Rewriting History, Reclaiming Identity: A Postcolonial Reassessment of Cultural Hegemony in S. L. Bhyrappa's Avarana

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Abstract:

Avarana is a novel by S. L. Bhyrappa that examines postcolonial cultural hegemony in Indian society and the need for historical revisionism. It is a work of historical fiction that seeks to represent Indian history through the eyes of its characters. The novel spans over 500 years, from the Vijayanagara Empire in the 14th century to the present day, and explores a range of historical and social issues that have shaped Indian society. The present paper argues that Bhyrappa's narrative functions as a counter-ideological intervention that challenges dominant historiography shaped by colonial epistemology and postcolonial ideological devices. The study contextualises the novel within Indian historical writing, examining how fictional narratives can serve as sites of resistance, repetition, and identity recovery. Through an analysis of Lakshmi's journey of unlearning and rediscovery, the paper demonstrates how the text advances tensions between hegemonic narratives, subaltern silences, and contested histories.

Introduction:

Santeshivara Lingannaiah Bhyrappa, commonly known as S. L. Bhyrappa, is a renowned Indian author who writes in the Kannada language. He was born on July 26, 1934, in Santeshivara, a small village in the Shimoga district of Karnataka, India. He has written over twenty-five novels, several collections of short stories, and numerous essays and articles. His books encompass a range of topics, including religion, philosophy, ethics, politics, and social issues. He is renowned for his realistic and meticulous portrayal of characters, as well as his powerful and engaging narrative style. Bhyrappa has received numerous awards and honours for his literary contributions, including the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Padma Shri, and the Padma Bhushan. Due to Bhyrappa's valuable contributions to Indian literature, particularly in historical narration, he is regarded as one of the most important literary voices in contemporary Indian literature. Some of Bhyrappa's most famous works include Vamshavruksha, Anveshana, Tantu, Sartha, Mandra, Avarana, Bhitti, and Avarana.

Apart from all other literary creations by Bhyrappa, Avarana becomes highly debatable for its portrayal of the Mughal invasion of India and its impact on Indian society and culture. The novel was initially published in Kannada in 2007 and has been translated into many languages, including English, by Sandeep Balakrishna in 2014. Avarana discusses Hindu-Muslim relations, social order, and governance systems of the past. The novel also interrogates the dominant postcolonial narrative of Indian history and challenges the impression that the Mughal period was harmonious. It demonstrates that history is not merely a collection of documents and events, but also an integral part of emotional and cultural identity. Bhyrappa has tried to give voice to the Indian sentiments for which the prominent writer and Nobel

laureate V. S. Naipaul said, “India is a country that, in the north, outside Rajasthan, was ravaged, and intellectually destroyed to a large extent, by the invasions that began in about 1000 A.D. by forces and religions that India had no means of understanding. The invasions are in all the school books” (Naipaul).

In the novel, Bhayrappa narrates the story of a scholarly woman, Lakshmi, with great sensitivity, exposing how the manipulation of historical narration has been used to shape and control the country’s cultural and social narratives. The novel not only reflects the need for historical revisionism as a response to cultural hegemony, but also highlights the dominant historical narratives that have been used to suppress and marginalise truthful perspectives and voices. The novel truly embodies the spirit of one of the most important postcolonial theories called New Historicism, which “not only sees literature as one discourse among others, but also views the social and historical context of literature as itself composed of a network of discourses, of ways of signifying and understanding the world” (Habib, 2005, 567).

The novel also examines how historical events and figures have been manipulated to serve specific political or ideological agendas, necessitating a reevaluation of their factual interpretation. However, the attempt to control history has been an eternal feature of human society. To maintain its identity and survival, every society needs to create a form of the past that suits its current needs and worldview. As a result, political debates today rely heavily on the interpretation of history. Sometimes, political groups invoke specific historical events to bolster their claims, while at other times, they create a new narrative by overlooking inconvenient facts. It is similar to the thought of Michel Foucault, the most significant thinker of New Historicism, who saw “knowledge as a form of power and analysed power as highly diffused and as not distinctly assignable to a given set of political or ideological agencies” (Habib, 2005, 566). However, it led new historicists to understand literature and history not as impartial reflections, but as networks of power and knowledge. Similar to this, it becomes clear that the novel shows that narratives of history are sometimes created, sometimes suppressed, and sometimes recognised, depending on who is in control. Therefore, the various definitions of the past in India, such as academic history, religious memory, or political discourse, are actually a struggle for identity and authority in the present.

