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TRADITION, MODERNITY, THE CONCEPT OF DHARMA AND ADHARAMA IN ANANTHMURTHY'S SAMSKARA

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Abstract:- UR Ananthmurthy's Samskara deals with the theme of conflicts in tradition and modernity and dharma and adharama among the Brahmins in Sarasvatipura village. The agrahara of Sarasvatipura has been well-known for the observation of the norms and principles of Brahmanism from the time immemorial. The village is guided by Praneshashastri, an authority in the Vedas, Upanishads and other Hindu scriptures. At this juncture, the agrahara is polluted by the immoral act of a wealthy Brahmin called Naranappa. He brings an untouchable woman called Chantri to his house and lives with her. The Brahmins of this village excommunicate Naranappa from their caste and treat him as an outcaste. This affects the portrayal of underprivileged people and communal harmony of the Brahmins in Sarasvatipura.

Keywords: Tradition, Modernity, wealthy Brahmin , excommunicate.

INTRODUCTION:

When the agrahara undergoes restlessness, another misfortune takes place there. Naranappa happens to die. The residents of the Saravastipura agrahara are divided in the matter related to the funeral of Naranappa. While some of his relatives want to apply the norms of Brahmins to cremate Naranappa's body, others argue that he is an outcaste and therefore no Brahmin norms and rituals should be observed in his cremation. They approach Preshacharya for the solution to this crisis. He consults the books of Vedas and other scriptures and realizes that such situations have not been discussed in those books. He pays a visit to the Hanuman temple in the forest and seeks the Lord Hanuman to solve this problem. He becomes unsuccessful here also.

While he leaves the temple to return home, Chantri meets Preshacharya in the mid forest and falls at his feet to help her for the cremation of her so called husband. When he lifts her from the floor, he happens to touch her uncovered bosom and loses his self control. Overwhelmed by lust, he makes love to her. On his return, he notices that his ailing wife has passed away. After his wife's funeral, he leaves Saravastipur as a sort of self imposed excommunication for his misconduct with Chantri. He moves from one place and other like an orphan. He realizes that being away from the village will not bring about any redemption to his sin and cleanse the village from the pollution. He returns to his village with a view to restore the lost glory of Brahmanism to his village. Thus the theme of Samskara may be regarded as caste identity and decadent Brahmanism.

The novel Samskara is a social novel which gives us the full picture of the castes in a south Village Durvasapura in the state Karnataka. The village is inhabited by smarta Brahmins who follow the sect of Shankara's philosophy. They are traditional and believe in the caste systems. In Durvasapur, there are many castes -Brahmins, Muslims, Fishermen and low caste people. The Brahmins of the village look upon Praneshacharya as their leader.

Anantha Murthy attacks the instable roots of brahmanism with the help of the character of Naranappa. Naranappa describes the lives of all great Brahmins who had violated their orthodoxy by falling for the charms of women of low caste . He sights the example of the great sage Parashara who fell for the irresistible charms of Matsyagandhi, a fisherwoman and took her in his boat and blessed her body with a sweet fragrance. They made love in the boat itself under the cover of the clouds and thus born the great sage Vyasa who wrote the immortal Mahabharata. Another such example of love transcending spirituality is that of the great sage Viswamitra who lost all the spiritual powers that he had gained by falling for the ensnaring charms Menaka. One more such example is that of sage Adi Shankara who enter into the dead body of a king to experience sex with his queen. All the agrahara Brahmins who find fault with Naranappa for denigrating brahminhood, do not contribute to its dignity

by their conduct. They are guilty, of jealousy, lust, anger, gluttony and adultery. Even the great Praneshcharya is guilty of committing adultery and sustaining adulterous thoughts after tasting real sexual pleasure with Chandri, the concubine of the much denigrated Naranappa. He commits the sin of his friend Mahabala and his opposite number Naranappa. Shripati commits adultery with Belli and consumes liquor secretly with his friends after the drama rehearsal at Parijatapura.

