

# Exploitation of poor laborers in Mulk Raj Anand's *Two leaves and a Bud*, Filmed as *Rahi* and the *Wayfarer*

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## Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand's novel "Two Leaves and a Bud," published in 1937 later adapted into the film "Rahi," released on 1953 in Hindi as *Rahi* and as *The Wayfarer* in English vividly portrays the exploitation of poor laborers in colonial India, particularly within the tea plantations of Assam. The narrative centers around Gangu, an indentured laborer, whose life is marked by the harsh realities of colonial oppression and social injustice most of the labourers were once farmers. In a system that deprives them of autonomy and dignity, the "farmers" turn into "laborers" as a result of economic hardship. Anand employs social realism to highlight the economic, social, and political inequities faced by the laborers, depicting their struggles against the backdrop of British colonial rule. The novel underscores the dehumanizing conditions and the psychological impact of colonial dominance on the workers, who are often treated as the 'Other' and subjected to severe exploitation and violence. Through his poignant storytelling, Anand not only exposes the brutalities of colonialism but also evokes a strong sense of empathy and outrage towards the plight of the oppressed, making "Two Leaves and a Bud" a powerful commentary on social exploitation.

**Keywords:** Two leaves and a bud, Exploitation, Colonial oppression, Coolies, Social Realism.

## Introduction

A well-known Indian author and social activist, Mulk Raj Anand made important contributions to English literature. Anand, who was born in Peshawar on December 12, 1905, frequently emphasized the plight of the poor and contemporary social issues in his artwork. Mulk Raj Anand's most well-known works are essays, short stories, and novels that examine caste prejudice, poverty, and the human condition. Anand was an important character in Indian literature because he used his writing to raise awareness of the suffering of the underprivileged in society. He became well-known for his distinctive narrative that focused on social themes and was among the first Indian authors to write in English. In his writing, he focused on the life of the lower castes in traditional Indian society and societal issues. In his work, he mostly addressed caste inequality, poverty, pain, starvation, exploitation, and the status of women in Indian society. Anand's novels, short stories, and essays provoked discussion about social reform and equality while illustrating the harsh realities of time.

According to the Dr. John De Le Havre when he opines "There is nothing more horrible in this universe than the cruelty of man to man." (Anand, M. p.119) Published in 1937, Mulk Raj Anand's "Two Leaves and

a Bud" delves into the intricate dynamics of tea plantations in colonial India, illustrating the hard reality faced by laborers against the backdrop of British empire. This essay will analyze the topic of social realism in Anand's book, paying particular attention to how the author depicts the miserable situation of Assamese tea plantation workers, as well as their exploitation, struggles, and tenacity. By analyzing character interactions and narrative development, this article clarifies the author's use of the social realism subject, which illuminates the political, social, and economic injustices that were common throughout the colonial era. By the end of the nineteenth century, social realism was widely accepted. Anand documents the day-to-day activities of tea plantations to reveal the dehumanizing effects of colonialism on disadvantaged populations laborers and how they deal with oppression, discrimination, and class differences. According to the article, "Two Leaves and a Bud" pays homage to Mulk Raj Anand's social realism by giving readers a realistic portrayal of the human condition amongst the unstable landscape of colonial India, with exploitation serving as the novel's central theme. Anand says the novel was essential "And yet I feel that book had to be written, because what I had to say in it was deep in me from the day I lived for a while near a plantation in Assam and visited Ceylon and saw the inhumanity and barbarism prevalent there...". He had to write it. (Anand 2016, 34) Anand saw the unfairness in society. He uses Marxist ideas of revolt. He shows a path to fix these issues people created.

