

**REALISM AND SOCIAL CONCERN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
A. J. CRONIN'S *THE CITADEL* AND N. A. PARTHASARATHY'S  
*SATHYAVELLAM***

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**Abstract**

*Literature, which traditionally prevents the mankind from doing wrongful deeds, is the mirror of contemporary life. Especially, 20<sup>th</sup> century literature stresses the need of idealists having social concern besides documenting the bitter social realities as such. Set of principles sans the contemporary knowledge of social realism and rationalism can never be named after idealism. The proposed paper is to be a comparative study on realism and social concern in the select novels of A. J. Cronin and NA. Parthasarathy. The researcher focuses realism as a style of art or literature that shows or describes people and things as they are in real life (Webster n.p). The selected novels, Cronin's *The Citadel* and Parthasarathy's *Sathyavellam* are filled with idealists who want to protect and upgrade the lives of the suppressed. The primary aims of the proposed study are: a) to compare the role of realism in the select novels of A. J. Cronin and Na. Parthasarathy, b) to compare the level of social concern among the protagonists of the select novels. The present research will once again ensure the universal saying: literature is one, humanity is one.*

**Key words:** *Comparative Literature, Realism, Rationalism, Social concern, Idealists.*

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Literature, the inexhaustible source of timely guidance, has been serving the humanity by creating awareness -- awareness of the past, present and future; historical novels excavate the past; social novels unveil the present; and the stories of fantasy often deal with the future. The researcher focuses on the second type – awareness of the present state – called realism. Webster Dictionary defines realism as ‘a style of art or literature that shows or describes people and things as they are in real life.’ (n.p)

The proposed paper is to be a comparative study on realism and social concern in the select novels of A. J. Cronin and Na. Parthasarathy. A. J. Cronin's *The Citadel* and Parthasarathy's *Sathyavellam* are the novels chosen for the study. The primary aims of the proposed study are: a) to compare the role of realism in the select novels of A. J. Cronin and Na. Parthasarathy, b) to compare the level of social concern among the protagonists of the select novels.

Archibald Joseph Cronin, a Scottish novelist and a physician, is well-known for his realism and social conscience:

His strengths included his compelling narrative skill and his powers of acute observation and graphic description. Some of his stories draw on his medical career, dramatically mixing realism, romance and social criticism. Cronin's works examine moral conflicts between the individual and society as his idealistic heroes pursue justice for the common man. (Cronin n.p)

Cronin's close observation of his field, as a medical practitioner, is reflected in the National Book Award winning novel, *The Citadel*. The inner conflicts of Andrew Manson, an idealistic physician, is the best example to prove his acute scanning over the follies of his own field. Cronin himself states,

I have written in *The Citadel* all I feel about the medical profession, its injustices, its hide-bound unscientific stubbornness, its humbug ... The horrors and inequities detailed in the story I have personally witnessed. This is not an attack against individuals, but against a system. (*The Citadel* n.p)

Manson works as an assistant to Dr. Page in Drineffy. Shocked by the unsanitary conditions of that place, he tries his level best to improve the conditions with the aid of Dr. Philip Denny, a

cynical semi-alcoholic. Christine, his wife, helps her husband with his silicosis research. Dedication towards research makes him an MD. Cronin does not idealize Manson as a perfect man with no evils. The character is chiselled with care and gifted with life when the author makes him commit the dual errors - he becomes money minded and drifts away from his wife. But his originality is soon restored with the death of a patient. His wife meets with an accident and dies. An incompetent surgeon, who is accused of murder by Manson, takes revenge on him. Manson forcefully justifies his deeds during the hearing and preserves honesty.