At times, the rhetoric becomes so especially existentialist as to up set upset the balancing act of tradition and modernity. After testing out the theory that he is not responsible for sinning with Chandri because he did not speak it, he reasserts an existentialist ethics: "Even if I lost control, the responsibility to decide was still mine. Man's decision is valid only because it is possible to bring form and line to this thing we call our person" (P. 98). At the end of the novel when he anticipates explaining himself as a "new man" to his neighbors, he distances himself from a theological frame for his change: "When I tell them about myself, there should be no taint of repentance in me, no trace of any sorrow that I am a sinner. If not, I cannot go beyond conflicts and dualities. I must see Mahabala. Must tell him: only the form we forge for ourselves in our inmost will is ours without question" (P.135). Shaping ourselves through choices, forging our own form, these are heady notions about "leaving the ghostly stage behind". (P. 123)

Naranappa is a smart Brahmin in the beginning but he has degraded himself to a low-caste because he has kept Chandri as his concubine. Praneshacharya has tried to reform him but he has not succeeded. Naranappa has mixed with low-caste people. About him the novelist says, "But Naranappa hadn't walked the path, he had turned a deaf ear to all counsel. By sheer power of example, had even stolen Praneshacharya's own words and Sanskrit pupils. Guruda's son Shayam, Lakshmana's son-in-law Shripati. Naranappa had incited Shyam to run away from home and join the army. The Acharya, wearied by complaints, had gone to see Naranappa one day. He was looking on a soft mattress, and showed some courtesy by getting up. He didn't take counsel well, and talked his head off; sneered at the Acharya and Brahmin ways" (Mukherji, 43)

In the long soliloquy which covers four pages of the novel, there is the mention of the sweet memory of Chandri with whom he had full enjoyment of sexual contact. The following extract gives the inner thoughts of Praneshcharya about Chandri:

"I must examine unafraid even my belief that the moment occurring suddenly by itself, without my stir, in the darkness of the forest. It is true it occurred suddenly; I didn't go after it and get it. The outstretched hands touched the breast—desire was born—there, there's the secret. That was the moment that decided which way to turn, no, a moment when I could have decided which way to turn. The answer is not that my body accepted it, but in the darkness my hands fumbled urgently, searched for Chandri's thighs and buttocks as I had never searched any dharma. In that moment, decisive of which way I should turn, the decision was taken to take Chandri" (P. 83)

Praneshacharya was conscious that the decision to mix with Chandri was on account of the loss of control over himself. He was also conscious that we make or mar our personality through our choices. Naranappa, according to Praneshacharya, became the person he chose to be but Praneshacharya thinks that many great persons such as Parashara and Vishvamitra, fell a victim to the sudden impulse for Matsyagandhi and Maneka.

This is clear from the novel Samskara that Durvasapura and villagers around it are following the Hindu caste system. Whatever the advantages of the caste system be, the author has shown the evils of caste system in South Indian Villages. There is much rigidity in the caste system prevalent in Indian Villages. For example, Naranappa who has joined the low caste by keeping Chandri as his wife, is not allowed respectful place among the Brahmins of Durvasapura, he is treated as renegade or sinner.

The novel Samskara gives us clear-cut division of the caste system in the village Durvasapura, Parijatapura, Kundapura and Kaimara and other places, in the region of Shivamogga, a district of Karnataka. Of all these places the evils of caste system are described in details in the village of Durvasapura. The novel was written in 1965 but the incidents, characters, castes belong to the period of 1930's and 1940's before independence.

The residence of Durvasapura is mainly Madhava. They follow the rules and rituals of Madva sect founded by Madhvacharya in the twelfth century. They are orthodox and this orthodoxy is represented by Praneshcharya and other Brahmins of the village. The chief of them are Dasacharya, Gurudevacharya, Lakshmana, Durgabhatta and Shripati. Brahminism and orthodoxy of the named Brahmins is opposed by Naranappa who has become reprobate and corrupt Brahmin because he has kept Chandri a low-caste woman as his concubine.

The caste system has eaten the vitals of Indian society and stands as a stumbling block to its progress. Samskara aims at the systematization of human values for national progress by its clinical approach to the closed society of Durvasapura agrahara. The affairs of the agrahara leading to both physical and metaphorical striking of a rotting body. Though the message administered by Anantha Murthy in the novel is stringent, its purpose is to stem the rot and pave the way for an Indian without the barrier of cancerous caste system for making the country a nation in reality.

