Chapter I

Conceptualising Literary Controversies, Narratives and Communities

Literary controversies are not new to any literary or linguistic community. They arise without notice and cause not only furore in society but also serious debates on the questions of language, literature, interpretation, creativity, history, truth, freedom of expression, fundamentalism, state, community, democracy, and citizenship etc. Throughout history, the hegemonic social groups in different societies have attempted to suppress anything that conflicts with or anyone who disagrees with their beliefs. Though literary controversies are relatively of short duration in terms of repercussions and implications, they shake the stability of society and pose threat to writers' lives as in the case of *The Satanic Verses* controversy (1988). Though there exist tons of literature on specific literary controversies rarely we find serious academic studies on them. One of the reasons for this inadequacy could be that literary controversies are seen as spontaneous and sporadic moments in the otherwise smooth history of literature. They are seen as aberrations in the history of literature. Secondly, there seems to be a feeling that any study on literary controversy does not enhance our literary understanding. Thirdly there is a general feeling that literary controversies are inconsequential to the history of literature and therefore they do not merit any literary attention. The text-centered theories of literature ignored literary controversies with out any hesitation. Hence, they have remained anecdotal in the literary history.

Literary controversies are neither mere expressions of anger nor isolated instances or aberrations. They are inextricably linked with the socio-political contexts in which they are played out. Academicians have usually conceptualised literary controversies as instances of 'fundamentalism' or 'communalism'. However, frequent occurrences of controversies around literary narratives, their intensity and debates raised around them have made it difficult to establish a precise cause or reason for literary controversies. Drawing a typology of literary controversies has been rendered difficult due to multiple
reasons and unpredictable implications of literary controversies. Though India has not remained innocent of controversies around censorship or banning of literary or historical narratives, to the best of our knowledge, there are hardly any attempts to study and understand systematically the problems and issues surrounding them.

Nevertheless, recent interest in interdisciplinary researches, increasing awareness of questions related to the nature of language and its relationship with power has kindled interest in literary controversies. In this area, a few scholars have attempted to explain literary controversies in socio-political terms\(^1\). They have all investigated the complex relationship between writing, reading and the politics of interpretation. That apart, more importantly, they have addressed a complex connection between language, society and culture. The efforts of a very few but extremely effective and insightful studies of the above kind are far reaching. It is very relevant and significant for us to pick up the issues raised by them and work toward a conceptual framework within which literary controversies can be productively studied.

In this dissertation, *Narratives and Communities: A Study of Select Literary Controversies in Karnataka* we intend to explore relationships between narratives and communities. We focus on the select literary controversies in the literary history of modern Karnataka. We examine the *how* and *why* of literary controversies citing specific instances in which certain communities have demanded the state government of

\(^{1}\) There are many social scientists and literary critics who have looked at literary controversies from different perspectives. The controversy around Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 generated variety of perspectives on different issues. For instance, Charles Taylor considers the Rushdie controversy as a blot on the western pride over the freedom of expression and plural culture. He interrogates the western (the English) concept of freedom of expression (1989, 118-122). Feroz Jussawalla applies the Saidian framework of orientalism to study Rushdie's work and describes *The Satanic Verses* as orientalist in mimicking the west (1989,106-116). Sourayan Mookherjea believes that Rushdie has taken up the function of advocacy of migrants in the metropolitan culture of England. It is due to writers like Rushdie that invisibility of minority migrants from the third world countries has become visible in the first world countries (1992-3, 107-127). Peter Bayer sees the controversy as the result of Muslim community's increasing anxiety over the western domination and globalisation (1994:3). Apart from these, Monica Juneja (1997) discusses the controversy around M.F.Hussain's paintings when the Right Wing forces tried to destroy his paintings. She points out that it was the anxiety of losing control over the public sphere, which resulted in coercion on M.F.Hussain by the Hindu communalists. Chitra Panikkar (2000) examines the censorship controversy around James Joyce's *Ulysses* and the question of sexuality.
Karnataka to ban certain literary texts or to expurgate certain portions of literary texts for they hurt the 'sentiments' of communities.

In the recent past, different communities have actively intervened and attempted to contest certain literary narratives in Karnataka. However, such visible intervention has not been properly understood. Therefore, the main focus of the study is to locate literary controversies in their larger social contexts and to examine their relationship with communities. This dissertation has a definite focus. We wish to examine literary controversies related to the modern narratives of Viraśaivism raised by the Viraśaiva community in Karnataka.

In this first chapter, we outline the area of study, its scope and clarify certain conceptual categories employed in the study. The chapter is divided into eight sections. In the first section, we try to understand different kinds of literary controversies and their scope across different issues. In the second section, we explicate the notions of narrative, community and literary controversy. The third section attempts to explain the relationship between literary controversies and the Viraśaiva community. The fourth section briefly gives details about why only certain 'literary' controversies are chosen for our study rather than 'non-literary' controversies. The fifth section delineates the socio-geographical profile of the Viraśaivas and the Viraśaiva community. The sixth section will brief about the methodology adopted in the dissertation. The seventh section is a discussion of different approaches and theorisations of literary controversies and communities. The last section is about the critical engagement with the four theorists of literary controversies.

I
Towards a Typology of Literary Controversies

The most contentious literary controversies in the recent past were around two English novels viz., Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Taslima Nasreen's *Lajja*.

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2 The Viraśaiva community is also known as the Lingayath community. However, throughout the dissertation the term Viraśaiva is used except in those cases wherein the term Lingayath is inseparable from the contexts under study. We give detailed information about the community later in the chapter, pp. 16-23.
These controversies exemplify the complex nature of literary controversies. The controversy around *The Satanic Verses* engendered violent reactions from the Muslim community in many countries around the world. As soon as the novel was published in 1988 in Britain, some Muslim leaders immediately called for a ban on the book and prosecution of Rushdie for libel. When the then Prime Minister of the Britain, Margaret Thatcher, refused to heed to the demand of the Muslim community, the first significant Muslim demonstration against the book took place in Bolton in December 1988. Copies of the novel were publicly burnt. Immediately thereafter, Rushdie's novel attracted international attention. It was banned in India within a few months of its publication in England. In the following weeks of 1989, the novel was banned in South Africa, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Somalia, Bangladesh, Sudan, etc. The main criticism against Rushdie's novel was that it caricatured the sacred image of Mohammad, the prophet and the novel was seen as blasphemous. The second biggest controversy was around Taslima Nasreen’s *Lajja*, which first occurred in Bangladesh and later on spread to other parts of the world. The novel angered the Muslim community not only in Bangladesh but also elsewhere. In India the Central Government banned its circulation. These two literary controversies brought the issues of freedom of expression and Muslim community’s religious beliefs into sharp focus. The two controversies were seen as the sites of battle between the 'secular/progressive' forces and the Muslim ‘fundamentalists’.

On the surface, the above-mentioned novels were opposed on religious grounds but there are several other instances in the history of English literature of banning books for reasons other than religion. Issues of social ethics and morality have been invoked to restrict freedom of expression. For example, Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) was banned on the grounds of 'obscenity' and the author was put in the pillory for his political positions. The Catholic Church banned Voltaire's *Candide*, published in 1759, for

3 This English novel illustrates the difficulties of a Hindu family in the Muslim majoritarian country in the aftermath of the demolition of Babri Masjid (1992) in India. When this novel was published, it was alleged that the author deliberately humiliated the Muslims describing them as violent but expressed full sympathies with the Hindus.

4 James Sutherland discusses the prosecution of the novel in the new edition of *Moll Flanders* (1959).

containing "immoral" descriptions. In the eighteenth century, literary books were banned on the grounds of general morality and human values. The question of religion was never directly raised during this period while banning a literary work. For example, Nathaniel Hawthorne's masterpiece *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)\(^6\) was censored for it was considered as pornographic and obscene. Harriet Beechar Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)\(^7\) was banned because it was alleged that the book contained 'obscene language'. Gustave Flaubert's *Madam Bovary* (1857)\(^8\) was banned from circulation for it was seen as a work that could corrupt the minds of the reading public. It was also considered "obscene". In 1885, the Concord Public Library in Massachusetts banned Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, labelling it as "trash and suitable only for the slums"\(^9\).

The early twentieth century was also marked by several trials, literary censorships and controversies around literary works. For example, D.H. Lawrence's novels were in the eye of controversy and he constantly fought against censoring his novels. In 1915, his novel *The Rainbow* was suppressed on the grounds of obscenity in Britain and the copies of the novel were destroyed without prosecution\(^10\). In 1928, British publishers refused to print his another novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1922)\(^11\) because it was accused of having graphic descriptions of sexual life, which were uncommon for the time. In the face of the offensive against the novel and upon being denied publication in Britain, Lawrence published it in Italy. The copies of the novel published in Italy were later seized and destroyed by the customs officers at Dover. His novels were tried in the courts of Britain and America in subsequent years. Both the English and the American courts counted his novels as obscene. James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922)\(^12\) was proscribed on the charges of vulgarity, sexuality and he was held responsible for causing moral


\(^7\) For details on this controversy see the introduction to the novel (1970).

\(^8\) Reference to the controversy is discussed in introduction to the novel (1950)

\(^9\) Alfred Kazin (1981)

\(^10\) *The Times*, an English newspaper in England, reported in 1915 that 1,011 copies of the novel were destroyed. For the original report see R.R. Draper's *D.H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage* (1970).


\(^12\) See Chitra Panikkar's article "The Obscenity question" (2000) for details about the controversy.
degeneration in the society. Bernard Shaw's *Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet* (1909)\(^{13}\) was banned in England for propagating political ideology of Irish nationalism that was against the British rule.

Literary controversies always do not attract international attention outside a particular linguistic/cultural community. There are several instances in the history of censorship where literary controversies were very local as far as the scope and consequences are concerned. For example, Vladmir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955)\(^{14}\) was banned on charges of vulgarity in France but there was no objection to the novels in America. This was quite the reversal of the previous case when America did not allow *Ulysses* for circulation while it was published and circulated in France. In the case of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Ulysses*, the ban on them in America and England had religious colours. Banning of these novels was legitimised on the grounds of protecting the religious ethics of Christianity, family values and ethics of marriage in the Christian world. Therefore, these controversies were not confined to only 'literary' factors. They involved non-literary factors such as defining and recasting Christian way of life, marriage, sexuality and human relationships. This was accomplished in the name of certain 'humane values', which were seen as inseparable from literary values. The above novels and plays were contested precisely because they were against the established values of humanity and morality.

In all the above-cited controversies literary texts were understood as embodiment of human values and virtues and therefore, they were expected to contribute to the larger goals of humanity, brotherhood and communal harmony. The questions of public morality, ethics, sexuality, obscenity etc. dominate the literary controversies and they are also inextricably linked with several other issues such as history, literature, freedom of expression, state, democracy, public sphere, communities, etc. Therefore, it is important for us to extend the study of literary controversies to non-literary domains.

\(^{13}\) Details about this controversy are available in Lucy McDiarmid's article "Augusta Gregory, Bernard Shaw, and the Shewing-Up of Dublin Castle" (1994).

