

STUDY OF CUSTOMS AND SOCIAL WAYS OF THE HINDU SOCIETY OF THE THIRTIES IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S TWO LEAVES AND BUD

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Abstract

Anand is certainly a great novelist whose representation of the world around him-of men and women like Bakha, Sohini, Gauri, Munoo, Gangu, Lalu, Anant and so on-is true to life and whose characters are real, but there are certain norms and patterns in his work which have been common to social realists all over the world. He has also created real female characters like Laxmi and Gauri in *The Old Woman and the Cow*, Sohini in *Untouchable* Aqi in *The Village* and Rukmini in *The Road* which are very much real.

Introduction

The novel begins with the philosophic statement of Anand "Life is like a journey" and with this the tragic journey of Gangu - the protagonist, a hapless peasant from a village near Hoshiarpur in Punjab, starts to the naturally beautiful Assam. The realistic description in the novel of the Assam and its natural beauty is presented in very lively manner. It gives us almost in telling details, the panoramic picture of the tea-plantations.

This way Gangu starts his journey to Assam and he is lured by the false promises of a tout, leaves his native village, and goes with his wife Sajani and his children Leila and Buddha to work on the Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam. Soon he discovers that the promises made to him were all false, that the world of a tea plantation is like a prison house; The prison has no bars, but it is nevertheless an unbreakable jail.

Matter

In the journey to Assam, Gangu recalls a song which was sung by Sajani for Gangu. With this song, Anand indirectly narrates the truth of journey;

"He had wished to believe that it was true that it was possible for a man and woman to be companions in life and death together; whom everyone had to face alone, but even in life, unfortunately, people usually travelled very much by themselves, unless they accepted each other."(TLB. 2)

This philosophical statement proves literally true in case of Gangu. He has been deprived of his land in his native town; the enticing promises of Buta. The promise of a piece of land is enough to ensnare the improvised Gangu who has been deprived to his possession of the ancestral land in his native town. Here in Tea Estate, he and his family are offered a hut which has been constructed without any attention to the hygienic requirements of the occupants. Here Anand describes the social and economical conditions of labourers in Tea Plantation. This is far away place where Britishers exploit Indian workers without mercy on them. Anand has projected heart rendering reality of such humiliation. It is true what Gangu recalled the proverb so often repeated in the North;

“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.” (TLB. 8)

But soon Gangu realized his ill fate. He was exploited by every superior. Not only Gangu but all labourers in tea plantation have their own suffering saga. The exploitation of Gangu can be seen in the Estate, the amount given to his family is less than eight annas. This earning reminds him that in his village he alone used to earn eight annas a day by working on the land-lords. This makes him sad with the thought what a liar Buta has been in all his talk about high wages, about the free gift of land and so on.

Within a week of their employment in the Tea Estate, Gangu becomes a victim of Malaria. It is the place where cholera has spread earlier and two hundred coolies leveled out in less than a month;

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

The next morning he is all right but the fever which has left catches Sajani. Soon the news spreads that the cholera which has visited again. The coolies became panic-stricken. The Medical officer of the Tea Estate, John de la Havre promptly visits Gangu's hut and checks Sajani. Anand writes;

“As he bent down to put the thermometer into Sajani's mouth, her eyes glared at him, lusterless and cold. He put his hand to her head, groped for her pulse, sounded her heart. There was no answer, "Dead", he whispered and stood dumb and listless, exploring for a ray of a light to illumine the darkness that enveloped his head.” (TLB. 88)

Anand had narrated the heart stricken situation of a poor worker who is far away from his land with his only family where his wife passed away and left Leila Buddha and Gangu to suffer more on the land. Gangu's sadness is augmented by the worry that he had no money to buy a red cloth and to make a bamboo hearse. He was in need of money for his wife's funeral. He then recalls what Buta had told him that the manager sahib is a sort of mai-bap, who lends money so he approached to Shashi Bhushan to talk on his behalf to the manager sahib in 'angrez' to get the loan. Gangu 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.” (TLB. 112-113)

When he goes to Charles Croft-Crooke, the manager of the estate, he is blamed for spreading contagion, and is instantly turned out of his office. In the meantime, discontent, which is life in the plantation, is aggravated by the brutal behavior of Reggie Hunt, the assistant manager. Gangu finds himself involved in the strife. He was beaten and kicked out. Croft-Cooke became angry on him;

"Get-out! Get-out! exclaimed Croft-Cooke, turning purple with rage, and staring at the coolie. You bloody fool, get out! Get out! You have been spreading infection all over the place! Didn't you know that you were under segregation? By whose orders did you come here?" (TLB. 114)

Gangu leaves the place deeply humiliated. The next day he approaches Buta with the request; Can you can give a loan of money for the creation? Said Gangu. I have a not a piece and the body has been lying in the house for two days".(TLB. 118)

Buta, the barber turned sardar, comes up with all manager of excuses and left without shame, finally he was helped by De la Havre for the funeral of Sajani. Gangu left alone to his sorrows, the worlds goes on all the same. The superciliousness of the capitalists is matched only by the passive unconcern of nature. The woman is a hunting picture of moving path. Gangu's remark that she has attained "happy death" is reminiscent of Han's pathetic words in coolie wherein refers to death as a 'release'. Death defines as the attainment of 'release' is eloquent in its exact exposition of the misery of the workers. C.D. Narsimhiah's comment on Coolie is relevant on in this context also:

"Death has ceased to frighten these poor they also past all fright; it is life that is a threat, and death is a release."²

Realistic picture of the utter detachment is of the affluent folk in the hunt scene. The tiger tears off large chunks of flesh from coolie's face but hunt goes on unaffected. And the sahibs get busy taking photographs when the mauled man writhes in agony. As women too have to work, the whole lot of 'the suckling humanity' is put under the torrid sun. Some women leave their babies in their baskets. The mother returning from work finds her child lying in the dust, or in a drain, or still worse, dead by the way side. Another equally appealing picture is that of a mother who is chased to the work spot even while she is feeding her child. Though the birth of a child means 'one more month of feed', the coolies do care for progeny because it also means more hands to earn for the family.