In this novel the novelist favors the life and principles of Naranappa. He seems to be a symbol of modernity because Naranappa follows the progressive principle of Congress party. There is a battle between Dharma and adharma in the novel. The old values of purity and casteism are thrown to the winds in the novel.

The novel Samskara begins with the death of Naranappa in Durvasapura agrahara. He is anti-brahminical Brahmin and had lived all his life as rebel challenging the ways and beliefs of his agrahara counterparts. He has been a headache to the fellow Brahmins of the agrahara by his reprobate ways openly holding the established customs and conventions held sacred by the Brahmin while alive. He has abandoned his legally wedded wife and lived with a low caste prostitute by name Chandri in the heart of the agrahara and eaten the food cooked by her. He has mingled with Muslim by eating meat and denigrating the temple pond by catching and eating the fish dedicated to Lord Ganapati. He has thrown the sacred stone 'saligrama' held in

reverence and worshipped for centuries by his fellow Brahmins into the river. This besides, he has consumed liquor with others openly in front yard of his house in low company. In addition to attacking Brahmin beliefs he has corrupted the Brahmin youths like Shyam and Shripati making the former desert his home and join the army and later going after the low-caste woman Belli neglecting his wife Lilavati and becoming disloyal to Lakshmana and his Anasuya who have reclaimed him from an orphan.

The above extract shows that a new type of ideology is working through the novel. There is a protest among the youths against the prohibition of joining the army. The novelist has pointed out the worst effects of casteism and untouchability in the novel. The Brahmins are opposed to Naranappa because he has kept Chandri as his kept wife in his home but Anantha Murthy has shown the progress role of Naranappa as he is member of a dramatic troupe of Parijatapura, he used to take part in the musical concerts of this group of artists and musicians. Secondly, the novelist has shown that Chandri's beauty had great attraction for Naranappa. Therefore the novelist has proved that beauty of Chandri was much better than the weak and ugly Brahmin woman. That is why the outlook of the author is progressive because he has appreciated the beauty and charms of the low caste woman. Naranappa took intense pleasure in the company of beautiful woman Chandri. Even the author has shown that flowers were used for worship by the agrahara Brahmins, "But the flowers that bloomed in Naranappa's yard were reserved solely for Chandri's hair and for a vase in the bedroom"

The novel also shows the futility of the centuries-old caste system operating in India undermining the very concept of national integration. The caste system has been eaten the vitals of Indian society and stands as stumbling block to its progress. Samskara aims at the systematisation of human values for national progress by clinical approach to the closed society of Durvasapura agrahara. The affairs of the agrahara with the intimates following age-old rituals and caste prejudices convert it into a ghost colony. Life becomes nightmarish for everyone in the agrahara leading to both physical and metaphorical striking of a rotting body. Though the aseptic administered by Anantha Murthy in the novel is stringent, its purpose is to stem the rot and pave the way for an India without the barriers of cancerous caste system for making the country a nation in reality. Anantha Murthy's Samskara thus projects a universal outlook for the well being of humanity as a whole where the narrow walls of caste and creed will not obstruct the progress of humanity towards a global community.

From the thematic point of view, the novel Samskara is very significant. It has got many themes of modern India combined through a very popular novel which has secured fame and name for the author Anantha Murthy. On account of the importance themes, it has been prescribed in many universities in India. The importance themes in the novel are: 1) the portrayal of decadent brahminism in the state of Karnataka. 2) The orthodoxy and its bad effects on the society. 3) The theme of superstitions and among sections of a village society. 4) The theme of reformation of a corrupt Brahmin. 5) Tension between tradition and modernity, on account of a pleasant mixture of these themes this novel although banned for some time for its erotic element has attained great popularity.

The Presentation of the theme of Decadent Brahminism: It is through the character of Praneshacharya that the orthodox and decadent Brahmin culture has been presented in the novel. Although Pranasha has received his education at Kashi, yet he has narrow approach to religion. On the question of the cremation of Naranappa, he consults religious books but he is not able to come to any definite conclusion. Then he goes to the Maruti temple where the god Maruti is not able to give him any reply. Then he falls into a very undesirable erotic situation of contact with low-caste woman Chandri.

