

**The Indian Social Novel in English: A Neo-Victorian
Encounter**

Carmen Escobedo de Tapia
University of Oviedo
Spain

*Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment, full
effort is full victory.*
Mahatma Gandhi

He was an ineffectual 'pawn in the chessboard of destiny'.
M.R. Anand. *Coolie*

Abstract

The influence of the Victorian on postcolonial Indian narratives in English dates to the 1930s with the Founding Fathers: Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan. There is a clear development of the Indian social novel that emerges in the Gandhian era to the connexions with the Victorian, underlying the relationship between neo-Victorianism and globalization. It is the aim of this article to highlight a Dickensian pervasive presence in the first stages of Indian narratives in English, specifically the Indian social novel. I will establish a comparative approach between Dickens' celebrated novel *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and *Coolie* (1936) by Mulk Raj Anand, the social Indian writer par excellence. I suggest a neo-Victorian encounter framed within a colonial/postcolonial encounter, making explicit how different historical processes – late eighteenth-century England and the Gandhian era in India – cause a similar social impact on so different contexts. Mulk Raj Anand adapts and appropriates the Victorian in *Coolie*, showing deep social concern and claiming against social evils, injustice and hypocrisy in India. This analysis stands as a transcultural exercise that shows Dickens' universal scope regardless of time and space.

Keywords: *postcolonial novel; Indian social novel; neo-Victorian; Charles Dickens; Mulk Raj Anand; globalization.*

1. The Industrial Revolution, the Gandhian Era and the Indian Social Novel: Dickens and Anand

The influence of the English Industrial Revolution can be viewed as a model of historical, social and political transformation from which to consider the influence of the historical and social factors underlying the Gandhian era in the Indian context. Those changes and the life in Victorian Britain were illustrated through the literature of the time. Similarly, Indian writers stood as representatives of a historical moment that portrayed the image of India as a product of the clash that was caused by the encounter with western values and conceptions of the world. The neo-Victorian past allows for a historical reflection which leads us to reconsider other contexts and times as different as India and the Gandhian era from an ethical critical perspective which will prove the fluidity of that particular period of British history:

The imaginative capability of history is closely connected to its ethical capability. One of the purposes of historical time travel is to transport our modern selves into alien situations which allow us to highlight by contrast our own values and assumptions. Sometimes it is easier to examine complex ethical questions honestly and openly in a historical rather than in a contemporary setting. The distancing takes out some of the heat of the moment without disengaging entirely contemporary values and attitudes. In this respect history asks us not to lose ourselves in the past but to view the past from our own standpoint; in fact, one of the functions is to help us define our standpoint clearly. (Mandler 2002: 147)

The immediate consequence of the Industrial Revolution, with the growth of technology, brought about the increasing power of money, cheap labour, a greater demand for goods, new political powers, etc. The urban landscape became the image of poverty, and

children became marginal in a society that seemed to have benefitted, but in the same way allowed for the emergence of child labour, which was indeed a form of slavery that led to children exploitation, inhuman torture and, in many cases, death. As Anindita Dutta states:

These child labourers were forced to work in factories and workhouses at the insistence of their parents and workhouse guardians. Child labour in Victorian Britain was part of a gruesome system which snatched children from their childhood, health and even their lives. Many children in Dickens's times worked sixteen hours a day under atrocious conditions, as their elders did. (Dutta 2014: 1-4)

These historical and social circumstances could very well apply to India by the end of the nineteenth century, and even currently. The contact with the west at the beginning of the colonization had meant the arrival of new social models as well as the assimilation of the western outlook on life. India became then impregnated by the western values parallel to a development of new forms of industry brought about by colonization. As in Britain, there was a quick development of the urban environment and new means of transport appeared; in particular, there was a great development of the railway system, factories proliferated everywhere, and there was a massive movement of people from the rural to the urban areas, transforming big cities like Mumbai – Bombay at the time. In the new social landscape created by the colonization we find, once more, the figure of the poor, which placed many children on the verges of a society that was already highly hierarchical due to the caste system division. The Gandhian era goes from 1920 to 1947, the year in which India achieved Independence. India was undergoing a process of decolonization. By then India had already taken conscience of the idea of a nation which would claim for independence. In 1857, with the Indian Revolt, new winds of change had started to blow across the country that would affect the political and social spheres in the subcontinent. After World

War I, the role of Mahatma Gandhi characterized a period that would set the basis of modern and contemporary India.

It is not surprising that a country where individuals were socially framed according to the caste system would justify many injustices within the social landscape, which is reminiscent of the Victorian era. In addition, the social contrasts were boosted by the increasing power of money and capitalism that the British colonization brought about. The urban environment in India became a much more oppressing force on individuals than in Victorian Britain. Young people who belonged to the high castes became postcolonial subjects psychologically disturbed by new social circumstances that clashed against their traditional beliefs. Those who belonged to the lowest stages of the social system became the real victims of the new economic order created by colonization. In the big cities, the protagonists of these changes were the *coolies* or factory workers, many of them children who roamed about in the streets trying to make their living and who became exploited as cheap labour. Postcolonial India stands, then, as a representation of the Victorian social landscape. This historical and social context was reflected in the literature of the period. By then the novel form had already undergone a process of *indianization* that allowed Indian writers to experiment with style, form and content.

