CHAPTER - VIII

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing, an attempt has been made to establish the close connection between History and literature. Up to a certain period of time, History drew heavily from literature to the extent that literature was regarded as deemed history. The evolvement of history into a distinct discipline and its being regarded as mother of all social sciences now, has not broken its close connection with contemporary literature. Sans the imaginative, metaphoric expressions, dramatic narrative, fine tuned characters and sequences and the finesse of language which literature delves into, the general socio-cultural and political set up relates directly to the time frame chosen from history. Failing which such literature is ridiculable as a concoted and irrelevant work. Just as History is not mere a chronicled chronology of events, literature cannot just be a figment of imagination of its author. The approach of these two discipline may well differ, History’s being macro which records significant events of the time chosen and its impact on the society, and literature concentrating on the socio-cultural aspect of life. Their interdependence continues as history provides themes and content to literature and the latter provides sources for the reconstruction of history. If history is the repository of sufferings, sorrows, joys and achievements, literature is its embodiment. Literature can not evolve from a vaccum for it bears the imprint of society, culture and the movement of history that gave rise to its creation.
Having understood the close connection between history and literature, it is surprising to note that contemporary literary works have not been much explored for drawing inferences on the events of the chosen time frame in history, particularly so on the subject matter chosen for this study. Stress has been laid on archeological and anthropological sources, artifacts, inscriptions, carvings, coins and documents of various kinds as preferred sources leaving contemporary literature not explored to the desired extent. This has resulted in a perceivable research gap. The study undertaken herein is an attempt to bridge the said gap. The sources used for the study are exclusively the literary works from modern Kannada literature, to be more specific, the modern Kannada novel. In here a literary work is considered as a document, on par with an archeological source, an artifact, a coin or a scripture and is analysed thoroughly to elicit information on the time-frame, general social set-up, the contents and the author to see whether it matches to the general conclusions recorded in the related period in history.

The term modern Kannada literature came to be regarded so for the literary works created from the first few decades of 20th century to date. It is a vast body of creative expression with numerous genres such as poetry, prose, short-story, novel, essay, travelogue, drama, humour, epic and others. Conducting our study using all the genres is a near impossible task, which not only is burdensome and time consuming but may throw up repetitive ideas, inferences and conclusions. In order to avoid the confusion this study deals with the genre of novel as its primary source.

The selection of novels has been made in such a way that they represent various schools/movements of Kannada literature from the early
decades of 20\textsuperscript{th} century to date. Care has been taken to pick an author to represent different geographical locations of the state.

Feudalism has been a medieval phenomenon which came into practice between the 5\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th} centuries. The collapse of the western Roman empire, resultant anarchy, birth of splinter nations, the barbaric invasions and continuous infights among the rulers made the life of a common man miserable. An arrangement, inter-alia, came into existence where the common man surrendered his lands to the powerful and sought protection to his life and property from the latter. Unable to cultivate the vast expanse of lands, the overlords re-distributed them between the vassals and expected a return as well as military and other services from them. This resulted in the pyramidal structure of administration with the king, however weak, at the top and the peasants and serfs at the bottom with overlords and their vassals occupying the middle rungs. It was the peasantry and serfs who bore the brunt of all other strata above and the arrangement caused exploitation, penury and miserable existence to them. Thus feudalism represented an economic institution fitted into an exploitative and suppressive politico-military structure resulting in the creation of a huge mass of toilers and serfs at the bottom. The arrangement declined with the emergence of a strong central government.

As the studies advanced, it came to light that feudalism was not an exclusive domain of Europe but surprising similarities; uniformities, resemblances and variations existed throughout the world. Scholars like March Bloch, Max Weber highlighted that there were several types of feudal tendencies visible in almost all civilizations. R.S.Sharma in his reply to the objection to the coinage of term ‘Indian feudalism’ by Harbans Mukhia who
opined that ‘unlike capitalism, feudalism was not a universal phenomenon’ emphatically says that ‘In my opinion, tribalism, the stone age, the metal age and advent of food producing economy are all universal phenomenae. If peasant society means a system in which the priests and warriors live on the surplus produced by peasants, augmented by the activities of artisans, such a society existed in a good part of the old world.’ The Marxian approach highlighted the fact that ‘feudalism, which began with the decline of the Roman Empire and the conquest of the barbarians, was the result of destruction of productive forces, decline of agriculture, decay in industry for lack of markets and violent interruption of trade’.

In the Indian context, studies in feudalism have been undertaken by scholars like D. D. Kosambi, R. S. Sharma, B. N. S. Yadava, T. V. Mahalingam, R. N. Nandi and others. It is R. S. Sharma who espoused the concept of Indian feudalism, which he says began with land grants to Brahmins, temples, and monasteries and later extended to warrior community, the grants later on were supported by fiscal administration, and judicial rights also. The system came to be more prevalent due to 1. Lack of commerce, 2. Decline of urban life and 3. Paucity of coins. However, the feasibility of applying the concept of feudalism to Indian agrarian relations came to be questioned by scholars like Harbans Mukhia, Irfan Habib, Burstein stein, Daniel thornier and others. While the differences and debates on the nomenclature still simmer, this study retains the term Indian Feudalism, as no other term appeared appropriate for the present. One major variant in the features of feudalism in the Indian context is castism. The society was divided on the basis of Chaturvarna, which prohibited vertical mobility in the social ladder. It is said that feudalism strengthened the caste
system and the caste system in turn weakened feudalism. In the process, the Indian social structure was characterised by caste-oriented feudalism and the positions became hereditary in nature. As elsewhere, there was oppression, subjugation and exploitation in the Indian feudal social structure, but unlike the European model, the revolts and rebellions by peasants are rarely observed. Such demurs occurred in some selected areas like Kagodu, Ankola and such others in Karnataka.

To summarise, the essential features of a feudal set-up may be enumerated as under:

1. Absence of a strong central government
2. Closed economy with minimal trade and monetary transactions
3. Rural and agrarian phenomenon
4. Political organization and administrative structure was based on land tenure and land was the source of power.
5. The administrative structure provided for the emergence of powerful intermediaries
6. Powers of the overlords were supreme
7. The all-pervasive powers of landlords lead to exploitation. The surplus was taken away by the overlords and their intermediaries leaving the peasants and serfs with bare subsistence. This also led to the economic, political, social and cultural oppression of the poor.
8. Serfdom existed
9. In the Indian context, feudalism the caste factor became the backbone of feudalism.
10. The majority of landless and serfs hailed from backward classes and untouchables. The latter were not included in the chaturvarna and
were considered as panchamas and were used as slaves and bonded labour.

11. Feudalism enabled the caste system to reign supreme and the latter weakened and reduced feudalism to a hereditary factor.

12. Rudiments of manorial system observed in the Indian context also.

13. The essence of feudal-like governance in India was that it was not strictly by general law but by customs and practices. Economic and political opportunism is observable even in the post-independent India under democratic dispensation.

Although feudalism as a structural entity is non-existent, let us examine some of the situations observed in the rural areas of Karnataka, which, as depicted in the novels chosen for this study, bear resemblance to certain features of a feudal set up.

**THE ABSENCE OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT**

In the medieval Europe, feudalism emerged out of the chaos caused by the collapse of the strong centre, the Roman Empire, resulting in the birth of splinter nations. The infant nations could not provide security to the lives and property of general public from the attacking barbarians. The situation gave rise to the emergence of powerful overlords who were offered lands by the common people against protection.

