



Masculinity, Social Reform, and Nationalism in the Tulu Play *Jana Marl*

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Abstract

Mainstream nationalist history tends to marginalise the significance of regional patriotism. The influence of the early phase of nationalism in the form of social reform, for instance, can be vividly traced in the region of South Canara, where Dayanand Sarawati's Arya Samaj had a regional presence. The Jnyanodaya Samaj and Mandir that was established at Hoige Bazar in Mangalore by the Mogaveera fisher community members of the Thingalaya family in the earlier decades of the twentieth century is a fascinating testimony of this regional nationalism. Besides, the impact of Gandhian nationalism in Mangalore is evident in the emergence of local leaders like Karnad Sadashiv Rao and Kudmul Ranga Rao. Madhav Thingalaya, whose play is taken up here for analysis, wrote the first Tulu play to be published, on the theme of social reform. He took an active part in the freedom movement. He belonged to a matrilineal community practicing AliyaKattu or inheritance by nephews through maternal uncles. The play is historically significant for the exploration of theatre to foster awareness of modernity, education, and the ill-effects of the practice of untouchability, drunkenness, lack of hygiene, blind faith in deities, animal-sacrifice, dowry, gambling, and other practices in South Canara. Gender is a crucial category in our understanding of the working of nationalism here. The paper hopes to have a closer look at the play to understand the working of masculinity in consonance with nationalism in this region. Some of the questions that will be addressed here are: How is masculinity understood here in the context of social reform and anti-colonial nationalism? How, therefore, is it dependent on the projection of femininity for its entrenchment? How does the othering of communities and castes impact underlying nationalist anxieties and stereotypes? How are regional beliefs and practices seen here in relation to monotheistic assertions?

Keywords: Tulunadu, social reform, superstitions, idolatry, heroism, masculinity

Madhava Thingalaya was the first playwright of the Tulu theatre. He used the medium of drama, which straddled the oral and the literary worlds of culture, to propagate his vision of the nation among the literate and illiterate masses of Dakshina Kannada. The play *Jana Marl* (Mass-madness or craze) taken up for study in this paper, was first published in 1933, and prior to this, was enacted in several places to quicken the nationalist movement in this region, and to assert the arrival of the Tulu literary movement spearheaded by S.U. Panyadi and others. *Jana Marl* shows the impact of the social reform movement and Hindu nationalism in the tenets of the Arya Samaj and the teachings of Gandhi. Several contemporary issues concerning the nation are explored in the play led by its virtuous hero, Ramanand. In his crusade against idol-worship, superstition, gambling, untouchability, dowry, and other unsavoury practices, Ramanand is shown on stage offering stiff resistance to the conservative section of society of the region. He manages to convert some young men to his worldview, and they help him in his fight against epidemics, gamblers, and ignorant masses. The play has a little respite by way of romance that brews between the hero and his friend's sister, Radha. The play that began in a bleak manner ends on a positive note. Thingalaya's play has a didactic project or 'design' upon the viewers, and uses the visual and auditory cues that could entertain and teach. The play is a record of the history of the times.

The anti-colonial nationalist struggle in India went through several phases – social reform in the early phase, an appeal for more representative electoral and administrative opportunities in the colonial regime, a militant, aggressive phase, and the one led by Gandhi, using Satyagraha and Ahimsa as a tool. The hope in all of these was to unite the whole of the country into a nation – what Benedict Anderson calls 'imagined communities'. Anderson writes that the rise of print capitalism and the standardization of regional languages had a significant role to play in the bringing together of dispersed communities in a common consciousness of a nation. He writes that 'print-language is what invents nationalism' (1983).



In the Canara region, or Tulunadu, the coming of the Basel missionaries and the printing of Tulu dictionaries, folk-lore, proverbs, and grammar-books gave legitimacy to a language and culture that was predominantly oral in nature. The consciousness stirred different reactions in the people of this region. While giving them a feeling of unity through the regional language, it also left a trace of self-conscious embarrassment, as the language was seen as rather 'primitive', and lacking in 'literature' that the hegemonic Kannada could boast of. The need therefore to create a corpus of creative works in Tulu, was linked to questions of regional pride and identity, as well as a pan-Indian identity. This regional understanding of linguistic nationalism is seen in other parts of the country, as for instance, in Hindi, Malayalam, Telugu, and others, and was achieved by tapping into the maternal archetype like *Tulu Appa* symbolising the region and the language as mother. Linguistic consciousness thus became a primary marker of larger political identities. S.U. Panyadi, Sheenappa Hegde, N.S. Kille, Madhava Thingalaya, and others therefore strove to create a robust linguistic and literary presence, and also simultaneously took pride in the construction of the nation.

