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RIVER, A DYAD OF BEING AND NOTHINGNESS: READING OF ANANTHAMURTHY'S SELECTED HEROINES

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ABSTRACT

The river has got sumptuous meanings and interpretations from time immemorial. It stands for abundance, existence, movement, acceptance etc. Ananthamurthy adds a new quality to it, the quality of woman. The paper entitled 'The Rivers of Ananthamurthy' discusses the women characters of U R Ananthamurthy from the chosen novels – *Samskara*, *Bhava* and *Awasthe*. The book *Asante Manasaputhrimar*, by Nithya Chaithanya Yathi on Kumaranasan's heroines, gives the inspiration for this paper. It is a thematic analyses based on the characters – Chandri (*Samskara*), Radha (*Bhava*) and Gouri Deshpande (*Awasthe*) of U R Ananthamurthy. Apart from the realistic touch they are the symbols of 'Indian women' who have been forgotten by the contemporary Indian women due to acculturation and assimilation of two traditions. These characters recreate the epic characters of India, who have the will power, the potentiality and identity, and satisfy the cultural, moral and emotional needs and continue their journey towards the being. In this paper the word 'river' represents the chosen characters because both are similar in the nature of flowing, abundance, spontaneity, acceptance, and purifies but still they flow towards their destination, nothing can withered them. The women characters are like water, attached with the detachment and detached with the attachment. The chosen women are examples for existence and existential dyad – being and nothingness. They are flowing to the destination without affected much by the changing seasons and hindrances, accepting everything and rejecting nothing.

Key Words: Woman, River, Acceptance, Rejection.

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"It is good for a drink when man is thirsty, it is good for wash when a man is filthy, and it is good for bathing the god's images with; it says Yes to everything, never a No." –
Samskara

INTRODUCTION

U R Ananthamurthy, Kannada writer, introduces the 'whole' and 'exotic' women characters in his novels. The synthesis of presence of mind and will power and attachment with

detachment and detachment with attachment are the peculiarities of the chosen characters. They are as naive as dove and prudent as serpent. He has moulded the women from different social and cultural sectors and one can equate them to the women characters of the Indian epics – Ramayana and Mahabharata. Here we are going to look at the three women characters or heroines of Ananthamurthy from his four novels – *Samskara*,

Awasthe and *Bhava* – that are translated from Kannada to English by four different authors. The heroines are Chandri, a low caste prostitute from *Samskara*, Radha, prostitute cum concubine from *Bhava* and Gouri Despande, a companion to the protagonist from *Awasthe*. Ananthamurthy's novels give a chance to stop and look back at Indian tradition especially Indian womanhood. The Sanskrit word for woman is 'Sthree' which means the 'safeguard of truth.' Ananthamurthy presents safeguards of truth, truth in different perspectives, in his novels. They, rather than the waves and froth of the so called movement 'feminism,' are epitome of the 'Naari of Bharatha' or an Indian Woman and replicas of real life situation and also symbolise the peculiar qualities like presence of mind, will power, and the choices made by them in their crucial moments and the ferociousness coated by calmness etc make them significant and powerful. This paper discusses how each character faces the situation or surpasses it and how they fill the lack in them and become full, in other words how they attain the 'real one' through 'being in the world' and 'being out of the world.'

Chandri is a symbol rather than a realistic character embodying a natural wholeness and an instinctive spontaneity. *Samskara* is a collision with a new sort of awareness of self, partly conditioned by existential thinking. Meenakshi Mukherji commented on the theme of the novel in her essay titled, *Samskara*, that, "The difficult and uneasy process of transition between the fixed settled order of life and the still inchoate stirring of self is part of the thematic concern of the novel. Although largely allegorical in texture and mythic in its conscious structure, the novel does not repudiate the demands of realism. Thus both in content and form it can serve as an illustration of the kind of mutation that a western form has undergone in India" (83). Ananthamurthy's most of the characters and context of the works are from the real life situations. He introduces himself as one who is ". . . living in the world of Purana and reality at the same time" (Baral 70). The whole novel is a narration of the three days incidents in a village called Durvasapura. It begins with the death of Narannappa, a Brahmin by birth and an anti-Brahmin by life, and his concubine

Chandri approaches Praneshacharya for cremation. Because of Naranappa's anti-Brahminical behaviour the people of agrahara fall in a dilemma regarding his death rites including Praneshacharya, the guru of the agrahara. *Samskara* passes through the inner angst and thoughts of Praneshacharya.