The Orthodoxy and its bad effects on the society: The novel points out many orthodox habits of the residents of the village Durvasapura. The novel begins with the dead body of Naranappa lying in his home and the Brahmins are so orthodox that no one is willing to perform the death-rites of Naranappa. Secondly, the Brahmins are narrow and orthodox. In never accommodating Naranappa in the social usages of Brahmins society. Then orthodoxy and superstition are easily seen the attitudes of the Brahmins towards the epidemic plague. The villagers all believed in the epidemic as the result of some demon or evils spirits. The only one person is Manjayya who is convinced that the plague is caused by some infection spread by dying rats. In other matters also the villages shows their superstitious belief.

The theme of reformation of A Corrupt Brahmin: Most of the incidents and actions in the novel centre round the libertine Naranappa whose reform is the mission of Praneshacharya. Praneshacharya belief that Naranappa can be perfectly reformed but, Naranappa wants to take shelter behind the progressive policy of the Congress. Therefore he attacks the orthodox Brahmins. In the afterwards A. K Ramanujan rightly observes: "Naranappa's targets are the trait-laced village Brahmins who attended to the rituals, but have not earned by any means their 'refinement of spirit'. They are greedy, gluttonous, mean-spirited, they love gold, betray orphans and widows, they are jealous of Naranappa's every forbidden pleasure".(Mukherji, 34)

Conflict between tradition and Modernity: The novel treats the theme of conflict between and modernity. In the afterwards Ramanujan rightly says: "All the battles of tradition and defiance, asceticism and sensuality, the meaning and meaninglessness of ritual, dharma as nature and law desire and salvation, have now become internal to Praneshacharya. The arena shift from a Hindu village community to the body and spirit of the protagonist". Then, there is the portrayal of low nature and eroticism in the novel. Anantha Murthy has presented the low characters of Chandri, Belli, Padmavati and presented the naturalistic theme of immoral love and prostitution through these characters. Indeed prostitution is a permanent theme of the novel which is present from the beginning to the end.

In the novel Samskara there is atmosphere of conflict between tradition and modernity. The atmosphere is full of anxiety and indecision. The problem of Naranappa's cremation creates the atmosphere of anxiety and indecision. The chief characters led by Praneshacharya always labour under uncertainty and doubt. They can't solve the problem of the cremation of

Naranappa.

Note how this language doubles modernist existentialism with traditional wisdom, however, 'beyond conflict and dualities' could take you to atma, pure soul, or to the Sartrean zone where existence precedes essence. The 'ghostly stage' is clearly one of confusion and inauthenticity, but neither its precise terms nor its actual achievement are at all certain. The quoted passage, after all, ends with perhaps, and he also calls himself 'a lost soul'. Lost of tradition, adrift in modernity, not yet accustomed to the self-creating mastery of the modern or confused by his own timidity and theological oversimplifications, and very much needing the reality check of an engagement with the world that tempers the soul and transforms precepts to wisdom, ghost of self, or of religion he feels tortured by conflict and dualities, as we saw above, and he wants to escape this ambiguous Trishanku state, Suspended between heaven and earth. Perhaps we are ready just to dismiss him as whiny and duplicitous, throwing up a theological smokescreen around his neocolonial self. But in order to find our way through these perplexities, let us read further in passage that begin with shaping ourselves through our choices:

“Naranappa became the person he chose to be. I chose to be something else and lived by it. But turned at some turning. I am not free till I realize that the turning is also my act, I'm to answer for it. What happened at that turning? Dualities, conflict, rushed into my life. I hung suspended between two truths, like Trishanku. How did the ancient sage face such experience? Without dualities, conflict? One wonders. The great sage who impregnated Matsyagandhi the fisherwoman in the boat and fathered Vyasa -did he agonize over it like me? Did Visvamitra suffer, when he lost all the merits of penance for a woman? Could they have lived, seeing life itself as renouncing, staying with God, going beyond conflicts opposites by living through them, taking on every changing shape that earth carves and offers, flowing finally into formlessness in the ocean like a river? (P. 98-99)

