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# Social Realism as the Key Theme in Mulk Raj Anand's Novel *"Two Leaves and a Bud"*

**Dr. P. Sudha**

Associate Professor, Department of English  
PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore

**Abstract**

*Mulk Raj Anand's "Two Leaves and a Bud" was published in 1937 which dives into the complex dynamics of colonial India's tea plantations, depicting the harsh reality experienced by labourers against the backdrop of British empire. This paper will examine the subject of social realism in Anand's novel focusing on the author's representation of wretched plight of Assam tea-plantation workers, the working-class exploitation, difficulties, and perseverance. This article elucidates the writers use of the theme social realism which sheds light on the economic, social, and political inequities prevalent during the colonial era by examining character interactions, narrative development. Social realism was largely popular towards the close of the nineteenth century. Anand exposes colonialism's degrading consequences on underprivileged populations by documenting the daily lives of tea plantation workers and their interactions with tyranny, prejudice, and class disparities. The paper contends that "Two Leaves and a Bud" is a tribute to Mulk Raj Anand's eye on social realism, providing readers with a clear depiction of the human experience amid the turbulent terrain of colonial India and exploitation being the major theme of the novel.*

**Keywords:** Exploitation, Poverty, Social Realism, Indians, British Raj, Conflict.

**Introduction**

*Two Leaves and a Bud* is a 1937 dramatic novel in which the author describes the wretched plight of workers on Assam tea plantations, whose work is to collect *"Two Leaves and a Bud"* day in and day out. Gangu, is the novel's central character, who is a middle-aged farmer who works on his field in a village near Hoshiarpur, Punjab. He is tempted by a tout's false promises and leaves for Assam with his wife Sajani and children Leila and Buddhu to work on the Machpherson Tea Estate, abandoning his native village. Soon he understands that the promises made to him was completely false, and that the world of a tea plantation was similar to a prison.

"I guess it was in our destiny. But back home, it felt like a jail, and here it's slightly worse...Water comes first, followed by mire. This prison has no bars, but it is an impenetrable jail. The chowkidars protect the plantation and will bring you back if you run....."

Sajani, wife of Gangudied of malaria, and Gangu, like other coolies, believed that plantation life is only a progression from today's awful to the worse of tomorrow. There was unrest among the coolies, and one day they broke out. Two ladies began quarrelling, and Reggie, the Assistant Manager, took harsh measures, injuring

three coolies. Croft-Cooke makes an appeal to fix the problem, but was futile. The coolies decide to agitate, dividing the plantation into two groups, each with a few dissidents. The planters receive airborne aid, and the use of force brings the coolie-demonstrators to their senses. And no sympathy is expressed for them.

The governor is scheduled to pay a visit, and a tiger hunt will be staged for his benefit. However, Reggie is dissatisfied within and despises the coolies. He recklessly attempts to attack Leila as she is quietly picking tea leaves alone. As she flees, Bim pursues her to her house, and his father intervenes to save her, but, enraged by anger and tears, he murders Gangu in front of him. A trial ensues, and the tea planter is taken to court, but Mr. Justice Mowberley, agreeing with the majority opinion of the white man, acquits him of murder.

Thus, the story depicts the injustices of the British Raj, as well as the misery and suffering of the Indian masses. In other words, the novel's central issue is the economic exploitation of labor by colonialists, or capitalists. The workers cannot adjust and the same time escape from the overall condition. The writer believes that—"It is perhaps better written, and technically it is more complex than *Untouchable* or *Coolie*, because I tried to evoke in it the varying moods of the beautiful Eastern Indian landscape and felt the passions with an intensity that I was writing as thinly veiled fiction." But I admit that as I got into the novel, I became biased in favor of my Indian characters and started to caricature the Englishmen and Englishwomen who play such an important role in this work." Anand captures the realities of the situation and captures the life of a worker.

### **Exploitation of Labour**

The novel '*Two leaves and a Bud*' explores the exploitation of laborers on a tea farm in Assam. The acute deprivation and its sad impact on the lives of these individuals are explained all the more.

The author's exquisite descriptions of the scenery add to its vividness and beauty. Assam, sometimes known as the 'garden of India,' boasts wooded hills, rich meadows, flowing rivers, and copious rainfall, ideal for cultivating tea leaves. The commercialization of tea in Assam during the second half of the nineteenth century led to a surge in demand in the UK and other countries. The British authorities were aware of the workers' unhealthy circumstances, which sparked a considerable controversy in the Indian government. Between 1890 and 1930, the Delhi government formed four special commissions to evaluate labor conditions. The detailed conditions of the laborers were recorded.

