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Unresolved Dilemma in U. R. Ananthmurthy's *Samskara* and *Bharathipura*

Abstract:

This paper intends to study the Unresolved Dilemma in U R Ananthmurth's *Samskara* and *Bharathipura*. U.R. Ananthmurthy emerges as a social reformer through his novels. Like Charles Dickens he has pointed out deep rooted evils in the social life of Indian villages. The novels reveal the futility of the centuries old caste system operating in India. The caste system cheeks the growth of national integration. The novels written by him are examples of realistic characterization. The novels portray an allegorical miniature of India which requires self-examination and self – rejuvenation through lofty ideas that will take the nation through in its quest for all round progress. To do this, the nation must get rid of the albatross that hangs around its neck. It is sad to think that the father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi had to shed his blood fighting for the fusion of the caste – divide in India. The characters in his novels are life- like. U.R. Ananthmurthy portrays or sketches the characters in the novels in the most realistic manner. He selects characters from ordinary life. The personality of the character is drawn through physiological processes. He collects incidents and facts from real life. The character creation is a kind of documentation.

Keywords: Brahminhood, Dilemma, Orthodox society, Untouchability, Rites, Rituals.

U. R. Ananthmurthy is a modern-day writer and a critic in the Kannada Language as well as considered as one of the pioneers of Navya Movement. His novels purportedly scrutinize aspects ranging from challenges and changes faced by Brahmin families of Karnataka. The majority of his novels expose a reaction of individuals to situations that are remarkable and artificial. He portrays the tale of mystery, passion, spiritual exploration as well as mysteries of present and past. U.R. Ananthmurthy's novels *Samskara* (1965) and *Bharathipura* (1973) suggest novels of naturalism. Naturalism deals with the nearest cause for the phenomenon. Every social event or incident can be traced back to its nearest course. The characters and incidents in the novels written by him seem to be drawn from his own personal life in the Brahmin agrahara. To quote Ananthmurthy's own words:

“....while growing up in agrahara, social and cultural responsibilities to face life induced knowledge in my mind. But it's due to the influence of Mahatma Gandhi's influence in pre- independent India.... apart from that the surrounding in which I lived was influential. If we rub our eyes and observe the surroundings which we live in, it imparts knowledge in us. The rebellion spirit emerging in me questioned the age- old rituals and hence exhibiting unacceptable social behavior seem to embed in me, the conflicting points- imagination and stark reality.... Such memories formed an integral part of my life. My stay in the temple surroundings, the evenings prayers with long session of rituals, the festivals in the Kaarthika maasa, holy preaching, a life along with my fellow men who led a simple life, a sect of society suffering due to the meaningless belief of caste system, poor farmers being dragged to the court frequency by the landlords – these memories reflect in my writings.

Those were the words of Ananthamurthy in the speech given by him while receiving the Jnanpitha award. Such memories in his childhood had arose a torrent of conflicting views in his mind. His mind was in a dilemma which remains unresolved. Ananthmurthy's writings at various stages explicit the dilemma erupted in his mind about the correlation between tradition and modernity.

U.R. Ananthamruthy's novel *Samskara* (1965) and his later published novel *Avashte* (2011) have a basic ground of similarity between them. Both the novels have been directed as films and accepted by the audience. If drawn a comparison between the two novels mentioned above, one can recognize the internal conflict which the protagonists Praneshacharya and krishnappa Gowda undergo is more or less alike. They are involved in internal conflicts, a state of mind with unresolved in internal conflicts, a stage of mind with unresolved dilemmas hunting for a rational solution for the problems. They try to find their "self" in the social arguments. These characters appear, to grow in this unresolved state of mind. They emerge to be the reflection of the reader'. And sometimes, the other way round i.e. an alien state of mind from of that of the reader. Their state of mind, at times, appears to be miles away from reality. The basic similarity amongst the two novels is the similarities of main characters i.e. the protagonists in both novels have striking similarities between them. The characters rising up to be significant, their weakness, the ways they overtime their weakness, the incidents which given way to transcend their weakness- these are the basic similarities in the novels. Most significantly the characterization of both the protagonists – Praneshacharya and Krishnappa gowda the complex personalities in themselves. Though they appear straight and simple in nature, they are truly intricate characters dwindling within themselves. Coming to the novel *Samskara* the story and the dilemma of the protagonist begins with the question of the cremation of Naranappa. A person respected by the whole

community undergoes a process of resurrection when he finds himself stuck with the cremation of a member of his own community. The status and respect he had gained till then remains a problem as dead body of Naranappa. As a result, he dwindle with conflicting thoughts, dilemmas. Self interrogation and tries to interpret the incidents of his past. He comes face-to-face with the reality of life at the end of his confused state of mind. What would happen when he comes face-to-face with the life? The writer leaves the story without providing an ending. It seems he has given room or space for the reader to imagine and ending of the novel. The novel "Samskara" depicts the life of agrahara extending for seven to eight days.

