CHAPTER IV

MAKING SENSE OF IDENTITY IN S. L. BHYRAPPA’S SELECT FICTION

Dr. S. L. Bhyrappa is the most popular and noted Kannada writer from Karnataka and is a major writer after Shivaram Karanth. He is widely translated and is very popular in other Indian languages as in Kannada. Most of his novels are rendered into Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi and Telugu and some even into English, Sanskrit and Urdu. The novels *Grhabhanga* and *Datu* have been translated into all the Indian languages and published by NBT and Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. Other than Rabindranath Tagore, the most translated writer of India into other Indian languages including English is S. L. Bhyrappa. He is the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishat Award. Almost all his novels have gone into several reprints, some to seven or eight. His autobiography, *Bhitti*, a recent publication has seen three editions. He is equally popular on the silver screen. It is often said popularity and eminence do not always go together. Bhyrappa is an exception because he has achieved both popularity and eminence at the same time.

He has written seventeen novels and each novel exemplifies in various ways Taine’s view ‘Man, Milieu and the Moment’. Varied socio-cultural issues and the impact of the same on individuals’ personal beliefs is his favorite forte of analysis. As a writer with a philosopher’s sensibility he is too well aware of the essentials of human nature, its impulsive desires irrespective of culture or society one does live in. Since he approaches human problems against the background of both the socio-cultural intricacies and the fundamentals of human nature, his writings do have cosmopolitan
breadth and appeals beyond transnational limits. Bhyrappa shot into fame with his *The Uprooted (Vamsavriksha)* which deals with the problems of a champion of traditional values whose faith is shattered by an accidental discovery. *The Witness (Saksi)* is a psychological investigation into the ramifications of different modes of human relationships. Tantu reflects on the contemporary times highlighting the educational, sociological and political transformations, recalling the terrors of the ‘Emergency Period’ and the degeneration of the ethical and educational objectives. There are many secrets for his popularity and eminence which Pradhan Gurudatta in his preface to *The Crossing Over* expresses thus:

His philosophical background (a subject he taught in his professional career), his literary pursuit (a keen student and analyst of our ancient, medieval and modern literatures in the various languages, including English and Sanskrit), his sociological and cultural studies (of the various tribes dwelling in the nooks and corners of the world) his vast experience (he has widely travelled in almost all the countries in the several continents of the world, except Australia), his literally going in search of experiences, his knowledge of other arts (including dance and music), his deep reflection on the various aspects of life and death, his distinctive literary taste (that makes him aim at rasanubhava in his literary creations), I believe, it is a combination of all these. He takes to writing only when his experiences crystallize and compel him to express (vii).

The present chapter addresses the subject of identity and the related conflicts in the fiction of S. L. Bhyrappa. Dualities of varied kinds characteristic of the pluricultural context of India and fundamental dichotomies of nature/culture,
ideal/real, impulse/reason, individual/community so on and so forth precipitate identity conflicts in S. L. Bhyrappa’s novels. Or in other words his writings express dialogue of highly complex kind carried on between the different identities the individuals partake from that of the society and the needs of the ‘self’. Characters are highly sensitive beings with an ever alert conscience and they experience identity conflict more acutely for the same reason. All the four novels picked up for studying the intricacies of identity conflicts are set exclusively in India. They all belong to the modern post-independent Indian society, where binaries of opposing nature; east-west, oriental-occidental, tradition-modernity, regional-national, marga-desi, multi-linguistic and north-south discrepancies etc., galore causing identity confusions in individuals. Ever caught amidst the binaries the personas’ of Bhyrappa’s fiction do express a highly intricate consciousness suffering from lack of quietude and peace of mind. The inherited traditional roots always conflict with the changing socio-cultural practices and the characters suffer lot of stress and strain.

On analyzing identity conflicts in Bhyrappa’s novels a specific pattern of presentation is perceived. In each novel selected for study there is always a distinctive towering personality with abundance of capacity for identity stability that comes from abundance of faith and sense of self-respect. Against him there are a whole lot of others who suffer from acute identity conflicts, and the related crisis. The distinct selves are tormented less by conflicts mainly because they are gifted with powerful voice of reason and enlightened consciousness to choose amongst the plethora of identities and remain steadfast to the same. Not all are capable of such enlightened awareness and hence suffer identity conflicts and fail to resolve them well in time resulting in crisis of varied kinds.
Though capacity of Indian culture to amalgamate exotic cultural elements is much appreciated at larger societal level, at the level of individuals’ lot of psychic upheavals due to dichotomous ambience are experienced. Loss of identity, experiences of rootlessness resulting in alienation and isolation are perceived acutely by them. Interestingly in contexts of cross-cultural confrontations it is said that a sense of crisis is never experienced by someone capable of strong faith in one’s native culture. But usually many in multi-cultural contexts experience an acute sense of being torn between variable sets of values, beliefs etc., leading to identity conflicts. Against the background of the subtle briefings on the intricacies of identity conflicts (a detailed study of them is made in Chapter Two) the present chapter will analyse identity conflicts in S. L. Bhyrappa’s fictional works. The causatives of identity conflicts in Bhyrappa’s works range from the post-independent corrupt ambience of India to the coexistence of dualities of contrasting kinds. Or in other words the sensitive characters caught up in maze of the related vices of contemporary times and social ambiguities experience identity confusions.

_Tantu_ is a magnum opus novel of S. L. Bhyrappa which makes a sweeping analysis of the intricacies of the post-Independence Indian society; its neo-colonial vulnerabilities, devaluation, corruption, bribery, selfish politics that resulted in the declaration of emergency period in a democratic nation. S. Ramaswamy, the translator of _Tantu_ has described it thus: “Gives a wholesome vision of life examining life from historical, social and philosophical world views” (Shanthakumari ix). Hemalatha Mahishi’s words sums up the colossal impression one receives on reading the novel thus:
The end of colonial rule by foreign forces only to be followed by neo-colonialising forces of the nation and related political bankruptcy, primacy of money and power, castiesm, lack of pride and respect for the nations heritage and tradition, love of foreign, mean mentality, insolvency and amidst such general rout of the time are trapped, the few who needs to struggle very hard to maintain their ideals and this is what Tantu is all about (Nadig 226).

The ambience of post independent Indian society evinced lot of changes in all walks of socio-cultural life. The novel mainly concentrates on certain essential arenas; religion, education, politics, bureaucracy, journalism, music and aim to capture the changing trends in them. The vast coverage of the novel inspires L. V. Shanthakumari to compare it with Charles Dickens A Tale of Two Cities and The Great Expectations (323). Each field is represented by a persona within in whom the dualities characteristic of a transforming society precipitates identity conflicts and the related experiences of crisis in a composite way.

B. K. Ravindra, is the Resident Editor of the Bangalore edition of The Tribune. He is a staunch idealist journalist with a strong faith in traditional virtues of his country in all walks of life. He has strong faith in journalism ethics and tries to uphold the editorial values of truth, accuracy, impartiality, accountability, public interest and independence in his editorials. Talwar, chief editor of Delhi edition of The Tribune is also an idealist editor with intense faith in media ethics. The newspaper The Tribune had been started by the one Ranka sometime before Indian Independence to propagate value journalism. But the corrupt ambience of the post-independent India is not conducive to the smooth functioning of idealists like Talwar and Ravindra. Both have abundance of conviction and stamina to retain intact their
faith in the rout of changing values and transformations. Maintain their ideals by suffering serious personal and professional mishaps. The immorality rampant in the society subjects them to acute moments of identity conflicts precipitating crisis in them. The study of their experiences of identity conflicts and the way they resolve them makeup the interesting part of the novel.

Honnatti and Anaiah represent the field of music and education respectively. Both of them are idealists typifying certain values in their chosen field. If Anaiah struggles in the field of education to live up to his faith, Honnatti tries to live the ideal meanings he associates with music. Ravindra traverses all these fields; education, music, politics and other socio-cultural spaces in his right as a journalist and also out of his personal interest provides a fine perspective of the ideal and the real in these fields. Since he is a journalist of high caliber and his knowledge of the varied aspects of the society is profound he becomes the most authentic and reliable source in the novel about the transformations happening in post-independent India. He serves as the central consciousness of the novel and is related to all major personas and events in one way or other. By his immense faith in the traditional virtues and with a fine historical sense he links the past with the present and provides us a comparative perspective of the both. Since the major concern of the novel is to compare the pre-independent Indian scenario with that of the post-independent India, Ravindra’s presence becomes indispensable. In his own rights he serves as a kind of perspective provider or commentator.

Ravindra, Talwar, Honnatti and Anaiah are all men of high sensitivity and integrity and are subjected to identity conflicts of very serious kind with imminence of crisis at hand all the time. Forces of ill-virtues rampant everywhere, in all walks of life, undermine their ideals and influence to destabilize and demoralize them.
How they preserve the stability of identity in their chosen field amidst the general rout of declining morals and meanings is indeed interesting. The novel as well explores the changing trends in man-woman relationship in Ravindra-Kanti and Honnatti-Kanti relationship. Ravindra’s son Anup represents the modern contemporaneous youth force with misplaced interests. The education system encouraging false values, its extensive commercialization and the repercussions on the immature youths is signified in Anup and his behavioral nuances in the novel. The major characters are analyzed to understand the nuances of identity conflicts experienced by them against the background of socio-cultural transformations of the time.

The novel to begin with through the character of Ravindra introduces us to a series of events significant of the transformation happening in the country. Receding respect for the country’s history and heritage, declining faith in religion, declining morality and language problem are some aspects discussed in the novel. The event of the theft of the statue of Goddess Saraswathi from the Channakeshava temple built in Hoysala style signifies onslaught on the country’s heritage and history. The event also means people’s declining faith in religion and in papa-punya ideals. Wang Bin (Tazi 78) describes a similar condition in China in the era of globalization by the term “cultural aphasia”; a negative repercussion of the phenomenon of hybridization, where both self-hood and self-worth is neglected in the course of hybrid identity formation. Ravindra is as much worried of the linguistic onslaughts happening in post-independent India. He is a dumb witness to the fast extinction of Kannada language with Hindi and English gaining prominence. His wife had defended speaking in Hindi or English inspired by the spirit of nationalism. A school teacher friend Rajashekara had described English as a gateway to the world of
knowledge, science and technology. Ravindra inspite of all the concern for the native language had experienced identity dilemma. When he had talked in Kannada his son wouldn’t care, speaking in Hindi, he felt he was totally surrendering his individuality and so he had chosen to speak in English justifying thus: “English was the international language of science and that it provided a window to the world” (15). At times Ravindra also feels, “we are more enslaved to the English since the British left” and thinks - “intelligence should grow in a child; not knowledge of a foreign language. No country progresses by adopting a foreign language” (82). He as well quotes Shankara’s famous saying: “Nahi nahi rakshati dukrimkaram - learning the rules of grammar don’t bring salvation” (83). Such conflicting thoughts in Ravindra speak of the identity conflict prevailing in the society in matters of language and also the difficulty of having a stable identity in the matter. At Banavasi after receiving the ‘Pampa Award 2005’, Bhyrappa had stressed relativity between language and culture thus: “The existence of a culture depends on the language…the present tendency of thrusting English on Children will cause deterioration of culture” (Hindu).

Ravindra is also concerned of the decline in morality and the increase in selfish disposition of the people. The tenants (two school teachers) of his grandfather’s house in the course of their stay had brought the house to collapse and finally had vacated it without even in forming. The two farmers Kempa and Kariya had gobbled up his grandfather’s leased out land mercilessly. The events signify how freedom without self-control and fortitude is always dangerous. Ravindra’s grandfather had meant the same when he said “Swaraj meant self-rule, but that first, one should rule oneself. To do that one need skill, one needed character. Without these, what kind of Swaraj is it?” (33). People’ increased vulnerability for bribery
and nepotism in free India made him express his disappointment thus: “A man who succumbs to the temptations of bribery and nepotism isn’t free. Indians are not fit for freedom. They need someone to ruthlessly subjugate them - like Indira Gandhi; or they have to be ruled by moral strength - like Mahatma Gandhi. They are essentially followers” (33). Political freedom from the British had paved way for Political vendetta and nepotism in Indian Politics. The selfish political manipulations the novel describes are morally outrageous and signifies of hooliganism. The instance of the local politicians of Basavanapura inscribing their own names erasing the real donor’s name (Ravindra’s grandparents) on a corner stone of the village hospital in a big public function is an example of the kind. Ravindra was disgusted on coming to know of this and had felt - “history and gratitude were two face of the same coin. To say these people had no sense of gratitude was the same thing as saying they had no moral sense” (129). The moral imbroglio and the resultant demoralization is discussed in detail by Dr. Ithal in his book Bhyrappanavara Kadambarigalu: ondu adyayana. Intranational interaction had resulted in obliteration of regional idiosyncrasies in many areas of culture. People of one region were completely insensitive to ethnic heritage places and values of other regions. Ravindra gives the instance of a Marwari (a Rajasthani) who builds his house taller than the temple blocking the eastern light falling into the interior of the temple, plunging it into complete darkness. The locals had expressed indifference to this, calling the temple, a “dilapidated old temple” (51), “a Brahmin temple, It’s some Brahmin deity. Who cares?” (51). After independence caste consciousness had dominated the people and everything was looked at less as ‘national ‘we’ and more as ‘community ‘I’. Amartya Sen refers to the dangers of privileging one particular identity amongst the manifold identities thus: “Our shared
humanity gets savagely challenged when the manifold divisions in the world are unified into one allegedly dominant system of classification-in terms of religion, or community, or culture, ornament, or civilization” (xiii). Ravindra refers to the tendencies of politicization of specific identity thus:

Every community strived to make sense that a man from their own community became a representative. The good of his own community was foremost in the representative’s mind, not the good of the entire nation. All the people in the ministry were pillars of their communities, but nobody represented the people as a whole ---- this was the way things were- not just in the council of Ministers, but in every government office, university, school and college - in fact in every institution (130).

