

Dying Humanity in *Two Leaves and a Bud* and *The God of Small Things*: A Comparative Analysis

RAVI PRAKASH

Abstract. Humanity demands dignified life of each human being irrespective of caste, creed, class, gender, age or any other discriminating ground. It wishes for ensuring familial, social, economic, political, intellectual and emotional freedom for every individual. In fact, everyone talks of humanity but the irony is that it is always seen in a very deplorable, wounded and bleeding state. Humanism is found everywhere almost in dying state. To be a man or woman is very simple but to be a human being is extremely difficult. Surprisingly enough, human population is increasing, but humanity is falling down. The present paper attempts at analysing the depiction of the deteriorated human values in Mulk Raj Anand's celebrated novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) and Arundhati Roy's magnum opus work *The God of Small Things* (1997) comparatively. In both these novels one finds humanity being shamed and humiliated. The horrible life-odyssey of Gangu and his family in Indian pre-independence era and Ammu-Velutha's heart-rending saga of love and care for one another in Indian post-independence era are enough to prove the condition of humanity in reality. Both these novels portray the suffering human beings due to the stigma of class-distinction.

Keywords : Humanity; humiliation; deplorable; pre-independence era; post-independence era; stigma; class-distinction.

In the present era human population is increasing with a very high speed but humanity is dying. In the novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy one can find the cruelty of this world towards the downtrodden people of society. This civilized society is structured on the pillars of various types of discriminations on the basis of class, caste, creed, gender, age etc., due to which the whole building is on the verge of crumbling down. Humanity demands dignified life of each human being irrespective of caste, creed, class, gender, age or any other discriminating ground. It wishes for ensuring familial, social, economic, political, intellectual and emotional freedom for every individual. In fact, everyone talks of humanity but the irony is that it is always seen in a very deplorable, wounded and bleeding state. Humanism is found everywhere almost in dying state. To be a man or woman is very simple but to be a human being is extremely difficult.

Mulk Raj Anand has written many novels including *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *The Village* and *Two Leaves and a Bud* where he has projected various types of inhumane behaviour being done in India, being ruled by the Britishers. That time Indian society was divided and not only Britishers were exploiting Indians but Indians too, were exploiting other Indians. *Two Leaves and a Bud* depicts the story of a simple Punjabi peasant Gangu who joins the tea-plantation of Assam with his

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wife and his daughter. Like other coolies they are also subjected to injustice and exploitation by tea-planter Reggie Hunt. The climax is reached when Hunt tries to molest Leila, the good-looking daughter of Gangu. When the father runs to rescue his daughter, a bullet pierces his body and he drops dead. The case of murder is tried against Reggie Hunt, but the white jury try the court declare him innocent, and Hunt is acquitted. Racial discrimination has been nicely presented through this incident. Such types of discriminations were not present in the slave India only but in the free India too, it is still present. Arundhati Roy too, has tried to show the discrimination in Indian socio-political contexts including familial domain as well. The story of Ammu, Velutha, Pappachi, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Chacko, Estha and Rahel aims at highlighting the bitter fact of unsympathetic attitude of this society towards an individual. The maltreatment of Mammachi at the hands of Pappachi, tortures meted out to Ammu and Velutha at the hands of their family members and whole society, mental, emotional and sexual exploitation of children and the overuse of environment, these are the issues which have been raised in this novel. Arundhati Roy has used a very unique style and language for satirizing the conditions. In both the novels *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) and *The God of Small Things* (1997) one finds humanity being shamed and humiliated. The horrible life-odyssey of Gangu and his family in Indian pre-independence era and Ammu-Velutha's heart-rending saga of love and care for one another in Indian post-independence era are enough to prove the condition of humanity in reality. Both these novels portray the suffering human beings due to the stigma of class-distinction and caste-discrimination together. In these novels deplorable state of womankind is also projected heart-touchingly.

Gangu is by profession a farmer who works on his field in a village near Hoshiarpur in Punjab. He is tempted by the false promises and leaves for Assam with his wife Sajani and his children Leila and Buddhu to work on the Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam leaving his native village. Soon he comes to know that the promises made to him were entirely false, it seemed that the world of a tea-plantation were like a prison house :

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. The *chowkidars* keep guard over the plantation, and they bring you back if you should run.