The story weaves around the incidents in the agrahara which happen in a time span of seven to eight days. Though the protagonists of both the novels are egoistic or observed with self-pride, the feeling of self-pride and ego in Praneshacharya can be viewed only at a subtle level. But the main component of praneshacharya's character is his self-pride and feeling of superiority.

".... he bathed Bhagirathi's body, dried her up and dressed her in a fresh sari every day. Then he offered food and flowers to her as he worshipped God every day. He used to put flowers in her hair every day. He gave her holy water then Bhagirathi touched his feet and from his side he blessed her. Then he brought her a bowl full of porridge from the kitchen. This was done for the last twenty years between them the day began with the bath at dawn and through the day he supplied the food and medicines to his wife. After doing this service Praneshacharya every day went to Maruthi temple for worship." (Samskara 1)

This narrative brings out the estheticism of Praneshacharya. The person who does all the primary works for the lame Bhagirathi finally offers her holy water and flowers and gets his feet touched

by her, thus displaying husband –wife relationship and hence subtly reveals the prejudice underlying in Praneshacharya the feeling of superiority as a husband and a respectable Brahmin of the community. The pride he takes in marrying an invalid woman and taking care of her displays praneshacharya’s claim of superiority by leading a life of self – sacrifice. The person who claims to be given the birth of a brahmin to lead a life of salvation also insists his feet to be touched by his invalid wife explicit the self – pride in Praneshacharya. He lacks far- sighted vision only in the crucial matter of cremation of Naranappa. He is regarded as the Crest Jewel of Vedic learning. How can he be considered as an enlightened man when he is caught in the question of brahminhood, holy books and torrent of God- evil or good? He doesn’t take a rational approach. The Crest Jewel lacks the knowledge of considering a corpse as a mere non-living thing which the low – caste, uneducated chandri understands,

“.....it’s a dead body, it’s decaying. It should be cremated”

With the help of Ahmedi Bari, a Muslim, she cremates the body of Naranappa. Praneshacharya caught in the conflicting thoughts, probing on the thought of nullifying brahminhood realizes the universal truth, ‘a corpse is a mere non- living thing only when his identify is at its, stake.

“..... the thing which is to be burnt becomes a problem among the things which will be burnt.” - is realized by Praneshacharya. He realizes this truth after his self pride is destroyed. He also realizes the truth that it was his feeling of superiority which made him feel that he can win over Naranappa at any cost, by his nobility. Naranappa, though drunk and involved in anti- social behaviors, used to get up and convey a sense of respect as soon as he saw praneshacharya. This only served in strengthening his over –confidence about the effect of his aestheticism that bore upon others. It gave way to strengthen his egoism. The occasions where

he was forced to admit defeat before Naranappa's Anti – social behaviours, forced him to be suspicious about his own aestheticism. When he learnt that it was his preachings luscious puranas that paved way to Shripati making love to Belli, he started realizing the victory being gained by Naranappa over him. Hence he retorted to preachings of Vedas instead of luscious puranas. Praneshacharya's realization about the decadent brahminhood in himself happens a little late and hence deepens his misery. Praneshacharya loses his courage when the problem, of Naranappa's cremation tops on him as a mountain. When he fails to find solution for the problem, he appears to be breaking down; praneshacharya fails to hold a practical approach towards the problem. He tends to ignore the fact that a decaying corpse need to be created and should not let the Brahmins to starve for a longer time. The fact which half- wit Lakshmiddevamma realizes about a dead corpse being allowed to rot which has never happened before an hence nullifying Brahmanism is surprisingly not understood by the learned man praneshacharya . When he fails to find an apt solution in religious holy books, he comes face-to-face with his own self- pride, feeling of superiority, craving for respect and status, His mind is torn by conflicting thoughts and remains unresolved even after the novel ends. The novel ends but doesn't conclude. He is haunted by the thought of being susceptible to insult as he fails to find a solution rather than being worried about a rotting corpse which is turning the agrahara nauseous. Acharya's dilemma deepens with the act of love – making to chandri accidentally. He fears to face the society after the act and exhibit an escapist attitude by insisting chandri to reveal about what happened between them. After this, he is haunted by the ways to gratify his carnal desires rather than anything else. One can see Praneshacharya tormented by the torrent of dandling thoughts in himself.

