CHAPTER FOUR

LIBERATION MOTIF IN THE DELINEATION OF PROTAGONISTS

Liberation as we have already established is not just a concept or merely an attitude that underlines the power of the poor and the oppressed to emancipate themselves from their dehumanizing situation, but is a praxis comprising a relentless scientific analysis of the present socio-political reality geared to positive action for transformation of unjust, unequal and oppressive social structures. Liberation as collective action for empowering the poor has become the hallmark of all the aspirations of the third world societies. As a collective search or struggle for freedom from all shackles, economic, political, social, religious and cultural, it is more pronounced and articulated in some third world countries than in others. While social justice for all, equality of opportunities and freedom from all forms of exploitation, constitute the core of the liberative movement all over the world, we should carefully define the vital importance of the cultural and peculiar political and historical dimensions of a country.

Hence the cultural heritage and political situation of the Nigeria of Achebe and of the India that Anand is portraying have a significant place in the liberation drama that is being enacted. Similarly we should take cognizance of a very
fundamental postulate of the liberation thinkers. According to it, man, particularly the dispossessed and disinherited man, is the subject of his own destiny and history. In other words, the perspective of liberation is not that of the elite classes, but that of the proletariat, the poor, the commoners, the oppressed masses. The belief or assumption underpinning this is that the poor have been invested with a messianic mission for the total liberation of the humankind. Therefore liberation is not thought to be achieved by a handful of leaders or educated intelligentsia alone, but by the self-redemptive action of the masses.

It is from this premise of the liberation dialectics that we proceed to evaluate Achebe’s and Anand’s delineation of the protagonists of their novels. Both these third world novelists are professedly committed to transformation of the unjust structures operating in their respective countries. They have enunciated very clearly the ideological framework within which they function as writers and novelists. Thus it becomes incumbent on them that they justify and legitimise their stand vis-a-vis their social impulse on the one hand and their fictional strategy on the other. As such we presume that both Anand and Achebe are genuine searchers not only as social and political thinkers but also as artists. In fact, this is the
acid test of their authenticity as ideologues and artists. The hero of a novel occupies a central position in the action and story, thereby determining the overall thrust and impact of the novel. An examination of some of the protagonists of Anand and Achebe should yield valuable insights into the author's perception in terms of liberation.

It is widely accepted that Anand as a novelist presents powerfully his view of Indian society and its maladies through his skills of characterisation. It is no exaggeration to say that he is a character novelist. In all his novels we find one or more leading characters who dominate the action of the novel. His protagonists are invariably drawn from the underside of society, the voiceless and marginalised sections of India.

It is interesting to learn from his article titled "The Sources of Protest in my Novel", that Anand's spirit of protest as a writer was aroused and inflamed by a statement of Edward Sackville-West:

I made first conscious protest as a writer, when I came away from Bloomsbury after hearing the critic, Edward Sackville-West, declare: "There can be no tragic writing about the poor. They are only fit for comedy, as in Dickens. The canine can't go into literature."

(Contemporary Indian Fiction in English: p.23)
And C.D. Narasimhaiah has paid a fitting tribute to Anand's brave innovation as a novelist saying that he introduced into creative literature whole new peoples who have seldom entered the realms of literature in India.

It is in this sense that we attribute "heroism" to the central characters of his novels. Anand certainly made a revolutionary departure from the existing practice and from the principles laid down by Aristotle and other classical masters. What is meritorious is that Anand has clung to his conviction with great tenacity despite censures from all literary quarters and marginalisation by critics and scholars in India and abroad. In point of fact Anand was a pioneer in this type of fiction in India. All his protagonists are tragic heroes in their own rights, but their tragedy is not merely personal but symbolic or typical of the tragic situation of large segments of Indian population.

In his very first novel, Untouchable, Bakha the sweeper boy is the protagonist. He belongs to the lowest rungs of the caste-hierarchy that existed in the Punjab. The higher castes
who had religious sanction for their caste superiority considered these low-born untouchable. Hence, Anand in this novel has set himself the task of exposing the darker, heinous and diabolical aspects of the caste system perpetrated by the caste Hindus. Anand does this by probing the consciousness of the half-starved poverty-stricken sweeper boy, as he goes through his daily rounds of sweeping and cleaning against the background of his family, friends, playmates and the series of humiliations and insults he is subjected to. Anand has achieved his purpose in a remarkable fashion by observing and portraying Bakha’s acting and reacting, in the short span of a day. Bakha may lack the maturity or courage necessary for him to achieve the status of a protagonist. But Anand has endowed him with a keen sense of his own personal dignity and an irrepressible zest for the good things of life aspiring to dress and behave like the sahibs.

