



COEXISTENCE OF CARNAL DESIRE AND ELITE CULTURE IN ANANTH MURTHY'S SAMSKARA

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Abstract :

Ananthmurthy's award winning novel Samskara portrays various aspects of South Indian Culture along with intercultural relationship encountered like salad bowl in a small village. The so called elite culture of Praneshacharya in this novel has been emerged at the cost of the sacrifices of baser human instinct and carnal desire. Culture as a gist of all its definitions which lets an individual to celebrate his/her existence in the society as the member of that group but a responsible and respected character like Praneshacharya gets isolated from the society and he is detained within his own boundaries behind the walls of social taboos. Culture which makes man more interactive, celebrative and open-minded and carnivalesque performs exactly in the contrast in the case of Praneshacharya. This paper is an attempt to explore this contrast from the novel and illustrate how a poor guy is a prey of his own carnal desire against his own panorama of cultural value responsible for his escape from the society and as a social being

Key words: *Culture, Carnal Desire, human values*

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Carnal Desire is one of the baser instincts like hunger in human beings like animals. It needs to be satisfied instead of locking up in deep down in our subconscious mind. In the theory of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud focuses on this instinct of human beings. He defines an instinct as “a source” which “is a state of excitation within the body and its aim is to remove that excitation”. (Freud 1938:125) According to him “The sexual instincts are remarkable for their plasticity, for the facility with which they can change their aim...for the ease with which they can substitute one form of gratification for another” (Freud 1938: 127)

In Indian culture irrespective of religions, sex has always been a social taboo. Hindu society even forbids discussing the subject among the adults. However, sex is sublimated in the form of marriage which is approved socially by the other members of the cultural group. If a man or woman has sexual relation without being married, then it is labeled as the adulatory and sin. Such a man or a woman is expelled from the society. Due to this, often sexual desires are suppressed but these desires flows out whenever they find the way. The Jnanpeeth awardee U. R. Anantha Murthy is a well known figure in Kannada Literature. His short novel *Samskara - a Rite for a Dead Man* is a controversial



classic in Indian Literature which shows the Praneshacharya's duel between his carnal desire which the baser instinct of all human being and his elite Brahmin culture which is trapped in its old-age hypocrisy. The novel was originally written in Kannada and published in 1965; it was translated into English by A. K. Ramanujan.

The novel *Samskara* is the story of an anti-Brahminical Brahmin Naranappa who is dead in novel. His death causes the havoc among the Brahmins in Durvasapura because he is man who had abandoned his legal wife and had relationship with a low caste woman, Chandri. He would not observe the death anniversary of his parents. Besides, he has friendship with Muslims with whom he would eat and drink forbidden things. No one is ready to perform Naranappa's last rites. It is the story of lusty, greedy, hypocrite Brahmins of the agrahara like Garudacharya, Lakshmanacharya, Dasacharya, who hate Naranappa and curse him for being anti-Brahmin even after his death. These Brahmins are the hypocritic who appear the staunch follower of their scriptures and dharma. They hide behind religion but they are exposed in the course of plot. Their gluttony is displayed when chandri offers her ornament to one who performs Naranappa's rites. It is also the story of low caste prostitute Chandri who loves Naranappa very much. She is the loyal woman with mission. She wants the appropriate rites and ritual for the dead body of Naranappa. So she visits the guru of Brahmin Praneshacharya for the proper sacrament for Naranappa's body. *Samskara* is more especially the story of great Sanskrit scholar Praneshacharya, who belongs to elite culture of Brahmins who leads the community. He lives a life of high values and is respected highly among his fellow Brahmins. Praneshacharya is a learned Brahmin "Crest-Jewel of Vedic Learning" (6) who represents the higher section of the social order in Hindu varna system. . As a person, he has earned the greater reverence among his fellow Brahmins. Durgabatta, one of Brahmins describes praneshacharya's intellectuality in following words

Our Acharya has won all sorts of arguments with all the super-pundits, yours and ours, won honours at every seat of learning in the South, fifteen lace shawls and silver platters ... our Acharya... (6)

