CHAPTER VI

LOVE AND LIBERTY
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"To be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. (www.goodreach.com)"

While the preceding chapters deal with ‘modernity’ in aspects of art, literature, power, politics and other universal issues, this chapter deals with the theme of ‘modernity’ at the individual level, in terms of love, lust, liberty, marriage, morals and conjugal relationships. It explores the intricacies of gender relations. And the changing patterns of societal views towards the same.

The Woman of Basrur (1970)

The Woman of Basrur or Mai Managala Suliyalli, as the novel is known in its original Kannada version, is a unique piece of literary art in which Karanth depicts his deep insight into the human instincts of sex, marriage and morals. Like in many other issues, Karanth differs drastically from his contemporary societal views regarding sex, the codes of conduct on marriage and morals. He never considers sex as mean or a taboo. Sex as a natural human instinct ought not to be suppressed or ignored. Neither is it to be glorified nor to be considered as ignoble.

The entire novel centers around one major character - Manjula, a most sought after courtesan in the tiny hamlet of Basur. Through her, Karanth unravels the intricacies of the human mind, the complexities of mind body relationship, consummation of marriage, and the realization of mystic aspirations of a common woman. V.M. Inamdar in this regard, rightly points out:

The Woman of Basrur presents a fantastic picture of a unique human aspiration seeking harmony in the fusion of the mind and the body.
The natural physical instincts find vent in physical consummation which in turn elevates the mind into the higher consciousness. (1973 p 70)

Manjula, the daughter of Bhavani, the courtesan, is a very beautiful, prudent, sensuous and sensible young woman. She is the courtesan most in demand by the young and the old, the rich and the noble, the spirited and the spiritual alike. She is a singer, dancer and also well versed in Sanskrit. The rich and the noble invite her to their houses for performances. Any celebration or ceremony, marriage or festival, the music concerts and performances of Manjula are booked in advance. People throng the venue more to have a glimpse of the dignified dancing deity Manjula rather than the celebration itself. Karanth registers this custom of inviting reputed courtesans for celebrations and festivities thus: ‘Till about 1930 it was a customary practice in our town to invite courtesans for performances during weddings of rich families.’ (1965 p60)

In the olden days Basrur was known more for its artisans who were adept in sculpting in sandalwood. The main entertainment for people was music, dance and folk arts like ‘Yakshagana’ and staging of mythological plays. The rich and the noble, in and around Basrur, were great lovers and patrons of music and dance. Be it weddings or any other festivities like Ramanavami, Shivaratri or Navaratri, the rich and the noble would sponsor the performances of music and dance by the courtesans. As such performing arts flourished continually in Basrur.

Later with the advent of the British and the development of marine business links, Basrur gets a facelift and becomes one of the leading unloading islets for the Portuguese sailing vessels. The Basrur port becomes busy with cargoes of pepper, salt, cloth, rice sugar etc. Merchants and traders wait for the arrival of their
merchandise. As things go on, in the meantime they camp in Basrur and are entertained by the local courtesans. The novel also depicts the raising town of Basrur where trade flourished with sea vessels from Portugal and other places stopping over for some time. Traders from the surrounding places would camp at Basrur while waiting for the arrival and departure of the ships. Many a time, their waiting would prolong for various reasons and during such waiting periods they tried to amuse and entertain themselves with the locally available resources and one of them being the beauties of Basrur. This is how Basrur comes to be known more, not only as a trade centre or even a port but more so for 'women of pleasure'.

These women could not be branded as the cheap ‘women for pleasure’ or prostitutes as is usually done. They were not the popular ‘red light area stars’. On the other hand, they were all courtesans of a rich family tradition. It was never considered mean or ignoble to have links with any such woman. It was more a matter of pride and honor to have had the connection of any lady of Basrur. Even the women were not woman of casual purchase. They had to be wooed a lot and if at all a person had to be considered by these women, they did have to possess a basic minimum requisite.

Not all were whores of casual purchase. There were many families of courtesans of the older tradition, well versed in music, dance and poetry and in the art of conversation, trend setters in fashion and tutor to the leisured class in the liniments of good living. Having a mistress from this class was itself a mark of distinction and rated above wealth, measured in gold or landed property. “Riches were considered easier to acquire than the favors of these fastidious and choosy women”. (1970 p2)

Infact, it was much easier to settle a marriage alliance rather than be
accepted by a courtesan. It was not just the power of the purse that mattered but other issues demanded consideration.

It would not do to knock at their door and weave a silk purse filled with silver. Nor was it as simple as marriage, which was mostly a matter of tallying horoscopes. There had to be a special merit in a man before they deigned to avouch safe their favours. Their transactions were discreet and reserved for the select few of the society. (1970 p2)

Not only this, it was a time when the society itself considered courtesans not as mean but were looked upon with respect, mainly because these courtesans were not one who were just in the profession but women with a lot of love and liking for art and culture. They were well versed in music and dance. This particular tradition of the courtesan’s performances in temples and weddings was one that was very much in vogue during the time. During the 1930s, it was a very usual custom that people invited courtesans to perform in temples and weddings.

