CHAPTER 4

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CHAPTER 4

NAIVE POLITICS IN KARANTH’S DEPICTION OF DALITS

What do I care about Jupiter? Justice is a human issue, and I do not need a god to teach it to me.

~ Jean-Paul Sartre

Before proceeding with exploring the politics in Karanth’s depiction of Dalits and establishing its linkages with the theoretical framework that has culminated in the formation of modern cultural revivalism in India, it is essential that we discuss the socio-political context of the genesis and growth of the genre of novel in India in general and Karnataka in particular in order to understand Shivaram Karnath and U R Ananthmurthy’s works in broader context.

Evolution of Novel in India and Karnataka

It can be observed that in India ‘respectable’ literature very often was under the control of the Brahmins and mostly written or inspired by Sanskrit. It was made possible because of their control over the educational system and proximity to the ruling elite. The aim of art or literature in Indian society was traditionally dominated by the goal of creating in the audience or readers absorption of rasa. Rasa, literally, means ‘taste’, or ‘essence’, or ‘flavour’. Kakar (2009, 30-1) opines that it is the aesthetic counterpart of moksha. He goes on to say that rasa is the aesthetic mode of transcendence – of quieting the turmoil of chitta and bringing it nearer to its perfect state of pure calm. Thus, literature in India was rarely expected to play a role in the socio-political uplift of the masses.
The beginnings of the novel in India lie in the colonial encounter between the ruling culture and the indigenous cultures. It becomes important, therefore, to examine the novel against the backdrop of nationalism that we have elaborated in the previous Chapters. If we take nationalism to be a discourse which constructs its own narrative, we can see how the novel is an inextricable part of this process. Thus, in this process of narration we can recognize a tendency towards constructing a homogeneous and monolithic ‘Indianness’ as against the diversity of existing cultural practices. This vision of Indian culture and identity, as we have discussed earlier, was the Vedantic vision, which was only one of India’s many traditions, and which stood for the learned pandits’ intellectual discipline. Thus, the brahmans’ hold over the intellectual realm continued in a new guise (Padikkal: 1993, 222-23).

Also, just because the genre of novel is borrowed from the West we cannot conclude that its practice was replicated here without any variations. As every language has its own specific narrative culture when a writer tries to borrow a new form, by virtue of the fact that he is borrowing it into a language and its culture of narrativity, the form undergoes many subtle changes. Padikkal (1993, 222) opines that even when a nineteenth-century Indian writer consciously attempted to produce a novel, the work was marked by pre-novelistic forms of story-telling. One could say that these writers strove after new ‘content’ rather than concentrate on formal aspects, and therefore the Indian novel, in spite of being influenced by Western authors, appears to be structurally dissimilar from their works.

In the nineteenth century fictional texts that are available to us, we find that the reality of the Indian social situation was often moulded and manipulated to meet the exigencies of this new western literary mode. Meenakshi Mukherjee (1985, 99-100) argues that the realistic novel was able to come into existence because the tension between individual and society had acquired certain intensity. She believes that it is because of this tension that the narrative fiction was able to give up some of the qualities associated with the epic or
the romance. She further argues that if the tension had become so acute as to threaten social disruption, creative expression may have turned inward, towards solipsism and away from realism, and may be poetry would have been a more suitable genre in such a situation. Therefore, in the opinion of Mukherjee, if the social transformation of the nineteenth century had not set in motion certain dialectical forces among the English-educated class, the novel in its realistic form might not have taken root in India.

When the novel was emerging as a distinct genre in India, social realism had for some time been the dominant mode in the European novel, and the early Indian novelists joined in ‘that effort, that willed tendency of art to approximate reality.’ (Levin: 1963, 3). This effort consisted, among other things, in the creation of characters in situations permitted individual choice as well as their mimetic representation in a manner which did not distort contemporary Indian reality. (Mukherjee: 1985, 98).

Novels began to be written in India during and after the crucial decade of the 1850s, marked on the one hand by the establishment of the three universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras by Acts II, XXII, and XXVIII of 1857, and on the other by the historic revolt in the same year, in the wake of which the rule of the East India Company ended to herald the declaration of India as a British colony. Although only three years earlier Wood’s Educational Despatch of 1854 had reiterated Macaulay’s agenda by stating that the objective of higher education in India was ‘the diffusion of the improved arts, sciences, philosophy and literatures of Europe’ (Indian Journal of History of Science, July and October 1988) there are indications that after the 1857 Revolt there was some rethinking among the British about the civilizing mission of education in India. Unease about the education policy was couched in economic calculations of investment and return but there was an undercurrent of worry about its long-term political outcome. However, the process once set in motion could not be rolled back (Pandey: 2005).
In the early part of the nineteenth century, most Indian languages produced various kinds of prose writings claiming to be 'novels,' although it took about two decades for the form to consolidate itself. Padikkal (1993, 221) states that the three historical moments of the nineteenth century Indian novel are those of 'marvellous' stories, historical romances, and realist social novels.

In 1858, Peary Chand Mitra published, under the pseudonym of Tekchand Thakur, the first Bengali novel, *Alaler Gharer Dulal*. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Durgeshandini* came out in 1865, and his *Kapalakundala* in 1866. In Marathi, Baba Padmanji published *Ranuma Paryatan* in 1857; in Assamese, Padmanabha Barua's *Bhanumati* came out in 1890; in Tamil, *Kamalampal Charittiram* (1893), *Indulekha* (1889) in Malayalam, and *Indirabai* (1899) in Kannada were published. During the same period, novels were written in Gujarati, Hindi, Telugu, Urdu and Kashmiri as well. Thus, the emergence of the novel in the nineteenth century was a pan-Indian phenomenon.

However, these early novelists had two tasks as writers due to their commitment to nationalism. On the one hand, in order to strengthen the political aspirations of the colonized, they had to battle against all institutional divisions which might show up the nation as fragmented; and on the other, they had the task of demonstrating the cultural uniqueness and essential difference of India from the West (Chakravarti: 1999, 28). Thus, the early Indian novelist becomes the advocate of a return to the glorious past. However, the 'return' more often than not is a rewriting. The early novels show very clearly these conflicting impulses (Padikkal: 1993, 224-25).

Historically speaking, the various local dialects began to produce literature in their own (Pramanic: 1990, 27). Because of its caste system and other hierarchies, India had always had many languages. The growth of these languages only enriched Indian culture and they did not pose any major challenge to the concept of Aryan culture as most of
their contents were based on Sanskritic and ‘great traditional’ elements (Sarkar: 1928, 84). But as these languages grew, they began to flourish in emotional and intellectual fields thus representing to their speakers the working content of their culture. Cultural reforms thus, have taken the shape of resurgence of regional elite cultural renaissance rather than the strengthening of people’s culture. (Pramanic: 1990, 28)

With the creation of the modern educated class, the dialect spoken by it in a particular region became the ‘standard’ form. Being economically and socially powerful, this class achieved a certain convergence of dialects through the print medium, shaped a ‘new’ language, which now acquired the status of the vernacular, to articulate its political ambitions (Dash: 2009, 29). That is why we find in the age of nationalism, which coincides with the introduction of print, the drive to produce grammars of the vernacular, the search for a literary tradition, and the writing of modern literature. Indicators of the formation of new language identities include the publication of journals, the popularization of print and mass media, writing which employs ‘modern’ literary forms, and the invention of literary canons (Padikkal: 1993, 225-26).

What we see in the early Indian novel is the dramatization of a certain kind of resistance against colonialism, of how the Western-educated class sought to achieve ‘progress’ according to modern, universal norms, attempting therefore a cultural reequipping and re-creation. Unlike the Western novel, which had for its dominant theme the rupture between individual and society, the Indian novel — authored by the newly educated class — dwelt on the recasting of social identity in the confrontation with a colonizing power (Ramakrishnan: 2005, 11).

The hopes, aspirations and political ambitions of the brahman middle class are among the forces that shape the earliest Indian novels. We find in them, therefore, the attempt to imagine an Indian nation, to argue that it is culturally powerful, to search for a common Indian tradition that is essentially different from that of the West, and make this manifest in language (Padikkal, 1993, 226-27).
The early Indian novel had the definite purpose of inculcating a morality. It often speaks of how children should behave, how they should obey their elders, what kind of education they should acquire, and other matters. The authors of these works indicate their intention in the prefaces. The introduction to a Bengali novel includes the following:

It chiefly treats of the pernicious effects of allowing children to be improperly brought up, with remarks on the existing system of education, on the self-formations and religious culture and is illustrative of the conditions of Hindu society, manners, customs, etc, and partly of the state of things in the Mofussil (Thakur: 1991,197).

From about 1870 to 1930 or so, historical romances as well as ‘social’ novels were published. Their most pressing concern seems to be ‘progress’: how do we accomplish progress as a nation? How do we survive and learn to live in changing historical circumstances? What are the reasons why Indians and their culture were subjugated? The earliest novels emphasize these questions and construct their narratives around them. Influenced by the paradigm of the Western Enlightenment, these writers see the questions as cultural ones; and the solutions they attempt to devise draw on the criterion of progress as manifested by the ‘civilized’ society of Europe. The stupendous progress made by the empire on which the sun never set, its humbling of even such a great civilization as India, suggested that unless Indians gained the cultural strength of the British they would not be able to liberate themselves. (Padikkal, 1993, 228-29)

Some early novels advocate social reform on the model of Western rationality; some speak of the great past of India and argue for its revival; others accept the historical fact of colonialism and seem to adopt a status quo view out of helplessness. Padikkal (1993, 229) classifies these three kinds of novels as:

(i) those which speak of an ideal yet to be realized;

(ii) those which want to revive an ideal; and

(iii) those which speak nostalgically of an ideal that is being destroyed.
He further opines that in Kannada, the above three types of novels were published in three different regions - the first in Dakshina Kannada (the southern coastal area), the second in Bombay Karnataka (the area which belonged to the Bombay Presidency), the third in Mysore (a princely state, not under direct British rule). However, none of them out rightly attack the caste system. This seems to uphold Ambedkar’s argument that the changes brought about by the British hardly had any effect on the native social structure in spite of the ‘modern’ conditions created by the colonial state where ‘men of all castes and races work side by side in the mill without any misgiving regarding the caste of their neighbours’ (Ambedkar: 1932, 493). Ambedkar’s observation had reference to the popular perception that this co-mingling of caste under modern conditions was evidence of the disappearance of the caste system. But Ambedkar argued that the everyday life in the colonial society had made it impossible for the upper castes to follow the same rules they had followed a hundred years ago. The educated upper castes who were aspiring for ranks in the colonial society had effectively adjusted to the demands of modernity. They had come to deny caste in public spaces while practising it privately. This, according to Ambedkar, was a ‘modern’ phenomenon of caste peculiar to society under the colonial rule (Dash: 2009, 97). The early Indian novelists were no exception to this.

Rajalakshmi (2004, 39-40) opines that this could take place because the modern state was not established against but within the traditional nation. It is because of this tendency that the contradictions and conflicts that enter traditional society with the advent of modernity are projected in the novels of this period. However, the concept of the nation and the homogenising tendency latent in it are not portrayed as a problem.

In the opinion of Meenakshi Mukherjee (2000, 18) the early novelists in the ‘vernacular’ and the novelists in English belonged to roughly the same social segment across the country - upper-caste urban Hindu male (women like Swarnakumari Debi or Krupa
Satthianadhan were rare exceptions) and must have read the same English books - both canonical and popular. Yet, the language in which they wrote seemed to automatically determine the way this reading would be processed for creative purposes. The Indian languages, opines Mukherjee (2000, 22) capitalized on the emotional resonance of this unspoken assumption by invoking regional nationalism through the merger of gender and language.

Chenni (2005, 104-5) argues that the major Kannada novelists of the period chose a narrative model which was a rejection of the discourses of nation, aggressive communal identity and masculinist heroism in favour of the model of little narratives of the community rooted in the specific details of a region. The purpose of this could be to document in rich detail the subtle transformations which the colonial encounter with modernity was bringing in the rural regional communities. Chenni, however, rightly recognizes that 'the sensibility which was at work in this type of fiction was shaped by the Gandhian sociological imagination – in-ward looking, painfully aware of the persistent inequalities in society and responding to them with a sharpened moral conscience and compassion' (Ibid, 105).

G. Rajshekar (2010, 4) is of the opinion that the literature and the politics of the upper-caste writers would have some necessary relation. For example, for Karanth and Adiga people did not mean the community. They perceived the people, composed of various caste groups, as a mob and were afraid of the forces such as Shudra assertion in the public arena. They thought of them as those only with muscle power who will arrive as road rollers and bring in ‘road roller equality’. In this respect they were not liberal democrats. This makes Rajshekar to think that the political inclinations of a writer directly correspond with literary work. And he cites many examples from Kannada literary world to prove this point.
'South Canara' in the Last Century

In order to understand the novels of Shivaram Karanth and U R Ananthamurthy it is essential for us to understand the colonial condition of coastal Karnataka, especially the formerly undivided Dakshina Kannada district. After the death of Tipu Sultan in 1799, Dakshina Kannada came under direct rule of the British. From 1834 on, the pietist-fundamentalist Basel Mission had been working in this region, and by 1914 had deployed over a hundred missionaries, more than half of whom were active in the area of language and literature. The Mission, which had its central office in Mangalore, was not only involved in script-reform, editing and collating texts and printing, but also ran a tile factory and a textile mill. In the entire district, the Basel Mission was the prime educational institution.

