

## PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF ABUSES IN 'COOLIE'

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### Preliminaries

If abuses are treated as speech acts, the sociological novels of Mulk Raj Anand can be best understood. The novel *Coolie* by Mulk Raj Anand is replete with abusive expressions. The writer deliberately creates some characters who use offensive language and certain characters who become the recipients of the verbal abuses. There are definite social, psychological, cultural aspects that govern the choice of abusive language. The fictional characters manifest attitude, describe the world or change the things by way of abusive expressions. In the novel *Coolie*, we come across abusive use of language. The abuses that occur in the novel are dominated by the social stratification in Indian context. The Indian society as reflected in the novel is based on the class system. Therefore, in the novel *Coolie*, the abusive speech acts are related to the class discrimination.

Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Coolie* is of epic dimension for it takes the readers to different places of India where we come across people belonging to different age groups, castes and classes, occupations and professions and where we come across the variation in the use of the register. What is striking about this novel is an element of contrast showing the rich and the poor, rural and the urban, English people and the Indian people. Therefore, the novel *Coolie* is multicultural in nature offering the scope to construe the selected speech acts in terms of power and solidarity semantics. The speech acts which include terms of address, abuses, diminutives, endearment, honorific registers, etc are also worth studying beyond communicative aspects. The socio-cultural, strategic competence, and discourse competence are much more important than the linguistic and communicative competence. If the speech act theory is applied to the novel *Coolie*, one understands the linguistic utterances beyond the grammatical boundaries. The present article is an attempt to shed light on the abuses in the novel *Coolie* using the principles in pragmatics.

## Pragmatic Analysis of Abuses

Since the novel *Coolie* is primarily based on the class-consciousness, it would be interesting as well as noteworthy to study, interpret and analyze the carefully selected speech acts. The importance of social relationships in determining address forms is, in fact the subject of independent research. It is interesting as well as surprising to note that abuses are used as a form of address. The use of abuses is common to all cultures. Gujri, Munoo's aunt in the novel *Coolie*, for example, flings abuses at him shouting at the top of her voice:

*Munoo ohe Munooa! Where have you died? Where have you gone, ominous orphan? (p.9)*

The utterance was uttered with a shrill, hoarse voice standing at the low hills of Kangra valley from where one could see the silver line of the river Beas surrounded by the mango-grove, ferns, weeds and bushes. Munoo had been grazing cattle on the banks of the Beas. The address terms she uses are partly diminutives and partly endearments; diminutives in the sense that they are used to express disapproval of Munoo; endearment for they are the deviations in the name itself. The illocutionary force of the utterance indicates that his aunt wanted Munoo to come home as early as possible because his uncle was leaving for Sham Nagar and he must go with him to earn his livelihood. Her intention behind the utterance also indicates that she wanted to get rid of Munoo by sending him to the town. She uses taboo words to describe Munoo. She calls him 'ominous orphan' because Munoo's parents had already gone to the heavenly abode. Both his uncle and aunt wanted Munoo fend for himself. The perlocutionary effect of the utterance shows that he was terribly frightened to hear the voice of his aunt. Though he heard the shouting of his aunt calling him back from the valley, he did not reply. He simply turned from the shade of the tree where he sat hidden. Panic-stricken he wanted his aunt to disappear into the hut.

The above speech act is an example of code switching for the sentence structure is Hindi whereas the words used in the sentence construction are English. One of the

reasons for using the code-switching device is to convey anger and annoyance strongly. The expression “*Where have you died?*” is taken from the Hindi phrase “*kidar marr gaya*” and is used to express anger for the person who is wanted urgently but not available on time. Despite the repeated shouting calls of his aunt, Munoo would not respond on purpose. Therefore, the utterance involving code mixing is used to emphasize the exigency of the situation. In the Indian context people make use of two languages simultaneously which is known as bilingualism. S. V. Parasher (2001) says:

*“When people of widely different cultural and linguistic background live together in a geographical region over a considerable length of time, sharing common, socio-economic and political activities of the community stable bi- or multi-lingual societies are created.” (p.14)*

The swear words either in Hindi or English are extensively used by the characters ranging from children to grown ups. At times, they are used as diminutives whereas occasionally they are used as endearments. The study of the following example will illustrate the fact:

*‘Have you no manners, you savage, that you let your aunt shout herself hoarse and don’t answer her?’ (p.10)*

Jay Singh, son of the village landlord, is Munoo’s rival for leadership of Bishambar and other village boys. He wants Munoo to go away from the village forever so that he would get a chance to lead the boys in the absence of the latter. The term of address he uses is ‘*you savage*’, which apparently is an abusive expression, but in reality, it is an endearment. The term is used by Jay Singh to show close proximity. However, there are a number of abusive words and phrases in the novel. Some people use abusive language in the name of some animals. Animals are powerful symbols of certain qualities- good or bad. We either admire or despise people using animal metaphors. Let us examine the following utterance of a young man:

*‘Look out, you son of a donkey?’ (p.18)*

The above utterance cannot be understood unless it is put into the context. In pragmatics, the context determines the meaning of a linguistic expression. Here, the rider of a bicycle uses the utterance. As the donkey is looked upon as a stupid or brainless animal, Munoo is given the qualifications of a donkey. When he saw Munoo in his way walking carelessly disregarding the warning bell of the bicycle, he gets angry and reminds him to be cautious while walking.

The above expression is an indirect speech act and is intended to create a perlocutionary effect on the mind of the hearer. Here, in this case, Munoo is the hearer and he steps aside and barely escapes being knocked down into the gutter. The man, to save the boy from any injury, uses the abusive expression, '*son of a donkey*'. The implied meaning one gets from the phrase is the boy in the context is so silly like a donkey that he cannot understand the rules of traffic in a town or city.

The abuses are not only in the name of animals but they are also related to sexual characteristics. For instance, Munoo's uncle makes him aware of the impending danger of the bicycle to which Mulk Raj Anand calls two-wheeled steel horse. The abusive terms used by Munoo's uncle in the following expression make this clear:

*'Ohe, illegally begotten!' you will get killed! Idiot!' (P.18)*

On seeing a two-wheeled steel horse coming towards Munoo at a terrific speed, his unkind uncle addresses Munoo as illegally begotten and calls him idiot to avert the accident. The illocutionary force of the utterance was so strong that boy was terrified. As a result, the boy became frightened and could not understand what to do in this situation. Had the toy-seller not dragged the boy to a safer place, the cyclist would have knocked him down. His uncle, unmindful of the boy's plight, continued his verbal abuses without stopping for a breath:

*'Walk quickly, rascal! You will get killed before long if you don't look out.'* (p.18)

Daya Ram, uncle of Munoo, having said this utterance struck him on the face. Munoo began to cry. He was very disheartened because he thought that his uncle had a stony heart. Nevertheless, he had no option than to follow his uncle mutely. Thus, it becomes clear that Munoo is a mute sufferer. The term ‘rascal’ is used in the sense of an abuse as well as diminutive. It is an abuse because the utterance is uttered in a harsh tone, which makes the boy realize that he should be cautious while walking on the city road. Usually, the term ‘rascal’ is used in the sense of disapproval of somebody’s way of doing the things. In this sense, it is a diminutive. Here, in this case Munoo’s manner of walking is disapproved.

Munoo’s journey into the new world is full of struggle, disappointment, trials and tribulations. He suffers not only at the hands of his own relatives but his masters who assign him different odd jobs also oppress him. For example, Munoo is ill treated by his uncle who wants to get rid of the boy. He considers the boy a burden in the family. Therefore, he expects the boy to do some work for his daily bread. He takes the boy to his master and asks him to pay respect by joining hands. His uncle says:

*‘Join your hands, pig, and say, “I fall at your feet” (p.23)*

Munoo’s uncle flings an abuse in the name of pig. The above speech act is directive in the sense that Munoo is ordered to do something. The boy is ordered to join hands as the mark of respect. In India, people give respect to the superiors or elderly people by joining their hands. Munoo is asked to do so by his uncle to get favour of Bibiji, the mistress of Babu Nathu Ram. Since Munoo is a teenager, he dutifully obeys his uncle and joins his hand to show that he respects the woman.