II
Narratives, Literature and Communities

According to the Oxford English Dictionary the term 'narrative' means an account or a commentary of something either in written or in spoken form. A narrative can be, to put it in the words of Abrams, "a story, whether in prose or verse, involving events, characters, and what the characters say and do" (Abrams, 1993: 123). This description of narrative by Abrams indicates only literary perception. Narratives that exist outside the realm of literature are not considered in such definitions. The rise of modern linguistic studies and the subsequent development of the Formalist and the Structuralist approaches to different forms of writing deepened the scholarly interest in the study of narratives. Theories of narratives found much significance among French Structuralists. For example, Roland Barthes' *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* (1977) played a crucial role in furthering the studies on narratives. During the latter part of the 1960s, however, Barthes grew increasingly sceptical about the structuralist approach to language, literature and cultural sign systems in general and, influenced by early post-structuralist theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan, had begun to develop a new approach to the analysis of narratives which he styled 'textual analysis'. The impact of these collective influences led Barthes to develop an approach to the reading of narrative texts which, instead of seeking to relate texts to a structuralist notion of the abstract system of narrative, foregrounds the involvement of texts in the vast intertextual arena of cultural codes and meanings. Textual analysis, based on an intertextual notion of meaning, replaces the apparently scientific and objective approach of structuralism with an emphasis on the openness of the text and the productive role of the reader of the text. In textual analysis a text has meaning only when a reader activates the potential meanings intertextually 'present' within it. A text, viewed intertextually, only exists in the act of reading. Such quests for a general grammar and theory of narrative have initiated studies on literary forms such as novel, short story, folklore and so on. The Structuralist/Formalist studies and subsequent theories in the area of narratology set the stage for further theoretical formulations. Some of these theories still continue to inform the contemporary studies on narratives.
The early eighties witnessed a shift in the scholarly focus of narratology. It moved away from predominantly semiotic and linguistic concerns. Literary and linguistic scholars, philosophers, historians, anthropologists examined the issues of narratives in relation to variety of texts apart from the literary. Gradually, the analysis of narratives assumed an interdisciplinary nature. Barthes recognized not only the literary forms of narration but also the cinematic, the historic, and the mimetic, etc. According to him,

> We find narrative in myths, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, and conversation (Cited in Chhibber, 1986: 202).

Barthes’s notion of narratives cuts across the boundaries of modern disciplines. Accordingly, many of the methodological questions derived from history, philosophy, socio-linguistics and so on were incorporated in subsequent studies on narratives. It is precisely as a result of such interdisciplinary efforts, that the general notion that literature is 'imaginative', 'creative' and fictional, while history is 'objective', 'actual' and 'scientific', is no more tenable in the contemporary academia. History with the capital H is considered as one among the several kinds of narratives. Hence, it is not possible to distinguish between History and Literature but one can think about the relation between historical and literary narratives.

Hayden White, a historian, has demonstrated the elements of fiction and tropes of language in historiography. He has raised questions of narrative representation and its politics both in history and literature. He has looked at the nature of representation in historiography emphasizing on the role, function and power of narratives (Hutcheon, 1989:50). In his *Melahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (1973), White establishes that scripting history is prefigured in a tropological mode (metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy and irony). He shows how the language of history is not free from the figurative play of meaning that is always associated with literature. However, White confines himself to dismantling the notion that history is either scientific or objective. Another historian Keith Jenkins goes a step further to point out the
subjective elements and ideologies in shaping the discourses of historiography. He
opines,

History remains inevitably a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian's
perspective as a ‘narrator’...historian's viewpoint and predilections still shape the
choice of historical materials, and our own personal constructs determine what we
make of them (Jenkins, 1991: 12).

White and Jenkins' theorisation of 'history as narrative' need not lead us to reduce
everything to a linguistic/narrative process. There are many other aspects of narratives.
They are related primarily to questions such as how certain narratives are established
firmly and why; what kinds of narratives gain significance and in which contexts. So,
ideologies that determine narratives of literature, religion or history need more scholarly
attention. In order to probe into these aspects we need to move away from 'linguistic
turn' of narratology to the 'cultural turn'.

*Narratives: From Mallory to Motion Pictures* (1985) is another critical text in this
direction. In the preface to this book, the editor, Jeremy Hawthorn points out the recent
developments in the field of narratives. He stresses on the historical, social, textual and
generic aspects of narratives for analysing the narratives. He opines that narratives
involve an act of interpretation from the beginning. What he means by interpretation is
the process of recollecting, selecting and presenting the past in an ordered version. Other
essays in the book examine the narratives in various forms of writing such as magazines,
pamphlets, novels, criticism, etc. He has analysed the ideologies that influence the
production and dissemination of narratives.

Narratives are neither independent nor are they self-constitutive. They are
constructed in a systematic and formal way. According to Bannell and Hunt, "narratives
provide a link between culture as system and culture as practice" (1999:17). They point
out that a culture is dependent on a continuing process of deconstruction and
reconstruction of the public and the private narratives. To them,

Narrative is an arena in which meaning takes form, in which individuals connect
to the public and social world, and in which change, therefore become possible
(Bannel and Lynn, 1999; 17).
They consider actual narrative forms, their development over time and their eventual impact on historical practice as well. They notice how narratives get their power from being woven into the daily life.

Question of agency in shaping narratives is very vital. For example, description of an event of the past in the present differs from narrative to nan-alive. Different narrations of an event are not naturally told and they need not be 'true' accounts, as we would like to believe, but are constructed by different agential interests. Constructing a past embodies some amount of memorizing process linked to the available cultural and material patterns. As Neera Chandhoke point outs,

Narratives of memory, we thus comprehend, are not about summoning up a long forgotten or hazy past, or about a 'technique of recall'; they are about making causal connections between things. As a complex exercise in connection and thereby interpretation, the narrative—never wholly real but neither wholly imagined—will always be more than a sum of events that the narrator recounts to us (Chandhoke, 2003:143-144).

Therefore, why the narrator recounts a narrative to us, how s/he recounts it, in which context a narrative is constructed by the narrator, what is the effect of such narrative on the reader/community etc. are some of the important questions that we may investigate. According to Chandhoke, another aspect of narratives or narrativisation is that they act as "power mechanisms" (ibid: 145). What she means by power mechanisms is the power of narratives to dictate the audiences “to imagine that ‘this’ or ‘that’ occurred in this and not that way” (ibid: 145). The process of narration involves an act of attributing significance while ignoring the other as being simply insignificant. In other words, the process of narrating a story always constitutes an act of exclusion and inclusion. What is highlighted and what is marginalized in the story is dependent upon the personal commitments of a narrator, his/her ideology and discursive practices.

Production of narratives, their dissemination/performance is not a matter of an individual choice. Since narratives are part of society and culture, group/collective imagination of narratives too will have multiple implications on narratives of literature and history. Chandhoke demonstrates 'the collective' engagement with narratives in the
context of the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi issue in 1992. The narratives, in this issue, were projected as though the majority Hindu community was victimized and it was turned helpless before the Muslim minority. The ‘traumatic’ condition of the Hindus was narrated in such a manner that the issue culminated in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in the hands of the Hindus. The collective and selective memories about Lord Rama, the Hindu culture and the Hindu Rashtra were all harnessed to mask as well as to maintain the domination of the majority Hindus over the minorities. It is precisely this ‘collective’ narration in which the present dissertation is interested.

III

Narratives and communities

Narratives and communities are related in a distinct way. Literary controversies are the instances, which help us to understand the relationship between narratives and communities. The role of narratives in forming and naturalizing an image or an identity of a community is vital. They are very important for the communities because they are socially symbolic acts. Nevertheless, it is difficult as well as problematic to assume that there exists a direct relationship between narratives and communities. The collective memories form narratives of communities and help the communities establish the same. In the process of narrating a past or an event, new knowledge is created. Creating new knowledge is followed by consistent efforts to legitimise it. Though the individual members play a crucial role in the production of narratives for the communities, the latter are not passive receivers. Sometimes the narratives created by an individual are acceptable to the community and some other times, they are not. However, an individual writer and the collective consciousness of a particular community may have commonly shared narratives of history. The differences between the two can be over what exactly constitutes the past and what should constitute the past in the present and for the future.

The attempt to produce literary and historical narratives can also be a way of constructing a ‘community identity’. The construction of narratives of history, religion or literature is a way of constructing a universe of events around an identity. In the context of literary controversies the construction of community identity through the narratives of
history, literature or religion can either be "a question of empowerment" (Friedman, 1992: 837) or a question of reasserting its dominance and hegemony. Narratives allow the communities to exercise 'authority' over representation and retain it to contest anything that runs against their conventions of narration and representation.

Community is not made up in vacuum. It is a group of people coming together for achieving or realizing a common goal by means of exhibiting a set of commonly shared feelings or interests. This act of coming together is possible only if the members of a social group imagine themselves as belonging to one community. The imagination of 'our' community is always in relation to another imagined community, i.e. 'their' community. This imagination of 'we' and 'they' constitutes the part of a community's consciousness to influence its social and political processes. The imagination indicates a certain transcendental character, a recognition obtained on a moral and collective plane. Although enmeshed in social relations, 'community' is taken to be the primary resource of legitimacy and normativity in those relations, and obtains solidarity offering the participants a collective sense of belonging. The imagination of 'we' and 'they' need not be always antagonistic but can also be mutually complementary. The antagonist or complementary relationship between communities may change in accordance with the immediate needs shaped by historical sensibilities and community interests.

There need not be a single goal, which binds people or communities together. There is also not a single or permanent principle that sustains the unity because the principles of unity or solidarity vary from context to context and from purpose to purpose. There can be several goals and principles of coming together. Among them community identity for socio-economic and cultural mobility or for reasserting traditional dominance can be crucial ones. For instance, in the Satanic Verses controversy (1988) several Muslim communities all over the world displayed solidarity in opposition to Salman Rushdie and his novel. As we know, these Muslim communities are not homogenous and vary from region to region. They have different cultural practices and exhibit different trajectory of their histories. These communities took strong objections to Rushdie for his blasphemy. The process of ‘coming together’ is indicative of several
points here. People, as individuals, are scattered. That does not mean to say that they live a totally unorganised life. They share several concerns as well as discourses of Islam. But they have other identities as well. Their national identity is different. They are divided into moderates, orthodox and so on. However, on specific occasions and for specific purposes they identify with each other and feel the necessity to come together invoking the discourse of 'Islam'. As pointed out earlier, this unity is possible on several binding principles. Narratives of culture, language, religious affinities, caste feelings, political aspirations, economic interests, regional/national unity, ethnicity and more importantly the global affairs etc. are responsible for the invocation of binding principles. The commonly shared narratives are not newly created in the immediate context of a particular literary controversy but produced historically and culturally over a period of time on the basis of certain shared memories, concerns and cultural practices.

IV

Communities and Literary controversies

Literary controversies around banning, censoring or proscribing a book or an artefact are public disputes and they are related to matters of religious belief, political ideology and public morality. Censorships or bans result in arguments and counter arguments in the public sphere. Since the controversies are public, they form social phenomenon. This phenomenon, in most cases, involves the participation of several social groups. The idea to ban a book or to demand for a ban usually arises whenever certain social groups or individuals feel strongly that a particular book has violated or misrepresented the established social values or personal image or commonly accepted beliefs. Even as such demands unfold, the controversies divide a particular literary/linguistic community into two groups viz., the 'votaries of freedom of expression' or the 'secularists' and the 'champions of community sentiments' or the 'communitarians'\(^{15}\). Both these groups participate in the process of encountering, exchanging and judging the merits of their respective claims. As Ernan McMullen opines,

\(^{15}\) In the dissertation, the terms 'secularist' and 'communitarian' are employed to signify differences existing between the two. By 'secular' we do not mean the common significations associated with the term such as anti-religion, anti-monastic or radical. Their differences with "fundamentalism" or "essentialism" do not entail that they are democratic and non-communal. We employ the term to indicate the terms of
Each side argues that the other is wrong and that they themselves are right, or at least has the better case. The difference between them is one of belief, of knowledge claim (McMullen, 1989:51).