Since most of the people there were cultivators, the Saraswat brahmans who had already gained a high social status because of their literacy and commercial activity, were able to make full use of the Mission schools, and became the first to be exposed to English education. The Saraswat brahmans have been eulogized in the British records as an active, progressive class. Just as English education led to the 'progress' of this small community, it led also to many new problems. Influenced by the Basel Mission and by college education, Saraswat brahmans began to engage in social reform, and began to reject traditional brahman practices. Alarmed by this, their religious leader Pandurangashrama Swami stringently imposed on them the practices they were trying to oppose. In the conflict that ensued between the Swami, who saw reformism as destructive, and the educated Saraswats, who thought religious taboos meaningless in the modern world, a variety of issues were debated, including widow remarriage, child marriage, and travel across the seas. In reality, even the practices advocated by the Swami were different from those traditionally in use, since neither reformists nor their opponents could ignore the changing circumstances of their existence (Conlon: 1977, 167).
Keshava Sharma (2005, 9) opines that apart from the influence of the missionaries, the business enterprises that were started in and around Malpe and Pannamboor ports, influence of new educational policy, the pattern of small land holdings and their relationship with the landless labourers, migratory relationships with the coffee estates in the Ghat section and bigger cities like Madaras and Bombay formed the socio-economic background for the novels of Karanth and Ananthamurthy.

The novelists of that time used to decide in advance which values should win out in the end, and pay attention mainly to how they should be depicted in their narrative. As the preface to Indirabai says: 'Readers may ask what the intention of this book is. Truthfulness and purity of heart have been sarthakagalu [ends in them selves] both in this world and in the next. This book's aim is to make this notion evident (Venkatrao).’ The novel has another name: Saddharmavijaya (Triumph of True Faith). Gulvady criticizes harshly a society that, unaware of the essence of a religion, merely practises its external rituals. What is being practised is not the true faith. Fossilized religious rituals and religious evils must be uprooted-this process will be made possible only through modern education. When Bhaskarao (son of Sundarrao, who was killed by Indira's father) returns from abroad and marries Indirabai, everyone accepts defeat. Indira escapes from the cruelty of a traditional society through her education (Padikkal: 1993, 231).

Padikkal after exhaustively exploring the context of the origin growth of Indian novel concludes that –

...the novel in India begins as the story of the English-educated class's striving for social identity, for a new nation, for a new sense of community. Whereas the radical rupture between 'individual' and 'society' is the central concern of the Western novel, in India the novel voices the conflicts, hopes and ambitions of the middle class. The genre took shape in the context of the Western epistemology
propagated by colonial rule, an epistemology used by Indians to 'know' India as a nation, to critically examine it, and to envision futures for it. Our understanding of the early novel must also encompass the fact that it provided literary expression for political aspirations that were not yet feasible in the political realm. It is in this context that I would like to call the early Indian novel the epic of the colonized. It was, however, the response to colonialism of the educated middle class. The problems of other classes, their perspectives on their society, and their multiple traditions have all become silent in history (1993, 237-38).

Shivaram Karanth - the Man and His Life

Dr Kota Shivaram Karanth, the renowned Kannada novelist and Jnanpith award-winner, was born on the 10th of October, 1902, in the village of Kota in Dakshina Kannada district. A literary genius and liberal humanist, Dr Karanth was a colossus in the country's literary firmament. His early life is described in his autobiography, Ten Faces of a Crazy Mind, translated into English by H.Y. Sharada Prasad (1993). In his own words, as a boy his 'attitude to studies was one of disinterest'. He dropped out of college without taking a degree. However, he was lucky in his teachers. A middle-school teacher taught him to do interesting things with his hands; to garden and to weave mats, for example. In high school, one teacher inculcated an appreciation of Yakshagana; another opened up the library of Kannada literature to him.

In the first two decades of the 20th century, during which period Karanth's intellectual-literary ideas and ideals were formed, colonialism in India was at its peak in terms of power and influence. The Indian response to colonialism, as could be expected, was complex and contradictory. On the one hand, the Indian society had accepted the colonial discourse equating progress with English education and modernity. On the her hand, it had developed
a strong sense of nationalism, fiercely asserting native traditions and glorifying the country’s rich past. As a corollary to such pan-Indian currents of nationalism, the Reform Movements like Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj had swept through the country leading to tumultuous changes in all the spheres of Indian life in a breathtaking pace. The Novel in Kannada (and other regional languages) came into being in such a context. (Ramachandran: 2001, 24)

As he grew up, Karanth some sort of contempt for the ‘vanity’, the ‘tyranny’, and the ‘narrowness’ of his Brahmin upbringing. He was disenchanted by his visits to Kashi and Prayag, places he found crowded, dirty, and full of grasping priests and pandas. While turned off by faith and studies, Karanth was enchanted by the arts. He was gripped by the travelling theatre companies that came to his neck of rural Karnataka.

Those were the days when the whole nation was undergoing dramatic changes under the leadership of Gandhi and Tilak. Gandhi’s Non-cooperation Movement was sweeping across India, and every young man and woman was fired with the spirit of nationalism and revolt. Karanth recalls the visit to Mangalore, in September 1921, of Gandhi and the Ali brothers as part of the Khilafat Movement, and the way he was moved by Gandhi’s speech. The death of Tilak also caused tremendous anguish among the students. Gradually Karanth began to realize that he could no longer continue his studies passively. (Ramachandran: 2001, 7)

Karanth was a multi-faceted personality. Besides creating writing in almost all literary forms, he tried his hand in theatre, folk-arts, photography, film production; he ran a school, he was a social reformer, he ran a press and published many of his earlier works himself. He both revived and redefined Yakshagana, the dance-form of the West Coast.

The output of his writing is amazing. Forty four novels, sixteen plays, seven musical plays, twenty five children’s books, collection of short stories, twelve science books, nine
art books, five biographies and five volumes of autobiography, four volumes of science encyclopaedia, three volumes of children’s encyclopaedia, and a dictionary. He single-handedly managed the compilation, editing, and writing of these works. Besides, there are more than a thousand essays, pen-portraits, reviews, tributes, letters, and literary notes.

In the field of fiction, Karanth was prodigiously active, in part because he did not bother unduly about theory or technique. However, most of his novels vary in theme, technique and their presentation. *Marali Mannige* (Return to the soil) deals with the theme of three generations of a family in the coastal village, who face hardships of life with courage and adjust to changing times. *Bettada Jeeva* (Man of the hills) depicts the extraordinary life of a brahmin farmer who accepts challenges of nature and wild beasts, pestering Malaria, along with differences in the family with equanimity. *Maimanagala Sulliyalli* (Whirl of the body and mind) brings out attempts of a talented woman with a creative mind, to attain fulfillment of physical and intellectual cravings, and her partial success. *Alida Mele* (Life after Death) is the unraveling character of a dead person who leaves behind a vague letter with some clues to his friend, the author. The saga of search for the persons mentioned in the letter, provides several insights in human mind and behaviour. *Mookajjiya Kanasugalu* (Mookajji’s dreams) which brought Karanth the Jnanapeeth award in 1977 deals with the visions of an eighty year old who has undergone widowhood for seventy years and innumerable sufferings but has not lost faith in life. The whole novel runs in the form of dialogues between Mookajji and her grand-nephew interspersed with her musings. *Mookajji* attempts to represent Indian ethos.

Karanth actively participated in the 1977 election campaign and bitterly criticised Indira Gandhi’s Congress government. He had earlier registered his protest against the Emergency by returning the prestigious Padma Bhushan. In 1991, he unsuccessfully contested an election against actor Anant Nag from the Kanara constituency.

Karanth opposed starting of big industries in both Dakshina Kannada and Uttara
Kannada districts against the local people's wishes. He filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court against the Kaiga nuclear power plant and launched a movement against the project for some time.

Ramachandran (2001, 34) opines that Karanth was a superb socio-cultural historian, and no other novelist in Kannada (with the exception, perhaps, of Dr. K.V. Puttapa, the first Jnanapeeth Awardee in Kannada), has registered the sweeping and breathtaking changes that swept through the Indian Society, beginning with the colonial rule in the 18th century and gathering momentum with the introduction of Western institutions in India, in the 19th century.

D R Nagaraj (2003, 40) opines that in the world of Kannada novel a completely new and powerful era was introduced Karanth. On this background itself even the Gandhian politics had begun with this. It is important that it had begun growing spreading widely. Karanth had built a realistic genre with his distinct personality.

He (Nagaraj: 2003, 41-2) further argues that the Indian socio-political life experiences from 1922 to 1947 has completely moulded and controlled Karanth's sensibilities. In the modern Indian history it is the most important era. It is an era in which India lived very intensely. It is an era in which all the forces of socio-political life and developments was embodied and manifested. The mirror of this era was Karanth.

According to T. P. Ashoka (1992, 4), Karanth observes all the contradictions of our socio-cultural framework. Therefore, it is possible for him to maintain a love and hate relationship. There is no another Kannada writer who has seen the life of the land with love and curiosity as much as Karanth. Thus, the complete writings of Karanth are a critique of our cultural and social life.

As a novelist, Karanth inherited the Reformist Novel or the Novel of Purpose, and he wrote, in the beginning, similar Reformist novels that dwelt on the evils of orthodox
Hindu society. But, very soon, he got tired of such novels of purpose. He explains this shift in his stance to a question of Ananthamurthy in these words:

In the beginning, my attitude was that of a social reformer. ... My aim, then, was destruction - a sort of 'not this, not this, not this.' ... But later I began to look for another more standing value - a value that can make life more interesting and beautiful. If everything is destructible, why should we live? There must be something - some faith, some joy - which makes one persist with life. I want to explore that. (Lekhanagalu, 4: 399) (quoted in Ramachandran: 2001, 116-7)

Siddalingaiah (2002, 50) opines that the socio-cultural transformation of that period and the spirit of Indian Renaissance deeply influenced Karanth; while Narayan (2002, 62) believes that Karanth has a very high place not only in Karnataka but in the whole of India. He further asserts that although Karanth was not a man of faith, the overriding principle throughout his life was to pay back the society what he had received from it, and thus clear his indebtedness to the society.

Gopalakrishna Adiga and U.R. Ananthamurthy have pointed out that the strengths of Karanth's fiction are also its limitations. 'What strikes us most', writes Adiga, 'is his sincerity and earnestness.' The characters, dialogues, situation and story are 'so authentic that [they] become a part of our own living experience.' However, there is in Karanth's writings throughout a lack of imagery. Only when a novelist's intellect, feelings, contemplation, values, dreams, memories at the conscious and unconscious levels - only when all these ingredients are cooked to a delicacy, does it create a new experience for the reader.' Likewise, Ananthamurthy comments that in becoming his people's 'most authentic writer', Karanth had to rigorously exclude the aesthetic and poetic dimensions from his fiction. Since humans for him are the product of specific social relationships, he cannot write about the intensity
of mystical experience or the agonies of the alienated individual. His novels are rich, readable, authentic; yet they ‘do not contain invisible eddies that catch the reader and draw him into subliminal depths.’ Guha, Ramachandra. The Kannada Tagore; Shivarama Karanth (http://www.arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/karanth.doc)

Sharma (2005, 36) opines that there are two models of nationalism observable in the novels of Karanth: i) the overt nationalism inspired by Gandhian idealism; and ii) the covert nationalism which was that was indirectly inspired by the national movements of the time.

As Dr Giraddi Govindraj points out Chomana Dudi, Kudiyara Koosu, Kanyaabali, Sarasammana Samaadi, Bettada Jiva, Marali Mannige, are Karanth’s unique works of the early phase. In these novels Karanth looks at life as an outsider. That does not mean that they do not depict the inner pain and pleasures of personal life, but, they appear to our sight as though they are exterior activities” (1998, 177-78). It was because of these novels that we perceive Shivaram Karanth to be playing a real role as a cultural revivalist though the trend continues even in later part of his writings. But he is very vocal at this stage compared to the latter.

G. Rajshekar (2010, 4) observes that it is difficult to think that Karanth’s works were above his political inclinations. Karanth along with Adiga, he recalls, had continued association with BJP even after the destruction of Babri Masjid and Bombay riots and the last public event attend by him was an RSS meeting. Rajshekar further states that although Karanth was a frequent visitor to Bombay the barbarity of the Bombay riots of 1992-93 did not disturb him. This makes him suspect the liberal humanist credentials of Karanth, and the biases in his thinking would have been also present, in some form or the other, in Karnath’s creative works.
Karanth’s Portrayal of Dalits

Chenni (2002, 74-6) opines that Karanth who searches for Choma’s hut, or the colonies of Kudiyas, represents the Gandhian, sociological imagination. According to Ramachandran (2001, 29), Karanth who in his initial novels had presented crude and simplistic view of life very soon came out of it. In his own words,

‘Later on, I began to realise that the people of my early plays and stories/novels were not to be found in real life, and that people in real life were neither black nor white but of mixed shades......Before we either condemn or admire others, what is expected of us if we desire to know what Life is, is first to understand such people. Be in an injustice or evil social practice or person, we should make an honest attempt to seek answers to such questions: ‘why did it happen?’ and ‘why did he act and behave in such and such a way? What would I have done if I were to be in his position?’ (Karanth: 1978a, 21-2)

However, the question to be asked here is, ‘did Karanth who was deeply influenced by the world-view of the modern cultural revivalists regarding Indian nation and culture, manage to come out of it, at least in his creative writings?’, and ‘was he able to come out of the partial and ascribed view of the Dalit identity in his novels?’ The next section attempts to answer these questions by examining mainly two of Kamath’s selected novels: Chomana Dudi: 1933 (Choma’s Drum) and Marali Mannige: 1940 (Back to the Soil/Return to Earth).

Chomana Dudi (Choma’s Drum) and the Dalit Identity

Chomana Dudi (‘Choma’s Drum’) was the first novel of Karanth where he attempted to examine a problem from as many different points of view as possible. It was published in 1933, and, as he himself recalls, this was the novel that earned him recognition throughout Karnataka. In the opinion of Ramachandran (2001, 29-30), through this work Karanth
widened the scope of the reformist novel and added new dimensions to it.

