

# Human Atrocities in Novel 'Two Leaves and A Bud'

## by Mulk Raj Anand

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**Abstract:** As we know the three pillars of Indo-Anglian Literature are Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, and R.K. Narayan. Indo-Anglian novelists have attempted the portrayal of many themes. Hunger is one of them. In such novels, the protagonists leave their native places for good, in search of food and work and usually meet a tragic end. The exploitation of poor and illiterate farmers being cheated and exploited by landlords is another major theme in such works of fiction. The condition of the landless people in villages is worse. They have to work as a labourer, coolies, domestic servants, and mill-hands or rickshaw-pullers. Thus a large number of novels depict the gruesome reality of hunger and deprivation in the Indian context. *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1998), Mulk Raj Anand's third novel, deals with a similar theme. This paper aims to bring out the heartrending tragic elements spread in this novel. The problem remains, however the world of the exploiters and the exploited has changed.

**Keywords:** *Labours, Exploiters, Indians, Employers, Migration.*

### Introduction:

*Two Leaves and a Bud* is a great literary work created by Mulk Raj Anand. The main quotation of this novel is said by Dr. John De Le Havre when he opines "There is nothing more horrible in this universe than the cruelty of man to man." (Anand, M. p.119). *Two Leaves and a Bud* by Mulk Raj Anand deals with the miserable and pitiable plight of the tea plantation coolies. Gangu, the central character of the novel is a larger-than-life figure. He is a middle-aged farmer working in his field in a village near Hoshiarpur, in Punjab. But he is lured by the false promises of a tout about a rosy life on tea plantations and he leaves his native village to search for pastures new in Assam.

### Background of the Story:

The main protagonist of the novel is Gangu, who leaves his native place Punjab, along

with his family to Assam for better livelihood and financial security. Gangu goes there taking his wife, Sajni, and his children Leila and Buddu with him to work on the Macpherson Tea Estate. The tea plantation is a world within a world, a world apart. In this Tea Estate, after a week of hard labour, the amount given to Gangu's whole family is less than eight annas: three annas for Lalu, two annas for his wife, and daughter, and three paisas for his child. When Sajani dies, he goes to Babu of the estate of Shashi Bhushan Bhattacharya to talk to, the manager sahib in *Angrezi* to get the loan. Since the Babu demands commission for this service, Gangu making the promise says: "Babuji, I promise to give you some of the money which the sahib may give me if you talk to him in *Angrezi* and get me the loan I want..... My wife died last night and I have been ill. Take pity on me." This tempts the

Babu to contact the Manager of the tea estate of Assam, Crone Cooke. However, on listening to his words the Manager becomes furious, kicks him, and orders him to go out of his premises. Such was the behavior of Gangu's master.

### **Exploitation and Suppression as a Major Theme:**

Exploitations in all forms of tea labourer by British masters and Indian manager is the central theme of this novel. Masters hate servants, use them, exploit them, and beat them, but use their wives and daughters for personal purposes. The servants normally get land for cultivation by offering their wives and daughters to Reggie Hunt, the Assistant Manager. The novelist also successfully portraying many humanitarian souls in the story especially Le Havre and Miss Barbara who in contrast to the cruel exploiters from the same origin promised to help. Gangu for the allotment of the land that he could cultivate. He tells Gangu: "Yes, I will do that. Certainly, you ought to get land, it is in the contract of every labourer that he will get land to grow rice on when he comes here. I will see that the contract is enforced." People can hardly believe their ears that a British physician would speak in such a plain and straightforward manner. Anand created this figure so that good and bad human relationships could be demarcated.

About him Anand remarks:

The doctor had resisted Anglo India's belief in British greatness ever since his arrival in this country. At first, perhaps it had been from an instinct to be different from everyone else, an individual. Then he had given up the Imperial Medical Service, because the sentimental romantic in him wanted to make a brave gesture to convince

himself that he had really come to regard Indians as human beings and to believe that they had a right not only to rule themselves, but to rule themselves justly by destroying the inequalities of caste, class, and creed.

In this novel, Miss Barbara explores the cunningness of Europeans. She is a friend of humanity. The relation between the coolie and Miss Barbara was hedged in by a thoughtful humanitarian outlook. The third friend of humanity is Narain who explores the reality of the tea plantations in front of Gangu. He narrates to the newcomer, Gangu, the brutality let loose by the planters on the poor coolies. He tells Gangu the reality about Reggie Hunt. As the novel develops Gangu comes to know from Narain how the coolies can get land. He is a man who loves to develop good and compassionate feelings with other people.

Gangu exhorts his fellow laborers to work hard for, 'after all, men are better men when they are working than when they are idle.' He has great faith in the immense capacities of man for transforming society.