Mulk Raj Anand stands as the *Indian Dickens* in the 1930s. Dickens was engaged with the poverty-stricken people, the unvoiced, the forever suffering; he would become the critical voice of a context that called for reform, claiming for social justice. Likewise, M.R. Anand becomes the “writer of the poor”, he is engaged with the downtrodden of a social hierarchy that places *untouchables*¹ out of the social pyramid, and makes them the victims of not only the process of colonization which led to the postcolonial system, but also sets them at

¹ *Untouchable, Harijan, coolie, dalit*, are all terms that are used to refer to the people outside the Indian social pyramid, which divides society according to caste.

the margins of a society which attributes value to human beings according to their birth.

In this colonial/postcolonial encounter that allows us to establish a direct relationship between such different cultural contexts as India and Britain, it is precisely where I aim to place the comparison between Anand and Dickens, in particular *Coolie* and *Great Expectations*, one of Dickens's most acclaimed novels. The encounter between Britain and India allowed for a literary influence that was felt in the development of the Indian novel in English. If the first examples of the genre were mainly superficial imitations of original British counterparts, with the *Founding Fathers* narratives achieved an independence that allowed Indian writers to experiment with style, form and vocabulary. Since then, the Indian novel in English would start a firm pace to finally acquire stylistic independence.

It is then identified in Anand an adaptation and appropriation of the ethics and aesthetics of the Victorian times, with a Dickensian projection that best exemplifies that he primarily made the decision to use Dickens's fiction as a means "to (re)encounter the nineteenth century, while ethics is used in the sense of intellectual and cultural meanings and impact contained within or consequential to that aesthetic choice" (Heilmann 2010: 10). Anand finds in Dickens the "ethical subjects" (Davis 1998: 240) that inspire his Indian imagination where ethics and aesthetics intersect; the presence of the past determines the nature of his present (Heilmann 2010: 11), and makes this author a social commentator and critic of the colonial and postcolonial Indian social context.

Anand was deeply engaged with the Indian social reality which characterizes the historical context of his times. He was worried about social injustice: rural population, caste abuse and the oppression of women, orphans, untouchables and the exploited in the urban context. He is a reformer, he uses stern, almost naturalistic realism through a narrative that reflects a very personal style, rough and emotional at the same time. He is involved with human suffering caused by economic inequality. We can say that he writes moved by a

Marxist theoretical prism with a clear critical attitude towards his own country, in an attempt to move the social conscience of the reader.

Anand's characters invariably seem to fall into three classes: the victims who are usually protagonists; the oppressors, those who oppose change and progress, and the good men. Under the last category fall the social workers, the labour leaders, all those who believe in progress and can see how modern science can improve the lot of the sufferers and help bring about the equality of all men.

Thus, while Dickens's social portrayals are considered documentary records of the Victorian society, Anand becomes, likewise, a representative of a social narrative which records the social injustices that India suffered under the influence of British imperialism, and provides the readers with a faithful portrayal of his critical viewpoint derived from his contact with Dickens's novels, which helped him identify the same characteristics of Victorian England in the context of postcolonial India. Anand's *Coolie* then becomes a social document of the Gandhian era in the same way as Dickens's novels are records of the nineteenth-century British society, since

Criticism and reading, present and past, are aligned here in a complex web of interrelations and influences. [...] what we explicitly seek to invoke in our use of the concept (neo-Victorian) is a series of metatextual and metahistorical conjunctions as they interact within the fields of exchange and adaptation between the Victorian and the contemporary. (Heilmann 2010: 4)

2. A Neo-Victorian Encounter: *Coolie* and *Great Expectations*

Coolie is a bildungsroman with a profound Indian flavour, a third person narration that tells us the adventures and misfortunes of a boy, Munoo, a fourteen year old adolescent who is the protagonist of a journey both physical and psychological. This journey drives the

reader from a small village in the Kangra Hills to the big city of Bombay.

The Dickensian tones in *Coolie* come not from a rewriting or intertextual exercise, as we find in Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) and Lloyd Jones's *Mr. Pip* (2007), but from an imitation of style and content. As Louisa Hadley puts it, there are two methods of incorporating Victorian literary forms:

Whereas the process of 'writing like...' involves the imitation of style of a previous author or literary form, the technique of 'borrowings' refers to the incorporation of another's text into one's own, a process often designated as intertextuality. (Hadley 2010: 144)

Both novels examined in this chapter belong to a strand of (neo-)Victorian fiction which engages with the Victorian era in specifically social terms, as we have previously said. Anand finds in Dickens a source of inspiration both from a stylistic perspective and from the way to approach and depict the social illnesses of the historical context of *Coolie*, which is set in a postcolonial India that had already undergone the transition from the colonial mindset to a postcolonial rebellious attitude towards the Empire. It is possible indeed to recognize aspects of the Victorian in (post)colonial contexts and subjectivities which are transferred through the English language and style.

Indian writers have adapted the use of the English language to the Indian context through a process of *indianization*, with peculiarities that, however, can also be found in Dickens, as for instance the use of repetition and reduplication to emphasize ideas or to highlight effects in the narrative. From a stylistic perspective, we can identify in *Coolie* features that remind us of a Dickensian style. Senses are a major semantic field in both novels, maybe more in the case of *Coolie*, since it is one of Anand's most distinctive narrative features to appeal to the reader's sensibility by contextualizing the English language,

transferring the Indian essence through the use of vocabulary and images. We find in both novels detailed descriptions of settings; for instance, the big cities of London and Bombay, turned into bustling environments which overwhelm the protagonists, like Oliver in *Oliver Twist* or Munoo, in *Coolie*.² In the descriptions we often find onomatopoeias that can even remind us of a Joycean prose, and they alternate with parts of mortal silence in which characters turn to introspection and reflection. These contrasts, present more clearly in *Coolie*, reinforce the sense of instability that is applicable to both main characters' psyche; they remind us of the effects of Victorian society, as they are reflected in Dickens's world. In the case of Munoo, who is an adolescent, a *coolie*, an outcast in the Indian social context, he becomes representative of the postcolonial Indian society and people in general. Both social writers use a descriptive style to highlight the injustices of society. Anand's descriptions verge on the naturalistic, and so he does not avoid the ugly details of the reality he portrays, using a very diverse and naturalistic style.

