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THE CARROT AND THE STICK OF DYNAMITE: EXPLORING THE BRAHMINICAL ISA THROUGH DALIT LITERATURE

Songborto Biswas
PG Student
Centre for English Studies
J.N.U, New Delhi, India

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Abstract:
This paper proposes that the Brahminical social order established their own norms in a manner akin to Louis Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus. This Brahminical ISA has two sides- the carrot and the stick. The carrot encourages people traditionally outside caste society or restricted to its lower orders to adopt practices of the Brahminical order codified in the Manusmriti, for social assimilation and ascendancy (U. R Srinivas's Sanskritization). The stick punishes those who defy the Manusmriti code. A well-struck blow against the Brahminical ISA can result in serious repercussions for not only the challengers but for society at large, turning the stick into a stick of dynamite. In this paper, we will explore both sides of this coin through two texts- Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's short story, They Eat Meat and U. R Ananthamurthy's novel, Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man. The latter depicts turmoil in a Brahmin Agrahara after the death of a brahmin who openly rejected the social order while the former describes how an Adivasi family accept one of the central tenets of the Brahminical social order as their own in order to assimilate. This analysis will reveal the systems used to maintain the integrity of the Brahminical social order as well as its limitations.

Keywords: *Dalit Literature, Samskara, Ideological State Apparatus, Brahminical Social Order, etc.*

If we glimpse through that authoritative tome, the Manusmriti, we will find rules laid down separately for each of the four Varnas it divides society into. Unsurprisingly, the section for the brahmins is the longest, comprising the major portion of the book, followed by the section on Ksatriyas and then a miniscule section of Vaishyas and Sudras. For the brahmins, rigorous instructions are given for every aspect of life, codes of conduct laid down for every situation, guidelines given for every contingency. And through the millennia, this code has essentially evolved into a sceptre of Brahminical authority- it is the adherents of this code who yield the ultimate control in Indian society. Armed with the code, people privileged by birth within caste society have imposed their own social order for the masses whose tenets extend beyond the text of the code.

Very curiously, certain sections of people which were traditionally outside the purview of caste society or perhaps restricted to its lower orders, by birth, have adopted the practices of the dominant Brahminical order for social assimilation and ascendancy. This is a part of the process U. R Srinivas terms Sanskritization. But if the existence of the code is caste society's foundational pillar and greatest strength, it is also a tangible object that can be attacked. The flouting of the code or the defiance of the social order translates to striking a blow at the heart of caste oppression. In the 21st century, this flouting has taken the form of practices such as beef eating festivals (mostly on academic campuses like Osmania University in Hyderabad). But the defiance of this Brahminical hegemony is never without consequence. A well-struck blow can result in serious repercussions for those holding the club or even, for society at large. In this paper, we are going to explore both sides of this coin through two

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texts- Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's short story, *They Eat Meat* and U. R Ananthamurthy's novel, *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man*. The latter depicts the events which take place in a Brahmin Agrahara after the death of a brahmin who openly rejected the social order while the former describes how members of an Adivasi family after moving to Gujarat, accept one of the central tenets of the dominant Brahminical social order as their own in order to assimilate. This analysis will thus reveal the systems used to maintain the integrity of the Brahminical social order as well as its limitations drawing on Louis Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses.

In classical Marxist theory, the State had been "conceived as a repressive apparatus. The State is a 'machine' of repression, which enables the ruling classes (in the nineteenth century the bourgeois class and the 'class' of big landowners) to ensure their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter to the process of surplus-value extortion (i.e., to capitalist exploitation)" (Althusser, 137). The Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) thus conceived were the government, the administration, police, the courts, the prisons and the army. Althusser extended this definition to include a new category which he called the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). These were "a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions" such as the religious ISA, the educational ISA and the family ISA. For Althusser, the religious ISA or the system of different churches were thus extensions of the state. In traditional Hindu society, the Brahminical orthodoxy was not partof the political ruling class. But they were able to dominate and exploit the masses by the authority of the code (which also contained the code of conduct for the ksatriyas who were, in fact, the political ruling class). Thus, the social order of the Manusmriti code was upheld by the state which recognised the supremacy of the Brahminical orthodoxy. And the authority of the code also functioned through ideology- it was a religious belief system (ISA) that made people accept the hierarchical social order, but if they questioned it, they would also be subject to persecution from the monarchical state (RSA). Thus, the concept of ISA and RSA can be adapted almost seamlessly into this context.