In novel, Praneshacharya seems to be trapped in the panorama of his highly regarded elite culture that does not allow him to enjoy the basic urges of human beings. Initially he is a satisfied soul whose activities are divided into domestic and religious. He begins his day by performing his regular duty of helping his wife in getting bathed, dressing her up, feeding her meal and giving her medicines. After completing his domestic duties, he worships at Maruti temple and recites the holy legends to the Brahmins of the agrahara who regularly gather in front of his house to listen to his preaching both in the morning and in the evening. He is a scholar and his recitations are new every day. He is absorbed with his routine life. He is a firm Brahmin who is devoted to his Dharma and Karma and who only wants to get salvation. He marries a barren sick woman only to lead a celibate life. He feels proud of his supreme self-sacrifice of carnal desire. He himself thinks 'By marrying an invalid, I get ripe and ready.' (2) He is fully occupied with his duties and responsibilities that even he does not know what desires are meant to be. His state is vividly described in chandri's thoughts



‘Poor man, he probably knew nothing of the body’s pleasures, his wife lay there like a dry log, the good woman. Yet how patient he was, what a halo around him. Not even once had he raised his eyes and looked at her.’(46).

His virtues even attract Chandri; she reminds her mother words “...prostitutes should get pregnant by such holy men. Such a man was the Acharya, he had such looks, virtues; he glowed. But one had to be lucky to be blessed by such people.”(46) Praneshacharya has preserved his characters from all the evils in society but he has not experienced the purity of carnal desires. He himself has the attraction towards the forbidden things which his elite Brahmin culture denounces; which Naranappa enjoys when he was alive. The confrontation between Paranesacharya and Naranappa reveals Naranappa’s hate towards falsity of Brahmin culture. Naranappa argues,

‘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,’ and so on irreverently. The Acharya had even said, ‘Stop it, it isn’t good for you. Don’t separate Shripati from his wife.’ A guffaw was the answer. ‘O Acharya, who in the world can live with a girl who gives no pleasure-except of course some barren brahmins!’ ‘You fellows-you brahmins-you want to tie me down to a hysterical female, just because she is some relative, right? Just keep your dharma to yourself-we’ve but one life-I belong to the “Hedonist School” which says-borrow, if you must, but drink your ghee.’ (21)

Again when Praneshacharya attempts to bring Naranappa on the righteous path in his second visit to Naranappa’s house, Naranappa lashes out the Brahmins in front of Acharya and narrates

‘Aha! The Acharya too can get angry! Lust and anger, I thought, were only for the likes of us. But then anger plays on the nose-tips of people who try to hold down lust. That’s what they say. Durvasa, Parashara, Bhrigu, Brihaspati, Kashyapa, all the sages were given to anger....Look, Acharya-those are the great sages who set the tradition, right? Quite a lusty lot, those sages. What was the name of the fellow who ravished the fisherwoman smelling fish, right in the boat and gave her body a permanent perfume? And now, look at these poor brahmins, descended from such sages! (23)

Naranappa threatens “Let’s see who wins in the end-you or me. I’ll destroy brahminism, I certainly will. My only sorrow is that there’s no brahminism really left to destroy in this place-except you.” (23) Naranappa proves Praneshacharya how he is one responsible for the decay in Brahminism. He criticizes Acharya for his vanity and suppression of feelings and desires

“You read those lush sexy Puranas, but you preach a life of barrenness. — 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.’ (25, 26)



The episode between Naranappa and Acharya shows how Acharya himself comprises the baser carnal desires. It is also true. When he recites the holy legends, it attracts the youth because of his narration skill with erotic poetry. Shripathi, a young brahmin has slept with Belli a low caste at the river only after he had heard the Acharya description of Shakuntala's beauty.

“He couldn't stand it anymore. Belli was carrying a pitcher of water on her head, the rag on her body had slipped, and as she stood in the moonlight bouncing her breasts, the colour of earth. she'd looked like Shakuntala herself. He had then personally, carnally, enjoyed the Acharya's description.” (39).

It is Naranappa who in fact, helps Praneshacharya to find out his personality's another side which he has buried deep down in his subconscious. He has compromised with his inner feelings.

Later in novel, his character exhibits his inner urges and carnal desires that are restrained deep down in his soul. The self-awakening thoughts of Praneshacharya persuade him. He symbolically goes through a rebirth and experience the dual existence of contrasting natures within himself when he truly comes to know about the physical pleasure with Chandri. When Acharya fails to find out the solution over the problem of Naranappa's dead body, he offers prayers to monkey-god and asks for His help but he does not get any positive sign from the God. While returning home, he meets Chandri who was on her trail to Praneshacharya. Chandri overflows with compassion for him. Acharya gets tempted towards the touch of true woman. Anathamurthy vividly portrayed the incident.