While Anand has paid meticulous attention to every detail of Bakha’s life as he goes about his daily chores, he hasn’t failed to investigate and indicate his innermost anguish and search for his own identity. Anand no doubt emphatically depicts Bakha and his father Lakha, brother Rakha and sister Sohini as struggling to eke out an existence which is sub-human, confined to their dreary and monotonous routine of cleaning latrines,
sweeping and begging for food which is their only reward for their daily drudgery.

Anand portrays Bakha as a sweeper, untouchable with a difference. There are a few subtle artistic strokes by which Anand projects Bakha as a nimble and intelligent boy who was discontented with his anonymous position. He wanted to better his position and was unhappy about his status that merited only contempt and ill-treatment from the caste people. He wanted to dress and live like the Tommies. All in all, Bakha lived in a world of phantasy and illusion. But in and through all this we catch a glimpse of Bakha's search for identity, or recognition as an individual, as a human. These comic and pathetic touches of the writer enhance the poignancy of Bakha's consciousness as a mere untouchable.

Bakha is torn between two worlds, one illusory, fashioned by his acute imagination and the other the grim reality of his nameless existence. All the insults heaped on him, the humiliations and harassment, mental, physical and even sexual suffered by his sister Sohini notwithstanding Bakha is able to retain his sanity and flare for life, thanks to the 'fire that was a smouldering rage in his soul'.
The question he poses to himself in his depth of dejection and depression is: "Why was all this?" Anand makes Bakha go through a painful process of introspection and self-confrontation. That is also a moment of truth, of illumination that Bakha is afforded as a result of his soul-searching. The root-cause of all his agonising and tormenting experiences, it now dawns on him, is the fact of his being an untouchable. He finds himself imprisoned in this cell, for no fault of his.

Bakha is depressed, but not desperate. His consciousness of his pathetic predicament strengthens his will to fight against this oppression. He will not be a pushover. He is looking out for a solution. He is not easy cannon-fodder for any demagogue or orator or evangelist. Of the three alternatives proposed, he is not fascinated by the Christian preacher, attracted somewhat to Gandhi's charismatic personality but captivated by the third alternative that promises immediate liberation from the filthy and despicable work done by the untouchables.

Bakha is an individual untouchable, all right. He has his personality, feelings, reactions, aspirations all very authentic. Nevertheless Anand's delineation of Bakha leaves no trace of doubt as to the former's intention that Bakha is a type of all untouchables who suffer similar discrimination and have no power,
position or money with which to resist or protest. Bakha’s spirit is protesting. His anger although ineffective in one sense, can generate a strong determination to fight discrimination and restore dignity and equality to the untouchables. He seeks deliverance from a work that makes them contemptible and dirty. Bakha is a symbol of the rage and indignation simmering in thousands of untouchables. If thousands of Bakhas can channelise their awareness and anger along positive, liberative action, one could reasonably hope for a radical transformation of not only the community of the untouchables but of the whole society.

It may be argued that after all Bakha too is a prisoner and victim of his own self-pitying, self-recrimination and meekness and therefore is not the subject of his own destiny. He is more acted upon than acting, a passive victim of fate and of the system that annihilates him and the likes of him. But one cannot fail to perceive that Bakha is a die-hard optimist and warms up to the teachings of Gandhiji and the poet Iqbal Nath Sarashar. He is disgusted and dismayed by the hypocrisy of the world he is living in. But he doesn’t give up. He is still confident of a better future if only Gandhi’s idealism and the poet’s much vaunted mechanisation and modernization could eventually remove the stigma and the social ostracism of the untouchables and
rehabilitate them as equal citizens of India. He returns home at the end of the novel, not with a vacant mind or a pervasive feeling of desperation but with his mind and his whole being echoing the fiery words of the poet, a harbinger of good tidings. Bakha finds in the poet and to some extent in Gandhiji an affirmation of his own deep-seated yearning for liberation. And Anand has revealed in an unmistakable way his own predilection for mechanisation as a route to achieving a socialist democracy.

In Coolie it is Munoo's sojourn and travails that become Anand's symbolic representation of the unequal class relationships sharpened by the capitalist system with the underlying hope of a crisis and an alternative. Like Bakha, Munoo is a victim of hostile circumstances from his birth having lost both his parents. He belongs to the Kshatriya caste but on account of poverty and its attendant disabilities he is driven from pillar to post in search of a better life.

The story is cast against the background of a capitalist society ushered in by the colonial rule, where caste-hierarchy notwithstanding, it is injustice and exploitation and cut-throat competition that govern the relationships between the powerful business class and the silenced and subjugated working class. While Anand doesn't pretend that caste is no more a force to
reckon with, he turns his attention to another crucial problem. He follows with compassion and concern the relentless battle and struggle waged by a whiff of a boy barely fourteen years old. But his delineation of the protagonist, though charged with pathos, doesn't betray romantic idealism or threadbare sentimentalism. Munoo's ill-fated odyssey started from his home in the scenic Kangra Valley, wended its way to the household of Babu Nathoo Ram, then to the warm and kind-hearted hearth of Prabha, his wife and their pickle factory in Daulatpur, then to the Bombay cotton mills and finally to Simla as a rickshaw-puller for Mrs. Mainwaring.

