Chapter II

Battle of Wills: Secular Intellectuals and the Champions of Community Sentiments

In this chapter, we shall deal with the question of representation, the views of both proponents and opponents of literary bans and their arguments for or against the same. The chapter argues that both those who are in favour of and those who argue against the 'controversial' text, not only construct a 'self of the respective group, but also the 'other'. These constructions reflect on their respective cultural and literary locations. Hence, it is not only interesting but also sociologically productive to analyse the 'battle of wills' between the two groups involved in a literary controversy. Literary controversies serve as the best examples of gaps and contradictions in the received categories of creativity, literary imagination, freedom of expression and community. This chapter is an attempt to understand how multiple representations affect the relationship among the writer, literature and communities in the context of literary controversies. We intend to open up several contentious issues that are not usually addressed in the process of representation but are generally reduced to 'literary' by both the proponents and the opponents of ban.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section of the chapter talks about the relationship between Kannada literature and its literary controversies indicating that Kannada literature is not a smooth and uncontested domain and that it is very much a part of the community's imagination. The second section will reveal how the Viraśaiva narratives are subjected to different interpretations and appropriations. This section intends to show the long-term differences between the secularists and the communitarians over the narratives of Viraśaivism. The third section of the chapter will give an account of literary controversies in connection with the Viraśaiva community. The fourth section tries to theorize the construction of the 'self and the 'other' by the secularists as well as the communitarians. The fifth and the last section of the chapter is an attempt to
formulate certain hypotheses, which will be examined in the subsequent chapters to understand the complexities of literary controversies and the Viraśaiva community.

I

Literary Controversies and the Kannada Literature

The history of modern Kannada literature is generally perceived only from a 'literary' point of view. For example, G. S. Amur's *Essays on Modern Kannada Literature* (2001) traces the history of Kannada drama, poetry, novel and short story from *Navodaya* (the new dawn) period to *Navya* (the Modernist) period. 'Literary' history here is confined to descriptions about evolution of genres and literary stages/movements in modern Kannada literature. As a result, modern Kannada literature is viewed as an evenly unfolding integrated corpus of knowledge. It is autonomous, linear and continuous. *Navodaya* literary movement (1890-1940) is described as the 'renaissance' of Kannada culture and literature. *Pragatisheela* (the Progressive, 1940-60) is explained as an embodiment of socialist ideology. *Navya* (the modernist, 1970-80) is seen as an 'individualist' literary movement. While women writings (1980s onwards), for Amur, are an 'exclusive' domain of women, the Dalit writings (1980s onwards) are important for they foreground Dalit's 'experiences' and their social problems for the first time in Kannada literature. The literary history of the kind written by Amur not only canonizes literature but also focuses only on the already canonized writers.

However, the Kannada literary history cannot be constructed by way of representing only a few writers and the so-called literary movements. It is a site of contesting literary articulations. The Kannada literature and its relationship with the general public is a complex phenomenon. Writers and readers, who constitute the general public, do not belong to a single community. They come from different communities with different social and cultural backgrounds and experiences. Obviously, their ways of writing, reading and interpreting literary texts are determined not only by aestheticism, but also by their social and cultural location. We can go a step further and argue that the much-acclaimed notion of literary taste itself is embedded in the larger social and cultural contexts. The chronological history of Kannada literature has failed to acknowledge these
social and historical contexts and differences. It does not even historicize a literary text enough. Instead, it de-historicizes literary meanings, which are masked within a terrain of aesthetics, literary sensibility, imagination, etc.

In the generally accepted literary history of Kannada, the 'ancient' and the 'medieval' Kannada literatures\(^1\) occupy an important place. In a way, the very idea of modern Kannada literature is crucially dependent upon the conceptions of these periods. For instance, the vacana literature of the twelfth century and the Dasa literature\(^2\) of the fifteenth century have found a permanent place in the histories of Kannada literature. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, new readings were provided to the vacana and the Dasa literatures, thus making them relevant to modern times. It is during this time that the old Kannada texts were found, collated and anthologised. In this process of modernizing the medieval texts, only a few texts of vacanas and Dasa songs were selected and categorized. They were re-interpreted as imbued with modern values of rationality, secularism, and democracy. This was inevitable since the vacanas used to be exclusively associated with religious communities and the liberal and secular intellectuals of the Brahmin as well as the Viraśaiva community interpreted these texts along the lines of modern aesthetics\(^3\). Such a move is symptomatic of a shift away from the communitarians' 'traditional' hold on the songs of Purandaradasa\(^4\) and vacanakaras\(^5\).

Successive literary movements in Kannada literature after the *Navodaya* movement have drawn inspiration from the vacana and Dasa traditions. However, studies

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1. The periodisation of Kannada literary history is a modern phenomenon. It follows the general pattern of tracing the evolution of Indian literatures into ancient, medieval and modern period. Such periodisation has generated a lot of debate on which literary works belong to which period. Aijaz Ahmed has discussed the politics of periodisation (1998).
2. Dasa literature was produced during the medieval period by Purandaradasa, Kanakadasa, etc., the devotees of Lord Vishnu.
3. While the Brahmins identify Purandaradasa as their community icon, Kanakadasa is associated with the Kurubas, the shepherds by profession.
4. Special issue of *Prabuddha Karnataka* (The Kannada Literary Journal of Mysore University: 1919) carried an article by V.G. Kulakami which argued for the study of the *Dasa* tradition especially the study of the songs of Puranadaradasa from literary point of view.
5. We shall discuss the modernization of vacanas in the early twentieth century in the third chapter.
on these two traditions from different perspectives in the modern period have also generated literary controversies and debates on many occasions. These controversies are related to clash between different social groups as well as religious communities. Even though the controversies initially began at the individual level, they were indeed community centred. In literary controversies, debates around controversial texts centre on the authors and their intentions. Authors are recognized, received, read and criticized in terms caste, gender, history, religion and so on. Modern Kannada literature has witnessed several such controversies and debates, where the writers were accused of bias and prejudices. The authors, in such cases, are usually identified with a particular caste/community and are accused of serving personal/community interests.

A look at some of the literary controversies of the twentieth century would exemplify the contentious issues in Kannada literature. The following controversies clearly demonstrate that the evolution of Kannada literature does not signify a linear progression; nor does the literature exhibit humanism or liberal values:

1) In 1912, the Jain community of Belgaum filed a petition in the district magistrate court against staging a Kannada play namely Sangeeta Basaweshwara Nataka. Shri Kadasiddheshwara Prasadhika Konnur Karnataka Sangeeta Mandali, a professional troupe of Karnataka, performed this play. The Jain community alleged that the play caricatured Bijjala who, they thought, belonged to their community. After hearing the petition, the district magistrate served a ruling to stop the performance. This prohibition annoyed the Viraśaiva community. Mysore Star, a bilingual daily of the community severely criticized the ruling and carried out consistent attack against it. One year before this incident, the Brahmin community also had demanded a ban on the play in Dharwad on the ground that the play contained some objectionable references to the Brahmins. But the district magistrate had not banned the play then and allowed the performance after censoring some parts of the play which were allegedly anti-Brahmin.

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6 More details on Sangeeta Basaweshwara Nataka controversy are given in the next chapter, p. 117.
2) In 1919, some leaders of the Viraśaiva community lodged a complaint with the district magistrate court of Dharwad against an article written in a Kannada weekly namely Shubhodaya. The complainants felt that the contents of the article were highly objectionable because they distorted the image of Basava and Allama. The Brahmin community was accused of spreading hostility towards the Viraśaiva community since the writer of the article and editor of the paper happened to be Brahmins. The controversy was well known as the Shubhodaya controversy and it generated a lot of heat between the Brahmins and the Viraśaivas. This controversy was seriously taken into consideration by the Viraśaiva scholars like Halakatti, Siddaramappa Pawate and Hardekar Manjappa who felt a dire need to prove their worth in the modern world and reconstruct the community image in tune with the changing times.

3) An article on Basava in a Marathi newspaper Sakula was in controversy in 1934. The Viraśaivas were angry because the article 'caricatured' Basava's image. It was written that Basava hatched a conspiracy against Bijjala. This point angered the Viraśaivas and they lodged a complaint against the newspaper in the Bombay high court. The court, after hearing both sides, ordered the editor and the writer of the article to tender apology for 'hurting the sentiments' of the Viraśaivas.

4) In 1934, two Kannada plays of Shri Ranga, a Brahmin playwright of the early twentieth century, namely, Harijanwara and Prapancha Panipattu were in the eyes of the storm. Harijanwara satirizes and condemns the conservative rituals of the Brahmin priesthood. This satire was severely objected by the Brahmin community in northern Karnataka. There were many protests against Shri Ranga. On another occasion, Prapancha Panipattu angered the Viraśaiva community. Siddappa Kambali, a Viraśaiva educational minister in the then

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7 This controversy is examined elaborately in the next chapter.
Bombay government, threatened Shri Ranga that if the parts of the play which caricatured the Viraśaivas were not deleted, his career as a teacher would be in danger.

5) *Jaratari Jagadguru* is a Kannada novel written by Basavaraj Kattimani in 1952. As soon as this novel was published in the same year, it landed up in controversial because, the *Mooru Saavira* mutt of Hubli took objections to the depiction of a Viraśaiva guru in the novel. The mutt burned copies of the book publicly and there were many threatening calls to Kattimani.

6) Masti Venkatesh lyengar's Kannada novel *Chennabasavanayaka* landed up in controversy in 1958. The Viraśaivas did not take note of the novel till the government of India recognized it. The controversy aroused when the Central Sahitya Akademi decided to translate the novel into all the fourteen Indian Languages, which are accepted in the constitution as national languages. However, the Viraśaivas alleged that the 'character' of Rani Virammaji, the protagonist's mother and the queen of Bidanur, in the novel is portrayed with the deliberate wicked intention to show her as a woman who does not care for morality. This portrayal, it was accused, depicted the Virasaivas as cowards. They demanded the Central Government's intervention in order to stop the proposed translation. S. M. Vrishubhendraswamy reminisces that the copies of the novel were burnt publicly at places like Shimoga, Gadag, Bellary, Kodagu, etc. (1999:35). The Government of India, under severe political pressure, had to ask the Sahitya Akademi to give up the proposed plan of translating the novel.

7) The serialization of Vishukumar's Kannada novel *Karavali* had to be dropped from a Kannada daily Kannada Prabha in 1969 due to controversy around it. It triggered off social and religious tension in coastal Karnataka between the

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8] *Jaratari* means saffron silk dress usually worn by religious heads or pontiffs.
Muslims and the Mogaveeras. The Mogaveera community (the fishing community) attacked the Kannada Prabha press in Bangalore demanding an immediate withdrawal of the serial. It was said that the novel hurt the sentiments of the fishermen community for it depicted an “unimaginable and unacceptable” marriage between a woman of the Mogaveera community and a Muslim man. Much before this, Vishukumar’s short story Devaru Helida Kathe (Story Told by God) had invited the wrath of the Brahmin community. This was because the story was accused of containing anti-Brahmin descriptions.

8) In 1984, the psychoanalytical book on Ramayana that hinted at a possible relationship between Seeta and Lakshmana in Ramayanadalli Seethayana (Seetayana in Ramayana) by Polanki Ramamurthy, a noted critic and an English professor of Mysore University, was led to controversy. Brahmins of the two Hindu organizations i.e. R. S. S. (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) and the V. H. P. (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) lodged a case against Polanki Ramamurthy, demanding an immediate ban on the book. As a result, the state police confiscated the copies of the book. Some members of the Hindu organizations even tried to assault the writer. The proponents of the ban accused that the author has deliberately illustrated the relationship between Seeta and Lakshmana in bad light. In the book, Seeta is portrayed as expressing her inner love feelings for Lakshmana when Rama had gone out. This episode in the book was condemned because it was against the popular belief about Seeta’s fidelity to Rama.

9) In 1984, the Muslims were up against Saara Aboobkar for writing a novel, Chandragiriya Teeradalli (On the Banks of Chandragiri). Certain details in the novel were found objectionable because they were against polygamy and the custom of talaq. To put it in other words, the novel “throws light on the system of talaq and reconciliation” (2003:7). Sara was accused of
misrepresenting the Holy Koran and the Muslim activists threatened her with dire consequences.

10) K. S. Bhagawan’s English version of a Kannada work namely *Shankaracharya mattu Pratigamitana* (Shankarachaya and Conservativism) was found ‘dangerous’ in 1989 by the Joint Director of the Prosecution for ‘containing’ anti-Hindu elements. The Sub-inspector of Vaiyalikawal area (in Bangalore) was directed to take action against the writer on charges of hurting the sentiments of the Hindus and fostering communal disharmony in the society. It was alleged that the writer twisted the historical facts about the Shankaracharya by describing him as a *Goonda* (rowdy-sheet).

11) The *Maarga–I* (Path-I) controversy in 1989 was about a research work by M. M. Kalburgi, the Kannada professor of Karnataka university, Dharwad. The Viraśaiva community was angered by his research findings. Kalburgi was made to apologize publicly for ‘wild’ imaginations supposedly made by him in the name of research about the Viraśaiva women saints of the twelfth century. The community leaders argued that M. M. Kalburgi deliberately distorted the image of Nilalochna (the second wife of Basava) by describing her as sexual and sensuous *(Kamada Aatura)* and Nagalambike (sister of Basava) as the wife of a lower caste man.

