

CHAPTER 4

COOLIE AND TWO LEAVES AND A BUD: THE 'SAGA' OF THE COOLIES

Introduction:

In pre-Independent India, there was rampant exploitation of the poor labourers who worked in the cotton industries and the tea gardens. Though law forbade it, the parents often let their underage sons and daughters work inside the industries and tea gardens to enhance the family earnings. The womenfolk also came forward to work with their husbands so that they could live a comfortable life. However, they had to face various abuses at the hands of their employers. The labourers received wage payments for their work. The meagre amount of wage the workers received was not sufficient to live with ease. Often, the labourers were forced to borrow money from the moneylenders to make both ends meet. The practice of borrowing money at high rate of interest from the moneylenders led the labourers into trouble, as they could not repay their loan in time. Moreover, the labourers had to satisfy the foremen and the sardars of the industry for their jobs by giving bribes. The labourers were in constant fear of losing their jobs in the industry if they failed to bribe the foremen who served as the intermediaries between the authority and the labourers. Hence, they wielded great power over the labourers.

Besides, the plantation labourers were duped into the plantation sites by the sardars who helped the plantation authority by bringing labourers from distant places by offering false promises of land and other rewards. The plantation authority preferred the family as a whole to work in the plantations. When the labourers reached the plantation

site, they were almost regarded as prisoners. The wage of the plantation labourers was lesser than the industrial labourers. Very young children were also employed in the tea plantations. The labourers often faced physical abuse from the sardars and the managers if they tried to disagree with the authority. The women labourers suffered from sexual exploitation at the hands of the managers of the tea gardens. They lived in very unhygienic condition, which often led to their premature death. In fact, the plantation labourers were forced to live a hellish life inside the tea plantation gardens.

Mulk Raj Anand's two early novels—*Coolie* and *Two Leaves and A Bud* provide a realistic portrayal of the exploitation of the poor labourers and their real hard work. These labourers were forced to accept a meagre amount of wage for their hard work following which they were unable to live a healthy life. They suffered mutely without staging any protest against their exploitation. It is on the basis of such a gory background that this chapter shall attempt to analyse the condition of the labourers in the household work, inside the industry, and in the tea plantation gardens. The level of discontent of the labourers caused by their exploitation, and the manner in which they react to such exploitations are also sought to be explored with textual references.

Brief Outline of the Novels:

C is the tragic story of an adolescent boy Munoo. The novel is centred round the character called Munoo whose parents were dead, and so he was living with his uncle Daya Ram. To improve his financial condition, Daya Ram took Munoo to Sham Nagar and put him under the custody of Babu Nathoo Ram as a domestic help. In Sham Nagar, Munoo had to face the inhuman treatment of Nathoo Ram and his wife Bibi Uttam Kaur. Unable to bear such treatment, he fled to Daulatpur. On his journey to

Daulatpur, he met a kind-hearted person Prabha Dayal and lived with him. Prabha Dayal had a pickle making industry and Munoo started to work there. Prabha and his wife Parbati showered their love on Munoo. However, Prabha's business collaborator Ganpat made life difficult for Munoo. Ganpat cheated Prabha leading to the closure of the pickle factory. Munoo's ill luck returned as Prabha had to leave for his native place on doctor's advice to regain his health.

From Daulatpur, Munoo went to Bombay to have a better future. He was fascinated by the enchanting stories of affluence in Bombay. However, soon he became aware of the hard realities of city life. In Bombay, he met an old man Hari and his family. With the assistance of Hari, he got a job in Sir George White Cotton Factory. While working in the Cotton Mill, he made friendship with Ratan the wrestler. Ratan influenced Munoo a great deal which might have resulted in the emergence of a more mature Munoo, but the communal riot in Bombay brought about an abrupt end to their relationship. Amidst the riot, Munoo met with an accident, and Mrs. Mainwaring brought him to Simla. In Simla, as a domestic help and rickshaw puller of Mrs. Mainwaring, he lived a very hard miserable life. Such hard work took toil on him and the condition of his health deteriorated considerably. Finally, he breathed his last suffering from tuberculosis. In *C*, "Anand's indictment is against the society as a whole...The economic exploitation of the proletariat by a few egoistic, irrational, inhuman and cruel individuals very succinctly becomes the essence of Munoo's misfortunes" (Asnani, 1985, p.16).