The untimely death that Munoo faces as a consequence of tuberculosis does by no means put the lid on his ever vibrant and patiently enduring spirit. The very flexibility and suppleness of his youthful body lend strength to his character at once dignified and proud of his caste and minimal education. Of course he was an orphan whom nobody wanted except for the purpose of exploiting him. He was literally hounded out by society and driven mercilessly to his doom.

We certainly feel let down by the writer when Munoo succumbs to a wasting sickness. What happens to his robust optimism and positive outlook in the face of a relentless fate
not allowing him to enjoy the sunny side of life or the legitimate pleasures accessible to a boy of his age? Munoo achieves a heroic character albeit in a minor key or limited sense, in this that we admire him more than we sympathise with him. Moreover in Munoo's vicissitudes we are enabled to witness with deep concern the tragedy that is the life of millions of workers in our country. Anand has moreover portrayed striking parallels and contrasts in his study of human nature under the impact and onslaught of capitalist values of self-aggrandizement, profiteering, selfishness and dishonesty. Anand has juxtaposed the innocent hard working and basically contented coolies and labourers and the unscrupulous, opportunistic, self-degrading employers, traders and bureaucrats. Between the two, Anand makes his judgement clear and unmistakable. It is a superb piece of satire without a trace of contempt but compelling our acquiescence to the moral judgement on the depravity and inhumanity of the business class. Anand ratifies the central tenet of liberation ideology that it is only the dispossessed masses who should work out their own liberation and not expect any dramatic conversion or change of heart on the part of the wealthy. Munoo finds fellowship and brotherhood only in the company of coolies and others in a similar predicament. The attitude of the rich people
is one of cold indifference or positive animosity.

There is one hint which Anand has consciously thrown about Munoo's awareness of the injustice of the situation and how the trade union was one legitimate means of redressing the grievances of workers and even sometimes of overthrowing an anti-labour management. Just before the close of the novel as Munoo is confined to bed suffering from the ill-effects of consumption, Anand says:

When the haemorrhage occurred he looked terribly frightened. But when the sun shone and his breathing was a little better he became intent and absorbed in himself. He wanted to get well. And he made plans in his head. Ratan had written to him to come to Bombay to a small job in the pay of the Trade Union organising the fight against the Pathan money lenders, the foreman and the factory wallahs. Munoo felt he would go...

(Coolie: p.326)

But it was too late, this enlightened resolve. Munoo fell a prey to consumption not long after. Anand has made a subtle suggestion about the inevitability of revolt and rebellion and the necessity of struggle if such a dehumanizing system could be dismantled and a more human dispensation has to become the order of the day.
This and numerous instances in the novel where workers join together to display their solidarity and collective bargaining power and the attempt to forge and strengthen a Trade Union at all costs and to demand their basic rights are an eloquent testimony to Anand’s unshakable belief in liberation, be it only economic and social, of the downtrodden groaning under the weight of an anti-people system.

Now let us examine Anand’s delineation of Ananta in *The Big Heart*. Ananta a coppersmith of Billimaran Lane in Amritsar with his experiences of working in cities like Bombay commands not only the respect of most of the thathiars but also their admiration and fear. He is moreover a man of tremendous physique endowed with endearing qualities such as deep concern for human beings living in misery, starvation and squalor and readiness to extend any help to them and a disarming simplicity that appeals to children. While Lalu of the village trilogy discovers that harmony with oneself, self-control and self-renunciation are prerequisites for success in any action for liberation late in life, Ananta possesses it right at the beginning of the novel. He is convinced of the absolute need for unity and solidarity in order to combat suppression and exploitation and of the truth
that the destruction of the machine that is threatening to ruin the coppersmith class is not a solution to the problem. Instead he vows to engage in concerted and positive action in order to bargain from a position of power with the factory management.

Anand has sought to find a solution to the question of man or the machine or tradition versus modernity in his fictional context. In this endeavour Ananta, the protagonist, becomes his powerful spokesman and an inspiring symbol. Ananta advocates a middle path of accommodation but not at the expense of human values but in a bid to master one's destiny. And in this he is not just a passive spectator or a demagogue indulging in radical rhetoric.

His life depicted by Anand in the space of a day, shows him to be a man of action, of optimism and hope and above all of warm humanity. Probably it is this last trait that has blinded him to the social stigma that is attached to his living with Janki, his mistress. This is disapproved by the thathiars who are champions of tradition and conventions and vehemently opposed to mechanisation and modernisation.

