Mulk Raj Anand’s ‘Coolie’: An Epic Depiction Of Subjugation

Abstract: Mulk Raj Anand’s coolie is an extraordinary portrayal of the misery of the exploited lot, especially, the children and the young men and women — by the British cruelty and the local zamindari, who have robbed them of their childhood and youth, sinking their self-respect and dignity of life by torturing them in various ways. The description of the deceived and depressed, in the novel ‘coolie’ by Anand, has attained epic dimensions. The theme of deprivation, hunger, starvation has been taken to the lofty heights of an epic, gaining universal significance. Though this theme has been dealt with many, including BhabaniBhattacharya in ‘So Many Hungers’ and Kamala Markandeya in ‘Nectar in a Sieve’, Mulk Raj Anand’s ‘Coolie’ has risen to the epic heights, in which the suffering of Munoo has been depicted in an exceptional style. This research article focuses on how the colonial forces, capitalist minds and Indian slavish attitudes have impoverished the people, especially, the poor, leaving them soulless.

Keywords: An epic depiction, theme of deprivation, inhumanity and exploitation, colonialism

1. INTRODUCTION:
The description of the deceived and depressed, in the novel ‘coolie’ by Anand, has attained epic dimensions. The theme of deprivation, hunger, starvation has been taken to the lofty heights of an epic, gaining universal significance. Though this theme has been dealt with many, including BhabaniBhattacharya in ‘So Many Hungers’ and Kamala Markandeya in ‘Nectar in a Sieve’, Mulk Raj Anand’s ‘Coolie’ has risen to the epic heights, in which the suffering of Munoo has been depicted in an exceptional style. Manu, the chief figure in the novel ‘coolie’, a fourteen-year-old boy, is an embodiment of miserable childhood. His father tasted death in instalments losing his five acres of land to the landlord in paying the interest on the mortgage, leaving Manu and his mother penniless. The first taste of bitterness of life is experienced by him in the form of his uncle who has made him and his mother virtual coolies with ruthless inhumanity and exploitation. After a few months, he has lost his mother and became lonely in fighting against the fate, against the British cruelty, colonialism, capitalism and industrialism. The miseries that his parents experienced in the hands of the landlords, and even in the hands of his own relatives, day and night, has been deeply registered on the surface of his mind.

2. LITERARY REVIEW
After the demise of his mother, Manu’s misery has been deepened and continued unabated till his last breath. The bereaved boy’s employment starts as a boy servant in the house of an ‘Imperial’ bank employee after his beloved mother’s departure. The ‘lady’ of the house subjects him to untold agony with her rude treatment. He is abundantly abused and constantly subjected to unending agony. He endured the unbearable for a long time silently. Being unable to bear the torture any longer, Manu runs away to another destination, Daulatpur where he joins a pickle factory as a coolie for the pittance of a salary. As he finds no place to rest, he hides his head at different places and once he has to taste the lathi of a policeman on the platform of a railway station. He runs to Bombay in the hope of a new lease of life. But, this new place also doesn’t offer any relief to the rigors of life and more so, the occasional destitutes that were seen in Daulatpur, are omnipresent here in Bombay. This place also turns cruel to Manu. From there, the last phase of his life shifts to Shimla in an unexpected way, without his interference. He is taken to Shimla by an anglicized lady that puts on Angrezi clothes and lives in bungalows as she requires a boy-servant who can be her rickshaw puller. The snow covered hills and the most beautiful scenes and sights of Shimla could not beautify the life of this young boy, but affected him in all aspects — the snow turned into sneeze and created lung problem. The heavy duties took a toll on the tender boy of sixteen, who succumbs to death ultimately.

3. ANALYSIS AND RESULT OF DEPICTION OF SUBJUGATION
Coolie, indeed, is a unique work of art by Mulk Raj Anand as he has woven into a different texture the themes, arguments and ideas, the central theme being the exploitation of the poor and the under privileged by the unethical forces of capitalism, industrialism and colonialism. Anand has explained how the contact with the British degraded the Indians who went to any extent of winning the favour of British, the British inhumanity. The craze for modernity among Indian masses has been brutally exploited. The British not only exploited the natural resources of this nature rich nation but systematically debased the character and attitude of the Indians, especially those who were in the service of the British. They have corrupted the poor in such a savage way that even the poor have begun exploiting themselves, their own destitute brothers and sisters. C.D. Narasimhaiah calls Coolie, ‘a novel of human centrality’, the novel being the focus of the inhumanity of the society in all facets. The British rule has downright devastated the very ethos of the people. The slapping of Munoo by a policeman for just looking at him, is a mere sign of the cruelty of the colonial. Till then, though India was in alien rule for a long period, the soul was not plucked, i.e. self respect was not grabbed. But with British rule, people had lost not only their financial freedom but also all kinds of independence — cultural and traditional independence besides losing conventional and vedic wisdom. In a way, an ordinary Indian has become soulless, being thoroughly exploited in every aspect and made ‘coolies’ in the true sense. Children had been robbed of their innocence and childhood; young had been deprived of their youth; adults have been adulterated and the old have been subjected to humiliation. Manu, the coolie, has been deprived of the joys of youth and replaced with the unknown and obnoxious sexual pleasures. He was never allowed to have his own feelings or thoughts, views or opinions but only forced to follow the whims and fancies of his masters very sacredly and religiously. Through modern machinery and technological skills, cotton mills, men and women of
India have been made slaves and coolies. The British inhumanity is rampant and omnipresent.

4. CONCLUSION:
Thus the life of Manu is the story of starving millions of miserable Indians who have been subjected to untold miseries of all sorts—hunger throughout life, insults all through life, ceaseless psychological suffering and never ending physical diseases. Poverty has degraded and demoralized their lives. Mulk Raj Anand has projected Manu as the archetypal figure of untold suffering of the grossly neglected, ignored and the exhausted. A panorama of the life of Indians of different classes and categories from North to South, from East to West, from rich and ruthless capitalists to merciless men in power, to selfish Sahibs and merciless Memsahibs to miserable Manu, has been presented; injustice, exploitation, cruelty, brutality has been exposed. The theme of hunger has been so pragmatically and sensibly depicted that tears cannot be prevented from rolling down the cheeks of any one with basic human feelings.

REFERENCES