The other novel *TLAB* began with the protagonist of the novel Gangu's journey along with his wife Sajni, son and daughter Buddhu and Leila from his native place Hoshiarpur to Macpherson tea estate in Assam. Sardar Buta lured them to Assam telling them about the tea estate utopia. However, Gangu and his family members worked very

hard to earn their livelihood. While working in the tea-estate, he lost his wife Sajni during the outbreak of malarial epidemic. He was so poor that he was unable to collect money to bear the expenses of her funeral rites. He asked for help from every quarter but none helped him in his ordeal. Later, he went to the village bania to borrow money in interest. Gangu suffered a lot because of the exploitation of the moneylenders and the landlords. There was a sudden quarrel in the tea-estate between two coolie women, which resulted in a riot. The Assistant Manager Reggie Hunt put down the quarrel ruthlessly. The coolies went to meet the Manager of the tea-estate Mr. Croft Cooke to seek redress to their grievances. However, it was observed as an indication of the impending mutiny and therefore, the police and the army were summoned. The kindhearted English doctor De La Havre was sacked from his service for supporting the cause of the coolies. Later, Gangu's daughter Leila fell a victim to the evil desire of Reggie Hunt. He was a womaniser and unable to control his lust, he chased Leila to her hut. Gangu arrived there to rescue his daughter from the clutches of Reggie. However, he was killed by Reggie mercilessly. In the trial, Reggie was acquitted by Justice Mowberly and a jury by majority votes. Thus, the novel *TLAB* tells the story of exploitation of the poor working class people. In exposing the social evils of his time, Anand handled the theme of exploitation very realistically.

Social Discontent and Subdued Spirit of Rebellion in *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and A Bud*:

Munoo of *C*, was an orphan boy from Kangra hills. His father was a peasant whose plot of land was usurped by the landlord of the village:

He had heard of how the landlord had seized his father's five acres of land because the interest on the mortgage covering the unpaid rent had not been forthcoming when the rains had been scanty and the harvests bad. (Anand, 1993, p. 2)

His uncle and aunt, both of them treated him cruelly, and to improve their financial condition, he was almost sold out to Nathoo Ram. At the tender age of fourteen, his uncle dislodged him from his native village. At that moment, he was studying at the fifth standard. Had he completed his study, he could have shown better understanding in handling the course of events in his later life. Without education, his actions were mainly governed by instincts.

When Munoo reached town with his uncle, he knew that a different life was waiting for him: "Perhaps the customs in the towns are different" (Anand, 1993, p. 13). He became a domestic help in the household of a Bank sub-accountant Babu Nathoo Ram in Sham Nagar. His wife Bibi Uttam Kaur was very cruel. She debarred him from taking part in any celebration in the family. He was not even allowed to use the toilet as he was a rustic. He was turned into a slave from all respects. She told him: "You are being paid a good wage, more money than you ever saw in your whole life in the village, more money, in fact, than your mother or father ever saw" (Anand, 1993, p. 23). Her continuous nagging made Munoo feel: "He was to be a slave, a servant who should do the work, all the odd jobs, someone to be abused, even beaten..." (Anand, 1993, p. 31).

The cruel behaviour of Nathoo Ram and his wife forced Munoo to approach his uncle Daya Ram, who had little sympathy for him to listen to his requests. He said: "You are their servant...You must not mind what they say. You must grow up and work. You

have had too easy a life at home” (Anand, 1993, p. 32). In fact, he threatened to kill Munoo if he would refuse to live in Nathoo Ram’s household. Daya Ram retorted: “I have neither sympathy nor food for you” (Anand, 1993, p. 48). So, he had to return to Nathoo Ram’s house. In such circumstances, he was convinced of his servitude: “It did not occur to him to ask himself what he was apart from being a servant, and why he was a servant and Babu Nathoo Ram his master. His identity he took for granted” (Anand, 1993, p. 34). Unfortunately, there was nobody beside him to offer love and sympathy. When he found no alternative to change his position as a slave, he was forced to think: “he promised himself again that he would be a good servant, a perfect model of a servant” (Anand, 1993, p. 36). At such a tender age, he was forced to accept the hard realities of life.

Munoo lived a carefree and easy life in his village, and he had not got enough time to adapt himself with the hard and complex life of a domestic hand. One day, out of an innocent prank, he bit his master’s eldest daughter Sheila’s cheek. He did not have any evil motif behind such an action. He did it inadvertently but he had to pay a heavy price for this offence. Bibi Uttam Kaur went prudish in this regard. Her outburst made Babu Nathoo Ram furious towards his servant and so he beat Munoo severely. Such inhuman treatment at the hands of his master was intolerable for him. So, he decided to leave Babu Nathoo Ram’s household. Munoo realised:

...there seemed to be only two kinds of people in the world. Caste did not matter...The Babus are like the Sahib-logs, and all servants look alike: there must be two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor. (Anand, 1993, pp. 55-56)