*Chomana Dudi*, a stark story of a landless labourer, was an effort that went beyond existing features of social-realism in Kannada literature (Ramachandran: 2001, 30). At the centre of the novel lies the problem of ‘untouchability’. Choma, the protagonist of the novel, belongs to a ‘low’ caste called ‘Mera’, the members of which were forbidden by tradition (till India became a republic) even to own a small piece of land. They were condemned to labour for their masters and eke out a hand-to-mouth existence. There was also the problem of migration to the Ghats because of the debts they would have incurred to meet the expenses of marriages and festivals or illness. There they would work for a few months in coffee estates under very exploitative working conditions. Due to the hostile weather conditions in the Ghats most of them would fall ill or die, and hence, the burden of debt would be passed on from father to son. Thus, these Dalits would be born and dead in debt and penury. It is because of such a portrayal of Dalits that G. Rajshekar (2010, 4) says that the non-Brahmin characters in Karanth’s *Marali Mannige* are merely caricatures.

The events in the novel can be experienced through only one particular character: Choma. All the events are focused on him. The narrator describes the life of Choma in great detail as he is the central figure through whom events in Chomana Dudi get organized. He is the character on whom the events make final impact. His thwarted desire to be a farmer, two of his sons going to coffee estate to payoff their father’s debt and their not being able to accomplish the vision, one of his sons converting into Christianity and the death of another one and finally his dear daughter being lured into prostitution and all other minor events get intimately connected to him. It is through him that we experience the novel.

Ravindran (2002) opines that Choma is ‘an isolated figure going on suffering, something like a character in Thomas Hardy’ (42). He further argues that Thomas Hardy’s novels are about man’s cruelty to man, man’s cruelty to women, man’s cruelty to animals and
birds; most of them do not rebel although they have a tendency. However, we find that it is a non-historic observation. It is a far fetched idea because Karanth’s model of emancipation is Gandhi’s Harijan movement. In Gandhian Harijan movement model there is no space for rebellion.

Choma is presented as a person who cannot decide for himself and is quite incapable of timely protest. It is not that Choma does not rebel. Choma’s rebellion is not violent. In fact, what we see in him is his desire, plan to go to the priest with a plan of conversion. Of course he comes back, beating retreat, and then very reluctantly allows his children to go up the ghats and then work. It is a subdued kind of rebellion. It is also not appropriate to read the final acts of Choma and the statement of the narrator as a tendency to rebel. Beating of the drum with such a great vigour epitomizes the pain and the agony of an individual who has to take recourse in his usual fate without having an alternative. Thus, Karanth as an artist shows incapacity to move out from a socio-historic-political sphere that he comes from, in his characterization of Choma.

The major theme of the novel is denial of the right to own land by the laboring castes, branded as ‘low castes as well as out-castes’. Choma has a pair of oxen which he found abandoned as calves in a forest. He raises them, and his sole ambition in life is to own a piece of land and cultivate it using his oxen. Hence, he does not want to sell them at any cost. But caste-prejudices overriding, his dream of owning a piece of land remains a dream. Completely broken, Choma gets himself drunk, shuts himself up in his hut, and wildly goes on playing on his dudi (a small, traditional drum) till dawn. At dawn, the narrator explains that ‘the drum, the hand raised to play on it, the suppressed suffering are all there. But Choma is no more.’

T. P. Ashoka (1992, 85) observes that the desire of Choma to own a piece of land is far ahead of his time and space. Ramachandran (2001, 31) opines that the mature
understanding of the problem of the depravity of land for the Dalits on the part of Karanth is noteworthy. He further observes that as opposed to Mulk Raj Anand, whose Untouchable also was published around the same time, views and condemns the caste-system on moral and ethical grounds. But, Karanth views the problem of the Dalits as basically an economic problem, one of ownership. This, Ramachandran observes, is the reason why the novel offers no easy solutions to this problem. However, we find no sufficient reason in the novel to help us come to this conclusion.

The first description of Choma’s landlessness and his desire to possess one is narrated in chapter two in these words:

He was proud that unlike others in his community he was not debt-ridden’ (18). Along with this pride, he nurtured a secret ambition to become a farmer. He knew that farming was an a vocation alien to his community and that he would be hard put to it to ask Sankappayya to lease him a piece of land to cultivate. (18) Nevertheless, he clung to the hope that he would some day wield the plough in his own or a rented field and cut a proud figure. Dreaming of that great day and to prepare himself for it he had been rearing two oxen. Three years old, they were in his view ready to be harnessed to the plough. (Ibid.).

The narrator further states that -

One day, sitting in his hut, Choma reflected that the oxen had grown up and he should not keep them idle any longer. He resolved to see the landlord and venture the suggestion that he be allotted at least a small field bearing an annual rent of one mound of rice. For the first time he bared his heart to his children, of whom only Belli had any pluck to oppose him. She at once came out tartly: ‘Now, don’t you make any such demand and be snubbed!’ (18)
If we look at the reaction of Choma, the father of Belli the protagonist of the novel and the narrator who guides the character to the snubbing of the desire of Choma by Belli it becomes clear the issue of the land is not the central concern of the tragedy that besets Choma and his family. ‘Choma was very angry, but, after he had pondered a little, his anger died down and he suddenly dissolved in tears’. (18) From this description what could be inferred is, it does not become sure whether it is Choma who ponders or the narrator wants him to ponder so. Since, the issue pertains to the chaturvarna system by which the upper caste legitimatization gets justified.

Rai (2002, 85-6) recalls that it is sometimes said that Karanth was an anti-communist and pro-feudalism. It is because of this reason that Karanth did not portray Sankappayya and his mother as villains in *Chomana Dudi*. Rai further agrees that Karanth opposed Land Reforms when Devaraj Urs introduced them in 1972. He openly declared his opposition to this in one of his forewords for his novels. He declared that it was treachery to rob Peter to pay Paul. But this, in the opinion of Rai, doesn’t make Karanth a reactionary or anti-reformist. His novels are not constructed on the foundation of a political or economic agenda. When he reacted to contemporary events he did not bother about what people might feel about it. This, he argues, is because many times the novels of the formative phase of Karanth were the product of experiences, of direct field exploration rather than the vicarious experiences gained through books. However, we find that this view is not supported by the novel.

Exploitation due to traditional bondage which keeps Choma tied to Sankappayya is not presented as much repulsive as the calculated and merciless exploitation which puts Choma in the trap of the Coffee Estate manager and his agent. Could this be, because of the greater influence of the colonialism in the Coffee Estates on the Ghats with greater Christian influence than the traditional, feudal Hindu society represented by Sankappayya?
Caste which is the centre of experience makes the writers like a broken metaphor. Writers like Bendre, Maasti, Karanth were cheated by Vedic caste system. The irony is the centre of their experience itself has narrowed them. (Mogalli, 2008, 27)

Rao (2002, 92-3) argues that -

Shivaram Karanth wrote *Chomana Dudi* at a time when the country had not yet come out of the Gandhian mood. Gandhian mood, according to him, is very accommodative; it acquiesces in some of those oppressions, although it is in a way opposed to them. However, what is very striking in that particular novel is that Dr Karanth seems to look at the system as the villain and not the individual. For example, the employer of Choma is never portrayed as an oppressor. He is never portrayed as a villain. In fact, he sympathizes with Choma but he has certain constraints. For example, he has a muttering mother who prevents him from doing a good turn to Choma. This, in the opinion of Rao, means that Karanth looks at the entire system as the villain. In a way, it is trying to suggest that Choma and what happened to him and his children is a kind of oppression that was meted out to him not by individuals but by the system. In a way, it is diverting your attention away from the culpability of individuals.

The depiction of the upper caste landlord Sankappayya should be contrasted with Manuel, the Christian supervisor of the coffee plantation. When Chaniya was ill

She heard someone call her father from outside, and, going out, saw the landlord standing in front of the hut. She told him everything including Choma's departure for Kokkada and Chaniya's illness. Sankappayya offered his sympathies and went away. What more could he do? (72)
How caring and concerned is the landlord, therefore, there is no need to change the situation for the Dalits. The Brahmin landlords are very caring when their labourers fall sick they pay a visit, they express their genuine sympathies. No body expects anything more from him!

Long before the sunrise, Manuel was calling out Choma. Choma went out and the sight of Manuel only tore open a healing wound, reviving in him the painful memories of the plantation, of Chaniya’s death, and of Guruva’s desertion which was to him no different from death. He believed that it was Manuel who had ruined his life, and he went in without speaking to him. (82)

The night of Chaniya’s death Choma was drunk and was beating the drum on the very spot where his son had breathed his last. The narration brings forth two aspects, one is the sensitivity of Sankappayya which could be observed by his comments. The other is the Gandhian notion of drunkenness.

Choma was sitting on the very spot where his son had breathed his last. He was mumbling a song. How remorseless was the sound Dama dhamma dakadhakka! From his voice she guessed he had drunk too much. The sound woke up Sankappayya in his house. “Abba! What a devil is this man! No day, no hour is too bad to beat the drum. His son died only this morning. Has probably filled himself with liquor up to his nostrils!” He was right. Choma was drunk as never before. What else but toddy could drown his anguish? (74)

Rao (2002, 93) observes that -

....in Chomana Dudi Choma’s getting a piece of land or not getting, it is depicted as if it entirely depends on the landlord’s mother’s few words. The onus of responsibility of Choma’s tragedy perhaps rests on this character. It seems to be
very unique to me because usually Karanth's women characters are very strong. They don’t oppose life, they don’t oppose progress.

Why then does the narrator bring in an elderly woman to block a possibility of some sort of change and accommodation in favor of the Dalits?

In the novel the Dalit deity, Panjurli, is depicted as a vengeful ‘god’ by stating that ‘He (Choma) dreaded that a vengeful Panjurli would trouble him all his life’ (118). Karanth who had studied the life of the Dalits before writing the novel that should have known that the Dalit concept of the deity (‘Bhuta’) is entirely different from that of a ‘god’. Dalit deity is much more human, accommodative and down-to-earth than the one portrayed by Karanth. His portrayal of the Dalit deity comes closer to the Judeo-Christian concept of ‘God’ which was borrowed through the process of Orientalism and adopted by the cultural revivalists to understand their religion as a reaction to Christian religion as propagated by the West. The most natural question that arises at this juncture then is, why did Karanth, despite his knowledge of the concept of the Dalit deity project it as a ‘jealous God’ of the Christians? Is it to make the deity powerful enough to stop the Dalits going into the Christian fold? Also, any person who believes in this description of the Dalit deity would be led to think that the cause for the disintegration of Choma’s family and its tragedy is because they showed some affinity towards the Padre’s ‘God’ and his religion. Thus Karanth, who was otherwise quite proud of his realist approach finds himself justified to deviate from it to save the Dalits, whom he sees as part (though part only of the lowest strata) of the Hindu fold, from getting ‘corrupted’ by changing their religion.

Christianity as the ‘Other’

Writing about the response to his novel Karanth (1978, 40) recounts that 'Because the question of conversion has appeared in its content of the story; had
made one or two priests of Puttur taluk appear angry. I have no respect to anyone who promotes religion by taking advantage of the poverty of the human family, suffering, distress, pain and converts'. However, we need to understand this stance of Karanth in its total context. When Karanth wrote this novel, the imperial British rule was equated with the religion that the rulers belonged to by the upper caste nationalism that prevailed in this country. His anti-Christian stance first gets expressed when he documents the collection of firewood by the household of Choma. There are no words of concern and care for the Dalits but an insensitivity of the British government is brought out in a very subtle way. 'The forest is of course close, but it belonged to the government and there one could not allow much liberty to one's sickle, so they had to walk daily to distant hillocks and look for suitable leaves. By the time they did this it was invariably late afternoon. (15)

In the opinion of Ramachandran (2001, 32) the novel also throws light on why colonialism was not seen as an unmitigated disaster in India. Rather, it was even welcomed and the colonial master was respected because colonialism showed an alternative for the lower castes to alleviate their misery through conversion to Christianity. When one of his sons becomes a Christian, Choma tells himself: 'No more! I won't have anything to do with the god of this village any longer. Now I will accept the Christians' god - the god who made my son a farmer' (47). Though, conversion was an alternative for the Dalits to get away from some of the oppressive practices of the Chaturvarna, regretfully the narrator does not see this lone conversion if Choma's son in good light.

The road, he now realized, he had so long tried to follow was riddled with thorns of frustration: Sankappayya would never fulfill his ambition even if he threatened to immolate himself before him. He was now sure, he would never be a farmer
as long as he was an untouchable. He remembered Guruva, without jealousy or anger in his heart. The question rose in his head: Why should I not become a farmer the way he has? Since his own ancestral god had failed him, what was the harm in accepting the padre’s god? No sooner the idea germinated than it struck roots and burgeoned into a sturdy tree. He remembered Neela’s, death. The tragic spectacle stood before him in bold relief and lurid hues as he recalled the heartlessness of those who stopped the Brahmin boy from going to the rescue of his drowning son. Neela should be living now if only he had belonged to any caste but accused holeyas. “The holeyas”, he thought bitterly, “are not wanted by the god of their own clan. Why should that god cause them to be born and tormented?” No more of this troublesome god! His god hereafter would be Christ—the God that enabled Guruva to become a farmer.’ (113-14)

He confided his decision to Belli. She was astonished at the pertinacity of her father’s ambition. She too had been thinking along the same lines. She had been longing to see Guruva; she had been feeling that he could fill the place of her dead brothers, now that Choma was growing old. But could they join him without joining his religion? It no longer mattered who their god was. This reminded of her Manuel, of her dalliance with him, and she even fancied herself as his wife. Had not Guruva become Mary’s husband? (114)

She timidly asked her father: “Why should we not join the padre’s religion? That will bring us the good fortune of becoming farmers.” “Let it be so, since we have been let down by everyone.” .... Then shall I go and tell the Padre?” “Father, two brothers are gone for good. Should we continue to be hostile to the one who is living?” Choma did not understand what she was driving at. “Father, why
don’t you bring Guruva along? If he is nice to us, we shall join his family and that will also fulfill your dream’ (114-15) ……Belli tells Manuel later, “Supervisor, we have decided to join the padre’s religion.”

