

CHAPTER 5

THE LAL SINGH TRILOGY: THE LOSS OF PEASANTRY

Introduction:

The policy of the British Government to collect revenue of farmland through cash was largely responsible for the exploitation of the peasants by moneylenders and landlords. B. S. Saini remarked, “The advent of Pax-Britanica...the village organization as a self-sufficient unit was the first to disappear under the stress of new economic factors” (B.S. Saini, 1975, p. 41). The British was relentless in exploiting the rural peasants with the help of its agents- cunning moneylenders and greedy landlords. The peasants were forced directly or indirectly to borrow money for the sake of paying taxes and other requirements. About the unprecedented poverty of the peasants, Khushwant Singh remarked:

...the 1870’s ushered in an era of peasant indebtedness which had never been known in the country before...elaborate legal system introduced by the British contributed towards the impoverishment of the peasantry and the enrichment of moneylenders and lawyers.” (Khuswant, 1966, pp. 151-152)

Likewise, regarding the condition of the peasants, Jawaharlal Nehru commented: The peasantry were a blind poverty-stricken, suffering mass, resigned to their miserable fate and sat upon and exploited by all who came in contact with them-the Government, landlords, money-lenders, petty officials, police, lawyers, priests” (Nehru, 1936, p. 48). In 1920, Nehru visited Pratapgarh, and he was shocked to observe the miserable condition of the peasants. In his own words: “a new picture if India...naked, starving,

crushed and utterly miserable” (Nehru, 1936, p. 52). This actual event was incorporated by Anand in his *The Sword and the Sickle*.

Mulk Raj Anand had deep love and sympathy for the peasant folk, which can be traced back to his mother who came from the family of a peasant. Anand had deep attachment with his maternal uncle and grandfather whom he observed from close quarters. As a child, the life style and actions of his father influenced him very much. When he became a writer, those past memories assisted him greatly in portraying the lives of the peasants of Punjab in the early years of twentieth century. In his famous Lal Singh Trilogy, Anand portrayed the condition of the peasants and how the peasants were forced to live in inhuman condition. Anand stated:

I had always felt that the simple hard working folk on the land were more innocent than the clever businessmen of the towns. In addition, the Sikh villagers’ Sat Bachan mentality of service seemed to me always spiritually nobler than the world of work through cash-nexus, which was prevailing in the cities. And yet the devotees, who toiled from dawn to dusk, were mostly indigent, scratching their little land, for small gain and constantly being deprived of what little they had by the money-lenders, the absentee landlords, and the Sarkar, whose mainstay was the land revenue. These big eyed often hollow-cheeked children of the soil took so little out of the land they tilled for the amount of work they put in. (Anand, 1973, pp. 89-90)

The peasants did their best to earn their livelihood with hard work and honesty. However, their simplicity and honesty did not save them from the clutches of the exploiters. In this chapter, a detailed investigation has been made regarding how the

simpleminded peasants were exploited and duped by various land lords, money lenders, religious guru and above all by the representatives of the British government, and how they had to remain mute observers of all sorts of inhuman atrocities.

Through these three novels *TV*, *ATBW*, and *TSATS*, Anand brought to the forefront the miserable condition of the peasants. The settings of *TV* and *TSATS*'s are in India, whereas the setting of *ATBW* is in the war torn Europe in the World War I. *TV* is about the dissatisfaction and discontent of Punjabi peasants. *ATBW* exposed the hypocrisy of the British government which left the helpless peasants exploited and forced them to fight for the British army. *TSATS* is about the revolutionary spirit of the peasants and their sacrifice for the sake of their right. The novel also exposed some of the leaders who claimed to work for the peasants but in reality, they were working for their own good. All the three novels, as a whole became a human document of suffering of the peasants. They can also be treated as the testament of the ruthless exploitation of the Indians by the British Government from all corners—political, social, religious etc.

