

Maguni Charan Behera *Editor*

Tribe, Space and Mobilisation

Colonial Dynamics and Post-Colonial
Dilemma in Tribal Studies

 Springer

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Chapter 19

Understanding Socio-economic Subjugation by the British in Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud*

Miazi Hazam

Abstract Until the last few decades, the north-eastern part of the Indian Union had not received attention in the eyes of Indian writers writing in English. As a matter of fact, in the early periods of the rise of Indian writing in English, the northeast remained a non-entity. If one was to cast a glance over the fictional world of the celebrated trio of fiction writing in the early stage of Indian Writing in English in India, the northeast is absent except in Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud*. As the only novel dealing with the northeast in the early stage of development of fictional writing in English in India and coming from the pen of one the three giants of Indian fiction in English, the novel is significant. However, the greater significance of the novel lies more in its examination and critique of the 'dirty work of the empire' in the tea gardens of Assam. Economically, the tea gardens of Assam and West Bengal held a significant position as they accounted for a considerable portion of the revenue collection in India for the British coffer. The proposed paper intends to attempt an analytical study of Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* in order to understand the exploitative nature of the power structure developed by the agents of the companies that owned the tea estates of Assam on the basis of Anand's representation of the trials and tribulations of the male protagonist who has been lured from his native village in Hoshiarpur to work in the tea plantation of Assam by the agents of the company. Since the novel is primarily based on the experience of the migrated tea garden labourers, an understanding of their 'lived' versus 'projected/expected' experience will also form a part of the study of this paper. The outcome of the paper is expected to be contributory to the socio-economic subjugation of the migrated tea garden labourers in the tea estates of Assam during the British rule. The approach of study will be a combination of the post-colonial and the Marxist.

Keywords Mulk Raj Anand • Northeast India • Assam • Colonial exploitation • Power structure • Post-colonial approach • Marxism • Socio-economic subjugation • Tea Tribes

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© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2022
M. C. Behera (ed.), *Tribe, Space and Mobilisation*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-0059-4_19

Until the last few decades, the north-eastern part of the Indian Union had remained almost a non-entity in the creative Indian mind. It had not received proper attention in the eyes of Indian writers writing in English. A quick glance over the fictional world of the celebrated trio of fiction writing in Indian Writing in English in India (Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand), the northeast is conspicuously absent except in Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937). As the only novel dealing with the northeast in the early stage of development of fictional writing in English in India and coming from the pen of one the three giants of Indian fiction in English, the novel is significant as a very strong literary representation of the northeast in the large body of Indian fiction written in English. However, the greater significance of the novel lies more in its examination and critique of the 'dirty work of the empire' in the tea gardens of Assam. Economically, the tea gardens of Assam and West Bengal held a significant position as they accounted for a considerable portion of the revenue collection in India for the British coffer, yet the condition of those who created this immense wealth remained miserable.

It is a commonplace knowledge that the colonial machinery operated in all the colonies with the sole motive of exploiting the resources and the natural wealth of the regions and the logic they provided, such as the 'white man's burden' (Kipling, 1899)¹ amounted to nothing but a lame excuse for carrying on the vicious process of socio-economic exploitation in the colonies. If Africa attracted the European powers with her minerals and ivory, the exotic spices and food brought them to India. The cardamom, pepper, other spices, cotton, indigo and tea held special attraction for the European imperial powers, including the British, in this sub-continent. The proposed paper intends to attempt an analytical study of Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) in order to understand the exploitative nature of the power structure developed by the English trading houses in the tea estates of Assam on the basis of Anand's representation of the trials and tribulations of the male protagonist who has been lured from his native village in Hoshiarpur to work in the tea plantation of Assam by the agents of the company. Since the novel is primarily based on the experience of the migrated tea garden labourers, an understanding of their 'lived' versus 'projected/expected' experience on Althusserian basis will also form a part of the study of this paper (1984). The outcome of the paper is expected to be contributory to the socio-economic subjugation of the migrated tea garden labourers in the tea estates of Assam during the British rule. The approach of study will be a combination of the post-colonial and the Marxist.

