

The Concept of Poverty in the Poetry of Kuvempu

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1. Introduction

It is a well known fact that literature is the mirror of the society. Literature of any country at any time reflects the attitude, habits, and thinking process of that society. If we look at the literature of any country in any time of the human existence, we see people belonging to different class and group viz. rich and poor, black and white, upper and lower class, landlord and slave, and ruler and ruled etc. The concept of poverty can be defined as – those who are not provided with basic needs. This definition of poverty does not applicable to all countries in all time in the world. The definition of poverty is different from country to country, class to class, and time to time. This makes us difficult to give a definition that is acceptable by all people throughout the world. Man made poverty or man manipulated poverty is more severe and long lasting than natural poverty due to various natural disasters such as earthquake, volcano and other untoward incidents. Though the scope of poverty is increasing day by day, but here we are taking into consideration only money and other basic needs.

Kuvempu is the philosophical poet of the twentieth century. His concern for or attitude towards the socially downtrodden, poor, untouchable is quite interesting for the post modern leader. Kuvempu is the modern poet of twentieth century with social concern for the poor people. He coined many terms into Kannada language such as ‘maha chandassu’, pakshi kashi etc. The credit of giving the term ‘shri samanya (respected common man)’, goes to philosophical poet of Karnataka. The word ‘shri’ is used before the name of rich, famous and upper caste people. But Kuvempu used this term before the name of the common man. There is an inequality among people based on sex, class, religion, colour, country since ages. He is the pioneering poet who spoke about this inequality in the society. He looks at everything from the humanistic point of view. This can be seen in his poetry, novels, short stories, essays of this great poet.

If we make an attempt to study the poetry of Kuvempu, we find many poems which deal with the theme or concept of poverty. In his poetry we can find out what are the reasons for poverty? How does it affect the people? And how can we eradicate or root out poverty or wipe out it in India in particular and in world in general.

So far the scholars of various periods have found mainly three concepts in the poetry of Kuvempu such as:

1. Role of nature in the poetry of Kuvempu.
2. Spirituality in the poetry of Kuvempu.

3. Rationality in the poetry of Kuvempu.

Along with these major themes in the poetry of Kuvempu, if we observe the poetry of him we can find poems about the poor, untouchables and downtrodden people in the society. To mention we can list out following poems where the poverty is the central theme in these poems. They are:

1. Negila yogi(peasant)
2. Jadavadi
3. Kalki
4. Raktadhuni
5. Kittaiah
6. Raitha drusti(sight of the peasant)
7. Kogile(cuckoo)
8. Soviet Russia
9. Gobbara(fertilizer)
10. O banni sodarare bega banni (O brothers come soon)
11. Hosa balina geethe(song of new life)
12. Kranthikali
13. Bekku-illi(cat-rat)
14. Lenin
15. Shri samanya dheeksha geethe
16. Brahma- nayi
17. Shudrakli
18. Ashtagraha
19. Yogasiddi
20. Amalana kathe

In these poems of Kuvempu we find poverty being the main theme.

Kuvempu is a different poet than other modern poets. The main reason being, Kuvempu came from different social background from that of other post modern poets. The post modern poets are from so called upper caste people and from well do families in the major cities. But Kuvempu was from a place which is far away these modern cities. He is from a coastal district in South Karnataka- Shimoga. He himself belonged to one of the backward classes. Hence, he had the personal experience of suffering from the hand of so called upper caste people.

In order to understand the inner meaning of his poetry, it is very necessary to understand the social scenario from which he came from. If we consider his poetry from the above mentioned point of view or background, Kuvempu's poetry can be divided into four types for detailed study. They are:

1. Kuvempu's poetry pertaining to peasants.
2. Kuvempu's poetry with revolutionary theme for social equality in the society.
3. Kuvempu's ballads and narrative poems dealing with poverty.
4. Kuvempu's other poems dealing with poverty and poor people.