Ravindra quotes the Dalit radicalists’ who argue all things of heritage value in the country should be sold to American museums and the money paid should be used up for Harijan welfare as a way of atoning for the sin of ill-treatment in the name of caste. Consciousness of caste identity had increased after independence and Yogendra Singh refers to this change thus: “The resurgence of the consciousness of identity …among the weaker section of the society and… emergence of new power elite from the backward classes. . .” (12). Ravindra finds logic in the Dalit radicalists’ argument and suggests them to write down their opinion to ‘The Tribune’ and regrets that India because of caste practice never could conceive of a unified society in the past. But at the same time is aware that the idea of unified society was a post-independent awareness. Thus traditional social identities; of caste, region, religion, language were politicized afresh and the politics of difference was propagated consciously and strategically after freedom. Kancha Illaiah’s
solution for the matter “It is only a conscious Dalitbahujan movement which can, step by step, decastize society, socialize the means of production, and finally create humanitarian socialism in India”, (52) has an answer for all kinds of identity politics in general in the country. Any ‘bahujan' reaction always will be solution oriented.

Kanti, Ravindra’s wife is as much a victim of identity confusion. She is unable to amalgamate between the values of tradition and that of the present. Though she orients more towards modern values, she is often in conflict with Ravindra who tries to uphold traditional virtues. The interaction between Kanti and Ravindra is symbolic of tradition-modernity conflict and the related ambiguities characteristic of India after independence. She fosters love of Hindi and English and non-vegetarian food habits in her son without any qualms and rejects out rightly Ravindra’s opinion on the same. She is class sensitive and cherishes elitist notions over simple living and encourages everything that would help his son move with “Delhi’s high society, social life and likes and dislikes” (133). Ravindra’s love of the traditions of Karnataka and Kannada language she thinks are anti-national in nature. Her indifference to Gandhian values is too pronounced and she always uses the word Gandhi to indicate anything “cheap and beggarly” (207). While Ravindra had felt furious at his son Anup’s misdemeanors, Kanti had reconciled to the ways as natural and normal in modern times. Aware of the fact that Kanti could not be dismissed as completely wrong and that she was only identifying with the ways of the modern world, Ravindra himself a misfit due his unrelenting nature and inability for resilience to adjust to modern values thus: “A man who lives a pure life has a limited imagination, and a limited capacity for forgiveness, ‘he thought’ he tends to weigh everything according to principles and definite points of view” (159). Under the stress of the identity conflict he rationalizes his son’s misbehavior in school days
thus: “He had been bred in Delhi, Patna, Bombay and Bangalore. He didn’t have roots anywhere. . .. All he would use were those languages and common every day terms like - “coco-cola, ice-cream, chicken, cabaret and so on. How could one expect any good to come of this?” (165). Irrespective of his wife Kanti’s vehement protest he admits his son to Vivekananda Vidyashala run by Annaiah with the aim to transform him. When Ravindra supports the value education given at the school by Annaiah and the dedicated group of teachers, Kanti adjudges them as a bunch of ignorant sheep of no use. Instead she feels the nation needed the “intelligent people who overcame the odds to increase the nation’s wealth by setting up an industry. . .” (168). The school is based on the ideals of Vivekananda and tried to inculcate the ‘merits of sacrifice, bravery’ and practiced Gandhi’s idea of the purpose of education; ‘to promote the individuals all round development’ and Kanti saw little uses for such ideals in modern society. Ravindra however had noticed lot of positive transformation in his son and the boy’s best part of learning had been his “willingness to help others and the school, without expecting any personal reward” (404). Kanti too had perceived the changes but she was more depressed at the thoughts of her son living the life of a village simpleton, hardened by coarse manual work like a farmer.

Ravindra in spite of his greater capacity for identity stability needs is forced to become resilient to avoid tragic repercussions for his family members. He had tremendous faith in the value education and had felt no virtue in the modern utilitarian education. Ravindra in principle had always opposed education based on capitation fee and he had described it as “acquisition of knowledge that had no human value” and students who paid heavily for education could not be persuaded to “use the knowledge they had gained to benefit society” (528). Anup who had
stood first in secondary education at Vidyashala fails to make up to high caliber institutions of Engineering like IITs and NITs. Anup is sent to study in a regional engineering college by paying capitation fee (by his mother) and Ravindra is left depressed in the face of his principles dwindling in his very personal life. Such moments are followed by feelings of anguish and alienation, acute signs of identity crisis. Ravindra becomes a dumb witness to his son’s misdemeanors, a proof that he was unable to hold on to the values he had learnt at Anaiah’s Vidyashala. Thus, in an ambience of contradictory values many fail to hold on to the right values as in the case of Anup and Kanti but men like Ravindra don’t compromise easily. He adheres to the identities he respected and continues to promote them whenever opportunity arises, significant of his capacity for identity stability. He symbolizes Kakar’s idea of “ideal adulthood” (119) or “psychological maturity” (119).

Corruption that had become rampant in post-independent India in all walks of life also affects the field of journalism. It becomes very difficult for Talwar and Ravindra to thrive in the demoralizing ambience of utter chaos and dishonesty. To sustain one’s conviction for value journalism was very difficult in this period. The novel relives the historical event of Emergency period of 1975, when freedom of expression was curtailed by the government and journalism was used for the propagation of governments’ agendas. ‘The Tribune’ had condemned the control imposed on the freedom of expression for which all sorts of restrictions had been imposed on it and was even threatened of closure. ‘The Tribune’ editors were given clear instructions to involve just in bland reporting and to avoid criticism of the government. The whole ambience suggested a death blow to value journalism in which Ravindra had tremendous faith. Ravindra had thought, “The Tribune’s free, independent days are coming to an end” (938).
In such critical moment when Ravindra’s morale had sagged completely, Gopi Krishna Talwar, an idealist journalist shows the path out of the moral imbroglio. Talwar is a journalist in a Gandhian mould and he starts a new newspaper called ‘The Fact’ to protest the loss of editorial freedom and the damage caused to the “tradition of dedicated professionalism” (939). He believed that “The slightest change in the paper’s usual stance will offend millions of our regular readers both morally and ethically” (940). The Fact had included only serious features on subjects such as the fundamental rights of citizens, democracy, social justice and so on. But when his very wife opposes his attempt he thinks “No matter how much she rails, when it is the question of morals, I act according to my conscience” (941). The doctor had advised him to give up his journalistic activity to save his family. The suggestion of the doctor had induced a moral dilemma in Talwar that nobody understood his commitment. He had thought, “over the years he had devoted himself to his family, wife and children, but now that he was older, he felt he had to act according to his conscience, otherwise life would have no meaning” (1112). The ambiguities of his life had made him contemplate of metaphysical questions - “What is life? What is family? What does the relationship between a husband and wife mean? He knew the answers Indian metaphysics offered - that relationship is related to Maya or illusion and are temporary and transient. ‘It could be Maya, but you still have to live through these things’” (1113).

Ravindra too joins Talwar’s paper least caring for the monetary emoluments. He thinks “I’m going to be fifty in the not too distant future. If I don’t spend at least the next ten to fifteen years sacrificing my own material wealth in the fight for freedom for expression my life will be meaningless” (947). Ravindra too like Talwar felt that his duty/dharma was to place before the public the truth about the nation’s
political and economic situation. Writing anything that hid, twisted and destroyed the truth, he felt was sinful and so he decides “The only decent, moral thing to do was to give up this soul- destroying coolie work and support Talwar’s endeavors” (952). Bhyrappa in his autobiography Bhitti speaks of the major concerns of any of his novels thus: “expansion of meaning that deals with values and clash of values” (494) and “the origin and stimulation were…of the same…moral struggle” (497) and in Talwar and Ravindra the same is codified. Even in his student days Bhyrappa was interested in certain questions that vexed him and he wanted to study philosophy to seek answers to his questions. To one of his teachers, he confesses his interests in questions like, “Death, Morals, Dharma, Values, God, Goal of Life such problems” (295).

Ravindra involves in Annaiah’s school more ardently because the school aimed “character building a priority” (955). Whenever he suffers acute identity conflicts by ambiguities, he depends on other idealists to stabilize himself. He starts believing like Annaiah “You can’t change the present generation, but you can try to make the honest citizens out of the next generation” (955). He tries very hard to help Annaiah to save his school from the scheming politician like Parushurame Gowda by bringing in S. N. Patil, the chief advocate of the Karnataka high court and makes him the member of the school committee. Both Anaiah and Ravindra join hands do run a school different in its goals compared with the modern schools that fed commercial and material impulses. Their purpose is best expressed in these words:

If their characters are shaped and given a firm grounding at this early stage, then it won’t matter where they go or which profession they enter, they’ll always perform their duties with honesty and integrity and they’ll instill a similar moral attitude in their subordinates (956).
Ravindra is a man of ‘Culture’ in the Arnoldian sense and he is a great connoisseur of music and his friendship with Honnatti is mainly based on their mutual love for music. The reasons he gives as to why he respected Honnatti is a proof of the values he respected most. Honnatti was the one “who has sacrificed worldly comfort to an inner calling” (292). Ravindra felt only people who made that kind of sacrifice were worth respecting. But later Honnatti’s affair with his wife Kanti gives a serious jolt to Ravindra’s moral conviction. It becomes the most demoralizing event that shook his very faith in virtuous life. The effect of this event on Ravindra’s morale is described thus:

It had completely shattered Ravindra’s ethical and moral beliefs. His very faith in the goodness of human nature had collapsed, completely undermining his interest in life. There didn’t seem to be any point in starting a new school to shape the characters of future citizens. Life was just about getting and spending money and developing one’s animal instincts - power and wealth, name and fame, sexual indulgence - that was all there. Any struggles were fought with purely with these aims in mind. Ravindra didn’t see any point in trusting or respecting anyone. This feeling seemed to provide the answer to the questions that had been hounding him. If he could accept that this was the way things were, there wouldn’t be a problem (1000).

He felt totally empty- going back to Vidyashala, or starting a new school, all looked meaningless for him. He couldn’t escape the feeling that “things were the same no matter where he lived or went or what he avoided” (998). In his hellish state of despondency he feels no safe place to go and no reliable human to
correspond with, “I must go home. Home? But where is my home?” (1001). For the first time he suffers from acute existential angst. Ravindra in all demoralizing moments had tried to maintain the stability of identity and had recuperated fast to spearhead his ideals in new forms. But Honnatti’s behavior demoralizes him so acutely that he is pushed into a state of schizophrenia. In his desperation suffers existential angst thus:

He experienced the same old feelings of emptiness. He went to the lodge and lay down for a while and came to the realization that it was his conscience that was making him feel so completely purposeless, a state that was mirrored by the whole of the society, indeed by the whole nation. Anyone who believed that they had managed to fill this nihilistic emptiness was living in a fool’s paradise - it was nothing but an illusion. Ravindra concluded that all he could do was to live with this existential reality (1000).

He tries to derive strength from the struggles of Annaiah, Battaru and Talwar and tries to deduce lessons from their life. They all had suffered their life long cherished ideals crumbling before their very eyes. Instead of giving way completely to desperation and existential angst of meaninglessness they had found out a way out of it. When they had nobody else to guide for, they had turned inwards had listened to their conscience and had acted as it had suggested. He remembers Annaiah - who inspite of being invaded with feeling of emptiness as he witnessed the changes that were taking place at Vidyashala had not allowed it to erode his peace of mind or zest for life. Then he recalls Talwar and his decision to resign from his job when he couldn’t tolerate the newspaper selling out to the ruling party and had started a weekly newspaper on his own (fortnightly) mainly to publish the truth.
Annaiah like Ravindra is an idealist but in the field of education. He has tremendous faith in traditional mode of education and felt that modern education did not make youths, self-reliant and value oriented. To realize his ideals of true education he had resigned from his government job and had started his dream school Vivekananda Vidyashala at Halakere. Since he believed “teacher is the school and the school is the extension of the teacher” he hired teachers who are full of “idealism, enthusiasm and devotion” to teach in his school. Many of the teachers in Annaiah’s school believed “life had no meaning unless there was a goal to strive for” (97) and did pursue their goal by forever remaining bachelors. Only those who were deeply committed to the basic aims of the school and were not interested in money making were allowed to work at the Vidyashala. They all believed that they benefited society more by “selfless service than by formally renouncing the worldly life and wearing ochre robes” (752). They were all highly educated who could have found lucrative job elsewhere, instead they had discovered their purpose in life at Annaiah’s school.

