

BHARATHIPURA: SOCIETY, CULTURE AND CONFLICT

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The works of U.R. Anantha Murthy respond to moments of their time and reflect on the issues of people, society and culture. Literary endeavors of a writer, direct or indirect significations obviously address the ways of society-cultural issues and its contemporary conflicting realities. The social issues of cultural tradition are thematically grounded, per se, 'caste' as a major issue of cultural problematic in Bharathipura. Yet sympathetic is author's treatment of the tradition as the protagonist of the West-turned young man is involved against caste; a construct of the culture of Brahminism.

Jagannatha, the protagon is a person of his modern learning-is quite fed up with the society he saw in his native town. After five years in England, back in his native town, Jagannatha felt, everything he saw was unchanged and stagnant. As he walked streets, just surmised, if untouchables were to refuse to carry human waste! (p.6) He thought, "Brahmins and merchants have not produced a thing of beauty" (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.9) as artisans do. The narrative combining 'epistolary' and 'stream of consciousness' devices to express the present, often uses the flash back to present the past with the present; Gandhi had visited Bharathipura, had gone straight to the ghetto of untouchables –soon after, Gandhi had undergone the puriffication through the rite of panchagavya as Sripathi Rao had told to Jagannatha. The untouchables and 'Gandhi's Purification rite' is indicative of the problematic in culture and a conflict present in Bharathipura.

Sripathi Rao was an impact on Jagannatha's mind; the person behind Jagannatha's intellectual culture. Rao, a congress leader and freedom fighter-now keeps a Khadi store- had read books of Ingersoll, Bertrand Russell and Bernard Shaw,; had caused Jagannatha to be a skeptic, had made him go to England for studies. Rao also had kept Scot.'s novels, Oliver Goldmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* and Herman Hesse. Rao's reading of *Harijan* at his home is still green in Jagannatha's mind. In England he championed the cause of individualism and liberal politics. His girl friend whom he wants to marry is in England when heis back in India.

Disgusted, seeing "nothing new" and "life sterile" in Bharathipura (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.9), Jagannatha longed "to feel a sense of belonging to somewhere." (U.R.Ananthamurthy p. 12) He contemplated to find "a new link for life" and "fulfillment" in Bharathipura. The sordid thing on his mind was untouchables who "carried baskets of human faeces" on their heads. (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.

13) A need for a responsible action, came to Jagannatha's mind. There were certain other concerning issues; Sripathi Rao tells Jagannatha that the food served at the Manjunatha temple was on the basis of Brahmin-Shudra caste discrimination. (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.22) and that Rao's wife and daughter carried plates to temple shamelessly everyday for free meals; Jagannatha could share his things with only Margaret and Sripathi Rao and writes to her in England:

"Dearest Margaret, We can restore dignity to man only by destroying God otherwise..." (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.22)

In his previous letter to Margaret, Jagannatha mentioned his flight from Delhi, which, on board, had some twenty Vice-Chancellors, some business men, four or five Hippis, a scientist and Air-crew members. A godman of importance was present, before whom those American hippie-Girls prostrated and an air hostess too. Irrespective of castes and class, Shirali Baba, with his extended hand, had diffused his influence of magic, and had whole country surrendered to his charismatic magic fleets. Jagannatha mentions how the whole state approached him. Jagannatha mentioned there should be a churning of History;

- "Unless we destroy God, We will never ever be creative" (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.10)

In surge of his rational mind, Often he would mentally compose lines of letters to Margaret in his imagination;

"There is nothing creative, and the lord Manjunatha is the cancer of life here. The market place is a cancerous growth, A tribute to lord Manjunatha" (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.4)

Jagannatha is compelled to think of plans for constructive things he has to act as a decisive self; he has to write to news papers. Thrown into self analysis, he interrogates himself; Is "undistorted act of living" possible? (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.23) The narrative grips the psychological moments of Jagannatha's revolutionary preoccupation for untouchables. A self doubt about his intended action follows in drafting a letter to Margaret. He needs people for the awaited action "to turn the wheels of history" (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.23) He counted on Rao the Gandhian and thinks Will it be his resolute-forming of clarity for "pure action" as his plan depended on participation of "Pilla ? Kariya? Mada?" the "faceless, nameless untouchables" (U.R.Ananthamurthy p. 23) Jagannatha's mind charted possibilities of his decisive action for the historic temple entry on his mind:

"If untouchables could take their first step into temple and by that one step negate the history of centuries... (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.24)

Jagannatha drafted letters but tore them to compose a simple plain message to the public but contents of the torn drafts had pertinent things that untouchables entering Manjunatha temple, would be punished by Bootharaya who "hangs them by their feet and make them cough blood." (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.26) The second draft Jagannatha intended meant; "The Manjunatha temple was supreme enemy of the scientific outlook." (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.26) Bootharaya helps extract "prompt tenancy payments of rent" from farmers that unless the miraculous powers of Manjunatha were destroyed, "the divine hold of Manjunatha" keeps people inert from being "creative" and "all meaningful social actions" and progress of history would be impossible. One authentic step of untouchables would change the centuries of reality. (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.26-27)

He wrote to Margaret about feudal mode of life in Bharathipura and his intended action but his self doubt made him think that people would degrade him; he wrote he was in “fear” about “losing his options and means”. (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.28) but he thought, desisting the action would be unbecoming for him.

In the “medieval town” of Bharathipura, Bootharaya “the god of the tribals” (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.6) owed his vassalage to Manjunatha; Brahmin priests had “established lord Manjunatha over Bootharaya and got the tribals to serve them and their interests.” (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.6) p as Nagararaja Jois, Sanskrit poet and ‘the famous creator of Hindu Almanac’ of the town had said to Jagannatha. Jagannatha wanted to know more. Rao simply answers : “they are all kinds demons...these spirits are of the Sudras, of lower castes.” (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.21) Jagannatha reminded Sripathi Rao “we use Bootharaya to keep our tenant farmers!!” (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.21)

Folk visit Manjunath and Bootharaya; the practices were imposition by the ruling class of the region, the rulers, the priests and landlords who were the part of the power structure. As per Bootharaya’s injunction no arbitrations should be taken to the court. (U.R.Ananthamurthy p. 23) The daily free meals arranged at temple came of the peasants’ donations from their grown rice and vegetables. Jagannatha’s family, because of their faith, sent their tons and tons of rice loads to the temple. The cult of Bootha worship, its historical past, its

continuity and other aspects are dwelt upon by Peter Claus; he discusses the mediation and adjudication of disputes were held in the secessions of the cult of the spirit (Claus p.67); ‘the Bootha’ which would ask as mentioned in the novel:

“Is dharma being adhered to properly here? The Chief trustee Jagannatha was expected to answer him “Yes, yes, yes, it is.” (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.44)

Dharma Brahmins who call themselves ‘dwijas’ (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.47-48) The Brhaminical ideas about society gained importance. These ideas about society can be looked upon as extensions of the ideas Brahmins developed about themselves” (Bronchorst p.11)

Jagannatha has resigned to the privileged position of the chief trustee of the temple to step out from medieval-feudal “status and protection” (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.42) of the privileged land lord had; so that he would not be connected to the feudal order. He has thought out his self should achieve an authentic identity in leading a revolt with untouchables. (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.38) His consciousness of rationalism is a development against the falsity of religious realm, is as much a fact as he is a man who cherished free thinking, spirit of rationalism, values of freedom and human dignity; a powerful contemporary impact, the middle class young generations of the western world had been reeling under. Jagannatha follows agnosticism and free thinking of Ingersoll, the intellectual currents of Shaw and Russell; like these thinkers he is non-conformist and a man of science, of modern conditions confronting the mean and self conceited society of Bharathipura with doubts and questions of the new world.