2. The Concept of Poverty in the Poems of Kuvempu's pertaining to peasants

In the poems such as Negila yogi, Suggihadu, Saggada Bagilu, Raithana Dhrushti, Gobbara, Kulada Kalige etc. in these poems speaks about the removal obstacles of the development of the peasants and better condition of the poor on various aspects of their life.

It is a well known fact that India is an agricultural country and peasants are its backbone. Here more than seventy percent of the people depend on agriculture for their livelihood in various ways both directly and indirectly. It is also a major contributor for the Gross National Product. India is also a nation of villages. As Mahatma Gandhi said 'the development of India is not possible without the villages are being developed'. Most of the people in India live in the villages. "Food is one of the basic needs of the people any where in the world and it is the peasants who feed all the people all over the world working throughout the year under the scorching sun, wind, and rain. But the quality life of these peasants is very bad. The peasants neither get respect from the society nor enough reward for their hardwork in terms of money and peace of mind. Since this is the case, the present generation is distancing itself from agriculture. He has been pushed down the order by the various agencies of the society"¹. The condition of the peasant, from ages, is precarious one. In the ancient days they were ignored and ill-treated by the landlords in spite of their hard work, and he has been cheated by the middle men who make all the profit that is due for the peasants. In this way they have been exploited by the all- king, landlord, middlemen, capitalists, money lenders. As the poet is speaking against these ill practices, we have to welcome and respect the concern and attitude of the poet.

The poet, Kuvempu, knew the base of the society. The peasant is the necessity of the for its very existence. He does his work without any selfish thought. Hence, it is proper to all time Negilayogi.

Kuvempu's poem 'Kittaiyah' is his interest in his life though out. It shows his concern and thinking process for the poor peasants and for their welfare. For Kuvempu art is not for arts sake, but it is for a life sake, to bring about change in the lives of the downtrodden. This shows his constant appeal to be a social being for the welfare of other people. In the same poem he speaks about the causes, which are responsible for the unspeakable poverty of the poor peasants in his native district-Shimoga. Kittaiyah says, we have to give land tax whether

there is flood, drought, or harvest. In order to pay the tax, they have to sell everything in order to raise the money to pay tax.

This has been happening since ages i.e from ancient Indian rulers, muslim rulers and during British rule the peasants were tortured if they did pay tax.

If we go for the detailed study of literature of Kuvempu, we find many social and cultural differences in our society. In the society, anywhere in the world, there are two kinds of people- the ruler and the ruled. Whether it's blacks government or whites government, the social and economic condition of the peasants is the same- heart rendering. All the dynasties throughout the Indian history sucked the blood of the peasants. Pain is pain whether we are stabbed by the our own people or by the foreigners. This poem shows us how the peasant has been exploited and suffering since ages, and even today they are suffering in the so-called democratic government i.e for the people, by the people, and to the people. This is a very unfortunate thing to happen to them who work day and night to feed the whole country selflessly at the cost of their family.

Earlier writers wrote poems about well personalities, gods, demigods –Rama, Krishna, Hanumantha Bhima and Arjuna- and not about common man who is part and parcel of every man's life. But it is Kuvempu who began the tradition to write about the common man and their activities. He began to write about Karisidda, Kittaiyah, Kalki, etc who rustic people. "This trend in writing poetry reminds us William Wordsworth in UK who wrote about common/rustic people, their life in their own simple language which was unprecedented in the history of UK. He gives voice to the voiceless people. He questions the culture of so-called upper caste people whose culture was influenced by the colonial rulers- British and others. It is culture and life style of the peasants which is the culture of native land/country. Kuvempu tries in his poem 'Gobbara' to change thinking process of the people regarding culture"². In this way, the neglected peasants for ages get the primary importance in the poems of Kuvempu.