The school mainly tried to put into practice the principles of Gandhi - ‘an education institution should be economically self-reliant and should not depend on government.’ Vidyashala similarly survived on the charity of the villagers and from the crop harvested in the farm cultivated in the school premises - where students and teachers worked together. Ravindra too had admitted his son Anup to Annaiah’s Vivekananda Vidyashala on coming to know the aim of the school was to promote Vivekananda’s ideals and proclaim the merits of sacrifice and bravery and to practice Gandhi’s idea of all round development of individuals. Annaiah is a proponent of ‘ahimsa’ or non-violence and he signifies a stable identity and against all odds he strives to execute his ideals.
The placidity and joy of running one such school is short lived. A local political leader with the purpose of owning the school involves in all sorts of anti-school activities. The villagers in the neighborhood of the school are set against the school. Since the villagers had stopped helping the school it becomes inevitable for Annaiah to run the school on government grants. Annaiah thus suffers the failure of his first ideal that an education institution should be self-sufficient and create its own income. He knew that an institution that accepts Government help won’t have the freedom and strength to stick to its educational ideals. Villagers from neighborhood are instigated against the school and are stopped from admitting their children to the Vidyashala. On looking at the empty classrooms and deserted campus the teachers had felt betrayed and their desire to make selfless dedication to their work and ideals was unacknowledged and “they were like donors without beneficiaries”. Annaiah and his coterie of teachers’ purpose of shaping at least a few honest citizens had nosedived caught in the quagmire of petty politics. All teachers felt “a nagging feeling of emptiness”, (750) a sign of identity crisis. The developments affected the teachers immensely as it had undermined their entire belief system and they had all lost sense of purpose and direction in life. Thus it becomes inevitable for Annaiah to introduce certain transformations to save the school from getting closed down. All he wanted was to see that the basic ideals of the school remained intact. Chief advocate of the Karnataka high court, S. N. Patil is admitted into the school committee as a member to resist the political vendetta on the school. To fill the dearth of students they start admitting students from all over India - with this the journey downhill of Anaiah’s dream school begins and one by one the principles or ideologies of the school are compromised. Admission of the students from all over India defeats the main purpose of running a school for the
benefits of locals and Patil argues for the need to admit the children of the wealthy and rich for the school. The reasons he gives signify the changing notions in modern day India thus:

You could allow children from rich families to enroll. After all, what is the essence of socialism? Why restrict yourself to begging or having the children grow their food with their own hands? Does a “realised soul” - a saint - discriminate in this way and say: “I’m only going to bless the poor and not the rich?” The nation’s leaders assume that the rich get rich by dishonest means, and they formulate their policies accordingly. But we have to put an end to this. We have to reinterpret what Gandhi said. Vivekananda’s thoughts are more comprehensive than Gandhi’s. What do you think? (756)

The ideology, “Students should be taught in their mother tongue - especially in the early stages. . .” is compromised and teaching in English is introduced. To attract students from outside (all over India) they changed the school’s image from a poverty-stricken school into a famous Indian institution and advertised in newspapers for admission. Even teachers were elated, as school was revived and still the opportunity to pursue their philosophical interest was intact. But when parents criticized and expressed their low opinion about the poor state of the buildings the inevitability to modernize the school becomes essential. Thus the desire of Annaiah to run a school exclusively on the principles he believed in is thwarted. The modernization process that commanded the whole of India also spreads to Annaiah’s Vidyashala as well. Annaiah is conscious of the changed public morality in post-independent India. He realizes heroism is associated with corrupt officials and parents rush in to marry their daughters to them and allegations against corrupt
people are converted into publicity stints. Ravindra’s words convey the apprehension of Annaiah thus: “When the entire populace believed the adage that he who gets the honey will lick his fingers, what hope was there of people seeing corruption, nepotism, dishonesty and lies as immoral?” (954). So Annaiah is ready to compromise and allow certain transformation in his faith. Instead of retreating with disappointment he continues to be proactive and accommodative. The features of modern society from which he had tried to remain aloof invade his favorite school as well. This in turn had annexed his mind with feeling of emptiness but he had not allowed the feeling to dominate him to erode his peace of mind or zest for life. He had only thought,

Though you can’t change the present generation, but you can try to make honest citizens out of the generation…If their characters are shaped and given a firm grounding at this early stage, then it won’t matter where they go or which profession they enter, they’ll always perform their duties with honesty and integrity and they’ll instill a similar moral attitude in their subordinates (956).

The resilience and stamina of Annaiah is proved here. He now strives to achieve the metamorphosed ideals as per the demands of the modern society but is not ready to retreat and disappear. So he accommodates transformations only to realize that there is no midway; the past and the present cannot be judiciously amalgamated. Modernization of the school in all possible ways continues and Annaiah fails to stop it. Need for large amount of fund to run the school as per modern parlance leads to fund raising activity and more and more business magnets become members of the school executive committee. They all start imposing their ideals on the school while donating fund exorbitantly. Annaiah’s protest, “Still, I
want our school to be able to stand on its own two feet without the support of all these VIPs” (1034) turns out too weak to counter arguments like:

This is an age of big establishments. Gandhi said that everything should be on a small scale, didn’t he? What did Nehru do? He brought in the Five Year Plan. Everything he created was big - Bhakra Nangal, Hirakud, Bokaro, Durgapur, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd., Hindustan Machine Tools and the parliamentary buildings in Delhi. Can we afford to be small in a country as big as ours? In such a big city as Delhi? (1035)

Annaiah retaliation “I’m not talking about those—just about our school” had got drowned in talks on “annual budgets of American universities like Harvard and Stanford” (1035). The fact that Anaiah was allowing changes under immense stress and duress and he struggled from acute identity conflict is felt in his thoughts that ran thus:

Annaiah felt slightly embarrassed at the way the school was heading and at all the recent changes. He felt a painful loneliness inside. He had found peace while surrounded by the mud walls and flooring that the students had laid and while sleeping with nothing more than a coarse blanket and wooden headrest. It was satisfying to think that they had built all this themselves, their sweat mingling with the mud (1035).

Almost all the founding principles of the Vivekananda Vidyashala had been flouted and thus the changes symbolized bulldozing the very heart of the school and trampling of the dreams of its conceivers. Thus the intricacies of the modern world push Annaiah to inaction and incapacity to become a passive onlooker. He who had resigned his government job and had undergone all the travails to open his dream
school is pushed to inactivity and to feel himself inept and inefficient in the general
disarray of corrupt ambience. The celibate teachers realized that all their sacrifice
and impersonal service did not reach the right persons. Material and commercial
impulses dominated the society so much that however much they tried they could
not instill the value of ‘selfless service’ in their pupils. They realized that,

Their current students had other aims and objectives. They wanted to become
engineers, doctors or chartered accountants so that they could increase their
father’s business ten, even a hundred, fold. They wanted to get into import
and export, or become a Central Government Minister, or a tennis champion
so they could win a hundred thousand dollars. While it was considered good
that they were ambitious, they were also selfish. Their plans didn’t include
helping others at all. This bothered the celibate teachers because there was
simply no satisfaction in dedicating their lives to such people (1038).

They were racked with self-doubt as to the use of teaching at all, if they
couldn’t instill in pupils some of their ideals and values. On knowing the reason as
to why from all over India children were sent to the distant and remote Halakere,
their moral courage dips to the lowest. To prevent drug abuse, to find relief from the
drudgery of bringing up children (by working parents), spoilt brats and their
rehabilitation, children from broken homes and to study hard to become doctors and
engineers (again for lucrative reasons) were the reasons and none came to tend their
character and idealism of any kind. With such feedback “their feelings of bitter
disappointment, disinterestedness and emptiness intensified . . . for they have to bear
the guilt of bringing up selfish exploiters” (1040).
Annaiah too suffers from feelings of acute crisis. Though the school still existed he felt uprooted and made him wonder, “whom it was for, whom was it helping” (1050). When the school had been set up it had been for the region’s poor people and the purpose was to build character, teach them self-reliance, self-respect and introduce them to the new way of thinking. Annaiah suffered pangs of guilt whenever he realized he had betrayed the causes and his ideals. The feeling had made him protest before the ever expanding school committee thus: “still, I want our school to be able to stand on its own two feet without the support of all these VIPS”, (1034) to which the all-powerful Patil had replied,

This is an age of big establishments. Gandhi said that everything should be on a small scale, didn’t he? What did Nehru do? He brought in the Five Year Plan. Everything he created was big – Bhakra Nangal, Hirakud, Bakaro, Durgapur, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd., Hindustan Machine Tools and the parliamentary buildings in Delhi. Can we afford to be small in a country as big as ours? In such a big city as Delhi? (1035)

The argument had successfully silenced the feeble voice of Anaiah. The teachers had tried to inculcate the virtue of self-less service in the pupils and Patil explains how in modern times the meaning of service has changed thus:

In your mind service, celibacy and sacrifice are inseparable. You seem to believe that service isn’t possible without sacrifice - that’s the traditional Indian view. But now service means agreeing to perform a certain job for a suitable fee. It means doing the job honestly and efficiently. That’s all it means… It’s a concept based on professionalism. Offering extremely good
service and making money aren’t mutually exclusive. There’s no call for sacrifice, celibacy and such things here (1057).

The climax is reached when the committee members quote the latest complaints of the parents on Annaiah and his fellow teachers and command Annaiah and his likeminded fellow teachers to leave the school by taking gratuity or provident fund to compensate for their salary. There is no choice left for Annaiah and his group; either they had to keep numb watching all the transformations or had to leave the school. What graver event can one think of to precipitate feelings of crisis? One by one all the school teachers leave the school and join the school opened by Honnatti for the disabled. Annaiah too leaves his school and joins Honnatti’s school and decides to guide him as to the mistakes he had to avoid not to suffer pitfalls in the future, the kind he suffered with his school.

Hemanth Honnatti, identifies completely with music though he is an engineer by profession. His love and dedication to music is such that he resigns his lucrative job to pursue music fulltime without any impediment. He specially is interested in sitar, to perfect sitar playing he leaves Bombay and finally comes to Jogi Gudda (hill), (at the foot of which is situated Annaiah’s school) as the ambience gave all the tranquility needed for practicing sitar. He felt it is difficult to engage in sadhana in cities and had selected Jogi Gudda of Halakere as fine place for learning. Honnatti lived like a sanyasi on top of the hill devoting himself to music completely. Ravindra had immense respect for him for he was the one “who has sacrificed worldly comfort to an inner calling” (292). Honnatti’s mother said “he approaches everything with yogic discipline” (294). To Honnatti pursuit of music is as much the pursuit of ‘truth’ and a means to “self realisation”. He aspired like Gandhi and
Vivekananda to make “A devoted, dedicated inner search to try to find out who one really is and what one wants to be” (199). When his practice of sitar in the serene calm of Jogi Gudda is disturbed by the hooliganism of local political leader (had smashed his sitar to the ground) he leaves for Bangalore and continues his practice of sitar undisturbed in Ravindra’s house. In the course of his stay there he meets Kanti, Ravindra’s wife and had responded positively to her attempts to befriend him, mainly because of her keen interest in music. With time Honnatti grew to depend on her companionship more and more as she helped him to concentrate on the finer aspects of an artists’ performances. But he always believed that their friendship was that which developed between two likeminded music-loving friends and hence was special. But Kanti had larger interest in Honnatti than just sharing his musical interests and one day she seduces him and thus sexual intimacy develops between them. But throughout Honnatti is never at ease in this aspect of their relationship because Kanti was Ravindra’s wife, whom he loved as a brother. He honestly felt that Ravindra was like his brother and the fact that a brother’s wife is like one’s own mother - “Honnatti felt an intense sense of disgust”. Thinking of Ravindra’s “affectionate nature” (535) and “clear conscience” his liaison with Kanti seemed “like prostitution and adultery of the worst kind; appropriating one’s own brother’s wife” and also a case of “betrayal and sin” (535). Honnatti felt that he had committed a terrible sin; “I am a sinner, I am a sinner, I am a sinner” he repeated to himself. He introspects “Was he really so eager for happiness that he was willing to forgo all morality?” (535). He felt like smashing his sitar, “it was because of the sitar that Ravindra had been so helpful and Kanti had become so intimate and had started the affair they were having” (535).
At times when he felt bewildered and confused as to the moral lapse in their relation, Kanti had always distracted him by talks on the great future he had as a musician and all the name and fame that awaited him. In response he would suppress his sense of sin and rationalize that an artist would never be able to let his creativity soar if he couldn’t leave behind restrictive social conventions and thus Kanti became his “musical muse” inspiring music.

Honnatti though had wanted to move up in the world of music and get recognized as world’s great instrumentalist, he believed “fame in the art world should be attained purely on the grounds of merit, even without any publicity...An artist had to build up a following by word of mouth, because seeking publicity by any other means compromised his artistic integrity” (632). But when Kanti with her strong business acumen plans to sponsor him to gain national and international recognition using publicity gimmicks and popular media, he doesn’t stop her. This signifies that Honnatti is under pressure of identity confusion. For amidst all such activities he suffers from overwhelming sense of guilt and quite often resolves to end his relationship with Kanti. He feels that Kanti had abused him sexually, had treated him as a “male prostitute” and she had attained him knowing his weakness for music. In Kashi, where he had been to meet Vijaya Mishra, his future accomplice in public concerts Honnatti has a different experience. As he walks in the lanes of Kashi he feels the very ambience there exuded happiness and “peace of mind” (778). His visit to Dasaswamedh Ghat on the banks of river Ganga and the sound of the flowing river awakens him to the true nature of music “This was the way the music should be – it should have all the majesty of Ganga, and be heard in a sublime setting” (782). All the while on Jogi Guda and in his interaction with Kanti he had been bothered by the question “What’s really music is all about” (792). On
watching the flow of river Ganga he realizes he had taken a wrong route under the influence of Kanti. Music for name, fame, to please somebody, “to embellish and show off” and to attract crowd was all wrong. It’s about “becoming completely engrossed in the music by and for yourself” (782). He is attracted to the concept of “a profound, majestic and non-exhibitionistic kind of music” (783). After viewing the various Ghats on the banks of Ganga he goes to Harishchandra Ghat - “a famous cremation spot where all Hindu’s wants to get cremated after death” (783). At Harishchandra Ghat Honnatti is profoundly affected “it was as if the story of Harishchandra had been waiting to burst into his consciousness. . .. His mind was on fire” (784).

