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NATION AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES IN U.R. ANANTHA MURTHY'S *SAMSKARA*
AND *BHARATHIPURA*

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ABSTRACT

Anantha Murthy's novels *Samskara* and *Bharathipura* deal with reactions of individuals to situations that are unusual and artificial. His novels deal with psychological aspects of certain characters in different situations, times and places. He shows changes and challenges that the Indian Hindu families face in Karnataka in the changing social and economic circumstances. Sometimes the impact of Mahatma Gandhi and Indian socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia is clearly seen in his novels. He is also influenced with the idea of individuality of the self and 'existentialism' of Jean Paul Sartre. He has critical insight for Indian caste system and Indian Philosophy. The modern urban world is as bad as the feudal order, and the politics of modern democracy is as manipulative as the atrocities of feudal societies. It is for this reason that the novels of U.R. Anantha Murthy remain ambivalent and open ended when they juxtapose tradition and modernity, the urban and the feudal caste order. In India these elements merge, fuse, diverge and sometimes contradict with one another. In present paper I have tried to show nation and historical perspectives and socio-religious conflicts which the protagonists like Praneshacharya and Jagannatha Rao face.

Key Words- existentialism, atrocities, ambivalent, tradition and modernity, socio-religious conflicts.

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Anantha Murthy's *Samskara* is a religious novel. The novel exposes the conservative life style of the Kannada Brahmins. It attacks the traditional and orthodox principles of the Hindu religion. Sex is an integral part in various Hindu puranas and all the Brahmines of Durvasapura agrahara lead a dull and sterile as well as passive life by suppressing their sexual desire. During his preachings Praneshacharya glorifies the amorous sexual charms of legendary Shakuntala and admires Kalidasa for creating such a wonderful and captivating paragon of beauty. Like other orthodox Brahmins of the Agrahara Praneshacharya lacks to admire real beauty in flesh and blood. Praneshacharya is a contrast to the characters like Naranappa and shripati who admire the beauty of low caste women as Chandri and Belli. After his sexual experience with Chandri, Praneshacharya compares the beauty of his ugly wife Bhagirathi to that of Chandri. In *Samskara* Anantha Murthy writes:

For the first time his eyes were beginning to see the beautiful and the ugly. He had not so far desired any of the beauty he'd read about in the classics. All earthly fragrance was like the flowers that go only to adorn the god's hair. All female beauty was the beauty of Goddess Lakshmi, queen and servant of Lord Vishnu. All sexual enjoyment was Krishna's when he stole the bathing cowgirls' garments, and left them naked in the water. Now he wanted for himself a share of all that. He wiped the water off his wife's body, laid her on the bed he'd made, and came out again. The din of conch and gong abruptly stopped; his ears seemed to draw in a sudden depth of silent water. 'Why did I come here? Did I come looking for Chandri? But Chandri isn't here'. This bedridden woman, and that other woman who suddenly pressed his hand to her breast- what if both should leave him? For the first time, a desolation, a feeling of being orphaned, entered his in most sense. (77)

Bhagirathi is the invalid wife of Praneshacharya who is the 'crest jewel of Agrahara' Brahmins. Bhagirathi feels that she is a burden to her husband and often advises Praneshacharya to marry a healthy and fruitful woman. As a scholar of Vedanta, Praneshacharya thinks that marrying her, he is making a sacrifice for attaining salvation. In mythology, Bhagirathi is the river goddess Ganga, a symbol of fertility and wild energy. But Acharya's wife Bhagirathi is sterile and invalid. In *Samskara* Praneshacharya recalls his past experience such as:

Did the clutch this duty, this dharma, to protect this wife lying here lifeless, a pathetic beggar woman or did the dharma, clinging to him through the hand in hand through these ways? He did not know. When he married her he was sixteen, she twelve. He had thought he should renounce the world, become a *Sanyasi*, live a life of self-sacrifice. That was the ideal, the challenge, of his boyhood days. So he had married a born invalid deliberately. (75)