After Sham Nagar, Munoo went to Daulatpur. There he worked in a pickle factory owned by Prabha Dayal whom he met in train. Prabha provided him food and shelter. It was a hard life working in the pickle factory. Ganpat, the business partner of Prabha, was a cruel man who used to beat his labourers often forcing them to work incessantly: “They worked long hours, from dawn to past midnight, so mechanically that they never noticed the movement of their own or each other’s hands” (Anand, 1993, p. 92). While working there, he often faced physical torture from Ganpat. Thus, there was no change of his fate in Daulatpur:

It was a dark, evil life. He rose early at dawn before he had had his full sleep out, having gone to bed long after midnight. He descended to work in the factory, tired, heavy-lidded, hot and limp, as if all the strength had gone out of his body and left him a spineless ghost of his former self. (Anand, 1993, p. 89)

Later, Ganpat cheated his business partner Prabha in financial transaction, which ultimately brought about Prabha’s downfall. In this way, Prabha was forced to leave Daulatpur with his wife Parbati. Munoo suffered from another misfortune in his life.

Then Munoo came to Bombay to earn his livelihood. Though he was hopeful of a better future, the elephant driver with whom he came to Bombay, cautioned him: “The bigger a city is, the more cruel it is to the sons of Adam...You have to pay even for the breath that you breathe” (Anand, 1993, p. 152). When he observed beggars and coolies on the streets, Munoo became aware of the grim future that was waiting for him in Bombay. He understood the reality of Bombay, which he was going to face: “So, after all there is no money to be picked up in the streets of Bombay...because there are poor people

here, too” (Anand, 1993, p. 161). Like in Daulatpur, in Bombay also, he saw poverty-stricken coolies. At night, he observed multitudes of coolies lying on the footpath:

The bodies of numberless coolies lay strewn in tattered garbs. Some were curled up into knots, others lay face downwards on folded arms, others were flat on their chests, pillowing their heads on their bundles or boxes, others crouched into corners talking, others still huddled together at the doorsteps of closed shops, or lay on the boards in a sleep.(Anand, 1993, p. 162)

With the help of his newfound friend Hari, Munoo got his much-anticipated job in Sir George White Cotton Mills. Hari worked there earlier and then went to his native place to bring his wife, his son and daughter. His intention was to engage all of them in the factory. When he became successful in securing jobs for all his family members, he expressed:

They must learn to wake up early. They will have to go to work at the factory before sunrise every morning. Why did I go away from Bombay four months ago, if not to fetch them, so that, like the children of other men, they should begin to earn their living. Thus only can we make both ends meet. (Anand, 1993, p. 167)

The foreman of the cotton mill asked for commission because he offered them job in the factory. According to Hari, it was almost a tradition to do so: “Paying a commission to the foreman is a question of self-preservation. He is the most important man in the factory” (Anand, 1993, p. 175). Every worker in the factory tried to satisfy the foreman because of his important position in the factory. Deep inside their heart, they were not

satisfied to do so but it was their compulsion to obey him. Hari commented in this regard:

...he charged every worker in the factory a price for the gift of a job, a price which went up if there were more men about than there were vacancies to fill; and that, incidentally, he ran a moneylender's business; that lastly he was a landlord who owned hundreds of straw huts in the neighbourhood and rented them out to the coolies at a profit. (Anand, 1993, p. 175)

However, the story of workers like Munoo helps to understand the fact that despite facing atrocities in the factory from various quarters, the factory workers could not protest. They did not want to dissatisfy the mill authority. In Bombay, it was very difficult to get a job, and the factory workers were constantly in fear of losing it. They worked for twelve hours a day but when they returned to their huts or tenements, they could not get any solace. It seemed that existence was a kind of burden for the labourers:

A twelve- hour day wears one down. And to live in a fifteen-by-ten room, cramped on the floor, amid the smoke and smell of cooking and of the food eaten, amid a chaos of pots and pans, old beds and crawling children, in the publicity of the common staircase, the common washing place, the common latrines, and amid the foul smell of sewages that filtered over the pathways, conduces to comradeship. (Anand, 1993, p. 208)

Munoo felt happy after getting a job in the Cotton Mill, but such happiness was momentary. The coolies and workers of the Cotton Mill were treated in ruthless manner, which was led to Munoo's understanding that the land of equality and freedom

could never be found. The colliers and workers were forced to work for eleven hours a day with meagre wages. After returning from the factory, the workers got hardly any time for recreation. The women folk had to make themselves busy in cooking for the supper. Such a hectic schedule sucked away the vitality of the workers:

At night, when the six o'clock whistle blew, there was the walk home again. It was eight or nine by the time, the females, tired after the day's work, could cook a meal. To get eight hours sleep it was necessary to go to bed immediately. It was not hard to go to sleep. These men did not need veronal for their insomnia. The twelve hours a day was a sedative. (Anand, 1993, p. 208)

Coolies did not protest against their exploitation for fear of revenge and punishment. Ratan the wrestler was the only worker in the cotton mill who dared to show his discontent to the mill authority, as he shouted at the foreman: "you may be a foreman, but you have no right to beat the mill employees!" (Anand, 1993, p. 201). Ratan asked the labourers of the Cotton Mill to join the Trade Union to give vent to their pent up feelings: "You ought to be manly enough to stand up for yourself. Alternatively, you should come with me and join the Union. You are all so lethargic" (Anand, 1993, p. 207). Yet Ratan also suffered at the hands of the mill authority as he lost his job because of his dissenting attitude. Thus, he was forced to go to the Trade Union office for help but the cold response that he received from the Trade Union leaders was very disappointing.

It was Sauda, a fiery leader of the All India Trade Union Congress who promised to help him to fight against the injustices done to him by the mill authority. Sauda

delivered his speech narrating the problems of the mill workers. He was discontented because of the silence of the workers regarding their difficulties. He commented:

Do not all the insults you people suffer rouse you from the apathy to which you have succumbed? Does not all the misery, all the degradation you suffer rouse you to indignation?...Look at the room you live in,...Is it big enough to house you all? And thousands of you are content to live in these tenements, and straw huts which have no paved road, no playground. How long can you live like this? At the best six months and then you will go home to die. And those children of yours sweat hard all day for an anna and get stunted and never grow up. When will you wake up? When will you come to your senses? (Anand, 1993, p. 219)

Sauda explained the workers about the reason of their suffering. In his opinion there was a broad division in the society between the rich and the poor. The workers were poor because they did not know how to fight for their rights. They also did not have respect for themselves. Sauda's words are worth quoting:

There are only two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor, and between the two, there is no connection. The rich and the powerful, the magnificent and the glorious, whose opulence is built on robbery and theft and open warfare, are honoured and admired by the whole world, and by themselves. You, the poor and the humble, you, the meek and the gentle, wretches that you are, swindled out of your rights, and broken in body and soul, you are respected by no one, and you do not respect yourselves. (Anand, 1993, p. 233)

He wanted to raise the sunken souls of the workers so that they could muster enough courage to go against the mill authority. He realised that the workers were full of discontent but they could not express it due to fear of punishment. He opined that the labourers should unite themselves against all sorts of the injustices. He urged the workers to demonstrate their discontent by staging protest against the mill authority:

Stand up, then, stand up for your rights, you roofless wretches, stand up for justice! Stand up, you frightened fools! Stand up and fight! Stand up and be the men that you were meant to be and don't crawl back to the factories like the worms that you are! Stand up for life, or they will crush you and destroy you altogether! Stand up and follow me! From tomorrow you go on strike and we will pay you to fight your battle with the employers! (Anand, 1993, p. 233)

Sauda was acutely aware of the pathetic living condition of the mill workers. In spite of working hard all day long, there were many shortcomings in the lives of the coolies. He sorted out the primary necessities of the mill workers in a charter of demands and asked the workers to recite them along with him as a mark of solidarity amongst them:

'We are human beings and not soulless machines'

.....

'We want the right to work without having to pay bribes.'

'We want clean houses to live in.'

'We want schools for our children and crèches for our babies.'

'We want to be skilled workers.'

'We want to be saved from the clutches of the moneylenders.'

‘We want a good wage and no mere subsistence allowed if we must go on short work.’

‘We want shorter hours.’

‘We want security so that the foreman cannot dismiss us suddenly.’

‘We want our organizations to be recognized by law.’ (Anand, 1993, p. 234)

However, the communal riot in Bombay destroyed the spirit and prospect of strike by the workers in the cotton mills. Munoo lost his job in the cotton mill due to this communal riot. While trying to save his life from the rioters, Munoo met with an accident when a car knocked him down. Mrs. Mainwaring, the owner of the car, decided to take Munoo to her residence in Shimla for better treatment. In Shimla, Munoo slowly recovered and passed his time as one of the servants of Mrs. Mainwaring. Sometimes, he worked as her rickshaw-puller, and sometimes as a domestic help. The difficult nature of work took toll on him and his health deteriorated. Unfortunately, while working for Mrs. Mainwaring, he suffered from tuberculosis. He did not recover from this deadly disease and ultimately succumbed to it: “in the early hours of one unreal white night he passes away- the tide of his life having reached back to the deeps” (Anand, 1993, p. 282).

