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U. R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskar*: An Insight to Prostitution in India

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Abstract

In the ancient times the structure under which the institution of prostitution worked was entirely different from that of the present age. While in the ancient times we find more dignified and secular attitude and even well to do prostitutes who sometimes received special attention of the kings saw much degradation in the later years. These Indian prostitutes can be compared to that of the higher class *hetaira* of Greece who was known for their different calibres. They were well versed in different abilities and profession to attract the men of position. In the earlier days men of position were known to spend much of their time in the company of such women. They were trained in not less than “the sixty-four arts.” The list includes the detail regarding the number of works that is expected out of profession. It deals with over all development of both mind and physique.

Keywords- *Prostitution, Evils, Degradation, Creativity, Exclusion*

Introduction

“It is one of the oldest oppressions, not oldest professions,” **Gloria Steinem**
Exchange of sexual services in lieu of monetary benefit is considered as prostitution. The profession itself is known to us from the beginning of the civilization and is also considered one of the ancient professions known to humanity. This class of women were not limited to the rules in which they suffered restrictions in terms of movement and practice. Prostitutes (*vesya*)¹, *ganika* as they were commonly known to the Indian society were a part of Indian society. There were a huge number of prostitutes who lived on the verge of abject poverty and were forced to accept this profession under

dire circumstances. Many of them worked as menial workers with no right to dignity, each and every day was a struggle to them and they could hardly afford mere subsistence level of income. These generally came from low class. But there were prostitutes who were well versed in the area of literature and art. They were known for their calibre to music and dance; they were known to reach the height of prominence. Sometimes they were compared to the beauty of “Aspasia and Phrynes of classical Greece” (Basham 184). They were known to be well versed in, “not only music, dancing and singing, but also acting, the composition of poetry, impromptu and otherwise, flower-arrangement and garland-making, the presentation of perfumes and cosmetics, cooking, dress-making and embroidery, sorcery, conjuring and sleight of hand, the composition of riddles, tongue-twisters and other puzzles, fencing with sword and staff, archery, gymnastics, carpentry, and architecture, logic, chemistry and mineralogy, gardening, training fighting cocks, partridges and rams, teaching parrots and mynahs to talk, writing cipher languages, making artificial flowers and clay modelling” (Basham 185). Such was the huge list so that they can fully be of company to men and can be utilized in various places of prominence. The idea was to completely captivate men. Prostitution in India was basically in heterosexual in nature and homosexuality was not common. Rather literature of early age hardly gives us account of the latter, but former is like that of loving tale. Much has been showered and associated with the phenomenon of the prostitution in the early age, but it is likely that they learnt and got well verse in all the above listed arts. Anyhow they were expected to gain these areas of arts and entire love-making was treated as art.

It was not mandatory that all the prostitutes were to learn all the arts that are mentioned in the context of the sixty-four arts, rather these were expectations regarding their abilities and what was required of them. Women of such calibre could easily reach to high position and could play an important role in the lives of these well to do people. It can be believed that women did made fortune by allying themselves with such abilities and could easily steal away man’s heart. “A courtesan of a pleasant disposition, beautiful and otherwise attractive, who has mastered the arts... has the right to a seat of honour among men. She will be honoured by the king and praised by the learned, and all will seek her favours and treat her with consideration” (Vatsayana) The literature of the later age also agrees with this notion.

Some of the courtesans who were well versed in such activities reach to height of prominence some among them could be cited were Amrapali, of Vaisali, who was famous in Buddhist legend, which was later adopted in Hindi cinema also. Amrapali is more like that of legend, the story that revolves around her is like that of some no better than that of heroine of today’s day but it also suggest that women were not maltreated in this profession and they reached to the height of greatness sometimes. Amrapali is complex combination of both wealth and wit and is known among the best of

men of her age; mostly civilized and belonging to high strata of society. Sometimes even princes of the state are also found to be associated to her. On his journey towards hill the Buddha is invited by Amrapali to dine with her accept her hospitality, Buddha readily accepts it. Eventually we see that Amrapali becomes nun and one the most handsome poem emerge in Pali literature in her honour.