However, Bhyrappa’s history-based fiction is an attempt to remove the veil of falsehoods placed on Indian culture and society because“who controls the past controls the future. who controls the present controls the past” (Orwell, 2000, 37). It is the obvious conceptual line of the novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, and Byrappa’s narration, with great precision, profoundly explains why the actual description of history is necessary to expose the

biases and prejudices that underlie the traditional accounts of Indian history. At the same time, Bhyrappa also warns the reader that the assignment is not easy to complete, but requires a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the past because "we cannot truly comprehend our own selves or the history of our nation or, indeed, the history of the entire world, unless we unshackle ourselves from the bonds of false knowledge, desire, and action, and elevate the intellect to a state of detached observation" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 6).

Cultural Hegemony and Politics of Memory in Avarana:

The phrase hegemony means that the ruling class establishes its ideology, values , and beliefs in the entire society in such a way that they seem natural or genuine. In this way, people accept that hegemony even without direct repression or punishment. However, the phrase was only used in a narrowly political context before the Italian politician and philosopher Antonio Gramsci explored it. Nevertheless, Gramsci's thought of hegemony, especially for cultural dominance, has two different meanings, such as "on the one hand it is contrasted with domination and on the other hand hegemonic is sometimes used as an opposite of corporate or economic-corporate to designate a historical phase in which a given group moves beyond a position of corporate existence and defence of its economic position and aspires to a position of leadership in the political and social arena" (Hoare, 1999, 20). As per Gramsci's opinion, the hegemonic stage manifests itself in circumstances where a class takes itself beyond a single corporate group and works to give direction to society. Furthermore, Gramsci also called "non-hegemonic groups or classes as subordinate, subaltern or sometimes instrumental" (Hoare, 1999, 20). Gayatri Spivak more precisely specifies the term in the Postcolonial context that "hegemony is a more sensitive and therefore useful critical term than domination, which fails to acknowledge the active role of subordinate people in the operation of power" (Scott, 1986, 1072).

In this sense, cultural hegemony refers to the dominance or control of one culture over others within a particular society. It involves using religious beliefs, practices, and institutions to exert power and influence over other groups, often at the expense of their own beliefs and practices, because "hegemony is not an automatic process but must be achieved by means of a conscious and deliberate program. The moulding of subjectivity itself toward unconscious complicity with the aims of the rulers preempts the need for excessive and dangerously provocative coercion by law and by force" (Habib, 2005, 27). It increases the ability or potential of a group of people to maintain total control over social or cultural institutions. It allows the elite to significantly influence the common sense of everyday thoughts, ideas, behaviour, and

expectations of the rest of society by directing or insisting on the normative ideas, beliefs, and values that have become dominant.

This idea is clearly evident in S. L. Bhyrappa's narration of Avarana. As the novel illustrates, a particular ideology, primarily secularism, has become dominant in historiography and educational institutions. Therefore, the dispute over history in Avarana is not just a logic about the past, but a struggle over who maintains cultural and ideological power in the present. The novel illustrates how, in historiography and educational institutions, a particular perspective is presented as the truth, while other views are overlooked. As a result, people accept this unverified discourse on the subject of truth as impartial and scientific, and in reality, it furthers the interests of the ruling or dominant class. In this way, the novel reveals not only the history of the past, but also the game of knowledge, power and culture in the present, for which Karl Marx thought, "The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of the ruling class" (Amin).

