

THE IDEA OF HUMANISM IN PANNALAL PATEL'S NOVELS

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Abstract

Pannalal Patel (1912-1989) is considered an exceptional incident of Gujarati literature, who without any traditional form of training for literary creation, wrote only by his own sensibility. By establishing the distinct image of the subject-content and fiction formation in the field of novel and short-story writing, he could establish his identity among the reputed personalities of Gujarati literature especially as a regional novelist. Pannalal seems somewhat different than his forerunners because without pursuing any ideology, he has depicted the true heart of human being and sang the status of humanity in his novels.

One of the celebrated writers of Gandhian era, Pannalal's approach seems validating the humanitarian aspect. The facets like non-violence, non-cooperation, consciousness of self-dignity, desire to establish right and the awareness to fight against injustice etc. are fully merged in his expression. Pannalal has focused on some evils like caste discrimination and women's exploitation prevailed in the society. The traditional background either in the form of humanitarian values or sanskaras along with social complexities are apparently visible in Pannalal's region. The prime concern in Pannalal's writings is broad humanity. Pannalal concentrates chiefly on the element of love. Though while narrating the story some truth-seeking utterance take place in his writings obviously. His is art for art's sake primarily, yet wholly looking it examines certain ethical standards too. Without pursuing any ideology he can sing and elevates the human values. His appeal seems universal. The evidences reflected in his fictional world offers due justification of his life philosophy.

Key Words: Humanity, love, human values, Gandhian facets, caste-discrimination, women's exploitation, native consciousness, public welfare.

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Pannalal Patel (1912-1989) is considered an exceptional incident of Gujarati literature, who without any traditional form of training for literary creation, wrote only by his own sensibility. By establishing the distinct image of the subject-content and fiction formation in the field of novel and short-story writing, he could establish his identity among the reputed personalities of Gujarati literature especially as a regional novelist. Pannalal was the winner of Narmad Gold-medal, Ranjeetram-medal and many more prizes. *Manvini Bhavai* his *magnum opus* also won him 'Indian Jnananpith Award' in the year 1985. Pannalal's literary career lasted for about 47 years. During this marathon span, he wrote 56 novels, 26 short-novels (collection), 15 books on literature for children, one-act plays, conversions of literary works into drama and miscellaneous (Prakirna) forms. The renowned writers like Sundaram and Umashankar Joshi geared up his genius.

Pannalal is an example of a man who in spite of scant formal schooling, rose to become one of the greatest of Gujarati writers. The source of his creative consciousness is rural background. The major inspiring sources of his creativity are the native dialect, the living standards, the customs, and traditional, orthodox values of the region where he lived for years. Pannalal seems somewhat different than his forerunners because without pursuing any ideology, he has depicted the true heart of human being and sang the status of humanity in his novels. Pannalal himself has confessed: "In reality, I am not an idealist, emotionalist or literary writer. Since the beginning, i.e. when wrote the story, *Kanku*, I am interested only in the human life..." (Pramodkumar Patel 93 Trans.). He does not remain harsh towards the tough realities of life like Umashankar Joshi because his aim is neither to reform the society nor to propagate any form of idealism. He aims at talking an earthly man, showing the manifold mysteries of human incarnation and strength of people in love and separation. He shows the brave face of humanity. One of the celebrated novelists of Gandhian era, Pannalal's approach seems validating the humanitarian aspect. The facets like non-violence, non-cooperation, consciousness of self-dignity, desire to establish right and the awareness to fight against injustice etc. are fully merged in his expression.

His first novel *Valamana* (1940) has been considered the true introductory text of rustic life. Pannalal has preferred the moment and the situation in this short novel with which his artistic sense of testing mysticism of the human heart has been manifested. Monor Mukhi in order to get advantage of victimized Zamku brings her to Ahmedabad. He does this evil business to earn money by selling her to some else. But the person, who wishes to sell her off, seems somewhat changed by heart afterward. He observes the face of his dead daughter Nathi in Zamku's innocent face unknowingly. The flow of latent love awakens in his heart to show his best. As a result, after returning to the village, Mukhi gets her engaged to Moti, the son of Amba. Though, Mukhi has to struggle hard against the group of community to solve the