People who saw them performing with devotion developed such admiration towards them that they would rever them. Those who do not belong to the chosen few would express their admiration from a distance by standing under the evert of the courtesans’ houses and listening to the music or the jingle of bells that wafted out at known times of the evening and night. (1970 p3)

Overall, the Basrurians and the neighborhood regarded women of pleasure with a lot of respect and regard.

If on the one hand, Basrur was known for ‘merry making’ and ‘trade’, on the other hand, it was known for skilled craftsmen or wood carvers who came from Soraba and Siddapur. The icons and boxes, they made in sandal wood and ivory and their paintings on wood were in great demand. The narrative voice says:
But times have changed so much that now these craftsmen are no longer in demand. Hence, they also have diversified. Earlier if they took to craft, now they have turned to making turbans and crown of pith for the head of bridegrooms at weddings and by fashioning decorations that hang in homes. Most of them have changed over to farming but a few retain some of their old skills". (1970 p 4)^.

Some of the carvers are traditional players on the drums also particularly 'maddali' and the tabalas.

Those were the days when performing arts was given so much of importance that troupes would travel from place to place for performance and there were rich men of the place who patronized their performances and the artists as well. In those days it was rare for a professional theatrical company to come to Coondapur and the walls were all plastered with posters. (1970 p9)^.

In any age for that matter, glamour and show does have its impact. What people really crave for is not art or ideas in the true sense of the word but feminine figures of the stage with lovely voices. Basrur had an elementary school for the towns' children, which was opened during the Colonial rule. But children from rich and respected families were not sent to the elementary school but were given primary classes by Puttur Aigolu or village school teacher, wherein they were imparted traditional learning starting from alphabets and the 3Rs. The teacher was a real hard task master with a tamarind twig in his hand. It was not just the traditional learning that the Aigolu imparted but even folk art like Yakshagana also. Women were not to be educated beyond a particular grade. Gangakka the maid feels that education is of no use to girls. When Chandri wants to join High School, Gangakka feels as Shari did
- that so much reading was quite unnecessary for people of their kind. If at all she approves of Chandri's going to school, it is with the only idea that "during her daily trips to school, Chandri would catch the attention of some wealthy admirers." (1970 p 26)⁹.

Even in sending Chandri to school, the ulterior motive behind was to see to it that their family vocation could be improved. Mother Shari and daughter Chandri are diametrically opposites in their thinking. While Shari is very particular that her daughter needs to continue the family vocation, Chandri is dead against it. Her mother's efforts to teach Chandri music and dance and prepare her for the hereditary vocation lead nowhere. Chandri, representative of the next generation, is least inclined towards the family vocation. She considers it mean and ignoble. She deters from learning even music and dance lest she may be dragged into the traditional family vocation. Chandri often tells her friend Sharada: "If worst comes to worst, I shall run away from home or jump into a well. But I shall never feed on left overs like a dog". (1970 p27)¹⁰.

We find an attitudinal change in Chandri from her mother. While the previous generation took to the family vocation just like that without any questioning or reasoning, Chandri of the contemporary generation questions, opposes and develops distaste towards it and is not ready to yield at any cost. On the other hand, she wants to get into a job and somehow eke out her livelihood. Sometimes she asks her friend Sharada: "Can't I get a job somewhere? I want to get out of Basrur. It can never be my home. Like mother; like daughter people think. Let my examination be over. I shall seek a job in Udupi or Coondapur" (1970 p27)¹¹.

To dissociate herself from the present life and situation, Chandri does not mind even separation from her mother. She says: Such is the aversion that Chandri
has towards her mother’s vocation that: When suitors came to the house and Shari calls out to her daughter, Chandri sharply retorts that whoever has come should go back the same way. Shari weeps and rants but Chandri is unmoved. She brushes away her mother’s entreaties with the remarks: “you may talk about anything with me except my marriage”. (1970 p 27). Thus, we find that the new generation is not willing to blindly follow the vocation of the family predecessors but is in search of new avenues, deviating from the convention. The English education system has already inculcated a new set of values.

If Chandri presents but one aspect of the change, a contrasting view is being given by Ullur. While Chandri regards the clan’s vocation as ignoble, disgusting and shameful, Ullur opens up a new vista to Manjula exalting sex. In the words of Manjula herself:

“He taught me yet another thing. I had always been ashamed of my hereditary profession. He made me see that sex need not be regarded as shameful in itself. If the body and its demands are indecent, the world itself was indecent. He taught me to look at life with wit and highness” (1970 p101).

