CHAPTER V

HUMOUR AND LACONY
It is a well known fact that Arnold Bennett is a realist with an intention to present life as lived by people in the Five Towns, as well as some other urban and suburban parts of England. At the same time he is a rare artist whose genius for capturing the life of the people simultaneously opened up his mind to the widest spread, humorous and ironic gestures that are usually present in any cultural group. That way humour is not the end of his art. On the other hand it concerns itself with the heavy weight of the pathos that usually becomes a property in the lives of the people, particularly when the life-styles are changing radical due to one or the other reason. The quick changing facts of life around him automatically attracted his artistic attention. The changes themselves are there because of the fast mechanisation and urbanisation. From this mechanised and urbanised angles the traditional lives of the people of the Five Towns appeared misplaced, incongruous, lopsided and humorous. Bennett as a realist does not pay a mere casual attention to these misplacements and incongruities. He was not required to take any special labour inorder to project these incongruities. Only he was required to observe the life as lived by the people around him. Pursuing their lives in their own dogmatic manners the people are bound to render themselves laughable.

There is not a single character in Bennett who does not provoke our gentle and genial laughter one time or
the other. But, however, his design has no place for clowns or fools. Almost all his characters are serious and seriously devote themselves to the essential pursuit of life. This in fact is the basic reality of any culture at any given moment. Therefore the humour of Bennett is incidental and periferal.

(1) Classical taste of Bennett's humour.

The incidental or periferal nature of his humour should not mislead his readers. In the manner of the great classical comedy writers Bennett is very clear about the real underlined pattern of comedy. Any incongruity or abnormality in a person or a situation leads to essential comedy according the ancient classical comedy writers like Aristophanes and Menander. Both the classical comedy and the new comedy of the ancient Greece ultimately become the backbone of the renaissance comedy of England during the Elizabethan age. The real underlying pattern of comedy is always some sort of deformity or deficiency. This point was brought home by Walter Allen. Says Allen:

The loving descriptions of illness and disease can hide grotesqueness that underlies iceyman steps or the devices of classical comedy that he was impelled to use. They were forced upon him by the very nature of his material. One would, I suppose, normally describe iceyman-steps as comedy; but it is the underlined pattern of comedy. Allen prefers to call it the 'underlined pattern of comedy' for the simple reason that Bennett here concentrates his
artist's focus on such a deformity whose intensity to cause harm never becomes clear for the people.

Miserliness is a universal trait. Wherever this mythical medium called money gets designated as a medium of exchange in some form or the other. This miserliness of pure love of money for its own sake becomes a geniological trait. It is unerasable from the public mind. Whenever any action becomes propelled by this animating force, the character concerned automatically becomes incongruous and ludicrous. Such kind of idiotic mass passions are at the root of all comedy in the world. But the evil itself should not be taken as harmless or merely laughable. Therefore Allen rightly suggests that it strikes at the underlyng pattern of comedy. But in respect of the 'loving descriptions of illness and disease' Allen altogether missed the point. Neither in the Liceymansteps nor in any other Bennett's novels there is an attempt on that part of the author to 'hide the grotesqueness', on the other hand 'the grotesqueness' of the character becomes more and more elusively available for the reader's comprehension in the 'descriptions of illness and disease'. Bennett makes them elusive not because he wants to hide them but because he wants to suggestively hint at the gravity and seriousness of their 'grotesqueness', otherwise present as a particular pattern in the character. The description of
the death scene of Darius Clayhanger was important in this context. One of the descriptions of the same is as follows:

Darius no longer sat up and twisted himself in the agony of the struggles. He lay flat, resigned but still obstinate, fighting with the only muscles that could fight now, those of his chest and throat. The enemy had got him down, but he would not surrender. Time after time he won an armistice in the ruthless altercation, and breathed deep and long, and sighed as if he would doze, and then his enemy was at him again, and Darius, aroused, was fresh to the same terror summoned clara in the extremity of his anguish.

