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THOUGHTS ON MODERNISM IN ANATHMURTHY'S SAMSKARA



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ABSTRACT

During 90s, a social movement in India was witnessed to be dominant that not only attempted to put an end to the traditional practices but came up with entirely new trend- modernism. As a matter of fact, it existed well before; however, emergence of it was quote veiled. Few of the great Indian writers paved a path to such notion to be practiced and they also dared to talk

about subsequent reactions to the orthodox pattern of living. The present paper on Anathmurthy's Samskara is an earnest attempt to bring out a kind of reformation, rather, revolt adventured by few people having the sense and a kind heart towards ill effects of discrimination.

KEYWORDS

Modernity, discrimination, social change, transformation, revolt

RESEARCH PAPER

U.R. Ananthmurthy is a well-known literary figure of modern age in English literature. His notions and thoughts go beyond his own Kannada language and culture and touch global perspective. Both his creative works and his social engagements made cross the Indian periphery and sought for him global recognition. His central themes are loaded with the examination of the caste system, religious rules and tradition as well as the ambivalent relationship between the received cultural value system and new values of changing world this is evident in his four major novels: *Samskara*, *Bharatipura*, *Avasthe*, and *Bhavar*. Social life in a country is so full of vagaries and varieties that the novelist with an observant eye and an understanding heart will find the material spread out before him to be literally inexhaustible. Some of the best studies of social life are naturally enough in the regional languages.

Two major concerns of Ananthmurthy's novels have been the social changes dramatically accelerated by British Colonial rule and exposure to the west and the inner cultural debate between the tradition and modernity. The novels *Samskara* and *Bharatipura* reveal both these concerns which are inseparable from each other. One of the features common to these two novels is looking down upon the low caste and downtrodden sections, a crucial factor in the context of social stability and social transformation. Ananthmurthy's exploration of this problem reveals a progressive approach to deal with issues like this.

The present paper makes an attempt to analyze the thematic concerns related to progressive approach in the legendary novel *Samskara*. Hence the need to understand the meaning of progressivism is a precondition for further deep understanding of the novel. Progressivism is an intellectual and rational movement to provide justice to all by eradicating discrimination prevailing in the society in the name of caste, religion race, gender and others. It is democratic in spirit and aims and the establishment of the egalitarian society. All leading Indian progressive thinkers feel that most of the problems arise out of the caste system. Moreover, this system is manifested in exposing such irrational and unscientific practices such as untouchability, superstitions, and other exploitations of the weaker sections in the society. Creative writing has been used by many rationalists across the country as a means of propagating progressivism and Ananthmurthy is one of them. His progressive novels deal with issues like exploitation of the depressed, social inequality, ill-treatment and inhumane behavior of the so called high class sections in the name of religious doctrines and other similar beliefs. The philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi in this connection influenced Ananthmurthy to a greater extent. Ananthmurthy in his novels, therefore, is seen attacking the power centres of tradition and culture in the places like Agraharas with his progressive thoughts.

The novel *Samskara*, which is widely acknowledged, is motivated by the search for a new approach to life and philosophy. Ananthmurthy came to the prominence with the very first novel which became an internationally known text through A. K. Ramanujan's excellent English translation. It was made into film by Pattabi in 1970 and became the hot subject of discussion. The protagonists in the novel are engulfed with the spirit of modern age. The title *Samskara* refers to a concept, more central to Hindu culture. The meaning of it is refinement, culture and improvement. The novel opens with an announcement of death of a heretic Naranappa who was a Brahmin and even after his death; his brahminism does not leave him. Now his relatives disown his dead body and nobody is ready to perform post death rites. They all go to their religious head, Praneshacharya but he too is unable to find a way

out as who will perform the last rites. He goes to the Maruthi temple to seek the divine intervention but fails to get any signal from the God. While returning he meets Chandri and the sexual union with her transforms him completely. On the way, he is guided by Putta and after his sojourn; he decides to return to his village with heightened awareness and a transformed man.