To explain it, Avarana presents a group of intellectuals associated with art and literature who initiated the Progressive Movement to promote social and religious generosity in the country. The activists of the movement identify themselves as progressives who never miss a chance to "publicly condemn a religion, which 85 percent of the country's population followed" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 23) but remain silent on issues that are not suitable for their agenda. Bhyrappa highlights the hypocrisy of this so-called progressive group through the story of Lakshmi alias Razia, who becomes an activist in the Progressive Movement during her studies in Bangalore. However, at the beginning of the novel, Lakshmi is a blind follower of the Progressive Movement, whose sense of progressiveness comes from her belief in individual freedom and equality. As a loyal activist in the movement, Lakshmi is critical of religious and cultural beliefs that she considers regressive and backward, believing that "I was progressive; I had risen above self-deluding and man-made bonds like religion and caste and creed" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 17).

However, the thought and act of Lakshmi expose the selective approach of these so-called progressives and explore how they develop an agenda toward cultural hegemony. Lakshmi falls in love with Amir, a Muslim activist of the Progressive Movement, who always says that "I don't believe in religion, any religion" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 18), but forces Lakshmi to convert to Islam for their marriage. Nevertheless, Lakshmi's father, Narasimhe Gowda, a faithful follower of Gandhian thoughts and Indian culture, has opposed her marriage for a reason that, "Your marriage with Amir doesn't concern just you or what you are doing now. Your child, or the child or children of your child, or someone in some future

generation that you both will give birth to, will someday destroy our temples. It's best you understand right now that you will be directly accountable for that sin" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 16), and offers an alternative solution that "If he (Amir) truly loves you with the intensity that you say he does, let him become a Hindu and change his name. You will have my blessings. I will officiate the marriage according to traditional Hindu rites" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 18).

Though Amir claims to be an activist of the Progressive Movement, which has the primary goal to set social and religious equality, he holds the bigoted thinking of his religion that "My religion doesn't tolerate either the man or the girl to leave Islam. If they even try, they are killed. And it's not just that. They also kill the person responsible for providing such a motivation" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 18). Apart from it, Amir not only rejects the proposal but convinces Lakshmi that "our marriage is also an effort at achieving a larger purpose-to build a society shorn of religion, the opium of the masses. That day is not too far. But till then, we need this strategy" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 18). Though Amir has an apparent impression of his religion's conservative attitude and intolerance and is aware of his inability to change it, he considers Lakshmi's religion (Hinduism) orthodox. In addition, he mocks Lakshmi when she hesitates to decide on conversion, "That simply means you've still not freed yourself from the artificial distinctions of religion" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 18).

Apart from this, the novel also explores the machinery, including social and governmental, that works behind this kind of Progressive Movement to achieve its set agenda of cultural hegemony. These so-called activists have developed a complete mechanism that has impacts primarily to justify their agenda, such as Lakshmi thought that her marriage to a Muslim brings turmoil for her, but "the reception was quite the opposite. Newspapers published my photo on the front page and decorated me with titles such as 'courageous woman.' They published my seminar papers verbatim. Every progressive or revolutionary organisation wanted me to inaugurate whatever programme they organised. I became a celebrity, a star of sorts" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 23).

Lakshmi married Amir because she assumed "their love was built and grew on a foundation of a shared conviction in the Progressive movement" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 20). However, the activists of the Progressive Movement systematically present the marriage of Lakshmi and Amir as a rebellion against the idea of Hindu superiority. They address it as "the courageous rebellion against antiquated social and religious norms. They encouraged others to emulate (Lakshmi and Amir) by making exchange garlands" (Bhyrappa

and Balakrishna, 2014, 33). In addition, Professor Shastri, the leader of the so-called progressive group, justifies the inter-religious marriage by saying, "the urgent need of the hour is to destroy the traditions of the Hindu society because it is the majority community" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 33). In this way, they celebrate this interfaith marriage as a slap on the majoritarian society of the country because these progressive intellectuals set the agenda to characterise the Hindus as the suppressive element of alternative perspectives and voices, which becomes a challenge to social harmony.