12) *Mahachaitra* (Great Spring) is a Kannada play written in 1984 by H. S. Shivaprakash. In the mid 1994, MM and her organisation *Basava Dal* launched an attack on the play. They demanded immediate withdrawal of the play from the Kannada textbook prescribed in Kuvempu and Gulbarga Universities. Many members of the Viraśaiva community held demonstrations, *rasta roko* agitation and *dharnas* in the northern part of Karnataka, especially in Gulbarga and Bidar. The main objection was that the writer portrayed Basava as an escapist and Akkamahadevi as a mad woman who walked around the streets of Kalyana. The play was withdrawn from the syllabus later.
13) In 1995, the Vishwakarma community took objections to a Kannada textbook prescribed for high school students. They demanded the removal of a story *Oduva Ata* (The Game of Reading) from the textbook. Shivarama Karant, one of the seven Jnanapeetha awardees in Karnataka, wrote the story. The main objection of the community was that some parts in the story demeaned the community's traditional profession as artisans. The syllabus committee heeded to the demand by withdrawing the textbook.

14) The Ganiga community (oil-pressers) in Karnataka raked a controversy in 1995 around a Kannada short story *Kappu Holeyallondu Belli Nouke* (A Silver Boat in a Black Stream). The story appears in an anthology of Kannada stories written by Udyavara Madhava Acharya was prescribed for the first year B.Com Students in Mangalore University in 1995. The story was accused of hurting the sentiments of the Ganiga community. Though there were no public protests, the community appealed to the university to withdraw it. The university withdrew the book in three months due to the controversy.

15) The *Basava Deepti* controversy arose with the publication of *Basava Vacana Deepti* in 1996. It is a compilation of revised version of Basava's vacanas by MM. The controversy was around changing *ankitanaama* (authorial signature at the end of each vacana) of Basava's vacanas. Various religious organisations of the Virasaiva community and several other intellectuals severely criticised her of tampering the vacanas. The government of Karnataka has imposed a ban on its circulation. Even today her religious conventions or discourses meet with strong opposition from the community in the northern parts of Karnataka due to this controversy.

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9 I could not ascertain the precise reasons for the controversy.
10 Details of *ankitanaamas* are given in the fifth chapter, p.209
16) *Dharmakaarana*, a Kannada novel written in 1995 by P. V. Narayana, a Brahmin writer, was in the eye of the storm when the Karnataka Sahitya Akademy chose the novel for its annual award in 1997. The ABVM launched an agitation against the author and his book. The organization and others alleged that P. V. Narayana portrayed Akkanagamma, the sister of Basava, as a prostitute. They demanded that the Karnataka Sahitya Akademy should withdraw its decision to confer the award to the novel. Subsequent developments forced the Akademy to drop the award and later on the State Government banned the book.

17) In 1997, the State Government was forced to withdraw a ballad on Kittur Chennamma, the queen of Kittur in the late seventeenth century, from second year pre-university Kannada textbook. In the ballad there was a reference to a Brahmin's name. The Brahmin community gave a representation to the government against the ballad because it made fun of the Brahmin.

In all the above controversies, education, literature and media, which are part of the public consciousness, have come under severe attack and criticism. The main contention between the secularists and the communitarians is not only related to the 'religious' matters but also about the questions of history, community identity, public space and so on. For instance, the *Chennabasavanayaka* controversy indicates a tension over the question of history; the *Oduva Aata* controversy symbolizes the dynamics of community identity and the *Chadragiriya Tiradalli* controversy illustrates the social and religious aspects of the Muslims. Even though we typify the controversies into religious, community identity or social, all the above-mentioned issues, due to their overlapping nature, affect each controversy. Except the *Karavali* controversy, other controversies have not resulted in any kind of clash between two communities. The clash between the Mogaveera community and the Muslim community, in the context of *Karavali* controversy, indicates the social relationship between the two at the time of novel being published. The bone of contention in all the other controversies is between the writer and the 'affected' community.
In all these literary controversies, the secularists and the communitarians are antagonistic to each other's interests and concerns. The secularists see no merit in opposing the communitarians, as they are taken for granted as representatives of irrationality, but are often forced to get involved in the controversies because when their integrity, scholarship and freedom of expression are seemingly at stake. Literary critics and literary historians in Kannada literature discount these aspects as aberrations or intrusions into the general order of the history of the Kannada literature, not worthy of dealing with.

II
Institutionalisation of Virasaivism in the Kannada Public Sphere

The Kannada public sphere has always had a love-hate relationship with Viraśaivas. This is evident in its habit of both accepting as well as resenting certain aspects of Viraśaivism. In a short span of time, the community has demanded the State Government of Karnataka to constrain the writers from hurting the sentiments of the Viraśaivas, several times. Maarga-I, Mahachaitra, Basava Vacana Deepti and Dharmakaarana controversies have revealed the community's resentment over the 'misrepresentation' of their religious icons and values by the Kannada creative writers. The community has expressed its strong will to 'own' and monopolize the knowledge of Viraśaivism for itself. Any literary endeavour that runs against their beliefs and values of Viraśaivism that they cherish is objected as 'unwanted interference' into its 'internal' affairs. But this is a paradox. The Viraśaiva community, on the one hand, possesses its history and literature as its valued treasure and on the other, it tries to universalise it as a significant part of Kannada literature. This paradox of showing sectarian attitude as well as transcending sectarianism indicates the community's modern dilemma. We will get back to the dilemma of the community in the next two chapters.

Both the Viraśaiva as well as the non-Viraśaiva writers have fore grounded the diverse traditions of Viraśaivism, especially of vacanas. A few among them, the communitarians, try to homogenize the community by re-producing the narratives around the icons such as Basava, Allama, Siddharama, Chennabasavanna, Akkanagamma, etc.
But the secularists have expressed dissent at the monopolistic tendencies of the communitarians. They have tried to highlight the critical traditions within Viraśaivism in order to avoid appropriation of Viraśaivism by the communitarians. Therefore, the vacanas are no longer considered literature belonging exclusively to the Viraśaiva community. As a consequence, there are multiple and often conflicting interpretations of vacanas and Viraśaiva puranas. However, it is an interesting part of history to know how the narratives of vacanas and of the twelfth century movement have been constructed and claimed by different social forces, which are sometimes antagonistic to each other. This movement has also been averred as a secular movement, which paved way for establishing a casteless society. There are also works like A. K. Ramanujan's Speaking of Shiva (1973) that claim that the process of individualization started during this period. It is very clear that such works satisfied the social needs of certain social groups of Karnataka. This could be one of the reasons why different communities of Karnataka claim the vacanas for various purposes. The notions of nationalism, equality, religious harmony, casteless society, democracy, etc mark their claims through vacanas. For example, in the first half of the twentieth century, vacanas were seen as representing the secular culture of Karnataka and they were projected as an integral part of the Kannada literature. As the idea of Karnataka arose there was a need to seek help from the Viraśaivas to consolidate the notion of Karnataka for it was the majority community in the northern parts of the state. Hence, the Viraśaiva and the Brahmin intellectuals employed vacanas for mobilizing the people for the cause of unified Karnataka. Thus, history of Viraśaivism is, on the one hand, considered a 'religious' past that cannot be tampered with, and on the other, it has been constructed as a shared history of all the communities living in Karnataka. Similarly, since the early twentieth century, different social groups have constructed the twelfth century religious movement and the vacanas on the basis of their own vantage points.11

The process of transformation and naturalization of the vacanas in the consciousness of the Kannadigas began during the colonial period and it was accelerated

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11 In the forth chapter we shall give a detailed account of how vacanas are appropriated by different cultural traditions, which are traditionally antagonistic to each other.
after independence. The academic as well as the non-academic institutions laid more emphasis on the vacana tradition. The Vīraśaiva hagiographies and other works of metaphysical nature, as earlier, continued to be recognized as part of Kannada literature. But the vacanas were to displace them soon as the 'authentic' sources of the Vīraśaiva history. However, the institutional efforts to study the Vīraśaiva literature with special reference to vacanas have not ended up in producing a single/monolithic intellectual tradition. Multiple approaches and concerns have marked such endeavours. That apart, the hard work done by individuals, voluntary associations and religious organizations resulted in the creation of different intellectual traditions. These intellectual traditions have provided different ideological readings of the vacanas.

The Centre for Kannada Studies in the Karnataka University is the foremost academic institution, which promoted scholarly studies on Vīraśaiva literature on large scale between 1950 and 1970s. The majority of Kannada scholars in this Centre hailed from the Vīraśaiva community and they worked relentlessly to produce scholarly literature on Vīraśaivism. M. M. Kalburgi's *History of Vacana Publication* (1990) mentions the pioneering contribution of the university to Vīraśaiva studies in the 1960s. The work done in the Kannada Adhyayana Peetha (Centre for Kannada Studies (1960-80) is considered as the third stage in the history of the modern Vīraśaiva Studies. During this period, eighty works on vacanas were published and out of them the Peetha published forty. This period witnessed not only path breaking research and discovery of new Vīraśaiva texts but also new insights, added to the earlier studies. Under the guidance of R. C. Hiremath, a massive research project of collection and publication of vacanas was taken up in the year 1962 for which many Vīraśaiva scholars worked. The names of M. M. Kalburgi, J. S. Kulli, Pundit Nagabhushanashastri, V. R. Koppal, and Mevundi Mallari are prominent in this research project. The Peetha published many more anthologies of vacanas of Cheiinabasavanna, Siddharameshwara and other Sharanas. This project helped in ascertaining the accurate number and authorship of the vacanas. The Peetha was also instrumental in continuing the legacy of previous Vīraśaiva scholars in

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12 This book traces four stages of studies on vacanas from colonial period to post-colonial period. Descriptions of other stages are given in the third chapter.
establishing the vacanas as poetry. Apart from the vacana studies, scholarly works on *Shunya Sampadane* (Attainment of Nothingness) contributed to a new dimension of the Viraśaiva Studies. *Shunya Sampadane* is an anthology of vacanas compiled in four different versions by four scholars during the fifteenth century. They identify Allama Prabhu as the cultural icon in their works and there is less focus on Basava. It is important to notice here that Allama is seen as the guide and philosopher of Basava in *Shunya Sampadane*. In the following chapters we will see that some of the Viraśaiva sects are indeed uncomfortable with such articulations. However, the authors of the modern narratives on *Shunya Sampadane* are not as categorical as their medieval ancestors as far as this particular issue of highlighting Allama is concerned.

Let us now look at some other efforts that are taken up in the public sphere of Karnataka. This includes several writers who were interested in what they believed as the secular values of the vacana movement and its poetic quality. The secularists are not happy with the sectarian, revivalist and communal manipulation of the vacanas by the religious and political leaders. Therefore, inclusion of vacanas in the educational curriculum was a major step towards popularising them. When they were selected keeping their educational value in mind, the religious overtone was played down. The moral, devotional and literary aspects were highlighted in the curriculum. An anthology of vacanas published in 1979 is one such work that illustrates the process of overlooking the religious dimension. ‘Vacana Kammata’, (The Workshop of Vacana) "a representative collection of 'vacanas'"13 was prescribed for Kannada textbook of the undergraduate students of Bangalore University in 1979. As the chief editor of this book, G. S. Shivarudrappa, a well-known poet and critic, writes in the preface to the anthology that the vacanas were edited and prepared with a focus on devotional, literary and linguistic aspects. The edition was designed with the aim of emphasizing distinct expressions and constraints of each vacanakaras. There are sixty vacanakaras of different social backgrounds and ages in the anthology. Nowhere in the preface is it said that the

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13 This book was edited by K. Marulasiddappa and K. R. Nagaraja, the well-known critics in Kannada and was published under the centrally sponsored scheme for production of books and literature in regional languages at the University level with the assistance of the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Government of India, New Delhi.
vacanas exclusively belong to the Vīraśaivas. When we go through the edition, we learn heterogeneous articulations of the vacana movement. That is, there are different vacanakaras who popularised the vacanas and their values in the twelfth century. The focus on different vacanakaras has minimized excessive focus and privileging of a certain group of vacanakaras.

Such attempts to popularise and deviate from monolithic constructions of vacanas have put the history of the Vīraśaiva movement under severe examination. Ambivalences and contradictions found in the movement and in the life of its pioneers have come under scrutiny. We do not say that the secular writers studied and produced literatures on Vīraśaivism only with the intention of contesting the religious forces or the communitarians. But the efforts of the secularists can be seen as unravelling multiple dimensions of the Vīraśaiva movement and vacanas, which are quite contrary to the essentialist/romanticized notion of the communitarians.

A. K. Ramanujan's translation of the vacanas in Speaking of Shiva is another attempt that does not mask the vacanas in a metaphysical framework. His ideas about the vacanas disclose the subversive, radical and poetic aspects of the vacanas. His translations of vacanas of different vacanakaras acquire a special significance for his emphasis on the 'individualist' and 'subjective' aspects of the vacanas. His engagement with the Kannada literary modernism allows him to read vacanas as literary expressions of an experience of the 'self'. He considers them as the personalized experiences of vacanakaras. He points out,

> Even the few given conventional stances of bhakti are expressed in terms of deeply felt personal relations; the loves and frustrations of bhakti are those of lover and beloved (e.g. Mahadevi), mother, and child, father and son, master and servant, even whore and customer (Ramanujan, 1972:53)

The concerns of the vacanas are with "subject rather than the object (of worship)", he points out (ibid: 53). The Bhakti movements of India are analogues to European protestant movements. Like the concerns of the Christian Protestant Movement, the vacana movement too was against priests, rituals, temples and social hierarchy. And this
opposition is articulated in terms of direct, individual, original experience of the vacanakaras. For Ramanujan, while the classical and folk traditions depersonalise literary expressions, vacanas stand as good examples of personal expressions. In short, the self-reflexive aspects of the vacanakaras are more exciting for Ramanujan. Nowhere does he consider vacanas as divine and sacred. His beginning remarks on vacanas as literary 'lyrics' drift away from the essentialist and religious aspects attributed to them by the communitarians. His emphasis on 'individualism' in the vacanas reflects on the modernist movement in the Kannada literature of his days.

