

Dr. S. L. Bhyrappa's Novel *Daatu*: A Realistic Portrait of the Social Conflicts in Indian Society

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study the reflections of social conflicts in Dr. S. L. Bhyrappa's one of the most outstanding literary work, *Daatu*. *Daatu*, a Kannada word, literally means 'crossing over'. Every person and a society live in a circumscribed boundary. These boundaries could be of various types such as; social, cast, religious, racial, etc. In most of the cases rational thinking, that impels to cross over the boundaries mentioned above. Dr. S. L. Bhyrappa suggests 'to cross' these boundaries to reach the ultimate truth of human life, by denying falls social practices and fervent faith in God. Dr. Bhyrappa has effectively portrayed and presented various social conflicts of Indian society in this novel. A book written 45 years ago is applicable today also. Is this Dr. Bhyrappa's visionary ability? Or is it our backwardness? The answer is not so difficult.

Key Words: Conflicts, Caste, Indian Society, Dr. S. L. Bhyrappa

The aim of this research paper is to find how Dr. S. L. Bhyrappa has portrayed various social conflicts in this particular novel, *Daatu*. Social conflicts are the biggest obstacles for any progressive society. Being a part of technological, global, modernized nation and world too, we cannot sustain and move forward with these regressive views related to casteism and its inter-related issues.

Renowned and controversial writer of Kannada literature, Dr. S. L. Bhyrappa has an extraordinary skill of portraying the conflict situations related to family, social ethics, culture and religion. He always uses his characters to define his life-philosophy and as a tool to bring forward social and individual issues.

Gigantic power of imagination, extraordinary narrative skill, in-depth study of history, rational thinking and religious obligations has enabled Dr. Bhyrappa to write about aspects of Indian society. Reading his novels such as; *Vamshavriksha*, *Parva*, *Sartha*, *Mandra* and *Daatu* effectively reveal his greatness as a well-acclaimed novelist of our time. *Daatu* was published in the year 1973, which won the Central Sahitya Academy Award in the year 1975. B. S. Chandrashekhara writes as "*Daatu* had the unique distinction of being considered as the most outstanding literary work by both the State and Central Sahitya Academy in the same year. (Chandrashekhara). It had been translated in English by Pradhan Gurudatta and L.V. Shantakumari in 2017. K. Shivaram Karanth considers novel *Daatu* as

a new trend in modern Kannada literature, along with Lankesh's *Biruku*, Shantinath Desai's *Vikshep*, Giri's *Gati Sthiti*, and Dr. Anantha Murthy's *Bharatipura*.

***Daatu* - A Suggestion for Crossing Over:**

Daatu, a Kannada word, literally means 'crossing over'. Every person and a society live in a circumscribed boundary. These boundaries could be of various types such as; social, cast, religious, racial, etc. In most of the cases rational thinking, that impels to cross over the boundaries mentioned above. Dr. S. L. Bhyrappa suggests '*to cross*' these boundaries to reach the ultimate truth of human life, by denying falls social practices and fervent faith in God. K. Shivram Karanth writes, "What is new in this novel is the author's personal philosophy shaping the actions and manners of its characters...*Varnashrama Dharma* cannot adequately explain our caste hierarchy." (Karanth)

Dr. Bhyrappa has effectively portrayed and presented various social conflicts of Indian society in this novel. A book written 45 years ago is applicable today also. Is this Dr. Bhyrappa's visionary ability? Or is it our backwardness? The answer is not so difficult.

In this novel, Dr. Bhyrappa portrays the visible as well as hidden conflicts within Indian society; in terms of family, cast, marriage and other social systems. The setting of the novel took place at a small village called Tirumalapura, where various individuals and castes encounter one another. Thus, Dr. Bhyrappa's *Daatu* represents the socio-religious and cultural story of entire nation.