Choma’s and his family’s situation in the Hindu caste order was in a great need for a change. As the plot of the novel itself reveals the immediate alternative Choma and his family had was Christianity. Guruva had made use of this alternative. The plot of the novel does not reveal any open insult or embarrassment that Guruva had suffered due to his caste. It was due to his love affair with Mary he that becomes Christian. But for Choma and for his other family members, after the death of Neela, the other alternative as suggested by the very plot itself is Christianity. Choma and his family do not convert to Christianity, though it was the sole alternative that they had.

As it has been suggested already the novel does not see Christianity with a positive attitude. The novel tries to depict Sankappayya the landlord positively whereas Michael and Manuel who come into the life of Choma’s family are depicted in a very negative attitude. Both of them are depicted as womanizers.

What makes Choma not to give up his earlier fold and join a fold to which his son belongs to?

Choma was hurrying along to Kokkada. Not far from his hut, on the only foot trail leading from it, there stood a shed housing an idol of Panjurli. Choma as a rule never passed it by without prostrating before Panjurli. Even Badu, which often ran ahead of him like a guide, invariably stopped at the spot until Choma finished his obeisance. Today also Badu stopped in front of the shed. Choma went down on his knees by sheer force of habit. A shiver ran down his being. Kneeling before Panjurli even after deciding to join the padre’s religion!’ (118)
Contempt for Christianity could be read easily from the words that are used to mention Christianity. ‘Padre’s religion’, is the nomenclature which is used for Christianity by the upper caste narrator who feels the need for stopping conversion. For Choma it is also the religion of his son, Guruva. The narrator does not want Choma to be converted. What does he do to stop Choma from converting to Christianity? He brings in Panjurli, the apparition of Panjurli! Even in the words of Panjurli we could find same intention. “Choma, having believed in me till your old age are you forsaking me in the last few days of your life and running after the padre?” (118) ‘running after the Padre’ is Choma running after Padre? He must be running after the land which is denied to him by Sankappayya, he must be running after the religion where people touched at least to save the other. ‘He tried to struggle to his feet but could not. He felt as if he saw an apparition of Panjurli standing before him. He felt he heard it say:

“Choma, having believed in me till your old age are you forsaking me in the last few days of your life and running after the padre?” (118) Choma’s hair stood on end. It was wrong of him, he thought, to desert a god venerated by generations of ancestors” Could one escape death or sorrow or other vicissitudes of life by being a Christian? ....These were common to all human. (ibid, 118)

It looks as though the narrator has forgotten why Choma has opted himself to join Christianity. He philosophises life. Is it the queries of death, sorrow which has led Choma to this situation? Then, how does the narrator succeed in stopping Choma from joining Christianity using an irrelevant argument? The upper caste attitude to retain the Dalits by making illogical arguments for their miserable condition is at work at this moment of the novel. It is not that Christianity would redeem Choma completely, however, it is appropriate to muse about the intentions of the narrator who constructs the plot of Choma for the
The narrator who is in the process of reforming his religion wants to stop Choma from joining Christianity; he has no other ways of stopping Choma. Otherwise, when did Choma think about the enigmas of life and death so intensely?

The resolution that Choma makes here is very important. To substantiate,

Choma's hair stood on end. It was wrong of him, he thought, to desert a god venerated by generations of ancestors. Could one escape death or sorrow or other vicissitudes of life by being a Christian? These were common to all human beings.

He dreaded that a vengeful Panjurli would trouble him all his life. He remained plunged in thought and then resolved, "I shall remain whatever comes my way."

(118)

Why did Choma want to join Christianity? Isn't it because that he was denied an opportunity to till his own land which would be possible in Christianity? Wasn't the narrator trying to narrate a story of an untouchable who suffers due to his desire to have a land to be cultivated as it is pointed out by critics? Why, then, doesn't the land issue not spring up at this crucial moment? It could be inferred here that the narrator does not want Choma to till his land and he wants to attribute the impending tragedy as a part of the presence of Christianity.

At this juncture what does the narrator do with Choma?

He walked back to his hut. Since the door was ajar, he walked straight in and saw Belli and Manuel conversing sitting on the same mat. His whole being trembled. Startled Belli and Manuel stood up at one bound. Choma glared at them for two full minutes. He drew a long breath and flung his staff at Manuel, who ran for his life. (118-9)

Belli being seated on the same mat and conversing with Manuel makes Choma behave in a very frenzied manner and this notion continues till the end of the novel. Why is it
that Choma is terribly upset? Suddenly there is an emotional outburst in Choma. The novelist is ending his story. Christianity, is the villain of the upper caste reformers of the modern cultural revivalism. The structure of the plot conveys at the end it is Christianity which has played havoc in Choma’s life. Christianity becomes the reason for his frenzied behaviour and his ultimate demise.

Caste as ‘Given’

In the modern period (since the British conquest of India) caste is an empirical reality as well as a theoretical problem and can hardly be approached merely as a part of the feudal superstructure. It has a direct relation with the mode of production and it goes beyond that to supply a very powerful and extremely effective ideological apparatus to the bourgeois-landlord state for dividing and suppressing the democratic movements of the people, besides having an important role in articulation of class interests (Halder: 1994, 64).

In economic terms, the Dalits were employed for the lowest kind of job, in tanneries, salt factories and weaving. In agriculture, they were neither Zamindars nor peasants, they were merely agricultural labourers, either bonded or free. They were virtually ignored and uncared for. The relationship between them and the landlords was not that of superior and inferior but of master and slave. Such a labourer was a continual loser in matters of purchasing and disposing of his produce. Indeed the cruelty of the system extended to the minutest detail. It may not be out of place here to add that even those converted to Islam or Christianity have not been entirely exempt from the virus; they have also imbibed practices to avoid untouchables (Mehta: 1988, 146-7).

Speaking of the efforts for their uplift Mehta (1988, 147) opines that towards the end of the nineteenth century, the renaissance leaders took up the cause of the amelioration of their conditions. The Christian missionaries were the first to do so. But later on the work was taken up by others who suspected that unless Hinduism did something for them, all
these classes would be converted to Christianity.

However, Karanth in his novel blocks for Choma all possible routes towards independence from the clutches of the caste system. Even when Choma at one stage plans to become a Christian, so that he can be free from the vicious circle of Hindu casteism his ‘innocent faith’ in his God does not allow him to do so (Ravindran: 2002, 40).

When we read the novel what we come across is the instance of Guruva’s eloping with Mari. The instance is known to the narrator. Even before coming to know about it the way Choma speaks or the narrator makes him to speak,

“My child Guruva, God willing, you too will marry within a year. I am already looking for a suitable girl. I must find a lass who fits our creed, caste, and station in life. We can’t just pick any girl we may come across. I know of a lass, the daughter of that fellow in the lower koppa.” Chaniya, who had been standing silent not knowing how to break the news of Guruva’s perfidy, grew apprehensive. Belli was anxious to hear from Guruva. (64)

As Ambedkar has pointed out it is the inter caste and inter religious marriage which are a solution to get rid of the caste system. Why is the narrator becoming a stumbling block for the inter-religious marriage? Isn’t it Gandhian logic of Varna order which is at work? The further construction of the plot adds to the above statement.

Chaniya’s sobbing calmed his father, who sought more details about Guruva’s love affair, though still disbelieving that his son could have done all that. When he was told that Mari belonged to another religion, he was again furious. “I will never again set my eyes on that fellow,” he swore, “if he has forsaken the creed and customs of our ancestors for the sake of a girl.” Belli wept uncontrollably. She could not bear to think that her dear brother had abandoned his religion to marry a girl and shall never again be a part of the family. (65)
The plot continues with the same thought,

What were they to do now? Guruva had, willfully sundered his family ties. Should they forget him and leave him to his fate, or should they try hard and bring him back? Belli suggested that he should be brought back. “Since he has been reckless enough to do all this, why should I call him back? Let us take it that he has been swallowed by Panjurli or Guliga. God blessed me with four sons and now I have lost one. If one had died, could we have helped it?” But how long this disgust? Paternal feelings welled up and overwhelmed him. “No, I shall search for him and bring him home wherever he is. I shall find for him a bride far more beautiful than Mari” (66)

Time and again the novelist tries to restore status quo with regard to caste. It looks as though he does not leave any stone untouched in his endeavour. Another conversation between Choma and Belli,

Since we aren’t fated to be farmers, what do we do with these oxen?”, “Why do we do means what? We shall rent a plot of government land and cultivate it. Even if it is a hill it is all right; I must plough a piece of land I can call my own, even if it is not larger than four times my palm.” “What for do you plough? For the mere beauty of it? If that is your idea, why don’t you plough, our courtyard? That will yield us at least a few seers of ‘paddy. It is no use swearing that you will overturn a mountain or mow down a jungle or fill up a pond to make a field. Give up such thoughts. Our elders ate the salt from Sankappayya’s family; we too are obligated to him, we cannot escape that. Despite your open disrespect to him two days ago Sankappayya told me to collect your wages whether you work or, not. Who will help us like this? He has a heart of gold. If we leave this land of his, the gods will never do us good.” (85-6)
The dialogue continues as the narration,

"You go on with your rigmarole; I understand nothing of it." "I won't say anything more than that you should sell the oxen to the landlord as soon as their legs are healed. In the present state of your mind, you might even kill them one day. Only the other day you were telling me that you won't offer to others the morsel that was not for you. You might cut them up one day in this mood. Instead of grieving their loss you would exult in having enough meat to last a fortnight." (Ibid.) 'Choma drew a deep breath and said: "If that is what fate has decreed, who can help?"

"Fate's decree about what?" "Decree about what! About my ambition to become a farmer." "Father, you are needlessly worrying yourself. Having been born holeyas, how can we aspire for something far above our station? Destiny, yes destiny, is the main thing. You win only be what your destiny decrees for you. Destiny wanted only Guruva to become a farmer, so he became a farmer though born a holeya." (108) The narrator writes destiny for Choma in Belli's words. Why Choma not follow the destiny of Guruva? Would the narrator allow him to do so? Because he wanted to be a farmer would he ever wish for the death of the landlord's mother? 'He returned to the hut in stark despair. He did not take his meal. Belli earnestly implored him to abandon his dream. In vain'. (110)

The plot continues with the same thought,

What were they to do now? Guruva had, willfully sundered his' family ties. Should they forget him and leave him to his fate, or should they try hard and bring him back? Belli suggested that he should be brought back. "Since he has been reckless enough to do all this, why should I call him back? Let us take it that he has been swallowed by
Panjurli or Guliga. God blessed me with four sons and now I have lost one. If one had
died, could we have helped it?” But how long this disgust? Paternal feelings welled up
and overwhelmed him. “No, I shall search for him and bring him home wherever he is.
I shall find for him a bride far more beautiful than Mari” (66)

The plot of ‘Chomana Dudi’ does picture several demonic situations of caste system.
Choma’s family has to receive a terrible blow for being untouchables. This situation is heart
rending. The narrator brings in the situation vividly,

Then another, ghastly tragedy struck his family. Bell was busy and asked Choma
to take her two brothers to the stream for a bath. The two boys had long outgrown
the need for such care but Belli had continued to bathe them ‘daily as a gesture
of affection for the motherless children. Reaching the stream, Choma told them
to wait and went to the jungle to collect certain herbs to cleanse their hair of
its oily encrustation. It was a fairly broad stream and people from upper castes
were washing clothes on the opposite bank. Some boys were already gambolling
in the water, which tempted Neela and Kala to wade in. They splashed about,
swam, dived and chased one another. Neela wore himself out and was in trouble.
Kala ran up the bank and shouted for help. Those who were in the nearby fields
came running and a brahmin boy was about to jump into the river but was held
back by his elders because, they did not want him to touch a holeya. The boy
stood confused. Choma also heard Kala’s shouts, and came running but stumbled
and fell. When he arrived on the scene he did riot know what the uproar was
about. He did not know swimming and Neela drowned before the eyes of everyone.
As Choma began to wail, the brahmin boy leaped into the stream and brought
the boy’s body to the bank. Neela was dead. For the first time in his life,
Choma, realized what it was to be an untouchable; the tragedy seared his heart. He dumbly carried his dead son home. He carried the body inside the hut, and shut himself in. He could not dispose of the body till the police arrived and held an inquiry. Many villagers including Sankappayya called at the hut but Choma never came out to see them. (110-11) When an untouchable is dying, if those who could rescue think about the pollution of the touch and thereby become also a reason for the death of an untouchable, why should the untouchables remain in the fold? When the narrator himself carves out several inhuman practices of the caste, what forbids him from at least suggesting certain way outs from this system.

**Recourse in Symbolism**

Ramachandran (2001, 31) opines that what immediately strikes the readers of this novel is the artistic restraint shown by the novelist. Easily the writer could have indulged in melodrama and sentimentality. But, Karanth’s narrator takes upon himself the role of a reporter in order to avoid melodrama and succeeds in conveying to the readers the untold pain and acute humiliation that Choma and his children suffer, through apt symbols. The oxen which Choma loves more than his children are in the end wounded and let loose in the forest; the drum is Choma’s constant companion which he plays always to forget his sorrow. These two, the oxen and the drum, and the darkness (literal as well as metaphorical) with which the novel begins and ends, ably convey to the reader both Choma’s doom and the inhumanity of the caste-system.