Praneshacharya fails to find a solution for Naranappa's cremation in despair, makes love with Chandri. Consequently, he starts meditating on the memories of the past and the encounters with Naranappa. He recollects Naranappa's words which conveyed that every action of human being will bear positive and negative consequence. Praneshacharya, who had dedicated his complete life to attain salvation, depriving himself of carnal desires, starts suddenly craving for sexual pleasure. His minds start being pre-occupied with the thought of gratification of his sexual desires and hence desires to find out Chandri. He moves accordingly. On his journey to nowhere, he happens to come across Putta of Malera caste. Putta takes Praneshacharya to the world which Praneshacharya had shut himself off from the whole of his life. Praneshacharya experiences a feeling of mixed emotions -disgust and at times bewilderment, when he moves through the fairs and festivals along with Putta. Praneshacharya looks indecisive and appears fickle-minded when he is deterred by the thought of being identified and hence ends up losing the gained superior status Crest Jewel of Vedic learning. Though he decides to move to Chandri by shedding his Brahminhood, he finds himself being haunted by the thought of losing his fame and popularity. He seems to be caught in a dilemma throughout the novel. The worst part is neither of his dilemma seems to be resolved even though the novel ends. Praneshacharya panics at thought of being haunted by Naranappa's ghost and doesn't bother to find out Naranappa's body and rushes back home. It reveals the deteriorating aesthetic and moral beliefs. He gets his wife's body cremated with the help of other Brahmins but pays no attention to Naranappa's body which ought to be cremated. His negligence towards a dead corpse rotting in aghara displays an unacceptable behaviour of learned Brahmin. Chandri's timely action of cremating a corpse which was turning a nuisance raises her to a high esteem in the eyes of the readers. The whole novel seems to be encompassed with unresolved dilemmas. The high-caste Brahmins who are

considered to be embodiments of noble qualities are portrayed the other way round. Low-caste people appear far more practical and less pretentious and explicit to have a rational approach towards life. Ananthmurthy portrays hypocritical attitude as the basic trait of Brahmins and thus highly pretentious. The title of the novel is apt with the novel revolving around the various connotation of the word “Samskara”. The very word Samskara gives way to various conflicting opinions and thoughts, which later culminates into unresolved dilemma of the human minds sketched in the novel.

On the other hand *Bharathipura* (1973) is a novel written by U.R. Ananthamurthy in Kannada and later translated to English by P. Srinivasa Rao. *Bharathipura* is the tale of the London returned Jagannatha Rao, also called Jaganna- his ambition and his thought process. He returns to his home town Bharathipura after a long time. There is a conflict with in Jagannatha about his ideals and practices. The whole story centers around Jagannatha’s aim to take untouchables into Manjunatha temple. His thought process at various points of time in the novel that makes the novel interesting. The story of *Bharathipura* also deals with a complex theme juxtaposing traditional Indian-ness and ideologically confounded existentialism of a rich England-returned youth, trying to make sense of his roots.

The story of *Bharathipura* starts with Jagannatha, who has returned from England and is tortured by the languid indifferences and staleness of life around him in his native village Bharathipura. With the aim of shattering the existing orders – symbolized by caste relationships, the Manjunatha temple and all its associated traditional and cultural elements but equally unsure of any consequential alternative order, he sets out to teach the lowliest outcaste of his hilly village to read. Though he is aware of the significant undercurrents of the society’s make-up, which are not as innocent or simple as they appear, he formulates the idea of a change that could bring