State Patronage and Viraśaivism

The Viraśaiva community emerged as the single majority community after the unification of Karnataka. It is not surprising that the literature and the tradition of the dominant community attracted a lot of state patronage. The institutional attempts to study Viraśaivism are indeed a result of the State Government's interest in it. The State patronage to the Viraśaiva Studies is not less significant. The erstwhile Government of Mysore published a commemorative volume on Basaweshwara in 1967 on the occasion of his eighth birth centenary. The birth centenary was celebrated at the national level. The committee formed to oversee the celebrations included many Viraśaiva ministers as its members. The volume has articles on the life, philosophy and literature of Basava. Basava's ideals are compared with that of other world religions and philosophers. Also included are the translations of Basava's vacanas and his contribution to the cause of social justice and an egalitarian society. Hence, we can safely conclude that if the scholarly work on Viraśaivism has sculpted Basava as 'secular' leader and the 'founder' of the Viraśaiva community, the Government of Karnataka has projected him as the state icon. This apart, the government of Karnataka has been supporting various projects related to Viraśaivism. It has published a complete volume of vacanas in 1988 under the editorship of M. M. Kalburgi.

Debates and contradictions about the historical truth about the twelfth century Shiva Sharanas continued to persist and the discovery of new literature on Viraśaivism fuelled the debates and contradictions to some extent. The debates were more related to
intellectual questions than any thing else. For example, they were about the issues related
to exact authorship, originality, number and period of vacanas or about the hagiographies
of vacanakaras. Such debates were confined to the academic circles. But several
Viraśaiva mutts, apart from the state patronage, within the community continued to
appropriate the Viraśaiva literature for their own religious purposes and created a very
different 'history' of the Viraśaiva community. The Viraktha mutts\textsuperscript{14} of the Viraśaiva
community played a leading role in the preservation and perpetuation of Basava cult.
They played an active part in the revival of Basava cult and they are still the propagators
of the ideals of the Shiva Sharanas. In our view, these differences and conflicts are
indications of certain unresolved questions on the Viraśaiva history, religion and
literature in the colonial period\textsuperscript{15}.

The relationship between the Viraśaiva religion and politics needs a special
attention here. The 'cohesive' conditions (Manor: 1989) of the community during the
1950s and 1960s have a dialectical relationship with political power of the Viraśaiva. In
Karnataka, it was the Viraśaiva community, which dominated the political scene from
1956 to 1972. According to J.P. Shouten, the Viraśaiva gurus were influential in
determining the outcome of elections in Karnataka. He writes,

\begin{quote}
There are more Virakta gurus—and some of the Gurusthalada tradition too—who
are known for their political influence. Especially in the fifties and the sixties, it
was not unusual that the results of elections were determined by the propaganda of
some mighty gurus among their followers. The Virakta monastery of Chitradurga
and the Gurustalada matha at Sirigere had an age-old conflict and their
competition played a major role in regional political elections (Shouten,
\end{quote}

In the field of education too, the mutts undertook the responsibility of providing
education to the community. The educational institutions set up by the mutts were built
on the principles of vacanas\textsuperscript{16}. Educational initiatives not only created an awareness

\textsuperscript{14} Viraktha mutts belong to Viraktha tradition, one of the two monastic traditions of the Virasaiva religion.
More information on these traditions is given in the next chapter, p. 145
\textsuperscript{15} We have discussed this point in the next chapter.
\textsuperscript{16} We are not assuming that these institutions have truly adhered to the ideals of Vacanas like equality of
caste and gender, justice and good faith. Our intention here is to reveal how the educational institutions for
their own legitimacy deployed the Vacanas.
regarding the importance of education among the Viraśaivas but also encouraged the youngsters from various sub-caste groups of the community living in the rural areas to be educated.

**The Communitarians and the Iconisation of the Viraśaiva Mystics**

The differences between the secular writers and the communitarians in the institutionalisation of Viraśaiva Studies is about the emphasis on particular aspects of the Viraśaiva legacy rather than in the structure as a whole and the functions that they perform. The differences over the interpretation of tradition, religion and the notion of freedom have brought the two parties into conflict. For instance, MM’s novel *Kranti Kalyana* (The Kalyana Revolution, 1973) highlights the mystical poems of Basava. She wrote the novel with the sole purpose of disseminating the ideals of Basava and propagating the religious beliefs of her organization. In the novel, she glorifies the achievements of Basava and she calls him as Jagadguru (the guru of the world). This novel gives a vivid picture of the ritualistic and caste-ridden society of the twelfth century in the context of a marriage arranged by Basava between a lower caste man and a Brahmin woman. It also gives a brief sketch of the *indomitable courage* of three followers of Basava-Haralayya, Silavanta and Madhuvarsa- who sacrificed their lives for the sake of their convictions for the casteless society. The whole novel is centred on Basava. Great care has been taken to portray Basava as the sole leader of the Viraśaiva social revolution, throughout the novel. There is more emphasis on the greatness of Basava and his ideals. It is through such glorification that the novel essentialises the Viraśaiva history. In other words, Basava and his followers are illustrated in the novel as flawless characters and their ideals are romanticized. As a result, we do not find any critical engagement with some of the social and political questions raised by the Viraśaiva movement. In 1984, MM’s organization *Vishwa Kalyana Mission* produced a Kannada film on the life history of Basava, titled *Krantiyogi Basavanna* (The Revolutionary Saint Basava). MM wrote the screenplay, songs and dialogues for the film. This film also projects Basava as a revolutionary man with extraordinary powers to
appeal to the minds of anybody. Such illustrations of Basava in the novel and the film very well go with MM's goal of spreading the religious beliefs of her organization. For many Vīraśaivas, Basava is the undisputed God. Hence the vacanas are also seen as religious doctrines. This religious dimension attributed to the vacanas by the Vīraśaiva seers is also supplemented by the acceptance of 'literariness' of the vacanas. When supplemented by the 'literariness', the vacanas acquire more significance. They are regarded as the most undisputed as well as undisputable writings in the modern period.

The narratives of Vīraśaivism are not contained only in the textual tradition of Vīraśaivas. The folk traditions have also contributed immensely. But the folk narratives are ignored systematically for constructing the dominant form of Vīraśaivism. Ignoring the folk elements and other popular beliefs about the Shiva Sharanas was not only a matter of the middle class taste, aesthetics and sensitivity but also a gesture of marginalisation of anything that challenged the established beliefs of the mainstream Vīraśaivism. The textual knowledge of the Shiva Sharanas has always exhibited a strange ignorance of such folk epics. Daniel D'Attilio, a professor in the University of Wisconsin, has pointed out that the Karnataka University and the subsequent scholarship on Vīraśaiva literature have obscured the wide variety of literary and folk traditions of the Vīraśaivas. His research work "Challenging Current Virashaiva Historiography: C. P. Brown's Study of the Role of Folklore and Aradhya Brahmins in the Evolution of Elite

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17 Religious ideas of Mathe Mahadevi and her organizations are explained and discussed in the fourth chapter.

18 H. Tipperudraswamy's novels such as Jyoti Belagide (Kannada—The Light That Never Was, 1983—on the life history of Nijaguna Shivayogi), Kartharana Kammata (Kannada—The Maker's Mint, 1989, on the life history of Basavanna) also come under this category. These texts popularise the philosophy of Shivayogi and Basavanna. Paripurnadedege (Kannada—Towards Perfection, 1959, on the life of Allama Prabhu) got him an award from both State as well as Central Sahitya Akademies.

19 Manteswamy, a folk epic is an example for this. Manteswamy is believed to be the leader of a tribe in the southern Karnataka. In the epic, Manteswamy goes to Kalyana to test the true devotion of Basava and his wife Neelambike. He puts them to several ordeals before accepting that they are true and dedicated devotees of Lord Shiva. In addition to this, he exposes the hypocrisy of the Shiva Sharanas who were parasites on Basava and lived on dasoha (the divine offering of food).
Virashaivism in Telugu draws our attention to the ignored area of Viraśaiva study and the contemptuous attitude of the elite Viraśaivas towards the folk narratives of Viraśaivism. According to him, the centralized perceptions of Viraśaivism in the current academic circles have systematically neglected its folk roots and their dissemination in the regions outside Karnataka like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Though there exists more than three thousand Viraśaiva mutts in Karnataka, not all of them are functioning and among the functioning mutts only a few enjoy high stakes in the religious life of the Viraśaivas. They are very active in organising seminars and conferences on Viraśaiva literature to which literary scholars and writers are usually invited. The Viraśaiva seers and the leaders of the community are proud of vacanas. They think that vacana literature belongs to the Viraśaivas alone. Notwithstanding such a claim, the very process of institutionalisation and the projection of Basava as the cultural icon of Karnataka have turned the vacanas to a public treasure. The Viraśaiva political leaders and the seers are more concerned with not only the religious tenets of the vacana literature but also with 'more than life size' personality of vacanakaras. They also admit secular values of vacanas in order to project that their community/religion is the only 'true' secular religion of Karnataka.

The above-mentioned variety of Kannada scholarship of the Viraśaiva seers and their followers has not gained much attention from the secularists because the latter do not consider them as creative writings and dismiss them for being religious and communal.

**The Modern Narratives and Viraśaivism**

As we have observed in the preceding section, studies on Viraśaiva literature, especially on vacanas, have provided a ground for producing, disseminating and legitimising both secular as well as 'communal' constructions of Viraśaivism. If the religious leaders and their followers produced the 'divinely' picture of the Shiva

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Sharanas, the secular scholars and writers of Kannada literature have expressed deep concern and unhappiness over any kind of deification of vacanakaras. The role of religious organizations and caste associations in the fields of education, social reconstruction, spirituality and politics has come under severe suspicion and interrogation in recent times. Intellectuals, scholars and other prominent persons of the community have criticized the Viraśaiva seers and their organizations for manipulating the Viraśaiva masses and exploiting the sentiments of the masses in the name of religion. Ownership of huge property and its mismanagement by the mutts has generated an ill feeling in the minds of many intellectuals. The seers are blamed for fostering communal feelings and dividing the Virasaivas in the name of caste and religion. Their claim of the moral upliftment of the Virasaivas is condemned because of the gap between 'words and deeds'. They are also criticized for distorting the 'true' values of vacanas and the ideals of twelfth century Shiva Sharanas; for becoming ritualistic; for practicing priesthood etc. that are believed to be against the values of vacanas and vacanakaras. A very good example of such criticism is Jar atari Jagadguru, Basavaraj Kattimani’s novel in Kannada. It attempts to lampoon the aristocracy and moral degradation of a Viraśaiva seer. Many mutts have become the centres of corruption and unlawful activities. The gap between 'words and deeds' on the part of the Viraśaiva seers are taken to task by several writers and scholars. New interpretations of vacanas attempt to contest and expose the religious manipulations of Viraśaiva literature. In the face of the accusations, the seers have to relentlessly fight to prove their relevance and significance in the modern period. They need to project the social and political power of the community as well. They introduce the corporate culture in the religious places mainly by investing huge sums in the field of modern education. In this effort they have to deploy all the available strategies of the private sector to augment money and keep the business going. This is seen as contradictory to the vacana ideals by some of the intellectuals.

Reference to this novel is already made while mentioning literary controversies in Karnataka. For details refer p. 57.

Four letters by eminent Marxist activists and creative writers in Basava Maarga (2004), a journal devoted to the propagation of vacanas and ideals of Basava, strongly criticise the Viraśaiva mutts for their moral corruption. Kamala Hampaṇa, a woman writer, is worried about the increasing number of mutts in the name of Dalits. She does not find it necessary to establish mutts for Dalits since the existing ones have become centres of immorality. K.S. Bhagawan, whom we have already discussed earlier, thinks that mutts have produced slaves and slavery. Another creative writer and critic Chandrashekar Patil is opposed to the
The Kannada literati have accepted Kannada novels and plays that draw materials from the Viraśaiva movement enthusiastically. The revolution—religious, social and political—led by Basava during the twelfth century has thrown up questions that are relevant to contemporary society. That is the reason why various writers are attracted to the vacanas and who read the movement with greater interest and curiosity.

P. Lankesh’s *Sankranti* (1973), H. S. Shivaprakash’s *Mahachaitra* (1986) and Girish Karnad’s *Taledanda* (1993) are the most important Kannada plays that have re-interpreted the twelfth century movement to address the present problems and issues. Certainly, they have deviated from the usual path of romanticizing the movement and deifying the Shiva Sharanas. They have all accepted that the contemporary social and political life has led them to re-think the movement. In other words, contemporaneity of the Viraśaiva movement is more important to them than deifying or iconising Basava. First step towards this de-deification is that, in all these plays, Basava, as the cult figure, is not given prime importance. Yet he becomes one of the means for addressing several questions related to social, religious and political problems in Karnataka. Though all these playwrights have gone back to the same twelfth century movement for their themes, the ideologies have been different. G. S. Amur has noted the roots of these different themes as,

The Gandhian ideology with its probing questions regarding Truth and Ahimsa provided the intellectual context for Lankesh’s play. Shivaprakash approached his subject against the background for the dangers posed by dictators to the lives of ordinary men and women. Karnad’s play has been the result of his response to the Mandal and Mandir agitation of the late eighties of the last century, which rocked the Indian society (Amur, 2001: 254)

Written in different time periods, these playwrights have shown that the Viraśaiva movement and the vacanas do not signify a singular meaning. Let us examine these three plays to understand how they have portrayed the Shiva Sharanas and presented the vacana movement.

increasing number of mutts which do not have moral principles. K. Ramdoss, a Marxist, condemns caste-based mutts for they seemingly foster casteist feelings rather than work for communal harmony in the society.
Lankesh’s *Sankranti* is a well-known literary text in Kannada literature. This play criticizes the futility of dogmatic ideals and focuses on the inner self of the human beings. Lankesh draws our attention to the fact that despite the radical ideas present in the vacana movement the cultural differences and social hierarchies did not disappear; on the other hand, they continue to persist.