Tea plantation and tea gardens have a long history of existence in Assam and West Bengal. However, since the focus of this paper is limited to *Two Leaves and a Bud* only, the discussion will be limited only to the tea gardens of Assam. It should also be noted that the fictional locale of the McPherson Tea Estate in the novel will serve as a microcosmic representation of the conditions of the tea estate across Assam in general during the British rule. Deluar Hussain, in his *Marginalization and the*

¹ This is the title of the poem by imperialist poet Rudyard Kipling with the sub-title the United States and the Philippine Islands. It was published first time in *The Times* (London) on 4th February, 1899. See Alison Chapman (2002) for details.

Tea Tribes of Assam: A Study on Mulk Raj Anand's Two Leaves and a Bud and Umakanta Sarma's Ejak Manuh Ekhan Aranya (2018) writes how tea, from being a wild produce in the hilly areas of Assam and West Bengal, turned into a lucrative trading product for the British:

Joseph Banks, a British Botanist reported to the East India Company that the climate in some parts of British India was ideal for tea plantation. Accordingly, the vast land in the state of Assam and West Bengal were converted to mass tea plantation. (Hussain, 2018:25)

After this disclosure to the East India Company, began the rise of tea gardens and tea trading in Assam and West Bengal. In 1823, Robert Bruce introduced the first tea plantation in Assam and the next year, i.e. 1824, saw the formation of the Tea Board in Assam. In 1837, the first tea garden in Assam in Chabua became operational by engaging indentured labourers brought in from different parts of the country. Since tea had remained a monopoly of the Chinese for a long period in the international market, the British wanted to challenge this Chinese monopoly in the European market with the varieties of Indian-grown (see Sen, 2004:26 and also Hussain, 2018: 19). With this intention, they began growing varieties of tea which included the native ones as well, but the best ones were reserved for the English market so that they would pose a challenge to the Chinese and other varieties. Thus, tea acquired an important position in Britain's list of produce to be taken from India but behind this began a tale of insane exploitation and inhumanity baffling all rationality. Anand's novel takes up this tale of dehumanization of human beings and presents before the readers the pain and agony at their emasculated state of existence in which they are neither able to resist the unjustified torture and humiliation heaped upon them nor escape from this leaving hell. *Two Leaves and a Bud* thus has as its central theme the subjugation of the large population of workers sweating out their lives in the tea plantations of Assam under an exploitative colonial regime.

In the early chapters of the novel itself, the exploitation carried out by the British planters in the McPherson Tea Estate of Assam, which happens to be the locale of the novel, is spelt out in the following words by the sympathetic Dr. De la Havre as he mutters the opinion that '[T]he hunger, the sweat, and the despair of a million Indians' enters into every cup of tea (Anand, 1946:21). This process of hunger and exploitations is a historical one that has churned under its juggernaut wheels the thousands of migrated and native workers who form the common group largely termed as the 'Tea Tribes' of Assam.

The Tea Tribe community serving in the different tea estates of Assam for more than one and a half century is a curious combination of various tribes and sub-tribes. These workers were brought from different regions of India to work in the tea gardens of Assam with high promises. They were lured mostly from the states of Odisha (erstwhile Orissa), Uttar Pradesh, Bihar (including the portion which is now Jharkhand), Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. These people, along with the native Tea Tribe workers of the state, formed the greater Tea Tribe community. Before being brought to the tea estates and being appointed as tea garden workers, these people were often lured with the promise of high and satisfactory wages, bonuses and other necessary amenities such as cheap ration and livery, firewood for cooking,

housing and sanitary facilities, better medical and education facilities for them and their families. But once they were appointed, all these turned out to be mere baits. 'The Workmen's Breach of Contract Act' of 1859 empowered the trading houses dealing in tea in the states of Assam and West Bengal stronger as it reduced the status of the tea garden labourers to that of bonded labours. This anti-worker law increased the suffering of the workers more as it made dereliction of duty and refusal to work punishable offences. They could even be imprisoned and persecuted if they broke the conditions of the contract (see Chatterjee 1980).

