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HYPOCRISY OF BRAHMINISM IN U.R. ANANTHAMURTHY'S SAMSKARA

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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to study a remarkable Kannada poet and novelist, U. R. Ananthamurthy's popular novel Samskara. The main objective of the paper is to analyse various brahmin characters in the novel and to point out the orthodoxy and hypocrisy prevalent in them situated in a brahminical agarhara in the South of India in the state of Karnataka. There has been a comparison and contrast between the orthodox characters and the modern character named Naranappa. The so-called pious characters like Garuda, Lakshmana, Durgabhatta, their wives have been completely absorbed in vices. They prove themselves to be greedy and lusty.

KEYWORDS: poet , novelist, Samskara , Jnanpith Award and Padma Bhushan

DISCUSSION

U.R.Ananthamurthy is an eminent writer writing in Kannada language, who has written many novels, short-story collections and poetry-collections. He is especially known to the English readers by his mostly acclaimed novel *Samskara*, which was written in 1965 and translated into English by A.K.Ramanujan. He has been a winner of many awards including Jnanpith Award and Padma Bhushan. Mostly his novels have been adapted into films.

Samskara is a novel in which Ananthamurthy has depicted the hypocrisy of brahmins in a small colony of brahmins, named Durvasapura in a south-Indian state Karnataka. Pragya Shukla and Manish Shrivastava rightly opine:

The novel, soon after its publication became the epicentre of controversy for hurling accusations at the upper caste agarhara situated in a tiny hamlet called Durvaspur in Western Ghats of south India. Ananthamurthy was labelled as anti-brahminical and was condemned for attacking the superstitions and hypocrisies

of his own orthodox community in which he had grown up. (11)

The novel opens with the incident of death of an anti-brahmin Naranappa, who has rejected brahminhood and started mixing up with his Muslim friends; he also eats meat and fish and has also kept a low caste woman as mistress. He also disrespected holy stone, worshipped by other brahmins, throws it into the pond and spits after it. This incident of death uncovers the hypocrisy of the whole brahmin agarhara and their clinging to orthodoxy. It points out the greed and lust of brahmin community, who consider themselves as the best of all the classes of Indian society. According to Gladin Rose, "The Hindu society has been classified into four different sections on the basis of caste—Brahmins, kshatriyas, vaishyas and sudras" (190). The first three categories are the privileged, whereas sudras are the most neglected section of society. They are the unvoiced people, along with the women characters and the widows have a very miserable plight:

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. (Saroj 533)

An outcaste like Naranappa does everything to degrade brahminism. Moreover, he threatened everyone to be a Muslim, he is prevented from doing all this. The Brahmin community does not excommunicate him. Therefore, he has not been outcasted. Now the problem is that no one is ready to cremate him. In the words of Bidari, "The novel also shows the futility of the centuries-old caste system operating in India undermining the very concept of national integration (11)". The Hindu Brahmins have superstitions about this situation also. They cannot eat without cremating the body. "It's all right for children. They can eat. Only we adults shouldn't, till the funeral rites are done." Sitadevi said (3)". Naranappa's relatives are Garuda and Lakshmana, but they too make excuses and they are not ready to cremate him. They question his affiliation to Brahminism, "The real question is: is he a brahmin at all? What do you say? - He slept regularly with a lowcaste woman. . . (4). Then another relative says, "Naranappa had contacts with a lowcaste . . . 'As you know he even ate what she cooked . . . 'And he drank too.' . . . 'Besides drinking, he ate animal flesh.' (6)". Garuda makes excuse of not having related to Naranappa any more. He says:

Between Naranappa and me, it's true, there's a bond of kinship going back several generations. But, as you know, his father and I fought over that orchard and went to court. After his father's death, I appealed to the guru at the Dharmasthala monastery. He decreed in my favour. Yet Naranappa defied it, even god's word - what do you say? - So we swore we'd have nothing, no exchange of words, no wedding, no rite, no meal, no hospitality. That's what we swore - what do you say . . . (5)

Naranappa was married to Lakshmana's wife's sister. Lakshmana also is not ready to cremate him, he says he does not relate to him any more. He says:

Naranappa abandoned his lawful wife after tying the wedding-string round her neck. You may condone even that . . . He went and got mixed up with some woman. My wife's sister became hysterical and died: he didn't even come to the funeral rites. You may condone even that; but he didn't care to observe the death anniversaries of his own father and mother. . . bring Muslims over and eat and drink forbidden things in the wide-open front yard? (7)

