



## Reality and Realism: A Sociological Study of Telugu Novel

Dr. M. Sreedevi  
Xavier

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, The M. S. University of Baroda, VADODARA, GUJARAT

### ABSTRACT

*The main thrust of this paper is to analyse sociologically the Telugu novel which emerged as a result of the cultural encounter with the western world in the first place and then developed into a distinctive form of literary creation focussing on the socio-cultural movements going hand in hand.*

*The main objectives of this study are - to understand the infusion of 'reality' and 'realism' in the writings, of this genre; to examine how they acquired a distinctiveness of sensibility, world vision, and function, almost right from its 'transfer' on the Indian cultural soil, showing a wide range of forms and thematic concerns. The literary works are analysed from the perspective developed in sociology of literature. The novel is a revealing window into the formations and transformations of social context and psychic universe of the middle classes, even though the thematic content remains unrestricted, cutting across all boundaries of class and status, of interiority and exteriority.*

**KEYWORDS:** Literary Traditions, Social Movements, Progressive Trends and Transformations, World Vision

### Introduction

The rise of the 'novel' as a distinctive genre of modern literature is perceived by contemporary historiography to be concurrent with the emergence of the bourgeois social formation in Europe (Ian, W. 1967). One of the earliest articulations of this linkage between the two developments was provided by Hegel, when he characterised the 'novel' as 'the modern bourgeois epic' (Hegel, 1920). And long before the rise of recent theories about the 'novel' as an epistemology, yielding 'truth' about man and society, it is instructive to note that Hegel inaugurated his philosophical career, in 'Phenomenology of the Spirit' (1807), by actually drawing upon Diderot's novel 'Nephew of Rameau' - to unravel the structure of 'the world of self-alienated spirit' (Hegel, 1979). Four decades later, Karl Marx inaugurated his scientific/critical career by a similar use of the novel, in his 'Poverty of Philosophy' (1847). For articulating 'the last word of social science', on the eve of every general reshuffling of society, Karl Marx draws on George Sand's historical novel 'Jean Ziska: Combat or death: bloody struggle or extinction'. It is thus that the question is inexorably put (Marx, K. 1847).

Thus, indeed, it was the question inexorably put to Indian writers of the nineteenth century, after the brutal crushing of the 1857 uprising against the East India Company. It is a tribute to the inherent strength of the creative muse of India that it proceeded to assimilate, and transform, this western (for them 'English') genre for the twin themes of 'recovery' (of cultural civilizational roots) and 'discovery' of the world around them, as much in its exteriority as interiority. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (Walter Scott of Bengali), with his historical novels inaugurates this adaptation and assimilation, in the last quarter of the 19th century; but, it is important to note the contribution of his two hitherto neglected contemporaries of the South, Vedanayakam Pillai in Tamil, and Chander Menon, in Malayalam, are equally significant pioneers, who take their models from Cerventosand the English comic novelist respectively (Satyam, R. 1981). Narahari Gopala Krishnama Chetti's historical novel 'Sri Rangaraja Charitra' (1872), and Viresalingam's social novel 'Rajsekshara Charitra' (1878) belong to this pioneering, galaxy, in the Telugu language of Indian literature. The infusion of 'reality' and 'realism' in the writings, of this genre, takes place, almost concurrently, in the works of writers in Bengali, Malayalam, Marathi, Urdu etc (Mukherjee, M. 1984). The genre, in the hands of its Indian practitioners thus, acquires a distinctiveness of sensibility, world vision, and function, almost right from its 'transfer' on the Indian cultural soil, showing a wide range of forms and thematic concerns (Woolfe, V. 1966).

The very elasticity of this 'form' of modern literature precludes the possibility of theorising about its 'normative' structure, or its 'exemplary' role, within the straight jacket of ideologies, political or academics. It is, therefore, necessary to keep clear of the plethora of current 'theories' on this 'genre', and hold fast to its 'open-ness' as a form. Its potentialities are far from exhausted, here or elsewhere; and what has been achieved so far is but the visible 'apex' of a vast iceberg, whose depths and contours remain to be sounded and determined by the creativity of writers today and tomorrow.

### 1. Historical Genesis

In the Telugu language, the genre of 'novel', it is significant to note, begins on the concurrent note of historical 'recovery' and social 'discovery', in its two pioneering works- 'Sri Rangaraja Charitra' (1872) and 'Rajsekshara Charitra' (1878).