The novel opens with his aunt calling him: "Munoo ohe Munooa oh Mundu" (1), which reminds us of the opening lines of *Great Expectations*:

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip. (3)

Both protagonists are presented alluding to their names, which links directly with the concept of identity, which becomes specifically important in the field of the postcolonial. Names define our identity. *Coolie*, the title of the book, refers in general to those millions of children that constitute the community of *coolies* in India, unnamed,

² In *Oliver Twist* the city of London is viewed through the eyes of the child in a very similar way to Munoo's perception of Bombay.

unidentified, marginalized, untouchables that roam about, unshaped human beings defined only by traditional religious beliefs. Coolies are out of the social pyramid, they are the downtrodden of society. Anand pays homage to them by presenting Munoo and his story as faithful representation of these victims of the Indian tradition and society. This way, Anand associates the concepts of self-identity and community, and by extension the West and the East.

The use of the symbol of the orphan child as the writer's dissatisfaction with the society that he observes in harsh development around him is used by both authors. In a world given increasingly to utilitarian values, clearly identified in Dickens's *Hard Times*, and to the development of machines, the child becomes the icon of imagination and sensibility, a symbol of nature set against the increasing pressures of social experience actively denaturing humanity.

Both Munoo and Pip start their journey in the countryside, the former in the Kangra Hills, the latter in the marsh country in Kent. Both novels present the contrast between the rural and the urban, and both Anand and Dickens portray Bombay -Mumbai- and London as the places where to find, at last, the climax of Pip's and Munoo's great expectations, one and the other eventually determined by their own cultural contexts; but soon the cities turn into aggressive environments that cause them distress and loneliness.

Thus, when Pip leaves his village early in the morning, he finds himself with his little hand-portmanteau as if expelled from Paradise and on his way to Hell, "[...] the mists had all solemnly risen now, and the world lay spread before me" (136)³, a whole world of possibilities, his dreams and expectations of becoming a gentleman yet to be fulfilled. Likewise, Munoo, in his journey, abandons Daulatpur with high expectations and hopes to find in Bombay the way to get a better social situation and become an Englishman:

³ Milton in Book 12, lines 646-7, of *Paradise Lost*, describes Adam and Eve expelled from the Garden of Eden with the following words: "The world was all before them, where to choose/ Their place of rest...".

The train was seeding through Daulatpur. Munoo was staring out of the window [...] there was only a curious flutter of excitement in his heart, like the thrill of fear and happiness [...] fear of the unknown in his bowels and the stirring of hope for a wonderful life in the new world he was entering. (80-1)

But soon both characters discover the dark side of their dreams, and the city becomes the epitome of failure rather than of possibilities. In this contrast stands the presence of religion, another essential issue in the Victorian context, developed all through the novels. The country seems to represent Paradise, and the city represents Hell. Pip says that “[he] was scared by the immensity of London, [he] thinks he might have had some faint doubts whether it was not rather ugly, crooked, narrow, and dirty” (138). Munoo, on his side, also realizes that the city is not what he had expected. Bombay first appears as a huge and multicultural metropolis where the teenager finds his hopes of becoming a European man revived: “Munoo emerged from the Central Station. Before him was Bombay; strange, complex Bombay [...]” (177). But at the same time he finds the city “more confusing than Daulatpur and Sham Nagar” (185), and seems to realize that he is alone in the world:

And he shut his mind to the silver, the orange, the green, the gold, the blue, the flaming red of the trappings of the Arabs, the Hindus, the Muhammadans, the Parsees, the English, and the Jews, and walked on, concentrating on himself. (185)

We find here the different consideration of God in the eyes of both protagonists, which again is directly linked to the different cultural contexts and to the authors’ religious stances. While Pip seems to have faith in God, who leads his destiny, and finds in the development of his life the intentions of a divine hand, presenting Dickens’s christian

standpoint, in the case of Munoo we find Anand's Marxist ideas represented through the eyes of the child. While Munoo seems to recognize the diverse religions present in India, he does not seem to understand them. Though he considers several times the possibility of becoming a religious man, always expecting to improve his miserable life, he finally loses hope and abandons the idea of and the faith in God. Even at the end of the book, this loss of faith in religion is made explicit in the open confrontation between Hindus and Muslims that Munoo witnesses, and which shows one of the most important religious issues during the Gandhian era, and all through Indian history, which would eventually lead to The Partition after achieving Independence in 1947. The Partition is an important historical episode in the modern history of India which meant the division of India and Pakistan according to religious criteria, with a massive migratory movement of people: Hindus moved to India and Muslims to Pakistan. Thus, Munoo observes that "there was violence throughout the mill areas and the town, and the whole strength of the police, including the armed police, had to be mobilized to keep the disorderly element in check" (280).