Memories of the legend of Harishchandra flooded back, “how king Harishchandra had lost his kingdom- indeed lost everything- because of his principles and how he was reduced to working as a watchman at a crematory” (784). Even his wife Chandramati had decided to get cremated along with her dead son unable to bear the loss of chastity. Both Harishchandra and Chandramati had endured so many misfortunes yet were not ready to compromise their principles. He wonders whether the story of Harishchandra and Chandramati had meant “the husband’s absolute honesty and his wife’s unqualified chastity as they had confronted each other in the cemetery before their son’s body --- were these things two faces of the same purushartha - spiritual goal?” (784) (Italics mine). He realizes both had least cared for the sanctity and the other implications of a ‘mangalasutra’.

The myth of Harishchandra and Chandramati and the mangalasutra concept in it signified the value of the need for absolute honesty and unqualified chastity in husband-wife relationship. Both had compromised with their principles so easily. He realizes that he had been wrong in seeking the virtues of music in his relationship
with Kanti especially when their relation carried the muck of vulgarity. He is tormented by feelings that “I caused the break-up of their marriage” (789). He feels inspired by Harishchandra and Chandramathi’s incredible strength; his total devotion to truth and her undying chastity and he decides to give up his relation with Kanti once for all. Irrespective of Kanti calling him “stupid old traditional mind burning like a corpse in Harishchandra’s time . . .” (812) he ends his relation with her with the words “but I’m consumed with guilt because I’m having an affair with a married woman-and with what feels like my brother’s wife at that” (812).

Honnatti even after the end of his relation with Kanti continues to be haunted by “an unshakeable sense of my own sin” (966) goes on a sort of pilgrimage to Haridwara, Badari and Mathura. Throughout his journey he contemplates on human relationships and issues of papa and punya (sin and virtue). At Badari he had felt it “a place of tremendous spiritual power where one could cleanse one’s mind”. He starts hating music because he felt,

In fact, all art! He felt that art was subversive and that it wormed its way into a person’s emotional life, burrowing away until it totally undermined their moral fibre. He found that he couldn’t continue at the Omkar Vidyalaya after realising that art couldn’t expiate a person’s sins (971).

He decides “Art can’t wash away our sins - that’s something that only selfless service can do. Only good works have that power. I suppose that’s what made me think of this Vidyashala” (971). He lives Mathura and goes to Vivekananda Vidyashala to involve in self-less service to expiate his sin. He wants to confess his sin to Ravindra but is afraid that the news of betrayal from wife and a trusted friend would surely destroy Ravindra’s faith in human nature and make him
a misanthrope. Honnatti completely abandons music with the thought that all music seemed to do was “plunge him into emotionally turbulent waters” (978). He decides that “he would do anything other than teach music” (979). He attributes his sinful relation to what Omkara Baba had said of Satyasya satya - “the truth of truth” which had referred to the traditional idea of “inescapable past sins”. He feels that the true meaning of life was best expressed in “Annaiah and the self-sacrificing teachers and the school” (978). Honnatti was unable to overcome his guilty conscience - “is there no atonement and punishment for a sinner? Is there no escape? He felt”. He had tried everything, had wandered all holy places, even playing music couldn’t rid him of his feelings of guilt and betrayal. In his search for right path of atonement for sin he is helped by Jayaprakash Narayan - a man of deep moral convictions. Jayaprakash’s interpretation that as long as he atoned for his sin and never committed the mistake again, it was alright and not to worry about religious interpretation of papa-punya (sin and spiritual merit) and ‘inescapable past sins’ impresses Honnatti a lot. He begs Ravindra’s forgiveness and only after receiving Ravindra’s pardon involves in the self-less service of running a shelter and a school for the handicapped and is freed from his pangs of regret. But the novel ends with the scenes of impositions of the Emergency period of 1975 and all good and innocent people are in the jail including Honnatti, Anaiah and Ravindra waiting for realize. The ending signifies the author’s impression of hopelessness in post-independent society. The well-known critic G.S. Amur observes that ‘the ending signifies the limitation of the authors’ of better days in the future vision for the dark spell of emergency “fails to leave any hope and solution for future” (40).

*Datu* (1973) translated into English as *The Crossing Over*, which won Bhyrappa the Central Sahitya Akademi Award for 1975, focuses on the evil of caste
system. It is hailed as “a novel with a progressive view and a revolutionary bias.” In his award receiving address, Bhyrappa stated:

I have thought my novels begin an exploration; I have tried to deeply examine some of the problems which were confronting me and the areas of my experience. This process has resulted in my own soul searching. My personal experiences became deeper and broader. Each of my novels takes me a step nearer to a mysterious center of experience, and has enabled me to understand and appreciate the complexity of life and its meaning. It has brought me a satisfaction more meaningful than any scholastic study of any theory. It has brought to the fore several problems which were lying hidden in my subconscious mind.

More than any other novel, The Crossing Over stands a testimony to the above views. The action of the novel is set in Tirumalapura, a small town in which several communities are living in a harmonious manner, at least outwardly. The novel focuses on three families and the conflicts the members of these three families undergo under the pressure of caste faith and the changes happening therein in the society. One of the three families is that of Venkataramanayya and he belongs to the Brahmin community. Venkataramanayya is the priest of the village temple and has a son Venkatesha and a daughter Sathyamaba. Venkatesha doesn’t study much but his sister completes her postgraduate studies in History and works as a lecturer in a college in Bangalore. The other family is that of the Minister Melagiri Gowda and he belongs to the Vokkaliga (farmer’s) community. He has his wife Bhaghirathamma and son Srinivasa and father Thirumalae Gowda. Then there is the family of Bettayya, an MLA, representing the scheduled caste, which includes his
daughter Meera and son Mohandasa. All the elder members of these families believe rigidly in the caste distinctions and are opposed to any changes in the matter. But the younger generation of these families opposes caste prejudices and is not only the harbingers of change but in the course cause enough turmoil and conflicts precipitating disasters of severe kinds in their own life as well as in the life of others. While the elder generations remain distant, the youths of their families entangle causing complications of varied kinds.

Melagiri Gowda’s son Srinivasa, and Venkataramanayya’s daughter Satyabhama are classmates, befriend each other and decides to marry, but their marriage is unacceptable to both the families because of the caste difference. Their marriage is thwarted by the elders of both the family at times using the official machinery and other times the religious sanctions. Srinivasa, though unwilling, marries Kumudini, daughter of powerful MLA of his own caste under the pressure of his family members. Kumudini on coming to know of the affair of her husband succumbs to depression, breathes her last during her delivery. Srinivasa develops intimacy with Meera and wishes to marry her but their marriage is thwarted again by the elders due to the caste reasons. Srinivasa’s parents don’t want Meera to marry because they think that their upper caste status would be polluted by this marriage with a dalit girl. Caught in the imbroglio of caste practices Srinivasa turns mad, Meera drowns in the village reservoir. Friendship develops between Mohandasa and Satyabhama and even subtle inclination in both of them to marry is inspired only to be thwarted by caste related complications. Ultimately Mohandasa’s vengeance against the upper castes culminates in his blowing up of the village reservoir and he is as well carried away in the resultant flood. Thus Srinivasa, Meera, Mohandasa, Venkataramanayya do meet tragic ends of varying kind caught up in the changing
nuances of caste practices in India and Satyabhama though survives is an unhappy person and a disappointed witness to the difficulty of reconciling castes and ameliorating caste discriminations. If youngsters fail to live their ideals, the elders of all the three families do experience different degree of stress due to the changing caste equations. On witnessing the disastrous consequences his daughter had to suffer for her reformative zeal and being subjected to shame and humiliation Venkataramanayya goes mad and drowns in the village reservoir. But before his death initiates his daughter into the ritual of Brahminhood, a privilege denied to woman. Satyabhama in turn performs the scared thread ceremony to Meera; a woman from the scheduled caste. The consistent aspect of the novel is that any proposition of inter-caste commingling for what so ever reason is doomed to failure with disastrous consequences. Srinivasa-Satyabhama, Srinivasa-Meera and Satyabhama-Mohandasa marriage proposals being paradigms of inter-caste marriage never happen in the novel and prove the compositeness of caste faith prevailing in the society. Satyabhama is thrown out of her job, compelling her to work as a sales girl, and finally return to her village only to witness the imminence of changes in the matter and the difficulty of attaining reformation.

*The Crossing Over* created a new awareness of a very familiar experience to the people in the Indian society. It was their own society, their own environment, their own familiar characters and their own problems which they had little understood and analysed, till Bhyrappa presented them very clearly and in an artistic and new angle and with a deep analysis of the various factors underlying them. It is this demystification of a social mystery that makes this novel unusually absorbing. *The Crossing Over* by S. L. Bhyrappa mainly addresses the issue of caste practices and the emerging complications in the immediate aftermath of Indian independence.
It is a social practice prevailing in India for the past four thousand years and every Indian irrespective of one’s likes and dislikes is attributed with caste identity and is subjected to its idiosyncratic practices. The rigidity of caste faith is gradually declining for varied reasons but even at the threshold of twenty first century one can’t assuredly say it has disappeared completely. Caste faith and the related practices continue to exist and have been sustaining new dimensions of meanings and use value unheard of in pre-Independent India. As caste practices is basically characterized by hierarchical relations it has paved way for both caste politics and politicization of caste identity for varied reasons.

After colonization dilution in caste faith was observed for many reasons. Exposure to a culture that did not express caste beliefs, western education and the impetus received towards rational thinking and scientific spirit are few of them. Awareness of the democratic principles of equality and the desire to evolve an egalitarian society as much encouraged the opposition of the practices of hierarchy amongst castes. Constitutional upholding of human rights and dignity similarly added to the dilution in caste faith. But the changes happened not very easily as theorized; fundamentalists clashed with rationalists in the matter. Constitutional, legislative and judicial interference was perceived of to set right the injustices in the practice and varied laws and regulations were passed to curb caste related atrocities. *The Crossing Over* provides a wonderful experience of all the versatile intricacies related to caste identity as it is expressed in individuals with varying perceptive and discriminative capacities. The novel represents indeed with historic authenticity the caste consciousness of individuals and its influence on human relationship in all its subtle nuances and intricacies. The novel purports neither complete transformation nor prevalence of the traditional set up intact, instead aims to capture the nuances of
changes happening in the post-independent India. Some of the characters are unable to adjust to the changes and do suffer disastrous consequences as in the case of Venkataramanayya, Srinivasa and Meera. Some like Venkatesha and Melagirigowda whose priorities of life are different, do make caste related vulnerability in people their capital for personal profit and survival. The real harbinger of change and the one with genuine modernist stance, Satyabhama, after all the painstaking effort is disappointed unable to bring about the desired transformation. Thus a contemporaneous burning social issue is transformed to the medium of art very effectively by S. L. Bhyrappa.

The novel concentrates on three different families belonging to three major factions of caste; Brahmin caste, Shudra caste and the untouchable caste. In terms of the experiences they undergo these three families represent caste setup of the country in all its compositeness. The Brahmin caste is the most privileged of the castes and is described as perpetrating hierarchy and exploitation over the Shudras and the Dalits. The Shudra though is the underprivileged caste is said to be subjected to the lesser rigors of exploitation compared to the untouchable caste, renamed as ‘Harijans’. The study aims to analyze some major characters and the intricacies of identity conflict they undergo in relation to the social practice of caste.

Venkataramanayya is a traditionalist, a conservative with immense faith in the caste practice because it has been the tradition of the society and religion has propagated caste differences. He is the head priest of the temple in Thirumalapura and believes in the sacredness and superiority of Brahmin community as per the tradition of Varna system. He finds it very difficult to digest the transformation evinced around in the matter for it undermined the very utterings of God, almighty
himself. His daughter Satyabhama’s decision to marry a Shudra sends shockwave through him. He expresses mixed emotions of anger, insult and helplessness and in his angst even wishes his daughter had died of illness - “Each day while worshipping he prayed fervently to Lord Tirumala: ‘Don’t let this marriage come to pass’” (111). He is happy that Melagiri Gowda and the other elders of the family had refused marriage of their son Srinivasa with Satyabhama. But when he comes to know from Bettayya of the prohibitions she suffered; evacuation from the rented room, dismissal from employment and the need to do the dismal job of a sales girl, he repents his act and curses Srinivas’s pregnant wife Kumudini of infertility. The predicament of a caste victim, social disgrace, poverty and deprivation of social security is all experienced by Satyabhama for obliging an inter-caste-marriage. On seeing the despicable condition of his daughter and her suffering Venkataramanayya starts behaving in a weird way; symbolic of his inner confusion and turmoil. He performs the daily routine of his priestly profession in a perverted manner. It is described in the novel thus:

As an afterthought he walks barefoot to the temple. He made two circuits of it, but not in the usual auspicious direction, then made his way down to the nearby canal and washed himself as if, once again, he was ridding himself of defilement contracted during a funeral (262).

