CHAPTER - 5

THE LATER PHASE OF

K. CHINNAPPA BHARATHI

It is better to die for an idea that lives, than to live for an idea that dies.¹

- Ngugi wa Thiong’o
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Sugar: 1993

K. Chinnappa Bharathi’s each novel portrays at least one significant aspect of exploitation. *The Awakening* is about protest of the tribal people of Kolli-hills against capitalist and bureaucratic system. *Thirst* is about the clash between the upper caste-rich people and the bonded labourers of slums. *Sugar* deals with the struggle between the capitalist sugar mill owners and the mill workers and the sugarcane farmers. *Pavalayai* is an exception. It describes the instinctive nature of human behavior and a sort of transformation of its hero, Periannan. The last novel *The Generations* explains how the values have become meaningless because of capitalist tendencies of human beings. The novel dwells on the total collapse of the strong foundation of family because of the capitalists’ forces. The lust for money and property results in many evil things. Struggle between capitalists and a non-capitalist is the major theme of the novel. Bharathi’s novels which reflecting social reality’ are the mouth pieces of his own ideology, which always seems to be dull, pale and non attractive for the readers, because there are no farfetched hyperboles and exaggerations. Only in a few cases, sentiments, love affairs and gay moments are noticed.

This chapter deals with the remaining three novels of Chinnappa Bharathi, of which *Sugar* is more vigorous. This novel
contains Aristotle’s theory of the three aspects. The beginning is Veeran’s family and its sudden end; the middle is his becoming an orphan, and going to Kandaswamy’s house in search of a job and the end is his becoming a prominent leader of Workers’ Union and making workers’ life meaningful. The novel has autobiographical elements. But it does not ruin the art of creativity. No doubt all the novels carry artistic qualities. This Creative writings generate socio-cultural awareness. This is the minimum social responsibility and commitment from every creative writer. Here an attempt is made to study the novel and analyse it. Keeping in mind the warning given by Jacques Derrida that the meaning of the sentence always ‘defers’ and ‘differs’, no final word is possible in literature.

Sugar begins with the portrayal of the remote village and its huts. The pathetic living condition of the people is given in the very opening page itself.

The huts do not have doors. The entrance will be covered with a rectangular frame of bamboo splits and palmyra thatches. Pigs, dogs and chicken reared by the cheli people will enter the huts through gaps. S: 1993:3.

Veeran has neglected his studies and has craze for films. He worships his hero and as demigod. His father Karuvayan, (which means black mouth) and his mother Kendi worried about their son’s conduct and became pessimistic in life. Meanwhile, sharing the meat of a dead buffalo between Pariahs and Cobbler depicts the traditional way of life in a remote village. The cabblers themselves are not aware, exploitation by the upper class.

They murmured to themselves. We are, after all, their children.......However harsh their treatment might be .....We rely on their generosity’. S: 1993:10.
Ultimately it was agreed that the dead buffalo was to be handed over to cobbler community. A heated argument took place among the cobblers. That reflects the socio-economic condition of cobblers community:

“A sleepy-looking man said ‘During elections we are forced to vote for a particular candidate by the landlords. It does not matter who wins but we cannot afford to displease our master. It is they who give us work and stand by us in times of need’. S:1993:12.

Angry young man Veeran protests this kind of exploitation. It is the first reaction of Veeran who slowly get hold on the fight against injustice and casteism. He says:

“We will tell our masters, We will vote for your candidate. Please ask him to build a stone platform’. S:1993:12.

Veeran and his father Karuvayan prepared the buffalo meat. While preparing the meat, Veeran narrated the filmy story which he had seen earlier. His father cautions him about his too much involvement in the activities of film club. But Veeran devotes more time on the club activities and avoids working at farm. For this Karuvayan curses himself for sending his son Veeran to school. He complains:

Without school education Veeran oould have been, like other boys, working in the farms. Another man advised him to handle his son the right way’. S: 1993:16.

A stroke of fate has struck the family of Karuvayan. All the family members except Veeran are killed by snakebite. But people misunderstood and complained that the behaviour and non-seriousness of Veeran forced them to take extreme step of poisoning themselves.

‘His aunt lamented that the family members killed themselves out of humiliation brought upon the family by his behavior’. S: 1993:19.