We learn soon, then, that Munoo is an orphan, just like Pip: "Munoo ohe Munoo! [...] Where have you died? Where have you gone, you ominous orphan? Come back and begone!" (1). Munoo lives with his aunt and uncle, and the object of abuse, insult and ill treatment, "the face of his aunt, with its hard jaw, its bright red-cornered eyes, its sharp nose and thin lips, all in a malevolent framework of dark hair, flashed across his mind" (4), which makes us understand why he feels eager to leave when his uncle, Daya Ram, tells him he is going to town to get a job as a servant to a Babu, a bank clerk. Munoo has faith in a future far from his aunt and uncle, a future that would allow him to earn money, that would open him the doors of new opportunities, and maybe the possibility of a more dignified existence: "will you never come back? [...] No, never, I never want to come back" (5). But in his adolescent mind he feels worried. In spite of all his aunt's abuses and his slave situation, he is driven to a static

attitude, as if he wanted to keep to his roots, where he finds his real identity, his definition as a human being, with all the negative implications inherent to that status. Anand here refers to the fixed social hierarchy and resignation that characterizes the poverty-stricken part of Indian society.

Munoo is then forced to leave his roots and start a journey that will drive him from innocence to experience, in the same way that Pip moves from the marshes to London with great expectations. Both orphans undergo similar adventures that relate them with different characters that are the source for maturity and development. Munoo is the victim of cruelty and violence all along the journey: "[...] walk quickly, you rascal! [...] his uncle shouted and struck him on the face" (8). Munoo cries and feels resentment and hate towards his uncle. The first part of the child's adventures gets him to the town of Sham-Nagar, where he will learn about the importance of money for the first time. He asks where to find the cattle to graze and the fields to plow, but he is told that there are no cattle nor fields there, since people work in order to get money. This is shown by Anand as one of the illnesses brought about by colonialism: western capitalism, which creates new values that would clash with the Indian traditions and beliefs, dislocating the identity of postcolonial subjects who, like Munoo, lived in the rural areas that represented their roots and where they found their real identities. But once Munoo reaches Sham-Nagar, he feels enchanted, "as if he were walking in a dream, in a land of romance where everything was gilded and grand, so different was the world from the world of the mountains" (9).

Likewise, Pip, who lives with his dreadful sister and her husband, good old Joe, who had accepted to bring him up when he married his sister "[...] bring the poor little child. God bless the poor little child [...] there is room for him in the forge" (40), moves from his home to Miss Havisham's with fear. They both know the positive –or so they have been told– implications of this step in their lives, but could not avoid a feeling of dislocation; they feel they lose their

identity since they are driven apart from their comfort zone, an existence that, though miserable, makes them feel defined. Pip reflects as he leaves:

I had never parted from (him) before, and what with my feelings and with soap-suds, I could at first see no stars from the chaise-cart. But they twinkled out one by one, without throwing any light on the questions why on earth I was going to lay at Miss Havisham's and what on earth I was expected to lay at. (45)

Munoo, in turn, cannot "realize the significance of this world" (9); the unknown stands before him. Both orphans show an inner anxiety when confronted with the great expectations they should hope for and their real childhood feelings.

The feeling of self-definition is therefore present in both protagonists. In the case of Munoo, the effort is double since he has to define himself in the crowd of coolies as well as a human being in the postcolonial in-betweenness. Identity, then, is one of the postcolonial concepts that underlies Munoo's story, which in Pip is contrasted by the concept of self-achievement. This relates to another pivotal concept that is implied in both novels: destiny. To what extent are Munoo and Pip free to choose their steps in life? Both of them are conscious of their position in the social organization, and the fact that they should move on in order to achieve a better social status. While Pip feels a responsibility towards Miss Havisham's generosity and thinks that he "has a particular reason for wishing to get on in life, and I should be very much obliged to her if she would impart all her learning to me" (61), Munoo discovers the power of money and class-consciousness: "money is everything, Munoo thought. And his mind dwelt for the first time on the difference between himself, the poor boy, and his masters, the rich people, between all the poor people in his village and Jay Singh's father, the landlord" (55). Anand develops this idea in full, since it is one of the most direct effects caused by capitalism in the

Indian context, and everywhere. Anand applies his Marxist theories and makes a stern critique of the social organization of his context: Munoo reflects that “there must only be two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor” (56), and that caste did not matter; thus, his conclusion is that “I am a Kshatriya and I am poor, and Varma, a Brahmin, is a servant boy, a menial, because he is poor” (55). We infer here that Pip will find it easier to promote in life than Munoo, precisely due to the different cultural and social context they belong to. In the case of Munoo, destiny is linked to strong social bounds, “a pawn in the chess of destiny” (35). Pip, on his side, can find more possibilities to improve his social status, thanks to the generosity of the unknown benefactor who pays for his education.

The contrast between rich and poor is completed with the contrast between good and evil. This is something that we also find in both texts and it is further developed in the relationship of the protagonists with different characters that they meet along their journey. If Munoo leaves his aunt and uncle, who treated him like a dog, he will fall into Babu and Bibiji’s hands in Sham-Nagar. The episode that narrates Munoo’s life as a servant in Sham-Nagar is an example of human evil, represented in the violence and cruelty with which Munoo is treated in the house of the Babu. He is continuously beaten and insulted: “you eater of your masters! May you die! May the vessel of your life float in the sea of existence [...] rogue! scoundrel!” (57). At this stage we find Munoo feeling free to escape this inferno, in an attempt to restore his dignity as a human being. This way, Anand seems to give him the chance to free himself from the nets of destiny: “a whipped dog hides in a corner, a whipped human seeks escape” (59). After being seriously beaten, he decides to fly away and step on to some other unknown episode of his life. He is not conscious of the steps he sees himself forced to take due to his relationship with other characters; he just moves on fleeing from evil and cruelty. Munoo’s circumstances remind us of the picaresque features, which we also find in Dicken’s narrative, mostly related to secondary characters.

