FICTION AS REFLECTION OF SOCIAL CHANGE

CHAPTER V

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An Indian novelist who took to writing in the beginning of the 20th century was conditioned by the social concerns of the uncertain future being shaped by social, political and cultural movements and their involvements in the transformation of Indian society. The national movement bore the impact of various channels which was an association of different forces and struggles such as labour movements, peasant uprisings, social reformations, cultural and political activities etc. All these performances aimed to evoke an awareness on the necessity of reforming and changing the entire society in various walks of life for a better tomorrow. It was impossible for a writer with social consciousness to create a work without imbibing and reflecting the spirit and realities of these social movements and the transformation taking place all over India as a result of these processes. It had its impact both in the social and individual consciousness and it involved as a national experience in the first half of the century. Naturally, the social realities and the process of transformation appeared as an integral part of the Indian literature of that period, especially in the works produced
by writers who had social commitment and the works of such writers portrayed the complex totality of society itself.

In Anand's work one could often come across with the theme of confrontation between traditional life and its values with the emergence of modern values and systems. The slow and gradual transformation took place as a result of his association with Professor G.Dawes Hicks in his younger days, when he had come under his influence on the realistic tendency in philosophy. It was 'a tendency in the direction of scientific analysis which seemed to have arisen as a reaction against the romantic, mystic movements in the nineteenth century literature especially of Kant & Hegel'[^1]. This helped him to analyse 'the popular concept of God, Reality, Immortality etc. in the light of the most up-to-date scientific research'[^2]. With these modes he was able to develop his own philosophy based on humanism with which he analysed the social realities. He believed that the highest reality in the world is man and he determined to write with his attempt to realise man's potential in achieving a perfect life adopting the values of equality in social and economic sphere to get freedom in all walks of life questioning all forces that blocked progress and liberation. This forms the essence of Anand's humanism
which he likes to be called 'comprehensive historical humanism'. He relates his philosophy with realism and insists its indispensable inclusion in the social transformation. It is a part of his attempt to create a modern progressive society upholding the human values. His humanism is based on a rational perspective as he views that human progress can be attained by man's efforts and he alone can determine his destiny. Hence it can be called scientific humanism which is closely linked with existential philosophy as he believes that man alone is responsible for his destiny. It is the man-made barriers and forces that stand against his progress. And his literature is also a crusade against such bitter realities blocking peace and prosperity. His views agree with the view points of Corliss Lamont who says, 'human happiness has its own justification and requires no sanction or support from supernatural sources............. Humanism asserts that man's own reason and efforts and man's refusal to recognise this point is one of the chief causes of his failures throughout history³.

Anand is able to imbibe this and he co-relates this idea effectively with the attitude of many characters like Lakha and Bakha in Untouchable, Munoo in Coolie etc. and
Nihal Singh & Harnam Singh in Lalu Trilogy, Gangu in Two Leaves and a Bud etc. as they are fatalists who believe in the theory of Karma and God. But Anand strongly disapproves these theories and points out that this fatalistic attitude is chiefly responsible for their misery and this stands as a blockade against social transformation from the worn-out conventions to a modern progressive world.

At the same time his insistence on the need for transformation and its methods are conveyed through characters like Ananta in The Big Heart, Colonel Mahindra, and Gauri who is transformed into a woman of self-will in The Old Woman and the Cow, Lal Singh the protagonist in Trilogy, Maqbool Sherwani the poet in Death of a Hero etc. They believe in themselves and resist the conventions and are ready to face challenge. They also have firm faith in the dignity of labour and aim to achieve their mission at any cost. Some among them in their course of action meet death but still they win our admiration on behalf of determination, courage, service and the human values for which they had become martyrs. They represent the new voice heralding transformation, facing and challenging the bitter realities that make the society stagnant and curb social progress.
Anand is a writer who firmly believes that art is for the sake of humanity and its prosperity. Hence he has to be aware of the social realities and its portrayal to expose and attach certain dark forces. Thus social realism often assumes a greater dimension in his novels. Anand calls this realism as 'Poetic Realism' and he associates this with his humanistic values and vision to social realities. He views it as a point of direction towards creative truth.

Thus Anand uses realism as an effective means to discover and interpret the truth of life based on real experiences and not from the scholarship gained out of books. So the realism helps to gain a true awareness of social life and analyses it through various angles. It also helps to understand the different forces that make life miserable. The experiences of Bakha, Munoo and Gangu are only some among them through which various kinds of evil forces that degenerate society and individuals are being shown. Thus his realism acquires significance as it becomes an effective technique to open the doors leading to an unexposed region where evil forces govern life-situations.

