

Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud*: A saga of Gangu's injured self

Dr. Priyanka Sharma

Associate Professor

Department of Applied Sciences & Humanities

K.I.E.T. Ghaziabad (U.P)

India

*"Man lives consciously for himself but unconsciously he serves as an instrument for the accomplishment of historical and social ends."*ⁱ (Tolstoy: 1991: 06)

The Indian English Literature is richly dipped in hues of its native cultural ethos. It gives voice to the prevalent malpractice in the contemporary Indian society. The most significant era in the history of Indian English fiction is the appearance of Mulk Raj Anand who, with an observant eye and an understanding heart, portrays India's contemporary social life with vagaries and varieties. Anand's art is committed to expose social injustice, economic exploitation and the plight of suppressed castes and classes in India. It is his photographic description and presentation which makes his themes universally more appealing.

The eminence of Anand's fictional art lies in the realistic portrayal of the abject plight of the suffering mass. Anand presents the loss of identity for his protagonists and prepares them to regain such identity though after a prolonged struggle. His intimate contact with the suffering underprivileged and the myriad levels of Indian masses with their differences of caste, creed and colour seem to have implanted in his mind profound impressions about the *still sad music of humanity*. Iyengar remarks:

"Some of the best studies of social life are, naturally enough, in the regional languages; and it is not easy to translate the racy idioms of every day speech into English. Urban life in India attracts the novelist by its excitements, perversions, sophistications and violent alternations between affluence and poverty, splendor and squalor; but the interior, the areas of obscurity and inaccessibility have their attractions too and sometimes bring out the best in the creative novelist".ⁱⁱ (Iyengar: 1995: 327)

Anand's outstanding novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* reflects social realism and depiction of inhuman behaviour in the layer on working class exploitation. The plantation workers in the novel reveal the growing psychological stigma to survive in the face of exploitation. Anand's ultimate purpose is to expose social evils and his humanistic stance, acquires greater momentum and stronger intensity in this work.

Anand presents a panorama of the life of the poorest in the colonial India when British rule was showing some of its wickedest features. This Paper presents a confrontation and interaction between Anand's métier as an artist who demands for his humanistic creed. The Paper exposes the tragic disintegration of the Gangu and his family confronted with the brutal forces of capitalist exploitation.

Two Leaves and a Bud deals with the evils of the class system and covers a wider range of suffered life of downtrodden in India. Its locale is a tea plantation in Assam and its hero a Punjabi peasant Gangu - is an extension of same suffering and exploitation. The novel begins with the philosophic statement of Anand --*Life is like a journey*. The tragic journey of a

hapless peasant Gangu – the protagonist, starts to the naturally beautiful Assam from a village near Hoshiarpur in Punjab. The realistic description of the natural beauty of Assam and is presented vivaciously that gives the panoramic picture of the Assam tea-plantations. Anand describes the sunrise on the Assam tea plantation:

The morning mist had risen over the valley and evaporated with the dazzling burst of sunlight. The air was still under the clear even sky. The welter of leafage was tense beneath the world's hollow cup. There was a concentrated lull in the slow heart of the day, as if India missed a heartbeat of the day, in the march of time. (Mulk: 1998: 12)

Anand is known for his realistic and sympathetic portrayal of the Indian poor that combines humanism with realism. His fictions reflect the poverty in rural India and social evils prevalent in the early decades of the twentieth century. *Two Leaves and a Bud* reflects that the poverty of these Indian downtrodden miserable lives that affects their entire family. Anand depicts the widening gap between the haves and the have notes, the exploiters and the exploited, the rulers and the ruled. Commenting more explicitly on the sufferings imposed upon the Indian labourer by their British masters in the novel, Anand in a letter to J.F. Brown wrote:

*"I conceived Two Leaves a Bud as a poem in suffering. I admit that it is the most bitter of my novels, but is poetic. Were it a literary reportage, it would be hundred times more bitter."*ⁱⁱⁱ (Nandan Sinha: 1972: 06)

Two Leaves and a Bud presents an exploited Gangu whose wife dies of a disease and he was killed while trying to protect his daughter from being raped by a British colonial officer. Through Gangu, Anand portrays the mental state of the laborers of tea-plantation who feel jeopardized while working under the ruthless masters. Gangu roams in the whirlpool of his destiny and passes through various moods from theism to atheism, godlessness to god-fearing attitude, acceptance to realization, selfishness to sacrifice and from illusion to reality.