The novel entitled 'Sri Rangaraja Charitra' (The History of Sir Rangaraja) by Narahari Gopala Krishnama Chetti published in 1872 was an original novel based on certain historical developments in the annals of Vijayanagar. But the story is original. Madras Gezzet pointed out that Sri Rangaraja Charitra is a first Telugu novel.

Viresalingam's 'Rajsekshara Charitra' (The History of Rajasekhara) is a social novel and well received by the readers and reviewed in the journals of those days. It was translated into English by T. R. Hutchinson under the title 'Fortune's Wheel', Viresalingam wrote a shorter novel 'Satyavati Charitra' (The History of Satyavati) for women to instruct them in the ideas of domestic and social life. Influenced by Swift's Gulliver's Travels, Viresalingam wrote 'Satyaraja Purva Desayatralu' with the background of Hindu life and ideas. For about one decade Viresalingam was the only person who wrote novels. But in 1891, 'Chintamani' (Telugu journal) was established with the object of encouraging the growth of the novel in Telugu. For the first time Viresalingam in cooperation with Nya-pati Subba Rao instituted the award of prizes for the best novels. Under this scheme Khandavalli Ramachandrudu, Tellapragada Suryanarayana Rao, Chllakunkirti, Goteti Kanaka Raju, Tekumalla Raja Gopala Rao, Rentala Venkata Subba Rao got first or second prizes for about five years. Chilakamarti came to a greater prominence as a best novelist. Inspired by the historical novels of Meadows Taylor, Chilakamarti wrote in Telugu 'Ahalyabai' and 'Karpuramanjari'.

Twentieth century commenced with a historical novel, 'Bhuvana Mohini' by Dharanipragada Venkata Siva Rao, published in 1901. It relates to the story of Nurjahan, the plot was well developed and the characters were portrayed in glowing colours. At the same period humorous novels were written by Chilakamarti and Achanta. Some social novels came at the same period. Chilakamarti's historical as well as social and humorous novels prompted others in the field to write historical novels.

### 2. Emergence of Literary Associations and Translations

During the second decade of 20th century there came into existence many literary associations and many novels were published by them including the translated works from Bengali novels. At this time many writers were attracted to the detective novels in Bengali and started translating also. Writers started translating novels from many other Indian languages as well as from English, French and Russian. But more important than these translations are original novels which mirror the social life of the Telugu country.

With the widening of the intellectual horizon through the liberal English education and the awakening of political consciousness in the country in the early 1920s, was born the Modern Novel in its true sense. 1922 stands in the history of Telugu Novel for Unnava Lakshmi Naraya-

na's novel 'Maalapalli' (Kuppuswamy, B. 1981).

Unnava Lakshmi Narayana (1877-1958) was a great leader of Andhra, who participated in the Non-cooperation movement of 1921, Salt Satyagraha Movement in 1931 and Quit India Movement in 1942. He wrote this stirring novel Maalapalli (village of Maalas, a Schedule caste), when he was in jail in Vollore in 1921, about the twin problems of National independence and the untouchability. It was published in 1922. It is interesting to note that this novel was banned in 1923, soon after its publication, by the British rulers. It was permitted to be republished in 1935 only when certain parts were deleted. It was prescribed as a text book by the Andhra University authorities. However, it was again banned in 1936. This ban was removed in 1937 by C. Rajagopalachari who formed the Congress Government of the composite Madras State in that year.

The title Maalapalli indicates the theme as well as the problems about which the story is written. The novel is probably the very first novel published in any language in India on the problem of untouchability. Maalapalli portrays the conditions obtaining in this part of the country during the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movement days, the wrong headedness of the British authorities and their servants here in their treatment of the Indians, especially the so-called criminal tribes, the social set up of Andhra, the surging patriotism of the mass, and the universal longing for political liberation. Being in the thick of the movement himself, and having courted imprisonment for resisting the British authorities, Unnava over emphasizes the importance of the revolution and makes his characters incredibly, idealistic and overwhelmingly good.

