

"The Fish Seller – A Unique Narrative"

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Among the prominent writers influenced by the Bandaya (rebellion) literary movement, **Bolwar Mahammad Kunhi** stands out. His works not only reflect the sensibilities of the Muslim world but also champion universal human values. His narrative style is distinctive, and he holds a special place in Kannada Dalit and Bandaya literary circles.

Bolwar is primarily a short story writer, though he also penned the novel *Jihad*. His notable story collections include *Atta Ittaragalu Sutta*, *Devarugalu Rajyadalli*, *Anka*, *Aakashakke Neeli Parade*, *Ondu Tundu Gode*. He has also written a representative collection of children's songs titled *Thattu Chappale Putta Magu*. His edited works include *Santamma* and *Shatamanada Kathegalu*. His stories have been translated into Malayalam and published as *Rukhiya* and *Pathari Pathamma*. Born in 1951 in Bolwar, Puttur, he worked as an officer in Syndicate Bank.

In the 1970s, along with Dalit and Bandaya sensibilities, a unique Muslim consciousness began emerging in Kannada literature. Bolwar's writings beautifully depict the cultural decline, blind faith, and innocence prevalent in Muslim society. While portraying the struggles of those living in adherence to Islam, he ultimately unveils the truth that it is the **human being** who is important, not the **religion** one follows. He has received several awards, including the prestigious Karnataka Sahitya Academy Honorary Award.

The Fish Seller – A Model of Artistic Harmony

"*Meenu Maruvavanu*" (The Fish Seller) is an excellent story to explore Bolwar's literary techniques and philosophical perspectives. It emphasizes Hindu-Muslim unity and social harmony, delivering a powerful social message. This story validates the claim that his stories offer lessons in social ethics.

This story artistically expresses communal harmony and the values of shared living. It shows how people from different faiths and castes can live together with mutual respect and connection. From the very beginning, this is evident when the Muslim fish seller **Razak** visits **Subraya Joyce**, a Hindu astrologer, for a reading. The story suggests that **human connection** is more important than astrology or religious rituals—and that this bond is built on mutual trust.

When Joyce accurately reveals Razak's name and details by casting cowrie shells, Razak is amazed. Joyce jokingly attributes it to information from **Adram Bairy**, prompting laughter from both men. The author states directly: "They exchanged love and respect for each other."

Joyce's wife calls Razak "the fish clock," as he's so punctual with his fish-selling rounds that she's recognized him solely by the sound of his cycle horn every afternoon. Razak becomes known as "Radio Time Razak." Joyce and his wife both admire his sense of time and discipline.

Faith in Work: Spirituality Beyond Ritual

During a festival lecture at the **Sahasralingeshwara temple**, Joyce delivers a powerful message:

“True devotion needs only sincerity, not elaborate rituals. Whatever work you do, if you believe it's a divine offering and approach it with reverence, you will be rewarded. Take our fish seller Razak – his dedication is no different from spiritual austerity (tapasya).”

This comment becomes the talk of the village. The story portrays how rural communities accept all religions based on faith and sincerity. But even amidst such harmony, **religious narrow-mindedness** lingers.

Subtle Resistance to Narrow-Mindedness

Not everyone is pleased. **Narayan Prabhu**, another local, is uncomfortable with Razak being used as an example in a Hindu sermon—even though he has no doubts about Razak's sincerity. While Joyce's speech had nothing wrong in it, using a Muslim fish seller as a spiritual model felt inappropriate to Prabhu. This reveals lingering narrow-mindedness, despite surface-level harmony.

However, Prabhu is not portrayed as a villain. He is a deeply human character. When he hears that Joyce has stopped practicing astrology, he becomes disturbed, feeling it may be his fault. Ultimately, he joins Mukund Bhat and Adram Bairy to visit Joyce, showing his moral concern.

Crossing Religious Boundaries with Love

There is gentle humor and affection in Joyce's conversation with his wife:

Joyce: “Tell me—have any of your sons ever looked as clean as this one?”

Wife: “Still, that fishy smell is better than the cologne he's wearing.”

Joyce: “Don't worry. No man she meets will match her standards. She treats all men like her children.”

This dialogue, though laced with sarcasm, reveals admiration for Razak—a deep affection from someone of another religion.

Likewise, the bond between Razak's mother and Joyce's wife also reflects this intimacy across religious lines.

Faith in Human Connection Over Rituals

A key element is Razak's faith in Joyce—not in astrology itself, but in **Joyce the man**. Despite having no belief in astrology, Razak visits Joyce out of personal trust. This shows that **human connection** trumps religious belief.

Joyce too values Razak. When Razak visits, Joyce says:

“You don't need to know the future—you're already making your decisions and living them. If I tell you the cowrie shells predict a loss from buying a car, will you cancel it? No, because you trust yourself.”

This shows Joyce believes in Razak's success, even beyond his own astrology.

The Crisis: When Belief Shatters

But when Razak meets with a **car accident**, Joyce is shaken. He begins to doubt his own astrology. Could he have prevented the tragedy if he had warned Razak? What is the use of a belief system that doesn't help someone in need?

This moment exposes Joyce's human side—a profound sense of responsibility, not limited by religion. He mourns not just for Razak's fate but for **his own inability** to prevent it. This introspection highlights the story's central theme: **Only human empathy can surpass all barriers.**

Communal Harmony in a Divided World

This story doesn't rage against injustice with aggression like other Bandaya works—it **preaches love over anger**. It beautifully portrays a **long-standing culture of Hindu-Muslim unity**. It shows how people of different faiths can live like one family, sharing joys and sorrows together.

In a world growing more divided by religion and caste, this story gently but powerfully affirms that **being human is more important than being religious.**

Joyce, Mukund Bhat, Narayan Prabhu, Razak, and Adram Bairy—though from different faiths—live with mutual understanding and affection. When Razak suffers, Joyce is heartbroken. That's no surprise. **When we care beyond religion**, such pain is inevitable—and beautiful.

Conclusion:

In *Meenu Maruvavanu*, Bolwar Mahammad Kunhi crafts not just a story but a **lesson in empathy and coexistence**. Through humor, tenderness, and profound reflections, he shows that human values can triumph over dogma. This story has the power to educate, heal, and unite—making it a timeless testament to literary and human greatness.