Prostitution was often the part of Indian literature; its adaptation could be found in the best of the depiction such as *Mrichakatika* a ten-act Sanskrit play, which was written by Śhudraka the writing can be traced back to the 2nd century BC. The story revolves around a courtesan Vasantsena; this too was later adapted in the Indian cinema.

In the novel *Samskara*, revolves around a beautiful prostitute, who remains the charms of novel and is adored by all. Her beauty is described in the most magnificent terms and Chandri she is described as “utterly beautiful, beyond compare. In a hundred mile radius...” Chandri has all the Chandri charms so as to Brahmins of Durvasapura *agragara*² are easily captivated by her. While the women of upper caste have been treated as unattractive in nature, Lilavati is mentioned as, “short, plump and round” (28), Chandri surpasses the beauty of all. Chandri and her beauty mesmerises the onlookers and she is mentioned as, “A real sharp type, exactly as described in Vatsyayana’s manual of love-look at her toes longer than the big toe, just as the Love Manual says” (Ananthamurthy 9).

Even though Chandri is prostitute she is admired for the devotion which she shows towards Naranappa and it is for this reason, Shripati acknowledges the contribution made by Chandri in the life of Naranappa, who a reprobate Brahmin brought her from a village to fill his lust. She remains with him for a decade and takes care about him. Naranappa, who vomits after the fit of drunkenness, is actually caressed by Chandri and she takes care of him like that of wed-lock wife. Even in the night to fill his whims and caprice she used to serve him, in the middle of night when used to demand food she used to readily prepare food for him and would then serve him. This attitude of Chandri throws the light on her character and we see that she takes all the care for Naranappa and eventually she stays in her life and she helps him out even in his death. Prostitution is age old problem for Indian society and even after so much dedication Chandri is unable to gain respect and treated as concubine of Naranappa.

Even after the death of Naranapa she does not abandons him as the others have done rather she goes to Praneshacharya regarding his funeral. Chandri stands firm on her ground and is ready to suffer anything so that Naranapa could get proper funeral. Chandri even gives away all her important gold and jewellery that ‘stunned the Brahmins.’ She places her four-strand gold chain, her bracelets, and her bangles in front of Praneshacharya and stupefies the Brahmin of *agrahara*. She also acts as agent of exposing the religious dogmas of the Brahmins, for outside what they reject inside they

approve of. “The Brahmins bowed their heads; they were afraid, fearful that the lust for gold might destroy Brahmin purity” (Ananthamurthy 11).

Durgabhata is the only Smarta Brahmin that comes to the rescue of Chandri. This changes the entire scenario. Chandri is unconcerned about the harsh words that she suffers at the hands of other people and pays no heed to the taunts of Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya and sleeps outside the veranda of Acharya, waiting for his final words. The devotion of Chandri towards the person who is abhorred by all even arouses dilemma in the mind of Praneshacharya and he internally admires her. Praneshcharya’s dilemma can well be expressed in the words when he says, “look here, Chandri. Your generosity complicates the question. The Brahmin has to follow whatever is right for an emergency.”

When the Brahmins of the agrahara leave for Parijatapura, Praneshacharya pays heed to the words of Chandri and welcomes her into the dining room where his wife lay, Praneshcharya accepts that “how pure Chandri’s heart was.” But after dwelling thorough the sacred texts, Praneshacharya is unable to reach any conclusive solution regarding the funeral rites of Naranapa. Praneshacharya who gets confused regarding the course of action is unable to reach any final conclusion and in this way he seeks for divine help and in this context he move towards the Maruti temple in the following morning. Chandri is on the other part is afraid about the odd things; she is filled with fear and is “afraid of facing the angry Brahmin faces.” She then returns eventually to her grove, cleans herself, fills the lap of her sari with ripe sweet plantains and moves towards temple. Her looks are elegantly described as ‘her glossy black hair loose on her wet body, her wet sari clinging to her limbs.’ She places herself near a tree, closer to the Maruti temple while Acharya desperately prays for the divine intervention inside the temple. She longs for simple things and simple happiness that prostitutes are usually devoid of, a permanent partner and also she thinks about her mother’s words that were mainly centred on idea that prostitutes had no other choice but to get children from other men and in such a case she thinks about Acharya. She regrets about that she was past thirty. “Ten years she’d lived with Naranapa, still she hadn’t had a child. If she had borne a son, he could have become a great musician; if a daughter, she could have taught her to dance, classical style. She had got everything; yet had nothing.”