In this situation, the influence of the ISA even exceeded the power of the RSA in some cases. For example, Shivaji, at the height of his popularity, was forced "to secure the support of a pandit, whose reputation for scholarship would silence all opposition to the views he might propound" to fabricate a royal pedigree for him so that he, "an upstart sprung from such a *Shudra* (plebian) stock (could) aspire to the rights and honour due to a Kshatriya" (Sarkar, 210). But with the constant onslaught of foreign invaders who became rulers in India and particularly, with the advent of British colonialism, the link between the political state and the Brahminical orthodoxy was considerably weakened. Nevertheless, the Brahminical social order remained virtually unquestioned among the Hindu masses. The Brahmins continue to use this social capitalto get economic and even political power (in local governance) over members of other caste. Though no longer linked to the political State directly, the Brahminical orthodoxy functions exactly like a State, securing authority throughout the pretext of benevolent guardianship and then exploiting the masses. But this is a State whose authority is maintained almost entirely through ISA. One of the texts selected for this paper is based on the colonial era and the other is based on the postcolonial era, therefore, it is mainly the ISA aspect of the Brahminical orthodoxy that we will be exploring through this text.

Now, coming to the texts, *Samskara* is a novel set around 1920-30s in rural Mysore State Province (present day Karnataka). During this time, the very basic aspects of Western modernity were gradually entering the region and starting a process of manifold change in society. But such changes were yet to disturb the dominant social order of Durvasapura, a small Bramhin Agrahara where most of the novel's action takes place. The man who is the central catalyst of the action, Naranappa, dies just before the book begins. For the residents of the Agrahara, Naranappa was the devil incarnate. It seems he almost went out of his way to flout every diktat of the Brahminical order. The Manusmriti

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clearly dictates: "A Brahmana who unintentionally approaches a woman of the Candala or of (anyother) very low caste, who eats (the food of such persons) and accepts (presentsfrom them) becomes an outcast; but (if he does it) intentionally, he becomestheir equal" (Manu, 222).

In open defiance of this, he lived and copulated out of wedlock with Chandri, a beautiful low-caste woman, in his house in the agrahara. He also violates the section on the consumption of forbidden liquor. One of the oft-quoted sections of the Manusmriti is the one on the consumption of meat. Though it does not forbid, the consumption of meat directly, it restricts the practice: "A Brahmana must never eat (the flesh of animals unhallowed by Mantras) but, obedient to the primeval law, he may eat it, consecrated with Vedic texts" (Manu, 76).

In practice, the Brahminical order has extended this above and beyond in certain parts of the country, including Mysore where the Brahmins practice strict vegetarianism. But Naranappa flouts his meat-eating in the face of his neighbours. Even Chandri, his companion, implores him, "Don't eat my cooking, don't eat meat and stuff. I'll give it up myself; if I crave for it, I'll go to the Shetti's and I'll eat my fish there, not in the Agrahara" (Anantamurthy, 56). Such is the extent to which ISA has functioned that Chandri who has lived outside the pale of vegetarianism throughout her life cannot perceive a brahmin doing the same. But Naranappa does so with impunity. It is made clear to the readers that Naranappa's defiance is not just for his own pleasure. He recognises the corruption of the Brahminical order, its exploitative nature and therefore challenges it openly. In its stead, he embraces modernism not merely through gluttony and lust but also his support for the Congress Party and his patronage of theatre.

As a foil to Naranappa, there is in the text the character of Praneshacharya, the guru of the agraharaand "the Crest-Jewel of Vedic Learning" (Ibid, 16). A renowned theologian, the acharya sees the Bramhinical order not as a means of exploitation but as a duty to nurture and guide the masses. He has read the sacred texts and adheres to them, but even beyond that he is guided by his sympathy for fellow man. He intentionally marries an invalid woman and cares for her throughout her life. When he finds Chandri, a lower caste woman who is impure by the standards of his own order, lying out in his verandah, he provides her with a mat, a blanket and a pillow purely out of altruism. By his very goodness and scholarship of theological texts (which contemporary society regards as erudition), Praneshacharya is able to uphold respect for the Brahminical order and thereby propagate it just like ISA. But there are chinks even in his moral armour. Ultimately, he falls prey to immense lust in an act of sexual transgression with Chandri and descends into moral turbulence.The other Brahmins, much more avaricious and lustful, are only interestedin securing as much as they can out of the social order.Examples include Dasacharya, who "lived entirely on meals that brahmins get at death-rites and anniversaries" (Ibid, 18) or Shripati, who secures the outcaste girl, Belli's sexual consent by virtue of his superior status in caste society.

