Anand’s third great novel, *Two Leaves and a Bud* was published in the year 1937. Anand has set it in the background of the forests of Assam. It reveals the miserable plight of the laborers in the Tea Plantation of Assam. Anand’s anguished cry in *Coolie* gives place to an outrageous protest in this novel. Anand continues his theme of glaring disparities between the rich capitalists and the poor laborers in this novel too. The action in this novel is concentrated in the tea plantation of Assam. The British masters of the tea plantations become a target of Anand’s furious attack. The fury sometimes hampers the aesthetic appeal of the novel, but otherwise it presents the lives of both the planters and the laborers with naturalistic accuracy. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Anand does not narrate the odyssey of an individual but presents the class conflict between the two groups- the British masters and their Indian sycophants on one hand and the poor and exploited coolies on the other. The protagonist Gangu and the exploiter Reggie Hunt are only the representatives of their respective classes. Anand presents the helplessness and miseries of the former and the cruelty and roguery of the latter in such a way that he unconsciously converts them into mere symbols of humility and vice. Ravi Kumar comments on Anand’s *Two Leaves and a Bud*:

Poetic in style, this novel presents the pathetic life of the coolies of Assam Tea Estates. 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.[1]
To provide his attitude a touch of objectivity, Anand chooses Dr De La Havre, an English man to fight for the cause of the downtrodden laboring class. But the effect becomes the reverse with Anand’s failure to conceal his penchant for protest against the atrocities inflicted on the poor collies. In an effort to idealize an English character for attaining an effect of objectivity, he loses whatever objectivity he had been able to bring in his handling of the subject because the authorial intrusion becomes all the clearer through Dr. Havre’s occasional indulgence in long harangues in the plight of the coolies. The sacrifices of Dr. Havre, like those of Mohan in Coolie, are incredibly great, the speeches of the two fit ill in the framework of the novel. Kiran Pratap has studied Anand’s Two Leaves and a Bud in the humanistic perspective. She observes: “Two Leaves and a Bud dramatizes moral issues and shows tremendous dramatic power through the counter pointing of good and evil and through a conscious manipulation of characters and incidents.”[2]

The novel opens with the end of Gangu’s journey from the district of Hoshiarpur to the hills of Assam and his cliché about life: “Life is like a journey.” Gangu, the hero of the story, crosses India horizontally from a village near Hoshiarpur in Punjab to the MacPherson Tea Estate in distant Assam. Whereas Bakha of Untouchable and Munoo of Coolie are mere boys, Gangu is past middle age. His wife Sajani and his children Leila and Buddhu also accompany him. On the way to Assam he inquires lots of things from Buta, the Sardar of the MacPherson Tea Estate. It was he who had recruited Gangu and other coolies on false pretext. Very soon, they all reach Garhi station and the Sardar leads them all to a small wooden shed where they meet Shashi Bhushan Bhattacharya, “a mercurial being, with a thin body and a foxy face, with a wild shock of hair.” He asks all of them to go to their billets, as they must be tired. The tea plantation is a
world within a world that is more a prison as Narain, a coolie from Bikaner tells Gangu: “I suppose it was in our kismet. But at home it was like a prison and here it is slightly worse. First water, afterwards mire! This prison has no bars, but it is nevertheless an unbreakable jail.”[3]

Between his journey to Assam and the metaphorical journey to the other world, Gangu’s life is full of unbearable pains. The enticing promises of Buta, the intriguing Sardar of Macpherson Tea Estates, allure him to the distant Assam tea plantations. The promise of a piece of land is enough to ensure the impoverished Gangu who has been deprived of his possession of the ancestral land in his native town. His innocent faith in Buta’s cunning words proves fatal for him and his family. Like other innumerable coolies from all over India, he gets entrapped in the prison like tea plantation. The words of Narain, “This prison has no bars but nevertheless it is a prison”, give a jolt to Gangu’s dream and brings him back to stark realities. He and his family are offered a hut which has been constructed without any attentions to the hygienic requirements of the occupants. The insanitary conditions cause epidemics. Very soon Gangu and other coolies adjusted themselves to the working of the Tea Estate. Sunday is a holiday so must of the coolies prefer to go bazaar in the village of Bedhi, two miles east of the tea estates. The children and especially the wives of the coolies are very happy. They get a chance to buy numerous things for the household. After coming back, due to the over strain, Gangu developed fever. His heart throbs and his temples ache like a heap of cracking wood enveloped in a leaping inextinguishable fire. His wife pressed his legs, and his daughter massaged his head with oil.

