



## Conflict Between the Self and the Society in Select works of U R Ananthamurthy

Dr.Sindhu N S

Associate Professor of English  
Maharani's Arts College for Women  
JLB Road, Mysore, Karnataka

**Abstract:** The philosophy of Existentialism influenced the literatures around the world to a large extent. In India, many writers were swayed by this philosophy and U R Ananthamurthy is one such great Kannada writer to be influenced by modernist writers of Europe. The current paper deals with one of the major themes of Existential philosophy- the conflict between the self and the society depicted in the select works of U R Ananthamurthy.

**Key Words:** Existentialism, Humanism, Tradition, Modern

Received 12 Feb., 2023; Revised 22 Feb., 2023; Accepted 24 Feb., 2023 © The author(s) 2023.  
Published with open access at [www.questjournals.org](http://www.questjournals.org)

While most of the Kannada modernist writers experimented with new themes and styles, the existential theme of the tension between the individual and the society, the caste conflicts in the society, the social problems like illiteracy and poverty were very subtly dealt by U R Ananthamurthy. The Sartrean dictum- 'Existentialism is humanism' finds its absolute expression in the works of U R Ananthamurthy. A sharp impact of the political situation prevailing during the time he wrote and the cultural ideology he believed in are the chief influences on his works. His stay in Europe too had its influence on him for it was during this period that an everlasting impact of the modernist writers of Europe happened on him. His masterpiece *Samskara* took its birth during his stay in Birmingham. The major preoccupation of Brahmanical hegemony and the subsequent caste conflict is the theme of *Samskara*. Through the two contrasting characters, Praneshacharya and Naranappa, the author drives home the ultimate purpose associated with life. At the same time, the novel is also a mirror to the changing social scenario of the post modern India.

Considering the individualistic views about life, the epitome of Brahmanical values, Praneshacharya after entering into the unexpected sexual act with Chandri, the deceased Naranappa's concubine realises that nothing can decide an individual's happiness, except the choice that he or she makes to attain his or her happiness. The satisfaction for a human being does not come with the attainment of position or scholarship, sacrificing and neglecting his or her own primal needs in the course of attaining them.

.....We shape ourselves through our choices, bring form and time to this thing we call our person. Naranappa became a person he chose to be. I chose to be something else and lived by it. But suddenly I turned at some turning. I'm not free till I realise that the turning is also my act, I am to answer for it. What happened at that turning? Dualities, conflict rushed into my life. I hung between two truths like Trishanku.... (*Samskara* 136)

The existential ideologies treated in the novel and the way in which the writer uses the literary devices of irony and creativity are highly applauded by the critics. Perhaps the hint to his next novel *Bharathipuragets* its expression as Praneshacharya steps out of the Agrahara following the footsteps of Naranappa to the outside world. His act of drinking coffee with a low caste acquaintance is symbolic of his permanent departure from his previous dwelling place and also has uncertain future. The novel ends with Praneshacharya's uncertain future as he thinks,

The sky was full of stars. The moon, a silver. A perfectly clear constellation of the seven sages. A sudden noise of drum beats. Hence and there the flames of a torch. The hard breathing of the bullocks climbing the hillock. The sound of the cow bells round their necks. He will travel for another four or five hours. Then, after that, what? (*Samskara*, 169).

The ending of the novel is definitely uncertain. Yet, Praneshacharya has a hope lingering in this uncertainty. It is a sort of existential dilemma that he finally dips into. The world outside agrahara is also not without mess. There is no assurance that he finds his ultimate happiness there. He is back to his agrahara more puzzled and saddened. The existential philosophy peeps in here. Life has no inherent purpose or meaning. Then what is the way of making one's life meaningful. Ananthamurthy's all works revolve around this existential question.

The protagonist of *Bharathipura* represents the typical Navya hero- weak minded and confused. The author has taken up one of post independent India's serious problems, untouchability. Jagannatha, the hero of the novel is a London educated idealist. His main aim is to eradicate from the society of Bharatipura the problem of untouchability. With this mission at hand, he begins to educate the people of the lower castes by reading for them the history of Russian and French Revolution. As he tries to educate them and prepares them for the revolutionary task of making them enter into the sacred Manjunatha temple of Bharatipura, he also realises the futility of the work he has undertaken.

