

Exploring the Social Mistreatment in Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and A Bud*

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Abstract

The present paper aims to investigate the dilemma of the social mistreatment and marginalization of impoverished laborers, specifically by white masters and their supporters. It illustrates how colonial power dehumanizes, deceives and cheats the impoverished laborers of the tea estate. The corrupted and merciless white master of the Macpherson tea plantation in Assam has a greedy and envious attitude towards the destitute, landless and defenseless coolies. It depicts the miserable situation of the indentured underclass protagonist Gangu, who was first taken advantage of by the landlords in his home country and then by the white masters on the tea estate. He is the epitome of the oppressed human race. Due to his poverty, he is a member of the socially excluded class. A hierarchy of classes is depicted in *Two Leaves and a Bud* because of social standing, power and financial standing.

Key Words: *Exploitation, Laborers, Oppressed, Experiences, Landlord.*

Introduction

One of the most well-known Indo-Anglian novelists, Mulk Raj Anand's works were read and praised all over the world. Through, his prolific writing, Anand became known as a voice for the disadvantaged and voiceless characters in his main works who are ostracized because to their caste or status. In Anand's made-up universe, untouchable sweepers, oppressed coolies, indebted farmers, pathetic laborers, and abused women all have significant roles. He has chosen real-life heroes that he had a close relationship with when he was little. They are disadvantaged in some manner. He writes about their struggles for identity and existence as well as their issues and hardships in life. Anand spoke up for the underclass that were shut out of socioeconomic opportunities and subjected to political, social, cultural and economic marginalization. Through his novels, he portrays the tragic lives of the oppressed.

One of Anand's best-known novels *Two Leaves and A Bud*, powerfully illustrates the realistic representation of the underprivileged class. Given that the novel explores the pain and suffering of the laborers on Assamese tea plantations, the title is both provocative and fitting. The story illustrates the innocence and suffering of the average working class person. The protagonist of this tale represents the naive working class's maturation into experience. The theme of social mistreatment in this novel is element of the bigger colonial practice.

Anand has attempted to depict a social setting in the novel that is neither wildly fanciful nor overly dramatic. All he has done is attempt to portray the reality of the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in Assam. Here, it is necessary to take into account the circumstances that existed

in the Thirties when Anand wrote. When Anand returned to India in the spring of 1932 to see Sabarmati Ashram and present Gandhi with his manuscript of *Untouchable*, Gandhi counseled Anand to approach people before pursuing literature as a vocation. Anand took the advice and traveled to several places of India, including the Valley of Kangra, where he had spent long time as a boy. Afterward on, he also went to the Assam tea garden. He must have seen firsthand the appalling working conditions of tea estate laborers during this tour. His novel, *Two Leaves and a Bud* was a reflection of what he had witnessed. The work caused controversy because it depicted the brutality with which British colonialists treated the coolies on plantation estates and their exploitation. The events leading up to this controversy are described by Amrik Singh in his most recent book. The main Assamese tea planters' association had political clout. The novel portrays the deplorable working conditions of the workers in a striking and realistic manner.

The story revolves around the fundamental struggle between the ruled and ruler, which are represented by the indentured laborers of India as a group. The purpose of the novel's construction is to highlight the cruelty meted out by one class against another. The novel's main character, middle-aged coolie Gangu, is a symbol of the oppressed class. He is the epitome of the oppressed human race. Due to his poverty, he is a member of the socially excluded class. Gangu suffers as a result of the colonists' violence. Gangu's entire family faces hardships as a result of their poverty, dependency and social exclusion. He becomes a topic of British colonization and need. A middle-aged farmer from the Hoshiarpur district named Gangu loses his land to moneylenders. Gangu is persuaded to leave his home in Hoshiarpur and come at work as a tea estate laborer in the remote Assamese forests by Buta, the Sardar of the Macpherson Tea estate. In addition to his wife Sajani, he has a daughter Leila and a son Buddhu. Gangu can't resist the allure of a generously donated plot of fertile land, substantial savings and the prospect of excellent pay. He is so compelled to go there. But as soon as he gets to Robertson Tea Estate, Gangu begins to realize that the despicable Sardar Buta has conned him. One coolie from Bikaner named Narain reveals that once a coolie gets there, he is not allowed to leave on his own initiative. Three annas are paid to Gangu for laboring from dawn to dusk, two annas to each of Sajani and Leila, and half an anna to Buddhu. They receive violence, beatings and sexual exploitation of their wives and daughters in return for this. The retailers impose steep fees and outrageous borrowing interest rates. Gangu discovers that his family's combined income is insufficient to even purchase meals. Because the coolies' pathways are so filthy, hookworms proliferate and flourish there. There, the threat of cholera is constant.