Soon the fever left Gangu and caught Sajani. She developed cholera and died. It was so sudden that Gangu was dumb with the shock. He was blinded and could not at first believe that she whom he had come to regard as immortal from
the habit of nearness could have lapsed into an utter and ultimate silence and become *swargbashi*. For a time, he moved in a trance, beckoning the despair of bereavement to come and take possession of him. He had to do his wife’s funeral; for this he went to the office for a loan of twenty rupees. There he was asked for a *najarana*. Since Gangu neither had cash nor any other security to give, he was denied even a single pie. Rather he was driven away by Charles Croft Cooke, the Burra sahib with a harsh comment, “You bloody fool, get out! Get out! You have been spreading infection all over the place……By whose orders did you come here?”

The planters show inhuman measures to avoid devastating epidemics. There are polo matches and herring expeditions to occupy their attention in the time they spare from a vigilant supervision of the work of coolies. Their purpose of strict supervision seems to squeeze the coolies to the last drop of blood. The loss of his wife leaves Gangu a completely shattered man. Even after getting humiliation at Croft Cooke’s hands, he dared not think of wreaking vengeance on the sahib as he considered himself responsible for this. He went to Buta too, for a loan but he also refused. At last Gangu had to carry the dead body of his wife to the cremation ground. He felt choked in his throat with the memory of his wife and his eyes filled with tears. Gangu was very much perturbed by his wife’s sudden demise. For walking under a torrid sun, sowing, had taught him patience and endurance, virtues which make for dour hearts but weak wills. He was worried about his two children especially his daughter Leila. She is “Sajani’s gift to him, to tend him in his old age.” Leila too had become lonely in the house after her mother’s death. She had wept bitterly when Sajani died; she had cried for days as each little thing she did in the house which her mother had done before, reminded her of the fact that her mother was no more. She often sang, “Mother, O Mother, O my mother whenever
the memory of you comes to me, there is a sudden pain in my heart.” She felt as if she could see the warm presence of Sajani close to her and who seemed to say,

> Never mind, my beautiful, you will soon be happy, I have told your father to betroth you and you will soon be married and go to your husband’s home. But mind you look after your old father and your little brother, now that I am no more.

One can find a new light in Leila’s eyes. The way she bruises the python symbolizes a revolutionary message. Gangu often became nostalgic after his wife’s death - recalling his bullocks and plough to till with, the small lichen growing on the edge of the wall, Bhola, the toothless village dog running across the fields in search of an imaginary rabbit and shy women threshing the hay in the sun. He also cursed Buta, who, to him, had wept like a hypocrite at the death of Sajani. ‘The liar’, Gangu bursts forth, and ‘he killed my Sajani with his lies’. He further added: “She was unhappy from the very moment she arrived here, though she didn’t say so, because she did not want to hurt me. And then she took my illness and died.”

Moreover, Gangu was a man of self-respect. One day when Narain narrated the atrocities of Sardar Buta who beat Suleman, a fellow coolie for no fault of his, Gangu was suddenly reminded of his own beating at the hands of Manager Sahib. However, he didn’t want to think of that incident because the Rajput in him, who should have retaliated, had been prevented from doing so by the calamity of his wife’s death. He knew it very well how the insult latent in the beating hurt a man more than actual pain of the blow. The kicks had bruised his body, no doubt, but it was the humiliation of having always to lower his eyes before the man who had beaten him. To remain silent, to suffer and to stifle the bitterness of his experience to forgive, was now his innermost instinct. Forgiveness to him was not fickleness.
He often reminded the proverb, “men with abiding purpose cherish neither hatred nor love…they forgave lightly.” But forgiveness did not mean that they should cease to strive against wrong. Indeed, true forgiveness was a hard battle to be humble and not proud in forgiveness’.

In the Assam Valley tea garden, Reggie Hunt, the assistant planter was a dominating voice. The wives, sisters and mothers of the coolies were not safe in the valley. He was so cruel that once he gave order to the wardens to strike them. He himself rode his horse into the thick of the crowd, trampling on the men, women and children who pushed and groveled and ran in utter confusion. The sobbing, moaning mob of hurt and broken creatures seemed to waver helplessly before this image of Reggie’s ferocity. All the coolies rushed towards the Manager’s barrel ends of the rifles. In the turmoil, one coolie had died and several others wounded. At the initiative of Gangu, they went to Dr. De La Havre. He, on hearing about the incident, felt a dismal wave of futility and the utter invisible ache of helplessness. He encouraged them to report the matter to the Bara sahib and also to abstain from working till justice is given to them. They all crawled away towards the Manager’s office. But their power and courage—all disappeared the moment they saw Reggie Hunt and Croft Cooke. Some of them started “retracing their steps, while the rest fell back, stumbling, shrieking, hysterical, craven and defeated.” Narain very well remarked, “There was nothing to be done except to make up their minds to settle down there and smoke the hookah and mention the name of Ram.”