The major preoccupations of modern literature such as despair, alienation, loss of identity are the main characteristics of *Navya* or modernist movement. Although Anantha Murthy's writings are influenced with existentialism, realism or symbolism but he has a great insight in the socio-cultural and political realities of post-Independence India. The dualities and contradictions in the lives of individuals and communities are chief concerns of his writings. As a *navya* writer Anantha Murthy turns to the paradoxes of social life and the various dichotomies which is constructed into the lives of individuals. The *navya* movement also catches the transitoriness of societal life that experiences various kinds of upheavals. In *Caste In Indian Politics* (2010), Rajni Kothari writes:

It is a tribute to the subtle dynamics of Hindu society that in spite of this psychological cost, the adjustments of *Sanskritisation* go on all the time; and one of the many reasons is that the structural distance that is sought to be jumped can often be related to the achievement of other indices of power and position in the modernist segments of society as perceived both by the striving groups as well as the transition to a consensus of the new status of the striving group. Important in this respect is the crucial role that the distribution of secular power has always played in status ranking in Hindu society; and the consequent capacity of the system to keep adjusting to its changing hierarchical balance.(13)

The novel *Samskara* deals with many issues of religion and untouchability and other social perspectives of post-Independence India. The confrontations among the three main Brahmanical sects of Karnataka namely the *Smarta*, the *madhva* and the Sri vaishnava are well presented by the novelist. In the novel praneshacharya is a scholar of vedanta philosophy and a "Crest-jewel of Vedic learning" among the Mahdva Brahmins. He faces many conflicts with other two Brahmanic sects. Praneshacharya becomes a blind mouthed man on the question of the cremation of an unholy Brahmin of his own Agrahara named Naranappa. The question of cremation (or Samskara, Dahan Samskara) of a unholy Brahmin becomes the samskara or rite of Praneshacharya who is metamorphosed from a idealist Acharya into a rational and pragmatic one through the various stages which reveal hypocrisy and the orthodox brahminism. On the sad occasion one of the characters of the novel old Lakshmidamma curses the agrahara Brahmins calling them villain such as :

'You villain! A golden man like Naranappa became an outcaste, got himself a harlot. You fellows call yourself Brahmins, you sit there and don't want to take out a dead man's body. Where has your

brahminism gone, you rascals! Don't you know you'll fall into the lowest hell reserved for outcastes and perish there? In this agrahara, in all my born days, have I seen a body kept uncremated all night? Not once. Rama, Rama, the times are Rotten. Brahminism is in ruins. Why don't you shave your heads and become Muslims, why do you need to be Brahmins, you ! (43)

In the novel *Samskara* like other female Brahmin character old lady Lakshmiddevamma's voice and warnings have no meaning for the Brahmins of the Durvasapura. The normal Brahmin like Praneshacharya faces many complex qualities when he falls in the web of religious and social responsibilities. Through this character Anantha Murthy presents the complex qualities of tradition and that of modernity. Praneshacharya experience various stages in his life as the house holder life, the life of a sanyasi and that the life of a forest-dweller and wanderer in the company of Putta. From the perspectives of tradition, praneshacharya is none of the above, however, much he conceives himself in traditional terms, and he is this very much a 'lost soul' caught by the illusion of qualities. In his encounter with the issues of religions qualities and the issue of untouchability praneshacharya faces the tragic situations which leave him as a confused man. He fails in both as a traditional priest and a modernist. He allows his personality to unfold, by playing despot to his own tradition or even his own modernity. He experiences that vedic reciprocity degenerates into hierarchy, androgyny into patriarchy, humanity into opportunism. He faces all these situations and qualities by betrayals of equality and inclusion. Praneshacharya tries to maintain traditional brahminical purity while still managing the proper burial of a reprobate, and then escalates into how he can transform his sterile erudition into living faith. The Acharya's crisis is how to achieve an authentic self despite the entanglements of his thoroughly defined and relatively privileged position as a respected and holy Brahmin priest. He faces the conflict between the living implications of a cultural past and the modernist or present perceptions and several instincts of his contemporary time. Anantha Murthy creates the individuals like Acharya as an 'individual-self' defining himself through his professional and personal achievements rather than through his actualization of his self – consciousness or scriptural precepts.