The temple ran its business and self interests as one could find in the narrative. The temple authorities offered loans to villagers; “loans for marriage, loans for farming, loans for medicine”

(U.R.Ananthamurthy p.42) The money laundering by the temple trustees went unhindered; “In Bharathipura...at the root of every connection was money. The protector of this system was Bootharaya, a henchman of Lord Manjunatha. (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.49) One Ramakrishnaiah a father of eight children, defaulted on his payments and the temple authority raided on his house and seized his property. When he approaches Jagannatha he suggests him to go to court. (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.68) The untouchables owned no lands of their own as they were subjugated to be the condemned servants and labourers in the system for thousands of years; so in Manjunatha’s system too: Manu said Sudras have no right to possess property. (Manu Ch-10. V.129) For a his dharma is to serve Three Classes: (Manu ch-10.V.121) The landless untouchables drudged to carry their lots;

“Someone ploughed and grew food. Some one here ate it. The life force weakned by the fat of free meals in the name of Lord Manjunatha. Bootharaya danced and danced and danced to protect and preserve this system. It was a dance without real meaning.” (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.24)

Jagannatha knew the oppressive hierarchical system of Brahminism. Jagannatha who wants a “fundamental **change**” has a great intention to end the ever alive-undying value of ‘caste’ among the Hindus. Indeed he enters into a mission of leading the untouchables of Bharathipura to enter the temple of Manjunatha. Jagannatha was the chief trusty of the temple, a privileged position to which he resigned in order to “be real to himself”.... and bring aboutaction (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.54)

“...Untouchable should be taken to the temple! The realities of centuries should be changed with a single step of an untouchable . Manjunatha should be broken , People should be subjected to the painful process of becoming responsible for their own lives.” (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.54)

What prompted Jagannatha to get engrossed in an issue, -a large majority simply do not even care to think? - was he wants in his self, to be real to himself; an identity of his conviction that he could break free of “ the pre ordained pattern” of ‘fixed’ human relationships of a fixed ‘impossible condition’ ; a situation he might commit suicide ,if he fails utterly.” For Jagannatha his conviction has a purpose and meaning for him. Whereas, Sripathi Rao, advises Jagannatha not to get estranged or alienated among people and Rao coldly remarks “leadig a few untouchables is not going to mean much” (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.82) Without support, Jagannatha is carrying his struggle within and without.

There is social withdrawal of Sripathi Roa and Puranic and Advani. Puranic now disillusioned, in his youth had married a widow; Puranic , once a rebel and a researcher on Bootharaya; paradoxes coexisted in him. He believed “collective action was impossible. “To westernize ourselves is the solution to all problems”. (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.92) Puranic’s friend Advani thinks Bootharaya is power that can sooth his psyche. He also a Bootharaya’s medium. The other form of withdrawal was Adiga’s, whose last resort for all problems in the world is religion or to simply “become other wordly ascetic” (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.116)

He said What do the Purana say?- “This Vashishta married an untouchable woman called Arundathi who later was transformed into a star,It is she who is invoked to bless the bride and bridegroom during the wedding ceremony. Thus, you see, our religion has been revolutionary isn’t that true”

(U.R.Ananthamurthy p.116) Jagannatha Simply retorts “self deception” and his rational being is indignant, and asks;

“Our religion has made our country stagnant ...how come society has remained the same for centuries in a country that boasts of so many revolutionary stories ? (U.R.Ananthamurthy p.116)

There is a world of hypocrites; Prabhu the business man, Sathyaprakash, The Commissioner of the district, Ramesh Chandra, a Reader in Sociology a silent upholder caste system who believes uneducated should not be given voting right, Rangaga Rao and Neelakantaswamy of Mysore socialist Party who possessed no principles of politics.

The novel has two marked dramatic rebellious situations of significance; one the climatic and another Jagannatha’s preceding the climax. Jagannatha’s iconoclastic saligrama incident where Jagannatha forces the untouchables to touch the saligrama of his family, could be iconoclastic desecration or paradoxically, an invented spiritual act by Jagannatha Rao, a Brahmin-revolutionary? which either way means nothing to untouchables except their gripped fear and confusion who are differently conditioned to be the slaves and no more as to Pilla, Kariya and Mada. They have just made appearances in a significant movement when Sathyaprakash and his relative education minister are least bothered about fellow untouchables. Ananthamurthy was a contemporary of B.Basavalingappa, the multifaceted progressive leader and in Devaraj Urs government was a Minister who was instrumental in banning the scavengers carrying night soil on their heads in 1973.