The nation as imagined community went hand in hand with another construct – that of masculinity. According to Joane Nagel, nationalism is a masculine project, and "nationalism typically springs from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope" (Nagel 1998). Violence and aggression, cast as male traits, along with the desire to redeem lost honour, impel nationalists of colonised countries. Colonised nations were cartographically imagined as feminine, and the European male colonizer was seen as strong, aggressive, and with martial might (Loomba 1998). Indian iconography showing fierce feminine and divine Shakti also showed the shackling of this maternal deity with the British enslavement of the nation. Now the nationalist imperative was a reiteration of traditional feminine norms. But though the nation was feminized, and issues related to women seemed central in nationalist construction, Lata Mani points out the actual absence of women in this masculine discourse, in nineteenth century debates on sati. Mani shows that the woman was more the 'site' or the ground on which nationalists, revivalists, and the colonial authorities argued and fought their battles around tradition (1990). Woman then became a sign or a symbol of tradition. But as Anshuman Mondal points out, the symbolic could also be appropriated by nationalist discourse as the embodiment of a Hindu community, and thereafter

of the nation in the sign of Mother India. The figure of the sati could be of a weak woman as well as of a stoic, strong woman. This Janus-natured nationalist appropriation of weakness and strength, was, according to Mondal, mapped on to the colonizer-colonized equation. Weakness and vulnerability could also be great and superior, a sign of feminine shakti as seen in Bankim Chandra and Aurobindo, and also call for a robust male-hood through physical exercise and improvement in diet (Mondal). Women were guardians of Indian culture, and in their reproductive maternal role, had a national duty to produce strong sons, who with their militant masculinity, would then free the nation-mother-goddess from British shackles. In India, Ashis Nandy notes the constant denigration of Indians as weak and effete, and the equation of the enslaved nation with pliant femininity eager to please the masculine master. As a response, many Indian nationalists and revolutionaries advocated a militant and muscular stance to overcome this degradation. However, Gandhi, he says, turned this colonial masculinity on its head. Heroism was now seen as inhering not in physical violence and aggression, but in moral courage, soul, or truth-force, and the superior feminine virtues of sacrifice, suffering, and self-restraint (1983). In rejecting hyper-masculinity, Gandhi does not fight shy of androgynous possibilities in conceptualizing the nation. Gandhi perceived the new *Kshatriya* spirit that emphasized forgiveness, forbearance, compassion, and courage to meet brute force with moral strength. A celibate-nation that practiced *brahmacharya*, he felt, would help preserve energy to stand up to the might of the British empire (Nandy 1983, Parekh 1989). He felt that untouchability was a blot on Hinduism that needed to be expiated by upper-caste Indians. However, he did not speak for annihilation of caste, and upheld the *varnashrama dharma* under which the untouchables were to be accommodated along with Shudras. While he saw women as superior, the role they had to abide by after independence was the domestic one within oppressive Hindu patriarchal family structures (Katrak 1992). As *Jana Marj* unfolds its action, this call for restoring dignity to the Dalits is loudly proclaimed, and challenged shrilly just as quickly by adversarial figures. The hero is certainly Gandhian in courage as well as in articulating anxieties and vulnerabilities.

Apart from the huge impact of Gandhi, the Arya Samaj also made its presence felt in the region. The proselytizing efforts of the Protestant Basel Mission among the Billavas was enough to set alarm bells ringing, and the Samaj had to quickly make its



presence felt in South Canara. Madhava Thingalaya's grandfather followed its tenets and efforts in social reform. The Arya Samaj, like other such socio-religious associations responded to Christian evangelism and Anglicist denigration of pantheistic beliefs and idol-worship. It envisioned a return to Vedic culture, and propounded a monotheistic worship that opposed idol-worship. It believed in the truth-consciousness of an infinite God who was formless, eternal, almighty, and who alone, as creator of the universe, should be worshipped. All actions should emerge from Dharma, and truth should be upheld over falsehood. The chief goal of the followers ought to be to work to dispel ignorance, foster knowledge, and strive for the physical, social, and religious well-being of the entire world (Saraswati1908). The Arya Samaj exhorted its followers to work against caste-discrimination, and encourage education. The play *Jana Marl* amply demonstrates all these precepts that get amplified and reiterated throughout in the words of the protagonist. The *Shuddhi* and *Sangatan* begun by the Arya Samaj worked to bring low-caste converts to Islam back into the Hindu fold by purification, and to strengthen and unify Hindus. As Charu Gupta notes, the Khilafat movement in the North, and the widespread anxiety about forcible conversions to Islam and rape of Hindu women during the Moplah Rebellion in Malabar, apart from other factors, including the colonial denigration of Indians as effeminate, contributed to the formation of a muscular, militant, Hindu masculinity in the nineteenth century. The Arya Samaj and the Hindu Maha Sabha, she says, feared that a united Muslim presence might wipe out Hindu culture. According to Gupta, in a rejection of Gandhian ideals of gender, even Hindu women were at times called forth to uphold this militant identity to protect the community, and their own chastity by carrying a dagger with them. Manhood was constructed as a community identity, and included the task of protecting women, even as they were made a part of the new masculine ideal (Gupta 2001). The first Tulu novel *Sati Kamale*, for instance, clearly portrays such a heroine. In the present play, however, the ideal woman only needs to strictly adhere to traditional notions of femininity.