But Anand is interested not only in the portrayal of the disintegrating factors through his characters; but also
in making his strong protest and insists the need for a great transformation which alone can eradicate the worn-out elements and help the society to attain progress. This he does by presenting the experiences of characters like Ananta in The Big Heart, Colonel Mahindra and Gauri in The Old Woman and the Cow, Lal Singh in Trilogy etc. They invite our attention, as they are not silent sufferers. They show the courage to resist and they go out boldly in the field of action with a mission to transform the society with a dedicated effort. Thus they appear as representatives of a new generation moulded by social awareness encountering bitter realities. In the last part of the Trilogy, The Sword and the Sickle we are shown how the farmers are transformed into a class with a sense of social awareness and class-consciousness. This happens as a result of a process as Lukacs says 'the mutual interaction between man and his social surroundings produces personality and life moulds men into members of a class'.

Thus the characters attain self-realisation along with social awareness and their journey often becomes a spiritual one aiming a soul-search. It paves the co-existence of individual and social traits, moving towards a common destination. In the Lalu Trilogy, Lal Singh realises his
position in the society out of the bitter experiences he had faced from the priest as well as the land-lord representing two forces of institution and he decides to react against these authorities. To do this, he leaves the village and his journey in literary terms, is a form of spiritual-quest for a search of his own identity. The rich and varied experiences he had in military trenches and in other fields in Europe in fact opened to him a world of knowledge through which he was able to see how vast and various is universe and life. The European social and cultural values taught him various aspects of life and society. He compares and contrasts them with Indian social orders. All these helped him to realise his potential and he is transformed into a different man with a broad outlook and refined perspective. His personality is totally transformed. The once dejected man who pitied himself and exclaimed, 'it seems as if I was born to suffer and be sad' had been transformed into a man of self-will and assertain and with a determining spirit, he goes into the field of action involving militant action with a missionary zeal from the uplift of the down-trodden. The realities have elevated him to a higher level of consciousness and awareness. As Alastair Niven says, 'In most of Anand's novels there comes a
crucial moment to realisation when the main character fully understands his place in the social order. It is the encounter with the bitter realities and the conflict of social values that elevated him to a higher level of consciousness and awareness, as P.K. Rajan rightly comments, 'The conflict of values that inevitably accompanies the process of personality making shift from the phase of a veiled opposition to the old order is the phase of practical action to end that order. And the new values that emerge in the process are those of liberty democracy and socialism.'

The Trilogy thus pictures the bitter realities itself becoming cause for the social transformation and it paving the way for the emergence of a new awareness.

In the development of Anand's literary career he presents various processes and factors involved in the transformation through a series of events and experiences. In *The Big Heart* it is the mechanisation that leads to the break-down of the old order and life-conditions based on the caste system, leading to the formation of a new order based on class in which capital or money becomes the determining factor in all spheres of life. Here too he gives the realistic pictures of the miseries with a human concern, 'he saw whole
crowds of women huddled together, the whites of their eyes glued in empty stares from hollow deep like those in unburnt skulls on the cremation grounds in his dreams last night. They bent over the fleshless skeletons of their children, looking, just looking, without moving their heels, as if they were waiting for something they knew not what. They had bowls of pieces of coloured rags spread out for aims but they were not begging. For they seemed too weak even to lift their head and accost the passers-by with their stares!

He does not herald this transformed order as it presents a dehumanised set of codes and a system where the ultimate factor upheld in monetary benefit. He strongly condemns the ruthless forces of exploitation in this transformed social order too. He could accept an order or system that has a humanistic approach only.

P.K. Rajan rightly points out that Anand's The Big Heart is 'in its essence a search in fictional terms for the change that is taking place in Indian Social reality'.

Here Anand represents the social reality and changes in awareness trends creating new trends. Anand is able to portray the co-existence of both caste and class systems involving in the
social structure to create unrest and curb its advancement. Along with this he presents the impact of mechanisation depriving the traditional artisan community and their life-conditions. Here the Indian Society is at cross roads as the old order is confronting a modern system of life and it creates conflicts and terrors. Anand portrays this social reality with a keen insight and also presents the social structure and the factors that govern it.