His play revolves around the love affair between Rudra, a lower caste man and Usha, a Brahmin woman. Rudra is enamoured by the sophistication of Usha and she is attracted by his crude but honest nature. This love story is presented against the background of the religious and social upheaval of the twelfth century Karnataka. This play does not deal directly with the famous incident of the Virasaiva movement, i.e., the marriage between lower caste man and the upper caste woman, but with a similar event.

The problem, around which the play revolves, starts with the conversion of Rudra as a Viraśaiva. He tries to acquire the new, civilised qualities of speech and behaviour and consequently Usha loses interest in him gradually. She does not want Rudra to lose his basic instincts. She is simply thrilled to touch an untouchable. One day Usha ridicules Rudra for his mindless conviction about his new religion and following Basava blindly. She abuses Rudra's new caste and criticizes his 'civilized' behaviour. She questions his trust on Basava. Rudra is enraged by her remarks and 'seduces' her. This event causes tension between the Brahmans and the Viraśaivas. Taking advantage of such tense situation, a group of Brahmans kill a Brahmin and put the blame on the Sharanas. Fearing that the situation will go out of hand, Bijjala takes personal interest to solve the problem. But he has no option but to punish Rudra for daring to touch and 'seduce' a Brahmin girl. Before punishing Rudra, a trial is conducted by him to know the truth about their relationship. At a crucial moment in the trial Usha refuses to accept the new Rudra as her beloved and announces that he has indeed, raped her. Bijjala pronounces 'death punishment' to Rudra.

Amongst all these incidents the play unfolds several subplots, like Rudra's father and his inability to abandon smoking and drinking despite being a Sharana; Bijjala's
responsibility to maintain communal harmony to sustain his political power etc. Nowhere in the Play is Basava portrayed as a supernatural being; on the other hand, he is shown as a common human being who is incapable of preventing the king from punishing Rudra. Differences between Bijjala and Basava over social and religious revolution, as depicted in the play, indicate the complexities and difficulties involved in the social transition envisaged by Basava.

Bijjala's dilemma in accepting the social cause of the Virasaiva movement depicts his accountability to all the religions in order to maintain communal harmony so that his political power will not be in danger. Being the head of the state, he cannot openly support one religion at the cost another. Ujja, Rudra’s father is reluctant to give up his habits of smoking, eating meat and taking liquor. This reluctance to give up the 'bad' qualities exposes the incongruity between the vacana movement and the ideals propagated by Basava. The main reason for this was that the movement failed to recognize the social and cultural differences between the upper caste Sharanas who developed the ideas of casteless society and the lower caste Sharanas who were still exploited by the upper castes. This play is in the form of a debate and places the individual between two choices. Basava, placed between the establishment on one hand and the revolution on the other, suffers because he knows that the revolution is defeated by the strength of the establishment.

_Mahachaitra_ (Great Spring) by H.S. Shivaprakash depicts the tumultuous social upheaval that is a sequel to the social revolution for equality and humanity initiated by Basava in the twelfth century. Interestingly, nowhere in the play does Basava appear. His personality is narrated in the conversations of the characters. However, the hopes and aspirations of Basava are present throughout the play. The writer is more interested in portraying the hopes and despairs of the lower class Sharanas than that of others. It concentrates on the heroic fight of the Sharanas from the low, labouring castes—both men and women—at a time when the movement was losing the battle for equality. Emphasis is laid on the views of the lower caste Sharanas such as Turugahi Ramanna, Ole Shantaiah, Hendada Maarayya, etc. In the course of the play, we see the social
antagonism between the Sharanas and the Brahmins. The Sharanas express their aspirations, hopes and frustrations at the turn of the incidents due to which they are put into trouble by the king and the orthodox Brahmins. Shivaprakash makes use of vacanas, myths, legends and folk literature to construct the social, religious and political situation of the twelfth century Karnataka. He devotes the drama to "the crores of working people". According to the author, this play focuses on the sociology of the struggle in the twelfth century Karnataka. In an interview to the newspaper, Deccan Herald (1st July, 1995), during the height of the Mahachaitra controversy, he opines, "The entire play shows how the artisan Sharanas had to defend themselves against the onslaught of the priestly and merchant classes. For me the sociology of the struggle is more important..."

Girish Karnad’s Tale Danda (Punishment by Beheading) re-examines the structure of the caste system of India. Picking up historical-cum-political background of the twelfth century Viraśaiva movement for his plot, he moulds his theme of Tale-Danda to serve his present needs. In a preface to the play Karnad writes,

I wrote Tale-Danda in 1989 when the ‘Mandir’ and the ‘Mandal’ movements were beginning to show again how relevant the questions posed by these thinkers [Shiva Sharanas] were for our age. The horror of subsequent events and the religious fanaticism that has gripped our national life today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions they offered.

In this play, in one instance, Basava arranges a congregation of poets, mystics, social revolutionaries and philosophers at the Anubhava Mantapa (the Hall of Experience)23. They oppose idolatry, reject temple worship, uphold the equality of the sexes and condemn the caste system. But events take a violent turn when they act on their beliefs and a Brahmin woman marries a 'low-caste' man. The play deals with a few weeks during which a vibrant, dynamic society plunged into anarchy and terror.

The voices of the working class or the lower castes deployed in Sankranti and Mahachaitra have a decentralizing effect. They are more concerned with the present than with the past. One can interpret these two versions as a battle between the 'profane' and

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23 In this place, Sharanas of all castes and creeds assembled to debate and discuss issues of several kinds. It was a central meeting place for all the Sharanas.
the 'sacred'. The blending of the present with the past helps the writers to universalise the problems of the present and address the reasons for such problems. For these writers, divinity of Shiva Sharanas is not important, which explains why they have not portrayed the Shiva Sharanas as supreme and significant sources. Prahlada Agasanakatte, while analysing these plays, points out "these writers have shown keen enthusiasm in the act of 'murthybhanjakatwa'" (Agasanakatte, 2001:27). What he means by 'murthybhanjakatwa' is that these writers have indulged in the act of destroying the supernatural or metaphysical idol of Basava constructed by the Viraśaiva communitarians. He describes the process of 'murthybhanjakatwa' in the three dramas as such:

Basava of Sankranthi is feeble and uncertain and Basava of Mahachaitra is emotional, feeble and timid. In Tale Danda, the play literally beheads Basava. For Karnad, politics, power and its implications become important themes to frontalise his ideas about the twelfth century movement. Therefore, the movement led by Basava and his religious ideals are weak, vague, absurd and uncertain (2001:25-27).

There is no glorification of Basava or his achievements in the plays. The appropriation and re-telling of an existing text becomes an inversion of the 'original' text and the contestation of the 'values' attributed to it. It is seen as a counter-discourse to the dominant vision of society and culture. Given the complex social existence and multiple reading 'publics', these kinds of plays, which are contrary to the monopolizing gesture of certain individuals or organizations, are perceived by the communitarians as threats to the 'organic' knowledge.

It is worthy analysing why the plays cited above focus upon the revolution at Kalyana at the heart of which lies the issue of an inter-caste marriage and the question of inter religious conflict. It is important to note here that all these plays are written after the sixties of the last century. The modernist authors are either socialists, social democrats or with a background of some version of Marxism. Self confessedly they were searching for answers to the contemporary problems in the vacana movement. The three plays raise three issues. The questions of caste, of class and religion constitute the central theme of the plays. The authors, as we will see in the following pages, firmly believe that they are well within their poetic justice while 'using' the narratives of Viraśaivism. It seems to us
that the modernist readership is also excited to read such plays for its radical symbolism. But the Vīraśaiva communities cannot afford to allow the secularists to treat their religious icons as ordinary mortals. For them, the twelfth century Vīraśaiva saints are not only the ancestors of the community but also of divine origin. They are incarnations of various members of the divine court (the *Kailasa*) of Lord Shiva.

We have mentioned only a sample of vacana resources and their use in the modern Kannada writing. We picked up only those plays that are recognized for their radical ideas. Indeed there are hundreds of literary texts based on the Vīraśaiva movement, which include plays, poetry, novels and short stories. Books for children and women were also written during the modern period. If we consider the research works, creative literature, historical narratives, compilations and philosophical treatises and the other materials produced and circulated in the modern period, we can safely conclude that no literature belonging to other communities in Karnataka has received such a wide attention. All these put together constitute what one may call the 'vacana' discourse in Karnataka.

**III**

**Battle of Wills: The Literary Controversies**

From 1989 to 1997, at least on three occasions, the Vīraśaivas expressed their resent over three literary texts viz., *Maarga-I* (1989), *Mahachaitra* (1994) and *Dharmakaarana* (1997). The Vīraśaiva communitarians, in the context of these controversies, have criticized the works for their authorial 'ill' intentions, 'misdirected' notion of freedom of expression, 'misrepresentation' of history and 'wild' imaginations about the twelfth century Karnataka. These controversies and the debates that followed represent the ongoing and unresolved debate between individual rights versus community identity and the 'secular' versus essentialist interpretations of Vīraśaivism in a democratic country like India.

**The Maarga-I Controversy (1989)**

When *Maarga-I* controversy arose in 1989, the secular literati held that the Vīraśaiva fundamentalists are mainly responsible for the controversy. The
fundamentalists were compared to Ayatolla Khomenie, the 'fundamentalist' leader of Iran and they were depicted as "Khomeinis of Dharawad" (Virabhadrappa, 1989:20-28). The comparison was in reference to the controversy around Salman Rushdie's English novel The Satanic Verses in the same year. In the heat of the Satanic Versus controversy, the Maarga-I controversy in 1989 assumed the question of community identity for the Viraśaivas. Before we examine the contentious issues in the controversy, let us narrate the controversy in detail.

M. M. Kalburgi is a renowned name in the field of Kannada research. Born in a Viraśaiva family, he has extensively worked on Viraśaivism. He has collected compiled and edited several medieval Kannada literary works. He has also published an index of several inscriptions. He was the director of Basava Peetha of Karnataka University. This Peetha was established with the intention of promoting research on Viraśaiva literature especially vacana literature. He was the chief editor of Samagra Vacana Samputa (Complete Vacana Volumes) published by the Karnataka Sahitya Academy of the Government of Karnataka. He is conferred with the Kannada Sahitya Akademy award thrice for his contribution to research field in Kannada literature.

Maarga is a collection of research papers on the Viraśaiva literature. However, three articles in Maarga-I angered certain sections of the Viraśaivas of the northern Karnataka. Two religious mutts of the Viraśaiva community viz., the Mooru Savira mutt of Hubli and Brihan mutt of Chitradurga raised strong objections to these articles and demanded the State Government to take severe action against the writer. These three articles were:

a) “Nilalochaney Badukinalli Ondu Thiruvu” (A Turning Point in the Life of Nilalochane),
b) "Nilalochane" and
c) “Nagalambike, Nilambikeyara Maduve” (Wedding of Nagalambike and Nilambike).
In "Nilalochaneya Badukinalli Ondu Thiruvu", Kalburgi refers to Basavaraja Ragale the hagiography of Basava written by Harihara in the thirteenth century. Using the evidence from vacanas as well as this hagiography, Kalburgi sketches the life history of Nilalochane (also known as Nilambike), the second wife of Basava. According to Kalburgi, most of the vacanas of Nilalochane depict her viraha or the pain of separation from Basava, implying at the possibility of a strained relationship between Basava and her. His argument is based on a popular myth. The myth runs as follows: One day Sangamadeva (The Lord Shiva) disguised himself as a Jangama and visited Basava to test his devotion. He not only demanded for hospitality but also for a veshya (a prostitute). Basava, who could never afford to disappoint the Jangama guest, could not find one in the entire city of Kalyana for the Shiva Sharanas were already with them in the guise of Jangamas. He confided about his helplessness with his wife Nilalochane. She understood Basava’s helplessness and agreed to serve the guest. Pleased with her devotion to the guest and her husband, Lord Shiva, could not continue with the game of disguise. He revealed his true identity and disappeared after blessing her. When Basava came to know that it was Lord Shiva who visited him, he felt both ecstatic and pained for not being fortunate to be blessed by Lord Shiva. But from that day onwards Basava worshiped his wife as his mother. He considered his wife as the mother of the world (Goddess Parvathi). According to Kalburgi, many vacanas of Nilalochane are the expressions of her pain over this separation from Basava. However, Kalburgi is struck by her fidelity to Basava and admires her as a model for Indian women.

In another article "Nilalochane", Kalburgi raises some doubts about the exact identity of her father. While doing research on Nilalochane, his initial guess was that she must have been the sister of Bijjala, the Jain king, in whose court Basava was a minister. He examined several myths related to her to find the exact identity of father. The more he inquired into her past, the more mysterious it looked and innumerable versions posed serious problems to him. It was difficult for Kalburgi to conclude the identity of her parents. For example, if some myths mentioned Siddharasa as her father, the other myths

24The Jangama is a travelling religious teacher, ideally free and pure. To the Virasaivas he is the lord on the earth, and linga and guru are other aspects of Him.
did not mention anything about Siddharasa. In such circumstances, Kalburgi considered Singiraja Purana as a reliable source. According to this mythical work, written in the seventeenth century, Nilalochane was the adopted sister of Bijjala and her father was Siddharasa. Kalburgi concludes that the hagiographies deliberately conceal some facts about Nilalochane's parents. However, he does not elaborate on what was concealed.