Praneshacharya is unable to get any answers for his dilemma and becomes completely dejected. In the desperation to search for the answers he comes out of the premises of the Maruti temple, Chandri accidentally sees Praneshacharya and for no greater reason she starts following him. As the time has already elapsed and the dusk has made its way, the woods appeared dark; Chandri finding an occasion kneels before Praneshacharya seeking his blessings. In the desperation to find solution to her problems she kneels before Praneshacharya and eventually her body touches the knees of Acharya. In the entire movement carelessly dressed clothes gets opened. This completely

devastated the Acharya. She leans her body on the thigh of Acharya and embraces his legs. Chandri feels pity on Acharya and she is, “filled with pity at this Brahmin who had perhaps never known the pleasure of woman, helpless at her thought that there was no one but him for her in the agrahara...” the thoughts creates pain in her mind and eventually she weeps. He touches her body; a body of such woman knows no bounds for Praneshacharya has never touched any of such body. As the stupefied Acharya bends forward to bless her, his hands touches her and he feels the hot breath in the silent scene, her tender body, her tears all engulfs the wit of Praneshacharya and eventually we see that her loosened hairs completely attracts the attention of the Acharya. Chandri also is equally attracted towards Acharya and she completely mesmerises the attention of Acharya by her gestures and countenance. Equipped in all the arts of love she sits beside the Acharya and pulls him closer. Chandri takes the plantains out of her lap, peels them and readily feeds the Acharya.

Eventually Chandri embraces Praneshacharya and the helpless Acharya is hypnotized by the looks of such damsel completely gives himself to her. The Acharya is falls into the lap of Chandri like that of small child and eventually he cries like ‘a child in distress, “amma!” (Ananthamurthy 55). She caresses the weeping Acharya like a mother cares to a child. “It felt as though he’d turned over and fallen into his childhood, lying in his mother’s lap and finding rest there after great fatigue” (Ananthamurthy 59).

But Chandri is no typical prostitute and she understands the importance of reputation of Praneshacharya. She proves to be an instrument self realization for Praneshacharya and he finally realises his self. All the tradition and culture that for were responsible for the entrapment of Praneshacharya were free now and the liberating thoughts come in the mind of Acharya. Chandri in the whole affair is able to maintain the dignity of Acharya and quietly leaves the place.

Chandri in small moment acts as both a mother and a mistress to Praneshacharya and Naranapa and she remains the central woman figure in the entire plot. It is around her that most of the important things revolve. She provides food, her presence gives solace to either character and giving access to her body she ultimately fills their life with grace. In the nature, womb of dark forest, Acharya is able to realize the importance of life and the dilemma regarding the id and ego subsides. Even in present India we confront the similar problem is India and prostitution is still a grave problem in India, an estimated three million workers (Mander) are still engaged in India. They live a deplorable life that is devoid of any hope, the children of many are left in the hapless situation and they remained deprived from the education and could not be included in the main stream of development. This results in the perpetual entrapment of these workers and their upcoming generation being trapped in

Notes & References

1. Vaisya in the present era has acquired a deplorable term but any how the meaning still means prostitutes.
2. Agrahara, meant the land donated of Brahmins by the kings. These were large patch of lands and were responsible for the emergence of rich Brahmins.

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