Various Conflicts in *Daatu* :

The caste system in India has affected the social life and peace of this nation. The ancient religious preachers and followers of Hindu religion had created this unjust social ladder. This ladder never allowed upward mobility to so-called down-trodden class. As the education and social reforms started spreading in India, the off-streamed class started fighting for their rights. They took help of education, social reformers, caste based vote banks, political leaders and law. These various social conflicts got ignition at this particular point and acquired entire nation.

Dr. Bhyrappa presents several conflicts related to people and social systems. People and systems influence and affect one another, which leads to chaotic situations in social life. These conflicts can be divided into sections such as cultural conflicts, personal conflicts, marriage conflicts, caste conflict, conflict between educated and uneducated people, conflicts due to upper caste mentality versus revenge.

K. Shivram Karanth writes in this regards,

"...the last novel I like to refer to is Bhyrappa's *Daatu* or 'Pass over'. Its dominant theme is intercaste marriage, in a caste-ridden society like ours. The author focuses our attention on a village named 'Tirumalapur', its various castes and sub-castes. Each one has its own pride and resents to have alliance with other people. There are caste rivalries and antagonisms. This is made intense by power politics. People of the lowest caste think that the only way to come up is

to destroy the much-hated upper castes". (Karanth)

A society is a bunch of various individuals tied up with relations and moral obligations. When a situation of disagreement occurs between an individual and society causes various conflicts. Social obligations and rituals have great interference in the lives of an individual and families too. Conflict situations could be more serious when they arise in one family. Families and relationships are the sources of our strength and pains too. Human relationships are extremely complex; they effect and affect our personal and social lives.

Religious and cultural conflicts:

We find psychological and emotional conflicts of Venkataramanayya, the priest of Tirumalapura temple. He is a highly respected and religious person. He is knowledgeable and a strong follower of rituals. He follows caste system in his personal and social life. But a hidden truth of his life is his extramarital affair with a woman from a lower caste named Matangi.

"What we call God is just a piece of stone. It doesn't deserve to be worshipped. From tomorrow, I'm not going to do this job anymore". (Pg. 191)

"Has God created us to commit such sins? Why should there be this terrible attraction in the desire to commit a sin? "(Pg. 310) There are several characters (esp. Venkataramanayya) who elaborates most naked truth about us that despite of being bounded to the concepts of purity, loyalty, faithfulness, religious purity etc., human tendency inclines towards committing sins.

Venkataramanayya is caught in a great dilemma between his social face as a hard-core religious person and his physical and emotional attachment with a woman from lower caste. Picturing this plot in the story has a greater relevance as a highly respected priest ruins his so-called purity and reputation due to his illicit affair. A person who had a strong belief that, "*Yagnopaveetham paramam pavithram...*" says "What's the matter? It's just a six yarns of spun cotton". (Pg. 199) This shows his transgression from a religious chief to a contemptuous atheist.

Another example of conflict is related to Venkatesh, son of priest Venkataramanayya. He follows his father's footprints as a religious follower but according to the changing time, he tries to encash his religious knowledge for the people who want to upgrade their castes.

"Venkatesha replied coolly : 'Why do you accuse me of greed? Do you think things like this are only happening here? All over the country people are trying to upgrade their community from one category to another.... Everyone else is trying to be recognised as a Brahmin, and to be our equals.'" (Pg. 364)

Venkatesh is a regressive character, but he pretends himself as progressive, when he is in social and political situations.

Bettayya is a MLA who belongs to a lower caste. Despite of being a political figure he follows caste system in his daily life. Though he is aware of the law and constitutional rights he denies for raising his protest for entering the village temple. This

shows his fear for God and higher castes of his village. Same kind if religious and cultural fear could find in character of Rangamma, Shrinivas's mother.