(CH. P. 106)

All through his life Darius was obstinate, self-willed and uncompromising. As an individual who absolutely believed in the Darwinian canons of progress as an available fact of achievement in a lifetime through perseverance. He never believed that man is gregarious; and at the point of sorest need he requires human companionship to console and not his obstinacy or individualism. The point of irony lies here in Darius' summoning of 'Clara in the extremity of his anguish'. In his own hot-headed manner he would not summon his son Sewin who was standing close to him. In his preference for clara Darius shows his enmity towards his son which was nurtured all through his life. We should not forget here that Clara herself is just like Darius in her disposition. It is not in her blood to stand by some one in a gregarious warmth, even if it is worth to be her own brother. The description of the dying moments no longer hice the
grotesqueness in Darius' faith in Darwinian progress. Even in his last moment he could not make friends with his son. This trait in Darius is certainly the underlyng pattern of comedy because his faith is grossly misplaced. But then the descript:ons of death do not certainly hide the grotesqueness of his character. The 'grotesqueness that underlies kiceyman steps' is in no way different. Referring to the all perceiving grotesqueness that prevailed the victorian age John Bachelor has to say as follows. Says Bachelor:

A whole history of industrial conditioning has to be overcome, the victorian inheritance embodied in Darius Clayhanger. Edwin's tyrannical father has to be thrown off. And Edwin fails to throw off; the personal ambition and sexual drive when he begins to show are signally defeated by the novels' pattern.

John Bachelor's point is correct. It is this self-willed, oppressive victorian tyrannical father that has rightly destroyed the very personality of his son. But, however, in the fictional gloss both the simple-minded son and the tyrannical father are the creations of Bennett. They are true to the reality; and in their togetherness there is that expression of grotesqueness rather than hiding.

(ii) Humour accelerating readiness.

From the point of view of providing readiness to his novels and creating an unceasing interest and novelty
this humour of Bennett is highly efficacious. So Bennett took up humour as an inevitable material in his novels. Moreover whether a given situation or a particular character is humorous or not mostly depends upon angle provided by the author. Arnold Bennett is an expert in providing such angles through his longdrawn meticulous commentaries and deductions in between the given incident. Very often the incidents themselves are impregnated with conversational humour, which in itself is highly exciting and creates a sort of dependable and frank atmosphere in between the characters themselves. A small piece of conversation between Mr. Prohack and his would be son-in-law Oswald Horfey is quite interesting.

"Mr. Prohack. May I put one question? "Have you kissed Missie already?"
"I - er - have"
"By force or by mutual agreement?"
"Neither."
"She made no protest?" "No"
"She reverse rather?"
"Yes"
"Then why do you come here to me?"
"To get your consent"

(Mr. Prohack, p. 178)

It goes a little further and there the matter ends. The lover is badly exposed. Though prohack did not show any protest, he had shown his displeasure beyond any doubt.

The questions come one after the other as if the person is
in a witness box. Though Norfey is being harassed a little the reader gets their legitimate share of laughter.

Almost all the comments of the author are edged with a grave serious slant. But the gravity and the seriousness of the descriptions becomes seemingly light and withstandable because of his humorous interlocutions. Such interlocutions are innumerable in his novels. Referring to young Clayhanger innumerable doubts provoked by common sense: Jennett has to say as follows:

He did not definitely blame his education; he did not think clearly about the thing at all. But, as a woman with a vague discomfort dimly fears cancer, so he dimly feared that there might be something fundamentally unsound in this sound education of his. And he had remorse for all the shirking that he had been guilty of during all his years at school. He shook his head solemnly at the immense and nearly universal shirking that continually went on. He could only acquit three or four boys, among the hundreds he had known, of the shameful sin. And all that he could say in favour of himself was that there were many worse than Edwin Clayhanger. Not merely the boys, but the masters, were sinners. Only two masters could be unreservedly respected as having acted conscientiously up to their pretensions, and one of these was an unpleasant brute. All the cleverness, the ingenuities, the fakes, the insincerities, the incapacities, the vanities, and the dishonesties of the rest stood revealed to him, and he judged them by the mere essential force of character alone. A school master might as well attempt to deceive God as a boy who is watching him every day with the inhuman eye of youth.