Veeran leaves the village with a heavy heart, and goes in search of a job. By this time, Singa Gounder and Nachiappa Gounder come
together to open a Sugar factory. This plan is to acquire the land of small Sugar farmers and to make them landless labourers. They give false assurances of jobs security in the inaugural function of the sugar mill. Veeran meets Kandasamy who guides him to get a job at the factory. He says: "Employer wants only such people. The butcher needs a goat, not a lion". S: 1993:37.

The Sugar mill starts and the management, the money lenders and the capitalists get good reaps, but the labourers and the farmers get only mirage share of their due. The rich becomes richer and the poor becomes poorer. The workers at the factory come together to fight for their legal rights and reward for their hard work. Kandasamy, Veeran and others have formed a union. Despite his strong involvement in the activities of the union, Veeran keeps up his love with Kannamma. This is the necessary deviation in the novel.

The factory owners were not interested in protecting the welfare of the workers.

'Machines were being installed round the clock. Workers were mercilessly exploited, the management showing scant working for twelve hours at a stretch. They did not mind the heavy work-load. In their anxiety to acquire the status of a permanent worker after regular production commenced, they overlooked the inhuman treatment meted out to them'. S: 1993:74.

Kandasamy was enraged by the callousness of the management. His blood boiled. Was human life so cheap?'. S: 1993:75.

The management failed to give protection and medical treatment to the workers.

The management did not provide medical facilities for workers injured in accidents. This led to a good deal of heart burn among them. What happened that day was an altogether different matter. A worker, on whom a heavy pipe fell, writhed in pain and died. Even goats, dogs and chicken were taken to the veterinary hospital in time for treatment. Emergency medical care had been denied to construction worker. There was no one to question the
management for their callous indifference. Workers were not allowed to express their sympathy by remaining near the dead body. Nor were they allowed to console the dead man's parents and share their grief. S: 1993: 78-79.

The factory was inaugurated; Nachiappa Gounder is the owner of the mill supported by Singa Gounder. The management continues its apathy towards the workers. Even after two three tragic human loss at the factory, they never bother to improve the working condition of the workers. Every worker is scared. The management plays a double standard. They encourage sugarcane farmers by donating festival offers and make them turn against the workers.

'The owner tries to make a good impression on farmers by donating money for festivals and turn them against us when we go on strike'. S: 1993:117.

The management of the Sugar mill tries to curb the striking workers through unlawful and cunning way.

'If Singa Gounder intervenes no worker from this area will join the strike. Outsiders stay in rented houses owned by farmers. They can be brought around if house owners threaten to evict them. If this proves ineffective we will teach them a lesson of their life'. S:1993:138.

Kandasamy considers death and dignity equal. The striking workers come to a conclusion that 'Man dies only once. We should lead a decent life or perish with honour'. S: 1993:147. The significant decision they have taken is that they have to fight for their rights peacefully. Kandasamy concludes the meeting by saying:

'We should try to convince and persuade those workers who do not agree with us. We should not indulge in violence. If violence is forced on us, we shall give fitting reply'. S: 1993:147.

The striking workers are punished and even non striking workers are being targeted and punished and arrested. When Kandasamy is suspended from the service, it is Veeran who makes the plan of 'fast unto death' programme for reappointment of Kandasamy. He says:

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'Our ideology and aspirations for a decent life will spread wherever there is poverty. Knives, clubs, and bullets are powerless. They are incapable of suppressing a vibrant class struggle. The movement is an instrument of the down-trodden to put an end to capitalist exploitation'. S: 1993:162.

At this crucial juncture, the election is announced and one of the candidates involves to set right the problem. The management agrees; after strong persuasion by the present minister who is an election candidate, to pay of leave salary. This is the first success for the workers. The workers understand the selfless service of Kandasamy and they want him to be appointed again. After Kandasamy's reappointment Veeran plans to marry Kannamma. Friends and neighbors attend, and not the relatives of Kandasamy, because of caste feeling. Veeran faces yet another acid test in his life. When he is asked about his caste, he has to say he is the son of a cobbler. But Kandasamy supports him saying that understanding is better than the caste. Lakshmi, Kandasamy's wife, says: ‘Caste, the damn caste, let’s see what it can do to us’. S:‘93:188.

