CHAPTER III

"THE POOREST OF THE POOR - A STUDY OF COOLIE AND TWO LEAVES AND A BUD"
"THE POOREST OF THE POOR" - A Study of
Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud

In his well-known essay, "The Story of My Experiments with a White Lie", Anand 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", says Anand,

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 1 castaways ---

This dream came true for the first time in the thoroughly revised and finalised version of Untouchable, which came to be acknowledged as a resounding success. Having run the risk of becoming an 'untouchable' by virtue of its unusual and unprecedented subject, Untouchable was published in 1935. In quick succession followed the two novels Coolie (1936) and Two Leaves and a Bud (1937), which too are about "the poorest of the poor" and their plight, with this difference that while Untouchable and The Road, discussed in the previous chapter, deal with untouchables who are discriminated in the name of caste, these two novels are concerned with another class of
people, a growing mass of Indian humanity consisting of wage-earning labourers, derogatorily and contemptuously referred to as coolies, who too are socially discriminated and made to suffer indignity, humiliation, and material and psychological damage no less than the unfortunate outcastes.

'Untouchable' and 'Coolie' have been derogatory and discriminatory terms in India. 'Coolie', however has the distinction of being used in some other countries too as a term of contempt. One recalls that as an Indian and spokesman for the Indian indentured labourers in South Africa Gandhi was sneeringly referred to as the 'Collie barrister'. There is a basic difference between an 'Untouchable' and 'Coolie'. An untouchable like Bakha or his counterpart may be chided, humiliated and even kicked for violating the laws of caste, for not being beyond pollution distance. But, paradoxically, he has his place in society, in spite of being called an outcaste, because his services are necessary. He is sought after to remove refuse or skin dead animals. The lot of the coolie, the wage-earning labourer, is very different. In theory, he is free to move about and choose his own work to earn a living. But the conditions under which he has to live, and the rigid system which has brought him into existence, have made his life
insecure. He has no assured place in society, because he is not indispensable. Often underpaid and overworked, always poor and burdened with debt, and unsure of continuous employment, he frequently becomes a drifter, moving from place to place unable to strike roots in any place. Where he works he is just taken for granted, as if he were a cheap and useful machine, and often made the target of abuse and indignities. The emergence of this new class of 'Coolies', who are displaced disinherited and dispossessed, was "the direct result of British rule, and the industrial revolution they brought about without paying much heed to social reforms". Under colonial rule, a number of social and economic changes took place and as a result a feudal society was gradually transformed into a capitalistic one.

The class system in India has turned out to be a new kind of caste system. It is built on the cash nexus on which it thrives. It has created a society much more complicated and devious, and in some respects more rigid than the one created by caste. Therefore it has become a very powerful divisive force, far more damaging to social cohesion than caste, as it has tended to segregate people into the rich and the poor, the haves and
the have-nots, cutting across all distinctions of caste, race, culture, intellectual attainments and so on, and to discriminate against the poor and the have-nots. As money appears to have become the chief governing value of life for most people, and the measure of status and place of an individual in society it determines both caste and class, and all human relations. Exploitation of the vulnerable to one's advantage becomes the means of attaining wealth. A necessary consequence of it is the dehumanisation of all concerned, and segregation and subjugation of countless people who earn their daily bread as wage-earners and coolies into perpetual misery, and deprivation of all their potentialities for growth, development, and fulfillment. It also encourages and fosters avarice, greed, possessiveness and sadism in human nature. Anand's social anger in novel after novel is directed against all those who are responsible for this state of affairs in Indian society.

Between the writing of the first draft of Untouchable, sometime in the late 'twenties and the writing of Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud with which this chapter is concerned, Anand's perception of the social problems of India and his vision of Indian social reality had been sharpened, broadened, and deepened due to the several influences he came under. The influence
of Gandhi has already been referred to in the previous chapter. P. K. Rajan has pointed out:

While he (i.e., Anand) still remained basically in the Indian-Gandhian-Buddhist-humanist tradition, the influence of Marxism widened the horizons of his outlook and he began to see the tragedy of the Indian poor in a new light.

Although Anand had been familiar with Marxist thought since the coal miners' strike in England in 1926, which was repressed by the Government, he did not feel "the full impact of Marx" until 1932 "when he accidentally fell upon Marx's "Letters on India". His reading of the letters revolutionised his thinking completely. They "clarified and extended" his "half-formed thoughts." Then Marxist creed appealed to him because it seemed to offer "an explanation of, and a solution to, to the sufferings of his fellow men". The imprint of Marx on his thought and art becomes more and more conspicuous from this time onwards, and is clearly manifest in Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud.

From the plight of the social outcastes and untouchables caused by quasi-religious considerations, Anand turns his attention in these two novels to the travails and tragic plight of the uprooted and insecure.
peasants who, forced by circumstances, have become coolies in places far off from their homes. His attempt is 'to portray in artistic terms "the yawning hiatus between the haves and the have-nots, the exploiters and the exploited, the rulers and the ruled". In these novels, justly called "chronicles of coolies" by M. K. Naik, "the range and scope of Anand's fiction widens and the canvas expands" to accommodate an incredible range of Indian life from the extreme Himalayan north and the industrial south west, to the tea gardens of Assam in the north east. In Untouchable Anand restricts himself to describing just a day in the life of an untouchable in a town, and with edged economy selects and organises his material in such a way as to explore the mind of the protagonist. The focus is single and concentrated. In Coolie Anand takes a panoramic view, covering vast spaces, a large number of people as well as a great variety of people, and relates a series of adventures in which the orphan protagonist gets involved, to die ultimately almost as a destitute. In Two Leaves and a Bud once again, Anand restricts himself to a single place, a tea estate in Assam, to concentrate on the miseries and humiliation of indentured labourers of a tea plantation. Together these three novels make, in the words of Cowasjee, an "epic of
misery".

Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud deal with the conditions of labourers in the pre-independence days, more particularly in the thirties. This fact has to be borne in mind while reading them, because since then a number of welcome changes have taken place in the living conditions of labourers in India, particularly wherever they have organised themselves into unions. In general, many of their interests are protected and life is made less insecure for them. Still, with the phenomenally increasing population of the country, there are countless people as unorganised labourers, many of them being children, young boys and girls, whose lot is not at all different from that of the coolies in Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud. They continue to be overworked, underpaid, and constantly harassed by the money-lenders, and exposed to several health hazards. Discrimination against them persists. And the struggle between the have and the have-nots is as severe as before. Therefore much of what is seen in these two novels remains as much true today as it was when they were written.

To begin with Coolie, in choosing a coolie for the protagonist of his second novel, Anand was doing
something unprecedented as in the case of his Untouchable. This novel portrays the trials, tribulations, and humiliation of Munoo, an orphaned boy of fourteen. In its incisiveness and suggestiveness the one-word title chosen for the novel is comparable to the title of Untouchable. The absence of any article in the title suggests the anonymity as well as the inconsequentiality of the protagonist Munoo, in spite of his being an individual. He emerges from the novel as an individual and a type at the same time. As Srinivasa Iyengar has observed, "Coolie carries no specific indictment of individuals: the indictment is against a society as a whole— a society that breeds such prejudice and cupidity and cruelty". And hence the panoramic scope of the novel, its broad sweep and diffusion. In this context Srinivasa Iyengar's observations deserve to be cited:

Coolie is more like the macrocosm that is Indian society --- (it) is verily a cross-section of India, the visible India, that mixture of the horrible and the holy, the inhuman and the humane, the sordid and the beautiful. The general effect is panoramic, good and evil being thrown together as in actual life; --- we are constantly shifted, a new situation engulfs us at every turn, and new cruelties and absurdities whirl round us. Village,
Taluk headquarters, District headquarters, Presidency capital, the national (summer) capital—this is progression indeed, but only spatially, for the human situation hardly alters wherever we may be. Munoo is the exploited all the time, one way or the other, by one person or another; and his fate is typical of the fate of millions whose only distinguishing badge is patient sufferance.

The endemic evil castigated in this novel is not caste, which becomes secondary, but socio-economic discrimination. Anand's sociological concerns here include such issues as poverty, exploitation, social and economic parasitism, and moral corruption.

Coolie narrates "the odyssey" of Munoo, a sturdy hill-boy of fourteen, orphaned and left to the care of his uncle and aunt, none too well disposed towards him. Innocent, naively warm-hearted, full of curiosity and zest for life, he is taken out of the pastoral surroundings of his native village in the Kangra valley much against his wishes, to become a domestic servant in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram, a clerk in the Imperial Bank of India in Sham Nagar, all because of the cupidity of his uncle Daya Ram, and aunt. That is how he is uprooted from his native surroundings and set on a
course of adventures, not of his seeking, until he dies of tuberculosis, aggravated by over work. Munoo's experience of discrimination actually begins at home, and intensifies as he is forced to go from place to place. He is driven from pillar to post till death overtakes him. Had his been a more fortunate life, and had he been a rogue and not an innocent victim of the rogueries of the world, the story of his adventures would have made an engaging picaresque novel. Through him, as Cowsjee remarks, "the whole misery of India speaks". Although Anand tells the story from a limited omniscient point of view, it is projected from Munoo's angle mainly. The narrative is limited to a period less than two years in order to lay stress on "the proletarian tragedy of life-negation", thwarted innocence and unfulfilled potentiality.