It is observed in episode Chandri of the novel that she is looked down upon as she belongs to the untouchable community though Naranappa, a Brahmin brings her to his home and lives with her. She conducts herself as a good wife and as any Brahmin woman, she does her tasks in the Agrahara. However, her presence in Naranappa's house is regarded as the cultural pollution. By narrating this, Anathmurthy reminds the readers that the practice of shadow pollution and social boycott which prevailed in the society in the past is irrational and unscientific. He also reveals that Chandri has been accepted for sexual intercourse by such an orthodox person as Praneshachraya but denied the right to marry and live with and among the Brahmins. After the death of Naranappa, she becomes an outcaste and a destitute as well. The Brahmin woman of the Agrahara ventilates their pent up hatred and anger against Chandri. If the Acharya talked to her, he would be polluted. "He would have to bathe before his meal." Anusuya said, "May tigers trample her tonight, may snakes bite her, this whore, this seducing witch. All became of this filthy whore. Won't someone brand her face?"

Another instance of this exploitation is the episode of the liaison between Sripati, a young married Brahmin and Belli, an untouchable. Sripati uses her whenever he needs sexual gratification but denies to what she really deserves, even to speak to him publically. At one of the occasions, Sripati becomes very impatient and comes with sexual desire, but Belli she was ranting about someone and something. She was like ripe ears of corn bending before the falling rain. He did not listen to her. He wrapped on his dhoti, put his shirt, combed his hair and ran in a hurry. Belli was alright for slipping with her but she was no good for even to talk with for Sripati.

Chinni too faces the similar circumstances. Sitadevi, a Brahmin woman throws a betel nut and leaves to her without giving them by hand lest she would be polluted by the mere touch of an untouchable. This is condemnable. Chinni begged standing at a distance: please Avva, throw a morsel for my mouth, avva! (58). The low caste people like Chinni stood far away from the high caste Brahmins and begged from a distance which was a practice in the past. They feared to approach Brahmins lest they pollute them.

This paper also focuses upon hypocrisy of the people who exploit the low caste people. Praneshachraya who has accused Naranappa of polluting the Agrahara by living with Chandri, also commits similar offence by having sexual intercourse with Chandri. Therefore, his image as a staunch follower of customs and Vedas turns out to be hypocritical. But he has sincerity and faith in his controlling capacity of senses which, of course, proves to be false. We have to appreciate his candid nature of asking Chandri to go to the people of Agrahara and admit their union in order to perform the funeral rites of Naranappa. He says to her, "Chandri, get up. Let's go. Tomorrow morning when the Brahmins gather, you tell them yourself this happened. As for my authority to decide for the Agrahara, I have lost it. I'm ready to do the funeral rites myself. I've no authority to tell any other Brahmin to do them that's all"(68).

The Brahmin men and women, who objected Chandri's entry in to the Agrahara and also denied her from performing last rites of Naranappa, later grant the permission. Their

change of mind is because Naranaapa accepted Chandri, he used to eat meat, would accompany the Muslims in various activities. Chandri is ready to offer all the jewels and property, all Naranappa's relatives show their willingness to carry out post death rituals. Garuda who casts his eye on Chandri's Jewelry changes his words and tries to convince Praneshachraya seeking permission to perform Naranappa's funeral rites saying that: "Whatever, he might have done, how can we cut the family bond that binds us? So if you kindly give the permission, I will perform the funeral rites." Sitadevi's son had joined the military. She thought of bringing her son from the military if only Chandri's jewelry came into her hands. She vowed offerings of fruit and coconut to Maruthi; "oh God! Let my husband be the one to do the rites" (28).

Now it seems that Naranaapa's habit of eating meat is not an offence. One of these days her son would return from army-will the cruel tongues of Agrahara keep quiet about it? She would once maligned Praneshachraya for hesitating to ex-communicate Naranappa. Now she thought of him worshipfully: "he is truly a man of loving kindness, surely he will take on her son's sins also and protect him. No doubt about it."(59). Thus readers are led to understand the hypocrisy of these characters.