about something new, whatever the consequences, good or as bad. Jagannatha vows to have his low-caste laborers enter the temple on an auspicious day. The author ends the novel in a profound confusion that is open for interpretation. In the novel, religion portends through lord Manjunatha, Bhootharaya and Saligrama. Life has turned frozen cancerous and venomous to its own followers in the village. Hence, in the Saligrama, we see the hand of God totally sterilizing the hand of Man. Jagannatha through the destruction of that image wants to make the hand of Man prevail over the hand of God. In the Saligrama episode, the Saligrama represents a value system with loaded historical importance and significance. Jagannatha wants to make a powerful jump to create a creative society, to mobilize a morbid humanity. Thus, comes up with a very old idea of breaking an icon is loaded with value. The legend surrounding saligrama as to if one worships it, it brings about good effects. And if one defiles it, it ruins him or her. The legend is benign and blessed to the Brahmins. The same legend embodies horror to the pariahs. The legend is a hypocritical nonsense to Jagannatha himself, who has seemingly become the iconoclast. Jagannatha's quest in breaking the icon of saligrama would end if the pariahs were emancipated. Jagannatha's sole aim is to destroy the image of saligrama as an icon of tremendous religious powers. If the innately believes that the saligrama is a mere stone and nothing else, why would he give so much importance to destroying its significance? In turning the saligrama into a mere stone by an act of touching it, isn't he creating a new legend, a new icon out of saligrama? By urging the pariahs to touch the saligrama in order to turn it into a mere stone, isn't he again ironically creating a new image which suggest that whatever the pariah touches would be nothing but a mere stone of significance? When he asks the pariahs to touch it and see for themselves that it is a mere stone, he adds that if they don't touch it, they would remain fools forever. Does he mean that if they touch it they would not remain fools? Jagannatha appears to create a non-

deterministic and blind image himself. At the end, when rage leaves Jagannatha, he understands that pariahs had meant nothing to him, and therefore, he was perpetrating the clash of icons by trying to destroy one image, in which he does not believe and pitching it against an image that he uncertainly, non-deterministically, involuntarily and most importantly carefully creates.

The protagonist Jagannatha is the son of a wealthy landlord. He is respected by his fellow men. He goes to London for higher studies. Thought brought in an orthodox brahmin family; he had a liberalist attitude towards life. Hence, in London, succumbs to all worldly pleasures. He gets into a relationship with Margaret. Margaret is the daughter of a Gujarathi father and British mother. Margaret shows a keen interest in Indian culture and society. Margaret and Jagannatha develops an intense relationship. A guy named Chandrashekar from Bangalore, a friend of Jagannatha, too craves for Margaret's friendship. Jagannatha nursed a feeling of jealousy for him and called him a hypocrite. At a certain point of their relationship, Margaret points out a weakness in Jagannatha. According to her, Jagannatha wants to be accepted and acknowledged as a honest and nice person. As a result, he tries to be good and does what is expected out of him though his inner conscience suggests a contradictory approach. He doesn't project his inner self due to the threat of being looked down upon. Margaret tells Jagannatha that Chandrashekar was better than him;

“Look, Jagan, Chandrashekar's spite seems more authentic to me than your nobility. One can't really feel your presence, feel that you are there. Your anguish over your incompleteness appears to be playacting, but Chander suffers more. You see, his cruelty..... he becomes real but that..... even his meanness..... But you are not enough of a man”.

After this incident, Jagannatha determines to leave to Bharathipura. Jagannatha's attempt to emancipate pariahs is just to establish himself as a real man before Margaret. For him, rebellion meant reinstalling his authenticity. He wanted his self to achieve a shape through the revolt against the established mind-set in Bharathipura. Margaret's presence is felt throughout the novel through Jagannatha's memories and the letters he writes to her. Jagannatha's aim to discover and establish self collaborates with an aim of his'. His aim or intention was to emancipate the low-caste folk and abolish untouchability. The low-caste was denied the right of entering Manjunatha's temple. The low-caste appears to have lost their self-respect and dignity and hence gives in to the whims and fancies of the upper section of society. They yield themselves to the horrid circumstances and don't bother to rebel against the social system which deprives them of the right to move around freely.

