

The Despondencies of the Labours in Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud*

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Abstract

The Research paper delves deep into the unhappiness of the oppressed labours who are subjugated by the British authorities in the estates of north-east. The researcher has made an analysis on the melancholy of Labours in the novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* by Mulk Raj Anand. Mulk Raj Anand is an eminent Indian novelist. He has drawn his heroes and heroines from outcastes and pariahs and under-dogs. They are downtrodden, sweepers, coolie, the unemployed coppersmiths, the debt-ridden farmers and poor simple soldiers who are his favourites. The novel exposes the irremediable exploitation of labour by capital in human society. It is illustrated through the tragic clash of interests and destinies between the Indian coolies and the British managers of tea estates in Assam during 1930s when India was a British colony.

Key Words: Subjugation, Estate, Gangu, Promises, Labour.

The word 'caste' comes from the Portuguese word 'Casta' signifying 'breed, race or kind. The word 'Jati', in India is most often used as the Hindi word for caste, has many meanings. Slater, in his work *Dravidian Elements in Indian Culture* has put forward the notion of the source of caste in India. He says it is a combination of both practical and ethnic origins that arose in India before the Aryan invasions as a result of occupations becoming hereditary and marriages being arranged by parents within the society of the common crafts because sexual maturity redeveloped easily and trade secrets were thus presented.

The earliest supposition concerning the origin of caste system and discrimination can be traced to the mythological story of formation of the four Varnas embodied in the 'Purusasukta' (hymn of man) of the Rig Veda. Untouchability is a word that probably appeared towards the culmination of the Pre-Maurayan period. Various explanations of the origin of untouchability have been offered. The Dharmasutras attribute it to the inter mixture of caste. It has been suggested that in the majority instances these origin of untouchables took place as a result of complete isolation and loss of tradition of the Buddhist communities. The term 'untouchables' was first used by the Maharaja of Baroda before the Depressed Classes Mission of Mumbai in 1909. Marc Galanter, a legal scholar, observed that the criminal law was inter-practiced to give a broad immunity to the efforts of higher castes to keep lower castes in their place.

The caste system of India, as a system of division of labour and land control, may have developed in the early kingdoms of northern part of India. Castes also might have advanced out of societal classes. Caste in India is a social institution, deriving sanction from and intimately interwoven with the Hindu Belief. Association of a caste is obligatory and not a matter of choice where a person is born into it. It is basically impossible for human folks to change their caste. Each caste boasts of a typical tradition of culture and tries to preserve it stubbornly. The customs by which it lives are generally different in some respects from those of any other caste. The caste system provides the individual member of caste with rules which must be observed by him in the matter of food, marriage, divorce, birth, initiation and death.

Ancient India had no novelists though it had many great story-tellers whom the world remembers and honours even now, and their tales never tired of listening to again and again. Therefore, the term 'novel' was new to India. The first novel written in Bengali was 'Alanler Gharer Dulal' (Spoilt Son of a Rich Family in 1852). But Bankim Chandra established the novel as a chief literary form in our country, India. It was he who revealed that the ordinary life of a middle class Bengali could be the subject matter of a high class novel and that religious and social view could be put across through novels without detriment to their artistic merit. He is remembered even today as the father of the Bengali novel and the first Indian to write a novel in English. Bankim's principal novel Rajmohan's Wife was published in the year 1864.

After independence, however, novelists in India have shown themselves susceptible to the influence of America and European (especially Russian) novels, and also models from the oriental countries. The novel in India, whatever its medium, is subject to the same or at least similar discontents and limitations. There are certain stock responses, which are found almost everywhere. The novelist is apt either to turn in nostalgia to the past and glorify and idealize it, or to turn to the present in a gesture of protest if not disgust.

The character of the Indian novel is bound to vary from language to language and is bound to be conditioned by the regional, linguistic and cultural peculiarities characteristic of the writer and this environment. But the India novel, whether in English or in any of the Indian languages, has an individual quality, a distinctiveness which calls for serious critical attention and the Indian novel in English has their distinctiveness much more than the novels in the other languages of the country, a distinctiveness which transcends all the peculiarities characteristic of different linguistic and cultural milieu. Though this would mean our accepting the Indianess of the Indian novel in English as some of the prominent frames of reference in all critical studying of the genre, has to guard oneself at the same time against the danger of the India ness' becoming, with the writer and the critic alike, an obsession, an unhealthy pre-occupation with "orientalism", lush scene painting" and with a desire to pardon to the national self-esteem of the Indians or gullibility of European intellectuals.