So, we find that Ullur teaches Manjula that the instincts of the body are quite natural and normal and that there is nothing shameful or indecent about it. He neither idealises love or sex nor does he consider love and sex divine or mean. He just accepts the reality as it is. We find a contrast in the attitudes of Ullur and Venkatu also as far as their spouse is concerned. Ullur says:

My wife has no time for beauty. It never occurs to her that there is some purpose in being created a woman. She only looked upon herself as an inevitable, sacrifice to the male. I do not
know whether she has derived any joy or satisfaction from what she has done. She has not learnt even to wear a saree with elegance or to comb her hair for my sake. (1970 p100)\textsuperscript{14}

Here what Ullur is looking at is the sensuous, beautiful and joyous part of life. Whereas Venkatu of Dharwar one of Buwa’s devoted disciples in learning music has a totally different notion of his prospective bride. Though Venkatu himself is a musician, is not enamored by the art and beauty of life. He is a pragmatic person who looks at the realistic part of life and not the sensuous side of life.

His stipulations were rather modest: bride should know cooking and should be able to run a home. He was not particular about her looks. Wealth or knowledge of music also did not figure in the list of qualifications. It was enough if she gave him the respect that was a husband’s due. (1970 p80)\textsuperscript{15}

Thus we find in The Woman of Basrur, manifold changes in the town of Basrur, change in the attitude of Manjula’s predecessors and Manjula, Manjula and the subsequent generations of Shari, Shari and Chandri and even the contemporary society.

Changes in the Succession Attitude of Manjula and her Predecessors

Manjula’s mother Bhavani is the first in the hierarchy of women we meet. She is totally dedicated to ‘Pala’ and never scrambles for anybody bigger or better, though permissible. Then comes her daughter Manjula who is endowed with beauty, talent, art and richness. She is both sensuous and sensible. She comes across various men - the rich and the noble, the basal and the beastly, the spirited and the spiritual, the artistic and the like. The persons, whom she comes across, tap different qualities in her and vice versa. She is torn between the bickering of the body and the mind and finds a retreat in the words of her demised mother that “we are here to sell our body
but not the mind”. Throughout her life, Manjula is in pursuit of happiness – happiness of the body and mind and ultimately realizes that in her last suitor, ‘The Swami’. Through her character, Karanth shows that even a courtesan can find bliss through her profession which even married women are deprived of.

Shari, the adopted daughter of Manjula displays neither the sensibility nor sensitivity of Manjula and follows the family tradition in languid, listless way. Diametrically opposite to Shari is her daughter Chandri who is educated, progressive and pragmatic in her ideas and thinking. She is highly resurgent towards her family profession and aspires for a dignified and respectable future. Through her Karanth portrays the modern young woman with progressive ideas aspiring for not just patronage and popularity, but peace, progress and prosperity. This is a clear evidence of Karanth’s reformist views.

The Woman of Basrur also hints at the gap between the generations of Bhavani and Manjula, Manjula and Shari and Shari and Chandri. If Bhavani plays the devoted courtesan to ‘Pala’, Manjula is an aspirant for wholesome happiness: If Shari is a casual and listless professional; Chandri is a repulsive and boisterous young lady, full of hopes and light for a better tomorrow. Through the rows, Karanth projects a vision of the changing Indian scenario. Education plays a dominant role in this transformation.

Chandri also represents one of the rebellious woman characters of Karanth like Bhagirathi and Sunalini who are strong, assertive and have the freedom and discretion to choose what they want.

The novel marks a change or deviation from the hitherto existing notion of sex being considered as derogatory, mean a prostitute community as vulgar, voluptuous and ignominious in the society. Karanth retaliates in his usual iconoclastic style that if
it is so then the world would not be what it is today, and tries not to glorify or complain but accept the bickering of the body as natural, normal and human. Through some of the characters in the novel, he reconciles to passions of the body and doesn’t try to ignore it.

Another important change noted is that earlier children from rich and respectable families were never sent to formal schools but to the local schools run by *Aigolu* for learning. By the time of Chandri, we see her going to Government Public School. To that extent, the society is modernized. The Colonial regime has affected the society in this fashion. The other indications of modernity noticed are: Sanskrit being replaced by English; the Sanskrit and *Vaidik Patashalas* being replaced by government English schools; cottage and handmade products like ivory and sandalwood carving slowly disappearing; calculative and cunning businessmen replacing aristocratic art lovers and lively villages giving way to faceless, shapeless urban set ups.

**Mookajji’s Visions**

Shivarama Karanth’s *Mookajji’s Visions* brought him wide acclaim and also won him the prestigious Bharatiya Jnanapith Award in 1977. The original Kannada version appeared in 1968 while it was rendered into English by T.S. Sanjeeva Rao in 1977.