Kandasamy concludes another meeting by saying ‘If goats stand together and remain firm they can even withstand the attack of a lion. We should remain disciplined and conserve our strength. The union is our sheet anchor’. S:‘93:190. An old woman appreciates Kandasamy. Her words reflect the age-old system of exploitation. She says: ‘These are ignorant people. Teach them, guide them. For generations they have allowed themselves to be exploited’. S:‘93:192.

The workers have learnt a lesson. They also realize the necessity of selfless service like the one done by Kandasamy. The concluding remarks of the novelist make good impression on the minds of the workers and readers.

'The workers have learnt a good deal from experience. Their awakening will gradually lead to a rejuvenation of the ordeal with faith in their destiny and hope for a better tomorrow. The seed for a just and equitable society free from exploitation has been sown. It will sprout, grow and bear fruit'. S: '93:192.
The novelist has been cautious in creating awareness and making the workers and common people including the farmers know the 'meaningful' living condition, through hard struggle. The darker side of the workers gets a light of knowledge, light of awakening. The picture of the two different worlds capitalists and working mass—is given with a message of reforming of the existing society.

**Pavalayi: 2000:**

This is the fourth successful novel written by the progressive novelist in Tamil Literature today, Chinnappa Bharathi. He narrates the story of title Pavalayi and her love affairs and married life with the anti-heroine Periannan. It attracts young readers very much, because of the lyrical quality of the language and the attitude of young boys and girls. Even after her marriage with Periannan, she faces dilemma—whether she should forget the past and lead a happy life with Periannan or not. But as she has already surrendered her soul and body to her lover she could not lead life with Periannan, so she promptly goes with her lover. The anti-hero suffers a lot for losing her. His servant widow Thangammal tires to make them live together but she fails and dies. This causes Periannan a great loss. Isolation, orphanage and, meaninglessness in life haunts him and he decides to transfer all his property to his lower caste servant Raman.

Periannan says:

‘Hei Rama I have none to lean on, you are the only support. You are the heir to piece of dry land. I am not saying this out of heightened piety. The distaste and bitterness in my life make me say this .........He paused a little as if reluctant to utter that thing which he was about to. Then he said, 'I don't think that I am left with any more honour or status. I have lost everything. If is you who should take care of me.' He spoke as if having attained all the sagacity of a sage'. P: 2000: 143.

There is a saying, 'If you get a good wife you will become family holder. If you get a bad wife you will become a sage'. The decision of Periannan makes Rama’s puzzled and confused:

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'Raman shook with grief as if the earth was turning over. He was shocked and shattered. Had the master gone mad? How could a cobbler, who eats the dead cow, and lives at the mercy of landowners, become fit to be the heir to the line of honoured farmers? If that happens will there be rains in the country? Will not sins and wrong doings grow and multiply? Would not God put out the eyes? My God! why are you testing me? "He cried out, overcome by emotions and took hold of Periannan's legs". p: 2000:143

As a matter of fact, the novel is centered on the life activities of the unfortunate man Periannan. The response of male to the extreme behaviors of woman is strange.

Two major aspects can be noticed in this novel. Primarily, it portrays the woman's freedom, her aspirations and her performance to achieve her goal even at the cost of exploitation of sex. Secondarily, how Periannan, being an upper class rich farmer transfers the land to his cobbler servant Raman and he is unwilling to accept the same, because of long established fear of God, religion, and tradition.

It is presumed that the novelist intends to question the separate yardsticks for man and woman. If man does it, it is okay, if woman does it, it is objected. If adultery is a sin, it should be equally applicable to both. Whoever violates it, it is a sin. Time only will provide an acceptable answer.

**THE GENERATIONS:**

This novel portrays heavy bombardment and splintering shells of Marxian philosophy and the authors strong commitment to its ideology. The novel is not just a replica of the philosophy of Marxism but the mouthpiece of leftist ideology in India today. Having said this, it is prerogative to notice any reader to see the creative power of the writer of this novel. At the synoptic level, the novel is about three generations and how each generation differs from the other.
Alagappan, who is the protagonist of the first generation, believes in Murugan:

"Muruga! O the God Karumalai! Yesterday went off peacefully. All time is under your control. You know all we think but we know not what you think. Protect us, O Lord! He murmured the words of devotion, his lips hardly moving in that misty dawn". G:2004:1.

He follows the opinion of the preacher who once declared "God is one, by whatever name one may call Him". He is in the opinion of whichever the god he prays to, temple he visits, he prays the name of Murugan only and he learns reading and writing with the help of the priest at night.

