

The Hidden Pathos Behind the Refrain “Two Leaves and A Bud”

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Abstract:

The present paper aims at - how the word “refrain” plays a vital role in Mulkraj Anand’s Novel “Two Leaves and a Bud”. According to grammar, the word “refrain” has two lexical performances: As a Noun and As a verb - as a noun the word means: “*a phrase or a verse recurring at intervals in a song or poem, especially at the end of each stanza in chorus.*” - as a verb the same word means: “*stop oneself from doing something.*” The novel “Two Leaves and a Bud” takes its title from the simple refrain which the tea leaves gatherers, at the Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam, recite as they pick two leaves and a bud:

I will make a sheaf
Plucking, plucking, plucking
Two leave and a bud
Two leave and a bud

The workers at the workplace sing this type of refrain for getting rid of tiredness. But the hidden pathos behind the refrain makes the workers refrain from thinking of their own welfare, human justice as well as human rights.

It is an attempt to show the pathetic conditions of the Indian labourers at the tea estates; how they are, brutally, exploited by the rulers and also why the poor workers at the tea plantation refrain from protesting against injustice and inhumanity instead of enjoying themselves by singing the refrain at work.

Keywords: Exploitation, indentured, plantation, artist, underdog, humanist, villain, rakshas, complement, pessimistic, medley, unsavory, cliché, niche.

Introduction:

Being a prominent figure in the colonial and the post-colonial Indian writing in English, Mulk Raj Anand reveals a blend of idealism, socialism and a keen perception of the contemporary social issues through the novel “Two Leaves and a Bud” that culminates in a tragic clash of interest and destinies. He proves himself as a versatile genius, an optimist, a humanist, a profound thinker, a moving speaker, an able organizer, a politician, a civil servant, a journalist, a great scholar, a patient teacher, a capital storyteller, and a literary architect through his thought provoking novels. In short, his novels are nothing but a medley of different shades. He depicted the lives of the poor and the downtrodden in his novels. He is the one of the three pillars of Indian writings in English, Raja Rao, and R.K.Narayan being the other two. These writers, through their writings, tried to bring respectability and identity to Indian English Literature. These writers made a sincere attempt to articulate the subdued feeling and suppressed emotion of their countrymen. Indian literature was identified as a literature of fairy-tales and fantasy stories in the world.

Bengali novelists like Sharath Chandra and Rabindranath Tgore made an Endeavour to bring in a note of realism in their works. The trend was continued by the trio. The novelists gathered courage to voice the sufferings of the people under British rule and also under the pressure of out dated customs and oppressive tradition. The society had been reeling under the yoke of slavery for the past hundreds of year. Age old practices of discrimination on the basis of caste and class continued to separate man from man. The society suffered at different levels and at all levels but could not think of uniting regardless of any bias, under one banner of humanity. Early in life, his intimate contact with the suffering underprivileged and the myriad levels of Indian masses with their differences of caste, creed, and colour seem to have implanted in his mind profound impressions about ‘the still sad music of humanity.’ His research in philosophy has immensely contributed to his humanism; and as he admits in his “*Apology for Heroism*”, his research was, indeed, ‘search for truth’. He felt that philosophy, should answer the problems posed by human needs.

In his well-known essay, “*The Story of My Experiments with a White Lie*”, he explains the profound impact Gandhi made on him during his stay at the Sabarmati Ashram. He particularly mentions that Gandhi “exhorted devotion to the poor”. After the spiritual experience of the Gandhi Ashram, he says, “I began to dream of writing only about the poorest of the poor human beings, who I had known specially was I inspired to brood on the castaways.” Two Leaves and a Bud is the heart reading experience of Gangu, a worker in the Macpherson Tea Estate, in Assam.

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The European bosses pester and exploit the labourers. Gangu and his family suffer much: his wife, Sajani, becomes a prey to malaria; and he himself faced death at the point of Reggie's gun in his attempt to save his daughter, Leila, from the clutches of the lust-blind Reggie. Goronway Ree quotes 'with great skill and without insistence, Dr. Anand shows the Indian coolies exploited, starving, cheated, dirty, diseased, as the true heirs of one of the world's greatest civilization'.

The callous and unfeeling British represented by Croft-Cooke, the manager, and Reggie Hunt, a drunkard and a womanizer, are in flagrant disagreement with the humanist. Dr. De La Havre and his beloved, Barbara, both of whom is clearly for the Indians and condemns the exploitation by the British imperialists and capitalists. Anand's irony, however, is not as trenchant as that of Forster for it is diluted to some extent by the tender moving pathos of depiction. The pathos existing behind each and every life of workers at the tea estate in Assam makes them hapless. *Two Leaves and A Bud* is no blood curdling melodrama or a spasmodic declaration of revenge, but one of the most sensitive novels about the age of slavery through bonded labour in India.

Like "*Untouchable*" and "*Coolie*", "*Two Leaves and a Bud*" dramatises moral issues by the counterpointing of good and evil. Gangu, the protagonist, accompanied by his wife and his daughter and his son Budhoo moves from his native village in the Punjab to distant Assam to take up a job in Macpherson Tea Estate owned by an Englishman. Initially excited at the prospect of starting life afresh in the plantation, Gangu soon comes to realise that his days at the tea estate have been nothing but a series of deprivation – his wife dies, there is an attempt at raping his daughter, Leila, and ultimately, he himself is shot dead by Reggie Hunt. The final moment of disillusionment comes with impact of the communication that Hunt is exonerated of the charge of murder by a British jury. Here, while listening to the judgment, Gangu refrains from asking for justice in the court itself.

The characters in the novel suffer meekly due to their inferiority complex and they surrender to the exploitation by their rulers in order to save themselves from hunger. The central character Gangu is a middle aged person who can be called a symbol of all those coolies in the early stage of the British colonialism who were lured away from their native places. As a victim of the feudal exploitation in the hands of the landlord at his native place, he is brought into the valley of Assam. Here he becomes the victim of the colonial and capitalistic exploitation. Ill-paid and ill-fed and he is compelled to live in unhealthy and unhygienic conditions.

Premila Paul in her thematic study of the novel says that this novel portrays, "the yawning hiatus between the haves and the havenots, the exploiter and the exploited and the rulers and the ruled." The capitalistic exploitation widens the gap between the rich and the poor. This novel is an example of how the capitalistic exploitation kills the life of the poor labourers on one of the tea-plantations in Assam. This novel can be called a proletarian novel and also an example of the cancerous effects of the class system and colonial exploitation.

Finally, it can be said Mulk Raj Anand has tried to present the cause of common people. The pathetic conditions of the Indian labourers at the tea estates are nothing but the hidden pathos behind the refrain "*Two Leaves and A Bud*" recited at the tea plantation by the labourers while gathering two leaves and a bud. Thus the poor workers at the tea plantation refrain from protesting against injustice and inhumanity instead of enjoying themselves by singing the refrain at work. It is proved that Anand is a writer of proletariat with a progressive outlook which enabled him to expose the old superstitions, rampant, injustice and exploitation of the underdog in Indian society.

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