According to Cowasjee, Anand "was provoked into writing this novel by the partiality shown by Bonamy Dobreel, T. S. Eliot and K. de B. Codrington to Kipling's hero Kim. He took for his central character, Munoo, one of his childhood playmates, who was consigned to labour in a pickle factory and who accepted his lot with a fatalism peculiar to the Indian peasantry". Peter Quennel, whom Cowasjee quotes, has said of the novel that it is "India seen third-class --- a continent
whose bleakness, vastness and poverty are unshaded by a touch of glamour, more or less fictitious, that so many English story tellers, from Kipling to Major Yeats-Brown, have preferred to draw across the scene".

There are five chapters in the novel, each chapter representing a specific phase of the protagonists' life in a specific setting. They are all linked together by the travails of the protagonist. The first, which is a very short chapter, serves as a prelude to what follows. It introduces Munoo, the orphaned boy under the care of his loveless uncle and aunt, just a little before he is forced to leave his village in the Kangra hills for Sham Nagar. He is presented as a natural rural lad, who is joyous, innocent, and sensitive, full of high spirits, and whose blood "ran to the tune" of all the "lavish beauty" found in the idyllic surroundings of his village, from which he virtually tears himself away to earn a few rupees to gratify the greed of his guardians. He knows that his parents were ruined by the ruthless usurious landlord who had seized their land because they could not pay the interest on the mortgage. He also knows "how his father had died a slow death of bitterness and disappointment and left his mother a penniless beggar". It is as if Munoo has inherited
from them their victimhood. The novelist seems to suggest that Munoo's beginnings in life are characteristic of the underprivileged and dispossessed classes. In spite of his awareness of his lot and his unwillingness to leave his village, he has dreamt of "all the wonderful things" that the town is supposed to have. Subsequent experiences shatter every one of his dreams, as he tumbles from episode to episode. "The chronicle of Munoo's life proceeds to reveal him always as the harassed underdog, the victim of forces against which he is powerless to fight, and which he can neither control nor accept".

Chapter two of the novel is concerned with Munoo's stay in Sham Nagar and his experience of discrimination and humiliation at the hands of his superiors, not of caste but of status and money. Thrown out of his village home by his hostile aunt and bullying uncle, Munoo is put into the domestic service of Babu Nathoo Ram, an employee of the Imperial Bank in Sham Nagar. His descent from the comparative security, freedom and happiness of his village on the hills into the plains, in retrospect, would appear to be a descent into hell, though certainly not of his making. He is maltreated and exploited by the Babu and his turbulent wife, while his uncle appropriates to himself the five rupees paid
as his wages. He is virtually turned into a domestic slave, his condition being no different from that of a bonded labourer. He has to live in an "atmosphere charged with sharp abuse, unending complaints and incessant bullying" day in and day out.

Munoo's troubles start from the very minute he is installed in the service of Bibi Uttam Kaur, wife of Babu Nathoo Ram, after a long march through the hills in the hot sun. He expects that he would be given some food at his destination, according to custom. Instead, he is asked to go on an errand at once. Not even his uncle, whose name ironically is Daya Ram does not think of his hunger, but chooses to drive home to the boy of his servitude: You will be looked after here. You will get plenty to eat in this home -- Don't forget to do your best for the masters. You are their servant and they are big people". When Munoo returns home after his first errand, he is given only "a loaf of stale pancake", not a meal though he helps Bibiji to cook it. Not infrequently he is given "the remainders from her husband's plate". He has to eat the chapatis given to him with his hands, being considered too low in status to eat off the utensils. The grimness of his experiences in this household is starkly depicted in
telling scenes. One such happen within hours of his arrival at the house. Used as he is to run into the fields every morning to relieve himself, and unable to know where the lavatory is, he relieves himself close to the wall outside the house. He is discovered, panic-stricken and shamed. A volley of abuse from Bibiji follows. He is warned that he has to use the servant's latrine at the foot of the hill, not theirs because they are superior people. He is also warned that he has no right to join the laughter of his superiors or the sports of her children. To top it all comes from her the humiliating insult, adding to the injury already done:

Since you are being paid a good wage, more money than you ever saw in your whole life in the village - more money, in fact, than your mother or father ever saw - it would be good for you to do a little work for it.

Bibiji calls Munoo for no particular reason 'savage', 'brute', 'thief', 'idiot', 'stupid fool', 'good for nothing pig' etc. His life under her roof becomes one of "drudgery from morning to night (and) is equalled only by the most violent invectives and insults hurled at him".
In spite of his hardships, Munoo retains his zest for life, impish and irrepressible curiosity and child-like sense of wonder. Almost every object in the house of Nathoo Ram fills him with amazement:

He lost himself in the fairyland of the sitting-room as, squatting on his heels, he swept the carpet with the broom. His eyes caressed the mahogany varnish of the throne-like chairs, they dwelt with admiration on the various photographs—He scrutinised everything with wonder and love, tracing the colours, the shapes and sizes of all the things, inquiring into their meanings.

'What is written in that book, I wonder?' he asked himself. 'How does the big clock work? The voice in the box: I wonder how it arises?'

Here is irrefutable evidence of Munoo's potentiality for growth, development and fulfillment, which is damaged and destroyed by the discrimination he is subjected to in various places. In this he resembles Bakha the untouchable. Like him too, he is sensitive and responsive to gestures of kindness and consideration. He is "touched---to the quick" by the kind offer of his master's daughter Shaila to help him in scrubbing the utensils. He is attracted by the warmth radiated by the chota Babu, and his spirits revive in the atmosphere
created by his jollity. Munoo's heart goes out to him when he gives him on a plate some English sweets to eat. Out of gratitude he answers with alacrity every little gesture of command of the chota Babu. But the persistent and malicious nagging of his Bibiji, who is never tired of reminding him of his inferior status, neutralises whatever comfort and solace he derives from the little gestures of kindness shown him by the chota Babu.

Hunt and humiliated, Munoo is forced to brood over his lot. It is not easy for him to settle down to a "routine of domestic slavery". "The wild bird of his heart (flutters) every now and then with the desire for happiness". He finds it necessary on an occasion to ask himself question about his identity, very much as Bakha does when faced with a crisis. To his question, "What am I - Munoo?", the answer he gets is, "I am Munoo, Babu Nathoo Ram's servant". The reality of his position in the social order with its inevitability flashes upon his mind. It does not occur to ask himself what is he apart from being a servant. He gets so much conditioned to his servant-hood that he takes his identity as a servant for granted. As Rajan points out, Munoo's "level of consciousness is so low --- that
he takes the servant-master relationship to be final and irrevocable”. Having to live amidst men of perverted ambitions in a world of perverted ideas, Munoo resigns himself to the fatalistic view that he has to remain a slave. As yet he is not aware of the secret of the superiority of his master and those like him. Their nice clothes and the nice things they possess are enough to convince him that they are “marvellous, wonderful people”. It takes some more time for him to know that the superiority they claim for themselves rests on money. Thoroughly convinced of his own inferiority, he accepts his position as a slave, no more than a brute as his nagging mistress has called him, and promises himself “that he would be a good servant, a perfect model of a servant”. But, instead of becoming a perfect servant, he brings down upon himself the fury and wrath of his mistress by inadvertently lowering her family prestige and depriving his master of his one opportunity to climb the social ladder.

That happens during the visit of Mr. England, the chief cashier of the Imperial Bank, to Babu Nathoo Ram’s house to favour him with his company at tea. The Babu extends invitation to him with the hope of ingratiating himself with his superior and getting from him a letter of recommendation for the position of accountant.
The tea-party, which ends in a superb fiasco, brings out fully the flattering and cringing servility of Nathoo Ram, and reminds the reader that the background for this novel is the British India. Narasimhaiah has remarked: "There is nothing to match the masterly presentation of the fiasco in all Indian fiction in English". Excited and elaborate preparation for the tea-party precede the Sahib's visit, and Anand describes the week-long medley of preparations "with wit, detachment and insight". Munoo also shares the excitement of the occasion with his master and mistress, and is in high spirits throughout and eager to be serviceable. But while fetching the tea for the Sahib, in his excitement he trips and the precious china falls to pieces on the floor, and with the party as well as the Babuji’s prospects of promotion fall through.