Karanth projects religion and faith as having definite social purpose and the laws that govern them. Through the character of an old woman Mookajji, Karanth juxtaposes the contemporary social and religious faith as well as the new trends and varied dimensions that can be attributed to those faith and beliefs Mookajji visualises the various sequence and events of life both personal and public past and present and reveals the same in an inscrutable way.
Mookajji, as she is being called by everybody, has passed four score years of age and is the sister of the narrator’s grandfather. She is being widowed at a tender age of ten and since then has been living in her ancestral house at Mooguru. As she herself says, she is as old as the peepal tree in front of her house. She is metaphorically compared to the roots and branches of a veritable jack or tamarind tree because of her static life. Both jack and tamarind grow to a venerable age and timber made of jack wood lasts very long. Granny as she is called by her grandson Subbaraya is like tamarind, since her words are sweet sour.

Karanth at times speaks through Mookajji in his revelation towards the universality of life and anthropomorphous nature of Gods and deities. Karanth gives importance to individualism, humanism and to crown it all human life itself. He propagated the principle of ‘live and let live’ as against the Darwinian ‘survival of the fittest’. This same philosophy takes expression in the words of Mookajji,” the crux of life is in living and letting others live. We need to live a fruitful and useful life. Useful not only to human beings but to the life around.” (1979 p75)

Mookajji thinks and speaks beyond the realms of her age and place. Rationality or ‘spirit of enquiry’ - is considered one of the important attributes of ‘Modernity’. Physical age is never a measure of one’s mental ‘Modernity’. Though physically four score years old the knowledge, rationality and understanding of humans and the zeal of human spirit displayed by Mookajji is abnormal and at the same time ‘magnanimous’. In this regard, V.M. Inamdar posits

Behind all her dreams, stands out the truth and reality of lives experiences, the wonder of its divinity. Life viewed as a process would have to doubt and examine many of the mystifying things said about it Mookajji represents that attitude. (1983 p79)
Karanth depicts Mookajji as far ahead of her physical age and the spirit of the age also. She stands for a way of thinking about life for a recognition that centuries of human history converge into every moment of the present or the past. She is one who is able to rationalize the various dogmatic and ritualistic life of her Age. Karanth presents several examples in the novel to discuss her far reaching ideas.

The first instance is in the case of Nagi, the basket maker and Ramanna, the oil seller. When the entire village detests Nagi for having forsaken Ramanna, her husband in search of temptations of the flesh and luxurious life, it is only granny who understands her youthful passions and tries to bring about a reunion between them. She stands for life, unity and merger rather than disintegration. Though old and chronologically belonging to the previous generation, she behaves in a strange but progressive way. Thus she shows a remarkable interest in straightening the wronged life of Nagi.

‘Granny’ or ‘Mookajji as she is called by everybody because of her typical silence, spends most of her time on the ‘Ashwatha Katte’ (pipal tree with platform) opposite to her house. Barring her lunch, dinner and relaxing time, she spends most of her time sitting under the peepal tree musing, muttering and brooding over. The people of the surrounding hamlets though respect and revere her are skeptical, critical and often resist her ideas as seamless, baseless and senile. In the words of Subbaraya, “the village thinks that my Granny is senile” (1979 p26).18

One peculiarity of Granny is her extra sensory perception which she had developed over the years. In this self absorbed dreaming she could visualize the events, incidents and individuals of the past, link that with the present and also predict the future. Thus she is due to see behind, beyond and even within herself and the
world as such. At times, these visions even assume the shape of super normal prophesies. It is during one of her such visionary moments that Subbaraya tries to trace the roots of the cave begotten articles. By mere touching of those articles, Granny was able to flash her mind back to hundreds of years and narrate in a movie style the events, and imagine the past. Like a visionary, she is able to interpret and explain the history and significance of the ancient relics. It is rather a very strange and mysterious extra sensory perception of her that she could intertwine the past with the present.

On the one hand, Granny dives deep into the anthropological roots of man and simultaneously speaks on the anthropomorphous nature of God. At a time when the society never questioned or delved into the origin of Gods and their hierarchy Granny dares to sieve through the act of assigning human nature and hierarchy of Gods. Her ideas on God, gender and avatars are rather bewildering and intriguing. In reply to Subbaraya’s question on the gender of God, analyzing logically Mookajji opines that-

God is neither mal nor female. Going to the genesis of the creation of God and attributing gender to it, she views that-

An idol was carved and it was kept there. Then they began to worship it. For a child the biggest thing in life is its mother; not even its father. We grow up and after so many years, when we are hurt even a bit, we scream ‘Ah! Amma!’ that is why God became an Amma. There is nothing wrong in thinking so. Love for one’s own mother is something vast intense and real. (1979 p190)

She rationalizes on the concept of the incarnations of God. The spirit of rationality in Granny is really commendable. She is one who is not a well read person. Yet, she never accepts or takes things for granted. At the same time, she doesn’t
contest or challenge the conventional assertions also. Subbaraya questions her regarding the sanity behind the incarnations of God, for protecting the virtuous and punishing the vice. Granny deems that it is not necessary that god needs to take an avatar to destroy his own creation.