Ananta's efforts to mobilize the thathiars for collective action to help all the coppersmiths thrown out of job to secure employment in the factory are finally doomed to fail because of
Ananta's association with Janki and of the unfortunate incident wherein Ananta's receipt of the balance of his wages from the younger brother of the factory owner is misconstrued by his thathiai brethren as a bribe. The narrow outlook and the prejudiced views of the coppersmiths stand in the way of their unanimous approval of his proposals. Student Satyapal and his crew mouthing some Marxist slogans and indulging in inflammatory and emotion-charged rhetoric prevent the people from listening to Ananta. Finally madness and mob fury get the better of wise counsel and more planned action. In the orgy of violence and destruction let loose by Satyapal and group after gatecrashing into the factory, Ralia runs amuck and in the act of mindless vandalism, murders Ananta who tries to dissuade him from destroying the machines.

The death of Ananta at the hands of a fellow thathiai in the very act of preventing anti-social and mindless violence and vandalism from destroying the cause of thathiai unity and solidarity is significant. In other words the pathetic death of Ananta although paradoxical, becomes a martyr's death, symbolising the sacrifice demanded of any grass-root leader in the cause of liberation of the working class. Ananta is first and foremost liberated from the curtain of suspicion,
insinuation, jealousy and mudslinging that separated him from his people when he was alive. In this violent death, Ananta shines as a hero and champion of the coppersmiths even as the poet Puran Singh Bhagat articulates a rare insight while paying a tribute to Ananta’s indomitable spirit:

"All stories end in death, Jankai" the poet said. "But childling, even if one is given a short life, it becomes shorter if it is guarded selfishly. On the other hand, think of the joy of living for others, of helping others."

(The Big Heart, p.229)

Anand sums up the essence of what it is to be committed to the cause of liberation. Ananta had earlier spelt out that it is not by just one instance of rebellion that change can be realised but by a many a conflict between the employers and workers in several places, at different times, all this having a cumulative impact of making a dent in the system that is oppressive. Ananta’s death is a triumph of such faith, signalling the beginning of the end. The remorse-filled thathiars mourn the death of Ananta as an irreparable loss but translate their anguish in a determination to carry on his fight, the struggle. Above all, the single most striking result of Ananta’s death is the dramatic
transformation that takes place in Janki after Ananta's death. Janki vows to practise bhakti and, to organise the women comrades in future.

We hear Anand's voice when the poet Puran Singh Bhagat utters these words:

"You must not be afraid, Jankai" he said.
"You are so sensible and have such understanding. What a great thing it would be if women like you who possess such gifts of sincerity and grace, give yourselves to 'bhakti', devotion, to working for others".

(The Big Heart, p.229)

Janki has begun to respond to the call to become a new woman, to overcome fate by daring all criticism and provocation and taking risks in order to make Ananta's dream come true.

Anand's heroes are tantalizingly complex. There is a certain flatness and static quality about them given their predisposition to love, compassion, suffering, endurance and sensitivity. However, they don't stagnate but have the capacity to relate their own personalities to the realities of the world. Speaking about an ideal of man in Anand's novels Mr.D.Riemenschneider asserts:
Munoo's intellectual capacities, for instance, are few and he is purely a suffering human being; Bakha's rebellion is almost likewise limited by his little education and Lalu lacks the sense of proportion in his struggles. Ananta, on the contrary, represents a harmonious balance between sensitivity and intellect though the final test of his strength occurs at a time when he himself cannot grasp its significance. In Gauri we face a repetition of the whole development from a slightly different aspect because she is a woman. In Maqbool, sensitivity, reflection and action combine in such a perfect way that they triumph over the absolute challenge of annihilation.

(Riemenschneider: p.24).

This concept of self-effacing sacrifice echoes the teaching of Jesus as propounded in: "...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone:" A. Shepherd, in his essay "Alienated Being: A Reappraisal of Anand's Alienated Hero" reiterates:
Anand believes in the values of unrelenting struggle despite all obstacles, real or imaginary; there are really no other alternatives. It is the untriumphant hero whom he celebrates in his novels: Kanwar Rampal Singh, Lal Singh, Ananta, Maqbool, men whose good intentions are exceeded only by their personal limitations in a struggle based on the ideal of right: "It must be remembered that the literature of each age becomes significant through the confrontation of the hero of the opposing death forces and by showing through his struggle, even if he fails, the possibilities of a nobler, bolder and near superhuman destiny - the affirmation of life itself against death in all forms" (Anand).

(Shepherd in Perspectives on M.R. Anand: p.151)

Anand has wittingly or unwittingly hit at the central paradox of the liberation praxis. Affirmation of life for the suffering masses underscores the need for sacrifice and struggle aimed at eliminating all forms of death, liberation from all forms of death-dealing forces and establishment of a new society
upholding life and pro-people values. In and through all his novels and protagonists Anand has tried to scrutinize and explain this paradox. All his heroes are caught in this paradoxical predicament at the end of the novel. It is when they come closest to success that they meet with apparent failure or disillusionment. His characters, especially the central characters, embody the contradictoriness of human nature in its extent and depth. After all, the gap between the real and ideal in life is what spells the difference between successful men and others who face apparent defeat. If it is an inseparable part of human life, it is also an intrinsic element in the whole logic of liberation praxis.