'All this must end now!' He said to himself, meaning all that could be included in the word 'Shirk'.

(C.f. ... 26)
The young Edwin Clayhanger has very curious doubts in his mind about the situation as to "why were not the pots made in the south where the Clay came from"? (CH, P. 26) Somehow he could not comprehend as to why the clay was laboriously transported from the far south to the Five Towns. In not finding the answer he even could not blame his Education. He does not where the answer lies.Bennett is indirectly hitting at the art of specialisation in industry and business. Quite naturally the young Edwin found it difficult to comprehend the modern ways of business monopolies. Five Towns is specialising in the pottersies trade. But it doesn't have the necessary clay in the Five Towns. It has to come in boats from the far south. In this context the following conversation between Edwin and Sunday is worth quoting.

'Where does that there clay, come from?' asked Edwin. For not merely was he honestly struck by a sudden new curiosity but it was meet for him to behave like a man now, and to ask manly questions. 'Huncorn', said the Sunday scornfully. 'Can't you see it painted all over the boat?'

'Why do they bring clay all the way from Huncorn?'

'They don't bring it from Huncorn. They bring it from Cornwall. It comes round by sea - sea?' said laughed.

'Who told you?' Edwin roughly demanded.

'Anybody knows that!' said the Sunday grandly but always maintaining his gay smile.

' Seems devilish funny to me', Edwin murmured,
after reflection, 'that they should bring clay all that round about way just to make crocks of it here. Why should they choose just this place to make crocks in? I always understood -'

'Oh! come on! the Sunday cut him short.

'It's blessed well one o'clock and after!'

(CH. P18 - 19)

In the above context Bennett is making an ironic onslaught on the curious and vulgarish manners in which the monopoly routes conduct their expensive business. The overall ironic stance of Bennett becomes clear if we alternately put the same question as to why cloth is made in Lancashire and not in India where from the cotton comes or why cigarettes are produced in London out of tobacco imported from India. They as could as well have constructed the factories in India rather than in Lancashire and in London, when Bennett poses the question towards the clay that had been imported from Cornwall the sharp irony of his mind becomes clear.

Edwin is not happy about the manner in which the crock industry was growing in the Five Towns, as we come to know as later his main concerns were with becoming an architect.

The Five Towns pottery business not only appeared to him simple and silly but also gave him some sort of inhibitions and hatred towards its' specialisation. Therefore he considered his potteries as some sort of concept and weakness if not in the present at least in the future, in
The above passage his state of mind is compared with that of 'a woman with a vague discomfort daily fears cancer, so she daily feared that there might be something fundamentally unsound in this sound education of his' the use of antithesis between something fundamentally unsound and 'this sound education of his' suddenly breaks in hackneyedly humour, and makes a general reflection on this unfortunate state of modern education itself. In which was a pretty nice shirker of the school curriculum. In fact most the boys, except 'three or four' are shirkers like himself. It is here that he slightingly and ironically, gives the epithet of 'shameful sin' to this process of shirking the school, in calling it a shameful sin the far reaching destructive influence of Methodist school, in which Edwin clay-hanger might be reading, gets a sharp ironic rebuff from the hands of Bennett. Hence the humour is serious, and is meant to be. This becomes clear when he says 'not merely the boys', but the masters were sinners'. Now according to Edwin there are only two masters whom he could unreservedly respect as having acted conscientiously up to their pretensions. One is an unpleasant brute', meaning thereby Sunday his shirking-time companion; and the other was 'the rare essential force of character alone'. The gentle ironic touch in which Arnold Bennett exposes the false value of modern
culture is obvious here.