As soon as Munoo begins his work as the houseboy, he is profusely abused by the landlady:

*‘Eater of your masters! Strange servant you are that you fall asleep before the sun sets! What is the use of a boy like you in the house if you are going to do that every day? Wake up! Wake up! Brute! Wake up and serve the*

*Babuji his dinner. Or at least you eat your food before you sleep, if sleep and die you must.’ (p.25)*

Munoo is at the lower rung of the ladder of social hierarchy. In other words, he belongs to the category of servants. Bibiji and Munoo share master-servant relationship. The speaker enjoys the right of calling her servant ‘brute’. The abusive expression, ‘*Eater of your masters*’ is the literal translation of the Hindi expression, ‘*Namak haram!*’ which is used to show that the person in whose case the socially forbidden words are used is not trustworthy. Bibiji, the wife of Babu Nathu Ram let fly the abuses. At one point Bibiji says to Munoo:

*‘Yay, shameless, shameless, vulgar, stupid hill-boy! May the vessel of your life never float in the sea of existence! May you die! What have you done! Why didn’t you ask me where to go? May you fade away! We didn’t know we were taking on an animal in our employ, an utter brute, a savage! What will the sahibs think who pass by our doors every morning and afternoon! The Babuji has his prestige to keep up with the sahibs. Hai! What a horrible, horrible he has made outside my house!’(p.8)*

Munoo did not know where he should go to relieve himself. There were houses all around. He hurriedly went to the wall outside the kitchen lest he could not control himself any longer. The landlady was seething with anger when she saw him releasing the stools. She could not bear the sight.

The above utterance of Bibiji indicates that she was extremely angry with the boy for relieving outside the kitchen. She calls him ‘vulgar, stupid boy’. She also uses indirect speech act and calls him an animal. Here, the landlady regards Munoo an animal because he does not even know where to relieve himself. In another incident, Munoo is regarded as monkey. Chota Babu says:

*‘You paws, you monkey!’ (p.33)*

The above expression apparently looks like an abusive expression but at the pragmatic level, it is an example of endearment. Munoo is addressed as monkey by Chota Babu. Here, it must be mentioned that Chota Babu and Munoo share friendly relations. Besides being a doctor, Chota Babu is also one of the members of the house where Munoo works. The Babu treats Munoo in a friendly manner. He allows Munoo to come into his room and listen to music. Munoo wants to listen to musical notes created by the singing machine. When he enters the room without dusting his feet and hands after throwing the rubbish outside of the house, Chota Babu utters the above speech act as an endearment. In the same speech event, we come across another term of endearment, this time in the name of some bird. Babu calls Munoo:

*'Ohe, son of an owl,' have you dried your feet before entering the room?'*(p.32)

Here, the address term is in the name of a bird, which has derogatory connotative meaning in the Indian context. The bird named 'owl' is associated with a person with beady black eyes, whose appearance is ugly and who becomes a laughing stock. At this point, Munoo is addressed as the son of an owl for not cleaning and drying his feet before entering Chota Babu's room. However, in this case the address term is endearment.

On the contrary, Bibiji, the mistress of the house constantly nags Munoo for the latter is careless in doing the household duties. The ill treatment meted out to Munoo makes him disheartened and dejected. Bibiji at one point in the novel calls names and gives him a resounding slap on the face. Here, we are reminded of Bakha, the protagonist of the novel *Untouchable* who also receives the slap on his face. Both the characters Bakha and Munoo represent the lowest caste and the class of the Hindu social structure based on hierarchy respectively. Bibiji's speech act is worth studying here:

*'Spoiler of our salt!' 'You have brought bad luck to our house! Beast! And I have tried hard to correct you.'* (P.59)

The address term '*Spoiler of our salt!*' is an abusive expression as well as a diminutive, it is an abuse because it is aimed at bringing humiliation to Munoo for not

doing the house work according to the wishes of Bibiji, it is a diminutive for it is aimed at bringing disgrace to Munoo. The phrase “*Spoiler of our salt*” is an example of code switching. The Hindi phrase of abuse ‘namak haram’ has been borrowed using English rephrasing. The Hindi abusive term is often used in India to indicate the person who is poor and who works at his master’s place betraying his master.