His third article "Nagalambike, Nilambikeyara Maduve" is about the marriage of Nilambike and Nagalambike, the sister of Basava whose son was Chennabasavanna, one of the important figures in the Viraśaiva history. Kalburgi informs us that that identity of Chennabasavanna's father is shrouded in mystery. Besides this, the identity of Nagalambike's husband's identity is also found to be still unclear and vague. He assumes that Dohara Kakkayya, belonging to lower caste, was her husband. In the same article he attempted to demonstrate that Nilalochane was the sister of Bijjala. According to Kalburgi these facts were important, for they testified Basava's integrity. Kalburgi was thrilled by the radical decision taken by Basava in marrying a Jain woman and according to him, Basava set a model for others for inter-caste marriages.

When these articles appeared in 1985 itself in Sadhane, a literary journal of Bangalore University, there was no controversy. A few Viraśaiva scholars criticized Kalburgi for his wild guesses. In 1980, Siddhalinga Swamy of Tontadarya mutt, Gadag, said in a public meeting that Nagalambike was married to a lower caste man called Dohara Kakkayya. This also did not result in any objection. Conflict arose when Vrishabhendraswamy, Kalburgi's colleague in the Kannada department of the Karnataka University, alleged in 1989 that it is unbecoming of a Viraśaiva to distort the images of Viraśaiva saints. Though Kalburgi's self-confessed intention was to foreground the secular values of the movement, it backfired. The communitarians declared that Kalburgi deliberately distorted the personality of Nilalochane by describing her as sexual inciter (Kamada Aauru) and Nagalambike as the wife of a lower caste man. They accused that calling Nilalochane as a Jain by birth is contrary to the historical truth. They claimed that Nilalochane's vacanas should be understood in terms of spirituality, as they expressed her desire to be one with Basava. Her desire was pure and sacred. They were very clear about
Nagalambike’s marriage also. According to them, Nagalambike was not married to a lower caste Kakkayya. Citing the *Singiraja Purana*, a seventeenth century hagiography of Basava, in support of their claims they argued that a Sharana called Shivadeva was her husband. This hagiography, according to them, provides a vivid description of Shivadeva’s marriage with Nagalambike.

Kalburgi was accused of imposing psychological theories of Freud on the Shiva Sharanas. *Akkana Balaga*, a Viraśaiva Woman’s Organisation in Davanagere, brought out a booklet, titled *Dr. Kalburgiyavara Tiruvu Muruvina Vakramaarga* (Dr. Kalburgi’s Perverted Logic 1989) which is full of criticism against Kalburgi. This booklet considered Kalburgi’s research ‘blasphemy’. It had a picture of Nilambike worshipping the *ishtalinga* on the cover page.

Siddappa Langoti, the editor of *Basava Belagu*, carried out a systematic attack on Kalburgi (1989). He condemned Kalburgi for taking leniency in distorting the history of Sharanas. According to him, Kalburgi’s mere speculations over the Shiva Sharanas depicted them in bad light. In his opinion, such baseless imagination not only disfigured history but also was largely untrue. According to Langoti, such distortions of history hide insights into the Viraśaiva past. He recognized the right to express, but cautioned against the misuse of freedom of expression, which hurt the feelings of any community. He criticized Kalburgi’s arrogance and irresponsibility in carrying out research despite several criticisms in the past.  

The marriage alliance between Dohara Kakkayya and Akkanagamma, as believed by Kalburgi was strongly condemned. According to Kalburgi, *Varnasankara* was quite common before the revolution in Kalyana. But Patil Puttappa, a journalist, retorted that Varnasankara did not exist before Basava and there were no historical evidences (Puttappa, 1989:16, No. 1740 and 1989:12, No. 1745). In other words Puttappa was not ready to accept that marriages between lower caste and higher caste families were a

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25 *Shivanubhava*, a quarterly journal in Kannada meant for disseminating the philosophy of Basava, carried several articles (1985) condemning Kalburgi’s ‘wild’ imagination in the name of research.
common affair during the twelfth century. He argued that such marriages were not accepted till Basava began the revolution in Kalyana. According to him, it was Basava who brought about revolutionary acts of Varnasankara between lower caste and higher castes. He pointed out that Kakkayya could not have been Akkanagamma's husband because there was no evidence to show that they both met in Bagewadi. Kakkayya decided to meet Basava when he heard about the movement and was attracted to Basava's philosophy of social equality (Puttappa, 1989:17, No. 1748). According to Puttappa, he met Basava for the first time in Kalyana and he was from Malawa country.

The Maarga controversy did not end in battle of words. There were several life-threats to Kalburgi and a huge mobilization of the Viraśaivas tried to put pressure on Kalburgi. The communitarians demanded the State Government to ban and confiscate the book immediately. The communitarians were so enraged with Kalburgi that despite Brihaïmatha Jagadguru's (religious head of Brihan mutt, Chitradurga) consolatory words to the gathering on the day of the meeting in the Mooru Savira mutt (20th March, 1989) that Kalburgi belonged to 'us' and that he did not write articles deliberately, the public was impatient and frenzied. They demanded severe punishment to Kalburgi. One among the gathering suggested that one litre of kerosene was enough to burn Kalburgi. This controversy ended with an apology from Kalburgi to the Virasaiva community in the presence of heads of two monasteries. In the second edition published in 1995, Kalburgi deleted the 'controversial' sections of his article without giving any reason for such deletion.

However, many writers, intellectuals and literary organizations supported Kalburgi and defended his freedom of expression. For example, Sadananda Kanavalli remarks sarcastically,

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26 Dr. Viranna Dande has documented the incidents of the controversy in his Kavimarga (1989), a quarterly journal published from Gulbarga. I am thankful to him for sending me a copy of the special issue on the controversy.
The agitation against the book was started by great intellectuals with the support of the religious gurus, aided by the money power, and supported by the 'innocent' followers who did not know the in and out of the agitation (Kanavalli, 1989:14).

B. V. Virabhadrappa alleged that Vrishabhendraswamy's professional jealousies with Kalburgi was the main source of the controversy (Virabhadrappa, 1989:22). According to Virabhadrappa, Vrishabhendraswamy held Kalburgi responsible for the defeat of his candidate in the election for presidential post for the district level Kannada Sahitya Parishat. He also points out that Kalburgi's sincerity and commitment as a researcher gained him jealous colleagues in the Centre for Kannada Studies. According to him, the above factors resulted in Vrishabhendra Swamy calling for a religious war against Kalburgi.

The Akhila Karnataka Kannada Teachers' Association of Mysore strongly upheld Kalburgi's scholarship. Forty-two writers held a press conference in Bangalore and supported the individual's right to research. They strongly condemned 'violence' of the Viraśaiva communitarians in order to force a writer to abide by their dictates. They urged the State Government that neither Kalburgi be removed from Basava Peetha as demanded by the Viraśaiva communitarians nor should Kalburgi's resignation to the Chief Editorship of the vacana volumes being published by the Government, be accepted. Kannada Sahitya Parishat, Karnataka Press Academy, Karnataka Women Writers' Association, Bandaya Sahitya Samiti and the Karnataka college teachers' associations supported Kalburgi's right to expression. The Eighth Bandaya (the rebel) literary conference held in 1989 passed a resolution that any attempt to ban the book should be prevented and Kalburgi's freedom of expression should be protected. The Gulbarga Dalit Sangharsha Samiti urged the government to give full protection to Kalburgi and release the Maarga volumes without delay.

**Rhetoric of Research, History and Community**

Throughout the *Maarga-I* controversy the most dominant feature of the debates was a line drawn between 'research' and 'imagination'. Research was perceived as objective, scientific and true to the facts. It is not imaginary or subjective. H. M. Nayak,
the well-known Kannada professor and a critic, distinguishes between the *Satanic Verses* controversy and the *Maarga* controversy. He points out,

Salman Rushdie’s work is a novel. It is based on imagination. It is accidental if the characters and incidents in the novel resemble real life. In some contexts, they might have been created deliberately. In such circumstances, one may not have an opportunity to rectify the mistake. But it is not true in the case of Kalburgi’s paper. If he has arrived at wrong conclusions in his research, others have the freedom to rectify them (italics mine, 1989:33).

He was not at all happy with the rhetoric of the communitarians as well as their interference in the academic matters. He held that there was no need for ‘fundamentalists’ and non-academics to ‘interfere’ in the academic research. Kalburgi also endorses the responsibility of research in searching for the truth. He ends his article on *Nagalambike, Nilambikeyara Maduve* thus,

Research means arriving at relevant and accurate decisions with the help of empirical evidences. If different evidences are available tomorrow, a researcher has to revise the research findings. This is the utmost task of a researcher because truth is greater than the researcher (italics mine, 1989:238-252).

While Nayak valorises the notion of truth Kalburgi moralizes the role of researchers as seekers of that truth.

In fact, the communitarians' notions are not in any way different from that of other scholars. For all of them are trained in the same tradition of empirical research. They are eager to establish the historical truth and construct a tradition of Virasaivism. They also did not go beyond the notions of true history, sacred facts and objectivity and did not even address certain elementary questions like how the twelfth century religious world comprehended the world, what was the symbolic order represented in the ancient works, how do we understand the worldview of the twelfth century vacanakaras? Expecting both the parties to have problematised the 'origins' and raised the question of 'intervention' into and representation of Virasaivism in successive centuries by various scholars and hagiographers including the colonial scholarship would be farfetched. In this particular sense the secular as well as the communitarians speak the same language of Orientalism. However, the complete dismantling of the symbolic universe presented and
handed down by the secular scholars is unacceptable to the votaries of the community 
sentiments. This, in our opinion, cannot be understood invoking a simple opposition 
between the secular and the 'fundamentalist' forces.

**The **Mahachaitra** Controversy (1994)**

The *Mahachaitra* controversy was another controversy, which created a furore 
in the public realm in Karnataka. The controversy, once again, raised the question of 
Viraśaiva history, literature and religious beliefs. H. S. Shivaprakash wrote the play. He 
is a poet, playwright and critic. He was the editor of *Indian Literature*. He belongs to the 
Viraśaiva community and is the son of Shivamurthy Shastri, one of the Viraśaiva 
scholars. Shivamurthy Shastri was a poet in the Royal court of Mysore and was one of 
the leaders of the Karnataka Unification movement. He believed in the Sanskrit lineage 
of the community and published several books related to the Renukacharya tradition and 
Shaiva Siddhanta.

From 1984 to 1994 i.e. for ten years, *Mahachaitra* was performed many number 
of times all over Karnataka. Once the performance was sponsored by the Basava Samithi, 
a literary organ of the ABVM, on 'Basava Jayanthi' (birthday of Basava) in Bangalore. It 
was also prescribed as a textbook in the Kannada Department of Mangalore University 
during 1986-87. Signs of trouble surfaced only when it was prescribed as a textbook for 
the undergraduate students of Kuvempu University and Gulbarga University in 1994. 
Once again the play was criticized for distorting the sacred image of the Shiva Sharanas.

In the mid 1994, MM and her organization *Rashtriya Basava Dal* along with the 
*Basava Dharma Peetha* of Kudalasangama mounted an attack on the play. They 
demanded an immediate withdrawal of the play from the two universities. There were 
many demonstrations, *rasta roko* agitations and *dharnas* in the northern parts of 
Karnataka, especially in Gulbarga and Bidar to pressurise the Government authorities to

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27 For more details about the play, refer pp.75-76 of this chapter.
28 This tradition believes that Renukacharya was the forerunner of Basava and he was one of the five 
founders of the Viraśaiva religion.
withdraw the play from the university syllabus. Large number of rural masses were mobilized from neighbouring villages of Gulbarga and demonstrations were conducted in the premises of the Gulbarga University. Many Virāśaiva seers and organisations gave moral support to the agitation but did not participate in the demonstrations directly. Even Sharana Basappa Appa of Gulbarga, the head of the prestigious religious mutt in Gulbarga, did not evince any interest in the controversy except showing moral support to MM's agitation. This controversy evoked reaction in the state assembly also. Bhimanna Khandre, a Virāśaiva member of the state legislature, demanded that the book should be immediately withdrawn from the syllabus and the author should be brought to book.29

When the State Government delayed in taking any action, he condemned the government and wondered if the Central government could ban the English novel, why should the State Government delay in banning Mahachaitral? Owing to pressure from many quarters and considering the consequences for the forthcoming Panchayat elections, the government, headed by Veerappa Moily, formed a three-member committee to look into the matter and give recommendations. Following the committee recommendations and after many deliberations, the government directed the two universities to withdraw the textbook 'temporarily'. Initially, the universities were reluctant to heed to the pressure of the government. But later on due to sensitivity of the situation and due to a lot of pressure from the government, both the universities decided to withdraw the book after the first year as it was prescribed for two years. However, the agitators persisted for the withdrawal of the book immediately forever. In the end, the university syllabus committees had to give in. The play was completely withdrawn from the syllabus the very next year (1995). Deccan-Herald (14th March, 1995) reported that the sudden withdrawal of the textbook put thousands of students in a quandary if they should study the text for the exam or not.