Pip confronts cruelty in the relationship with his sister and when he faces the convict Magwitch in the marshes at the beginning of the novel. However, he soon finds good in his relationship with his uncle Joe, who is portrayed as a positive character from the very first moment in the story. Destiny seems to play fair in the case of Pip, linked to a more western-like mindset that seems to give more opportunities to human beings. Pip tells Biddy, another good character in *Great Expectations*, that he wants to be a gentleman: "I have particular reasons for wanting to be a gentleman" (107); Biddy, however, seems to push him into a static attitude: "but don't you think you are happier as you are?" (107), to which Pip, very assertively, answers that he is not happy at all as he is: "I am disgusted with my calling and with my life" (108), and he feels he has never felt bound to either since he was born. He considers himself "a poor dazed village lad" (108), but at the same time he feels the strength and freedom to move on and aim for greater expectations.

The contrast that we find between Munoo and Pip facing their destiny and their use of personal freedom make us, once more, consider the different contexts that mould the imagination of both creators. The historical context affects both Victorian Britain and Gandhian India in similar ways, but the cultural contexts determine the steps the protagonists take and their freedom when playing with their destinies. While Munoo in his escape feels " [...] intensely alone, as during the suspended moments of his descent into this inferno" (61), Pip finds himself " [...] walking in the summer afternoon toned down into the summer evening, and it was very beautiful" (110).

One feels pity for Munoo, being the victim of both the postcolonial and the Indian backgrounds. It is not until part three in the story that we envision a sort of oasis for him. He escapes Sham Nagar, and the train, a symbol of modernity, allows him to reach his next stop, Daulatpur. Pip, as far as chapter eighteen, has moved much further than Munoo; he had been Joe's apprentice for four years already and was convinced that Miss Havisham, his benefactor, "was going to make (his) fortune, when (his) time was out" (113). At this

point we perceive that the western outlook seems to provide Pip with more hopes than the Indian context to Munoo.

Munoo's dreadful situation in this respect is then explained in the light of a colonial/postcolonial encounter. He is an orphan and a social outcast in India. He does not belong to a kin group, he does not have an inherited occupation, nor economic or political power. But the explanation of his miserable situation seems to stem from the change the Indian society experimented under the British colonization and its aftermath. Capitalism was implanted in India. The economic and industrial revolution brought about by Britain was translated into the inevitable changes undergone in the Indian social organization. People were defined in terms of caste but, with the colonization, the influence of the Industrial revolution added economic criteria. Society then was divided into rich and poor, and Munoo's eyes observe as he realizes about this unfairness:

Whether there were richer or poorer people, there seemed to be two kinds of people in the world. Caste did not matter. [...] The babus are like the sahib-logs, and all servants look alike. (69)

And so, the final corollary is a deeply-ingrained conviction: "there must only be two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor" (69).

Anand, the same as Dickens, finally considers that the most important problem of society is the class division caused by the Industrial Revolution, because, as Munoo tells us, "Money is, indeed, everything" (55). However, the development of the protagonists differs in this respect, as we shall see, and will make the difference between the contexts we are dealing with explicit in spite of the similarities found from a historical perspective. Pip seems to achieve greater success in his journey, since he finally gets benefitted by the effects (positive and negative) of capitalism which, theoretically at least, allows for more chances for individual promotion: "[...] I was

pressed for money by more than one creditor. Even myself began to know the want of money (I mean of ready money in my own pocket), and to relieve it by converting some easily spared articles of jewellery into cash" (324). Pip's psychological and physical journey that leads him towards the city of London represents a movement towards self-achievement, while Munoo travels from innocence to experience, from the rural to the urban. He is driven by Pip's same hopes and dreams, but he finds that the city is a representation of his failure to achieve even a more dignified sort of existence. The first city he travels to, Daulatpur, represents another step in which Munoo reaches manhood and forgets innocence.

There he finds Prabha and Parvati, secondary characters in the novel that give Munoo a bit of hope. This couple's house stands as an oasis. He will find there the affection and love he lacks. He has been subject to abuse and mistreatment, and when he finds this couple he realizes that there can also be good people in the world. At this point he discovers the factory environment and seems to feel the need to reaffirm his identity in order not to lose his references in the midst of this sphere of unnamed social beings that form the community of coolies working in factories:

I was called Munoo at Bilaspur, Mundu at Sham Nagar [...] My father died and then my mother died too. My uncle, Daya Ram, who is a chaprasi in the office of the bank of Sham Nagar, got me a job as a servant in the house of the Babu. Yesterday the babu beat me and I have run away [...]. (61)

This contrasts with Pip, who, in his development as a character and on his way to achieve his great expectations, decides to be called Handel, and seems to reject his past, as opposed to Munoo, who tries to define himself in terms of his idealized past. Thus, Pip, at the age of twenty-three and at the end of the second stage of his attempt to fulfil his expectations, admits that "I would not have gone back to Joe now, I would not have gone back to Biddy now, for any consideration" (276).