Though McMullen is referring to the controversies over the scientific texts, his views hold good for our context as well. He considers that a controversy is "a community activity, even though it may begin by involving only two people" (ibid: 52). In the recent years, increasing instances of mobilization of religious 'fundamentalists', communities, voluntary organizations, etc. to demand banning of a particular text or a work of art have necessitated a thorough investigation of ‘unofficial social censorship’\(^\text{16}\).

In the above instances of ban or proscription, authors of the banned books encounter challenges to their freedom of expression and in turn, they try to protect their 'right to express' supported and aided by their sympathetic readers. Debates over questions of literature, history, religion, politics, community sentiments, sexuality, morality and so on become very important for the contending parties. The debates are usually either between a) an author and the communitarians or b) between an author and a particular government or c) between an author and an organization. In a democratic country like India, the contending parties, in the instances of the first and the third cases, seek the government intervention. Narratives of literature, history, religion, and politics around the controversies do not merely pertain to the discursive practices but often become a ground for conflicting social forces.

The controversies around literary or historical narratives are not mere examples of 'violence' or mere instances of imposition of certain social norms on a writer. They have differences existing between two forces of the literati over several issues related to literary controversies. Besides these, we assume that the differences regarding the “proper” ways of understanding history and religion marks differences between the two forces. By communitarians, we mean a group of individuals, who represent themselves as the carriers of sentiments of the community and ignore/marginalise any other stakes for representation. Some politicians, religious heads and scholars constitute the group of communitarians.

\(^{16}\) The term 'social censorship' is used to describe the recent phenomenon of religious groups/communities or political systems intervening in the literary or artistic matters and pressurizing the governments to ban or censor the works, which are found objectionable. Two articles, Kalpana Sharma's "Censorship: Unofficial Might" (22nd, Dec. 2003) and Rajeev Dhavan's "Ban, burn, destroy" (11th, Jan. 2004) in The Hindu, have drawn our attention to the non-government mechanisms of censoring or banning a work of art, history, media or literature. They describe the phenomenon as 'social censorship'.

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raised fundamental questions about writing and reading practices. The communitarians attempt to define the nature of narratives; they decide terms of how narratives should be constituted and what is the historical truth, etc. The controversies exhibit the anxiety of the communitarians about how readers, belonging to the different social and cultural backgrounds, interpret a text, which is a part of their ‘treasured’ tradition. Therefore, it is important to understand and theorize what happens to a literary history/text when it is interpreted through the charge of ‘outrage to public morals’, 'obscenity', 'blasphemy', or 'racism' by the communitarians. Such examination also involves the question of how controversies influence relationships between narratives, communities and the freedom of creativity of the writer.

V

Why Literary Controversies?

Our study on literary controversies is distinctive from history controversies, 'science' controversies, 'religious' or 'political' controversies. The history of literature considers certain kinds of writing as literature and identifies various literary genres for such writings are seen as different from that of philosophical, historical, anthropological, sociological writings and so on. As we know, over several centuries literature is assigned an autonomous and a distinct place of its own. Different institutions, ideologies and theories have sought to answer the question 'What is literature?' from multiple and different points of view. In the twentieth century it was the Russian Formalism and the New Criticism, which were foremost in ascribing several literary genres the privileges of literature. However, the post-modern theories such as Deconstruction\(^\text{17}\), Cultural Studies\(^\text{18}\) and Post-colonial theories\(^\text{19}\) etc. have deconstructed and challenged the

\(^{17}\) We consider Derrida and Paul de Man as the representative theorists of this approach to language and literature.

\(^{18}\) Richard Hoggart’s views about cultural studies (1979) are taken as a representative of cultural studies. We are aware that there are different streams of cultural studies and different theorists like Raymond Williams (1994) and Antony Esthope (1991), etc. Raymond Williams talks about the future of cultural studies, while Esthope traces the shift of literary studies into cultural studies in England.

\(^{19}\) Homi Bhabha has been the foremost theorist of post-colonial criticism/literature over the last twenty years. Once again we are aware that these post-modern and post-colonial theories have multiple origins and lineages.
conventional notions of literature and language. The post-modern turn in language and literature is due to its active engagement with Russian Formalism and New Criticism. The post-modern theorists sought to dismantle the genre distinctions between literature and other disciplines. Though their interventions have been extremely valid, relevant and fruitful to understand literary and critical practices, they have not taken into consideration the institutional and social dynamics that receive, interpret and shape literary or critical conventions seriously. It is not only the university academicians who are involved in literary criticism or literary theories, but the reading public also participate actively in the formation of literary world and consolidate certain notions of literature. There are school teachers, student population and vast number of general readers who are untouched by formal courses or theories of literature but still entertain certain ‘conventional’ notions about literature. These aspects need to be understood and explained in order to discuss the literary controversies in any meaningful way. This will enable us to know why and how different readers receive literary works in different ways. Along with this point we need to understand how literature becomes a domain for establishing certain conventions and strengthening certain ideologies. Since literature is also the site where the monopoly of interpretation is negotiated between/by different communities, it is very productive to know the terms of negotiation.

In recent times, as mentioned earlier, collective/community reading has made noticeable interventions in the literary domain. In order to preserve certain values, the community employs literature or literary aspects for religious/communal purposes. A community intends to protect and preserve certain values of collective belief because it feels that a literary text violates the community beliefs. It is very interesting to note that ‘collective’ reading exploits the existing discursive practices selectively to read, interpret and define what literature is all about and what it should contain and represent. Even though disciplinary boundaries are problematic and essentialist, the collective/community reading sustains and consolidates the boundaries. Therefore, we need to actively engage with how literature is put to use by several players in the society in the context of literary controversies. In other words, we attempt to open up the socio-political, religious and
cultural interventions by different contending parties and implications of such intervention on general ideas of literature, culture and society.

VI

Narratives of Vīraśaivism and Vīraśaiva Community

The Vīraśaiva community is an economically and politically dominant community in Karnataka. It is the single largest community of the state. It is comprised of heterogeneous sub-sects. K.S. Singh, in his ethnographic survey of castes and tribes in India, says that the Vīraśaivas are "spread over 36 of the present-day districts of Karnataka" (Singh, 1998:1984). According to the 1931 Census Report, the Vīraśaivas were 63.5% of the total population of the geographical area, which is known today as Karnataka. They belong to various castes and even religious groups such as the priestly class (the Jangama), the peasants (Pachamasali, Sadaru, Kudu Vokkaliga), the traders (Banajiga, Wani), the artisans (Badigar, Banagar, Devanga, Ganiga, Kumbara, Kammara Sivasimpi, Jugar, Hatgar) and the service castes (Hadapad, Madiwal/Dhobi). Though there are many Dalit groups among the Vīraśaivas (such as Madiga Jangam, Mala Jangam, Lingayat Samagar, Lingayat Machegar) they are not treated in a dignified way by the upper castes of the community. Instead, Varna system is very well applied in their case. The upper castes neither marry nor eat with the lower caste Vīraśaivas.

The community holds a unique place in the modern history and culture of Karnataka. It stands apart from other religious and social groups. Today it has its own hierarchy comprising of priests, cultivators, traders, service groups, artisans and scheduled castes. Geographically too, the Vīraśaivas are scattered. The geographical location of the Vīraśaivas has to be considered while analysing the social, cultural and political life of the community. As many as fourteen sub-groups of the Vīraśaivas (58.3 per cent) live in plateau areas, the percentage being on the higher side when compared...
with 17.3 per cent of rest of the communities. Eleven communities (45.8 per cent) live in the plains, the percentage is lower compared with the 61.4 per cent for all communities; only two communities live in the coastal areas among which, is a scheduled caste i.e. Lingayat-Machegar.

These sub-sections pursue varied occupations. They are engaged in government service (91.7 per cent against 65.83 per cent at the national level), cultivation (79.2 per cent against an average of 54 per cent at the national level), labour (70.8 per cent against 53.6 per cent at the national level), private service (66.7 per cent against 47.9 per cent at the national level), self-employment and business (58.3 per cent against 44.27 per cent at the national level), animal husbandry and trade (29.2 per cent against 21.55 per cent at the national level), specialized service, textile-weaving, textile-dyeing, pottery and terracotta, wood work, metal work, skilled and unskilled labour (one community each; skin and hide-work is reported as the traditional occupation of one community)\(^{21}\).

It is generally believed that a remarkable religious, social and reformatory movement arose in the second half of the twelfth century. And this movement is known as Viraśaiva movement\(^{22}\). The adherents of this movement called themselves 'Viraśaivas' - Vira meaning heroic - the ardent worshippers of Lord Shiva. According to many scholars, the Viraśaiva movement contested the domination of the Vedic religion and attracted people from different walks of life into its religious faith. The movement’s egalitarian goals and its opposition against caste hierarchy made possible for the downtrodden castes to participate in the movement. Therefore, any individual from any caste could become a Viraśaivite provided s/he believed in Lord Shiva and wore istalinga

\(^{21}\) This data is collected from *Indian Communities* (1998) documented by K.S.Singh.

\(^{22}\) The twelfth century Viraśaiva movement is also known by other names like Vacana movement and Lingayath movement. It is called vacana movement because the ideals of the movement were propagated through large number of vacanas (for an explanation of what vacana is see p. 19 of this chapter) composed by the Shiva Sharanas (the devotees of Lord Shiva). Those who have differences of opinion with the term 'Virasaiya' usually prefer 'Lingayath' to describe the movement. We discuss the differences in the fifth chapter.
[the personal talisman obtained at initiation and worn at all times]. It was a multifaceted movement and was aimed at criticizing traditional notions of purity and rules of conduct. Criticizing the dominant culture of Brahmin community, the Viraśaivas argued for social equality and upheld the dignity of labour.

Though there are several researches, scholarly writings and literary compositions about the origin and spread of Viraśaivism\(^\text{23}\), the twelfth century social movement headed by Basava and the vacanas\(^\text{24}\) composed by various Shiva Sharanas acquire a special significance for our study of literary controversies. The vacanas primarily include religious doctrines and the mystical experiences of Sharanas. The term Sharana is derived from ‘\textit{sharanu}’ meaning ‘to surrender’ or ‘to submit’. Sharanas are those who have submitted themselves to Lord Shiva or \textit{istalinga}. The term Sharana is often used in Viraśaivism as a synonym of \textit{Bhakta}, the devotee. Though the idea of Viraśaivism prevailed much before the twelfth century, it is now a popularly held belief that Basava founded Viraśaivism in the twelfth century. The names of Devara Dasimayya, Siddharama, Allama Prabhu, Akkamahadevi and Chennabasavanna are prominently associated with the Viraśaivism. There is enough evidence to demonstrate that women and the lower castes participated in the Viraśaiva movement. Though a large number of people from various castes and social background participated in the movement, only a few of them are projected as \textit{the} leaders of the then Viraśaiva community and the

\(^{23}\) We use the term ‘Viraśaivism’ not just to signify the religious practices associated with it, but the whole body of knowledge produced on the Viraśaiva puranas, vacanas, and hagiographies of Shiva Sharanas. It refers to a set of philosophical, literary and religious doctrines. It does not mean any particular school of thought. It also means a way of life, identified so by both the Viraśaivas and the non-Viraśaivas.