3. The Concept of Poverty in the Revolutionary Poems of Kuvempu

Jadavadi, Rathnaduni, Kalki, Kogile, and Soviet Russia, Hosabalina Geethe, Kranthikari, Bekku-illi, Lenin, Shri Samanya Dheeksha geethe, Brahmanayi, Shudrakoli – these are the poems which deal with the revolutionary theme to bring about a social change. We can find the difference between Kuvempu and modern poets in these poems. For Kuvempu internal fighting is as important as external fighting. Other modern poets only sympathise with them.

Kuvempu states his stand on the administration and its exploitation of the peasants in his few poems such as Jadavadi, Rakthadhuni, Panchajanya. Then Kuvempu thought that the British must be rooted out of the country and society must be freed from the strong hold of the upper caste people. The common man and the peasant must be removed from

1. Kuvempu Sahithya Sameeksha, G.S Shivarudrappa, page -62, 2. Vasantha Prakashana, 2004.

Kuvempu Kavya Samskruthi Cheriteya Roopaka. Narahalli Balasubramanya, page-88, Ankitha Pusthaka, 2004.

this double oppression, is the wish of the poet. Among the poets who expressed revolutionary ideas, Kuvempu stands apart. Kuvempu always supported and encouraged social change to bring about equality.

One of the important poems which deals with revolutionary theme is 'Kalki'. In this poem Kuvempu depicts the gap between the rich and poor. On the one hand there are big houses of rich and on the other hand, there are huts of the poor. "The rich lead a happy and luxurious life and the poor live in the dark suffering. The rich have more than enough to eat and waste, but the poor sleep in the empty stomachs. They live in the contradictory conditions. This is the cruel world. It is true that the poor people have the patience to endure, but there is a limit to it. If the limit is crossed, it is very difficult to imagine what would they do in order to pacify their anger. If this untoward incident has to be prevented, the poor people have to be given equal rights to lead a happy life"³

In India, still we have not identified the real reasons for the poverty. We are still giving superstitious and blind reasons as the cause for the poverty. Even today it is imprinted in the mind of the poor people that it was god who decides their fate. Even after rapid increase in science and technology, if the people think like this there is some problem in their thinking process. They have been conditioned like that by the rich and the so-called upper caste people. Even today there are millions of people suffering and losing their life due to hunger and malnutrition.

Kuvempu's character Kalki, in one of his poems, represents neglected and exploited people for centuries and they are symbol of poverty in the society. He drinks the blood and eats the head of the people still he feels hungry. This shows the intensity of hunger and poverty in the destitute people. In India, today, we find eighty percent of malnourished people, forty-two percent live below poverty line. As the poor do not eat food and sleep in empty stomach, they don't get sleep. Even they are lucky enough to sleep, they were awakened by the nightmares, which do not allow them to sleep peacefully.

"The symbolical and deep meaning of these poems show poet's concern for the poor people. He is not writing just to write poetry, but with a purpose i.e. to bring about a positive change in the present society. Various poets have appreciated Kuvempu's empathy for the poor in these poems"⁴.

The existence of god, theory of karma, fate, belief in the previous birth are cited by the bourgeoisie society in order to keep the poor as poor forever and exploit them for their development and welfare. The rich are becoming rich and poor are becoming in this in this country. On the one hand there are few crorepaths and on the other hand there are millions of poor people with a meal a day.

This is how India is becoming one of the super powers in the world. In order to root out the materialism in the society. He gives a call to the people to come out of their churches, mosques and temples in order to fight against the evil poverty, inequality, and injustice. Though god is a concept innovated for the betterment of human beings, we are blindly wasting our precious time in the temple, church and mosque chanting useless mantras. This has to be stopped.

