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Social Exploitation and Colonial Oppression in Mulk Raj Anand‟s *The Two Leaves and A Bud*

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ABSTRACT

The story is about a farmer who tries to save his daughter from a British soldier. The novel is more aggressive and bitter while attacking on the dehumanizing effects of colonialism and capitalism. This paper deals with 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. Anand deals with the miserable and pitiable plight of the tea plantation coolies. This paper reveals how East Indian plantation workers are exploited economically.

Keywords: Exploitation, colonial oppression and east-west encounter, economic, and social injustice.

INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand is a committed writer and humanist par excellence. He was born in Peshawar in the year 1905, which saw the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon. His family belonged to the Ismaili Hindu community of coppersmith whose traditional occupation was beating copper sheets into domestic utensils. Educated in the cantonment schools and university of Punjab he graduated with an honours degree and went to London study philosophy under Professor under Dawes Hicks, the great Kantian scholar. He got a doctorate degree in philosophy, but did not join the career in the army or in teaching. His father was a non-commissioned officer in British Indian Army. His first six novels *Untouchable, Coolie, The Leave and A Bud , The Village, Across the Black Water and The Sword and the Sickle*. Anand deals with misery and the wretchedness of the poor and their struggle for a better life. Almost all his subsequent novels are a variation on the same theme and are extended to bring home to the reader the plight of the overburdened peasant who is powerless to fight superstition and social convention and who is baulked at every step in his aspiration for better life. “The book 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” (George, C. J, 51)

It culminates a tragic clash of interests and destinies, the novel starts from a village in North Western Indian Manoo‟s peregrinations covers vast spaces of Northern and Western India; but Gangu crosses India horizontally from a village near Hoshiarpur in the Panjab to the Macpherson Tea Estate in distance Assam. Whereas Bhaka and Manoo are more boys, Gangu is past middle age, and he takes with his wife Sajani, and his children, Leila and Buddhu. The Tea plantation is a world within a world, a world apart; as the coolie Narain tells Gangu: “ I suppose it was in our kismet . But at home it was like a prison and here it is slightly worse. first water, afterwards mire! This Prison has no bar, but it is nevertheless un breakable jail. The chowkidars keep guard over the plantation, and they bring you back if you should run ” (97)

Superficially, the foreign exploiters and the masses of the exploited make pattern of tension in the novel. But quite a few of the Indians, the *sardars*, the *mistris*, the *babus*, the *warders* are exploiters too, and between them create an atmosphere of twisting and turning for the coolies. On the other hand, there are also the good, idealistic Britishers, people like John de la Havre, whose consciousness is seeped with the agonizing memories of yesterday and stinging woes of today. “There is Croft - Cook the boss of the plantation and his reasonably contended wife; there is their daughter, Barbara, who is in love with de la Havre; but what chance has their romance in the atmosphere of the tea-Estate Club, where the white people meet, and talk airily , foolishly or callously, generating hate and abetting cruelty? The Villain of the novel, of course, is Reggie Hunt, the assistant manager, who is sheer evil, compounded of cruelty and lust. ” (167)

The novel „*Two Leaves and a Bud’* takes us to the luxuriant forests of Assam and reveals to us to the slavish plight of the labouers in Assam tea-plantations. In this novel, Anand boldly tackles the problem of indentured labour that

crushed humanity, their wives and children. The telling realism of the book brought Anand in conflict with the ruling class who did not like to have the skeletons in their cupboard dragged out to the public gaze, because „Two Leaves" „dared openly to characterize the English tea-planters of Assam."

'Two Leaves and a Bud' is the tragic story of Gangu, a Punjabi farmer. Gangu along with his wife Sajani, daughter Lelia and son Budu leaves his native Hoshiarpur and enlists himself and his family as indentured labourers in Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam valley. Soon after his arrival Gangu realises that he has unwittingly walked into a trap. All the promises of land and paternal treatment at the hands of the planters are found to be utter lies. He finds that he had and his family become tools for exploitation of every kind. He finds very difficult to run his family on starvation wages and incurs debts which he cannot clear. Soon a malarial epidemic rages and his wife Sajani falls a victim to it. He has to put an epic struggle to raise the money for her funeral. A chance quarrel in the plantation between two coolies results in a riot which is ruthlessly put down by Reggie Hunt, the Assistant Planter. When the coolies go to the Planter Mr. Croft Cooke to represent their grievances it is looked upon as mutiny and the police, the army and the navy are summoned. Aeroplanes scarf through the air while the army drives terror in the minds of the coolies with its shots. The kind and sympathetic English doctor has to leave the plantations leading to abrupt separation from his lady love Barbara. Reggie Hunt who is a notorious womaniser one day chances upon Lelia in the tea bushes alone. Tempted by her beauty he chases her to her hut and when Gangu her father intervenes he shoots him down. The white judge assisted by a majority of white jury"s pronounces the verdict that Reggie is „Not guilty".