During Naranappa's lifetime, he and Praneshacharya, two contrary forces, continue to operate in Durvasapura with Naranappa openly challenging the guru- "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."(Ibid 34) Complications arise in this order after his death when the vital question arises- who should perform his death-rites? Naranappa has been able to defy the social order in life by virtue of his economic independence because the Brahminical ISA does not have the backing of the RSA. But in death, he is robbed of this agency. The duty of performing the funeral rites fall on either one of his two relatives in the Agrahara- Lakshmanacharya and Garudacharya. But both of them try to avoid it because they fear that doing the rites for this self-proclaimed ex-Brahmin, one who has polluted himself by choice, will leave them polluted as well. But when Chandri offers the jewellery Naranappahad bought for her, to cover the cost of his funeral, the hypocrisy of the corrupt Brahminical class comes to the fore. His two relatives are now arguing, though covertly, for the

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privilege of performing the rites and getting the ornaments. But Praneshacharya, struggling with the pangs of his conscience, cannot decide between the two and the other villagers who want the body burnt and the jewellery donated to the temple. Thus, it is not individual ill-will on the part of Praneshacharya and his other followers but the code itself supported by the doctrine of moral superiority that trip up the theological scholar. And the strength of the code is such that even the Sudras refuse to burn the body fearing divine repercussions. By the time the bloated, partially decomposed body of Naranappa is burnt by a Muslim at Chandri's behest, it has already started an epidemic of bubonic plague. With powerful irony, Anantamurthy show how fear of ritual pollution ultimately leads to physical contagion.

For the orthodox Hindu, the funeral rites are essential for the perpetuation of the cycle of birth-rebirth and eventually obtaining the ultimate goal of moksha. Thus, to deny one of that would seem to be the most severe punishments available to the Brahminical order. But even beyond the orthodox beliefs (which Naranappa would not have given two hoots about), there was the question of the disposal of the body itself. The most committed atheist would not have wanted their own corpse to become bloated and rot or be eaten by wild animals. And this, it seems is the ultimate punishment or the proverbial stick that the Bramhinical order has in store for him- the denial of moksha and the ravaging of the corpse. But the stick backfires as an epidemic of bubonic plague which ravages the entire community, killing countless Brahmins and untouchables indiscriminately. It is only when the future of the entire community is threatened that the Brahminical social order is disrupted because the Brahmins flee. The stick which was supposed to punish Naranappa turned into the stick of dynamite that severely damaged society at large including the Brahmins. So firmly is this order entrenched into the masses that any attempts at disruption have explosive consequences.

The other text, *They Eat Meat* is a short story from Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's critically acclaimed collection, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*. Hansda is a member of the Santhal tribe, the largest indigenous tribe in West Bengal and Jharkhand, and in this collection, he writes about the various aspects of the Santhal experience in the present day. In the story, Biram Soren, a central government employee, is transferred from Cuttack to Vadodara and moves there with his wife, Panmuni and son, Hopon. From the beginning, there is a considerable culture shock and the first one to make them aware of this is their Telegu landlord, Rao: "Vadodara is a strongly Hindu city...People here believe in purity. I am not too sure what this purity is, but all I know is that people here don't eat non-veg… Nor do they approve of people who eat non-veg... Tribals, even lower-caste Hindus, they are seen as impure" (Shekhar, 11).

As our explorations in the *Manusmriti* have revealed, the consumption of meat is not expressly forbidden for caste Hindus or even Brahmins, but it is regulated and often discouraged. But in Gujarat, a powerful force has allied itself to the Brahminical orthodoxy in this respect- Jainism. With its central tenets of *Ahimsa*, Jainism has been an emphatic proponent of Vegetarianism from the beginning. Andre Wink writes, "Jain temples are found in Gujarat as early as the sixth and seventh century…Caulukyas, in particular the Shaivist king Kumarapala (1144-74) ...set out to make Gujarat a Jain state. Edicts were promulgated against the taking of animal life" (Wink, 355) Caste Hindus found it easy to strongly link the concept of ritual purity with the set Jain tenet of vegetarianism and for them, it became a "strongly Hindu" attribute.

