Chapter I

Introduction
INTRODUCTION

Comparative literature is a method of investigation and it is mainly concerned with relationships, resemblances and differences. It is an attempt on the part of the researcher to discover the unity and diversity in a multilingual and multi-religious culture. A study in comparative literature paves the way for a more comprehensive and adequate understanding of the works and authors. It is an interaction between literatures written in various languages and also an extension of healthy critical procedures adopted by readers of literature in all periods and cultures.

Henry H.H Remak, in *Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective*, has offered a more convincing definition: “Comparative Literature is the study of the relationship between literature on the one hand and the other areas of knowledge and beliefs such as the arts...philosophy, history, the social sciences...religion, etc., on the other” (5).

Comparative literature has been recognized as a distinct discipline in the recent decades. Each university is now actively involved in establishing a separate department...
of comparative literature and many scholars have produced
good studies. But till 1980s, it was not at all thought of in the
Indian context and that is why Nirmal Jain, in Comparative
Literature, points out, “Comparative Literature as a separate
study has not taken root in the Indian academic system” (80).

Effects of liberalism make easy availability of literatures
of other states and nations. Chellappan, a great scholar and
comparatist, aptly conveys, “The concept of a self-enclosed
national literature is becoming outmoded as harmful even
from the aesthetic point of view. It tends to blur our vision,
atrophy our attitudes and conventionalize our responses” (1).
Comparative literature widens the outlook of the scholars,
when the works of other nations are valued. In this respect, it
is worth quoting Chellappan again:

Comparative Studies liberate literature from
narrow, linguistic boundaries and seek to
establish the unity of literature and thereby the
unity of Man... In as far as all great literature is
concerned with the universal man they have a
common core and comparative literatures can
enable us to see national literature as part of a universal culture. (1)

Sisir Kumar Das expresses the same opinion in his paper titled, *Comparative Literature*:

Comparative literature differs from the study of single literature not in the methods but in matter, attitude and perspective. It can go on extending its area of operation-its ultimate limit is the literatures of the whole world. Its strength and its weakness lie in its cosmopolitanism. (97)

No regional literatures of India, like Kannada, Tamil or Malayalam, can assume international recognition, unless the quintessence of these literatures is compared with those of established national literatures, like French, Russian, German and others. Bijay Kumar Das comments on the scope of comparative literature in India: “Comparative literature studies in India is the need of the hour. Besides broadening our outlook about Indian literatures, it will further the cause of national interest” (34). C.R. Viswesara Rao, in *Comparative Indian Literature*, also offers his
suggestion as to what is required for comparative literature, “The minimum requirement of a comparative study is the binary concern, which is hardly sufficient to meet the full demands of comparative literature” (11).

Based on these observations in regard to the scope of comparative literature, this study aims at comparing the works of Mulk Raj Anand and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai. Among the many novelists, they are two of the most outstanding novelists of contemporary Indian literary scene. It is widely appreciated that they are trend setters and pioneers and their contribution in making the Indian novel a powerful instrument of social transformation. While Anand has a great concern for the downtrodden people of Indian society and his novels, therefore, throw light on the prevalent pains and predicament of 'have-nots', Naik elaborates, “He is at his best when he is exposing the limitations of the decayed Indian tradition and championing the cause of modernism as a curse for the ills of Indian Society” (24). Pillai chose to highlight almost similar concerns in Malayalam, one of the regional languages of India. Pillai was best known, as Zahcarias Thundy points out, for his “stories on the
oppressed members and classes of society and subjects heretofore avoided by serious writers" (286) as well as for his simple use of language.

All the major works of them were translated into many Indian as well as European languages. A proper study has been made on them all over the world; they are today ranked with some of the greater novelists of the world. Though writing in two different languages, Anand in English and Pillai in Malayalam, and hailing from the northern-most and southern-most parts of India, Anand was born on 12 December 1905 in Peshawar, and Pillai was born on 17 April 1912 in Alappuzha, their fiction has striking similarities. They are, in several respects, the most closely comparable among the contemporary novelists of India. Many of these similarities, like thematic and stylistic, are the result of several common influences on their mind and art, especially those which helped the growth and development of their awareness and turned their attention to the social and political issues of their times.