Chinua Achebe’s portrayal of characters, specially the major characters, is consistent and convincing. In all his five novels we perceive his stamp as a creator of authentic protagonists. In Things Fall Apart Achebe has skilfully drawn the character of Okonkwo on whose fortunes revolves the fate, the rise and fall of the Igbo clan of Umuofia. His death at the end of the novel signifies the death of the old traditions and ways of life. This is how Achebe has depicted the symbiotic relationship between Okonkwo and the people, culture and fortune of Umuofia.
Achebe presents Okonkwo’s character as self-willed, self-opinionated, proud, courageous and power-conscious as well as human and expansive. People fear him as much as they respect him and admire him for his valour, wealth and other achievements. Although he is a character of intense individuality, he is also one in whom the values most admired by the Igbo peoples are consolidated. His stature is heroic as presented by Achebe at the beginning of the novel. His heroic nature is flawed because of certain shortcomings and deviations apart from the inexorable element of fatality symbolized by the ‘chi’ that seems to work against him in the final analysis. His impatience and irrational rage elicit from him rash responses to situations. Above all he was a man tormented by a nagging fear of failure and weakness that characterised his father Unoka, who incidentally had been nicknamed "agbala" (woman) as he had taken no title.

There is a clear split in Okonkwo’s personality between his strong and positive qualities and the weaker side dominated by excessive ambition. The final catastrophe, that seals the process of destruction of the old values and symbolises it, is sharpened by Okonkwo’s obstinate refusal to accept the unsettling changes brought on by the advent of the white administration, religion and trade. His suicide is certainly a desperate act but not done out of cowardice. It was prompted by a sense of helplessness and
rejection by his clan. It knocked the bottom out of his personal view of his clan’s right response to the current phenomenon. He was a man totally frustrated as he saw his best hopes dashed to the ground. The refusal of the kinsmen to stand by him when he attacked the white authority’s messenger was an insult and shame he could not bear. Hence he took the most extreme step. But protest he did. He disapproved of his clansmen’s meek submission to a foreign power and foreign religion that undermined the traditional fabric of the tribal society and culture. Even in his ignoble death by suicide, considered to be an abomination and unworthy of a burial by his kinsmen, Okonkwo doesn’t lose the tragic eminence. We don’t despise him in his death, but we sympathise with him and in fact feel inclined to admire him. Okonkwo achieves his tragic status by rising above the sceptical relativism of his people and by standing for the essential values of the community. His death is an assertion that there are certain things which are absolute. But the irony is that the same attitude is a denial of the basic tenet of Igbo reality which finds stability in flexibility and relatedness. Achebe projects the classic dilemma of open, flexible societies encountering powers, monolithic and unscrupulous.

His death only heightens the irony of the final scene where the novelist holds up to mild ridicule the ‘civilizing mission’ of the colonial masters. The total lack of understanding
displayed by the British of the native social and cultural heritage is highlighted in the last paragraph, although, a mild ironic strand runs through the whole novel. The death of Okonkwo and the general falling apart of all cultural and social customs and values are symptomatic of the colonial notion of a divine mandate given to it for civilizing the Africans, at the cost of destroying the indigenous system. The process of liberation commences here even as Okonkwo teaches his clansmen what it is to lead a dignified life without losing one’s self-worth. The white man’s wiles, subtle and sinister designs and hypocrisy should be exposed. This seems to be the message that Achebe delivers through the principal character’s death. It is hoped that even Okonkwo’s death by suicide could serve as a historic reminder of the colonial rulers’ apathy to the Africans’ predicament and the traumatic psycho-social wounds suffered by the natives.

In No Longer At Ease Achebe’s central character is Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of Okonkwo, the protagonist of his first novel. He is son of Nwoye who betrayed his father by deserting to the new religion. Nwoye’s experience of the brutality of his father Okonkwo in murdering Ikemefuna the boy-hostage who became attached to him, forced him to become a Christian. Obi has returned from England with a B.A. degree full of an idealism to rid his country of corruption and to create a new nation. He starts well enough. He is appointed to a responsible post as
Scholarship Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Education. But Obi's affair with Clara an "Osu" belonging to an inferior caste, a descendant of slaves, complicates the situation as his family and kinsmen vehemently disapprove and oppose this relationship as unbecoming foreign educated young man.