As P.K.Rajan observes, 'Anand inquires into the central conflict inherent in the social reality and emphasises the need for the emergence of higher levels of consciousness by dealing a mortal blow to the old value and, striving for the emergence of a new order'. He voices his protest against the worn-out systems and hopes for a better tomorrow. Though Ananta, the protagonist becomes a martyr while championing the cause of the down-trodden, we see a note of hope as the task begun by him is to be continued by Janaki. Thus Anand, in The Big Heart presents the social realities becoming a cause for the transformation with the society acquiring a new and higher level of awareness, getting rid of decayed values and systems. As Margaret Berry points out, 'In no other novel has Anand attempted to organise a whole social, economic
and political picture\textsuperscript{10}. He also presents the industrial culture transforming the life-conditions into a degraded, mechanised one. The urbanisation, as a result of the migration of rural folk into industrial centres have created a filthy, unhygienic atmosphere and Anand here gives a realistic presentation of the life-conditions of the poor city-folk who is alienated from natural surroundings. 'He (Ananta) saw a man, utterly naked, his buttocks wrapped in a paste of sweat and dung and urine, rolling about on the edge of a ditch of a h insing agony, lifting his neck with an aching stupor and then slipping into filth\textsuperscript{11}.

It is for the eradication of this heart-rendering state and the forces that are responsible for such a state of life Ananta prepares his actions. In fact his martyrdom attains greatness as he died a martyr, during his attempt to create a new social order based on brotherhood and equality.

Thus as P.K. Rajan points out, 'The Big Heart is, in short Anand's sympathetic depiction in fictional terms of the changing social reality and shows his passionate zeal for the sufferings of the poor and the deprived and above all, his relentless search for the integral man and for the emergence
of a higher consciousness.\textsuperscript{12} (Studies in M.R. Anand, P.K. Rajan P.91).

The Big Heart, Trilogy and the later fictions show Anand as a novelist of more matured vision and accuracy with which he portrays how the socio-economic factors attain new dimension in shaping and governing the realities in the transforming sphere. Along with this he presents how these factors play a role in transforming the consciousness of individual and the awareness they acquire out of it. So the protagonists of the later novels are not mere silent sufferers like Bakha of Untouchable who are not rebels but innocent victims as they have not acquired the knowledge and awareness of the development in the social and economic sphere.

But through the early novels like Untouchable, Coolie and Two and Leaves and a Bud Anand was able to open the doors that led to a region that was completely ignored. By doing it Anand was in fact confronting various faces of Indian social realities. Anand's own words: 'In Untouchable I face human degradation of millions of rejected. In Coolie I confront the spark of life in Munoo, snuffed out in a few months by 'Civilisation'. In 'Two leaves and a bud' I confront the labourers of the Assam tea plantation under the British machine
civilization working against the deprived. Exposing the realities centred around various spheres of Indian society he raised his strong protest and urged for the reformation that would free the society from various evils that hamper progress. He felt that 'protest all around is necessary-religious protest, metaphysical protest, social protest etc.'

The keen observation and analysis of the cross-section of Indian society and their problems enabled Anand to have a humanistic awareness and understanding of the Indian Social reality in its depth. Thus his novels possess an ideology base don humanist-realism where emphasis is laid on compassion to fellow-beings. Anand prefers to call his art poetic-realism base don humanist values. He says, 'My realism is only superficially like that of the west-European. Deep underneath, all the characters search for their human destiny in the manner of the heroes of our forest books.'

But it is interesting to see that Anand succeeds in fusing the western realism which he had imbibed through the works of Dickens, Balzac, Maxim Gorky, Turgenev and Marxian writers. He also succeeded to a great extent in treating themes based on Indian social realities and analysing them on the basis of European ideologies.
As S.C.Harrex points out, 'Anand has Indianised a western materialist structure derived largely from Marx and has tried to find for this structure, applied to Indian conditions, an alternative to the social order and a realist mode of expression which in the West, has been the methodology of fiction\(^\text{15}\).

By the effective synthesis of various ideologies Anand interpreted Indian realities in their exactness and through his novels which was deep-rooted in the social sphere which compassionately pleaded for a progressive reformation. Anand became a spokesman of his age and society and hence it is apt to mention that his art effectively fused the aspects of humanism and realism.

But along with it, what makes Anand's works significant is his firm faith in man and human labour and it is with this conviction he presents the bitter realities that affect the life of scavengers, coolies, peasants, labourers and other down-trodden sections of the Indian society.