Gangu, lured by the false promises of a tout, started with his wife Sajani and children Leila and Buddhu to work on the Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam. He was offered a hut which has been constructed without any heed to the hygienic requirements of the occupants. Excessive heat, lack of fresh in the billets, inadequate food, scarcity of drinking water and filthy living brought pathological disorder. In addition to this manual labour, constant ragging and brutal behaviour resulted in physical, mental and emotional loss to coolies. They were compelled to work in unhygienic conditions and thus starved. The tea garden in Assam become a symbol of his slavery and this world of a tea plantation was like a prison house, Narain who was executed on a contract of three months, was confined there for last twelve years. Anand pens the pain:

"The prison has no bars, but it is nevertheless an unbreakable jail". (Mulk: 1998: 32)

Gangu drifted from bad to worse and finds no peace at heart. His all hopes destroyed when Narain tells the pitiful stories of how the planters along with police and magistrate torture the erring coolies. Narain says:

"About three thousand men, women children were lying at the station. No train would take them....." (Ibid: P.32)

Improvised Gangu soon realizes that he has been trapped in a pandemonium without escape as he was deprived of his ancestral land in his native town. All promises made to him were false. He seems to lose his grip on his innate potentiality. He has to undergo daily insults at the hands of his plantation masters. The exploitation of Gangu can be seen in the Estate that after a week of hard work, the amount given to him is less than eight annas. This makes him think of what a liar Buta has been in all his talk about high wages, about the free gift of land and so on. Gangu recalls a proverb:

“Never believe a barber or a Brahmins, for the one arranges marriages, and has to describe an ugly girl as a fairy, and the other draws horoscopes; and must make the evil stars appear the luckiest”. (Ibid: P.8)

Anand exposes the bitter suffering or cruelty of humanity at different levels superlatively loathes and condemns evil of all its shapes and shades and greatly succeeds in tuning our hearts to compassion and beauty. Anand creates a scintillating melody of moods—joy and sorrow, hope and fear, tranquillity and anger, love and lust, humour and pathos. The indomitable spirit, the spiritual upsurge of man is the real hero and the plea for universal love is the real theme of his novels. Whenever Anand saw people in deplorable condition, his heart wept which gave him a sensible and sympathetic outlook to see other problems and the sensitivity which made him cry for other's misery. He made his novels a medium to present his anguish that renders reality of such humiliation. It is true that Anand probes deep into the various facts and facets of human life through his galaxy of characters- it is a specific study of his social ethos which has been betrayed by the evil design of society. In this context K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks:

“There are novelists about whom one critical study could be written, but one would be enough. There are novelists who would be effectively suffocated even by one research performance. And there are the novelists who are large who invoke multitudes- who can survive several attempts to probe and sound and contain them. Mulk Raj Anand is surely of the last category. Each new study adds a little to our understanding of Anand and his work, yet leaves the subject un-exhausted.”^{iv} (Iyengar: 1974: 05)

Two Leaves and a Bud stand as a breathing document of the sufferings of the tea labourers. Every corner of the garden of Tea Estate--- the leaves, buds and the shade shrubs are the silent witnesses of the oppression and agony of poor Gangu, who stands as the insignia of the oppressed class. Within a week of his employment in the Tea Estate, Gangu becomes a victim of Malaria. It is the place where cholera has spread earlier and two hundred coolies levelled out in less than a month. Without giving much concern to his health, he keeps on repeating the well being of his young daughter in his mind. Dutiful Gangu's life was centred on his daughter:

“I shouldn't die' he muttered under his breath, till Leila is married, and Buddhu has grown up.” (Mulk: 1998: 83)

Gangu and his family suffered much due to Malaria in Tea Estate. Unfortunately his wife Sajani becomes a prey to malaria. She dies in Gangu's arm crying for medicine. Gangu's sadness is augmented by the worry that he had no money to buy a red cloth and to make a bamboo hearse. Gangu tried hard but could not get a loan for the cremation. Such is the plight of Gangu that he has to run from pillar to post to borrow money for the funeral of his wife. He then recalls what Buta had told him that the manager sahib is a sort of *maibap*, who lends

money so he approached to Shashi Bhushan to talk on his behalf to the manager sahib in 'angrezi' to get the loan. Gangu pleads;

"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". (Ibid: P.111-12)

Anand always deal with social problems in his fictions and he uses creativity to serve social and humanistic purposes. Gangu, who scarcely able to save a penny despite the involvement of his wife, daughter and children in the work, strives hard to bring about a change in his destiny but consequently suffers a lot. His never ending sufferings artistically arouse *aesthetic sympathy* in the readers. The fate of Gangu is the fate of every indentured labourer. He was barbarously beaten and kicked off by Croft-Cooke when he pleaded to lend him some money for the funeral. Mr. Croft Cooke, the Manager, lives enshrouded in his own ethnocentrism and fails to sympathise with Gangu's urgent need for arranging funeral rites for his wife who met a premature death as a victim of unhygienic condition. Later he approaches Buta with the request:

"Can you give a loan of money for the creation"? Said Gangu "I have a not a penny and the body has been lying in the house for two days." (Ibid: P.111-13)

On the helpless and tragic condition, David Cecil remarks:

"A struggle between men on the one hand, and on the other, the omnipotent and indifferent fate is the interpretation of human scene."^v (Bhatnagar: 1997: 182)

Anand shows these coolies are under compulsion to renounce all pleasures in life and work as a beast of burden sans humanity. His writing covers essential human sympathy, humanistic compassion, search for identity, human desire to earmark a little space in this vast world and panoramic view of the rural life in India. Anand discloses from the preface of the novel about his vivacious characters and their social conditions which forced him to write about them. He admits:

All these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflections of the real people I had known during the my childhood and youth. And I was repaying the debt of gratitude I owed them for much of the inspiration they had given to me to mature in to manhood, when I began to interpret their lives in my writings. They were not mere phantoms..... They were the flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood, and obsessed me in the way in which certain human beings obsess an artist's soul. And I was doing no more than what a writer does when he seeks to interpret the truth from the realities of life.^{vi} (Mulk: 1998: 06)

Anand also represents the realistic picture of physically exploited and molested women peasants. The two young girls Barbara and Leila are the symbol of unfulfilled hopes and broken spirits. The European bosses pester and exploit the coolie labourers. The evil atmosphere and an arena of conflict and exploitation, treason and injustice, derision and devilry --- is shown in larger dimensions and with greater intensity in the Tea Estate.

The women peasants were the worst sufferers as they were the victims of vicious--base appetites of wicked men. The women in the novel were perilously exposed to any sexual

assault by some lustful British people, particularly by Reggie Hunt. Reggie Hunt, the Assistant Manager of Tea Estate, treats all coolies as inferior human beings and flogs them. He is always drunk and symbolizes cruelty, untamed animality and unmitigated evil. Reggie whips those coolies who grope forward beneath a load of undergrowth on his way with an accusation. This man has no consideration for anyone's mother, sister, wife or daughter. He lives openly with three coolie-women. The wife of Neogi is a victim to the carnival desires of Reggie who is lust incarnate. Anand tries to vivify Hunt who possessing a mistress in Tea Estate; writer writes:

"She yielded to him, her body limp and contorted into a silent despair, her eyes a gaze at the wild sensual heat in his face, her heart turned inwards at the cold virginity that seemed to freeze her at the contact with him. He made a sudden up charge, as if he swung her body hard, hard, harder, tearing the flash of her breasts, biting her cheeks and striking her buttocks till she was red and purple like a mangled corpse, ossified into a complete obedience by the volcanic eruption of the lust." (Ibid: P. 186)

Anand has narrated the heart stricken situation of poor Gangu who was too away from his native land with his young daughter Leila and son Buddha to suffer more on present work station. Two leaves and a Bud present the picture of the European club-life along with the Indian hut-life, the exploitation of the bosses and the suffering of the coolies and the lust and ire of Reggie Hunt. Reggie exercises illegal power. This *Angrezi sahib* cast his lustful eyes on the young coolie's women's half naked body---vaguely covered with tattered clothes. His indiscriminate amorous advances make women run away at his sight. The young coolie women in disgust keep themselves at arm's length from his filthy presence. Reggie's lustful gaze caught Leila one day and he was fascinated to see her youth. Anand has neatly projected Reggie's burning lust for Leila who tried to seduce her. Anand sketches Reggie's mind for her through these lines:

"Slim young body defined by the narrow girth of her skirt and the fine stretch of her bodice, her whole demeanor like a bird that would flatter in the hands of the shikari." (Ibid: P. 121)

Maddened by frustration, lusty Reggie asks her to come at his bungalow. Leila, a very young child, runs away innocently at the sight of Hunt. She was conscious to her youth and beauty protests against Reggie's lust. Reggie persuaded her madly. Leila, with great difficulty, escapes an attack on her chastity and slips into her hut. Reggie Hunt's cruel behaviour and lust for the young child can be seen clearly. He asks her to come out of her hut. But she refused. Seeing this Buddha got frightened and ran to call his father to rescue her. Lust-blind Reggie attempted rape on his daughter. Gangu tried to save Leila from his orgies but he was indiscreetly fired and shot death at the point of Reggie's gun. Leila's escape in her hut resulted in the death of Gangu.

