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Representation of Social and Cultural Issues in the Works of Dr. U. R. Ananthamurthy



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ABSTRACT

The Renaissance, in India, started with Raja Rammohan Roy. He was called as the first prose writer in English. Indian English fiction is at least a century and half old which is the gift of English education. U. R. Ananthamurthy is a contemporary writer and critic in the Kannada Language as well as considered as one of the pioneers of Navya Movement. His writing supposedly analyzes aspects ranging from challenges and changes faced by Brahmin families of Karnataka. Most of his novels portray a reaction of individuals to situations that are unusual and artificial. He portrays the tale of mystery, passion, spiritual exploration as well as mysteries of present and past. Ananthamurthy has deeply focused the socio-cultural elements in his works. The deep study of the novels puts forth the ideologies like impact of Hindu religion, influence of tradition in orthodox society, caste system, conflict between upper and lower class, the problem of untouchability, the effective use of rites and rituals in day today life, love, lust and sex etc. These social and cultural elements are representatives of the stronghold of Hindu principles, specially practiced by Brahmin people.

Keywords : *Navya Movement, orthodox society, untouchability, rites, rituals, Sati Pratha, liberalization, globalization, privatization, social politics.*

Research Paper

Introduction :

The beginning of Indo-Anglian literature has a long past. The history of literature takes us back to the socialist, cultured, traditional and religious India where the society was ruled by so many religious dignitaries like Gautam Buddha, Mahavira, Manu, Basaveshwara etc. The connections of literary movements are related with the social movements of contemporary society. There were four stratas of society like Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudras. But when these four stratas started fainting then the socialist movements started taking shape. The men like Raja Rammohan Roy, Lokmanya Tilak, G. G. Agarkar, Jyotiba Phule, Shahu Maharaj and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar began to speak against the irrational practices. Raja Rammohan Roy fought against the 'Sati Pratha' whereas Shahu, Phule, Ambedkar fought against untouchability in an orthodox society. These great socialists not only opposed it but also expressed their opposition through their writings. These problems became the subject matter of their writing. The literature became the mouthpiece for the contemporary problems. The literature started to present the social, economical, religious, psychological and sexual aspects of the society.

The Renaissance, in India, started with Raja Rammohan Roy. The change of Indian's dogma, rites and rituals started with the arrival of detest to Sati-pratha by Roy and Lord Bentinck abolished it from Indian roots. Then, the socialist movements started to take roots in the Indian soil. Raja Rammohan Roy wanted India to become a new and modern country, and the Indians to become a virile new people by achieving a new integration of our traditional strength with the new scientific disciplines from the west. He was the first man who introduced an autobiography in India and afterwards men like Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi wrote their autobiographies. He was called as the first prose writer in English. The literature then is divided into two categories that is of pre-independence period and post-independence period. This production comes under the broader realm of post colonial, colonial literature, the production from previously colonized countries such as India.

Indian English fiction is at least a century and half old which is the gift of English education. The novel is the importation from the western countries. The Sanskrit literature has a prose fiction of which Dandin's *Dasa Kumara Charita* and Subandhu's *Vasavadutta* are some of the noted examples. The earliest specimens of Indian English fiction were tales rather than novels but their use of fantasy shows their links with the ancient Indian tradition, in spite of the fact that their subject matter is contemporary. One of the noted novelists, Raja Rao, deals with the

plight of untouchables in his novel *Untouchable class*. With the arrival of these novelists, the elements like caste system, religiousness started to appear in fictions. K. Nagarjan's *Athvar's House* is a family chronicle and covers economic vicissitudes in the life of joint family relationships, clash between orthodoxy and new ideas.

U. R. Ananthmurthy is a contemporary writer and critic in the Kannada Language as well as considered as one of the pioneers of Navya Movement. He has been awarded *Janpith Award* for his contribution in Kannada language, and also been awarded *Padma Bhushan* by the Government of India. He was born in Melige, Trithalhali, a Taluka of Shimoga district. He received his education in a traditional Sanskrit School. He started his career as a professor and instructor in 1970 in English Department, University of Mysore. In 1993, he was elected as the president of Sahitya Academy. His works have been translated into several Indian and European languages. His main works include *Samskara*, *Bhava*, *Bhartipura* and *Avasthe*. His literary works deal with psychological aspects of people in different situations, times and circumstances. His writing supposedly analyzes aspects ranging from challenges and changes faced by Brahmin families of Karnataka. Most of his novels portray a reaction of individuals to situations that are unusual and artificial.