This episode has undoubted literary qualities. It has a two-fold significance in the novel. It demonstrates that Anand can present an authentic picture of a colonial Englishman. It also illustrates, as Cowasjee points out, Anand's conviction that, the British Government not only exploited the Country's natural resources, but debased the character of those Indians who were in its service. It
created a body of sycophants, looking up to the English, fawning, cringing becoming a ready tool of exploitation in the hands of their masters. And they lost their sense of humanity and human decency. Nathoo Ram and Daya Ram have been dehumanised in the service of the English, and have lost all fellow-feeling. This is best seen from the way they bully and abuse Munoo.

In other words, this episode draws attention to the human consequences of discrimination in the name of race, which becomes the burden of Two Leaves and a Bud, which will be examined later on in this chapter.

Munoo is made the scapegoat for the utter collapse of the tea-party. He is blamed for it all. His mistress raves most:

Vay, may you die, may you be broken, may you fade away, blind one! --- May the flesh of your dead body rot in hell! With what evil star did you come to this house, that you do everything wrong?

The chota Babu's attempts to defend Munoo are of no avail before the fury of Bibiji who gives him a sharp, clean slap on the cheek, not content with having lashed out at him with her tongue. When he turns to his uncle Daya Ram for sympathy and for some lentils and rice, he gets indeed insults and blow after blow. His pitiful
cries have no effect on his uncle who "had been hardened into cruelty by his love of money, by the fear of poverty and by the sense of inferiority that his job as a peon in the Bank gave him". Daya Ram throws him out with, "I have neither sympathy nor food for you!"

Full of disappointment and helpless rage Munoo returns home (returns morosely to duty - a service incapable). In a few days he recovers his natural vigour and zest for life. But unexpectedly he gets involved in a scuffle with other servant boys in which he receives a dangerous cut on his head, which keeps him confined to his corner in the kitchen for several days because of acute pain and fever. While Bibiji gives him scant attention, the chota Babu regularly dresses his wound, and Sheila in her own child's way gives him her sympathy. Even in his half-conscious state of mind he is sensible of their kindness, and in particular the elusive attraction of the girl. His upbringing has been such that he bends his head with shame every time he sees her really or in imagination, as she is like the fruit in someone else's garden.

More importantly during these days of forced confinement, the urge to be free, independent and earn money grows on him. As a result of his recent experi-
ences, his consciousness has expanded a little more to make him dwell on the importance of money, and the difference between a poor boy like himself and rich people like his masters. It is a very significant indication of the growth of his consciousness that he recalls "the shrivelled-up skeleton of old Gangu, the seventy-year-old grandfather of his school friend Bishan, who worked as a labourer on the fields of anyone who could employ him", "the lean face of Bishamber's mother who went charring in the house of the land-lord", "the hollow eyes of his own father looking down at him tenderly", and his mother who, while he lay warmly and securely in her lap, "moved the millstone, round and round --- till she had languished and expired". In his present state of emptiness, the thought that there are "so many people" in his village who are poor brings him some comfort, though a small one. Would they all die as his parents did, he wonders. His brooding soul comes to the conclusion:

Money is, indeed, everything --- whether there were more rich or more poor people, there seemed to be only two kinds of people in the world. Caste did not matter. 'I am a Kshatriya and I am poor, and Varma, a Brahmin, is a servant boy, a menial, because he is poor. No, caste does not matter ---:
there must only be two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor.

Munoo regains health physically, though his will is broken, and he actively returns to all his earlier domestic chores.

Munoo's natural impishness, which remains unschooled by all the rigorous moralising and abuse of his betters, and which remains unchecked by the physical hurt he had suffered, brings him once again into immediate disgrace. One day to make his role as a monkey, which all the children enjoy, as natural as possible he bites innocently on the cheek of Sheila. But this act is construed otherwise by his employers whose sensibilities are shocked. He is slapped, kicked, and beaten savagely with a thick stick so mercilessly by Babuji that even the sadistic Bibiji feels that the "ungrateful wretch" has had enough of punishment. Munoo's soul surges up in such rebellion and hate that he himself is startled by it. But, like Bakha, he too dare not revolt, such being the conditioning of his life. Anand adds the cryptic remark: "A whipped dog hides in a corner; a whipped human seeks escape". That is precisely what Munoo does. At the twilight hour, when all the members of the household are other-
wise preoccupied, he runs away from home. He finds his way into a third class railway carriage, glad to be in the moving thing, though he does not know where the train goes.

Thus begins the next phase of Munoo’s life of discrimination, humiliation and victimisation, in the feudal city of Daulatpur. This phase is followed by his experiences in the industrial city of Bombay. Chapters three and four of the novel which together make up the bulk of the novel, depict these phases of Munoo’s life in which he becomes a real coolie. From the seeming security of his domestic slavery at Sham Nagar, he is flung on to the uncertainty and insecurity of the life of a wage earning labourer and all the attendant travails of it. In these chapters, as Cowasjee has observed, Anand is "at his angriest", his anger directed against all those individuals and institutions responsible for discrimination against the underprivileged, dispossessed and downtrodden, and the consequent dehumanisation.

Munoo who hides himself under the bunk of a packed third-class carriage in the Daulatpur bound train, is found by Seth Prabha Dyal who owns a pickle-making and essence-brewing factory in Daulatpur. Himself being a hillman from Kangra, the Seth recognises
Munoo as one from the hills. As he is childless he regards the boy as "a very auspicious find". On listening to the orphaned boy's story, he feels very tender towards him, in whom he seems to see his "unborn son". He at once takes Munoo under his protective wings and feels paternal towards him, much against the wishes of his young partner Ganpat who is also traveling with him. Ganpat is a complete and sharp contrast to Prabha. To work by contrasts, reinforcements and parallel situations appears to be an important aspect of Anand's narrative technique in this novel. Prabha is by nature compassionate, honest and straightforward, and never knows to play hide and seek in his dealings with others. Having been a coolie himself who knew poverty and hunger first hand before he could rise by the hard way, he can effortlessly identify himself with other deprived and dispossessed persons, including the workers in his factory, and treat them as fellow human beings. His travails and miseries as a coolie have not corrupted his nature or dehumanised him. But he is also credulous and gullible, and therefore becomes an easy prey to the machinations of his swindling partner Ganpat before long. Parbati, Prabha Dyal's wife is a meek helpmate to him. When her husband brings Munoo home, with wonderful
eagerness she comes up to Munoo and without asking any question takes the boy into her arms. Later when he falls ill she nurses him like a mother. The Dyals, as Munoo is very quick to notice, are a happy contrast to the Nothoo Rams at Sham Nagar for whom he slaved. On his arrival at their home, they feed him very well, in sharp contrast to his being given a piece of stale bread at the Nathoo Rams. Anand's ironical comment deserves particular mention: "It was the most sumptuous meal he had eaten since the feast on the death anniversary of his father and mother, which his aunt had given three months before he left the hills". If the first phase of Munoo's town life was packed with misery, the second starts with some relief, providing the much needed balm to his wounded soul. But, as the subsequent developments show, this relief turns out to be short-lived partly because of the double-dealings of Ganpat.

Ganpat is conceived as a typical mean and petty exploiting employer, without scruples and qualms of conscience, and deeply suspicious of others, especially his social inferiors. He has no objection to taking Munoo into their service to run errands and do odd jobs, provided he works without wages and is content with food only. That he is a specimen of depraved humanity indicated by his "dark-brown goat-like face, hollow-
cheeked and pinched". The fact that the novelist repeatedly refers to him as "the goat-face" indicates his own revulsion against him. The son of well-to-do and indulgent parents, and a city-dweller, Ganpat has disgraced his family by gambling, drinking, and whoring. He has been ejected by his class as a necessary consequence. Left penniless and frustrated he has nursed a grouse against fate, and turned his malice against his fellow beings. A slave-driver and bully of an employer he is very much a counterpart of Bibiji. He develops a dislike for Munoo from the moment he sets his eyes on him, calls him names, ill treats and humiliates him very much like the nagging wife of Nathoo Ram. On this very first day in the factory as Munoo goes about inquisitively, Ganpat falls foul on him;

Sit down, swine! --- don't interfere with anyone's work Don't fidget. Learn to sit still. You would have been in the hands of the police, or you would have had to walk hungry and forlorn in the city, if we had not brought you here. You are not to walk around getting in other people's way.

He constantly reminds Munoo of his position in the factory as well as society.
Ganpat, in spite of his fallen condition, is conscious of his so-called superior status. He is convinced that with money one can gain status. His contempt for those of inferior status extends even to his benevolent partner Prabha. When it is conclusively known that he has swindled and betrayed Prabha, he not only browbeats him by threatening to dissolve their partnership, but hurts and humiliates him by contemptuously calling him a coolie:

You have betrayed me. You are a dirty coolie, and a dirty coolie you will remain all your life --- I don't care if you go to the dogs, you meek, cunning swine --- your father was a coolie and you are a coolie --- I won't disgrace myself and go down on my knees to anyone, least of all to a low coolie like you!

