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***Ichhamaran* and *The English Teacher*: A Comparative Cultural Study of Novels of Anand Patil and R. K. Narayan**

- Dhammashil C. Gajbhiye

Abstract: The objective of the research article is to juxtapose the two novels as distinct cultural products from the perspective of Comparative Cultural Studies. So in this research article an attempt is made to gain contrapuntal perspective on various aspects of culture and cultural discourses as revealed in fictional discourses. These sample texts are selected at random span over seventy years and provide a good ground for comparison of ideology instrumental to two different classes and the politics of culture in shaping identities. So it is a comparative cultural study in which some socio-political aspects, as presented by the novelists, are also considered.

Keywords: Cultural Studies, Comparative Literature, Identity, *Ichhamaran*, *The English Teacher*.

The comparative cultural study is a contextual approach to the study of culture in a global and intercultural context. Stephen Totosy de Zepetnek defines comparative cultural study as-

“.....a field of study where selected tenets of the field of cultural studies meaning that the study of culture and cultural products including but not restricted to the literature, communication, media, art etc. is performed in a contextual and relational construction and with a plurality of methods and approaches, interdisciplinarity and if and when required including team-work.”¹

In the light of this definition of comparative cultural studies, the novel *Ichhamaran* by Anand Patil can be better examined with *The English Teacher* by R.K.Narayan. Both novels are autobiographical in their contents and nature. In *My Days*, Narayan describes *The English Teacher* as “autobiographical in content, very little part of it being fiction”²; whereas Patil in an interview has mentioned *Ichhamaran* as an autobiographical novel. Again these novels narrate the stories of well educated young teachers; one is of English literature, whereas another is of Marathi literature. The protagonists in both the novels are married, having a child, voracious readers of literature and having an urge for creativity in literature. Again both novels give a vivid description of death and philosophical contemplation about it. So reading these two novels with the perspective of comparative cultural studies will provide distinct image of two different cultures, one of South Indian Brahmin culture as reflected in Narayan's *The English Teacher* and another of Maharashtra Maratha (Kshatriya) culture as presented in Patil's *Ichhamaran*.

R.K. Narayan's *The English Teacher* is a modernist novel, depicting a love story of a married couple 'Krishnan' and his wife 'Sushila'. It is a regional novel set in a small town 'Malgudi' in 'Tamilnadu'. The story starts when

Krishnan is already a married man and Sushila is already a mother. Krishnan is a lecturer in English in the Albert Mission College of Malgudi. The couple with their child and a cook, resides in a rented house but when Krishnan's father offers to advance him the money to buy a house, the couple starts a search for the house. They eventually arrive at a house in Lawley Extension which Krishnan perceives both attractive and propitious. As Sushila visits backyard of the house, she locks herself in an unclean outside lavatory. Sushila is here thoroughly traumatized by her experience. It causes her illness, which leads to her subsequent decline and death from the typhoid. Narayan describes Krishnan's response to the death of his wife very poignantly. In the second half, the novel provides an account of Krishnan's attempt to establish contact with his deceased wife, which leads to an encounter with the paranormal. In the novel, protagonist opposes the British system of education; though he himself was the product of same education, which he considers "makes up morons, cultural morons". He opposes the perpetuating system of education which cripples his imagination and hence believes in social freedom and independence of mind. At the end, we see Krishnan revolts against the existing educational system and hence he gives up his job and prefers to work as a primary teacher.

Ichhamaran is a post-modernist novel set in a small village 'Shirvade' in Western Maharashtra. The plot revolves around Walu Aaji, who has lived for more than hundred years, is now on death bed. She is blind grandmother of protagonist Raghu, receives death by her own will. Here Raghu Sankpal is a teacher of Marathi literature in Ravalnath College of Arts and Commerce, at Banda in Goa. The novel starts when Raghu gets a letter from his father that informs him about the sickness of his grandmother and that she is about to die. Raghu somehow manages to get leave from his college and reaches to his village Shirvade with wife and his child. At first, Walu Aaji rebukes him and does not allow them to enter in the house because it was dangerous for the life of his four month old baby to stay in the village, as there was a very heavy rainfall and there was no transportation and medical facilities available in the village. According to Walu Aaji, the evil eyes of enemies were dangerous for the baby, moreover Raghu's first baby boy was still born. So she insists on sending them back to Banda same day. But neighboring women convince her and compels them to return next day. When Raghu leaves his village, Walu Aaji promises him that in any condition, she will not die before the celebration of Diwali, as she wants everyone of her family near her at the time of her death. Though Walu Aaji is sick and about to die, she has a very strong will power, which keeps her alive till Diwali and thus she is able to keep her promise. She wants food grains and woods from her own form for rites of her passage. She was just like a banyan tree not only for her relatives but also for the whole village. Walu Aaji dies according to her will, with all family members near her and her burial is described as a unique ceremony, witnessed by all people in the village.