In the novel *Bharathipura* Anantha Murthy deals with the issues of dalit emancipation, issue of temple entry for dalits with the issues of untouchability, socialism in post-independence India. The term Brahmanism is related with that socio-religious order which accepts the supremacy of Brahmins who officiate at sacrifices and receive payments for their services. The sacrificial aspect associated with this order may be traced to vedic times, while the theistic concept of faith in a single god is a later religious addition. In Indian history, the Gupta period is notable for the setting up of brahmanical temples with the images of deities installed in them. From that time, the religious impulse swings forward from that time, the religious impulse swings forward from the abstract to the concrete, with the ceremonial worship of images replacing sacrificial offerings to hosts of unseen vedic gods of vogue personality. The authority of the Vedas was in no way questioned. As a revelation of God, the eternal and infallible of religion, Vedic texts were studied with care and attention, and Vedic sacrifices did not cease to form part of the orthodox Brahmanical religion. In later vedic era the Hindu society and Hindu religion faced stagnation due to its origin and practices of *Varna* system and caste system. In *Critical Essays on Dalit Literature (2013)*, D. Murali Manohar observes:

The social order, maintained through the varna system, must be preserved in order for the Brahmins to consolidate their power. Marriage between castes would create chaos in determining the caste of a child born to parents of different castes, therefore there must be some sort of system for punishing those who break the system so vital to the Brahmins' control. This is where untouchability comes in, by making sure that the upper castes do not pro-create with members of other castes. The system for determining out caste of "alien" status is highly complex, leading to many classes of outcastes as well as those who are ill considered twice-born yet lower than those of a pure inter – caste union.(67)

It is very difficult to understand the notions and point of views of those people who believe in practice of untouchability. In the novel *Bharathipura*, the protagonist Jagannatha Rao, a brahmin landlord and the trustee of the temple of Manju Natha (Lord Shiva) well understands what is stagnant and what is dynamic in the contemporary. Indian religious system. Anantha Murthy exposes the orthodoxy of the Brahmins of Bharathipura of Karanataka. He shows that all is not well and set right due to implementation on of Indian

constitution after long period of colonial rule over India. The ex-untouchables like Holeyas still face subjugation socially and religiously after Indian constitution has vanished and eradicated untouchability by law. The novel exposes how the practice of untouchability continues after the decades of Indian Independence. The Holeyaru or Holeyas face this inhuman situation and they become the victim of their reiterative performativity of the practice of the other caste Hindus. Jagannath Rao vehemently criticizes the practice of untouchability and thinks the caste Hindus as barbaric who still practice untouchability. He is fully convinced that untouchability will be eradicated only when dalits can walk in and out of the famous temples such as of Manjunatha with ease. When this happens, it will also be possible to drink water from the same well and to dine together. As a radical individual, educated in England Jagannatha tries hard to break all the barriers of religious and social norms for his ideal of socialism. He struggles for dalit emancipation by given the dalits proper clothes and educating them in his own house. He has a firm nation for equality and equal respect to all human beings. In *Bharathipura*, Anantha Murthy writes:

The Holeyaru came in the late afternoon. I keep forgetting the names of these. Who's Pilla? Who's Kariya? Who's Mada? On the sand he wrote the letter that made the *Cha*, *ja*, and *ta* again. These men can chop wood deftly with ease and yet, look at the way they perspire writing the letters as they sit of a spread of sand and bend over to write on it! As they pronounced each letter and went over it with their forefingers, their rippling muscles controlled with tension; the nerves on the back of their necks stuck out. After a while, their legs would go to sleep and, after the lesson was over, they would clump away as if they had sand-bags tied to their legs. Jagannatha felt terribly dispirited sometimes when he saw the fear in their eyes as they traced the letters. And when his farmhands stood around at a respectable distance, curious to see what he was doing, he was greatly embarrassed. He felt as if he were performing some esoteric ritual of magic and sorcery.(77)

Anantha Murthy presents a realistic world in the novel *Bharathipura*. The novels also deals various hierarchies of caste and tradition among the Brahmins, Vokkaligos and Lingayats of Kannada society. *Bharathipura* creates a modern world and changing socio-economical systems of village life. The development and tradition should not be critiqued with the same intensity. Anantha Murthy shows contradictory realities of post-Nehruvian India with the deep rooted traditions of religion and caste hierarchies which are *shashwatha*, the eternal. The creative thinker or writer has a duty to deal with the social questions even when he or she is preoccupied with eternal questions. In an interview with N. Manu Chakravarthy (published in *Bharathipura* 2010), Anantha Murthy says such as :