De La Havre, a man of positive nature, felt that they all had been brought up to what they are now by the sweat of these coolies. Once when Gangu came to him for some financial help to pay off his loan of twenty rupees, he immediately gave him ten rupees and eight annas. He also assured him to do something about a piece
of land for him. He was very critical of the system. On account of his pronounced sympathy with the coolies, he was dismissed and his romance with Barbara came abruptly to end. Though he tried his best to make her recall their relationship but of no use as she was not ready to give up all her relationships for the sake of his love.

Gangu, in spite of his best efforts, could not improve his lot. Life settled down once more to its ordinary routine of dullness for him. He had accepted everything else without even so much as a gesture of complaint. His condition was constant source of anxiety to his daughter who thought he was going mad and to his son who believed that he had become ‘possessed of a ginn or a bhut’. Gangu too, often mumbled: “Who are you, who look towards me? What have I done, oh! Can’t you spare me? My heart is weeping. My wife is dead! My children are young.” And suddenly he would get frightened and would begin to walk back as if the oncoming horses were going to rush at him. He would begin to count the beads of imaginary rosaries and would cry out: “Lord, God, deliver me, save me from the wrath of my enemies.” He very often thought at the working of the Almighty. He said that though the earth was bought and sold and confiscated, God never meant that to happen, for He did not like some persons to have a comfortable living and the others to suffer from dire poverty. He had created land enough to maintain all men and yet many die of hunger and most live under a heavy burden of poverty all their lives as if the earth were made for a few and not for all men.

Charles Croft Cooke had organized a hunt in the honor of His Excellency, Sir Geoffrey Boyd, and the Governor of Assam. The latter had decided to inspect the gardens, particularly the disaffected areas- ‘the scene of the mutiny’. Croft Cooke was happy as the Governor’s visit would not only enhance his prestige in Anglo-Indian circles but also convey the dual policy of the government to the people—the policy of firm rule as well as a paternal regard for the welfare of His
Majesty’s subjects. All the coolies who had been engaged to organize the hunt were given five rupees as baksheesh. Besides, those men who were marked as budmashes during the mutiny were pardoned and half their fines remitted. This was done to stimulate goodwill between the sahibs and the coolies. Though Gangu was not too grateful for these gracious gifts as he still had part of the fine to pay off and the debts he had incurred for his wife’s funeral, he had begun to accept everything without any complaint. He felt he wanted no gold, no silver but only food for his existence. But in his heart of hearts he kept on saying, “Money is everything in this world” as if the phrase were loaded with all the suffering he had endured. He further added:

It is the crux of the world—Gold. Gold is the living soul of man, the color of rajahs and gazelle-eyed courtesans, beautiful to the sight. It is gold that conquers understanding and understanding that achieves gold, so that in this wonderful world gold and understanding are but conditions of each other….

Reggie Hunt, too, had to pay for his cruelty. A sort of coldness had come to prevail between him and the rest of the English community over the riot. He held his father and his stepmother responsible for his miserable life. Though for the time being, he thought to go home, get married and then come back and be thoroughly respectable. That would certainly rehabilitate his position. But that was a question of money. Unless he had sufficient money, he could not afford to keep a wife. For him life was a sport and he wanted to be happy at any cost. He needed only three things—a spot of polo, a woman, and a drink and would damn everything else. Once, in a mad accession of lust he approached Leila while she was leisurely plucking the leaves alone. Seeing him she ran away but he followed her to her house. There, mad with lust and maddened by frustration and fear, he shot blindly
in front of him and killed Gangu. The strain of irony is obvious when Reggie Hunt is discharged guiltless by the biased jury.