Outline of The Lal Singh Trilogy—*The Village, Across the Black Waters and The Sword and the Sickle*:

These three novels in the Lal Singh Trilogy poignantly represented the life of the peasants of Punjab in the Pre-independence India. These novels are interlinked through the actions of the protagonist Lal Singh a Punjabi boy of the village Nandpur. The first novel of the Trilogy *TV* is the gripping story of the misery of the Punjabi peasants interspersed with the exploits of the adolescent protagonist Lal Singh or Lalu. The novel begins with the introspection of Lal Singh's father Nihal Singh regarding the change in the lives of the peasants. Nihal Singh was discontented with many things, of

which his primary concern was with the exploitation of the peasants by the village landlord and the village moneylender. Lal Singh was sent to Albert Mission High school, where he studied up to class eight. He was having progressive outlook and often showed his displeasure at the traditional beliefs and rituals. Many a times, he found himself at loggerheads with his parents and the village community members. His father Nihal Singh's conflict with the village landlord Harbans Singh had severe consequences for him because he had to leave his village Nandpur. Later he enlisted himself in 68th Rifles of the British Indian army to save himself from the police. Tragedy awaited Lal Singh as his elder brother Sharm Singh was hanged for killing land lord's son and his father breathed his last because of this family misfortune of losing his eldest son. The novel ended with the departure of Lal Singh with his regiment for France to take part in the World War I.

The second novel of the Trilogy is *ATBW*. The novel is about the valour of the Indian sepoy in the foreign shores of France. Lal Singh and his companions Daddy Dhanoo, Uncle Kirpu, Subah Singh, Rikhi Ram etc. and other Indian sepoy entangled themselves in the war with the Germans, though they were not aware of the causes of this world war. This may be one of the finest war novels in English with the blatant portrayal of the claustrophobic tension at the battlefield. The ultimate dehumanisation of the sepoy due to the cruel demand of the situation at the battlefield was delineated with precision. At the same time, the novel also portrayed the stringent discipline of the army, which sometimes infringed upon the basic freedom of the sepoy creating much discontent but no rebellion.

TSATS is the third and the last novel of the Lal Singh Trilogy where the revolutionary spirit of the peasants is portrayed in realistic detail. After returning from Germany as a

war prisoner, Lal Singh understood the exploitative nature of the British government because he was released from his duty in the most unceremonious manner. His crime was that he was a war prisoner in Germany. Lal Singh returned to his village but he faced disappointment reaching there as his family household became desolate—his parents and the eldest brother no more, his elder brother turned a sadhu. He observed the result of the war everywhere in all pervasive desolation and wretchedness of the peasants. Amidst such despair, Lal Singh met his childhood love Maya and eloped with her to Rajgarh. The Count Kanwar Rampal Singh offered him hospitality and he soon engrossed himself in the revolutionary ideals of the Count. He became a leader of the landless exploited peasants of Rajgarh and fought for their rights. Lal Singh also met Gandhi and had a conversation with him. But, he was not sure about achieving success through the Gandhian mode of agitation. In the last part of the novel, Lal Singh was imprisoned for the crime of going against the government policy.

Social Discontent and Subdued Spirit of Rebellion in Lal Singh

Trilogy:

Mulk Raj Anand had very high opinion about the peasants. He opined, “The peasant... is India and India the peasant” (Anand, 1942, p. 29). However, the exploitation of the British Government destroyed peasantry and the country as well. The traders and landlords were the vicious agents of the British Government in the business of exploitation. The helpless peasants were “uprooted from the land by the inexorable pressure of their three oppressors: the Sarkar, the landlord and the moneylender” (Anand, 1942, p. 68). Anand’s awareness of peasant’s revolutionary capacity came to him through his mother as she used to sing an inspiring peasant song first sung by

Banke Dayal, the editor of *Jhang Sayal*: “Take care of your turban, O peasant” (Sharma, 1971, p. 51). The song urged the peasants to unite and prepare for supreme sacrifice for the sake of the country and for one’s own self-respect. The song kindled the patriotic feeling into the peasants and it was instrumental in rallying the peasants for the Kisan revolt of Punjab in 1907.

The novel *TV* opens with the description of Nihal Singh to his son Lal Singh about the meanness of the British government in annexing Punjab to its territory. According to Nihal Singh, the British government was successful in doing so because of the betrayal of some Sikh generals. British government bestowed the traitors with land and other benefits. Nihal Singh told Lal Singh about Teja Singh who was one of the traitors. Teja Singh’s son Harbans Singh was the landlord of their village Nandpur who usurped five acres of land from Nihal Singh:

To make Teja Singh a landlord; think of the iniquity, people. We lost ten of the twenty-five acres we had inherited, through the thuggery by the Sarkar. And after the traitor's death, his son, Harbans, has the effrontery to take another five by producing a false deed... But I will see that the wrong is righted. I will fight this suit about my five acres as I have fought it for ten years.” (Anand, 1960, p. 7)