\(^{24}\) Vacana literally means ‘an utterance’, ‘speech’ or a ‘promise’. Vacanas are the main source of spiritual and ethical teachings of Basava and his contemporaries. A.K. Ramanujan, in \textit{Speaking of Shiva}, describes them as the compositions of Viraśaiva saints (1973:37). In other words, Vacanas are commonly known as the utterances of the Sharanas of the 12th century Viraśaiva community. Those who composed the vacanas are called \textit{Vacanakaras}. Ramanujan considers the common Kannada language used in the vacanas as radical because, according to him, they defy the Sanskritic Kannada used by the earlier Kannada poets. He considers them as \textit{Bhakti} poems, poems of personal devotion to a god. There are varieties of vacanas with multiple interpretations and meanings. As of now, we know approximately 1393 vacanas of Basava, 1409 vacanas of Allama Prabhu, 1378 vacanas of Siddharama, 1471 vacanas of Chennabasavanna and 340 vacanas of Akkamahadevi (Shouten, 1991:11). These five vacanakaras are the most important leaders of the twelfth century vacana movement. But there are many more vacanakaras. More than two hundred twelfth century vacana composers are known till day and, in later times, many vacanakaras joined the
Viraśaiva movement. This is due to various historical/cultural reasons that we explore in detail in the following chapters. Among the prominent Shiva Sharanas, Basava is the most revered icon sculpted in the mainstream Viraśaiva discourse in the last century. Only a few sects within the Viraśaiva community resent the iconisation of Basava. Let us know more about Basava and his iconic image.

Basava was born at Bagewadi, a provincial town in the northern part of the present Karnataka, probably in the year 1105. His parents were Brahmins and they were devotees of Lord Shiva. He was brought up with values of religious observance and devotion. In the available narratives on Basava it is said that even as a boy, he was very religious but also rebellious in nature. He did not believe in strict religious observances prescribed for the Brahmins. His understanding of devotion was different from the traditional approach of his orthodox family. He refused to wear the sacred thread that identified him as a Brahmin. According to some sources, he refused to undergo the upanayana (initiation ceremony of being invested with the sacred thread), which was obligatory for every Brahmin male. He even discarded the sacred thread before leaving his parental home at an early age. He left the familiar surroundings of his birthplace and started his own spiritual quest. Along with his sister Akkanagamma, he went to Kudalasangama, a place in the northern Karnataka, the meeting place of the rivers Ghataprabha and Malaprabha. Basava found a guru in Kudalasangama and studied the sacred scriptures at this centre of learning for several years. Then he settled down in the city of Mangalaveda, the present day Basava Kalyana, which was the capital of Kalachuri dynasty. Basava was appointed at the court of Bijjala II, the Jain king, where he rose to become his treasurer. It was here that he married Gangambike first. After a couple of years, Basava married Nilambike.

Basava was very devotional and pursued the spiritual goal intensely. Gradually his spiritual achievements received more and more attention. Basava propagated a form of Viraśaivism in which everybody could participate including even those who were...
regarded as untouchables. Spiritual seekers from other places came to Kalyana to participate in the Vīraśaiva movement. Within a short time, Basava’s residence became the centre of a spiritual community that boasted of a great number of Vīraśaivas. They rejected the notion of temple institution, dominated by the Brahmin priests. Instead, they worshipped istalinga, which every member of the 'new' Vīraśaiva community, male and female alike, wore it on their body. Instead of the age-old religious writings in Sanskrit, to be explained and recited by the experts, they used Kannada language for the propagation of their 'new' cult. Many Vīraśaivas, including Basava, wrote vacanas in Kannada. In the popular conception it is held that Basava and his followers strove for an egalitarian society without caste hierarchy. Several accomplished mystics became members of the Vīraśaiva community and made their own contribution to the development of religious ideas and devotional practices through vacanas.

However, his popularity attracted enmity and hostility. Brahmin ministers in the court of Bijjala conspired against him and began spreading rumours that he misused the money from the king's treasure in order to spread the Vīraśaiva religion. The growing popularity of the Vīraśaiva movement soon became an eyesore of many others. Along with the spread of Vīraśaivas the number of adherents also increased. Gradually, opposition to the new religion also picked up. The Brahmin establishment felt the threat of this new religion intensely. Bijjala, who initially supported Basava, became scared of the growing influence of Basava and disapproved of his doctrines and religious beliefs. The king was not in favour of Basava’s rejection of caste barriers. Around the second half of the twelfth century, this hostile atmosphere in the town of Kalyana culminated in a crisis. The king was made to interfere and execute two members of the Vīraśaiva community for the violation of caste rules of marriage. This execution followed a marriage arranged by the Vīraśaivas between a Madiga boy and a Brahmin girl. Since the parents of the boy and the girl were Vīraśaivas, they did not mind this marriage for there was no place for caste hierarchy in the newly acquired religion. The Brahmin ministers and the priests in Bijjala's court took strong objections to the marriage. They argued that if Bijjala allowed this marriage, it would amount to polluting the caste purity. This marriage generated a sensitive situation in Kalyana and the king supported the Brahmins
and decided to punish the violators of the caste rules. The repressive actions of Bijjala against the marriage forced all the Viraśaivas to flee the town in different directions. Basava went back to Kudalasangama, where he passed away shortly after his arrival. There is some mystery surrounding the death of Basava. A few hold that the king killed Basava. However, Bijjala too did not live much longer. It is believed that some Sharanas killed him for revenge. Since the followers of this movement were spread all over Karnataka, they could spread the new religion. Chennabasavanna, the nephew of Basava and the son of Akkanagamma, played a crucial role in giving a philosophical base to form and spread the religion. He is revered as Shatstala Brahma for defining basic principles of Shatstalas. In the subsequent centuries, Viraśaivism consolidated as a religion and was institutionalised. However, in the colonial period the Viraśaiva community witnessed a new phase of re-formation.

The scholars on Viraśaivism have studied this movement in the context of the Bhakti movement. The 'medieval' period in the history of India is marked by the spread of Bhakti movement in different parts of the country. Members of different communities, especially from the artisan classes, revolted against Brahminism and the Vedic religion during this period. Bhakti became a vehicle of their social and political expression. In the context of Karnataka, details about the Viraśaiva Bhakti movement are available in the vacanas and in the form of hagiographies written by later Viraśaiva poets. These hagiographies were primarily intended to foreground the twelfth century Viraśaiva saints as the incarnations of Gods. However, our intention here is neither to go to the origins nor to provide a 'true' history of Viraśaivism but to look at the ways in which the history of Viraśaivism is constructed in the colonial and post-colonial contexts. The differences and gaps in the history of Viraśaivism provide interesting clues for the analysis of literary controversies.

Literary controversies connected to the Viraśaiva community in the twentieth century are around the narratives of the above explained past and the Viraśaiva icons. The literati in Karnataka see Basava as the leader of the social movement and as a

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25 For details about Shatstalas see Chapt. 4, pp.172-173.
historical figure while for some Vīraśaivas, especially for the communitarians, he and the rest of Shiva Sharanas are *nulana puratanas* or the new incarnations Lord Shiva. They too acknowledge the historical significance of the Vīraśaiva/vacana movement. They see no inconsistency in merging history and the belief about the sacredness of the Shiva Sharanas. The two ways of understanding the history of the twelfth century Vīraśaiva movement are one of the root causes of literary controversies in Karnataka. The literary scholars are of the view that since Vīraśaivism is a progressive movement, there should not be any problem in researching the movement in order to bring new facts about it. These new facts sometimes contest and are contrary to the religious beliefs of the communitarians. It seems to us that it is this conflict, which is visible repeatedly in debates over the literary controversies.

The ‘iconisation’ and canonization of the Vīraśaiva history and literature have been so strong that any digression from the received beliefs invariably attracts severe criticism from the self-proclaimed saviours of the community. On several occasions, the saviours found the narrativisation of the Vīraśaiva past in literature and history objectionable. They used their strength as the dominant community to demand a ban or confiscation of such objectionable literary works or works of historical research. This community is involved in several such controversies since the early twentieth century. These controversies have assumed religious and casteist turns too.

Since the colonial period to the present day, the processes of the formation of Vīraśaiva identity have also effected the above mentioned literary/historical narratives. The narratives of its past and literature that undergo a fresh lease of transformation during such controversies have raised the question of self-representation. The communitarians have shown a tendency to keep the monopoly of interpretation over the Vīraśaiva literature. They dislike others’ interference/intrusion in this matter. But the creative writers and researchers who think that they are the most sensitive, creative and objective minds in the world would not care for the dictates of the communitarians and write what they consider as the truth, which creates a flash point. However, any ‘misrepresentation’ of the Vīraśaiva history becomes a flash point due to various reasons. We relate the
various reasons to the hierarchical social structure within the community, different historical experiences and circumstances, tensions between secular and fundamentalist forces, literary practices, societal transformations, economic imbalances among the several sub-sects of the community, etc. These reasons have primarily altered the attitude towards narratives of Viraśaiva literature and history.

The dissertation is designed into six chapters. After the introductory chapter, in the second chapter, *Battles of Wills: Secular Intellectuals and the Champions of Community Sentiments*, we deal with the question of representation and describe how the proponents (the communitarians) and the opponents (the secular intellectuals) of ban on a literary text view the given text and argue either in favour of or against it. We show that both the contending parties not only construct a 'self' but also the 'other' during the controversies to represent and legitimise their respective claims. Hence, it is interesting as well as sociologically productive to analyse the *battles of wills* in the context of literary controversies. In this chapter, we analyse three literary controversies: the *Maarga-I* controversy (1989), the *Mahachaitra* controversy (1994) and the *Dharmakaarana* controversy (1997) to demonstrate the process of representation. We intend to open up several contentious issues that are not usually addressed in the context of literary controversies, for the parties involved in the literary controversies generally reduce them to the 'literary'.

The third chapter titled *Colonialism and Formation of the Viraśaiva Community* delineates how the Viraśaivas identify themselves by refashioning the narratives of Viraśaiva literature, history and religion in the context of the *Shubhodaya* controversy in 1919. The delineation focuses on:

a) The refashioning of the Viraśaiva self-representation in terms of modern values in the colonial period and

b) The formation of modern identity of the Viraśaivas.
We discuss two controversies viz., *Sangeeta Basaweshwara Nataka* (1912) controversy and the *Shubhodaya* controversy. Discussion of these two controversies will be extended to understand the evolution of community consciousness among the Viraśaivas in the late colonial period. This will be followed by our attempt to re-visit the history of orientalist narratives of Viraśaivism from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.

The fourth chapter, *Crushed by English Poetry? Making of Vacana ‘Poetry’ and Paradigm Shift in the Imagination of the Viraśaiva Community*, is a sequel to the second chapter in terms of its focus on the shifting identification of the community and the emergence of new perceptions of Viraśaivism. We attempt to examine the politics of secular imagination of the vacanas of the twelfth century Shiva Sharanas in the early twentieth century. The chapter seeks to explore the dynamics of institutionalisation and naturalization of the vacana tradition in the early twentieth century. In doing so, we attempt to show how the production of the vacana tradition provided a new paradigm shift in the perception of Viraśaivism and a secular image for the Viraśaivas. We discuss the contribution of two Viraśaiva scholars in the colonial period towards imagining a secular space of the Viraśaivas through vacanas.