There is something unmistakably Satanic about Ganpat's moral depravity, his "personal hate" and "perverse selfishness", and "his ambition to amass wealth and to rise in the world" regardless of the means he employs. The "dark underworld of the factory full of the intense heat of blazing furnaces and the dense malodorous smells of brewing essences, spices and treacle, of dust and ashes and mud" seems the most appropriate setting for this demonish and malevolent man. It is the humanity of
Prabha, who is at heart a coolie, that sustains his relationship with Munoo and the other factory employees, all hill-men. It is these poor coolies who stand by him when he not only goes bankrupt defrauded by Ganpat but becomes broken-hearted by his partner's depravity. Philip Henderson, whom Cowasjee cites, observes correctly that Coolie "takes us into a world in which the comradeship of man for man exists only among the very poorest people. With nothing to hope for, their common humanity is all they possess".

The Toder Mals, who owe their prosperity to opportunism, sycophancy, and hobnobbing with big people are "essentially Nathoo Rams gone successful", and represent like Ganpat, another form of human depravity and self-degradation. The letter Sir ToderMal addresses to Dr. Edward Marjoriebanks the Public Health Officer, shows what kind of a toady of the British he is. To the Mals in general and to the snobbish lady Mal in particular, those who work in the pickle factory are "the scum of the hills" and for such "gentlemanly people" like themselves, it would be a lowering of their status if they stooped to talk to those of the factory, who are their social inferiors. When Prabha goes bankrupt all his creditors, with Lady Mal at their
head, beleaguer him. "They yell, shout abuses, fight among themselves for what little might still be got from auctioning the property, and then together fall upon their victim as birds that turn on a wounded member of the flock to destroy it". The total absence of restraint and self-respect in them and their hysterical clamoring show how much human nature can become depraved because of the lure of money. Even to the bamboo cart driver who takes Prabha and his wife to the railway station, they are objects of contempt, for they are "not rich lallas but a pack of coolies". Shattered more by the bankruptcy of human beings than his own forced impoverishment, and all his belongings reduced to a trunk and bedding, Prabha on his way to the hills tells himself: "It is as it should be. Man comes to this world naked and goes out of it naked and he doesn't carry his goods away on his chest. It is best to travel light". These guileless words carry tremendous power. Experience has driven home to him the transitoriness as well as worthlessness of mere economic prosperity totally devoid of humanity.

With Prabha going insolvent, whatever security Munoo has had ends. But wholly preoccupied as he is with his benefactor's plight, he wants to help him out as best he can by earning money as a coolie in the Grain
Market. He and Tulsi saunter out with a view to sleeping in the Market so that they can find work early the next morning. Neither has any idea of the condition prevailing there, particularly the sheer struggle for survival among the coolies. Munoo sees for the first time in his life the strife and cut-throat competition among the wage-earners to find work, and the merciless exploitation of the merchants and tradesman. That the total earnings of both Munoo and Tulsi are never more than eight annas per day is enough comment on the plight of the coolies. To earn even this paltry sum "it needed all their pluck and a bit of good luck". There are so many coolies in the market place clamoring for work and wages that it becomes, as Harrex puts it, "the Darwinian struggle for survival at the primal level". This is the direct consequence of Capitalistic exploitation of the poor who have to compete with one another to earn even a pittance of wages so that they might live another day. There lies the difference between the cruelty and callousness of the coolies, which is born out of their struggle for survival and the inhuman clamor of Prabha's creditors to recover their dues which is born out of their merciless greed. It is to the credit of Anand that, while he makes it plain
that his sympathies are with the exploited coolies, he does not idealise them or their virtues. As Cowasjee points out, "what Munoo suffers at the hands of his masters is no more than what he suffers at the hands of fellow-workers as down-trodden as himself". In Anand's assessment, the blame for this state of affairs lies with the capitalistic class system and society at large.

Anand's portrayal of the courtyard of the Grain Market, noteworthy for its voidness and visual accuracy of detail, implicitly contrasts life of the factory hand and that of the coolie outside. What is borne out is that the lot of the coolie is a shade worse, because he is reduced to the condition of a beast of burden. It is as if the distinction between man and beast is obliterated:

The square courtyard --- was crowded with rude wooden carts, --- cramped with snake-horned bullocks and stray rhinoceros-like bulls and skinny calves bespattered with their own dung, as they sat or stood, munching pieces of straw, snuffing their muzzles aimlessly, or masticating the grass which they had eaten some hours before. Pressed against these were the bodies of the coolies, coloured like the earth on which they lay snoring, or crouching.
round a communal hubble-bubble, or shifting to explore a patch clear of puddles on which to rest.

Mosquitoes and flies assail the sprawling naked bodies of coolies. Munoo and Tulsi, who cautiously make their way as if through a jigsaw puzzle are asked to go away as there is no room for anyone. Indeed there is no room. They find a resting place for the night on a mound of grain sacks. On waking up the next morning Munoo makes the discovery that among the coolies in their struggle for survival and for a hand to mouth existence, neither religion nor caste matters and that their employers seem to prefer those who are willing to work for a low wage.

With daybreak begins the mad rush for jobs by the coolies, in which even the taller and heftier ones appear to succeed, only after cringing before the Lal-las, pleading with them, and offering to carry a sack for a paltry "anna". Munoo stands helpless behind only listening to the "shouts, the curses, the oaths and the prayers" arising from the throng. But when he actually finds work, he proves unequal to carrying a huge sack. He makes his way to the vegetable market, where he may find lighter loads to carry. But even here
there are "swarms of coolies about" already, who frantically rush at the shops, "pushing, pulling, struggling to shove each other out of the way", to win the "coveted prize of an anna job". Often it is the caprice of the merchant or the shrewdness of a lalla who can make them accept less wages for more work that decides their lot. Sometimes a subtle trick secures a coolie a job. And Munoo secures most of his work by cunning, by trying out new tricks from time to time, which do not always succeed.

After Prabha and his wife return to their village, Munoo tries his luck in the railway station as a coolie but he is chased away by a police constable as he is not a licensed coolie. Hence his one question is how to find work and where. A chance meeting with a kind elephant driver of a circus company which is bound for Bombay, enables him to steal a free ride in special train to that "wonder" island city on the Malabar coast about which he had heard from a fellow coolie that one could earn easily anything from fifteen to thirty rupees a month in a factory there. Thus another phase in Munoo's life begins. Chapter four of the novel, which is the longest, is concerned with it. It begins with Munoo's two thousand mile long journey under a malevolent and merciless sun from Daulatpur in the north to
Bombay in the south-west. The train in which he travels rushes past the varied and changing landscape of the country, its historical ruins, its desert stretches, plains, rivers, valleys and hills, filling the child-like mind of Munoo with wonder, which is still alive in spite of the hardships and humiliations he has gone through so far. The pace of Anand's prose narrative is so modulated as to suit the changing scenes, whether rural or urban, and to bring to life vividly the panorama of Indian life.

The image of Bombay as "truly a wonder city one should visit before one died" conjured up by a coolie at Daulatpur has impressed itself so well on Munoo's mind that he is very eager to reach the land of his heart's desire. Almost anticipating what lies in store for him the good samaritan, the elephant driver, cautions Munoo before he helps him to slip out of the railway station at Bombay: "The bigger the city is, the more cruel it is to the sons of Adam. You have to pay even for the breath that you breathe". As Munoo walks through the streets of this strange, complex city of many races, many tongues, many colours and smells, and tall, imposing buildings, he is filled with a sense of his utter smallness and insignificance. His heart sinks...
when he finds on the crowded pavement a coolie lying
"huddled, pillowing his head on his arm, shrinking into
himself as if he were afraid to occupy too much
space". Before long, he sees many more such roofless
coolies on the pavements. He has his very first experi-
ence of discriminatory and humiliating treatment in the
commodious restaurant where he goes to buy soda water to
quench his thirst. He is ordered to sit down on the
floor as though he is an untouchable, while the other
customers there look at him as if he were a leper. As
he walks along with the aged Hari and his family who are
also coolies and whose acquaintance he strikes up, he
becomes conscious more than ever before the contrast
between garish opulence on one hand and rampant filth
and privation on another. At every step the steep and
cruel contrast between the haves and the have-nots is
driven home to him.

