

A Comparative Study of Henrik Ibsen's *The Pillars of Society* and Cho. S. Ramasamy's *Sambhavaami Yuge Yuge*

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Abstract

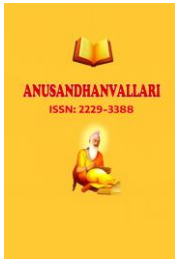
Comparative literature is a unique branch of literature where literature across countries can be compared and also the relationship between literature and other areas of arts and belief can be studied. It proves a good tool to move beyond boundaries and promote universality. In this paper, a comparative study of Henrik Ibsen's *The Pillars of Society* and Cho. S. Ramasamy's *Sambhavaami Yuge Yuge* is done to bring to limelight their similar kind of treatment of social evils in the plays. Their detestation of corruption is exposed in their works. So, this comparative study will highlight the similarities in the social consciousness of the two authors and their satirical manner of dealing with social evils.

Keywords: Comparative literature, Henrik Ibsen, Cho. S. Ramasamy, *The Pillars of Society*, *Sambhavaami Yuge Yuge*.

Comparative literature, the tool to transcend borders and boundaries has emerged as a vital branch of literature and gained impulse and momentum worldwide. An inter-disciplinary field of literature, it not only involves the comparison of literary works, but also includes comparison of literature on one hand and other areas such as history, philosophy, religion, psychology and social science. It's a fascinating branch of literature and new aspects such as thematic studies, genre analysis, translation studies, analysis of relationship between literature and other fields, thematology, influence, adaptation, translation have recently evolved. Through these kinds of comparative studies, one can cross borders and boundaries by comparing literature of two or more countries and can free themselves off from narrow mindedness and promote universality. Susan Bassnett gave a comprehensive definition of comparative literature as, "Comparative literature involves the study of texts across cultures, languages and historical periods, focusing on relationships, influences and interactions between literatures." (12)

For our multilingual country, comparative literature has enough scope because of the rich and varied forms of literature in our country, which forms a good basis for comparative literature and hence serves to foster unity in diversity also. Through comparative literature, one can transcend borders and boundaries by comparing literature of different countries. So comparative literature promotes universality more than any other field. In this paper, a comparative study of Henrik Ibsen's *The Pillars of Society* and Cho. S. Ramasamy's *Sambhavaami Yuge Yuge* is undertaken to reveal their similar kind of awareness towards the social evils in the society. They both can be linked together by their satirical treatment of social issues.

Henrik Ibsen, the Father of Modern Drama was a pivotal figure in dealing with social evils in his plays. The Norwegian dramatist brought drama to its earlier glory by his witty plays. Problem plays earned him an everlasting place in literature. They dealt with the burning problems of the day and hitherto untouched areas like



gender issues, position of women in the society, morality, corruption etc. He probed into the hypocrisy of the society and exposed them courageously in his plays. This undaunted handling of unconventional & subjects in the plays made him overcome the test of time. Cho. S. Ramasamy, the legendary satirist was well known for his intelligent and witty plays. His sarcasm, satire, wit and spirited dialogues remain unbeaten. He was a satirist, humourist, actor, a lawyer, a writer, journalist etc. His plays were adapted for TV series and films too. In his journal 'Tughlaq', he published political satires attacking each and every wrong thing in the nook and corner of the society. His plays faced severe criticism and several censorship due to his exposure of hypocrisy of the society and corruption in politics. He whiplashed the dominant social issues in his plays, which amazed the readers. His satirical skill remains afresh and anew.

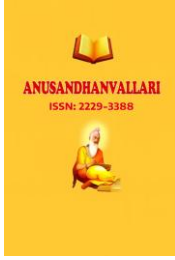
The play, *The Pillars of Society* was published in 1877. It is a satire on the hypocrisy of society. It's a revelation of how some men in reputable positions who seemed to be genuine and kind hearted were actually cheat, and hypocrites and earned money through evil ways. *Sambhavaami Yuge Yuge* is a mock play, which is a hard hitting attack against corruption in the society. Using mythology, he emphasized how corruption is deep rooted in the society that even God could not remove it and he himself became a victim of it.