Apart from these influences, some other equally important sources of their similarities are their common
attitudes and expectations as writers, and the affinity of temperament. They are highly sensitive to anything that affronts human dignity and deny social justice. With a similar sense of moral idealism and profound sympathy for the poor and the lowly, both opposed all kinds of hypocrisy, oppression and exploitation.

Anand is the Indian version of Charles Dickens as far as the treatment of social theme is concerned. He is messiah of the downtrodden. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar avers in this respect:

As a writer of fiction, Anand's notable marks are vitality and a keen sense of actuality. He is a veritable Dickens for describing the inequities and idiosyncrasies in the current human situation with candour as well as accuracy (130).

Similarly K.M.George says about Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai as:

Before 1940 he was acknowledged as one of the leading fictionists in his language. But with the passing of years he came to be acknowledged as
an Indian novelist ranking with Prem Chand, Yaspal, Mulk Raj Anand, Tarashankar and Sivaraman Karanth. Thakazhi was particularly good at bringing out the forces that shape society. (13)

The most powerful influence on the works of Anand and Pillai was the spirit of their times. K. Ayyapa Paniker observes, "The underdeveloped nature of the land where he (Pillai) was born and the backwardness of the people among whom he grew up became a source of inspiration and strength for him" (33). Anand too, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes, "wrote in a brisk unselfconscious way about what he had seen at first hand in the years of his childhood, boyhood, and youth" (335).

It was mainly the particular conditions of the thirties and forties that forced them break with the traditional themes in favour of contemporary social problems. They prefer the familiar to the fancied and explore the by-lanes of the outcastes, the peasants and the working people. In the preface to his Lone Traveller, Pillai acknowledges "If the literary contributions made by me so far have any
signification of social concern, it was...economic and social injustice"(11). Similarly Anand says, “I am a novelist, a writer of books, or social documents, about a rather neglected country-India.” (33).

The thinking and imagination of Anand and Pillai and their distinction and originality paved the way for reacting to the problems of their own society. The age in which they lived was an age of concern. Misery and deprivation had been seen everywhere. In Lone Traveller, Pillai writes it was “an important period in the present century when the life was made gloomy by the dark clouds of economic crisis and unemployment all over the world, including America.” (12) Both Anand and Pillai saw around them a world of economic nightmare, appalling poverty, social discrimination and exploitation of man by man. Subba Rao aptly describes:

If Anand sees life in the raw and exposes it mercilessly, flesh, wounds, blood and all...shredding sentimentalism and writes with a fine touch of scorn of social and economic inequalities, Thakazhi too does it equally well. (168)
At this time, Anand and Pillai gradually started brooding over the meaning of life and arriving at the idea that in the name of liberation of personality, it is essential to fight against the political and social injustice. Both of them became aware of the important role that art and literature could play in furthering the process of social change. They hold the view that literature is an important element in the education of the general public's social and political thinking. Here, it is appropriate to mention the words of S. Sujatha: “From the beginning Indian English novelists, under the impact of nationalism, sought to portray not only the national concerns but also the socio-cultural conditions of their times” (58).

A writer is not only the voices of his own conscience but the representative of the society to which he belongs. Anand and Pillai had concerns with their environment, their society and the incidents that take place around them. They committed themselves to the ideals of fraternity, enlightenment and social progress. They realized that social awareness was the key to social progress and felt that as novelist their responsibility was to shape the society. About a
writer's capability to uplift the society, Anand says in his *Apology for Heroism*,

the creative writer or the poet is in a position to expose the perverters of words, aspire to truth, to take a whole view of the world, a view which is both extensive and intensive. And he is possessed of the necessary apparatus to help to exalt men to the full heights of their dignity, to equip them with the necessary spirit to tackle the task before them. (135)