Approximately from the middle of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century, the procurement of labourers for the tea gardens of Assam was done through contract and *sardari* system. Under both these systems, the contractor and the *sardar* were given incentives for each labourer that they brought to the tea estates. Their income was thus on commission basis, and it depended on the number of labourers that they could bring. So, they used all means to lure as many unsuspecting people as is the case with Gangu in the novel. He was lured from his native village of Hoshiarpur in the Punjab by Sardar Buta Singh on the promise of better earning opportunities. He was promised not only a good house to live in with educational facilities for his children, but also a plot of land for cultivation on which he could grow his own crop. During the train journey from Hoshiarpur to Assam, Gangu asks several questions to Buta Singh regarding the type of facilities that he may expect to find in the tea estate to which the wily Buta keeps answering in the affirmative. He understands that if Gangu was to smell anything wrong, then he might change his mind of coming to Assam, and consequently, he would lose a good amount of his commission that he was expecting on reaching the tea estate. It is important to mention here that most of the labourers who arrived in the tea estates lured by the wiles of contractors and *sardars* like Buta Singh were the victims of poverty in their native villages. They were either debt-ridden or suffered from inadequate earnings with which they could not support their family. It was this burden of poverty on their shoulders that made them easy targets for recruitment as bonded labourers in the tea estates. Unknown to them, they usually failed to realize that their decision was only a movement from the frying pan into the fire. Little did Gangu realized that he had sealed his own fate the very moment he had agreed to Buta Singh's proposal to sell his ancestral plot of land and migrate to Assam. Such movement of people like Gangu from their ancestral villages to tea estates or coffee plantations or the newly mushrooming factories in the urban areas marks an important phenomenon in the history of all nations. Such movement is an indication of the movement of the working population from one place to another, thus bringing about demographic changes in places where they migrated from as well as in the places where they settled, either by compulsion or by choice.

This sinister process of baiting the workers from the different states of the country was carried out in a very systematic manner. There was a well-established hierarchy that functioned in a well-coordinated manner to locate, identify and lure people into the tea estates of Assam; and once the unsuspecting workers arrived at the tea estates from their native places, it was a point of no return for them. There was, in fact, a strong system of surveillance and policing the workers so that they should not, or

rather could not, escape from their living hells. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, the guards ascertain that none of them can escape from the tea gardens through the maintenance of strict vigilance. The guards not only keep an eye upon the men and women as they work in the tea gardens, and they also pay regular visits to the huts in the workers' colonies during night hours to ascertain that all the workers are present. If any of the workers was found trying to escape, then he was sure to be punished severely by the security guards. In the novel, it is disturbing to note how the authority uses the Air Force to subside the demonstration of the workers.

A critical point to be noted is the low bargaining power of the workers against the owners that paves the way for the exploitation of the former in the hands of the latter. Once the workers have been trapped within the stronghold of the tea estates, they have no option left to themselves other than to be at the mercy of the manager and other officers of the tea estate, whose majority comprised of the English. For the fulfilment of every need, they had to either take their help or approach the moneylender who charged interest at a very exorbitant rate. Once the loan is taken, the debtor is trapped in a never-ending cycle of compounding interests. This painful aspect of tea estate life that Anand portrays in his novel can easily remind an avid reader of the predicament of the poor Indian peasants in Munshi Premchand's novel, *Godan* (1936), since both these authors show the incapacity of the poor to break out of the trap of monetary exploitation in the hands of the parasitic class of the society. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, when Gangu has to approach a trader for a loan in order to fulfil the last rites of his dead wife, one can feel how the poor man is unwillingly burdening himself with a loan which he may not be able to repay till the end of his life. It is also disheartening and painful to watch how Gangu is refused a loan both by Craft-Cooke and Sardar Buta who could have easily lent the meagre amount and spared him the trouble. Later, Dr. Havre tells Barbara how the English have become rich by exploiting the Indian coolies in Assam and the industrial workers in Britain. He also makes it clear that all this is done with the support of the British Government. He says:

Your father has made his money in this country, but feels no gratitude towards it. Your mother has the mutiny complex, dyes her hair, bullies her servants, and juggles around the dance floor... But the poor, bloody colliers sweat their guts out, working for four farthings a day, to the tune of Reggie Hunt's guffaws. Hurrah for the Britons who never, never shall be slaves. Three cheers for the man who imprisons old Gangu on the plantation by false pretences, keeps him well-guarded and refuses to give him a strip of land which he promised by contract. But what's a contract with a slave? Less than a scrap of paper and that's your Empire! (Anand, 1937: 130-31)

Dr. Havre's criticism of the *modus operandi* of the British empire in India lays bare the dirt and squalor of colonialism and socio-economic exploitation of the coolies in the tea estates which contributed considerably to the economic well-being of Britain. When examined from the post-colonial reader's point of view, Craft-Cooke's attitude towards Gangu and the other workers in the tea estate is an example of the typical settler's attitude in colonized spaces. Mrs. Craft-Cooke's calling their butler, Ilahi Bux as 'Lie Box', adds to the same discourse. She, in her prejudice, considers all Indians as liars and thieves and openly states her misconstrued opinion about them. According to her, '...these natives are lazy. And we must not spoil them. They are

born liars. And they steal. I caught a coolie woman plucking roses from our garden the other day, and I shooed her off'. She further adds that they must 'not spoil them' with generosity or any show of kindness. (Ananda, 1946:23). Like her husband, she is incapable of seeing any goodness in the Indians due to her indoctrination in the lies of the empire. The agenda of racial inequality engendered by colonialism does not allow her to see beyond her own superiority. Furthermore, Reggie Hunt's hatred for the male coolies and his lust for the females are an example of the 'ambivalence of desire' that the colonizer normally adopts in his approach towards the colonized sexes.

The condition of the workers, both the native and the migrated ones, in the tea estates of Assam is comparable to a certain degree to the condition of the African slaves brought to the USA for working in the cotton plantations of the southern part of the country. Both these categories of human beings were deprived of their basic human rights and exploited to the utmost capacity. The difference in their conditions lies primarily on two points—first, the African-Americans were forcibly brought to work in the cotton plantations of the southern states of America, while the tea workers in Assam were lured into the vicious trap of exploitation through false promises and dreams of a better future; secondly, the condition of the African-American slaves was far worse than that of the tea workers in Assam. The most important difference in these two groups in terms of being exploited lays in the fact that while in the case of the African-Americans, it was the difference in race between the exploiter and the exploited, and in the case of the Indian tea plantation labourers, it was a difference of both race and class. As a matter of fact, it is possible to interpret the exploitation of the tea garden labourers using the Marxist principle of class struggle emanating from the inequality in control over the means and the result of production of wealth.

It would not be wrong to mention here that to understand the human conflict that Mulk Raj Anand presents in his novels, one has to take recourse to the Marxist bent that he exhibits in his writings. Though caste may take the fore-front in his *Untouchable*, it is also a tale of exploitation based on class difference originating out of an unfortunate combination of class and caste in Hindu society. Similarly, his other masterpiece, *Coolie*, also emerges as a tale of suffering of the underprivileged in Indian society. The present novel, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, also presents exploitation as a consequence of the difference in terms of class and race. In fact, Anand's inclination towards Marxism is no hidden knowledge. The strong Marxist stance which he adopted as an author in discussing the class struggle in Indian society had kept him in the scanner of the government and the intelligentsia for a good number of years. He had remained a suspect in the eyes of the government. Anand's Marxism was the result of his social consciousness. He was a socially conscious writer who viewed writing as a purposeful way of projecting the evils inherent in the society. (Joshi, 1969: vi) Anand was not an advocate of 'Art for Art's sake', thereby devoting himself to the task of being a conscious interpreter of the ills and evils of the society through a rejection of the luxury of pure aestheticism. As a result, his novels emerged as works of serious social purpose. They fit perfectly into what Bhabani Bhattacharya held about the nature of proper novels:

I hold that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society's point of view. Art is not necessarily for art's sake. Purposeless art and literature which is much in vogue does not appear to me as a sound judgement. (as cited in Sharma, 1979:121)

Anand was also influenced by writers such as Rabindra Nath Tagore, Bankim Chandra, Sharat Chandra, Munshi Prem Chand, Mahatma Gandhi and even the great Urdu writers such as Ratan Nath Sarshar and Muhammad Iqbal. The Western influences that operated upon him were Maxim Gorky, Leo Tolstoy, Victor Hugo, James Joyce and Fyodor Dostoevsky (Khan & Rizwan, 2008: xvii–xviii). The exuberant humanism and the mature nature of plot construction in his novels were the result of these diverse influences that shaped his artistic acumen. In his *Apology for Heroism*, Anand sets to record his theory of the novel as a means of social commitment in the following words:

The form of the creative writing which is the novel came to me much more naturally than any other form, because through this I could live through the experiences of to their people and realize what silent passions burst in their hearts, what silent passions burst in their hearts, what immediate and ultimate sorrows possess them, where they want to go and how they grapple in their ways with their destinies. (Anand, 1975:138–39)

Thus, his views on the novel as a literary form which he could utilize to his purpose coincide with that of Bhabani Bhattacharcharya. He devoted himself sincerely to the great task of asserting civilizing values in a wasteland disintegrating under the burden of selfishness and antipathy of human beings. His unceasing championing of the cause of the poor turned him into a crusader against those who thrived on the blood and the sweat of the underdogs of the society. The plot of *Two Leaves and a Bud* reflects this very concern of Anand as it is firmly based on the conflict between the capitalist owners and the poor labourers in McPherson Tea Estate in Assam. It is because the managing authority of the tea estate has in its hands all the repressive tools to exercise its authority over the workers, and it is always at an advantaged position in its relationship with the poor workers. The repressive system operates on the basis of rewards and punishment; it rewards the sardars and the security henchmen but punishes the innocent workers when they raise even a whisper about their just demands.

In the post-colonial sense, the light that Anand casts on the functioning of the tea estates of Assam in *Two Leaves and a Bud* is a projection of 'the dirty work of the empire'—a term used by George Orwell in his essay 'Shooting an Elephant' (Orwell, 1936). It was the colonial intent of exploitation in the colonies that had led to the dehumanization of the natives—a fact that Joseph Conrad brings forth in his famous novella, *Heart of Darkness* (1899); this is the very process that Anand criticizes in *Two Leaves and a Bud*. By projecting class-conflict between the planters who represented the rich trading houses of the colonial British Government and the Indian labourers in the tea plantations in Assam and combining the racial binary of opposition between the colonizer and the colonized in this novel, Anand makes capitalism coterminous with colonialism and shows how both the systems operate with the same objective. As offshoots of modernism, both colonialism and capitalism share the same original

impulse. Historically, the ideology of modernism has been seen to have within it the very element of colonialism as it becomes dominant in terms of what has been called 'instrumental reason' and division of realms where one term enjoys supremacy over the other. Reason carries on its domination in all spheres through the process of an increased rationalization. (Maura, 2013) As rationalization becomes a requisite of modernization and human emancipation, it becomes dehumanizing at the same time. Hannah Arendt, in her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), writes:

'The aim of an arbitrary system is to destroy the civil rights of the whole population, who ultimately become just as outlawed in their own country as the stateless and homeless. The destruction of man's rights, the killing of the juridical person in him, is a pre-requisite for dominating him entirely. In the concentration camps, there is not even the pretense of any civil or human rights—no inmates have any rights'. (Arendt, 1951: 451)

