

From ‘Prosperity’ to ‘Property’: Study of Ravishastri’s Novel *Illu*

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Abstract: A house, considered to be one of the basic needs for everyone, is for some people, a property to be saved for the future. The author considered the house as a symbol of prosperity. In the beginning of the novel, Ravishastri quoted Mahakavi Sri Sri’s poem saying that, ‘exploiting others is more evident now than it has ever been before in the world. Great murderers are strutting about as respectable people. Keeping a little of this in mind, I have attempted to write this’. Now a days, some people think that they want to become rich in the society by grabbing others’ property and they target the weaker sections for their personal greed. The novel *Illu* depicts the deep chasm that exists between the class division. It shows, how one’s socio- economic background affects one’s ideology, behavior and lived experience in the society. The novel talks about how people perceive their houses depending upon the class they belong to, how the government officials deal with the citizens of India based on their economic background, how people based on their financial standing are differentiated even in court, which stands on the idea of equality. The focus of the paper is on Ravishastri’s views on the society and how he blatantly criticizes the government officials, judiciary and local politics, etc.

Key words: Ravishastri, *Illu*, Telugu Novel, Telugu Literature.

1. Introduction:

The two World wars changed the perspectives of the writers in Telugu land. Many of the writers left the traditional thought and moved to progressive ideology propagated by western thoughts, which talked about the common man. During this period, majority of the Telugu writers were attracted by a progressive western thought which promised an Egalitarian world to the oppressed classes. In Modern Telugu literature, progressive writings came as a literary movement with the objective of propagating Marxism. In Telugu, several poets and writers like Tapi Dharmarao, Sri Sri, Anishetti, Somasunder, Bellamkonda Ramadas, Kodavatiganti Kutumbarao etc. were influenced by Marxism and started Progressive Writers Association in 1943 in Tenali, Andhra. Consequently, some of the well known writers like Dasharathi, Vidvan Vishwam, Tilak, Ravishastri, Vegunata Mohana Prasad, Sheshendra Sharma etc. joined the progressive writers association.

Rachakonda Viswanatha Shastri, more popularly known as Ravishastri is considered as one of the pioneer writers in modern Telugu language, whose writings are highly valued by the critics. Though he was a lawyer by profession, he knew the problems faced by the marginalized.

He had seen their lives, problems, struggles closely and portrayed the same in his writings. He penned several novels and short stories in Telugu. Among them, *Illu* is one of the most widely appreciated novel. *Illu* was translated into English in the name of *Illu* (The House) by Alladi Uma and Sridhar.

“The society accepted ethics are outdated and irrelevant today... our society became lazy and accepting old day’s ideas of Moksha. Finally what have we achieved? Love? Money? Fame? Nothing... finally he is alone!”
Chivaraku Migiledi (Sudarshanam, R.S. Sahitya Nepathyam. P.137)

These lines may apply to Ravishastri as well. He criticizes the outdated ideas and irrelevant concepts of old philosophers.

“In this

(God’s) creation

There is no justice, no Dharma, No Satyam, No Shivam at all’

Till now, to some extent-

One and only one among the crore of men craves to bring together all living beings, achieve equality, safeguard justice, and establish dharma, even if he is one in a crore, only such man is a true human being!” (*Illu*. 156)

Before discussing the paper, a brief outline of the novel is required. The novel begins with a conversation between Somayajulu (a corporator) and Chittemma (a widow and house owner). The novel's theme is written, based on the house of Chittemma. Chittemma has a fifteen hundred yards house with four bedrooms. It was just a tiled house. However the price of the house has increased because the town was going to become a megacity soon. Somayajulu, a corporator is trying to bag the house from Chittemma as early as possible. Another person, Gopika Manoharam also wants to purchase Chittemma's house so that he could build a commercial complex. Another character, DCP Chittibabu, a police officer, wants to become a partner in the property by displaying his power and authority. Finally, Chittemma house was purchased by So.Ma.Na. Enterprises that planned to construct a commercial complex in that place for which the chief minister was coming to lay the foundation stone. Somayajulu, Manoharam and Chittibabu's son in law Nanarao were the partners in the So.Ma.Na enterprises.