Though the so-called progressive group celebrates inter-religious marriage, the scenario of Amir's family is entirely opposite to Lakshmi's aspiration for freedom and progressiveness. She faced several restrictions regarding social customs and was required to follow Islamic social and religious customs, such as wearing a Burkha, eating beef, and offering five-time Prayer (Namaz), in which Amir also supported his family. Moreover, Amir used "the special privilege reserved only for men in his religion by pronouncing talaq, an unparalleled device of female oppression" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 29-30) and married again to a Muslim woman by using religious law, especially prevailing in Islam.

In this sense, Lakshmi's experiences of discrimination and conservatism in the Muslim society in Avarana illustrate important points of postcolonial theory. According to postcolonial ideas, the relations of power and culture in society are controlled not only by political oppression but also by cultural hegemony and social conservatism. Lakshmi loses her personal freedom due to tradition and social restrictions, which shows that progressiveness is not just a label given from the outside. True liberation is a process of knowledge, awareness and continuous self-evolution. From a postcolonial perspective, Lakshmi's experience serves as a symbol, illustrating how previous structures of power and hegemonic thinking can persist in society even after independence. Thus, Bhairappa indicates through this character that political liberation alone is not enough for progress and modernity, but also requires change at the cultural and psychological levels.

A nation always constructs its identity through stories, symbols and artistic creations. According to Ernest Renan's idea of 'What is a Nation?', "The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I understand genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea" (Renan, 1990, 19). However, Avarana shows how Indian postcolonial artists or creators rewrite their heritage and memory for political gain, just as colonial powers wrote history for their own purposes in the name of artistic creation. The novel

exposes how these progressives have supportive government machinery, which helps to mislead the people in the name of artistic creation. Amir and Lakshmi are artists who receive government projects to create documentaries on various historical places and events.

In such a case, Amir was assigned a project to make a documentary on Hampi, which is "reported directly to the central government's Heritage Department" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 10). They are working on the historical empire of Vijayanagar, which was destroyed by Muslim invaders. However, Amir wants to narrate that the destruction was the result of a fight between the Shaiva and Vaishnava sects of Hinduism. He has reasoned that "the government's unwritten diktat about how the documentaries must be filmed: stills of temple ruins, broken idols, and damaged artefacts must be shown in a softer light in order to avoid arousing anti-Muslim sentiments in the viewers" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 10). A similar has been done by Amir, a creative artist, with a play based on the Babri Masjid demolition, which was "concluded with the 'accused' (Hindus) accepting their guilt and rubbing their foreheads on the floor and vowing to atone" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 120). He also secured a documentary project to glorify Tipu as a secular and patriotic figure. It is an example of artists, such as Aamir and Lakshmi, who become instruments of a national narrative that ignores historical truths and presents a convenient, culturally controlled narrative. It is a form of cultural hegemony in which the honest facts of history are presented in a soft, controlled light, making them politically acceptable. In addition, whenever someone debates with these so-called progressives, they tease them as a member of "the anti-Muslim brigade and brainwashed" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 124). In this way, these so-called progressive intellectuals systematically set propaganda for cultural hegemony, for which V. S. Naipaul stated in an interview, "But I don't think people understand that every invasion, every war, every campaign, was accompanied by slaughter, a slaughter always of the most talented people in the country. So, these wars, apart from everything else, led to a tremendous intellectual depletion of the country. I think that in the British period, and in the 50 years after the British period, there has been a kind of recruitment or recovery, a very slow revival of energy and intellect. This isn't an idea that goes with the vision of the grandeur of old India and all that sort of rubbish. That idea is a great simplification, and it occurs because it is intellectually, philosophically, and emotionally easier for Indians to manage" (Naipaul).