issue. Finally Monorda accepts Zamku as his own daughter and manages everything for her marriage ceremony. This is the story of Monor Mukhi's changed heart. Monorda's journey with Zamku to Ahmedabad does not remain mere travelling, but also symbolizes his inner and heartfelt journey converting him from the materialistic to humanistic figure. Pannalal has depicted the two aspects of Monorda's Character. Here we find internal and external conflicts of his mentality. The feelings of rage, vexation, fatigue, fear, helplessness, love, excitement, dislike, and agitation of Mukhi's character stand in contrast and moves him by heart. At the end true father in his soul wins and judges to send Zamku back. The character sketch of Manorda seems to be impressed by materialistic world in the beginning, but at the end acquires his native identity after realizing the truth that 'daughters' should not be considered as properties to sell and earn money. The novel to some extent can be considered postcolonial text that defends native cultural identity. In the beginning, Manorda's impression seems somewhat mechanical or colonial mind, who always thinks of his own advantage. Neither feelings nor family refinements prevent him from committing the sin of selling someone else's daughter. While bargaining Zamku he realizes by heart that after all she is at his daughter's place. The sobbing of innocent Zamku moves him by heart, forbade him from committing that sin and his inner soul reminds him of his role as a guardian to judge the future of a girl. The man, who treats her mere selling thing or object to earn money in the beginning, seems completely changed in end and treats her as his own daughter. To him, Zamku now, is like his dead daughter, Nathi. Manorda's native cultural identity is awakened to rescue him from the materialistic trend of the modern world which validates the postcolonial reference in the text. The regional or rustic simplicity has survived his inner one towards the end.

Pannalal has added two epithets at the beginning of his novel titled *Malela Jiv* (1941) which justifies his favour for humanitarian value.

Mathani Tumbadiman Lakh Lakh Moti,

Lya Haiyani Kothali Khali,

Abhagiya! Haiyani Chenthari Thali!

(*Malela Jiv*)

(O Human being! Hundreds of pearls are stored in the gourd-like (plant, a pot or vessel made of its dry rind) head, but the bag of heart is empty, O you unfortunate one! The rag of heart is empty!)

Meaning: The intellect or knowledge is like a pearl. But the heart must be filled with love in human life. If it remains empty, life is meaningless.

While the second one is the well-known statement by Shri Aurobindo:

Din Kok Avashya Ha

Leshe Mrutyu Thaki Prem Jagne Pan Uddhari.

(*Malela Jiv*)

Meaning: Someday surely, the world too shall be saved from death by love.

Pannalal has focused on some evils like caste discrimination and women's exploitation prevailed in the society. His *Malela Jiv* offers the live portrayal of class and caste biased culture. For example, Kanji the protagonist of this novel couldn't marry his beloved named Jivi because of strong wall of caste structure. Though, Kanji himself doesn't favour the said rigid caste system. When his friend Hiro repeatedly reminds Kalu about the lower caste status of Jivi, Kanji tries to convince him through the sayings in dohra (a kind of metre):

Bullocks are by their horns valued,

And a mare by her earlobes:

But how can a human being be valued!

Your heart is unfathomably deep!

(*Kanji and Jivi: A Tragic Love Story* 35)

i.e. one can evaluate a bull from their horns, similarly a horse can be valued from its earlobes, but a human being can only be evaluated by his heart- it doesn't matter whether he or she belongs to a higher caste or a lower one!

Pannalal has depicted the live image of native rulers and oppressive structure of the region, which shows its broader appeal in the novel *Manvini Bhavai* (1947). The colonial authority had rooted its exploiting and harassing structure everywhere in India. Kalu, the protagonist of the novel expresses his anger against British hegemony that merely shoots instead of providing bread to the hungry people in days of famine. Kalu is symbolized as post-colonial face who blames the British Raj as:

“O you damned white man! You brought down the guns and cartridges; couldn't you have brought us some grain instead, wicked one? Here we have death dogging our every step, and in the midst of this calamity you use your carriages only to bring these deadly weapons, life destroying things. Why couldn't you have brought us something life-sustaining instead in those very carriages? You use all your brains- the whole gamut of the proverbial thirty-six arts and skills - for what? Only to deal out death to us...Had you used your powers to search out some means of enhancing life we should have taken you to be a true knower of the 'thirty-six arts and skills'-and a model” (*Endurance A Droll Saga* 394).

Farmer, the producer of grain remains hungry while those who have neither experienced labour nor have ever worked are enjoying the taste of *Roti*. Their store houses are packed with grain forever. Kalu decides to rob the grain from bullock-carts because he could not suffer more injustice:

“This whole hilly belt is now in the throes of hunger for want of grain. And look at this! Here’s Talakchand Karbhari carrying on his tradesman ship. It is Business as usual..... Is this justice or injustice? After all the grain belongs to us- belongs to those who have grown it. Yet those who raised it die of hunger. And then, too, before our eyes these trades-people are carting away what is ours- tantalizing us, leaving us famished and pining. If we have this much of grain the whole village could be fed a whole month...Why the village would come to life again!”

