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Demystifying Socio-Cultural Space in U.R. Anantha Murthy's *Samskara* and *Bharathipura*

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Abstract:

In *Samskara*, A Rite of Dead Man, the author represents the clash between tradition and modernity by two female characters– Bhagirathi and Chandri. The aim of this paper is to highlight rigid social norms and customs of India's complex socio-religious society. The women face many kinds of atrocities and subjugation in social setting. Praneshacharya, the protagonist, faces dualism in his life. Pleasures of soul without realizing the pleasures of flesh offer a lack in his life. He deliberately represses his sexual desires with his wife Bhagirathi but he realizes his own hypocrisy after his relation with the woman, named Chandri. The marginalization of women has become a kind of social and cultural construct in Indian society. In *Bharathipura* the novelist deals with ambivalent situation of Indian village life. The present paper aims to show socio-cultural space of both novels mentioned above.

Keywords: Subjugation, Marginalization, Tradition, Modernity, Cultural construct

In the novel *Samskara*, Anantha Murthy exposes the conservative life style of the Kannada Brahmins. The novelist presents various 'traditions' within Hindu philosophy. There are caste hierarchies among the Brahmins apart from the lower castes. The Madhvas and the Smartas are two predominant sects of the village Durvashapura. The Madhvas show their sophistication over the Smartas Brahmins. The irony is that one lane aghara itself lingers on the margins in the context of urban growth around it. This urban growth does not prevent creating sub layers among various castes including marginalized groups such as the lower castes. In *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation And Identity* (2010), Raj Kumar observes:

With the charturvarnic order, the Indian caste society gradually came to be established in between 500Bc-AD500 period. It is during this period that many caste laws and restrictions were made for the shudras to keep called dwija society and degrade them to the position of virtual slaves without rights of citizenship. The caste rules were mostly made by the Brahmins with the active support of the orthodox kshatriya kings. The dominant characteristics of all the caste rules was to suppress the shudras by prohibiting them from all knowledge and status, a process that continued for quite a long time. Thus, the caste scheme proved to be very effective instrument of domination and exploitation. As a result, a huge number of people remained ignorant

and submissive. Moreover, the system further weakened them by increasing divisions and disunion among them. (121)

The Madhva Brahmins practice their hegemonic status over the Smartas Brahmins. Even the Smartas Brahmins have many sub-divisions. Govind Sadashiv Ghurye In *Caste And Race In India (2014)* says, “Many of the subdivisions of the smarta Brahmins of the Telugu country bear names derived from the old names of the various parts of the country: Velnad, Vengi Nadu, Kasal Nadu, Mulki Nadu and Telaga Nadu. (35).” The village of Durvashapura in the novel, *Samskara* has miniature polity with strict rules and any infringement of them is punishable by excommunication. Praneshacharya faces such a caste hierarchy during his meal with other Brahmins. About this discrimination Anantha Murthy writes:

The Brahmin who sat next to him, who gave him the place, was a huge dark figure like Bhimasena. A Smarta, with sandalpaste marks drawn lengthwise on his forehead. The Acharya feared him as soon as he set eyes on him. Furthermore, he had questions that made the Acharya nervous.

‘Can I ask from where you come?’

‘I’ right from his place.’

‘From where exactly? From down the mountain?’

‘Kundapura.’

‘What community, if I may ask?’

‘Vasihnava.’

‘What sub-group?’

‘Shivalli.’

‘I’m of the Kota group. What’s your descent line?’

‘Bhardvaja.’

‘I’ m of the Angirasa line’. (*Samskara* 129)

