

Human Resilience in the Short Stories of Yashwantha Chittala

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Life has been an inspiration for the birth of several philosophies and streams of study from time immemorial. The upheavals that humankind has been facing from time to time are perennial. These upheavals can be analysed both at the individual and community level. That means to say, sometimes they are peculiar to the individuals and haunt them personally and some other times, the entire community is made to bear the brunt. But what is astonishing and worth mentioning is the spirit of resilience that mankind has shown during such times. The insecurities and uncertainties that haunt humankind have made the great scholars ponder over them to investigate their nature and Existentialism is the result of such an investigation. Existentialism is a philosophy which prioritises man over everything in the world and looks at everything from the human perspective. As man is the centre of study here, it has attracted the attention of knowledge seekers and has made its venture into different streams of knowledge and has also found its interpreters in all these streams. Thus we have a great number of works based on Existentialism in philosophy, literature and even films.

In Kannada literature, Yashwantha Chittala is an important author who wrote under the influence of Existentialism and the impact of Kierkegaard is quite evident on the works of Chittala. The characters that can be called ideal people in the works of Chittala are those, who confronting all the adversities in life embrace life as it comes to them and venture to do what is good for the society and to their own selves. Their ventures may be regarded as the 'daring act', a phrase coined by Kierkegaard. Though we find abundant examples of such characters in the novels and the short stories of Yashwantha Chittala, the current paper discusses the author's two short stories - "Siddhartha" (The boy who spoke to the trees) and "Obba muduka mattu avana sevaka" (An old man and his servant), where the protagonists show indomitable resilience on the face of unforeseen circumstances in their life. The protagonists of these stories, Siddhartha and Manek Daruwalla become the mouthpiece of existentialism urging the readers to shed their 'bad faith', thereby instilling in them the spirit to find silver lining in the darkest cloud.

“Siddhartha” is a story with the subtitle, “The boy who spoke to the trees”. Speaking about this story, the author poses the readers a question, ‘Can a man love his kinsmen being merciless to the trees?’ The protagonist of the story, Siddhartha is a young boy of fourteen years who leaves his home, his parents and his sister to do the most humane work of giving away the ashes of a young man to his old parents. This work does not fetch him any materialistic profit, but gives him satisfaction of doing a meaningful deed. Jagdeesh Pandit’s death becomes a pretext of awakening the spirit of humanity hidden in the mind of the young boy, Siddhartha.

The story begins with the death of a young factory worker Jagadish Pandit which is shrouded in mystery. The police cannot decide whether it was a murder or suicide even after a prolonged investigation. But the investigation definitely uncovers the various issues related to him- he is from Lucknow who had come to Mumbai not only in search of a job, but also searching for his sister who was brought to Mumbai by a pimp by name, Belaram.

His aged parents on hearing about the death of their only son are stuck to bed. The work of taking the ashes of Jagadish Pandit is entrusted to Siddhartha’s father which he could not accomplish. One day, without telling anyone, with the mission of delivering the ashes to Jagadish Pandit’s parents, Siddhartha leaves the house writing a letter to his family members not to search for him.

After a long period of one year, Siddhartha’s parents accidentally notice the disappearance of the ashes and they make it at once to Lucknow to Jagadish Pandit’s house with the hope of finding their son there. Siddhartha is not found there. But the parents of Jagadish Pandit tell them that it was Siddhartha who brought them out of their death-like life. In fact he played the role of a son to them. He left them only a few days ago after assuring himself about their recovery from illness to work in the apple gardens of Kashmir, the most cherished dream of his life. The hint about his love towards trees is given in the beginning of the story itself when his mother notices him talking to the plants in the balcony. The writer throws light on the philanthropic nature of the boy at a very young age which can be compared with that of the character of Siddhartha, the founder of Buddhism. In this story, we have pimps, corrupt politicians, and the trade unions who work against the purpose for which they are formed. We also have people like Siddhartha who work for the betterment of the poor and the needy who are no way related to them. His aim and ambition of working in the apple gardens of Kashmir amidst serene nature makes him reach the optimum level that a human being can reach which Fritz Schumacher puts forward in his social theory.