Chandri, who links the two combatants, Naranappa and Praneshacharya, is a liminal being. She is a concubine from Kunthapura and Naranappa takes her to agrahara on the behalf of his anti-Brahminical act. She is an exotic beauty and is compared by Naranappa with matsyagandhi. He enjoys his life with her instead of the "hysterical female" (21) in agrahara. Ananthamurthy uses a beautiful metaphorical description to describe Chandri. It is neither less nor more but an accurate one,

But the flowers that bloomed in Naranappa's yard were reserved solely for Chandri's hair and for a vase in the bedroom. As if that wasn't provocative enough, right in his front yard grew a bush, a favourite of snakes, with flowers unfit for any God's crown – the night queen bush. In the darkness of night, the bush was thickly clustered with flowers, invading the night like some raging lust, pouring forth its nocturnal fragrance. The agrahara writhed in its hold as in the grip of a magic serpent-binding spell. People with delicate nostrils complained of headaches, walked about with their dhotis held to their noses... while the auspicious Brahmin wives, with their dwarfish braids and withered faces, wore mandara and jasmine, Chandri wore her black snake hair coiled in a knot and wore the flowers of the ember champak and the heady fragrant screw pine... but when it grew dark, the night queen reigned over the agrahara. (15)

This metaphorical description tells about Chandri and how Naranappa cares her, agrahara people's attitude towards her, reaction of women in agrahara, and after all Chandri and her mystic beauty in an amazing way. She is a perfect feminine beauty but for Naranappa she is a person who can be exhibited and one who cares for him.

The way Chandri relate with Praneshacharya is extremely different from her attitudes to Naranappa's. They not even speak much but they understand and respect each other as human beings, who are above the mundane web of desires and lust. They meet at Naranappa's house and accept each other with dignity and love and Praneshacharya is the only one in the agrahara who considers Chandri as a woman rather than a concubine. Chandri comes and inform Praneshacharya the death of Naranappa. The rejection of the cremation by the relatives and neighbours of Naranappa makes Chandri to offer her jewels as reward for the person who will cremate Naranappa's body. Chandri's unexpected and brave act makes the situation more chaotic – one side the heap of gold and other side the Brahmanism, morales, and Naranappa as whole. Praneshacharya leaps into all the books of Hinduism for the solution and the whole day creeps like a stinking horrific snake. The whole agrahara waits in Praneshacharya's house for a solution, because with a dead body in the agrahara no one can eat and pray. The Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads, like all the jewels of Hindu tradition do not contain the answer for this dilemma. In the words of Osho "Man ordinarily functions out of the past, and life goes on changing. That is why life is confusing – confusing to the knowledgeable person. He has all the readymade answers. The Gita, the Koran, the Bible, the Vedas. He has everything crammed, he knows all the answers. But life never raises the same question again; hence the knowledgeable person always falls short" (140).

The confused and more withered Praneshacharya, the guru and the Pandit who conquered all the Vedas, in the midst of night goes to the Hanuman temple for solution. He is a person whose mind is rather stained with the culture, religion, systems, moralities etc and the real one are in the stage of impotency. Though certain life situations hint him, the world of reality, he prefers the 'conditioned him' which makes Praneshacharya mere routine person. Author uses the word 'routine' thrice in the first page itself which shows the intensity of conditioning on Praneshacharya. His routine includes his bedridden wife too. "He bathed

Bhagirathi's body, a dried up wasted pea-pod, and wrapped a fresh sari around it; then he offered food and flowers to gods as he did every day, ...

Bhagirathi said in a low voice, 'You finish your meal first.'

'No, no. Finish your porridge. That first.'

The words were part of a twenty year old between them" (1). This shows how rotten he is as a human being of flesh and blood. Chandri also accompanies him to the temple unknowingly. She plucks and eats some plantains to kill hunger and keeps the rest with her. God Hanuman also gives up Praneshacharya and the whole day prayer ends up in dread, an unknown fear. Hunger, despair, and anger, along with all other emotions burst out in him at that moment. Chandri stands in front of him to know the decision and to request for Naranappa's cremation. She bends and grasps his knees. He touches her hair with compassion but at the moment, the real Praneshacharya – a human being, raises. The blessing is struck in his throat which leaves Chandri doubly intense. Praneshacharya fainted. Chandri holds him like a child and he becomes a child, who weeps for his needs in her lap. Chandri holds his hands and places it on her body and while "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 at 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." (64)

The moment of togetherness – motherhood, womanhood, companionship, guru, the truth – Praneshacharya churned in a gyre of emotions in the first time of his life. He is reborn. Chandri does not want to trouble Praneshacharya so she leaves and with the help of one of Naranappa's friend, a muslim, finishes the cremation and leaves Durvasapura. By virtue of her profession she is both outside of the structured society as well as recognised by it. Like the river Tunga she is in the

village but unshackled by it. ananthamurthy's comments on river represents Chandri, "How can a sin defile a running river? It is good for a drink when man is thirsty, it is good for wash when a man is filthy, and it is good for bathing the god's images with; it says Yes to everything, never a No. Like her. Doesn't dry up, doesn't tie. Tunga, river that doesn't dry, doesn't tire" (44). Chandri is a symbol rather than a realistic character embodying a natural wholeness, an instinctive spontaneity, naturality and anti-corrupted system. Chandri raises him in the realm of existence and has made Praneshacharya as a 'dasman.' The novel ends up like this, "The sky was full of stars. The moon, a silver. A perfectly clear constellation...he will travel, for another four or five hours. Then, after that, what?" (138).