Religion and scriptures had always been his source of faith in caste practices. The changes happening around signified denial of God himself and he expresses his confusion by perverting the rituals of worship. His behavior is symbolic of his protest against God. He blames himself for reprimanding his daughter inspite of knowing that Satya had grown up watching changes in caste practices. He regrets
his anger on Satyabhama by hitting himself with sandals uttering “They’ll bring me wisdom” (265). Venkataramanayya’s confusion in the matter is expressed in the contradictory thoughts that assail him- “Does the idea of caste and creed have any real meaning? Or is it false?” (32). But in the Upanishad and the Geetha the Lord had declared – “these four castes were created by me” (32). Satya’s words “the author of the Bhagavat Geetha was a man and not a God” (33), haunts him. He is disillusioned and is subjected to tremendous amount of conflict. He takes her words seriously for he always had found her intelligent “…all those books she read. She had studied Upanishads and Bhagavad Geetha over and over again”. He is very much affected by her words,

All the scriptures deny caste-distinction. Even the Haridasas says so. And in any case what’s important isn’t what someone said: it’s our own conscience which tells us the truth. Our experience shows us the right path. These ancient traditions obscure what our conscience tells us and hide the validity of our own experience. People with the courage of their convictions live: cowards bury themselves in the mud and grope around like worms. It’s our own conscience which tells us the truth – customs and traditions obscure it.(113).

He is particularly perturbed by her statement, “It’s our own conscience which tell us the truth. Customs and traditions obscure it” (113). Satya’s reference to conscience mainly affects him and her reference to customs or traditions that “These ancient traditions obscure what our conscience tells us and hides the validity of our experience.” affects him a lot. His sensitive conscience starts perceiving the experiences of his life differently. He recalls his relationship with the untouchable woman Matangi and tries to make a fresh assessment of the affair.
Now details about the untouchable woman returned to him with increasing clarity. As he slept, as he washed, as he held the knot of his sacred thread and chanted: ‘Om tat Savitrvarenyam’, as he worshipped in the temple, holding the sacred light in front of deity, he couldn’t help thinking about Matangi (114).

In the initial stages of his affair with Matangi, the impurity of his act had bothered him. He had performed rituals of purification; ritual bath and change of sacred thread, every time he slept with Matangi. When Matangi had expressed fear of God’s anger at their relationship, he had referred to the purifying ablutions he performed but all the while had doubted his own words and had felt uneasy. His sense of ‘uneasiness’ was no doubt the voice of his conscience which he had not grasped earlier. Hence in the course of his relationship with Matangi though he was strictly following the dictates of the tradition he had felt sacred to look at the face of God- “Venkataramanayya felt afraid when, in the course his worship, he brought the sacred light close to the Lord’s face. Matangi’s question lingered in his mind” (123). Purity restoring rituals and ablutions though superficially had suppressed his guilt yet deep down he was uneasy- However, from that point onwards, he stopped gazing at the face of the Lord when performing the ritual of the sacred light. Even when he had ended his relation with Matangi (she had stopped coming to him after conceiving to protect his reputation) his sense of guilt continued to worry him and his fear of god also had continued.

He still feared to gaze at the face of the image, the eyes of which were covered with shining silver eye-plates. Even while performing his duties with the sacred light he preferred to look at the feet of the idol, never at the face (128).
But with time had become oblivious of it. But the changes happening around in the society and his daughter’s words, “conscience is truthful and tradition obscuring” haunted him and drove him wild. When faith in tradition had been strong he had not tried to decipher the source of his uneasiness. But in the times when caste traditions were questioned, he realized that his uneasy feelings were the voice of his conscience. The duality of traditional wisdom and its modern counterpart confused him. Like his daughter Satyabhama he couldn’t stabilize his identity by anchoring to any one of the duality with conviction. The duality he felt within is epitomized in his experience thus: “Thoughts of his daughter enraged him while memories of Matangi oppressed him.” Caught in the turmoil of doubts he denounced God. Looking at the face of God he said “this thing is stone nothing but stone. Why worship it?” (155).

One fine day he gave up priesthood with the following words:

What we call God is just a piece of stone. It doesn’t deserve to be worshipped. From tomorrow I’m not going to do this job any more . . . it isn’t simply a question of my renouncing this: the whole idea of worshipping is unnecessary and should be ended. The very notion of God is false, so it follows that worshipping him is a deceitful act. We should take up some other profession which is pure and which doesn’t involve any deceit. ‘You have another profession. Take it up, and leave this one.’ He took the key of the temple from his sacred thread and flung it to the ground. Then he turned to his son again. This is all I have to say. I leave you to make your own decisions (231-232).

Venkataramanayya starts living the life of a recluse; symbolic of his social and self alienation and the resultant isolation. Stops wearing the sacred thread for he
felt, “What’s the matter, it’s just a few yawns of spun cotton” (241). Venkataramanayya now denied religion, scripture and though he went up to the temple he didn’t greet or honour the God whom he had been worshipping for almost thirty years. Instead like a researcher in archeology he examined the images of the temple and immediately would have a bath in the canal as if wanting to be rid of the defilement. His odd behavior resembled insanity. He vacillates between customary practices and thoughts of denial of the same. He declared “All these rituals of sanctity and purity are nonsense”, and immediately a few moments later insisted of taking purifying bath and even scolded Satyabhama for not having “any sense of sanctity or purity” (267). One night he goes to the Harijan colony in search of Matangi and is beaten up by the Harijans and is pelted with dung and muck. Dogs were set loose on him and he is bitten by a dog on the calf. Though had gone in search of Matangi to the Harijan colony, when Matangi comes to his hut he wavers between notions of purity and impurity. He thinks thus:

I really ought to set fire to this place and leave. If I eat food cooked by this wretch it will be the end. I shouldn’t be able to clean myself of the sin even if I cauterize my tongue with darbha grass seven times. To satisfy one’s lust one can court any woman, but as for cooking food, for performing the rituals, for becoming a life-partner, that has to be a well-born woman. I can’t let Matangi come in here again (253).

A few moments later he thinks differently. He thinks of marrying her in the line of Vasishta-Arundathi couple in Hindu mythology.

He wondered if it might be possible to transform Matangi into a Brahmin. After all, why not? Didn’t the seer Vasishta marry Arundhati, who came
from the untouchable community, and convert her into a Class-Brahmin?
Vasishta had had that much power. ‘I could also marry this Matangi. I could declare before the people that I had truly married her. I could observe the fire-rituals each day and make her sit by my side as my life-partner. I could make her wear the sacred thread and initiate her into the chanting of the Gayatri prayer. She could be invested with the ability to offer homage to the deities when I was out of town. The hut would be transformed into an ashram. This would be my life in the third stage, Vanaprastha, where one lives in the forest and meditates (254-255).

It is interesting that he is able to overcome his reservation of purity in his illusion and imagine himself and Matangi as Vasishta-Arundathi of ancient times but when sane thoughts of impurity assert back. Away from the reality of contemporary society, in the world of fantasy he believes in the idea of ‘Brahminhood’ as it existed before taking on the present notion of caste. Venkataramanayya had stopped wearing the sacred thread and had identified himself as a Sanyasi. Even Satya’s idea that anybody can become a ‘Brahman’ is based on the sayings of Vedas, much before the word Brahman took on the caste structure. His enlightened conscience (but camouflaged as insane) tries not only to set right the injustices of caste but also that of gender. This is expressed in his acts of pledging half of his property to Satya and in his initiate of her into Brahminhood and in setting aside some two thousand rupees for Matangi. When he is publicly humiliated by Bettayya’s son Mohandasa for his affair with Matangi he drowns with forebodings on the changing times.
Satyabhama is the most important character in the novel who interprets the social identity of caste in a highly personal way. In the matter of caste, she has her own personal identity. She stands alone against the whole lot of characters who have interiorized the caste practices as per the dictates of the tradition and verbatim follow the same. She is the lone being who employs the voice of reason and conscience to the whole affair and realizing the injustice in the matter, sets to bring about the change with definite steps. Her personal identity in the matter she imposes with conviction against all odds. She has done her M. A in history and has the capacity to make the most objective and detached observation. Within and outside she is the same and until the end she is capable of consistency of behavior and thus has accomplished identity stability. She is able to rationalize caste practices, something not possible for any of the characters in the novel. Satyabhama’s outlook is qualified with a historian or social scientist’s disinterested, detached objectivity and she is neutral and unaffected like a visionary. Satya does not reject all values passed on by tradition outrightly. For instance, though she rejects caste idea, she has faith in the ideology of “dharma” – and calls caste practices as “adharma”. Venkataramanayya’s view on Satyabhama is a proof of her strong personality, “she’s strong and self-assured, with views which often startle her fellow-students. Perhaps the loss of a mother can have the effect of strengthening a woman and making her more manly.” she not only thinks radically but also enacts her mind out similarly. She has a strong desire to transform society and begins her journey by deciding to marry her classmate Srinivasa, a Shudra boy. She describes her marriage with Srinivasa a “moral decision” (14) - a righteous act though might impress as “immoral” for her family members and the people of her village. Her father’s claim that caste faith is ordained by religion is explained away by Satya thus: “business of
caste is a false doctrine which has nothing to do with religion” (39). She explains
him that caste is more a custom and nothing to do with Dharma and religion. Satya
is self-made as she says “I haven’t been influenced by anyone else’s views. I read
for myself and think. I act according to my convictions” (40).

Throughout her struggle she knows she is alone and her community would
not come to her support and that she will be ostracized as well. The rationale she
employs to disprove caste is interesting. The very fact that sex difference and race
difference is encoded in physical anatomy but by physical looks one cannot identify
caste is a fine proof of the phony nature of caste system argues Satya. Her
disapproval of caste is based on the murmurings of her conscience and she advices
the people to hear the voice of their conscience thus:

All the scriptures say these distinctions are false. Even the Haridasas said so.
But what is important now is not what anyone said in the past: it’s our
conscience which clarifies things and it’s our experiences which show us the
way forward. The problem is that these customs, these ancient traditions,
simply obscure our conscience and dull the significance of our experiences.
People who have the courage of their convictions aren’t shackled by ancient
ways of doing things: they know how to live. Cowards, on the other hand,
bury their minds in mud and live like worms (43).

Satya’s opposition of caste related creed also stems from her faith in
democracy. Satya was a very intelligent girl even as a child and was highly inquiring
and always trying to grasp the essence of the meaning. She had questioned the
explanation of the origin of caste given by her father thus: “If God created these four
castes who created the Muslims and Christians?” Satya’s sense of social justice is
proved best in her support of the caste related reservation policies of the government and she understood them in the right spirit as a compensation for the denial of educational and job opportunities for thousands of years for the lower castes. Her ideas on amelioration of caste differences are logical and scientific which she explains thus:

If children from their earliest days are introduced equally to all vocations the traditional relation between work and caste will disappear. It was through work that the idea of caste itself emerged. Now the time has come when the accident of birth should cease to determine the style of work people do. In point of fact their restrictions have now been abolished and it would be sensible for us to abandon these old hampering ideas of caste altogether. (162).

She had read many books and had cultivated the habit of independent thinking and had expressed contempt at the theory of social stratification as explained in the verses in Manudharma Shastra - “Even at that early age her sense of justice was disturbed by verses like: ‘Sudram tu karayet dasyam kritamakritameva va!’ (‘whether he is bought or not, a Sudra is destined to slavery!’), or ‘Na svamina nisrstopi sudro dasyadvimuchyate’ (‘although released by his master, a Sudra is not relieved of his slavery: it is inborn in him.’)” (413).

Equipped thus with just convictions and obstinacy to promote her ideas in action, she proposes marriage to Srinivasa, son of Melagiri Gowda. Even Srinivasa is inspired by revolutionary ideas and has no caste faith but he lacks the strong will power of Satya. Since it’s an intercaste marriage there are many impediments to face. Ironically the biggest obstacle is Srinivasa himself for he is unable to resist the
opposition of his mother and grandfather. When his mother threatens of committing suicide he is deterred and writes a letter to Satya explaining that time had not come to cross caste and creed and that marriage always needed the approval of the members of the community. Satya realizes that Srinivasa lacked the will power to rise to the level of his ideals and had fallen back into the mire of old customs. He fails to say to himself the kind of autosuggestions Satya gave herself to fight fundamentalist opposition

Still - do I have to hide my ideals and beliefs? Do I have to cringe to hold on to this security? ... Not that it’s shameful to admit one’s done wrong, but if you condemn your own action as wrong - when it wasn’t wrong at all and you just want to satisfy some immediate need - that would be sheer hypocrisy. You would be sacrificing all your integrity (197).

Satya is subjected to lots of suffering for her act of opposing social injustices practiced in the name of caste. She had to undergo financial and social insecurity but is not ready to compromise her ideals and beliefs. Amidst all threats her conscience keeps murmuring, “It’s conditions like this, and even harder ones, that put the strength and validity of one’s ideals to the test.” Satya is not ready to think of her failed marriage as a shame, “Of course it wasn’t me who lost, it was him” (282). Marriage with Srinivasa for her had never been personal gratification but had signified an instance of practically living of what she believed in and an attempt to outgrow hypocrisy. Hence even in happy times their love affair never had resembled the usual ways of romantic lovers.