The East-West encounter is prominent theme of Indo-Anglian novels, particularly of those written after independence. The conflicts and tensions and pressure and vested interests brought by British are depicted in the novels written by Indians, in English. The major theme of Anand"s novels has been the cultural clash of the two modes of life, the Western and the oriental and the consequent actuation of the painful process, of modernization. The contact with the west brought a conflict between realism and idealism, between materialism and spiritualism. This is a dramatic novel that ends with a "tragic clash of interests and destinies"(Ravi Kumar, 112).

In Mulk Raj Anands *Two leaves and a Bud'* we get a picture of Indo-British relationship of the colonial days before Independence of India. East-West encounter forms the major theme of the novel because the novel deals with the clash of conflict between the Indian coolies indentured to the Macpherson Tea Estate in the valley of Assam on one hand and the British planters and their Indian subordinates on the other. There is a clash of interests between the Indian coolies and the British pay-masters because the Indian coolies are paid starvation wages, made to live under unhygienic conditions giving rise to malaria and cholera epidemics owing to the contaminated water supplied to the coolies from the waters of the infested wells. The white planters exploit the coolies by subjecting to them and abusing them verbally and their women folk physically.

The novel presents the theme of exploitation of the under-privileged with far greater concentration than coolie, since in the earlier novel, the scene shift from one stratum of society to another, while in the latter work. The British planters make the lives of the Indian coolies miserable. The Tea Plantations in Assam is veritable hell. It is a prison without bars, a death-trap. The planters make the day to ay life of the coolies a hell by over-working them both by using threats and punishments. They treated as sub-human. They are believed to thrive under such horrible condition s and the English bosses are very proud that they are trying to civilise the Indian coolies and make them prosperous by their liberal attitude towards them which is far from true. All proposals for the uplift of the coolies by the benevolent doctor John de la Havre goes to the dust bin of the management. Croft-Cooke, the planter, Major Macara, the manager of Stephenson Tea Estate, Reggi Hunt, the Assistant Planter, Mrs. Croft-Cooke and Mrs. Mabel Macara are highly unsympathetic and inimical to the interests of the coolies. They think that the coolies are frauds and cheats and have to be kept under wary watch lest they should get spoilt.

John de la Havre, the doctor of Tea Estates in Assam is a liberal and sympathetic Briton. He is frank enough to admit in at the policies of British exploitation of India in general and the British business men exploiting poor and meek coolies for enriching the coffers of the British Empire in particular. He strongly feels that the British have not understood the Indians and India properly and as such their relationship is based on the mutual hatred and suspicion. In order to build a strong capitalistic empire, the British capitalists are exploiting the poverty of the Indian masses and have created a helpless clash- in the class of coolies and labourers who have neither a past nor a future. British mills, tea plantations and even British rule in India is based on a systematic principle of fishing in troubled waters.

In „*Two Leaves and a Bud'* Anand also exposes the racial arrogance of the white planters of the Tea plantations in Assam. They think that they are a privileged class, born to rule and dominate the Indian coolies by virtue of their power over them and their racial superiority. Reggie Hunt, the assistant Planter is an epitome of racial pride and arrogance of the British clan of the Tea Estate. He is boorish enough to chuck Dr. Chuni Lal , the assistant of Dr. Havre out of the premises of the English Club because the former is a „nigger", It is the racial pride and arrogance that make Reggie run a mock like a wild elephant on the beautiful coolie women with immunity. He looks upon the coolie women as his harem with none to dispute his right. He shoots Gangu down while the latter tries to prevent him from raping his young daughter Lelia. But as he belongs to the privileged ruling class, he of „not guilty" from an impartial white judge Mr.