Munoo is called a beast because he is poor and miserable. He is harassed due to his low class. Mulk Raj Anand deliberately makes his characters use abusive language and thus makes a new experiment in the use of language. He uses language as an action. The effective use of abusive language creates a perlocutionary effect on the hearer. Most of the abusive expressions are related to the animal imagery, the sexual activities, and the class distinction. Following are some of the speech acts where abusive language is used in the name of animals:

1. *‘You impertinent little rogue! So you dare to ask me for accounts, eh, son of a swine! This is the reward I get for keeping you so long, and for finding you a job! Money, money, money you want all the time!’ (uncle to Munoo) page-61*
2. *‘Son of a bitch! How can I get you the clothes you want, and shoes, if you spend all the pay money which I am keeping for you?’ (uncle to Munoo) page-60-61*
3. *‘Why, oh swine! Why don’t you answer me?’ (Babuji to Munoo)page-73*
4. *‘Get on with your work, ohe inquisitive swine!’ (The goat face to Munoo) page-115*
5. *‘Son of a dog!’ (Babuji to Munoo) page-73*
6. *‘Get out of my way, swine!’ (Ganpat to Munoo) page-125*
7. *‘Get away you hill dog!’[striking him on the face] ‘Go to your coolies, you dirty coolie.’ (Ganpat to Prabha) page-125*
8. *‘Shut up, demented swine, ignoble wretch!’ (Ganpat hurled his last abuse at Prabha) page-126*



9. 'Stop howling, dog, and don't follow me. I tell you I have made up my mind. I am through with such scum as you. You are not my class. You belong to thee street, and there you shall go. I spit on you.' (Ganpat to Prabha) page-126

10. 'Son of an ass! Heathen! (Pathan to Hari) page-236

11. 'Stupid bullock' (Jimmie to Hari) page-199

12. 'You lie swine! I went down myself yesterday and there was no water.' (Chimta Sahib to Hari) page-229

13. 'Surka bacha! Why didn't you inform me before you moved out of those huts? (Chimta Sahib to the coolies) page-229

In the above examples, the underlined words are animal abuses. It is noticed that these animals have bad connotations in Indian culture. The abuses are not only in the name of animals but they are also in the name of illegitimate sexual relations. The abusive speech acts showing the illicit relations are in plenty in this novel. Following are some of the examples:

14. 'Come out! Come out and face us, upstart hill-man! Come out, lover of your mother!' (page-126)

15. 'Ohe, lover of your mother, 'Ohe, illegally begotten, who asked you to lift the cask, you who have hardly emerged from your mother's womb? Run away, little rascal! I didn't see you go in to lift the weight or I should have stopped you. Do you want to have me sent to jail for murder? Get away, little wretch!' (The merchant to Munoo) page-144

16. 'I know he is ill. Of course, he would be ill, with so much money on his conscience. But go and bring him, or we will come and drag him out, the illegally begotten!' (One of the creditors to Munoo) page-127

17. 'Go, go, seducer of your sister, go and get him.' (a merchant to Munoo) page-127

The abusive expression in the 14, '*lover of your mother*' is taken from the Hindi expression, 'Madar Chod' which means 'mother fucker' in English. The creditors to Prabha call him names because he has not been able to repay their debts. The Lallas have come to the doorsteps of Prabha Dayal to demand their money. On seeing the house locked, the creditors knock at the door and abuse him profusely.

Similarly, the directive speech act as stated in 17 indicates the nature of relationship between the addressee and the addresser. Here, the addresser, of the abusive expression, '*Go, go, seducer of your sister, go and get him*', is a merchant who has come to the doorstep of the house of Prabha who has become bankrupt. The merchant asks Munoo to fetch his master who has been hiding in the house for fear of being beaten. The merchant addresses Munoo as the seducer of his sister. It is an example of code switching and is taken from the Hindi phrase, 'Behan Chod' that means the person has illicit sexual relationship with his sister. This type of abuse is very common among the working class of India. Probably, this is the reason why Mulk Raj Anand makes use of speech acts of code mixing and code switching involving abuses showing illicit relations between kith and kin.

## **Conclusion**

It is remarkable that Mulk Raj Anand recreates reality by the use of authentic linguistic expressions taken from the ground realities existing at the time when the novel *Coolie* was being written. The use of abusive terms as well as diminutive expressions is worth studying from the point of view of pragmatics because the study of language as an action really helps the reader to arrive at an authentic interpretation. Abuses, in short, relate the speech to the attitude of the upper caste/class towards the lower caste/class and to the socio-cultural environment of both the caste/class. In fact, it works like a living character influencing the interactions of the characters in the novel.

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