Like his other novels, in *Two Leaves and a Bud* also, Anand has depicted two sets of characters, representing two different approaches to life. On the one hand we have positive characters like De La Havre, Gangu, and Narain who stand for what is good in life while on the other there are characters like Reggie Hunt, Croft Cooke and Buta who stand for cruelty. Just as Munoo a village boy in *coolie* goes out in search of subsistence and security but is crushed by powerful exploitative forces operating everywhere and dies of consumption, Gangu, too, moves out and is ultimately killed. But this does not signify the end of individual spark. Gangu’s zeal and zest for life can be found in these lines: “He gripped the handle of his spade with an unwavering faith and dug his foot into the sod made by a furrow and sensed the warm freshness of the earth that would yield fruit.” In *Coolie*, Munoo also longs for life “…..Looking at Mohan frank-eyed and helpless, clinging to him as if the mere touch of his friend’s body would give him life.” Iyengar has rightly observed: “There is something of Forster’s, *A Passage to India* in this novel—the atmosphere of suspicion and strife, the racial intolerance and antagonism, the small talk in the Club, the reign of prejudice and unreason.”[4]

Many a critic come together and criticizes the propagandistic efforts of Anand, which have a direct bearing on his character delineation. S.C. Harrex says, “*Two Leaves and a Bud* fails to integrate philosophy and drama in an artistically satisfying way.”[5] Saros Cowasjee, though he tries to prove that Anand’s presentation of life in the tea plantations is based on facts and that he does not exaggerate the cruelties meted out to the laborers in the tea plantations, comes out with a general remark that “in fiction, straight facts in themselves mean little, and they must always be subordinate to the main interests- character and the story.”[6]
Anand has not been able to make his facts subservient to an artistic handling of his characters and the story. The result is that “Two Leaves and a Bud whittles down to propaganda,” [7] remarks Cowasjee. Marlene Fisher too adjudges the novel with an almost similar conclusion:

Although there are good moments in it, Two Leaves and a Bud is largely an unsuccessful work, and one of the reasons for this is the propagandistic use to which Anand has put his material. Another is the novelist’s failure adequately to control content through form. [8]

Fisher’s opinion that Anand has failed “to control content through form” implies Anand’s tendency to tell what he should have shown through artistically convincing situations and characters. The commentary of these critics, though harsh is justifiable, as Anand has really failed to strike a balance between art and intention. “It was a real story which I was writing in thinly veiled fiction” [9] affirms Mulk Raj Anand. But the veil is a bit too thin and so transparent the intention of the author seems to peep through the covering of fiction. His Marxist leanings become unaesthetically obvious.

In Two Leaves and a Bud Mulk Raj Anand has tried to show that the fate of Gangu is in fact, the fate of every indentured laborer. Long hours of continuous work under rigorous supervision of the British planters and the Indian Sardars, very frequent abuses and even beating at the hands of the owners, deducted wages leading to starvation and cruelty of money lenders are all that become the part of their life in the tea plantations. The planters adopt the attitude to nonchalance towards the coolies. Not only nonchalance, which would perhaps have been easily tolerable to the laborers, but atrocities and frequent beatings are the rewards the laborers earn for their sincere efforts.
The British rulers with the Indian feudal lords inflicted all kinds of humiliations on the poverty-stricken coolies. With their various complexes, they regarded the Indians, particularly laborers, with contempt and scorn. So aloof were the British from the Indian coolies that they had their bungalows well guarded against any interference by the Indian coolies. Anand’s irony touches almost heights when he remarks about the location of the club:

Situated in the pit of the valley, its wide veranda overlooked a vast polo ground, tennis courts, croquet-courts, and gardens, all duly protected against the intrusion of black men, wild animals, hungry goats and cows, by thick hedges and shady trees.

The statement is well substantiated when Reggie Hunt does not approve of Dr. Chunni Lal’s entrance into the club. The few words of Reggie-“I am afraid niggers are not allowed in this club”-contain all the venom of complex-ridden attitude of the Britishers towards the Indians. Through Reggie’s order to the servant ‘Turn the Babu out’, Anand has been able to reveal all the cruelty of the unfeeling British towards even the educated Indians. In the world of tea plantations, women and children too have to drudge for long hours for a pittance a major part of which is very frequently deducted on the pretext of bad plucking. Gangu is scarcely able to save a penny despite the involvement of his wife, daughter and children in the work. Such is the plight of Gangu that he has to run from pillar to post to borrow money for the funeral of his wife. Anand presents a pathetic but authentic picture of the infants who suffer negligence because of their mothers’ working whole day in the plantations:

And they were really no trouble because they did not have to be left at home. No sooner were they born than they could come with their
mothers to the bushes and sleep on the wayside. A whole gang of suckling humanity lay there under the torrid sun upon the mother Earth.