The fifth chapter, *Understanding Collective Interpretations and Literary Controversies* will show how collective interpretations, in the context of literary controversies signify the efforts of the Viraśaiva community to consolidate its power of interpreting the Viraśaiva texts and marginalizing other kinds of interpretations that pose challenge to its power. We begin with the theorisation of collective interpretation attempted by Stanley Fish who describes the collective interpretations as the product of what he calls, 'interpretive communities'. We examine the founding elements of interpretive communities as outlined by Fish and see if his notion of interpretive community is viable to understand and theorise the relationship between literary controversies and collective interpretations. The *Vacana Deepti* controversy (1996) is discussed to show how the so called 'collective interpretation' is manufactured on the basis of certain notions of religion by Mathe Mahadevi (henceforth MM), the first female guru of the Viraśaivas in the modern period, to establish and institutionalise her
perceptions of Viraśaivsim. The Dharmakaarana controversy is examined once again to demonstrate how the controversy led to a re-grouping of the Viraśaivas, under the banner of Akhila Bharata Viraśaiva Mahasabha (henceforth ABVM), to define Viraśaivism on their own terms in 1997. Both controversies are analysed to show the differences existing between MM and ABVM and their implications on the imagination of Viraśaiva identity in the post-colonial period. We argue that the literary controversies that we discuss in the second chapter are reactions of the upper caste Viraśaivas to the purported threat to their hegemony due to social, political and economic changes in Karnataka and the interventions of subaltern social forces in the domain of Viraśaivism.

In the concluding section, Conclusion: The Roads Taken and Not Taken, we attempt a recapitulation of the preceding chapters indicating towards newer areas of research with regard to the narratives of Viraśaivism in Karnataka in general and literary controversies in particular. Since no dissertation can be encyclopaedic, we admit that there are many areas, which we could not explore in this dissertation. Therefore, our attempt is to work towards a ‘framework’ within which literary controversies can be discussed.

VII
Methodology

In the dissertation, we examine a few select literary controversies related to the Viraśaiva community. So questions such as 'what is happening to the 'largest' community' and 'why is it agitated over literary texts frequently', form our primary points of departure besides examining different features of literary controversies. In other words, the reason for focusing our study on the Viraśaiva community is to know why, despite being a majority social group in Karnataka it gets 'disturbed' or feels 'under seize' by literary narratives. We examine only those controversies, which have created attention of the reading public widely due to pressure on the state government to ban or censor a particular literary work. The specific focus on the 'banned' literary texts is to distinguish it from other controversies. For instance, there are many literary controversies involving several authors but without implicating any particular community and without resulting in any censorship or ban. For example, the debates between Masti Venkatesh
lyengar and Kuvempu, the two great modern writers in Kannada, in the 1940s over interpreting the Ramayana is one such case wherein no particular community was involved\(^{26}\) and there was no ban called for.

Given the theoretical and methodological focus, we have looked into different kinds of sources state archives, legislative proceedings, private collections, newspapers and journals. That apart we interviewed the activists, writers and religious leaders of several Viraśaiva mutts and gathered historical accounts, literary narratives, biographies, autobiographies, folk elements, etc. We have not restricted our study to one specific region while analysing literary controversies because we want to demonstrate how the Viraśaivas reacted to the literary controversies across the state. This helps us to address the issue whether the concerns and reactions of the community are really 'collective' and 'spontaneous' as it is believed to be.

**VIII**

**Beyond the 'literary': Reading Theoretical Formations**

Intense debates have always followed whenever a literary text is banned or censored. But the literary critics soon forget these debates. Thus, the literary controversies are treated as isolated episodes in the history of literature. The literary historians do not put the discourse produced by the writers, the critics and the readers during the literary controversies to a productive use. Therefore, it is not surprising that the literary controversies are not well researched.

Literary controversies are not mere battles between writers and a group of people who take objections to their work. Also, they are not instances of state coercion. Instead, they provide us important clues about what is happening in a culture. Hence, we shall investigate the nature of the literary controversies, the deep-rooted multiple reasons that cause controversies and set out to theorise them in socio-political terms, for literary controversies are sites where a particular society becomes aware of its social problems

\(^{26}\) Masti accused Kuvempu of humiliating the Brahmins his play *Shudra Tapaswi* (1944). For an analysis of the clash between Masti and Kuvempu see Tejaswini Niranjana's "Whose Culture is it? Contesting the
and tries to resolve it by means of public debate. A few scholars have analysed the literary controversies paying attention to the above facts. For example, Susan Mendus brings forth the complexities involved in the literary controversies. She examines the *Satanic Verses* controversy and wonders:

> Reading through the vast and still burgeoning literature on the Rushdie affair, it is surprisingly difficult to establish precisely what the debate is about; in part it is about how to read novels; in part it is about the nature of Islamic fundamentalism; in part it is about the preservation of cultural identity in a multicultural society [England]. Most pervasively, however, it is a debate about the values which inform modern liberal societies—a debate in which liberal culture, with its emphasis on rationality, choice and the sovereignty of the individual, is pitted against cultures which emphasize sanctity, tradition and group identity (Mendus, 1993: 193).

Mendus's views clearly show us that though during the time of a controversy people involved in it might see only one aspect of the controversy; the controversy itself is symptomatic of several cultural problems.

In the following discussion, we would like to extend this line of argument in order to look at different dimensions of literary controversies and their dialectical relationship with communities. The main purpose of this discussion is to probe into the peculiarities and complexities of literary controversies and communities and to find out further ways of exploring and theorising them.

The four post-colonial social scientists and cultural critics who are examined here have focused on a wide range of issues related to literary controversies. The conceptual framework within which they discuss the literary controversies shows clearly that literary controversies open up multiple issues confronted by a society/community. These critics have clearly shown that the literary controversies between the secular writers and the communities cannot be analysed in terms of literature alone. The specific reason for choosing their essays is that they raise range of issues about modernity, tradition, colonialism and community. There are, of course, other participants in the debate whom we could have included. The purpose, however, is not to offer an exhaustive review of all
the scholars involved. It is to demonstrate some of the complexities of the literary controversies by showing how the abstract points presented in this introduction work themselves out quite differently in different theoretical approaches.

**Literary Controversies, Modernity and Community**

Sabrey Hafez is one of the important scholars who have thought about literary controversies from Marxist point of view. According to him, the erosion of progressive values and the replacement of the same by the fundamentalist forces may result in literary controversies. His article "The Novel, Politics and Islam" (2000) examines a controversy around Haydar Hayder's novel *Banquet for Seaweed* to expose the impact of religious fundamentalism on literature in Egypt. Hafez considers religious fundamentalism of the Muslims in Egypt as the sole reason for the controversy. The rise of Muslim fundamentalism in the 1980s has resulted in such controversy and according to Hafez, it symbolizes an erosion of modern values such as rationality, secularism and liberalism.

Hayder Hayder is a Syrian writer and he writes novels in Arabic language. The Egyptian government, under the pressure of the Muslim fundamentalists, proscribed his novel *Banquet for Seaweed* in 1986. The fundamentalists accused that the holy Quran was considered as a 'Shit' in the novel. A Fatwa was imposed on the writer for being blasphemous. Though the novel was written sixteen years ago and was published several times outside Egypt, it was only in 1986 that the Muslim fundamentalists created uproar over the alleged "blasphemy". The students of Azhar University poured into the streets of Cairo, holding demonstrations against the novel. Police used the tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the demonstrators. Hafez describes this controversy as the sign of Islamic fundamentalism that was gaining strength in Egypt over the last twenty years. He thinks that the conservative Muslims have resurged back to fight modern ethos.

Hafez's theorization of the controversy runs as follows. He identifies that 'novel', as a literary genre, emerged in Egypt in the twentieth century. He sees the rise of the novel as a signification of cultural transition in modern Egypt i.e., from religious fundamentalism to modern intellectualism. According to Hafez, this cultural transition is
very well captured in the genre of novel. In contrast to this modern period, Hafez notices, the pre-modern Egypt was under the grip of Muslim orthodoxy. It was a land of religious dogmatism that had moral and political support from the sovereign power. Religious orthodoxy was complicit with political power in oppressing the common people. However, this nexus between religious orthodoxy and the political power began to erode in the early nineteenth century, when Muhammad Ali (1805-48), often called the founder of modern Egypt, introduced a new educational system based on the European model.

Egypt witnessed a sustained modernization and development beginning from the early nineteenth century under Ali’s leadership. Schools, hospitals, newspapers, magazines, printing presses, learned societies and charitable organizations were founded in larger numbers. Even during British colonialism after the 1840s, urbanization and modern values continued to flourish and shape the life of the Egyptians. It is important to note that modernity entered Egypt well before British imperialism. As a consequence of modern changes in the early twentieth century, the Muslim conservatives were discredited. Nasser who succeeded Muhammad Ali as the king continued the process of modernization. During his rule a new generation of intellectuals started to rationalize the sacred Quran. Later on a secular dimension was attached to it in the 1940s. In 1960 the first Marxist biography of Muhammad, the prophet, appeared. Hafez continues,

The development of the intellectual offensive coincided with the country’s progress from colonial rule to limited independence, and finally complete liberation from imperialist control at the end of the 1950s (Hafez: 120).

He recalls that there were a few literary controversies in the past in 1920s and 1930s that resulted in the banning of literary works. In such instances Muslim fundamentalism/traditionalism was crushed brutally and successfully. Under the regime of Nasser, in the 1950s and 1960s, fundamentalists remained isolated episodes. The commitment of the progressive government and the measures taken to curb religious fundamentalism made many religious leaders to go underground. Hafez reminiscences:

Increasing activity of the left resulted in social polarization and a sharp crackdown on the Muslim Brothers and kindred groups could be seen now and then (ibid: 121).
However, this progressive phase in the history of Egypt did not last long. With Sadat succeeding Nasser in 1970, the balance between the progressive and the religious forces changed dramatically. Nasser's version of Arab nationalism and state-led industrialization was,

...unceremoniously ditched in favour of an open door to western capital and a brazenly pro-American foreign policy in exchange for lavish US and Saudi subsidies (ibid: 122)

Sadat, according to Hafez, on the one hand pursued the open-door policy and on the other, used the Muslim fundamentalists to suppress the progressive forces in Egypt. Adel Hussain, an ex-communist, was instrumental in bringing in such changes with the active consent of Sadat. Adel Hussain, argues Hafez,

...cleverly inverted prevailing images of modernity, associating it with failure, defeat and corruption and contrasting these to the puritan, idealistic standards of Islam (ibid: 124).

Slowly religious supremacy in Egypt was reconsolidated. Betrayed by the state, the poor classes were driven towards an alternative welfare system offered by the neo-traditionalists. Muslim fundamentalists took over the political system in Egypt and sought to retrieve orthodox tradition. Too much liberalization and the American hand in the economic affairs of Egypt led to a free reign of fundamentalists. This resulted in various forms of anti-people policies of the regime. Gradually, Egypt witnessed changes in the socio-religious and political spheres. These changes were accompanied by significant cultural shifts towards religious fundamentalism and caused the literary controversy in 1986. Hafez's study on the literary controversy, thus, captures the interrelationship between several factors viz., a) political history of Egypt, b) political changes and their implications on the Muslim world and c) changes in the religious life of the Muslims.

**Literary Controversies, Narratives and Reconstitution of Communities**

A.R. Vasavi's study, "Narratives in the Reconstitution of Communities", demonstrates the functional aspects of narratives from a cultural and sociological point of view. She has studied the Lingayath community\(^{27}\) of Karnataka, the Nadar community of

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\(^{27}\) Vasavi uses the term Lingayath instead of Viraśaiva.
Tamil Nadu and the farmers' community in rural Andhra Pradesh and has shown how these communities have grown into 'political actors' in the contemporary period. According to her, in the post-colonial period there is an increased awareness regarding the political role and strength of communities, which has resulted in ‘politicisation of the communities’.