However, the capitalists view coolies as dishonest, thieving and slothful. They are subhuman; they are not even human. The plantation doctor, John De La Harve, is worried about the outbreaks and unhygienic conditions there. Havre assaults the head of the Tea plantation, Croft-Cooke, when the deadly cholera outbreak occurs. Cooke promises to take the necessary action, but nothing materializes. The coolies are sub humans in his opinion. When Havre advises using mosquito netting, Croft-Cooke makes fun of him. Malaria soon spreads and Sajani, Gangu's wife, passes away from it. Because Gangu lacks the funds to carry out her final rituals, she turns to Croft-Cooke, the Burra Saheb, for a loan. He is permitted to visit the Saheb provided he promises to pay commission to the peons Hamir Singh and Babu Shashi Bhushan. However, he is expelled for carrying a sickness. Mulk Raj Anand is successful in portraying the crooked system and the corruption that existed back then at all levels, from the top to the bottom. Later, after asking Buta for assistance, Gangu is told to approach the Bania for a twenty rupee loan. As a result, the only assistance the coolies can expect from their superiors is abuse and kicks. Gangu becomes heartless. He's prepared to take any kind of shame. The death of his wife, the blow dealt by fate, is the most devastating of all.

The main character in *Two Leaves and a Bud* suffers as a result of her lesser status in the social order. A hierarchy of classes is depicted in *Two Leaves and a Bud* because of social standing, power, and financial standing. At the summit of the pyramid are the managers of the tea estates, such as Croft Cooke and Reggie Hunt, after those lower-level officials, such as Hamir Singh (peon) and Shashi Bhushan (clerk). Following them are custodians such as Neogi and coolie recruiters like Buta, who have a little more status and privilege than the coolies at the bottom such as Gangu, Narain, and others. Every individual with a higher rank uses his or her position of power and authority to oppress and degrade those who are beneath them. People like Neogi and Buta have the ascendancy over coolies such as Gangu and Croft Cooke chastises Babu Shashi Bhushan for mistreating Buta Ram. The coolies' poverty causes them to suffer. They have been marginalized by their poverty. Those like Bakha who are on the edge—or maybe even beyond it—face the true challenge. Unlike Bakha, Gangu is not caste marginalized; rather, because of his poverty, he lives on the outskirts. Anytime we discuss margins, a center is inevitably implied. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, the industrialist colonist—estate landlords and their representatives are on the priority and coolies such as Gangu are on the edge.

Gangu travels to the 'green hell' of Assam in the hopes of receiving a nice home, bonuses for his job and financial support when needed. The most alluring inducement made by Buta to Gangu was to obtain a plot of land as a present from the "English sahibs" to the coolies, as Buta had promised. Gangu views it as the most precious gift because he is landless. But as he confronts the circumstances in the valley, all of his hopes and goals are dashed. His neighbor Narain, a coolie, tells him about the appalling conditions there, which confirms his suspicions that he has been duped. When Narain reveals the story of the harsh truth of the place, Gangu is stunned. Narain states:

“You can’t escape from here now, anyhow
.....This prison has no bars, but it is
nevertheless a unbreakable jail. The
chowkidars keep guard over the plantation and
they bring you back if you should go. The
other day the chowkidar beat Balkrishna, the
boy who fled to the Santal village, because he
thought he could escape to his mother in
Oudh. The chowkidars go round at night with
a lamp and open every door to see if we are all
at home. There used to be a roll call every
night before I came.” (TLAB, 38)

