

**REFLECTION OF THROBBING AND SUFFERING OF AN  
UNDERCLASS PROTAGONIST IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S *TWO LEAVES  
AND A BUD***

**Dr. Dhanesh Mohan Bartwal**

Assistant Professor in English,

Department of Applied Sciences and Humanities,

THDC- Institute of Hydropower Engineering and Technology,

(A Constituent College of Uttarakhand Technical University),

New Tehri, Pin Code- 249001, U.K. INDIA

**Abstract**

Mulk Raj Anand's third novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), well appreciated by readers and critics, brought to him immense popularity and prestige. This classic novel presents a realistic picture of capitalist society through a journey of a poor underclass man Gangu. This underclass protagonist is the representative of all underdogs and down trodden society in pre-independence of India which was exploited by the cruel hands of Britishers. In his journey from Punjab to Assam, the protagonist suffers a lot in the capitalists' world not because of his mistakes but due to the whimsical and in-humanistic notions of capitalists which dragged him to the hell of labouring in the Macpherson Tea Estate Assam, and lost his life without fulfilling his dreams. Due to his poor condition and in order to feed his family, he compelled to leave his native place with the dreams of new world and future, and reached a new place which was far away from his village. But he faced scores of humiliations, exploitations and discriminations as a reward in lieu of his honest and hard labour. The present paper is an effort to highlight the sufferings and pathetic condition of an underclass protagonist Gangu who, firstly, exploited in his native place through landlords and secondly, in the tea estate through capitalists corrupt outlook. The paper also presents the humanistic treatment of Mulk Raj Anand for the aching heart of the protagonist.

**Key Words:** - Britishers, Capitalist, Discrimination, Native Place, Underclass, Humanistic Treatment.

The period of pre-Independence was the period of frustration and social evils. In this period, on one hand, Britishers enslaved India and exploited the Indians and, on the other hand, the Hindu caste system and the plight of out-caste and under-class people were alarming. During this period a few Indian novelists wrote about the conditions of India. Some prominent novelists like Bankim Chandra got fame for his romances in the imagination of Scott, Rabindranath Tagore wrote about upper-class gentry of Bengal, Sarat Chandra for middle-class life and Munshi Premchand presented the condition of Indian peasants and humble workers. But Mulk Raj Anand is different from others and is known as the champion of underdogs and out-castes. He writes against Vedantist kind of caste system that divided the Hindu society into four sub-categories- Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, and, also, strongly condemns the Vedantic tradition in which the upper-castes exploit lower-castes and treat them like an animal. In his novels, Anand tries to present the distress and agony of underclass of India. The pains and miseries of the society affected the sensibility of Anand and he confesses himself:

There has always been an emergent connection between my life and my writings, throughout my creative career. Most of the critics, who have written about my novels, have not motivated that my fiction arouse from the compulsion of life. (Anand, p.2)

Mulk Raj Anand (December 12, 1905-September 28, 2004) is one of the founding fathers of Indo-Anglian literature. His novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) reflects the evil of poverty and cruelty which ‘Gangu’ faced in a tea state. Beside this novel, he wrote *Untouchable* (1935) which is the result of his keen sympathy with a sweeper boy and downtrodden people. *Coolie* (1936) is the story of Munno an orphan boy who struggles for his livelihood and suffers the communal frame of the Indian society. The novel is an attack on imperialism, capitalism and exploitation of human beings. *The Village* (1939) is a pitiable story of a subaltern sepoy Lal Singh who joined the Army and, therefore, the conflict continues between the theory of *Karma* and theory of God. *The Big Heart* (1945) is a story of the struggle between man and machine. It is focused on the evils of industrialization where the people had to suffer. *The Road* (1961) is again based on caste superiority and obstacles faced by the protagonist after the Indian independence. *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) show the lack of unity and leadership. The autobiographical projection of Mulk Raj Anand can be seen in his *Seven Summers* (1951). The monarchy comes under the sharp criticism in *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953). *Morning Face* (1968) is a reflection of Indian belief on the traditional practices. The youthful sentimental feelings of nostalgia are expressed in *Confession of a Lover* (1976), and wrote some other short stories which were the result of Anand’s consciousness about downtrodden classes.