The time frame of the novels chosen for this study is last few decades of 19th century to the later decades of 20th century, where the situation is definitely different from that obtained in the medieval Europe. The question of collapse of central government does not arise as up to 1947 India was under the imperial administration and the princely states that owed
allegiance to them and post 1947 saw the emergence of an Independent India, a democratic republic, under a strong union government. The governance fell in to the hands of elected representatives, who were yet to come out of the glamour, grandiose and authoritarian spell of the Raj days carried the feudal mindset. The vested interests having been successful in preventing the full implementation of land reforms even after 61 years of Independent India is an example for this.

The infrastructure in the rural areas remained pathetic right through the raj days to the present scenario as well. The villages are remote, inaccessible and remain neglected and uncared for resulting in underdevelopment. Measures initiated for the social and economic development of the village poor are rendered ineffective by the affluent and the money allocated is pocketed by the unholy alliance between a corrupt bureaucracy and the politicians and vested interests in the rural areas. Therefore, despite the presence of strong central and state governments, the governance aspect is still in the hands of the powerful, rendering it weak and superfluous.

The story line of Puttappa’s novels (both KH and MM) runs through the last few decades of the 19th century to the first 2-3 decades of 20th century. The country was under the clutches of imperial government, but the Malenadu was under the governance of the princely state of Mysore who owed allegiance to the Madras presidency. For the British, the princely states were inferior entities and were of relatively lesser importance. Memories of sepoy mutiny was still fresh in the minds of people of Malenadu, who had just come out of the clutches of the feudal dispensation of the Nayaks of Kavaledurga. Forming the northern border of Mysore state, Malenadu was
remote and thoroughly inaccessible. Difficult terrain, torrential rains and
dense forests made communication and conveyance a difficult exercise
resulting in ineffective governance. Barring a few policemen, who
occasionally visited the village for a hurried beat and extortion, a marker of
toddy trees and a doctor, government officials hardly visited the area.
Criminals, after committing their misdemeanors, crossed the border and
escaped into Dakshina Kannada district, which was under the Madras
presidency. The infrastructure and civic amenities were pathetic. Education
and medical facilities were unheard of. Roads were in a thoroughly
degenerated state. The author suggests that the roads, which were laid during
the Muslim regime at the centre, were seldom repaired. Bi-cycle, coffee,
newspaper, clock and matchboxes were considered as miniature wonders by
the rural public. The general living condition was miserable. Every sickness,
hardship, mishap or death was ascribed to the wrath of the spirits. In this
anarchy arose the local chieftains who owned large areas of cultivable lands
either by succession or usurpation or by encroachment of forestlands, which
got regularized in due course. It is they who controlled the village, the
people and their affairs and promoted the serfdom and bonded labour.
Labour was paid a pittance, mostly in kind, barely enough for subsistence.
The dictum of the village lords reigned supreme.

The novel Gramayana also deals with similar time frame as that of
Puttappa’s novels. The author indicates that the imperialist and feudal forces
were finding the going tough elsewhere, but, Padalli being a remote and
inaccessible village, people were blissfully unaware of the developments
elsewhere. For them the feudal lords of the villagers were their omnipotent
masters. Conveyance was mostly through bullock carts and country made
boats to cross the river. Originally believed to be an Agrahara created and
donated to the Brahmins by sage Parashurama, the village later became a
Jahgir of Maratha warrior. Once the Jahgiri was lapsed, the village comes
under the clutches of 3 power blocks namely, the erstwhile Jahgirdar’s
family, the Gowda household and revenue officials who fought among
themselves. The police, higher revenue authorities visited the village only
occasionally, as such, the day to day administration, law and order and
dispensation of justice, informal but binding on the villagers, remained in the
hands of powers that be in the village. Official records of succession, births,
deaths and crimes were tampered with to benefit the powerful. A corrupt
religious head actively meddles in to the village affairs in order to benefit his
own henchmen. Innocent villagers suffered from the oppression, exploitation
and in-fights between the powerful.

Coming to the novel Chomana Dudi by Shivarama Karantha, the
village Bhoganahalli is again remote and inaccessible, covered by a hilly
terrain and dense forests. It was also cut off from the civilized world.
Villagers mostly commuted by foot to nearby villages and to get to the
nearest motorable road one had to walk up to Belthangadi. Bus travel was a
luxury for the labour community who managed to come up to there and most
of them preferred walking up to the plantation area. No government official
ever visited the village. In the given circumstances, the local land owners
like Sankappayya controlled the lives of the villagers who were mostly
tenants, landless labourers and bonded labourers.

The novel Ukkina Kote speaks of a village named Baradenahalli,
literally meaning a barren village. The setting here is the post-independence
and also post land reforms implementation in Karnataka. Despite land
reforms, local chieftains like Kengappa has successfully managed to retain his large holdings with active help from his political connections and an amenable and corrupt bureaucracy. As a rich landowner donning the colours of a local chieftain, Kengappa in order to retain his clout and affluence in the village, unleashes a reign of terror and demands allegiance from the villagers. A self-appointed dispenser of justice in the village, he operates through his trusted henchmen till the latter served his purpose. He gives a dramatic twist to a cold-blooded murder, and gets away with it with the active connivance of the police and the religion.

The villages appearing in the novels of Geeta Nagabhushana (both HMMH and Dange) named Bandelli, Bheemalli, Karelli Pati and others also are remotely situated. The villagers have to walk 8 to 10 kilo-meters to take a bus to the nearest market or township. Ignorant, illiterate and gullible are the villagers they fall easy prey to the machinations of the local chieftains. The Gowdas and Kulkarnis, the landowners in the area, befriend the bureaucracy to get the latter’s support when needed.

Compared to the villages in the novels aforesaid, the Dyavanooru of Kusuma Bale is not all that remote and inaccessible for there are buses flying through the village to and from Nanjanagud. Also, the village boasts of a handful of educated dalit youths who are trying to build a movement against the system of bonded labour. But owing to the towering presence of land owners like Somappa, who also nourishes political ambitions and brandishes the feudal mindset of caste-superior landed peasantry, the common man’s voice is muffled. Somappa successfully manages to have a dalit youth murdered and get away unscathed.
The instances quoted above are the examples how feudal powers survive despite the existence of a strong government for the governance is rendered weak and ineffective, the control aspect compromised through an unholy alliance between the feudal elements, political authority and the bureaucracy.

**RURAL AND AGRARIAN PHENOMENON**

The places, characters and the story lines of the works selected for this study are all based in the rural areas of various geographical regions of Karnataka. If Kanooru, Muttalli, Megaravalli, Lakkunda, Nelluru and such other villages appearing in Puttappa’s novels belonged to the Malenadu(hilly) region, the villages named Padalli, Ajarani, Havanooru pertained to north Karnataka region particularly to Bagalkot district. While Bhoganahalli, represented South Canara, Baradenahalli is characteristic of the general life obtained at southern Maidan, especially the Tumkur district. The villages Bhimalli, Bandelli, Karelli-pati belonged to the Hyderabad Karnataka area and Dyavanooru belonged to the Nanjangud taluk of Chamarajanagar district of the old Mysore area. Some of the names mentioned above may not be physically traceable, as they are in fact substitutes to actual villages with different names for reasons obvious by the relative authors. The life depicted, the dialect spoken, and the general socio-cultural environment depicted therein does represent the relative geographical regions. For example, the village Padalli may sound imaginary, but the life depicted thereat resembles the village Hirepadasalagi in the Jamkhandi taluk of Bagalkot district. Kanooru may not be the real name of the village depicted but there are hordes of such villages in the malenadu region. Villages namely, Megaravalli, Muttalli, Bettalli, Lakkunda do in fact
exist till date. Bhoganahalli may sound imaginary but hundreds of such villages can be found in the Kundapur area of Udupi district. The villages named in the novels of Geeta Nagabhushana namely, Bhimalli, Chinchansooru, Bandelli, Karelli Pati and Dyavanooru in the novel Kusuma Bale do exist. Baradenahalli in the Ukkina Kote may appear imaginary, but again such villages are commonplace in Tumkur region. They are remote, cut-off from the civilized world. Education, sanitation, and medical facilities are unheard off in the villages. People had to commute to distant towns in order to obtain education and medical facilities and to buy other essentials.