Granny does not accept any contradictions. The type of person she is, she gets into the root of things, analyses everything and then narrates. She accepts God as an omnipotent force, who is much above any demon or devil. Such being the case-

Does God need an avatar to kill an insect that he himself created? However bad a man or demon is, he is but a tiny worm before God even less than a worm! To kill it must he assume an avatar? (1979 p190).

Karanth here through Mookajji, questions the very underlying truth behind avatar and the Hindu mythology. This is a way to shake the very edifice on which Hindu mythology is built. Karanth himself doubted and reasoned about the existence of multi carnations like Rama or Krishna or Vishnu etc. After a lot of internal conflicts, mental afflictions and deliberations, Karanth’s quest for the supreme leads him to the conclusion that ‘God as a concept is limited to human perception. What we feel, we instill the same to the concept, of God’ says Karanth in his treatise on life Balveye Belaku or Light is Life.(1987 p39) (translation by the researcher) He preserves god in a novel and a highly individualistic way, in accordance with ‘As you perceive, as you worship, so is he who is God’. (1987, p39) (English rendering by the researcher).

Mookajji is more or less the mouth piece of Karanth who questions, contradicts, analyses, syntheses and arrives at a conclusion many times much against the existing social and cultural norms. Karanth never hesitated to express himself and
his revolutionary ideas either in private or public. Similarly Mookajji also quips
"Since God is omnipresent, would it be necessary for him to be born in order to sweep
away the accumulated dust and dirt like a Ravana or a Hiranyakashyap. (1979
pl95)\textsuperscript{23}.

Similarly, Mookajji’s rationalistic ideas on heaven and hell, human gender,
ascetics and monks, pilgrimages, celebrations and the like are very novel revealing
and provoking.

Mookajji thinks, speaks and acts much ahead of her times and expressions.
Being widowed at a very early age, she has not experienced the pleasure and pains of
married life or even conjugal relationship. Yet, she realizes the temptations of the
human flesh. Though she herself has not succumbed to it, she understands the plight
of Nagi and is conciliatory towards her. Though she does not approve of it, she
softens towards her and tries to re-unite Nagi with Ramanna. She arbitrates between
the two for their re-union.

Karanth never considered sex as basal or a taboo. Mookajji also endorses the
same. She considers sex as a natural human instinct neither to be subdued nor
avoided. Karanth in his other novel The Woman of Basrur also echoes the same. But
when hidden or forcefully subdued even the natural instincts lead to unhealthy
practices. Mookajji who has the power to penetrate deep into the human mind and see
through it, cautions Janna and even Anantharaya against such unhealthy practices.
What is really appreciable here is Granny’s frankness in expressing the views she
considers right without any fear or hesitation. No taboo restrains her from speaking
her mind.

Karanth imbuces Mookajji with such sharp penetrative mind that she is able to
differentiate sense from non-sense and also pure and honest heart to adulterated ones.
Though always at home, still she can make out the ostentations from the real. She is happy that Manjunath is performing the pooja of Hinduganamma. She does appreciate it. Yet, deep within her heart she knows that it is more for show and pre-tension that Manjunath is celebrating the feast in such a large scale. The entire pendal erected in front of the temple is ravaged by the stormy wind. The pride and affectation of Manjunath is dispelled or indicated in the heavy rains that disrupts the pendal. This reminds one of Shelly's poem on human vanity 'Ozymandias' wherein the narrative voice says-

My name is OZYMANDIAS, King of Kings.

Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!

No thing beside remains. Round the decay

Of that Colossal Wreck, boundless and bare,

The lone and level sands stretch far away.(www.google.co.in)\(^{24}\).

Human vanity knows no bounds and Karanth is totally against the display of it. He has expressed his contempt towards such characters even in some of his novels. In taunting Manjunath, Mookajji attracts the wrath of his wife.

To the question what accounts for the senility of Mookajji- it could be traced to a childhood calamity. It is here, that Freud's interpretation that childhood makes the personality of person holds good. In case of Mookajji, the childhood imprint on her mind finds expression in various ways in the form of her mutterings.

This could be traced to the power of the mind as believed by Freud that the subconscious mind has a bearing on the individual behavior of a person. He very strongly believed that the childhood of a person has a bearing on the adult life. Viewed in this perspective, Mookajji's mutterings, musings and sometimes even eccentricities can probably be accounted for.
Thus we find that Granny, who though born and brought up in a traditional surrounding and without any formal education, is miles ahead of the contemporary generation in her attitude, outlook and approach. It is quite mysterious as to how she has been able to break open the crust of her traditional.