Like Bakha and Munoo, the coolies in **Two Leaves and a Bud** also face terrible humiliations. They are accused of thieving habits. The dealer sharply tells Gangu that the necklace is as white as his face is black. This is true what Premila Paul observes;

When Munoo is abused by the shopkeeper, his feeling is hurt, but yet he is excited over 'the wonder of city'. But Gangu is more mature: he understands the insult involved in the beating of the coolies, how it hurts their self-respect and sense of dignity besides lacerating their backs.³

Anand presents the realistic picture of the exploitation and physical molestation of coolie women in the novel, Reggie Hunt's cruel behavior can be seen during the quarrel. In the quarrel, the crowd turns uncontrolled as murder taken place. 'I will shoot you all', Reggie shouts. Then the coolies march towards the doctor sahib, shouting, 'Dilawar Sahib ki jai' and request him to talk a few words to the Manager Sahib and save them to take courage and proceed shouting "Dilawar Sahib, ki jai". But Reggie shouts;

'Shirr up, complaining fool', Reggie Hunt shouted, rushing forward. 'Step back or I will shoot you dead! Let de la Harve mind his business. Back you go, swine, back you go to the lines" 'Get back! Swine', roared Croft-

Cooke, roused out of his deliberateness by Reggie's impetuosity, and advancing under cover of the warders. 'Get back to your lines. And I can deal with de la I larve Sahib.'(TLB. 13)

The crowd becomes frightened and after that with immediate effect De la Harve is dismissed from his service. They all run in different directions just to protect their existence. And then the soldiers march through the road facing no opposition from any one and the authorities declare that the mutiny had been crushed.

Croft-Cooke, Reggie Hunt and other men of the Estate who earlier used to spend their days in different activities now turn to the hunting as they realize that the coolies will not disturb them again. They have organized hunting programme for His Excellency, Sir Geoffrey Boyd, and the Governor of Assam. The coolies are engaged, at the great risk of their lives, in the elaborate hunting arrangement.

The women hunter, Reggie Hunt is fascinated one day to see Leila's " 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"(TLB. 121) so he asks her to come at his bungalow. Leila refuses and slips into her hut. Reggie pursues her and asks her to come out. Buddhu gets frightened and shouts "Father, Father", and rushes towards Narain's hut where his father is. Reggie wants to run away but he was face to face with Gangu at a distance of two yards. Maddened by frustration and fear he indiscreetly fifes resulting in the murder of Gangu. This is followed by a trial lasting 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 and he is discharged.

This is the true picture of pre- independent India and Indian society. People suffered a lot during the British rule in India. Anand has exposed the realistic and real subject of suffering mass in India. The novel it self is the realistic portrayal of the suffering saga of coolie in Tea plantation in Assam. Anand himself has visited the places and interviewed so many coolies and found their real life problem. He has not only found their problems but also try to expose it to the world with the intension to remove all the social, political, economical and religious ill and evils.

Thus the injustices of the British Raj, the exploration of the colonialists, and the misery and surfing of Indian masses are all exposed. Mulk Raj Anand expresses;

"And yet I feel that this book had to be written because what I had to say in it was deep in me from the days lived for a while-near a plantation in Assam and visited cyclone and saw the in humanity and barbarism prevalent there, with the consequent dehumanization of the colonial involved in the process ".⁴

In the novel, Anand has presented realistic agonies, suffering and misery of coolies falling on the thrones of life and bleeding. The painful truth presented in the novel brought Anand into conflict with the ruling class who always boasted of their human right record. For Two Leaves and a Bud, Goronwy Ree Lauded the author 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 civilizations."⁵

The colonial experience and hard realities authentically painted in **Two Leaves and a Bud** is much more than an area of darkness. The inhumanity of the British Empire and racial antagonism do not obscure other concerns which are positive and optimistic. Like Bakha and Munoo, Gangu is also the victim of society and civilization, but that does not mean that cruelty and oppression win in the novel. The British character, Reggie Hunt symbolizes cruelty, lust and evil but there are other images which uplift us. Anand brings out the coarseness of Hunt's mind by the words which he is speaking to another planter;

“Dirty cheats, the whole bag of them. And not only here, too, the deceitful bitches. They try the same game in bed, leaving you high and dry at the critical moment.” (TLB. 57)

The Indian social life is given a new dimension in the novel. The British officials and their Indian subordinations are ranged against the defenseless coolies working in the stifling surroundings. The capitalist forces are symbolized in this novel by the British. The Englishman who believes in the ideology of Whiteman's burden is pathologically suspicious of all Indians. Every coolie is a potential agitator for the British officials. Anand has presented heart rendering picture of explanation of coolies in the tea plantation in Assam. The cry of Gangu heard clearly;

References:

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4. Mulk Raj Anand, *Apology For Heroism*, (Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1975)132.
5. Goronwy Ree, In *The Spectator*, No. 5679 (30th April, 1937) 833.
6. Saros Cowasjee, *Anand's Two Leaves and a Bud*. *Indian Literature*, Vol. XVI, Nos. 3&4, (July-Dec. 1973): 74.