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THE CONFLICTS OF FOOD CULTURE IN TULUNADU - 'GANDHI BANDA'

Dr. Sudha Kumari K.

Assistant Professor

Department of Kannada

St. Aloysius College (Autonomous)

Mangaluru

The novel '*Gandhi Banda*' written by H. Nagaveni reveals the cultural background of Tulunadu. In the foreword of her first book of short stories, '*Nakane Neeru*' she writes, "I grew up on the seashore. I have witnessed the richness of *Tulunadu*. I was born there, I grew up there and I saw the world there. *Bhootha, kola, kambala, talamaddale, yakshagana, digana*, sea, seashore, tides, monsoon, westerly winds, the smell of fish, all were part of my life. Is it within me or am I within it...due to occupational commitments I had to move away from the soil of *Tulunadu*. And then it dawned upon me the importance of the soil, the water, the sky, the attire, the smell of the surroundings and the company of the people around us. It was as if the earth under my feet caved in and I had a freefall. It was then that I became introvert. That introversion gave life to these stories."¹ We can see food habits or food culture in her novels, just as we see religion, caste, women, fairs, etc. in her works. A variety of petty shops are indispensable in the plots containing *kola, kambala, bayalata, nema* and fairs.

The novelist describes it thus: "Today is the day of *kambala*. Wholesale *laddoo* stall, Rukmai Kamath's sweets stall selling *chakkuli, laddoo*, sweets and spicy snacks have appeared before daybreak on the left side of the paddy field. On the right are *mandakki* stall of Kurlari Mama; Marybai's stall of various cooked tubers, stalls selling various jiggery, Theresamma's stall selling fried seeds; Monu Poojary's little stall selling green gram *payasam*, sweet shop of Akkamma Moily, Vittal Prabhu's Durgamba Tea Stall, which have added colour to the festivities."² The food culture was evident along with the culture of *kambala*. Fairs and food are indistinguishable components of any culture. This novel has portrayed the uniqueness of the coastal culture. The fair has vegetarian food stalls. We do not find non-vegetarian stalls because everyone prepares non-vegetarian food at home.

"While Pandu Shetty of Kulyaguthu had slaughtered four chickens for the dinner, Subbayya Shetty of Jarigebettu had two. In majority of Bunt, Poojary and Moily families *moode, gunda*, rice noodles, *dosa*, dumplings and *korirotti* were eaten with chicken gravy, others relished them with fish curry. However, Pancha Poojary, the store keeper of Patel Hebbar has neither because he relishes the meat of the local wild bird *pundada*. He treats his guests with *pundada* gravy and rice noodles. The smell of fish curry and chicken gravy spread across the landscape passing through houses of Brahmins"³ This is a solemn occasion of relishing non-vegetarian food among the lower classes.

The list of dishes being prepared in the houses of Brahmins are described as follows: "in the Brahmin houses *pathrode, moode, gunda* prepared in jackfruit leaves, *neerudose, payasam, chutney, koddell*, sweets made with banana were being prepared". The novel elaborates on the distinct food habits of different castes.

"It is a tragedy that in a pluralistic country like India, something as personal as eating habits are classified as superior and inferior. This classification is solely made by the community has political clout. The other communities accept them in order to attain social status."⁴ Animal sacrifice is part of many traditional practices. This is followed by fellowship meals. In the modern society, efforts are being made to dictate what one should eat and what one should not. However, the novel factually portrays the food habits of different community.

This is evident in the way Hebbar serves food to the *shoodras* and lower caste. The *shoodras* loitering around the houses of the Brahmins are portrayed as those drooling for their food. The words, “Hebbar’s stinginess and his mind work in tandem. After the guests have left, he will add water to the remaining dishes, add a little salt and chilli powder, boil and then serve it to the lower caste people. They eat it heartily, bow to him in gratitude and leave” portray the disregard Brahmin Hebbar had for the lower caste through food.

Influenced by Gandhi and Karnad, Marappa and Adrama give up non-vegetarian food. Shift in cultural practices in order to obtain social status can be seen throughout history. Eating non-vegetarian food during *maari pooja* is described thus: “on the next day, the rotating sound of grinding stone could be heard in every house. After having lunch comprising chicken gravy and *rice pundi*, Marappa appears in the front porch. After the new son-in-law had a wash and quenched his thirst with tender coconut water, Subbayya Shetty opened his mouth to ask him to eat the *prasada* of *maari pooja*. But remembering that he is against *maari pooja* and had given up non-vegetarian food, he kept quiet. Since he started to oppose animal sacrifice like Karnad, he had not consumed meat.” This is a significant transformation in the food culture.⁵ In the same way, when Karnad visits Marappa-Adrama couple also, he ignores the caste discrimination and relishes vegetarian food. Soon a movement takes shape to fight for dining together. We can see the paradigm shift food cultures have brought about in *Tulunadu*.

“Karnad’s advice was that in the upcoming Panambur fair, all should be allowed to dine along with the Brahmins. Nandaneshwara is the lord of everyone. Why should there be discrimination in distributing his *prasada*? However, Bhootaithal disagreed. Should Brahmins dine with *Holemadigas* who eat dead cattle? Should *Vaidik* class share the table with *Shoodras* who are personification of filth? Nobody will be served food; neither Brahmins nor *Shoodras*.”⁶ It is ironical that the higher rules of where? who? how? one should have his food are formulated. Can we call it transformation if the taste of the food and the place of eating are changed? However, the novel depicts that the food culture formed by humans is full of contradictions.

The food culture of *Tulunadu* is unique. The higher classes control what one should eat and what one should not, and the lower classes have continually fought against this. Food culture can bring about intense social conflict. The novels written by the novelists of the coastal area have presented this aspect from the critical point of view.

The discussion on food culture does not deny bases of conflict within itself. There is never ending conflict among modernity, colonialism, caste, religion, freedom, agriculture and deities. We observe both different facets of foods and the conflicts they have effected in the society when we its presentation from Indirabai to the spate of violations.

Foot note

1. Nagaveni H., *Nakane neeru*, Foreword
2. *Gandhi banda*, p. 18.
3. Ibid, p. 18.
4. Rahamath Tarikere, *Maranadologana kichchu*, p. 45.
5. Narendra Rai Derla, ‘*Gandhi Banda*’ *heege nammolage*, p. 348.
6. *Gandhi banda*, p. 26.

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