Obi, who is an idealist and sets out to root out corruption and establish a model of clean and upright public life, runs into rough weather as conflicting demands are made on him. While he is asked to pay back the loan given him for his studies abroad, he is expected to display a standard of living appropriate to his "European" rank. This is a severe test to his security and integrity. Obi is no longer at ease. He is pulled by conflicting demands and pressures. He is in a state of confusion reflecting the contradictions that characterize his society in the wake of a new order and a new set of values as a natural outcome of it. Obi is shocked and stunned by the contradictory values and opinions held by his contemporaries and his own parents. Achebe leaves no doubt about the truth that this state of affairs was caused by the import of Western value-system, life-style, habits and customs that upset the traditional balance. In other words, materialism and its twin acquisitiveness, have become the modern day monster that is ruining the Nigerian body politic. Corruption is the logical extension of acquisitiveness which was released in Nigeria by the forces of colonialism. Obi is a victim and product of this situation.
The opening scene wherein Obi is convicted of taking bribes is certainly powerful and subtle indictment in Achebe’s idiom of the moral and ethical decadence set in motion by the colonial ethos. But the interesting point is the irony that is underlying the whole scene. The Umuofia men are distressed not because Obi indulged in corrupt practices but rather because he was ‘caught’ accepting bribes.

Obi’s strength is his moral consciousness but unfortunately it is not supported by an equally strong moral courage. As a result when he has to take a stand he falters and fails miserably. Moreover he lacks the capacity for consecutive serious reasoning. This twin inadequacy ultimately let him down and led him to his doom.

Achebe’s ironic vision reaches a poignant stage in the story as Obi’s trial and conviction take place even as he is beginning to realise his moral guilt and his responsibility to turn over a new leaf. But Achebe has succeeded superbly in asserting his moral vision and his historic perspective through the skilful delineation of his protagonist.

Obi’s characterization has helped Achebe in masterfully probing a moral problem and an ethical question with astute intelligence and great objectivity and detachment. He neither
condemns outright Obi nor does he exonerate him. While taking a rigid traditional line with regard to public morality, he points his finger, very subtly through an ironic-cum-satiric mode of writing, at the real perpetrators of such an ambiguous situation. In fact by the end of the novel Achebe wins our sympathy and admiration for Obi who is a transformed person.

Obi is a type of a host of educated new elite in Nigeria. They are well-meaning and intelligent and determined to rid their society of rampant corruption and other evil practices. They may be for a while rattled by the contradictions thrown up by a polity that is no longer at ease. They may be victims of this predicament. Nevertheless they are the hope of a young nation like Nigeria. The educated new elite are a single most talented group that can catalyse the movement for change of structures and establishment of a more humane and fraternal system. This, in effect, is a definite programme in view of liberation. Of course, no nation can pin all its hopes on its intelligentsia. But it is a group that cannot be ignored or marginalised in any liberation package.

In Arrow of God Achebe’s interest is ostensibly to evoke the glorious and colourful Igbo-past by elaborately describing the rituals, customs, historical happenings, beliefs and
The ultimate victory is an affirmation of the wisdom contained in the saying, "no man however great can win judgement against a clan". The power of the people in liberative praxis is brought out by Achebe in the way he has delineated the character of Ezeulu. Between Ezeulu and the people, it is the people's power or grass-root struggle that will ultimately triumph.

In Anthills of the Savannah where Achebe further probes the function of power and particularly of military power, his literary form has been dictated by his political vision and the subject he is dealing with. He breaks new ground by not only making a departure from his own practice but by striking a posture altogether different from other African practitioners faced with identical socio-political situation and rage. The triumvirate at the helm of affairs in the fictional African State of Kangan are Sam, the General and His Excellency, the Head of State and his two friends and rivals, Chris, the Commissioner for Information and Ikem Osodi, the editor of the National Gazette. It is through the observations and articulations of Chris and Ikem that Achebe mainly develops and portrays the perversion and corruption of power, herein typified by the person and functioning of the President. These two have their own theories
and views and share and discuss these in the company of Beatrice Okoh, Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and the fourth major character in the novel.

Of the four, Achebe has drawn in detail only the characters of Ikem, Chris and Beatrice, giving very little attention to the depiction of Sam's character, probably indicating his inevitable failure as dictator and the irrelevance of dictatorial regime in the African context. Of the three, it is Ikem Osodi who is also poet, novelist and playwright who gets, the most extensive treatment. He is a crusader against the abuses of power and uses his editorials to ridicule, parody and disclose such malpractices. He is a fiery character, a young Turk possessed of an anarchic spirit coupled with a determination to prevent any further corruption by unquestioned power. He believes, "Only half-wits can stumble into such enormities" speaking of the hazards of power. Achebe however decides to reeducate him as he does the other main characters. In the novel we observe how Ikem turns from a passionate radical and freelance theoriser to a prospective martyr, a model of a new leadership role.

