29th June, 1967.

Dear Shri Ramamurti,

I have received your letter of 15th June.

I am not surprised that you have guessed the influence of Charles Dickens on my novels.

Of course, I am much more indebted to Tolstoy and Gorky.

My readings in Dickens, however, during my early London years left deep impressions, because of the contempt in which he was held in Virginia Wolf's circles.

Moreover I shared with a man called T.A. Jackson many ideas about Dickens' own predilections.

Also, living in the same street in which Dickens lived, in Bloomsbury, verging on Islington, and in recoil against the contempt for the poor, of the bulk of the literary world, Dickens became more lovable.

There were other writers whom I read like George Gissing and Francis Thomson the hobo-poet who wrote the Hound of Heaven in a Doss house. He was discovered by the poets Francis and Alice Meynell.

Indeed I wrote a paper for Delhi seminar on Dickens, which I looked for in my file and found. Have you a copy? Otherwise I will get my typist to grind a copy for you later this month and send it to you.

Meanwhile, please keep in mind that my background being different, I did not self-consciously follow Dickens ever.

I am giving brief answers to your questioneer.

Regards.

Yours sincerely,
Question 1: "Marxism in your humanism"

There is no doubt of my debt to Marx. But before I read Marx I had already read Tolstoy Dostersky and Gorky - all in jail.

Therefore before going to London in 1925, I felt that man are not free. And always in despair. This attitude was confirmed by one of my uncles, who told me about the Buddha's sense of pain Dukha. So I hovered between existentialism and the hope offered by Marx in my early novels.

Question 2: In my early boyhood, when I saw my young cousin age nine died of T.B., I wrote a letter of protest to God, and told him he did not exist. I began later, vaguely to disbelieve the believers.

Later still as I was confirmed that the anthropomorphic God was a consolation offered to human beings by all the faiths, as a mantra to recite in distress. I did begin to see the more exalted idea of the deity as cosmos, whom one puts into one's body-soul with the breath of fresh air every morning. The search for Unity in self actualisation of one's person beyond the half and quarter man one is does compelled a dialectical idea of reconciling contraries. I don't like the use of abstract words like 'Dialectical Materialism'. In the life of feeling, there are no abstractions. One goes by insights and outsiights.

Question 3: Revolutionary changes

I do not think there will be anything like the French, Russian or Chinese revolution in India. There may be no uniform change of the social order. In different parts of the country there may be a change in the collective unconscious of people, from the old bad habits of caste, and disgust against the profit society, with its chor bazaars, as in West Bengal. And, through land reform and basic application of sharing produce, we may get a social democracy of the kind that Jawaharlal Nehru had in mind.
Question 4: Dickens's Popularity

As long as the world is poised between the few rich and the many poor, Dickens will be read as Tolstoy is read in Russia. In U.K. just now there is a revival.

Question 5: My novels and tradition

I broke away from the recital tradition of Ramayana kind of narrative to face human beings, as I knew them from and grew up among them.

I found that Tagore, Sarat Chatterji and Premchand had led the way. They broke with the recital, also with the moral basson at the end of the novel.

Tagore dealt with middle section, Sarat Chatterji with lower middle sections, Premchand with the peasants. I began with the Untouchables.

Question 6: Dickens influence.

Refer to my article

Question 7: Dickens was called 'humanitarian' and not 'humanist', because he was essentially sentimental in his beliefs. He felt human beings could come through the goodness through Christian charity. He was not in despair because of Christian hope.

'Humanism' anticipates breakaway from sentiments, to sympathy or pity, or understanding - that man is not free, but can be, that man can make himself.

Question 8: Dickens and Marx - I do not think that Dickens ever read Marx. He may have heard of the German philosopher. But I have not seen any evidence about their having met - May be T.A. Jackson's book, published by Laurel & Wishart, Museum street, London W.C.1., may give some information. Jackson was a Marxist.

Dear Prof. Ramamurthy,

Greetings of the season!

I returned from tour to find your letter of 7th January.

I feel with you that the parallelisms between the works of Charles Dickens and Mulk Raj Anand may make a worthwhile study. Not too long. Then it can be published.

I recall that, after reading Pickwick Papers in India, I did read intimately, the Dickens novels, specially David Copperfield, Great Expectations, Christmas Carol etc. Most of them!

Like Dickens, my obsession for the poor was confirmed by the opposition to this kind of writing by the snobs of Bloomsbury.

Of course, I have come, away from English middle class writing, to the poor, via Tolstoy and Gorky, to the Indian interior itself on my own.

I have been influenced by the themes of Dickens to an extent, treatment of children specially, but not exactly by the actual writing of Dickens. As you may not know the English cockney milieu is far removed from the Indian poor folk. And the predicament of the rejected in India is far more intense than that of the British poor, who were used by the upper classes of Great Britain for policing the Empire and for slaving in factories which made the Industrial revolution.

The sense of humour of Dickens and Anand is similar. But, again, I am different, because the English are low voiced and the Indians are raucous.

I don't know if you know the novels of George Gissing, who came after Dickens. And I wonder if you have read Gorky. As also the Scotch writer Lewis Grassic Gibbon, author of A Scott's Quire. And Balzac!

Anyhow keep in touch.

Yours sincerely,

(MULK RAJ ANAND)