Gyanendra Pandey observes that the Arya Samaj was the first Hindu organization to introduce proselytization in India (2012). Kenneth Jones observes the opposition it faced from Muslim groups like the Ahmadiyyas and Sikhs (1989). Writing about the role of the Arya Samaj in the rise of communalism in Punjab, Jones says that communalism was not "new, but a part of traditional

South Asian civilization, modified during the nineteenth century, by the dual influences of modernization and westernization." (1968). He traces the conversion and reconversion records of the Samaj, observing the threat they posed to both Sikhs and Muslims while reconverting low-caste Sikhs and Muslims in sizable numbers. He also mentions protection of the cow as one of the activities taken up by the Arya Samaj. The Samaj, like other reform movements, promoted education of women, and remarriage of widows in response to the British charge of the nation's low civilizational quality reflected in the degradation of Indian women by their men. Education for women therefore was intended to make them better companionate wives and enlightened mothers as a reflection of the Aryan women of the golden age. They were to be shining examples of *pativrata* as in the Vedic period, and their education must let men seem noble and generous, but was not to have any radical edge that might upset domestic equations or challenge men in the outer world. An enslaved nation whose masculinity was questioned by the British needed to be redeemed. As Partha Chatterji says, the inner domain of the home was now seen as a sovereign space that was spiritual, where women were the custodians of culture, and where men could rule autonomously without external interference (1990). Thingalaya's heroine, Radha therefore, exemplifies such Aryan virtues, and will serve as an ideal companion, helpmeet, and supporting wife in a curious mix of Vedic and Victorian assumptions of femininity. Thus the binaries - East/West, tradition/modernity, inner spiritual world of culture/outer corrupt material of the colonizer- were gendered terms revealing masculine assertion. Lala Lajpat Rai, a staunch supporter of the Arya Samaj, expresses masculine fears of the nation's imitation of the West when he said, "Whether they want to make men of our women, by putting them into those avocations for which nature never meant them?" (as quoted in Anshu Malhotra, 44). Malhotra notes that he rejected the idea of 'mannish' women, and saw every woman as a potential mother - a 'mother in embryo'. The romanticizing of an ancient Aryan golden era by European Indologists was used by Indian reformist, revivalist, and nationalist male imagination to invent a modern Aryan Indian womanhood transposed onto the old model. The fall of the educated, free Aryan woman was laid at the door of Islamic rulers of the 'dark' historical period, by Indian men in response to western charges of degraded Indian womanhood. Thingalaya's Radha, as well as Meera, are a far cry from the actual



women of the region, and are fashioned out of nationalist and Victorian material.

As historians have shown the veering towards the Arya Samaj by the Thingalayas could also be a response to the attitude of the Evangelists, the Orientalists, and the Anglicists, all of whom felt the local practices of worship of daivas was an 'archaic' practice. A.C. Burnell is filled with a sense of horror at the 'hideous din' raised during a *Kola*, and was convinced that the daivas were devils, and Edgar Thurston saw Bhuta-worship as 'devil-dances.' The Orientalists appreciated the Aryan culture and expressed high regard for the Vedic gods. M.J. Walhouse in an early paper *On the Belief in Bhutas* says: "Although the lower castes and classes in India acknowledge and reverence the Brahminic gods, their familiar household cults is much more especially addressed to inferior supernatural beings analogous to the evil spirits, devils, ghosts, and goblins of European superstition." He sees the daivas as demons who are inferior attendants of the Brahminic gods, and who are generally evilly-disposed towards human being(1876).Thingalaya's play had to therefore critique local forms of worship, and dissociate its sensibility from traces of these seemingly barbaric forms of worship. This, again, is achieved largely through diatribes and rants.

The popular folk and oral narratives revolving around these 'bhutas' needed some sanitization in literature and theatre of the Tuluvas. A.V. Navada and Denis Fernandes note the attitude of the missionaries and colonial administrators towards *Kolas* and the performers who 'lacerated their bodies and drank the blood of the animals offered as sacrifice to angry deities on the principle of blood for blood'. The people around were seen as a howling group as well. Navada and Fernandes observe that the need to govern, administrate, and control the natives led to a creation of knowledge about the region of Dakshina Kannada. The study and classification of castes came mid-nineteenth century with the theory of race using anthropometric parameters to study physical features to divide people as Aryan or Dravidian, martial, or criminal, along the lines used by Risley and Thurston. They write that rituals, marriages, funerals were documented from the customs of Brahmins. The Dravidian deities were mostly female, while those of the Brahmins were masculine. The Dravidian deities, according to Navada and Fernandes, were attributed with a bewitching and mysterious gaze that could inflict some injury through this fixed gaze. The missionaries saw these deities as forms of Satan., and felt these were propitiated by people out

of fear of illness and loss. "The non-Brahminical forms of worship were seen as uncivilised and primitive, conservative, and unchanging, also on account of the terrain which promoted seclusion and isolation. The forests and the mountainous terrain too were seen as conducive to such habitations by the Bhutas, or imagination about them" (Navada and Fernandes "Introduction" 2008).