Mulk Raj Anand is the author of the fictional work *Two Leaves and a Bud*. The main character of the book is a farmer from Punjab's Hoshiarpur district who travels to tea plantations seeking employment. The 1937 book emphasizes how East Indian plantation workers are exploited economically. Gangu, a humble farmer in a village close to Hoshiarpur, Punjab, and his family—his wife and kids—are at the center of the book's plot. An agent entices him to work at the Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam, which is controlled by Europeans. There, he must harvest "two leaves and a bud" all day long. He acknowledges that the appeal of working on a plantation was a lie, saying, "I guess it was in our kismet. However, it was like a jail at home, and it's a little worse here. Water at first, then mire. Even though this prison is bar-free, it is an impenetrable jail. The plantation is guarded by the chowkidars, who will return you if you should flee. The coolies plan strikes and rallies because they are fed up with their British employers' repressive practices. But they all ultimately fail. In an effort to save his daughter, Gangu is killed by an English officer, who is easily acquitted. Thus, the oppressive capitalist practices of the Europeans, the unfair legal system, and the predicament of the Indian working class are all reflected in the novel.

## Synopsis

'Two leaves and a bud' comes from a tea workers' song in Assam. Assam is in northeast India. British planters started the first tea industry outside China there in the 1840s. The line highlights the long hours of tea estate work. Like Mulk Raj Anand's other books, the novel explores exploitation and poverty during colonial times.

The novel starts with a train trip 'Life is like a journey' Train scenes are great for movies. The book was first a film in India and then in the UK. Gangu is a 'coolie' or laborer. He is going to the Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam. His wife, Sajani, his teenage daughter, Leila, and his younger son, Buddhu, are with him. The trip is long. It takes twelve days and nights. They are coming from another part of India. Gangu was hired there to work on the estate.

'It's a good deal,' Gangu thinks as the train rolls on. Mr. Macpherson, the white owner, paid for the whole family's train tickets. The recruiter said life on the estate would be good. He promised good pay, a nice house, a school, and a hospital. Gangu is old and

has lots of debt back home. He agreed to the trip because of that. But when he gets to Assam, he learns the recruiter lied. The realities of plantation life start to show once they arrive. The working circumstances are terrible: there are few medical facilities, a shortage of clean water, and overcrowded shelters. The management provides low pay and implements severe discipline. Gangu and other workers are effectively indentured servants because they are tied by contracts. Their travels are tracked, and they are unable to escape.

The whole family works hard. Still, they don't earn enough to buy food. Gangu has to borrow money again. The interest rates are very high. Women face another problem. Mr. Reggie Hunt, the assistant manager, watches them work. He often uses his power to get sexual favors from them. The 'coolie lines' are where the workers live. These huts are full of disease and bugs. Malaria is always a threat. Dr. Harve, the local doctor, wants Mr. Croft-Cooke, the manager, to take steps to stop it. But the manager does nothing. Dr. Harve starts to help the coolies more.

Then, Gangu's wife, Sajani, gets sick and dies. Gangu is too poor to pay for her funeral. He tries to borrow money from Mr. Croft-Cooke. He has to bribe some people just to see him. When he does, the boss quickly sends him away. He thinks Gangu might have malaria. Gangu can't borrow money from anyone else. One day, Leila is working on the estate when 6'2 Mr. Hunt almost rapes her. She runs away. Hunt chases her. She hides in her father's house. Hunt shoots into the dark and kills Gangu. In court, a jury of seven Europeans and two Indians finds Mr. Hunt not guilty. He is set free. "Two Leaves and a Bud" ends with gloom. Gangu's sacrifice doesn't help; his family's ruined. The system that hurt him still thrives. The title refers to perfect tea leaves. It also shows how workers' lives are wasted. They're just tools for the tea business.

Few important lines from the movie "Hum gareebon ki zindagi mein, khushi ke pal kabhi nahi aate. Hum to bas apni zindagi guzaar rahe hain, apne sapne kabhi sach nahi hote." Translation: Happiness seems absent from the lives of the poor. We simply live each day as it comes. Our dreams often remain unfulfilled. This line shows the despair and tough life of the working class. It mirrors the problems of those pushed aside. This is a common idea in Mulk Raj Anand's writing, seen in the film, *Rahi*. The line stresses how far the poor are from their dreams. It is a strong claim about unfairness in society.

### Cinematography

"*Rahi*" (The Wayfarer) is a movie based on Mulk Raj Anand's book "Two Leaves and a Bud". Dev Anand directed the film in 1953. It shows the exploitation and injustice in India before it was free. The movie focuses on workers in Assam's tea farms.

