

Art Cannot Own What Reason Disowns: Caste in Kannada¹ Literature

P. P. Giridhar

Mysore, Karnataka, India

Abstract -As deductivist as it is inductive, as theoretically motivated as it is empirically oriented, the paper, a low-down on my view of (literary) art, argues that there has to be a natural adductive-abductive tension in art, which corresponds to how the world is and how you wished it was, or to put it in more picturesque terms, the *prose of reality* and the *poetry of the soul*, the *outer eye of empiricism*, real-worldism and the *inner eye of deductivist mentalism and rationalism*.

There is at the least a three-way typology of Indian literature as regards how they deal with caste, for instance, which happens to be one of the slimiest scams of human history. The three ways are: a. caste endorsed and legitimized as a matter of course or justified or assumed as a basic immutable irreducible iron-clad premise. This is the theoretically flawed kind. This subcategorises in two ways: those that assume caste as an ironclad immutably basic premise and then go on to build their worlds. e.g. *The Death-Rite (samskaara)* and those that legitimise this slimy construct called 'caste' after averring that tinkering, rather jibbingly, with this barbaric system would be infructuous. e.g. *Crossing-Over (daaTU)* b. caste/religion described as it exists and then transcended (Man needs to transcend the manifest to ignite change). e.g. *The Inscrutable Mystery* (Chidambara Rahasya), *The Twilight Narrative* (Mussanjeya Kataa Prasanga), *The Unbrahmin* (Abrahmana) being other possible examples. c. Caste depicted in passing without either endorsing/justifying/legitimising or critiquing it, it being used merely as an incidental and almost irrelevant backdrop to a different thematic space. e.g. *Carvalho*, *Purushottama*, *The Woods* (KaaDu), ... The latter two categories source, nourish, affirm and protect life and civilization, seeking out fresh new life-narratives of remaking ourselves vis-a-vis caste.

Keywords - *adductive-abductive, deductivist, inductive, deductive mentalism, ontology, samskaara, daaTu, scaffold, literary art, experiential reality, artbed, pavement, poetry of the soul, prose of reality.*

0.0. We divide the exposition into three broad parts:

0.1. The deductive and essentialist point is that anything and everything one writes, paints, sculpts, sings need NOT be ipso facto art, much like anything anyone says need not

constitute good sense. The deductive theory part where we talk about the location of caste in man's ontology (1.0), followed by what we think art/literature is, or ought to be (2.0). Then we will see how Kannada literature fares vis-a-vis caste (3.0). Vis-a-vis caste, Kannada literature branches into at least three types: The first type (3.1) which we think should not qualify to be called 'art' is the type that owns what reason disowns. That caste is absolute cerebral garbage is a no-brainer.

These literary pieces either assume this garbage as immutably basic or try to legitimise it. We think these are positively harmful to the Kannadigas' future. The examples are **The Death-Rite (3.1.1)** and **Crossing Over (3.1.2)**.

The second type is the one where caste is depicted only to be transcended. This is exemplified by a novel like **The Inscrutable Mystery (3.2.0)**.

The third and last type is one where caste forms an irrelevant or incidental background to other thematic concerns. Kannada novels like **Carvalho (3.3)**, and **Purushottama** are good examples of this type.

1.0. Caste and Man's Ontology

Man's ontological landscape is a mix of disparate identity badges. Some of these badges are ontology-external and some ontology-internal. This distinction also corresponds rather well with identities that are subject to choice and those that are NOT subject to choice. That is, choice driven identities are ontology-internal and choice-independent identities are ontology-external. The submission here is that ontology-external badges should play no role in value judgement because they are outside man's tether/choice. Caste as prevalent in India is a supreme example of a value-judged ontology-external identity badge. Caste as understood in India is therefore unacceptable. It is also clear that caste like religion is Not man's constitutive moment precisely because it is outside man's ontology.

¹a. Kannada is the great south Dravidian language spoken by over five crore people in the southern Indian peninsula.

b. Another possible title of the present article could very well be: **Art and Human Ontology.**

One could picture this schema as follows.

a. Identities that are not subject to choice, and hence, pace the putative belief, are NOT man's constitutive moments, are outside man's ontology.

(ai). Externally or socially foisted, not subject to choice and not subject to change, yet value-judged and **for that reason, unacceptable:** CASTE in India

(aii) Identity badges that are not subject to choice and yet are subject to change: religion, land or nation, given names, submission id ...

(aiii.) Identity badges, biologically determined, and so are not subject to choice and therefore are not, or hardly subject to, change or value-judgement: son, daughter, brother, sex, skin-colour, race, IQ...

b. Identity badges that are subject to choice (and, therefore, to change)

(bi) husband, wife, friend, enemy, email id...

(bii) writer, peon, teacher, prostitute, snake charmer, doctor, engineer, linguist...

(biii) Identity badges that are internally evolved, deeply ontological: good man/woman, evil man/woman, good Samaritan, altruist, saint, ascetic, ...

1. ART/LITERATURE

2.1. Every human behavior needs to fit into a template, a chase (as in letter-press printing technology), and a procrustean bed. In their nature and character, these templates may be different for different arenas of human behaviour. The procrustean beds that grammars of natural languages are, are different from the procrustean beds that artistic pieces are. The latter, for example, are admittedly freer. But there is no denying that there is such a definable procrustean bed, however small it might be. It is never a no-holds-barred free-for-all! Science has this fool-proof way of consigning nonsense, material that doesn't conform to its procrustean bed, to the dustbin. Art in general and literature in particular, it seems, has no such systemic mechanism. It is left to the people and people being what they are, it is anybody's guess how literary pieces are socially received.

Art has its own chase, its own procrustean bed or subsoil. One could call it the art bed, analogous to river bed, seabed, garden bed etc. This art bed is what stimulates the reader's mind and broadens his/her horizon in a way that discursive discourse does not. All art per force stimulates and broadens one's horizon in ways only art can: implicit seemingly, unwitting persuasive wonder-inducing narrativisation.

2.2. An overarching feature of this chase, of all art, is that every piece of art has to be, or ought to be, a being-enriching, civilization-protecting, eye-opening and life-nourishing curve, which is in fact what the depiction of empirical facts distils into, as we argue in the next paragraph. Although art could make use of all these, art is neither sociology nor philosophy nor metaphysics nor politics nor economics nor

linguistics, in that art is for sure NOT the place to go to, to find out about sociology, metaphysics, philosophy, economics and political science and so on. But art could of course make use of all of these for its ultimate goal of remaking man and of affording fresh narratives.

Art has to do with man's ontological and civilisational finery. Its mandate is to deepen and enhance man's sense of being, part of which is to ensure a fair even playing ground for all for whom the piece is meant. If these alleged works of art fail in this diagnostic test, they cease to be art, they need to be dust binned. If a work of art promotes or legitimizes caste as understood in India, for instance, which is nothing but a brutal form of institutionalised injustice, it could in point of fact be positively harmful to society.

We will argue that this deductive strainer is what strains the first kind out of the realm of art. This straining out is underpinned in the following argument: Art, unlike sociology and cultural anthropology, is not a looking-glass. It is NOT a mere mirror.

2.3. (Literary) art is a magical carpet that wafts you away from mundanity and this-worldliness on to a heart-warming soul-lifting, soul-searching plane, onto the infinity or divinity, if you will, of human existence and being. Man is home to both good and evil, both to meanness and magnanimity, to selfishness and selflessness and so are aggregates of human beings. Irrationalities like caste and religion tap into the dark irrational seamy part of man. The big question is if the empirical setting is loaded in favor of the evil, selfish, and mean side of man, what ought to be the equation of art with such a setting?

The paper is about the life blood of all art in general and of literary art in particular.

2.4 I am sure there are such linguistic constructs in all languages of the world, constructs which endorse social constructs that are value-judged categories despite being ontology-external, and for this reason alone, do not make intellectual moral and social sense. Things like the irrationally exclusivist caste and religion, and social practices like dowry, patriarchy in India, kidnapped-bride marriages in Kirgistan, head hunting in north east India, female genital mutilation (FGM) that is widely prevalent in some 30 countries in the world including among the Bohras in India, child marriage, child labour, *leblouth* or *gavage*, the coercive practice in Mauritania the African nation of force-feeding child brides to attain obesity, which is a desirable feature of brides in that society (Girl children are force-fed as much as twenty litres of camel's milk and two kilograms of millet everyday in Mauritania.) (and the exclusivist race and nationhood all over the world) are empirical facts. One doesn't, at least I don't, expect art to depict these empirical facts as if they are the goal of art and leave them at that. The anti-life anti-civilisation Taliban in Afghanistan opposes girl education, music, dance etc and even polio vaccination. (Boko Haram in Nigeria is another anti-life anti-civilisation anti-creative body that comes to mind).

Now, a literary piece endorsing such social irrationalities can't rest back merely depicting an ethos that sanctions such practices.

That would NOT be art. Art needs to do more. This design feature of art is more than clear to me.