The process that Arendt mentions in the above lines explains the process which is akin to the process of the exploitation of the tea garden workers by the estate owners. Bill Ashcroft was explicit about the inter-woven relationship between modernity and colonialism. For him:

...modernity emerged at about the same time as European nations began to conceive of their dominant relationship to a non-European world and began to spread their rule through exploration, cartography and colonization...The imposition of European model of historical change became the tool by which these societies were denied any internal dynamic or capacity for development. (Ashcroft, 2001: 211)

Therefore, the relationship among modernism, colonialism, capitalism and the consequential exploitation of peoples in the European colonies can be probably expressed thus very simplistically: *Modernism = colonialism = capitalism = exploitation in the colonies*; Anand, the socially committed novelist that he was, describes this relationship in the form of the conflicting forces in *Two Leaves and a Bud*.

The pitiful state of existence of the workers leads them to find solace in the fatalistic view of the universe. They see themselves as fated to suffer and blame their misfortune on their *karma*, so that they might get some solace out of it. It serves as a simplified logic for them in times of despondency and acute suffering. This aspect is reflected in Gangu's meeting with his neighbour Narain after the former's arrival in McPherson Tea Estate. Narain tells Gangu that he had been virtually imprisoned in this tea estate by a *sardar* for the last twelve years, though he had been brought from his famine-stricken village in Bikaner on a contract for three years only. He says:

I suppose it is our *kismet*. But at home it was like a prison and here it is slightly worse... Well, you can't escape from here now... First water, afterwards mire! This prison has no bars, but it is nevertheless an unbreakable jail. The chowkidars keep guard over the plantation, and they bring you back if you should go. (Anand, 1946:35)

This is a shocking revelation to Gangu that his movements will be watched over by the guards, but he had prepared himself for all sorts of unexpected things in this new land. It is at such moments that his fatalistic view of the universe that he had inherited by virtue of being born a Hindu comes to his rescue to make his life easier. This is more pronounced in the manner he deals with the loss of his wife.

But, the humiliation and the exploitation of the coolies do not end with the torture of the males; the women and even the barely young girls are also not spared. With the type of Reggie Hunt prowling around, the women are always at a risk of being molested at his whims. In the novel, Reggie Hunt has been portrayed as a maniac who thinks that the native men are not good, but he fancies their wives and daughters. He exploits the women sexually by force. When Reggie Hunt first catches the glimpse of Leila, Gangu's daughter, he wants to know who she is. On being informed that she is Gangu's daughter, he wants her to be brought before him, but Narain tries to divert his attention by telling him that Leila is only a child. Fortunately, Buta arrives at the moment, and Reggie Hunt goes away with him. On his departure, Narain informs Gangu that nobody's wife or daughter is safe in the plantation because of Reggie Hunt. Towards the end of the novel, it is Reggie Hunt's lust for Leila that leads him to shoot and murder Gangu. He also exploits the other women like Neogi's wife, to whom he makes love forcibly. Thus, this adds the dimension of sexual exploitation of the colonized by the settlers in the novel.

This, in consequence, robs them of the will to resist and turns them into submissive subjects in an exploitative socio-economic structure. And even in the rare cases in which they feel themselves pushed to the wall and decide to raise their voice, they are cruelly suppressed by show of sheer brutal force. They are beaten and even shot at so that their morale is broken. Typical of colonial settlements, the native is not perceived as a human but more as an object to be kept at an inferior level of socio-economic existence. They are stripped of their essential humanity and dragged down to the position of dehumanized 'monstrosities' or aberrations on the basis of the stereotypes built on the basis of colonial prejudice that thrives on racism and the twisted logic of the empire, such as the faulty theory of scientific racism which propounded the superiority of certain races above other races. It is precisely the working of this twisted logic that leads Justice Moberley and his jury of seven European judges to exonerate Reggie Hunt of the charges of killing Gangu. The vote of the two Indian judges on the jury does not stand against Reggie Hunt as Justice Moberley and the seven other European judges belong to his race, and as per the formulation of racism, the native is not a human but an object or something 'to be kept in place'. Justice is thus prejudiced from the very point of inception itself where the 'other'—who is none other than the Indian in this context—is a 'potential criminal' or an aberrant subject in the eyes of the whites.