Innes C.L. has noted with perspicacity in her book Chinua Achebe:
It is Ikem who begins to articulate both an alternative political creed, a new radicalism in defiance of the President, and a mythic account of what is happening to Kangan. In both of these roles he seems to speak more directly than anyone else on behalf of the author. His radicalism is sceptical, opposed to the present orthodoxies of deliverance of all kinds: "Experience and intelligence warn us that man's progress in freedom will be piecemeal, slow and undramatic," he writes in an essay on oppression. Millenarian solutions "will always fail because of man’s stubborn antibody called surprise." Society, like the individual, must be reformed around - "its core of reality; not around an intellectual abstraction"....

(Innes 1990: p.173)

One can't easily miss the voice of Achebe in these words. Ikem, as Beatrice foretells, has to die but his death just as he begins to translate his convictions in his life situation, violent and premature and tragic, has all the grandeur and solemnity of a martyr's death. Achebe places this at the
threshold of a new awakening in the masses of the people of their own power and responsibility to react and protest which in turn provides the necessary environment for re-education of Chris, Ikem and Beatrice.

As the political crisis deepens Ikem sets his political credo and activity in motion and Chris resigns in sympathy. The plotting and counterplotting and the attendant everyday occurrences of life under a military rule are all powerfully projected by Achebe as taking place in Bassa, the Capital city. The focus of the various episodes is the way in which the masses react to the machinery of oppression.

Ikem now realises that the root cause of the failure of the Government is the failure of the rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of the country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation’s being. He, in a moment of illumination, abandons his editorship of the National Gazette. Later he addresses the students at the University of Bassa in defiance of the government. Echoing Achebe’s favourite aphorism, 'where something stands, something else will stand beside it', Ikem adopts the dialectics of affirming and contradiction. He unleashes an attack on half-baked orthodoxis of all kinds and their provision of easy answers. He believes in a self-transcending and self-perfecting ideology that eschews self-righteousness and extremism.
Shortly after his inspiring speech to the students he is accused of inciting the students and of engineering a conspiracy to overthrow the government. While he resists arrest he is fatally wounded. Thus Ikem fulfills the prophecy that he would die a martyr’s death.

In fact Ikem’s life, activities, theory, ideas and views and finally his heroic death for a cause underline his life-long yearning ‘to connect his essence with earth and earth’s people’.

Achebe has emphatically and artistically resolved the question of the solution or alternative to the present oppressive, military or civilian rule. Ikem articulates it not only when he places the cause of the failure of the government in its failure to re-establish vital links with the poor and dispossessed of the land, or when he composed the meaningful "Hymn to the Sun" but more emphatically by his death precisely while trying to make real this dream of his. He doesn’t build his dream on hope of a millenarian but by initiating a piecemeal reform of society around its ‘core of reality’.

Achebe has propounded through a fascinating web of incidents and episodes woven round the triumvirate against the background of a despotic regime, his own perception of an alternative to social and political chaos which has been the
actual scenario in Nigeria since Independence. He has aesthetically concluded the novel by harping on the concept of eschatology, reincarnation and resurrection in the person of Beatrice who is the biblical remnant to carry on the task of linking up not only with the present generation but also with the past precursors such as Ikem and roadmakers such as Chris. Elewa’s daughter who is Ikem’s ‘living speck’ is named Amaechina (May-the-path-never close) signifying the beginning of this process ascribing a crucial role to women as never before done in Nigerian history.

Achebe in a way celebrates the convergence of the women Beatrice and Elewa and the people at the syncretist naming ceremony. It is his tribute to the new alliance of people guided by enlightened and committed women which is a symbol of people’s struggle that will remain reincarnated in this story to be repeated generation after generation. Achebe has convincingly reiterated his hope in some kind of renewal and regeneration through an engagement with the oppressed as both Ikem and Chris embody in their lives and deaths. Ikem’s "Hymn to the Sun" is Achebe’s perspective of creation and decreation, ultimately emerging in a world of dialectic and mediation as against the one of unilateral power throwing up monsters of leaders.
There are strong similarities and subtle differences in the manner both these novelists approach characterization. While it is easily perceptible that Anand is a character novelist by and large, it is difficult to assert this of Achebe. Nevertheless characterization is a strong point of both the writers. And it is quite evident that both Anand and Achebe depend on their characters, mainly the principal ones, in order to narrate the story and to build the plot and action with the cause-effect logical structure.

Anand’s protagonists are drawn invariably from the oppressed sections of society and are therefore types of a particular segment of class of society. While individuality is not sacrificed, one cannot miss out Anand’s intention of projecting them as types of people whose lives and struggles he was determined to give artistic expression to. Even as types, Anand’s protagonists have their individual personality which makes them credible and real. Achebe on the other hand, delineates his protagonists as strongly personalised individuals more often than not idiosyncratic and therefore differentiated from the rest in the novel. While Okonkwo and Ezeulu are highly individualistic and even unparalleled in their own clan Obi of No Longer At Ease and Odili of A Man of the People are certainly
representatives of a particular segment of Nigerians. Obi and Odili are drawn from the sophisticated educated, town-bred Africans who are the cream and hope of Africa or Nigeria. Nevertheless their individuality is not sacrificed and they exist, act, react and interact in their rights as individuals.