29 Assembly proceedings of this controversy are gathered from the official report of the Karnataka Legislative Council Debates (eight session). Vol. CCXLV (No. 1 to 5), 1994.
Some dialogues in the play were found objectionable by MM and others agitators. MM's reservations about the play are serious. According to her, the play was sacrilegious to the Vīrāśāiva community and it advocated crime and free sex. She was against prescribing the distorted history of the twelfth century Shiva Sharanas to the students. Now let us consider a few 'objectionable' dialogues in the play between two characters i.e. Mukundabhatta and Adinathaiah. Mukundabhatta is a Brahmin who detests the vacana movement led by Basava. In a conversation with Adinathaiah, a Jain, he talks about Basava and says:

His mother did not have a child for a long time and then...(Shivaprakash, 1994:34).

Adinathaiah replies with surprise:

Oh that means...something suspicious? Do such things happen in your community too? (ibid:34).

According to MM the above dialogues are sacrilegious for it weaves certain suspicion around the birth of Basava. Continuing their conversation, Adinathaiah, says,

A lady used to wander on the Kalyana streets shouting 'Lord Shiva is my husband, Lord Shiva is my husband' (ibid:34).

The lady referred in the conversation is Akkamahadevi, the Vīrāśāiva woman saint. Such dialogues were considered by MM as contemptuous 'loose talk' and deliberately inserted in the name of the characters. Elsewhere Madivala Machideva, a Sharana from the washing community, in a fit of anger says, "We are not slaves of Basava" (Shivaprakash, 1995:26). For MM it was unimaginable to think that Madivala Machideva, an ardent follower of Basava, could talk about Basava in such a light manner. MM blamed that the author humiliated the religious icons of the community in the name of creative freedom. In a review of the play, she wrote proudly about Machideva's sacrifice in safeguarding the wealth of vacanas when Bijjala's soldiers attacked Machideva and his companions near Murugoda in Belguam district (MM, 1994:7). Shivaprakash, according to her, is

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30 MM's objections are documented in the journal Kalyana Kirana. For her analysis and criticism of the play see Kalyana Kirana (1994-95) Vol.22, No. 11; Vol. 24, No.8, 9, 10 and Vol.25, No.3.
insensitive to the loyalty of Machideva and portrayed him as disrespecting Basava. Another instance of the controversial part of the play, according to MM, is a conversation between Nilambike and Bijjala about Basava's end. Nilambike feels:

> Do not worry too much. Irrespective of who was the Emperor, Basavarasa's tale would have ended in water (ibid: 74)

This dialogue, it was accused, intended to show that Basava was an escapist and he committed suicide by drowning himself at Kudalasangama, the confluence of two rivers viz., Malaprabha and Ghataprabha. MM contended that Neelambike was an intellectual and a dedicated wife to Basava and she could not have had such feelings about her husband. A religious belief of the Virasaivas also needs to be explained here. Usually, divine beings are not believed to have an ordinary end to their life. Their end is believed to be a death by wish. That is, the divine beings and the seers have the powers to end their life only when they desire so. Since Basava was not an ordinary person, MM could not digest the idea that he ended life by drowning himself in the river water.

She cited several 'inaccuracies' in the play and the author's lack of 'historical sense'. According to her, in the play, Basava's wife Gangambike and his sister accompanied him to Sangameshwara (another name for Kudalasangama) when Basava left Kalyana because of caste turmoil in the town. However, according to MM, no literary account mentioned that Gangambike and Akkanagamma accompanied Basava to Kudalasangama. She held that both stayed back in the town and fought bravely against Bijjala and his army. MM believed that Akkanagamma was a brave warrior and protested the Lingayath religion till her death. Mahanta Shivayogi of Chittaragi-Ilakal blamed the present education system for such controversies because the education system is insensitive to the feelings of the communities and it inculcated 'false' historical sense among the public. He called the public to oppose any false propaganda against the Virasaivas. He considered the portrayal of lower caste Sharanas in Mahachaitra objectionable because Shivaprakash tarnished the image of Basava by using the so-called perceptions of the Dalit Sharanas (Shivayogi, 1994:15). Like the Maarga controversy,

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31 However, it is still a contentious issue if Akkanagamma fought against Bijjala or not.
this controversy was also region specific. The intensity of the controversy was high in Gulbarga and Bidar.

Shivaparakash denied all the charges and believed that his play was the voice of the marginalized Sharanas. He was supported by many Progressive and Dalit organizations such as SFI, DYFI, Karnataka Rajya Madivala Sangha, Kannada Desha Paksha and Dalit Sangarsh Samiti. They supported him for highlighting the working and artisan Sharanas in the play. Deccan Herald (18th Feb. 1995) reported that a rally was taken out in support of the playwright from Ravidra Kalakshetra to the Basaweshwara circle in Bangalore in protest against the government's decision to withdraw the textbook. An effigy of MM was also burnt in the procession.

**Mob Mania, Literary Creativity and the Secularists**

G. S. Shivarudrappa, a well-known Kannada poet and literary critic, criticized the controversy because it exhibited 'mob mania'. He said, "The present situation appears like a mob mania, a confusion born out of misreading the book..." (Deccan-Herald, 1994). Shivarudrappa, who has been very consistent in supporting the freedom of expression of a writer since 1950, considered the agitation against the play as yet another instance of 'fundamentalism'. Some Vīraśaiva religious heads also joined the secularists in condemning the 'fundamentalist' attitude of certain sections of the community. A religious head of Gurustala sect, Shivacharya Swamy (1995:12) appealed to the readers not to confuse history with literature. Mahachaitra, according to him, was just a literary play and not a history. For him, a meaningful dialogue between various intellectuals like Shivaprakash, Girish Karnad, Lankesh, Kalburgi and Tipperudraswamy, was a rational way of examining the contentious issues related to the play in particular and Vīraśaivism in general. He condemned coercive tactics of MM and other organizations in pressurizing the State Government to take action against the playwright. He described the agitation as a *Stone Age* tendency in the modern period. H. S. Shivaprakash also made distinction between literature and history in order to show that his play was fictional and did not contain any historical fact. In an interview to Deccan-Herald, he said,
Mahachaitra is a play, not history. In our culture, the sacred memory of Basava has several aspects to it. Persona of Basava is not a mere matter of history. He is also a cultural and mythical personality. Above all, Basava is a symbol of creativity; inspiration in our culture... Creativity need not be a replica of history. It is a matter of recreation of history (18th Feb. 1995).

For Shivaprakash the play did not intend to represent an accurate history and it should be considered as a literary work. He held that the 'fundamentalists' mistook literature for history. P. Lankesh, a renowned journalist and a Kannada writer analysed the play in his Lankesh Patrike and held that it indeed was a bad writing (1995:7-8). He blamed Shivaprakash for writing such a tasteless drama. He pitied students who had to read such a mediocre play for their examination. However, he did not spare MM for unnecessarily making it a religious issue. G. Rajashekar, a critic in Kannada, in the Afterwards to Mahachaitra, points out that the contemporary religious leaders had drifted far away from the 'original' ideals of the vacana movement. He felt sorry for their ignorance and failure to understand Shivaprakash’s noble cause in the play.

The Dharmakaaraana Controversy (1997)

Dharmakaaraana, a Kannada novel written by P. V. Narayana in 1995, triggered a controversy in 1997 when it was chosen for the annual award of Kannada Sahitya Akademy. The author of the novel is a Brahmin and teaches at Vijaya College in Bangalore. He is an acclaimed scholar on the vacana literature. He has a doctoral degree for his research on the Viraśaiva puranas and the vacanas. The Viraśaivas have duly recognised his contribution to the Viraśaiva studies.

This novel depicts the last few days of Basava in Kalyana just before the Viraśaiva movement. In the novel, the marriage between a lower caste man and a Brahmin woman arranged by Basava and his followers rakes up the question of varnasankara (caste pollution). The Brahmins who dislike and oppose Basava are against the marriage. Around this episode of ' unholy' marriage, the novel illustrates the socio-political and economic life of the people in Kalyana. It is also depicts the subtleties of politics mingled with religion. Religious rivalry between the Jains, the Brahmins and the Viraśaivas is illustrated vividly in the novel. This rivalry explodes into religious conflicts
in the end during the marriage incident, which eventually goes out of Basava's control. Basava is compelled by his followers to leave the town for his safety because there are rumours that he may be either imprisoned or killed by Bijjala's soldiers. The novel ends in Basava's exit from Kalyana and he spends his last days in Kudalasangama. Basava narrates the incidents in the novel. The novel can be seen as an autobiography of Basava. Basava is not portrayed as an incarnation of Lord Shiva. He is a human being with immense integrity, determination and commitment.

As soon as the State Sahitya Akademy announced its annual award for the novel, the Viraśaiva communitarians demanded the State Government to withdraw the award and ban the novel immediately for it deliberately hurt the sentiments of the Viraśaivas. The most controversial part of the novel was once again the portrayal of Akkanagamma’s personal life and her sexuality. In one instance Basava recalls his childhood in the Brahmin Agrahahara and the ordeals that he had to undergo as a young boy. His childhood was full of bitter experiences. Once he was forced to make an unavoidable choice of either abandoning his sister Akkanagamma or face excommunication from the Brahmin community for the Brahmins suspected that Akkanagamma had an illicit relationship with somebody in the Agrahara. The suspicion was developed because they could not know who was responsible for her pregnancy. But Basava, being a truth-seeker and affectionate brother to his sister, left the place protesting the moral degeneration of the Brahmins. He developed a unique courage to oppose the Brahmin hypocrisy and orthodoxy at an early age. In the novel, he reminisces that it was stories like Jabali-Satyakama that infused truth and determination in him. Then, he narrates the story. He draws on a puranic version of Jabali-Satyakama to show how Satyakama's honesty and truth had profound impact on him during his childhood.

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32 Agrahara is a residential place of the Brahmins. This place is traditionally forbidden for the non-Brahmins.

33 The story of Satyakama in the novel goes like this: Satyakama wanted to become the disciple of a Guru. When he approached the Guru, he was asked to reveal his father's identity. Satyakama could not tell because he did not know who his father was. The teacher told him to ask his mother about his father's identity. Next day, Satyakama confessed to the teacher that he did not know the exact details about his father since his mother slept with many men. The teacher was impressed with his honesty for he did not hide the truth about his birth and ultimately he accepted Satyakama as his disciple.
The story of Satyakama and its connection to Basava’s childhood was strongly objected by the communitarians. According to them, the story was a deliberate choice. Since the story was narrated after the Akkanagamma episode, it created an impression that Chennabasavanna, the son of Akkanagamma, was born out of wedlock like Satyakama and Akkanagamma was a Jabali (the prostitute mother of Satyakama). This time it was the ABVM, under the presidentship of Sharana Basappa Appa of Sharanabasaweshwara mutt, Gulbarga, which initiated agitation against the author and his novel. Writing about the intensity of the agitation, an English magazine Family reported:

The Veerashaivas took their protests to the streets, the author’s life was threatened and a member of the House [Member of the legislative Assembly] who is a Veerashaiva created anarchy in the House by tearing a copy of the book (1997:60).

The ABVM condemned the novel as blasphemous and formed a Ganachara committee to set right the denigration of Chennabasavanna and prevent false propaganda against the

34 In actual textual traditions, there are different hagiographies that give different pictures of Chennabasavanna’s birth. There is no single authentic evidence to show the true identity of his parents. For instance, Shivatatwa Chintamani, a sixteenth century purana, indicates that Chennabasavanna was born out of Prasada (by a divine grace). Prabhulinga Leele, a fifteenth century hagiography of Allama Prabhu, shows that Chennabasavanna was born out of the Prasada of Dohara Kakkaya, a lower caste Sharana. Halagedeva’s Shumyasampadane (fifteenth century) and other myths like Gururaja Charitre (sixteenth century), Bhairaweshwara Kavya’s Sutrarnakara, Proudadevaraya Kavya (sixteenth century) illustrate that he was born out of Lord Shiva’s Prasada. But there is an ambiguity about the concept of Prasada and lot of ink is already spilled over the exact meaning of it. It is Singiraja’s Amala Basava Charitre which illustrates that he was the son of Shivadeva or Shivaswamy. Majority scholars accept Singiraja’s work, as the authentic version to know Chennabasavanna’s parents since it does not create any ambiguity in anybody’s mind.

