

Representations of Women in Short Stories by Sahitya Academy Award Recipients in Kannada Literature

Dr. Kalpana Mukunda Iyengar

Abstract

This article explores representation of women in short stories written by women writers from the state of Karnataka, India. The seven different stories selected for analysis are – (1) *The Two Paintings* (2) *Mother*, (3) *Second Marriage*, (4) *Roowariya Lakshmi*, (5) *Dog's Tail*, (6) *The Third Eye*, and (7) *The One Who Left Forever*. Each of these stories represents women who play different roles that were archetypal of the social milieu of the times. The authors were preoccupied with women's suffering, status, sexuality, familial obligations, psychological experiences when women fall in love outside of their marriages, and an attempt to emancipate from societal and familial constraints.

Keywords: Women's suffering, obligations, sexuality, love, constraints

Introduction

Eminent women authors from Karnataka wrote short stories that have been chosen for analysis here. The stories were originally written in Kannada and then translated to English by Lakshmi and T.V. Subramanyam. Women in these stories play different roles such as housewives with modern ideas, an old fashioned stay home ideology to serve her husband, an artist's wife, a young woman married to an elderly man who is twice her age, a mother who has to decide between tradition and her attachment to her son, a woman who experiences attraction outside marriage, and a woman's dilemma to marry a man older because he is wealthy and family pressure.

Women Writers

The following section is a brief description of the women writers from the state of Karnataka.

Vani



Vani

Courtesy: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vani_\(writer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vani_(writer))

Vani was born in 1912 in Srirangapatna near Mysore. Her novels including *Shubhamangala*, *Eradu Kanasu*, and *Hosa Belaku* were made into movies. Her short stories, *Chinnada Panjara*, *Mane Magalu*, etc. She received the Karnataka Sahitya Award in 1962 and the coveted Sahitya Academy Award in 1972.

H. V. Savitramma



H. V. Savitramma

Courtesy: <http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/kar/writers/769.htm>

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H. V. Savithramma was born in Bengaluru in 1913. Her short collections include *Nirashsrithe*, *Marumaduve*, *Sarida Beralu*, etc. She has received the Indo-Soviet award and has translated Rabindranath Tagore's *Naukhaghata* and *Gora*. H.V.S. has also received the prestigious Karnataka Sahitya Academy award.

Anupama Niranjana



Anupama Niranjana

Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anupama_Niranjana

Anupama was born in Shimoga in 1934. She earned her MBBS degree from Mysore Medical College. Her topics range from social issues to women's problems. Her novels include *Madhavi*, *Runamuktalu* and her short stories such as *Roowariya Lakshmi*, *Dinakondur Kathe* (children's stories) are popular. She received the Kannada Rajyotsava award, Karnataka Sahitya Academy, and other awards.

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Triveni



Triveni

Courtesy: <http://chiloka.com/celebrity/thriveni>

Anasuya Shankar wrote with the pen name of Triveni. She received her B.A in Psychology and she employs psychological aspects to create characters in her novels. Her stories Belli Moda, Sharapanjara and Mukti were made into movies with Minuguthare Kalpana as protagonist in the novels. Her short stories volumes include Hendatiya Hesaru, Eradu Mansu, and Samasyeya Magu. Triveni's delineation of women's issues such as suppression, oppression, and *post-partum* depression are informative and educational. She received the Karnataka Sahitya Academy award in 1960.

Veena Shantheshwar

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Veena Shantheshwar

Courtesy: <http://www.thehindu.com/books/peeling-the-layers/article2071084.ece>

Veena was born in Dharwad and earned her M.A., M.Litt., and Ph.D. in English. Dr. Shantheshwar's short stories include *Mullugalu*, *Kavalu*, and *Koneya Daari*. She translated works from English and Hindi. Veena received the Karnataka Sahitya award.

The Selected Stories

Eradu Chitra

Eradu Chitra (Two Paintings) by Vani is a thoughtful description of a woman who sacrifices wealth and status to marry her beloved, who is poor. Chenni, Gangaram's wife instructs her husband to ask for a loan from their landlord so she can celebrate the *grama devatha* for protecting their child. After much contemplation, Gangaram submits and retorts,

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“Chenni, you are used to enjoying feasts and festivals so much! What comforts do you have, after marrying me?” (p. 2). Here Gangaram treats his wife as someone who is meant to enjoy life and that he was not in a position to fulfill her wishes including making an offering to their village deity. In another instance, Gangaram contemplates Chenni’s decision to marry him, “Chenni would surely be disgusted, waiting for me right from the morning” (p. 11). In the same story, there is the landlord’s wife, Triveni, who is depicted as a woman who is interested in decorating her house with expensive paintings and spending her life taking care of the invited guests during special occasions at her home. The two women stand in contrast exposing the marked difference in their status.

Amma

Another story titled ‘Mother’ by Vani unfolds the family drama of a widowed mother and her daughter-in-law. Vani’s depiction of Seethamma’s plight evokes pity in the readers. A young girl, merely 16 years old is widowed with a child to raise him on her own. The suicide motif that would have been a plausible solution does not work in Vani’s character because Seethamma is left with a child that depended on her, “*Had she no attachment for the child, she would probably have chosen to end her life, jumping into the village pond or a well*” (p. 26). This story revolves around Seethamma’s preoccupation with her son’s well-being and later the disappointments that came with a mismatch between the mother-in-law and the new daughter-in-law. Seethamma grew up in a village with minimum things; whereas, the daughter-in-law came from an affluent family. Seethamma’s decision to leave her son at a crucial moment is atypical in Indian stories.