This is how the novelist introduces the main character. He also goes on describing his physical characters. Alagappan is a businessman who is inspired by Chettiar, his friend, to make business a profitable one with business techniques. His wife always supports him. Thangammal is the symbol of hard work and Thangam means gold in Tamil. Because of hard work, and restlessness she may not be good looking but her inner qualities are gold—like, which the novelist is interested to look into. Both Alagappan and his wife are committed in taking care of social obligations. For example, whenever there is a marriage, Alagappa Gounder guides the people to purchase clothes at reasonable price. Gradually it has become the fashion of every marriage party to take him to the clothes shop. He has two sons but he knows none of the two is interested in taking up his business and farm-work. Alagappan is now a prominent mill owner. Meanwhile in one way economic progress and capitalistic tendency rapidly grow up. But at the same time the novelist gives the hints at the degradation and loss of morality, cultural values, broken human relationships. Even Alagappan who is interested in Lachmi, who is more a servant at his shop, than his wife. It creates a rift between husband and wife.

In this matter Alagappan was always obedient to his wife. She was devoted to her two duties—attending to household work and to farm. When she first came to know of Alagappan's liaison
with Lachmi, she reconciled herself to the situation without much ado. She reasoned that since she had neither the inclination nor the energy to cater to her husband’s sexual need, she should not object to his seeking solace in another woman, as long as there was no threat to her right to the family property’. G: 23.

Algappan’s first son Iswaran who practises as a lawyer at Namakkal married a woman with huge dowry. Now he is a reputed lawyer but unfortunately he is henpecked husband. Because, ‘She has married him, rather purchased him, with handsome dowry’. G: 40.

Iswaran has a sour relationship with his wife, as she behaves in her own way. When Iswaran is planning to go to his village, Chellamma, his wife tells him:

‘Your brother is loafing about and spending the family money recklessly. If we get our share of the family property, we can lend it and earn interest. We can also invest in household plots in the town. I want you to speak to your father on this matter’. G: 43.

Thangammal and her son Iswaran discuss many things; she is worried about her husband’s immoral conduct, and she considers it as her fate. She says, ‘It is my fate to suffer always, but no matter. It is enough if you, my children, live well’. G: 45.

Iswaran besides practicing as a lawyer, works as a business man. He is interested in opening a factory with the help of other rich men of the town. Iswaran thinks about his son Manivannan’s attitude and knowledge, he has possessed at the young age. His father Alagappan, also once thought in the similar way. This is the result of the generation gap. Iswaran remembers, ‘Nowadays the young people are cleverer. They are having more opportunities for life’s experiences. He could not pick holes in his son’s reply. He however said, ‘I hear that you are involving yourself in matters other than studies.....’ G: 68.

Manivannan is a brilliant boy who talks openly and his ideas are clear and sound enough to ignite the inner corrupt feelings of his father.
He responds to his father’s advice to take up law or business management, which would help his business. He argues:

'Father, what is important is education. It is necessary to widen a man’s outlook. But what an educated man becomes does not depend on his education alone. His conduct is shaped by his own desires and temperament also. Some people use their learning to corrupt the society; some others use it to improve the society. Education is a knife which is used to kill if it is in the hands of a butcher and to save a life if in the hands of a surgeon'. G: 69.

Iswaran is able to succeed in making Collaboration Company of cotton mill, and he is chosen as its Director. He is the one who makes survey about raw materials, cheap labour and market tendency. Ramachandran, Iswaran’s friend, tells him about the meaning of money. ‘Peace cannot be achieved by all crimes against humanity’. G:80. Gradually Iswaran’s friend Krishanan says that ‘with the passage of time, ideas also change values held sacrosanct once are considered meaningless by the succeeding generations. This ‘generation gap’ becomes wider and wider in courses of time’. G: 88.

The repeated statement which strikes the reader is ‘Time is a great healer. It will soothe all pain gradually’. Doesn’t it mean the suffering of the exploitation of the poor will come to an end? But “Man’s worth is decided by his wealth. Wealth is accumulated by exploitation of one man by another. Justice demands that a man who produces things by hard work should live comfortably. But in actual practice, the contradiction happens. The producer leads a miserable existence while a parasite who exploits him enjoys a life of luxury’. G: 93.