Parthasarathy's *Sathyavellam* depicts the corrupted higher educational system of Tamil Nadu during the 1970's; its flexibility to the politicians and rigidity to the straight forward teachers and students. The novel strongly illustrates the fact that every nook and corner of the contemporary society is affected by the misuse of political powers. Even the educational institution is no exception in this regard. Subash Chandra Pandiyan, the protagonist, is a student, doing his second year collegiate education. He and his friend Mohan Das are nominated respectively as secretary and head in the student council election at Malligaipanthar University. Tamilselvan and Anbarasan are their rivals. As they have strong political background, they play all types of nasty tricks to win the election. But, Pandiyan and his friends overcome all the issues and are successfully elected as leaders. The victory makes the opposite party more ferocious. Their political supporters get more and more angry; their inhuman atrocities earn them betrayal from all sorts of society - students, teachers, labourers and of the public. But, some selfish members from each group support the atrocities. The students win at last, as they have been constantly supported by Annachi, a true Gandhian, Kannukiniyal, beloved of Pandiyan and Manavalan, a good-natured alumni of Malligaipanthar university.

Kannukiniyal, studying Diploma in Drama, willingly shoulders his social burdens. In fact, she is the one who compels Pandiyan to enter into the social issues. Na. Parthasarathy excavates the bitter realities that are buried under political power. Its impact is omnipresent. Na. Parthasarathy takes a dig at the issue by depicting the involvement of the politicians in the student council election at Malligaipanthar University. As Mohan Das rightly states,

The rulers are becoming more and more fanatic,  
as they wish to win in all sort of elections -from  
panchayat board to the university union.

If they are to lose, they won't hesitate to stop that  
election in every possible way. (Parthasarathy 44)

The first chapter, in *The Citadel*, introduces the hard working, self contented young hero, Andrew Manson. He is so much excited that he receives his first appointment. He is to work under Dr. Page. He is on the way to Drineffy where the unsanitary conditions haunts him. Dr. Denny describes the unsanitary conditions as follows:

There's no hospital, no ambulance, no X rays, no anything. If you want  
to operate you use the kitchen table. You wash up afterwards at the  
scullery bosh...In a dry summer the kids die like flies with infantile  
cholera. (Cronin 13).

Besides, A. J. Cronin unveils the prevailing state of the panel system in the Pre Scotland War England; the system was rotten to its core. Many of the doctors treating the mine workers are found to be under qualified.

Dr. Bramwell, a third panel doctor at Drineffy in *The Citadel*, is so ignorant that he could not differentiate between the pancreas inflammation and the thymus gland inflammation. (Cronin 25) One day, he talks of Mr. Emlyn Hughes, with Manson. He said that Mr. Emlyn has some kind of mental trouble. Dr. Bramwell wants Manson to give a medical certificate that declares Emlyn as a lunatic. Manson examines the patient and surprised, as Emlyn is suffering from myxoedema. So, he suggests a new treatment and Emlyn is cured. But Dr. Bramwell is much delighted over the great victory, and propagates it as his own.

Ravanasami, the fake MLA in *Sathyavellam*, wrongly abbreviates Malligaipanthal into Mallai. When the well wishers of Tamil voices against the flaw, Polilvalavanar, a Tamil Professor comes to his rescue; he even goes to the level of writing verses on the MLA. Like Dr. Bramwell, the MLA has false pride that prevents him from accepting his ignorance.

Thayumanavar, the vice-chancellor of Malligaipanthal University, is a puppet in the hands of the mighty. He is selected for the position, setting apart many deserving erudite. As a result, he is to repay his gratitude in terms of accepting the mean and denying the worthy. Even in the student council election, he has no power; he has to obey each and every word of the minister and other political leaders. He does all kind of menial jobs to bring an end to the election. He tries to stop the election by saying 'the prevailing situation both in the university campus and among the students is not as comfortable as to conduct the election.' (Parthasarathy 49) But, in reality, there is no such situations exist; Anbarasan along with some rowdies attack Pandian and his group to make their statement – the vice chancellor's notice -- a true one. The registrar and the sub-registrar are controlled not by their conscience but by the vice-chancellor. But, the protagonist and his men drive the rowdy elements away. They do not even complaint the matter to anyone as they are aware of their enemy's true intention. Still the vice chancellor and the registrar try to prevent the students from conducting the election. They use the previous night riot to fulfill their dream. But, the students break the hurdle with their unity. The vice-chancellor allows police into the university campus and makes a request to the police to arrest Mohan Das and Pandiyan for no valid reason. This atrocity earns the students' angry. Unable to control the students, the vice- chancellor orders the police to release the students. As Pandian rightly indicates,

many intellects have, being at big positions, rotten the taproots of society invisibly, with their dishonesty, like the root--warms. Root--warms are very dangerous than the leaves--warm and gypsy moth caterpillar. (Parthasarathy 77)

The fake politicians even kidnap Pandian and they forcefully get his signature as if he wishes to get his election nomination withdrawn. But, Annachi and some students restore Pandian safely.