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai shows affinity with Anand in the realistic presentation of life situations and in detail, the transformation taking place in all walks of life. Like
Anand, Thakazhi too dealt with the problems deeply analyzing the root causes and various aspects involved in it. Both the writers maintained a rational and scientific approach in dealing with them. As in the case of Anand, Thakazhi too viewed realism as an effective mode to depict the changing social realities of India in the wake of transformation. And his works richly portray the 'complex and comprehensive set of relations between man, nature and history'. Thakazhi's earlier phase of literary activity, shows realistic tendencies like Anand's and both writers effectively link the individual to the social whole and informs each concrete particular aspects of social life against the background of the significant moments of history.

In the presentation of the life conditions and social factors of the down-trodden section, and in presenting the various social aspects in the phase of a transformation, Thakazhi was not only adopting the method of mere documentation but followed the 'realistic manner of penetrating through the accidental phenomenon of social life to disclose the essence or essentials of a condition selecting and combining them in to a total form and fleshing them out in concrete experience'. Thakazhi's earlier works were a product of such activities.
Thakazhi's earlier novels like *Thendivargam*, *Perillakatha*, *Thottiyyude Makan*, *Rantitangazhi* etc., were products of such activities. His professional life as a lawyer helped him very much to maintain such attitude. He got many opportunities to associate with the problems of the labourers, tenants, fishermen, scavengers etc., which gave him a first-hand knowledge of their personal affairs and the socio-economic aspects that determined their life. These experiences along with the knowledge of Marxian Ideology and the contact with the western realistic and naturalistic literary trends followed by Manupassant, Balzac and Zola helped him to develop a concern with the realities of the contemporary social life at a time when Malayalam novels were concerned with the portrayal of historical themes and life-situations.

A good number of Thakazhi's short stories and novels written in the wake of independence reflected the changing tendencies in social sphere as it was a period noted for transformation in all walks of life. The impact of world-war on the economy, freedom struggle, organisations aiming at social reformation, formation of labour unions, democratic procedures etc., necessitated a tremendous transformation in political, social and economic fields. Along with the changing
realities Thakazhi portrayed the factors responsible for the transformation and analysed them very carefully.

In *Tendivargam* we see the presentation of social inequalities and the impact of Marxian Ideology. The protagonist Kesu finds after careful analysis that only by the destruction of the capitalist forces, social inequalities and miseries be eradicated. We are shown in this novel the organised labour class declaring strike against the capitalists for denying their rights. Though Kesu who now has to look after his sister's child is unable to take part in it, he weaves colourful fancies about the triumph of the proletarians. Here Thakazhi presents various factors that are responsible for the bitter realities and points out the changes that would take place in the society.

In *Perillakkatha* Thakazhi depicts the severe cruelties and exploitation imposed on the poor innocent labourers by the feudal lords. While the members of the old generation silently accept and yield to their fortunes and exploitations, the younger ones strongly protest against the worn-out codes and systems, we are also shown the transition that is taking place in the society against the feudalist forces and institutions and the emergence of the organised labour class.
Thakazhi also exposes the degradation of political organisations in this novel.

*Thottiyude Makan* deserves much appreciation due to various reasons. It was the first Malayalam novel that depicted the lives of the scavengers who led an alienated life from the main stream of the society. It was Thakazhi who created an awareness among the literary circle, that was dominated and pioneered by the elite class that the scavengers are human creatures with flesh and blood and they too had dreams, aspirations and motivations. *Thottiyude Makan*, portrays the lives of characters belonging to three generation. It not only exposed the bitter realities and the pitiable life conditions, but analyses the sociological factors that are behind their tragic realities and this work created a new sensibility in the field of realistic movement in Malayalam fiction. Along with the portrayal of the social life of the outcaste communities, in a realistic a manner, Thakazhi describes the changes taking place in all walks of life and its impact on the scavengers. They are gradually transformed into an organised sect with a sense of class-consciousness and we are shown its evolution very clearly. Along with this he portrays the interior and psychological world and the
hidden desires of many characters like Chudala Muthu, overseer and Mohanan.