When she comes to know of her father’s inconsistency in behavior she goes to her village and starts living with him in the hut he had built in the coconut grove.
Satya though strongly opposes the tradition of elaborate ritualism yet she performs the rituals related to ‘initiation into Brahminhood’ as per the dictates of her father. This behavior of Satya is interpreted as symbolic of her identity confusion by many critics. But Satya says it is the intensity of her father’s belief that made her to perform the rituals. Wearing the sacred thread, she had uttered the Gayathri mantra and had performed the fire-ritual. But it’s as much an expression of her disillusionment. She reduces her faith to symbolic representation unable to convince the real world of the righteousness of her convictions. Her father after initiating her into Brahminhood had commanded her thus: “It will be your duty to look after god of fire. . .” She had followed it sincerely not in the spirit of performing a ritual but as an assurance to herself “that the fire he had invoked and the sacred thread on her shoulder were truths manifest before her eyes” (292). The fire becomes the symbol of “the truths manifest” and the truth she is struggling to convince the world is the value of attaining the identity of ‘Brahman’ not in the later sense of particular caste but in the sense of attaining highest spirituality and capacity to know truth. It is in this sense she had declared in the public gathering that anybody can become a Brahmin. She had told Mohandasa the same “if their actions are righteous they will all be Brahmins by virtue of that . . .” (421). Satya’s decision to keep the fire burning is remarked as an indication of her identity conflict. Satya’s conviction is very strong and her attraction in the fire-ritual was because it “was antecedent to other forms of worship” and belonged to the time of ‘Truth’; when sage Vasishta lived, and ‘Brahman’ had not taken the caste meaning and discrimination between people had not yet become the way of the life. Fire to Satya symbolized truth in a world that wallowed in falsehood.
After her father’s death instead of returning back to Bangalore she decides to stay in the garden hut because she had felt greater kinship with nature than the human society. Hence she says “The hearth, the oven with its three stones, the pond nearby, and the grassy bank . . . All these seems so friendly” (334). In the proximity with nature and village life she is inspired to live like a Shudra woman. Her effort to live like a Shudra woman signifies her desire to discard the privileged life of Brahmins and to mitigate the differences in the life style of the people of different castes. She wants to experience the life of hardship fallen to the lot of Sudhra and lower caste women to empathise with them and also wants to outgrow the elitist identity her caste had given her. Satya is unbiased to accept the fact that the Brahmin women given to a life of assured security by virtue of their caste had worked less and had become lazy with time. Satya decides to extend the horizon of her experience and merge with the ways of lesser women and thereby give up her elitism. She declares to herself thus: “I could cultivate the land myself. Like women of the agricultural community I could work the earth. I could live right here in the garden. I could build a small house, reasonably comfortable. I could become a Sudra: I should be even more of a Sudra than Matangi” (352).

When she befriends Meera, Bettayya’s daughter, she encourages her to study further. It signifies the modus operandi Satya had realized to curb many social evils. The real test of Satya’s conviction and her identity stability is best proved in her relation with Mohandasa, son of Bettayya. Mohandasa is an extremist in the sense that he holds extreme views about caste injustices and advocates illegal and violent modes of action to eradicate caste practices. She though grasps the justness of his anger she disagrees his insolent ways. She interprets his impatience thus: “She considered the matter. It was true that there had been injustice: but it had to be
eradicated gradually. Customs, beliefs, rituals which had come down through many
millennia could hardly be changed within ten or fifteen years” (412). Her sense of
justice is perfect and the same is proved in her decision to write a book highlighting
Mohandasa’s view point - that a revolution should happen; that lower caste should
protest and fight for justice and resort to violence if the occasion demands. His
argument she realizes has been illustrated in European history. People won’t make
conscience on their own accord and the argument had certainly got proved in the
case of European history. Though she had felt angry and disgusted at his arrogance
yet felt he had “understood a historical truth” though he was haughty, provocative
and quarrelsome. She realized “it was wrong to let her annoyance prevent her
learning something from him” (446).

Satya attends the village assembly that had gathered to determine the status
of various castes in their village. The leader of each community when his name was
called out had to explain the status of their caste and support it with scriptural
evidence. Satya was watching the proceedings with interest. She noticed people
were too eager to elevate their caste identity closer to the ‘Brahmin’ caste and she
observes “No community has been able to resist this influence or to overcome this
process of Brahminization” (465). It was the power, privilege, status and respect that
went with the Brahmin caste that allured them and none remembered the principles
of non-discrimination and non-dualism that went with ‘Brahman’. She recalls the
Upanishadic meaning of “Brahman”.

She thought about the Upanishads which she had been reading. They
proclaim that all the movable and immovable things are Brahman, that every
living being is a Brahman, that every soul is part and parcel of the Brahman,
that there should be no discrimination, no duality. He is you, and you are He, all these distinctions of time and space are false. Brahman alone is true. It has neither a caste nor a class nor a gender (465).

She notices how none remembered the real essence of ‘Brahman’ from which the word Brahmin had evolved. Contemplation of the truth of Brahman inspires Satya to enlighten the people in the assembly and free them from falsehood. She addresses the gathering and describes them that the true principle of Brahminhood is that “Anyone with the desire to become a Brahmin . . . is in fact a Brahmin” in relation to one’s desire and effort to acquire Knowledge or Veda, She states, “Every soul has a right to Knowledge, the right to acquire knowledge” (467) and condemns the caste Brahmins reducing “all other sections of the society to the status of Sudras, denying them the right to study the Vedas”, (467) including their women folk. After explaining thus, she proceeds to declare “I am ready to initiate everyone here, irrespective of their gender, into the knowledge of the Brahman. I have the qualification to do so. I have been invested with the sacred thread” (467). She shows the sacred thread she was wearing as a proof of her authority to initiate the desiring person into Brahminhood. But none wanted to become a Brahmin in the sense of acquiring Knowledge or Vedas for the privileges that went with caste Brahmin is all they wanted. People in the assembly fail to grasp the meaning of her words instead are shocked at the idea of a woman wearing the sacred thread and performing rituals of initiation. They knew that it was the custom of Brahmin men to perform initiation ceremonies. So they declare her as having lost her senses and even presume she is under the influence of the ghost of Venkataramanayya. The new twist her ardent effort had taken shocks her and demoralizes her. The situation had been a wonderful opportunity to serve her cause and convert it into a mass
movement. The utter failure of the prospect and the difficulty of a lone woman trying to convince the whole lot fundamentalist male bastion is too much to bear with and, Satya feels dizzy and collapses on the dais. She calls out aloud to the doubting crowd thus: “‘No, No, listen to me’, said Satyabhama. ‘I’m speaking the truth’, but all in vain.

When the widower Srinivasa proposes marriage again to Satya she refuses it. Her dedication to her anti-caste cause is such that beyond living her ideal she has no interest in humdrum routines of life. She refuses his proposal giving the following reason “The experience gave me a whole new way of thinking, and I started realizing that ideas of love, marriage, children and so on were relatively unimportant. And now I know that if I married you, you wouldn’t be happy” (531-532). She holds her father and his act of initiation into Brahminhood and her life of a Sudra woman as the major experiences of the in her life that had stifled the natural womanly sensibilities in her. However, as a friend lends her moral support to help him give up his bad habits. Satya’s enthusiasm to live her cause is such that she encourages Srinivasa to marry the Dalit girl Meera, Bettayya’s daughter. When he hesitates she encourages him to break the taboo against inter-caste marriages in the society thus: “Changes don’t come from the older generation. Only the younger people can bring them about. And these gulfs between the castes can only be bridged if we stop having arranged marriages” (533). Through the marriage of Srinivasa and Meera she wanted to prove to Mohandasa that hatred was not indispensable for attaining equality or destroying caste discrimination instead ‘unification’ achieved it better. By unification she had meant not mere eating, sitting or touching but marriage between communities.
Throughout Satya is rigid in her faith and commitment to the cause of destroying caste discrimination. When depressed Meera asks Satya to initiate her into Brahminhood she agrees but not without subtle hesitation. She had looked too enthusiastic to initiate anybody into Brahminhood in the village census assembly and had invited them to come forward to get initiated into Brahminhood. Now when Meera had asked for it instead of immediately the proposal accepting she appears hesitant. She involves in elaborate explanation. Describes how men of upper castes had badly discriminated their women folk and had treated them as ‘Shudras’. Then she adds “Now if I (a Sudra) wear the Sacred thread, why shouldn’t you?” This hesitation and comparison of herself as a touchstone to initiate Meera to Brahminhood is contrary to Satya’s declaration in the village assembly “anyone can become a Brahmin” and is suggestive of identity conflict in Satya. After initiating Meera to Brahminhood her emotions run thus: “she had a deep sense of satisfaction at having initiated into the Brahman someone who belonged to the community of untouchables - a community ranking at the bottom of the social hierarchy - but also a person considered as a Sudra among Sudras, that is to say a woman” (635). As an afterthought she realizes “It was her idea to be initiated” (635). For a moment Venkataramanayya wins our appreciation for inspite of all the raging confusion he had successfully taken a stance. Had initiated Satya into Brahminhood without a second thought but Satya fails to take an initiative until it is suggested by Meera herself. But Satya is not blind to the lacuna in her, by recognizing it, she overcomes it and attains complete identity stability unlike many others. She owes moral responsibility for Meera’s suicide thus: “Perhaps it was another result of my idealistic wish for social reform. I relied on Srinivasa, whose personality was quite
unsuited to the idea of reform, and the result was that Meera was sacrificed to my ideals. That’s terrible!” (653)

She decides never to bring about reform using others instead, “I should start with myself”. So she decides to marry Mohandasa as a part of her cause to suppress caste practices. Satya is ready for self-sacrifice, self-mortification. Meera’s words, “Caste distinction wouldn’t ever disappear unless the upper-castes assimilate others” makes her reconsider marrying Mohandasa. But before anything as Satya had planned is to happen Mohandasa precipitate disaster by blasting the village reservoir. Violence and revenge had always been his way of attaining equality and in blasting the reservoir he had kept to his idea of suppressing caste politics the rough violence. She removes the sacred thread her father had given throws into the flood water and walks away even as the following words echoed in her - “Dhiyo ya nah Prachodayat”- God help us to improve our intellect and guide it towards what is right. Satya’s act of throwing away the sacred thread is symbolic for even Meera before drowning had done similarly. It signifies her acceptance of the failure of her effort to suppress caste practices in the face of the misguided people. She prays to god to guide human intellect towards what is right.

The novel Vamshavriksha was published in the year 1945 and was translated into English as The Uprooted by the most gifted poet and an outstanding translator K. Raghavendra Rao. The Kannada version of the novel bagged the coveted literary award of the Karnataka state Academy of letters in 1967. The Kannada film based on this novel won the prestigious ‘Golden Lotus Award’ of the Government of India in 1972. Acclaimed by discerning critics as a modern Indian classic, this novel has been translated into several Indian languages – a testimony to it’s being truly a great Indian novel.
Socio-cultural transformation in any society affects both the larger society as well as the individuals mainly because of the ambience of dualities/multiplicities it generates. To choose between things of past (tradition) and the new (modernity) often confuses individuals especially in contexts where both do co-exist. In circumstances where neither the new values are ascertained completely nor that of the old are yet indispensable, the conflicts suffered by people are more composite and pronounced. The novel *The uprooted* is mainly concerned with the conflicts that characterize a transitional society and their effect on individuals rooted in social structures; its prevailing norms and the matrix of value systems. Two important characters Srinivasa Shroti and Katyayini are picked up for studying the nuances of identity conflict.

The character of Shroti is the most impressive compared to all others in the novel. He is a traditionalist, a firm believer in the traditional wisdom of the country and has cultivated the knowledge of the same painstakingly. He is highly esteemed for his profound learning in Vedic lore and science. He has cultivated scholarly learning for nearly thirty years and has profound knowledge in Vedas, Shastras, Puranas, Dharmashastras and Ayurveda. Other than his erudition even the character of Shroti is glorious. He is highly virtuous and invulnerable to temptations that usually assail humans. He is of amiable and gentle nature and his scholarly pursuits have given him “incredible self-control” (7) and capacity for equanimity and observing this his wife said “It is not human to be like that!” (35) He had trained himself to be neutral and detached in life and these qualities had fetched him the name “a Rishi, a sage” (303). Shroti is an avid follower of ‘Dharma’ and he lived life according to Sanatana Dharma (the Ancient Moral Law). Many critics feel that Bhyrappa is biased in his delineation of the character of Shroti. Dr.
Gopalakrishnaiah (132) for instance authenticates the same in his observation that
the novel glorifies the character of Shrotri. Everyone including history Professor
Sadashivarayaru consult him for all his historic-cultural doubts and also on
traditional samskaras. In the conflict between tradition and modernity that the novel
purports, Bhyrappa’s respect is more with tradition and hence no blemish at all is
suggested in Shrotri’s character.

Srinivasa Shrotri is a firm believer in the nobility of the Shrotri lineage and
as the head of the family thinks that it his dutiful prerogative to protect his family’s
honour. Traditional wisdom occupies an important role in influencing his faith in
family lineage. Shrotri has enormous pride in his family lineage with its untraceable
antiquity. He felt elevated and elated when he uttered the name of his Gothra and
Pravara, his Kashyapa ancestry, his genealogy dating from the Rig Vedic branch,
during his morning and evening religious ablutions. When his own name was recited
as a part of the illustrious lineage during family ceremonies he felt honoured. He
was fully conscious of his responsibilities and duties as a member of such an ancient
and illustrious family, and he performed all rites of his life in such a way as “to
maintain the honor of his family tree unsullied” (39).