In this context what Walter Allen has say about Bennet himself is worth quoting. Says Allen:

But probably the more important than his secular schooling was his upbringing in the Wesleyan Methodist faith. His satirical attitude towards it is plain in all his five Towns novels, but Wesleyanism was a constant element in the life of the Five Towns, so it was a constant element in his own. It was, one fancies, one of the factors in his upbringing that made it possible for him to immerse himself in the social world of London without corruption. For though he immersed himself in that world he was never wholly taken by it. In many ways his values came from those of a provincial non-conformist?

For Bennett the dichotomy between modern education and the modern tasks of life is complete and unbridgeable. The irrelevance of Wesleyan Methodist discipline is constantly stressed by Bennett in almost all his novels. Bennett's attitude towards Wesleyan Methodism played a big role in his being facetious. In his formative years, potting was the business of the people of Five Towns. If the potting business was to sustain their bodies most of them thought it equally important if not more, to teach religion for the purification of their souls. Bennett understood that Methodism was the cheap merchandise in Bursley. What Bennett hated most was not their religious zeal but their hollow external shows, not for the sake of faith but for social convenience. There are moments in which Bennett's humour reaches the level of sarcasm. About such a large
There is a mystery as withholding as subtle as... He is set-place at the end of the ungraceful in the... chapel - the "subtle more true of... to the end", meaning in high terms and... the intense and... silence, whilst there is... before his... of a threat... that the religion should play a particular part of the... with the inhabitants of the... was never liked by Bennett. Thus Bennett's... of very... en, and it acts as an art... reflection and... rendered of life around him... One should... that Bennett is... observer of the... the general life of England during the second half of the 19th century.

(111) Unprecedented turn of events.

In the totality of the life of the... many things happen unprecedented and they are helpful... the inner hollowness of the local inhabitants. Tite's... suicide shocked the conscience of many people. His reputation as a... superintendant was supposed to be unquestionable. The Methodist society of the... five towns, in their rank enthusiasm, used to entice the... rendered by him. But in reality he had been fighting
his back against the wall for a mere material existence. Metaphically he has been instrumental in saving many souls from eternal perdition, but he fails miserably to save his own soul. James Hall's remark is interesting and illuminating in this context. Hall says:

...by a remarkable twist he does turn Titus Rice, who, as the Sunday-school superintendent, had been nothing more than a broad satire on Wesleyanism, into something more by contrasting his downright conduct of the Sunday-school picnic with the ignominy of his suicide.  

This sudden turn of events is not an exclusive affair of his novel Anna of the Five Towns. Rice's suicide was a slap on the face of the Methodists. This 'broad satire on Methodism' brings out the general decadent situations prevail in the Staffordshire potteries. Bennett's presentation of this kind of human situations earns the appreciation of Walter Allen. Says Allen:

"Bennett's excellence lies in the delineation of the general human situation."

The Methodist church at this advocated teaching of Children on Sundays. Many children took advantage of it and learnt how to read and write. It was the aim of the proponents to instruct them their duty. What they meant was to instruct the poor children the ways and necessity of practising frugality. But when the authorities understood that in the long run the poor children would protect against the
religious exploitation they decided to stop the practice of teaching in the Sunday-schools. Margaret Drabble's reaction is quite revealing. Drabble remarks:

... the powers above soon noticed that although thrift and frugality were good for workman, education was not necessary at all to the employer's advantage, and a distinct change of policy emerged. It was decided that, after all, it was wicked to teach poor children to write a pamphlet by Robert Martin called 'The impropriety and sinfulness of teaching children to write on the Lord's day' shows clearly enough what kind of excuses were thought up to cover this essentially political decision. Drabble's remark is enough to bring out the unmindful hypocrisy practised by the religionist of the Five Towns. As a sensitive realistic writer Bennett could not close his eyes to these realities.