Only when the holeyaru came closer that Jagannatharealise that they had not lifted up the lower edge of the dhoti and tied it round the waist to leave their legs free; they had torn them lengthwise and worn half a strip each.....Jaganntha swallowed his anger. They looked ridiculous: feeling awkward about wearing something they were not used to, they had folded back the collars and mismatched buttons with the buttonholes.' (*Bharathipura*, 36)

As Jagannatha gets awareness about his impending failure of his mission he realises that this is due to his inability to connect himself with the low caste people. He is bound to the hierarchies of his community as they are bound to theirs. As he claims in the novel that he is much influenced by the writings of Sartre, Camus, Lohiaetc, at many places in the novel he seems to be a man with shallow personality. His failure in public life to make the untouchables to enter into the Manjunatha temple is a premonition of the impending failure on his part to establish successful relationship with his beloved Margarete. Both Praneshacharya and Jagannatha are the existential heroes created by Ananthamurthy. Both fall into the existential dilemmas. Praneshacharya seems to be the stronger of the two for he realises his weaknesses and understands the situation he is in. But Jagannatha tries to ignore his own weaknesses and leads a shallow life with the illusion of following the lofty ideologies.

Another major theme that Ananthamurthy deals in his fictions is that of the tussle between tradition and modernity. What is interesting is according to many critics though he seems to be on the side of modernity, on a careful reading one realises that neither tradition nor modernity wins. In fact, one might also argue that in his later works, there is a move towards respecting a certain kind of tradition more than the available modernities. His important work, *SooryanaKudure and Other Stories (Stallion of the Sun and other Stories)* challenges the existing political, social and cultural beliefs. 'Clip Joint' is a story in this collection which clearly brings out the tension between tradition and modernity. The story starts with Keshava, the main character of the story contemplating suicide. As he travels in train with his English friend Stewart, he wonders, 'What if I leap....?' This death wish is merely a reflection of his inner emptiness.

As the story progresses, we come to know about the reason for Keshava's anxiety. The immediate cause for this anxiety may be his sexual depravity or his unsatisfied sexual desire that brings him into the state of depression. But later in the story, when he sees the dance performance of a striptease dancer in a joint, he realises that his hunger for flesh is not the only cause of his frustration. It is just a pretext. The lack of emotional support and the burden of responsibility are the true causes of his existential angst. On the other hand, his friend Stewart is ironical about the western values which Keshava seems to adore and in turn has reverence for the traditional Indian values. Ultimately, the story ends with Keshava's realization that sexual fulfilment alone will not emancipate him from the existential angst. The author seems to suggest that modernity alone cannot be the source of contentment. According to MakarandParanjape, The story clearly shows that modernity cannot supply the answers. It also shows how the tradition has failed. We are, like Keshava trapped in an in between state. What is the way out? There is no way out really, except the kind of ambiguity and double denial that Ananthamurthy offers..... ("Clip Joint: U R Ananthamurthy- Response by MakrandParanjape" 130).

Keshava too is a typical example of Navya man- an ultimate failure. He neither understands the source of his anxiety nor tries to do something fruitful in this regard.

*Bhava* is another important novel by Ananthamurthy with existential undertones. Along with the element of mystery, the novel makes an attempt to explore the spiritual element of humanity. The word 'bhava' is a Sanskrit word and means both 'being' and 'becoming'. The novelist traces the psychological as well as the metaphysical journey into the process of becoming. The seventy year old Shastri in the novel happens to encounter a young man named Dinakara in the train, who wears a Srichakra amulet around his neck. Incidentally, this amulet belonged to Shastri's first wife whom he had killed doubting the chastity of her character. Shastri's encounter with this boy brings in his mind thousands of questions at once. Dinakara too

listens to the same story about his past life from one his acquaintances and suffers owing to the haunting doubts about his parentage.

As both the characters are out solving the mystery associated with their lives, things seem to get more puzzled. Both Shastri and Dinakara can never find answers to the questions they have. As the story progresses, the characters and the situations become immaterial as the novelist concentrates on the inner workings of the human mind. None of the questions posed by the characters finds an answer. The intention of the author is also not to provide answer to the questions.

According to the author the ultimate predicament of human beings that they have to accept the existential situation and live with the same. Each of the characters goes through this process of being and becoming. The path of reconciliation with the self is not an easy task. We are given an insight into the inner workings, the demons and worries that plague them and the slow resolution and the acceptance of life that they come to eventually. The superficial search for relationships ends in establishing humane and more meaningful relationships. The book thus reflects the path from doubts of the self, the questions that we as individuals have, to one of acceptance and surrender, reconciliation and then holding peace with what we finally can come near to as answers.

### **References**

- [1]. Ananthamurthy, U R. PragneMattuParisara. Karnataka Sahithya Academy, 1976.
- [2]. AnanthaMurthy, U.R, and Deepa Ganesh. "Ramachandra Sharma (1925—2005)." *Indian Literature*, vol. 49, no. 3 (227), 2005, pp. 157–159. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/23341038](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23341038).
- [3]. AnanthaMurthy, U.R, and MakarandParanjape. "Clip Joint." *Indian Literature*, vol. 40, no3 (179), 1997, pp. 124–135. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/23338294](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23338294).
- [4]. Balasubrahmanya, Narahalli. Navyathe. Karnataka Sahithya Academy, 1999.