The two rebellions in Bharathipura only mark the progress of historical possibilities. The patriarchal authority in society and family is symbolized by the chief temple priest Sitharamaiah who is doomed to be rattled by his son Ganesh’s rebellion. In Bharathipura rebellions are given vent at both unitary and systemic scale. Ganesh’s violent removal of lingam from sanctum sanctorum of temple is the climatic end of all in Bharathipura

Jagannatha is to be counted significant in the history of happenings in the oppressive idealist world; he is a participant in the historical aspects and events, and his identity marks a human hope, and self volunteered endeavor towards a mission- a possible identity of ‘becoming’ in his striving against an essentialist pre-determined reality of Brahminism. Historical pressures and influences have impacted times and men. Jagannatha’s intellectual actions have the links to the interactions of history.

What is significant is the pressures of history and social processes; the revolutionaries who were little acknowledged during their life span in the past, were to get acknowledged and accommodated in history later. Kudmal Ranga Rao and P Lakshminarasu who had developed a sense of criticism towards their cultural belonging, are significant in the contexts of *Bharathipura*; They were public personalities who were influenced by ideas, who lived them for the liberation of people by guiding and improvising the destiny of their fellow citizens- here they become the real predecessors of Jagannatha.

The novel is in fact a montage of many accommodated *isms* in the context of the problematic lives of untouchables. Bharathipura includes Gandhi, Lohia and other western thinkers. In Modern India

answers to untouchables to the problematic of caste come from two modern leaders who in turn prompted their influence on Gandhi and Ambedkar.

Kudmul Ranga Rao carried on mission of uplifting untouchables through education and welfare programs by founding **Depressed Classes Mission** in 1897 (Ushaprabha) where by thousands of untouchables had been liberated; which M. K. Gandhi had heard; and later on his visit to Mangalore on 24th of February 1935 had vouchsafed “I discerned social loyalty from Mr. Ranga Rao... He is my teacher when it comes to the upliftment of Untouchables.” (Chowta 1921) In similar contexts of struggle against the prevalence of caste superstition, Prof. P Lakshminarasu, popularly, - PLN -was a professor from Madras, was an intellectual who becomes relevant to the contexts of Brahminical background of Bharathipura. As M.K. Gandhi regarded Kudmul Ranga Rao as his guide and teacher, Dr. Ambedkar regarded “Prof. Lakshminarasu as the prodigy of 19th Century”. (Prasad Tibetan Review) When Dr. Ambedkar was thinking of a right way of liberation of people, he studied cultural and philosophical past of India. When Ambedkar was in need of information on Buddhism, he came upon Prof. Narasu’s famed *The Essence of Buddhism* (1907), a Master piece. Dr. Ambedkar himself publishes the third edition with his ‘Forward’. When people asked for a book on Buddhism, Dr. Ambedkar had recommended Prof. Narasu’s book “as the best” in 1948. Prof. Narasu had rejected caste practices and had dropped ‘Naydu’ caste surname. Prof. Lakshminarasu was a scientist, an author of books, Secretary of Social Reforms Association, a rationalist and a patriot from anti caste movement of Tamilnadu in 1930s, He had organized four Buddhist conferences in Madras (1917), Bangalore (1920), again in Madras (1928), and in KGF in (1932). Narasu’s intellectual and social involvement of his times has borne fruits with Buddhism spreading across India after Ambedkar embraced Buddhism. Cultural transition was a consequence of social responsibility assumed by the modern social movements.

The reception of modern thoughts in India among Hindus as regards their social customs, education and society had undisclosed guilt. Ambedka remarks “Hindu society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes.” (p.20) The English presence in India and their material and ‘cultural ways’, made a world of difference to the caste Hindus of India and it clearly showed their backwardness in many respects. The cultural backwardness they experienced and the presence of foreign missionary culture were then, the consequent factors for the reformative thoughts on issues of caste and religion among the Hindus of nineteenth century. The ever stagnant issues of social problematics even after decades of democratic India Bharathipura critiques the norms of culture and society. The Ananthamurthy, a progressive writers commits himself to ‘the sincerity and authenticity’ the Navya literary school followed.

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