Mowberley ably assisted by a majority of white juries. It is the whites for the whites by the whites! " Gangu and his family are sacrificed at the altar of capitalism, racial discrimination and disintegration and the disintegration of village community"(Kumar 81)

The Indian coolies are also to blame to some extent for their miserable lot in the hands of the white bosses of the plantations. They are too very meek and they submit to all the insults, abuses and misuses by the white sahibs without raising their voice of protest. They are highly superstitious. Gangu consider bringing a piece of iron home on a Monday will bring disasters. Narain, the Chowkidar talks about ghosts and spirits haunting the plot of land where the temple of kali is located. They are also fatalists Gangu and Narain think that they suffer because that is in their kismet. At all times of adversities they appeal to their Gods to remain their past sins and save them. They lack the courage to reason out the happenings of life and resort to escapism by depending on or seeking succour from the succour from the unseen forces rather than fighting out the causes or forces that hamper or oppress their progress. Even the educated Indians are not free from inferiority-complex. Babu Shashi Bhushan Battacharya cringes before Dr. Havre in spite of the fact that the doctor is a noble soul believing in the equality of people. Havre is also sorry for the foolish superstitions and caste system of Indians. This, Dr. Havre thinks, gives a handle for the ruling class to cavil at the Indians and practice their „divide and rule" policy. "The entire tragedy is unfolded against the background of the tea plantation which is a microcosm in itself. British officials and their Indian subordinate on the one hand and the indentured coolie on the other are ranged in two separate camps of exploiters and the exploited" (Kumar, 80)

The British bosses of tea plantations rule the coolies with an iron hand for they are basically afraid of the meek coolies who are in larger number. Croft-Cooke always wears a bullet proof jacket and carries a revolver with him for the fear of innocent coolies. It is this fear that makes the planters indulge in shadow- boxing with paper tigers. The slightest indications of the coolie discontent are viewed as a mutiny and the army, the navy and the police are air lifted to the plantation. The procession of the silent coolies led by Dr. Havre to meet and represent the high-handedness of the Assistant Planter Reggie is declared unruly and disbanded with the show of power and guns and the British doctor, John de la Havre is considered a traitor to his race and all the values that is represent and sacked on the spot. This shows that the show of power by the British on India is based on their fear of the Indians who when treated on par with the par with the whites will drive them out of India.

Dr. Havre during his conversation with his lady-love Barbara points out how the British Tea Plantations in India like the British Empire itself was built by the British policy of exploitation and double dealing. He is sorry that the freedom loving Britons at home become dictators in India by trampling down on the very values which they hold sacred at home. He is sorry that Britain is quite unkindly and cruel in her dealings with India. It is wrong for a mighty empire like Britain to behave in an ignoble manner and enslave Indians and India by virtue of their power over them. Through the character of Dr. Havre, Anand pleads for a better Indo-British relationship based on mutual love, understanding and above all humanness. Anand"s patriotism makes him caricature the Englishmen and women in the novel. This he does because he wants the Englishmen to repair the damages they have caused to the India and Indians. He also wants the Indians to come out of their narrow divisions of caste, creed, religion and other restraining forces which arrest, their progress. Thus Two Leaves and a Bud is Anand"s Passage to India.

The simple Panjab peasant who was joins the tea plantation of Assam with his wife and daughter. Like other coolies they are also subjected to injustice and exploitation by white tea –planter, Roggie Hunt. The climax is reached when Hunt ties to molest Liela, the good looking daughter of Gangu. When the father runs to rescue his daughter, a bullet pierces his body and he drops dead. The case of murder is tried against Roggie. But the white Jury that try the case declare him innocent, and Hunt is acquitted, racial discrimination has been nicely presented through this incident.

CONCLUSION

This novel brings out glaringly the contrast between our Indian tragedies the self-complacency of the British tea planters. It reflects a passionate sense of justice, evokes emotions of grandeur and indignity. It is a novel of conflict as a group experience. Anand's characters embody the struggle between modernity and tradition within colonial India. The novel examines the various forms of human atrocities depicted in the novel, focusing on colonial exploitation, class struggle, and violations of human. The novel reflects the class consciousness, social injustice and inequality, exploitation of the bourgeoisie and the inevitable sacrifice

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