Results of influences on change of Hindu societies of India and clashes due to such influences between a father and a son, husband and wife, father and daughter and finally the fine love that flows beneath all such clashes are portrayed by him.

He depicted the socio-cultural elements of his time. Though he was born in Brahmin family, he was against the Brahmin rites and rituals. He has discussed caste system, culture, religious rules, traditions etc. He portrays ambivalent relationship, handed down cultural values and new values of changing world. He has discussed the religious matters and contemporary Hindu themes. He has also elaborated the issues related with untouchability, complexities of caste system and myth of social justice.

He also portrays the tale of mystery, passion, spiritual exploration as well as mysteries of present and past. Besides, he has also thrown light on the contemporary political movements in India. In some of his works, he has explored zealotry to make sense of turbulence, tensions and contradictions of his times. He has been deeply reflecting upon the nature of modern civilization. He has been attempting to explore the impact of liberalization, globalization and privatization especially on our psyche. He handles themes in his novels in such a way that they are both, current as well as interesting and draws full attention of the readers. He makes his readers to think about these problems and their realities.

The novel *Samskara* basically was written in Kannada language and got translated into English by A.K. Ramanujan. The story of the novel is set in a street in a small village called Durvasapura in Western Ghats of Karnataka. The people living in the village were mostly Brahmins. They have a traditional mindset and strictly follow the rules defined by their religion. Two of the main characters in the story are Praneshacharya and Narnappa. Praneshacharya is a devout brahmin who completed his Vedic education at Varanasi. His main aim is to attain liberation. To be focused on his goal, he marries a woman who cannot participate in physical relationship and hence remains celibate. The other main character in the novel is Naranappa, a brahmin by birth but strictly rejected the rules of brahmin culture by eating meat and by keeping the company of a prostitute named Chandri. Once Naranappa visits Shimoga and he returns to Durvasapura with high fever and dies. The Brahmins left in a confute situation because a dead body should be cremated as early as possible. But no brahmins want to cremate the body because they thought that will become polluted as he was against brahmin principles during his life.

The novel doesn't offer a solution here. It remains open ended because Praneshacharya doesn't give any suitable solution. It is an effective tale of community chocked by unsustainable tradition. Ananthamurthy offers fine portraits of characters. The novel examines the themes like caste system, culture, religious rules.

The novel *Bhartipura* is named after the town in which it is set. The central character is Jagannatha, a brahmin whose affluence makes him the richest man in town. Having spent six years studying in England, he has returned to Bhartipura and is now terribly disappointed by the rigid and stupefied society here. He detests how the local temple God dominated everyday life. The temple and the visiting pilgrims are the source of the town's wealth. Jagannatha wants to shake up the local system and he wants to do this by leading the Harijans specially Holeyaru people to enter the premises of the temple. He makes aware the tribal people to knock the societal system but the tribal people thrilled and they don't want to be guinea pigs if the expected outcome doesn't appear. He also faces smaller hurdles as he tries to teach them to read. Jagannatha wants radical change in some respects.

The novel explores the practice of untouchablity in a traditional society, complexities of caste system and social justice. It portrays a specific time, place and of specific influences both, traditional Indian and modern Western. The centre of the novel is a society familiar with the class and caste issues. It also explores complexities of caste system and social justice. The novel is an attempt to go ahead to modern society. At the upper level, when there was socialistic revolution against the caste system, but in the village like *Bhartipura*, the society

was deeply rooted in the clutches of tradition and social system. The hero of the novel doesn't be an absentee but he wants to be a man of action. Besides, entering in a temple and earning money in the name of God is also profession.