In this reference Anand says, “They actually present the helplessness of both the mothers and the children. Mother Earth too fails to provide the necessary protection to these angelic creatures.” Narain’s wife, we are told, found her child “lying face downwards in a drain,” and still worse, another child had been discovered “lying dead at the foot of a precipice on the south side of the garden”. Narain’s wife is chased back to work even when she is breast-feeding the child. The women, moreover, are perilously exposed to any sexual assault by some lustful British people, particularly by Reggie Hunt. Any kind of resentment by a woman or her husband is likely to be put down with a heavy hand. The wife of Neogi is a victim to the carnal desires of Reggie who is lust incarnate. Leila escapes an attack on her chastity with great difficulty. But her escape in her hut results in the death of Gangu. There is a foreboding of such incidents at a very early stage in the novel. Leila, a very young child, runs away innocently at the sight of Reggie Hunt as she is afraid of the white man.

Narain’s remark introduces the character of Reggie in the novel who, through his deeds, confirms the remark: “He is a very budmash sahib. He is always drunk. And he has no consideration for anyone’s mother or sister. Gangu’s reply, “why, but my daughter is a child….He could not have said anything to her,” seems ironical when Reggie actually tries to molest her. Narain’s warning “Nobody knows what may or may not happen here…Nobody’s mother or sister is safe in this place” comes true. Leila’s fight for life against the python, as many critics observe, is an appropriate prelude to the incident of an effort of Reggie to attack the girl. “The python,” asserts Harrex “is a manifestation of the powers of anti-
human darkness….The girl, by contrast is identified with natural goodness, beauty purity, and innocence through her association with flowers which she picks.” [10] Premila Paul too calls Reggie “the human python.”[11] The phrase explains the basic character of Reggie adequately. To associate Reggie with a venomous animal is not inappropriate because Reggie scarcely has any human consideration left in him.

Anand is conscious enough not to paint the Indians as invariably good and the British unrealistically evil. Moreover, the subject of the novel is the evil of capitalism, and not the east-west encounter as in E.M. forester’s A Passage to India or kamala Markandey’s novels. No doubt, the novelist touches upon the theme of racial conflict but it is in the context of the capitalist-laborer relations. He, therefore, presents many of the Indian characters who, too, are the cause of trouble to the coolies. The greed of the grocer and moneylenders, the selfish motives of people like Buta and Neogi and the money-mindedness of Shashi Bhushan and others like him make the life of coolies still worse and more unbearable. They are all bent upon fleecing the innocent and helpless coolies. The world of the tea plantation, therefore, is a veritable inferno. Anand, quite dexterously, sets the tone of the novel in the very beginning. Gangu, on reaching Assam, finds the forests to be like the kingdom of Yama, “the God of Death, towering supreme, a skull in his left hand and a sword in his right hand.” Life, in this hell is so painful that death seems to be a welcome escape to another world.

The pain of torture and humiliation at the hands of the British rulers is expressed by Gangu, when he finds a pregnant coolie woman collapse and die, “Happy death, with a soul which had tired of pining in its sorrow.” The words of Gangu are as full of pathos as those of Hari in Coolie who occupies the vacant space for the night despite a warning by a woman that her husband had died on that
spot. Hari’s answer, “He has attained release; we shall rest in his place” amply reveals his sickness with life. Gangu has such a mental state again after the suppression of the riot. He, very often, looks at the river flowing there as a symbol of annihilation. He is afraid that someday the river will cause the doom of many people by turning its side all of a sudden. But then, remarks Anand:

He himself had suffered so many ups and downs in his life, however, and the dull pain of a constant anxiety had so seeped into the cells of his body that the torment of this fear did not become violent. He even looked forward to it as a kind of relief from the continual nervous agitation of days of waiting for the storm to come. And Gangu does attain relief from the painful world only a few days later.

We see in the novel that the British planters and their Indian officials demand complete passive resignation from the coolies. The British masters, though insensitive to the physical and emotional needs of the coolies, are sensitive enough to feel at once the revolutionary thoughts of the coolies. And they are prompt enough to make arrangements for the suppression of any agitation. When the coolies, under the direction of De La Havre, got to put forward their complaints against the unjust cruelty of Reggie Hunt, the British masters mistake their mission for a rebellion. They at once call in the army to suppress any such attempt. The coolies have never heard of trade unions in the tea plantations. Anand tries to set aside his prejudices against the British by making Dr Havre, himself a Briton, a supporter of the poor Indian coolies. But Dr Havre fails to realize his plans as he too has to depend on the permission and approval by the planters. He has also to suffer a lot for only supporting the cause of the Indians. He is excommunicated, he is deprived of the love of his beloved, and he has to face ostracization from his own countrymen. He feels him uneasy among the unfeeling and cruel British
owners. Barbara, too, who once had admired his human feeling and undaunted courage, rejects him in a cold manner. The coolies, therefore, can never hope for justice. Gangu, along with Narian and Bhutia, is fined for having gathered the coolies to express their demands.