The comic scheme of Richeymansteps was nothing but 'a comic portrayal of absurdity to a pathetic picture of neglected and wasted effort'. The comedy progresses through the labyrinthine ways of the miser Henry Earlforward. If he spends frugally, it is to be appreciated. But it goes step by step to the level of fasting. The more coins come to his coffer, the more he is obsessed with them. There things taken a turn for the worse. He underfeeds his wife and servant. When his wife's turn came she also did the same thing to her servant. That the whole things turn to be very fatal. His wife violet Earlforward dies of under-nourishment. His own death was sitting on
his shoulders but he did not care to take note of it.

Bennett, as an artist, is capable of all kinds of humour, say, from veritable fun and farce to gentle sophisticated humour. As an example of pure fun and farce the operation ceremony of the tooth of Mr. Povey in The Old Wives' Tale can be taken as the best example.

Samuel Povey, the shop assistant of Baineses, was a chronic toothache patient. One day he came to the shop with an angling face which was the symptom of his tooth trouble. Both the girls, Constance and Sophia, were ready to help him. Sophia was in a sprightly mood. She pretended that they were "born nurses by reason of their sex" (OwT. P.22) Sophia became ready for a mini operation. Helpless Povey patiently sat there at the mercy of the so-called nurse Sophia opening her mouth with some effort. Sophia successfully did the operation and brought the tooth out. But the tooth mysteriously disappeared which gave Povey an impression that he had swallowed it. But really the tooth was in Sophia's pocket. Suddenly came the anticlimax that Povey understood that the tooth which was constantly troubling him was there in his right jaw intact. Sophia, by mistake, plucked the adjoining tooth. Just before starting the operation they served Povey Laudanum. Poor Povey, instead of getting his rotten tooth plucked, lost one of his healthy teeth. The girls looked much younger than really they
were because of their naughty movements. Bennett's own concern is interesting.

The spectacle of Mr. Povey mourning for a tooth which he thought he had swallowed, but which in fact lay all the time in her pocket, seemed to her to be by far the most ridiculous, side-splitting thing that had ever happened or could happen on earth.

(OWT, p.31)

This kind of passages clearly show the sense of sly humour of Bennett.

Arnold Bennett's intentions are to give a collective picture of the society in its all embracing movements. In order to make the life pictures credible he gives them the mix colour and the creed of the Five Towns potteries. In all this he has an intention to unravel and to unearth the lazy, easy manners of life. From this angle it can be said that the characteristic behaviour of the characters are sometimes comparable to the comedy of manners of the 18th century. Incidentally the purpose of the comedy of manners is also associated with exposing the real excesses of the individuals by way of rendering them characteristic humorous types. Again as in the comedy of manners the humour of Bennett is conversational and conversationally light hearted. Most certainly he does not propose any harsh satire in his novels. Moreover his smiles at the Five Towns inhabitants are not with a contempt but with a child-like reaction and reflection at the exotic and the arresting.
In one of his journal items Bennett states: "essential characteristic of the really great novelist: child-like all embracing compassion". (Journal 15 Oct. 1896). But however it does not appear to be his real intention to present a funny picture of life. He wants to enlighten and elevate the people from the chaos and confusion they were reeling under. He tried to uplift them from the debris of social backwardness and diffidence. A touch of humour or a reflection cast on the situations does not become harsh or painful. The following conversation between George and Benbow exemplifies the point.

George said: 'Let's pray for something for you now, what d'you want? I want a bicycle. Ye know what I want! 'Oh, no, you don't, Bert Benbow!' Said George. 'You've got to want something safer than a bike. got ya! Nuh! suppose it comes tumbling down like the penknife did! We shall be damn well killed! Tertius Ingpen could not suppress a snorting giggle. '

'I want a bike', Bert, insisted, 'and I don't want nothing else'. The two bigger boys moved vaguely away from the window, and the little religionist followed them in silence, ready to supplicate for whatever they should decide.