All the villages mentioned in the novels selected for this study, have agriculture as the main occupation. Agriculture is carried through traditional methods and is mostly dependent on the rainfall. Some of the areas in the North Karnataka region, drought and famine are regular occurrences. The agricultural produce is mainly for local consumption and so were the village industries. Money transactions are limited.

The landholdings in the villages were highly disproportionate, with the rich owning larger areas of cultivable lands. The cultivation was undertaken by the owner or through tenants depending on the quantity of holdings. The landless, immigrant and bonded labourers worked in the lands of the owners against remuneration in kind and or a little cash. The surplus is cornered by the landowners leaving the landless and serfs with bare subsistence.
CLOSED ECONOMY WITH MINIMAL TRADE AND MONEY TRANSACTIONS

In the novels that depict the pre-independence rural life of Karnataka, economy is a closed one. The production, agricultural and village industries was used mainly for local consumption. Trading was not only minimal but negligible. Wages were mostly paid in kind, normally through grain in the form of padi. Immigrant labourers along with padi, were paid a little cash at the end of the season. In the novel Malegalalli Madumagalu, a character named Karimeenu Sabi acts as a small time trader visiting the villages once or twice a year with sacks of exotic goods such as spices, onion, cashew, dry grapes on the back of a horse and barters them against paddy, arecanut and similar produce. There was nothing called pricing on the items sold and the quantity of goods bartered depended on the whim of the vendor. So rare was the use of currency notes, that Obayya producing a torn note creates a sense of awe in the eyes of the villagers including the toddy shop owner. In the novel Gramayana, save one Babulal Marawadi, the presence of traders is nil. Jainara Jinnappa is horrified at the way money drained out of his purse for the legal expenses for getting a bail for Dada. The author suggests that Jinnappa would happily have given away loads of grain, but spending money was a painful experience. In the village, money transactions among the commoners, was almost nil and bartering the grain was the usual practice. No trading activities are shown in the novel Chomana Dudi except the village fare, where children and women bought cheap metal ornaments, bangles and toys for children with low denomination coins. Baskets and other bamboo products and even rabbit meat is exchanged against a much
watered toddy. Much of the wages earned in the plantation work went for the payment of earlier loans, consuming toddy and treatment of Malaria.

The post independence period witnesses the use of money, but owing to paltry sums paid as wages, the general buying power of the villagers remained poor. The trade for that reason remained minimum in the villages. Village industries have almost gone extinct and the soaring prices of goods kept the villagers at minimal subsistence. Even in cases of medical emergencies they turn to the local magician for he costed far less than the fees of a doctor or a midwife.(UK) In Geeta Nagbhushana’s novels, villagers starved for want of money to buy the essentials. The bonded labourer Kashinath was paid only a roti for his entire day’s labour. Lacchi is paid only a rupee per day as wages. Unable to live on such paltry income people migrated to far-off cities where men undertook physical labour and women to prostitution. Even a village like Dyavanooru records minimum trading activities owing to the poor buying power of the villagers. As a result very few commuted to nearby towns despite the availability of buses. One character boasts of having gone up to Sakleshpur but he happened to be the owner of a small plantation.

POLITICAL ORGANISATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE WAS BASED ON LAND TENURE

Unlike the period in which feudalism thrived, the time frame of the novels chosen for this study does not suggest any relation between the land holdings and political organization and the administrative structure. Unlike the feudal pyramid that characterized the medieval feudalism, the political organization and administration during the imperialistic rule was strong,
which preferred individuals who were capable to serve the government as effectively as possible. It was a well structured organization with the King at the top, although titular in existence, the parliament being the executive had its say in the appointment of viceroyys, and the latter in the internal administration of the country, In the appointment of residents, governors and other functionaries under whom the bureaucracy functioned. Mysore was a princely state supervised by the Madras province and under its jurisdiction fell the areas of the entire state of Mysore, of which the northern tip was Malenadu. Half the coastal area called Dakshina Kannada was under Madras presidency and the other half, Uttara Kannada and districts namely Bijapur, Dharwad and Belgaum were under the Bombay presidency. Districts of Bidar, Gulbarga and Raichur were under the Nizam rule. The governments ruled during the pre-independence areas were relatively stable. The post-independence area came under the democratic dispensation. Therefore, the question of political organization and administrative structure basing on land tenure does not arise. But land continued to be the source of power for the holdings were highly disproportionate. The influential cornered large areas of cultivable lands either through tyranny, forgery or through simple usurpation towards recovery of outstanding loans which grew out of the repayment capacity of the loanee due to exorbitant interest rates compounding viscously at shorter intervals. High yielding lands with nearby water sources were the preferred possessions of such land lords leaving the low yielding, un-irrigated and barren lands to others. Farmers saddled with such lands had to look for other activities to keep their subsistence level. Chandrayya Gowda, Shamayya Gowda, Kallayya Gowda, Rangappa Gowda, Bharamai Hegde (in KH and MM)were such land lords who by virtue of their greater holdings become the unquestioned masters
having absolute control over their tenants, labourers and serfs. Even the bonded labourers’ personal lives were under their control. Love and marriage among the bonded labourers needed express approval of the landlord. Over-ruling the dictums of the landlords could lead to disastrous consequences for the bonded labourers. They were physically tortured by the hired goons to the extent that they bled profusely and in one instance it resulted in the death of a bonded servant.

In Gramayana, it is the power blocks of Gowda and Jahgirdar who held 1/3 each of the village lands. The other third of the land was divided among the marginal and small farmers for whom the returns from their cultivational activities were generally insufficient. The Gowda owned 500 acres and the Jahgirdar the similar quantity spread over in 120 survey numbers. By virtue of their larger holdings they became powerful who could continue to control the destiny of the village. In Chomana Dudi, landowners like Sankappayya owned vast areas of cultivable lands, a major part of it was acquired by encroachment of government and forestlands. Here too the commoners generally owned low-yielding and barren lands. Church also owned vast area of lands but they were rented only to Christians and prospective converts to Christianity. The power of the Church’s land holding is used here to effect religious conversions.

In the post-independence era, the influential with the active help from the political authorities and the bureaucracy and saw to it their holdings remained intact despite implementation of land reforms. Kengappa in Ukkina Kote lets loose a reign of terror through his henchmen, using his political clout and active help by the administration. Vast holdings was his
source of power and with his affluence even manages to bag all remunerative government contracts in order to increase his money power.

