



CHANDRASEKHAR KAMBAR'S *HULINERALU* AND *JOKUMARSWAMI*: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Chandrasekhar Kambar is one of the most important Kannada dramatists in English translation. He wrote seventeen plays in the folk tradition and a lot of poetry. His folklore-based plays are as popular as his poetry. Of his seventeen plays two plays are chosen- *Hulineralu* and *Jokumarswami*. Both have feudal background and themes of conflict and fertility. His plays are full of music, myth, symbolism, songs, and prayers in the very beginning. He is in the tradition of *Bayalata* and *Doddata* - folk-plays staged very often in the villages in the north Karnataka.

Keywords: dramatist, folk tradition, poetry, music, myth, metaphors, symbolism, folk-plays.

Drama, one of the ancient literary forms, was the most popular before 3000 years ago and its popularity dwindled due the emergence of novel, cinema and other forms of entertainments. In the rural areas and cities the Drama is still vibrant due to its nature of presenting union of love and conflict of hatin human life on the stage and provide the imitation of life in three dimensions. The audience sit in front of the stage for hours and enjoy the entertainment provided by a team of actors with the musical party(i.e, *himmela*) situated behind them and before the simple backdrop.

In modern theatre in the West, the curtain has lost its importance. Setting has become symbolic and minimal. Among the contemporary Indian dramatists in English translation are - Girish Karnad, Vijya Tendulkar, Echulunkar, Mahesh Dattani and Chandrasekhar Kambar. Of them all, Kambar's plays, having their origin in the rural settings and themes, mixed with folk music and folk songs, provide full entertainment to the audience. He is awarded with Jnanapith prashsthi for his great contribution to the world of poetry and dramas.

Chandrasekhar Kambar wrote seventeen plays, a lot of poetry and critical prose also. The lyrical folklore-based poetry of Kambar is as great as dramas. Of seventeen dramas, *Hulineralu*, *Jokumarswami*, *Shrishshrang*, *Narcissus*, *Singerevva mattu Aramane*, *Sangya Balya*, *Jaisidnayka*, etc., are widely read and successfully staged.

Of these all, *Hulineralu* and *Jokumarawami* are most popular. *Hulineralu*, being written earlier to *Jokumarawami*, deals with the theme of Truth and its nature in a very difficult mode of an extended metaphor (it is a series of symbols and metaphors). Outwardly, it seems to be heroic story of a Gouda, killing a tiger in the nearby forest but its meaning is entirely different. In the text it is said that *huli* (i.e., tiger) is the *rakshas* who kills Gouda, throws his remains in a ruined well near the village. Entering the house in the guise of Gouda, he warns inmates not to go near and well and look into. Parallel is the story of the felling of an old tree in which hid the goddess of the village- *Karimayi*. *Kariyajja* sits in front of the goddess for the permission but he permission is not granted and he does not stand up. Like a unmoving stone, he sits as the Goddess does not approve his request. It is warning to Gouda not to go to the forest to hunt the seven striped tiger. Earlier he killed a twelve-striped tiger; so he is bold enough not to care Goudathi's bad dream of Gouda killing his son, *Ramagond*. Without the permission of *Kariyajja* and *Goudathi* he goes to forest but instead killing the tiger he ironically gets killed as it was not a tiger but it was a *rakshasa*.

There is a controversy whether to cut the tree or not. Cutting the tree will lead to bad times to the village. But Gouda disguised as *rakshas* send his men to cut off the tree. Before cutting the tree, a small girl comes out and *Kariyajja* believes that she is the goddess of the tree. She is convinced by the cutters that she will be made princess and allows to marry Prince who is born of the horn of a parrot which is in the cage beyond the seven seas. The girl agrees and the tree is cut off and the bad consequences ensue in the village.

In the second half of the drama, it is realized that *Ramagond*, the son goes to the prohibited ruined well and looks inside. Suddenly he faces the tall ghost of his father,(it is similar to Hamlet seeing father's ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*) *Rayagond*. But he gets confused who is the real person? The disguised *rakshsa*-gouda at home or the ghost. Meanwhile, there is another episode that *Goudathi* has become pregnant to the *rakshsa* and the fetus asks for the milk of the tiger. The insane *Goudathi* asks her son to go and get the milk of the tiger to be given to the fetus inside her womb. *Ramagond* goes to the forest to get the milk. Going there, he faces the tiger-the disguised *rakahsa* having arrived to kill *Ramagond*, ironically gets deeply hurt by a sickle at the back by *Ramagond* and runs back home. He meets *Yakshi* who gives him, a horn, a magic-mirror and a magic-horse by riding which he could kill the *rakshas* hid in the parrot which is on a tree in the remote forest beyond the seven seas. There is a hint regarding the Oedipus complex between *Goudathi* and her son, *Ramagond*. *Kariyajja* also dies and it is said that *Ramagond* was haunted by his ghost. Once he meets *Shari*, his beloved who thinks that he does not recognize her; she mistakes him to be in love with *Seetavva*. At the end he gives her the tiger's milk which she feeds the fetus which returns into a baby-tiger. She asks him to kill the *raskhas* hid in her stomach. *Ramagond* hesitates to prick her stomach by the sharp horn but *Ramagond* could not mind to kill his mother. She asks her tiger baby to go out and wander in the remote forest as he wishes as usual. There ends the complex plot-structure.