Shrotri disapproves his widowed daughter-in-law Katyayini remarrying and
resuming the householder’s life mainly because it is against the traditional meaning
and purpose of marriage. He firmly believed what traditional dharma said in the
matter. The goal of marriage was procreation to continue the family tree and that
one became a householder to discharge one’s worldly duties and obligations. One
begot children only because the family tree might continue and not wither away.
Since Katyayini’s first marriage had fulfilled the aim of procreation he objects to her
remarriage. But his reservation to her marriage has its source also in his fear fact that it would bring dishonor to Shrotri family lineage. His comments on her marriage proves the same. “The genealogical record that contained the twelve preceding generation of Shrotri’ had no record of any ancestor doing what Katyayini had done…. What Katyayini had now done left a strain on Shrotri family tree, which was impossible to wipe out . . . (167-168).

He discusses with her the nuances of traditional dharmic thinking on marriage customs to dissuade her decision to remarry. He calls her act ‘adharma’ for it disregarded the traditional ideals of marriage and house holder’s duties. When Katyayini argues that her desire to live the householder’s life only followed the path both of natural dharma and the social duties of ‘Gruhasthashrama’, he tries to disargue her with the following words,

The ultimate and supreme goal of life is not the enjoyment of life as a householder. Its goal is the perpetuation of the family tree, continuation of its life. After the family tree grows, if by chance the family life is terminated, it is not Dharma to return to it (180).

He argues that it is her self-interest and desire for carnal pleasure that failed her to discern “what dharma is and what is not”. He explicates the risks of her decision thus: “transcending the command of Dharma will jeopardise the other - worldly status of even preceding generations, condemning them to the worst kind of hell. Don’t you agree that we shouldn’t let this happen to our ancestors?” (153). When Katyayani had married Raja neglecting the dharmic subtleties he had sympathized with her thus: “an unfortunate woman who had failed to save herself from the onslaught of brute nature” (166). Her act is adjjudged not only as the weakness of flesh but also as a sin committed against the Shrotri lineage.
Later when the childless Katyayini comes begging for her son Cheeni, Shrotri discusses the subtleties of Dharma\Karma to disprove her rights over her son. Her motherhood claims, “how hard it is for a mother to be separated from her child, born to her flesh” (179) is disregarded in defense of Dharma thus:

No sprout can talk of motherhood once it leaves the family tree. The sense of motherhood, fatherhood, brotherhood, all these have meaning only in the context of the lineage, the family tree. The goal of marriage is merely to promote the interest of the lineage tree. If this is so, where then can the claim of motherhood arise? (180).

He theorizes the matters of tradition to woe ridden, crying mother, “Children do not belong exclusively to father or either mother. They are the wealth of the family and the lineage. If any one tries to stake our individual claims over them, they will elude all of us.” (179-180) To protect the family he advices her never to use law in the matter. He tries to prove that Katyayini is wrong even from point of view of natural dharma, “Once you become a mother, you are a mother forever. How can she resume of the status of a wife by becoming once again a virgin maiden? It is against the rhythm and rule of nature….” (181). Shrotri uses both the prerogatives of sanatana dharma and the natural dharma to prove his argument to Katyayini.

Such shift in arguments little suits the dignity and stature of Shrotri. It proves that even a staunch raditionalist like Shrotri is a victim of identity conflict. In his desire to retain the only fruit of Shrotri lineage (Cheeni) he had become illogical to the point of intermingling natural dharma with that of culture. As a traditionalist he wins our appreciation for his conviction but proves he is as much a victim of sentiments natural to humans. Love of grandson makes him blind to the perversion
in his logic. He fails to understand that he may deny the rights of her role as a Daughter-in-law and as the wife of his son but he has no right to deny her ‘womanly’ identity, nature has ordained her and the rights that go with it. He cannot deny her motherly prerogative which again nature privileges. In his penchant for the dictates of tradition he had forgotten completely of humane values and universal laws. He overlooks the fact that natural dharma always recognizes the naturality of man woman attraction for each other irrespective of cultural roles they dawn on. For a moment we feel that Shrotri is flouting natural justice in trying to suppress her womanly rights for the sake of dharma, a cultural element. He is indeed wrong in discerning that Katyayini’s act was “against the rhythm and rule of nature” (181). The nature – culture dichotomy in the form of woman-wife polarity becomes the subject of contention in the consciousness of Shrotri and Katyayini to justify their respective viewpoints. In mixing up natural and cultural claims Shrotri proves that at times he too was vulnerable to dualities. The child’s entitlement to grow up with the mother and the mother’s prerogative to bring up her child is overlooked by Shrotri. Thus we realize he had recasted the whole situation to his faith and beliefs and had given no place for the most essential aspect; the reality and the self-evident truth of womanly or maternal rights. He had ultimately through the logic of his argument had made her to think that by being untraditional she was not worthy of self-esteem. He had successfully given her the impression that she had committed a sin; an act of blasphemy. The notion of ‘sin’ indeed does play a spoilsport in the weakest moment of her life. Ultimately the saving grace of Shrotri is that though he drives his point of view with commitment after making his opinions clear he suggests her to follow her conscience.
He escapes from becoming a victim of dualities like Katyayini. His saving grace is his tremendous faith in Sanatana Dharma and what dharma dictates he verbatim follows. The description of his personality in the novel means the same.

His profound faith in life had given him the capacity for strong determination. He had been conducting his life in the light of the principle; that if we surrender ourselves totally to Dharma, then Dharma itself would guide us and sustain us in life. It was this total commitment that manifested itself as his sense of duty. In his scheme of life, there was no room for dualities of perspectives, behavior, conduct and goals. He had successfully suppressed the myriad currents and forces that were trying to fragment his life and developed a single force, fueled by a single energy . . . that this was the secret of his mental equanimity (263).

But there comes a time when Shrotri had to face the acid test of his faith or what can be described as the strength of his identity stability. On the day of the death anniversary ceremony of his parents he chances upon a letter revealing his birth secrets. The letter vouchsafes the fact that he did not belong to the Shrotri lineage and he was not even the adopted son. The most humiliating news is that his birth had taken place out of sheer malice, revenge and hatred. His father to deny the property rights to his brother had made his wife conceive from a stranger with no respectable identity at all and Srinivasa Shrotri had been born to that stranger. It is indeed a matter of great curiosity as to what stance he would take after all the vociferous denial he had made in the name of family lineage to disapprove Katyayini’s remarriage and her claims on motherhood. How Shrotri would respond to the void generated in his identity is interesting. If he was to follow the dharmic
dictates he had to give up all the privileges especially name and wealth that belonged to Shrothri lineage. To pretend obliviousness to the fact would mean hypocrisy that wouldn’t match with his character. So when the deep-rooted belief of his life is axed a veritable storm raged in his mind.

He had an enormous pride in his family history and its distinctiveness. He had believed that it was the foremost duty of every man to take pride in his lineage and continue it. He believed that rites like marriage, householder’s life and others were primarily means to promote the sacred goal of perpetuating and glorifying one’s family tree, and he acted accordingly. He had the humiliation now to see crumble before his eyes the very foundation of the lineage of Kashyapa sage, a lineage going back to time immemorial and a lineage to which he thought he had belonged (302).

The most humiliating aspect for Shrotri was that his birth had involved base motives like greed for wealth and sexual gratification. His very life being based on lie now amounted to “travesty of Dharma”. The whole context is a fine paradigm of dramatic irony. Shrotri who preached Katyayini the importance of family status, honour with pride bludgeoning her womanly instincts and motherly impulses had to eat humble pie. The very imbroglio he had sought in Katyayini’s life had boomeranged against him. He realizes that Katyayini in comparison with the acts of his nominal father and mother had not committed any reprehensible act. No base desires like vengeance or hatred had controlled her action but the spirit of modern age and the natural impulses of her youthhood had urged her to marry again. He feels that her only deficiency was her inability to resist the impulses of her youthful urges. How Shrotri would behave in the face of the twin disaster of ‘identity denial’ and ‘identity debasement’ is important.
His handling of the most ironical reality of his life indeed is most dignified and is in consistency with his earlier behaviors. His hitherto cherished identity though is perverted his disappointment doesn’t ensue into any perversion of his character. His faith in traditional virtues like Dharma, Karma remains the same and he behaves as tradition would dictate in the context. To begin with the surrenders the wealth that no longer belonged to him in charity. He performs his duty to his grandson Cheeni by marrying him of and ensuring his security in his father-in law. Then he proceeds to fulfill his desire to become a sanyasi; a life of worldly-renunciation, even in this last act of his life he follows the notion of traditional varnashramadharma. Thus Shrotri handles a moment impending with intense identity conflict with equanimity, grown out of strong will power and conviction. He acts in accordance with his faith in dharma, duty and self-righteousness. If at all Katyayini had shown similar conviction and obstinacy she could have saved herself from the powerful influence of Shrotri.

Katyayini’s character in the novel is a paradigm of victimization induced by identity conflict. She is haunted by her own fears which she is unable to rationalize well in time to save herself. Caught inbetween the notions of tradition and their counterparts in modern parlance she suffers from acute identity confusions. Other than the tradition-modernity duality, some of her identity confusions fall within the space of culture-nature dichotomy. Natural impulses are literally in war with the corresponding cultural norms and unable to resolve the same she succumbs. In contrast to Katyayini we have Shrotri who is well aware of both traditional notions and their corresponding modern ideas but his faith is too strong in the virtues of traditional norms and acting by the same he, literally is not affected by identity conflicts at all. Katyayini’s husband Raja Rao too has full faith in modern notions
and is free from identity conflicts. With Katyayini it is not so, she lacks will power to hold on to her beliefs strongly when it is needed most, vacillates and becomes an abject victim of identity confusions. Personal disasters deter her further from holding on to any particular faith and she falls prey to her own doubts.

Katyayini had taken her modernist notion from the discussion she had with her professor husband Raja Rao and it is not deep rooted. From the very moment of the marriage proposal she is tormented by doubts. Her fears of the marriage is expressed thus: “If you set your face against customary practices and the canons of Dharma and Karma, wouldn’t it bring evil consequences on society itself”. And Raja’s words “All man-made social structure, codes and norms, are at bottom strangle-holds on fundamental life-giving forces and they tend to destroy life-giving forces” (82) and his words “Civilization is nothing but a bundle of destructive constraints. . . . It is impossible to experience and enjoy life-forces without breaking out the trap of civilization.” (83) had impressed her a lot and had cleared her doubts to some extent. Raja’s play on nature-culture dichotomy entitled “The Primordial” had made her realize that widowhood and the mores that went with it was a curb on “natural vitality, . . . A hindrance to free life” of a woman. She had begged Shrotri’s consent not with conviction born of deep faith but had relied more on his compassion. The content of her letter is neither assertive of the righteousness of her action nor affirmative of her rights. She fails to counter Shrotri’s defense of the righteousness of traditional wisdom in relation to the goals of marriage, the duties of a house holder’s life, and motherhood. He disclaims her rights over her son by describing lineage norms of Hindu tradition thus: “Children do not belong exclusively to either a father or a mother. They are the wealth of the family and lineage; meaning to say none does have individual claims over them”. And finally
Katyayini begs him to consider her maternal emotions - “the inner agony of a mother torn from her child” (180). Shrotri had retorted saying “The sense of motherhood, fatherhood and brotherhood, all these have meaning only in the context of the lineage, the family tree. The goal of marriage is merely to promote interest of the lineage tree. If this is so, where then can the claim of motherhood arise” (180). In the initial stages of their argument Katyayini shows strength enough to answer back and impose her modern perspective over the whole affair. She even had dared to say that she little cared for lineage norms and other rituals declaring that she didn’t believe in such values. She had countered his argument with her modernist notion of individualism spiritedly thus: “your and my outlooks on life are totally different. If you consider the individual as an instrument of family or lineage goals, I attach the highest value of individual” (180). But when he leaves the decision to her saying “If your conscience urges you to take him away, then carry him off with you” (181), she is unable to decide. She had come to win him by her arguments of the superiority of motherly claims over dharmic subtleties but gradually had given in to his viewpoints and had started thinking in terms of moral righteousness. His reference to her act as “sin” affects her psyche, and becomes the main cause of her tragedy later. Katyayini’s weakness lies in the fact that the rationale of modernity she had picked up from education and the society in which she lived had not yet been converted into a strong faith. The dualities of nature-culture and tradition-modernity co-existed within and she was not able to cultivate the conviction to reject one at the cost of other like Shrotri who typified traditionality and her husband Raja Rao who epitomized modernity. She had succumbed to the force of his arguments and the justifications of traditional dharma and she had doubted her own claims thus: “Did it then mean that the blood, flesh and the milk from her breasts secreted
by her energies, her aspirations, hopes, ambitions, love, affection for the child had no values? Counted for nothing?” (183). When she is doomed to a life of childlessness forever (for health reasons) she thinks it as the punishment that god ordained her for the sin she had committed. She starts assessing things in terms of traditional thought pattern of ‘papa-punya’ (sin and spiritual merit) and her predicaments had only strengthened such thoughts. She thought thus: “Did her womb lose the moral and spiritual power to become a mother to perpetuate a new lineage?” But the fact that Katyayini was in utter confusion and that both tradition and modernity jostled to have claim over her is proved in her pleadings to God, “Oh, God, why have you tied up my life with such hopeless knots that defy my understanding? What is the point of all this anyway?” (212). Fundamental principle governing the content of dharma and karma completely occupied her mind and she suffered from acute feeling of emptiness and loneliness; signifying her identity crisis. She judges her marriage with Raja as “nothing less than a crime against her dead husband, living child and the old parents-in-law who looked to her support” (107). The mental turmoil affect her physical health and she takes to bed and shows no sign of recovery at all. She becomes an exemplar of the ill-effects of acute identity conflicts on an individual’s psyche and lack of mental stamina to attain identity stability. Even though Shrotri impresses as cruel if judged by the effects he causes on Katyayini, one cannot forget that she owes her sorrow a lot to her own incapacity for identity instability than to any external agency. While Katyayini looks more a compulsive victim of dualities; of tradition and modernity, Shrotri by his capacity for remaining to a particular steadfast reality (tradition) evades identity instability and the related sense crisis.
The novel ‘The Witness’ was published in 1986. It is an original translation by S. L. Bhyrappa himself, edited and recasted by Dr. Sharon Norris, who had worked as a journalist for BBC and teacher at University of Glasgow. The novel ‘The Witness’ is set in South Indian village of Bilikere of Tumkur district where lives the family of Parameshwariah which includes his wife Janakamma and their three children, Ramakrishna the elder most and his two daughters Seetha and Savitri. It is a family disposed for satvic gunas (sublime features). The real interest lies not in the plot of the novel but in the intricacies of the identity dilemmas the characters undergo in an ambience of dualities. Two main characters namely Parameshwariah and Manjaiah and their identity conflicts are studied in this chapter.