The story takes place in Assam before India's independence. Ramesh, a former soldier, starts working at a tea farm as a supervisor. He is supposed to make sure the workers follow the rules. He changes after falling in love with Ganga, who is a local worker. He then joins the workers to fight the unfair British managers. The movie shows how tea farm workers were treated badly during that time.

Dev Anand was not in the book "Two Leaves and a Bud". The book is about Gangu. He is a farmer from Punjab. Gangu and his family move to Assam to work on a tea farm. They were told they would get good pay and a nice place to live. But, they are treated poorly and face poverty under the British. The story ends sadly when Gangu dies trying to save his daughter, Leila. He was protecting her from a British officer named Reggie Hunt.

Dev Anand is connected to the story through the movie "*Rahi*" (1953). He plays Ramesh, a supervisor at a tea farm. The film reveals the unfairness in India before freedom. It focuses on the lives of tea farm wor-

kers in Assam.

The story is set in Assam before India's independence. Ramesh, a former soldier, becomes a tea farm supervisor. His job is to make workers follow the rules. He changes after falling in love with Ganga, a local worker. He joins the workers to fight unfair British managers. The movie shows the poor treatment of tea farm workers during that time.

Dev Anand is not a character in the book "Two Leaves and a Bud." The book tells the story of Gangu. He is a farmer from Punjab. Gangu and his family move to Assam to work on a tea farm. They expect good pay and housing. But they face mistreatment and poverty under the British. Despite their differences, the film shows the harsh actions of the rich. The movie features two kinds of rich people. Mr. Macdonald and Mr. Walker own or manage a tea farm in Assam. They care only about making money. Sashi Bhushan, Ramesh, and others are middle-class workers. They watch over the coolies and help their bosses make a profit. The movie clearly shows how these workers are treated badly.

Ramesh quickly proves he is loyal to the tea farm owner. He hits a coolie for smoking during work. He even hits Ganga, the main character, when she takes a thorn from her leg. Women must work in the fields, leaving their babies on the ground. One scene shows a snake biting a coolie woman's baby while she picks tea. This scene is very emotional and shows the tea workers' hard lives. Ganga is shown as a rebel. When Ramesh yells at the workers, Ganga points to the dying child -Uthao apna hunter aur maro isse, isne tumhara kam rukhbaya hai, company ko kitna ghata hua hai iski vajse. Maro! Maro na isko, iss nagin ke katnese nehi mara to tumhari hat mai bhi to saap hai isse katbao"(Abbas Film). She tells him to hit the child with his whip. She says the child made them lose money. She asks if he will let the snake in his hand bite the child if it doesn't die. This shows a cruel society that values money more than life.

The film's end shows tea workers, pushed too far, rebelling against the planters. They strike until their needs are met. The planters then cut off their food and drinks. A film song captures their pain: "Our stomach is hungry, it wants bread." The workers peacefully march to the manager's house. They want higher pay, equal wages for all, schools, and better homes. During the protest, Mr. Walker shoots Ganga, their leader Gangu dies trying to save his daughter, Leila she protects her from a British officer, Reggie Hunt. Ganga's dying words are: "Aj hamari jit hui hai, ab hamari aoyaj kobhi bondh nehi hogi" (Abbas Film) "Today we have won, from now our voice will never stop." Ganga's speech marks a revolution's start. It hints at a future with no class, bias, or greed. It shows a fair, equal world. The film, like the book, has some Marxist ideas.

Dev Anand is part of this story through the movie "Rahi" (1953). He plays Ramesh, a tea farm manager. This character was created for the movie. He is not in the original book.

Few important lines from the movie "Hum gareebon ki zindagi mein, khushi ke pal kabhi nahi aate. Hum to bas apni zindagi guzaar rahe hain, apne sapne kabhi sach nahi hote." Translation: Happiness seems absent from the lives of the poor. We simply live each day as it comes. Our dreams often remain unfulfilled. This line shows the despair and tough life of the working class. It mirrors the problems of those pushed aside. This is a common idea in Mulk Raj Anand's writing, seen in the film, Rahi. The line stresses how far the poor are from their dreams. It is a strong claim about unfairness in society.

