



Observations on ‘Chirasmarane’ a work of Niranjana on Class Conflict

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Progressive thinkers who dreamt of an equal society supported Marxism. In the global context as well as socioeconomic terminology ‘class’ was not given importance. The Indian society created caste-based labourers. But, industrialisation created two classes – capitalists and labourers. Marx views caste in the context of social class. The Marxist ideology leaned towards Communism. Therefore, it believes that class struggle is the driving force of social development. This struggle has been existing since time immemorial. S. S. Hiremath identifies discrimination based on class as follows: “During the time of the tribal culture when there were no classes as production forces increased, the production interrelationships had to change. Exploitation started spreading its tentacles as the tribal leaders and the priests enslaved those whom they captured and thereby started thriving on the labour of these slaves. The exploiters are those class of people who exploit the labour of others. They are the owners of the labour resources. Those who had to toil for a living were the exploited class”. The custom of slavery and feudal system that came into being thus transformed into capitalism. Marxism comprehended the pace of social development on the basis of classes and class conflict.

The teacher in ‘Chirasmarane’ has correctly identified the origin of class conflict. “the story of creation of earth, creation of man... lifestyle of first human beings...the ancient society...formation of groups...conflicts between them...slavery...the mighty and the marginalised...the hungry and the looters...fight for land...acquisition of knowledge...invention of machines...class conflict...voyage of traders from developed countries around the world...acquisition of those nations...India falling into the hands of foreigners...continued plundering of India’s wealth...First Freedom Struggle...defeat of the people...rejuvenation of revolt...rise of communism in Russia...resistance to colonialism...national unit...people’s struggle.” He explains this to students whose spirit of revolt has been rekindled. The teacher too is influenced by the Marxist ideology. He tries to form a class conflict there.

Maxism has its own place in the ideologies prevailing in the present world. It interpreted the hitherto unheardof historical conflict, social movement and upliftment of the downtrodden from a scientific viewpoint. It brought about radical change in viewing and studying history. Therefore, Marxism is global, national and local.

Against this background, the people who were influenced by Marxist ideology wished that political freedom should not be the only issue at hand, but economical equality and equal distribution of financial

resources should also be a priority. This ideology has also influenced Kannada literature. Progressive writers like Aa. Na. Kru., Niranjana, Basavaraj Kattimani, Tha. Ra. Su. were influenced by Marxist ideology and they expressed it in their writings. Niranjana has written novels based on class conflict.

Though Marxism had not influenced the Kannada much before the advent of progressive literature, a few novels have highlighted the conflict between the exploiter and the exploited. This attitude can be observed in the literature originating from coastal Karnataka. There is absolute truth in the words of O. L. Nagabhushanaswamy when he says, “Progressive literature evolved by its commitment to Marxist ideology and resistance to renaissance. Its aim is social change. It views literature as a medium for social change. However, the resistance expressed here is as a result of anger arising out of looking at life in a simplified way. Except Niranjana, we cannot find anyone with the spirit of resistance among progressive writers.” Niranjana said that it was an attractive proposition to form new society on the foundation of equality after India became independent. To him, Marxism and communism were as much indigenous as were the ideologies of Gandhi and Nehru.

Marx has been theoretically portrayed in Kannada literature. Marxism is an integral worldview. Marx studied and formulated his theory after deeply studying three theoretical ideologies of the 19th century, namely, philosophy of Germany, political economics of England and socialism of France. He formulated the outline of the new society on the basis of his experience of class struggle. His views deeply influenced the progressive writers of Kannada. Niranjana is one among them.

Lenin was an ardent follower of Lenin. Lenin further developed the principles of Marx in the era of imperialism. In the capitalist countries Marxism-Leninism was used against bourgeois system and exploitation of the labour class. Against this background, the citizens of the developing nations use this to eradicate poverty and development of the nation.

Though communism strives for the welfare of the labour class, it desires to uplift those who are exploited. It treats the poor and marginalised of all castes equally. It proposes to establish equality by opposing gender discrimination, giving importance to economics.