*Thottiyude Makan* bears the impact of political struggles and trade union activities that gathered momentum during that period in Kerala, and the influence of Marxian Ideology is very much reflected in this novel. We are shown the strength of the labourers getting organised under a union and their urge to transform the social structure and laws for justice and equality and Thakazhi's social analysis is also based on the Marxian theories. It thus presents the phases of social transformation and the attack against the exploitation by authorities. Thus *Thottiyude Makan* deserves attention three ways. Vividly and realistically, it portrays the day to day lives of the scavenging community with a human concern. Secondly along with the miseries, Thakazhi analyses various factors that determine their course of life on the background of Marxian ideology. Thirdly he presents the social transformation changing the attitude of scavengers and their transition into an organised sect with a sense of awakening and class-consciousness.

But the notable theory is that Thakazhi does not yield his visions completely to doctrines and hence he is
able to get away from portraying type characters or classes and does not become a mere political propagandist. The labourers (scavengers) who appear as chief characters are not idealised and hence do not create stero-typed characters based on the formula framed by protection literary groups. Chudalamuthu and Mohanan are led by their instincts and yields to cruel and treacherous activities.

As R.E. Asher aptly points out that, 'there is a complete avoidance of what might seem an almost inevitable tendency - to contrast an entirely noble labourer with an entirely evil superior. Scavengers are shown as being on occasion not only loyal and living, but fearless, ignorant, superstitious, cringing, treacherous and quarrelsome. This is, of course, not merely an attempt to imitate 19th century French realism, but also away from stressing that no people, but the system is essentially at fault.'

Thakazhi is able to portray realistically various factors governing the lives of the farm labourers without becoming a propagandist and didactic in Rantitangazhi, which is based on the peasant life of Kuttanad. At the same time, he effectively exposes the social evils of exploitation by the feudalist institutions. Here too, he is free from idealising
classes or characters. He pictures certain virtues that existed in the capitalist society even while criticising the anti-human practices. He presents the life-situations with a keen insight into human nature and life and does not yield to generalisation, and effectively balances in the portrayal of social realities and its exposure along with the treatment of human-nature in its psychological depth. As in the case of Tottiyude Makan, Thakazhi here too portrays the phase of transformation in the social sphere and we are shown how the caste-bound society is transformed into a class-bound one. We are also shown the farm labourers getting organised and transformed under a trade union into an awakened sect with a sense of class-consciousness gathering and an awareness of their rights. Along with this, he beautifully portrays the illiterate peasants realising their powers and understanding how inevitable and valuable is their labour strain. They are able to analyse their role in society and express it in a dramatic manner when one of the chief characters raised a question, 'Even if we are there, what will happen if we don't work for them?'

'We will be starving' Kunjappis [drooping head found] a prompt reply. 'And the Thambrans also will be starving'
Ityathi completed it. 'The whole country will be starving'.
This is in fact a moment of realisation of their social relevance and power and it is this awareness that played a dominant role in getting initiated to raise demands for granting justice and rights. This realisation in fact paved the way for the transformation. Kesari A. Balakrishna Pillai comments on this book: 'No other work has yet appeared in Malayalam in which the life of rural peasants in Kerala has been portrayed with so much initiate knowledge and so much emotional appeal as the present work Rantitangazhi'.

Even though Chemmeen is treated as a love-story, Thakazhi does not forget to portray the social realities around fishermen community and he indirectly mentions the socio-economic realities that affect the course of the romantic love which is treated in this novel. But he is more concerned with the racial experiences of the fishermen community and with remarkable accuracy he presents their life-conditions realistically. In Enippadikal, Thakazhi vividly portrays a tremendous epoch in the contemporary history of Kerala, bringing out the complexities of a period. It was a period of transition in all walks of life and Thakazhi is able to depict it with keen insight, observation and accuracy. He was not merely
documenting a transformation period and the activities around it, but was portraying it with a critical analysis. Though it is centred around the political spheres, he is able to correlate it with the interior world of characters involved in it in an effective manner and hence it can be called a political novel that deals with the public world of activity and the internal conflicts of personalities, mixing realism and psychology in a balancing manner.

We are thus shown vivid pictures of social transformation, treated by the two writers in an almost identical manner through various forces and channels. Though set against the background of two different regions of the Indian sub-continent, we get a clear picture of the transition from pre-Independence to the modern world and monarchy replaced by democratic government. Also we get a picture of the transformation from the caste-bound pre-industrial society to the mechanised era which is class-based and various factors involved in the process of transition are analysed in a detailed manner. Though they are set against two regions the social, economic and political aspects have much similarities and they are effectively exposed by these two writers with a concern to the down-trodden sections of the society.
Note


2. Ibid.


9. Ibid., P.86.


15. S.C. Harrex, *Perspectives on Mulk Raj Anand*