Mulk Raj Anand shows his fury against the evils of capitalism in his third novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* that is well appreciated by readers and critics. His humanistic vision and reformist zeal presents a poor man Gangu, who is the victim of age old landlord ship, higher than the upper-caste people. Anand always pours his sympathy on underclass people and bitterness on the ruthless oppressors in his writings. For this social reformist attitude Anand has been called “the Veritable Dickens of the East” (Iyenger, p. 130). By presenting Gangu as a central character of the novel “Anand champions the cause of the downtrodden and the under privileged, and highlights his liberal sympathies and commitment to humanistic outlook.” (Gupta, P. 37-38)

Anand’s outstanding novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* describes the pitiful life of tree plantation workers in the tea-estate of Assam where the coolies are brought from the outside of Assam with the temptation that they would be given a square of land for agriculture but once they are here the life becomes worse than hell. Anand wrote this novel after seeing the bleeding

heart of the poor labourers and presented the social condition of these people in the colonial India and, also, highlighted the devil features and notions of British rule. The aim of present paper is to reveal the pathetic condition of the protagonist of novel, Gangu, and his family due to the cruel treatment by capitalism.

Mulk Raj Anand selected his protagonist from the lower strata of the society and painted real India through his humanistic brush because he believed the people of real India do not reside in big bungalows, palaces and nor they spend their life luxuriously but dwell up in villages, poor huts and slums. Real India can be found amidst untouchables, coolies, landless peasants, exploited wives and homeless princes. He never pursued the oriental philosophy, mysticism and magic as many of his predecessors had done and these things make him different from the other writers. He made these victims of society more powerful with every preceding novel, and through every character he tried to represent the miseries of their gender, caste and class in which they suffered. Walter Allen comments on it,

It is only, through his characters that the novelist can succeed in what is his main social- as opposed to aesthetic-function, which is to awaken.... 'sympathetic comprehension' in our readers. (Allen. p.17)

Anand selects an innocent Punjabi boy Gangu his novel's protagonist who belongs to a village near Hoshiarpur in Punjab. He has become the victim of Buta's, the Sardar and the coolie- catcher, conspiracy and after crossing India horizontally reaches at Macpherson Tea Estate Assam with his wife Sajani, daughter Leila and son Buddhu for the better opportunities as well as future. His bad experiences of past life compel him to feel that life is a journey and disturb his mind also. He also suffers from preconception of miseries about such place which he had not seen ever in his life before. Gangu encounters with the troubles of Tea Estate within a few hours of his arrival. After facing devil and cruel Reggie Hunt, who is the assistant manager of Macpherson Tea Estate and villain of the novel, Gangu realises that he has been caught in the trap. Narain, neighbour of Gangu, comments on the severity of the Tea Estate,

'You will soon know, brother,' said Narain, 'First water, afterwards mire! This prison has no bars, but it is nevertheless an unbreakable jail. The chowkidars keep guard over the plantation, and they bring you back if you should go....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.' (Anand, p. 88)

Very soon, poor Gangu came to know about the conspiracy of Buta. He and his family earned only eight anns- three anns for Gangu, two anns for his wife and three pice for his child, instead of their one week hard labour in the Tea Estate and the false promises of liar Buta about high wages as well as free gifts of land. It is the matter of pain and sorrow for the protagonist because in his village he alone used to earn eight anns a day by working on the land of landlords. Through this incident, the novelist tries to present the social as well as economic condition of innocent poor labourers who want to uplift their pathetic condition but the greedy and cunning capitalists take benefit from their aspirations.

