

Prabha Dyal (in Anand's novel *Coolie*)**Generous**

Character Prabha Dyal, a kind and generous factory-owner, is the exception that proves the rule in this novel revealing the depth of exploitation in India. He sees the miserable Munoo on a train, gives him a job in his factory and offers him a room in his house. He also treats his pickle factory workers with respect and decent wages. He is something of a *doppelganger* figure for Munoo because (like Munoo, the coolie of the title), Prabha comes from the hills, was an orphan and worked as a labourer. His essential humanity is emphasised when he himself is exploited by his business partner and mistreated by the police. As a good-natured, generous person, he is ultimately defeated by the cruel system that grinds him and others down. Even though he rose from the ranks of a coolie to own a factory, he reverts to that lowly status by the end. His is a story of rags to riches to rags.

Activities Prabha Dayal is busy supervising his pickle-factory, inspecting jars, checking on machines and training his workers in new methods of production. He also spends time reviewing the accounts, although his lack of financial acumen results in his being cheated and losing the factory. His domestic relations with his wife and daughter are amiable and calm.

Illustrative moments

Generous Even when Prabha is cheated by his business partner and is bankrupt, he promises to pay his creditors and his employees' wages. In a dramatic scene, when everyone demands their due, the police come and drag the factory owner away to prison. As he is led from the factory, the police Inspector suspects he is hiding his money away somewhere and demands that he reveal the hiding place. Prabha, handcuffed and humiliated, says, 'Sir, I have no hidden money. But I have stock. I will sell it all and pay everyone.'

Kind Prabha's instinctive kindness is evident in many scenes. Perhaps the most moving is the scene in which he first meets Munoo, who has boarded a train without any destination in mind. Prabha sees him slumped in the corner of a compartment and puts a hand on his shoulder. 'Are you all right?' he asked. When the slumped body barely moved, he asked again and then raised him upright. 'C'mon. That's a good lad. Be brave. I will help you.'

Defeated Although Prabha runs a successful factory, he is ultimately ruined by his business partner's fraud which leaves him without a cent. When Prabha realises what has happened, he reverts to 'coolie-like' deference and begs for mercy. He places one of his partner's shoes on his head (an iconic gesture of deference in India) and says, 'Beat me on my head till I go bald, but don't leave me. We have been together two years and built up this business. It will be terrible for me to have to bear weight on my back as a coolie in my old age.' Once a coolie, always a coolie.