Radha, a prostitute cum mistress, a character from *Bhava* is another jewel of Ananthamurthy. *Bhava* is the fourth novel by him which concentrates on the story of three generations- Viswanatha Shastri, Dinakar and Prasad. The common thread lies in their search for identity both worldly and spiritually. One can broadly divide the whole characters into two groups- one is entangled with their parentage, relationships and hereditary and other is observing all those worldly 'mayas' in a detached manner, they live in this 'bhava' without being in it. Radha belongs to the second category. The story goes through flash back technique and juxtaposition of time. Viswanatha Sastri, a kirtanakar who recites Vedas and Puranas meets a traveller with an amulet around his neck which drags Shastri to the bitter and horrific past and at the same time he feels a hue of relief in his heart. He has left his home town fifty years ago with his share and settled in city with all the luxuries. He has enjoyed the wholeness of city and youth and met a seventeen years old girl, who he named Radha later from a prostitute's house. He has owned her and also made a separate house for her. The presence of Radha made him a new person and he started to lead a new life. "Shastri had never in his life met another spirit like Radha. It was not that she was without desires, but that all her desires were contained within the limits of family life... And Shastri who went around burning in anger, would always soften before Radha, enchanted by the

charming words which came from her sweet mouth" (37). As their relationship bore no fruit Radha forced Shastri to marry another girl. Saroja came into his life, though she is beautiful than Radha Shastri has still kept his bonding towards Radha. Radha and Saroja become good friends. She has acted as an advisor for both shastri and Saroja and she has converted her focus into her own privacy – a spiritual life. She has given the confidence to Shastri where he failed to win as a man on Saroja and has aroused the manliness in him through remembering of their olden erotic days.

Shastri's relationship with Saroja ended up in the murder of Saroja because of the suspicion on her pregnancy and that started to haunt him after his second wife Mahadevi got pregnant. The impotency has conquered him as a whole. The time arranged a meeting between Shastri and his son in Saroja, Dinakar, in a journey and he recognised Dinakar with an amulet he wears which was the one Saroja used to wear. The moment Shastri realizes the amulet his brutality of past haunts. He suddenly meets Radha and conveys the message and to which she replays: "I have not told you this. The servants here always gossiped that you killed your wife and buried her in the pit... I didn't tell you lest it would give you pain. Radha sighed, adding, 'God has saved you'" (65). It shows her patience and the victory over her emotions. Now Shastri is in limbo of the tormenting doubt, that whether Dinakar is his son or not. Radha answers him holding his hand tenderly, "believe that he is your son" (65). The words give Shastri the strength to face the reality and releases him from the tormented demon, the conscience. Shastri slowly lands into the realm of present with awareness. The words and presence of Radha make him a child and an observer with consciousness. He thought "why did I ever marry mahadevi? Of course you were urging me to marry. And I thought that if I had a child my troubles would go, and I would have peace. Saroja tortured me with her beauty and indifference. But Mahadevi was just like me. From the start she fell on me with her eyes burning. She is nothing like Saroja. She hates you too... my daughter marrying an idiot...left my house, I don't know where she went" (67-68). While Shastri goes on with

his inner thoughts Radha want to say the pregnancy of Shastri's daughter.

In Shastri's life Radha is the unconscious mind, which knows everything but hides; the safeguard of truth, Saroja's case, his daughter's case; his mind, he can utter anything without a second thought; mother, woman, advisor, and 'home' where one can go back as what we are. Radha accepts everything without reluctance and she passes through all without entangled into it like a river with 'let it go' attitude. She has made Shastri as a man who is ready to be in the world. He thinks "Perhaps people like me there is no release from this Bhava, we stay entangle in this world." (68) She wins the hearts -Saroja, Mahadevi, her daughter and Shastri -with the life span of a seventeen years old girl to a grey haired old woman.