The realistic world which I bring in, with which I am so intensely, seriously engaged, tends to make *Bharathipura* look dated. But the other thing that you have been saying the work contains may still make it relevant. I didn't plan intensely for it to be relevant in future also. It just happened and I have no regrets. But the work has lived because it has a symbolic frame. (*Bharathipura* 265)

In the novel *Bharathipura* deals with rapidly changing village life of Kannada society during 1970s. In that decade after independence, India was moving towards modernity but the religious and societal forces were posing a barrier in the ways of modernity. Jagannatha a wealth landlord returns home after getting higher education in England. He confronts with realities on multiple issues such as orthodox practices of religion. In *Caste in Contemporary India*(2015), Surinder S. Jodhka writes:

The experience of caste and its manifestations in everyday life are significantly different today when compared to what they used to be three or four decades back. However, even though it has under gone significant changes, the institution of caste is not dying of fading away. Perhaps the most important aspect of caste today is its role in the reproduction of economic inequalities and social exclusions. This waning ideas of hierarchy with persisting material and symbolic inequalities has heightened the level of friction in social relations among different caste groups.(48)

In *Bharathipura*, Anantha Murthy exposes the relations between the religious institutions and politics of post-Independence India. He shows how backward leader and MLA Guruppa Gawda uses the religion and caste for his success. Generally, voting behaviour is in India affected by the following factors:

1.Religion

- 2.Caste
- 3.Community consciousness
- 4.Language
- 5.Monetary considerations and expenditure on complaining.
- 6.Ideology
- 7.Poll objectives
8. The area to which the electorate extends.

Although Jagannatha fails to manage the temple entry for the dalits in the temple of Manjunatha but it has unavoidable impact on society. The newspaper reporter named as PRT writes, " If Jagannatha Rao was a true revolutionary, he should have boycotted the temple. There is no meaning in an atheist saying that the Holeyaru to need the temple.(224)" And again in the novel the news reporter from Bangalore writes in newspaper such as:

The district commissioner at Shimoga is himself a Harijan. He said to me, ' Our society has to be transformed through the non-violence Gandhiji believed in. Under the leadership of the president, the country is already treading the road to social progress peacefully. I believe the doors of the Manjunatha temple will be opened to the Harijans one day or the other. (*Bharthipura* 224)

Since the ancient days India has been pre dominantly a country by multiple religious communities preaching and practicing different religions. But the dalits faced various religious and social atrocities and castration due to imposed nation of pollution on them by the caste Hindus. In rural and semi-urban areas in India caste system has very sharp teeth. Because of changes brought by Indian constitution, western education, modernity and better economic consciousness and living standard of people in the age of liberalization, privatization and globalization (the era of LPG), impact of caste system is declining yet it is still a fact. Caste even now plays a significant role in social and political life. In *Culture Change In India (2000)*, Yogendra Singh observes:

But, in these five decades, many significant changes have taken place in social structure of the Indian society. The application of modern technology in agriculture has contributed to the rise of a rich middle class peasantry. The reservation policy in education and governmental jobs in favour of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, has triggered social mobility among them and a vocal leadership has emerged. Dalit movement, a product of the new agenda of cultural renaissance among the traditionally exploited lower castes, also challenged many tenets of traditional Brahmanical culture. It openly denigrated the principles of Hindu *dharmashastras* (religious scriptures.) (116)

In the novel *Bharathipura*, the protagonist who is trained in western technological civilization, wants to break several religious and social myths of the gods as well as those Brahmins that has kept the dalits in subjugated and marginalized condition for thousands of years. He manages to create various types of awareness in such people who are afraid of and refuse to break free from the terror of old religious and social hierarchical bonds. For a long time as imposed subjugation the dalits began to believe that untouchability was their lot. Gradually they became deprived of land and religion. As a radical thinker Anantha Murthy truly propagates that his works area, "journey from the profane to the sacred... from the quotidian to the abstract."

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