The growth of the novel in India was not righteously a literary phenomenon. It was a communal phenomenon as much, relatively the fulfillment of a collective need. It was connected with social, political and economic conditions which were equivalent to these which favored its escalation in England. The novel written by an India writer will certainly be Indian without any conscious effort on the part of the writer to the extent to which it depicts Indian life and culture,

reflects faithfully the life as the spirit of the Indian ethos and grapples with the problems and tensions generated by the rather unique way in which an individual's life and character are determined by home, family and society in the Indian social milieu.

Mulk Raj Anand is a great Indian novelist born at Peshawar in 1905. He had his education at Lahore, London and Cambridge and took a Doctorate in Philosophy. His father was a traditional coppersmith who turned to the army for a living, while his mother came of sturdy peasant stock. He chose the profession of letters. He wrote of the people, for the people, and a man of the people. His first five novels appeared in the following sequence: *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), and *Across the Black Waters* (1940). There are several novels and collections of short stories.

Two Leaves and a Bud exposes the irremediable exploitation of labour by capital in human society. It is illustrated through the tragic clash of interests and destinies between the Indian coolies and the British managers of tea estates in Assam during 1930s when India was a British colony.

Gangu, the hero of *Two Leaves and a Bud* is an industrious peasant of pious disposition and lives with his brothers in a village of the Hoshiarpur District of Punjab. But he finds himself deprived of his only means of livelihood in advanced age when his brother mortgages family's land and mud house for the repayment of their debts. At this juncture the cunning planter's agent Buta lures Gangu by false promises of high wages and bright prospects to go to work as a coolie in the Macpherson Tea Estate of distant Assam, Gangu is shrewd enough not to take the crafty Buta at his word, but the lack of any employment opportunity in a farm or factory in his native place for an aged man like him requires Gangu to agree Buta's offer. So he embarks a hazardous expedition into the mysterious or unknown land of Assam in the company of his wife, Sajani, and his two children Leila and Buddhu. However, he is not at all the happy with his departure from his home state to the thickly forested and dreadful region of Assam which he envisages as a green hell.

The Macpherson Tea Estate was not a paradise of plenty but a prison without bars where indentured Indian coolies were forced not only to live in dark and dingy huts guarded by Chowkidars but also to sweat their guts out for a pittance to the tune of the British and lustful Reggie Hunt's guffaws. Moreover, no coolie's wife or daughter was safe there as lustful Reggie Hunt was always trying to rape the coolie women. The new comer Gangu was shocked to know from his experienced neighbour Narain that the planter's agents imprison the Indian coolies on the tea estate by false pretences, kept them in every way, and exploited them in every way. But he prepared himself to face all kinds of humiliation and hardened his face into a knot of anguish which was not to be untied again.

Narain, yet another labourer was speaking with his companions that there was no escape for them from the prison of the plantation, because whosoever tried to escape was either killed or jailed by the planters with the help of the British government. Once twenty coolies complained to the Deputy Commissioner of Jorhat that they had been recruited from Nasik, near Bombay under a contract for one year but had served for more than one year, that they were being paid very low wages to be sent to their homes at the cost of the planters in accordance with the terms

of their contract. The Deputy Commissioner met the manager and had a discussion with him, but the result was that coolies were ordered to work on the plantation for another year instead of being allowed to go back to their homes. They refused to work any longer and started to walk homeward. But they were sent to their grave. The Gorakhpuri coolie said that he would run away from there by all means. But Narain pointed it out to him that the tigers, the lions and the wild elephants in the surrounding forest would not let him go. Gangu was completely carried away by Narain's story and prepared himself to endure every kind of suffering. Later part of the novel shows the brutality of the officer and death of the protagonist Gangu.

In reality if we look into the life of the labours, they suffer a lot in the hands of estate owners. The plantation labor force is commonly found living in houses with just one room, no sanitation and a lack of rudimentary facilities like drinking water. There are no medical amenities obtainable in the place where they stay and many women develop hazardous health related issues as a result of contact to chemicals used in the plantation estates. Malnutrition has also been identified as a noteworthy problem for women and children on the plantations. The payments are so despondently low that workers' families often go hungry. Labour Welfare Department is the only department or government channel who can take necessary action against the unruly estate owners who just turn their blind eye towards the poor condition of the labours which is still prevailing not only in Assam but also in different parts of our country where many Gangus' and Narains' suffer and Reggies' live.

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