According to Vasavi the resurgence of communities can be seen either as a symbol of their attempt to replace the state and its cultural narratives or as an attempt to use both community narratives as well as state narratives for further consolidation of communities. She notes that in the case of the Lingayath community the first argument holds good. She examines the Lingayath community's attempts to challenge the government of Karnataka in a variety of ways. She points out,

Lingayath community on several occasions has resuscitated the old symbols...to regain its lost cultural and economic position and status and in the process it has emerged as political actor (Vasavi, 2001: 129).

She mentions two occasions when the Lingayath community demanded to ban books that were considered by it as critical or derogatory of Basava - Mahachitra, a play and Dharmakaarana, a novel, both in Kannada language. She also mentions a demand to rename the Gulbarga University as Basaweshwara University. According to her, the efforts of the Lingayaths to rename the Gulbarga University were to scuttle the efforts of Dalit Sangharsh Samiti to have the university renamed as Ambedkar University. She examines the ways in which Lingayath community has deployed its cultural capital in order to mobilize different sects of the Lingayath community in Karnataka to realise the above demands. The leaders of the community used the cultural symbols and icons of the community effectively during these campaigns. Lingayath mutts and religious leaders emerged as important figures during the agitations. Thus, the Lingayath community was able to use the remnants of the medieval organizational patterns (that of the monastery system) and deploy cultural symbols of the Virasaivas to put pressure on the government.

28 A Controversy around this Kannada play occurred in the year 1994. The contending parties in the controversy were a section of Virasaiva community and a Viraśaivas writer.
According to Vasavi, some of the pre-modern cultural signs and cultural resources are incompatible with the modern state and its narratives and therefore, there is a clash between the community and the state. For Vasavi, the assertion of certain communities in the recent years is an indication of their awareness about the strength of the identity politics in the modern democracy. The encounter between communities and the state, consequently, has made it possible for the communities to emerge as political actors.

Vasavi looks at the social and economic reasons that are responsible for the political avatar of the Lingayath community. She points out that,

Changes in land-use patterns, land distribution by the state to landless caste groups, and the decrease in hereditary village posts, once enjoyed by Lingayaths in the area ... (ibid: 127)

are primarily responsible for the political activism of the community. Besides these,

...the rise of other middle-rank caste groups into the political foray and the new identity and consciousness of Dalits are seen as threats to the Lingayaths (ibid: 127).

According to Vasavi these socio-economic changes in Karnataka have threatened the once absolute dominance of Lingayaths in the region. It is in this context that the Lingayat community has become oversensitive to the behaviour of other communities towards it. She identifies the encounter between four kinds of narratives in the modern society. These are a) Narratives of the nation-state, b) Narratives of capital, c) Narratives of culture and d) Narratives of community. The communities use ‘community narratives’ to consolidate their position and counter the state narratives. In Karnataka, Vasavi argues, the Lingayath community has deployed its narratives to counter the state narratives, which has resulted in ‘ politicisation of the community’.

Politicisation of the community compels the community to behave like a "political actor" (ibid: 126). What she means by ‘political actor’ is the growing

29 This controversy around the Kannada novel took place in 1997. It was between a section of Viraśaiva community and a Brahmín writer.
sensitivity and awareness about its position vis-à-vis the state and other communities. The factors that have facilitated such political emergence of communities are the

...failure of the nation-state and its polity to engender and establish a civil society and the incompatibility of modern institutions and rules to pre-modern social formations (ibid: 126).

The failure of the modern state to accommodate the pre-modern social formations and institutions of the communities and to give them a political space to articulate their cultural, economic and political interests have given ample opportunities for the communities to question the state. Besides this imbalance between communities and the state, the latter has penetrated into all spheres of life and has absorbed the pre-modern elements of the communities into modern state technologies.

She compares the Viraśaiva community with the Nadar community of Tamil Nadu. The Nadar community also responded to the discourses of development and progress of the modern nation-state. It was very sensitive to the discourses of capitalism and believed that globalisation could be effectively used for the benefit of the community. In order to reap the benefits of modernization and globalisation it reconstituted itself around the discourses of capitalism. This reconstitution was possible due to its accessibility to the capital resources.

In the case of Andhra Pradesh, the state intervention to alleviate poverty and food scarcity in a region altered and displaced the local agricultural knowledge and tradition. But such state intervention, instead, did not put in place any measures to obliterate the existing social structures that were hierarchical. Consequently, the hierarchical social system continued to exist. In the process, the state privileged capital and modernization. Vasavi is more concerned with the loss of traditional rural life owing to the interventions of the state. In her other book also, Harbingers of Rain: Land and Life in South India (1999), she draws our attention to the violence of the state. She says,

...state intervention in rural areas of India is often legitimised in terms of an array of economic compulsions in which 'growth', 'development', 'modernisation' and
The analysis of Vasavi exposes the violence of the state and capital over communities and the latter’s reactions to such violence. The success for a community depends upon the proximity of that community to the institutions of the state. Through these three case studies, she shows that the communities have cultural and political capabilities inherent in them to fight and negotiate with the state and the capital.

As said earlier, according to Vasavi, it is the fourth kind, the narratives of community that are deployed by the Lingayath community to assert its identity and right to intervene in the process of interpretation of the texts that belong to the community. The Lingayath community has always guarded these narratives from outside interference. However, these narratives of the community, according to her, have become sectarian in recent times. What she implies by sectarian is that the Lingayath community and its narratives, which earlier stood,

....primarily to critique the then caste society and to consolidate a non-caste society based on work, worship of a single god, and commensality earlier...now....are deployed for divisive interests. (Vasavi, 2001: 8)

She is critical of the contemporary Lingayaths' vigilantism over the narratives of Virasaivism and their attempt to force monolithic identity on the larger public. This self-representation of the Lingayaths is achieved by means of narratives produced by the community and has also resulted in using its cultural images to articulate and assert its political concerns over the state and to challenge its narratives. Therefore, Vasavi considers such sectarian attitude of the community as communal, exclusivist and divisive. This sectarian attitude has also helped a few actors in the community to realize their personal interests.

In fact Vasvi’s essay deals with two time-periods, the post colonial and the pre-colonial. The concepts of ‘fuzzy' and ‘demarcation' point out this oscillation. The pre-colonial 'fuzzy' and 'fluid' communities find it difficult to cope with the new regional
and religious demarcations set by the colonial government in the colonial period. She points out,

It is as a result of such trends that communities that were once endowed with 'fuzzy' boundaries and 'dynamic' fluidity in the pre-colonial period, and which were subject to regional and religious demarcation in the colonial period, have in the postcolonial period, become susceptible to a consolidation of their identities and collective orientation (ibid: 137).

'Fuzzy' communities in the pre-colonial period were enumerated in the colonial period on regional and religious grounds. In other words, pre-modern India is marked by the plural life patterns but in the colonial and the post-colonial period these plural life patterns were homogenized and the monolithic constructions were foregrounded. The symbols from the plural life patterns of the pre-colonial period are employed to re-assert the community identities and collective orientations in the post-colonial period. Lastly, in such instances of communities emerging as political actors, both individual and collective political ambitions are articulated (ibid: 137) and there is no marginalisation of one at the cost of the other.

**Literary controversy, Colonialism and Communities**

Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha examine a controversy around Muddupalani’s *Radhika Santwanam* (Appeasing Radhika) and the public debates around it in the early twentieth century to demonstrate the changing perceptions of literature, secularism and patriarchy during the colonial period. They raise issues of orientalism, imperialism and bourgeoisie nationalism while examining the controversy.

In their article "Empire, Nation and the Literary Text" (1993), they explain how colonial intervention changed notions of aesthetics, gender and patriarchy in the Indian context in the early twentieth century. They hold that under the pressure of imperialism and colonialism, the patriarchy of the earlier kind underwent a drastic change. This transformed the discursive practices of the bourgeoing middle class in India. According to Susie and Lalitha the discursive practices were developed on the grounds of moral values and ethical principles of the Victorian as well as the nationalist consciousness.
Bangalore Nagarathnamma published *Radhika Santwanam*, a text produced in the pre-colonial period by Muddupalani, in 1911. But the British government, on the charges of obscenity, immediately proscribed it. According to Kandukuri Vireshalingam Pantulu, well-known social reformer of Andhra Pradesh in the nineteenth century, it contained "crude descriptions of sex in the name of Shringara Rasa" (Tharu and Lalitha, 1993:200). Vireshalingam denounces Muddupalani’s work for her immodesty. According to him, Muddupalani did not have the modesty that was natural to women because she was born into a community of prostitutes.

Muddupalani belonged to the Ganika community (community of dancers) and was a courtesan in the court of Pratapasimha (1739-1763), one of the Nayaka kings of Tanjavur of present day Tamil Nadu. Nagarathnamma felt it necessary to publish the manuscript because it was "brimming with rasa" (Ibid: 1993). Nagarathnamma also belonged to the Ganika community and she was also one of the socially active members of the community in the colonial period. Therefore, she felt that she should be publishing Muddupalani’s work. In this regard, Nagarathnamma said,

*I find the work immensely beautiful and as it has been composed, not only by a woman, but a woman of *our* community, I felt necessary to publish the proper work*. (Italics mine. Tharu and Lalitha, 1991: 118).

She was aware of the existence of several versions of *Radhika Santwanam* and wanted to publish the 'proper work' (Ibid. 1991:118). As soon as the book was published, there was uproar over the book and this led to demand for a ban on it by the newly English-educated middle class. Even social reformers like Vireshalingam took strong objections to the book. The British government was convinced that the book would "endanger the moral health of their Indian subjects" (Italics mine. Tharu and Lalitha, 1993: 201) and decided to ban it ultimately.

The intention of Susie and Lalitha is not to pass any qualitative judgments on the proscription. They discuss this literary controversy in order to understand the changing notions of aesthetics and patriarchy in colonial India, which resulted in restricting certain
kinds of literary expressions. According to them the new nationalist attempt at refashioning of patriarchy, despite giving some space for women in the public life, controlled the women and recast them to suit new patriarchies. The new patriarchy was not of the earlier kind. It was influenced by the post-enlightenment values of liberal humanism. The agency for women was denied by these "new" patriarchies. As we know under the pressures of colonial rule, the new middle class tried to refashion itself and as a part of that effort it was also 're-casting' women. We shall not elaborate on this for this point has been well theorized in the contemporary literature on nationalism and feminism. Susie and Lalitha compare the cultural practices and ambience of the pre-modern period with the modern period of the colonial times in order to show us how the conception of culture and cultural practices, the notions of good and bad, and of morality were refashioned by the middle class elites during the colonial period which were drastically different from the pre-colonial period.

They compare and contrast the new notions of nationalist literature and the nationalist curriculum with the 'secular' atmosphere of the Tanjavur royal court of the pre-modern period. They hold that this court gave patronage to many women writers in the court. They observe, "some quite radical changes were taking place in the society Muddupalani lived in" (Tharu and Lalitha, 1993: 205). They wonder that women poets and dancers,

...enjoyed an unabridged right to hold and inherit property and therefore retained control of their wealth. They had the status of free women, whose place in the public sphere was undisputed, and many of them commanded respect for their learning and their accomplishments. Their right to choose their lovers and friends was seldom questioned (Tharu and Lalitha, 1991:117).

They note that Tanjavur was the mosaic of various cultures of Marathi, Telugu and Tamil. The Nayaka period was comparatively progressive. They notice, "Another Telugu work from the same period Ramalingesvara Satakamu, dealt with the evil deeds of landlords" (Tharu and Lalitha, 1993: 206). Also, "secular prose narrative had also begun to make an appearance" (ibid, 1993: 206) during this period. They note that with the

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30 There are plenty of works on this aspect. The most important work among them is Recasting Women:
intervention of colonialism things changed. *Radhika Santwanam*, a work that was read, heard, performed and enjoyed by people two centuries ago was banned in modern times. They ask,

...what made a work that was unusual but relatively uncontroversial in its time, so dangerous and unacceptable two centuries after? (Ibid: 207).