The majority of the abuses and sufferings Gangu experiences on the tea plantation are undoubtedly caused by man's callous wish to cause suffering to other people. The welfare of the employees is of absolutely no concern to the owners of the tea estate. Even worse, they think that the best way to get them to work is to whip them, disown them from any organizational endeavors and, in extreme cases, kill them dead. While the underprivileged, overworked laborers go hungry and suffer, they eat, drink and have fun. It's ironic that Indian sycophants like Buta and Shashi Bhushan along with merchants, moneylenders and warders are the ones who make Gangu's life the most miserable, not just British characters such as Reggie Hunt and Croft Crooke, who treat coolies like Gangu in an inhumane manner. Gangu does not receive justice, thus his sufferings do not come to an end when he passes away. Reggie, the Gangu murderer, is found not guilty by the comically 'impartial' jury, which consists of two Indian and seven European members. By a unanimous vote, the jury finds Reggie not

guilty of the charges against him. Gangu, who was innocent, suffers as a result, while Reggie, the killer, is shown to be innocent.

The women in *Two Leaves and a Bud* are put in danger of being sexually assaulted by the lustful British colonists, especially Reggie Hunt. Any form of discontent or objection from a lady or her spouse is met with strong resistance. Reggie Hunt, who is constantly looking to save his thirst by raping the wives and sisters of coolie workers, has taken a victim in Negi's wife. Leila struggles mightily to elude an onslaught on her virginity. However, her father Gangu dies as a result of her hut escape. The occurrence is foreshadowed from the very beginning of the novel. A small toddler named Leila, terrified of the white man, flees away at the sight of Reggie Hunt. These all serve to demonstrate how indifferent and heartless the colonists were to the coolie women, particularly those who were always ill, frail and defenseless at their jobs and without any sense of dignity or self-respect. These ladies have endured all of this because they work as servants for strong male colonists on the Tea Estate. Subaltern theory allows us to categorize these characters, who originate from impoverished working class peasants in colonial India under subaltern categories. This research also examines the suffering and wretchedness of the underprivileged laborers, particularly the female characters and their fight for a better life.

This examination looks at the novel, *Two Leaves and A Bud* through the lens of subjugated theory. The author blends the marginalized group's maturity with the female characters' steady advancement and maturation. His debut novel, *Untouchable*, has echoes of the portrayal of subaltern individuals. Bakha's vibrant sister Sohini fights against Pandit Kalinath's physical abuse of her. She is unable to respond, though, because she has been ingrained in traditional Indian society for a very long time. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Leila takes things a step further by rebelling against Reggie Hunt, the tea grower, who is physically abusing her. She tragically loses her father. Lalu's dearest villager, Maya, is wed to an inappropriate man. She had a miserable, loveless marriage and soon gets widowed. In India, becoming a widow is a curse for women. A widow's penalty for disobedience is dictated by strict regulations and social exclusion. It renders an insensate object lifeless. The study illustrates how low working class women in India were treated inhumanely during British colonial authority. Additionally, the study seeks to advocate for ideals that would bring long-lasting happiness to the community and its members, such as compassion, humanness, peace, love, and the satisfaction of fundamental material requirements. It is necessary to foster accommodativeness and sensitivity in order to stop social and economic injustice from causing dissatisfaction and discontent and to improve living conditions worldwide. In an unfair colonial society where women suffered more than males due to a lack of inventiveness and socioeconomic issues, Anand delves into these issues.

Thus, investigation of the novel delves into the suffering and wretchedness of the impoverished laborers, particularly the female characters, and their fight for a better life. It examines the text from the perspective of Spivak's gendered subaltern theory. Sajani and Leila, Gangu's daughter, are working class peasants in the novel who labor for pitiful earnings.