"All right", George agreed. 'We'll pray for a bicycle. But we'd better all stand as close as we can to the wall, under the spouting, in case'.

The ceremonial was recommenced.

'No', Ingpen murmured, 'I'm not being god this time. It won't run to it. (TT, 1.57)

This is an idyllic etching of the children's world, with an ironic slant on the serious manners of the grownups even in the casual day to day matters. Bred Benbows asking for a bicycle is in itself childlike and puts a travesty of elders all the way going for prayers even for small useful articles of life. The children are mockingly re-enacting the excessive ritualistic behaviours of the elders. The chief point here is concerning the usual spiritual modes of life of the people in the Five Towns. It is true that they are harmlessly spiritual. But at the same time it is also equally true that they are idiotically self-assured in being the most submissive prayers of the sort for whatever they want in their lives. When the desired thing in the above context is a bicycle, the intended irony of the author aptly comes home. Bicycle is a mechanical device, and in being an article has nothing to do with solemn spiritual prayers. It only requires a little bit of money to possess it, and the children do not have it. Bennett improvises here a funny situation, which in its true reality is a harsh reflection at the decadent behaviours and dispositions of the people of the Five Towns. But at the same time the whole episode
Bennett's capacity to make most of his humour out of minor incidents is enviable. The narrative order of his masterpiece, *The Old Wives' Tale* starts from a silly biographical incident of the author. In his journal there is an entry dated 18th November, 1903. The whole entry is worth quoting here.

Last night, when I went into the Duval for dinner, a middle-aged woman, inordinately stout and with pendent cheeks, had taken the seat opposite to my prescriptive seat. I hesitated, as there were plenty of empty places, but my waitress requested me to take my usual chair. I did so, and immediately thought: 'with that thing opposite to me my dinner will be spoilt'. But the woman was evidently also cross at my filling up her table, and she went away, picking up her bag, and she took away all her belongings, to another part of the restaurant, breathing hard. Then she abandoned her second choice for a third one. My waitress was scornful and angry at this desertion but laughing also. Soon all the waitresses were privately laughing at the goings-on of the fat woman, who was being served by the most beautiful waitress I have ever seen in any Duval. The fat woman was clearly a crotchet, a 'manique', a woman who lived much alone. Her cloak (she displayed on taking it off a simply awful light puce flannel dress) and her parcels were continually the object of her attention and she was always arguing with her waitress. And the whole restaurant secretly made a butt of her. She was repulsive; no one could like or sympathize with her. But I thought - she has been young and slim once. And I immediately thought of a long 10 or 15 thousand words short story, 'The history of Two Old Women'. I gave this woman a sister, fat as herself. And the first chapter would be in the restaurant (both sisters) something like tonight and written rather cruelly. Then I would go back to the
infancy of these two, and sketch it all. One should have lived ordinarily, married prosaically, and become a window. The other should have become a whore and all that; "guilty splendour". Both are overtaken by fat. And they live together again in old age, not too rich, a nuisance to themselves and to others. Neither has any imagination. For 'tone' I thought of Ivan Ilyitch, and for technical arrangement I thought of that and also of Historie d'une fille de ferme. The two lives would have to intertwine. I saw the whole work quite clearly, and hope to do it.

(Journal 18, Nov. 1903)

The journal entry is also important as it provides the nucleus of the genesis of The Old Wives' Tale. It is this art of Bennett's all-embracing light-hearted, if not humorous, parallel of the author in being an observer of the delicate incongruities. If it is not for the fat woman's meaningless and restless movements, the fictional device of the two sisters would not have occurred to him. It is noteworthy here as to how he later changed the idea of the younger sister becoming 'a whore and all that; "guilty splendour"'. It is this sophisticated improvisation and revision that ultimately made his Old Wives' Tale a masterpiece and Sophia a heroine of all times. So to say even the weighty decisions concerning the fictional devices very often struck to him from the ordinary incident, latently containing in themselves a sort of challenge for the author's imagination. This sort of device is inborn for Bennett, and he meticulously implements the same quite often as a fictional device in his
novels. The slightly humorous or incongruous nature of the overall outward appearance of the episode never gets exaggerated in his fictional devices. Thus humour becomes with Bennett away of artistic observation.