Jana Marl can therefore be seen as an early effort in Tulu theatre to sanitise local beliefs, shed the label of irrationality and primitivity ascribed to Dravidian practices, and project a civilized side associated with the Aryans. 'Irrational' practices and beliefs therefore had to be snuffed out, if the nation was to refute colonial charges of savage customs of people, and prove native capacity for Reason and Enlightenment. The deity of Mariamma, associated with plague, small-pox and epidemics, is propitiated with votive offerings and slaughter of fowl and sheep. She embodies a Brahmin head and a Dalit body, and as Miho Ishii observes, is seen as alternating between an impure, dangerous, blood-thirsty side and a benign, pure, and tranquil form(2015).

Plague was first reported in Mangalore in 1902, killing more than eight hundred people. It continued to take a toll till 1926 when it disappeared altogether. The play has an unambiguous agenda of social reform against the backdrop of this epidemic. Thingalaya weaves in several social concerns of the day like superstitious beliefs, lack of sanitation, dowry-related problems, education, vices like gambling, and addiction to liquor. He creates a hero who is a man with a crusading zeal to save the villagers around from the epidemic and all the vices and social issues mentioned. While he has some friends and admirers who help him in this mission, the play focuses on the protagonist Ramanand's singular battle against both the social evils and affliction, and his detractors. There is a gruesome murder too in the play in the precincts of the Mariamma temple. The protagonist now lets out a tirade against idol-worship, votive offerings, and animal-sacrifice. He tends to the sick and dying, and is finally able to get the villagers see the rationality of his discourse, and build a Samaj for the worship of the transcendent, formless, and true Almighty, different from the *bhutas*, *daivas*, and fierce goddesses of the region. A closer look at the play brings to the fore the tensions between conflicting discourses of the early nineteenth century nationalist scene.

The Mother archetype is another concern of the novel. The protagonist displays an ambivalent and complex response to the figure of the divine



mother. On the one hand he decries worship of Mariamma, for that meant idol-worship to the reformers, and also implied votive offerings, fear of affliction, and animal-sacrifice – all of which confirmed the stereotype of idolatrous and superstitious natives. As a Samajist, the protagonist then had to experience a missionary horror at primitive practices. But simultaneously, at the symbolic and psychoanalytical level, the *Devi* also was supposed to be the nurturing mother-goddess. Her fierce form and her loving side had to be negotiated with, and accommodated by her sons. The devouring mother had to be transformed into the nation's *shakti*, a maternal power, that was to return to the cosmos after the nationalist struggle had been won, as Aurobindo had envisaged. She was the primeval force of Kali, and also the shackled mother-goddess needing her valiant sons to save her. In Mariamma's person, the Brahminic head and the Dalit body had to be reconciled. So Ramanand oscillates between negation and affirmation, between fear and love, colonial disgust and national reverence. He launches forth into a lengthy form of *ninda sthuthi*, or reproachful worship. He calls her a mere piece of stone, but also calls out in anguish for help. A few sections of it are given here:

“Has Jagadamba's holy temple also become a blood-spilling slaughter-house? O almighty goddess! How have you remained silent? O Devi! Have you deliberately taken this sacrifice in order to quench your thirst for blood? You are a mother to the entire world. Should a mother like you be thirsting for the hot blood of her own children? Alas! Your rakshasi-mind must be made of stone... See how the lifeless stone idol stands! ... All of this is futile. The chief impediment to the right path of our enlightenment and our progress is the worship of this idol. It is not right that we roll about in ignorance and superstitions the way pigs roll around in muck. Come along. Show to the world that you are *male children* prepared to die for truth if necessary. Do not huddle here like *cowards* fearing what others might say though you now know what the truth is.”

The addressee suddenly becomes the pusillanimous sons to whom an urgent call is given to free themselves and the nation by showing their mettle as men. The metaphor of the family keeps recurring. All men are sons to the same mother-nation, and are therefore brothers.

Ramanand has been eating at the homes of the outcastes in order to uphold Gandhian practices, and break the taboo on commensality between the higher *jatis* and the Dalits. Panyadi too had led the Dalits to the Udupi temple for entry to be granted to the latter, but had been stopped by his brother's act, as priest, of lying down at the threshold (Panyadi “Introduction” 2018)). Sri Narayana Guru's Movement in Kerala for reforming the Ezhavas spread to the Billavas in Canara. The Billavas too were forbidden entry into temples, though they officiated as pujaris for the Bunts. Accepting cooked food at the hands of Dalits was forbidden for higher castes. When Radha objects to this mixing with outcastes, Ramanand tells his sister Meera, “I shall give you an invaluable piece of writing by Gandhi tomorrow – ‘Who are the Untouchables?’ Give it to your Radhakka. Let her learn something from it.” Most writings of the region remain silent about the writings of Ambedkar, as for instance, his *Mooka Nayaka – The Mute Leader*, or any of his efforts in leading the Dalit Movement. This silence around Ambedkar, and acceptance of Gandhi's idea of reform among the Untouchables, could be seen in North Kanara as well. Gandhi's emphasis on atonement and expiation of guilt by the upper-castes, and the need for kindness was not centered on any radical shaking up of caste-structures.