Thus, *C* is an account of the misfortune of Munoo, who had to accept the hard realities of life at an early age. Munoo’s suffering was heart rending, as he was all alone in the wide world. He was forced to fend for himself from a very early age. His travails gave testimony that the world had been governed by monetary considerations. It was observed that those who were poor and alone had to suffer from the lack of money and support. His uncle Daya Ram sent him to work in Babu Nathoo Ram’s house only for money and other favours. He did not consider that Munoo was his nephew. Babu

Nathoo Ram and his wife treated Munoo inhumanely because they were paying his uncle Daya Ram for his services. It was as if they could do any injustice and harm to him for he was their servant. His poverty gave them opportunity to exploit him mercilessly. Same kind of exploitation was noticed when he was living with Prabha. While working in Prabha's pickle factory, Munoo and other workers were cruelly treated by Ganpat who was Prabha's partner.

Munoo did what he wished to do in his life. He rolled around according to his wishes. Whenever he faced problems, he escaped from it. He never tried to confront his adverse fortune. Of course, occasionally he wanted to show his anger and discontent but he could not revolt for fear of more disgrace. He was self-conscious, and it was his self-pity, which often overpowered him. Like any other young boy, he could well understand ill-treatment and injustice, and whenever he was subjected to such behaviour, he was deeply hurt. He did not revolt against Babu Nathoo Ram in Sham Nagar, Ganpat in Daulatpur, and Jimmie Thomas in Bombay. But, he had necessary pride and self respect, which directed him to leave Nathoo Ram's household. When he remembered that he belonged to warrior caste, he became conscious of his dignity and wanted to give befitting reply to the insults. Munoo was aware that he was not in a position to struggle against his conditions. However, when he observed someone fighting against injustice, instantly he wanted to emulate that person. He wanted to be like the wrestler Ratan because Ratan faced life with unruffled confidence. Therefore, he said that he would grow up to be a strong man like the wrestler. Like Munoo, another character Hari was also remained subdued because of his poor financial condition. He was bent down by the burden of responsibility of looking after his family.

He was illiterate and did not have the courage to protest against injustices for fear of punishment. It was observed that on many occasions, he was protected by Ratan.

Unlike Munoo, Ratan and Sauda championed the causes of the oppressed labourers. Ratan defended Hari and saved him from the clutches of moneylender Nadir Khan's men. Ratan got respect from his opponents due to his physical power. Sauda severely criticised the capitalists mill owners. He was extremely vocal in support of the mill labourers. He tried to raise the spirit of the mill labourers against the exploitation of the mill owners. He showed them how they had been treated by their employers like animals without showing any consideration for them. He was a leader with tremendous oratorical skill. He delivered his speech with authority and was able to influence his listeners by appealing to their conscience. His revolutionary speech, which was addressed to the labourers, could be regarded as one of the most influential speeches in the Indian English novel.

Gangu, the protagonist of the novel *TLAB*, is taken for discussion in this chapter. He is an illiterate peasant. He came to work in the Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam with his wife Sajani, his children Leila and Buddha. He was forced to leave his native place of Hoshiarpur because he lost his landed property at the hands of the village moneylender:

...the hut as well as his three acres were part of the joint family property, and Lalla Beli Ram, the vakil, had told him that, as the law of Angrezi Sarkar stood, the debt incurred by one brother of a family was binding on another...how the interest on my younger brother's mortgage piled up, so that all my three acres and my hut as well went just as a free gift to Seth Badri Dass.(Anand,1998, p.3)

After losing everything in Hoshiarpur, he had no other alternative but to leave his native place to earn his livelihood. Later, Gangu became a victim of Sardar Buta's false promises. Buta knew how to entice landless peasants into his fold. His alluring words are like this:

If anyone needs money for something special such as the purchase of a cow, for marriage or for the propitiation of the ancestors' ceremony, the sahibs advance it free of interest, and recover it only gradually. The manager Sahib knows and cares for all his people. He attends to their well-being, and he keeps them happy and contented. (Anand, 1998, p. 4)

He accepted Sardar Buta Singh's cheating with calm resignation. He could do so because of "the religion of fatalism, his faith in which was increased by his knowledge of the inevitability of death, unconsciously inclined him to build a shining ladder between heaven and his lot" (Anand, 1998, p. 172). Gangu knew intuitively that Buta was lying to him but he did not like to break that spell of hope offered to him. It was his neighbour Narain who informed him about the real picture and the cheating ways of the sardars who basically acted as the agents of the tea-planters: "Yes, all the coolies here are brought by the agents of the planters. Not one would come here of his free choice. What curse upon your fate has brought you?" (Anand, 1998, p. 37). He stated that the Sardars of the tea garden were important persons in the tea-estates. The plantation authority considered the Sardars very important because they used to help them in maintaining discipline inside the tea-estate. He expressed: "The sardars are favoured people. What they say goes...The sardars have land to cultivate, but I have none. The manager pays the sardar, the sardar pays me what he likes" (Anand, 1998, p. 171).