(iv) For pure entertainment.

In Clayhanger there is a descriptive passage which reveals this kind of puckish observation of Bennett with the tongue in the cheek. The incident refers to the description of Darius Clayhanger's shop. The passage goes as follows:

Over the double windowed shop was a discreet signboard in gilt letters. 'D. Clayhanger, printer and stationer', but above the first floor was a later and much larger sign, with the single word, 'steam-printing'. All the brick work of the facade was painted yellow and had obviously been painted yellow many times; the woodwork of the plate-glass windows was a very dark green approaching black. The upper windows were stumpy, almost square, some dirty and some clean and curtained, with prominent sills and architraves. . . . The gigantic word 'steam-printing' could be seen from the windows of the Dragon, from the porch of the big Wesleyan Chapel higher up the slope, from the conservative club and the playground at the top of the slope.

(CH, i-30)

At the outset we notice a strained effort on the part of the writer. But the strained effort become a formula of calculated fictional design in our after-thought. Darius Clayhanger, as we know, started his adventures in to modern lives as a printer. It was only later that he
extended it to steam-printing. Therefore the steam-printing label was 'above the first floor' and was a later and much larger sign. The whole arrangements give as a peep into the authentic intentions of Darius Clayhanger in aspiring to being a great achiever. It is true that Darius Clayhanger's character is built around this rootless achievement stigma. The modern industrial age is particularly characterised with this crude achievement stigma which ultimately grows into a ruthless characteristic aspirer for unique achievements in the modern minds. Darius Clayhanger's intentions are really speaking unbecoming of a happy adjustable man. That he was conscious of his great achievement is chronologically expressed in the above description. Ultimately this achievement consciousness that makes Darius a self-assured autocratic parent, because of which a sort of epic conflict grows between him and his son Edwin, which primarily is the hidden theme of the Clayhanger trilogy. This again is the central social theme of the generation gap followed by the ruthless strife of the generation conflict. This was brought over time and again by Bennett in almost all his novels.

In the novels like the Buried Alive where this generation gap is not the matter of confrontation, the
conflict itself gets diverted towards the conflict of intentionalities. This conflict of intentionality is a great social problem of the times of Bennet; and in our times it grows into a formula of great infight between the traditionalist and the modernists. Priam Farill, the hero of Buried Alive is a quaint artist. Somehow he nurtured in himself a contrary desire to the unassuming unknown and simple. But he was socially acclaimed as a great painter. This desire of Priam Farill in itself is humorous and ironic. Nobody in right senses would like the idea of sleeping into the anonymity of the masses, whereas he could claim a great social status in the virtue of his artist's stature. The idea of Priam Farill is funny, quaint and even irrational. But the whole novel concentrates on one simple widest spread psychological truth. That is about the disgust in being popular in the modern times to be popular is not a matter of elation or joy. This is so because we are living in an era of mob upsurges and false propagandas. Priam Farill, with an imposed emperoriousness—Priam is the name of that king of Troy and the father of the Prince Paris in the Greek Mythology—in his name itself finds himself uncomfortable, psychologically speaking. Quite ironically this Priam unknowingly works for his own downfall, just as the ancient Priam of Greece was genetically responsible for the fall of Troy. Incidentally our Priam
Farll maintains in himself both the characteristic traits of Priam, the Greek king and his ill-fated son Paris. To that extent Priam Farll has his Hellen in Alice Leek. However, the name-sake resemblance between the ancient classical characters and the hero and heroine of the Buried Alive need not be stretched beyond. Contrary to the classical weight of the ancient epic, Bennett's Buried Alive is literally a farce, with hillarious humorous twists and turns. As a beautiful example of the light hearted nature of the stuff of Bennett the passage where Alice was called into the witness box is interesting.