There is no reason not to say that such pieces are NOT literary art.

What with casteism, religionism, languagism, skin-colourism, patriarchy, slavery, umpteen blind beliefs, rackets and mafias, and inequities of all hues, quite a few social ethoses under the sun may be described as 'sewers in spate'. Who would want these 'sewers in spate' to be replicated or represented in art as they are, depicting them 'in preplanned tours' like some Kannada writers have done? There are people it seems who would like that! At least I wouldn't.

But we concentrate on Kannada literature here:

In fact I think literary pieces belonging to the first type like The Death-Rite(Sanskaar), Crossing-Over (daatu) and the like which we will do an analysis of in a while, ARE positively harmful for the Kannada society in that they require Kannadigas to continue to rot in a Manu-driven, caste-ridden, and by that token, a barbaric society, in that such works of art are deeply, irrationally and culpably, anti FEJ(=anti Freedom-Equity-Justice).

It is increasingly clear that this God of FEJ is the defining design feature of every human space on the planet! I don't agree that it is utopian. Caste is part of the empirically dystopic narrative of india. I am intrigued that castelessness is considered utopic. I think there is nothing nonredundantly sacred in any human group except as defined by this three-faced God of FEJ.

2.5.0. Facts, experiential or imagined (in which case they are not really facts), are to art as food is to life.

Food is there for life, but life is not there for food. Life is something else. Its aim is not ingestion of food although, paradoxical as it may seem, life is, in an essential sense, a function of food. *Without food one doesn't survive and yet food is not life.* The same is exactly true of art. *Without facts art will not survive, and yet facts are not art.* Facts of life or of lived experience cannot be the aim of art although facts input into, and sustain art, pretty much like food inputs into, and sustains, life. Literature or art in general is partly a function of experiential facts and non-experiential or imagined constructs. But this material from which art is made constitutes neither the output nor the goal of art, much like food, because of which the human body in fact exists and sustains, is neither the output nor the goal of life.

Facts of life are thus, quite emphatically, not a sufficient condition of art, although they are possibly necessary.

2.6.0. If the hard empirical facts of lived experience are not the aim of art, *what is their role in art* is the question. Parallely, if art is not a photograph or a photocopy or a mimeograph of life and reality, *what is it* is the question².

The role of reality in art is that of a scaffold, a paver, a service-renderer for something that per force follows the scaffolding and paving. Experiential facts are the source material, the pavement of the path-forgings. Facts only pave the way. Pavements are NEVER there for their own sake. They are there for people to walk on. Garden beds are there for something to grow on. Seabeds and river beds form a footing that sources life. **Art ought to source, nourish, affirm and protect life and civilization like this.** Even though grounded in reality and truth it has to have a footing that gives life and nourishes life and civilization. Empirical facts found art, constitute the point of departure for art, get art going, relating art to life, preventing it from degenerating into didacticism, tendentiousness, discursiveness and sermonizing. Subtly interwoven into this level of scaffolding however would be and ought to be a level that transcends it, like in the sea shore event where the watcher is led to what he is led to by what he watches, mundane though the event very much is. As they say, to solve a problem, we need to think at a level different from the level that the problem exists at. There are two such foundational levels in all literary creation, it seems to me. The essentially literary level is one that is different from the level at which the documentation of imagined or lived experience exists. An accurate documentation of factual happenings in one's life wouldn't add up to literature, it seems to me. An imaginative weaving of these factual happenings wouldn't either. This nearly anybody can do. These two levels link in terms of what may be called distillation and an implicit bar-raising value-creating commentary. When they are not sordidly irrational, the distillation part happens partially vacuously, but it still happens as in the case of the mundane and perfunctory sunset, about which there is nothing wrong or irrational. All art is a decisional act of intellectual accountability, social responsibility and moral acceptability. All art protects life and civilization like a construct called God presumably would. (This is, in a way, equating art with God!) This is a level distinctly and foundationally different from the level where one says art is NOT tendentious, didactic, propagandist or promotional. This is pretty much like the level where the head of a human or nonhuman primate family thinks well of all of his family members. All of the thinking and action that the head engages in, in family spaces, is built on, and is, indeed, a function of this level.

² This paper is not for people who think art replicates reality like a photograph. It addresses the nature of the artist's intervention with empirical facts.

One could indeed distort empirical, lived-experiential reality to achieve some aims; but these aims, I submit, can never be in violation of the eternal human values of freedom, equity, and justice. Dedalus Books in the UK for example has invented its own distinctive genre, which they term ‘distorted reality’, “where the bizarre, the unusual and the grotesque and the surreal meld in a kind of intellectual fiction”. Man in fact has this pressing but natural urge of seeking novel ways of living and thinking. This is fine and welcome, but the point of the procrustean bed for art, as indeed for all human behavior, remains. Magical realism for example may or may not make sense. It is not necessary that all magical realism makes good sense, much like mere ‘authentic’ and ‘aesthetic’ depiction of undistorted reality, may not make ‘artistic’ sense. Facts, experiential or imagined (in which case they are not really facts), are to art as food is to life.

Food is there for life, but life is not there for food. Life is something else. Its aim is not ingestion of food although, paradoxical as it may seem, life is, in an essential sense, a function of food. *Without food one doesn't survive and yet food is not life.*

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Without facts art will not survive, and yet facts are not art. Facts of life or of lived experience cannot be the aim of art although facts input into, and sustain art, pretty much like food inputs into, and sustains, life. Literature or art in general is partly a function of experiential facts and non-experiential or imagined constructs. But this material from which art is made constitutes neither the output nor the goal of art, much like food, because of which the human body in fact exists and sustains, is neither the output nor the goal of life. Facts of life are thus, **quite emphatically**, not a sufficient condition of art, although they are possibly necessary.

If the hard empirical facts of lived experience are not the aim of art, *what is their role in art* is the question. Parallely, if art is not a photograph or a photocopy or a mimeograph of life and reality, *what is it* is the question.

What is it that the literary piece or any artistic piece distils the facts into, implicitly slides or eases the facts into, is the critical question in any art.

At least make the description of empirical facts so touching as to give out a hint of its intellectual moral and social sliminess, untenability and barbaricity, as does this delightful Angami Naga³ tale:

Morusa is a denizen of Kidima. He is handsome, sprightly and spunky, bouncy, vimmy, verry and above all, brave. His relatives think of marrying him off. They saunter off to village after village to find a

suitable match for him. At last they find a suitable girl in a distant village. Representatives are sent to hold talks with the family and fix the day when the bride would arrive at the groom's place. On the appointed day, fancying that he would welcome his bride with a hunted head, Morusa goes head-hunting. He doesn't find a man who could be head-hunted in his own village. So he goes out to another village. Finding no men-warriors that day, who he could fight and get the head of, he head-hunts a woman. He comes back home, triumphant with the hunted head. Amidst the wedding festivities, people at home are feasting over the hunted head when the news arrives that the girl Morusa was to marry was bumped off by an itinerant head-hunter.

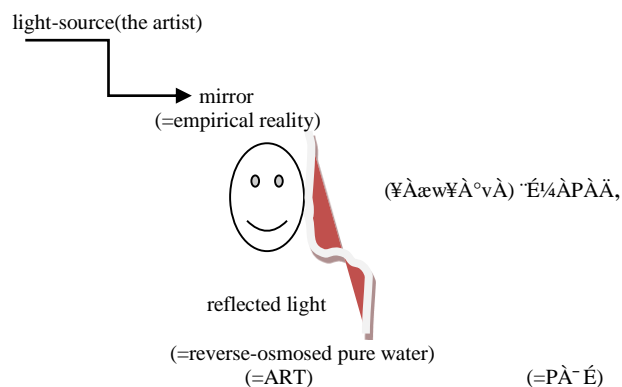
It doesn't take long for Morusa to realise that it was he who had gone and hunted his own bride!

The Angami tale starts out as wave in the ocean, rises up with the depiction of lived (**prose of**) **reality** but ebbing and flowing through the sieve of illuminating rationality (the inner eye of deductive mentalism broached earlier), lands on the shore, delivering and depositing this **timelessly precious poetry of the soul**.

To say that to be creative is not to be rational makes neither creative sense nor rational sense.

The artist is the light-source. She takes up empirical realities as the mirror and after the light of her independent reasoning and thinking abilities falls on the mirror of empirical realities, some process similar to reverse-osmosis takes place in the work of art, cleansing the social reality of dissolved impurities and the laughable absurdities obtaining in it, and the reflected light in the form of the reverse-osmosed pure water is the output of the work of art.

Graphically this is what ought to happen in art:



Some literary pieces can't light up the readers' path because either they are not lit themselves or they flame weakly or dimly, struggling to stay lit themselves! This is the

³ Angami Naga is a Tibeto Burman language spoken in Nagaland, a north eastern state of India.

plight of the first category of Kannada literature viz The Death-rite and Crossing Over.