Viswanatha Satyanarayana is one of the few master novelists. He is a scholar, poet, playwright and novelist as well as a short story writer. He shows his love for the mother country, for Hindu Dharma, and for progress on national lines in every one of his works. His novels are inspiring as well as thought provoking with all these features. He dislikes westernization (Sitapati, G.V. 1962). But he is a liberal and is not averse to the technique of the novel or the short story which developed in Telugu through our contact with English literature. In his novels, 'Veyi Padagalu' (thousand hoods) is the best and voluminous novel in which he preserved the Dharmic heritage of Hindus and which won him the Gyanapeeth Award. In 'Cheliyalikatta' he portrayed the sentiments and ideals of Hindu life. His other popular novels are 'Baddana Senani', 'Jebudonga', 'Ekavira', 'Hahahuhu', 'Svarganiki Nichchenalu' etc.

Adavi Bapi Raju is another novelist who deserves to be ranked high on account of his originality in the conception of plots and artistic skill in developing them. Being a fervent patriot he was eager to maintain the superiority of Indian and particularly Andhra culture, but at the same time he would not hesitate to admire the good elements of foreign culture. His novel 'Narayana Rao' (Murty, S. P. 1964) is too idealistic. 'Himabindu' is a historical novel with a description of Andhra life with Satavahana period. 'Gona Ganna Reddi' is another superb historical novel in which he portrayed the life and culture of the Telugu people during the 'Kakatiya' period. His other works are 'Konangi', 'Tufanu', 'Jaji-Malli' etc.

Another best novelist of this modern age is Nori Narasimha Sastri. His historical novels Rudrama Devi, Narayana Bhatt, Malla Reddy and Kavisamrat are the best of their kind in Telugu. He is very fond of legendary and historical plots. He chooses to write his novels in classical language. He employs a dignified and majestic style in keeping with the loftiness of his themes and engages the reader's attention all through.

Gudipati Venkata Chalam, popularly known as 'Chalam', is a stormy petrel in modern Telugu letters. With the publication of each of his novels and stories, there arose a storm of protest from the puritans in morals and in language both of whom he bitterly attacked and offended through his writings and through his devastating manner of denouncing traditional morality and expression. He fed himself on Balzac, Maupassant, Flaubert, D. H. Lawrence and others and introduced into Telugu literature ideas of free love verging on licentiousness, and with an iconoclastic fervour shattered all that was held sacred pure and inviolable in public morals and private conduct (Murty, S. P. 1964). His novels 'Daivamichhina Bharya', 'Brahmanikam' 'Aruna', 'Mydanam' etc. are excellent in themselves. Artistically considered, Chalam's novels are good and readable, but their influence on the reading public has been reprehensible. Chalam's followers like Dhanikonda Hanumanta Rao and Bharadwaja have produced some novels in their master's style, but they are not of much importance.

### 3. Emergence of Progressive novel

After 1940, there was a change in the history of novels. Writers left imaginary literature, historical themes and started dealing with psycho-analytical works in political as well as social novels. For about one decade there came novelists like K. Kutumba Rao, Gopichand, G.V. Krishna Rao, and Buchhibabu.

K. Kutumba Rao has become a legend in introducing science and modernity in fiction. His portrayal of the hypocrisy of the middle-class families and its problems is authentic. His novels Kulamuleni Manishi and Arunodayam are quite popular in which he deals with social realism.

T. Gopichand attempted successfully in introducing psychoanalysis, in his novel Asamardhuni Jeevita Yatra. An under-current of the philosophy of radical humanism can be seen in Gopichand's novels and other works.

Bucchi Babu's Chivaraku Migiledi is one of the best modern novels in Telugu. It is modern both in conception and execution and the novelist provokes the readers to think on a variety of problems and presents to them balanced and thoughtful study of human character and its complexities in varying situations of life.

G.V. Krishna Rao's Keelu Bommalu is a novel which illustrates how innocent people are ruined and are subjected to misery by the chicanery and machinations of the clever people in villages, which are now bereft of old traditional unity or morality.

In the later half of the 1940, and in 1950s writers with socialistic background wrote very popular novels. Writers like Alwaruswamy, Lakshmi Kant Mohan, Sivarama Krishna, Mahidhara Rama Mohana Rao etc. are popular among those who portrayed Telangana Peasant Movement. T. Ramanjaneyulu's novel 'Sangham' is being serialized in Praja Sakti, which also portrays Telangana Peasant Movement.