In the meantime, the valiant hero Ramanand continues in the role of the protector-male. Thingalaya also brings in a scene where Thaniya, an outcaste, pleads with other devotees to let him make offerings to the Swami, who incidentally, turns out to be a fraud. If one must use one of R.W. Connell's categories of masculinity here, Thaniya could be seen as embodying ‘marginalised masculinity’, though the abjectness of the outcaste, male or female, cannot truly be understood in Western terms. This scene shows a new consciousness among Dalits of the region, used as they were for long, to being treated with violence, indignity, and condescension. The agrarian feudal economy where the servile bondsmen slaved for the landlord, were from Dalit communities, their labour being exploited generationally by the wealthy landlords. The pity and understanding for Dalits stop at token acts. Neither they, nor their would-be-saviours speak the language of rights, of work, land, or material benefits. Thaniya's voice, which is that of the playwright's, shows an incipient consciousness of new possibilities under colonial modernity and nationalist reform – of rights to occupy public spaces, and to question prohibition of entry to sacred spaces. When Gurikar Dhoomanna yells at him for trying to cast his vile shadow on the



Swami, Thaniya mouths a long, sentimental monologue on physical purity, diet, hygiene, and touch using the language of reason:

“Brothers, how have I wronged you? Why do you push me out just because I was born an untouchable? Like the rest of you, I too have come to make votive offerings to Swami. Aren’t we Untouchables Hindus too? Don’t we too believe the same gods you believe? Aren’t we as clean as you are? On what basis do you show this discrimination? See, God has created all of us. As his children, is it right for some not to touch others? Look, I do not drink toddy. But you who belong to the upper castes do drink it. We do not eat the meat of dead animals. How then do you look for differences between us? Your blood is red. So is ours. You are made of flesh and blood, and have eyes and limbs, just like us. When this is the case, what other reason do you have for not touching us? Brothers, it is your duty to improve the condition of illiterate people like us. Why don’t you who worship God as purifier of the fallen ones, have the goodness to improve those degraded like us? How you have blamed Ramanand for eating in my house! Brothers, why do you object to eating in a clean house? See, I have received a little education. I am trying to become like you. Why mustn’t you touch me? Why can’t my offering be accepted?”

As Ambedkar observes of the Dalits themselves, the process of sanskritisation permeated every caste-rung. The Dalits would look down upon other inferior *jatis* among outcastes as well. Social taboos of touch, commensality, and marriage-alliances applied to the highest and lowest of the low. The caste-clash continues with the gurikar threatening to break Thaniya’s bones, and reminding him that no matter how clean he thought he was, he was still an untouchable by birth. An embittered Thaniya then reveals another direction that the oppressed of the earth could take – join some other power that was more favourable to them. Here, the play reveals the underlying anxieties of Hindu society in the early decades of the nineteenth century – individual and mass-conversion to some other religion that seemed more egalitarian. The fear of being fragmented and losing a very large group that was otherwise seen as outside the pale, led the Arya Samaj to counter threats posed by ‘alien’ religions by beginning, for the first time, efforts at proselytization. The *Shuddhi* movement was

therefore intended to reconvert those who had left Hinduism. In Tulunadu, the German Basel missionaries had managed to convert a section of Billavas to the Protestant fold, while the Italian Jesuits, after failing to convert the higher castes, turned their attention to the Dalits at Naravi and other places, and managed to convert a large number to the Roman Catholic faith.

Now Thaniya bemoans his wretched plight and threatens by turns:

“Alas! There’s no justice in Hinduism. As a human being, is someone unable to touch others simply because he is born into a particular *jati*? Though he was born into a *jati* of mere fishermen, didn’t the sage Ved Vyas become a great poet and earn the respect of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Sudras alike? Didn’t Valmiki earn fame though he was born a mere hunter? *Aiyyo!* Though we are born into Hindu dharma, and pray to Hindu Gods, Hindus do not touch us. They will touch us only if we become Muslims or Christians. Let it be. I will become fit to be touched by these, even if it means I have to become a Muslim.”

The concern of the slavish Thaniya here is not a complete break from the community, but a conversion on the rebound, to get back at the community for all the humiliation, and to still rise in the esteem of the upper-castes by crossing over into another faith. But often, especially in the case of the neo-converts to the Catholic faith, the Brahminical Catholics who called themselves *Bamonns*, refused to even attend church with the new-converts, preferring to attend Mass at Karkala instead, as mentioned in *Konkani Dirvem*. We get a glimpse of attempts made by Dalit Christian convertsto prove their superiority over Koraga converts to Christianity in Devdutt Kamath’s *The Burning Bush* (2006). But for the emasculated Dalits tyrannised by dominant castes, moving into a Muslim community perceived to be hyper-masculine, could imply a sudden change in a masculine identity.