At Daulatpur a destitute on the streets was an
occasional sight for Munoo. But Bombay presents to his
eyes a several times more magnified version of poverty,
human misery, discrimination and ruthless exploitation.
This city, confusing and bewildering, turns out to be
not a city of "wonders" but of nightmarish experiences.
Effortlessly Munoo and the elderly Hari establish at
once a comradeship, as only the very poor can among
themselves, and Hari offers to take the other to Sir George White Cotton Mills along with him the next morning when he hopes to find employment for his entire family coolies. To find a resting place for the night on the pavement, already teeming with numberless houseless and uprooted coolies, they trudge along for miles and miles. It is then that Munoo sees some of the most heart-rending sights. Narasimhiah as aptly remarked: "I don't know where else we get so vivid and so poignant a picture of the pavement dwellers in Bombay". In just a few words and phrases Anand captures vividly the poignancy and hopelessness of their lives, the living death that their lives have become. As Munoo explores the avenue of the broad street, he sees:

The bodies of numberless coolies lay strewn in tattered garbs. Some were curled up in Knots, others lay face downwards on folded arms, others were flat on their chests, pillowing their heads on their bundles or boxes, others crouched into corners talking, others still huddled together at the doorsteps of closed shops, or lay on the boards in a sleep which looked like living death, but that it was broken by deep sighs.
As Munoo walks along he stumbles "on a heap of patched quiet that half enclosed the rotting flesh of a leper". As he capers away stung by pity and fear, he unwittingly treads on a sleeping beggar woman who clings to her little child protectively like a tigress. What is remarkable is, as Narasimhiah points out, that Hari "amidst the pathos of his own miserable life, has the presence of mind, the serenity born of a determined acceptance of the hard facts of life to tell the boy in a tone of quiet dignity, 'walk carefully, my son, let us not disturb other people's rest'."

The most poignant picture 'of a destitute is seen when Hari and others reach a small clearing in the otherwise overcrowded place, where a half-naked woman tells them in a voice smothered by sobs, 'My husband died there last night!'. Hari remarks austerely: 'He has attained the release. We will rest in his place'. Narasimhiah's observation on Hari's words deserves to be cited:

Hari's austere remark is offered not certainly in arrogant heartlessness but in utter humility.--- I see in these simple sentences the wisdom of an old living culture which has sustained our peasantry through centuries of misery and manifesting itself now in an uprooted peasant in search of a factory
job. Death has ceased to frighten those poor ---; it is life that is a threat, and death is a release as Hari puts it.

Who is responsible for this state of affairs this depredation and sordidness, is a question that necessarily asks itself. Wisely, Anand leaves it to the sensitive reader to raise it. His reticence makes the implicit question far more compelling.

So far Munoo has been very much of a spectator, though sensitive, of the miseries of the houseless, rootless poor in the city. Harrex observes: "The poverty and suffering in the city streets is indicative of what is to come: a further descent into hell". The Cotton Mills to which Hari and Munoo go in search of employment are indeed an inferno, a "waste land", a place which breeds "a queer race of men dried-up, shrivelled, hollow-chested, hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed", who are made to work under sub-human conditions of existence, as Munoo discovers by and by. It is only after a lot of prayerful appeals, cringing and abject humility, by Hari and his agreeing to all the callous conditions of service and gratification of the foreman and the Pathan watchman, he and his companions are taken into service, on a wage less than what he had been given
earlier. There is no end to the crooked ways by which these coolies are cheated and money is snaked from them by the foreman, Jimmie Thomas, better known to the Coolies as the Chimtan Sahib, and the many ruthless parasites of the industrial establishment. At the mills Munoo, as M. K. Naik points out, is exposed to the full force of the modern capitalistic machine. The factory is a huge octopus with its numerous tentacles clutching the labourer in its deadly grasp slowly paralysing and poisoning him. The British Management offers no security of tenure and effects retrenchment summarily; the British foreman is at once the recruiting authority, a landlord who rents at ramshackle cottages at exorbitant rent, and also a money-lender—all rolled into one; the Pathan door-keeper practices usury with even more drastic methods; the Sikh merchant puts his monopoly as the authorized dealer in the Mill-workers colony to full personal advantage. The ill-paid, ill-housed, under-nourished and bullied labourer is broken, both in body and mind.

Money becomes the chief cause for socio-economic discrimination and the consequent ravages.
It may be noted that here at the mills discrimination in the name of class and money gets mixed up with racial discrimination, the whites looking down upon the natives, encouraged by the colonial British. Otherwise one who was no more than a mechanic in a Lancashire mill, could not have become the head foreman in one of the biggest cotton mills in India, and behaved towards the coolies like an uncivilized, inhuman brute, showering on them offensive swear words and abuse. Mr. Little's appalling outburst that the coolies, who are demanding the reinstatement of Ratan one of their fellows, "should all be put up against a wall and shot, the whole darned lot of them", may not represent every white man's view. But it is an extreme manifestation of the discriminatory attitude of the British employer. Little's outburst also betrays the sense of insecurity those like him suffer from, in spite of the racial superiority they have.

In spite of what he has seen with his own eyes in the city of Bombay and at the factory about the everyday hazards of the lives of the poor and the coolies, Munoo surprisingly retains still his zest for life, partly because of his own natural vitality and partly his newly established friendship with Ratan, the wrestler and fellow coolie: "I want to live, I want to know, I want
to work, to work this machine, I shall grow up and be a man". Earlier when he was at Sham Nagar, Munoo had wondered at the machine and was excited over the gramophone and the flying "steel bird". Now at the factory despite the frightening scenes he sees, his enthusiasm for the machine remains unchanged. But from the novelistic context the ethical ambivalence of the machine is made apparent. "The machine’s potential for the promotion of the common good, as envisaged by Munoo, has been perverted by the self-interest of the powerful few", whether in Bombay or Jamshedpur Anand takes up the theme of man and machine again in his later novel The Big Heart.

It is only after Munoo befriends Ratan that his awareness of the lot of the coolies as a whole and he as one among them, improves. In his native village in Kangra, at Sham Nagar, and Daulatpur he is seen as an individual. But once he reaches Bombay, his individuality dissolves in the multitude of coolies. He becomes a part of the toiling, struggling, starving mass. The centre of interest is more Munoo, the individual, but Munoo the coolie. The arbitrary dismissal of Ratan from employment by the Chimtan Sahib involves Munoo along with other coolies in the Labour Union, although he
understands very little of the nature of their activities. While Anand believes that organised labour would improve the lot of the poor coolies, he does not take a simplified view of it. He is only too well aware of the presence of leaders like the aristocratic Lalla Onkar Nath, President of the Union, who "had sought glory for himself through the adoption of a socialist programme, thinking that either Gandhi or the Government would buy him off in recognition of his balanced policy of compromise". The leaders of the Red Flag Union, Sauda in particular, mean well by the coolies and are anxious to help them. Anand obviously is in sympathy with them. However, that he is not entirely in favour of the manner in which they rouse the coolie masses to a frenzy and ask them to go on a strike at once to demand that rights, is suggested by the Mark Antony-like speech of Sanda, who deploys, "the methods of the demagogue" to rouse his audience to a frenzy. Cowasjee makes the pertinent remark: "--- his solution that all workers should go on strike is riddled with irony: for the workers are in debt, they are protesting against the partial shut down of the mills which means additional debts, and they are in no condition to go on strike". There is little wisdom in Sanda asking them, 'Think over what we have said', when all that they can think
about is where from their next meal will come. This situation in the novel has many possibilities for propaganda. Anand, however, does not yield to the temptation for it. It is unlikely that the novelist would endorse Sauda's over simplified view which finds an immediate echo in Munoo's heart, that "There are only two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor ---". It is appropriate to a demagogue, though well-meaning, like Sanda, and to an inexperienced young man like Munoo.

It is very easy for the mill owners and their parasites to whip up communal frenzy and thus throw into utter confusion the masses of agitating coolies. Munoo, who too is in the crowd and has to run for life, realises for the first time in his life, the hardness of life. On his way back to the mills the next morning he is knocked down by the car of Mrs. Mainwaring, an Anglo-Indian, on her way to Simla in the Himalayas. She takes the injured Munoo along with her and thus begins the last phase of his life as he drifts towards death. The fifth chapter of the novel which records this phase of Munoo's life is the least satisfactory, and is a complete contrast to the preceding chapter which recreates most incisively the inhuman side of the big industrial city and its socio-economic ravages. Does the Simla
episode really form an organic part of the total part of the novel? Narasimhiah doubts it. M. K. Naik finds it to be "an anticlimax" to the Bombay chapter. Even Cowasjee, who stoutly defends the inclusion of this episode, admits that it "comes very near disaster".

It is Cowasjee's contention that it is correct that the boy who came from the hills to the plains is taken back to the hills before his end comes. In this sense the wheel comes full circle. But one may well ask could not Anand have thought of some other way of taking his protagonist back to the hills than by this rather crude device of a car accident? What damage the artistic quality of this chapter is the unjustifiably excessive attention given to the Anglo-Indian woman and her morally ambiguous activities. The attention is shifted away from Munoo, who ought to be the occasion for all that happens in Simla.