Through the story of “Obba Muduka mattu avana sevaka” (An old man and his servant), the story teller shows the readers, the will power and stability of a stoic mind. It is a natural tendency in the materialistic world we live in today, that people become passive, misanthrope or suspicious when they are isolated due to age or circumstances. In this story we have a very strong willed protagonist, an old man, Manek Daruwalla who lives with his only servant, Pandu. By shedding his attachment for his property and wealth, he not only teaches a right lesson for his greedy relatives, but also attains meaningfulness in life by doing much good to the society. Manek Daruwalla becomes a symbol of robust optimism. He shows us the way of living life to its fullest at the most difficult times. He also becomes an ideal human being whom Chittala creates based on the principles laid down by Erich Fromm. He chooses the path of progress when placed in a very crucial situation. He successfully finds the answer for the question that his own existence poses him thereby becoming a complete human being in every sense.

When the story begins, all the close relatives of Daruwalla are dead and he lives with his faithful servant Panduranga Gavade. One day, the packers and movers come to his home without prior intimation to shift all the books from his personal library to a nearby college library. Though astonished and shocked for a while with their arrival, immediately, the old man feels that the books are more suitable to be kept in the library of a college than in the cupboard of his house as their

utility would be more in a college. Immediately, he also learns from the workers who have come to shift things that the father in law of his only grandson who now lives in America has made all the arrangements to send the old man to an old age home, thereby making the bungalow of the old man his own.

After listening to this from the workers, the old Daruwalla neither gets disturbed nor does he curse those people for parting him from his hard earned property. With lots of love he feeds the workers with the special dish that Pandu has prepared. He reconciles himself with the situation and prepares himself to part from Pandu also. As everything happens according to the plan of his greedy relatives, the twist in the story comes only when the will of the old man is read which was written much before the hatching of the plans by his greedy relatives. According to the will, fifty thousand rupees should be given to Panduranga Gavade and the remaining cash to an orphanage. His house to be given to his grandson only if he comes from America to settle in India, or else should be given to the Parsee Trust where it could be used for societal good. It is clearly indicated that the old man's writing of the will is not motivated by any sort of preoccupations or vengeance towards anybody. The steadfastness and the stability of Daruwalla are seen in his act of vacating his house and leaving Panduranga Gavade forever. Later in the story, we also read that the old man lived a jovial life until his death in an old age home where he was popular with the inmates for his positive attitude. Whatever was written in his will was very well executed and his relatives were not successful in their wicked plan. Daruwalla sets a model for the way of leading a fruitful life.

In the opinion of Vivek Shanbhag,

The concerns in the stories of Chittala are varied- the innocent people of his stories want to prove their innocence to the world. They pay for the sin of others. The characters that live in the city suffer because of isolation, while the characters living in Hanehalli enjoy the bliss of living with the community. They are naturally antagonistic towards cruelty. The world unraveled in front of us by the very sensitive writer Chittala is without parallel. It is a world of good, bad, competition, anxiety and at the same time the world of prayer. The voice of the narrator consists of the maturity of the one who has made a very deep study of life- On the basis of this study, he has attained the capacity to forgive the blunders also. He has the never ending love and concern towards the younger generation and also non exhaustive love for Hanehalli (Sahithyaloka 212).

When we examine the stories of Chittala, it becomes glaringly evident that the characters in these stories suffer from existential isolation. According to the American psychologist, Irwin D Yalom, existential isolation cuts beneath all other isolations.

No matter how close each of us becomes another there remains a final unbridgeable gap; each of us enters existence alone and must depart from it alone. The existential conflict is thus, the tension between our awareness of our absolute isolation and our wish to be part of a larger whole. (Love's executioner and other tales of psychotherapy 9).

Existential isolation according to Yalom is the most dangerous isolation that never allows a person to mix with his or her fellow human beings and at the same time makes it unbearable for one to live by oneself. While some characters succumb to this isolation and meet with a disastrous end, the others successfully come out of it and try to lead a life which is worth imitating. The protagonists of the stories discussed though have every chance of succumbing to frustration and suffering a great deal in their life, opt to go towards the brighter side of life. The only medicine according to Yalom to come out of the existential isolation is 'love'. According to him, 'Love is the answer when there is no question'. Chittala too advocates the same medicine for all the personal as well as societal banes through his stories.

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