The voices that clash within the play in a Bakhtinian sense of dialogism throw up unintended insights that slip out of scripted authorial intent. Antagonistic voices in the play end up exposing the chinks in nationalist discourse. The issue of untouchability, for instance, formed a part of the social reform agenda of the Arya Samaj as well as of Gandhian politics. The following rant by the conservative gurikar Dhoomanna against Ramanand and his team is one such instance that betrays male anxieties around caste and endogamous alliances:



“Why have all of you gathered on the road? [Seeing Srinivas and Sadashiva] Oho! Ramanand’s most trusted men are right here. Look, kids, have you nothing else to do? Gone and joined that Ramanand! “Do not slaughter sheep and fowl! Come and touch the untouchables!” This is what you preach. Why don’t you send forth proposals, and marry their girls as well? *Kaliyuga* is here! *Kaliyuga* has indeed begun on earth. Hey! Do they feed you at home? If I had children like you, I would kick you and chase you out. When that Gandhi dances, so does that Ramanand! And you guys dance to Ramanand’s tune!”

Apart from infantilizing grown men who saw themselves in the mould of heroes out to rescue the vulnerable, the passage suggests a feminization of the nationalists including Gandhi who seem pliant, supple, eager-to-please, and passive in their desire to accommodate one another. But when the seeming adversary, portrayed as narrow and conservative, flings the challenge at these leaders about marrying women from Dalit communities, the differences between the two groups collapses. They are essentially the same in matters of marrying within the *jatis*. Ramanand is projected as a selfless crusader of the Depressed communities. But his zeal, like that of the Samajists and Gandhi, stopped at eating with the Untouchables, visiting their homes, and showing sympathy and paternal condescension. As Ambedkar says, the only way of annihilating caste structures was by inter-caste marriages and mixing of blood. Christophe Jaffrelot sees the concern over untouchability more as a mechanism of holding on to caste structures to unify Hindus and prevent depletion of their numbers than to actually address the issue in radical ways (1996). Though *jatis* are not mentioned here, one can safely assume that Ramanand and Radha who marry at the end, belong to the same caste. Nor would the author create a scene where Ramanand’s sister Meera, on growing up, might contract a *pratiloma* marriage with a Dalit male. The Arya Samaj, as the name suggests, would not include such an aberration in their reform agenda, and Gandhi ‘adored the *Varnashrama Dharma*.’ Sheenappa Hegde in an early Tulu novel *Narayana the Imposter* ends the political upheaval therein on a note of all’s well that ends well. The king resolves to revert to earlier hierarchies of administration and caste.

The reformist men, thus, were not much different from the so-called orthodox men after all. The masculinist nationalist concerns of the

nineteenth century were deeply entwined with notions of communalism and caste. The following sentences put into the mouth of Thaniya (now a Beary) effectively sum up the Hindu nationalist phobias, preoccupations, and indignation felt in reliving historical wrongs. The gurikar who had roundly abused Thaniya as a polluting presence, now forgets ideas of the pure and the impure, and pleads the Beary Thaniya to shelter him from the dangerous epidemic. Thaniya rants in a ventriloquized Hindu rhetoric:

“Do you know who I am? I am an untouchable by the name of Thaniya. The untouchable you abused and drove away. *Aiyyo!* When I was a Hindu, you pushed me out. Now that I have become a Beary, you draw me close to you, do you? You do not want the untouchable who belongs to your own Hindu community, and who believes your own god. You want the Beary who blames your religion, and who breaks your idols. You want the Beary who eats the cow whom who call ‘Mother’. You want the Beary who vows to destroy your Hindu religion. It’s alright. Cast us out. Continue with your resolve of not touching us. But you will very shortly face the consequences of all that you have done. We are seven crore untouchables. All of us will either become Muslims or Christians. You alone are responsible for the depleting number of Hindus. You yourselves will make this place where Hindus lived, a Muslim country, and you will be left without heirs.”

All the masculine fears identified at the national level by Mrinalini Sinha, Charu Gupta and others, are localised in an expression of regional nationalism. The helplessness of men who are unable to protect the motherland, the mother-tongue, and the cow as mother from ‘aliens’ is poured out here. Present resurgent national and regional tensions and conflicts around gender, race, caste, and community, can find eerie precedence in nineteenth century discourse including Tulu theatre.

Yet another masculine concern that crops up here is the reconfiguration of the feminine identity to bolster a specific kind of manliness that was Aryan. New patriarchal tyrannies elevated the husband to divine levels even as he made demands on the wife to be refashioned as modern, educated, virtuous, and capable of straddling the inner domain of culture, and the outer treacherous terrain of national reform. Radha is convinced that it is Ramanand alone who will navigate her safely across



‘the ocean of life’ as her ‘lord’, her ‘*yajamana*’ who would help her join ‘the pantheon of faithful wives’ and bring ‘fame and glory to womankind.’ She asks her brother to let her stay back during the epidemic, and help Ramanand care for the suffering villagers, and thereby find heaven and salvation. Bringing up the recurrent national trope of Savitri, she says, “Permit me to share his difficulties just as Savitri’s in-laws permitted her to go the forest with Satyavan.”