However, the Simla phase may be seen to have some relevance to the theme of social discrimination. It shows that not only Eurasians like Mrs. Mainwaring are discriminated against by the whites in the name of race, but even among the English themselves those whose husbands earn more look down upon those whose husbands earn less. But there is no indication in the text to suggest that Munoo notices this. In his naivety he is all
admiration for his mem-sahib. His return to the hills is ironical. Simla is a paradise for the British and the rich. For the coolies it is just another realm of struggle and sweating for mere survival. Munoo is virtually turned into a domestic pet and a slave by his patroness, even though she does care for him in a maternal sort of way. She too moves away from him when it is known that he suffers from consumption which has been aggravated by rikshaw-pulling. There can be little doubt that she makes use of him to gratify her whims and fancies. During the last days of his life the only companion and source of solace is Mohan, the high-born English-educated Leftist revolutionary. Anand's didactic intentions held in check more or less successfully till now, become explicit with the introduction of Mohan into the novel. The novel loses rather than gains by this device. Even by the time Munoo reaches Simla in the company of Mrs. Mainwaring, he is "mentally and physically broken--- sad and bitter and defeated, like an old man". This chapter adds little to our knowledge of the plight of the coolies. In another respect too the novel falls a little short of our expectation, in spite of being on the whole a convincing novel. Anand is so much preoccupied with painting his picture
of social iniquity and discrimination that he virtually leaves out of consideration and development the transformation that must have come about Munoo who is uprooted and thrown into the maelstrom of the varied urban world. Even the consciousness of Bakha in Untouchable expands under the impact of experiences. True, Munoo has moments of thought and of introspection. But this aspect of his personality is not developed in the novel. Could it be that the novelist is so much engrossed in presenting a vivid account of the inequities, injustices and discriminations practiced against the dispossessed and underprivileged, that he fails to give adequate attention to a comprehensive portrayal of his protagonist? It is only on reflection that one becomes aware of this limitation in Munoo’s portrayal. But one always remembers the novel’s very impressive close: "In the early hours of one unreal, white night he (Munoo) passed away—the tide of his life having reached back to the deeps".

To move on from Coolie to Two Leaves and a Bud, another chronicle of coolies, is to go from a vast panoramic world to the microcosmic world of the tea estates of Assam. This novel unfolds the entire tragedy of the indentured labourers of the tea-plantations, for whom their place of work is a prison-house without
bars, as it tells the heart-rending story of an uprooted middle-aged peasant of Hoshiarpur in the Punjab who becomes a labourer in one of the plantations in Assam. It may seem somewhat surprising that Anand should have chosen an apparently poetic title for this novel which is full of agony, violence, and bitterness. There is a tilt and a swing about it, so different from the prosaic one-word titles of Untouchable and Coolie. But Anand could not have chosen a more appropriate title. It derives from the familiar gathering song of the tea-plantation, sung by the coolies in small groups. Ironically, for many a coolie the song turns out to be a dirge, because his or her life is plucked out just as two leaves and a bud are plucked. In this sense the title of the novel points to the tragedy at the heart of the lives of the plantation labourers.

Having lost his three acres of ancestral land and his hut to the money-lender Seth Badri Dass, and lured by the fabulous promises made by Sardar Buta who recruits labourers for the Mcpherson Tea Estate in the distant Assam valley, Ganga along with his wife Sajain, daughter Leila, and son Buddhu, leaves his village home reluctantly to become an indentured labourer in the British-owned tea estate. It is dire necessity and
poverty that force him out of his native village. He would have liked to eke out his livelihood in his village if only he had a patch of land of his own to cultivate. In fact the most tempting bait dangled before this hapless peasant wedded to the soil, by the coolie-catcher Buta, is the possibility of a plot of land being given to him free of cost, so that he could grow rice on, while continuing as a coolie on the plantation. There is also the hope of a return to his native village after a few years frugal life in the tea-plantation.

But within a short time after his arrival at the McPherson Estate, Gangu realises that he has, along with his family, jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They are all trapped in a rigidly militaristic organisation and a system of gross discrimination and exploitation, from which there is no escape. As Narain, one of the coolies, puts it, "This prison has no bars, but it is nevertheless an unbreakable jail. The chowkidars keep guard over the plantation, and they bring you back if you should go". The coolies are ruthlessly turned into slaves by their English masters and their toadies, who beat, abuse, and exploit them. They become overworked, underpaid victims of graft, usury, and extortion, and are housed in huts primitive and insanitary. Cholera and Malaria plague them. The honour of their
women is not safe. At the bazaar where they have to buy their provisions, they are abused, humiliated, and cheated by the banias. Gangu's dream of a life of freedom and honourable peasantry fulfilled through the dignity of labour is in no time shattered.

A charge levelled against this novel by some of its English readers when it was first published, may be briefly referred to here. The factual accuracy and authenticity of Anand's depiction of the condition of the indentured labourers, and of the inhuman behaviour of their English masters, was seriously challenged by some. Binay Krishna Bhattacharya and Cowasjee have conclusively shown that there is no ground to question or doubt the documentary basis of this novel at all, and that Anand did have first-hand knowledge of the conditions in the tea estates of Assam and Ceylon. Further, Cowasjee points out:

--- the picture he (Anand) paints is more than substantiated by the report of the Royal Commission on Labour, familiarly known --- as the Whitley Report. Anand has drawn much of his information from the Whitley Report, and far from exaggerating he has minimised the brutalities of the English planters and the hardships inflicted on the coolies.
The relevant question is, not how true is Anand to actual facts, but how far has he been able to recreate his perception of the plight of the coolies working for the English planters, into imaginative fiction. In this respect, the novelist's success is not certainly unqualified, though in parts surely the novel is deeply moving.

As the novel confines itself to one manageable locale, the discrimination and humiliation experienced by the plantation coolies is presented with far greater concentration than in Coolie where the scene shifts from one place to another and from one stratum of society to another. The characters in this novel, much more than their counterparts in the other novels of Anand considered already, fall into two separate groups: the discriminated and exploited Indian coolies on the one hand, and the discriminating and exploiting masters, most of whom are British on the other. As a result of this division, the problem of racial discrimination "looms much larger in this novel than --- in Munoo's story". Many of the characters tend to be two-dimensional. Anand's anger is directed against the Colonial English men and women and their Indian parasites who insult and ill-treat the natives. In the world of plantations where class, status, money, and race matter most, caste
becomes irrelevant, either for blame or praise. Only occasionally and in passing the coolies remember their caste. It is their shared suffering, humiliation, and sub-human treatment that hold them together and evoke mutual sympathy in them.

The novel begins with Gangu the protagonist, who is on his way to Assam with his family, telling himself, "life is a journey. A journey into the unknown". This is no mere worn out commonplace in his case, because for him, who perhaps had not stirred out of his village, it is now indeed a journey into the distant unknown. When the novel ends, he is that dead, and thus his life's journey too ends. In between a number of things happen, and several characters, English and Indian, are introduced. As the details of the narrative are woven round Gangu and his family, the novel acquires a unity. There is a natural and quiet dignity about this middle-aged peasant who has learnt through long experience of life, like Prabha of Coolie, to accept stoically whatever befalls him. As Cowasjee points out, Gangu "in his passivity, his tender loyalties, his compassion and depth of suffering, symbolizes the Indian peasantry". He is so self-effacing that he rarely draws attention to himself. On the contrary he makes
the reader think of countless other discriminated and suffering individuals. Through out the novel he is found to be sparing of speech. It is his friend and fellow coolie Narain who is more vocal and outspoken. Gangu's very reticence sharpens the pathos of his life, especially in the plantation.

Within minutes of their arrival at the plantation led by Sardar Buta, Gangu with the shrewdness of an experienced peasant smells the "atmosphere of twisting and turning" prevailing there. The brief conversation he has with Narain confirms the misgivings he has had begun to feel already about their life on the plantation. As if to forewarn him of what is to come, he catches a glimpse of Reggie Hunt, the assistant planter on seeing whom Leila frantically runs away Narin sums up his character, from the coolie's point of view:

He is a very budmash sahib. He is always drunk.
And he had no consideration for anyone's mother or sister --- Nobody's mother or sister is safe in this place.

Actually the first Englishman whose glimpse they catch is Dr. John de la Havre, and not Reggie Hunt. In fact, in this novel Anand looks at the relationship between the ruling colonial British and the ruled Indians more closely than he does in Untouchable or Coolie. It would
appear that the English characters receive as much attention as the natives, particularly the coolies. After considering Anand's portrayal of the plight of the coolies, his exploration of the discrimination practiced against Indians by the British may be considered. This is only a measure of convenience, though artificial as the coolies and the white officials are in constant contact and conflict.