“The society we live in is composed of classes. This classified society has given rise to conflict of interest and class conflict as also consciousness about the class” says Acharya Narendra Deva. The socialists believed that in this class conflict, socialism will be in support of the downtrodden. Though Acharya Narendra Deva did not question the ethics of using violence in class conflict, he denounced the idea that violence is essential. This can be seen in some novels of Kannada.

Though capitalists exist in all civilised nations, they do not live a civilised life. They exploited the lower classes. They created a class of slaves for the manufacture of goods of their personal consumption. The slaves were forced to work for them. This class is called the labour class.

We cannot view the labour class from the angle of Marxist ideology. We have to view it from the Indian perspective. In order to protect their interests, the classes initiate conflict among themselves. However, this ultimately results in political conflict. However, this research has followed the method of searching for class conflict from the social perspective.

The struggle of labour class has been portrayed well in Kannada novels. Many novelists of the region can search for class conflict or struggle in those novels. Colonials, kings, Brahmins etc. had

servants. They had to work in their fields and houses. Some novels have portrayed them as working as slaves just to obtain food. They have also portrayed how the lust of seers, their meanness and religion have betrayed the devotees. ‘Vagdevi’ written by Bolar Baburao is a classic example for this view.

‘Chirasmrane’ has exposed the class conflict from the historical perspective. It is the story of struggle and also story of revolutionary fighters. It is the story of the farmers who revolted during the 40s. It originated in the Malabar region and spread to Kasargod, Karivallur, Chirukkal, Neeleshwara and Kayyar. Niranjana has beautifully portrayed the struggle at Kayyar in ‘Chirasmrane’. The theme of the novel is based on the resistance shown by the downtrodden against the British colonialism and their supporters.

The exploited farmers formed an organisation to fight for their rights. The colonials and their subordinates leave no stone unturned to suppress them. However, they cannot stand the strong resolve of the farmers. However, their inhumanity subjected them to punishment. Many were hanged.

A teacher comes to Kayyar, the centre of the exploited people. With the help of his students Appu and Chirakunda he creates awareness in them and sows the seeds of rebellion. The awareness sown thus in the minds of the poor of Kayyar spreads and gives sleepless nights to the ruling class. The people who used to bow to the landlords started to resist. This was all because of the teacher of Kayyar Primary School. He clearly explained class discrimination, exploitation of the labour class and revolution to the students and sowed the seeds of resistance in them.

The awareness that started from reading newspapers extended up to farmers participating in regional conference of farmers. In a village full of small agriculturists, there were only two landlords – a Brahmin by the name Namboodiri and a lower cast person by the name Nambiar. They were exploiting the farmers and slaves. Then arrives the teacher to the village. He creates awareness and rebellion in them. He also enrolls Appu and Chirakunda to the revolutionary party. Brings the farm labourers together. Aboobakar joins Appu and Chirakunda. He then introduces them to the scholar. The scholar tells them about evolution of socialism, colonialism, and role of local and foreign capitalists in India.

He tells them, “if labourers unite, those who exploit them can be defeated. The chains that have tied us will be broken. We are not alien to revolution, our farmers should wake up, unite... farmer associations should be started in each and every village”. He also shows the labourers how to fight to obtain freedom from the British as well as from local landlords. Subsequently, Kayyar Raitha Sangha is formed with Chirakunda as its secretary; red flag started to fly. As the farmer’s association became stronger, the cruelty of landlords against the farmers also increased. People like Appu and Chirakunda dreamt of people’s unity, struggle, revolution, freedom struggle day in and day out.

As Chirakunda’s father could not repay Rs. 1000 loan he had taken from the landlord, he snatched the land from him and made his children his slaves. Appu’s father comes to know of this and he finds it difficult to assimilate it. The novel portrays the human consciousness and at the same also opposes exploitation by the landlords.