A paradoxical statement is employed by Anand very skillfully, “he [Gangu] was allowed to enjoy the liberty of being a slave”, to present the abjectness to which the coolies are forced. The satire reaches a climax when Gangu is killed by Reggie hunt and the magistrate, along with the jury, acquits Reggie of the charge with the judgment: “An impartial jury has found you ‘not guilty’ on the charge of murder or culpable homicide….You are discharged.” “The impartial jury”, we are told, was very partially proportioned with seven European and two Indian members. There could scarcely be any episode more ironical than this one. One dexterous stroke of irony adequately brings out all the pathos of the lives of coolies who are denied justice and fair play. K.N. Sinha seems to overlook the concluding chapter of the novel when he remarks:

Two Leaves and a Bud may be regarded as a brilliant piece of naturalistic fiction. It has little or no use of irony, which alone could encompass the whole range of feeling from the sublime to the ridiculous. It leans rather on pathos; making it do the work of irony…it succeeds in transmitting an overwhelming sense of passion which gives it its telling dramatic force. [12]

It is not to be denied that the novel has a “telling dramatic force” but the remark that it makes “no use of irony,” implies going against the textual facts. Anand makes a successful use of irony both of episode and statement. The novel, no doubt, is a brilliant piece of naturalistic fiction, as it presents the life of coolies
in stark colors. That the pains of coolies and the atrocities of the masters are not exaggerated with a propagandist aim is well revealed by Saros Cowasjee. He compares the plight of coolies in *Two Leaves and a Bud* with the facts in the report of the Royal Commission on Labor known as the Whitley Report from which Anand drew much of his material. The comparison drives the critic to the conclusion that “far from exaggerating, he (Anand) has minimized the brutalities of the English planters and the hardships inflicted on the coolies.”[13] Anand himself, in a letter to J.F. Brown remarks: “I admit that it is the most bitter of my novels, but it is poetic. Were it a literary reportage, it would be hundred times bitterer.”[14]

That it could be bitterer, critics do agree. Cowasjee, for instance, agrees with the reviewer of the *New Statesman* that “the book is a plain indictment of the Assam labor system. That being so, the documentary basis could have been made stronger.”[15] Sinha, however, does not agree with Anand’s own evaluation of his novel that “it is poetic.” Sinha’s criticism, however, does not seem very acceptable when he asserts that,

*Two Leaves and a Bud* is neither authentic reportage nor a poem in suffering. It’s sensitized and to some extent truthful delineation of experience is much too peripheral and casual to be truly poetic, it is flashy and episodic in the extreme, whereas true poetic rendition implies an integrated and functional view of life. [16]

His observation of life of coolies, no doubt, is “integrated.” His portrayal of the character of Gangu is as true to life as that of Bakha or Munoo. The nostalgic reminiscences of his life in his village, the acute pains of his existence in the tea plantations, his reaction to various situations make his portrait life like and
authentic. Saros Cowasjee, who otherwise praises the character portrayal of Gangu, remarks:

The only flaw in this excellent portrayal is that Gangu is occasionally given a kind of introspection which does not seem true to his character. It is unlikely that the simple peasant would ask himself the following questions and that even if he was to do so, he would frame them in these words. [17]

Gangu proceeds to quote the following questions:

Did all the Sahibs who came to own this land get their laborers by letting lies pass for truth, did they make deceit a virtue and exalt the virtue and exalt the worst to the best, make very pushful duffer like Buta into a Sardar, and liberate all the selfishness that any charlatan could use for his own purpose? Do all good men die here and others live on? But we must not forget that pain may have either of the two reverse effects on the mind of a person; it may make a person dull-witted and blank it may also, which is more likely, sharpen his wit.

In fact the reasoning like that of Gangu is a deduction of conclusion after observation, rather firsthand experience, of highly pathetic situations. Moreover, his intellectualization of this is compatible with the thoughts in his mind about life in general when the train reaches the tea plantation.