The novel *Bhava* is originally written in Kannada but translated in English by Judith Kroll with the author. He is a reciter of Harikatha, encounters an Ayyappa pilgrim in a train. He sees Sri Chakra amulet around a pilgrim's neck which looks like one that belonged to Saroja – his wife. This is a story of three generations as Shastri, Dinkar and Narayan. The interwoven lives of three generations play out variations on the same themes. It is a drama of cruelty and lust, a lyrical meditation on love and transformation. The novel takes a story of complex human relationships, the problem of illegitimate relations etc. The novel narrates the incident that once Shastri, the hero is travelling in a train. He came across a man named Dinkar who had worn an amulet around his neck. Shastri sees it and gets shocked because that amulet belongs to his wife Saroja. He had murdered his wife due to her illegitimate relations with Pundit. That traveller, Dinkar, might be his son. Ananthmurthy, also wove one another story where Dinkar comes across his old friend Narayan and Narayan is the father of Prasad. The novelist has woven these three characters one after other. He also portrays the extra-marital relationships and its effects on a particular person. The novel is an implication of the difference between two societies that the Native Indian Society and Western Modern Society

The word *Avasthe* means disorder in Kannada. The novel was originally written in Kannada but got translated into English. The main character in this novel is Krishnaappgowda who was the doyen of the socialist movement in Karnataka and became the Chief Minister. The novel was made into a movie but it generated a lot of controversy and was almost banned. The novel examines the traditional and Feudal India. The novel also examines the ups and downs of the socialist politics in post-independent India. The central theme of this novel is socialist politics and for the further development of the novel, it is based on the real life story of one of the active socialist politician named Gopala Gowda. He was one of the Chief Ministers of Karnataka whose working period was so long as about fifteen years in the history of Karnataka. Gowda was influenced by Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya's socialist movement all over India. U. R. Ananthmurthy developed the hero in the novel and showed the workings of Gopala Gowda.

Ananthamurthy has deeply focused the socio-cultural elements in his works. The deep study of the novels puts forth the ideologies like impact of Hindu religion, influence of tradition in orthodox society, caste system, conflict between upper and lower class, the problem of

untouchability, the effective use of rites and rituals in day to day life, love, lust and sex etc. These social and cultural elements are representatives of the stronghold of Hindu principles, specially practiced by Brahmin people.

The novel *Samskara* is an ideal example of the performance of tradition, caste system, class conflict and the lust for physical relations. The protagonist of the novel has an illegitimate relations with a lower class girl Chandri. The novelist presented the human relations in a complex way. Another important character in the novel is Praneshacharya who is a representative of the bold practicing of class and caste conflict, the performance of rituals in each and every life activities. He tries to give solution about the cremation and how it should be performed. The novel ends but does not conclude. In *Bhartipura*, the society was governed by the upper class people where the lower class people were not permitted to enter in the temple. They were kept outside and were not permitted even to perform the Puja in the temple. The tradition of performing rites which continuous from years is in the hands of a typical class. But the protagonist opposes the tradition running down, the right limited to upper class and caste.

The practicing of cultural elements are skillfully presented in Bhava like preparing food in *madi*, use of rangoli on special occasions, and eating food on banana leaves. Sitamma who is representative of the strict following of these rules and regulations in day to day practices, whereas *Avasthe* deeply focuses on the social issues like class and caste conflict. The hero, Krishnappa, belongs to a lower class. He is part and parcel of socialist politics and strongly opposes the Marxist principles in Indian society.

The problem of untouchability is the chief subject matter of his novels because each character in his novels that are Chandri in *Samskara*, Holyyyaru people in *Bhartipura*, Gangu and Prasad in *Bhava* and Krishnappa in *Avasthe* are representatives of particular class. In every novel, the protagonist of the novel brings these untouchables in the light and represents a severe problem of Indian society.

Anathamurthy presented the social problem of illegitimate relations, love, lust, sex in his novels. The man like Praneshcharya could not control his feelings; lastly, he surrenders to Chandri. He kept celibacy but lastly handovers everything to her. Thus, the novelist has woven these elements, characters in such a way that they represent the Indian social and cultural background.

The trilogy of U.R. Ananthamurthy viz. *Samskara*, *Avasthe* and *Bhartipura* are based on the concept of social justice. In every novel, he tried to concentrate the readers' attention towards the contemporary social and cultural problems of India.

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