There are at least three kinds of lamps: One that is not lit, the second that is dimly or weakly flaming, that is in fact struggling to survive, and the third lit well, burning bright and therefore able to light up the way ahead.

2.7.0 Art, in my view, consists in such telling as in the Angami tale, which becomes the third burning-bright kind of lamp elucidated in the foregoing paragraph, where there is a, efficient and effective churn or a momentum created in the work of art for change for the better.

The socially sanctioned practice of headhunting being depicted as it exists before being effectively and efficiently cartooned and critiqued.

This is art.

A piece that depicts this practice and endorses it as a matter of course would not be, and should not be considered, art. The adductive-abductive tension broached above is clear in the churn created in the above tale: the tension between the way the world is and the way you wish it was. If the idea that facts are not art is true, then the question is, what is the nature of the artist's intervention ('such telling', broached above) with the world of experiential empirical facts art engages with?

The pavement part is the mirror function of art while the distillation part is its lamp function, which corresponds to the nature of the artist's intervention with the world of empirical facts. One expects at least such a churn in art about irrational realities in empirical life.

All art is more like a lamp than a mirror, as we said, the (literary) artist being not just a shallow creator but a visionary and a spokesperson for a whole generation of human beings. This is possible ONLY if the artist is the light-source that, reflecting as it does via the mirror of reality, illumines the reader's path. This is how the artist transcends the manifest to ignite change.

2.8.0. What art does with empirical facts is what one looks for in any art. There is an anecdote that M. Hiriyanna(2011) relates in his book, Art Experience. On seeing the painting of a sunset the connoisseur remarks, "I haven't seen a sunset like this in my life", and the painter comes back with the following:

"Don't you wish to see one?!"

This exactly captures my idea of art.

A possible, if not a foolproof analogy, is when you stand on a beach, staring at the distant horizon across a humungous expanse of seawater, one might forget one's mundanity, one's materialistic utilitarian self-centred mindset, one's this-worldly woes. One is per force pushed to a different plane of one's being, to a different phase of one's consciousness. One feels these life-enhancing vibes it when one hears great music, sees great painting, great sculpture

and great dancing and is with great people. A great piece of art is a magic carpet that wafts you away on to a fresh life-enhancing plane of existence. Any sensitive human being gets life-enhancing intimations of an infinity that transcends life's mundanity, its temporality, its seedy sordid reality, much like an aging person gets increasingly unmistakable intimations of her mortality. (A fisherman or cetological workers might not get these intimations could be beside the point here.)

True art does this. True poetry does it. True creative fiction does it or if it doesn't do it, it ought to do it. True drama could do it. It takes you to a different, higher plane of existence, a serene sublime tranquil contemplative layer of consciousness possibly not available to nonhuman primates. (Discursive discourse does it on a distinctly different plane.)

That is why we call it *art*.

It is clear as daylight that such an expansive mood cannot result from a depiction of things as they exist in society, however authentic and aesthetic may be the description. (Authenticity and aestheticity thus do not bear on my argument here.) This is because things in social spaces are often, and typically not, how they ought to be in a rational reasoned universe. Most of them are dark irrational sordid things. When they are not sordidly irrational, the distillation part happens partially vacuously, but it still happens as in the case of the mundane and perfunctory sunset, about which there is nothing wrong or irrational.

All art is a decisional act of intellectual accountability, social responsibility and moral acceptability. All art protects life and civilization like a construct called God presumably would. (This is, in a way, as I have mentioned earlier, equating art with God!) This is a level distinctly and foundationally different from the level where one says art is NOT tendentious, didactic, propagandist or promotional. This is pretty much like the level where the head of a human or nonhuman primate family thinks well of all of his family members. All of the thinking and action that the head engages in, in family spaces is built on, is indeed, a function of this level.

You deal with the world the way it is, and not the way you wished it was, they say. This dealing is by one who lives in the empirical world. Even the dealer in the empirical world often strives toward a world we all wish it was. Art is not empiricity although, as we said, it takes off from it. Art ought to bridge this chasm between the way the world is and the way you wished it was. Art is precisely the area of human behavior where there is a life-enhancing reasoned, if imagined and seemingly magical, thrust toward the way you wished the world was. Art in fact is one of the inhabitants of the space between the way the world is and the way you wished it was. All art is ever a move toward the higher, more sublime spaces that humans are capable of. In such a move one doesn't expect the baser phases of human consciousness like casteism, religionism, languagism and masculinism,

child slavery and trafficking etc depicted only to be endorsed and legitimised.

2.9.0 The following possibly apocryphal tale expresses best what I am at pains to press home:

x and y are friends. Both live in their underground houses. x takes y home once. And y asks x: “Your house is so very bright. How?” To which x asks, “Why? Is your house not like this?” “No”, replies y, “You come to my place! You can see it yourself.” x does call at y’s home the following day. y is flabbergasted to see his own house brighter than it usually would be. (“It wasn’t before. It is because *you* are here!” y almost says!) This is because x is light and wherever he goes, it is always light.

(Literary) Artists are like x. wherever they go, they light up the readers’ path, or they per force need to.

(Literary) Artists need to be positive life-enhancing symbols for mankind. They symbolise what is sublime in human consciousness. Apart from being creators, artists need to be visionaries and spokespersons for future generations.

By unraveling the inner significance of things they need to make others see the inner face of things that exist. As the redoubtable U. R. Ananthamurti said, the poet “makes the mundane look as if swilled out with the divine.” Why should this apply only to sunsets, moonrises, flowers, mountains, dales and female anatomies? In one of his works he mocks at the snobbish hauteur of the affluent by having a character thrust his bottom at them. It behooves artistes to make social spaces also look ‘as if swilled out with the divine’.

That Indian writers haven’t done this with something like caste is significant. Even great photography makes the mundane timeless and divine. This shows them in poor light. This strain of thought is the natural flow of this definition of art.

I can’t, no rational man can indeed, think of artists perpetuating in their writings what ought not to be perpetuated in a social ethos. This, i.e. litterateurs perpetuating what ought not to be perpetuated, has happened time and again in Kannada fiction. A sizeable chunk of Kannada literature, especially fiction, is not *art* by this token. And Kannadigas seem to have lapped it up, and lapped it up culpably in my view, with reverential awe!

2.10.0. There is a level where scientific discourse steers clear of their creators. I believe there IS a level, which we call the subsoil level where literary discourse also steers clear of their creators. Another way of saying it is that there are terms that discourses contain in terms of which the reader negotiates with them. This is significantly true of inter-human space as well. My negotiation with another human being is in terms of what he enshrines his ideas and beliefs which shape his behavior. I may navigate away from people who don’t measure up to my idea of a good human being. This is clear. I am sure every human being has done this. Back to literary

narratives, my negotiation with them is in terms of the terms it enshrines in themselves. If they endorse caste, religion, patriarchy, head-hunting, FGM, foeticide and so on as a matter of course, such narratives have clearly no use for me and for mankind.

3.0. In the light of the above theoretical and deductivist discussion of (literary) art, and of the nature of the equation between human ontology and the various identity badges it encapsulates, we take up Kannada ‘novels’ viz **The Death-Rite**(Samskara), **Crossing Over**(Daatu) which illustrate the first category, which by our definition of art don’t in fact qualify to be called art, **The Inscrutable Mystery** (Chidambara Rahasya) for the second category of literature that transcends schismatic barriers like caste and religion, and finally, novels like **Carvalho** (a personal name), as typical of the third way of dealing with caste as an incidental backdrop to other thematic spaces.

There could be a fourth way, (and a fifth way) which we leave open.

3.1. THE FIRST CATEGORY

3.1.1. The Death-Rite (Samskara).

As Zydenbos (1996) avers, the novel is more widely known abroad than any other Kannada piece of creative fiction and it is putatively the canonical acme of Indian literature.

The factual cosmos of the novel:

The novel narrates the life of Praneshacharya, who belongs to the caste of Madhva Brahmins (the highest ranked caste even among Brahmins, who traditionally occupy the highest spot), traces his personality and evolution in terms of the equation between him and his ambience - social, moral and epistemic - as he navigates through life. At the beginning of the novel he is projected to be the epitome of Brahminism. He is looked up to by his caste-fellows. Naranappa, the polar opposite of Praneshacharya, a caste-fellow but who is a debauched Brahmin dies apparently of plague which we learn has attacked the village. No Brahmin of the *agrahara* (the settlement of Brahmins) at Durvasapura comes forth to do the last rites because he is supposed to have violated Brahminism by boozing and living in with Chandri, a seductive Shudra woman and a prostitute. Being a debauched Brahmin he is considered to be an outcaste by his relatives and the neighbours in the Agradhara, but his formal expulsion as an outcaste wasn’t conducted. Two questions Naranappa’s death due to plague poses:

- a. Who will do the last honours, the funereal obsequies?
- b. Who will do the *bojja*, the last postdeath ceremony performed for deceased relatives to relieve them from the state of being ghosts, when a dinner is served to the surviving relatives because he

doesn't have children? *Bojja* has to be done only by one's own (legitimate) male children, if not by one's legitimate son-in-law.