In the novels of Geeta Nagabhushana (both HMMH and Dange) a handful of people belonging to upper castes are depicted to have cornered all fertile and high yielding lands with a nearby water source. They are unaffected by the hardships caused by the drought and famine. Most of such lands were said to have been acquired fraudulently or by forefietment against an unpaid loan or by simple usurption. Encroachment of forestlands, grazing fields was another method of extending one’s holdings. Somappa in Kusuma Bale owned vast areas of lands and plantation areas and uses his affluence to gain political power. The landowners treated the landless with disdain.

The aforesaid makes it evident that owning large areas of land made the owners powerful and dictatorial. Their large holdings were their source of power by virtue of which they gained an easy access to the officialdom as well as the political powers that be. With that access they attempt to scuttle or dilute all progressive measures such as the land reforms, abolition of tenancy, zamindari and bonded labour, and steps to restore the ownership of land to the actual tillers and other such initiatives so that their own interests are protected.

RESEMBLENCE TO MANORS

The affluent lived in imposingly built houses, which bore resemblance to the manors of lords during the period when feudalism thrived. The houses of Kanooru, Konuru, Bettalli, Simbhavi were all very big around which the general life at the villages revolved. For the tenants, serfs and others it was
the rallying point for after all it was their master’s place through which they earned their livelihood. The novel Gramayana speaks of the ‘wade’s of the Jahgirdars and the Gowda where the respective tenants, labourers, serfs and the poor waited upon the masters to take orders for their daily or seasonal chores. Particularly, the ‘wade’ of Jahgirdars resembled a castle with its apportionments such as the divan khana, baithak, the court hall, the ranivas (for the women of the noble men), the storage, servants’ quarters, stables and other such areas which in the earlier days got them the status of de-facto kings of the village. There was a shiledar who took care of the day-to-day activities of the wade. On festive occasions, the Jahgirdars along with ‘hulibyati halabas’ (a criminal tribe) and the Maratha community went for hunting in the adjoining forests. Indupur, a small princely province had a Maharaja, a palace, ministerial quarters, court hall and arenas for pleasurable purposes such as singing and dancing. He built a ‘garadi mane’ (exercise hall) for prospective pahelwans (wrestlers). He travelled in a palanquin with well-trained horsemen keeping the guard. For religious services he had a ‘Raja purohit’ (The head priest)

The Gowda’s ‘wade’ too was a hugely built structure and was the rallying point for his tenants, serfs and in general for the entire village as well as he served as a village headman and the police patil responsible for the law and order situation in the village. He was also tradition bound to take upon the general welfare of the people of the village.

In Chomana Dudi, Sankappayya’s house was a huge one with a large courtyard in which the labourers gathered to take the order for the day and in the evening to collect their daily ration of grain. Zamindar Kengappa’s house as described in the Ukkina Kote was very large, always filled with
servants and workers and as the author explains, it was difficult to guess who is where in that house. It also had a big veranda which was used as a court hall for dispensing justice to the villagers when a dispute or untowardly incident occurred. Geeta Nagabhushana also speaks of the landowners living in big and ‘pucca’ houses with plenty of servants and bonded labourers to serve them. They lived comfortably during drought and famine for they had sufficient stocks of grain in their houses. Their houses were waterproof which protected them from floods and inundation. In the novel Kusuma Bale, Somappa’s house is so big, the entrance of which could allow an elephant to pass through. The opening of the front door sounded so loud that it appeared as if the whole village yawned.

If the manors in the medieval Europe acted as functional economic units of the powerful overlords, the houses of the land owners of the time frame selected for the study were the rallying points for taking orders, receiving payments, carry out specially assigned tasks and places where the justice was dispensed to the villagers in case of disputes. The authority of the landowners in the village remained absolute and any one violating the orders were severely punished by causing starvation, agony, physical torture and even death.

The discussion above touches upon the structural aspect of the feudalism. Remnants of such a structure are traceable even in the democratic set up with a strong centre. The main aspiration of the present dissertation, however, is to highlight the relation aspect of feudal tendencies as man enters in to various kinds of relations with other members of the society in the course of his general social being. Such relations could be personal, economic, social and cultural. All such relations are relevant here, as while
dealing with the life of an individual or society we cannot fragment them into various entities. Hereunder, let us examine the economic aspects of such relations and proceed thereafter to other relevant facets.

**OVERLORDS AND INTERMEDIARIES**

Technically speaking, there were no intermediaries or overlords aka the European model for the time frame chosen for this study. There was strong governance both at the provincial and central levels, particularly so during the post-independence era. But the powerful land owners had moulded themselves into a situation where they could make their ends meet with the political governance and the bureaucracy above, and hordes of henchmen below, using a blend of diplomacy and authoritarianism for suitably dealing with varied situations. The Jahgirdars and Gowdas obliged the higher authorities and powers that be in various government departments and exploited the hapless villagers. Kengappa (UK) befriends the officialdom and political hierarchy to ensure that his interests were protected from the ensuing land reforms but unleashes a reign of terror in the village through his henchmen. He even arranges for the brutal murder of Marayya but escapes from the crime un-implicated with active help from the police and religion. Dattappa Kulkarni falsely implicates Lacchi and has her arrested and jailed in the process ruining her entire life (HMMH). Somappa uses his henchmen to murder Chenna for his having committed the sin of having an affair with his daughter Kusuma and impregnating her (KB). He gets away easily with his political clout, caste supremacy and affluence. The religious institutions, seers also favoured the affluent landowners for they depended on the latter’s donations and support.
The Gowdas, Heggades and Nayaks of Malenadu carried out their day to day and seasonal chores through seregars. (KH & MM). The plantation owners too ran their administration through seregars.

The landowners with their manipulations at the bureaucratic and political hierarchy got important decisions in their favour but acted authoritatively in the villages under their control, so that their dictums were carried out without any demur for the people knew the consequences of violating the orders. The plight of the landless, serfs and labourers was pitiable, for they had no other means of survival for defying their masters and turn elsewhere for livelihood and protection. They were reduced to a meek, timid and voiceless mass that suffered endlessly. The powers of landowners were absolute and remained largely unquestioned. Rava Bahaddora observes correctly in his novel Gramayana that ‘for the common man, the feudal lords were still his omnipotent masters.’

**DISPROPORTIONATE LAND HOLDINGS**

Almost all the landowners appearing in the novels selected for our study have land holdings, which were disproportionately higher than that of a small and marginal farmer. Chandrayya Gowda, Kallappa Gowda, Rangappa Gowda and others (KH and MM) owned huge land holdings. Some of the holdings were through inheritance, some through expansion by encroaching forest and government lands, and some through set-off against unpaid loans or simple usurpation through forged documents. In Gramayana there is a clear distribution of lands, one third each, of holdings between the power blocks. There the village Gowda and the Jahgirdar house holds own about 500 acres each vis-à-vis the moderate and paltry holdings of a
marginal or small farmer which again carried the risk of getting usurped by the deft pen-work of Kulkarni or by pawning to a village lender at times of distress. Sankappayya cultivates few selected lands and rents out the rest but the dream of poor Choma to have a small strip of land for undertaking cultivation on rent gets ridiculed. (CD). Kengappa owns a vast expanse of land, so much so, seeing from one end one will not be able to make out the other end (UK). Kengappa here has successfully taken care to see his interests are protected despite implementation of land reforms. The landholders in the novels of Geeta Nagabhushana (both HMMH and Dange) record that they owned all the high-yield lands with ready access to water sources. Somappa in Kusumabale is affluent, thanks to his large holdings using which he aspires to gain political strength.(KB)

The larger holdings not only guarantee affluence to their respective owners but also other powers such as control over the destinies of the less and under-privileged. They paid paltry wages, often in kind, kept them at bare subsistence levels, abused and assaulted them physically at the earliest available opportunity- however flimsy the ground may be- and became the self proclaimed dispensers of justice whenever a dispute arose. The personal lives of the underprivileged heavily depended at the mercy of their masters.