The tribal identity of the Sorens is suspect in this city with its purity obsession and Mr Rao encourages Bimal to mask it. He even offers to introduce him to people as his friend and a good man. This act holds significance because as an insider in Caste society, Rao is making an attempt to initiate Bimal into it, though his indigenous origin would debar him. This simplistic explanation would make caste society seem like an exclusive club where Rao is recommending Bimal for membership. As ludicrous as this idea seems, there are indeed chains of acquaintances and casual alliances which are

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required for a smooth life even in a large modern city and Rao's warning indicates that even these would be denied to the Sorens if they do not absolutely conform. And the primary requirement for conformation is, of course, vegetarianism.

Initially, of course, there are small acts of rebellion, especially, on the part of Panmuni. TheSorens are only able to eat non-veg food at their relatives' house in the CISF campus. Outside they only sometimes consume a contraband egg with great caution. But gradually, they are impressed with the city's cleanliness and adjusted their palates to the vegetarian food to the extent that the non-veg fare even at their relative's house during their occasional visits are reduced from elaborate chicken and fish dishes to a simple egg curry. This reveals how they have internalised the Brahminical ISA to some extent. There is a constant emphasis on cleanliness as another reward the city offers for obedient conformation to the Brahminical norms. It seems to symbolically indicate ritual purity. Mr Rao, who has chosen to live permanently in Vadodara and has internalised this norm of vegetarianism to such an extent that he will not even allow his wife to cook a single egg in the kitchen, keeps citing cleanliness as the reason for his being attracted to the city, the carrot that has tempted him into internalising the norm. But unlike Mr. Rao, the conditioning of the Sorensis not complete. It is interrupted by the 2002 Gujarat riot which they are able to associate with this ISA structure. In the end it is revealed that they switched back to non-vegetarian food as soon as they get the chance to move out of Vadodara.

In his fourfold model of acculturation, Berry describes assimilation as the acculturation strategy where individuals adopt the norms of the dominant host culture over their own culture of origin. At face value, this is what happens here with the Sorens. Initially they do perceive it as regional cultural factor- "In Odisha, Panmuni-jhi could be a Santhal, an Odia, a Bengali. In Gujarat, she had to be only a Gujarati" (Shekhar, 16). But the religious and caste element makes their case much more complex than the straightforward adoption of dominant Gujarati culture. As tribals, their position within the Hindu fold is shadowy. Though they are clearly a distinct ethnic group with their own religious practices, in Gujarati mass perception, they are regarded as Hindus for this one simple reason- they conform. Not only do they eat vegetarian food but they also"went to mandirs, celebrated Hindu festivals, fasted on certain days, lit dhoop-batti in their house" (Ibid, 17). In essence, they consciously adopted practices of caste Hindu society to conform just as described by Srinivas in his 1952 book, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*. As mentioned before, Srinivas used the term Sanskritization to refer to the emulation of upper-caste behaviour by those considered lower in the hierarchy. For including tribals who have traditionally been outside the caste purview within the scope of this context, he advised caution. In this case, the Sanskritization is distinctly clear as each of the upper caste practices have been delineated in the story. And for this, their reward, their carrot,is social acceptance with a new friend circle.

The power of this carrot or the extent of the reward for assimilation becomes apparent during the 2002 Gujarat riots when even their locality is attacked by a Hindu mob baying for the blood of the one Muslim family living there. The people of the community unite to resist the mob and harmony is restored. This one assimilated family stays safe as do the Sorens. Thus, in the modern world, Sanskritization has had a wider reach. The caste society which was originally interested in exploiting those outside its scope is now willing to accept and even protect them as long as they conform, at least in this one locality. But the Soren's final break-away from the structure of the Brahminical ISA reveals also the transactional nature of the Sanskritization in this case. As soon as they no longer need the support of the Brahminical structure, they are able to reject its practises.

Both the texts reveal certain characters or situations where the Brahminical order has penetrated completely. They reveal how it has expanded out of the Manusmriti code has become almost independent of the political body and functions completely through social and by extension, through economic relations. But this act of adaptation, far from weakening it, has made its norms even

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more wide-spread, its net has been cast wider. Most importantly, these texts reveal the two arms of the order supported in each case, by the Brahminical ISA- the carrot and the stick, the reward and the punishment, where the latter even evolves into the stick of dynamite, punishment that can have widespread impact on society and large. But they also reveal how sporadic acts of exploitation and violence performed with the support the ISA sabotage the power of the ISA itself. Thus, the hold of the ISA can never be all-permeating.

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