It is to be remembered that the novelists in Indian languages, before Anand and Pillai, were engaged themselves in the portrayal of the life of the upper strata of the society. It was a great revolution that Anand and Pillai spearheaded in the history of Indian novels by writing the prevailing socio-economic conditions of their period. Pillai, in *On the Banks of Reminiscences*, explains his approach:

Our motto was the representation of raw life. We did not accept the doctrine of art for art's safe---
The present generation does not know anything about the evils like pollution or untouchability ---
All people, both men and women were engaged in a big struggle. It was necessary for them to become aware of that struggle. Then art had to give way. Why can't we look at this period in this way? (288)

Like Pillai, Anand also states his position in his essay, 'Why I write?', "I wanted to write in the time bound contemporary world, about the here and the now, seeing everyone with a naked vision, in all the starkness of the human situation" (7). Again he expresses his stand point in Apology for Heroism: "Any writer who said that he was not interested in 'la condition humaine' was either posing, or yielding to a fanatical love of isolation- a perverse and clever defence of the adolescent desire to be indifferent" (81).

Anand's humanist convictions and humanitarian compassion and Pillai's socialistic convictions have fired their imagination to arrive at a social progress tackling social problems. Anand and Pillai hated the social institution which causes cleavage between the different strata in the social structure. They believed that their art could be an effective instrument for social transformation. Anand himself admits:
I began to write about the suffering men and women I had known to find out the reasons for their heart-rending failure to live happy lives, and to learn for myself what were the things and ideals I could honestly believe in, and to help to remould the tragic world in which I had grown up into less harassed world. (4)

Anand expresses the responsibilities of an artist in *Apology for Heroism*: "Whether we take the task of destroying the spurious elements of contemporary civilization or of reconstructing the future society, the creative artist occupies an important role in both spheres" (136). Art, according to Anand, creates wider consciousness of the readers by arousing compassion. It was their common sympathy for the oppressed and the down-trodden and their actual experiences with the lives of such people that bring Anand and Pillai close to each other. Ayyappa Paniker writes about Pillai: "The sympathy for the underdog was perhaps something in the very fibre of his being which did not require any kind of extraneous ideological prop" (10). Similarly, C.J. George says, "Anand’s novels reveal his passionate concern for the poor
and the oppressed and his deep and abiding commitment to human values" (211).

Both Anand and Pillai, right from their childhood, have heard stories from their parents. Pillai has acknowledged his indebtedness to his father for kindling in him an interest in story telling. His father, Sankara Kurup, used to tell stories when Pillai was a boy. Dr. V.K. Naryana Menon has confirmed this view by writing:

At dusk, as is the custom in Kerala homes, the head of the family would sit by the side the oil lamp and read from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, the great epics of the Hindus, and Thakazhi would listen to his father's stories spellbound. Thakazhi's earliest education was thus at home. (8)

Anand too used to hear stories, not from his father, but from his mother, Ishwar Kaur, during his childhood. Saros Cowasjee writes:

If his mother's faith abetted his already agnostic bent of mind, her recital of songs, tales, myths,
and epics of the village community created in him an awareness of the richness of Punjabi literature. He was particularly impressed by his mother's intonation of Japji, the Sikh prayer book. (4)

Both the writers inherited these parental legacies and they have been well integrated in their writings.

After high school studies, Anand went to England to study philosophy and Pillai went to Trivandrum to study law. K. Ayyappa Paniker observes, "Life at Trivandrum Law College opened the doors of world literature to the boy who had just come from the village" (36). Saros Cowasjee writes, "In September 1925, at the age twenty, Anand sailed for England" (9).