Nihal Singh was unable to tolerate such injustice on him by the landlord. His decision to fight a legal battle against the injustice spoke of his indomitable character. However, at the same time, he was also naïve to keep faith on the British government in getting justice. The peasants would have been happy with their lot, had they been left undisturbed with their occupation, but such condition was hard to think of under the

British rule. Nihal Singh's wife Gujri sadly commented: "It is a terrible world in which only thieves and robbers seem to prosper" (Anand, 1960, p. 22). There was all round exploitation from all quarters. The peasants lost all hope and Nihal Singh was forced to utter: "The pleader thugs you, the seth counts so quickly, you can't tell the figures and the policia wants his palm greased before he lets the cart go past the custom" (Anand, 1960, p. 22). Anand portrayed Nihal Singh's abject poverty, and while doing so, he delineated the deplorable condition of the peasants due to rampant exploitation. The peasants were illiterate but they understood the intention of the British government. Justice was an illusion when the protector became the perpetrators of injustice. An intelligent peasant Harnam Singh spoke of the action of the government: "The Sarkar is buying up the harvest cheap storing it in its granaries so that it can sell it at a profit" (Anand, 1960, p. 21).

The British government, with the help its agents, made the peasants believe that they should do their best to produce more crops so that they could get extra money for it. Naive peasants believed such promises and invested everything they had on the farmland. However, when the harvesting was done, and because of the abundance of the crops when the price crashed to the lowest, the government showed the real face and bought the crops at the lowest of the price. The condition of the peasants could be well understood when they had to sell the crop at a price, which was one tenth of the price of seed. In this way, the peasants were tricked to mortgage everything they possessed to the cunning moneylenders to repay their debts. Though the peasants were in debt, they never refrain from religious rituals. They were superstitious and believed that by showing respect and offering gifts to the holy man of the village they could earn the blessings of the almighty. Lal Singh's father Nihal Singh was also no exception. He

had reverence for village holy man Mahant Nandgir and sent Lal Singh to offer Mahant a piece of Japanese silk cloth. Lal was never having any good opinion regarding the character of the holy man of the village, as he was aware of the tricks of such men due to his exposure to education at the Church Mission School in Sherkot. Lal opined that the holy man “ate sumptuous food dressed in yellow silks, smoked charas and drank hemp, and if reports were true, whored and fornicated” (Anand, 1960, p. 45).

Lal wanted to work for the betterment of his village. However, in such a tender age, he had no resources and power to do so. At the beginning of *TV*, Lal is shown as an impetuous young man, a beginner in the journey of life. In fact, he is too young to comprehend the complexities of life. With his father and two elder brothers to take the decisions relating to family and financial matters, Lal was almost free to live a life full of happiness in his own way. Then he visited Manbad festival of lights with delight. In a sudden fit of impetuosity, he had his hair cut without thinking about the sacrilege he would commit by violating the religious beliefs of his community. The village community and his own family members were shocked at his conduct. Such an act of hostility against the religious ritual of keeping full head of hair uncut was unprecedented. Subsequently, Lal was dealt with severe actions by the village community for this violation of the religious ritual. Villagers led by landlord's son blackened his face, made him sit on a donkey and paraded him across the village, so that in future no one could dare to violate the sacred religious customs of Sikhism. Young Lal was aghast at such a punishment meted out to him. He expressed his sheer disgust:

That I was born on this land...That my mother gave birth to me while she worked in the fields...that these are my father's fields...I wish I had never been

born...I wish I had been born somewhere else, in some city, in some...in any place other than this village. (Anand, 1960, p. 98)

As a tender young village boy, Lalu's discontented heart could give vent to his pent up feelings only through words.

One day, Lalu accompanied his father Nihal Singh and his eldest brother Sharm Singh to the village moneylender Chaman Lal. They wanted a loan to meet the expenses of Lalu's elder brother Dayal Singh. But, the moneylender was cunning and he refused to sanction the loan amount. He demanded a bond for sanctioning the loan so that he could exact heavy interest on the loan later on. Lalu could sense the trick of the moneylender because he knew the moneylender would take the thumb impression on the bond without writing anything about the loan amount and the interest. Lalu forbade his father to give such a bond to the moneylender. But, his suggestion was not accepted and Nihal Singh and Sharm Singh put their thumb impressions on the bond for the loan. During that time, it was a popular trick adopted by the moneylenders to cheat their customers. Lalu was young but his educated mind was quick to catch this clever trick of the moneylender.