Ramu, a worker, speaks a key line about the hard lives of farmers. He says that hunger grows, and farmers starve. They must sell their land and even their daughters. "...bhook ki kheti hoti hai, hamare tumhare jaise kishan bhooke marte hai, apni jamin girbi rakhte hai, apni beti o ko bazar mai bechte hai" This shows how bad things are for poor people. They suffer greatly because of unfair systems. These words show the movie's message. It is about how colonial rule hurt people and their towns.

"Rahi," a Hindi social drama, came out in 1953. Khwaja Ahmad Abbas directed and produced it under Naya Sansar. The film is based on Mulk Raj Anand's 1937 book, *Two Leaves and a Bud*. It was also made in English as *The Wayfarer*.

Key people who worked on the film: Khwaja Ahmad Abbas directed and produced it. He also wrote the screenplay with Mohsin Abdullah and V.P. Sathe. S. Ramachandra was in charge of filming. Mohan Rathod edited the film. Anil Biswas made the music. Prem Dhawan wrote the song words. Singers like Lata Mangeshkar and Hemant Kumar sang in the movie.

The cast included: Dev Anand as Ramesh and Nalini Jaywant as Ganga. Balraj Sahni played Dr. Thomas, and David Abraham Cheulkar as Kalu. Manmohan Krishna acted as Hari, Ganga's father. Achala Sachdev played Chanda, and Habib Tanvir was Ramu. Rashid Khan appeared as Shashi Bhushan.

### Thematic Study

In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Mulk Raj Anand shows how poor workers were used during British rule. The book tells about Gangu, a poor farmer. He is exploited on a tea farm in Assam. Gangu's story shows the suffering of these workers. They were brought to the tea farms with false promises. Coolies from across India were brought to work in Assam's tea gardens. They were promised much, but could barely feed themselves. The book vividly shows Assam's terrain and harsh weather.

Indian peasants faced hardship before independence. They struggled to feed their families, leading them to take great risks. Gangu, a high-caste peasant, lost his land and became a coolie. Moneylenders haunted him in his village and at the tea gardens. This book is about his struggle.

Mulk Raj Anand quoted: The coolies' lives are like slaves in America. Their economic state is even worse than the slaves. This seems true, as few tea plantation revolts happened before independence. In the book, a small fight led to an air force being called. Coolies were trapped and could not escape their hard lives. Today's Assam plantation workers are descendants of these laborers.

Mulk Raj Anand is a strong writer. His writing is clear, stating facts plainly. Sometimes, he interrupts the story with his own thoughts, which slows the pace. His views are meaningful and based on facts, but they can feel disruptive.

Mulk Raj Anand is the best writer to show rural India's struggles from Indian and English views. I suggest this book to fans of historical fiction and those who want to learn about pre-independence India. Through Anand's point of view these character who supported the coolies and labourer they saw them as human rather than worker both in film and novel .The doctor rejected Anglo-Indian beliefs in British superiority upon arrival. Initially, it was to be different. He quit the Imperial Medical Service. He wanted to show he saw Indians as human. They deserved self-rule and justice. Miss Barbara reveals European cunning; she is kind. Her connection with the coolie shows humanitarianism. Narain, another friend, shows Gangu the tea plantation's cruel reality. He tells Gangu about Reggie Hunt's brutality. Gangu learns from Narain how coolies can get land. He builds caring relationships. Gangu urges laborers to work hard because work betters people. He believes in humanity's power to change society. Mulk Raj Anand said love drove him to reveal life's beauty, terror, and tenderness.`

Gangu was told he would earn more than he did back home. When he got to Assam, he did not. He was stuck in poverty. The workers faced hard work and were cut off from the world. The farm owners saw them as tools to make money. This cruel treatment showed how the British thought of the local people. They saw them as things to use. The tea farms had a class system like the one created by colonialism. Gangu and the others were at the bottom. They had no rights, so they were easily exploited.



The novel shows how the workers were used. This idea is also in Marxist theory. Marxism says society is split into two groups. These groups are the rich and the workers. The rich own the businesses. The workers sell their work to live. In the book, the British farm owners are the rich. Gangu and his friends are the workers.

