations. Following the death of his parents, he relocates to live with his uncle and aunt, yet their neglect leaves him emotionally impoverished. Devoid of nurturing figures,

Munoo becomes susceptible and yearns for stability, only to confront recurrent abandonment.

Freud posits that early trauma, particularly stemming from neglect, often resides in the unconscious and may resurface as anxiety or disorientation. Munoo's experiences of trust and betrayal—whether from his uncle's family, the mill overseers, or Mrs. Mainwaring—illustrate his unconscious quest for safety in detrimental circumstances.

This cyclical pattern fosters emotional turmoil: Munoo internalizes blame for his mistreatment, experiences guilt, and suppresses his pain as a coping mechanism. His silence in response to abuse is not merely passive; it serves as a defense mechanism rooted in a fear of further abandonment.

### **Displacement, Dissociation, and Loss of Self**

Munoo's physical journey—from the hills of Kangra to the urban slums, and ultimately to the hill station—mirrors a psychological trajectory of fragmentation. With each relocation, he forfeits a portion of his identity, growing increasingly alienated from himself. He is deprived of opportunities to settle, forge stable relationships, or articulate his true emotions.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, this leads to dissociation—a mental fragmentation induced by extreme stress. Munoo begins to operate mechanically, shifting from one job to another, suppressing his emotions, and merely striving to endure. He often refrains from confronting his pain, as doing so would necessitate succumbing to its weight. His psyche develops what Freud refers to as “psychic numbing,” wherein emotional responses are stifled to evade further trauma.

Moreover, he is seldom lovingly addressed as “Munoo.” Instead, he is labeled “coolie,” reducing him to a mere laborer. In alignment with Fanon's portrayal of the colonized individual, who is defined by external perceptions, Munoo's name, history, and individuality are stripped away. He embodies disposable labor, with his identity obliterated by economic and racial structures.

### **Repression and the Failure of Language**

Language plays a pivotal role in psychoanalysis—not solely for what is articulated but also for what remains unspoken. Throughout the narrative, Munoo rarely divulges his innermost fears or desires. He refrains from discussing his

parents, his yearning for love, or his feelings of humiliation. This silence stems from repression rather than ignorance.

Freud identifies repression as a fundamental component of neurosis. What is repressed does not vanish; it simmers within the unconscious, manifesting in various ways. For Munoo, this manifests as abrupt outbursts, dreams, or inexplicable sorrow. His emotional state resembles a concealed wound—an adaptive response that obstructs him from collapsing under the weight of his suffering.

A significant illustration is Munoo's relationship with Mrs. Mainwaring. Although she appears benevolent, the power imbalance is evident. Munoo experiences warmth and attraction but grapples with expressing these emotions. This confusion—a blend of gratitude, dependence, and desire—remains repressed, exacerbating his internal conflict. He is unable to articulate his feelings, echoing Fanon's assertion that colonized individuals often feel “speechless” in the presence of their oppressors.

### **Psychic Death and the Tragedy of Tuberculosis**

Munoo's demise from tuberculosis symbolizes more than mere physical termination; it signifies his psychological disintegration. In literature, illness frequently reflects deeper emotional realities. Tuberculosis, characterized by its gradual and suffocating progression, parallels Munoo's slow erosion of humanity.

By the time he arrives in Simla, Munoo's psyche has already fractured. He has lost the capacity to hope, love, or even recollect his past. His physical decline only follows after his mind has surrendered. Anand illustrates “psychic death”—a condition wherein an individual emotionally ceases to exist.

The concluding scenes resonate not due to their dramatic nature, but because they encapsulate the final stage of trauma—when the will to live diminishes, and the self feels like a specter. Munoo's life concludes quietly, underscoring the tragic reality of a world devoid of avenues for healing.

### **Conclusion**

Coolie is a narrative of movement—through various locations, occupations, and social strata—but fundamentally, it represents a psychological impasse, with Munoo ensnared in a cycle of trauma and repression.

Through the lenses of Freud and Fanon, this article elucidates that Munoo's journey transcends the physical realm, descending into loss, fragmentation, and silence. His experiences are not singular; they epitomize countless children and laborers who are crushed by economic systems and invisible wounds that transform them from within. Thus, Coolie transcends a mere tale of poverty and exploitation; it unveils the colonized psyche, where the mind becomes the ultimate battleground. By exposing the internal consequences of social injustice, Mulk Raj Anand compels

us to reflect on how society impacts not only the body but also the soul.

#### **Works Cited**

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