As a matter of fact no oppression sustains longer; revolt and revolution surely comes into force. It is natural that one takes on the things so far as he or she to a certain extent and then mutiny is bound to take place. Moreover, it is not at all mandatory that an oppressed will only raise his voice; it can be the one who does not like discrimination irrespective of the class or caste he belongs to. The character of Naranappa plays a major role in which the revolt has been launched. Bringing untouchable woman Chandri to his house and living with her in Agrahara indicates that he has given life to a woman as a wife irrespective of her caste. He criticizes young Brahmin boys who listened to the puranas narrated by Praneshachrya especially the stories of Shakuntala and made love with a fisher woman:

Your Garuda robs shaven widows. He plots evil with black magic men and is one of your Brahmins, isn't he? You read those lush sexy puranas but you preach a life of barrenness that young fellow in the Agrahara listened to Kalidasa's heroine Shakuntala narrated by Praneshachrya felt a fire burn in his lions and he ran straight to plunge his heat in the cold water of the river. Luckily an outcaste fisherwoman was bathing there. He fantasized she was Shakuntala of the Achari's description and made love to her right there- with the Moon for witness. Didn't the Achari himself corrupt the Brahminism of the place? (25)

Regarding revolt against untouchability, the progressive thoughts in the mind of Naranappa, depict that Ananthmurthy was influenced by Gandhian principles which strongly condemned the practice of untouchability. Naranappa said: "Your texts and rites don't work anymore. The Congress party is coming to power; you will have to open up the temples to all outcaste." (21). This is a sure sign of protest against established social norms. Another instance of revolt is depicted in Chandri's act of performing the last rites to Naranappa. As per the Hindu Samskara, only the elder son of the dead or any man amongst his relatives is permitted to perform the last rites. When such is the case, Chandri who is neither a male nor does she belong to Brahmin family performs the last rites. She tells Seshappa, the cart man: "You must come with your ox cart and take this dead body to the cremation ground. We can cremate him. That's not her lover Naranappa. It is neither Brahmin nor Shudra. A carcass, a stinking, rotting carcass"(70).

This portrayal of Chandri does not only reflect the courage of the author but also his sense of protest against such norms. Finally, Praneshacharya who had lived his life with perfect adherence to his caste norms until his union with Chandri is portrayed that he makes a self introspection through which he realizes that fastening to the man made restrictions in the name of Samskara is futile and irrational. After the death of Naranappa, Chandri comes and takes shelter on the Verandah of Praneshachrya's house. Praneshachrya realizes that Chandri was sleeping even without a mat. He comes and talks to her kindly and also gives her a mat to sleep. This shows his changed perspective in regard with the set norms. This is his first step in bringing about changes in the way of thinking of the upper classes: "Che! That young woman is sleeping in the Verandah without even a mat. Chandri! Chandri! Take this mat and a pillow" (49).

Acharya was concerned about Chandri's future as she is helpless woman now. So he gave the jewels for her future life. This shows Praneshachrya's concern for a poor woman and his notion of humanity. "Look Chandri, keep these jewels with you for future. Naranappa is dead but you have a life to live"(49). He rules out the taboos and becomes a social being in his involvement and sexual union with Chandri. His change of mind is also evident when he puts his hands on Putta's shoulder and walks with him into the soda shop and coffee shop. He watches the cock fight and defends Putta by raising his hand when a man in the crowd challenges Putta. He protects Putta and likes his company even though he is a Malera. This indicates a progressive method taken by Acharya to show that all are equal and there is no caste system. Sripati is yet one more Brahmin character in the novel, mixed up with the Brahmins of Parijatapura and had a passion for dance-drama. Along with his friends, Sripati decides to take Naranappa's body and cremate it.

Thus adequate measures and solutions are taken up by Naranappa, Chandri, Sripati and Praneshachrya to revolt against tradition by socializing themselves and bring about progressive thought sin their way of living, bringing about a social reformation and revolution. This is the result of progressivism. On the basis of revelations made through the analysis of the novel, it can be concluded that there is a strong tendency of the theme of progressivism on the novel. The progressive step taken to deal with social problems of life take a definite form in the novel which deal with national issues of social inequalities and injustice of the underprivileged and their emancipation which forms the core of progressive novels of U.R. Ananthmurthy.

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