The Shrine (1937)

*The Shrine* or *Sarasammana Samadhi*, as it is titled in the Kannada original, is one of the important realistic and unique of Karanth’s novels. In fact it is a landmark in the history of Kannada literature in depicting the changing phases of the contemporary male chauvinistic Indian society, societal views on gender relationships, marriage, morals, conjugal relationships etc. *The Shrine* is considered one of the earliest novels where Karanth probes into the problems of love, lust and conjugal relationships.

The novel projects Karanth’s views not only on the contemporary society but also basic theism of love, lust, marriage, morals and human relationships in general and conjugal relationships in particular. It is a blend of realism and fantasy in a literary form.

Karanth wrote this novel at a time when men were considered next only to Gods, Gods on high pedestals and women only offerings to them. *The Shrine* reflects the same theme with an extension towards female education and the resulting awareness and inner strength it brings about. It presents a clear picture of the contemporary Indian society with its inherent male chauvinism, female subservience and social honor and humor. Karanth here delves deep into the not so much publicized issues of love, sex, marriage and conjugal relationships in marital affairs. It traces the change in the attitude of women folk towards themselves, towards men and
towards the society as a whole. T P Ashok’s views in this regard are worth mentioning:

“Oh the one hand is portrayed the views of society on marriage, morals, sex and conjugal relationships, while on the other hand is depicted the views of new generation of youngsters like Sunalini and Bhagirithi. What is interesting here is the fact that the section of the society which is exposed to English Education tries to question the existing customs and values of the society. As such they come up with alternatives to the existing practices thereby trying to reform the society”. (1996 p94)\

The novel explores the above issues through the family life of four sad families wherein women are ill treated and humiliated in their marital life. The four families dealt with here are that of Janaki - Thimmappaya, Hiranya - Bhagirathi, Sunalini - Annappa and Nagaveni - Seetharama. All the female characters Bhagirathi, Janaki, Sunalini and Nagaveni are unhappy in their personal lives and as such visit the ‘Mahasathi’ Sarasamma’s shrine to seek solace and set right their ailing families. The tomb of Sarasamma is considered to be blessing the helpless and the destitute. Thousands throng the shrine with their requests and applications in the form of coconut offering to the shrine secretly. Sarasamma is believed to bless and straighten the contorted lives of marital misfits, pining lovers and dreamy youths. The family of Janaki and Thimmappayya presents a traditional and conservative family wherein a ‘woman’s destiny is only to cook, clean and wash’ (1937 p10).

Janaki is a mother of five daughters. Yet she has not enjoyed the happiness of marital bliss. Her good for nothing husband Thimmappayya roars like a Ravana and is never in good terms with his wife or children. He is a sadist who derives pleasure in
tormenting his wife. He is irresponsible, indulges in cheating to meet his own ends, and takes unilateral senseless decisions — both in money matters and marriage deals. To crown it all, he is a village preacher but never follows any thing he preaches. This nature of his prompts Seethakka, Janaki’s friend and confidant to remark: ‘How can reading of holy books reform a man? Do neem buds turn sweet if you pour syrup to the tree? (1937 p11)’27. Finding no way by which Thimmappayya could be made to change for the better, Seetha sermons Janaki to take a vow to Maha Sathi Sarasamma’s shrine so that her life may change for the better.

The next family considered is that of Hiranya and Bhagirathi, and he has estranged her. Bhagirathi is not able to comply with the strict disciplinary code of her in-laws. She is unable to bear the torment of her father-in-law whose opinion is, ‘What belongs to one’s feet should not be put on one’s head’. The derisory words of Venkataramaniah, her father-in-law sink deep into the soul of Bhagirathi. Her self esteem is bruised and when her father comes to take her for a week’s stay, her accumulated anger bursts out and deserts Hiranya saying ‘I will never return as a footwear’.

What is noteworthy here is the fact that at a time when the contemporary women folk are considered meek, submissive, docile and voiceless, Bhagirathi is dare enough to voice and assert herself. She is not the quiet type who would stay mum when her self respect is challenged or wounded. She cannot tolerate humiliation or overbearing of any sort, even within her own family. On hearing that arrangements are on for a second marriage for her husband she neither feels crestfallen nor does she moan over her pathetic plight. On the other hand she retorts with full vigor saying that she too can reciprocate.

Hiranya, the husband of Bhagirathi, true to his name is a golden character but
unseemingly voiceless and submissive, especially in front of his father. On Bhagirathi deserting him, he is all the more passionately in love with her and is not ready for fresh proposals of his father. Neither is he daring enough to voice it openly nor oppose it outrightly. Hence, one fine day he leaves his father's house once and for all as a silent protest against his father's dictatorship.