In an eloquent speech, Ramanand the nationalist male reminds her of the disciplined and dedicated work that the Arya woman would have to put in to work alongside men in the cause of the nation. She had to show inner strength, resilience, and sacrifice her happiness to redeem the nation. Comparing her yet again to ancient women from the epics, Ramanand says:

“Are you prepared to sit starving?

Are you prepared to walk boldly in a village that resembles a crematorium, and where heaps of corpses fall around? Are you prepared to serve people suffering from pestilence? Are you prepared to boldly come with me when groans and shrieks rend the air in the terrible darkness all around? Are you prepared to push aside your selfishness and give your very life for the sake of others? Are you prepared to face every hardship with me as the women of yore like Sita, Savitri, Damayanti, and Draupadi were for their husbands?”

When Radha shows steadfast devotion to Ramanand and the cause of the nation he had taken up, he feels she will “attain the glory of ancient *Aryamahilas* like Sita, Savitri, Draupadi, and Padmini” and show the right path to the future generation of women in their village.

The literary ideals of femininity that set the male imagination on fire, and which a Brahminical patriarchy promoted, emerged in new understandings of conjugality and companionate marriages in the reform period. Radha says:

“You are my lord. You are the radiant sun in the blissful firmament of my life. You are the lotus that blooms in the blessed pond of my marital life. If you perish, so do I. Your woes are mine. Your joys are mine. Even if you are in hell, or dwell in a terribly dark and fearful cave, it will seem like heaven to me. I yearn to always stay close to you.”

The gurikar too reiterates the nationalist ideal of Aryan womanhood to reconfigure femininity in modern times. The divine power

attributed to this transformed woman on account of the mythical ideal of feminine steadfastness and virtue saves the vulnerable man from death, and from the clutches of the colonizer. If manhood inheres in valour and vigour that help the sons save the nation-mother from foreign yoke, it is also because another woman – the chaste and strong wife, a reform woman who is educated and enlightened – who negates the emasculation of men, denies the need for the masculine colonizer to ‘rescue’ her, and vindicates Indian masculinity. This modern Arya Mahila is the high-point of an ancient civilization, now denigrated by the West. Dhoomappa, the man who had abandoned his ailing wife and son in the hope of marrying a young woman, now waxes eloquent about Radha:

“You are a veritable goddess. This blessed man’s life has been spared because of you. You are Savitri who remained with Satyavan. You are Sita who stayed with Rama. You are Damayanti who stayed with Nala. May the girls in future hear about you and try to emulate you.”

However, this literary and mythological male fantasy about a pan-Indian reconstituted womanhood hinging solely on steadfast devotion to the husband was an upper-caste, upper-class figure of femininity and conjugality. It could not actually represent either the lives of low-caste/class women of the country, and certainly could not be applied to matrilineal societies, of which the playwright himself was a part. Here, according to the rules and laws laid down in *Bhutada Pandya Aliyakattu*, women did not have to marry before puberty, nor cling to the same man for life if she felt oppressed or neglected, could always return to her natal home, divorce the man and remarry if she wished to, and did not need to depend on the husband economically (1873). This seems a far cry from the new feminine national norms drawn up from Brahminical and Victorian models in the nineteenth century. Chastity was not a norm that was strictly imposed to discipline the minds and bodies of women as under Brahminical patriarchy. The colonial administrators and the missionaries found these matrilineal customs promiscuous, and representative of a society that had not evolved beyond a primitive stage. Therefore the male literary and nationalist ideals of femininity find their way into the nascent Tulu literary field, and tradition is ‘invented’ here, as in the national imaginary. The national imperative of ‘recasting’ women therefore found expression in many of the early twentieth century Tulu works that was at odds with the counter-world-view of women in the *urals*, *sandis*, and *Paddanas*,



especially revolving around Siri, rural poor women, or female *daivas*.

The masculinity of the protagonist in this play is dominant, but not toxic. His power emanates from his nationalist passion to render selfless service, reform the world of the Tuluvas, purge it of superstitious beliefs, idol-worship, animal sacrifice, and social menaces like addiction to liquor, gambling, and demands for dowry. In most of these social issues, the influence of Gandhi and of the Arya Samaj can be felt. Though giving of dowry in matrilineal communities in pre-colonial times was seen as a positive means of securing the position of women by its judicious use for her needs, it is also, in modern times seen as an evil, a system that was exploitative and commercial. The play shows Sridhar, a friend of Ramanand's, expressing his anguish and helplessness in 'procuring' an 'affordable' and suitable groom for his sister Radha. He returns horrified and disillusioned after seeing the dissolute, unemployed son of Dhoomanna Gurikar, for whom the father demands an atrocious sum. When a saddened Sridhar then approaches Ramanand and pleads that he marry his sister, his plight is emblematic of diminished men of lower classes, struggling under the yoke of fending for the honour and material needs of the family. This depiction is certainly not of brothers in dominant landed communities managing the estate for the welfare of the sister's offspring. Sridhar feels a man should not be born poor and wretched, struggling for a roof over the head in a world heavily in favour of the rich. Manhood sans money is an unenviable position to be in. The hero now comes to his rescue, and becomes a veritable saviour for the girl too. Ramanand says,