They approach Praneshacharya, who is the epitome of Brahminism and is well versed in all the religious scriptures like the Vedas etc, to find a solution to this issue. The protagonist pores over dharma shastras, the holy law-codes to hack a way out. If someone dies in an agraahara, Brahmin males are obliged not to eat food until the last rites of the deceased are conducted. Praneshacharya finds no solution in the scriptures and on the third day he walks over to the nearby Maruti temple (the temple of Monkey God known as Hanumaan in India) in the woods to seek the guidance of God through a worship. But the god there is not helpful either. And there in the dead of night Chandri the lover and illegitimate wife of Naranappa walks toward him to the temple presumably because of a caste-based superstition of a non-brahmin or shudra woman wanting to be made love to by Brahmin men, one of the pretty obtuse intellectually horrible caste-oriented shibboleths the novella abounds in. One sees no other reason why she should volunteer to be on the site. He makes love to her, something Naranappa had been doing all his life, which all the Brahmins loathed but for which didn't formally ostracise him, because of which they couldn't allow non-brahmins to do the last honours either. The novel crescendoes and climaxes with the protagonist Praneshacharya's physical union with the 'lowly' Shudra prostitute Chandri, which then triggers a set of contrite, and self-reflective thoughts in him and a turning point in his inner life. Then his disease-afflicted wife Bhagirathi dies too, after cremating whom the protagonist leaves the place, unable to face his community folk presumably because of his tryst with the Shudra woman and because he has no solution to the problem at hand even after four days. He seeking a divine (and scriptural?) solution among other things makes the protagonist a weak character, as opposed to a Naranappa who had the guts to do openly what he wanted and Mahabala, the Smartha Brahmin who too, much like Naranappa, trod a different path, I think. As Bhagvan(2011) avers, he is a helpless leaf torn between the gusty winds of decadent Brahminism and vulgar materialism. A literally directionless protagonist is walking along, not quite knowing where to head when Malera Putta, another Shudra and a chatterbox-riddler accosts him and goes along with him. He is on his way attracted to Padmavathi, another Shudra woman, and who is also readily available, for special 'brahmins' like Praneshacharya, but not at all for Shudras, but he refrains from copulation. At the temple he is eating in, Praneshacharya thinks that he should perform Naranappa's last rites, and tell the brahmins the truth of his midnight sexual tryst with Chandri, that he felt disgust with his wife, that he drank coffee in a common shop in a fair and lusted

after Padmavati, a Malera woman, polluted other Brahmins sitting eating with them in a temple and did the sacrilege of inviting a Malera to join him in the temple⁴: "Not a repentance, but just the truth. The truth of my inner life."

The novel ends with Putta and the protagonist parting ways after they both see the fair at Meelige.

Our points of criticism of **The Death-Rite**(Samskara) are as follows:

1. that the novel depicts a deeply casteist society. This is okay. But it depicts it as if it is perfectly okay for a human aggregate to be casteist, which is what is not okay. This gives a significantly wrong signal for the ordinary Kannadigas, which is why pieces like **The Death-Rite**(Samskara) need to be rejected, which is why such literature is not at all useful for the native speaker's caste-free, exploitation-free tomorrows.

Paradigmatic of this impuguably unacceptable facet of the novel are the following textual fragments:

- avaLa hattira maatanaadidare, matte snaana maaDabeeku: "If I talk to her, I need to take a bath again." (p:2)
- chandri sarrane taleya meelee serugu eLeduKonDu bhayagrastaLaagi nintaLu. "Pulling her saree-end all of a sudden on to her head, Chandri stood petrified." Seeing Praneshacharya appear (p: 2)
- kiiLu jaatiya heNNondara samparkavanna.: "With the contact with a woman from an inferior caste"(p:11)
- haage vicaara maaDidalli, brahmanaralladavarige avana shavavannu muTTuva adikaara illa: "If you come to think of it, nonbrahmins have no right to touch his dead body."(p:13)
- avanu kulageDali, avana heNaanna shudraru ettu saagisidare, taanu praaNa iTTuvavaLalla. "Whatever he may be, whether he is dissolute or noble, caste-impure, if a shudra lifts and carries his dead body, she will yield breath (About Anasuya, Lakshmanacharya's wife. Naranappa is her maternal uncle's son) (p:29)
- janmaapi avanu aDDa panktiyavara maneyalli niiru muTTidavanalla: "he for the life of him never touched even water in the houses of those crossrow castefellows (the 'inferior' Smartha Brahmins)." (p:45)
- oLLe heeLuttiiri. naanu maaleeravanendu martee biTTiddiiri "Well said by you! You have forgotten I

⁴ There is the putative belief that the novel is antibrahminical. But One of my friends, a Brahmin herself, said, she thought it was the most brahminical novel she had ever read! I agree. (Chitra Panikkar in a pc.)

am a Malera” Belittling the shudra caste of the Maleras as against Brahmins (p:100)

- eenee naasha vaagali, putra naashaa beekadare aaagali, brahmanya naashakke tanu tayaarilla: “Whatever may perish, even my own son may perish, but I won’t allow the perishing of my brahminhood” Garudacharya, a Brahmin character in the novel. (p:27)
- puurva janmada puNyavillade braahmanya praaaptavaaguvudilla ennuttade shaastra... “Without previous birth’s merit, one does not get brahminhood, say the scriptures.”(P:40)

The revolutionary part of the novel consists in lampooning some practices and shibboleths of the community of Brahmins in special relation to man’s natural disposition. Some examples of this shibboleth-lampooning follow:

- the character of Naranappa, who crosses defiantly the limits in living that Brahminism sets for its members.
- the character of Pransacharya, who crosses them nondefiantly and naturally.
- the character of the Smarta Brahmin Mahabala, who like Naranappa, crosses defiantly the limits in living that Brahminism, which is the very negation of freedom, equity and fraternity, sets for its members.
- brahmanya uLiyalu veda puraanaLannu arta tiLiyade oodabeku.

“For brahminhood to survive, one should read the vedas and puranas even if you don’t understand them” (p:66)

Some points here:

- a. Brahmins being shown as philanderers is not new to Kannada literature. A *yati*, an ascetic, pontiff of a religious institution called *matha* has been pictured in Bolara Baburao’s **Vagdevi** as someone who openly keeps a married woman as concubine and what is more, there is nothing clandestine about it so that the impression that this (=straight forward questioning of traditional ways and notions) hasn’t been done “in such a radical and penetrating manner before” **sanskaara**, **The Death-Rite** (Zydenbos op cit :244) is suspect.

- b. Pransacharya the hero is pictured as the master Brahmin, relegating all other Brahmins to the background, which is empirically unlikely.
- c. The hero’s existentialist soliloquies are the author’s own, and are only unrealistically the hero’s!
- d. The characters both of Naranappa and Pransacharya are improbable. While the distance between Pransacharya and other Brahmins is too much to be true, that of Naranappa is at the other unlikely extreme. Both are possible but not probable. Literature deals with probable worlds and not possible worlds.

The novel nowhere laughs at the supremacist view of caste, the supremacist abominations that caste entails, because of which one is constrained to say that the novel is a socially irresponsible, morally outrageous and intellectually vacuous piece as the phenomenon it endorses as a matter of course, viz. caste is a socially irresponsible, morally outrageous and intellectually vacuous social construct.

The putative argument is that the protagonist has an inner life and integrity which is at variance with tradition and this sources the salutary and creative conflict. And this, its symbolic simplicity and the piquant language are the high points of the novel.

I agree.

Unarguably the novel is a well written, well constructed piece. One may not agree with Bhagvan (2011) that it has no thematic substance. But the novel doesn’t do enough to qualify to be called ‘art’. The novel is revolutionary, as pointed out, only in so far as it lampoons some space within the caste of Brahmins. What it doesn’t lampoon viz caste as the horror of institutionalised injustice is a bigger deal, we submit, than what it in fact lampoons. But even this revolutionary part, the lampooning part, as pointed earlier, comes to naught when one realises that this viz Brahmins straying from the allegedly⁵ ‘Brahminic’ way of living life has been done persuasively earlier, in **Vagdevi** by Bolara Baburao, for instance.

2. That Brahmin women are pictured either as invalid or otherwise unattractive as opposed to other women being pictured as symbols of sensuality is unacceptably tendentious.

⁵ We say ‘allegedly’ because honesty, integrity, intelligence etc are not, can not be, the exclusive privilege and property of individual communities. This no-brainer, I was happy to note, is realised in Kannada literature in Yashwant Chittala’s novel **Purushoottama**, for instance, where a character asks another whether the girl he wants to marry should belong to the same caste as his, and the insightful answer that the character comes up with is

“Not caste, but the same *sanskaara*”. This has at one stroke detached objective qualities of human personalities from superficial labels like Brahmins and Shudras, Britishers and Americans...*Sanskaaras* or mind-traits are not the prerogative of individual communities. The intellectually indigent Indian and the Kannadiga has yet to realize this, although it is such a no-brainer!