While there is an unavoidable ring of sameness or monotony in the types of protagonists chosen by Anand, Achebe delights the readers with a refreshing range and novelty in choice of protagonists. Anand's Bhikhu of The Road, is Bakha of Untouchable. Of course Anand is constrained by his fictional purpose to confine himself to a narrow spectrum of individuals. But Achebe, although limited by his deliberate choice to the Igbo tribe and its pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial experiences, has nonetheless produced characters who move, live and have their being in the artistically evoked Igbo milieu of the particular novel. However Anand displays his creative fecundity in filling his canvas with myriad minor characters.

In Anand and Achebe the characters inevitably become the spokesmen of the novelists. Nevertheless, it should be conceded that Anand whose protagonists in effect become vehicles through which he conveys his views and voices his protests, has used extreme caution and subtle literary narrative techniques in order
to perform the task. His method is not crude preaching or sermonising or exhorting except in some places, where propagandist intent mars the aesthetic and artistic finesse. Achebe has his share of the propagandist mechanism subtly pressed into service through the narration or commentary of characters. He has in particular a wise man in every novel who affects the authorial voice that presents a same viewpoint, offers wise alternative or drives home a traditional saying or proverb or aphorism in order to instil a sense of the clan into some key characters.

Achebe escapes critical censure for doctrinaire or propagandist approach by allowing his protagonists to a considerable degree, to develop on their own without making them his mouthpieces or spokesmen. He has circumvented this pitfall by creating special characters in the clan who are recreations of the traditional wise men or elders of an Igbo clan. The protagonists however grow in an organic fashion, given their qualities good and bad and the milieu of the clan. The author hardly intrudes into the growth process of or imposes his viewpoints on his protagonists.

Anand however tends to impose his opinions quite overtly on his central characters thus doing harm to their authenticity and credibility. Mrs. Meenakshi Mukherjee has severely castigated Anand, in an exaggerated fashion, for this defect thus:
... But when his convictions are imposed upon his heroes, who are usually countrybred or unsophisticated people the characterization fails. Anand’s characters are lonely misfits - not lonely in the tradition of the modern European protagonist of fiction, whose loneliness is a form of intellectual alienation, but lonely because Anand has transferred his own loneliness to them. They lack the necessary background, are thereby rootless and mythless and appear somewhat unnatural.

(In Naik et al. 1977: p. 245)

While the accusation that Anand interferes in the organic growth of the protagonist with his personal views and conviction is real, it is not tenable that his characters are all rootless. In fact the disarming innocence, unmerited suffering and breathtaking naiveté of protagonists like Bakha and Munoo far outweigh this defect. In fact one never for a moment suspects the reality of these characters. His other protagonists such as
Bhikhu, Gangu, Ananta and even Gauri exhibit characteristics of maturity and adulthood which balance the novelist’s occasionally inordinate intrusion or pulpit-preaching at the cost of their individuality.

Another charge levelled at Anand is that his characters are either good or bad lacking the real life mixture of good and evil. While this allegation may apply to a host of his minor characters, his heroes are not all paragons of virtue or incarnations of evil. Munoo and Bakha barely out of their teens are represented as free from adult vices or inclinations. Nevertheless Anand adds a comic touch when he endows them with a flare for some outlandish or exotic adventure. Bakha, for instance, likes to imitate the sahibs in the way they dress and behave and in playing hockey like them. Munoo’s irrepressible yearning for life and good things of life including his sexual maturation and misadventures, nevertheless adds a new dimension to his characterisation. Ananta is a judicious mixture of good and bad qualities with his innate goodness outweighing his moral deviancy. Gangu and Gauri strike us as perfect individuals who are more sinned against than sinning.
Achebe avoids this pitfall and therefore his protagonist cannot be put into neat categories. Achebe's heroes are all life-like and real and almost defy the illusion of fiction. The way Achebe has painted Okonkwo, or Ezeulu or Obi or Odili, precludes any danger of the characterization becoming melodramatic or stereotypical. They are products of a society and culture which had its legitimate share of the good and the bad, of nobility and meanness, of openness and narrow-mindedness, idealism and corruptibility and all shades of spirituality and materialism.

All said and done both these novelists with their characterization of the protagonists have sought to drive home their own perceptions of liberation and societal transformation conditioned by their own socio-political and cultural backgrounds. And both have exercised caution and restraint in not overdoing this and in allowing this motif to operate as an undertone and as a subtle, and subdued aspiration simmering in the subconscious of the heroes. Certainly this unconscious yearning for liberation at different levels can be interpreted as the partially internalised and articulated aspiration in the race, caste, class or tribe for which Anand and Achebe have become spokesmen.