Gangu's fortune slanted from bad to worse, and he was miserable at heart. When Gangu and his family earned less than eight annas as the salary of the entire week, he was totally disappointed. All the promises of high wages, free gift of land etc were mere lies. His sheer disappointment could be discerned from the following lines:

What had the family got after almost a whole week's work? It did not even work out at eight annas a day for the whole family: three annas for him, two annas for his wife and daughter, and three pice for his child. Why, in the village he had been able to earn eight annas a day alone by working on the landlords's land when he had lost his own! And the planter Sahib, while giving him the contract, had said that there was no land yet which he could spare to give him for cultivating rice. (Anand,1998, p. 64)

Gangu realised that he committed a big mistake by taking Sardar Buta into confidence. Gangu recalled a proverb with indignation: "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" (Anand, 1998, p.8). Gangu's wife Sajani suffered from malaria and died without getting any treatment. Gangu could not arrange a loan for the cremation. He went to the planter of the tea garden Croft-Cooke for loan, but he was driven away from his office for fear of contamination. Later, he broke his oath of not borrowing money on interest from the Bania and borrowed twenty rupees from him for the funeral rites.

The labourers of the tea garden were forced to work in unsanitary conditions. The tea gardens in Assam were like a prison house and the labourers were like prisoners. Gangu's friend Narain told him about the prison like tea-gardens:

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...The chowkidars go round at night with a lamp and open every door to see if we are all at home. There used to be a roll call every night before I came” (Anand, 1998, p. 38)

There was no escape from the tea gardens because there was close vigil on the movements of the coolies so that they could not escape. Again, the chowkidars used to visit the huts of the coolies at night to ascertain whether they were inside or not.

Gangu’s neighbour, Narain suffered greatly. He used to be subdued easily as he was aware of the punishment he would receive for any dissent. He told Gangu some harrowing incidents of punishment, which took place in the tea gardens of Assam. He compared the tea estate with hell: “...You are in the kingdom of Yama...” (Anand, 1998, p. 214). The labourers were not given any scope to organise themselves into any Union by the tea estate authority. Persons with any link with Trade Unions were debarred from entering into the tea estate. In this regard, Narain said: “The sahibs of the plantations won’t allow its representatives to come and tell us what a trade union is” (Anand, 1998, p. 210). Gangu lost his hope when Narain informed him about the horrible stories of exploitation and subjugation of the coolies by the tea-planters with the help of the police and magistrate. Narain also told Gangu about the fate of twenty coolies who complained the Deputy Commissioner of Jorhat about the violation of the contract. The complaining coolies mysteriously disappeared after their decision to return home. In this way, Gangu became aware of the danger of working in a tea estate. But, unfortunately, his belief in fate led him to relate his misfortune with the Karma of his past lives:

...as in the old days in his village, so, now, he plodded on like an ox all day....detached and forgetful in the Nirvanic bliss of emptiness where the good and evil of fortune seemed the equally just retributions of an inevitable, inexorable fate, imposed by the Omnipotent, Omniscient Providence, of whom Siva and Vishnu and Krishna were the supreme incarnations.” (Anand, 1998, p. 261)

Regarding the suffering of the Indians, Croft Cookes’ daughter Barbara had some important questions: “Why do these swarming, under-nourished, bleary, worm-eaten millions of India suffer so? Is it because the festering swamps of the tropics breed disease, and that they cannot check the tribulations of destiny?” (Anand, 1998, p. 123). She was sympathetic to the sufferings of the coolies because of her close association with De la Havre, her lover. She was well aware of the reality of India where one section of the society suffered from poverty while the other section was living very expensive lives. Echoing Munoo and Sauda, Barbara also talked about the division between the rich and the poor:

The black coolies clear the forests, plant the fields, toil and garner the harvest, while all the money-grubbing, slave driving, soulless managers and directors draw their salaries and dividends and build up monopolies. Therein lies the necessity of revolution in this country. On the one hand, the vast masses, prisoners of so many chains, bearing the physical signs of grief, of lassitude, even of death, and on the other hand, the supercilious rich, wrapped up in their self-assurance and complacency, never once questioning the ideals of glory and power and wealth. (Anand, 1998, p. 124)