3. The bottomline burden of this argument against **The Death-rite** is two-fold:

- a. The growth of the hero, in terms of the natural and almost unwitting defiance of what lofty Brahminism stands for, which is the real positive of the novel, is a function of the flawed form of institutionalised injustice that caste is. In a setting where Brahmins are not distinguished from other groups in ways of living, the hero's actions don't add up the way they do in a casteist setting, which is to admit that Praneshacharya the hero wouldn't stand out in a noncasteist setting, which means that the being of the novel is deeply rooted in caste. The hero-harlot union, for instance, which is the fulcrum of the novel, is in fact a function of the caste shibboleth of Shudra women wanting to be made love to by Brahmins. Since the underpinning is flawed, the hero's actions make no valourisable sense.
- b. Since caste is a socially irresponsible, morally outrageous, intellectually vacuous and civilisationally unaccountable construct, any construct that endorses or legitimizes it is for sure a socially irresponsible, morally outrageous, intellectually vacuous and civilisationally unaccountable piece.
- c. This is unacceptable.

One of the defining features of the Navya (the Modernist) literary movement in Kannada, it is said, is to explore new values. The following is the blurb on the back cover page of the novel by Shantinath Desai:

“**Sanskaara** is one of the unprecedentedly consummate accomplishments of what is called the Navya(Modernist) movement in Kannada literature. There is an exploration of some basic tenets of this movement in this work. If we can reckon that putting old sanskaaras (cultural practices) to the test, sloughing off useless ones and exploring new values honestly and boldly without jibbing at the dualities, friction and sorrows is a basic tenet of this movement, this is enacted from the beginning to the end in the thematic substance of the work, in the history of Praneshacharya, the protagonist's character, in the way the tale is narrated and in the language. If one looks at the overall achievement of the work, one can say that it is one of a few works that can represent Kannada literature that can light up the Indian literature scene.”

Is to uphold and legitimize caste, the slimiest scam that mankind and human societies have known in history, as **The Death-Rite** (*sanskaara*) undoubtedly does, a value? **The Death-Rite** (*sanskaara*) illustrates rather well the Kannada proverb of *heNN chenda kaNN kuruDa*,

“The woman is pretty but is blind!”

The yawning chasm between Shantinath Desai's very averment and the conceptual schema of the novel **The Death-Rite** (*Sanskaara*) is one of the biggest jokes of the Kannada literary and intellectual world.

The small edifice people believe there is, on the weak and intellectually shameless casteist understructure collapses readily. The novel, I am afraid, hammers the supremacism of human beings which is a function of an externally foisted social category. Supremacists of all kinds - caste supremacism, religious supremacism, racial supremacism, colour supremacism, gender supremacism etc - belong to the 'mafia of the human soul'.

How can such a supremacy-advocating piece be art?

How can a 'mafia of the human soul' constitute the 'poetry of the soul' which all art in my view aims at? How can the mafia of the soul be the poetry of the soul? All art is per force a decisional act of ethical responsibility, social answerability and moral and civilisational accountability, it seems to me.

If art ought not to own what reason disowns, if caste is something that reason disowns, and if a literary piece owns caste as **The Death-rite** very much does, then **The Death-rite** is not art. If caste is a socially irresponsible, morally unacceptable, intellectually vacuous and civilisationally unaccountable construct, then a literary piece like **The Death-Rite** which assumes caste to be an iron-clad, irreducibly and unquestionably fundamental premise of human social space, then **The Death-Rite** is very much a socially irresponsible, morally unacceptable, intellectually vacuous and civilisationally unaccountable piece.

Manu⁶ allows a Brahmin man copulating with a Shudra woman, which in fact is the fulcrum of the novel, and this is thus in the ultimate analysis no big deal. In its exploration of the equation between tradition and human nature and tradition and culture, the novel is supposed to be revolutionary but the protagonist is in no great turmoil: he even contemplates doing it to Belli another Shudra woman and going and living with Chandri, the Shudra woman he made love to. He is to that extent honest, much as he was honest when he deliberately married an invalid as a religious austerity measure. But the question that still remains, especially after his tryst with Chandri, is why he wants to do

⁶ Manu(circa 150 CE) is presumed to be the saint who wrote Manusmriti which serves as a text of the code for the Vedic tradition in Kaliyuga (the era of Kali) in which we are living now.

this instead of marrying a Brahmin woman and doing what biology warrants. Moreover his wife Bhagirathi has no objection to this. There seems to be no answer to this question in the novel. The only caveat here could be the fact that he married an invalid of his own volition (Praneshacharya says explicitly that he does not want to *become* a positively excellent man (*saatvika*) but *is* one, and his behaviour shows it). But this is no argument in the scene that has developed. If this is true, then this stance of not remarrying of the protagonist is not organic to the character because he could have married a normal Brahmin woman even after the midnight sex in the dark and deep woods. You can't say if you are marrying, you have to marry an invalid because of religious righteous considerations and compulsions, but for all other practical purposes, you wouldn't mind a normal! Consequently whatever accrues positively to the novel because of his sexual tryst with Chandri the Shudra woman has no real underpinning, it seems to me. (The author has gone on record as saying some other casteist Kannada authors' works are 'preplanned tours'. One wonders if the same charge is not true of **The Death-Rite** (*sanskaara*). The Brahmin women here are caricatured as unseemly unattractive physically, paving the way for Brahmins to be attracted fatally to the irresistibly lush physical riches of Shudra women.)

The alleged high points are more than offset by the novel's brazen and deeply and culpably casteist (and caste-based superstition) orientation⁷. The only anti-caste statement in the novel is in Chandri, the shudra prostitute's soliloquy on p 57:

That (=the dead body) is not the Naranappa I loved.
Neither a Brahmin nor a Shudra. A dead body. A
stinking rotting body.

I expect the author of these lines, if he is to be socially responsible, morally acceptable and intellectually nonvacuous (which all (literary) artists need per force to be), to know that at the only significant level of human ontology, none is a Brahmin, none a Shudra, none a Christian, none a Muslim,, none a Shinto, none a Dinka and so on. Once he realizes that identity badges such as caste, religion and nationhood are socially foisted categories, it is easy to see the absolute shallowness of saying the above deeply misleading sentence, which, very wrongly and culpably, implies that this can happen only with death. It behooves everyone to look upon everyone else as one's equal with the same 'divinity' in him.

I expect art to scoff derisively at, laugh at, mock at, lampoon, caricature and satirize a civilizational scam like caste.

⁷ The author of **The Death-Rite** (*sanskaara*) in one of his other pieces mocks at the snobbish arrogance of affluent people in society by having a character thrust his bottom at them and he also says that the poet 'makes the mundane look as if swilled out with the divine'. **Why don't they do it**

The novel would slump against truth like a pack of cards if all the demeaned communities in the novel come to the streets to protest the demeaning. This in fact is in the womb of time. In fact this has started happening. A textbook in Tamil Nadu was withdrawn because of the demeaning of a community. A film titled **Anegan** starring actor Dhanush got into trouble because the community of washer men are demeaned in the film (Bengaluru Mirror, January the 28th 2015:16). Incidentally I was also surprised by the undue packing of the novel with sex, or sex-driven descriptions of female anatomy. One wonders if such descriptive hammering is necessary in art.

Bhagvan(2011)'s dissection of the novel under the title **Decadent Brahminism and Vulgar Materialism** seems to be bang on target and so it bears reproducing here:

- a. The idea that the illegal cross community coitus if it happens it happens as a rule between Brahmin men and Shudra women, not the other way around, not between Brahmin women and Shudra men (if this isn't tendentious, what is?), which as Bhagvan points out happens, for example, in Kuvempu, arguably the best Kannada novelist, and which only signals the incorrigible *manuvaadi* casteist that the author of **The Death-Rite** (*sanskaara*) pretty much is. Manu lays down that, Brahmin men can have physical intimacy with non-brahmin women but Brahmin women ought not to. This is precisely what happens in Sanskaara. So this is nothing new.
- b. The turmoil within the protagonist after his tryst with the shudra whore Chandri is not very purposeful.
- c. It is not as if the protagonist is left high and dry with a crippled wife with no estrogen. She in fact volunteers that he could remarry, which he doesn't opt to do. He could well have married a Brahmin woman even after his meeting with Chandri and satisfied his libido.

The fact that there is no explanation for this in the novel could be a suspect feature of the novel.

The submission of the essay is there is a huge Q mark against artifacts like these because they depict intellectually vacuous, socially irresponsible and morally outrageous empirical realities as they are, there being no creative vision for society and man and no spokespersonship broached above.

They are of course creations, but vacuous and intellectually slimy linguistic constructs.

with a social construct like caste is my question. That would be real value-building, which is supposed to be one of the defining features of the Navya(Modern) movement

We know that language is used for building mental worlds, however false, irrational and unsatisfying they might be for a cognitive rational human being.