In the article "Why I Write" Mulk Raj Anand says: "But the compulsion to pursue the truth of human relations has, I confess, become the mission of my life. I could not have written all the twenty or so novels, and hundreds of short stories, if I had not been possessed with the source of love Gandhi touched off in me, and if I had not had the deep desire to reveal the beauty, the terror, and the tenderness in the lives of my character."

### **Conflict between the Poor workers and the British masters:**

*Two Leaves and a Bud* leave a stronger impression on our sensibilities in this regard. The novel is a faithful rendering of the ex-

ploitation of the poor servants on an elaborate scale and portrays the class conflict between the poor workers and the British masters. The conflict is between the rich and the poor, the natives and the foreigners. The novel presents the grim reality of Indo-British relations. Gangu is a representative of the Indian coolies working on British-owned tea plantations. Gangu comes there in the hope of starting a new life, but in the process loses his life. Tea plantation is a world in which the British officials and coolies are ranged into two separate groups. The British exploiters have no love for the Indian coolies working for them. It is their prejudiced and rude attitude to the Indians that make the East-West conflict unavoidable.

Reggie Hunt, Croft Cooke, Tweetie Hitch Cocker etcetera belong to the group of British exploiters. They not only exploit unfortunate Indians they also glorify their brazen exploitation. The British officers spend their time visiting clubs, playing polo, and organizing hunting expeditions. They arrange a special hunting expedition for the visiting Governor. The average behaviour of the British against the helpless Indians is exemplified by Reggie Hunt and Croft Cooke. For these people, Indian workers are nothing better than a piece of property, a service tool in the vast machinery of the plantation, and at best a sub-human being with no rights and privileges. Although de la Havre is an English man he does not represent the mentality shown by Reggie Hunt and Croft Cooke. Aware of the miseries of the plantation workers in Assam he feels that the nation that prides itself in not being enslaved has enslaved millions of people in India.

### **Oppression of the Poor:**

"So the Britons who never, never shall be slaves, went and enslaved the millions of Asia, went and built . . . grandiose Gothic homes for themselves in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras and barns for coolies to work in. These were ostensibly good enough for the niggers for they did not seem to die when out into them."

The Indian labourers are over-worked, underpaid, and ruthlessly exploited. Furthermore, the English men become suspicious of the majority of Indians, their motives, and their actions. They believe that every worker on the tea plantations is a potential agitator. Though situated in India the entire tea plantations are owned and controlled by some white men with the sole purpose of making money and earning profit. Imperialist Britain's thirst for profit and power has no end. It ends in subjecting millions of Indian coolies to sub-human existence, gradually grinding them down to death. Gangu in this novel is an apt example of such exploitation by the British.

The owners of the tea plantations have no concern, whatsoever, for the welfare of the workers. What is worse is that they believe that flogging these hapless workers is the only way to keep them in proper proportions. They try to intimidate these workers so that any sort of agitation and rebellion becomes out of the question. They eat, drink and make merry while the Indian workers grind for them.

### **True Story:**

This tragic novel was subsequently adapted to a Hindi film, *Rahi*, by Dev Anand and simultaneously released in English as *The Wayfarer*. The novel depicts in detail the concept of haves and have-nots

and the exploitation of one at the hand of the other, in pre-independence India.

In his Preface to the Second Edition of *Two Leaves and a Bud* the novelist tells us that "it was a real story which [he] was writing with a thinly veiled fiction. He further adds that he had first-hand knowledge of the workings of such tea plantations in India and Ceylon.

For Le Havre, this sort of treatment of the workers was nothing short of cruelty. The exploitation of Indian workers is mixed with prejudice. In *Coolie* we come across a similar attitude. Misunderstanding and prejudice are part and parcel of this exploitation process. In a sense, the contact with the British and the Europeans degrades Indians and they lose their sense of self-respect. They can go to any length to win the favors of their political masters. Naturally, the British look down upon them and insult them at every step.

### Conclusion:

Mulk Raj Anand vividly brings to life the routine of the British overseers and tea plantation workers. *Two Leaves and a Bud* is, indeed, a powerful picture of the exploitation of the poor and the wretched working class by the wealthy bourgeois class. The one distinction in this novel is that the bourgeois class consists mainly of the British. This novel can be thus read as a story of oppression and exploitation of Indians by the British. My concluding thought is, the real theme of the novel, however, is not of the suffering of the Indians at the hands of the British, but the oppression and exploitation of the coolies at the hands of tea planters also although, they are Indians, of the working class at the hands of the employers. They were outsiders but trying

to turn Indians into themselves and they became successful.

They have come and gone, but even after 75 years, we have not been able to wipe away the colonial mentality as it is deeply rooted in our mind. People of his race flourished in different places in India. We could not eliminate them, rather we became their mental slaves. No doubt we are physically free, but cannot escape from the colonial consciousness. Whereas for a one free country, connection of land and roots is as important as to expansion of fruits, flowers and leaves.

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