Marx said workers feel apart from their work. They do not feel like people since their work only helps the rich. Gangu feels this way on the tea farm. He is only a small part of the money-making machine. The farm owners paid the workers very little. They made them work as much as possible. This is how they made more money.

Marx thought workers would see they were being used. Then, they would fight the unfair system. The book does not show this happening. But, it asks for changes to help the workers.

Two Leaves and a Bud uses Gangu's story to show how workers were badly treated in colonial times. The book agrees with Marxist ideas about how rich people use poor people to make money. It shows how the British hurt the workers through class and a feeling of not belonging. The book asks for kindness, change, and an end to systems that treat people like things. Many writers have written about unfair labor, poverty, and injustice. Here's how Two Leaves and a Bud compares to their books.

Premchand's *Godaan*: *Godaan* is about poor farmers used by landlords and lenders. Anand's *Gangu* struggles like Premchand's *Hori*. Both are stuck in debt and mistreated. Both books show social classes and money problems. But, Anand writes about colonial factories. Premchand writes about farming problems.

Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* Dickens looks at factories in England in the 1800s. He shows how workers suffered. Like Anand, Dickens uses people to show how money hurts people. Both writers show how workers lose respect. But their stories are in different places and times. Mulk Raj Anand was a pioneer. He wrote Indian-English stories about social problems. These included caste, poverty, and colonial abuse. His books, like *Untouchable* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*, showed unfair systems. They also called for social change.

While D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913) isn't about colonial abuse. But it has similar themes to *Two Leaves and a Bud*. Both explore oppression and class issues. Economic struggles are present in both novels. Characters are stuck due to money problems. In *Sons and Lovers*, Paul Morel's family is poor. His father works as a miner. In Anand's novel, Gangu's poverty leads to harsh labor. Class oppression is another theme. Lawrence looks at industrial capitalism in England. It hurts workers like Paul's father. Anand shows this in colonial India. There, workers face economic and racial abuse under British rule. Both novels show the mental impact of oppression on people. Paul's bad relationship with his parents mirrors Gangu's family. They face constant suffering. *Sons and Lovers* focuses on personal life in a capitalist society. *Two Leaves and a Bud* adds racial abuse in colonialism. Together, they critique unfair systems in different places. Mulk Raj Anand's *"Untouchable"* (1935) is key in Dalit writing. It powerfully shows the oppression from the caste system. The novel shows the harsh lives of Dalits through Bakha, a young sweeper. Anand uses Bakha's life to show the wrongs untouchables faced in India. Oppression in *"Untouchable"* Caste Discrimination the novel shows the strict caste system. Untouchables are shunned and face daily shame. Upper-caste Hindus see Bakha as impure. He lives in fear and lacks respect. His job cleaning toilets shows the caste system's inhumanity. Economic Issues Dalits like Bakha are poor and do hard work for little pay. Their poverty keeps them low in society. This makes them stay oppressed. Gender Issues Dalit women are extra vulnerable. Bakha's sister, Sohini, is abused by a priest. Pandit Kali Nath shows how some use power badly. Human Worth Bakha wants respect, even while suffering. He fights caste oppression in his mind.

Anand calls for social change. New flush toilets at the end give hope. They could free people from low caste jobs. Colonial Times: The book also looks at British rule. It kept caste rules for easier control. They did not fix the unfair system. Importance to Dalit Writing "Untouchable" is one of the first Dalit books in English. It lets the unheard be heard. It questions society by showing Dalits as people. Anand's view of Bakha makes him a symbol. He stands for all oppressed people seeking fairness. Just like in the novel 'Two leaves and a Bud' the inhuman treatment harsh reality of poor labourer. Colonial Oppression "Untouchable" focuses on caste, but it touches on colonialism: The British used caste to better control India. Anand criticizes unfair Indian rules and British inaction. In closing, "Untouchable" is key in Indian books. It shows caste oppression clearly. It asks for social change. It fits Anand's goal to fight wrongs and push for human worth.