Such 'works of art' typically exemplify on the other side of the divide my argument that all artists need to think themselves to transcend the manifest to ignite change. That is how art irrigates, as it ought to, man and society in civilisationally rich, morally uplifting and intellectually scintillating ways.

The novel has created the impression that it is revolutionary, but no one I am afraid, has shown that it is in its viscera **NOT** casteist, and as for its revolutionariness in intracaste space, this has been done earlier in works like Bolara Baburao's **Vagdevi**.

There is enough evidence in the novel that it blatantly remorselessly and brazenly endorses legitimizes caste as a matter of course, which is what I am afraid a piece of art should not be doing. It endorses the impression that Brahmins are the greatest creations on earth, that you become a Brahmin because of what you have done in your previous birth, that Shudra women are readily available for Brahmin men and all that rubbish. undertone throughout the novel is that the author, incurably and quite culpably, believes in, and is comfortably happy with, the institutionalized injustice called 'caste'.

Why should a thinking rational animal, people who seek man's progress on planet earth, take it seriously?

The Death-Rite (*sanskaara*) is appreciated all over the world presumably because man has this nose for evil things, a taste for irrationalities, because the world is prone to think and unthinkingly believe in what the rabble thinks and believes in. I recall when President K R Narayanan visited the Elysee palace in Paris the worldwide headline was:an untouchable reaches the Elysee palace!

How on earth can French people be happy endorsing untouchability? Why do they get a kick(=a high) out of what Indians think, think culpably, of K. R. Narayanan? Why don't they think for themselves? What is untouchable for India is untouchable also for the French, the British and the world at large. This is a case of the world not knowing what it is doing! Westerners do this I guess with reference to Indian literature as well! This has to be one of the reasons why they accolade a novel like **The Death-Rite** (*sanskaara*).

Imagine the validity of the novel if the communities that are remorselessly, intellectually-indigently demeaned in the novel, Belli, Chandri, Malera Padmavathi and Malera Putta, for instance, come out on to the streets protesting?

The piece falls apart, slumps against truth, like a pack of cards.

The sad but enduring tragedy of India is that the communities that are demeaned in fiction themselves don't think well of themselves in relation to some other communities? They seem, culpably, to acquiesce.

Since that i.e the protest, hasn't happened on a wide scale, Kannada writers continue to paint caste as it exists, just as a slimy and barbaric category it in fact is, justifying and legitimizing it, continue to portray women, and so on unthinkingly, according to the rotten intellectually poor stereotypes that they have in their noddles.

I however see that although, according to me, there are no reasons not to say that they are 'grotesque failures as literary art', not to say that they are **not** pieces of literary art, *for their popularity, which must be considered an indication of the currency of such a warped ideology among the Kannada-speaking public, they are valuable documents of contemporary Kannada culture.* (Zydenbos's words op cit in 1996, which were about one novel (viz. **dharmashree** (The Glory of Religion) extrapolated to all such works here).

Conclusion: The Death-Rite (*sanskaara*) is not, cannot be deemed, a value-creating piece of art, despite the fact that it lampoons some shibboleths within a community, the reason being that it assumes as unalterable, endorses and legitimizes, even if unwittingly, a social moral intellectual horror called caste as a matter of course, because of which it is more a mirror than a lamp, more adductive than abductive, its intervention with reality being more of a cosmetic beautician's than a surgeon's, and it is thus a beacon neither to the Kannadiga nor to mankind.

It only legitimizes and perpetuates a mortal sickness in society by wrongly assuming that the sickness viz. the caste system is an eternally valid iron clad ethos on which assumption it begins to build its world of action. The intraspace revolutionary part is not really revolutionary, as pointed out earlier, many earlier novels e.g. **Vaagdevi** by Bolara Baburao have done long back.

Art can and ought to effect change.

It has a role in the fresh narratives we seek of ourselves and in the process of remaking ourselves. It ought to impact existing social narratives, sourcing, affirming, sustaining and nourishing life and civilization.

The role of pieces like **The Death-Rite** (*sanskaara*) and **Crossing Over** (*DaaTu*) in Kannada, the illustrations in the first category in our taxonomy, is noticeably and remarkably nil in this regard.

Such pieces in fact are linguistic constructs that take the reader up the garden path, epistemological, moral and ontological garden path.

The Kannada child in my view needs to be initiated, not into rotten stuff like the ironclad mysteries of caste and superstitions, but into scientific rationalism, spirituality and the God of FEJ: freedom, equity justice.

Both **The Death-Rite** (*Sanskaara*) and **Crossing Over** (*DaaTu*) miserably fail in doing this.

This is what Zydenbos (1996:108), for example, has to say about some Kannada novels:

If in **Vamshavriksha** (The Lineage), we already see that Bhyrappa delights in religious obscurantism, in **Tabbaliyu niinaade magane** (You became an Orphan, fellow!) and **Dharmashree** (The Glory of Religion), we find a literary expression of an Indian variety of fascism. Numerous passages in the novel are not much more than propaganda for RSS, an extreme right wing of Hindu, anti-nonhindu movement. The RSS figures prominently in Bhyrappa's **Tabbaliyu niinaade magane**. **Dharmashree**, Bhyrappa's antichristian fantasy (in which he vents his contempt of other people as well: people from 'lower castes', people whose skin colour is dark, foreigners, Muslims, nonvegetarians, people who speak incorrect English) can be read as an interesting case study of the right-wing political and quasi-religious frame of mind⁸...

Art, says Picasso, washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life. Nobody knows what dust of everyday life SUCH Kannada novels mentioned above wash from the Kannadiga's soul. And presumably such literature in other languages cannot wash, do not wash, such dust from the souls of their speakers.

I reject it, not merely 'disagree' with it.

Because caste is not independently valid socially morally and intellectually, we need to discard, reject and deny the authority of such caste-advocating, caste-legitimizing 'creative' literature, which is exactly what hasn't happened. Disagreeing without discarding could be okay in the case of superstitions if they are innocuous and not damage-causing. In this case however, we need to **reject** (and in fact **ban**) such 'art' because mankind stands to suffer if it is allowed.

I submit that mankind reject (and ban) all such 'creative' literature that assumes as immutably ironclad, legitimizes, endorses and promotes ontology-external variables like caste, religion, patriarchy and all such irrationalities, man-made barriers that are schismatic. Spirituality in contrast is not schismatic.

In the Kannada context the contribution of pieces like **The Death-Rite** (*sanskaara*), **Crossing Over** (*DaaTu*), **The Glory of Religion** (*Dharmashree*), and a host of others to a just and equitable Kannada tomorrow is a big zero simply because they are pro-caste, pro-injustice, pro-patriarchy and pro-slavery and thus are deeply regressive and backward-looking.

⁸ I am happy people are realizing what some Kannada writers are perpetuating such kind of literary stuff. For example at the Annual 81st All India Kannada Literary Meet at Shravana Belagola in Karnataka, women felt appointing Sri S.L Bhyrappa as a National Professor of India was an affront to women as he has vilified women in his fiction. (See TOI feb the 3rd 2015 p:3). One would be happier if various castes come out onto the streets to protest their vilification in his novels. That Kannadigas need to

As a Kannadiga who looks forward, in the days, decades or centuries to come, to such a society, I need not take these writings seriously.

Such 'literature', literature that endorses evil and irrationality, literature that is NOT a message of life, hope and dignity, is not art, much like all evil, all irrationality, all bloody-mindedness in real life needs to be out of life: art by definition is NOT a photocopy or a photograph or a mimeograph of reality, much like a literary translation is NOT a photograph or a photocopy or a mimeograph of the previous text. This discussion is not for people who think art replicates reality like a photograph does.

As averred earlier, art ought to stimulate the human mind and broaden its horizon and understanding in ways that discursive discourse does not. **How can a piece, doing nothing more than depicting for example, a casteist society exactly as it is (authentically and aesthetically, if you will), only to endorse, legitimise and promote it stimulate me and broaden my understanding?**

This is what in fact pieces belonging to the first category exemplified by pieces like **The Death-rite** (*Sanskaara*) and **Crossing Over** (*DaaTu*) do.

The (rational) Kannadiga needs to pause, consider and weigh this.

As Stella Adler points out (2014),

life beats you and crushes your soul but art reminds you that you have one.

This quality is not found in the first type of our typology:

What caste-endorsing caste-legitimizing Kannada literature (like **The Glory of Religion** (*dharmashree*), **The Death-Rite** (*sanskaara*) and **Crossing Over** (*daaTu*) that paints such irrational evil practices as they exist, literature that violates the ontological dignity of individuals under the guise of painting things as they are (it is Not clear why the Dalit Chooma in the Kannada novel *choomana duDi* is denied conversion in the face of his brother's conversion), does it culpably tells you such dystopic practices are indeed right, *which is exactly what one doesn't expect from art.*

This is exactly the point.