The novelist gives probable solutions to the problem of exploitation, Kandasami gives a piece of advice to Manivannan, which is the message of the novel too:

You are worried how you are going to associate yourself with the exploitation practiced by your father in his business. But you have overlooked one important fact. Exploitation exists not only in big industries but also in smaller undertakings; only degree is different
The only section that does not practice exploitation is the labour class. A trader or craftsman who employs a servant in his trade also exploits the servant to some extent. It is not practicable to go into your father's business, establish direct contact with the workers, educate them on their rights and responsibilities. Time only show how you involve after becoming part of the capitalist class. If you have a strong character, you may be able to withstand the temptations and do real service to the society. G: 94.

Manivannan is disgusted; seeing the corrupt lives, corrupt thoughts and talks of freedom and values of life. He remembers the ideals of Gandhiji and Subash Chandra Bose. But Iswaran continues the Iswar Group of Industries. The Union leader's comment on the present condition of working labourers at factory is as the following:

'Capitalists get huge loans from banks for starting industries. After sometime they close the industries on the ground of loss and do not repay the loans. Then they again get financial aid from Government for reopening the closed industries. At the time of such reopening they impose all sorts of conditions-retrenchment, wage-cut, stoppage of overtime wages etc.,'. G:120.

The leader also clarifies the poor economic condition of India on all front. He says it is because the rulers blindly follow the capitalistic rules of the world Bank. The world Bank puts the conditions:

'As a result of subsidies for agriculture and small industries have to be cut and import duties on foreign goods are removed. Taking advantage of the free-trade policy, foreign countries dump their products in developing countries and destroy the industries of these countries'. G: 121.

Iswaran declares that if the striking workers would not stop, the management will close down the factory to save the loss. Now the striking workers are divided on the continuation of the strike. 'Rangarasan, an extremist: Says:

'No. No. ... We should not reside from our earlier stand. If we decide to withdraw the strike decision, it will spoil the morale of the agitating workers of the other mills also'. G: 121. But Vasu, another union leader says: 'I think, there is the risk of casual labourers taking our place and helping the owners to run the mill'. G: 121.
The leaders come to a point that the management should accept their demands but Iswaran Says: 'If we accept your demands and run the mills, we are sure to incur loss. If we close the mills, our loss will be less. That way we will be the gainer'. G: 121. The negotiations fail. The decision would be announced the next day. Iswaran faces a strong revolt from his own son Manivannan, who argues that whatever his father is doing is wrong and unethical. He says he wants to leave him and go somewhere else. This hurts Iswaran. No doubt, the words show genuine concern for the poor working class. Manivannan says:

You have acquired all your wealth and luxury by the labour of the workers. But you want to deprive them of their due wages under the pretext of loss. You want to retrench them and deprive them of their livelihood. If they decide to strike, you plan to kill them. You are even prepared to take then extreme step of setting fire to the mill and make a profit in the process. In this way you will ruin the lives of hundreds of workers. I cannot be a party to your nefarious activities'. G: 124.

Iswaran says that he is also an idealist but he is forced to become greedy. We have to change ourselves according to the situation. But his son does not agree with him when he says that they are thieves and murders. Iswaran tries to console by him by saying that he is young and needs time to understand hard reality of life. But Manivannan says:

'I shall pose a challenge to this society which is based on selfishness and exploitation. I shall dedicate my life to the service of the suffering humanity'. G: 125.

Iswaran now understands that he had taken care of accumulating wealth and never bothered about bringing up his son. His son takes life quite opposite the one he has taken. This disturbed him and
collapsed, 'lifeless'. He comes to a reasonable conclusion at the end of his last days, that understanding his life is a matter of waste.

The novel ends with the death of Iswaran making the contrast between the capitalistic forces and human relationships. Human values and relationships are always necessary for life and not money only. Algappan represents the traditional life, Iswaran represents the exploitative class of modern man and Manivannan represents a new generation, ideal generation, yet to be born. The novelist dreams for the birth of a generation like that of Manivannan. The classless society is given through Manivannan's ideology. This society is the ambitious wish of the novelist. The society is like a wheel of cycle; if the present day is bad, there will be a good time. The human beings need to have constant and conscious struggle to change the evils of the society and to establish a new harmless society. The author has rightly attacked the long established notions of exploitation. Certainly, his novels awake the long slumbering, suppressed, oppressed and exploited class.
NOTES