"I will not accept your money and sell myself for a girl. *Born a man*, I must marry by earning for myself, and spend it on my marriage, rather than marry for money, and have parents shed tears over their daughter's marriage. It is not right to marry for money, for that would be a mere business transaction where *a man is sold to a girl*. That wedding is no marriage at all." [emphasis added]

The playwright defies older norms of transaction in marriages, and constructs masculinity as incorruptible to the lure of lucre, and suggests the enhanced dignity of a man who values the new ethic of work, and will not be 'sold' to a woman, who might then control him, sans respect. Besides, the New Man, as much as the New Woman, must be refashioned to suit modern times – be strong, valiant, protective, Aryan, and nothing less than

divine. But ambivalent gender-imaginings now also placed a cultural onus on the *pativrata*. She was now the saviour of vulnerable man, the resolute, death-defying *Sati Shiromani*.

The freedom of a nation was also linked to health and hygiene, and Ramanand was a tireless worker in his village ravaged by plague. The playwright is quick to dissociate his hero from regional rituals and worship. Ramanand says of the gullible villagers:

"They have fallen into a dark state of ignorance and blindness...Their minds are always preoccupied with the issue of *bhutas*, *daivas*, and *devis* rather than matters of health. They believe diseases come from Mari. So they are busy making vows to Mari, and to *Bhutas* instead of paying attention to ways of keeping their homes and surroundings clean."

The heroic patriot does not have to take up the sword to prove his worth. Non-violence and reform of society prove both manliness of a moral kind, and nationalist spirit at the micro-level of one's own native region. This moral force shines forth in the way Ramanand finally wins the trust of his detractors. The Health Inspector lauds his efforts thus:

"You are a *true* friend of the nation. Those who uplift people untouched by the winds of reform, seething in the heat of ignorance, and who give them the strength to discern tenets of truth from falsehood are real patriots. No matter what efforts salaried employees like me might make in this direction, we will never get the fame and glory that *heroic and self-sacrificing men* like you get." [emphasis added]

The Gandhian hero and Arya Samajist had a herculean task ahead of him in national/regional regeneration. Charges of 'darkness of heathenism' that needed the saving light of Christianity had to be countered with an alternate native idea of the divine. There were now remarkable similarities in the monotheistic idea of a true, eternal, abiding, God of love and light in Christian and Aryan conceptualization. The charge of primitive and savage practices of idol-worshippers is replaced with an omnipotent God who cared for the downtrodden. Ramanand, the proponent of worship of this Almighty God alone, links worship to unity and concerted social reform. He exhorts the villagers to establish a *Samaj*, where all would take up the cause of eradication of irrational and blind



practices, and uplift the village, and the nation. Freedom from the British and *Swaraj* depended on this dedicated service as worship. He says:

“We must therefore establish a *Samaj* in our village through which there will be efforts to bring in a new consciousness among our people through reform. If we do not unite, we will not get *Swaraj*. We must give up our internal differences, and be ready to work for one goal. We are all children of God. If there are differences among us, then God Almighty, who is our father, will not look upon us with love. God is the Saviour of the downtrodden. As his children, we must uplift the downtrodden who are beneath us, and thus be fit to receive his love. Only when we do this will we receive his complete love. It is only then that our lives will be blissful.”

Shortly after Thingalaya passed away, Gandhi visited the Jnyanodaya Samaj and encouraged the local nationalists.

Echoing the colonial voice reprimanding natives for being responsible for their own enslavement owing to their blind beliefs, Ramanand explains male sagacity to his sister, “Meera, when our people have fallen into the net laid by the demon called ‘blind belief’, and have lost our independence, it is the duty of every *wise man* to try and fight this demon and see that people get back their freedom.”

Ramanand pleads to God: “God! Grant me the patience, dedication, and devotion to replace the ignorance of darkness that my brothers dwell in, and lead them to righteousness.” The hero had to be sacrificing, and have a strong moral core along with resilience and patience – androgynous qualities embraced by Gandhi. When Sridhar asks him to leave the pestilence-ridden village, Ramanand again refers to imagined bonds of kinship forged with the villagers and countrymen. The Gandhian and Samajist must work tirelessly for the downtrodden. The country and the village merge, and kinship binds them all. He says:

“Serving the destitute is serving God. My aim in life is to serve the forsaken. Nothing else can please me as much as this work. This very village is my family. Must I abandon my family which is writhing in pain and misery, and instead, become an unjust person saving my own life and accompanying you who are healthy?”

The play ends in all praising Ramanand for his tireless sacrifice and endeavours to reimagine the concept of the nation, and in a passionate plea to

give up the mass-madness of following unhealthy customs and beliefs.

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