To the people assembled at Appu’s house, the teacher says, “Why should be the guardians of the crops in Krishna Nair’s fields. We should get out of slavery. We should be the owners of our land” to explain the exploitation of the landless. He sows the seeds of rebellion in them. He makes them aware that

farmers should unite and form Kayyar Raitha Sangha. This incident lays foundation of a new beginning. The teacher encourages the people to unite and form the farmers' association.

The method used by the landlords also reflects casteism. This tendency of exploiter-exploited divide is seen at all time periods. The characters Kalyani, Krishna Nair, and Chirukanda's father exemplify this. "we were farmers with our own assets till yesterday. We commanded respect in the village. Today we are their slaves, tenants..." sighs Kalyani. The words "have you ever calculated Kalyani? The interest we have paid so far is more than the principal" reflects the exploitation by the landlord.

Seeing Kalyani's desperate attempts to save the land from the landlord, Chirukanda says, "I begged him to give little more. He told me even if time is given, from where will you get one thousand rupees. I told him I will sell a portion of the fields if required. Hearing this he started yelling. Said that if payment is not made immediately, he will drag to court. Has any farmer benefitted from going to the court? There were many people around who pretended to be on my side and said don't go to the court, settle the issue amicably. There is no landlord like him, you will have to beg after losing your fields. Be his tenant; transfer the property in his name. Fearing about police, court and jail and thinking that at least I can live in the village, I decided to transfer the property in his name and repay the debt". He even narrates how, apart from the interest, he had collected other things. "We have given all tender coconuts, coconuts, vegetables, sugarcane. After working in our fields, we were working in his fields...he does not remember any of that. During his daughter's marriage we have not only given our contribution, but also done all the work."

So, in order to counter the atrocities of the landlord, the farmers of the village try to form an association. The teacher remembers the mango tree he had watered and four of his students preparing for the rebellion. The slogans of revolt start to reverberate on the streets of the village.

"Who is the owner of the land?"

"Farmer"

"One who ploughs the land"

"Is the owner"

"Old loan..."

"should be written off"

"Zamindari system..."

"be abolished"

"Destroy..."

"Imperialism"

It looks as if people had informal education and united to fight. Here the focus is on colonialism and the cruelty shown by the local landlords. Resistance is the only way of relief to the downtrodden. The teacher was the foundation of this resistance movement. The severity of the resistance forces police Subbayya to jump into the river. When the news reaches the British government, it sends the military. This

is the turning point in the farmer resistance in Kayyar. The narrator says, “the frenzy was not because a police had died. In the imperialist empire, he is a minute entity. The nervousness was due to the fact that ordinary citizens had woken up”. Sixty persons were charged with sedition. Chirakunda, Appu, Kunjambu, Aboobakar and Krishna Nair were charged with murder. The incident became a public issue. While the teacher and others were awarded life imprisonment, Appu, Aboobakar, Chirakunda, Kunjambu and Krishna Nair were awarded death penalty. While being taken to be hanged, they shout, “Inquilab Zindabad”.

K. R. Nagaraj who critically analysed the novel has this to say: “The pandith and teacher’s philosophy is scientifically based. Therefore, there is unification of philosophy in the novelist’s objective and narration. Nowhere is it evident that political, familial and human relationships are alien to each other. On the path of the conflict, they are unavoidable”. Against this background, when labour class was formed, the landlords started to exploit them.

When Chirasmarane was written, the British had established their colony in India. They also brought the Zamindari system. Locals had no right to question it. The right of land was given only to those who supported the government. They became the new landlords. These landlords and others were helping in military recruitment as also in tax collection. The farmers’ land was in the control of the Zamindar. The farmers had to lease the land from them. A stage came when they had to part with majority of their produce to the Zamindar. Some lost their land and became agriculture labourers. Therefore, the five heroes of the novel raise their voice against imperialism.

Though night school is started in Kayyar, it does not succeed right away. So the farmers ignore the school. Reading of newspaper by Chirakunda was the primary reason. Seeing this development, the teacher is never under the impression that he can inspire them for the struggle at once. He waits for the right moment to prepare them for it. However, the novel portrays how capitalism and bureaucracy join hands to suppress the unity of the farmers.

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