In another occasion, Lalu observed how a Patowari, a government official, who used to collect the land revenue, wanted to travel gratis on a yekka. The yekka driver Jhandu showed his discontent in an appropriate manner: "You expect us to give you everything for nothing as soon as you put on a kot pat-loon or a uniform. And you bully and bluff and swagger about the poor people" (Anand, 1960, p. 124). The abject condition, in which the villagers of Nandpur lived, even appalled Hercules Long, the Deputy Commissioner of Manbad. He was an honest officer, who understood the exploitation

of the British government quite well. Though Mr. Long had good will towards the villagers, he practically could do nothing to lessen the sufferings of the peasants. The Deputy Commissioner had chosen Lalu as the patron-leader of the Boy Scout movement initiated by him. This move was not appreciated by the village landlord and his supporters because it was a prestigious position, particularly because it was offered by a powerful British officer. In case of Lalu, it was something like a dream came true. Though such a duty had nothing to do with the improvement of the condition of the villagers, Lalu accepted this duty because for him it was a matter of pride: “a confirmation of all the vague, impractical plans to reform the village that he had evolved from his own passionate purpose and conviction” (Anand, 1960, p. 142). In the mean time, Lalu was suspected to be in a love relationship with the landlord Harbans Singh’s daughter Maya. The enraged landlord conspired against Lalu forcing him to escape from his beloved village to avoid arrest.

After this incident, Lalu went to Ferozpur and enlisted himself in the army. In the army, Lalu met the peasants who joined the army to make enough money so that they could recover their mortgaged land. While serving in the army, he met Kirpu and Dhanoo, two dispossessed peasants and made friendship with them which enhanced his knowledge of the suffering peasants. Kirpu told his tragedy: “I and my brothers had forty acres of land...It was all lost because there was always drought in the hills of Kangra and the revenue could not be paid” (Anand, 1960, p. 191). Dhanoo also had similar experience to tell which was full of agony and suffering: “animals by the hundreds and men by the thousands suffer a pain beyond endurance in out of the way villages like mine...” (Anand, 1960, p. 193).

These destitute peasants and tenants were wretched human beings without any hope of survival. They were lured into the army by the agents with false promises of reward. When they enrolled themselves in the British Indian army, the dehumanizing treatments of the army officers began. When compared, the Indian army officers were found to be more brutal than the British officers. The peasants who enrolled themselves in the British army found the enclosed spaces of army barracks a veritable hell. They could not understand that in a country which was under foreign rule it was only an illusion to dream of a free space where one can live with dignity. They could only live a life of illusion. They were in such a pathetic situation that they could not even dare to show their displeasure and discontent.

During his first few months' stay with the army, Lalu faced atrocities at the hands of his superiors. In the mean time, Lalu had to return to his village on leave for a few days to meet his father who was bed-ridden. During his absence from the family, many untoward incidents happened. Lalu's eldest brother Sharm Singh was hanged for murdering the landlord's son Hardit. Nihal Singh did his best to save his son but he could not. The whole village was submerged in debt, the peasants were clueless about their next course of action as there was nobody to guide them in such a difficult condition. In spite of such misery and sufferings, the British government was relentless in its agenda of exploiting the peasants. The situation is best expressed through the words of Lalu's uncle Harnam Singh:

The Sarkar should know how to regulate prices and should give guarantees to the farmer against the cheapening of the market. How are we ignorant folk to know the market conditions beforehand? How can we plan the crops so as not to produce too much or too little? But, the Sarkar will not do a thing. It merely

sends down the Patowari to collect rent and takes money on the yield with out bothering about what prices the grain has fetched. (Anand, 1960, p. 213)

Harnam Singh's words echoed the misery of every peasant. It seemed during the time of peace such ruthless exploitation had never occurred in the history of human civilisation. Helpless Lalu decided to return to his regiment at Ferozepur. As the World War I broke out, Lalu had to move with his regiment to Europe.