*Chomana Dudi* would have remained an average novel but for the introduction of the *Dudi*. Choman’s beating of *Dudi* remains a very rich and complex symbol in the novel. It is a celebration, it is an announcement and it is a splendid expression. It is both comic and tragic simultaneously. It is a protest, it is a lament and it is the voice of rebellion with
futuristic implications. The novel’s levels of signification are controlled by this element alone which organizes all other events into a single focus. In narratology it is called metalypsis. A reader has to confront the sound and the rhythm of dudi. The Dudi invites us to laugh at the naivety of yielding to injustice and exploitation. It elevates the sufferer to a high level and degrades his tormenters. It assumes the proportion of tragic joy; it is also tragic background music for Choma’s daughter’s falling into a sex trap. The frenzy of the drunken mood, the expressions of the sense of rejection, the rage of the sense of being deceived, the helplessness to rise against the oppressor and the exploiter, and the confusion out of inability to read one’s own plight, and many other ideas are summed up in the sound and the rhythm of the dudi. The dudi is a complex and fascinating element in the narrative strategy. It is indeed unique. (Ravindran: 2002, 44-5)

‘Choma’s Drum’ depicts a failed struggle of an individual of a dalit class. There is a conscious effort from the side of the narrator to control the destiny of Choma. The reaction of the protagonist to rebel against the system is thoroughly controlled by the narrator consciously. If we find certain justification to support the failure of the dalit individual, Choma to protest against an oppressive system around him on the basis of the realistic approach of the novel, then the very question of radical Karanth who wanted the dalits to tread the path of progress becomes ambiguous. To satisfy the desire of Choma, Karanth could have made use of other narrative techniques; not that Karanth was unaware or he has not made use of other approaches in his novels. When it was a question of Choma, an untouchable, why did Karanth strictly adhere to the realistic approach?

Karanth is very restrained about his own comments. He does say something about it, he talks about Shiva’s Damaru when he talks about Choma’s Dudi, but all are on an inarticulate level. I do agree with you that without Dudi the novel would have been less successful. (Ravindran: 2002, 96)
The reason for the use of Dudi in a fantasy like manner has to be interrogated here. What has Shiva to do with Choma? The biographical detail of the author might throw light on the use of Dudi and Damaru.

As the legend goes, Karanth's ancestors, the Kota Brahmins, are supposed to have been brought to Karnataka by a king called Mayura Varma in the 15th/16th century. It seems their saga is mentioned even in Sahyadri Khanda, 'which is more myth than history,' says Karanth. The Kota (or 'Koota' which means a 'group' or 'band') Brahmins were highly orthodox and conservative; they believed that only they were 'pure' Brahmins. 'Our particular community is unusual from one point of view,' notes Karanth in his Ten Faces of Crazy Mind, 'we do not obey any monastic order. We are not lorded over by any particular monk.' Most probably, Karanth inherited his rebellious spirit from his ancestors; and he retained this spirit throughout his life. (Ramachandran: 2001, 3) The 'Kota' in the name Kota Shivarama Karanth stands for the place where he was born on October 10, 1902. Kota was then a small village, about eight miles to Kundapur on the west coast of Karnataka. ... The major community in the village was of 'Smartha' Brahmins - those that worship both Vishnu and Shiva. Most of the people there were poor and owned just one or two acres of land. (Ramachandran: 2001, 2)

Karanth hails from a vaishnavite family who would worship Shiva. The upper caste agenda of giving a pan-Indian structure is at work. Shiva's image is loaded with the idea of providing a pan-Indian entity to Choma, a mera, to be precise, according to the Gandhian glossary a 'harijan'. The entry of a non-mera God is certainly a surprising element for the readers who are not sensitive to the act of the conscience which has a motive to retain chaturvarna system.

But, the question that we need to raise here is whether Karanth takes recourse in symbolism to enrich the narration or to leave ambivalent many questions pertaining to
traditional values which he did not directly want to answer due to the process of side-
glancing the west and protecting ones own perceived culture and identity as the other cultural
revivalists had done? The next section tries to explore these aspects in a little more detail.

Silences and Suggestiveness as the Reformist Politics

Narayana (2002, 56-7) says that although initially most of the critics appreciated this
'heart-rending' story by seventies disagreeable voices were heard. By that time four decades
had been completed after the publication of the novel. What was the main objection? The
first objection was the method with which Karanth has perceived and expounded the
protagonist is not authentic. The second objection was the novelist has sympathy towards
the Brahmin landlord who does not give Choma a piece of land. Those who have expounded
the first argument cite many reasons. 1. By depicting Choma himself as the reason for
losing an opportunity from coming out of the dilemmas of the Caste (Choma, who had
set himself to become a Christian, changes his decision fearing bhootha), truly, Karanth had
not at all grasped the possibilities of liberation of people like Choma. 2. The desire of
Choma of Karanth to possess land is not depicted in accordance with the desire for the
land by a landless labourer; what is found there is the thoughts of the middle class. Imagining
a relation between the internal commotions of Choma to that of his beating of the drum
to put it out is itself is an example for one of the thought processes of the middle class.

The reason given by those who say that Karanth's sympathy is towards the landlords:
Karanth has depicted the landlord as the one who backtracks from giving land to Choma
except for by being pressured by a conservative mother other than that he had no opposition
to the desire of Choma. In this character the class consciousness of the landlords is not
seen. Instead, this character has been imagined as natural to the reformist framework of
Gandhian era. By observing Choma's inauspiciousness, the landlord's character takes a
position stating it is because of these, people like Choma are in the position of the destitute.
All these point towards Karanth’s attitude towards society. (Narayana: 2002, 57). ‘...even after deciding to join the padre’s religion!’ (118) these are the words of the narrator. Christianity is spoken as though it is the padre’s religion. Can we perceive some sort of dilemma here?

It is very interesting to note the way Kalkuda and Punjurli react when their existence is questioned; in Kudiyara Koosu, when Bhatta violates the practices of Kudiyas, and in ‘Chomana Dudi’ when Choma moves to Kokkada. The narrator makes his preference known in the process of narration, ‘he (Choma) felt as if he saw an apparition of Panjurli standing before him. He felt he heard it say: “Choma” having believed in me till your old age are you forsaking me in the last days of your life and running after the padre”’ (118) What is important is the instructions of the narrator, he says ‘he felt he heard,’ what is the need of putting it in the direct speech, isn’t it to make it intense? The difference to be grasped here is the difference between feeling the words and hearing it. The narrator is very tactful in narrating. If we closely observe the words that are knit for Panjurli, the scheme of the vicious scheme of the narrator becomes very much evident. The mockery is in the pressure of mocking at padre’s religion that is Christianity, the narrator who has the upper caste sensibilities mocks at Panjurli by equating it with padre, that even in its own words. That is the ambivalence which is pointed out at this juncture. An upper caste conscience in the attitude to subdue the Christian religion which was becoming an obstacle to the priestly class of India. That conscience sees both Panjurli and Padre on equal terms. These are the words of the Panjurli well designed by an upper caste conscience, ‘...having believed in me till your old age are you forsaking me........and running after the padre?’, the other inconvenient observation is Padre’s Christianity? What perception of Christianity does he send forth? Is it the perceptions of the Meras, the community to which Choma belongs to?
Choma is a bonded labourer; added to it an untouchable. He does not possess ownership over the land in which he works very hard. This is the historic reality of our land. His desire is he has to possess a land of his own as a tenant; the content of the novel is his struggle for it. Finally Choma fails in that attempt of his. Throughout the novel this problem has been established as subjective. From the internal explanation of the work we get two reasons for Choma’s not getting the land: a: Choma is a drunkard. He wasted all his earnings by drinking. Therefore he did not get the land. b: Choma’s children did not stay with him; his landlord was not kind-hearted enough to give him the land. (Nagaraj: 2003, 50-1)

The novel stops with giving these two reasons. The Novelist feels contented by depicting the character of Choma romantically with rage. The words and the language of the novel Substantiates this. Both these reasons that originate from the novel are non-comprehensive and subjective. Choma is a fruit of the growth of history. His children, his landlord are different parts of a circle. The novel nowhere conveys that the reason for Choma’s tragedy is in the structure of his living itself. (Nagaraj: 2003, 51)

‘Choma’s wife - wife is probably too dignified a word for a lowly untouchable’s mate’ (12) is the narrator’s voice, How does the narrator value relationship of the people of the lower caste? If they were upper caste, then she would be his wife, because they are not, the word ‘wife’ is probably too dignified.

‘Choma was bonded to Sankarappayya. This meant that neither he nor his children could work for anyone else without the consent of the landlord, his only refuge and provider.’ The narrator makes a factual statement about the existence of Choma, the protagonist of his novel. Isn’t the narrator soft towards the bonded labour system? The narrator does not make a comment with regard to the bonded labour system. Does not make a comment regarding it. Is he comfortable or happy with the existing system? He further narrates woes
of Choma by narrating his pitiful economic existence. The narrator is not scornful about the system. But, his narrator scornful about the system, no. Narrator states further, ‘Choma had been to the festival with his whole family. There they had danced from morning to evening, until they were tired.' (13) There is no mentioning of the hunger, but lack of food which restrains them from staying overnight, the reason cited is ‘They would have spent the night also there, but had to be back by the gloaming because they had nothing by way of food that day. (13) Is the lack of food due to bonded labour of Choma? Look at the reason mentioned by the narrator,

Four days earlier, Choma had some guests, and they had departed only after eating away all the rice he had borrowed from the landlord as six day’s advance wages; there was nothing left for the festival. Sankappayya an upper caste landlord is sensitive he had given away ‘six day’s advance wages’ but the untouchable relatives of Choma are insensitive because they did not give a thought to the upcoming festivity for Choma, ‘they had departed only after eating away all the rice he had borrowed from the landlord.’ (13) On the festival eve he forgot to see the landlord’ (13)

How careless is Choma in his forgetfulness? Thankfully Sankappayya does not remind Choma of his forgetfulness.

....he went there in the morning only to find that the landlord had already left home. When he ran into Sankappayya at the fair, his eyes and lips radiated a smile and he bowed worshipfully. But the landlord failed to divine the message of all this and Choma could not summon up courage to articulate his desire. (13) The entire suffering that happens due to bonded labourness is seen as a status quo affair though a feeling of sadness does get a mere mention, ‘while others fell
asleep from sheer fatigue, Belli sat at her father’s face. Neither was a stranger to such privations, which were actually a familiar part of their life. To get over his dejection, Choma took out his drum and Belli began to sing “Ley ley lley la!”

The cow nationalism that has been making its own presence in the pre and post independent India also finds its expressions in Karanth’s narration. A parallel could also be observed in Samskara of Ananthamurthy. A Muslim meat vendor had met him six times and said: “Why do you need these oxen? Sell them to me and I shall straightaway pay you ten rupees in cash.” Any other person in Choma’s position would have fallen for the offer, but Choma was determined not to sell them even if he was offered one hundred rupees. They were worth at least thirty rupees but because they were Choma’s, the dealer chose to depress the price.” The translator has evaded the word ‘thief’ (Kalla) used for Mapille the Muslim meat vendor. According to the narrator the Muslim tries to cheat Choma, but Sankappayya does not. The same point gets elucidated at various instances. The narration of the instance of wrongly mentioning of the debts to Choma by Manuel and trying to trap him. The point here is not that either the Muslim meat vendor or Manuel don’t cheat Choma, but in depicting the woes of Choma the upper caste Gandhian narrator fails to see through oppression met against Choma by Sankappayya, an upper caste, landlord. The upper caste reformist agenda to save the Dalits succumbing to the ploy of the people belonging to other religions is a point to be considered.

True, as a novelist of realist trend Karanth makes use of the techniques of realism in a masterly manner. He keeps num without making any comment when he feels it is required to fulfill his agenda of narrating a story. “Sankappayya, having just finished his lunch, was sitting in the outhouse, his face glowing with contentment. As he began to chew betel, he
tossed a quid of tobacco to Choma. Choma, who loved tobacco next only to his life, was beside himself with joy, the more so because the piece was the very one which the landlord had intended to use. He began to knead the piece on his palm with lime (26-27). This kind of an exploitative relationship between the upper-castes and the Dalits does not deserve a comment by the narrator.

The most important episode that the critics point out to show Karanth’s concern for the Dalits lies here. It is the Gandhian idealism, the continuation of the varna order, Karanth was progressive as Gandhi was, but unfortunately both of them fail to realise the obstacle that was posed by this order.