The city therefore symbolises Munoo's rite of passage from innocence to experience, rather than one step further towards self-achievement, as it is the case of Pip. In Daulatpur, Munoo starts to work in a dark factory, and here he becomes a *coolie*, an adult worker who tries to fight hard for survival in a dark infernal atmosphere. In spite of the bad conditions he is subject to, he feels as if Daulatpur were his home but, in a picaresque style –as we have aforementioned–, he perceives he has no luck and is urged to move forward to a final step that would be represented in his encounter with the big city of Bombay, which in turn would stand as the symbol of Victorian Imperialism: "Munoo emerged from the Central Station. Before him was Bombay" (152). Bombay stands before him full of expectations, being the commercial and entertainment capital of India. The city is represented as the huge and multicultural metropolis that revives in Munoo his hopes to change into a European man, in an attempt to restore his past suffering experience. However, this feeling is not as intense as when he discovered previous settings. His perception of the city is somewhat negative: "[...] strange, complex, Bombay, in whose streets purple-faced Europeans in immaculate suits [...]" (152), and he realizes that this city is not perfect, but even more confusing than Daulatpur or Sham Nagar. He is drawn back by this feeling as "he shut his mind to the silver, the orange, the green and the gold, the blue, the flaming red [...]" (152). He stares at the medley of shapes and colours before him, he loses balance as he walks, but nevertheless his soul feels determined to go onwards⁴: "oppressed and overcast, the boy walked along the square wiping streams of sweat off his face" (153). Finally, he aims for a bench "at the foot of a marble statue of the short, stocky, broad-bottomed Victoria with a scroll in her hands and a crown on her head" (153). The statue stands as an essential symbol of British imperialism exercising its power to the most as the child finally

⁴ The postcolonial city very frequently turns into a character that oppresses postcolonial individuals and even drives them to death, as in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* (1965).

sits exhausted. It is here when his colonial and postcolonial identities intersect, since he observes, as if his Indian self was identified, the sight of "a blue-black crow cawing in defiance to the world as it danced and fluttered after relieving itself" (153). Bombay, then, will become the climax but, at the same time, the frustration for Munoo's great expectations. The city makes him experience extreme loneliness and makes him realize that there is no possibility for a *coolie* to attain self-achievement. He takes part in revolutionary mobs, workers' demands for justice and claims for the improvement of the inhuman conditions in which factory workers -*coolies*- live, highlighting the importance of the concept of "voice" in the postcolonial. We find here an intersection of the historical and cultural contexts. The colonized subjects should always find themselves through their voice, and *coolies* and workers -and children- of the world should fight for their rights. As little Matilda tells us in Lloyd Jones's *Mr Pip* (2006):

[...] my Mr. Dickens had taught everyone of us kids that our voice was special, and we should remember this whenever we used it, and remember that whatever else happened to us in our lives our voice could never be taken away from us. (219)

While Munoo seems to end his journey victim of the force of industrial capitalism introduced by British colonization, Pip seems to achieve adulthood in a less harsh manner. London, unlike Bombay, does not stand as an aggressive environment. In the end, Pip discovers the positive side of his story and personal development. The topics of friendship and love seem to be more developed by Dickens. Thus, Pip's great expectations seem to be more or less fulfilled, and this is illustrated in his love relationship with Estella, as I will further explain.

The concept of love is widely developed in both novels and it is an issue that is in-keeping with Victorian views of sexuality. According to Steven Marcus (1966), the other Victorian is built upon the idea of hidden, silent and repressed sexuality, rendered mute and

invisible to history by social inhibitions and prohibitions. The Victorian era becomes then increasingly identified with sexuality and, more specifically, with its repression.

In general, the relationship of both Pip and Munoo with female characters entails a world of feelings that give shape to their understanding of love and sexuality, and it is through these bonds that we see the evolution of the concept in the development of the protagonists. All through the respective narratives, both characters are going to find women that would stand as examples of tenderness or cruelty. In the case of Pip, we observe this in his relationship with his sister, but mainly in his relationship with Estella and Miss Havisham; paradoxically the three of them are negative characters. The latter deceitfully stands as the image of Pip's benefactor and she hides in her own life story the failure of love. She would project her frustration on Pip, putting all kinds of obstacles between him and her adopted daughter, Estella, even arranging a marriage for her. In the end she feels the need to reconcile herself with Pip and asks for forgiveness: "Oh, what have I done! What have I done!" (337), to which Pip answers that she has done very little because he should have loved Estella under any circumstances. Pip's love for Estella seems to be pure and almost platonic; their different social class is a great obstacle to overcome; but, nevertheless, he would love her all his life, since Estella, as he himself admits, was his inspiration, and:

According to my experience, the conventional notion of a lover cannot always be true. The unqualified truth is, that when I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible [...] I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be. Once for all; I loved her none the less because I knew it, and it had no more influence in restraining me, than if I had devoutly believed her to be human perfection. (198)

In *Coolie*, while living with Babu and Bibiji, Munoo feels attraction for Sheila, their daughter, but at this stage he discovers that it is impossible to have any sort of relationship with people from a different caste or a higher social class. When he later meets Prabha and Parvati, he discovers the feeling of love personified in the affection with which Parvati treated him, as he narrates in the episode of the fever that he suffered due to hard work in the factory: "the warmth of those words, the comfort of them as they insinuated their way into his soul, as the air, subtly, invisibly insinuates itself into the body, the glow of those words, like the protracted joy of sympathy [...] the magic of those words was an inheritance of this woman, through centuries of motherhood" (94).