Those who owned large areas of cultivable lands gave them on rent to others for cultivation. The share of the produce was on the traditional 50:50 basis. The sharecropping was known by the names of Kori, Lavani and such others. The landless worked with either the master or tenant against payment of wages. Some of them worked as bonded servants at the master’s household against repayment of loan taken earlier or some social commitment. The wage earners lived at bare subsistence levels.
EXPLOITATION

‘Feudalism has to be seen as a mechanism for the distribution of means of production and for the appropriation of surplus’ says R.S.Sharma in his paper entitled ‘how feudal was Indian feudalism’ published in the ‘Themes of Indian History, the state of India 1000-1700 (edited by Herman Kulke and published by Oxford University press 1995, page 51) which meant the presence of a surplus consuming class which lived off the labour of a subject peasantry. Feudalism as a structural arrangement may have vanished once a strong centre emerged and collection of taxes got streamlined. However, the feudal tendency remained deep rooted in the psyche of the village landowners. In the rural life depicted in the novels selected for this study—both pre-independence and post-independence—such tendency existed in clear and loud terms. The zamindars and powerful land owners paid the toilers with a pittance, minimum possible share to tenants and kept the landless and serfs at the barest subsistence level. The daily allowance of grain paid to the household workers and bonded labourers was meagre. Even that was curtailed at times as punishment for the mistakes committed. For example, Chandrayya Gowda orders for with holding padi to Byra and Sidda for no fault of theirs (KH.) Choma bar ters half the amount of his daily padi to Biram Pujari against a bottle of watered-down toddy, leaving his other family members insufficiently fed or to starve (CD). Wages paid to the plantation labourers also was meagre most of which went for repayment of old loan, consumption of toddy and treatment of Malaria, leaving the labourers insufficiently fed and leaving them weak and susceptible to diseases (CD). Kashinath gets only a roti and Lacchi is paid only a rupee for the entire day’s labour(HMMH). The landless remained
eternally at the mercy of the zamindars, and wages paid were unequal between men and women- the latter getting \( \frac{1}{2} \) or \( \frac{3}{4} \) of the wages given to their male counterparts. The men in charge of disbursement of padi or wages acted whimsically, curtailing the wages or padi unnecessarily, citing false records of absence (UK). In Gramayana, the poor, landless, serfs and labourers were reduced to mere pawns in the hands of the power blocks in the village. When Gowda and Jahgirdar store away the surplus produce in underground silos, the poor, landless, and serfs struggle to have two square meals a day. Worse was the plight of dalits who starved day in and day out for they were not allowed to work in the fields due to the untouchability factor. Some of them even die by consuming rotten grain stored in silos for a long time. The relief from the government in the form of taccavi loans are stolen at the behest of Padadayya. The Fouzdar imposes a hefty sum of Rs. 100/- on the poor and ignorant Sangappa for telling a simple lie and the latter had to pay it by pawning his land.

The bonded labourers who are expected to be at the beck and call of their masters day and night are treated inhumanly. They are subjected to physical assault if they disobeyed their masters. The loans availed by their forefathers get never repaid and went on accumulating, compounded viciously by the interest factor, leaving their entire lineage at the service of their masters.

The low caste and poor women were subjected to sexual exploitation. They were expected to give consent to their masters failing which lead to dire consequences. Lacchi was falsely implicated in a theft case when she refused sexual favours to Dattappa Kulkarni and is arrested. She is gang raped in the police station and later in the Inspection Bungalow. Durgi gets
raped by her own brother-in-law and later is seduced by Govindappa Kulkarni (HMMH & Dange). Belli is subjected to forced sex by the plantation owner and the sergar (CD). Putti is used by Thimmappa Heggade (MM). Madara Malli, despite her pleas to let go in view of her brother’s illness is forced to sex by the Fouzdar (Gramayana). Chimana, although upper caste Maratha but poor, is raped by padadayya. Chandrayya Gowda makes use of Gangi and Rangappa Gowda of Akkan (KH & MM). All through, the novels indicate that using a low caste woman for sexual gratification was an accepted fact in the villages. In the case of Phakirappa, the Kulkarni of the village raves and rants for the former not offering his wife first to the village lords. The Kulkarni cites the custom of the village where the husband of a new bride can sleep with her only after the village lords enjoyed her first (Dange). Nagamma parades around her widowed daughter-in-law for a suitable taker, as if she was a cow up for sale. Sesi gets pregnant but is in confusion of the sirer who may be someone among her lovers or her own son-in-law. Elsewhere Ninga tears his wife’s ear while snatching her ear stud to meet the expenditure on toddy. Subbamma falls prey to the overtures of serga Rangappa Setty, gets pregnant and dies a ghastly death while aborting the pregnancy (KH & MM).

The exploitation of the poor is contradicted by the luxurious and indulgent life of the rich. Liquor and meet are consumed in abundance. Even a religious centre like Hirematha, becomes a den for consuming the ganja (opium) and sere (country arrack). Bapusahab is known as an expert seducer of women (Gramayana). Chandrayya Gowda takes Gange, the concubine of sergar Rangappa Setty (KH). Zamindar Kengappa had numerous affairs in and outside the village (UK) and Govindappa Kulkarni courts Durgi. He has
no objection for the illicit relation between Savitri and his son but vehemently opposes the marriage between them.

SERFDOM

Unlike the European mode, where serfdom was through extreme coercion, serfdom in India is characterized by the inevitable subjugation of the poor and landless. There were landless labourers, immigrant labourers, domestic servants, henchmen and bonded labourers under the control of landowners. Oppressed as they were, they toiled in their masters’ lands and households for a paltry remuneration. The grain allowance given at the end of the day was barely sufficient for subsistence. They were closely monitored, lest they idle away from their work. The living conditions offered to them were horrendous.

Worst were the sufferings of the bonded labourers who, either themselves or their forefathers, are indebted to the village lords, have to toil until the loan was fully repaid against a paltry remuneration in the form of grain. They were treated, along with the cattle, fowl, or pigs, as the personal property of the landlords. During the partition of a joint family, the bonded labourers too were shared. They did not have an independent existence. Even their personal affairs like love and marriage needed the assent of their masters. A girl marrying a boy of other village was frowned upon as the landowner stood to lose one free hand and the lord of the other village stood to gain an extra hand without paying for it. There are instances where married girls were forcibly brought back, their marriages annulled and the girls remarried to a boy from the same village. Enraged by Thimmi’s elopement with Gutti, Bettalli Kallayya Gowda has her brother Sanna beera
subjected to physical torture. The bonded labourers are frequently abused, manhandled and beaten up even for the smallest mistakes they committed.

In Chomana Dudi, the bondage of Choma ran through several generations. The entire lineage of Choma had to serve the family of Sankappayya for generations together for a paltry remuneration, most of which was in kind- mainly in the form of grain in limited measures. Choma’s desire to cultivate a small strip of land himself does not materialize as the custom barred a holeya undertaking such a venture. In Kusuma Bale, the village Dyavanoor, which boasts of the presence of a few educated dalits, too has the system in vogue. The bondage is against a loan or annual remuneration. The procession demanding the abolition of the system of bonded labour is jeered and ridiculed by the upper class landowners.