Caste conflicts:

In his speech given at Sahitya Academy Award function in 1999, Dr. Bhyrappa had said that "Of late an atmosphere is created in which a sensitive person is forced to feel ashamed of India's past. In the Universities and other cultural institutions and the media, a determined and well organised group dings into the ears of youngsters that the so-called Indian culture was based on exploitation of the lower castes by the upper castes; that it represented exploitation of women; that it was anti-life; and that all the so called artistic achievements like the great temples were products of forced labour; that it was only after the advent of Islam and later the British that egalitarian concepts were introduced into Indian society". (Bhyrappa)

The entire novel is blended in a theme of caste system and casteism in Indian society. almost every character has his views and opinions about castes and religious things.

"...on the basis that the very name *Hari* got contaminated and that the people of this colony didn't belong to *Hari*". (Pg. 2) A person of a lower caste can be named as Hari, but are these deprived class people are really accepted by so called higher castes? While describing the village, Bhyrappa has represented the disputes between Shivas and Vaishnavas. This is like an example of the differences among various aspects of Indian religions.

"I have taught both communities. However they may flower mound, gold is still gold and iron is iron". (Pg. 10)

"Yet, these times are theirs, isn't it"? (Pg. 10)

From the beginning and till the end every character and events move around the caste system and the point of views of various people in particular situations. Shyamanna, educated but unemployed Nagaraj, a newspaper agent Subbaraya, Tirunarayana Iyengar, Raghavendra of Madhava Samaj and Venkatesh, son of Venkataramanayya all these characters express their own point of views about the issues of religious practices and caste system. Venkataramanayya is a priest of the village temple and a highly respected person of Tirumalapura. Satyabhama is educated daughter of Venkataramanayya and a central character of this novel. This story starts to explore with the news of Satyabhama's marriage proposal with Srinivasa, who belong to Palghar/ Gowda caste.

"For a moment, he was unable to believe it. He could never have imagined his daughter doing such a thing".(Pg. 12)

"You haven't learnt anything all these years. Why don't they accept? This is a perfect chance for that Bramhin-hater to insult our people by marrying his son to a Brahmin girl. He won't give up this opportunity". (Pg. 15)

"Father, even if a horse wanted to move in, it wouldn't be accepted by the asses into their stable". (Pg. 15)

The rigid and orthodox thinking of both the castes about this inter-caste marriage could be noticed at the beginning of the novel. A reader can notice the fanatic opinions of different characters about caste and religious issues. Every character response to the situation in consonance with his religion and rituals had taught him. No one is willing to think rationally and beyond their orthodox mind set.

Conflicts related to marriage systems:

Caste-based marriages and patriarchal families are the dominant forces of our marriage system. It prohibits or rejects the freedom of choosing his or her life partner. *Daatu* effectively represents the interference of casteism in marriage system. Similarly caste system has tremendous impact on social practices and here lies all the roots of different kinds of conflicts in Indian society since hundreds of years. Satyabhama is a rebellious central character and she twice attempts the inter-caste marriage. First time Gowda Srinivas and then Mohandas of lower caste, but due to the interference of caste system it could not happen. Another conflict is related to the marriage systems in Indian society.

Srinivas also suffers from personal conflict of marrying Satyabhama. He is educated young son of influential political figure Melagiri Gowda. He is in love with Satyabhama and wants to marry her, but his mother has different opinion and a kind of religious fear regarding this inter caste marriage. Respect for mother and love for Satyabhama is the conflict of Srinivas, which ruins several lives. Satyabhama never get married, Srinivasa's marriage prove a

failure, second time Srinivas falls in love with Meera, this affair also results in nothing, due to this Meera commits suicide. One conflict of Srinivas ruins many lives.

Melagiri Gowda is a father of Srinivas, he is a influential political figure in the novel. Initially he is happy about his son's wish of marrying a Brahmin girl, Satyabhama. But being political leader he is having a great fear, as this inter-caste marriage might affect his political career. His wife, Rangamma and his father Thirumale Gowda have negative opinion about this inter caste marriage. Caught in a conflict of inter-caste marriage and political career brings unhappiness and stress to Melagiri Gowda and his family.