They point out,

Colonial restructuring of gender and the curricular institutionalisation of literature both worked to undermine the authority of Indian literatures and undercut the societies that gave rise to them. (Ibid: 209).

According to them, the colonial, orientalist and nationalist perceptions of literature and aesthetics restricted the domain of women’s expression. The nationalist recasting of women produced an ideal womanhood that was different from that of the ‘western’ and the 'traditional'. There was no place to articulate women's desire in this new notion of the ideal Indian womanhood. But Muddupalani’s *Radhika Santwanam* was not only a text that primarily articulated the desire of a woman but also gave an active agency to woman in the act of love. This is something, which the nationalist intelligentsia was unable to digest. In the process of recasting women some of the texts written by women writers like Muddupalani were marginalized in the name of obscenity. Susie and Lalitha argue that nationalist agenda of the upper caste male exhibited “Brahmanical” (ibid: 210) qualities and ignored the literary creations of the lower caste women dancers. Consequently the upper caste male gaze of the colonial period, shaped by the western ways of aesthetics and changing ideologies of class, caste, gender, did not consider the concerns and requirements of the women but imposed its own parameters to decide and judge women.

**Engaging with Modernity and Colonialism**

Before examining Susie Tharu and Lalitha’s criticism of colonialism and nationalism, we need to note that there exist three striking parallels between Vasavi and Hafez’s understanding of literary controversies. 1) Both have focused on changing nature of communities that have explicit effects on literary controversies. 2) Both have dealt with the question of modernity inextricably linked to the controversies. 3) Both have

pointed out sectarian and essentialist attitudes of the communities in appropriating cultural and religious symbols. They have clearly demonstrated the scope and implications of literary controversies on the communities in post-colonial times. However, in their understanding, a community exhibits a homogenous structure. Their concept of community and modernity need sufficient explanation because there are different and antagonistic interventions while accessing modernity and a community cannot be understood as a unified and a homogenous term.

Vasavi deploys the binary oppositions of 'fuzzy' (pre-colonial) and 'demarcated' (colonial) in order to conceptualise the dynamics of contemporary communities. This is to indicate that the modern state dictates term for categorizing/demarcating the pre-modern communities. In her conceptualisation, pre-modern indicates pre-colonial. Her contention is based on the notion that innumerable castes, religions and communities were demarcated on the basis of religion and region during the colonial period and that the modern state in the post-colonial period has perpetuated such demarcation. However, such conceptualisation of community may not allow us to see the multiple ways through which the "fixing of community identities by the state are accepted, negotiated or rejected" (Upadhyay, 2001:34). In the second and third chapters, we have shown that in the colonial period the Virasaiva community actively engaged with the state whenever the latter enumerated the Virasaiva population for Census purposes. And we have also demonstrated how the narratives of Viraśaivism were employed to contest the state intervention in the community affairs in the colonial period. The Viraśaivas did not accept the state dictates passively but tried to insert its meaning and imaginations into the state narratives. The second point is that the reconstituting of community as political actor is not a contemporary phenomenon, as Vasavi would like to see. There were many communities that reconstituted themselves during the colonial period by way of a conscious engagement with colonialism as well as with other communities in order to safeguard their interests. Our study of the Viraśaiva community and its relationship with the state and other communities in the colonial period would testify how communities were politically motivated and politically assertive.
The narratives of the community and the State are not mutually exclusive. The four types of narratives identified by Vasavi are not independent of each other. We need to see through the overlapping tendencies of these four types of narratives. Most importantly, we need to be sensitive to the collaboration and mutual reinforcement of narratives of the state and the communities. Carol Upadhyay has focused on this aspect. She disapproves of the tendency of studying community identity and narratives of self-representation only in relation to the state. She investigates the role of the academia in producing knowledge about identity formations for the state. She points out,

The discourses and practices of the academy and those of the 'real world' inform and partake of one another in multiple ways, and this interconnection is especially dense with regard to concepts such as community, culture and identity,... It is not only the practices of the state but also academic work that is implicated in the reproduction and transformation of identities (Upadhyay, 2001:49-50)

In the second chapter, arguing along the lines of Upadhyay we have tried to reveal how the academia, the 'public' and the state apparatus work together in order to re-produce and legitimise certain kinds of knowledge through the narratives. The analysis of controversies around narratives of history and literature will demonstrate the complex relationship between narratives of the state and that of the Vīraśaiva community.

Another point of Vasavi was that the structural changes in Karnataka were responsible for the Vīraśaiva community to reconstitute itself and assert its dominance. But this point cannot be extended too far. Because the structural changes in the spheres of politics and economy have not affected all the Vīraśaivas alike and their perception of the structural changes does not boast of uniformity. The Vīraśaivas have demonstrated different perceptions of the structural changes because they do not share a unified and homogenous historical lineage and cultural patterns. Besides that, they are stratified into hierarchical social arrangements. Consequently, the multiple perceptions of the structural changes have contributed to certain kind of crisis and a feeling of being 'under seize'. Once again, this feeling has been imagined differently by different sections of the
community. We call this imagination *castiest crisis*. That is, different castes of the community perceive the crisis differently and their perception is related to their distinct socio-political background and historical experiences.

Narratives of history are also narratives of tradition. Invoking tradition need not necessarily be non-modern or need not entail an erosion of modern values as Hafez envisages. Like history and literature, traditional values are also invented in the modern period and they act as principles of mobilization of opinions. However, Hafez’s critique of fundamentalism in terms of binary oppositions of tradition and modernity does not consider Muslim ‘fundamentalism’ as a modern phenomenon. His critique of Muslim fundamentalism is in a way a nostalgic trip to the early modernity and early modern state institutions. Though Hafez makes a valuable point about how religious fundamentalists took advantage of globalisation, his obsession with modernity does not consider how different sections of Muslim community intervene the domain of modernity from different axis within the Egyptian society. He does not see that the controversy over Hayder's book is a sign of Muslim community's battle for political power and identity rather than a mere sign of fundamentalism. His own analysis shows that the Islamic fundamentalists were very much ‘modern’ and they tried to mobilize the community repeatedly with the support of political power. He does not consider the fact that 'Muslim tradition' is also constructed by the changing conditions. We argue that the controversies around narratives of literature and history provide opportunities for a community to refashion itself not only in terms of the so-called traditional values but also the modern ones.

**Patriarchies, Communities and Colonialism**

Charu Gupta’s analysis (2000:91) of the 'dirty' Hindi Literature in the late colonial north India reviews Susie Tharu and Lalitha’s article. She argues that the Victorian sensibility did not solely determine the indigenous perceptions about the

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31 The term *castiest crisis* is formulated following Etienne Balibier’s concept ‘racist crisis’ (1993). Baliber, while theorising racism in the contemporary France, considers that it is not merely the structural changes in the society that create crisis but crisis also depends on the way it is perceived, defined and formed by the racists. In other words, he theorises how the rhetoric of crisis adds a much-needed mechanism to defend and legitimise racism.
question of woman and aesthetics. Secondly, the charges of obscenity in the colonial period were across gender lines and not merely due to prejudice towards women. Therefore, according to Gupta the issue of obscenity was central rather than that of gender. She discusses how the ‘Hindu publicists’ (2001:1-29) re-constructed patriarchy by means of othering the Muslims. For this re-construction of Hindu patriarchy, she does not hold the colonial power and the Victorian values responsible. She mentions the conflicts between several castes, middle class literary groups and social reformists over the question of woman that ultimately defined patriarchy in modern times. She disagrees with the assumptions of the present day scholars that the colonial rule successfully established hegemony by means of the Victorian values of sexuality and patriarchy. She indicates the lack of finality in the establishment of Hindu identity formation around patriarchy, sexuality and incompleteness of the colonial discourse. As an extension of such analysis of patriarchy and sexuality, we need to examine the dynamics of the then prevailing social relations between Ganika community and the other communities especially the Brahmin community if we are to understand colonialism, the middle class patriarchy and its relation to the "new" notion of morality which resulted in the proscription of works such as Radhika Santwanam.

The relationship between the Ganika community and the Brahmin community in the Madras Presidency underwent drastic changes during the colonial period. The changing values of art, dance, and other forms of cultural practices indicate these changes. Susie and Lalitha consider the anti-nautch movement as the offshoot of the progressive, middle class and upper caste social reformation. It was this middle class and its 'aesthetic' sensibility that was responsible for engendering new notions of purity, morality and human values. But it is important for us to note that among the educated middle class, there were differences of opinions as far as reformation of the Ganika community was concerned. Some of these differences surfaced in the context of nautch reform. The middle class social reformists who considered nautch as an obscene and low art form attempted to reform it or abolish it. But the conservatives objected to any kind of reformulation. Though the conservative forces within the upper castes harboured the

32 The term nautch was used by the British to refer to the Devadasi tradition in India.
notions of purity/pollution, they did not feel that reformation of the nautch tradition was required. For example, historian V. Ramakrishna (1983) explains the debate around nautch reform as perceived by Venkataratnam, a social reformer and the president of the Metropolitan Temperance and Purity Association in the Andhra region. Ramakrishna notes:

The critics of nautch reform put forward the theory of “recognised outlet for human passions”, and that, in case the system is abolished family life would be threatened with destruction. The opponents of Venkataratnam held the view that his efforts were bound to fail as he was seeking to remove the Himalayas. Some others opined that there is a necessity for the maintenance of a caste devoted exclusively to the performance of fine arts (Ramakrishna, 1983:138-139).

Venkataratnam was a contemporary of Vireshalingam Pantulu and was instrumental in pioneering the 'social purity' movement with the goal of achieving social progress. The anti-nautch sentiment was at the heart of this movement. The conservatives were against Venkataratnam's anti-nautch movement as well as reform movement. Ramakrishna points out,

The native press lodged its protest against the system of having common schools for girls of the general public and the children of nautch girls. They feared that such an arrangement would lead to the corruption of the children of the general public (ibid, 1983:140).

Even those who pressed for the abolition of the nautch system raised it as a question of purity and pollution. The twin questions of obscenity and morality were the main reasons for the anxiety of the middle class literati, which attempted to impose the new cultural practices against the polluting effects of the nautch.

Yet, social reform was not confined to the Brahmin community alone. Several other communities also attempted to reform themselves in the last decades of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The social reform attempt by the Ganika community was a test case to understand the refashioning of various communities during the colonial period. The idea of reformation had caught the imagination of the enlightened few of the Ganika community. The discourse of the non-Brahmin movement in the Madras region created awareness among the Ganikas about their social status in the society. The process of reformation was informed by a critical engagement with the dominant communities such as the Brahmins. One such instance of critical engagement
was the case of Bangalore Nagarathnamma. She was one of the important activists who constantly encountered the reformists. Let me give a brief summary of her biography. This is important because her zeal for the welfare of the Ganika community is closely connected with her career and popularity as Carnatic singer and dancer.