Anand’s weakness lies in his inability in “integrating his humanistic philosophy and drama in an artistically satisfying way.”[18] He fails to resist the passion to moralize. His Marxist tendency becomes obvious when he overtly protests against the atrocities of the capitalists, particularly the British. He again introduces an altruistic Dr Havre to support the cause of the laborers against their
suppression by the employers. Anand, no doubt, chooses an English character to speak for the Indian coolies and he has tried to conceal his prejudices against the English colonialists, the fault, however, lies in making the savior figure unconvincingly virtuous and making him indulge in direct propaganda for the suppressed coolies against the thriving British owners. Sometimes his harangues propagate against capitalism so only that he seems to be merely a device to articulator Anand’s outraged feelings. The interference of the author is clearly felt in most of the episodes in which Dr Havre figures predominantly. Like Mohan in Coolie, Dr Havre not only articulates Anand’s overtly Marxist thinking but also demonstrates it. Mohan gives up highly stationed family and chooses a comparatively austere life full of hard work. He dedicates himself to a consideration of the plight of the poor coolies though he fails to effect any change in the inequitable social order of the plantations. He only observes, prepares reports and gives impartial comments regarding the living conditions of the coolies. These documents do not fit into the framework of the novel. The reports read out by Barbara clearly reveal Anand’s message for the coolies and the planters alike.

Dr. Havre’s failure to actually affect a rebellion by the coolies against their masters makes him all the more an unauthentic character. He has dedicated himself to the cause of coolies, he has incurred the wrath of his compatriots, but when the coolies actually want to go to Mr. Croft-Cooke to complain against the atrocities meted out to them, he can do nothing except tell them to go “to the Burra Sahib and report to him”. When the coolies want him to go with them to the Burra Sahib, he, instead of doing so, prefers to stay back and attend to the injured coolies. At such a moment of excitement he feels no sentiments:
De La Havre stood for a moment to ask him what he could do, what he really felt, go to the surgery. He tried to force himself to feel something, some pity, some remorse or tenderness. But all his blood seemed to have dried up. And he stared before him, still, detached, apart. Even in his brain he could not see the crowd except as a solid mass.

At such a critical moment, a “tremor of weakness travelled down his spine”. And when he actually wants to go with the rebellious crowd against the cruel masters, he is sacked. He is no more successful in effecting a revolution against the cruel capitalists than Kanwar Rampal Singh in The Sword and the Sickle against the feudal lords. Dr. Havre again fails to change the orthodox thinking of Indian people. His visit to the house of Shashi Bhushan to see his wife, who is in labor, makes him appear as an ineffective fellow in his practical life. The wife of Shashi Bhushan refuses to be attended to by a male Doctor. Dr Havre can do nothing against such rigid orthodoxy. He has to come back without ever seeing the patient. Anand remarks that Dr Havre was “angry with himself for having intruded and still angrier with the stupid conventions of these people.” But he feels helpless against these conventions and comes out only to brood over some of Indian superstitions.

Due to their too flimsy nature, Dr. Havre’s relations with Barbara too, seem unconvincing. Dr. Havre is excommunicated because he sides with the Indian coolies. Barbara, who has revealed great admiration for Dr. Havre’s sober and profound thoughts against the shallow thinking of her parents, Mascaras, and Reggie Hunt, ultimately chooses English life of merry-making in preference to the austere and thought-oriented life of Dr Havre. Unlike Maya in The Sword and the Sickle, Barbara gives in to the ways of her parents and snaps all relations with Dr. Havre with unconvincing abruptness. Dr Havre, in this way, appears to be a
clumsy figure, “an ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain.”[19] Almost all the critics on Anand, with varying degrees, have severely criticized Anand’s failure to make Dr Havre a lively, dynamic, and convincing character. Harrex comments on the lifelessness of the savior figure: “…the combination of tendentiousness and moral passion in De La Havre’s character comes directly from Anand. The main danger of this mind transplant is that “life tends to be lost in the process.”[20] H.M. Williams who adjudges the novel a bit too harshly, finds Dr Havre to be merely “a card-board figure cut out on the pattern of English ‘liberalism’ and parlor-room Marxism.”[21] Though we cannot completely agree with his appreciation of the novel in general, his appreciation of the character of Dr Havre is just. Dr Havre really seems to be only a spokesman of Anand.