In London, Anand was encouraged by a girl, Irene, daughter of a professor of Biology at the University of Wales, whom he loved, to write the story of his life. Saros Cowasjee writes:

What did appeal to her was Anand's gift of storytelling—especially his vivid recollections of his
mother, aunt and cousins. She asked him to put down the story of his life on paper, and to impress her he began a 'confession', modelled on Rousseau's *Confessions* which she had given him to read. (11)

Pillai also got the guidance from a teacher, K.M.George says:

He fondly remembers a couple of teachers who encouraged his talent for story telling, among them the well-known play wright and critic Kainikka Kumara Pillai, who was then a teacher in the N.S.S High school at Karuvatta. An instance of his encouragement is the short story *Sadhukkal (The Poor)* published in the periodical *Service* even while Thakazhi was in school. (9)

Anand and Pillai were students of arts before they turned to political action through their creative fiction. The theme and the characters of their novels had been taken from the rich material offered by real experiences. They had first seen their heroes as pieces of trembling humanity and loved them
before they sought to put them into their books. Their contact with the poor people enabled them to see things by themselves, learn the lives of the poor closely and analyse the society as well. They interpret the truth of life from felt experience, and not from books. Hilda Pontes points out:

The distinction of Anand as a writer has always been the choice of themes and their treatment in his works. His novels are mainly on themes around human suffering caused by political, economic, social and religious factors. (129)

Anand acknowledges that the characters in his novels have come fresh from contact with the flesh and blood of everyday existence.

Anand confesses in the Introduction to Two Leaves and a Bud that the characters of his novels are,

The reflection of the real people I had known I had known in childhood and youth. And I was only repaying the debt of gratitude I owed them for much of the inspiration they had given me to mature into manhood when I began to interpret
their lives in my writing. They were not mere phantoms, though my imagination did a great deal to transform them... They were flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood, and obsessed me in the way in which certain human beings obsess an artist’s soul. And I was doing no more than what a writer does when he seeks to interpret the truth from the realities of life. (1)

Pillai too had taken the characters from the felt experience. This is evident from the writings of K. Satchidanandan:

“Thakazhi was also a careful observer of the village-life; its relationships, hierarchies, structures of inequality, joys and sorrows of the humble folk. That is what helped him write stories” (13).

Anand gave up all philosophical theories which he studied in London and dedicated himself to lift human beings from the depths of degradation. His aim was to “rescue from the obscure slums of the British Indian cantonment, a man of real flesh and blood, from inside knowledge of the hutments where I had lived and played” (57). In the same manner, K.M.George says, “Thakazhi practiced as a pleader in the
courts at Ambalapuzha and Alappuzha. This continued for about twenty years; but his heart was not in his profession” (10).

Though both of them wrote and published a few stories between 1929 and 1934, their career as novelists actually began in the mid-thirties, with Pillai’s *Reward for Sacrifice* (1934) and Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935). Pillai’s *The Unchaste* (1935) and *Realities* (1945) and Anand’s *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) are the novels to have been written obviously under the spell of French Naturalism with its emphasis on a humanistic vision of society.

The impact of Marxism and the progressive writing is seen in the following novels like Anand’s *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1941), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and *The Big Heart* (1945) and Pillai’s *Scavenger’s Son* (1947), *The Skull* (1947), *Two Measures of Rice* (1948), *The Beggar Class* (1952) and *His Reminiscences* (1955).

Anand’s *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1948) and Pillai’s *Chemmeen* (1956) are of great significance as they
mark the beginning of a new stage in the long and distinguished career of these authors. In these novels, both the writers reveal their interest in the analysis of the predicaments and psychology of individuals.

Both Anand and Pillai won many awards for their writings. Their novels stand testimony to the fact that they were widely read by the people not only in India but abroad as well. Anand won the Sahitya Akademi Award for Untouchable in 1974 and Pillai too won the Sahitya Akademi Award for Chemmeen in 1957 and the Janpith Award in 1984 for Kayar. Anand was awarded the International Peace Prize in 1952, for promoting understanding among the nations of the world through his creative work. Pillai received The Soviet Land Nehru Award in 1974. The Government of India also honoured them with the award of Padma Bhusan to Anand and Pillai in 1967 and 1985 respectively.