### Conclusion

Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* is a deep book. It shows the bad parts of oppression and how people were used for money. It also shows how bad colonialism was for people. It was written in 1937. The book tells about the hard lives of workers on tea farms in Assam. These farms were run by the British. Anand shows how cruel colonial rule was. He asks for people to care and want things to be fair. Gangu's sad story shows how bad colonial money-making was. It also shows that people everywhere suffer but can be strong. This makes the book important in Indian writing and other places.

Colonial Oppression as a Central Theme : The book is mainly about how bad colonial oppression was. The tea farm is like a small version of British colonial rule. Workers like Gangu were only used to make money. They were tricked into coming with promises of a good life. But Gangu and his family were stuck in a system. This system used them and did not treat them like humans. The farm is like a "jail" where workers could not leave. Their contracts took away their freedom. The book clearly shows how unfair things were because of colonialism. Gangu could not get away from his problems. He had to borrow money for his wife's funeral. He had to protect his daughter from bad men. This shows the problems faced by people who were not treated well under colonial rule. Reggie Hunt was an English officer who killed Gangu. He was found not guilty. This shows that colonial powers could do whatever they wanted. It shows how unfair the whole system was.

Social Realism: A Mirror to Society Anand uses social realism to show the hard lives of tea farm workers. He tells about shelters that were too small. He tells about dirty water, sickness, and hard work. This paints a clear picture of how workers were ignored and used. The book shows the physical and mental harm done to workers. It is a strong statement about the human cost of colonial money-making. Dr. John De Le Havre says, "the cruelty of man to man." Anand uses this to say the colonial system was bad. He also says that people in general can be cruel. The book also talks about how women like Leila were used. They were even more at risk in this unfair place. This makes Anand's story of oppression even deeper. It shows how class, gender, and race made life even harder for people who were already suffering. *Two Leaves and a Bud* shows Anand's Marxist views. The book slams the idea that money is more important than people. Workers are shown as tools, not as people with dreams. Gangu's sad story shows how unfair things were under capitalism and colonial rule. He tries but fails to make his family's life better. Even though it ends sadly, the book hints at fighting back. Workers protest and rally, showing their anger and wish for change. But they don't win under colonial rule. Anand thinks that even if people like Gangu fail alone, they help the bigger fight for fairness. *Two Leaves and a Bud* is like Anand's older book, *Untouchable*. That book is about how Dalits in India faced unfair treatment because of their caste. Both books show unfair systems

and how people are put down. But they are set in different places. Untouchable is about caste problems in India. Two Leaves and a Bud looks at racial unfairness under colonial rule.

In both books, Anand makes the main people seem real to get readers to care. Bakha in Untouchable and Gangu in Two Leaves and a Bud stand for groups who are not treated well. By sharing their stories, Anand questions what is normal in society. He wants things to change for the better. The 1953 movie Rahi (The Wayfarer) tells Anand's story in a new way. Dev Anand plays Ramesh. He shows how middle-class workers fit into unfair systems. The movie stresses how workers stand together. Ganga says as she dies, "Today we have won; from now our voice will never stop." Rahi is different from the book but still shows how bad things were under colonial rule. It shows that unfair treatment hurts whole groups, not just single people. It is a strong visual way to show Anand's ideas from his book. Two Leaves and a Bud is set in colonial India, but its ideas are still important now. These ideas include money problems, unfair systems, violence against women, and people's strength. The book reminds us that unfairness is not just in the past. It still happens in different ways today. Anand asks us to care about those who are not treated well. He shows how Gangu stays human even when things are hard. He challenges readers to see their own biases and fight unfair systems. Mulk Raj Anand's Two Leaves and a Bud is more than just a book about colonial rule. It asks for fairness that matters always and everywhere. By showing how people were used on tea farms in Assam, the book shows the human cost of unfair systems. It asks for respect and equal rights for everyone. Gangu's sad story points out how bad colonial capitalism was. It also shows how strong people can be when things are tough. By sharing the stories of those who are not treated well, Anand shows the unfairness of systems. He also inspires readers to think about a world without unfairness. Two Leaves and a Bud is still a great book. It challenges us to face unfairness in society. It also celebrates the strength and humanity of those who live through it. Its ideas still matter today making it a vital contribution to global literature on oppression and resistance.

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