35 Ganachara is a regulatory principle to realise and implement the ideals of the Virasaiva religion. It is one among the five principles of Virasaivism propounded by Chennabasavanna. These principles are also called as Pancacara (five principles of conducts). The Sharanas of the twelfth century established these five principles to govern the life and behaviour of the Virasaivas. The five principles are: Lingchara, Sadachara, Shivachara, Ganachara and Bhrtyachara. K. Ishwaran, a sociologist, explains, “the principle [Ganachara] embodies the injection against the exploitative aspects of the Brahminical socio-religious arrangement” (1983:105). Ganachara implies not listening to slander about Lord Shiva’s principles of conduct. It aims at strong loyalty towards one’s own tradition and community. According to the principle, the devotees should dissociate themselves from people who indulge in objectionable practices. Ganachara is a way of injecting discipline and conduct into the Bhavis (non-believers in Lord Shiva) who distort the image of Shiva Sharanas or Lingayath beliefs. Non-believers of Shiva or Linga are considered as Bhavis. In other words,
Virasaiva icons. Four prominent Virasaiva scholars i.e. Chandrashekar, B. Virupakshappa, R. Rachappa and G. P. Shivswamy prepared a list of allegations on behalf of the ABVM to highlight the mistakes committed by the author. A copy of the list was sent to the State Government along with a demand to ban the novel. Some of the allegations and justifications for the same are as follows:

a) Even though the historical studies have proved that Akkanagamma is Basava’s younger sister, in the novel, she was portrayed as the elder sister of Basava. They cited Basava Purana (a hagiography of Basava) to prove that Akkanagamma was Basava’s younger sister. Hence, they held that P. V. Narayana was not well informed about the Virasaiva history.

b) According to the Virasaiva puranas, Basava rebelled against the orthodox ritual of Upayana (initiation) at the age of eight and left his parental home for Kudalasangama. But in the novel, such rebellious act of Basava was not portrayed. They alleged that the author concocted false stories and tried to prove that his version of Basava and Akkanagamma was true. It was charged that the author deliberately wanted to show Basava as an escapist who fled Bagewadi (his birth place) along with his sister to save his skin and he was not a revolutionary. The novelist intentionally did not highlight Basava’s revolutionary ideas against Brahminism. This was interpreted as Brahminism of the novelist. Several evidences were cited from the Virasaiva hagiographies like Harihara’s Basavaraja Ragale and Singiraja’s Amala Basava Charitre to prove that Basava left Bagewadi at an early age protesting Brahmin orthodoxy and moral decline.

c) The most serious charges levelled against P. V. Narayana were related to Akkanagamma’s personal life and her sexuality. In the novel, she is depicted as an unmarried woman for a long time. However, this was unimaginable and far from the fact for the Virasaiva communitarians because the Brahmans in the twelfth century

\non-Lingayaths or non-Virasaivas who do not wear Linga and do not worship Lord Shiva are Bhavis. Brahmins and Jains were considered as Bhavis in the twelfth century.
were too orthodox to keep a woman unmarried for a long period. Besides this point, Basava, as the narrator in the novel, illustrates the 'unfortunate' episode in her life. As explained earlier, it was held that the novelist inserted the Jabali-Satyakamastory to malign integrity and moral life of Akkanagamma. They produced evidences to substantiate that Akkanagamma was married at an early age and they pointed out that the Viraśaiva hagiographies and research done on the Viraśaiva literature by Halakatti, Hiremath, Shrinivasmurthy, Kalburgi, etc. in the modern period have proved this point.

d) In the novel, Basava is portrayed as wearing the sacred thread even at the age of thirty. Against such depiction, the ABVM argued that Basava could not have worn the thread till that age because he was against rituals and he abandoned Brahmin community to join the Viraśaiva religion at an early age. But the novelist, they accused, wanted to show that Basava was a wise and intelligent Brahmin who led the Viraśaivas movement. The ABVM wondered, could Basava not be wise without being a Brahmin? Were not the lower caste/class Shiva Sharanas such as Allama Prabu, Siddarama, Madiwala Machayya, Nuliya Chandayya and Ambigara Chowdayya wise and intelligent? Then they questioned why these Sharanas were not given importance in the novel. The ABVM thought that the novelist was a Brahmin to the core and he ignored the lower caste Sharanas deliberately.

e) The ABVM alleged that Basava’s wives, Gangambike and Neelambike, were not portrayed in good taste in the novel. Their characterisation in the novel was just like any other common woman with no strong commitment and sincerity. Both were portrayed as visiting several temples to pray for children. According to the ABVM, the Sharanas were against the static symbols in the temples and therefore, they did not visit any temples in their life except worshipping istalinga.

1) The ABVM was angry over the characterisation in the novel. Basava was illustrated as an inefficient administrator. Against this, Bijjalla emerged as an able and proficient king. They could not digest that Basava was shown as an ordinary and irresolute
minister who escaped social responsibility while Bijjala proved to be the central character with his pragmatism and shrewdness.

g) According to the ABVM, the temples, mentioned in the novel, did not exist at all and the author imagined falsely that the Shiva Sharanas were polytheist.

The above points were invoked and circulated constantly by the Viraśaiva leaders as well as the politicians. The Viraśaiva legislators in the upper and lower houses of the State Assembly cut across party lines in denouncing the novel. They demanded a ban on it in chorus. Bhimanna Khandre of the Congress (I) party made a lengthy and rhetorical speech against the writer and the 'immoral' contents of the book. He declared that humiliating Akkanagamma was humilitating the whole womenfolk in India. According to him, "The bad portrayal of Akkanagamma violates the respectable position held by the women in India." He threatened the legislative assembly that he would self-immolate and warned that the assembly would be responsible for a 'bloodbath' if action was not taken against the novelist and the novel. Except a CPI (M) legislator G. V. Shrirama Reddy and Virappa Moily, who was the chief minister of Karnataka during the Mahachaitra controversy, all the other legislators favoured action against the author. Vishwanathareddy Mudnal, the vice-president of the ABVM went on hunger strike for seven days demanding an apology from the writer. The whole controversy and the debates centered on the question of women’s 'chastity' and 'distortion' of history.

The controversy around the novel did not erupt when it was first serialized in a Kannada magazine Maardhani in 1995 or when it was published in the same year. But the storm was kicked off when the Karnataka Sahitya Akademy decided to confer its annual award to the novel in 1997. As soon as the news spread about the award, the former Vice-President of India B. D. Jatti and other Virasaiva personalities like Ko.

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37 Mudnal’s fast unto death was reported in Kannada Prabha, a Kannada daily in Karnataka, on 23rd March 1997.
Chennabasappa and H. Chandrashekar, urged the then chief minister J. H. Patel to prevail upon the Akademy to withdraw the award. When the situation seemed to go out of hand, Leeladevi R. Prasad, the then minister for Kannada and Culture wrote a letter to the president of the Akademy to withdraw the award. On 26th March 1997, the politicians of all parties in the assembly demanded a ban on the book. On the same day, the minister ordered for the confiscation of the copies of the novel. The government's decision to withdraw the award and to ban the novel was taken keeping in view of the 'law and order' problem. For the government's decision, the minister said,

A novelist has no right to distort history and in any case we had to take the necessary steps to prevent a law and order situation (Frontline, 1997:44).

But in June, the government revoked the order as per the High Court directions. Once again the Viraśaiva organizations and the political lobby began mounting pressure on the government. Ultimately, the government banned the novel due to the political uncertainty during this period. Disappointed with all these 'unfortunate' happenings and in protest against the president of the Karnataka Sahitya Akademy, Shantarasa's lack of strong determination in this matter, P. V. Narayana rejected the award. In a letter written to the president of the Akademy, Narayana gave the following reasons for rejecting the award,

Controversy about my novel Dharmakaarana has created chaos in the literary world. Giving in to the pressures of the ministry, you have recommended reconsidering the award. You were reported in a newspaper that the novel did not deserve award and you have not denied the reports. Not to give vent to violence, I reject the award (Kannada Prabha, 1997:5)

Later on Shantarasa resigned his post protesting against the Government's interference in the affairs of the Akademy.

The author categorically denied all the allegations levelled against him during the controversy. He said that he did not write anything against the Shiva Sharanas and his

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38 The gist of the government order goes like this:
According to I.P.S. section 295A, the distorted history portrayed by P. V. Narayana in Dharmakaarana has hurt the Virashaivas and the followers of Basava. Since it was ill intentioned and since the situation has become tense, it is declared that the government will confiscate the copies of the novel under C.R.P.C. section 95. This order carried the signature of the secretary of the department of Kannada and Culture on behalf of the governor. A copy of the order was given to me P. V. Narayana from his personal collections.
novel was based on solid evidences drawn from the Viraśaiva puranas and historical materials.

Earlier, the Viraśaiva communitarians challenged the notions of 'freedom of expression' as understood by the secular writers like P. V. Narayana. They seemed to respect an individual's right of expression but they were against the excessive use of freedom in the name of 'creativity'. They were of the strong opinion that one's freedom or liberty should not hurt the sentiments of any community. Sharana Basappa Appa, admonished,

Writers like P. V. Narayana take consolation in writing bad literature \([\text{Dharmakaarana}]\) in defence of caste system and they are scared to face those who opposed the caste and the Varna system (italics mine. In a report sent to the State Government).

Here, Basappa Appa meant Shiva Sharanas who opposed the Varna system. He was particularly hurt to see that the radical image of Basava, who challenged Brahminism, was portrayed as an 'escapist'. He went to the extent of saying that it was P. V. Narayana’s malicious intention to speak against those [Shiva Sharanas of the twelfth century movement] who spread the universal truth and democratic values. The freedom of expression, he opined, was necessary for only those who deserve it, others like P. V. Narayana simply did not deserve it. Hence, he opined, only the virtuous people should have the freedom of expression and not the vice. The press statement of the Mahasabha accused the writer of using 'creativity' to destroy the history of Sharana movement. A personal letter\(^{39}\) written by Basavaraj Patil to P. Lankesh compares P. V. Narayana to Khomeine for writing lies in the novel and described Narayana and Shivaparakash as goondas who caused mental torture to the public. He condemned Lankesh and others, who were opposing banning of the novel and supported an author's right to express, as the mafia gang in the literary world.

As usual, this time also many organizations expressed their solidarity with P. V. Narayana and condemned the religious bigotry of the Viraśaiva community. This

\(^{39}\) P.V.Narayana gave this letter to me.
controversy was described as the height of religious fundamentalism in the state. Feelings of strong resentment over the highhanded behaviour of the Viraśaivas were described as indicators of communal disharmony and blatant violation of individual rights.

Creativity and Freedom of Expression

During the Dharmakaarana controversy, Lankesh, in an editorial to Lankesh Patrike, wrote,

_Dharmakaarana_ as a novel and as a literary text is a bad work. P. V. Narayana does not know how to narrate an incident, characters and events (1995:3).

Nevertheless, he also condemned the ugly face of religious ‘fundamentalism’ showing its ugly face frequently and harassing the creative writers. A seminar (on Dharmakaarana and Abhivyakthi Swatantrya) organised by Samudaya, a left organization, in April 1997 defended the writer’s right to express. Few others criticised the unnecessary publicity given to the book and questioned the decision of the Sahitya Akademy to confer an award to the book. They also denounced opportunism of Bhimanna Khandre and Vishwanath Reddy Mudnal for taking political mileage out of the controversy. They were compared to Khomenie (K. V. Subbanna, 1998:96; Gayatri Nivas, 1994:1; Panditaradhya, 1994:6). In Udupi, Mateeyavaadi Virodhi Vedike (Forum Against Communalism) took a procession and condemned the ‘fundamentalists’ for suppressing the writers’ freedom of speech and democracy. In a pamphlet brought out by the forum, the state’s inability to handle the controversy was criticized in strong words. It condemned the government’s inability to safeguard the plurality of Indian life and its partisan way favouring one community. It blamed the government for joining hands with the ‘fundamentalists’.

IV

Understanding Representations

Construction of the self and the other by the secularists and the communitarians in the context of the above literary controversies show how identities are inscribed and contested and on what terms. Construction of the self and the other is a process related to

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40 Proceedings of the seminar are reported in Kannada Prabha, 20th, April 1997.

41 I am thankful to P.V.Narayana for providing me a copy of this pamphlet.
the location of each group. Moreover, this process is part of marking one's cultural, social and literary locations distinct from others. In the present context, the construction of self and the other is dependent upon a set of binaries such as individual versus community; secularism versus fundamentalism; freedom of expression versus coercion, modernity versus tradition, etc. In other words, it is the battle between "the horses of instruction" and "the tigers of wrath" (Mendus, 1993:104). Mendus discusses the battle between these two forces in the context of *The Satanic Verses* controversy. According to her, battle between the two parties symbolises the forces of light (self of the authors) and darkness (the other of the authors), between rationality and bigotry, etc. The horses of instruction claim rational and secular self against the communitarians. The tigers of wrath construct themselves as the protectors and the preservers of the community sentiments. For them, liberal writers become the other because they do not honour the sentiments of the community. This construction and contestation of self and the other is grounded on some general notions about secularism, freedom of expression, creativity, history, tradition, etc. Besides these, there are already some models (several literary controversies at national and international level) available to formulate a series of distinctions/binaries. Paradox is that in the process of constructing the self and the other, both the parties share and reproduce certain values of the above-mentioned notions from their own locations.

Viewed in the above perspective, what is being today posited as an opposition between the freedom of the artist and the sentiments of a community is an artificial one, for the realization of both are part of the same processes, where one is contingent on the other. The notion of artistic freedom as an absolute quality was in fact part of a romantic myth born in the nineteenth century Victorian period that valorised the artist as a rebel against 'society', enjoying the anger of those in authority. Therefore, the secular self is imbued with the belief that a creative writer is a literary genius who transcends the boundaries of cultures, traditions and politics in search of ultimate truth. S/he is constructed as some one who can go beyond them in the high moments of creativity. Therefore, usually furore against a literary work is seen as an attempt to constrain such creativity and control the freedom of expression. For them, fundamentalism is the sign of ignorance and arrogance because the communitarians lack minimum knowledge of
literary aestheticism or criticism. Any demand on ban or confiscation of a book by the communitarians is condemned for their 'primitive' (Hema Anthony, 1997:61) nature and uncivilized manners. The secular authors project their writings as 'progressive', 'secular' and 'transformative'. It is taken for granted that the secular forces construct their self as signifying progress and the other as symbolizing conservatism. This construction of the self does not originate spontaneously. As we have discussed in the previous sections, it is the continuation of differences already existing between the secularists and the communitarians.