Very few tea estate laborers who came from Assam worked there. Planters preferred hiring outsiders as laborers since they were more reliant to their masters, disconnected from their family or clan network, and so more prone to exploitation. Landless peasants in North India and tribal communities in Central India were disproportionately affected. The family was identified was given a free travel and promised decent earnings, medical treatment, and education for their children. All were interested in such an offer. Hundreds of thousands of people arrived, and like Gangu, they discovered little pay and he was not able to feed his family. Gangu earned three annas, Sajani and Leila each earned two, and Buddhu earned half an anna. They toiled from sunrise until dusk. A rupee equals sixteen annas, which is a little amount. Due to insufficient earnings, the family started borrowing money from Indian merchants who frequently visited the farms. The characters in the story are described as 'demons' who sucks everyone's blood due to their greed.

In addition to economic exploitation, Anand emphasizes the sexual dimension. The character Mr. Hunt, who is the English assistant manager who supervises the tea workers so he is physically close to them. He is the villain of this novel who drinks a lot and lusts after young women. According to a character in the story, 'No one's mother or sister is secure on this estate.'

The picture of Buddha catching and caged a pigeon reflects the worker's entire plight. The workers like the bird, struggles to adapt to their surroundings but yet unable to flee. Anand authored the book after spending nearly a year in Assam on a tea farm, where he witnessed "inhumanity and barbarism."

### **Social Realism as a Key Theme**

The story explores the many reactions to exploitation and the theme of social realism. The novel's title is a line of a traditional song sung by the plantation workers. Despite some stereotyping, the novel's strength lies in its diverse and is psychologically deep with three different viewpoints. First, there is the quiet pain of the workers. Gangu exhibits a stoic mindset, depending on the gods and never challenging the estate system till the end. Second, the estate's colonial owners were self-serving and complacent. Mr. Croft-Crooke, the manager, exemplifies the 'turn-a-blind-eye' attitude by promising to address the poor conditions but ultimately failing to act.

Barbara, his daughter, is aware of the situation and worried, but prioritizes other matters. A third answer is from guys who deliberately exploit workers. This group consists of both British (e.g., Mr. Hunt) and Indian males, including greedy merchants and estate overseers. Dr. Havre, who symbolizes the author's voice, epitomizes the outstanding combination of compassion and action. The scientist is infuriated by both the workers' beliefs and the growers' inhumane behavior. The author analyzes himself from the perspective of a social scientist or political philosopher, concluding that the issue is systemic corruption rather than individual misconduct. The story concludes with an accusation of the legal framework and its processes. Mr. Hunt is on trial for the cold-blooded murder of Gangu, who was shot in front of several witnesses. The jury pronounces their decision in the concluding sentence: 'Not guilty.'

Social realism being the sub genre of realism mirrors the society in an accurate way. The movement started in the late nineteenth century in response to social and economic inequalities depicting the detailed accounts of everyday occurrences highlighting the middle or lower class people. This becomes the setting of the novel which provides the commentary on social injustice and concerns of the lives of the working class. The early examples of social realism in literature was seen in the works of Charles Dickens and Fyodor Dostoyevsky which shows sympathy towards the working class. The novels show the struggles of the poor with uncompromising honesty and critiques the ruling power. The novel 'The Grapes of Wrath' by John Steinbeck represents the conflict between migrant workers and landowners.

### **Conclusion**

Social Realism emerged as a response to Romanticism's emphasis on idealism and inflated self-esteem. The writers highlighted the harsh realities of modern life and empathized with working-class individuals, especially the impoverished. They documented what they observed objectively, as it existed."Social Realism" provides a comprehensive knowledge of social existence. It is an intellectual ability to analyze the nature and function of society, including its institutions and traditions. It is an intellectual immersion into the social process.

The novel '*Two Leaves and a Bud*' shows the inhumane nature of the colonizers and the well-to-do Indian landlords and money lenders. Their nature ruined the lives of the tea plantation workers in a bad way which lead to lots of human atrocities. The writer clearly captured the real time scenario of Assam tea -plantations. The higher officials paid no heed to the sufferings of the workers. The disparity between the rich and the poor is explored in the novels of social realism.

Individual, social, and cultural changes in all realms of life, with their complexities and subtleties, include information about family, class, marriage, school, politics, interrelationships,

economy, morality, religion, and educational standards. Social realism has impacted the readers of the early nineteenth century. -The novels expose us to the injustices of the society and gives us a glimpse of the society in the time of British raj. This genre endured the test of time and lasted for two centuries.

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