On the other hand, a Smarta brahmin, who is not so orthodox, advises:

Chi Chi Chi, don't be too rash, Acharya. O no, a brahmin isn't lost because he takes a lowborn prostitute. Our ancestors after all came from the North - you can ask Praneshacharya if you wish - history says they cohabited with Dravidian women. (5-6)

There has been a dilemma about cremation of Naranappa in the whole Brahmin community. Some of them have fears that if they cremate him, they would not get invitation for worship and brahmin meal. They are also afraid of being corrupted and degraded by cremating Naranappa, "The brahmin wives had come in through the backdoor into the middle hall, unable to contain their custody, afraid husbands might do something rash (4)".

But the whole situation upsides down, when Naranappa's concubine puts her gold jewellery before Praneshacharya. The eyes of all the brahmins glittered with the shine of gold. The wives of all the brahmins have been shown in the novel to make their husbands induced towards gold. Lakshmana's wife Anasuya, "looked at the four-strand gold chain round Chandri's neck and the thick gold bracelet on her wrist, and could not bear think of it. She wept loudly" (7-8). Internally all the brahmins and their wives want to cremate the dead body now, yet they want the guru (Praneshacharya) would give them order, so that they might get the gold and they also retain their purity:

The women calculated swiftly: that heap of gold was worth at least two thousand rupees. One after another, the wives scanned their husbands' faces. The brahmins bowed their heads: they were afraid, fearful that the lust for gold might destroy brahmin purity. But in the heart of everyone of them flashed the question: if some other brahmin should perform the final rite for Naranappa, he might keep his brahminhood and yet put all that gold on his wife's neck. (10)

Instantly, all the brahmins get ready to cremate the dead body of Naranappa. Garuda said, "Who'll get my son Shyama out of the army, Acharya-re? And tell me, who but my son can do my rites when I die? So, if you'd kindly give me permission, what . . . ?"(30-31). His own son has joined the army and he would have also become impure, so he should be given the right to cremate Naranappa's dead body, so that with the money offered by Chandri, he could get his son back from army, he thought. As stated earlier, Naranappa has no relation with Lakshmana; yet being greedy for gold, Anasuya nagged Lakshmanacharya, "Wasn't Naranappa my own maternal uncle's son? Sinner he may be. But if any lowcaste man is allowed to pick up his dead body,

I'll die of shame (32)". Now Lakshmana is also ready to cremate Naranappa:

Lakshmana gasped. 'Narayana, Narayana.' He wiped the sweat off his body, closed his eyes, and said, 'Acharya-re, if the Books have no objection, I've none either. Naranappa is my wife's sister's husband, isn't he, after all? If you don't mind, no one but me has the right to perform the death-rites.' And opened his eyes. (34)

Other brahmins like Dasacharya are also interested in cremating presently. They are waiting for "No" from Garuda and Lakshmana, "The eyes of the poorer brahmins like Dasa grew moist, their mouths watered. Would Garuda and Lakshmana let anyone else do the rites? (10)". They plead for Naranappa, "For one thing, he may have rejected brahminhood, but brahminhood never left him. No one ever excommunicated him officially. He didn't die an outcaste; so he remains a brahmin in his death. Only another brahmin has any right to touch his body (9)". Even the brahmin women are presented as greedy for gold, "The women kept staring at the heap of gold and they were disappointed by their husbands' words (12)". Now the whole agarhara of brahmins is ready to cremate the dead body. Thus, greed for gold by brahmins has been depicted in this novel. The brahmins who give the message of sacrifice and renunciation to the other castes of the society, are too greedy for gold, as portrayed in this novel.

As quoted earlier, no brahmin can eat, until the dead body is not cremated. Yet the brahmins could not keep themselves in restrictions. Parijatapura brahmins are not so orthodox as the brahmins of Durvasapura. Yet the brahmins do not hesitate eating in their houses. But they do not want themselves to be called impure. Therefore, they eat stealthily, because the dilemma of cremation of the dead body remains unsolved, even after two days. So Dasacharya does not mind eating, "I don't really mind eating in your house. But if those rascals in our agarhara hear about it, no one will invite me to a ceremony again (56)". He is also afraid of being noticed eating at a smarta house:

As soon as the word *uppittu* was uttered, the bowels in Dasacharya's belly turned and made loud gurgling noises. Still, he was afraid to eat cooked stuff in a Smarta house; so he suggested: 'No, no, *uppittu* doesn't really agree with me. Just a little plain flat-rice, and some milk and jaggery will do.' (57)

Naranappa has resisted the brahminical ways and he has criticised them from the core of his heart. To Praneshacharya, he used to say, "O Acharya, who in the world can live with a girl who gives no pleasure - except of course some barren brahmins! (21)" and "Acharya-re? Push those sickly

wives of yours into the river. Be like the sages of your holy legends - get hold of a fish-scented fisherwoman who can cook you fish-soup, and go to sleep in her arms. And if you don't experience god when you wake up, my name isn't Naranappa (26)". He has condemned the poor and miserable life full of formalities and renunciation. He has condemned the upper caste hypocrisy. Dr Rajneesh Pandey aptly remarks:

In the novel all the sensitive issues related to rituals, *samskara*, untouchability, sexual relations, etc are perfectly raised. The novel also spotlights the voracity, lust and inhuman attitude of Brahmin community. The most striking thing about Ananthamurthy's characters is that they stand for liberty from a life shackled in traditional rituals. (613)

Mostly the characters in *Samskara* are hypocritical; though they show themselves as pious, pure, high caste brahmins. In this novel, the hypocrisy of high caste brahmins is exposed. In the words of Aditi Dev, "Anantmoorthy's *Samskarais* seen as a vicious indictment of the orthodoxy of the rigid brahminical system (2)". Durgabhata's intentions can be taken as an ample proof of it, when he sees Chandri, Naranappa's low caste concubine at Praneshacharya's house:

For the first time his connoisseur eyes had the chance to appraise this precious object which did not normally stir out of the house, this choice object that Naranappa had brought from Kundapura. A real 'sharp' type, exactly as described in Vatsyayana's *Manual of love* - look at her, toes longer than the big toe, just as the *Love Manual* says. Look at those breasts. In sex she's the type who sucks the male dry. Her eyes, which should be fickle, are now misty with grief and fear, but she looks good that way. Like Matsyagandhi, the Fisherwoman in the Ravi Varma print hung up in Durgabhata's bedroom, shyly trying to hide her breasts bursting through her poor rag if a sari. The same eyes and nose: no wonder Naranappa threw away the worship-stone for her, ate taboo meat and drank taboo liquor. (8)

On seeing Chandri, he remembers the fisherwomen as described by Praneshacharya in the religious scripts. He feels entertained and in his thinking of Naranappa, he praises his courage. He even recalls a brahmin poet, who wrote fleshy poetry on his wife's breasts:

One remembers Jagannatha the brahmin poet who married the Muslim girl and his verses about the alien's breasts. If Praneshacharya were not present, if Naranappa weren't lying dead right there, he

would have happily quoted the stanza and expanded on it even to these barren brahmins. (8-9)

Later, in the novel, there is also a description about his fascination for widows of Smarta clan, "Furthermore, he was fascinated by their widows who didn't shave their heads and grew their hair long, who even chewed betel leaf and reddened their mouths (12-13)". He feels attracted by the beauty of those widows. Not only the brahmins, but their "Crest Jewel of Vedic Learning" is also impressed by Chandri's generosity:

Praneshacharya asked Chandri to sit down, came into the dining-room where his wife lay, and proceeded to tell her how pure Chandri's heart was, how she'd laid down all her gold and what new complications arose from that generous act. (20)

Praneshacharya criticises Naranappa for shedding brahminical ways and adopting a life-style of a corrupted person; he also advises him to mend his ways and leave such life-style. Later, in the novel, Praneshacharya gets recluse in Chandri's arms. Once, Naranappa has also commented upon Garuda's hypocrisy, "Your Garuda, he robs shaven widows, he plots evil with black magic men, and he is one of your brahmins? (21)". The character of Naranappa is free from hypocrisy. In the novel, he does whatever he likes and does not behave in a greedy manner like Garuda and Lakshmana.

In brief, it is clear from the above observation that the novel *Samskara* is an attack on the hypocrisy of brahminism. It is a satire on the brahminical way of living. The novel is an attack on the life-style of brahmins which is full of superstitions. In the novel, through the portrayal of characters like Durgabhata, Garuda, Lakshmana and Dasacharya, it has been shown that they are clinging to the orthodox way of life and the vices like greed, lust have been explored.

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