When Alice was called, and when she stood up in the box, and, smiling indulgently at the doddering usher, kissed the book as if it had been a chubby nephew, a change came over the emotional atmosphere of the court, which felt a natural need to smile. Alice was in all her best clothes, but it cannot be said that she looked the wife of a super eminent painter. In answer to a question she stated that before marrying Priam she was the widow of a builder in a small way of business, well known in Putney and also in Wandsworth. This was obviously true. She could have been nothing but the widow of a builder in a small way of business well known in Putney and also in Wandsworth.

(BA, p.173)

The adjective 'doddering appended to the usher and the manner in which Alice 'kissed the book, as it had been a chubby nephew', are highly inflating as categorical examples of Bennett's humour in hillarity. The following
conversation again fills the court room with abundant humorous atmosphere.

'How did you first meet your present husband, Mrs Leek?' Asked Mr Gratitude.

Mrs Farll, if you please, 'she cheerfully corrected him.

'Well, Mrs Farll, then'

'I must say' she remarked conversationally, 'it seems queer you should be calling me Mrs Leek, when they're paying you to prove that I'm Mrs Farll, Mr --, Excuse me, I forget your name'.

(AH, p.173)

In almost all his novels we have such exulting terms and terminations of repartee and humour that emerges there. That Alice was the widow of "a builder in a small way of business". (AB, p.173) did not put any social ethical moral or psychological constraints in her in the becoming the wife of Brian Farll. It is this kind of personal frankness of one with his/her own self is the essence of happy living for Bennett; and he incorporates the same untiringly in every part of his novel. Incidentally Alice in the above situation absolutely shares the personality of the Helen of Troy in being a frank beloved of Paris.

(v) The creative purpose of his humour.

Bennett's humour is all pervading, life-giving and life-preserving. Honestly speaking he never believed in the idea of all embracing perfection being available for man. The inherent imperfections in man quite naturally render him into a humorous, if not ludicrous, species.
The same idea is abundantly presented in the following passage. Referring to Rimes Carroll at the end of the novel when he was seeking his final and never to return exodus from England Bennett says as follows:

His sajourn in our land had not crowned him with brilliancy. He was not a being created for society, nor for cuttting a figure, nor for exerting exalting tact and prudence in the crises of existence. He could neither talk well nor read well, nor express himself in exactly suitable actions. He could only express himself at the end of a brush. He could only paint extremely beautiful pictures. That was the major part of his vitality. In minor ways he may have been, upon occasions, a fool. But he was never a fool on canvas. (BA, p. 187)

The passage abundantly speaks of Bennett's honest surprise of man as a living entity in order to arrive at this great artistic gesture Bennett had to observe man in all his perfections as well as imperfections. While talking of perfections he created upright seriousness and while talking of imperfections he evolved heartening caricatures. But in all probability he rendered man lovable and even adorabe. It looks paradoxical when Bennett devastatingly criticises journalists through the story of Buried Alive Bennett writes in 'journalism for women'.

The born journalist came into this world with a fixed notion that nothing under the sun is uninteresting. His notions are pathetic, gigantic fallacy, but to him they were real.
Irian Farlii, the man who was very much alive, was reported buried in the West Minster Abbey. It creates untold complications.

Thus humour was resorted to by Bennett as a growing fictional device finally to profound his own honest obeisance of man as a living entity on this earth.

Most of the humorous episodes are directly lifted from the life-styles and the living situations. As had already been noted Bennett fixed this strategy of his novels with in the life-styles of the post-industrial revolution era of England. The cultural facts of life in its progress during these times was intimately reminiscent in his memory. It is out of these real living circumstances that all the strategic essences of Bennett’s novel, inter alia humour, come forward as the particulars of life as lived by the people. In the next chapter it is proposed to analyse some of these real life pictures.

...
References