Anand's Untouchable and Pillai's Scavenger's Son were at first treated not fit for literature by the orthodox critics since they were concerned with vulgar subjects. Untouchable was rejected by nineteen publishers. In this connection, Saros Cowasjee writes that the book
was saved by the timely intervention of a young British poet, Oswell Blakeston, who took the manuscript to Wishart Books. The book was accepted on the condition that E.M. Forster should write a preface to protect it against being called ‘dirty’. (44)

Pillai too moved away from the old track, unlike his predecessors. C.P. Sivadasan confirms this view by writing, Pillai, “strayed away from the beaten track ...daring enough to be original in the portrayal of the insulted and the humiliated whose lives were intertwined with dirt and excrement” (54). It is to be noted that Pillai was the first novelist in Malayalam fiction to make bold attempt in this direction.

Both Anand and Pillai were inspired by the Progressive Writers Association. They became its members to reform the society. K.M. George describes

Those were the days when Pragati Sahitya or The Progressive Literature Movement was influencing the whole of India. The thirties and forties of the
century were particularly alive and fruitful in all the developed languages of India. Malayalam also came to the forefront and Thakazhi was in the vortex of the movement. Inspired by the propagators of the movement and also by the great works of the West, Thakazhi launched on his career as a short-story writer (10)

Sajjad Zaheer, Chief Founder of the All India Progressive Writers Association, in *Mulk Raj Anand: Contemporary Indian Literature*, described the venture of Anand in this way:

For the first time in our literature the most down trodden and the most exploited section of Indian humanity was depicted with piteous realism and deep sympathy as the central figures of Indian life.... To Anand belongs the honour of being, the pioneer, the first in launching modern Indian literature on this new road. (11)

The educated middle class in Kerala were considerably influenced by Russian and French realistic literary works.
Pillai too was influenced by great writers like Guy de Maupassant, Chekhov and Steffan Zweige and Emile Zola. K.Satchidanandandan observes, “His life in Thiruvananthapuram as a student of law brought him closer to Kesari’s circle. It was here that he was introduced to European realists: Zola, Balzac, Falubert, Maupassant, Chekhov, Tolstoy” (13). Pillai has acknowledged in *On the Banks of Reminiscences* that the works of “great novelists in France certainly influenced me” (215). He was encouraged by Kesari Balakrishna Pillai, his mentor and perceptible critic, to read such works in English translation. K.M. George brings out how Pillai has become the writer of fiction by saying, “it was the Kesari Club, consisting of brilliant thinkers and writers, and the guidance of Balakrishna Pillai that gave shape to Thakazhi as a writer of fiction. And it was fiction with a purpose” (10).

Anand’s long stay at England associating himself with great intellectuals like Bertrand Russell and the perusal of books by Gorky, Tolstoy, and Ruskin influenced him to write his early novels in the thirties. Saros Cowasjee opines, “He (Anand) had come to Socialism through Tolstoy, Ruskin, Morris and Gandhi as a protest against misery, ugliness and
inequality" (13-4). Thus both Anand and Pillai had the training and talent to introduce in Indian fiction the naturalistic tradition found in European novels.

Marxism was another common influence on Anand and Pillai which further helped the growth and development of their social and political thinking and determined some of their identical concerns, attitudes and artistic intentions. Pillai says in On the Banks of Reminiscences: “I came into contact with Marxism at Trivandrum. The communist manifesto was the first work I read. After wards in so many ways I came under the strong influence of that ideology” (254).

The Marxian Philosophy provided both the writers with clear perceptions of the social and political ideas of their times. The influence of the Soviet Literature and the Progressive Writer’s Movement made an impact in their common approach to literature and social problems. Inspired by communist ideas, Anand in England and Pillai in Trivandrum, they were drawn to Soviet Literature that affirmed a new world, free from exploitation and capitalist enslavement.
Anand and Pillai thought that literature must have some social purpose. They focused a powerful spotlight on the unaccepted features of the society in which they lived. They were inspired by the socialist literature which was closely linked to the struggle of the working people for the victory of socialism. As writers of revolutionary ardour and faith, they realized, Margaret Berry pinpoints in *Mulk Raj Anand: The Man and the Novelist*,

Socialistic realism is the fundamental method of soviet literature and criticism: it demands of the artist a true, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. Further, it ought to contribute to the ideological transformation and education of the workers in a spirit of socialism. (31)