The immigrant labourers are usually from the down hills, from Dakshina Kannada district. They are enlisted by a seregjar and kept at the disposal of the landowners till the end of the season. They are housed in a lane, in untidy hutments and are paid daily allowance of grain and the sum agreed upon at the end of the season.

The henchmen belonged to none of these categories. With the support of their master they act as de-facto landowners and let loose a reign of terror among the villagers in order to please their masters, completely unaware of the fact that their own position depended on the whim of their master. They were akin to bonded labourers, kept at the beck and call of the master but were kept in relative comfort as long as they were in good books of their masters. Once antagonised to the master, they stood to lose everything, at times even their life.
Yet, despite the long suffering, penury, pain and anguish they seldom rebel against their masters. Choma, unable to bear the disappointment of not getting a strip of land for cultivation on rent, vents his ire by beating the oxen, drinking toddy and beating dudi for the rest of the night. Only once, he talks a little rough with Sankappayya, for which the latter angrily asks him not to step in to his courtyard any more (CD). Marayya slaps his master but pays the price with his life. Kariyanna, the other henchman, resolves to fight against oppression in the longer run(UK). In Gramayana, the starving tenants, landless, serfs and untouchables loot the silos and standing crops belonging to Gowda not on their own volition but on provocation by the power blocks opposed to Gowda. They run away in panic once the ‘ghostly’ Dada fights them single handedly. Sanna Beera, to avenge his beating by Ijarada Sabi, chops off a finger of the latter and runs away from the scene, implicating Gutti for the act(MM). Only Durgi acts decisively, by pushing Govindappa Kulkarni off the speeding train. However, the fact remains that all these acts are done at the individual level only and collective efforts are not made in order to counter the authoritarian rule of their masters.

If the exploitation of men was usually characterized by excessive work, paltry remuneration, inhuman working and living conditions, abuses and physical assaults for mistakes committed or not committed, the plight of the women was worse. Like men they had to work all the day but at lesser wages. Additionally they had look after the home and hearth, bear and rear children and put up with physical assaults from their drunken men. At work they were expected to deliver sexual favours to their masters. Numerous such instances come across in the novels. Most of these women accept the plight as their fait accompli except Durgi in the novel Dange, who goes to
the extent of killing her paramour after coming to know that the latter hatched a conspiracy to kill her daughter. Unable to bear the poverty and starvation during drought and famine, women are forced to resort to prostitution.

CASTE AND UNTOUCHABILITY

The main feature that sets apart the Indian feudalism from the European and other models is the caste system that has become inherent to the Indian social order. The system is hierarchical and follows the dictums of Varnashrama Dharma. It is a hereditary, endogamous and a localized group having traditional association with an occupation and a particular position in the hierarchy. Vertical mobility is prohibited. The caste system is governed by the concepts of pollution and purity. Every caste is segmented into several sub-castes and each sub-caste is endogamous. This kind of a system is in vogue in the Indian society for about 2000 years.

The chaturvarna system, dealt with in Manu Dharma Shastra expressly bars vertical ascendance of a lower born individual to an upper caste. It further prescribes the concepts of ‘anuloma’ and ‘pratiloma’. In the former a high caste man can marry or have relation with a low caste woman but the latter prohibits marriage or relation between a low caste men with upper caste woman. Severe punishments are prescribed to erring men from a simple penalty for the upper caste men to beheading in case of a Sudra.

It is said that feudalism strengthened the caste system and the caste system in turn made feudalism weak. Simply put, feudalism moulded itself in to the traditional and rigid caste system making the succession of holdings hereditary. R.S.Sharma expounds the theory that feudalism in india began
with the grant of lands to the Brahmins, temples and monasteries and later on was extended to the warrior community.

The novel Gramayana speaks of sage Parashurama creating an ‘agrahara’ to Brahmins at Padalli, which in due course came in to the possession of Maratha warriors. Hoovalli Venkatappa Nayaka’s forefathers were believed to have headed the army of the Nayaks of Kavale Durga(MM). Chandrayya Gowda, Bharamai Heggade, Rangappa Gowda, Kallayya Gowda and others from Puttappa’s novels, Shankarappa Gowda from Gramayana, Kengappa from Ukkina Kote, Irapagasi Gowda from Dange and Somappa from Kusuma Bale are all the beneficiaries of the long drawn process of transformation of Sudras from a common helotage to the status of peasants, the process which is believed to have started from the period of Guptas. Vysyas who were earlier peasants turned towards trade and commerce proper.

The social scene of the novels selected for this study is no different from the continuing social heirarchy on the basis of castes. Brahmins occupied the uppermost position in the society with their hold on the religion, scriptures, astrology, almanac and indigenous medicine. Some of them owned huge areas of cultivable lands. Manjappa Bhatta(MM), Dattappa Kulkarni(HMMH), Govindappa Kulkarni(Dange) can be quoted as examples to this. In Gramayana Sheshappa Kulkarni had a few acres of land in his name but tries to usurp the lands belonging to the Deshpande family by making fraudulent entries in the succession register. Balacharya’s family too owned lands but his nephew loses it all in gambling and alcoholism. Shudras were never allowed in to the house of a Brahmin. Prasadam after pooja was served in the courtyard or in the open place in front of their
houses. Food was served from a distance. There were landless among the Brahmins who lived by practicing priesthood and fortune telling. They commanded and at times demanded respect from all other castes. Venkappa Jois jumps around lest he touched the ground in front of a sudra household. He professes the sudras to worship ‘Bhootaraya’ and is intolerant of sudra children getting educated (KH). Balacharya is a devout individual but his kinsmen and Sheshappa Kulkarni are greedy and wily. The Mamaledar and his clerk are corrupt(Gramayana). Sankappayya is a powerful landowner who refuses to rent a strip of land to a holeya for cultivation (CD). Mokshananda is all set to tour the country to re-induct the religious fervor and make the people aware of the glorious culture of our country, which of late is losing its impact on the society. Madhvacharya appears as a caricature who is financially poor but steadfast in upholding the superiority of his caste.(KB)

Except the novel Gramayana, where Kshatriyas (Jahgirdars) occupy the next position in the caste heirarchy, there is no presence of Kshatriyas and Vysyas in any other novel indicating their having lesser connections with agricultural activities. It is sudras who owned most of the lands in the rural areas. In the novels of Puttappa it is Vokkaligas who came next in the caste heirarchy followed by Halepaikas, setty and others. In the novel Gramayana the casten heirarchy consisted of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Sudra and other backward classes. Ukkina Kote has Brahmin, lingayat and backward classes. Similar combinations were observed in the novels of Geeta Nagabhushana and Devanoora Mahadeva. The untouchables were outside the purview of chaturvarna and were called as panchamas.
The elevation of Sudras from their erstwhile helotage to the status of peasants also placed them as the main perpetrators of exploitation of the backward classes and untouchables. It is they who enjoyed the surplus, paid the labour meagerly and indulged themselves in pleasure seeking pursuits. In the novels selected for our study the sudra land owners are picturised as selfish, cruel and intolerant of lower castes attempting to imitate them culturally. They opposed Halepaikas undertaking cultivation with the vehemence a Brahmin opposed Sudras learning the Vedas. They barred the Halepaikas using a palanquin, horse and musical instruments in their marriages (MM). In a bid to strengthen their position, they resort to forefeietment of lands, usurpation by force, producing forged documents, using muscle power against those who dared to oppose, deceive or disobey, vied with caste equals for a superior position and above all remained insensitive to the sufferings of the landless, serfs, bonded labourers and untouchables.