The poor people have been suffering from the clutches of the rich and so-called upper caste people. In order to free themselves from the rich, they must not be afraid of shedding their blood. If they make a revolution now at the cost of their life, their posterity or future generation may benefit from it. If they do it they may get enough food to eat and cloth to cover their naked body. Kuvempu professes a creation of a society where every one, both the rich and the poor live a life of equality in all the aspects of life. This large scale inequality must be removed from the society in order to make a society where all are equal. In the present, in India, democratic set up all are equal. There is no difference between the president and the common man, and work is worship for all men whether one is teacher or cobbler or washer man. This makes us to remember social reformer Basavanna. But demands not only external equality but also internal equality i.e. thinking of the human beings must change. In this the poet argues for the eradication of lord-slave system in our system. But the writer's appeals to equality and justice only remain on the paper. This makes the poet feel let down by his own people.

4. The Concept of Poverty in the Ballads and Narrative poems of Kuvempu

Karisidda, Nagi, Amalana Kathe, Haluru etc. come under this category. We also see the concept of poverty in these poems as well. In his poems the respect and importance given to the common man is very appreciable. It was thought earlier that the protagonist or character of a poetry must be a man belonging to higher echelon. Kuvempu deviated from this way of thinking and made the common man his character. This type of change has been brought in, in English, by W. Wordsworth. He wrote about common people in their own language. For example, Solitary reaper, Simon Lee, Resolution and Independence, idiot Boy etc. He makes us to remember great poets like Harihara, Vachanakaras, who wrote about common man and about their life. "Many poets thought that there is nothing to write about in the life of common man. But Kuvempu disagrees with this attitude and shows in his poem 'Gobbara' that common man's life is as important as man of high social status"⁵.

Karisidda-Giddi are poor people. After many years of childless life, they get a baby boy called Byra. But the child dies when he went with his father to a tank. This is the theme of the poem. They are very poor people. The child grows up eating malnourished food. The only source of his food is breast feeding. More than anything else what is more important is poet wrote about common man as W. Wordsworth in Simon Lee.

3. *Kuvempu Kavya Samskruthi Cheriteya Roopaka*. Narahalli Balasubramanya, page-20, Ankitha Pusthaka, 2004.

4. *Kuvempu Kavya Samskruthi Cheriteya Roopaka*. Narahalli Balasubramanya, page-27, Ankitha Pusthaka, 2004.

5. Nenapina Donialli, Kuvempu, Page-243. Udayaravi Prakashana, Mysore. 1980

Kuvempu's poem 'Nagi' gives the heart rendering picture of a poor family. Nagi, Mada, Madi, Ninga are all common people. Nagi suffers from the ill-treatment of step mother. This poem brings to her notice his another poem 'Salada magu' (son of the loan).

'Amalana Kathe' consists of 190 quatrains. The theme of the poem is the poor lives happily with his wife and children speaking his mother tongue. Though he has not got any degree he respects his mother land and tongue. This poem is an example for common man love his society. It is believed by the people that Kuvempu began writing in Kannada, his mother tongue, after he was told by Kosin to do so. But the fact is he wrote this poem much before this incident.

Kuvempu's another poem 'Haluru' depicts the beautiful rural life, its death and duplicity of man. The materialistic life of city people and uncivilised behaviour of so-called upper caste people. Here the poet gives primary importance to food and

their other materialistic things. This poem deals with suffering of the common since the ages. And how he speaks for them.

5. The Concept of Poverty in his other poems

Besides the poems mentioned above, there are other poems which deal with poverty, poor people, downtrodden, weak, and low caste people. His other poems are: Gommateshwara, Kalarathri, Prakruthi Upasane, Asha murthy, Halli Hudugi etc. Though these poems deal with different themes, there are instances where the poet brings the concept of poverty and speaks for the poor people. Like this we can see how the poet fought for the poor and downtrodden people. This has to be studied in depth for better understanding.

References

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2. Narahalli Balasubramanya,(2004), *Kuvempu Kavya Samskruthi Cheriteya Roopaka*. Ankitha Pusthaka, Bangalore
3. G.S Shivarudrappa (2004), *Kuvempu Sahithya Sameeksha*, Vasantha Prakashana, Bangalore