The low caste pariahs devoid of self confidence bear the injustice meted out at/to them. Jagannatha firmly believes that it's the popularity of Lord Manjunatha and Bhootharaya's existence that has strengthened the hierarchy of caste system prevalent in Bharathipura. Pariahs' fear of being ruined if they defile the existing beliefs prevents them from expressing any sort of rebellion in the society. Jagannatha recognizes the importance of weakening Lord Manjunatha's hold on people's mind, thus serving as a means to reform the society. Jagannatha wanted pariahs to enter the temple and shake the very ground of belief which promotes untouchability. The village Bharathipura reflects India as a nation. The aesthetic beliefs, the agricultural background, the decaying community, the polluted surroundings arouse a doubt as to whether it's a religious or a sacred place. U.R. Ananthmurthy has penned this novel Bharathipura at the backdrop of the social injustice happening in India and the hurdles, they come across when they try to rebel against the set of norms of society. There are instances in the novel which reveals that caste of

the person is ignored when it come to the gratification of sexual desire. The crucial part of the story is that it's the Brahmin community who carry in them rational and modern thoughts, though they don't implement it in their lives, unlike other novels. The belief in Lord Manjunatha insists the continuation of set norms of society and also adds to the income of the village.

Emancipation of pariahs by letting them enter the temple premises would adversely affect the income of village. The opposition of the Brahmin community – the temple priests and landlord against Jagannatha's attempt to bring pariahs to temple unmask the fact that priests and landlords use untouchability and casteism as tools to gratify their selfish needs. The conflict in the novel can also be termed internal. In other words, Brahmins being forced to ward off their narrow- mindedness and inhumane behaviour. These are few dilemmas which can arouse in the mind of the readers. There are few characters in the novel who exhibit a suspicious behaviour. Shripati Rao is influenced by Gandhiji and is a realist. Though he believes in Jagannatha's ideals, he believes that those ideals are far from reality. Yet he supports Jagannatha. The casteism is deep set in the mind of Sripati Rao too. Sripati Rao is against casteism. Yet, he expresses his difference in feelings for Lingayaths and Gowdas. Another striking part of the novel is the District- collector of the place who was a low caste, but did nothing to improve the conditions of his fellow-men. Instead he joins the high caste group and serves to satisfy his selfish purpose and protect his well-being. He doesn't express any sort of rebellion or opposition against the high caste folk who suppress his fellow-men in the name of caste to which they belonged to. In fact he goes to the extent of blaming his own fellow-men and accusing them.

Jagannatha's sole aim was to emancipate pariahs by taking them to temple. Jagannatha makes futile attempts to bring in a genuine desire of freedom oppression in the minds of pariahs. Jagannatha hardly recognized any of them and knew their names. His frustration sometimes

emerged out of anger which only helped in scaring the pariahs to do what he wanted them to do. For example, the touching of saligrama where his outburst of anger forces them to touch it. They themselves never wanted to touch it as an act of rebellion for the injustice meted out at them. A sign of rebellion is slightly seen in Pilla who is accused of trying to molest Kaveri. But the fact being Pilla witnessing the illegitimate relationship between Janardhana Shetty and Kaveri reveals the hypocrisy of high caste folks. When one of the child among the pariahs succumb to death due to the fire burns, it is considered as an ill-omen which they have contracted by defiling Lord Manjunatha and Bhootharaya through touching the holy stone saligrama. Jagannatha himself had not completely come out of his belief in Lord Manjunatha;

“Jagannatha flipped through the pages of a note book. One page was about Clive. ‘Manjunatha Prasanna’ occupied all the blank spaces. Even today he could not decide his old habit of remembering Manjunatha whenever his left eyelid quivered or his left leg tripped over something or when he was about to receive his question paper from the supervisor”

Jagannatha himself was unsure about his long-planned actions. The lines of the letter written by him to Margaret goes like this;

“That the untouchable may smite Time out of his slumberous state is my fervent hope. But the untouchable come like shadows. My thought is still like a specter because they have not yet acquired any selfhood”.

Jagannatha’s long planned action is ruined by Ganesha’s thoughtless actions proves more meaningful and achieves some purpose though it’s wrongly conceived by the villagers. But Jagannatha’s meditated revolution ends up in vain. Jagannatha fails within himself, before

Margaret and the villagers. He is also torn when he learns the truth about his birth, his parent and his mother's infidelity.

The dilemma in the mind of Jagannatha remains unresolved. He was equally unsure about his action and its consequence. The reader is also left with the question as to what would be the next step of Jagannatha. Was Jagannatha in a hunt to rise himself to high esteem in the eyes of Margaret? Or was he trying to rise himself in his own eyes? Was Jagannatha really bothered about the pariah's pitiable state? Jagannatha himself was obsessed with the gratification of sexual desires but suppresses his desire to redeem himself in the eyes of villagers. It's true that Jagannatha is as shallow as any other character.

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