Gouri Deshpande, the third woman from the novel *Awasthe*, is depicted here as the symbol of woman of 'action' and response. The *Awasthe* is a sensitive study of an honest and idealistic politician and his inner consciousness than a mere objective presentation of the political situation. The novel also uses flash back technique. Through the narration of protagonist and his re-collections readers will get a picture of his past life and his existential angst. Gouri is a woman of action and response, that is, a woman who is not a reactor on peripheral outburst but an actor from inner core. Action is total and it comes from oneself, from the core or centre and response comes from the consciousness. She faces the reality from childhood itself. The evanescence of her father and mother's elopement with a rich merchant for her existence have turned Gouri as a less talker and a girl with no friends. The situations have made up her mind as a woman more than a girl. Gouri stays with her mother in the house of merchant and people look at them with a sarcastic eye. All these have made her mind opaque and she becomes a woman with the self identity.

Gouri meets Krishnappa Gouda, the protagonist of the novel, during her college days. He is a stout person from lower caste with high political ideologies and revolutionary ideas. All the girls are attracted towards him and he becomes the hero of the college. Krishnappa belongs to a lower caste and because of his zeal in studies Maheswarayya, a

businessman, sponsors his studies. The degeneration of socio-political scenario and the influence of persons like, Annaji – his friend, a revolutionist who inspires Krishnappa in other words who uses Krishnappa for implementing his ideas-change his life and thoughts. For creating a single man revolution he gives up his college education. During the verge of his decision he meets Gouri. Though they are classmates they would not talk each other. His opponents from college spread rumours about Krishnappa and Gouri's relationship and doodle pictures and comments about them. These situations pull them together but Krishnappa is reluctant to open up his feelings towards Gouri, due to his inferiority complex regarding physique, caste, class etc and she does not force too. Though they are known to each other's feelings they separate. What attract Krishnappa towards Gouri are her calmness and casual responses and real actions. For Krishnappa, Gouri is a woman who has the mentality to accept everything and reject nothing with a stern and balanced mindset, which inspires his thoughts and entangles the problems which he faces a lot because of this dyads – rejection and acceptance.

The second meeting of Gouri and Krishnappa happens at his withered state – as a husband, as a politician, as a social worker, as a father and after all as himself. He is paralysed and the disease cuddles his mind than body. When Gouri informs her coming Krishnappa feels the shrinkness from different realms. His paralysed body pulls him back from the evanescence. He is dishevelled to the core with the unawareness of the reasons. He is not aware about the reality or the truth, because his thoughts are freeze and the opaqueness blocks the vision. His existential struggle and angst deform him as a man of aversion and the complex web of unawareness as a man of grudge. Gouri analyses and realizes the situation and takes control of it. She first changes the house under the banner of better treatment, which gives a relief from his wife Sita, an ordinary woman, only with complaints and blaming and the daughter who falls in the midst of the pull between her parents. Gouri has taken up the treatment of Krishnappa, physical therapy and exercises, as a whole. Krishnappa started to unwrap

his false egos unknowingly because of Gouri's mingling and their open discussions regarding his personal and public issues. Gouri has made him understand the relevance of Sita in his life and Krishnappa's over expectation or conditioning mentality towards Sita. She closely mingles with him as much as possible and which gives him the feeling that she is recreating the lost -robust, dynamic, passionate and enthusiastic- olden days. She has become "...a pool of profound silence. She was like the earth which hides the sprouting seed in its warm and tolerant darkness. Her fingers played gently over his entire body. They searched all the nooks and corners, as if to awaken by their touch the hidden spring of life...feel intensely that he had eyes, ears, neck, stomach, and genitals. As his body warmed up, sprouting and springing..." (178). That night he has slept well and the change, both physical and mental, is recognised by the nurse.

Gouri's first influence gives him a jolt to face the world and leads his dream and ideology to actuality. Her second meeting awakens him and he is lifted up to the level of a balanced state, that is, acceptance of the present without the longing towards future and the burden of past. He becomes aware of his existence and starts his journey. The novel ends up with the conviction of Krishnappa to the meanness of the dasein and the acceptance of the presence. He says, "I am convinced, therefore, that it is impossible to be free from the meanness and commonness which constantly surrounds us.... How to make our daily life shine and glory? (190)

CONCLUSION

The three women or characters – here 'or' conveys the meaning that either they are real women or they are mere characters – of Ananthamurthy reflect the women in Indian village especially. They are like rivers - giving, taking, hiding, makes floating, sprouting, uprooting - but still they are flowing towards the ocean. They are flowing with the attitude of "... say Yes to everything, never a No." The way of the river gradually becomes clean and clear. It is in the shore but not. They symbolise the meanness, movement, action, abundance, existence and transcendence and are examples for the existential dyad – being and nothingness. Their presence has made the protagonists courageous and

to realize the truth that being in the world is the bedrock of transcendence and awareness.

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