Other than the castes indicated above, the novels also record the existence of several backward classes such as Kuruba, Kammara, Kabbaliga, Kataka, Waleekara, Eeliga, talawara, Biradara, Uppara, Beda, Lambani and others. They pursued their traditional caste based professions along with cultivation in their small and marginal holdings or obtained on rent from the superior caste landowners. The landless among them worked as labourers on daily wage basis in others’ lands. The castes mentioned above exist till date but their profession and habitats have undergone various changes, thanks to education, job opportunities and poverty alleviation programmes.

The untouchable appearing in the novels may be enlisted as Holeya, Madiga, Dohara, Bela, Billava, Hasala, Mera, Byra, Ajila, Mari, Mundala
and others, which exist to date. Subjected to maximum deprivation by the society dominated by the upper castes, their plight is pitiable. It is a fact that the maximum landless labourers, serfs, bonded labourers came from these communities. They are to perform despicable menial jobs and are to keep a safe distance from the upper castes lest their shades pollute the latter. They resided in separate colonies outside the village and survived on meagre allowance. Their living conditions are horrendous. They along with the cattle, fowl and pigs and agricultural implements were counted as the property of the landlords. A bonded labour is subjected to backbreaking work, is supposed to abide by the dictums of their masters and have no liberty in their personal affairs such as love and marriage. Whenever partition took place, they too were divided between the masters. They were not allowed to carry an ambition as mundane as cultivation of land on rent because the tradition barred allocation of lands to untouchables. In certain areas of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts, they are not called for agricultural work (CD). The novel Gramayana also records that the holeyas and Madigas were not called for working in agricultural lands. They survived by begging for the left overs in the masters’ household and consuming the flesh of dead cattle. They are expected to be meek, submissive and dutiful.

Now six decades gone by to the independence of the country and with several schemes and policies in place for the eradication of untouchability, the general perception about this evil is undergoing a moderate change. Of course, the fear of law and punishment for those who practice untouchability or commit atrocities on dalits has put many a perpetrator on hold. But the cruelty itself has not witnessed a vane as the incidents at Bendigeri,
Badanavalu and Kambalapalli –rural areas to be specific- still do occur. Revathi Ballav Tripathy in his work ‘Dalits: A sub-human society (Ashish publishing house, New Delhi 1994) highlights that ‘Though untouchability has been abolished by law, our study also shows the persistence of untouchability, particularly in rural areas. There again ‘for a Mala a Madiga is untouchable and for both of them Thoti is an untouchable’ (p-11)

The decadent and caste ridden society and the plight of untouchables provided a fertile ground for effecting conversions to Christianity by the Christian missioneries. Several incentives and inducements were offered which included providing lands on lease for cultivation to the untouchables. Preacher Jeevaratnayya devises a modus- operendi for this purpose which aimed at the conversions of land owners first so that all others may follow suit (MM). Choma too was offered land for cultivation provided he converted to Christianity (CD). Lured by such offers, some of them do convert with hopes of leading a better life thereafter (HMMH). Untouchables converting to other religions like Buddhism, Islam and Christianity in search of a faith, which assures them of equality and dignity of existence, is now a recurring factor. K.S. Singh points out in his work entitled ‘The scheduled castes’ (published by Anthropological survey of India and printed at Oxford university press, New Delhi 1993) that conversion is a not a new development as ‘during Muslim rule many of the untouchables and low caste people embraced Islam and joined the invaders partly to avoid persecution and partly in search of freedom (page 207). Vijaya Karnataka, an established Kannada daily recently (Oct-Nov 2008) provided a forum for discussion on this issue wherein noted writer S.L.Bhyrappa regretfully ‘high-lighted’ the so-called ‘tolerance’ of the Hindus on conversions. Indudhar Honnapur a
Dalit activist and writer angrily retorts to the observations of Bhyrappa as under:

‘Who gave the authority to these people to direct dalits as to what they should do and what not to do? These people kept quiet when dalits were forced to eat the human excreta at Bendigeri, when dalits were burnt alive at Kambalapalli and when the culprits went scot-free as the courts released them as innocents.’ This retort is representative of the increasing awareness among the dalit youths. Bheemaraja in ‘Ukkina Kote’ and Nagaraja in ‘Kusuma Bale’ do represent such characteristics. Honnapur goes on to add if the ‘religionless’ dalits, who were not part of Chaturvarna opt for a religion, be it Buddhism, Islam or Christianity, it would be a mere acceptance of it and not conversion (Vijaya Karnataka 13-11-2008)

However, when it came to having relation with an untouchable woman, the upper castes conveniently forget the tradition and vie with each other to have sex with them (Dange). Madara Malli (Gramayana), Putti (MM), Belli(CD), Durgi and Lacchi(Dange and HMMH) become easy targets or sexual exploitation. But a dalit man having relation with an upper caste woman, if found out, had to face dire consequences which included even death.(KB).

**IGNORANCE AND SUPERSTITION**

Centuries of deprivation, exploitation, poverty, the hunger, malnutrition, diseases, misery and sufferings, illiteracy, atrocities on them and the resultant fear made the people ignorant and superstitious. Their misfortunes were attributed to the displeasure of Dayyas, Bhootas, gods and goddesses who were to be appeased by the sacrifice of goats, sheep, pig ,
fowl and at times a bison. For their ills, they consulted a witch doctor instead of a medical doctor. People believed in faith healing and readily wore talisman or a charm band. They also visited the fortunetellers to know what the future held for them and sought suggestions to overcome the difficulties if any, in store for them in future. They readily believed in miracles, magical powers and portents. Marayya, after his murder, is believed to have become a spirit and the temple built for him was believed to exude magical powers (UK). Unable to pay the delivery expenses, Thimmakka’s parents turn to papayya, a witch doctor. Her death due to the lack of proper medication is attributed to the lack of faith of her husband Sanjeeva(UK). Kusuma Bale uses the supernatural element in the form of Jotammas and a story-telling bedstead. It also touches upon certain magical rituals performed by Turamma and Eery for the safety and rejuvenation of life-spirit in their children. Rather than ascribing the reason to the falling morals in the society, a character states that Bhoomitayi was unable to bear excessive sins committed by the villagers because of which Padalli was doomed (Gramayana).

Local gods and goddesses like Humuka Sidda, Ranaja Peera, Hirodyia, Savadatti Yallamma, Bhimalli Lakkavva, Chunchooru Mapuratayi were all believed to relieve the people of their sufferings. The system of ‘Devadasi’ had the sanction of the religion and the moneyed made use of the system for their sexual gratification.