Munoo, at this stage, seems to have reached fair happiness: "towards the spring he became very happy indeed" (93). This happiness seems to be linked to the discovery of Parvati as a representation of a past world of memories of maternal love, but not quite the same, as he himself recognizes: "a memory different from the recollection of his mother's embrace" (94). This new feeling drives him into the unknown, "a memory which stretched from the innocent joy of a child's love, learning from one woman the need to know another" (95). At the same time, he identifies the feeling of love with a feeling of sexuality, "a memory of love travelling from faith and trust and care along the curves of desire, into the wild freedom of love which is natural" (95). As if he felt anxiety towards this new experience, which can be identified with a Victorian inhibition, he tries to justify that "[it is a feeling] which acknowledges the urges of the heart, which seeks fulfilment, like the animals, and which mocks at the subterfuges of religion and the limitation of morality" (95).

Anand tackles the concept of love and sexuality more in depth and in a less repressed way than Dickens, probably due to the influence of the cultural context. The difference can also lie in the development of the character of Munoo as a teenager, which is coherently different to that of Pip, who, at the end of the novel, has

become a man. In the last part of Anand's narrative, when Munoo has already arrived in Bombay, he meets Hari and his wife, Lakshami. They are positive characters and here again we find Munoo recalling maternal love through his relationship with Lakshami, who teaches him life lessons with "all the tenderness of her mother's intuitive understanding of his need" (215). At the end of the book, Munoo is run over by Mrs Mainwaring's rickshaw. Mrs Mainwaring is a character that reminds us of Miss Havisham, both having a significant role in the lives of Munoo and Pip respectively. Both ladies hide stories of frustrated love. While Miss Havisham lives stigmatized by an unfulfilled marriage, Miss Mainwaring seems not to have felt the frustration of two divorces and likes flirting and moving about in an uninhibited attitude. We find a contrast between both, again influenced by the specific cultural contexts. Munoo, in his relationship with his new mensahib, discovers sexuality, contrasting these new feelings with previous ones:

Munoo contemplated her with restrained wonder, sufficiently exciting to thrill him to the marrow of his bones. No White woman, no woman even, has condescended to look at him quite like that. True, he had felt strange, inexplicable urges in his being about little Sheila at Sham Nagar, and had enjoyed sitting in the lap of Prabha's wife, and loved Lakshami, but what he felt in response to the pinching and the coquettish of this Mensahib was something different. (255)

Contrary to Dickens, who gives little representation of love and sexuality, Anand openly portrays Mrs. Mainwaring's sexual attraction towards Munoo, moving away from Victorian sexual repression.

As we move towards the conclusions of both narratives, we will find how each particular outcome is closely related to their own contexts. The evolution of the protagonists differs and is affected by different conceptions of the world and the effect of their own specific

cultural background. In *Great Expectations*, we find in the end an adult Pip who has learnt to see and understand the steps taken in his journey from childhood to adulthood. He has more or less fulfilled his expectations to become a gentleman, though he never achieves one of his most wanted desires: Estella's love. The end of Dickens's novel, which he was asked to change to a happier one (Calder 1965: 494-496), as follows, leaves the door open to our imagination, since he and Estella seem to stay friends:

'We are friends', said I, rising and bending over her, as she rose from the bench.

'And will continue friends apart', said Estella.

I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her. (412)

This ending allows us to set our sight on a possible future in which there might be a chance for Pip to fulfil his love for Estella. The sight is placed on the future, and this is related to the linear development of both the plot and the main character. Pip leaves his past behind, and as he becomes an adult he gives meaning to many aspects of his existence through self-discovery and self-development. This contrasts with how Munoo evolves, which is not in a linear but in a circular way, the same as the plot of the novel. The different endings of the novels show that, even though the similar effects of the historical contexts, the Victorian and the Gandhian -postcolonial- era, are made evident all throughout, the specific cultural backgrounds influence the way the authors conclude their character's search. Munoo ends up returning to Simla, back to a rural environment. In a way, he seeks the past because he has not achieved his great expectations, and he does not even find his true self-identity. He tries to find himself in the remembrance of Kangra, the place he really feels

he belonged to. In his evocation of the past, Munoo seems to find self-definition, and this also contributes to circularity, which relates with temporal and spatial temporality. Furthermore, we find that he is not even given the chance to grow up into adulthood, since he finally dies of tuberculosis at the age of fourteen.

The end of *Coolie* leaves no faith for hope: “ [...] in the early hours of one unreal, white night he passed away- the tide of his life having reached back to the deeps” (282). He was, indeed, a pawn in the hands of destiny, and a victim of the dislocation of a context affected by the illnesses of the western society that also characterized Victorian times. From a western viewpoint death seems to be Munoo’s way to break free from his unfortunate life and represents a failure of the humanistic discourse on the subject of human labour against the British Empire. It shows the consequences of enslavement, subjugation and oppression. He is a helpless victim who, in the end, has no power to decide. From a Hindu perspective, death does not mean the end, but another opportunity for him to achieve his expectations, since individuals are engaged in the wheel of reincarnation. Hinduism considers life, death and afterlife as parts of the path towards perfect oneness with *The Absolute*. Death is referred to as *mahaaprasthaana*, the great journey. Death is a most natural experience not to be feared. Anand, in this novel and as a social critic, seems to elude reincarnation, projecting on Munoo’s tragic end his Marxist ideology. Munoo dies as a victim of a society that feeds on the poor. His death openly denounces the injustice of capitalism then, and, we could say, in current times. Munoo does not achieve his great expectations and this contrasts with Dickens’s end, which leaves the door open for Pip to achieve Estella’s love and finally become a real gentleman, breaking with the social class stratification.