(*Endurance A Droll Saga* 373)

Kalu is the voice of crushed people against the tyranny of native oppressor who are the imitated faces of British Raj. Neil Bissoondath in ‘A Casual Brutality’ states explicitly the hegemonic nuance of internal as well as the external form of colonialism:

“as they (the colonizers) exploited us, so we (the Post-colonials) exploited each other. As they raped our land, so we raped our land. As they took, so we took. We had absorbed the attitudes of the colonizer, and we mimicked the worst in him. We learnt none of his virtues”. (Nayar 99-100)

Dissent is suppressed as elite groups take charge and become more oppressive than the colonial master. Initially, nationalism had helped the struggle against colonial masters but later on it becomes something entirely different. Kalu is the true son of earth. The farmer is considered the father of the world who nourishes the people, how can he be placed among beggars? He thinks: ‘better to die than beg’. When Kalu is forced to beg grain from Sundarji Sheth, he asks Raju:

“Do you know this? Worse than hunger and more terrible, is begging. Hunger melts down our flesh and bones, but this begging, in fact... It actually dissipates our pride, even our very soul... turns everything to water... reduces us to nullity. And remember....” (*Endurance A Droll Saga* 416)

Such utterances makes one realize the true spirit of native consciousness.

Pannalal has incorporated the incident of ‘Religion Conversion’ in a novel *Bhangyanan Bheru* (1957). The tribal youth, Mangalo, who is brought up by Kalu as own son, is Christianized. The interpreter of the Christian Missionaries group tries to convince the illiterate people that if they offer their son to them, they will make them civilized. They distribute the literature to propagate the Christianity: “distribute this... no money! Free to all” and convey the message “Lord Christ... have faith... do love” (193-194. Trans.). Kanako narrates the talk to Kalu and Raju which he has heard from Christian Madam: “If you want to survive from the pains like this famine, come to the refuge of our God”. When John insists Kalu to offer his son, Kalu reacts: “You can say much, but by selling someone else’s son who

is not mine, I do not wish to bring the second famine on this earth, brother John” (202, 204 Trans.). Kalu believes that religious conversion is a sin and practicing of such activities even displeases the nature. Several postcolonial novels deal with the theme of religion and faith, the relation between Christian missionaries and native people. Pannalal has woven together such postcolonial aspect in this novel. The novelist has also mentioned the war between England and Germany in a somewhat humorous tone in the chapter ‘Mangalni Motar’ (Mangala’s Motorcar). When people see the illiterate Mangal converted into an educated youth and modern personality, they appreciate the wonder of British culture. Even a man like Kalu has to alter his firm opinion on true religion: “What makes one see by providing education and teaches him the skill of earning bread, is a true religion. Therefore, he (Mangalo) has been involved in religion of these trustworthy people? Because in our religion ‘Guru’ merely makes us wear Kanthi (necklace) on our neck or offers the Rosary to count its beads, mostly, but in this religion they do not only provide education but also manage jobs. Moreover, they cure on free of charges if the person belongs to another religion like us, are sick”. To add this, Kalu further explains: “And our religion also preaches ‘mercy is the source of religion’. But these dependable men (Christian Missionaries) actually show the practicing (of such preaching)!” Kalu favours the Christian culture to some extent. But Mangalo seems somewhat confused on clashes among religions. The clashes of superiority or inferiority among religions have broken his old-new complexes: “Religion for what? What is religion?” (295, 296 Trans.) In addition to it, the days of the First World War make him nervous, because on one hand, his faith in Bible’s love and forgiveness leads him forward, contrary, his shaken faith wishes to return when he sees the World War being fought by the followers of Bible. Though, he favors the life of innocent and illiterate rustic people who can enjoy the life without **concerning** themselves in life-philosophy. “Then what? They will run away if ordered do so and if asked to come, soon they would be there!” (296. Trans.) It means they do not treat their life rationally. Mangalo thinks that those who are more educated are found more perplexed because too much knowledge and logic places one in a state of dilemma. Thus, Pannalal has mirrored the native identity of rural culture in a sensible manner.