Pillai has confessed in *On the Banks of Reminiscences* that,

Progressive literary movement was not an organization; it was only a movement. To oppose the rot in the past tradition was my aim during my early period. I don’t claim that this aim was
then a conscious one.... When the aim became clear, as a social being I felt that I had to be socially conscious. Then something else was inevitable to break a few idols. (267)

Their common conviction was that writers have an enormous role to play in bringing about a radical and social change. They realised the proper direction and purpose of writing. They felt the need to become more keenly aware of the basic problem of their times and suggest effective means of solving them. The influence of progressive writing is found in the novels of Anand written in between 1931 and 1945 and Pillai in between 1947 and 1955. Compared with the works which belong to their early period, these novels, written under the obvious impact of Marxism clearly indicate a new stage in the growth and development of their mind and art. They reveal parallel evolution of their art from a naturalist method into a socialist one.

Their main concern in their early novels is with man. They started looking at man as the centre of all philosophy. They lost faith in all non-humanistic and idealistic philosophical theories and focused their faith on the human
beings. In the early novels, both the writers set their protagonists against the actual background of their environment that determine their fate and show all those socio-economic forces which destroyed the inner spirit of them.

The changing political climate and the newly developing tradition have changed their writing and they became more revolutionary in content, style, tone and purpose. In their subsequent novels, they have demonstrated social revolution to change the society. Both of them felt that revolution was the need of the hour- a revolution against foreign authority and indigenous evil. They wanted not only political freedom for even the lowest sections of society but basic freedoms for the full development of human potentiality.

Once again, a similar change occurred in the writings of Anand and Pillai. This was mainly because of the changing social and political climate in India. Both Anand and Pillai drifted away from their earlier social and political concerns and moved towards matters of psychological and human concerns. This shift of emphasis in Anand and Pillai was also in keeping with the Indian trend in fiction around the
mid-fifties. This is clear from the words of Meenaskhi Mukherjee. In *The Twice Born Fiction*, she says, "the shift of emphasis was from the public issues of society to the private agencies of the individual" (22). The remarkable change in Malayalam fiction is shown in the writings of Ayyappa Paniker in *Socialist Realism and the Progressive Movement in Malayalam*:

The major writing of the post-1955 period is marked by a better insight into the psychological aspects of human behaviour, the importance of the individual the evil consequences of the herd instinct as promoted by political groups, and the irony arising from the grand scale discrepancy between one's professional ideals and his real actions. (34)

Like Pillai, Anand too describes the similar change in the second edition of *Apology for Heroism*:

It is not necessary to pay the price of socialism... the communist world, on the defensive denies to people the very liberties and human rights for
which the revolution was fought. Even the dreams of rapid social change have faded. The philosophical basis, which supplied the cue for reform and revolution, is suspect and needs deeper analysis. (141-2)

In their later periods, Anand and Pillai had equally drifted away from the activities of the left wing political groups. Pillai felt relieved when he broke away from the tradition of progressive writing. In On the Banks of Reminiscenes, he says, “As far as I am concerned, my novel Chemmeen was a release from this. To say the truth, what I felt was the relief of a comeback when I had finished writing it” (283).

On the basis of their writings, the novels of Anand and Pillai can be grouped into three different phases. The first one is the early phase of humanism, the human predicament is the central theme; the second one is the middle phase of revolutionary socialism and the third one is the later phase of psychological realism.

As the title of this work indicates, this thesis attempts a comparative study of social criticism in the writings of Anand
and Pillai and of the similar techniques employed by them to express these concerns. It is more of comparative in nature. The works chosen for the study are mostly those novels noted for their pronounced sociological approach and their political content. The present study seeks to show the striking resemblances between the novels in terms of their principal concerns and treatment and to examine the various factors that account for the thematic and stylistic resemblance to express the social concerns. The study also attempts to compare and examine how far both the writers have been successful in portraying the social criticism in their novels.

In the ensuing chapters, the themes of human predicament in their early novels, exposition of the downtrodden status of the underdogs, shift from the individual to the social concerns, revolutionary peasants and the sufferings of women are dealt with.