John de la Havre, the doctor of the Macpherson tea estate, understood quite well the cruelty of the British officers. H. M. Williams (1973) termed him a “walking capsule of humanism, socialism, progressivism and left-wing idealism” (p.34). He was disgusted with the inhuman treatment meted out to the coolies. He commented: “Man is selfish. Man is evil; there is nothing more horrible in this universe than the cruelty of man to man” (Anand, 1998, p. 128). He was careful in expressing his views regarding the condition of the coolies. The minimum wage that they got was not satisfying for them:

Wages of coolies on the Indian plantations have not changed for the last seventy years. The wages of a coolie in 1870, were five rupees per month. In 1922, the maximum wages of a coolie on the Assam tea plantations did not exceed seven rupees per month (about ten shillings and six pence). (Anand, 1998, pp. 125-126)

De la Havre had sympathy for the labourers. He was aware of the ignorance of the labourers regarding the unhygienic condition of the places where they lived. He remarked, “These coolies didn’t look as if they would require the breathing space of seven hundred cubic feet, or the floor area of thirty-six feet that an ordinary human being requires.” (Anand, 1998, p. 137). He was surprised at the resigned outlook of the labourers. He knew they were illiterate and poor but still there should be a little bit of resistance in them to save themselves from the atrocities of the tea estate authority. He wrote in his notebook: “The present system of plantation labour is a curse and a crime. It is a monstrous crime against humanity” (Anand, 1998, p. 126). When the coolies were beaten badly by Reggie Hunt and his agents, and when one of the labourers died, they were agitated and went to meet De la Havre and told him about the atrocity. De la Havre asked them: “Why do you let them beat you? Why can’t you beat back—all of

you together?” (Anand, 1998, p. 200). One coolie told that they could not hit back because they considered British rulers as their *mai-bap*. De la Havre was angry at such a naivety and told them:

I am not your *mai-bap*; I am like you, a slave of the planters. I do not suffer from them as you do, because they think I am a sahib. They and their like beat the workers of Vilayat in the same way as they beat you. (Anand, 1998, p. 200)

De la Havre helped the coolies to proceed with their march against the tea estate authority. He knew his attempt was futile but still he thought: “he was acting for freedom, for personal liberty and private virtue- that he was acting for the lives of these people.” (Anand, 1998, p. 226).

Emboldened by the company of De la Havre, the coolies decided to complain against Reggie Hunt but when Croft-Cooke and some riflemen stood in front of them their courage betrayed them, “They fell back almost automatically, and stood paralysed, their hearts contracting, their shrivelled hands joined, their heads dizzy with sudden shock of having been caught unawares” (Anand, 1998, p. 205). For helping the coolies, De la Havre was sacked from his service by Croft-Cooke. At such a treatment, he was shocked and he could only utter: “The mutiny has been crushed” (Anand, 1998, p. 227). He did his best for the sake of the tea estate labourers. He even sacrificed his love for Barbara and also his job but his sacrifice went in vain. His failure was not because of his limitations but due to the lack of unity amongst the tea estate labourers. The tea estate labourers lacked unity amongst themselves. They were illiterate and they had no leader amongst them to show them the right path. Thus, their aspirations were always subdued.

TLAB also provided a realistic picture of physical exploitation and molestation of coolie women. Reggie Hunt, the Assistant Manager of the Tea garden had lustful eyes on the wives and daughters of the coolies. Premila Paul (1983) termed him “the human python” (p. 37). Narain candidly revealed Reggie Hunt’s character: “He is a very *budmash* sahib. He is always drunk. In addition, he has no consideration for anyone’s mother or sister. He is openly living with three coolie women!...Nobody’s mother or sister is safe in this place” (Anand, 1998, p. 42). The coolie women tried to keep themselves away from his ugly glances. He brought coolie woman to his quarter without any shame. The wife of Neogi was the most recent victim to the carnal desire of Reggie. His indomitable lust is expressed through the following lines:

She yielded to him, her body limp and contorted into a silent despair, her eyes a gaze at the wild sensual heat in his face, her heart turned inwards at the cold virginity that seemed to freeze her at the contact with him. He made a sudden up charge, as if he swung her body hard, hard, harder, tearing the flash of her breasts, biting her cheeks and striking her buttocks till she was red and purple like a mangled corpse, ossified into a complete obedience by the volcanic eruption of the lust. (Anand, 1998, p. 83)

In one fateful afternoon, Reggie saw Gangu’s daughter Leila inside the tea garden plucking tea buds. He was fascinated by her teenage beauty and yearned for possessing her. His lust for Leila is quite visible in the following lines: “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 flutter in the hands of the shikari” (Anand, 1998, p. 121). An innocent teenager Leila was terrified by Reggie’s advances and she ran away from the garden towards her hut. He was mad with lust and followed her. However, she escaped

from the attack and reached her hut. When her father Gangu arrived at the scene, Reggie fired at him with his revolver. Gangu's suffering ended with his tragic death at the hands of Reggie Hunt.