Bangalore Nagarathnamma was the daughter of Puttulakshmi and Vakil Subba Rao, natives of Mysore. Not much is known about Subba Rao. Puttulakshmi was his mistress and Nagarathnamma was born on 3rd November 1878. But Subba Rao chose to abandon his mistress and the newborn child in a very early stage of their relationship. When Nagarathnamma was one and half years old, her mother, by then a destitute, found patronage under Giribhatta Timmayya Sastry, a noted Sanskrit scholar in the court of the Maharaja of Mysore. Thimmayya Sastry taught the child Sanskrit while her mother took care of her music tutelage. At the age of five, the ceremony of dedicating her to God was performed. By the age of nine, Nagarathnamma was proficient in Sanskrit and Music. By 1893, she had established herself as a musician and scholar of repute in the Royal Court of Mysore. Nagarathnamma moved to Madras in 1903 when she was twenty-five years old. C. S. Rajaratna Mudaliar, a wealthy merchant of Madras, was her patron in Madras. She settled at George Town in Madras. Her departure from the Royal court of Mysore ended her dancing career and in Madras she was well known as a singer as well as a harikatha performer.

Bangalore Nagarathnamma was extremely confident about certain things. Two instances give ample proof of this. Her intervention during the campaign for anti-nautch and her efforts to publish Muddupalani’s work are good examples of her social activism.

In 1910, Bangalore Nagarathnamma attended the Khanta Bhera, a festival of music at Rajamundry. There, Kaviraja Saarvabhauma Krishnamurthy Sastry in his exposition, said that a man called Muttu Palani had translated the Tirupavai into Sanskrit in the eighteenth century. Nagarathnamma who knew Muddupalani’s work drew attention of the speaker to his ignorance. She said that the translator was a woman and
her name was Muddupalani and not Muttu Palani. Since then she decided to publish the 'literary' works composed by members of her community so that people would at least know them. She hoped that this would bring to light the cultural achievements of her community, which is neglected in the contemporary society. Nagarathnamma did not choose Tirupavai but a highly original classic work namely *Radhika Santwanam* for publication. It was a great success and thousands of copies were sold within a short period.

The publication of Muddupalani’s classic work caused a furore in the society. The social reformers out rightly condemned it. Many of them denounced it as ‘obscene’ and labelled its author as a fallen woman. Nagarathnamma defended this great literary work, but to no avail. The western educated reformers put pressure upon the colonial government to ban this book. The British authorities considered it as a pornographic work and imposed a ban on the circulation of it in 1911.

Vireshalingam Pantulu and Nagarathnamma seriously debated the issue of obscenity in relation to *Radhika Santwanam*. When Vireshalingam condemned Muddupalani’s work as ‘disgraceful and inappropriate’ for women, Nagarathnamma shot back,

Does the question of propriety and embarrassment arrive only in the case of women, and not of men? Is he implying that it is possible for this author [Muddupalani] to write about conjugal pleasures in minute details and without reservations because she was a courtesan, but it would not be possible for respectable men? Then my question is: Are the obscenities in this book [*Radhika Santwanam*] worse than the obscenities in *Vaijayantivilasam*, a work that Pantalugaru personally reviewed and approved for publication? And what about the obscenities in his own work *Rasikajanamobhiranjanam*?

Interestingly, no one from the Ganika community objected to the publication of Muddupalani’s work.

Nagarathnamma was highly critical of the Brahmins when the reformation movement tried to abolish the Devadasi system, because the Brahmins who were the greatest patrons of Devadasis were unable to continue this age-old practice due to the newly acquired western education and values. The newly educated members of the Ganika community who began to feel that the Devadasi system should be abolished supported them. By 1930s, the practice of temple Dasis was withering away. Very few women were being dedicated to temples. If, for Nagarathnamma, the literature and practices of the Ganika community were a matter of pride, the newly educated members of the community considered them to be a matter of shame. For example, in 1926, Muthulakshmi Reddy, a noted gynaecologist of Madras and the first woman member of the Legislative Assembly fought for the abolition of the Devadasi system under the influence of nationalism. She was from the Ganika community. Her mother Chandramma was a courtesan of Pudukottai. Muthulakshmi Reddy, being highly articulate and forceful, began a systematic campaign to abolish the entire Devadasi tradition. In the year 1932, the Raja of Bobbili, Sir Shwetachalapati Ramakrishna Bahadur Varu Ranga Rao, became the Prime Minister of Madras Presidency. His friends organized a public function to facilitate him in a manner befitting a Raja, by organizing a nautch party. Muthulakshmi Reddy criticized this effort and raised a public debate. She wrote long letters to The Hindu and The Mail (English newspapers) and attacked her friends who attended the party.

The Devadasis of Madras who were against the abolition of the system came together under the leadership of Nagarathnamma. They formed the Madras Devadasi Association, with Nagarathnamma as its secretary. Other notable members included Veena Dhanammal and her daughters, T Rajalakshmi and T Lakshmiratnam, Salem Meenakshi, Salem Thayi, Salem Lakshmi and Mylapore Gowri. Thousands of appeals, some printed and others handwritten poured into the Legislative assembly of Madras presidency. The members of the association argued:

Our institution is similar to the mutts presided by sanyasis for the propagation of religion. We can be compared to female sanyasis attached to respective temples. We marry none but God and can become devotees of God (ibid).
They quoted from *Shaiva Agamas* to substantiate their scriptural origins. According to them Lord Shiva said:

> To please me during my puja, arrangements must be made daily for *shuddha nritta* (dance) which should be danced by females born of such [Devadasi] families and the five *acharyas* should form the accompaniments. Since these Agamas are revered by every Hindu, however modern and educated they are, what reason can there be for our community not to thrive and exist as necessary adjuncts of temple service? (ibid)

The above remarks are another classic case of retrieving tradition in modern space. They considered the legislative act to ban *Devadasi* system as uncivilised and discriminatory. They did not support Muthulakshmi Reddy's proposed abolition of *Devadasi* tradition. According to Nagarathnamma, abolition of the *Devadasi* system was unjust. She argued,

> In proposing this legislation, the legislators attempt to do away forever with our sect. Such legislation is unparalleled in the civilized world (ibid)

The *Devadasis* felt that if they were given a proper education they would certainly be able to acquire high status in the society. They implored:

> Give us education-religious, literary and artistic-so we will occupy once again the same rank, which we held in the past. Teach us the Thevarams of the Saivite saints and the Nalayaram of the Vaishnavite acharyas. Instil into us the Gita and the beauty of the Ramayana and explain to us the Agamas and the rites of worship (ibid)

According to the followers of Nagarathnamma such a religious training would inspire the *Devadasis* to model themselves after female saints like Maitreyi, Gargi and Manimekalai and the women singers of the Vedas. They opined,

> We might once again become the preachers of morality and religion. You who boast of your tender love for small communities, we pray that you may allow us to live and work out our salvation and manifest ourselves in *jnana* and *bhakti* and keep alight the torch of India's religion amidst the fogs and storms of increasing materialism and interpret the message of India to the world (ibid).

Nagarathnamma drafted the above appeal along with the other members of the *Madras Devadasi Association*. Though this proposal of Nagarathnamma looks traditionalist from present day point of view to the progressives, it was also an attack on the Brahmins' attempts to monopolize Vedas and Agamas. She criticized the social exclusion of her community members from modern education. She condemned the reformists for their elitist ideas. There were many who supported Nagarathnamma. Kalpana Kannabiran has
discussed in detail the anti-abolition movement led by Ngarathnamma and others. According to Kannabiran there were several organizations that opposed the bill against abolition of *Devadasi* system in the country. However, Kannabiran is of the opinion,

> The positions that the anti-abolitionists like Nagarathnnammal and Doraiikkannammal for instance took, were certainly not 'brahmin' positions, nor can they by any stretch be called a 'set of prostitutes set up by their keepers'... Their own radicalism and sensitivity to issues is comparable to the radicalism of the non-Brahmin movement, but they were located outside it and in opposition to it” (Kannabiran, 1995, WS-67-68).

Nagarathnamma's efforts to prevent the abolition of the nautch system failed. In 1927, a bill was introduced to abolish the nautch and in 1947, it became the law.

The Devadasi community was experiencing the changed conditions of the society and struggling for survival during this period. It was not only trying to refashion itself under the colonial rule and the new values brought to it by the new education but was also trying to assert its visibility in the public, in relation with other communities. Several communities in the colonial period came under the influence of modern/western education and consequently post-enlightenment values were internalised and employed by all of them for different purposes. These communities translated the modern values according to the social needs of the community. These values became grand narratives through which society and culture were interpreted and understood. It is in such a context that Nagarathnamma published *Radhika Santwanam*. Nagarathnamma found it necessary to project the "great" works from her community and reveal the cultural and literary greatness of her community. A sense of community awareness and the assertion of the self-identity are the motivations behind the publication of *Radhika Santwanam*.

We need to consider one more point here. It is related to how Lord Krishna was illustrated in the work and the general reaction to such illustration when Nagarathanamma published the book. In the work, Lord Krishna is presented as a mere human being who is vulnerable to worldly matters. As Susie and Lalitha note, Nagarathnamma's publication of the book was a subversive and radical act for that time because the book projected Radha and her sensuality as the central focus and Krishna as
pleasure-seeking man. As a matter of fact, the earlier version of the book edited and published by Venkatararsu and Brown did not give much place to highlight these 'subversive' and 'radical' aspects of the work. Instead such books were "trimmed, recast and critically mediated to conform to the Vedic ideal before they were re-circulated" (Tharu and Lalitha, 1993: 210). These editors excised not only descriptions of eroticism but also details about Muddupalani’s lower caste origins. According Susie and Lalitha, quite contrary to the earlier version the present edition published by Nagarathnamma highlighted Krishna and Radha differently from conventional literature in which, the man is the lover and the woman the loved one. Krishna woos and makes love to Radha...Radha is depicted as waiting for Krishna and even longing for him, but the narrative has as its focus on his pleasure (Tharu and Lalitha, 1993: 206).

However, in Radhika Santwanam "woman's sensuality is central" (ibid:206). In this work Radha is portrayed as "a complex, psychologically rounded character" (ibid: 206). Also, she encourages the liaison between lladevi, another mythical character, and Krishna. This work depicts Krishna as though he is a human being who is not beyond love and sex. Therefore, the publication of such work, without editing certain "sensitive" parts, was "startling and unusual" for that time.

In this dissertation we shall discuss literary controversies keeping in mind what we have learnt so far from the above discussions. Hence we shall locate the root causes of controversies not in the contents of a particular literary text but in the society. We use the temporal categories like colonial and post-colonial as mere signs of weighing the changes

Historically that was a time when the Brahmins were increasingly becoming restless for the 'wrong' interpretations of their Gods by other social groups. One such instance in the history of modern India was an objection raised by the Shri Vaishnavas against too much attention given to Lord Krishna's sexual pranks (Krishnalila) by the Christian missionaries in the early nineteenth century. Such emphasis on sexual pranks of Hindu gods formed the fundamentals of oriental studies of the western scholars, especially of the British missionaries. In order to prevent such misrepresentations of Krishnalila, Hinduism was reconstructed on the lines of Ramarajya. Jurgen Lutt (1995) has worked on different constructions of Lord Krishna in the nineteenth century and the reformation process in the Hindu religion. He considers that Virasaivites were instrumental in reforming and redefining the Hindu religion then. According to Lutt it was due to such reformation process and emphasis on Ramarajya that instances of projecting Lord Krishna as signifying sensuousness gradually withered away. Such reconstructions were necessary for the Virasaivites because the Protestant missionaries, who came to India after 1813, repudiated Hinduism for promoting 'sensuality'. Sensuality was seen as vice of Hindu religion and society and this provided a justification for missionary activity to level accusations against Hinduism.
rather than as the ultimate indicators of judging or measuring our theoretical formulations.

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