Mulk Raj Anand’s sympathy for the weak helpless and the poor coolies is again unaesthetically apparent in his prejudiced treatment of the British tea planters and their Indian sycophants. His contempt for the British is as obvious as is his love for the coolies. Reggie Hunt is lust incarnate. Riding, playing polo, drinking and womanizing are the chief characteristics of his personality. His sexual instincts have overpowered his rational and moral self. The novel shows that no beautiful coolie woman may avoid an assault on her chastity once Reggie takes a fancy to her. Any defeat or unhappy experience of Reggie must end in his forgetting the incident through a rape. His rough treatment of Neogi’s wife reveals the beast in him who is unable to suppress his lust. Again it is in a frenzy of lust that he chases Leila and the chase ends in the cruel murder of Gangu. Anand caricatures Reggie through incidents like his being helplessly caught in heavy rain. His defeat at polo and his failure to face these difficult situations in a manly manner, make him a ridiculous figure. The other English characters like Croft-Cooke, Hutchinson,
Mascara, and Tweetie do not indulge in immoral practices but they too are to blame for imposing no check on the open and lustful activities of Reggie. These English characters, as Premila Paul rightly remarks, “With their slimy ways have become parties to the dastardly acts of Reggie Hunt.”[22] These English planters are inhumanly indifferent to the feelings and thoughts of the coolies. Among themselves too, they are not bound by any bondage of mutual affection or even a feeling of patriotism. They are bound by drawing room conventions and club etiquettes whereas the coolies have instinctive affection and sensitive consideration for one another.

Gangu and Narain, for instance, feel a kind of comradeship though they were complete strangers before they came to Assam. Even when commenting on the importance of gold in an ironical style, Narain does not forget the significance of love. “For it would be difficult,” remarks Narain, “to keep afloat in the ocean of gold unless we rescue from its beautiful but bitter waters a little fragment of love.” The shallowness of their lives is clearly presented through the tiger-hunt scene. A number of coolies have to work day and night to prepare for the hunt which is only a way to satisfy the false ego of some of the Englishmen. Anand, with subtle irony, mocks at the English when a professional hunter kills the tiger and Croft-Cooke applauds the Governor of Assam, Geoffrey Boyd: “Excellency! That was a good shot!” His Excellency is photographed with one of his feet on the tiger. The scene is also an instance of the British cruelty towards the coolies. The tiger assaults a coolie and the British ladies in the distance shout: A rabbit! A rabbit! Anand, with skilful and subtle satire, lashes at the inhuman pretentiousness of the lives of the British. That Anand has consciously tried to paint the British in dark colors is clear in his own confession: “As I got into the book, I was biased in favor of my Indian
characters and tended to caricature the Englishmen and Englishwomen who play such a vital part in this book.”[23]

Despite Anand’s confession of his bias in favor of the Indian characters, the latter do not escape unleashed with their own weaknesses. The piercing eye of the novelist probes into the weak spots of the coolies who are responsible for much of their trouble. Anand criticizes them for their unhygienic ways of work, their habits of deceiving, their undue servility, and their inferiority complex. They are taken in by the clothes of the British people. The white skin of the latter is sufficient to cow down these gutless coolies. If the British have been able to dominate them, it is because the coolies have never raised a voice against domination. If Reggie Hunt looks at every coolie woman with lustful eyes, the coolie women themselves vie with one another to win the attention of the assistant planter. They had hunger for money and jewellery. If the planters are cruel, so are the Indian sardars like Buta and Neogi. Shashi Bhushan tries to extract money from the collies for letting them see Croft-Cooke. The novel is interspersed with such condemnation of the ways of the Indian employees and certainly it lends some objectivity to the novel.

But, in general, Anand’s leanings are very clear in the novel and his intrusion is felt very often. Despite his attempts to treat his theme and characters objectively, the fact remains that he has failed to do so. He has not been able to convey his message dramatically and forcefully. Marlene Fisher’s appreciation of the novel is acceptable: “Two Leaves and a Bud is one of the few creations of Anand in which the artist is overpowered by the angry man who is pained by his world.”[24] The protests of the angry man mar much of the artistic appeal of the novel. And the savior figure, Dr Havre, who becomes the instrument to give an outlet to the angry protests falls to emerge as a convincing, true to life character. Anand’s discreet choice of an Englishman as his desire-image fails to give an
impression of objectivity because of his effort to idealize him. The savior hero
seems to be a personification of selflessness and sacrifice, not a flesh-and-blood
figure. His ultimate dismissal from his job and his rejection by Barbara give the
novel a pessimistic tinge because it symbolizes the defeat of virtue in its fight
against vice.
References:


3. Anand, Mulk Raj. *Two Leaves and a Bud*. Bombay, Kutub Popular, 1946. All subsequent references have been taken from this edition of the text.


7. Ibid., p.88


9. Quoted by Saros Cowasjee in *So Many Freedoms*.p.85