The leading characters like Sathyabama, Srinivas, Mohandas, Venkatramanayya along with other supporting characters represent the views about marriage system in general and inter caste marriage system in particular. Satya is in love with Srinivas, but due to orthodox thinking the family of Srinivas denies their marriage proposal. Later on Sathyabama gets impressed by the intelligence and fighting spirit of Mohandas, but his views about taking the revenge on upper class people makes Satyabhama to rethink of her own thoughts. Srinivas gets married to another girl of his own cast. Unfortunately his wife dies and again he gets attracted towards Sathyabama.

Conflicts between educated and uneducated:

Educated characters like Satyabhama, Srinivas, Mohandas are the representatives of modern time. They have progressive views about social issues. Their modern

views are the outcome of their education. They are more open and liberal about marriage and caste system. But on the other hand, uneducated characters like Bettayya, Melagiri Gowda, Tirumale Garuda, Rangamma have orthodox views.

"The old chief had always accepted Brahmin supremacy, but now he seemed to be claiming that he and members of his community were superior to Brahmins or at least in no way inferior". (Pg. 19)

A noticeable difference between the views of these educated and uneducated characters reveals that education makes a great difference on your thinking ability.

Caste superiority and revenge:

During an interview by R. Surendran and Arsu, Dr. Bhyrappa had answered to one of the question saying "Satya did cross the caste obstacle; but she refuses to marry Mohandas because Mohandas entertains ideas of taking revenge on upper caste people, including sexually exploiting their women, as the upper caste men did to women of Dalits in the past. She thinks her life would be miserable with a man who is full of hatred and revenge even to the extent of sexual abuse. It is not the limitation of the novelist but it points out the fact that the characters concerned should evolve to a higher level". (R. Surendran) This particular answer emphasized the issue of caste supremacy and the feeling of taking revenge.

"These upper-caste people have taken as for granted for far too long. Filthy Brahmin! We are the original

Dravidians. We own the country". (Pg. 256)

One more kind of conflict could be found in terms of the thinking of the characters which belongs to upper casts and views of lower caste people in response to the orthodox thinking the feeling of taking revenge.

"If she considered Brahmins as horses, this would mean admitting her own community as asses: ...So she said: You don't question me, the five fingers are all not equal". (Pg. 39)

"The waters at a higher level, should maintain its level and a lower one should floor its own level". (Pg. 60)

"Lower castes men have taken advantage of upper caste women, molested them and let them down badly". (Pg. 122)

"You all know that this is the age of Kali and that the lower castes are doing their best to humiliate the upper castes. My own experience confirms this". (Pg. 123)

Brahmins and Gowda deny the equal respect two other castes. They have been prohibited from various kinds of social and religious opportunities. Educated lower cast people have the feeling of taking revenge and gaining their respect with the help of constitution and law.

Conclusion:

Daatu is not merely a story of Tirumalapura village or set of people, rather it is a realistic portrait of entire caste system existing in our nation. Story based on the background of Indian society of 45 years ago, still shows its

resemblance with present time indicates that we have developed and travelled long way in terms of education, science and civilization but issues related to religion and caste have tied us strongly to the old and outdated rituals.

This novel emphasizes progressive views and inclusive mind set, at the same time it conveys a strong message that casteism and the false religious practices need to be condemned. Social conflicts are the biggest obstacles for every progressive society. Being a part of technological, global, modernized nation and world too, we cannot sustain and move forward with those regressive views. These conflicts affect the

safety, happiness and progress of an individual and the entire society too.

Loss of social harmony has resulted into devastation. Symbiosis and social ecology has been replaced by hatred and revenge.

A book written 45 years ago is applicable today also indicates the ability of Dr. S. L. Bhyrappa's, at the same time it confirms our backwardness as a society. Post-independence era was the time of social reforms, but after analyzing this novel it seems that our social reformers could not achieve those reforms in reasonable amount.

To eradicate the caste system, it is necessary to change the orthodox and politically motivated mind-set of its followers.

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