“She wanted to hold his feet and offer him her devotion. The next second, she was falling at his feet. It was pitch dark, nothing was visible. As she bent over as if overcome with grief, she didn't quite fall at his feet. Her breast touched his knee. In the vehemence of her stumbling, the buttons on her blouse caught and tore open. She leaned her head on his thigh and embraced his legs. Overwhelmed with tender feeling, filled with pity at this Brahmin who had perhaps never known the pleasure of woman, helpless at her thought that there was no one but him for her in the agrahara overcome, she wept. Praneshacharya, full of compassion, bewildered by the tight hold of a young female not his own, bent forward to bless her with his hands. His bending hand felt her hot breath, her warm tears; his hair rose in a thrill of tenderness and he caressed her loosened hair. The Sanskrit formula of blessing got stuck in his throat. As his hand played on her hair, Chandri's intensity doubled. She held his hands tightly and stood up and she pressed them to her breasts now beating away like a pair of doves. Touching full breasts he had never touched, Praneshacharya felt faint. As in a dream, he pressed them. As the strength in his legs was ebbing, Chandri sat the Acharya down, holding him close. The Acharya's hunger, so far unconscious, suddenly raged, and he cried out like a child in distress, ‘Amma!’



Chandri leaned him against her breasts, took the plantains out of her lap, peeled them and fed them to him. Then she took off her sari, spread it on the ground, and lay on it hugging Praneshacharya close to her, weeping, flowing in helpless tears”

The sexual encounter with Chandri totally transformed Praneshacharya. He felt that he no longer had any moral right to continue as the spiritual leader of the agrahara. So he refused to direct the Brahmins in the issue of Naranappa dead body. What retires Praneshacharya from his place is nothing but the so call elite-brahmin culture which withholds him from living his true life. The culture which makes an individual interactive, celebrative, carnivalesque chains Praneshacharya within the walls of social taboos. His revered character emerges in the society at the cost of the sacrifices of his baser instinct and carnal desires. Naranappa does not succeed to trap Praneshacharya, but he instigates him to ponder over the true philosophy of life. Whereas Chandri lets him flow as man within her to satisfy his inner carnal desires.

The novel vividly portrays the dilemma and duel of Praneshacharya with his carnal desires and it is the elite cultures of Brahmin that prevents him to enjoy the life. He has trapped within his own boundaries behind the walls of social taboos. He tries to escapes from the reality of his life by evading in another village so that the people would not come to know about him and Chandri. But he carries guilt along with him; wherever he goes, he is haunted by the fear of discovery. He cannot forget Chandri’s touch. Praneshacharya thinks that it is not his dilemma or problem but it of all. He reflects

But, my dilemma, my decision, my problem wasn’t just mine, it included the entire agrahara. This is the root of the difficulty, the anxiety, the double-bind of dharma. When the question of Naranappa’s death-rites came up, I didn’t try to solve it for myself. I depended on God, on the old Law Books. Isn’t this precisely why we have created the Books? Because there’s this deep relation between our decisions and the whole community. In every act we involve our forefathers, our gurus, our gods, our fellow humans. Hence this conflict. Did I feel such conflict when I lay with Chandri? Did I decide it after pouring and measuring and weighing? (109)

The criticism of Praneshacharya reveals the falsity of his Brahmin culture. His anxiety is not Chandri but his own community that has shackled him with morality. Chandri in fact becomes a dream for him. At moment he decided to rebel against his culture.

By an act of will, I’ll become human again. I’ll become responsible for myself. That is ... that is ...I’ll give up this decision to go where the legs take me, I’ll catch a bus to Kundapura and live with Chandri. I’ll then end all my troubles. I’ll remake myself in full wakefulness ... (109, 110)



The novel ends with Praneshacharya's return to the agrahara in a state of confusion. His return portrays the paradox. The lust and greed for his position force him to return among his hypocrites Brahmins. Culture which lets an individual to celebrate his/her existence in the society as the member of that group compels a responsible and respected character like Praneshacharya to get isolated from the society only due to morality that his culture has laid upon him.

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Cite This Article:

Dr. Kiran N. Khetta, (2022). *Coexistence of Carnal Desire and Elite Culture in Ananth Murthy's Samskara.* *Aarhat Multidisciplinary International Education Research Journal, XI (II), 152-157*