The trial for the charge of murder exposed the blatant partiality of Mr. Justice Mowberley and a jury of seven Europeans and two Indians. They acquitted Reggie Hunt from the charge of murdering the plantation coolie Gangu. In this regard, Asnani (1985) commented: "Evil is thus shown triumphing and leaving no room for goodness of life" (p.19). The suffering and misery of the coolies did not get any attention from the tea estate authorities. The tea estate authority was the ruler and the coolies were ruled, apart from that, there was no consideration for anything in the bleak alien world of the Macpherson tea estate. In this context, Meenakshi Mukherjee remarked: "Anand is a rational humanist...believing in the power of sciences to improve material conditions, in progress and in the equality of all men, and his manifest intention is to propagate his beliefs through his novel" (Mukharjee, 1971, p. 7).

Thus in novels like *C* and *TLAB* Anand beautifully exposes the tragic exploitation of the poor labourers as well as their labour. He vividly described the sufferings of the poor in these two novels. Munoo of *C* lost his life due to poverty and rampant exploitation of his labour. Munoo's tragic fate reflected the difficulty of the poor masses of India who suffered from poverty and starvation and ultimately succumbed to death because they were deprived of their due share of wage for their labour. Again, the life of the coolies in Macpherson Tea garden was miserable. Their woes and miseries were due to the ruthless exploitation by the tea-planters. It can be stated that the novel clearly reflected what man had made of man. It was the realistic portrayal of the indentured Indian coolies and their inhuman suffering inside the tea garden. Therefore,

Niven (1978) stated, “These people are leading unrewarded, uncreative lives. They are cogs in a machine...” (p. 88). Gangu was made landless by the selfish Sahukar Seth Badri Das, and his lawyer also cheated him by misinterpreting the law. Then he was being lured into the Macpherson tea garden by Sardar Buta, he reached Assam with his wife and children to have a bright future. However, it was the fierce oppression of the tea planters and their fiendish agents who destroyed all his hopes and ultimately brought about his untimely tragic end. The tea planters never treated him and other coolies as human being rather they were treated as beasts of prey. Ravi Kumar’s (2005) comment about this novel is worth quoting: “A fierce denunciation of man’s cruelty to man, *Two Leaves and A Bud* projects Anand’s humanism, his rejection of his theory of Karma and God and the destructive effects of poverty and fatalism” (p. 115).

Summing up:

It can be argued that the novel *C* becomes an exposition of the division between the rich and the poor. Here, money is the most important factor in deciding any relationship. *C*, therefore, can also be regarded as a chronicle of the exploitation of the poor and their labour. Anand portrays the lives of coolies and workers with utmost sincerity. The downtrodden were too weak to stage any kind of revolt against exploitation. They were trying to save themselves by retreating from the scenes of exploitation, not by facing and fighting against the same. Therefore, H. M. Williams (1973) commented that the novel emerged “as an anguished cry, an indictment of the cruelty of the he system, and a declaration of pity for the hero, the betrayed and depraved Munoo” (p. 30). *TLAB* also exposed the cruelty of the tea planters and their treatment of the coolies as sub human beings. The poverty-stricken coolies were subjected to humiliation and exploitation

without having any respite. It also reflected the dreadful condition of social deprivation of the coolies, intrusive character of the tea garden authority, and the exploitation of the labour. Gangu was subdued from the very beginning of his entry into the tea estate and he never got redemption from his sufferings. The novel forcefully represented the predicament of the helpless coolies who were exploited in every possible way at every step of their life.

In the foregoing discussion, it is observed that the coolies and labourers were exploited by the rich and powerful of the society. It is clear, the helpless coolies and the labourers were forced to tolerate all the exploitation because it was the question of their survival. They were unorganised and scattered. It is true that discontent was dormant in them, but it could not become collective discontent due to the atrocities of the authorities. The tragic fate of Munoo and Gangu culminating in their death could raise the issue of inhuman treatment meted out to the poor and dispossessed by the rich and powerful and would stir the conscience of man to stand united against such treatment. The novels seemed to carry the message that the poor labourers should get their due share of wages for their hard work and labour. When it would happen in reality, most of their problems would go away. Therefore, it can be stated that love and humanism would be the only key to solve the problems of the exploitation of the poor labourers. Asnani's (1985) comment in this regard is worth quoting when he said that Anand "pointed out social conflicts and ills, not because he champions any abstract social theory, but because he has seen and experienced and felt them intimately in his own surroundings" (p. 21).

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