Parameshwariah believed in the virtue of ‘truth’ and followed the principle of truth in every moment of his life. To live a life of righteousness is his goal and is a staunch follower of traditional dharma. The lines, “Parameshwariah had taken an oath that I would tell whole truth and nothing” (5) proves the kind of man he is. He is as much a philanthropist and promoted the traditional virtue of hospitality and had made mandatory to feed one or other every day before having his own meals. Parameshwariah’s family is a happy family until his daughter Savitri is married to Manjaiah against the wishes of the family members and this marriage becomes the bane of headache for the whole family.

Manjaiah’s faith and principles are entirely different from that of Parameshwariah and this precipitates lot of conflict. Manjaiah believes in the right of an individual to satisfy the natural desires of libido uninhibited and therefore cares little for the prohibiting norms of the culture in the matter. So he leads the life of sexual promiscuity and involves in acts of sexual misdemeanors with all sundry;
the respectable women and the lesser kind (prostitutes). He flatters Savitri, Parameshwariah’s daughter and lures her into marriage despite the opposition of her family members. But even after marriage when he continues his sexually transgressive activities, Savitri breaks up his relation with him and returns to her parents’ house. The life of sexual profligacy Manjaiah carries on with conviction, undeterred by his broken marriage. While the whole world judged him negatively he feels no scruples. Thus, he is free from identity dilemmas people do quite often suffer caught between the pulls of contrary beliefs.

Certain events in the novel bring Manjaiah and Parameshwariah to confront each other. This signifies not just a conflict between two individuals but between two different worldviews and faiths. When Manjaiah is charged of murder of a coconut thief called Kanchi he wants his father-in-law to be witness to his innocence. Manjaiah infact wants to bank upon the good reputation Parameshwariah had as a man of truth to save his skin. But Parameshwariah refuses his wish as it is against the principles of truth. Further after all the suffering he had inflicted on his daughter Savitri he couldn’t bring himself to help Manjaiah. But Manjaiah targets Parameshwariah’s penchant for duty; personal and social, and paternal to persuade him to accept his proposal. He promises to reform and lead an honest householder’s life. His assurance to be an honest husband and the prospect of a normal family life for his daughter attracts Parameshwariah. When he still hesitates Manjaiah ensnares him by Parameshwariah’s weakness for performing duty. He misuses inconspicuously the very identities he preserved with passion. He sensitizes Parameshwariah to a streak of ‘adharma’ in him of which he was oblivious of. He directly charges Parameshwariah of neglecting his civic duty towards the society he lived in. Parameshwariah he tells had neither tried to stop the coconut thief nor had
tried to reform him, to the benefit of save the village and this irresponsibility signified adharma. The moral flaw so much deters the sensitive Parameshwariah he decides to amend for his fault and agrees to be the witness. Manjaiah thus successfully induces identity conflict in Parameshwariah. Parameshwariah’s predilection for identifying with values of duty/dharma and truth had got him ensnared in the trap of Manjaiah. But Parameshwariah is very unhappy, for to be the witness in support of Manjaiah means failure on many fronts to him. It means uttering the first lie of his life in support of a “sewer like man” Manjaiah was, to compromise his principle and to forever live in the memory of his dishonest act. He fulfills Manjaiah’s demand, but feels a moral wreck. As a man with ever alert conscience he suffers alienation severely from his own self as expressed in his anguished cry “I had lost my moral centre of gravity, the thing that had helped me keep my feet on the ground all these years” (28). He feels “I myself had gone and destroyed my very basis of living” (32) and suffers from “lack of purpose in life”; a sign of his identity crisis. His identities of a father and a citizen had clashed with his personal identity of a truthful man. Unable to lead the life of falsity he commits suicide by hanging himself to a tree in his village. Parameshwariah believes in a life of honesty and integrity and when he is not able to live so, his remorse is so intense that only death can put an end to his angst. Parameshwariah’s sense of justice is revealed in his description of himself thus: “anytime I ever did have to say something I’d distance myself from what I’d said almost as soon as I’d said it so that I could evaluate it” (4). He has the capacity to be “totally detached” (5). Even when his values are abused he doesn’t blame the abuser but blames himself and imposes self-chastisement. He is not judgmental of Manjaiah for using him but blames himself thus: “it’s true that anyone who tempts other people is a liar, but surely the
person who gives into it is an even bigger liar. That’s why I decided to commit suicide” (5-6). At end of the journey he has little comforts to fall back on and his turmoil is expressed thus: “It felt as if truth and lies were engaged in mortal combat and were crossing swords in his mind” (346). Moments of self-analysis and introspection reveals to Parameshwariah the exact nature of his identity. The truth he realizes of his self, he explains to Lord Yama (the novel has a fantastic scene of Parameshwariah meeting Lord Yama after his death and discussing the nuances of human nature) is indeed interesting. He explains how his suicide had other angles too other than regret for uttering untruth. He explains it thus: “maybe I decided to kill myself because I was ashamed at the thought that I’d lost my good name and reputation” (335) and his suicide could also be to win the admiration of the people, “for my dedication to truth” and he regrets trying to give publicity to his penchant for truth thus: “if truth had to advertise itself like that, then that in itself almost makes a lie” (335). In the end Parameshwariah no longer wants to get into an analysis of the nature of ‘truth’ and ‘lie’ and this signifies the difficulty to assert a ‘stable identity’, to attain what Honneth claims the condition of a “healthy human being”. Parameshwariah’s realization as to the ‘relative nature of truth’ when is applied to the character of Manjaiah, we realize he is as much a victim of identity confusion and he too has many inconspicuous paradoxical elements within him. Parameshwariah’s words “there was more to a man than what he consciously decides to do” (35) is proved in Manjaiah’s care as well.

After saving his skin by the help of Parameshwariah’s witness, Manjaiah flouts all his promises and continues to live his life as per his faith in the individual’s right in fulfilling his sexuality without any inhibition. Sexual desire according to him is the most basic and fundamental of the desires and not to satiate oneself to the
fullest in the matter is a moral flaw according to him. In his attempt to live his life as per his faith he is not second to Parameshwariah. He is a nonconformist and the same is proved in his sexual adventures. He has affairs with all sundry and he is little governed by the etiquette and proprieties of culture in this matter. As per the normative parlance of any society his libidinal excesses remind us of a ‘sexual maniac’. The only saving virtue of Manjaiah is that his sexual partners (women) concede fully their relation with him and have little regret for co-opting with him. Lakkoo’s opinion of Manjaiah echoes the same, “This man has got a special power over women. I am sure of it. He gets them running after him like bitches in heat” (38). Manjaiah feels nothing abnormal about his sexual exploits and sense of shame little assails him. He inspires the onlookers to introspect the righteousness of the submissive norms of culture or the interference of society to control the sexual autonomy of individuals. He has immense disposition for sexuality and he prides in this capacity. So he goes around misusing the vulnerability in others in the matter. In other words, he lives his life with conviction and even those who find his ways morally outrageous has a word of appreciation for him. Parameshwariah observes the same and says, “Even when surrendering to police, he looked all beaming “the sort of smile that’s born of supreme confidence” (9). The series of triumphs he had in all his affairs had made him an egotist, a self-aggrandizer and he is obsessed with this image of himself and every victory he thought was a replenishment of this image.

But his interaction with a woman called Sarojjakshi and the skirmishes he has with her serves a very valuable experience for understanding the identity anomalies in Manjaiah. Sarojjakshi becomes a nemesis to expose the vulnerabilities in Manjaiah. Manjaiah is attracted to her immensely and from the very first day of
his interaction with her he feels she is in different league altogether from him and also from other women he had relationship with. Everything about her he feels had an air of superiority. Sarojjakshi like him is a nonconformist and a “free spirit” capable of flouting all normative of the society to fulfill the needs of the self. He feels “he had been completely bowled over, in fact he had felt a little intimidated by her, inferior to her, even” (177). His impression of her is best expressed in the following lines,

She’d made him feel like some kind of country bumpkin. He’d begun to feel self-conscious about the way he moved, the way he talked. After that he chose his words carefully, watched what he said and how he pronounced the words. He’d never felt that way before, not even when he’d been in the presence of a Deputy Commissioner (177).

He observes unlike many women she was not subservient and with her it was combat between equals; none less and none more. She too had intuitively liked him and objected little to his libertine’s life. In fact, capacity for intuition and impulses in all its rawness; little suppressed by the social norms, binds them both. He no longer felt turned on looking at other women, after he is attracted to her. But when she resists his sexual advances, (slaps him to stop his progress in the matter) and makes him feel cheap he is hurt most. It is something he had not experienced in majority of his affairs; any women he had wanted he’d just taken there and then. He suffers from acute feeling of lack of sex-drive after his humiliation at the hands of Sarojjakshi. Though he reasons out the change in him to his age and overwork but deep-down he disagrees, “no, all this lack of sex-drive had to be down to her. She
was at the root of it all. . . After all, sex or no sex, he still found himself having to go and see her” (178).

It is in his relation with Sarojjakshi a different facet of Manjaiah’s character is exposed. His behavioral nuances prove that he is an egotist or even a case of egomaniac. His sexual plunders more than asserting the claims of sexual autonomy of individuals or the naturality of sexual desires was performed to feed his ego or self-aggrandizement. With Sarojjakshi for the first time he tastes failure and after this he starts doubting his sexual prowess; also the source of his egoism. Sarojjakshi instead of surrendering to his sexual prowess had teased him implying he was a mere lecher. In demeaning his sexual endeavors as uncouth and in thwarting easy success she had proved different to the whole lot of submissive women. She had confronted him on equal footing. Manjaiah had seen a competitor in her who could give him the taste of failure and threaten his ego. Thus the inferior feeling invoked by Sarojjakshi affects him immensely and he struggles to recuperate. His faith that all women could be made to surrender to his sexual prowess had faced the acid test at Sarojjakshi’s hand. Her ingratitude (overlooking the favours he had done her husband) and capacity to resist his attraction had proved her superior to him. Hence after this confrontation with Sarojjakshi he suffers from acute impotency symbolic of his threatened psyche. He vacillates between thoughts of conquering her to boost his sagging ego and escaping from her fearing failure once again. To have an illusion of success over her he tries to have sex with a women prostitute, a look alike of Sarojjakshi. His sense of triumph is short lived and he is tormented by the thoughts of Sarojjakshi and sense of shame invoked in him by her. Manjaiah had always had given a respectable twist to his affair with women as an attempt - ‘to give what woman really wanted’ and Sarojjakshi had hurt him by giving cheap meaning to it.
He accepts his defeat and tries to forget her but the attempt frustrates him. He experiences an acute sense of void or nihilism; he had felt that his whole life lacked purpose and a sense of direction. The surging feelings in Manjaiah are a proof of his identity crisis. She had hurt his self-esteem and self-worth and he suffered alienation from his own self. Thus Sarojjakshi becomes a means to understand the identity intricacies in Manjaiah. When later Sarojjakshi had begged for a permanent relation with him and had wished to have a child from him he is unable to get aroused. In her presence he had felt that “as if his whole body was paralyzed and as if he had no power in his limbs” (300). The failure to rouse is symbolic of his maimed ego. Sarojjakshi becomes the cause of identity confusions in him making him for the first time feel disinterested and bored about life.

The present chapter addresses the subject of identity and the related conflicts in the fiction of S. L. Bhyrappa. Dualities of varied kinds characteristic of the pluricultural context of India and fundamental dichotomies of nature/culture, ideal/real, impulse/reason, individual/community so on and so forth precipitate identity conflicts in S. L. Bhyrappa’s novels. Or in other words his writings express dialogue of highly complex kind carried on between the different identities the individuals partake from that of the society and the needs of the ‘self’.


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