The novel *Samskara* depicts many facets/layers of religion and caste. Though the ideal of a unified sense of Brahmanism remains exclusive, the question of what constitutes Brahminism acts as a unifying principle of the narrative. Praneshacharya’s agonizing over his loss of Brahminhood. He reiterates this question at various levels of the novel. He is unable to surrender his brahminhood and accepts the un-brahminical worldview. During his studies in Kashi, Praneshacharya encounters certain philosophic questions on dvaita and adavita philosophy. Praneshacharya asks his friend Mahabala (a Smarta Brahmin), “Don’t you need a path to the experience of God? It’s through dualism (dvaita) of God and soul you reach him’. At this, Mahabala replies, ‘What do you mean by a path? Is God’s heaven a city or a village so you can find it on a road? One should reach it from where one stands (99).” Naranappa shakes the very foundations of the Brahmin community and its ethos. He tells Praneshacharya, “your Garuda, he robs shaven widows, he plots evil with black magic men, and he is one of your Brahmins, isn’t he?.. All right, let’s see who wins, Acharya, you or me? Let’s see how long all this Brahmin business will last” (28). Naranappa is also an aware person of post-independent India. Naranappa says to Praneshacharya, “your texts and rites don’t work anymore. The congress party is coming to power, you’ll have to open up the temples to all outcastes” (30). Naranappa is an “angry, mad, strong-willed man” (31), who never bows to the social or religious

pressures. In the novel *Samskara* Anantha Murthy exposes and attacks instable roots of Brahmanism with the help of the character of Naranappa. In *Hindusim: A very Short Introduction* (1998), Kim Knott writes:

By the end of the puranic period ten principal incarnations or *avtaras* had been recorded. These were:

Matsya, the fish
Kurma , the tortoise
Varaha , the boar
Narshimha , the man lion
Vamana , the dwarf
Parshurama , Rama with the axe
Rama
Krishna
Buddha
Kalki, the white horse' who will come at the end of the Dark Age or kaliyuga. (55)

In the novel *Samskara*, Naranappa describes the lives of all great Brhamins who had violated their orthodoxy by falling for the charms and amorous beauties of women of the lower caste. Naranappa cites the example of the great sage Parashara who fell for the irresistible charms of Matsyagandhi, a fisherwoman. The sage had sexual experience with Matsyagandhi in her boat. Their sexual intercourse became a cause of the birth of the great sage Vyasa, who wrote Mahabharata, a great Indian epic. Another such example of love transcending spirituality is that of the great sage Vishvamitra who lost all the spiritual powers that he had gained by falling for the ensnaring charms of Menaka. Naranappa poses one more such example of Sage Adi Shankara who entered into the dead body of a king to experience sex with his queen. Naranappa motivates the Brahmin youths like Shyama and Shriapati. Breaking the brahmanic ideals Shyama joins Indian army and Shripati joins a theatre group. Shripati sleeps with a low caste woman named Belli and neglects his Brahmin wife Lilavati.

The novel *Samskara* deals with the issues of religion, orthodox practices and untouchability of caste Hindus of Karnataka. The novel is full of numerous Hindu rituals and rites. The incidents mentioned in the novel take place in the early 1930s and 1940s just before independence. The future of the Hindu religion as well as orthodox beliefs remains under discussion in the novel.

In this novel Naranappa is an ant-brahminical Brahmin and has lived all his life as a rebel challenging the ways and beliefs of his agrahara men and women. He has been a great problem to the fellow Brahmins of the agrahara by refuting and repudiating and established customs and conventions held sacred by the Brahmins. He also vehemently criticizes Varna system and caste system of the Hindu society. In *Ambedkar: Awakening India's Social Conscience* (2014), Narendra Jadhav presents Ambedkars's ideas of caste and Varna in Indian Hindu society. Jadhav writes :

(1) That caste has ruined the Hindus;

- (2) That the reorganization of the Hindu society on the basis of *chaturvarnya* is impossible because the *Varnvyavastha* is like a leaky pot or like a man running at the nose. It is incapable of sustaining itself by its own virtue and has an inherent tendency to degenerate into a Caste System unless there is a legal sanction behind it which can be enforced against every one transgressing his *Varna*;
- (3) That the reorganization of the Hindu society on the basis of *Chaturvarnya* is harmful, because the effect of the *Varnavyavastha* is to degrade the masses by denying them opportunity to acquire knowledge and to emasculate them by denying them the right to be armed;
- (4) That the Hindu society must be recognized on a religious basis which would recognize the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity;
- (5) That in order to achieve this object the sense of religious sanctity behind Caste and *Varna* must be destroyed;
- (6) That the sanctity of Caste and *Varna* can be destroyed only by disregarding the divine authority of the *Shastras*. (26)

In the novel *Samskara*, Naranappa throws the sacred stone '*Saligrama*' which is a symbol of reverence of worship for centuries by the Brahmins of agrahara. He throws the *Saligrama* into the river. He has a firm belief that Brahmins themselves are responsible for their present condition. Brahmins like Garudacharya and Laxmanacharya become object slaves of greed, anger, jealousy and lust.