One change noticed in Hiranya is that he does not totally agree with the societal views of treating women as basal. But he dares not express it openly. Hence, when his parents find fault with Bhagirathi and her frankness as outrageous, though he cherishes a diametrically opposite view, neither does he try to convince them nor does he defend Bhagirathi. On the other hand, he accepts that in front of Bhagirathi when he says: “People have one yard stick for men and another for women. They condone a man’s moral aberration but not a woman’s” (1937 p41).

Here the significant point is that Karanth understands the plight of normal persons who are not very courageous enough to go against the conventional societal practices or parental views and at the same time do not approve of the same. Hence, they silently protest and at the right time they just walk out. In a way, we find that Hiranya has a counter part in Nwoye of Things Fall Apart who also undergoes the same conflict.

Compared to Bhagirathi, Hiranya is not assertive and docile. Yet is discretionary enough to reason out and is judicious enough to stand by his decision. Hiranya goes to reunite with Bhagirathi knowing fully well that the society and his family would not endorse his views and acts. To that extent, he has changed and respects the views of Bhagirathi also.

Through the character of Bhagirathi, Karanth brings to the fore the importance of female education and also the impact it can have in changing the age old,
conservative social norms. Slowly even men like Hiranya also change for the better.

The next pair which is being dealt with is that of Sunalini and Annappa. Sunalini belongs to the educated class of ladies whose family aspired to get her married to an IAS Officer. But as luck has its share, she marries Annappa, a shopkeeper, who hasn’t even got through his matriculation. She spends most of her free time reading newspapers and this is not being tolerated by her husband and her spiteful mother-in-law. Both are very critical and contemptuous of Sunalini’s reading habits and taunt her a lot. She is being considered a ‘decoration piece’ reading English newspapers.

Sunalini’s mother in law Rajivi belongs to the conservative old generation who is bent upon disciplining and exercising her authority on her daughter in law. She feels that two square meals are all that has to be provided with. She vehemently asks ‘Does she not have enough to eat and enough to wear?’ to which Sunalini retorts back equally sarcastically saying – ‘So has that Gopi in the cow shed’. Rajivi who is not able to bear the brunt of Sunalini’s sarcasm curses her English education which is responsible for the callous, adamant and headstrong nature of Sunalini. Rajivi expresses her dissatisfaction thus ‘This English education is really ruinous. It is because of this that her father Devappa Prabhu was crushed to bankruptcy’.(1937 p18)²⁹

Rajivi attributes the failure in the business of Devappa Prabhu to English Education and even threatens Sunalini that they would bring her a co-wife. This disturbs Sunalini the least and she retorts saying that she can also bring paramours: ‘You may marry four women. I won’t object. I can also bring here four men for me to live with’. (1937 p55)³⁰. Both Annappa and Rajivi are astounded to hear such a shameless and straightforward reply from Sunalini and are dumbfounded. Caught
miserably in the web of helplessness, lovelessness and loneliness Sunalini attempts suicide and is being rescued by Chandrayya. Sunalini is ready to throw open the shackles of marriage and live with Chandrayya who saves her from her suicidal attempt.

The next pair of Nagaveni and Seetharama mulls around the ignorance of sex on the one hand and overzealous sexual assault on the other. Nagaveni, the new bride is young, ignorant and as such is the un-co operative type, of girl without proper education and common sense. She is scared of Seetharama and is too young to understand the sensitivity of conjugal relationship. Seetharama on the other hand is overzealous and is in a hurry to attain consummation. In the bargain, he overlooks the fact that physical desires and mental proximity are like the two faces of the same coin. He pounces on Nagaveni like a tiger on its prey. As a result, love which has to consummate in sex, appears more like an assault on the young mind of Nagaveni. He does not behave like a real husband who understands the young mind first and later progresses physically.

Here Karanth, in a subtle way, speaks on conjugal relationship, marriage, morals, sex and fidelity. He expresses his suspicion on pre-fixed marriages based on horoscope matching. Neither does he totally approve of love leading to marriage, nor does he oppose it. Further, he also never thinks that education is a tool to happy married life. Janaki, Bhagirathi, Sunalini, Hiranya, Chandrayya all visit the shrine of Sarasamma to further their desires. And almost all their desires are centered on the institution of marriage, conjugal relationship and marital bliss. When all human efforts fail man relies on the unknown and unseen super human and this is what all these characters do. They find solutions to their personal problems and relationships by offering worship and sacrifice to the shrine of ‘Mahasati’ Sarasamma under the
superstitious belief that Sarasamma would guide them through their thorny way of
life.

The irony of the fact remains that Chandrayya, one of the sensible characters of
the story later learns that Sarasamma herself was a 'marital misfit' who was groping
around in search of marital fulfillment. Another point which Karanth makes very
clear through The Shrine is the importance given to the institution of marriage in
India. It speaks of the time wherein failure in marriage is considered failure in life
itself. While Janaki, though not very happy about her marital life is not ready to break
her bondage with her husband and come out of it, maybe because of her grown up
daughters. She fails miserably in changing her husband and is utterly disillusioned,
still never does she think of deserting her husband Thimmappayya.