The dramatic irony remains the essential element in a novel *Pachhale Barne* (1947) wherein Kumvarbai gives one of her twin sons to ‘Raj’ as there wasn’t a legal heir to the throne and saves Rajbai, a Thakarani from clutches of evil hands. For the sake of public welfare and removal of their poverty, Kumvarbai leaves her dear son aside, but her own son, Amarsinh after becoming Thakore, exploits and harasses the poor people. The novel *Naa Chhutake* (1955) concentrates on the Gandhian consciousness. The chapter titled *Gandhino Bhekh* (Gandhian Asceticism) in the novel illustrates the Gandhian philosophy. Dalo, the Gandhian

tries to convince his dacoit friend, Ratana to give up the path of committing violence in order to attain freedom from Thakore (the native rulers). He insists that Ratna should pursue the path of non-violence. Ratana is not ready to surrender. Dalo explains: "Ratana, dear friend! I think that our paths are going to alter. Hence, think over it and join with me. You know it, but to endure the beating and control the anger is a sign of true valor. Hence, throw away this false bravery (guns) into the deep water of Jambudia... Forget the enmity against Thakore and Mashur... How many days will they keep us in jail? We shall pursue the Gandhian way of life willingly" (118-119 Trans.). The novelist has depicted the future vision of cultural change of this world through the character sketch of Dalo, the dacoit and Gandhian who imagines that the strategy of war has already been altered, likewise the world will also have to change its calculation that 'one who kills without killing, is a true valiant'. To explain Rupal: the beloved of his daughter, Dalo remarks: "But remember at least, the whole world seems to me changing, otherwise how these Brahmins and Banias dare to challenge the Britishers (who are skilled in thirty-six arts) only with the help of raw cotton thread! Henceforth forgets the fight with weapons" (120, 123 Trans.). The identity of the true social worker is the character of inspector who was once a government officer. He strictly opposes the issue of heavy taxes imposed on poor people. When Thakore satirizes him: "Instead of advising the government, if you are kind enough, why don't you pay the taxes of poor people from your salary?" The inspector soon resigns and takes an oath "to dedicate his life in service to the subjugated brothers of the state" (359 Trans.). While delivering the condolence speech on Dala's death Bhaisaa'b affirms that dependent on violent weapons should note it seriously that one violent dacoit has taken the path of non-violence, is not an accident, but a true prediction of changing era: "Have trust, the sacrifice of Dalabhai would not go in vain, it will surely make us free from drudgery... and will establish the new-era accordingly" (419 Trans.).

The real form of Pannalal's characters excels in the great famine '56 (Era of Vikram: in the year 1956). When majorities of these people have lost their faith from God, man, nature and social system, Kalu neither becomes superstitious nor depressed. This soulful rustic farmer has full trust in humanity of men. He considers that hunger is wretched, not human being. He strictly remains attached to self-respect and therefore doesn't lose the faith in life. He is not ready to beg even when death knocks at his door. He refuses to take Khichadi from Sadavrata (a place where food is served free of cost to needy people) by standing in a queue of drought-stricken people. Raju too, has marvelous nature who does not sell her chastity to survive from hunger; she rejects the merchant's proposal, further gets angry that at any cost she would not corrupt her religion of ideal womanhood. While discussing the issue of scarcity of grain in her house with Kalu, she expresses her helplessness over miserable plight as a woman but

does not yield to circumstances: “That day when I went to the shet’s house to get some grain I saw that granary of his crammed full... overflowing. He praised my beauty and tried to play mischief, attempting to lay his hands on me. That day, returning home empty-handed, I was filled with such resentment, had I been a man I would have looted that granary then and there.” And adds further “... But what could I do? God has made me a woman!” (*Endurance A Droll Saga* 320) Sundaram observes in his introduction to *Bhangyanan Bheru* that Pannalal’s Raju has been manifested as a divine character in the form of Goddess Jagdamba and Chandi. Truly speaking, she is the incarnation of pity. It is clearly visible that more than love the element of pity towards all human beings is absolutely apparent in her character which survives her from physical hunger... positions her to be adjusted with her diseased and poor husband in domestic life... even offers her new strength to survive her beloved Kalu from becoming a kalrakshas (time-being monster) (16 Trans.). While the character sketch of Bhagat remains a selfless servant of humanity. He is such a gentleman who proves like a cool shade and shelter to the village people. He could scrutinize the psychology of human mind well. When Kanji accepts mad Jivi as his life-partner, Bhagat heaving a heavy breath mutters the philosophy over human nature: “O human Heart! How mysterious you are! On one hand you spew the blood of sorrow and suffering; while on the other hand, you sip the nectar of love and joy!” (*Kanji and Jivi: A Tragic Love Story* 259) Pannalal represents the norms of ideology inherited and acquired since ages through his earthly people like Kalu, Raju and Bhagat. These people are like the treasure house of virtues. They seem striving the refinements and courteousness of native culture.