The Pillars of Society has the protagonist Kastern Bernick, a rich business entrepreneur. He was given such a respect and reputation that he was considered a pillar of society. He was praised for his contribution towards the development of the town. But, he had many secret dealings in his past. Meanwhile Johan Tonnessan, an associate entered the town with his niece Dina. She was the daughter of Bernick through his illegal affair. Johan blackmailed Bernick that he would reveal the secrets in his personal life and also the unfair dealings and scandals he committed in business. Bernick's wife Betty came to know all these things and to her shock she found out that her own sister was having affair with her husband. Bernick's company built a ship called Indian Girl and launched it. As usual, they constructed it using cheap and poor quality materials and were not bothered about the risk it poses to the persons traveling in it. But Bernick's son Olaf planned to travel on the ship and Bernick was shocked. He convened a meeting and confessed all the truth to the public.

The next play, *Sambhavami Yuge Yuge* was staged in the early 1960s. The title refers to the myth of divine incarnation of God in every age to establish goodness and tranquillity. Rajarathinam was a wealthy man, who succeeded in business through corruption. His adopted son was Krishnan. Actually, Krishnan was Lord Vishnu born as a man to eliminate corruption. Peethamparam, the assistant of Rajarathinam led Rajarathinam in a wrong way. Rajarathinam wanted to join his son in a reputed college by giving them bribe as donation, but Krishnan opposed it. It ended up in a clash between Krishnan and Peethamparam. Someone shot Peethamparam in the darkness and unfortunately Krishnan was considered as the murderer. To get him out the case, he was declared lunatic. Krishnan got fed up with the society and proclaimed that even he could not remove corruption from the society.

Both the plays emphasize that corruption and hypocrisy are deep rooted in the society. The characters suffer due to their necessity to maintain their status quo and societal expectations. Also, these plays are instances of how power left unchecked could corrupt a person.

The protagonist of the society, Kastern Bernick turned wealthy due to illegal and unfair dealings. Many people flattered him as he was wealthy and also they expected that they could get benefits by praising him. He was hailed as one of the pillars of society. This kind of hypocritical behaviour of the society encouraged him to involve in shady dealings and earn profit without having any thought about the lives of innocent people. Similarly, Rajarathinam of *Sambhavami Yuge Yuge* was a rich but corrupt person. People around him encouraged him to become more and more corrupt. This gave him courage to get admission for his son by giving corruption as donation. The social setup encouraged him to buy admission, like a commodity. In both the plays, the depraved state of the society, which favours corruption and allows corrupt persons to flourish is exposed.



Also, these characters are instances of how power could corrupt a person. Bernick as well as Rajarathinam were in powerful position. They had none to check or question them. They weren't accountable to anyone. This kind of unchecked freedom paved way for lack of character and morality. Bernick had illegal affairs and unfair dealings. He was not afraid and kept on his affairs ruthlessly. Similarly, Rajarathinam became rich by corrupt dealings. He continued to achieve things through corruption. He wanted to get admission in a college for his son by giving a large sum of money as donation. These characters serve to show how power and unlimited freedom could lead persons in evil ways.

Their lives show how corruption will ultimately lead to despair. Bernick was forced to reveal the truth before the people, as his son decided to travel in the ship, which he built using cheap quality materials. Likewise, Rajarathinam spent a huge amount to make doctors declare Krishnan as insane to get him out of the murder case. Thus, the detrimental effect of corruption is portrayed true to reality in the plays.

Henceforth, Henrik Ibsen as well as Cho S. Ramasamy vividly portrayed the debased state of society and how corruption had laid its roots deeply. Also, the hypocrite society and the evils of corruption are exposed. This comparative study has revealed their similar kind of social anger towards injustices and social evils, though they belonged to different countries. Similar kind of comparative studies will bring out such similitudes and will undo borders and boundaries.

References

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