The corruption that took place in the educational institutions is best presented in the select novel; even the murders that are decorated with pseudo-truths are documented clearly. Manavalan, registers some bitter truths. One such is as follows:

Pandiyar knew the atrocities committed before the student council elections very well. Before a couple of years, Muthuramalingam, a twenty years old student had worked hard for another student nominating the assembly as Additional Secretary. He had been called as if one of his friends called him; He was beaten to death and was thrown into the swimming pool. The vice-chancellor, police and the RDO hid the truth by giving the false news to the newspaper – ‘student commits suicide by drowning due to severe stomach pain. (Parthasarathy 91)

Another notable death that evokes the students angry is the suicide Mary Thangam, a medical student. She is abused by a Professor, a close relative of the MLA and she commits suicide. Pandian and his friends try their level best to safeguard the justice. But they are able to get only an eyewash victory.

Dr. Llewellyn, in *The Citadel*, told Manson about a convention among the doctors of the place. They paid him one fifth of their earnings. Manson is surprised at the atrocity. He united doctors against him but the attempt was a failure. So Manson takes his higher studies and freed himself. Pandian is bold enough to break all the hurdles and to emerge as a young leader. The MLA, an illiterate, desires to get an honorary Doctorate from Malligaipanthar University. This is an intellectual bribe that he wishes get from a shareholder of the university who wishes to get some acres of land at a lowest prize from the government. But, Pandian and his friends put an end to the atrocities with the aid of Annachi, a true Gandhian.

Manson wants to create a medical revolution. He thought that Mary Boland, his patient, could not be cured under Dr. Throughgood, a famous orthodox doctor. So he decided to admit her under Mr. Stillman. This creates a big problem since Mr. Stillman is not a doctor; he is an American expert in lung diseases yet not a qualified doctor. Malligaipanthar University is brimming with fake teachers – a loyal vice--chancellor who fears the politicians, a registrar and sub-registrar, abiding by the words of the vice-chancellor, Tamil Professor writing verses on the fake politicians and the head-warden strictly following the footsteps of the rich.

Manson is surrounded by incompetent physicians -- Dr. Urquhart was an old man with no inspiration. Dr. Medly was a deaf and he hides his disability through lip-reading. Dr. Oxborrow was a good preacher rather than a good doctor. Manson wanted to create unity among them. Besides Dr. Llewellyn was having his share for no service

*Sathyavellam* starts with Pandian's journey towards his social life as a budding leader; *The Citadel* starts with Manson's as an Assistant physician to Dr. Page. He loves and marries Christine, a good-hearted; And, Pandian loves Kannukiniyal, an idealist; both the heroes encounter problems that affect their career strongly but they managed to gain victory, as justice is on their side. Both the heroines direct their lovers, when they deviate from the path of righteousness. Like Dr. Bramwell, the MLA in *Sathyavellam* has false pride that prevents him from accepting his ignorance. Though the heroes soulfully dedicate their life to get justice they meet failure in one point or the other. When comparing Parthasarathy's Pandian with Cronin's Manson, it is notable that the level of social

concern imbibed in them is equal; But, these two leaders get their inspiration from others – Pandian respects and is guided by Manavalan, while the other one has Dr. Philip Denny in the respective place. The biggest similarities between the writers are clearly traced out at the end; the authors manifest their protagonists true leadership quality in the absence of their inspirations; both the protagonists make a revolution in their respective field – Medicine and Education; both the novels value the wise instead of the mere book worms. The selected novels document the contemporary realism in the respective fields ; both the protagonists are highly service-minded; yet, there are some notable differences, as no two work of art can be alike in every aspects. However, the selected novels once again prove the universal fact – *humanity is one, literature is one.*

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