As stated earlier Pannalal neither follows nor advocates any principles or theory in his writing. The systematized form of theoretical perspectives or framing up with a particular theory to convey messages perhaps remained limited in the first half of the 20th century in Indian regional writings. The prime concern in Pannalal’s writings is broad humanity. Pannalal concentrates chiefly on the element of love. Though while narrating the story some truth-seeking utterance take place in his writings obviously. His is art for art's sake primarily, yet wholly looking it examines certain ethical standards too. Without pursuing any ideology he can sing and elevates the human values. His appeal seems universal. The evidences reflected in his fictional world offers due justification of his life philosophy. Here is the detailed account of philosophical utterances represented in his novels. The characters uttering the wisdom in the forms of idioms, proverbs or general statement actually serve as the mouth speech to the writer himself.

Quotes from: *Endurance A Droll Saga* (Manvini Bhavai):

- Wealth may bring on physical pleasures and keep the body well-nourished and all that. But the craving of our hearts is only peace, above all. (45)

- He who digs a hole falls into it, see? (47)
- After-all, our scriptures give pride of place to the householder above the ascetic. (60)
- Blood is thicker than water. (67)
- Burns inflicted with a fire-brand are endurable for they can heal after a while, but the wounds that taunting words inflict death alone can heal! (70)
- Better be a dirty pauper on one's own rather than eat another's salt and thrive! (78)
- It's man alone who has the propensity to tread upon a human heart willfully, while even cattle will harm you only when they can't help it. (84)
- There is no other God in the world greater than man. (85)
- One gets in life just what one is destined to have. (172)
- Man's career on earth is a bout with swords: He who knows how to wield the sword knows how to live. And he who doesn't is as good as dead through living....! (184)
- Hunger, that burning in the stomach, it may be possible to bear; what's truly unendurable is heart-burn! (264)
- Hunger is indeed the ultimate wretchedness! (330)
- Sighs of the oppressed poor would never go in vain; the hide of dead cattle (bellows) will turn iron itself to ash. (409)

Quotes from: *Kanji and Jivi: A Tragic Love Story (Malela Jiv)*

- Caste doesn't matter ... One's value is reflected in one's eyes!"(14)
- If a man doesn't have a feeling for his fellow men, then for whom shall we have it, brother?"(25)
- If our body gets soiled with a blot, it is removable as the new skin will be formed sooner or letter; but if our soul is soiled with a shameful blot then the blot will remain even in the next birth."(94)

Hence, Pannalal's region mainly depicts the pre and post-independence phase of nation. He is considered a representative of Gandhian period [1915-1945]. His colloquial expression has enriched Gujarati prose literature to a larger extent. Pannalal emphasizes the value based culture incorporating Gandhian bearings, Indianization and simplification. Literature of this period is characterized by humanism, social consciousness and perseverance of national spirit. Though, the modern Gujarati prose has been ushered in by Narmad at the initial stage, but along with Gandhi, Munshi, Meghani and Darshak, Pannalal too has contributed much in enriching it during this age. Gujarati novel has become a household and has generated the consciousness through addressing regional and national issues at this stage. The traditional

background either in the form of humanitarian values or *sanskaras* along with social complexities are apparently visible in Pannalal's region.

Pannalal has concentrated on various subject matters like true love, natural disaster (famine), middle class morality, female exploitation, orthodox structure of society, native oppression, rustic simplicity, regional consciousness, Gandhian thought, human relationship, religious conventions and superstitions. Manilal Patel in his essay on 'Pannalalni Navalkathaoman Vastav and Kala' notes that 'Pannalal is the writer of reality and truth, and he possesses the self-sense of transforming the reality into fiction and his natural sense itself remains the creative performance. Besides, possessing the wealth of life-experiences, the rural milieu and the whole rural perception, he has also the assets of direct practical approaches of life. Throughout the life he remained the assessor of the human mind, human nature and its activities. He narrates the 'crucial moments' often in his novels and places the 'two real' against each other at the same time, as a result of it the constructed juxtaposition makes his text more meaningful (Chaudhari & Dave 316, 317, 319 Trans.).

While expressing his views on writing activity in *Alakmalak*, Pannalal has shown 'what should be the ideal religion of a writer', he seems to advocate the postcolonial note. He favors the seeking of truth from both ancient and modern sense of creativity. He is of the view that the writer in modern time should not strictly adhere the transitory changing past values of the world. On the contrary, mere attracting towards the romantic waves too would not serve all the purposes. But by setting in between the old and newer conflicts, the writer has to discover the truth and will have to write with faith and tranquility (19 Trans.). To such extent, Pannalal seems to favour postcolonial aspect in his utterances.

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