“Hey, Choma.” Sankappayya asked, “have you consecrated the oxen to God?” As Choma smirked, Sankappayya continued, “Look, my bullocks have grown old and I can’t rely on them for ploughing this season. Why not harness your oxen?” Not a word escaped Choma’s lips. “You may either sell them to me or leave them in my shed as your own.” Choma did not know what to say. “Why are you mum? Have you taken any sacred vow not to put them to the plough?” “Are they for show, if not for ploughing?” “If so, will you harness them this monsoon? I need not look for any other pair, I presume. I shall pay you cash, if you desire. You may fix the price; if not we may ask a third person to do that.” “I have no mind to sell them, nor do I deny you their use. I have long cherished a dream. I wish you would help me achieve it.”(27)

Why doesn’t Choma make clear his desire to the landlord? Is it the narrator’s scheme? No, the untouchable might have failed to communicate his desire to the upper caste landlord. Sankappayya did not understand what Choma could be dreaming about. He went in on some work. After waiting for some time: Choma went to the field and pitched into his work. The whole work was over by the evening, and the landlord was happy. (27)

As dusk fell, the landlord himself measured out the rice to each labourer and they
all left. Only Choma stayed on. "How come Choma hasn't yet betaken himself to Biruma's shop?" the landlord asked in an ironic vein. "I won't go there today." "But why are you still here? Why not go home and beat that drum? You seem determined to banish sleep from this village." The joke set Choma laughing. The landlord knew that he was hesitating to tell him something. "Why are you still sitting here?" "Nothing, nothing much really. Just wanted to say a few words about the oxen." "What is that? Don't hesitate." "Master, you have so many tenants. If you could lease me a piece of land, even barren land, I shall revere, your name for the rest of my life." Sankappayya's first reaction was one of surprise. How could a holeya ever be a farmer?" (27-8)

Why not? Why the Gandhian ideal of liberation of the Harijans is not being made available to

Sankappayya? Isn't it the high time of Gandhian era? What were the upper caste ideals when it came to certain liberties to the Dalits which were unjustly curtailed by the upper caste mindset for centuries? 'But he did not spurn the idea. He had a lot of barren land and he might well lease a part of it to Choma. He went in to consult his mother.' (28) It's quite funny the contradiction that is too vivid between two successive sentences. What is the intention of the narrator? The former sentence gives an image of Sankappayya who is large hearted to accommodate the demand of an untouchable,

But he did not spurn the idea. He had a lot of barren land and he might well lease a part of it to Choma but the very next sentence is 'He went in to consult his mother', let us stop for a while and ponder, why mother? Where was she all along? Would she appear in other episodes? Certainly not. The mother here is used as an instrument not to give the land, later Panjurli would be used as an instrument to stopping Choma from going to Kokkada to be converted to Christianity. A Dalit is given an everlasting identity under all the cruel inhuman practices. 'Choma, waiting outside, was flushed at the thought that
the great day was probably about to dawn in his life. His heart thumped. In a few moments, the landlord came out. “Our ancestors,” he said “never leased a field to any untouchable and it is not possible for me to do so.” (28)

It was very easy both for Sankappayya and the narrator to say so. The narrator does not add a single comment either regarding the attitude of Sankappayya or of his ancestors. What the narrator has to say is ‘That settled the matter.’ (29) ‘Choma heard the landlord’s mother curse from inside the house: “Abba, the insolence of these holeyas!” Dejected, Choma was about to leave.’ (29) Choma was dejected is the only expression carved out for turning down his desire to possess the land. It is very much in line with the expected thought if Chomana Dudi is read as a story of an untouchable who had a desire to possess a piece of land, but was subservient to his fate and the recourse that he met due to the chaturvarna practice when he realised his children were getting converted to Christianity and he too unconsciously desired to convert himself to the same etches a tragedy of himself.

Choma is finally aware of the exploitation. Also there is an element of rebellion in him. Indeed he does rebel. If at all the novel is suggestive of certain social changes, the suggestion comes from the narrator and not from the character. Choma is faintly aware of the exploitation. The authority the exploiters gain through tradition and through cunning is powerful enough to crush him and his family. There is no clear realization that what is going on is exploitation. The authority of the dudi, the drum, may be as the author suggests symbols of Choma’s heart beat. But it can also be suggestive of Choman’s repressed protest. (Ravindran: 2002, 42)

It becomes difficult to pin point at the stances that are taken by the narrator in this novel with regard to the Dalits. What is his reaction to certain inhuman practices of the caste? Is he not supporting or endorsing them at least here in this part of the narration,
what could be inferred from this other than the narrator has a cosy feeling if not an awkward feeling for this practice. Look at the paragraph of novel in the first part the narrator explains ‘The monsoon returned again. Sankappayya sent for Choma and told him to come for ploughing from next day. Choma smiled, returning home and began to play the drum. As dusk fell, Choma and others had their normal rice gruel.’ (75) The paragraph continues by providing us an unpleasant piece of information, ‘It was not that Choma and his family never tasted anything except rice gruel. Whenever there was a feast at the landlord’s house he could partake of what were left over in the eating leaves thrown away after the meal. But feasts were rare.’ (75) The narrator narrates the poignancy of the Dalits but does not on the inhuman treatment that the untouchables were offered in the oppressive caste structure.

Ashoka (1992, 91) argues that when the novel, Chomana Dudi, is studied minutely it becomes clear that Karanth is not only telling the tragic story of Choma, but he is also constructing history of a particular time of Indian society. The complete vision of the novel is that Choma’s problem has to be solved but it should not end in authenticating the colonial administration. Here, Karanth is not only analysing a social problem but he is registering his protest against the colonial technique. Thus, in the opinion of Ashoka ‘Chomana Dudi’ does not only become a realist novel but it also becomes a novel which is written in opposing the colonial rule. However, the point that is missed by many critics like him is that along with opposing the colonial rule the narrator is also creating a national discourse within which the Dalits were protected and cajoled to adjust within the Hindu tradition with only a little bit of reform. The reason why most of the critics could have missed this point is likely because even their frame of reference could have been the same as that of the narrator. Thus, we find when we try to understand the construction of Dalit identity in the novels of Karanth his silences and suggestiveness speak loud.
Marali Mannige (Back to the Soil) and the Dalit Identity

Marali Mannige (Back to the Soil), written in 1941, is a story of three generations, covering the period from 1850 to 1940. Karanth documents three major stages of social change through this novel. The representative characters of the first generation are Rama Aithal, two of his wives Parothi and Sathyabhama, and his sister Sarasothi. Their lives throughout are governed by age-old traditions, customs, and rituals. Rama Aithal leads a hard life by cultivating paddy, which depends upon the vagaries of Nature; and labourers who have started to become assertive by losing their faith in customs and rituals as a result of English education. These hardships inspire him to take a bold step, the first of its kind in his family, of giving his son modern English education.

The second generation in the novel is represented by Laccha (short form of Lakshman), the son of Rama Aithal. This generation falls an easy prey to the lure of modernity. In order to get ‘modern’ education, Laccha has to go to city. Freed of all parental control and community-restraints, he begins to indulge in gambling and women of loose morals, irresponsibly squandering his father’s hard-earned money. Even after marriage, he does not change his ways of life; and, after his father’s death, he sells all his property, leaving his mother, wife and the only son, destitute.

Laccha’s son Rama stands for the struggle and dilemmas of the third generation just prior to conflicts, and independence (Ramachandran: 2001, 35). Amidst untold hardships (since he and his mother are abandoned by his father) and grinding poverty, Rama succeeds in getting a good education, culminating in a Bachelor’s degree. But then, like many of his generation, he suffers from unemployment, and moves from one job to another. Also, since these are the days of National Movement for freedom under the charismatic leadership of Gandhiji, he, like thousands of other young men, joins the Indian National Congress and participates in the Movement. Finally, he makes a decision as different and as
consequential as that of his grand father - he decides to return to his village and take up agriculture as his profession.

Ramachandran (2001, 36) says that first and foremost what we need to notice in the novel is the objectivity with which Karanth depicts the three generations and the corresponding three phases of the Indian society, spanning one hundred years before independence. It is very tempting for a novelist to depict younger generations as weak and decadent, and to be nostalgic about the traditional, 'pre-modern,' Indian society.

Chenni (2002, xi) says that with its publication Shivarama Karanth's *Maradi Mannige* almost at once achieved the status of a great classic of Kannada fiction. The narration is patient and unhurried. It tells us about three generations of characters who wage an unrelenting struggle against 'necessity' which here takes the shape of poverty. This is the poverty of a brahmin family in Kodi, a tiny hamlet on the Dakshina Kannada coast (western coast of Karnataka state) where the rains, the sea and the river allow only a 'mean' existence, testing human endurance and capacity to survive.

Karanth, like many other writers and thinkers of his time, is always ambivalent toward colonialism. For, he knew full well that traditional Indian society was full of inhuman practices and customs like marginalisation of women and caste-system; and that the colonial rule, with its secular English education and 'modern,' 'progressive' views could successfully combat such traditional evils of the Indian society. English education, breaking through caste-sect barriers, opens up untold opportunities for all sections, of society. Also, it affords upward social mobility. However, English education, synonymous then with modernity, while it lured many like Rama Aithal with its promise of wealth and social position, also threatened them with the prospect of alienation. Karanth documents such cultural alienation resulting from English education in these words:

As days and months passed, he (Laccha) began to like such new life more and more. He also developed the sharpness and easy volubility that he found among
the city-people. The new kind of English education gave him a sort of arrogance also. Whenever villagers crossed him on the road, he would invariably talk in English with his friends. (Even at home) he would be itching to talk English with his father and step-mother (144).

That English education need not necessarily alienate one, and that one could profitably bring together all that is good in both tradition and modernity is shown in Rama of the third generation, the generation that the writer himself belongs to. Rama does get English education; but the same education teaches him how to fight against colonialism. During his college days, Rama comes across a book called *India in Bondage* by Sunderland. He is so moved by it that he tells his friend: ‘When an outsider (Sunderland) sheds such profuse tears over our lack of freedom, shouldn’t we feel the bondage much more intensely? Should we, like tiger cubs born in prison, believe that our home is the prison?’ He joins the Freedom Movement and, following Gandhi’s ideals, begins to actively participate in the Non-cooperation Movement, advocacy of ‘Swadeshi’ products, adult education, prohibition, and such other constructive programmes.

Ramachandran (2001, 41) opines that as Karanth ably documents in Marali Mannige, English education does open up new careers like those of a lawyer, a civil servant, or a police officer. But it also creates the problem of unemployment for the first time in India. Till secular educational system entered India through colonialism, professions and occupations of all sections of society used to be determined by one’s caste and custom - a farmer’s son would continue farming; a barber’s son would continue as a barber, etc. Hence, there used to be no question of unemployment, occupation being hereditary and guaranteed (however low or high) by tradition. But modern English education, not closely aligned to anyone profession and having uprooted young men from their soil, creates, for the first time, a national problem called ‘unemployment,’ which continues to be a bigger and vaster problem.
in independent India. Rama, of the third generation in the novel, experiences this gigantic problem. He spends months together in big cities like Madras and Bombay, looking in vain for a job. Finally he decides to take up his grandfather's job, that of agriculture.

During the second half of the 19th century, the British began to set up huge industries in India. Industrialisation meant urbanisation; and urbanisation meant mass migration from villages to the cities. One of the major consequences of urbanisation was the coming into being of what came to be later called Hotel industry. In the society in which selling food was considered a sin and uninvited guests were to be treated like gods ('atithi devo bhava'), now it becomes a highly profitable, money-spinning business. The sons of Sheena Mayya (the neighbour and rival of Rama Aithal in the novel) set up a hotel in Bangalore, make a lot of money, and begin to buy up all available lands in their native village; and this fact spurs Rama Aithal also to give his son modern education. (Ramachandran: 2001, 41-2)

Mogalli writes (2008, 26) in the article, ‘Karantharu: Ondu Srjanaathmaka Prakriye’ written by Ananthmoorhy, he acknowledges how he was inspired to write ‘Samskara’ after reading Shivarama Karantha’s ‘Marali Mannige’. From his creative understanding he has understood Karanth rather seriously. He has made it public in the article saying that the roots that he found for his novel ‘Samskara’ is from Karanth’s Marali Mannige’s character Laccha.

In the caste allegiant society even though the writer tries to distance himself from it, as an undissolving, an annihilating conscience, transgressing the request of the writer it creates a chasm in creativity. It is of no use to blame the writer for it. As caste is in the writer’s consciousness, it is also a status of creative weakness which can embody the writer. For an Indian writer, experiences that emerge through caste create together with both beautiful and the distorted. .....In the depth of Indian aesthetics, without getting diluted, the stigma of caste impurity creates non-secular images by coming out when it is needed,
changing its costume to suit situations. (Mogalli, 2008, 27)

In the opinion of Chenni (2002, xi-xii) Karanth does not allow the careless reader to construct a nostalgic vision of the noble first generation to which the vulnerable second generation is a foil. Rama Aithala is a ‘loukika’, a this-worldly man, so deeply involved in the mud and storms of this existence that there is hardly any glimpse of anything that transcends it in his life. He therefore wants his son Lachcha to be his pawn in the new world of English education, well-paid professions and money. Modernity can be called a persistent paradigm in Kannada literature; in this novel, its fascinating ambivalence troubles Aithala. It is a morally ambiguous new world in which he wants his son to succeed. It is emancipatory and full of possibilities, unlike the confined and repetitive life of mere subsistence in Kodi. But it is also an always already fallen world, where pure-bred brahmans run hotels for all castes in Udupi, Kundapura and Bangalore, where the rigid and unambiguous religious codes and social mores have been replaced by the amorphous notions of money and success.

Mogalli (2008, 29) opines that Karanth tries to suggest tragedy, of the magic of modernity in the novel Marali Marinige, by creating the character of Laccha exaggeratedly. The character of Laccha does not naturally emerge from the natural form of the text; instead, the writer himself creates unwontedly at the centre of the work. This is evident even in the Braganza episode and the narrator’s reference to the education of the younger Bhatta in Kudiyara Koosu. This is a problem that we confront in Karanth’s dilemma. This dilemma is in the writer’s selection. It means those writers who have come from the Vedic background have these problems. On the one hand, taking shelter in the western values in the selection of the examining the tragedy. On the other, contrarily returning to the Indian Hindu lifestyle is the other. If we examine how both these selections get expressed in the creativity of those writers who hail from the Vedic roots as their base, bizarre elements come to
fore. In a similar manner the reminiscences of the antiquated caste metaphors which have remained at the unconscious level of the writer get exhibited.

Rama Aithala of the first generation is typically a Vedic man. Since he had no son his only worry was who would offer him the rice ball after his death. He always laments over the issue of not having a son to carry forward his progeny. His affliction is who would look after his household after his death. He has his second marriage thinking life is content only if one has a son. Since the first wife had not delivered a son he treats her cruelly with indifference. In these circumstances Karanth writes as though he is absorbed with Rama Aithala. This Rama Aithala appears as though he is an upright man of Hinduism. In the beginning of the novel it looks as though Karanth is opening the doors of a different family, as we precede further Rama Aithala who lives inside that house appears as though he is of the lineage of those who had kept Choma as a bonded labourer. Even then there are remote characters that follow Rama Aithala secretly with a lot of faithfulness. Shura, Kariya and their children cultivate Rama Aithala’s land as like Choma. (Mogalli, 2008, 33-4) It looks obvious, as though the upper caste land lord and the lower caste tenant do not find any itch in the system.