It is NOT clear how the above named Kannada novels, given only as illustrative (not exhaustive) examples here, remind some human groups called 'castes' that they too have a soul, that they too have inner light like every human being

raise their level of awareness and should not allow such intellectual and moral nonsense in the name of literary art, scripting a new chapter in what is literary art, and what is not, is my submission. Is the Government of India listening? **I am also befuddled that mankind has gone along with such a warped and skewed irrational view of art.**

on earth, that they are (also?) entitled to full ontological dignity.

One's conclusion then is that since a caste-ridden, patriarchy-ridden, slavery-ridden society is, for any healthy rationalist and rigorous thinker, a sick society, 'creative literature' that mimics or mirrors such a society without being diagnostic and therapeutic about it in a literary churn is also for sure sick literature.

As James Allen (2015) points out, everything in the universe including the universe is objectivised thought. The following quote from him would be very illuminating for the artist as it is for every human being on the planet who has a rational and inclusive vision of man and his future on the planet ;

The author, the inventor, the architect, first builds up his work in thought, and having perfected it in all its parts as a complete and harmonious whole upon the thought-plane, he then commences to materialise it, to bring it down to the material or sense-plane... To adjust all your thoughts to a perfect and unswerving faith in the omnipotence and supremacy of Good, is to cooperate with that Good, and to realise within yourself the solution and destruction of all evil. Believe and ye shall live.

3.1.2. Crossing Over (*daaTu*):

The Factual Cosmos of the novel:

The novel **Crossing Over** (*daaTu*) chronicles the story of social space in a village in terms of the gut issue of caste. Venkataramanaih a temple priest has two children: Satyabhama and Venkatesha. The daughter does an M.A and joins a lecturer's job in Bengaluru. Melagiri Gowda of the farmers' caste is a minister in the state government. His son, Srinivasa and Satyabhama gravitate toward each other before they decide to tie the knot. Their union is thwarted by the belief of caste supremacism. A reluctant Srinivasa then marries Kumudini, the daughter of an MLA(Member of the Legislative Assembly) of his own caste. Kumudini breathes her last in labour. Srinivasa then gets close with Meera the daughter of Bettaiah, an untouchable. This marriage is also held back by caste supremacy upon which Srinivasa gets nutty and Meera drowns herself in the village reservoir. As happens in a few of the original writer's fiction, Venkataramanaih's past belies his caste-supremacist beliefs: he has already sired Honnura through a union with an untouchable woman called Matangi. Satyabhama tries to convert Meera to Brahminism with the sacred-thread ceremony. Mohandas, Meera's elder brother wants to marry Satyabhama, but this doesn't come off either, although Satyabhama herself was for it. This is hardly convincing, hardly organic in the novel. Satyabhama comes across as

defiance personified in gestures like wearing the sacred thread (against the norm of women not wearing them) and finally chucking it away into the waters in the end, which is admittedly a positive in the novel, but I am not sure of its place in the overall conceptual schema of the novel, which is to legitimize this horror called 'caste'. Eventually Mohandas vents his ire against the caste system by blowing up the village reservoir in which he perishes.

My own critique of the piece is that the writer depicts a deeply casteist society and then finds that attempts at crossing over the barriers of schismatic caste don't pan out, thus legitimizing this civilisational violence called 'caste', which is precisely what prompts the translator Gurudatta to remark:

...This doesn't mean that Bhyrappa wants the society to stagnate." (p:x)

What else does Bhyrappa want other than expect Kannadigas to rot in a Manu-driven and eminently iniquitous ethos? Does Bhyrappa want the society to be egalitarian where the Brahmin has only that value - and nothing more - which the others give him? As a piece of poetic justice why don't writers like him picture a social ethos where Brahmins are the suppressed and depressed class for a change as indeed Brahmins were for 150 years in the prechristian Mauryan era? Such things Western writers attempt, but it may be too much to expect from the illiberal Indian writers!

That is the bigoted intolerant undemocratic Indian writer for you!!

The eventual effect I am afraid, is the same as that of **The Death-Rite** (*sanskaara*) that we saw: much like that of **The Death-Rite** (*sanskaara*), which assumes as ironclad the barbaric low-high system and then builds its world on this basic but wrong premise, the contribution of **Crossing Over**(*DaaTu*) to the Kannadiga's casteless, exploitationless, injusticeless tomorrows is a **big zero**.

The message is status-quoist, which is not acceptable to any cognitive rational, morally sensitive, socially responsible and intellectually nonvacuous Kannadiga⁹.

The unanswered question about **Crossing Over** (*daaTu*) is why is it that the writer doesn't choose the other equally empirical possibility of successful intercaste marriages that are there for all to see?

Is he unaware of, or scared of, or averse to, the leveling/equality they bring about?

One could say the writer has the liberty to write what he chooses to. If a writer chooses the horror of caste over castelessness, especially when both are empirically

⁹ By implication I am saying that Kannadigas, who endorse caste, are all socially irresponsible, morally mean and intellectually vacuous people.

available, then I would question his credentials as a writer as he then ceases to be a beacon, he ceases to be socially responsible, morally acceptable and intellectually vibrant.

I would go a step further and assert that even when the two possibilities are not empirically available, a writer worth his salt has, by way of his creative vision for man, to give the message of the hope of casteless equity in social space. But there are plenty of successful intercaste and inter religious marriages all round. The writer seems to be blind to such a creative possibility.

Crossing Over (DaaTu), much like **The Death-Rite(Sanskaara)**, is more a mirror than a guiding leading light. Art by definition is more light than mirror.

The writer of **Crossing Over (DaaTu)** also seems to think that social equity depends only on the will of the privileged to assimilate the underprivileged: On page no 631 of the translation the author has an untouchable mouth his own(=the author's own) regressively casteist idea of a barrier the annihilation of caste would have to contend with:

“...I don't know how it will ever disappear unless 'upper castes'¹⁰ assimilate us...”

Caste, such writers need to be told, is two-edged; all interhuman space is ever bilateral. It equally well depends on the underprivileged. Brahmins have only that value that the others give them: nothing more!

They need to realise this.

The ordinary Kannadiga, cretinous, gutsless and unself-respecting as he is, needs to be oriented and educated about human ontology. A bottomline about human ontology is that x has only that value to y which y gives x, and nothing more, nothing less. Mainstreaming is a huge myth the self-serving privileged perpetuate. **Sanskritisation** and **Brahminisation** have of course some empirical content (exactly because of the intellectual indigence, cerebral poverty of the 'common herd' of people) but have zero intellectual, moral, civilisational and epistemic content.

Why should somebody be Sanskritised or Brahminised? Why should somebody be Englishised or Germanised? In the Indian context the Nagas give us a convincing example of this.

“Keep your *mainstreaming* to yourselves. If you don't treat us well, we go our own way!”

they said, threatening to hive off. Indians will do well to learn from this.

Everyone should evolve and grow in terms of scientific rationalism, in terms of her own strengths and

¹⁰ I have sustainable objections to the use of expressions like 'low caste' and 'high caste'. It is criminal and exceptionable. **When will we grow?**

weaknesses, absorbing the best from all human aggregates under the sun. Period. No individual ought to clone other individuals, and no culture or community under the sun ought to clone other communities and cultures. This goes without saying but it needs to be said, and said time and again, it seems, given the propensity of humans to blindly, slavishly imitate others.

Why on earth should I privilege particular ethos on mother earth? These irrationalities persist because of the intellectual indigence of, and spinelessness of, people. I don't know if M.N. Srinivas realised this when he talked of *Sanskritisation*, which notion in fact is a load of unadulterated intellectual tommyrot.

Pradhan Gurudatta the translator's remarks, a sample of which is cited here below, are a load of flummery:

“daaTu created a new awareness of the familiar experience of the people in the society... It is this demystification of a social mystery that makes the novel unusually absorbing...he has analysed it from various angles, and deeply too. he has also underlined the right perspectives to be cherished with reference to the characteristics and transformation of society. He also stresses the fact that progressive ideas are to be practiced and uncharitable attitudes from whichever quarter they emerge, are to be condemned. By embodying these hard truths, this novel has become a significant contribution o Indian literature.

My comment:

- a. Awareness tending toward institutionalised injustice, awareness toward the impossibility of erasing this high-low nonsense?
- b. What about the (new) awareness of successful intercaste marriages?
- c. If 'literature' that legitimises (like **Crossing Over (DaaTu)** does) or assumes as an immutably ironclad cast-in-stone thing the institutionalized injustice called 'caste' (like **The Death-Rite (Sanksaara)** does) is a 'significant contribution' to Indian literature, **then God save Indian literature!** and even more importantly, and God save the Kannadiga for whom they are meant!

Like Shantinath Desai's blurb on **Sanskaara**(The death-rite), pointed earlier, Gurudatta's averral about **DaaTu**(Crossing Over) is also a great joke of the Kannada literary and intellectual world! How can writers who need to be 'engineers of the soul' be legitimisers of this execrable high-low business that caste is?¹¹

It truly amuses me!