Eradane Maduve

H.V. Savithamma’s ‘Second Marriage’ exposes the common practice of the time where daughters were married off to men who were much older than the girls for financial security. These women did not have a say in their choice of a husband and they succumbed to familial obligation and the groom would presume, “*...his wealth and status would impress the girl and win her love*” (p. 32). The relationship eventually takes a toll on Bharathi’s sexuality when she finds out about her friend Vijaya’s engagement with a man close to her age,

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“Bharathi felt strangely deprived. There was no scope for such frolic in her life... Krishnappa would not understand. Perhaps in his young days he had demonstrated a similar zest with his first wife. She must have enjoyed it like Vijaya” (p. 39). Vani aptly contrasts the loss of sexual pleasure in Bharathi’s life and the opportunity for Vijaya to experience it with a man close to her age.

Bharathi also had to suppress her thoughts of being with a younger man, but if she had pursued that thought and gotten involved with Vishwanatha, she would be ostracized by her society. Vani has also depicted a few atypical scenes in the story including Bharathi’s departure to work in a city leaving Krishnappa behind and family friend Vishwanatha’s interference with Bharathi’s life. Bharathi’s escape from the uninteresting life is short lived because she returns to Krishanappa in the end.

Roowariya Lakshmi

The story, ‘Roowariya Lakshmi’, the author describes the oppressive and domineering system that existed during the Hoysala reign. Intertwined with this plot, the story also depicts music and sculpturing. Anupama Niranjana presents the king attraction to a woman playing the veena, *“The girl’s full bodied figure, her perfectly rounded breasts, appeared to proudly proclaim her youth...”* (p. 64). There is much importance given to women’s bodies and their beauty rather than their art or talent and that is captured well in stories.

Nayai Bala

Triveni’s ‘Dog’s Tail’ is a story of a child widow who lives with her brother’s family. Shalamma lost her husband at the young age of thirteen and stays single all her life. She is presented a woman who engages in gossiping about other people and according to Triveni, *“No one could compete with Shalamma’s tongue, she talked as if she was a witness to everything and was a know-all. It was impossible to check the veracity of whatever she said, as one just ended up looking foolish”* (p. 76). Shallamma also had an excellent accomplice in Narasamma. They both were intense with the wane talk about other people, *“It was an agreement between them. If Narasamma gave a new piece of gossip, Shalamma would have to match it with a*

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recent bit of scandal. She fabricated one if it came to that” (p. 76). Another layer added to the story is the indication that if a man and a woman are alone, they should be involved in an affair. Women characters concoct this affair drama about other women through gossip. The author seems to suggest that women marginalize women.

Mooraneya Kannu

The Third Eye, Ambuja is penalized for an innocent and feminine act. The affinity Ambuja had developed with Srinath prompted her to wipe the sweat from his forehead during one of his visits, *“A tiny stream of sweat broke out, trickling through the thick dark hair, forming a string of droplets across the forehead. Ambuja, suddenly bent over him, took the edge of the pallu and wiped the stream of sweat”* (p. 94). This affectionate act is deconstructed to indicate a purposeful sexual move by Ambuja thus creating tension and suspicion in the men. Ambuja’s inability to conceive prompted Srinath to comment that the marriage between Ambuja and Ananth was not well consummated. This comment was made after the incident that left the three perplexed, so it is misconstrued and distorted by all the three. The author had to intervene and make Srinath address Ambuja as “Akka” (elder sister in Kannada) as if that would dispel all of the confusion and ill feelings that was brewing in the men’s hearts.

Like any possessive husband, Ananth contemplated the act and wonders in his mind, *“Abha! She is so bold. What does she think of wiping the forehead of another man in the presence of her own husband? At least she didn’t dare to kiss him. If he were not there, she would have even kissed him. Why did Ambuja act like this? Couldn’t she have been smart enough to hide her love, borne on the wind of immorality?”* (p. 101).

Eventually, both Ambuja and Ananth suffer the pangs of separation, but they justify the feelings by avoiding each other and living like two strangers under one roof. The little Radha from their neighbour’s house had to come into their lives for them to realize when Ambuja wiped the sweat off of Srinath’s forehead, *“Ambuja suddenly grabbed at Radha running nearby, took her pallu and wiped the sweat from her forehead. That feeling she had suppressed*

in a corner of her heart, the natural feeling that can sprout only in a woman's heart, broke out prompting her to go grab Radha and wipe the sweat from her forehead" (108).

Horatu Hodavanu

This story Portrays Satish's wife as a woman with secrets from her maiden days and her husband's impressive attempt to appease the wife by telling her that he would forgive her mistakes, "*What are you thinking of so deeply. Did anything happen in your past? Do let me know if it were so. I shall not misunderstand. I am ready to forgive everything. I felt disgusted that he was in a hurry to impress me with his generosity, to forgive my mistakes, rather than show a genuine concern by understanding me and sharing my misery" (p. 117).*

The wife had to suppress her attraction to a Shashi Dada, *mittaiwala* in one of the railway stations en route to Hubli by announcing that she would not go to Hubli henceforth because Shashi Dada relocated to his village and will not be available at the station. The passage between psychological and chronological times is utilized by the author to help the readers to understand the turmoil that Satish's wife experiences

Conclusion

Through these stories, the women writers from the state of Karnataka describe their women in the stories as people who succumb to societal and familial pressures by sacrificing their sexuality (*Marumaduve/Second Marriage*), authoritative old women who gossip (*Nayi Bala/Dog's Tail*), sacrifice their attachments to sons (*Thayi/Mother*), and escape their caged existence to seek happiness outside marriage (*Horatu Hodava/ The One Who Left For Ever*). These leitmotifs may be prevalent in cultures represented through the above stories even today and these authors were ahead of their times in recognizing the social issues.

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