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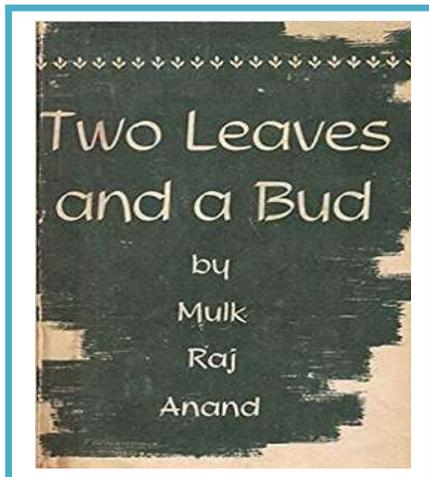
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BOOK REVIEW:

*Author: Dipanjali Barman**

Mulk Raj Anand, *Two leaves and a bud*, B.S. Venkataram, India, 2019, Total Pages: 257, (Price Rs. 4/-)



‘Two leaves and a bud’ is a fascinating novel by Mulk Raj Anand published in 1937. Although this is a fiction, interestingly the author tried to depict the true picture of coolie and planters relations in several ways. The books on the plantation history of Assam published during that period was very few and unlike today without electronic media as well social media it was quite difficult to go for such creation on plantation plot. And being a non Assamese author, work on plantation history of Assam is really praiseworthy. Although the book might be a fiction but we would like to say that it was the reality of Assam tea plantation and we feel that author might take help of primary sources i.e. personal observation, interviews and government records as collecting material before compiling and it is quite inspirable for those researchers who are working in this field.

The title of the novel ‘Two leaves and a bud’ is related with the plucking nature of tea leaves where it is important to pluck two leaves and a bud to produce quality tea and the work plucking is done mainly through woman class of population in the plantation of India from then and till now. In the novel with the help of a story of a poor peasant *Gangu* who came to work in the tea plantation of Assam during British colonial period from Hochiarpur District of Punjab, author tried to portray the condition of tea garden workers, coolie-planter relationship,

*Research Scholar in the Department of History, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad.



suffering of woman body in plantation, woman work burden, superstitious beliefs etc. In coolie-planter relationship the author's main concern was to show how class discrimination of rich and poor existed in the plantation by using the characters like poor coolie *Gangu*, *Ranbir*, *Neogi Sardar* against rich, arrogant planter *Raggie Hunt*, *Hitchcock* and *Ralph*.

Along with others, most important issue author tried to portray in the novel was how women worked or used in the plantation history of Assam during British era and how poor women and girls became the victim of sexual lust of luxurious planter's life. By using the character called *Gangu* a poor peasant, author tried to expose how someone had to face torture and sacrifice his life when he refused to surrender his beautiful daughter and wife to the garden manager under *Planter Raj* by unveiling the colonial planters as heartless or emotionless.

Mulk Raj Anand through this fictional story tried to focus on the concept of power and authority by revealing maltreatment of garden manager forcing to buy a women body by offering some plot of land or by power of purse and then how they used woman body as a corporal entertainment. Along with this author also tried to show the condition of plantation workers of India as a whole irrespective of their sex and gender and compared the condition of plantation coolies of India with the slaves of cotton plantation of southern states of North America and sometime more worsen than that of Negro slaves of America.

Most importantly Anand did not miss out to portray the gender issue in the plantation history of Assam. Though the novel was mainly focused on the story of a poor coolie father of a beautiful daughter where author romanticize the emotions of a father by creating colonial garden manager as the culprit but author also did not forget to display the glimpse of gender discrimination which was existed and can be said as an important feature of colonial tea plantation of Assam. By using different characters in the novel, the author explained various factors for high possibility of female mortality rate among the working population in the garden and the way woman becoming the victim of more work burden which hardly gave them time for taking care of their own child.

By using different small characters, author mentioned the existence of superstitious belief in the plantation of Assam, where Bengali clerk working in the plantation also preferred to deliver their child with the help of *Dai* rather than that of a doctor.



The only dominion that was existed in the colonial tea estate of Assam is obviously known by *Planter Raj* which Amalendu Guha sensibly sums up in his book '*Planter Raj to swaraj*'. In similar way 'Two leaves and a bud', also tell us several happenings of poor helpless coolies where sometime they (coolie) used to surrender their daughter and wife in front of rich garden manger to get in return some plot of land on the other hand sometime to protect that land from snatching by garden manager coolies surrender their women to planters. It seems like Women take birth in the earth to satisfy others. Author has mentioned an incident- where due to refusal of a coolie who was origin from Ranchi to surrender his wife to assistant manager was attacked very mischievously and afterwards his wife was brought to manager bungalow and kept there for a month and coolie was taken into confinement. Along with this the most heart touching story narrated by author Anand is of poor coolie *Gangu* and her daughter *Leila*. *Gangu* was shot dead due to refusal of planter's order to submit *Leila* to him and the accused was simply acquitted. Mostly all colonial managers kept coolie girl to accomplish their sexual desire in the tea plantation of Assam. Each and every beautiful girls of the garden were like planters' personal belongings. Author described the feeling of Assistant Planters *Raggie Hunt* who pointing his colleagues said "*how many of us did not have coolie women? Hitchcock and Ralph did exactly what he has done. And old Mac and Craft Cooke had done the same before their marriages, in their younger days*".

Despite this is a fiction but author depicted real picture of coolie and planter's life of colonial tea plantation of Assam. Author must have been encouraged by reality of plantation life to write this book. In similar way, where Mulk Raj Anand described about the fraud sardar, the fraudulent recruitment of coolie was a common feature of Assam tea plantation. And regarding the exercise of planter power on inferior coolie Amalendu Guha clearly mentioned planter-coolie relation with sufficient primary evidences in his book "*Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam*". And Anand's vision of keeping coolie girl by planter is also true because many writers like Rana Pratap Behal, Samita Sen also mentioned about the fact. Interestingly, Priya Chatterjee in her book "*A time for tea*" mentioned regarding the existence of *Chokri Khana* (girls' house), which were small houses in remote area but within the boundary of plantation for planters' favorite women and it was common till early 20th century.



Thereby it can be said that the author has successfully depicted the brutality of the planters and the sufferings of the coolie of colonial era in the book even at that primitive work period.