But none of the commissions managed to portray the reality of the situation quite like Anand did in this novel. He chronicles a worker's life at every turn, starting—crucially—with the hiring procedure. The majority of tea estate laborers were not from Assam. Planters recognized it was better to hire outsiders since they would be more reliant on their employers, cut off from any family or kin support system and hence more malleable. Particularly targeted were tribal communities in central India and landless peasants in northern India. In addition to being promised decent pay, health insurance and children's education, they were also guaranteed free travel for the whole family. Such an offer would not fail to captivate anyone. Like Gangu, they

arrived in the hundreds of thousands and discovered that the pay was pitiful. Working from dawn till dusk, they earned half an anna for Buddhu, two annas for Sajani and Leila, and three annas for Gangu. That is relatively little, considering there are sixteen annas in one rupee. The family is compelled to borrow money from the Indian merchants who prowled the farms like vultures because their combined incomes are insufficient to sustain them. They are dubbed "demons" in the novel because of their ravenous nature and ability to drain everyone of their blood. Anand draws attention to the sexual aspect in addition to the financial exploitation.

Reactions to social mistreatment the other main theme in the novel is the multiplicity of retorts to social mistreatment. Despite some stereotyping, the novel is a potent literary work because of the diversity and psychological depth of these responses. Three categories of reactions are discernible. First, there is the pain that the employees themselves endure, which is mainly unspoken. With his stoic viewpoint and unwavering faith in the gods, Gangu personifies this mindset. He never questions the virtues or vices of the estate system until the very end. Second, there is the colonial estate owners' self-serving complacency. The manager, Mr. Croft-Crooke, finest embodies this 'turn-a-blind-eye' strategy. Although he promises to take action to improve the terrible conditions, he ultimately does nothing. Barbara, his daughter, is aware of the circumstances and is worried, but she has more pressing concerns. Men who intentionally try to take advantage of the workers represent a third response. This group consists of guys from India and Britain. Lastly, there is the extraordinary reaction of humanitarian compassion combined with action, personified in the figure of Dr. Havre. As a scientist, he finds the superstitions of the laborers horrifying, just as much as the cruelty of the growers. Like a political philosopher or social scientist, he examines the circumstances and comes to the conclusion that systemic corruption, not individual wrongdoing, is the issue. On the final page of the novel, there is an indictment on the legal structure that is part of that system.

The exploitation of laborers on an Assamese tea farm is the main focus of this novel. The author's exquisite descriptions of the surroundings add to the vividness of the extreme hardships and their sad repercussions on these people's lives. With its lush meadows, meandering rivers, dense forests, and abundant rainfall, Assam is referred to as the "garden of India." These attributes are ideal for the growth of innocent tea leaves. After tea was created on a commercial scale in Assam during the second half of the nineteenth century, demand for it in the UK and worldwide increased dramatically. Assam was dubbed the "Planter Raj" because it quickly began generating enormous revenues for the tea planters and gained immense significance for the British colonial administration. Simultaneously, the unsanitary conditions of the laborers were known to the British authorities and their predicament was discussed extensively in the media and among the Delhi government officials. The Delhi government appointed at least four special commissions to look into the working conditions between 1890 and 1930.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Anand realistically portrays the life of the underprivileged class. Gangu gives a very credible representation of the misery of the laborers and peasants. In Anand's fiction, Gangu appears to be one of the most comprehensive and enduring depictions of Indian peasants. Gangu's narrative can be applied to thousands of agricultural laborers who are oppressed by those who share the colonists' mindset of using their authority to impose hegemony over the weak, suppressed under debt from lenders, and live in extreme poverty. Mulk Raj Anand discusses his social critique of capitalism's drawbacks. *Two Leaves and a Bud* is, on the whole, an achievement mainly in up to now as it is a successful reflection of social

mistreatment of the subjugated and capitalism. As a result, the narrative concentrates social pragmatism on the peasant exploitation layer. The primary objective of Mulk Raj Anand is to expose social injustice and make an effort to raise the status of laborers. The lives and experiences of millions of people residing in an uncooperative society have been elucidated by Anand.

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