CONCLUSION

Feudalism as concept of history may well has been vanished once a strong central government evolved, but on a close observation one feels the
presence of feudal tendency in the rural areas. The tendency prompts the strong in the society to retain their economic, social and political supremacy by trying and keeping the weak under their control. Leaving the week with barest minimum for subsistence, the elite enjoyed the surplus for their comfort, being totally oblivious to the sufferings of the poor. The situation was no different even in the democratic dispensation as the powerful lords, using their proximity to the powers that be diluted the effects of all progressive legislations. Despite legislations for land reforms, abolition of tenancy and zamindari systems, tillers to own lands and others, the rich have by hook or crook managed to retain their position and affluence. Large holdings are still seen in the countryside. The records of ownership may throw up different names some of them being benami and others in the names of their kiths and kins, but the possession and de-facto ownership remained with the erstwhile landlords. Y.V.Krishna Rao observes ‘Since upper limits were imposed on land holdings and future aquisitions were banned, big farmers have resorted to ‘lease in’ the land owned by small, marginal and semi-medium land holders.’(‘Agrarian scenario’, Navakarnataka, Bangalore 1999) Despite a ban, the system of bonded labour still survives in the countryside albeit in different names and forms. The minimum wages act is not strictly followed and differentiation between men and women still continues.

The existence of feudal tendency, naturally gives rise to various relations such as the owner and tenant, the master and servant, The land owning and the landless, affluent and poor, deprived and the well to do, which still characterize the rural side not very different from the erstwhile situation. ‘Gaining independence to the country was a great watershed for
the rural society of India which exposed people to practices of universal franchise and establishment of bureaucratic-administrative machine for development, improvement in agricultural techniques, land reforms, irrigation facilities, improved seeds, fertilizers, insecticides, roads, rural credit and others were expected to revolutionalise the agrarian scenario. Indeed, improvements have been recorded but the benefits of such improvements are cornered by the affluent leaving the poor man’s plight unaltered.

According to A.R. Desai (from his work ‘Agrarian struggles in India after independence, Oxford university press 1986) ‘the post independence measures such as 1. Elimination of intermediaries, 2. abolition of Zamindari and 3. Lands to tillers have in fact performed dual functions where 1. the richer sections of tenants broadened the base of proprietary class aka landlords and rich farmers who tried to augment production for maximizing the profit and 2. Deprived by tenurial security, the poorer tenants were forced to operate on shrinking pieces of lands transforming them in to marginal farmers, back door tenants or bonded slaves of new type. As a result the process of proletization and pauperization of ¾ of rural population set in. This has resulted in the Indian country side becoming a vast cauldron of boiling lava of tensions, antagonism of conflicts.(p-38) An unpleasant showdown appears imminent as ‘History does not provide a single instance of exploitative classes surrendering power to exploiting masses through a change of heart’ (op.cit. p-38)

The study undertaken drives home a point that Contemporary literature can become a good source of information for undertaking research work over various concepts of history. It is certain that literature cannot be
created out of a vaccum as the theme; the narrative and sequences in general adhere to the socio-cultural, political, economic realities of the time frame chosen. The characters and sequences of these novels may be imaginary but events depicted conform to the general situation obtained in the rural areas.

To sum up, we may delineate in- seriatim hereunder the findings of this study:

1. Although feudalism as a structural entity is non-existent now, the feudal tendency and intent remained in the rural areas of Karnataka during the time frame chosen for the study.

2. The governance aspect remained weak as due to lack of infrastructure and proper conveyance these villages have remained remote and inaccessible. Even after independence and establishment of popular governance, the situation leaves much to be desired.

3. Landowners with large holdings existed both during the pre and post independence eras. Land became source of power by virtue of which the owners controlled the lives of the villagers, perpetuating the existence of institutions such as the landlords, tenants, labourers and serfdom. The high ideals of land to the tiller and upliftment of the morale of the rural peasantry appears a distant dream.

4. With the unholy alliance between the political leaders and with active connivance of the bureaucrats, the powerful landholders virtually barricaded the effective implementation of land reforms and other progressive legislations.

5. By the financial might augmented by the large holdings, the landowners were providers of seasonal employment to the rural public, by virtue of which they reigned supreme in the villages. Public
work contracts went to the affluent, enhancing their strength further as employment providers. They demanded meek obedience by the tenants, landless, serfs, bonded and other labourers and expected the latter to follow their dictums, failing that dire consequences awaited.

6. The landowners took away the surplus leaving the under-privileged with barest subsistence, to lead the life of luxury and indulgence. This lead to severe exploitation of the under-privileged.

7. Serfdom existed in various forms in the rural areas including bonded labour despite legislatures banning it.

8. Caste system, which strengthened the feudalism, also helped giving it a caste colour and made feudalism hereditary. As such the landowners were from upper caste and the landless from the lower castes. The latter mainly belonged to backward castes and dalits. Untouchability, the bane of Indian society, existed. The scheduled castes survived on the leftovers provided by their masters and also by consuming the flesh of dead cattle. The untouchables lived outside the villages in separate lanes, lest they pollute the purity of the upper castes.

9. Abject poverty, ignorance, illiteracy and susceptibility made the weaker sections superstitious leading them to believe in supernatural powers, spirits and ghosts and to appease them through sacrifices of animals and other related rituals.

10. In such an unequal arrangement, the relations between various sub-segments of the society suffered. While the affluent were boisterous and oppressive, the meek suffered in silence bearing with every insult, injury and deprivation heaped upon them by their omnipotent masters. Land being the source of power, the superiors resorted to merciless
exploitation of the poor. The latter had to seek permission from their superiors even to carry out their personal affairs like love and marriage and the decision of the superiors was binding. If the dictum of the master is violated, the weak were subjected to severe physical attack and mental agony. The women of the weaker sections were subjected to sexual exploitation also.

We are in the threshold of a new social order with the advent of economic reforms based on the principles of liberalization, privatization and globalization which look welfare oriented but in fact widens the gap between the haves and have-nots. With the setting up of the SEZs, the availability of land for cultivation is sinking. Farmers despite good harvest are unable to sell their produce due to weak storage, distribution, transportation and marketing mechanism and above all a cut-throat competition. The farmers unable to repay the burden of loan are resorting to committing suicide. Fertile lands are being allotted on a large scale to IT, BT companies, resorts, factories and the land sharks in the guise as infrastructure developers. G. Ramakrishna in his preface to the work of Y.V. Krishna Rao (‘Agrarian scenario’, NavaKarnataka, Bangalore 1999) laments that: ‘Land to the tiller is a motto long forgotten in our country.’ Ramakrishna, understandably, opposes the idea of alienation of land for non-agricultural purposes. Adding further, he says ‘To convert fertile agricultural land in to commercial complexes is not a luxury that India can safely relapse in to…. Yet we are remorselessly following the suicidal path of converting fertile agricultural lands in to highways and corridors and complexes as if there were no scope whatsoever left to augment our transport facilities’ (Referring to the grant of 22000 plus acres of fertile agricultural land lost to BMIC.)
Y.V. Krishna Rao observes a growing nexus between the politician, administration, the police and the criminal. Social violence perpetrated on the economically and socially backward people and those belonging to the SCs and STs is on the increase. The communal, caste and separatist forces are gaining in strength (Chapter 5 of his work ‘Agrarian scenario 1947-1997,’ Nava Karnataka, Bangalore 1999). The situation looks ominous as the simmering differences in the society may well become unbridgeable in future.

The recent developments can have far-reaching consequences in the socio-economic front in this country for years to come. Contemporary literature will no doubt record such changes from time to time and therefore becomes an important source to elicit information on the process of changes in the society. The important politico-economic and the social events influence the contemporary literature, as the two important cannons of good literature is to maintain the unity of time and place.

The aforesaid study is only an attempt to establish a connection between the history and contemporary literature. A wide scope is available to study further on this and various other concepts of history with the help of contemporary literature. If this study inspires such studies in future, the pains taken to put forward a different approach to analyse history in the present dissertation would become worthwhile.