Many writers directed their attention towards Telangana People's Movement and as a result of their efforts many novels appeared on various aspects related to the Movement, such as 'Mrutyunjayulu', 'Simhaghariana', 'Prajala Manishi', 'Gangu', 'Onamalu', 'Mrutyuvu Needalo', 'Radha Chakralu', 'Chillara Devullu', 'Janapadam', 'Paata Rojulu', 'Kotta Rojulu', 'Telugu Gadda', 'Uppena', 'Yuga Sandhi' etc.

Alwaru Swami (1978) in Prajala Manishi (The People's Man) declares that his novel depicts the Telangana socio-economic conditions prior to the birth of the State congress, in 1938. The novel, tinged with Telangana colloquial language, also portrays the exploitations and the atrocities of the Deshmukh and his assistants. The pivotal subject of this novel is the land problem. The novel critically examines how the people who are slavish in the beginning of the novel gradually revolt against the Deshmukh and the age-old traditions. The novel also deals with Grandhalayodhyamam, religious conversions and reconversions, secularism, importance of education, land problems, labour issues, peasant problems, Marxian philosophy etc. and suggests solutions to these problems.

In Gangu, Alwaru Swami (1965) portrays the continuity of his earlier novel, Prajala Manishi. That means, Gangu depicts the conditions during the period 1940-45. It pictures the political set up of Telangana during that period. Describing this novel in the foreword to Gangu, the editor writes, that 'Gangu' is a historical novel. Whereas some other critics pointed out it is a political novel. The scholar Varavara Rao points out it is a novel of 'political economy'. Whatever be the type of the novel, it is a fact that, it organically depicts the then Telangana socio-economic and political set up.

B. Sivarama Krishna's (1947) 'Mrutyunjeyulu' (The Conquerors of Death) is the first ever published novel which depicts the Telangana Peasant Movement. It was published well in advance to the Police Action. The author's message through this novel is that one should win over the persecution, ignorance, injustice and inequalities. And also the author clarifies that there is no other alternative to fight against the military and the Razakars except through Guerilla struggle.

Lakshmi Kanta Mohan's (1951) Simhaghara (Roaring of a Lion) is one of the important novels published well before the first General Elections took place in 1951. This is the replica of novel appeared in English, with the title 'Telangana Thunders'. It depicts the feudal system in Tel-

angana and the feudal lord's atrocities and exploitations towards the people. It portrays the revolt of the people, under the protection of the Sangham, against the exploitations inherent in the feudal system. So, it is an authentic novel that portrays the Telangana Peasant Movement as a history. As Varavara Rao (1980) rightly points out, this novel is not merely an imaginative creation dealing with imaginary characters and events, but it is an embodiment of great historical reality and hence it acquired an immense documentary value.

Rachakonda Viswanatha Sastri set a trend of his own through his novels. He used the local dialect of Vizag and Srikakulam districts and popularized it. He comes first in the young generation who revolted against the traditional writing. His 'Alpajeevi' attracted readers as well as critiques in which he dealt with internal mentality as well as outer behaviour. His 'Raja Mahishi' and 'Aru Sarala Kathalu' are the most captivating writings in simple spoken language. He exposed the corrupt practices of courts of local administration and the politicians. During 1960s K. Venugopala Rao, G. Maruti Rao, Sarada became very popular.

#### 4. Emergence of social novels

During 1970s and 80s, many writers dealt with the social problems and family responsibilities. Baliwada Kanta Rao, B. Krishna Rao, Singaraju Lingamurthi, Sambasiva Rao, R.S. Sudarshanam, Somarju, Hitalshmu, E. Jagannadha Rao, Sivarama Krishna, D. Hanumanta Rao, R. Bharadwaj are worth mentioning. During this around there are significant works published depicting the Naxalite movement in all its angles. Many writers concentrated in presenting the situation through their songs, plays, short stories, badic recitals etc. Very few novels are written probably because the participants are mostly, atleast in the beginning, the uneducated masses.

#### 5. Emergence of Women novelists

In Telugu, we have a host of women novelists. Late D. Sree Devi's novel 'Kalathitha Vyakthulu' is unique in characterization, especially of urban middle class families. Lata and K. Rama Lakshmi are powerful among women writers who believe in women's freedom and liberation. Vasireddi Seethadevi is a progressive writer who deals with peasants. In the novel Matti Manishi, she pictured the rural life of peasant families. 'Samata' another effective novel of her is equally popular. In the novel 'Vuritradu', she depicts social conflicts in day to day life. Malatichandur wrote 'Champakam', 'Renukadevi', 'Atmakatha', 'Meghala Melimusugu', 'Lavanya' etc. in which she deals with various social problems. Devaedula Visalakshi's 'Grahamam Vidichindi', 'Kovvothi', 'Gomati', etc. are thought provoking.