On reading *Marali Mannige* we realize that Karanth the reformer of his community must have felt a deep down hollow in the modernity which is sponsored by the European notion. Since the caste hierarchy does not find a legitimate place Karanth through his narrator tries go back to the ways of the land but not the other. He does not accept a change. In other words he wants to reverse the change if possible. As Chenni points out Rama Aithala who in a way condemns his son’s pursuit of money, avoids the temptation of turning Lachcha into a handy symbol of the generation alienated from ‘home’ only to be corrupted by ‘world’. Despite the multiple explanations the narrative offers for Lachcha’s ‘evil nature’, there is something in him which gives the slip to moral and psychological explanations of
cause and effect. Interestingly, he is as much a made character as Sarasothi, just as invulnerable to change in his character. It is only incidentally and perhaps marginally that he represents the lost generation confronting a certain kind of modernity. U.R. Anathamurthy wonders why Karanth's moral vision fails to conceive Lachcha as a rebel, even a metaphysical rebel against the confining world of Kodi. But aren't Nagaveni and Rama rebels imbued with a genuine modern consciousness, while Lachcha is (only an escapee? With the third generation, the self-contained world of Kodi begins to crack up. There are all kinds of distractions, and the mental world of the characters expands far beyond sea-locked Kodi. It is in this that *Marali Mannige* is of a piece with mainstream Kannada fiction (Chenni: 2002, xiii-xiv).

Chenni further observes that,

at a time when the fervour of nationalism and attempts at cultural assertion had encouraged nostalgia about Indian spiritual traditions and its heroic past, Karanth consciously developed an earthy 'materialist' view of human life. In his autobiography he tells us how he was also carried away by the idealism of the Gandhian movement, until his own encounter with the unredeemed men and women of his society forced him to adopt a dispassionate anti-romantic view of life. What really happened was that Karanth retained the Gandhian idealism in the form of his belief in the possibilities of goodness, creativity and moral redemption in every ordinary human being. (2002, xix)

L M Inamdar’s remarks on ‘Back to the Soil’ become significant in the selection of the novel for the proposed study. He remarks “In the people’s novel the downfall of the cultural heritage of the people is illustrated in blunt truth. The novel envisages, how in the last century, the modern culture has turned the peaceful mansion of a heritage upside down.” (Jaya Karnataka: 1955, 309)
Karanth in his Context

In the opinion of Narayana (2002, 55-6) the query that how have or how do the writers apprehend distinct cultures depends on certain presuppositions. At present, the way distinct cultures are apprehended by the writers is not merely being discussed as a part of etymology or understanding. What relation do they have with that culture? What stance do the writers who apprehend these distinct cultures hold? Now these queries have come to the forefront. In furtherance of it, presently, the understanding of a culture without being a participator of that culture is looked at with suspicion. It has also been elucidated that the insider's view itself is authoritative. In such a context, it becomes still more complex to discuss these queries with reference to authors like Karanth. Because, his period of writing itself is of almost eighty years. During this period, our thoughts with regard to culture have also been changing profoundly. Narayana (2002, 56) further argues that it would not be right to think that Karanth had not grasped these changes. He may not have agreed the changes that were being transpired, but, it would not be appropriate to say that he was not influenced by them.

Mogalli (2008, 28-9) remarks that in the creation of the characters of the Vedic family, Karanth's narcissist creativity loses all its dimensions. In the waves of changing times, Karanth searches humanity to document in the experience of a bygone age. *Chomana Dudi, Alida Mele, Bettada Jeeva, Marali Mannige*, all these novels, in his opinion, have the same lullaby. In these novels Karanth's intense longing for humanity gets documented through a dense regional reasoning from a way of living which is vanishing. Even if we accept saying that a noble artefact as an ideal has no barriers of region, language, race, caste but in it totality we cannot accept it. Yes, it is true, that there is no indicated platform for any work of art and the writer. Experience is expressed only through the naval of humanity. If Karanth has the Vedic, Kuvempu has the Shudra platform. In a similar way if Devanoor
Mahadeva has Dalit platform Saara Abubakar has a platform of Islamic system. If the sprains of caste, religion, gender, class gets when a piece of art is formed in these platforms, our attention should be towards removing those sprains. By assessing the literary work from various experiences the tradition gets evolved. To broaden Karanth, to reexamine his works the literary queries become very crucial.

In novels like Kudiyara Koosu and Bettada Jeeva, Karanth deals with the encounter between man and nature. He records how man gradually gains control over nature and creates a new culture out of it. With a little modification it would have been an anthropologised thesis. He has gathered a great many details about the legends, rituals, traditions etc. But he used them not merely to transform their culture. He shows how Kudiyas, even people outside the bounds of Kudiyas, and nature have been undergoing changes and there have been political transformations. So even within a region he echoes a nationalistic voice. When Kariya and Kala are said to agree to feed and bring up a young deer, it becomes a symbol at the national level. (Rai: 2002, 86-7)

In Kudiyara Koosu except Giddi and her brother resisting from being taken to the big hills not even one positive thought is being shared about Christianity. Even that resistance which gets depicted is conspicuous. How the narrator traps both Kudiyas and Christians in a ruthless but a tactful manner. ‘His fault was that he had been in too much hurry. If he had worked more cautiously on the minds of the impressionable captives he would probably have succeeded.’ (88) Were Giddi and her brother captives? What kind of an image is the author trying to harbinge to Christianity in a land which was less known at that time? Isn’t it the same harbingering which gave an entity to Christians by the upper caste of the country which enjoyed religious superiority and thereby a great clout to have its opinion generalized for the entire masses? The harbingering is, Dalits are trapped as captives and then they are converted. Even in the novel these words are not uttered by
an uneducated therefore innocent Kudiya but by a narrator who is knitting a plot as responsible social being, a writer. Look at the Judgemental mindset of the narrator, he comments saying, ‘His fault was that he had been too much in a hurry.’ Is the judgement a sympathy or a rectification? It is not both. The narrator is trying to convey the hastiness of his own preoccupation with regard to the damage that is being done by the very conversion process that he has assumed. Karanth, the Gandhian is at work here, if not the upper caste scheme.

Ramachandran (2001, 45) argues that in *Marali Mannige* a major aspect of the novel is its concern with the issues of Reality and Fantasy. Here, in his opinion we find Karanth attempting to transcend the rigid framework of ‘Realism’ by questioning its very ideological basis of ‘Truth’. As Subraya, the second narrator points out, ‘Real world appears unreal, and the unreal appears real. Between the real and the unreal, the distance is very little - as little as between Truth and non-Truth.’ But we find Karanth unable or unwilling to do this in the case of Dalit characters. Without going into much detail Dr C. N. Ramachandran observes a diabolic creative personality of Karanth. He says ‘when I think of Karanth, the foremost image appears is that of a pierce revivalist. Rebellion, rebellion against the established systems was an were embodied in him. From the beginning he was an iconoclast. It might be religious, communal system, Karanth rebelled against them in his many articles and novels. From *Devadootharu, Sarasammiarn Samaadhi* to *Jagadhodhaara* ....naa, *Sanyaasiya Baduku*, in his last novel, *Antida Aparanji*, in all these, the iconoclastic stance and ideological thoughts as regarding the social reformation appears as pioneered by Gulvaadi. Karanth powerfully condemns those practices which are practiced then and even today, like child marriage, Sati, caste ....... till here we understand, Karanth means a rebellion which has to take place against the moral and social systems’. (Ramachandran: 2002, 12-13)
Ramachandran continues to observe ‘...but, where we see a confusion is, when we shed light on, the same Karanth appears to be a traditionalist when it comes to the other fields like politics and economics. How far is this correct? I don’t know. I present before you only queries. Many articles of his could be given as examples to complement my saying. But, without mentioning those articles I will mention the novels below. If we take these novels, *Naavu Kattida Swarga*, *Gondaavanya*, *Nasta Diggajagal*. *Moojanma* and *Antida Aparanji* and hundreds of articles, he ridicules and criticises in an ordinary sense which we consider as the achievements of Modern India. That, he does even directly and harshly. More importantly, for example, in *Naavu Kattida Swarga*, speaks about land reforms. It seems the writers of Kannada are hesitant to write about on this matter. No one else has written on a tumultuous social issue as important as the land reforms. Karanth is very critical of such ‘socialist’ policies of the government as Nationalisation of banks and industries, Land-redistribution, and Reservation. Chandradevi, in *Moojanma* says, ‘To help ten people one can be harmed’ - this seems to be the accepted principle today. ... To loot one and give it to another in charity is not real upliftment of the poor. It is not justice.’ (quoted in Ramachandran: 2001, 68-69)

Still more directly, Karanth attacks the ‘Land Reforms’ in these words: Whether our wealth is in the form of salaries, or bank-deposits, or land, its value is the same. If only the land-owners are targeted and their wealth has to be re-distributed among others, the society has to pay them (the land owners) the value of their entire wealth. ... Daylight robbery cannot go in the name of socialism. (Naavu Kattida Swarga, Preface quoted in Ramachandran: 2001, 69)

Similarly, a character in *Ade Ooru, Ade Mara* analyses the principle of land-distribution thus: Look here, why this penalty only for the land-owners: Now, there are many government
officers who are paid thousands as their salary. There are others who, getting only a hundred
or two, struggle to make both ends meet. On the basis of the same principle, why not
scale down the salary of all those officers and fix a limit on one’s salary as on one’s land-
holdings? (Naavu Kattida Swarga, 261, in Ramachandran: 2001, 69)

Most importantly in Gondaaranya he contests reservation. The anti-protagonists of
Karanth’s novel are usually labour leaders. In a similar way, those who people of the lower
caste who have obtained higher power status due to reservation or those officers who
have no qualification to be in authority. It has not become possible for Karanth to see
the labour movements constructively in any of his novels. Karanth’s firm belief is that the
matters like socialism and its various forms such as Marxism and communism are to there
only to be mocked at and not to be taken seriously. (Ramachandran: 2002, 14) Karanth
had a deep-rooted distrust of all shades of ‘Socialist Activities’ communists, Trade Union
leaders, and Left-oriented philosophers. This is the reason why, in most of his novels,
communists and Trade Union leaders appear as villains. They are pictured as those who
always look toward (the then) Moscow, and who, as individuals, are always unprincipled,
self-centered, and hypocritical. Organized protests and strikes, be they of any kind and
for any reason, are always ridiculed in his novels. Karanth retained such political views
till the very end of his life. In one of the extended interviews, conducted by G. Rajashekara
(a socialist thinker) in 1993, (Ramachandran: 2001, 70) Karanth elaborates and justifies
his position vis-a-vis Socialism in these words:

Those who cannot see what is happening in Poland today cannot see anything
in the rest of the world. I have gone through the entire literature of the Labour
Party; and I have met those who have escaped from Russia. Owing to their illusory
sense of equality, there is a greater exploitation today in Russia than anywhere
else in the world, either in the past or the present. ... To me a value is an individual’s
value. In the past there were poor people of all the castes; but they led an honourable life. ... Whatever problems they had, they kept up their word. That is value to me. I have never accepted the principle that because one is poor, one can steal from others. (Karantha Manthana. p.474 quoted in Ramachandran: 2001, 70-1)

For the first time in thousands of years of Indian history after independence democracy which has its base in the universal equality is active. Today, Equal education, equal judiciary system, equal social opportunities are accessible by all the citizens of every caste, class and religion. Even more importantly, for the first time in the history of India, neglected communities have become conscience in mass and are fighting for the social and political power. If we see in that way, it seems as though the later part of the twentieth century is the age of the organized and powerful Dalit Shudra movements. Women, Dalit, Shudra communities, Muslim - Christian religious minority communities which are in the periphery are moving towards the centre. Why a renowned political and social face which was never ever heard before in India does not catch glimpse of Karanth (and for other contemporary writers)? (Ramachandran: 2002, 25-6)

According to C. N. Ramachandran (2002), the reason for this stance must be found in Liberal humanism that was a part of Karanth’s rationality. One of the features of liberal humanism is Vehement Individualism. In the vehement individualism the individual and the society are always in the edge and there would be always conflict. Therefore, when Karanth sees the society, nation or religion, moral and political systems from the same perspective, for him the post independent society of India looks as though it has completely ruined itself. However, we have to observe here that he does not do it in his portrayal of the traditional values.

For example, the novel ‘Kudiyara Koosu’ examines the relationship between forest and man. This novel depicts the life of a tribe called ‘Kudiya’ in a picturesque way.
Predominantly, it is the innocent way of life of the Kudiyas being glorified in the novel. It has to be enquired, why the novelist has engaged himself so obsessively in depiction of a mundane life of the Kudiyas. The light also has to be shed on what aspects of life of the Kudiyas are being highlighted in the novel? Finally, these enquires should lead us to answer the certain enquires when we read the novel. What message does the novelist send to the world with regard to the life of the Kudiyas in particular and life itself in general?

Whereas Karanth appears a radical rebel in matters pertaining to religion, morality, and sex, he appears to be highly conservative and traditional in politico-economic matters. Karanth has no faith in the democratic system as it is practised today in India though he has faith in Democracy as such. His political novels register the total failure of the democratic system because of illiterate voters, corrupt politicians, and self-centred bureaucrats. Also, he detests such ‘Socialistic’ practices like Land-redistribution and the policy of Reservation for the downtrodden (Ramachandran: 2001, 118-9).

When we read the novels of Shivaram Karanth where the conversion is directly referred to in both Chomana Dudi as well as Kudiyara Kusu it is the physical lust of the man who is instrumental in the conversion process is targeted. Both Michael and Manuel are pictured as womanizers.