Thus, *Hulineralu* is more complex and difficult play than *Jokumarswami* because of the difficult philosophical theme of the nature of the Truth. There is use of symbol, myth, legend and fantasy. There is a strong influence of the Greek plays like Oedipus, the Rex on this drama. It is not so difficult as not to understand. The *rakshas* is understood to be the metaphor of the British. The colonial conflict is said to be another hidden theme of the drama. Like Wole Soyinka, the great African poet-playwright, Kambar also uses the folk songs in the drama along with music.

Jokumarswami, written next, is strange drama about the theme of fertility- begetting children. Its myth is as old as old as civilization. Lord Ganesha is also fertility myth, many do not know, as we drown him in water and he comes again the next year. So is *Jokumarswami* who represents regeneration in nature. He is born, dies and reborn again.

In the context of the play, Gouda has no issues and Goudathi is worried about her childlessness. There is a divine saying (this is similar to the element of oracle in the Greek drama) that if one makes a vegetable by cutting and baking the *Jokumarswami* (i.e., a long pumkin,i.e., *sorekayi*) kept in its erected position as the phallus. Phallus is the lingam i.e., symbol of fertility. It is worshipped by the Hindus for thousands of years.

Parallel to this, is the theme of conflict between Gouda, the feudal lord and Basanya, the tenant whose land is confiscated by the lord for a meager amount of loan of two hundred rupees. So there is a conflict between them. In the beginning *Jokumarswami*, kept straight in a basket, is worshipped and Shari, the poor prostitute takes it away as she falls short of clients. This news reaches the ears of the barren Goudathi who runs to her house, begs her to save from the black spot (i.e., *kalanka*) of being a barren wife, and brings the vegetable made of *Jokumarswami* to feed Gouda in order to get a child. But what happens is quite opposite- Gouda, in order to kill Basanya, sends the murderers to the field who wait for some time. There Basanya comes to kill Gouda from nowhere and frightens them. They run away leaving *kambali* and *bandooka*, saying that Gouda is in the house of Shari, and mad after love for Ningi, a betrothed to Gurya, another servant-client.

In the hut Basanya hides with *kambali* and *bandooka*. Goudathi enters the hut thinking that the insider is Gouda, her husband and feeds him the vegetable made of *Jokumarswami*. The vegetable influences Basanya who runs after Goudathi who is first unwilling to join him, submits to his love-making at the end. Thus, Basanya and Goudathi are bodily united. Gouda is angry knowing that it is not possible to get Ningi as she is betrothed. At the end, there is a conflict and Gouda and his followers kill Basanya whose child is in the womb of Goudathi. So here Basanya becomes the metaphor of *Jokumarswami* who is killed but like phoenix, geminates again. There is contract between Gouda and Basanya -the former is impotent and the latter is potent. Basanya is at the centre of the play. He is like Apollo, the god of love, after whom the young women in the village run after.

In the tradition of Balayalata, there are prayers in the beginning and songs in the middle and keep the audience busy throughout. The source of the dramas is the folklore and the theme is exploitative feudal system.

Kambar shows post-colonial inclination -sides with the down trodden, and laborers who rebel against the injustice done by the landlords. His use of local myths, symbols, metaphors, tales, legends, and cultural taboos and practices make the plays more interesting. The male and female characters are very close to the reality in both plays. Although both plays have the same feudal background, the themes are different. These fulfill the ultimate aim of the drama, being full of action, provides exuberant entertainment to the audience. There lies the success of Kambar as a poet-playwright, with difference of using the rustic language, socio-cultural milieu of the subaltern in the north Karnataka. It also becomes the limitation for the people of the other parts. As Prof Rajendra Chenni says:"...he is the most remarkable of our southern dramatists who paved the way for the future dramatists in modern Kannada literature."²

REFERENCES:

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2. Quoted from "Prasthavane" of the above mentioned book.