Mulk Raj Anand's characters are known as real life characters because he has selected these characters from his childhood memories and his experienced life. The suffering of sweeper boy Bakha, his childhood friend, helped him to write *Untouchable* (1935). And just like the same, the sufferings of the childhood playmate, Munoo, who was compelled to do labour in a pickle factory and suffered a lot by the notion of fatalism in the Indian society, provoked him to write *Coolie* (1936), and presented the evil face of class system which is not fruitful for under

class and downtrodden people. Premila Paul observes about the novel, “Munoo represents the disinherited and the dispossessed of the earth whose tragic life indicates inhumanity of man to man.” (Paul, p. 5) The pain and suffering of the coolies and labourers in the Skeffington Coffee Estate in the British rule forced him to write his third novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937). He wrote this novel in a totally different way from his earlier two novels. This novel is not like *Untouchable* and *Coolie* where tragedy was born through an individual, Bakha and Munoo respectively, but this novel is the “theme of conflict as a group experience” (Lindsays, p. 15- 16). He presents the novel as a conflicting saga between the group of poor Indian labourers and self-centered cruel British tea-planters. Gangu and other labourers of the Tea- Estate are simple and very close to the soil. These innocent labourers are not conscious about their identity and, consequently, they fall in the whirlpool of humiliation and miseries. Anand portrays the condition of poor peasants, coolie and labourers in the novel through his humanistic brush with the hues of words, who were earlier exploited by money lenders in their village and later by the Britishers in the tea estate.

Mulk Raj Anand inculcated an attitude that is full of love and sympathy inside his personality which reflects in his writings also for the underclass people who compel to live their life under the poverty line and lead a life without any future. He was the first author in the history of Indo- Anglian fiction who found himself with the weak, vulnerable, hatred and insulted poor people. And his quite a lot of novels highlight the condition of those people who are ignored by the society and its rigid ethnicity. He writes about the principle of art and fiction,

Certainly, literature, music and better able to fulfill the needs of our time than religion, and beauty is better worth worshipping than God or a Deity for whom the sanctions lie in the intuitions of a few mystics. For in art the creative imagination of man transformations the abstractions, justice, love, hatred, evil, etc. by passing them through the experience of the individual. (Anand, p. 5-6)

The novelist portrays the scene of labourers’ filthy colonies which highlighting the pathetic living standard of the poor coolies and workers. It seems as an act of exploitation and humiliation of labourers where after completing their hard work in suffocated, congested and unacceptable humid atmosphere for long hours in the tea estate, they are compelled to live in such type of colonies which are not suitable for residing. Many poor labourers have lost their life in these colonies because the streets of colonies are full of dirt where hookworms and other insects breed in abundance and spread life taking diseases like Cholera. But the capitalists do not care the pitiable condition of the labourers and workers, and treat them worse than animals.

Mulk Raj Anand’s deep knowledge, sensitive and humanistic attitude for the living condition of the labourers and coolies provoked him to write *Two Leaves and a Bud* in the more expressive way than other writers. H. C. Harrex comments, “Anand’s characterisations within the proletarian campus are strong varied and challenging.” (Harrex, p.144) The only aim of life of the novelist is to uplift the life of downtrodden and underclass people from their squalor through the humanitarian outlook which makes him strong dissenter against the capitalists.

The protagonist, Gangu, has also become the victim of Malaria within a week since his inhabitation in the unhygienic atmosphere of the colonies. Anand presents through this episode the sense of responsibility of a father towards his children. Lying on his cot, the protagonist of the novel said to him, “I shouldn’t die,” and mumbled under his frail breath, “till Leila is married, and Buddu has grown up” (Anand, p. 83). But in the next scene, his wife, Sajani, passes away due to notorious disease Cholera. Gangu’s sadness and helplessness reveal through this

episode. He falls in sorrow not only for his wife's death but the expenditure of funeral because he has no money to purchase a red cloth and to make a bamboo hearse for his wife. He approaches to an Indian clerk to sanction small amount of loan for cremation of his wife from the manager but the clerk wants to get commission for this. It is a matter of great irony that an Indian clerk is expecting commission from that person who is already in grief and having to give. But munificent Gangu says to clerk:

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. (p. 112- 113)

The novel not only reveals the pathetic condition of labourers in the Tea Estate but also highlights the deplorable condition of underclass women who work in doomed and unfavourable environment due to the ill economic condition of the family. They are compelled to leave their new born babies in baskets on the ground and find their babies wrapped in dust when they turn up from the hard work in tea estate and after ignoring all the work, whether domestic or in field, they rush to their babies having tears on their eyes in order to feed them. After fulfilling their exhausted duties regarding their home as well as economic earning for their family they are treated worse than animals, and most of the times they are unable to protect their honour and chastity. In the last episode of the novel, Gangu becomes the victim of Reggie Hunt's fired bullet and closes his eyes having fragmentary dreams of his daughter, Leila's, marriage because he wants to protect her from the seducing notions and hands of Reggie Hunt. In this episode Anand presents the helplessness of a poor father who does not have privilege to save her children because capitalist believes that underclass people are born to be exploited. The death of Gangu touches the sentiments of readers. In the next scene, the jury does not find Reggie Hunt guilty of this murder and gives it the name of accident. It is looking like discrimination and an irony that the justice of the white through the white heart and for the white found the merciless murderer like Reggie Hunt quiet innocent.

The novel presents the psyche of humiliated and compelled, "docile, gutless, spineless, coolies who never raised their voices except on the day of Holi" (p. 148), and the dictatorship of capitalists who exploit time and again the poor underclass people. The novelist has portrayed every scene of the novel with the humanitarian aspect and presented the real pathetic condition of labourers and coolies. He also believes that class system, which is so firmly rooted in society, is much stronger than the caste system, and this thing divides society in numerous sections because underclass people unable to raise their voice against capitalists' exploitation due to their ill economic background as well as condition, and capitalists who are much stronger than underclass dictate them for their basic needs. This is prevailing in every section of society, and after keeping his ethics in the margin every man, who is having good economic condition, dictates and exploits those who are below them. Human beings have forgotten humanism which is the ultimate truth of the life due to class stratification which is purely based on economic power. Goronwy Ree after reviewing this novel eulogized the author's endeavours for exposing with "great skill, and without insistence....the Indian coolies, exploited, starving, cheated dirty, diseased as the true heirs of one of the world's great civilization." He further appreciated, "I have no doubt that Dr. Anand's account of the tea planters is true." (Ree, p.832)

The main purposes of the novelist to opt such type of person who is poor and exploited as a protagonist in the novel are, firstly, to attack on the inhumanity and barbarism rampant in the tea estate, and secondly, through his protagonist, reveal the condition of labourers and coolies who locked up just like cattle at night and treated as prisoners during the day right there. This

pathetic condition of tree plantation labourers and coolies in the tea estates during the British rule distressed the humanistic and humble heart of the novelist. *Two Leaves and a Bud* is an account of the Gangu's misery and sufferings which he faced in every episode of the novel. Anand writes about the novel,

I conceived *Two Leaves and a Bud* as a poem of suffering. I admit that it is the most bitter of my novels, but it is poetic, were it a literary reportage it would be hundred times more bitter. (Anand. p.5)

Anand presents a complete but unfortunate life of a poor man, which may be the story of several underclass people, who starts his journey from Hoshiarpur in Punjab to Macpherson Tea Estate Assam in the quest for better life and better opportunities for his family. The poor underclass Gangu accepts all the humiliations, exploitations and discriminations on his mature but weak shoulders from the society in the hope of his identity but the capitalist society does not help him and refuses him the every stage of life. Like other poor and underclass his faithful companions are poverty, misery, injustice, exploitation, cruelty, humiliation and hatred, which remain with him till his death. Gangu is an exemplary figure of underclass and his death is symbolic as an upshot of the evils of capitalism that divide society into numerous sections. The death of Gangu arouses the conscience of humanity against the ruthless dictatorship of the capitalists who are exploiting and humiliating underclass for time immemorial.

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