In the preface for the English version of *Kudiyara Koosu* Karanth writes,

> As this novel is based on the life and problems of a very small tribal group living on the Western Ghats of South Kanara.... The Kudiyas lived in small groups.... They were a self-contained group. Though they served in cardamum estates in actual life they were free and independent.... What made me write my novel, were the social problems they faced and the outside interference which they could no longer withstand. There are more men than women in this tribe. But I met one Subba, who in spite of this drawback had three wives. There was no inter-clan
marriage in the early days. But rivalry among the owners of the estates prevented these people, from seeking spouses from other Kudiya groups so much so that when Dr. Haimandorf visited them, they told him that they had forgotten their clan names. I could easily discover in the facial features of their children that outside influences had already begun to poison their domestic lives. (Karanth: 1979, v-vi)

In the preface Karanth makes it clear what made him write the novel. ‘...the social problems they faced and the outside interference which they could no longer withstand.’ In the novel there are four masters who have been spoken about. Ballalas and Mathias never make any direct impact in the lives of Kudiyas by their act in the novel. Then it is Thirumala Bhatta and his son and the other one Valli Braganza who does not own the little hill but the big hill. At once the novelist makes a reference to the rule of the company that is the British rule. What would be observed even in Kudiyara Kusu is the bias of the narrator towards Christianity, and how this bias of the narrator carves out a very different entity for Kudiyas. In this sense what could be inferred is the revivalism that was taking place during the time of the colonial rule and even afterwards has carved out a different identity for the untouchables and tribal’s who were never a part of the mainstream Hinduism and there are ample examples to retain them in the periphery by side glancing Christianity by depicting Conversion as an evil force.

The Narrator of Kudiyara Koosu has admiration for the colonial or British rule not that he has a complete aversion to it. But to look down upon the lifestyle and the Gods of the tribal people is a matter of enquiry.

Kalkuda of the Little Hill was not like other deities. He was not placid like the Gods and demons down the valley. Delay of a day or two in celebrating their
feasts would not annoy them and they were ready to forgive little lapses in the rules of worship. But Kalkuda was, not a spineless deity. If he were, he would not have held sway over the ravines where men were afraid to step, would not have ruled over the distant hills and demanded tribute from the Kudia tribe. In the days before the Company Government, Kalkuda had even received a human head once in five years.’ (4)

Ironically the narrator stops the intervention of the company government only to control Kalkuda but when Kempi reveals in public that Tukra was responsible for the death of a pregnant woman “Do you know how that woman died? This my husband seduced her, and when she was big with child he pushed her into the water and killed her.” (15) Entire village knows the crime committed by Tukra, ‘First the people talked about his sin in whispers and then made bold to speak aloud. Many believed it;’ (19-20) The narrator does not even make an attempt to give an impression of depicting some sort of guilt or punishment for Tukra. Instead the narrator finds comfortable in making a cozy statement with the regard to the entire crime, as though the Kudiyas had no sense of justice, ‘In any other place this would have been a matter for the police and Government. But the hills were beyond the reach of the arm of civilisation. Not courts but Gods and spirits tried people here.’(20)

What is interesting to note is Tukra does get punished neither by Kalkuda nor by his people in the plot. What vision does the narrator have for the Kudiyas in the mid half of the twentieth century? The query gets raised due to the scene that follows the revelation of the crime and the narrator’s comment about the state of crime and punishment. Immediately the narrator writes saying

Within three days of all this, Bhatta, the landlord, arrived on the scene. It was a sudden visit. As usual the first thing he did was to send word to the Headman and to Tukra. Tukra hurried to him and explained that the Headman had gone
to Vitla for the very purpose of meeting him. "But I did not pass him on the way. But why bother? If he has gone there he will return." Tukra gave Bhatta an account of the events in the Hills and of the spell of terror that Kalkuda had cast. Bhatta was not too greatly impressed by devils and deities but he knew what they would do to those who believed in them. "Very bad, very bad. Did the old man's daughter-in-law also die? Poor fellow! At this age he will find it difficult to look after that brat his grandson. Should he go all the way to Vitla for this? What will you need for your feast? Fix a day and make all arrangements. I have not seen this show before. I shall stay and find out what you do," (20)

There is a strong sense in the novel, by the middle of the twentieth century certain people of the upper caste have tried to patronize the practices of the tribals and thereby have tried to acquire a position of hegemony over their religious practices and life style itself. "Tukra and the Headman went to Bhatta in the night. It was a brief talk and it was all about the feast for Kalkuda. They agreed that the Headman was to take the initiative and call the people of the Big Hill. All expenses were to be borne by the landlord." (21)

The narrator does not comment about the arrangement. He must be happy with the intrusion of Bhatta.

From the very beginning of the description of Valli Braganza, the lessee of the Big Hill tries to look down upon. If we closely read the plot of the novel, though the imperialistic attitude of Thirumala Bhatta and his son is seen in negative light, the narrator rarely comments on their ways. Instead the narrators itch towards Christianity becomes clear in the depiction of Valli Braganza's Character. At times the attitude of Thirumala Bhatta and his son is violently imperial than that of Valli Braganza. But it is clear that the narrator is more preoccupied with the influence of Christianity in the life of Kudias than than the approach of Thirumala Bhatta and his son.
Its present owner lived in a town on the plateau which was a day's distance as the crow flies but a week on foot. The owner had leased it out to a relation and was content with the annual share he received. This lessee, Valli Braganza, visited the hill at harvest-time. He knew his rupees and annas well. He did not bother to build a house for himself, as Bhatta had done on the Little Hill, and was content with a simple hut. He learnt to like what the Kudias cooked and was not averse to sharing their toddy. He came to think of the hill as a veritable paradise; only, as difficult to enter. But he could not stay in the hills all the year. He went there for two months after the rains, and again for the fair of the Corner Village. At the fair he had introduced a reform. It was after all a Hindu fair and how could he, a Christian, be enthusiastic? Instead of distributing clothes to his tenants, he gave them money and asked them to buy their own garments. This had resulted in a saving for himself. But one thing he did keenly feel: why should not these stupid people give up Kalkuda and Panjurli and Kalkutiga and follow the Cross? He had asked a padre to visit the fair and speak about the glories of Christianity. He even thought of building a hut next to the Shiva temple, raise a cross on it and make it a church. But the preachers he knew were not very fond a malarial places. His wish had remained unfulfilled." (85)

With the introduction of Valli Braganza, the first Christian character to be introduced in the novel, the narrator makes so many negative comments about him. Unfortunately, the narrator's description of these two paragraphs which are put together here bring to light a lot of fear which is associated with the character of narrator who is not actually present in the plot of the novel. The narrator directly attacks Christian religion merely thinking its business is only to convert the innocent. Valli Braganza's character is sketched as very stingy. But whereas of Bhatta, as benevolent who had in his own house, had a maid servant,
and his benevolence is expressed in throwing away of a tobacco as does Sankappayya in *Chomana Dudi*. Bhatta arranges for the feast, where as Valli Braganza mocks at the Kudiyas for worshipping Panjurli and Kalkutiga, instead he wants them to follow the cross, a padre to preach them the glories of Christianity. He even thinks of building a hut next to the Shiva temple, raise a cross on it and make it a church. He brings in a change of distributing money instead of distributing cloths during the fair of the Corner Village. Narrator mentions this change as a reform. Adding to it the narrator comments saying,

...it was after all Hindu fair and how could he a Christian, be enthusiastic? Instead of distributing cloths to his tenants, he gave them money and asked them to buy their own garments. This had resulted in a saving for himself. (85)

The narrator does not satisfy; he continues ‘So what? He raised a cross on the roof of his own hut on the Big Hill and, whenever he found time, told the Kudias of the greatness of his God.’ (86) For Karanth the narrator all the activities of the Christian character either looks as mean, negative or aspiring others to convert to their religion.

In both the novels of his where Christianity as had its great presence, Karanth tries to depict the Christian characters as womanizers, Manuel and Michael in Dudi, and here it is Valli Braganza.

Braganza’s constant companion on the Big Hill was Choma, without whom he did not venture out in the forests. When he went crab-hunting, Choma’s teen-aged son kept him company. The four or five pots in his house were cleaned by Choma’s wife or by his daughter, Giddi, who also filled his tubs with water. For all this work Braganza paid a four-anna silver piece each month to Choma. Though so careful with his purse, he was no miser in speech. He used gilded words with a purpose. Giddi, who was seventeen, had captivated his heart. She was not just
a healthy piece of flesh but one whose beauty was burnished by her look of innocence. Every time Braganza came to the hill he brought Choma a pocket-knife or a rosary. Giddi wore a rosary from which hung a crucifix, whose meaning she did not know but which she proudly showed off. Its power made her convert to Braganza at any rate. The result of it all was that Braganza began to feel how good it would be if people like her, whose wage was just a quarter of a rupee, could go with him to Karkala. A couple of days before he left for Karkala that season, Braganza went to Choma and said: “Eh Choma, where I live in Karkala it is very difficult to get people for work. Your children here have nothing to do. Why should you not send them with me?” He did not greatly care for the son but he knew that Choma would not send his daughter alone and had thought of this trick. Lest they should feel Karkala was too far away, he changed the topography of the region and made it a mere two days’ walking distance from the hills.’ (86)

The accusation with regard to the conversion of the upper caste against Christianity is the association of money to convert the lower caste and the tribal by luring them. And this is emphasized by the narrator with this incident.

Choma and his wife did not like the idea. But when the master himself asked, it was not theirs to refuse. They wavered and put off giving a reply but when the rains were over Choma was compelled to send them with Braganza. He implored him that he should bring them back for the fair. Braganza was there but he had not brought Choma’s children. His excuse was that Giddi was down with fever. But he quickly added that there was nothing to worry about. The climate of Karkala had suited her wonderfully. In fact she had gained weight. But that was no
consolation to her parents. To pacify them further, Braganza placed two shining rupees in Choma’s palm. The silver pleased him but his mind was not at rest. His daughter was ill and he had to see her. Ignoring Braganza’s dissuasion, he followed him to Karkala from the fair. The two days’ journey that Braganza had described lengthened out to five. (86-7)

If the narration is observed closely Christianity brings only pains in the life of Kudiyas in Kudiyara Kusu, as in the life of Choma and his family who is a mera, an untouchable in Chomana Dudi.

Choma was in for a shock. Glddi was in the best of health, but she wore a strange garb and her brother had cut his long hair and evidently both had been received into the religion of the padres. His sorrow knew no bounds. He insisted on taking them home with him but they refused. He felt the sky fall on his head. He trudged home alone and woebegone. (87)

Since, the conversion in Kudiyara Kusu is not effected due to the owes suffered by the tribals because of the hegemony of the upper caste, for the narrator it suffices to make use of a lighter tactic from stopping the kudiyas from getting converted to Christianity. He need not use the apparition of Kalkuda as he does it in getting the apparition of Panjurli in Dudi. Instead, he can slightly mock at Kalkuda.

His wife shared the ache of his heart but they could not tell their neighbours. The only person, in whom Choma’s wife confided, unable to contain it, was the priest’s wife. Little wonder that Kalkuda came to know it. (87)

The narration adds to the character of Valli Braganza with the same intensity the follies of the characters get sketched at length.
When Braganza returned to Karkala from Mangalore he was startled to find that the bird had flown. He had not credited the simple-minded Kudias with so much of initiative. He had thought Choma and his wife would merely shed tears and be resigned to their fate. His fault was that he had been in too much of a hurry. If he had worked more cautiously on the minds of impressionable captives he would probably have succeeded. But within two months of taking them to Karkala he had changed their dress and religion. Giddi was made to discard her sari for a striped skirt and a red blouse. He took her to church regularly. Though her brother protested, he had had his hair clipped, on the ground that the town’s climate made long hair bad for him. He spoke to them at length on the beauties of churches and the miracles of Mother Mary. Giddi and her brother knew so little of religion that it was not hard to convince them of the superiority of the modern God over the rabble of barbarous deities. To overcome their fear of what Kalkuda might do, he tied the cross round their neck and said it was a potent talisman which sent all heathen Gods scurrying. When dress changed, should not names change too? Although he could not give them any Portuguese surname, Braganza christened them a new. Giddi became Pauline and her brother was Paul. (88-9)

Braganza was earnest in his intentions. He had confided in the priest and secured his blessing. He had even ordered a silver-mounted ivory comb and a pair of earrings from a silversmith for his intended. He had formally proposed to Giddi and when she had given the expected answer without any fuss, he had counted himself a lucky man. Now that he learnt that they had run away, he hastened to the police station in a rage. The police officer heard his story in silence. (89)

Braganza was so convinced of his own rightness that it had never occurred to him that the law might take a dim view of his bringing to Karkala two people who had not
yet attained majority. When the officer learnt that the kidnappers were the girl's parents, he told Braganza to take back his complaint lest he be prosecuted for kidnapping minors and converting them by fraud to another religion. Crestfallen, Braganza approached his priest. Having known that the girl was as fond of him as he of her, the priest said: "Why do you worry? Go to the hill again, and she will run back with you. That is all.

Thus, the analysis of certain selected works of Dr Shivaram Karanth supports the thesis that even those writers who were active in ushering-in some progressive changes in the Indian society were unable to break out of the mold of Vedic ideology that has been sustaining the caste hierarchy. This is not to say that they have gone on to strengthen the roots of the caste system. However, it can be clearly observed that they have been very lax in forthrightly denouncing it - both, in their actions and creative works. What is more revealing and disturbing is the fact that even a rationalist like Karanth has traversed more in the path of modern cultural revivalists than digressing from it.

As we conclude this Chapter it seems apt to recall the words of I. A. Richards (1926) who said:

The realm of pure thought is not an autonomous state. Our thoughts are the servants of our interests, and even when they seem to rebel it is some among our interests which are in insurrection. Our thoughts are pointers and it is the other, the active, stream which deals with the things which thoughts point to (14).