Lakshmi identifies these progressives as "comrade historians" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 124) after the actual realisation. She feels humiliated for her association with these so-called progressive people, who meaningfully confront uncomfortable truths and acknowledge the complexities and contradictions of history and society. She also criticises

herself for being under the shadow of progressiveness, “I was part of this same group that loudly howled about unconditional, unlimited artistic freedom, I now realise what they were-me included-doing all along. We hollered about our right to artistic freedom, but denied the same freedom to our critics. What we did was gangsterism-we defined everything” (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 64).

Lakshmi’s understanding reveals that, despite the arguments for progressivism and artistic freedom, these groups actually suppress the voices of others and impose their own narrative. This behaviour connects with the thinking of Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak’s famous essay Can the Subaltern Speak?, in which she argues that “I cannot entirely endorse this insistence on determinate vigour and full autonomy, for practical historiographic exigencies will not allow such endorsements to privilege subaltern consciousness” (Spivak, 1988, 26). In this way, the novel serves as a powerful critique of cultural hegemony, operating under a well-planned conspiracy, and a call for a greater understanding of it.

A Journey to Rediscover History and Identity:

Martin Heidegger, a German Philosopher, noted in his famous book Poetry, Language, Thought, “A boundary is not that at which something stops, but the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing” (Heidegger, 1971, 152). It applies completely to Lakshmi, whose realisation of the fabrication of the Progressive Movement and her disillusionment bring a twist to the story. She becomes utterly aware of her unfaithful activism, which was elevated under the guise of propaganda, and feels ashamed for contributing to a harmful and malicious history far from the truth. Disappointingly, she thinks, “My world is the world of feeling. And I’ve wasted my life mortgaging this talent in the service of some social reform movement that no longer makes sense to me” (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 80). As an awakened, she wants to “being truthful to her art” (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 69) by knowing her past because “each intuition of your identity re-creates the past from the perspective of a newly assimilated future. Continuity is already built into each intuition of your present” (Waugh, 2006, 401).

As an apology for the injustice done to art and culture, Lakshmi prepared herself for the revivalism of the socio-political history of the country and decided “to read more, travel to every corner of India, take photographs and do fieldwork with only this intent” (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 80). Now, she embarks on a journey, both physical and intellectual, to discover her true identity, because “the study of history has a definite goal: the search for truth” (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 76). She had now reached a point of transformation, for which Homi Bhabha noted in his famous essay, The Location of Culture, “once more, it is the

desire for recognition, 'for somewhere else and for something else' that takes the experience of history beyond the instrumental hypothesis" (Bhabha, 1994, 12).

Through her father's extensive research and her reading of authentic and unbiased literature on Indian history, she learns that the narrative of Indian history she had grown up with was incomplete, biased, and distorted by prejudices. She finds "a vulgar use of certain historical events manipulated for political ends and with a complete lack of scientific foundation" (Cattini, 2011, 30).

Lakshmi's intellectual curiosity, personal experience, and desire for social change prompt her to challenge the prevailing dogma of Indian history and present a different perspective on how Hinduism and Islam have shaped the country in reality, as opposed to how historians and so-called progressive intellectuals have shaped it in the name of creativity or communal harmony. In addition, she also realises that "history is not tied to slogans and ideals and reform movements. It is to rid ourselves of notions of doctrines and movements and look at the incidents of the past as they actually happened" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 79).

However, Lakshmi's intellectual transformation proves the interplay between history and narrative literature. It demonstrates that the social and political circumstances depicted in the story are not merely the experiences of the characters but also reflect the underlying historical and cultural influences of the time. It sheds light on the interplay between social inequality, religious discrimination, and political power, allowing individuals to rediscover their own identity by examining history from a fragmented perspective.

Disputed Histories and Cultural Identity in Avarana:

Historical revisionism is "commonly associated with the manipulation of certain historical events for political ends" (Cattini, 2011, 32). It refers to reevaluating historical events, figures, and facts from a perspective different from what was previously accepted or taught. It involves challenging the traditional interpretation of historical events and figures and examining them in a new light to understand their significance and impact. However, historical revisionism in literature can take various forms, including reinterpreting the motivations of historical figures, highlighting previously neglected perspectives or voices, questioning the accuracy of historical accounts, or exploring alternative scenarios to explain past events. In literature, historical revisionism can also involve incorporating fictional or imagined elements to re-examine historical events or figures from a fresh perspective.