Yuddhanapudi, Madireddy Sulochana, Koduri Kosalya Devi, D. Kameswari, P. Ramalakshmi, T. Janaki Rani, U. Vijayalakshmi, V. Shakuntala, A. Sree Devi etc. have published novels which are readable without much purpose or social objective.

Muppala Ranganayakamma is a revolting novelist. Her 'Balipitham' is a convincing narration of the problem in intercaste marriage especially between upper caste and what is known as untouchables. She also uses her powerful pen to propagate Marxism as she does in her novel 'Janaki Vimukti'. She wants the women to fight against the stupidity and arrogance of men. Her daring critique, 'Ramayana Vishavruksham' against Viswanatha Satyanarayana's 'Ramayana Kalpavruksham' portrays her confidence in revolting against the traditionalism.

From 1980s to till date many writers are concentrating on Separate Telangana Movement. Malayasri's Nirnayam- Telangana Novel is a social novel which portrays mainly the aims, experiences, and aspirations of the middle class youngsters in Telangana. Narayana Reddy's Ganuma mainly focuses on the issues related to Muslims and Dalits of Telangana. There are also host of writers who are concentrating on other social issues.

#### Concluding Reflections

The picture that emerges from the foregoing needs to be set in perspective. First, the audience reached by the genre is, largely the literate sector, which is still a minority of the population. Within this limitation, however, the possibilities inherent in this genre have been explored on developed widely, and with a large measure of success. The 'novel' is firmly transplanted in the new soil; but, the plant itself has started bearing prints, which would be literally inconceivable in the era of the 'new novel' and the death of the novel in its original homeland. As creative literature, it is steadily moving to the centre stage of recognition and acceptance despite its 'pulp' avatar which is reaching steadily widening circle of readers. It has acquired a specificity, which is rooted in its socio-cultural context.

It is therefore, legitimate, to raise the Goldmannian question as to its appropriateness for the theme of 'resolution', or even its mild prolegomena - the exploration of 'possibilities' beyond the existing order (It will be recalled that Goldmann had the cases of Sastri and Genet before him while reaching this formulation). If the evidence of the fiction coming from the Abhudaya group has any implicit hypothesis, our answer to the poser must be in the affirmative. Given our social formation, and its stage, the opportunities for such explorations and uses are virtually unlimited. The dialectic of utopia and ideology remains to be unfolded in its full working. The dialectic of 'I' / 'We' relationship has been barely scratched. What has undoubtedly been tried is to introduce, through this genre, a whole range of new sensibilities, a new mode of self-consciousness, a new way of linking oneself, to the ensemble of relationships constitutive of our social order, in short, the pre-figuring of a new subject as agent of action, of transforming action. And the first articulation of a new 'world-vision', as understood by Goldmann, is found even if the social group which is its locale is somewhat precarious and unsure of its strength and potentialities.

## REFERENCES

- Hegel, S. (1920). *Philosophy of Fine Art*. London: OUP | Hegel, S. (1979). *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. London: Clarendon Press Oxford | Kuppuswamy, B (1981). A Study of Malapalli in 'Triveni' Journal of Indian Renaissance, Andhra Pradesh: Triveni Publishers Pvt. Ltd, Vol. 50, No. 3, Oct-Dec | Marx, Karl (1847). *Poverty of Philosophy*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, | Mukherjee, Menakshi (1984). *Reality, and Realism; Indian Women as Protagonists in Four Nineteenth Century Novels* - in Sudhir Chandra (Ed): *Social Transformation and Creative Imagination*, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library | Murty, S. P. (1964). *Telugu Novel in 'The Novel in Modern India'*. Bombay: the P.E.N. All India Centre, ICCR | Satyan, R.: *Three Pioneer Indian Novelists in 'Indian Literature'*. Delhi: Sahitya Academi publications, XXIV, No. 4 | Sitapati, G.V. (1962). *History of Telugu Literature*. N. Delhi: Sahitya Academi, p. 217. | Virginia, Woolfe (1966). *Collected Essays*, Vol. 2, London: Hogarth Press | Watt, Ian (1967). *The Rise of the Novel*. London: OUP |