If Gangu was left with any hope about his prospects as a coolie on the plantation, it is defeated within days of his arrival there. The wages for the whole family amounts to eight annas a day, which he was earning singlehanded in their village while working for his landlord. The child's wages are cut on the pretext that the leaf is not properly picked. At the village bazaar Gangu has no choice but to buy provisions at an exorbitant price from the Seth in addition to suffering humiliating treatment. His own suffering makes him compassionately sensitive to the plight of the Tibetans who are insulted and cheated by the merchants. He yearns towards them and bursts with an indignation and remorse at their suffering, and his own. But there is little that he can do either to help them or himself.
While returning from the bazaar Gangu contracts severe Malaria which virtually paralyses him. But even as he recovers from it in a fashion, his wife Sajani catches it from him. It is mistaken for cholera, another mortal disease, that all the coolies dread. The doctors arrive at Gangu's door only to find Sajani already dead. In his anxious attempts to raise money to cremate his wife, Gangu has to face insults and humiliations. The Sikh chaprasi demands his nazara to allow him to see the Sahib so that he can appeal to him for a loan. The clerk Babu Shashi Bhushan, knowing quite well why Gangu is there, is angry with him because he has not given him the customary present. Gangu promises both the chaprasi and the Babu that he will gratify them with money from out of the loan he may get from the Sahib. The Sahib begins to discuss in a matter of fact fashion the terms of the loan. But the moment he gets to know why Gangu wants the loan, he turns purple with rage. He is scared of the possible infection and shouts: "Get out! Get out! You bloody fool, get out! You have been spreading infection all over the place! Didn't you know that you were under segregation?"

Chagrined and humiliated Gangu walks away blaming himself for violating quarantine. Sardar Buta, when he approaches for help, only feigns sympathy and advises
him to go to the bania in the bazaar. Filled with self-pity, suppressing his reproach against Buta, and wiping the welling up tears, Gangu tells him:

The Sahib will not give me a loan I have just been. He beat me for coming out of quarantine. Oh, friend Buta Ram, if only I had known things were going to turn out this way, I wouldn't have come here.

These artless words, unforced and unpretentious, distill all the pathos, suffering and anguish of his life.

With the generous help given by Dr. de la Havre, Gangu is able to cremate his wife, and on the recommendation of the doctor also gets a small patch of land to cultivate. Thereafter even though he resumes his daily routine, he is no longer his former self. Apart from the grief for his dear wife for which there can be no parallel, Gangu feels the hurt of humiliation he experienced at the Sahib's place. How sharp and deep the hurt has been for a self-respecting person on whom abject humility and servility are imposed by poverty, may be seen from the following paragraph:

His self-respect and his sense of dignity had been hurt by the kicks he had received from the Manager Sahib. And he did not want to think of that inci-
dent because the Rajput in him, who should have retaliated, had been prevented from doing so by the calamity of his wife's death. He could sympathize with Suleman (a coolie from Jubblepur), though he did not know him. He knew how the insult latent in the beating hurt a man more than the actual pain of the blow. And there was something more cruel in the impact of a kick than in all the abuse that was hurled at him. Not that the kicks had bruised his body, stiff and muscular from a life of toil, but it was the humiliation of having always to lower his eyes before the man who had beaten him.

Gangu's experience is typical of all self-respecting coolies trapped in the plantation. His own experience of misery, humiliation, and deprivation have taught Gangu to sympathise with others in a similar plight, whether he knows them or not.

Unexpectedly complication and confusion arise in the lives of the coolies because of a fight between two of their women, one of whom currently enjoys the favour of the dissolute assistant manager. A riot of noises spread throughout the valley, and men from the nearby fields gather and join the babel of shouts, abuse, screaming and howling. They are all rounded by the sirdars, the assistant planter rides his horse into the
thick of the crowd trampling on men, women and children. And the warders, under his orders, charge backward and forward, thrusting left and right, aimlessly, till their blows tire their hands. The entire body of coolies, who are freely called pigs and donkeys, are abused and humiliated. Through the impact of the hard wood on their bones the coolies seem to realise "the hopelessness of their lot, even as the bullocks when beaten too rigorously shiver and snort with a sudden realisation".

Even Gangu feels the sheer injustice and inhumanity of the sardars' attack on them. For once his fatalism, typical of most coolies conditioned to a life of humiliation and slavish obedience, yields place "to a homicidal fury" and a "spirit of retaliation". On his suggestion they all go to Dr. John de la Havre, their only friend and well-wisher among the ruling sahibs, for his counsel. When asked by him, "Why do you all let them beat you? Why can't you beat back—all of you together?", their helpless answer to him is: "What can we do, Huzoor? You are our mai-bap ---" Advised by de la Havre they proceed like an army of ants to meet the Burra Sahib to redress their grievance. As much of their courage has already failed them, they are easily driven away and scattered, by a few threats, loud
shouts, and a show of force by just a handful of people sporting rifles. To what extent the will and powers of resistance of the coolies have been shattered and their individuality as human beings subdued to servility and slavish obedience by the system may be gauged by this.

Late at night, after their return from the Burrah Sahib, the coolies sit in Narain's hut, all huddled together as if they are conspirators, only to tell each other of the plight of thousands of other coolies, and their futile attempts at escape from the hell they are forced to live in. Their employers and the Sarkar together frustrate all their attempts to return home. One of the most harrowing tales narrated by Narain tells how a company of Gurkhas charged with their bayonets and rifles a party of three thousand coolies, men, women and children, when they were asleep in the station yard of Chandpur, hoping against hope to catch the next train home. The moral to be drawn from these tales is, as Narain puts it, "there is nothing to be done except to make up our minds to settle down here and smoke the hookah, and mention the name of Ram". These artless words condense the frustration and despair of their lives.

With "the damned mutiny" of the docile, spineless, gutless coolies, who only sought justice from their mas
ters, is successfully quelled, life returns to its normal, monotonous routine. All the "ringleaders of the mob", Gangu among them, are fired but allowed to work. Gangu plods on like an ox all day as in old days, grasping the distinction between himself and his masters. He resigns himself to his fate and takes neutrally all that befalls him. But when the money-lender attaches his meager salary, it is not easy to console himself. For days he is upset, and keeps on repeating to himself and to others "Money is everything in this world", as if there is nothing more to say. There is far greater force and authenticity in Gangu uttering these words than in the labour leader Sauda in Coolie saying that there are only two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor. Battered and broken in body and spirit, Gangu would have died a natural death before long, had not Reggie Hunt, whose lustful passion for Leila was frustrated, shot him in sheer panic.

Thus Gangu, who comes to the tea-estate with the hope of starting a new life goes out of it, losing his life. Unlike the lives of Bakha, Bhikhu and Munoo, his is a life of unrelieved misery. Anand presents a deeply impressive picture of the lot the discriminated and exploited coolies through him. He is presented in depth,
and he remains a memorable character. But sometimes Anand attributes to him certain ideas and attitudes and a reflectiveness which are not consistent with his essentially folk and peasant character. For instance on his way to the bazaar with his family, he meets some Tibetans, and sets to thinking about the immortality of the Lamaitte reflects:

The immortality of the Lama must be a myth, unless there was some hidden magic of which he knew the secret and with which he could prolong his life. --- There was no God. There were only men and life and death fulfilling their own purpose through cross purposes, as in a play --- .

Towards the close of the novel, having had his fill of poverty and misery, Gangti reflects in a monologue.

I have always said it and I say it now again that, though the earth is bought and sold and confiscated, God never meant that to happen, for He does not like some persons to have a comfortable living and the others to suffer from dire poverty. He has created land enough to maintain all men, and yet men 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!

139
These and similar utterances attributed to him do not appear consistent with his character. There are a few more such instances.

The emergence of the displaced and dispossessed coolies on the plantations as a class, drawn from the distant parts of India was the direct result of the British rule and the enterprise of their planters who were hard headed businessmen who understood profit and loss much better than human beings. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, all the plantations are owned and managed by the British who thrive on the labour of the coolies, who are discriminated against, kept irrecoverably poor, and dehumanised, the discriminators and exploiters on the one hand and the discriminated and exploited on the other form two distinct groups. The plight of the coolies has already been considered. Now Anand’s treatment of the British characters in the novel may be examined. While Anand’s facts concerning the coolies cannot be found fault with, his handling of the British characters has come in for much criticism. His impartiality and objectivity have been doubted, and he is said to distort facts concerning the lives of the planters. But, as Cowasjee has shown, Anand does not get his facts wrong regarding the English either. It is in turning them into the art of fiction that he does not succeed.
Many of his English characters, though minor, turn out to be caricatures, in his attempt to focus attention on the morally vacuous insularity of the English men and women and their dehumanising impact on their Indian dependents.

In Coolie Anand tries to show that the ruling British have not only exploited the national resources of the country but debated the Indian character as well. In Two Leaves and a Bud, he shows how the English themselves have suffered in the process. Dr. John de la Havre, 'Dilawar Sahib' for the coolies, who is one of the two important British characters in the novel and a character of major importance, is deeply sensible of this aspect of Indo-British relations, and is disturbed by it. On a certain occasion he reflects on this question:

Most of the coolies were simple enough, and they were possessed of a strange natural dignity, when they did not have to cringe. But the Babu had become contemptible through having to cringe all the time.