Anand's portrayal of Gangu's miserable condition is quite realistic. Gangu the illiterate peasant symbolizes the transformation going on in the minds of people. The relation of his miserable condition makes him aware and he can hear the echo in his soul. Gangu became the universal figure of the suffering Indian peasants. Saros Cowasjee writes:

"It is the self-effacing Gangu, the shrewd peasant possessing a strange, natural dignity, who has all our sympathy. But he never becomes the hero of the story, and herein lays the merit of Anand's portrayal. Gangu, instead of drawing attention to him, makes us think of the millions of his suffering brethren. In his passivity, his tender loyalties, his compassion and depth of

suffering, he symbolizes the Indian peasantry. Fate has done its worst to him, and now its little gifts are only an anxious burden to life."^{vii}(Cawasjee: 1977: 92)

The novel ends on a note of unrelieved pain and disenchantment and sombre foreboding. It unfolds the story on anger and awe, cries and crimes with no one to sympathize except the readers. Anand tries to dramatize the cruelties inherent in the caste system and the suffering induced by poverty as well. Strange is the verdict of the jury which consists of so many renowned law savers. Gangu's murder was followed by a trial which lasted for three days. In the trial Mr. Justice Mowberley and a jury of seven European and two Indian members find Reggie Hunt not guilty on the charge of murder or culpable homicide. In the end Reggie Hunt was discharged from all the accused charges. The honourable court of justice supports the Britisher's culpable crime.

Anand presents realistic agonies, suffering and misery of coolies falling on the thrones of life and bleeding. He portrays the painful truth and every trials and tribulations of the down-trodden, dispossessed creature with compassion. He is a novelist of passion and strong social conscience who delineates the lives and experiences of people living in an alien and recalcitrant society. He has brought a mellow and creative humanism to his works. His novels are thus the novels of responsibility, of involvement, of creative tension and its resolution, of profound moral beauty and missionary commitment. In this context, Meenakshi Mukherjee is of the view:

"Anand is a rational humanist, in the western tradition, believing in the power of sciences to improve material conditions, in progress and in the equality of all men, and his manifest intention is to propagate his beliefs through his novel."^{viii} (Mukherjee: 1971: 27)

Two Leaves and a Bud is the goriest novel where Anand pours out his vitriol on the colonizers who treat the natives as sub humans. The British, with their various complexes, regard the Indians, particularly labourers, with contempt and scorn. All kinds of humiliation are inflicted on the poverty stricken coolies. Continuous and complete dedication to their job of plucking "two leaves and a bud" makes the refrain get into the very souls of the labourers. Anand has revealed exceptional, psychological insight in the portrayal of these characters that *once were real men and women* and are not mere phantoms of fantasy. Anand succeeds in a little measure to keep up his realism and humanistic sympathies intact. For *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Goronwy Ree Lauded exposes:

"Great skill, and without insistence the Indian coolies, exploited, starving, cheated dirty, diseased as the true heirs of one of the world's great civilizations."^{ix} (Ree: 1937: 833)

Two Leaves and a Bud portrays the abominable condition of social degradation, sub-human treatment, bureaucratic high handedness and exploitation of the unorganised labour. Gangu has been cowed down enough to have protested him abjectly before his all sahibs but gets no sign of redemption from his sufferings. The book intends to bring home the plight of the powerless peasants who are baulked at every step. Anand had the right mixture of insight and detachment and the fact that he has come to fiction through philosophy has given depth to his writing.

WORK CITED:

Anand Raj, Mulk, 1998, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, New Delhi: Arnold Associates India Pvt. Ltd.

ⁱ Quoted in *Indian Literature*, (1991), Sahitya Academy's Literary Bi-monthly, No.145 Sept-Oct, Vol. XXXIV, No. 5, Delhi.

ⁱⁱ Iyengar Srinivasa K.R., (1995) *Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

ⁱⁱⁱ Quoted by Nandan Sinha, Krishna Anand Raj, Mulk (1972), New York: Twayne Publishers Inc.

^{iv} Iyengar Srinivasa, K.R. (1974) "Forward" to G.S.Balarama Gupta's Mulk Raj Anand, *A Study of His Fiction In Humanist Perspective*, Bareilly, Prakash Book Depot.

^v Bhatnagar, Manmohan (1997), ed. *Indian Writing in English*, Delhi: Atlantic Publishers Pvt Ltd.

^{vi} Anand Raj, Mulk (1998), *Two Leaves and a Bud*, New Delhi: Arnold Associates, India Pvt. Ltd.

^{vii} Saros Cowasjee, (1977), *So Many Freedom: A Study of The Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand*, Madras: Oxford Uni.Press.

^{viii} Mukharjee, Meenakshi, (1971), *The Twice Born Fiction*, New Delhi, Heinemann Educational Book.

^{ix} Goronwy Ree, 30th April, (1937), In *The Spectator*, No. 5679.

^{xi} Iyengar, K.R.Shrinivasa (2004), *Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd.

^{xi} Khan, S.A. (1999), *The Novel of Commitment: Mulk Raj Anand*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

^{xii} George C. J. (1994), *Mulk Raj Anand: His Art and Concerns*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.