In the novel *ATBW*, the action started when the soldiers of Indian origin were brought to fight in Europe, they did not know anything about the war which they were going to fight in that alien land. The strange thing was that they even did not know about their enemy. It was a strange war they were going to participate. As soldiers, they obeyed their officers, and that was all they could do, "they were like conscripts, brutalised and willing to fight like trained bulls, but without a will of their own, soulless automations in the executions of the army code" (Anand, 2008, p. 133). The sepoys only joined the army with the hope of earning a good living and to get back their lost dignity:

For when they first joined the army, these legionaries did so because, as the second, third or fourth sons of a peasant family overburdened with debt, they had to go and earn a little ready cash to pay off the interest on the mortgage of the few acres of land, the only thing which stood between the family and its fate. Besides, the soldier pledged to fight the battles of the King-emperor, brought the necessary prestige to keep the local policeman at bay and to bail out brothers, fathers or uncles, who were arrested for non-payment of rent or debt. And, of course, always the proud family imagined that the second, third, fourth son would win promotion, a sudden prize, a grant of land or a life- pension for

conspicuous bravery in battle, and that would help them to pay off all arrears and start clear of all the misery once again with full possession of the land. (Anand, 2008, p. 168)

The naive Indian sepoy in the British army were hoping for the reward they would receive from the British government for their involvement in the war. However, they were totally oblivious of their pathetic condition in the trenches of Flanders in France:

They had already come through the long and weary trail and were now in the stage of waiting in this vast, timeless universe for their fate to fulfill itself as they had been suddenly transplanted into the world of their ancestors where men struggled against the elements, the gods and Destiny” (Anand, 2008, p. 132).

It was as if they were marching against death. Most of Lalu’s companion soldiers met their tragic death in the battlefield. Daddy Dhanoo was killed in the battle while Kirpu was forced to commit suicide due to hypocrisy, intrigues and intimidation inside the barrack. *ATBW* can be regarded as one of the best war novels written in the settings of the First World War. The novel poignantly tells the dehumanizing aspects of war in graphic detail. The Indian peasants turned sepoy were forced to leave their motherland, who were hardly any match to the trained German soldiers, but the bravery they showed on the face of death was truly commendable. Lalu, in such a devastating war atmosphere, was thinking in his usual manners:

He could not believe that ordinary men and women of good sense, and governments of France, England and Germany, which were saner and wiser than the ordinary people over whom they ruled, could be engaged in a war in which

men were being killed and wounded and houses shattered. (Anand, 2008, pp. 92-93)

Lalu's active participation in the war made him aware of the devastation of war. Already he saw numerous deaths in the battlefield. Being horrified at the prospect of annihilation of the Indian sepoy, he inquired introspectively "will a victory be achieved by killing all the soldiers of the enemy or will they just frighten them into surrender?" (Anand, 2008, p. 313). Amidst such horrifying atmosphere, he was also enlightened by the dignified life lived by European farmers like Monsieur Labusiere. He remembered his village Nandpur and the sub-human standard of life lived in the Indian villages. Knowing and feeling the disparity, such comparisons bring forth discontent in Lalu's mind. Of course, a deep prospect of an honourable life was always there in him only if he could successfully survive the war and could achieve a reward.

Lalu had a desire to mould his life according to his own wishes and expectations. However, when he became a sepoy and came to France to live a life inside the trenches where death might be reality at any moment, he understood that his desires could hardly become real until he worked hard for it. It was only after he lived a life of war prisoner in Germany that he became conscious of his capability. In this way, *ATBW* unfurled the sufferings, dissatisfaction and discontent of Indian sepoy engaged in the battlefields of France who ultimately had to sacrifice their lives for the British government.

The last novel of the trilogy, *TSATS* starts with Lalu's return to his motherland. He lived in Germany for five years as a prisoner of war. He was released and came back to India in 1920. When he reached India, he planned:

I don't really want to stay in the new regiment but I would willingly serve a few more years if there is only hope of getting something which would help my family. I would like to start a farm in Vilayati style." (Anand, 1942, p. 20)

However, his hope was soon destroyed when he learnt about his demobilisation. Such an action was natural on the part of British government, because after the war was over, the government hardly needed the services of a prisoner of war. Moreover, justice became a mockery at the hands of British government in earlier instances also. At such a callousness and unexpected turn of events, he was disheartened and discontented. He went to Manabad and accidentally met his childhood friend Gughri from whom he learnt about the tragic disintegration of his family. His parents and his eldest brother were no more alive, his elder brother Dayal Singh embraced ascetic life and became a sadhu. Such a tragic outcome was never expected but he withstood it and remained stoical.