If only the British had begun accepting these people from the very start on terms of equality, as human beings, he said, unconsciously assuming that
the worthiness of Indians in the eyes of the English was the only road to salvation. But there it was, the British had exaggerated the worst instinct in their own character, and called out the worst in the Indian (Emphasis added)

The doctor understands the contradictions in the attitudes and behaviour of the English towards people of other races and climes, Indians in particular. 'At home' in England they do not mind accepting Indians as guests whom they consider "superior to the negroes because they (are) not so black". Sometimes they even lionise them and regard them as harmless because they do not compete for employment.

This condescending attitude towards Indians changes radically overseas. The average English men and women are filled with the dream of English greatness and pride of their race. Filled with prejudices, which are mistaken for ideas, in favour of their race, customs and conventions, and standards, and against those of Indians, they cannot dream of treating the natives as their equal. The next step is to discriminate against the natives, exploit and impoverish them. da la Havre reflects: "It was generally the way of the world to make a man poor, reduce him in his own estimation, and then say he was dirty and obsequious". The doctor
diagnoses the Englishman's malady in India. The English are "nervy", because they are "completely isolated from the swarming millions around them". They are afraid and their fear becomes "an inverted bullying". It is only "by associating strength, wisdom and justice with the English as a superior race" and by creating an utter sense of inferiority among the Indians, their prestige and authority can be kept up. By keeping up this "fiction", they may guard themselves against a possible mutiny. In the novel Anand makes excellent fun of their dread of a mutiny by the coolies, their frantic preparations for meeting the crisis, and their triumphant quelling of it. de la Havre sees in "this pride of race, pride of country, and this exaggerated love of home" their "interests of economic supremacy".

It does not take long to see that many of de la Havre's ideas are Anand's own and that Anand uses him as his spokesman in the novel. In Untouchable, Coolie, and Two Leaves and a Bud, Anand presents life in terms of the experiences of the under-privileged, dispossessed, social marginals and outcastes, and then offers a commentary on that life. Because of the intellectual limitations of the protagonists, he introduces a character to serve as a commentator. In Untouchable the
modernist poet, and in Coolie those of the Red Flag Union and Mohan the young, educated revolutionary serve that purpose. In Two Leaves and a Bud he brings in an enlarged version of Mohan, namely John de la Havre who is given the status of a major character, who often deputises for him. de la Havre is intellectually well-equipped to be the author's spokesman. Though he gets involved with the lives of the coolies on the plantation he remains very much of an outsider to them. Because of his unconventional views about his own countrymen and Indians, a wide gulf separates him from the other sahibs. As a consequence, as Harrex perceptively remarks, "while the peasants on the plantation (particularly Gangu and his family) do most of the experiencing of life, especially suffering, de la Havre does most of the theorising".

As seen already, Anand's anger is directed against the colonial English men and women who in their ignorance and insensitiveness discriminate against the native Indians. A part of his strategy is to make an Englishmen the spokesman for his views. That he does not want to be unduly prejudiced against them and wishes to be fair by them is indicated by his introduction of the altruistic and enlightened doctor John de la Havre as a major character. In him Anand wants to create a
sensitive and fair-minded Englishmen, who intensely feels for the coolies without being sentimental and also understands the limitations of Indians, and who at the same time can analyse impartially the relationship between the English and Indians in all its aspects. Further he expects him to counterbalance the bulldozing profligate Reggie Hunt, the other major English character in the novel, who manifests in him the worst traits of the colonial British. But in actual realisation of his character in the novel, de la Havre becomes more of a mechanical contrivance than a dynamic character. His role as the lover of Barbara, the daughter of Croft-Cooke the chief Plantation Manager, does not improve matters much. He is so much obsessed with his ideas of reform and with "the need for an enlightened scientific consciousness and a revolutionary humanitarianism founded on Marxian economics as a basis for a politically independent India which will uphold the human dignity of all human individuals", that he lectures at length to Barbara when he is supposed to be making love to her. Though she is full of loving admiration for him, she feels impelled to ask him whether she or the Revolution comes first in his view. Her presence merely serves as an occasion for a long lecture on his favourite notion.
Effectively de la Havre serves to give expression to Anand's ideological concerns, and the novel whittles down to propaganda. The impact of Marxian ideas on Anand is too plainly seen in his portrayal of John de la Havre.

Compared with de la Havre, Reggie Hunt, the villain of the piece, appears realistic and credible, though crude. It is understandable if English readers are annoyed by Anand's portrayal of this character. But nowhere in the novel does Anand ever suggest even remotely that all English officials are like him in his immoral ways. What is most deplorable, however, is that the English men and women on the plantation, who are only too well aware of his uncivilized ways with the coolie women, do not even once express their disapproval of them. Could this be an indication of their moral vacuity? That Anand is anything but blind to the moral depravity of some of the Indians can be seen by his sketching of Neogi, Babu Shashi Bhushan, and Chambeli. Hunt, and along with him Croft-Cooke, Tweetie, Hitchcock, Macara, represent the ruling English. But none of them is as violently and belligerently active as Hunt. Arrogant and proud, full of animal spirits and youthful energy, Hunt even at twenty two remains, emotionally and intellectually, a school-boy. Elevated to the position
of an assistant planter he shapes himself to be a 'pucka' sahib, believing in the myth of white man's superiority in every respect, and imbibing in himself the superciliousness, the complacency and the assurance of the empire builders. All this results in his insulting and humiliating behaviour towards all Indians (for example his insult to Dr. Chuni Lal) and his brutality and hatred of the coolies. Flagging a coolie becomes a common occurrence. For him, and as for other English officials, every coolie, that spineless and timid creature, is a rebel and a seditionist. His lust for the coolie women is a class by itself. The coarseness of his mind is revealed in the way he describes the coolie women". Dirty cheats, the whole bag of them ---, the deceitful bitches ---". Reggie Hunt illustrates how corrupting the empire-building ethos can be. But it is nothing in comparison with the damage he and the like of him have done to others by their discrimination and dehumanising ways. Anand wisely makes a very brief and bare report of Hunt's trial and acquittal without any comment leaving it to the reader to draw his own conclusion, thus giving the novel a terse ending.

Together Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud reveal Anand's deep insight into the experiences of Coolies,
his profound compassion of these social marginals and underdogs, and his indignation at those who discriminate against them and exploit them. However his artistic control slackens, particularly in Two Leaves and a Bud, because of the intrusion of his ideological preoccupations. Anand appears as a writer with an axe to grind.
Notes and References


5. Ibid., p.18.


16. Ibid., p. 63.


18. Ibid., p. 11.


22. Ibid., p. 25.

23. Ibid., p. 59.

24. Ibid., p. 34.

25. Ibid.


150
27. Coolie, p.44.

28. Ibid., p.46.

29. Ibid.


34. Ibid., p.68.

35. Coolie, p.58.

36. Ibid., p.61.

37. Ibid., p.62.

38. Ibid., p.69.

39. Ibid., p.73.

40. Cowasjee, So Many Freedoms, p.69.

41. Coolie, p.78.

42. Ibid., p.79.

43. Ibid., p.83.

44. Ibid., p.78.

45. Ibid., p.85.

46. Ibid., p.125.

47. Ibid., p.108.

48. Ibid., p.110.
49. Cowasjee, So Many Freedoms, p.69.
50. Ibid.
51. Coolie, p.97.
52. Cowasjee, So Many Freedoms, p.70.
53. Coolie, p.150.
55. Cowasjee, So Many Freedoms, p.72.
56. Coolie, p.137.
57. Ibid., pp.147-48.
58. Ibid., p.163.
59. Ibid., p.177.
60. Ibid., p.179.
62. Coolie, p.188.
64. Coolie, p.190.
68. Naik, Mulk Raj Anand, p.41.
69. Coolie, p.257.
70. Ibid., p.218.
72. Coolie, p.262.
73. Cowasjee, So Many Freedoms, p.79.
74. Coolie, p.265.
76. Naik, Mulk Raj Anand, p.45.
77. Cowasjee, so Many Freedoms, p.80.
78. Coolie, p.284.
79. Ibid., p.317.
82. Cowasjee, So Many Freedoms, pp.84-87.
83. Ibid., p.85.
84. Naik, Mulk Raj Anand, pp.46-47.
85. Two Leaves and a Bud, p.1.
86. Cowasjee, So Many Freedoms, p.92.
88. Ibid., p.42.
89. Ibid., p.114.
90. Ibid., p.118.
91. Ibid., p.170.
92. Ibid., p.196.
93. Ibid., p.200.
94. Ibid., p.213.
95. Ibid., p.264.
96. Ibid., p.68.
98. Cowasjee, So Many Freedoms, p.87.
100. Two Leaves and a Bud, p.154.
101. Ibid., p.156.
102. Ibid., p.157.
104. Ibid.
105. Two Leaves and a Bud, p.57.