2. Ravishastri's views on the Brahmin community :

Though Ravishastri was a Brahmin himself, he does not hold any favourable opinion about a particular category of Brahmins. He criticizes them in the novel *Illu*. Anantam is a Telangana Brahmin. "Till then Anantam had been scared only of the Aruvella Niyogi Brahmins. After knowing Somayajulu for a while, he has begun to have both fear and hatred towards Velanati Brahmins too" (*Illu*. 9)

Anantam's father has been saying from the beginning: "Velanati rascals are also as dangerous as Niyogis. They're called Velanati Niyogis. These rascals are called Velanati Vaidikis. All the mud is from the same hole. Is it necessary to teach the fish to swim? So too, it's not necessary to teach the valanati fellow to be a Niyogi. It'll come to him effortlessly." (Ibid. 13)

Elders say that when you see a wretched Velaniti fellow, a wretched Niyogi fellow and cobra, first kill the Velanati fellow and Niyogi fellow and only then kill the snake" (Ibid. 20)

Ravishastri did not believe in caste system himself and was an atheist. Since he belonged to the same caste, he might have seen and experienced some brahminical tyranny himself, from close quarters. However, generalizing the entire caste may not be correct.

3. Ravishastri's views on politicians :

Post independence, India got political freedom and though constitutionally, it has given equal rights to its citizens, opportunists, like some political leaders misuse the constitutional right given to the common citizens, and deprive the citizens of all the privileges that the citizens are supposed to enjoy under the banner of being a welfare state. Political leaders are misusing their power and trying to exploit the downtrodden people with the help of a government officials and loopholes in the law. They do not think about the common citizens and their problems. The same is discussed in the novel *Illu*. In *Illu*, Somayajulu had planned to grab Chittemma's house with his vile ideas. He entered Chittemma's house with the intention of grabbing the property and to subdue Chittemma. He misguided Chittemma to increase the house rent of one portion and to file a case in the court to vacate tenant, Anantam's family. He had given two thousand rupees to Chittemma for court expenses and took her signature on a promissory note for two thousand rupees which he later changed to twenty thousand rupees. When he came to know that Chittemma is selling her house to another person he approached a lawyer to send legal notice to Chittemma saying that she took the advance amount for the house from Somayajulu and she has to sell her house to him only. When he did not succeed in getting Chittemma's house, he informed the police that Chittemma's nephew was involved with the Naxalites. Because of Somayajulu's attitude, Chittemma, her nephew and Anantam's family lost their peace of mind and Chittemma fought with Anantam's family over their removal.

Ravishastri has tried to show the real face of politicians in *Illu*. Politicians don't have human emotions and do not think about the welfare of the poor.

4. Ravishastri's views on lawyers :

Even after the promise made by the constitution regarding equality and justice to all before Law, it is a common parlance, even in contemporary times to question the moral standings of lawyers, agents of law. Ravishastri seems to have similar notion about the lawyers and the courts. He believed that lawyers and courts favoured the rich and exploited the poor. Being a lawyer, Ravishastri had seen several cases in the courts. He understood that the poor people who are involved in inconsequential crimes for their livelihood were arrested and made scapegoat and sent to jail. But, rich people, often involved in bigger crimes get saved because of their money and their social standing. They escape from the law because of their connections. Lawyers also support the rich people and they are ready to manipulate any case with their legal knowledge. They are ready to work for money and are not bothered about ethics or truth. In the novel, *Illu*, lawyer Reddygaru also looks for money. In this novel, lawyer Reddygaru never directly asks for money, his assistant Suribabu takes care of everything. When Anatam receives court order to vacate the Chittemma's house, he