S. L. Bhayrappa's Avarana is a unique attempt to explore the hidden principles of history and the retrospection of time in literature. This work is not just fiction, but an experiment in re-examining history and social identity from a modern perspective. Lakshmi,

the central character of the story, attempts to understand the relationship between herself, the social system, and history, engaging the reader in a life and history that unfolds as an intellectual journey. Bhyrappa has pointed out the need for revisionism in Indian history because it is well-known that the country has faced ruthless tyranny because of Islamic invasion since the late 12th century. It was the beginning of the period of Hindu's suppression, both politically and culturally, for which a historian noted "Of all Muslims, it was his aggressions which first brought devastation and disarray to India, and from that time the free-dom of the Hindus has diminished and faded like the phases of the moon" (Chatterjee, 1993, 103-104).

However, the dominant narrative of the nation's history has presented Islamic rule as peaceful and supportive of a pluralistic society. Though the Islamic invaders and rulers destroy several Hindu temples, "the excessive reliance of modern Indian historians on Islamic chroniclers like Ferista, Abu Fazl, Al Badayuni, and Mughal emperors like Babur, Jehangir, and Aurangzeb is an unfortunate reality of the penning history of the subcontinent with defeatist narrative and falsehood striking roots in the consciousness of our great civilisation" (Ratnu, 2022, 10).

Bhyrappa's demonstration of Lakshmi's deeper exploration into her research about "the history of Islam's triumphs on the Indian soil" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 47) is the sign of individual right and responsibility "to find out the true motives of these so-called historians" (Ratnu, 2022, 11). In her attempt, Lakshmi comes across various historical facts that have been obscured by the shadow of progress, such as the reality that Tipu Sultan was a bigot who "always refers to Hindus as kafirs and the British as Christians" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 67). In addition, after his pilgrimage to Mecca, "Tipu is on a mission to convert all non-Muslims to Islam and Islamize all non-Islamic nations" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 67). To support his claim, Bhyrappa also cited historical documents, including Tipu Sultan's Dreams, written by Tipu himself, which describe how Tipu persecuted followers of all religions except Islam.

Apart from it, though "Tipu never talks about modernising India and fumes that the Christians (British) are his biggest obstacle that he must urgently remove" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 67), unfortunately, "our Progressives call him the forefather of Indian technology, a role model of secularism and the progenitor of Progressiveness!" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 67-68). However, Lakshmi also understands their aversion towards factual history: "Progressive historians and writers paint Tipu Sultan in heroic hues for the sole reason that he fought the British, but they remain mute about the Marathas, who fought the same British?" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 68). In addition, the documents reveal that

Lakshmi reacts to the fact that every logic portrays Tipu Sultan as secular or a man of reform, encompassing education, language, nationalism, and technology.

Moreover, she finds similar historical documents, including Swelle's The Forgotten Empire, which signify that Islamic invaders were the actual cause of the destruction of the Hampi or Vijaynagar Empire, for which a group of progressive historians reason that "the Vijayanagar Empire witnessed some of the most barbaric strife between the Shaiva and Vaishnava sects" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 74). However, progressive historians narrate a story about the destruction of Vijayanagar, claiming that the violent conflict between the Vaishnava and Shaiva sects was the cause of the destruction of Hampi's magnificent temples and the smashing of its idols; they attribute this to the influence of the nearby Muslim kingdoms. To evidence their argument, "these historians tell us that all the destroyed idols and temples belong to Vaishnavas" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 76).

In addition, the narrative of the prince of Devagarh represents the broader historical context of the impact of the Mughal Empire on Indian culture and society. It reconstructs the devastating Mughal period, which claimed to be tolerant but was marked by cultural oppression, religious intolerance, forced conversions, the imposition of the Jizya tax on non-Muslims, and the destruction of India's rich heritage, which is unfortunately erased or distorted from Indian history.