Returning to his native village, Lalu decided to work for the benefit of the villagers, the peasants who were helpless on the face of atrocities and exploitations of the moneylenders, landlords and government officials. An urge for doing his best to the benefit of the peasants was within him. Of course, such feeling was not new for his family as his father often told him how he fought for the Khalsa- the honour of Sikh people. While working for them, he found a way to minimise the memory of his family tragedy: "he must do something for others" (Anand, 1942, p. 73). At such a critical juncture of his life, he met a revolutionary- Professor Verma with whom he had previous acquaintances. Professor Verma told him about count Rampal of Oudh and his intention of helping the peasants: "to organize the peasantry of the big estates in his province into Kisan Sabhas" (Anand, 1942, p. 77). On Professor Verma's request, Lalu decided to accompany him to meet count Rampal.

Meanwhile, Lalu also developed a relationship with the landlord Harbans Singh's widowed daughter Maya, who was indirectly responsible for Lalu's escapade from his village long ago. After getting professor Verma's proposal for working for the liberation of peasants with the Count Rampal, he eloped with Maya to Rajgarh. Of course, he was not sure whether he did the right thing to bring Maya with him when he had undertaken such an important task of working for the benefits of the peasants—"Why, o why, did I encumber myself with a breakable possession like you when I had just succeeded in controlling my own destiny for once?" (Anand, 1942, p. 87).

However, he thought he should select his priority between his love for Maya and his desire to indulge in activities of working for the oppressed peasants. In comparison to his cherished desire to work for the suffering peasants, his love and duty towards Maya became subsidiary. He seemed to understand: "there were no black or white people, no yellow or brown people, not even Francis and Chinis and Japanis, but there were only two races and two religions in the world, the rich and the poor" (Anand, 1942, p. 85). He was impressed by the Count's sympathy for the poor peasants. The Count was against the oppression of the peasants and termed the exploiters "non-cultivating, rent-receiving intermediaries and parasites" (Anand, 1942, p. 20). People from various classes ranging from the evicted tenants, the communists, the intellectuals, and the Congressmen accompanied the Count. These people had different motives while associating themselves with the Count. The Congress people forged good rapport with the Count because of the supporters he had amongst the discontented peasants and the participation of these peasants was most essential for the success of the movements initiated by the Congress. On the other hand, the communists had their own motif of

spreading the ideas of revolution amongst the landless peasants with the help of the Count.

The hypocrisy of some congress leaders was exposed who turned blind eye towards the problems of the peasants. In one such incident, when a young boy died begging and his relatives sought help from the Count for justice, the congress leader Tiwari expressed his inability to do anything for them. In fact, he tried to evade the situation when Lalu proposed to carry the body of the boy to Allahabad for placing it as an evidence of atrocity towards the peasants. Accordingly, they proceeded to Allahabad, but they were obstructed midway by the Nawab's men. A tenant was killed again by the Nawab's men. Lalu along with some companions somehow reached Allahabad. In Allahabad, Lalu met Mahatma Gandhi at Anand Bhawan. He had a conversation with Gandhi and he requested Gandhi to help the landless peasants and tenants fighting for their cause. However, Gandhi had a different plan for the whole of India: "If they render implicit obedience to me their general...then they should believe me when I say that if they spin and wear Khadi and abolish untouchability they will win Swaraj and be free from oppression" (Anand, 1942, p.205). But, Lalu became restless, as Gandhi's reply did not conform to his way of thinking regarding the problems and difficulties of the landless peasants and tenants. He almost lost hope with the action and philosophy of the national leaders in solving the problems and difficulties of the peasants.

Soon, the British government became aware of the developments in Rajgarh and cautioned the Count Rampal not to meddle with the government policies and to keep distance from his unruly companions. Therefore, a village named Kisan Nagar was established to accommodate the landless peasants and evicted tenants. Lalu and his companions were working actively in the pursuit of accommodating the peasants in

Kisan Nagar. A Kisan Sabha was also convened to show off the discontent of the peasants. The peasants grew bold and they ascertained:

They would not pay illegal exactions, would not acquiesce in forced labour, would not sell produce at market prices, and would not pay nazrana even if their refusal invited eviction, would not plough on evicted field, and would not rest till the eviction laws were repealed.” (Anand, 1942, pp. 269-270)

For fear of disturbance, the police intervened in the proceedings of the Kisan Sabha. The police dispersed the peasants. Lalu and his companions were taken into police custody. However, the English magistrate released the revolutionaries because he was apprehensive of riot by the discontented and beaten peasants thronging the Court. The peasants considered it as a vindication of their position and regarded it the beginning of their victory over the tyrannical system.