3. Conclusion

This analysis has aimed to establish a dialogue between cultural contexts through a literary neo-Victorian encounter, framed within the colonial impact and the postcolonial result of that impact in India. In this dialogue, orphans Munoo and Pip stand as social victims, representatives of specific historical moments that would be reflected in the way Dickens's and Anand's imaginations and their literary narratives depict their growth as human beings.

Anand appropriates Dickens's ethics and aesthetics, incorporating Victorian issues in his literary style and content. If different historical moments shape similar social aspects, cultural contexts ultimately determine the evolution of a human being. Both Pip and Munoo struggle for self-achievement and their progression represents similar social and personal effects of capitalism and the power of money in different historical moments, both finally contextualized in their particular cultural backgrounds. From this perspective, as already pointed out, *Great Expectations* and Pip evolve in a linear way, while *Coolie* and Munoo show a circular development, which relates with the –presumably– wider opportunities individuals find in western societies as opposed to societies like the Indian, where individual social behaviour is determined by the restrictions of strong social bounds and religious traditions. Both orphans start their journey from a similar idealized rural environment, and with the same hopes and expectations that lead them to the city, a negative symbol of the effects of the Industrial Revolution in Victorian Britain and postcolonial India in the Gandhian era.

Along the journey, both Dickens and Anand highlight the importance of human relationships, from which our main characters experiment feelings of good and evil, violence and cruelty, friendship, romance and sexuality, class/caste differences, and social injustice. The main concern in both novels is to represent and understand how underprivileged children manage to make their living beyond the pain and psychological damage inflicted by adults and by a society whose responsibility should be to care for them.

Therefore, and parallel to this literary comparative exercise, the past serves us to project Dickens's and Anand's claims onto the contemporary, since both Pip and Munoo's stories could also be considered in terms of the global and become the images of millions of children that nowadays undergo similar circumstances. While *Great Expectations* illustrates the tragic condition of children and labour in Victorian England, and *Coolie* the marginalized and miserable situation of the outcasts of the Indian society, who are nothing but 'pawns of destiny', their stories could also apply to a condition prevalent in our society today. This encounter, then, transcends time and space. The literary dialogue established between both novels, constitutes, as we have proved, a neo-Victorian encounter through which the lights and shadows, virtues and values of the Victorian period are identified with the clash of the colonial and the postcolonial in Gandhian India. Even more, they acquire meaning also in terms of globalization. The intertextual dialogue between Victorian Dickens and Postcolonial Anand serves us to fuse different historical times through a transnational dialogue. The connection of the colonial and the postcolonial, the global and the glocal, eventually helps us to recognize in the (un)familiar, the distant and the other, elements that shape our contemporary imagination and reality in an attempt to reflect and achieve a better world for children as social victims. Through this comparative analysis of both *Great Expectations* and *Coolie*, the Dickensian positive neo-Victorian inheritance would be the positive inference of Anand's Victorian inheritance, recognizing the neo-Victorian fluidities revealed in a re-interpretation of *Coolie* as a representative of the Indian postcolonial social novel.

Bibliography

- Anand, M. R. (1936): *Coolie*, London: Penguin Books.
Calder, A. (1965): "Appendix A. The End of the Novel", *Great Expectations*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

- Davis, A. (1998): "Truth, Ethics and imagination: Thoughts of the Purpose of History", in *History and Heritage: Consuming the Past in Contemporary Culture*, edited by Jon Arnold, Kate Davis and Simon Ditchfield, pp. 240-60, Shaftesbury, Dorset: Donhead.
- Dickens, C. (1992): *Great Expectations*, London: Wordsworth Classics.
- Dutta, A. (2014): "Children in Dickens's novels", in *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, Volume 2, Issue 2, 1-4. www.arcjournals.org.
- Hadley, L. (2010): *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Heilmann, A.; Llewellyn, M. (eds.) (2010): *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*, New York: Palgrave.
- Jones, L. (2006): *Mr. Pip*, London: John Murray.
- Kaplan, C. (2007): *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mandler, P. (2002): *History and National Life*, London: Profile Books.
- Mitchell, K. (2010): *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction. Victorian Afterimages*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sinson, J. (2010): *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.
- Steven, M. (1966): *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century Society*, London and New York: Longman.
- Walsh, W. (1990): *Indian Literature in English*, London: Longman.

Carmen Escobedo de Tapia

affiliation: University of Oviedo, Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

position: Senior Lecturer

e-mail: escobedo@uniovi.es

interests: Postcolonial Studies, Postcolonial Literature, Indian Literature in English

Selected publications:

- (2020): *Spiritual and Corporeal Selves in India: Approaches in a Global World* (Carmen Escobedo and Alejandra Moreno, eds.), Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, ISBN 1527557804, 9781527557802.

- (2019): "Re-reading Nature, Restoring Nature: *The Inheritance of Loss*", in *Losing Nature: Narratives of Forests and Water* (Kiran Desai en Bora, Zelia and Murali Sivaramakrishnan, eds.), Lexington Books. Ecocritical Theory and Practice, pp. 99-111; ISBN: 978-1-4985-8114-1.