In many cases, the cause of disagreement between the secularists and the communitarians is always at the discourse and material level. At the discourse level, any constraint on literary freedom is seen as the result of essentialist attempts to restrict 'literary creativity', 'literary autonomy', 'imagination', etc. Their discourses of literature are meant to defend freedom of expression, 'truth' and literary creativity. In their view, freedom of expression embodies claims of progress and 'truth'. Therefore, any infringement on 'progress' and 'truth' is construed as violation of human rights and imposition of authority. The assumption underlying here is that literary creativity is possible if it is imbued with freedom. Similarly, creativity is justified as preceding and predetermining factor of any literary work. The literary creativity is wise, thoughtful, responsible, artistic and rational. These notions differentiate an author from the communitarians who 'lack creativity' and exhibit 'irrationality'. They are described as unthinking and archaic. The secularists, despite holding different ideological perceptions of literature among themselves, safeguard the sanctity of literature in terms of imagination and creative freedom. Authorship of a writer is conflated with autonomy of literature and both are inseparable. It is quite common to hear a writer/critic saying, "I

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42 By discourse I mean to say a body of knowledge produced on certain subjects. Discourses claim certain truth effect and shape one’s consciousness. In the process, they also come under scrutiny and get transformed.

43 The division between discourse and material is not conceptualised in autonomous sense. They overlap each other. However, they demonstrate two different practices of the two contending parties.
don't like the work. But that does not mean to say that a writer's freedom of expression and autonomy should be curtailed". In such statements, liking or disliking a literary work presupposes that a literary work is essentially distinct, subjective, autonomous and self-explaining. Along with these constructions prescriptions are liberally offered for particular ways of discursive practices. These practices decide what is literature and what is not. In all these practices certain literary boundaries are drawn. His/her literary creations are privileged as distinct from other forms of literary works.

Ironically, the communitarians too invoke the same notions of 'freedom of expression', 'authorial intention', 'literary autonomy', etc. They grind their axe against the creative writers for hurting their sentiments. A writer is accused of prejudices and harbouring heartedness towards their community. Though the communitarians are not against the fundamental right of a writer's expression, author's intention or literary autonomy, they would like to define them in their own terms. They would like to decide if the writer has violated fundamental right of expression or not. Such decisions will be taken in terms of 'tradition', sanctity and group identity. In other words, metaphors of kinship, devotion, religion, community, morality, ethics of sexuality, etc. are employed extensively to create a sense of community.

Not that the communitarians are unable to distinguish between the creative and the discursive texts. They seem to be more wary of the 'bad influence' of literary works on the readers. The question of history and creative literature may be valid in certain sections of the society. But novel is a literary genre that can be read by any common person. For instance, a novel such as P. V. Narayana's is in the realistic mode and 'common people' may not be able to make these distinctions. Though not said in so many words, this was the cause of the anguish over the novel. Secondly, it is important to recall here that the agitation started when Sahitya Aacademy decided to confer an award on the novel. The communitarians could not stomach the State recognition to a 'sacrilegious' book.
The communitarians try to prove their point against the misrepresentation of the writers by constructing the past to suit their interests. It is the 'sacred' and 'untainted' past, which appeals to the communitarians. For them, there is not much difference between history and literature since it is the question of its influence over wider and diverse readership that matters the most. As MM remarked, "It is not advisable to read a literary work as just literary. It is also not possible" (MM, 1995:17). To her, Basava was not just an imaginary figure but also a "spirit who has become part of crores of people."

Competing and challenging notions of 'freedom of literary expression' and 'imagination', as understood by both parties, paradoxically indicate that the terms of debate are the same, but the ensuing defences and offences will be determined by respective ideological positions and concerns of each group and the ways of articulating them. Besides the ideological differences, the ways of articulating them are also different. The communitarians employ religious beliefs, caste sentiments and common heritage to realize their demands. Mobilization of huge masses is a crucial factor for them. And it is a common feature in all the controversies to see large number of Virashaivas supporting the religious heads and politicians to agitate against the literary works. Politics of number, manipulation of power and coercive mechanisms determine the differences between the secularists and the communitarians. If the governing body of the state is unwilling/hesitant to act against the author or the book, the communitarians will try to demonstrate its mass power to pressurize the state to act swiftly. In order to mobilize the masses and manufacture the consensus, the communitarians employ the available discourses of religion and history selectively. This is a strategy to sentimentalise the ‘damage’ done to the psyche of the community. Sometimes such pressure tactics might resort to violence too. On the other side, the secularists who are against ban or censorship might lack the mass power or they might think it is irrational and uncivilized to resort to violence. In such circumstances, a creative writer is rendered helpless and a minority. She will be a feeble voice and is vulnerable to compulsions. A writer will feel oppressed. She might fail to protect individual rights. Ultimately s/he is forced to approach the legal authorities to defend individual rights.
Moving Beyond the Literary Discourse

In the above literary controversies, narratives of history, literature, discursive practices, institutionalised power blocs, social and individual equations, political calculations, courts of law, legislative bodies or parliaments, voluntary organizations and social movement, etc. have proved a point that we cannot afford to subscribe to some totalised, essentialist and monolithic notions of literature, Viraśaivism and the Viraśaiva community as conceptualised by the secularists as well as the communitarians. Therefore, if we do not seriously examine the inter-relationship of the above mentioned factors we might not be able to analyse and address the problems generated by the literary controversies. Hence, we need to consider the following tentative hypotheses for any fruitful understanding of literary controversies:

a) The Question of History and morality

The questions of history and morality are the two central concerns around the literary controversies. The anxiety that certain literary works may change the 'normal' state of society and culture or threaten the cherished beliefs of a society shape the dissent of the communitarians. In all the three controversies discussed above, the questions of chastity of women and of the factual history have become the centre of intense debate not only in public platforms but also in the governing bodies of the State Government. It is the woman's sexuality around which the notion of morality is constructed. It is quite obvious in all the controversies that the question of sexuality was repeatedly referred to exhibit the 'sensitivity' of the situation. Religious beliefs, moral values and history are conflated with the sexuality of women in constructing the 'sensitivity' of the issue. The 'sensitivity' is constructed by the communitarians to appeal and convince the people. Legislative representatives like Bhimmanna Khandre and N. Tippanna, in the context of Dharmakaarana, were very vocal in emphasizing the significance of woman's chastity in society. According to them, a woman's chastity stood for the dignity and pride of any society. They argued that anything against her and her chastity would not be in the interest of welfare of society and nation. The secular forces that opposed the 'fundamentalists' did not try to understand this crucial point of sexuality in the
controversy. It is not only the past that the communitarians wanted to define and control, the sexuality of a woman was sought to be dominated and subordinated by employing the discourses of society, nation, shared history, casteless society, etc. In all the three controversies, female sexuality was "endlessly pursued, frequently recast and reformulated" (Chitra Panikkar, 2000) in the guise of history and sacred scriptural tradition. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand the historical perspective of the Viraśaiva literature and scriptural tradition upheld by the communitarians.

Even though the Maarga controversy began due to personal equations and personalized perceptions of research, debates around the controversies were the culmination of existing narratives of Viraśaiva literature, Shiva Sharanas and the twelfth century movement. These narratives were selectively manipulated to foreground particular historical aspects during the literary controversies. However, both the secular forces and the communitarians do not give sufficient attention to the lineage of the historical narratives and their distinct trajectory in the past. To put it in other words, many issues running through the contemporary rhetoric of the Viraśaiva communitarians are the products of historical processes through which not only the narratives but also the community itself is imagined as a homogenous community in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century.

The question of Chennabasavanna's birth, his father's identity, Nilalochane's relationship with Basava and Bijjala were contentious issues in the colonial period. The reappearances of these constructions and unresolved questions of authentic history of the Viraśaivas were the consequences of colonial discourses and modern imaginations of the community in the colonial period. Therefore, there is a necessity to examine similar kinds of controversies raised before (especially in the colonial period) and to see how the Viraśaiva community responded to such controversies by invoking history and imagining their identity. The next two chapters will dwell on how the Viraśaiva community grappled with similar kinds of literary controversies in the colonial period and the historical urgencies behind it. The purpose of this discussion is to compare and contrast the behaviour of the communitarians and the secularists of the present day with the past.
This will help us understand at what historical moment the secular and communitarian perspective of Viraśaivism evolved and the historical circumstances for such evolution.

b) Negotiating with the Internal Matters

In all the three cases, a religious mutt or a religious organisation has initiated the agitations against the literary works. However, the imagination of the secular forces about the Viraśaivas community accords an always-already homogeneous community internally. This normative definition of the Viraśaivas community needs more nuanced examination. Therefore, there are two points to be explained here.

i) It is clear from the preceding discussion that not all Viraśaivas and religious organizations were against the writers in the controversies. For instance, several religious organizations of the community did not show much and solidarity to MM in the Mahachaitra controversy. A letter written by B. G. Shashimatha, S. S. Juktimatha and Basavarajappa to Kalyana Kirana (3rd Dec. 1994) regretted the indifference shown by the Viraktha mutts to the 'noble cause' of MM. They compared the Viraktha leaders to politicians who were pretentious and hypocritical (1994:32). Such lack of unanimity, highlighted by them, indicates the differences and tensions among the Viraśaiva mutts and the Viraśaiva leaders. The differences are the result of unresolved problems of power relations between religious and secular forces on the one hand and between several mutt traditions on the other. Therefore, it is vital to understand these differences before we examine why the Viraśaiva mutts and their heads do not share unanimity and what are their imaginations of community identity. This point needs to be explored because these differences are veiled and a singular identity of community is constructed during literary controversies by both the secularists and the communitarians, of course for different purposes.

ii) Several religious mutts of the community, spread over different regions of the state, have become very active in mediating and sensitising the Viraśaivas about their social, religious and political life in Karnataka. Since the mutts and the Viraśaiva associations, playing a crucial role in constructing and sustaining the identity of the community, have
different pedigree, their perception of identity of the community and their engagement with it also differ. Their perception and engagement with the narratives of Viraśaivism and the community history are also intertwined with the questions of overall social and political equations in the society. As a consequence of heterogeneous religious practices, beliefs and institutions, the Viraśaivas have not developed a unified and monolithic internalisation of the value-system. They have not identified themselves with one single religious organization or institution. Therefore, each religious organization or institution seeks to manufacture consensus for its existence, relevance and sustenance. Along with this, they attempt to gain hegemonic influence over the general life of the Viraśaivas. Sometimes the mutts or institutions have also behaved in antagonistic manner for gaining hegemonic influence. They have shown the tendency to monopolise the power to define and set the terms of textual traditions of the community. They have always given prime importance to have control over the narratives of Viraśaivism because identity of the community, very crucially, revolves around them. Since the narratives of Viraśaivism continue to perform certain essential symbolic and material functions, we need to understand what gets ignored in the fight between the communitarians and the secular forces 'correct' interpretations. The communitarians, especially the mutt leaders, have not remained merely 'religious'. They are actively engaged in the process of manufacturing consensus for their 'rightful' claims over the narratives of Viraśaivism and we cannot stereotype them as 'irrational' and 'primitive', as the secular forces described them and ignore their influence in forming the community identity.

c) The contours of Contexts

We need to understand why do literary controversies arise only under specific circumstances and with regard to certain texts. Since the ideas of purely creative literary work and the pure reading are proved to be myths, it is important for us to look at the conditions of production and reception of literary texts. Therefore, so far we attempted to raise certain questions regarding the two very different reading communities and the differences existing between them. However, we need to understand that the differences are not merely textual but encompass wider social and political issues. These wider issues include sets of relations between authors, readers and communities as well as the social
context of writing and reading. As David Aers notes, literary practices, criticism or historiography of literature cannot ignore the complex relationship between individuals (writers/readers) and communities. He points out,

The generation of meaning and individual experiences cannot be understood apart from the social relations of specific community, its organizations of power manifest in the prevailing arrangements of class, gender, political rule, religion, armed force and not infrequently, race. So any reading that hopes to have relevance to a particular text must include an attempt to relocate it in the web of discourse and social practices within which it was made and which determined its horizons (Aers, 1988:4)

Aers's arguments suggest the necessity to extend the dyad of individual and community to encompass social, economic aspects and so on. We need to consider a complex relationship between individual, communities and narratives. In addition, we need to be more specific and sensitive to the differences between several literary controversies in terms of historical specificities and the discourses. To put it in other words, we need to historicize and contextually understand the literary controversies.

d) The Public Space and the Community

Interestingly, it is found that demands for censoring or banning a literary text usually arises when the state institutions recognise a literary work. That is, literary controversies that we examine in this dissertation arose either when an award is conferred on a literary work by a 'state funded' 'autonomous' literary academy or in the instances of a literary text prescribed as a textbook in the higher education. In all the controversies, the literary works have become controversial when the public institutions of State Government have recognised them. Let us recall that Maarga-I controversy has a background of Kalburgi’s tenure as the chief editor of prestigious vacana volumes commissioned by the State Government. Mahachaitra controversy was raised when it was prescribed as a textbook for the under graduate students in two universities in the Virasaiva heartland. Dharmakaarana controversy was triggered off when the Karnataka Sahitya Akademy decided to confer the annual literary award to it. This shows the community's anxiety over its image in the public space. Also, the Virasaiva community is conscious of and sensitive to legitimising any text, ideas, history, narratives related to it.
if they are not dangerous to their beliefs. Therefore, it is revelatory to probe into why the community feels agitated or feels 'under seize' in the public sphere.

e) Secular vs. Communitarian

The dichotomy of secular versus communitarian, as we have already stated, needs further elaboration. The secular interpretations of vacanas or the twelfth century Viraśaiva movement gives us the impression that the secularists form a unified group cutting across caste and religion. Besides this point, the secular interpretation of the vacanas is not a post-colonial phenomenon. Narratives of vacanas and the twelfth century Viraśaiva movement were re-written within the framework of liberal humanism and secularism in the colonial period. The trajectory of the secular interpretation of Viraśaivism in the colonial period is the story of translation of 'Viraśaiva identity' into modernity. Therefore, it is pertinent to ask what we mean by secular interpretations and what are their implications on the conception of Viraśaivism in the past and the present.

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