immediately goes to Reddygaru (Lawyer). He suggests to Anantam that they will file a petition for stay order. His assistant Suribabu says that court stay can't be received through words, as it requires money. "If you tell tale that rice is in the corner room, cooked rice won't appear on your leaf-plate. You must go into the corner room. Open the sack. Take out the rice. Put it in a vessel and wash it. Put it on boil on the stove. It must boil. Must cook. Then alone can you eat the cooked rice. Out-of turn petition, stay petition, warrant recall petition, ex-parte order, set-aside petition, delay condo nation petition, wretched petition, or appropriation petition – when will I write so many such petitions? If you don't take out the money immediately, nothing can happen," says Don't care master." (*Illu.* 55) The above lines show that the lawyers are after the money. They never bother about the problems of the client. Whether the client is poor or rich, the issue is small or big, they never mind.

5. Ravishastri's views on government servants :

Ravishastri had written several works. In majority of his writings, he portrayed the government servants in a negative light. He did not have favourable opinions regarding the bureaucrats. In his opinion, they are corrupted people; they never think about the welfare of the poor people. They always support the political leaders and work for money and power. The same is depicted in the novel *Illu*.

In *Illu*, Anantam (a tenant) is a clerk in the government hospital. "It is not that he does not take bribes. But he is satisfied with little. The pharmaceutical companies give bribes to someone. Anantam gets a small share from that. That is enough for him" (*Illu.* 10)

Another character in the novel is Chitikel Achittbabu, a D.S.P. The narrator describes him in the words, "When you see him for first time he seems very poised. Who can have a murder committed. He can be majestic like a mountain. He can act as if he is as dainty as a flower. He can roar like a lion. He can have a poisonous smile. He can hiss like a snake. When necessary he can speak like moonlight, he can have honey ooze out of his words." He is going to retire in a year and a half. As for his minimum desire in the meanwhile, it is to retire at least as additional SP-Additional Superintendent of Police.

This person also desires Chittemma's house. Finally Chittemma's house is bought by a group, which is a conglomeration of all the facets who take advantage of their power and position.

6. Ravishastri's views on doctors :

Like Ravishastri discusses about lawyers and bureaucrats, he also discusses about the doctors. In the novel *Illu*, A.S. Suvrna Sundari is a cancer specialist. Her aim is to collect as much as fee from the patients as possible. "Even if there is no cancer, Dr.A.S. Sundari would tell women that there is cancer in your uterus. She would remove and throw away the uterus (child bag) with her left hand effortlessly."

Furthermore, the narrator observes, "The doctors there – of course – are the best doctors. They are clever doctors, not just for one organ but for everything- for ears, nose, mouth, teeth, eyes, skin, flesh, veins, bones, hearts, lungs, intestines, abdomens, uteruses.

But-
The Ayahs, ward boys, sweepers and nurses will hound you like foxes, finally, they'll tear your money purse to shreds like a leaf-plate torn asunder by dogs. Not to mention the doctors. They will gorge you up like elephants do" (*Illu.* 80-81)

The above mentioned words show Ravishastri's opinion about doctors. There is no need to discuss much about the doctors.

7. Ravishastri's views on change in the society :

"If you can, be happy! If you follow that walkway you'll come to a small village. There, they will show you the bus route. This way, lies our path. You can choose which ever path will give you happiness! Even if you face hardship now, if you want everyone to be happy, then follow our path!" (*Illu.* 155) Udayabhasakram asked his brother Arunaprakasham. Ravishastri seems to suggest that it is through revolution, that an Egalitarian society can be truly established.

8. Conclusion:

Ravishastri is concerned with the socio-political set up of the country which has gradually created and broadened the chasm between the haves and the have-nots. In the contemporary times, our society is grappled with corrupted lawyers, doctors and government servants, who, far from serving the society at any level, have become money extracting machines, and are tirelessly degrading the marginalized sections of our society, based on gender and economic standing..

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