Mulk Raj Anand adds another dimension to this process of exploitation by making the collaborative native as an integral part of the suppressive machinery for controlling the disempowered workers. Thus, an interesting point in this novel is its emphasis on the role of the native collaborator(s) in perpetuating the process of exploitation initiated by the colonial settlers. The collaborator has always played a historically decisive role in helping the colonial master in successfully carrying on exploitation of the natives for a slice of the power and wealth that the colonial power structure evolved in colonized societies. The collaborator has for long remained an important point of focus for several post-colonial authors. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Sardar

Buta Singh and the estate guards, including Neogi, represent that class of collaborators without whom the colonial machinery would not have so successfully operated in the tea estates.

Thus, Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* presents the multipronged nature of socio-economic exploitation carried out by the English in the tea estates of Assam. Through the trials and tribulations of Gangu, the novelist has brought forth the monstrous nature of exploitation carried out in the plantations by the colonial powers. The complete disregard for human and ethical values is deeply troubling in the narrative. The repressive structure has been shown as so powerful that even a sympathetic Englishman like Dr. De la Havre has to suffer for his sympathy and concern for the Indians. If Hori in Mushi Premchand's *Godan* remains the quintessential figure of the exploited Indian farmer under a parasitic system, Gangu in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, through his suffering, his resignation and his forgiving nature emerges as the quintessential suffering worker in plantations. It is also clear that in portraying the sufferings of the downtrodden and marginalized section of humanity, Anand presents himself as a socially conscious novelist to the core. Though it is alleged at times that he exhibits Marxist inclination to a great degree in this novel, it cannot be denied that he has successfully created a disturbing text for his readers which is strong enough to shake them out of their apathy for the downtrodden and the marginalized, as he has always done with his other successful novels like *Untouchable* and *Coolie*.

While it seemed that the end of the colonial era or the British Raj in India would mean an end to the woes of the people working in the tea estates, it did not actually happen, for the exploitative machinery of colonialism returned in the guise of international capitalism in all sectors of production. The end of colonialism was almost followed by neo-colonialism. The multinational corporate houses that took over the task of production in these tea states also aimed at only one thing—the maximization of profit. However, methods of checks and balance became operative with the socialist model of development adopted by the independent government of India. Its measures for the eradication of poverty and the betterment of the living conditions of the deprived helped to restore some sort of equilibrium in an otherwise ravaged section of the society. But, does it mean that the condition of the tea estate workers has improved now? The answer is not an easy one. There has definitely been a perceptible improvement in their living standards with the impetus on health, sanitation and education after the country's independence. Today, in most of the tea estates of Assam, there are primary schools and provisions have been made for providing drinking water. However, it remains a fact that the provisions in these regard are still insufficient, and the government has to go a long way to achieve its goal. It is heartening to note that the government has devised and implemented several programmes for the upliftment of this marginalized class, yet the success of these plans and programmes depends on their proper execution by the executing agencies. As a result, the targets have remained elusive to a great extent. An investigation made by Justin Rowlatt and Jane Dieth (2015) for BBC on 8 September 2018 in the tea estates of Assam brought to light the deplorable condition of the workers there. It has transpired from their investigation that the accommodation and sanitary conditions in these tea estates are below standard. The unhygienic condition

of settlements along with malnutrition has resulted in poor health of the workers, including women and children. Many of the workers spraying pesticides were not equipped with proper safety gears. It was also doubted that child labour may also have been a practice in some of these estates. On the basis of this report, several of the multinational tea giants agreed to work for the betterment of the people there.

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