¹¹ One can only pity the cerebrally poor Kannadiga and the Indian who valourise such writings. May better sense prevail on him! This they owe their children and grandchildren!

Art seeds, and sources life and civilization. It gives, nurtures, nourishes, affirms and protects life and civilization. It adds value and beauty to life and civilization.

What do alleged 'literary' pieces like **The Death-rite** (Samskara) and **Crossing Over** (DaaTu) do? They own what reason disowns, affirming that human being x is condemned to be 'low' and human being y is destined to be 'high'.

As we saw, **The Death-rite** (Samskara) in fact implies this low-high hogwash can erase only with death! And **Crossing Over** (DaaTu) affirms that crosscaste schism is unbridgeable, legitimizing caste, both of which are socially irresponsible and morally unacceptable, and intellectually empty stances.

They are not 'art' for these reasons.

Conclusion: Crossing-Over (DaaTu) is not, cannot be deemed, a value-creating piece of art, despite the fact that it attempts 'crossing' caste, the reason being that it legitimizes a social moral intellectual horror called 'caste', because of which it is more a mirror than a lamp, more adductive than abductive, its intervention with reality being more of an unwilling unconvinced reformer than a real surgeon's, and it is thus a beacon neither to the Kannadiga nor to mankind.

It in the end only legitimizes a mortal sickness in society.

A penultimate point about the first kind of Kannada literature vis-à-vis caste is that they stress caste so very abominably that even when caste is erasing from the Kannadigas' collective psyche, they culpably remind them of it: caste is rapidly perishing for example in the Indian corporate space, and in urban and semi-urban spaces, equality is happening. (I have seen people refusing to rent out houses to the traditionally privileged (read: brahmins) if they have been turned down by the privileged for a similar thing, which is very wholesome), but instead of lifting the Kannadiga out of the morass of caste, 'literature' typified by **The Death Rite** and **Crossing-over** continues to remind the vulnerable Kannadiga of the slimy horror of caste.

Since the first category *either* assumes caste as immutably fundamental *or* legitimises it after some (in my view, hesitant) tinkering with it, and since caste is a socially irresponsible, morally outrageous and intellectually vacuous construct, the 'literature' that exemplifies this category is also socially irresponsible, morally outrageous and intellectually vacuous construct.

The theoretical point is that these alleged pieces of 'literature' seek to own what reason disowns, either assuming as immutably ironclad or legitimising this slimy

horror called caste, and since consequently they don't deepen one's sense of being, life and civilization, since they are far from protecting and nourishing life and civilization, their contribution to man's (or the Kannadiga's) exploitationless injusticeless casteless tomorrows is a big zero, and they cease to be 'art' for these reasons.

If such pieces as **The Death-Rite**(Samskara) and **Crossing Over** (DaaTu), **The Glory of Religion** (Dharmashree) and so on in Kannada are not art in the light of our characterization of literary art in that they fail to light up our lives like all art ought to, *what are they* is the question.

The answer is that natural languages are the evolution of man's capacity to think and create mental worlds. And since these instruments of thinking and creating mental worlds are stimulus-free, they can be used to lie, to be dishonest, to create irrational and positively evil worlds pursuing one's own (irrational) agendas and may not be designed for the general good of mankind that Allen talks about.

The books named above in Kannada and several others in other languages of the world illustrate this use of natural language. Clearly they are not driven for the general good of man.

That since they only parrot and replicate the irrationalities that obtain in society, since they endorse and legitimise the 'sewers in spate' that some human groups are, they are not useful for such societies is the submission. They are NOT designed for the general good of the human groups that help produce them, and by implication for the rest of humankind.

A more general sequitor conclusion that follows is that a society that allows and serenades such books needs to grow because it seems to encourage books which are not life-affirming, life-nourishing and civilization-protecting, and which clearly promote things that reason disowns¹². Irrational abominations like caste in the Indian society should amuse any rational cognitive thinking human being and its endorsement and replication in art even more so!

3.2. THE SECOND CATEGORY

In this kind, caste/religion is depicted and transcended with natural ease even in the face of the virulent schism between religions.

This is exemplified by pieces like **The Inscrutable Mystery** (Chidambara Rahasya), **The Twilight Narrative** (*Mussanjeya kataa prasanga*), K.T. Gatti's **The Unbrahmin** (*abrahmana*) being the possible other

¹² In response, a scholar whose opinion I value said this viz that art cannot own what reason disowns doesn't hold because communities have different even conflicting, needs. This response makes no sense to me. How could

irrationalities like caste, patriarchy, female foeticide, social inequalities and so on be a community's needs?

examples. On an all India level, Tagore's novels, e.g. *kabulivaala* and Prem Chand's novels e.g. *Gaban* come under this category..

It is clear that this is what Kannada children, the Kannadiga's hope for the future, need to be fed copiously, and NOT novels like **The Death-Rite**(Sanksaara) and **Crossing Over** (DaaTu), which is why we say the contribution of the novels of the first category to the Kannadiga's tomorrows is a hulking zero. .

3.2.1.We take up **The Inscrutable Mystery** (Chidambara Rahasya) as a paradigm case of the second category here for analysis.

The Factual Cosmos

The novel **The Inscrutable Mystery** narrates the tale of the village of Kesaruru with all its dynamics. The narration is done through the eyes of a free sensitive and poetic mind responding to the lay of the social landscape. With the suspense of a detective novel the novel pictures the variegated life in Kesaruru with the revolutionary outcries of some rationalist youth, people who are steeped in superstition and people like Angadi who are after some strange research findings. As a result of the friction among these various disparate elements of caste, religion and vevy rationalists, an inferno literally engulfs Kesaruru. Although there is explicit enmity between the Hindus and Muslims in the village, the love between Rafiq Ahmed the Muslim and Jayanti the Hindu evolves very naturally and innocently, and since this is natural, it is they who come out unscathed out of the inferno in the end.

3.3. THE THIRD CATEGORY

In this kind of literature 'caste' is only an incidental backdrop or irrelevant to the central dynamics of the novel. It is exemplified among others by pieces like Poornachandra Tejasvi's **Carvalho**, Yashavanta Chittala's **Purushottama**, Krishna Alanahally's *kaaDu*(=The Woods).

We take up **Carvalho** as a paradigm case of the third kind for analysis from the view point of caste.

The Factual Cosmos of Carvalho:

Carvalho, one of Tejasvi's masterpieces is the tale of the naturalist and entomologist Carvalho who with handsome funding from foreign organisations goes about exploring the flying lizard in the wooded Malnad hills in concert with a number of other people.

The fact that caste plays more the role of a background than of an actual participant in the dynamic action of the novel is clear from the following scintillating summary of the novel in the magazine **India Today**, there being no mention of caste at all therein.

The eponymous hero of the book is "a great botanist, an entomologist of genius", stationed in rural

Chikkamagaluru, and lately engrossed in the pursuit of a life-time: the quest for a reptile from pre-history, the flying lizard. Carvalho has international backing; "the Smithsonian Institute, the Geological Society, and the British Geological unit have come forward with monetary help to the tune of 7,000 pounds sterling".

But making this book wonderful is the fact that Carvalho has neither been put on the trail of the reptile by high-falutin' scientists, nor are his fellow journeymen in pursuit of the grail heavy-duty scholars.

The source of his inspiration is a rural truant, Mandanna, who claims to have seen the flying wonder; and the motley group that form the adventure squad which penetrates into the thick forests around Norvey consists of a cook-cum-expert-tree-climber, bow-legged Biryani Kariappa, Prabhakara, who handles the movie camera, Mandanna, who's the guide, Yenka the snake-catcher, Kiwi the dog, Carvalho himself, and the shadowy narrator, whose only raison d'etre seems to be the telling of the story.

Welding the group together are the feelings of excitement and wonderment. The author is telling us that awe of the unknown remains an emotion that can ignite and seize the imagination of the most unlikely of people, and set them hurtling down strange paths.

However, Tejaswi's real triumph is his ability to render real and three-dimensional all the minor and major characters - Mandanna and Biryani Kariappa are unforgettable - who people this slim book, and to tell with wry humour the smaller stories even as the larger enterprise unfolds.

There is the high farce of the bees laying waste the minister's public meeting - incidentally, bee-keeping as a vocation is majorly dwelt upon in the book, perhaps an indication of the author's predilections.

Then there is Mandanna's marriage to a mammoth-breasted cretin, and his subsequent arraignment in an illicit distillation case. Tejaswi impresses to the very last word. The end sees a breathless chase being given to the flying lizard; and a climax both poignant and cosmic in its reverberations.

Finally there could be a fourth category, which this article leaves open.

4.0. PERORATION

We in this paper have discussed the nature of the equation between human ontology and various identity badges like caste that man's ontology encapsulates, the nature of what we think is art as a prelude to discussing Kannada literature and assessing these literary pieces vis-a-vis caste.

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