Thimmappayya is a good for nothing foolish, adamant, irresponsible, vagabond husband of Janaki who takes no share in the domestic responsibilities of the
family. He is a cheat, a miser and above all a person who has the least respect for his
life partner. Janaki, though very well aware of all these does not ever think of forsaking
him. In other words Janaki belongs to the set of truly devoted Indian wives who
accepts husband with their limitations. She is a prototype of the erstwhile depicted
mythological 'Pativrata Naari' who silently bears all the hardship.

On the other hand, Bhagirathi and Sunalini represent the new age rebel
spouses who are not ready to accept and accommodate loveless and domineering
husbands and their families. In them Karanth has delineated the young new class of
women, highly individualistic, independent, aggressive and with high self esteem.
They are not the meek type who would bow down or even moan their pathetic plight.
Both are ready to forsake their marital families and retaliate rather than reconcile.
When family life is not congenial and living together becomes unbearable they break
out of the family ties and do not regret it either. In this regard T.P. Ashok makes a pertinent point:

On the one hand is portrayed the views of society on marriage, morals, sex and conjugal relationships, while on the other hand is depicted the views of the new generation of youngsters like Sunalini and Bhagirathi. What is interesting is the fact that a section of the society which is exposed to English education tries to question the existing customs and practices of the society, find fault with them and come up with alternatives to the existing systems thereby trying to reform the society for a better future. (1966, 140-141)^1.

Secondly both are non-caring for the society around and its code of conduct. Sunalini even decides to live with Chandrayya who rescues her from drowning and so is Bhagirathi who is just on the verge of eloping with Chandrayya, had Hiranya not come on time.

In the episode of Seetharama and Nagaveni, Seethrama’s interpretation of ‘honeymoon’ as sexual assault and Nagaveni’s total ignorance of sex and lack of education and shy nature are highlighted which is rather a reflection of the ignorance that pervades the society of the time.

What is rather puzzling is that both Sunalini and Bhagirathi, in spite of their aggressive and boisterous nature, succumb to superstitious belief of visiting Sarasamma’s Samadhi. Here their education and their worldly knowledge are masked and they are also like any other person who visits the shrine to try their luck. Their visit to the shrine could be accounted by the fact that sometimes education has very little to do with certain issues in life. Desperate situations in life drive a man to the most unwanted and even unreliable situations in life. When everything else in life
fails humans cling to something and someone for moral support and this is what even they do.

To sum up, the aspects of modernity dealt with here is two dimensional. The male dominant society with gradual changes not to the extent of respecting woman, but at least acknowledge that woman also has a mind and presence. Hiranya who reunites with his wife Bhagirathi shunning all differences and egoism is an example of gradual change for the better among men.

The second aspect of modernity noticed here is the acknowledgement of woman of their own positions in the family and in the society. Women like Bhagirathi and Sunalini assert themselves, voice their discontent, develop a non caring attitude towards their husband’s family and also towards the society. They are ready to forego their unhappy family ties for the sake of their individual freedom and happiness. Unlike Janaki who is not ready to swerve her family ties at any cost for the well being of her children, Bhagirathi and Sunalini stick to their individual decisions.

The next aspect of modernity noticed is the fact that the characters are honest enough at least in confessing openly in front of the shrine their temptations, their desires and their passions.

The other aspect of change noticed is the counter opinion that all marriages performed with prior horoscope matching do not necessarily mean happiness and harmony.

This chapter analyses the various concepts of love in particular and life in general in the factor of Modernity. Karanth, in his usual style, highlights on the one hand the meek submissive woman characters like Nagaveni and Janaki and daring characters like Sunalini, Bhagirathi and others who are you liberty as utmost and intimate. The basic philosophy underlying all the writing of Karanth is that life is ‘to
live and let live' and there lies the creative power of life. In his autobiography, published in 1977, he makes this very clear that "his writings are mainly aimed at giving insights and perceptive ideas regarding life, literature, art and his ideology". (1977 p31)\textsuperscript{32}.

After a study of the fiction of Achebe and Karanth undertaken under various heads and diverse parameters, the researcher draws certain conclusions which are discussed in the next chapter.
END NOTES


5. Ibid., p2.

6. Ibid., p3.


8. Ibid., p9.


10. Ibid., p27.

11. Ibid., p27.

12. Ibid., p27.


15. Ibid., p80.


17. V.M.Inamdar, *Shivarama Karanth: Kannada Writers and their Works* (Mysore: University of Mysore, 1983) 79


19. Ibid., p190.

20. Ibid., p190.

22. Ibid., p39.


24. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ozymandias


27. Ibid. p11.

28. Ibid. p41.

29. Ibid. p18.

30. Ibid. p55.