(*Two Leaves and a Bud*, 38)

Sajani dies of malaria and Gangu like other coolies felt plantation life as a progression from today's bad to the worse of tomorrow. He feels utterly frustrated and being cheated with the false promises made by Buta Singh. He exclaims with enormous grief at the death of Sajani:

'The Liar', Gangu burst forth. He killed my Sajani with his lies! 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.(143)

Gangu felt choked in his throat with the memory of his wife, and his eyes filled with water. Anand has shown quite poignantly how there was utter discontent among the coolies. Their conditions remind us of Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*. While two loose women start quarreling, Reggie, the Assistant Manager takes a strict action in which some coolies are badly injured. Croft-Cooke makes an appeal to resolve the matter but of no avail. The coolies decide to agitate, and the plantation splits into two camps, with a few dissidents in both of them. The use of force firing is the extreme of cruelty. Reggie, out of mad first attempts to assault Leila, as she is leisurely plucking tea leaves alone. As she runs away, she is followed by him to her house, where his father intervenes to rescue her, but maddened by frustration and fear, he kills Gangu who falls in front of him. A trial follows, the tea-planter is brought to court, but Mr. Justice Mowberley, agreeing to the majority view of the white man, acquits him of the charge of murder. Anand has sketched the character of Reggie Hunt very realistically:

If he could have met a woman here, he would have found it difficult to restrain himself from gutting her against the rock or throwing her into a hollow and jumping on to her. The oppressive urge of his hot, steadfast lust made his head quiver with a palpitating ache, till it became a dumb longing, goading a purblind soul amid the blindness of a cold felicity. His passion had become the image of the act as he would perform it.(184)

All these episodes are enough to show the callousness prevalent in the pre-independence India for which not simply the Britishers, but Indians like Buta Singh were equally responsible. Reggie Hunt was a Britisher but what to say of Indians when people like Chacko don't hesitate in making filthy advances towards the poor and the needy lady workers.

In *The God of Small Things* the merciless killing of Velutha for no any crime, the dejected death of Ammu, whose family members even denied proper last rituals to her, puts question mark on the humanistic ideals of the society. The police officials like Inspector Thomas Mathew gaze at ladies lecherously and kills an innocent paravan for loving a helpless divorcee. Velutha is trampled under the boots of police personnels brutally and ultimately dies leaving a big, big hole in the history of civilization. Estha's sexual exploitation by the Orangedrink Lemondrinkman presents bluntly the ugly face of this world. Even children are not

spared and they are maltreated so inhumanely. Estha became a totally frustrated man forever, mentally and emotionally distracted, a split-up personality:

Estha alone walked wearily to the bathroom. He vomited a clear, bitter, lemony, sparkling, fizzy liquid. The acrid aftertaste of a Little Man's first encounter with Fear. Dum dum. (*The God of Small Things*, 119)

All these problems projected by Arundhati Roy are not only of one Estha, one Rahel, one Ammu or one Velutha rather of many such characters of our society. Women are always subjugated and tortured. They are denied all those rights which are enjoyed by men. They are not allowed to take decisions even of their own lives, they are not allowed to seek higher education in many families, they are the victims of several taunts and partiality at familial and societal both levels. Ammu is much tortured by her family members including her mother, brother and her previous love Baba, a tea-planter from Bengal, who became her husband but whom Ammu divorced on account of the intolerable misbehaviour done to her. Actually, he wanted that Ammu should sleep with her boss for one night so that he could get promotion in his job. Ammu could not engulf this insult done to her emotions and faith as a wife and she left him along with her twins. , At maternal home, as she had to return there she is totally unwelcome and she two keeps on defying all family members. Her brother Chacko is a male chauvinist who believes that whatever is at home that belongs to him only and the daughter of the family, i.e. Ammu doesn't have any share in it. He is not so eager to get higher education but just for being a male child he is sent to England for the study where he marries Margaret Kochamma, who ultimately finding him too lazy and slovenly divorced him in favour of Joe. Nobody humiliates Chacko for this as he was a male child. He looks at all the female workers at Pickle Factory with bad intention and misbehaves with all of them, but that is encouraged by none other than his mother Mammachi declaring it as men's need:

She was aware of his libertine relationships with the women in the factory, but had ceased to be hurt by them. When Baby Kochamma brought up the subject, Mammachi became tense and tight-lipped. 'He can't help having a Man's Needs', she said primly. (168)

What can be more inhumane if a mother discriminates between her own children in such a despicable manner. Ammu and Chacko both are divorcees but the response towards them from the family and society is diametrically opposite. Roy describes Mammachi's differentiating attitudes as follows:

Her tolerance of 'Men's Needs' as far as her son was concerned, became the fuel for her unmanageable fury at her daughter. (258)

Anand and Roy do not like to write merely for the sake of art. They write with a purpose. If Anand is a committed writer, Roy is a committed social activist. Both are the champions of the poor, the underdogs or the downtrodden. They have a great sympathy for the suffering masses. The novels of Mulk Raj Anand are in direct succession to the period of Gandhism, in so far as he walks away from the pages of Tagore beyond the middle class to the lowest and the humblest outcastes, peasants and toilers. Anand was aware of the anarchy produced both by the feudal oligarchies and the then British rulers. In his preface to *Two Leaves and a Bud* Anand himself says, "It was natural, after I had probed the soul of the sweeper Bakha in my novel *Untouchable*, and reproduced each wound of the heart and body of the hill boy Munoo in the folk epic *Coolie* that I should record the journey of the Hillman Gangu through the vicissitude of his later life, after his eviction from the stony half acre in the Punjab, the Himalayas and his enticement as an indentured labourer to the tea estates of Assam. All these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in the novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflections of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth." (Preface, v) This revelation from the heart of Anand suggests at his humane attitude towards his characters, real and drawn from life. Through his characters Anand has quite realistically given vent to the fact that humanity is dying slowly and gradually and Roy through her novel *The God of Small Things* has well portrayed the fact that in free India the condition has rather worsened, not improved. Roy tells in *The God of Small Things* at one place:

Perhaps it's true that things can change in a day.
That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of
whole lifetimes.(32)

Today the whole society is talking about women empowerment and abolishing untouchability, but still a long struggle has to be continued to get success in this field. Still many Ammus are badly treated by their parents even. Children are innocent and their innocence must not be misused and abused. Anand has pointed out all the anomalies present in pre-independence India with an attitude of a propagandist and Roy has brought all such evils present in the post-independence India as a social activist. Roy has talked about the human beings' callous attitude towards the environment as well. Human beings have become not indifferent towards one another but towards the whole earth and its ecology. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy has described the pathetic state of Ayemenem district, Meenachal River, Paradise Pickles and Preserves. The environment and surrounding is decaying everywhere. Aundhati Roy, in the chapter 'The History House' has described so many flora and fauna while Velutha was about to be killed

by the wolf-like a posse of Touchable Policemen mercilessly. These Kottayam policemen woke Velutha with their boot and didn't care a fig for the living beings there while chasing the poor paravan. Velutha has been given the epithets such as, 'The God of Loss', 'The God of Small Things', 'the God of Goose Bumps and Sudden Smiles', satirically and aptly by Roy. He was indeed 'The God of Small Things' about which Roy writes further, "If he touched her(Ammu), he couldn't talk to her, if he loved her he couldn't leave, if he spoke he couldn't listen, if he fought he couldn't win." (217) This is the irony the base of which is the stigma of untouchability in the social scenario.

Obviously enough, it can be said that *Two Leaves and a Bud* and *The God of Small Things* both depict the instances of dying humanity, where one finds all human values, such as love, pity, compassion, sense of ownness etc at stake. There are indeed, some similarities and dissimilarities in the style, technique and language of Anand and Roy, yet their concern for the gradually occurring loss of humanity can well be seen in the subjects or issues raised by themselves in their writings. Despite the fact that humanity is endangered, hope still exists. If people take pledge to revolt against all sorts of double dealings being observed in our society and raise their voices to resist exploitations, surely humanitarianism will be restored. To quote John Milton:

What though the field be lost?
All is not lost;
The unconquerable will. (*Paradise Lost*, 105)

Ravi Prakash

Research Scholar

P.G. Department of English

Magadh University, Bodh-Gaya

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