The British government sensed ensuing trouble and soon Count Rampal and his associates were put under house arrest. The Count refused to obey the order and hence he was arrested and sent to Rae Bareilly. Lalu and other disgruntled peasants decided to demonstrate their protest against the arrest of their leader and marched to Rae Bareilly. The British government was ready for such demonstration of the peasants. The police dealt with the demonstrators violently, firing at them killing many. Many peasants including Lalu were locked-up in the police station. While inside the prison, Lalu went back to his past and asked himself:

Why had a whole generation been wiped off the surface of the earth? He mumbled to himself impatiently as he had often done before. Why were there food riots in Germany? What had happened to the square of land I was promised

by the Sarkar? And why was I demobilized? Why the money famine? Why was the speculation in Bombay not stopped and why was the black money of the contractors not taxed? Why the scarcity, the restlessness, the uncertainty in Vilayat as well as in Hindustan?What is the destiny of man how can I control it? (Anand, 1942, p. 388)

When he thought about the crushed demonstration of Rae Bareilly, enlightenment came to him. While living inside the four walls of the prison, and Lalu thought: “Now is the time to learn the ways of struggle, my love, now is the time to live in and through the struggle...Now is the time to change the world” (Anand. 1942. p. 393). He decided to guide the peasants on the path of achieving their goals through revolution when he would be out of the prison. He knew that the peasants failed because he and other leaders could not guide them properly. Lalu understood that their common enemy was British government and its policy of exploitation. Lalu also found out that he had a definite advantage to lead the landless peasants and evicted tenants because of his peasant ancestry. He decided “to throw himself with great zeal into the work for the peasants, and had become one with them more easily than any one of the leaders” (Anand, 1942, p. 280). He determined to liberate himself from the clutches of fear and to a great extent he was successful in doing so.

Thus, the three novels—*TV*, *ATBW* and *TSATS* are glaring examples of the testament of the exploitation and subjugation of the peasants. The protagonist of these three novels Lalu is the embodiment of discontent, as from the very beginning he expressed his displeasure against the ossified rules and regulations of the society as well as of the religion. Of course, he had to pay the price of his discontent, which was contrary to the social and religious beliefs and rituals. His character is given primary importance to the

analysis because the actions and the events of the novels hovered around him. Lalu's character developed gradually from a naïve village boy to a potent revolutionary. His journey was quite an extraordinary one as he could have remained an unknown village boy of Nandpur village but his sheer will power to defy the odd made him what he was. Because of the versatility of Lalu's Character in these novels Alistair Niven termed him an 'Everyman' (Niven, 1972, p. 48). Elements of discontent in Lal Singh Trilogy are related to the exploitation of the peasants by various agencies of the society like the British government employees, the landlords, the money lenders etc. They might have subdued, but revolutionaries like Lal Singh, Count Rampal, Professor Verma etc. instilled into them an indomitable spirit to fight back against injustices and exploitations.

In this way, the trilogy is about the simple peasants who worked on the land but the fruit of their work had been usurped by the landlords, the moneylenders in connivance with the agents and official of the British government. These three novels of the trilogy not only reflected the shameless exploitation of the peasants but also the resilience of the poor peasants. The peasants were the discontented lot on the face of their exploitation. The novels occupied a broad panorama of life and events of the peasants. It also dealt with politics, history, economics, sociology, religion and folklore. There were different classes of people—peasants, moneylender's government agents and officials, manual workers, landlord, priests, sepoys and their officers, prostitutes, pimps, sadhus etc who contributed to the drama of life in these novels.

It may be argued that Mulk Raj Anand, through these novels, relentlessly attacked the hypocrisies of the society, the Congress leaders, the British government and the Sadhus. Lalu, the protagonist in all the three novels, showed his discontent from the beginning.