In addition, Bhyrappa used the historical documents written and preserved by historians appointed by the then-Muslim kings, such as Haji Hamdullah Sahib. However, Haji Hamdullah has the history of the whole world from ancient times till the present day on the tip of his tongue. Badshah Aurangzeb appointed him as the custodian of archives, which are securely preserved in a heavily guarded fortress" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 81). Though Haji Hamdullah is a fictional character, his description and analysis of the significant events during the Mughal period are noticeable, such as the invasion of Hindu kings, atrocities against defeated kings and their women, treatment of women in Haram, Jauhar (self-sacrifice) performed by Hindu women to save their chastity, the exercise of the slave trade of non-Muslims, various taxes on non-Muslim, the political encounters and killing of father, Shahjahan, and brothers Dara, Shuja, and Murad Baksh by Aurangzeb to gain the throne, Aurangzeb's official orders to demolish of various Hindu temples including Kashi Vishvanath Temple.

Bhyrappa also presents the incidents of Shivaji's bravery against Aurangzeb, whom the dominant historians identify as "Shiva, the nimble mountain rat" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 139). The historians also did an injustice to portray Shivaji's heroism, who "manages to

reach his hole in the Deccan, the Alamgir's dream of bringing the whole of South under the Mughal Crown will be dashed forever" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 140). Despite admiring Shivaji, the dominant historians admire Aurangzeb, who "pursued his goal of Islamizing the entire Mughal Empire with single-minded zeal and discipline-Islam determined what was permitted or forbidden. Every law that was written and every order that was pronounced was utterly faithful to Islamic tenets" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 141).

Apart from this, Bharrappa also expressed his displeasure at the attempt by established historians to give a different account of the demolition of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, the centre of worship of the Hindu community. According to the Masir-e- Alamgiri (records of destruction after the destruction of temples), "The Badshah Aurangzeb had chosen Kashi to begin his holy mission because Kashi-what was its other name? Ah! Varanasi-was the holiest site, the one place which all the Hindus of Hindustan regarded as the most sacred, as the very centre of their faith" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 160). However, the dominant historians narrate the demolition of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple and the construction of the Gyanvyapi Mosque as the response of Aurangzeb against the rape of a queen of a Hindu King, and "the culprit could've been none other than the mahant, the head priest in charge of the Vishwanath temple" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 290). Otherwise, Aurangzeb was "not a zealot…he was tolerant, secular…or…well" (Bhyrappa and Balakrishna, 2014, 289).

In this way, Bhyrappa points out the need for historical revisionism to address inaccuracies or biases that may have been present in the existing historical narratives. However, only few of the major historical anomalies are depicted with facts in the novel, but they have had a profound impact on the social and cultural affairs of the country. Moreover, the historical undervaluation of events like the demolition of temples, such as the Ram Temple or the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, remains a source of contention for the Indian community even today. Therefore, it becomes crucial to re-examine and revise historical accounts to ensure they reflect a more accurate understanding of events.

Conclusion:

Avarana is a powerful critique of cultural hegemony and historical revisionism in India, which asks for greater openness and inclusivity in cultural and social narratives. Lakshmi's inner conflict and her awareness reveal that progressive movements and so-called independent ideologies often impose their own hegemonic narratives and suppress original voices. It highlights the importance of recognising and valuing diverse perspectives and voices and the dangers of allowing any single group or ideology to dominate the cultural and historical discourse. It calls for revisionism in literature to re-examine history and question established

views to gain a deeper understanding of the past. It is not just about a socio-political dispute, but a dialogue between truth and falsehood, where the search for history becomes synonymous with the search for identity. It reminds the reader that history is not only determined by the writings of those in power, but is also shaped by the re-enactment of suppressed voices, cultural differences, and authentic experiences. In this way, this novel occupies an important place in modern Indian literature, as it confronts cultural hegemony with the question of truth and prompts the reader to rethink their own identity, tradition, and history.

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