In the novel *Samskara*, Chandri faces subjugation and undergoes various social and personal restrictions by the caste Hindu Brahmins of the agrahra. Naranappa is ostracized the community as he lives with a low caste woman named Chandri. Chandri also faces gender discrimination. Despite being a low-caste woman she possesses many good qualities. She manages the cremation of her lover Naranappa with the help of Abdul Bari. The people of agrahara accuse Chandri for mis leading Naranappa. The Brahmin woman Anasuya curses Chandri, "May tigers trample her at midnight, may snakes bite her, this whore, this seducing witch" (7). The Brahmins of agrahara blame her for defiling Naranappa. The low caste women like Chandri and Belli are exploited sexually. These subaltern women have the same belief in some matters but give the Brahmins their due respect and place in the society. They remain silent victims and are unaware of their predicament in a caste dominated society where these women are treated as inferiors and thus remain helpless. Through the novel there s contrast between the law of the Indian constitution and that of the religious or societal law.

Praneshacharya personally visits Naranappa and tries reason him out and advises him to mend his ways. Instead of mending his ways he challenges the Acharya saying that he will win over him and raise the grave over Brahminhood. He even dares to give a piece advice to Praneshacharya. He wants the agrahara Brahmins to push their sickly wives into the river and get hold of some fish-scented lower caste woman like the legendary Matsyagandhi. He tells the Acharya that the Brhamins of

the agrahara will experience God when they wake up in the arms of the lower-caste women. Though Naranappa is a kind of the atheist in his life, he utters names of the Hindu Gods during his inevitable death. It seems that Naranappa dies as a believer.

Anantha Murthy's novel *Bharathipura* deals with the issues of dalit emancipation and temple entry. The issue of untouchability during the Nehruvian era is exposed by the novelist. The Caste system is not the outcome of the nation of spirit of toleration of Indian society. It is based on the hierarchical nations of pollution and purity and a sense of eulogization. In *Castes in India* (1945), B.R. Ambedkar says, "Caste in India means an artificial chopping off the population into fixed and definite units, each one prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy"(10). The Caste has mainly two characteristics: (1) membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born; (2) The members are forbidden by an inexorable law to marry outside the group.

The novel *Bharathipura* is a soul searching work of Anantha Murthy. Jagannatha Rao, the protagonist of *Bharathipura*, is portrayed as a victim of his own confused ideas of social change and socialism. The hero individually tries hard to educate the Holeyas of his village. The novel reveals the contrast of post independent Indian government's laws for the dalits with their encounters on the grass root level. The dalits in the village have no voice during the changes that occur in the village *Bharathipura*. Symbolically Pilla is a character in the novel that remains silent during the incidents that take place in the novel. The caste Hindus emerge as a different class as well as eulogized caste. Jadhav (2014) observes:

Caste and class differ in the fact that in the class system there is no complete isolation as there is in the Caste System. This is the second evil effect in the Caste System accompanied by inequality. This manifests itself in the fact that the stimulus and response between two castes is only one sided. The higher Caste act in one recognized way and the lower Caste must respond in one established way. It means that when there is no equitable opportunity to receive the stimulus from and to return the response from different Caste, the result is that the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves. (559)

In the deliberate manner in which the protagonist of the novel *Bharathipura*, Jagannatha Rao, temple trustee and landlord, goes about organizing the temple entry of the untouchables is the great event of the novel. The novel shows the mirror of the changing Indian way of social and religious life that has enveloped the country after its independence. The novel *Bharathipura* becomes a critique of the limitations of the radical middle classes, claiming an exclusive and sympathetic right to change the nation. There is influence of great socialist leaders like Ram Manohar Lohia and S. Gopala Gowda on the hero Jagannatha. Jagannatha tries to educate and organizes the dalits for temple entry in the temple of Manjunatha. The protagonist suffers all forms of social, political and religious tyranny in the novel. In the end of the novel Jagannatha fails in his mission but poses the glimpse of changes that were taking place after Indian independence. In chapter twenty eight of the novel which is titled as 'The Revolution' Jagannatha manages the temple entry for the dalits but a Brahmin

youth named Ganesha digs the idol of the Manjunatha and throws it into the river. Jagannatha and his well wishers Shripati Rao, Neelakanta Swami, Ananathakrishna and Ranga Rao fail in their attempt to make dalits to enter in the temple. The newspaper *Jagruthi* makes the news such as:

Fruitless revolution in Bharathipura
 Harijan entry into Godless temple
 'We won't step back from the struggle,' says Jagannatha,
 'Anyway, Bhootharaya saved God from defilement;
 Say a group of devotees. (249)

The novel *Bharathipura* deals with modernization, changing village economy and struggle of individuals for the questions of caste and class interests. Jagannatha is an enlightened Brahmin, educated in England. He wants to break free, get rid of his personal bonds, desecrates many secret things that have come down from the past. Jagannatha has an impulse to break the oppressive caste hierarchy, tries to gain liberation of the dalits and polluting sacred idol of the temple and polluting it. But the idol and the religious authorities become more sacred and powerful than it were earlier. Thus the protagonist faces ambivalent situation. He leaves the dalits more vulnerable than before. Jagannatha's moral act is incorporated into the deeper illogical and arbitrary patterns of belief and set cultural norms that generate power. The religious and cultural authorities become more powerful whenever these are challenged especially in Indian religious and cultural contexts. The novel reveals the fact that how the contemporary world recreates and reconstructs the past to protect its age long hierarchical structure.

Thus we find Anantha Murthy's *Bharatipura* is an unrelieved and stark human document. In this novel Anantha Murthy is highly satirical towards the orthodox caste Hindu customs. He develops characters like Jagannatha, Shripati, Ganesha and Pilla in the novel to expose the shallowness of a community which is rigid to tradition, certain rights of purity and rituals with its inter-sect and caste consciousness. Social roles regulate and organize behavior. In particular, they provide means for completing certain tasks. Societal roles provide social life with order and predictability. These social roles are responsible for social relationships in the community. As an aspect of culture, the social roles provide an important part of the guidelines and directives necessary for an ordered society. In *Glimpses of World History* (1949), Jawahar Lal Nehru writes:

People who have interests in an existing order do not want change, and resist it with all their might. And yet progress or any betterment means such change; an institution or a method of government has to give place to a better one. Those who desire such progress must necessarily attack the old institutions or the old custom, and thus their path leads to constant repudiation of and conflict with those who profit by them. (532-533)

In the novel *Bharathipura*, the hero Jagannatha Rao is a believer of socialism. Socialism faced many conflicts with Indian social practices after the country's independence. Anantha Murthy shows that everything in Indian village society is not set right during 1970s. India adopted parliamentary democracy after its independence

but the atrocities and exploitations of the people of lower rung of the society continued. In *Indian Panorama: The Bight and the Dark* (2003), A. Padmanaban observes:

Freedom from foreign rule, emergence of Indian nation and country, and installation of a secular parliamentary democracy on the high pedestal has been the high points of our achievements during the current century. Twenty first century is approaching. Let us which Dr. Ambedkar and other leaders gave to us. We should not allow the laborers of these leaders to go in vain and their dreams un-fulfilled. Let us all energize ourselves and march forward to make; India a truly Socialist, secular and Democratic Welfare State without Casteism, tyranny, injustice and exploitation, which the constitution of India proclaims and enshrines. (51)

India adopted the technological civilization and modernity in the changing village life during the period of post independence. Modernity and new economic forces changes the mindset and outlook of Indian people. In the novel Jagannatha confronts with realities on several fronts which he wants to change. He manages to create awareness in the people who refuse and afraid to break free from the rigidity of religion and society. Because of their reiterative performance in caste system the ex-untouchables of Bharathipura start believing that they are really untouchables. Anantha Murthy uses many symbols and images to deconstruct the past. The past is merged a course for the future to liberate the Indian way of social life from a make-belief world and help it confront the fast changing realities of the India's post-independence age.

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