Quoting at such length samples the degree of confusion he feels and his scholarly habits of conceiving it in relation to sacred literature. To be in the ocean like a river is one classic metaphor for moksha, the formlessness beyond ego. The reach it by living through contradictions and dualities is the tantric way of transformation rather than renouncing the passions. To transform the passions is to capture their mutual resonance, the way his college friend Mahabala did through music rather than through Praneshacharya's logic or philosophy, the way art works, are the vibration that includes all ways rather leaving them as exclusive parts. On other hand, to renounce the physical as in the ascetic tradition is to attempt to remove the distractions of the material realm in order to approach through the relative formlessness of the meditative life. These alternatives are related to what we earlier saw in the path through conflict versus the slow path through conventional faith and ritual. Engagement and equanimity have both their religious and their existential forms, within each, both authentic and devalued possibilities. Dharma's subtleties abound.

In this novel, there is a conflict between old tradition and modernity. Praneshacharya represents the old traditions and Naranappa represents modernity, praneshacharya had received his education after leaving his wife at her father's house. He had left her in the grateful house of her father, gone to Benaras, studied to become the Crest-Jewel of Vedantha Philosophy, and had come back. Here was the Lord's ordeal for him, waiting, to test was whether he had the strength to love and act by non-attachment, that was why he had given an ailing invalid wife into his hands. He would serve her, delighting in that knowledge. he had cooked for her, fed her the wheat-gruel he had himself made, done meticulously every act of daily worship for the gods, read and explicated the holy texts for the Brahmins. Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata etc. hoarded his penances like a miser his money.

The Acharya is the follower of Vedant philosophy but is more devoted to Madva cult which is traditional. He believes in penances, rituals and service to the weak. He has the spirit of sacrifice and service in him but falls a victims, of course unintentionally to the attraction and charms of the sexuality of Chandri. On the other hand, Naranappa represents modernity who believes in the Congress Party and its freedom of sex with Chandri with Shudras, friendship with Muslims and general free thinking. Naranappa had accepted the principles of the Congress Party. He had become degenerate and mixed with the Muslim but Acharya had taken vow to reform Naranappa. He could not do so because Naranappa had challenged him with the following words:

“Let's see”, Naranappa challenges him, “who wins in the end-you or me. I'll destroy brahminism really left to destroy in this place- except you”. Does Naranappa function to summon the Acharya into his modern existentialist crisis, or does he prompt the Acharya to shed the observations pride and the will to power and, instead, gain a fully realized form of past perceptions” (P. 78)

“In fact, we are made to think at times that novels real protagonist was a version of Anantha Murthy himself, traveling into pre-colonial idyll of Karnataka countryside devoid of British admixtures, and testing out a “modern” existential identity within the orthodox Brahmin discipline of unmixed, unmarked, utterly matched ideal. Meenakshi Mukherjee's discusses of the novel begins just here with “the author's attempt to exploit the tension between the two world views”. She focuses upon “difficult and uneasy process of transition the fixed settled order of life and the still inchoate stirrings of self”. She pursues the novel as an allegory of an existential form of identity emerging from a static non-existence ossified in ritual and dogma.

The novel becomes very popular and all readers took it quite reformatively but due to its too much eroticism it was not liked by a large number of Brahmins. Therefore Ramanujana rightly observes: “Not every reader is so taken. Certain Brahmin communities in South India were offended by the picture of decadent brahminism. They felt that men and women were unfairly caricatured; they were offended by the novelist's rather intrusive partiality for Naranappa and the sudra women”.

But in spite of its negative qualities, the novel has some redeeming features which are contained in the following extract of Ramanujana:

“One should reasonably take the view that this novel, written in the sixties, is really presenting a decadent Hinduism through the career of a limited hero, capable only of arcs, not full circles. As said earlier, the last phase of the Acharya's initiation is an anxious return, a waiting on the threshold; his questions seem to find no restful answers. What is suggested is a movement, not a closure. The novel ends, but does not conclude”.

The conclude, rigid tradition in the south Indian Village, conflicts between old tradition and modern tradition , decadent of brahaminis in present novel and caste identity and dharama and adharama.

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