Unlike Lalu, other Anandian protagonists—Bakha, Munoo and Gangu were unable to show their discontent. Bakha was uneducated and an untouchable—he was never capable of showing dissent, Munoo was only a coolie to fight against the British government, and Gangu was old and believer of fate. They were passive and did not possess the courage to speak against the authority. But Lalu is different from them as he kept his faith on his peasant ancestry. He was definitely influenced by the brave narratives of his father about his participation in different wars. Lalu's tumultuous spirit was restless when he was a teenager, but after joining the British Indian army, his spirit became steady due to the influence of martial discipline.

Besides, when Lalu was in Germany as prisoner of war, his exposure to revolutionary personalities created a desire in him to work for the exploited and subjugated citizens of India. His demobilisation from the army after his return to India was shocking for him. But, when he returned to his village, he observed the miserable condition of the peasants living the life of destitute. It was an epiphanic moment—a moment of realisation which led him to take his decision to participate actively in liberating the peasant folks. Revolutionary intellectual Professor Verma served the role of a medium in connecting Lalu to the Count Rampal. From a susceptible teenager, Lalu became a mature adult with necessary control over his actions with the lofty ideals of fighting for the cause of the peasants. The Trilogy truthfully reflected the exploitative nature of the British government. But, at the same time, it also demonstrated the attitude of the Indian rulers and leaders who were supporting the British policy of exploiting the peasants for their narrow selfish motives. *TSATS* ends with Lalu's strong belief that in near future, he would be successful by forging strong brotherhood amongst the exploited peasants.

Summing up:

In the Lal Singh Trilogy, it is observed that almost all the major characters such as Lal Singh, his father Nihal Singh, Lal Singh's eldest brother Sharm Singh, Kanwar Rampal Singh expressed their discontent and displeasure quite forcefully. There was rampant exploitation and subjugation of the peasants in the colonial period. The landlords forcefully evicted the tenants, the moneylenders tricked their clients and cheated them, the imperial police force sided with the landlords and the money lenders, and the British government officials exploited everybody with apparent impunity. In the British Indian army, there were nepotism, humiliation and harassment. It was a bleak world of corruption without any respite.

It is observed that though the exploiting and oppressing machineries were strong and malevolent, important characters like Lal Singh, Nihal Singh, Jhandu, Daddy Dhanoo, Uncle Kirpu, Kanwar Rampal Singh etc. never disinclined to do their duties. They were not fearful of the consequences of their actions. They were active and whenever occasion arose, they questioned the validity of such exploitative situations and actions. Unlike the protagonists of *Untouchable*, *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*, these characters of the Lal Singh Trilogy believed in fighting against the unjust order. They were not subdued by the magnitude of the evil however strong it seemed to be. Lal Singh's discontent and protest against the religious hypocrisy, his fight against the landlords, Nihal Singh's unending diatribe against the village land lord, Jhandu's protest against the Patowary, Daddy Dhanoo and Uncle Kirpu's strong resistance against the atrocities of the Indian officers of the British Indian army, Kanwar Rampal Singh's unwavering support and fight for the cause of the landless peasants and the

tenants were some of the glaring examples of how they showed their revolting attitude against the oppressive order.

Therefore, on the basis of the analysis done on the three novels of the Lal Singh Trilogy, it can be argued that, the subdued spirit of rebellion is not distinctly observed here. Because, along with social discontent, the spirit of rebellion is discernible all through the novels of the Lal Singh Trilogy. Lal Singh and Kanwar Rampal Singh were educated and knew about the process of revolution. They understood the necessity of solidarity and goodwill, and so they organised Kisan Sabhas to unite the peasants against the exploitative forces. They may not be successful but they dared to fight against the injustice. At the end, Lal Singh said: "Revolution is a need of togetherness, Comrade, the need to curb malice among men, the need for men to stand together as brothers..." (Anand, 1942, p. 367). This is the ultimate message i.e., to fight against the injustice and oppression, the oppressed must understand that he is oppressed and then he must convey this message of oppression to his fellow beings, so that everybody can stand against the oppressive system together. Though full-fledged rebellion was not present in the Lal Singh Trilogy, the characters were not meek sufferers like Bakha, Munoo, and Gangu. They showed their fighting spirit whenever they were led by an able leader. This is what makes Anand's Lal Singh Trilogy different from his previous social novels which also throw light on the progress of the writer Mulk Raj Anand himself.

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