In *The English Teacher*, R.K. Narayan has employed first person narrative. It is a story of a person, centered to 'I'. This privileges the writer to explore

his Brahman protagonist's psychology from within. Whereas in *Ichhamaran*, Anand Patil has used third person narrative and the story is not just the story of the protagonist but of the whole village, in which the writer gives presentation to the people of different religions, castes and sects. Patil's narrative is a distinctly postmodern phenomenon in that it deviates from Narayan's norms of modernism and so *Ichhamaran* is more experimental in technique and style. Even on one occasion, the writer directly communicates with the reader which is an important technique of the postmodernist narrative, as the writer says,

“वाचक हो, हे ऐकताना देवकीची अवस्था काय झाली असेल याचा विचार करा. वालमाईचे मरणच तीला शहाणे करणार असे तिलाच वाटू लागले. इतक्या दिवसांचा आक्कावरचा राग आज थोडा कमी झाला.”³

(Dear readers, just imagine, what could have been Devaki's state of mind while listening this. She herself felt, the death of Walumai would make her more sensible. Her hatred for Akka was reduced now, from so many days.)³

According to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory, novel's roots must ultimately be sought in folklore. This presence or absence of the folkloric components in the literary discourses demonstrates how Indian writers depend or do not rely on the indigenous culture. As we know, literature is not merely a linguistic construct but also a product of cultural industry that distinguishes between 'high and low or folk culture'. The presence of folkloric components shows the writer's sensitivity to the historical origins of literature out of oral verbalization. In this respect, we can clearly see that the presence of folkloric components is very few in *The English Teacher*. The abusive terms and expressions which are the part of folkloric intertextuality are completely absent in it, but there are half a dozen sophisticate expressions like helpless fools, foolish buffoonery, idiotic theme etc. In the novel, there is a mythological reference of Lord Shiva and Parvati, sporting on the Great Kailash Mountain. Again there are passing allusions of God Srinivasa, God of Thirupati Hills, God of Seven Hills, Goddess of learning Saraswati, but there is no use of folktales or folksongs in the novel. Here, *Ichhamaran*, comparatively shows greater space for the folkloric intertextuality which demonstrates writer's affiliation with the native culture. It consists of a number of abusive expressions like kadru, murkha, bhadya, ghati, rand, bhavane, gavandhal, chabrat, rakhel etc., which the writer has used very boldly. There are six full length folktales including 'Ranicha Ratnahar', 'Ghodeswar Patilachi Gost', 'Shetkaryachi Katha', 'Korpadachi Kahani', 'Nathanchi Kahani', 'Aai aani Baichi Kahani'. All these folktales display much folk wisdom here. In the novel, Anand Patil has also provided a large number of legendary and mythological references. In addition to this, there are more than forty folksongs interspersed in this prose narrative, which include Abhang, Kirtan, Powada, Ukhane, Cradle song, songs of Bahinabai and Janabai. The exhaustive list comprises of 'Aaji maji gunachi' (p10), 'Bai amacha gunacha' (p35), 'Koni koni kotava, Mhatarchya natava' (p29), 'Aar sansar sansar, jasha tava chulhyavar' (p31), 'Naka Balanu ugumugu, Chandavarcha dhagu' (p48), 'Dubala bhartar nag mhanus maja' (p60),

“Pandharilag jhali chori, Janabaicha gela jat” (p61), “Dev dagadacha kela, Gavandi tyacha bap jhala” (p64), ‘Dul bai dul ga, Dulyachi kadi’ (p95), ‘Yajsathi kela hota attahas, shevatcha divas god java’ (p102), ‘Jyotibachya vate dhurada chadhato gaganala’ (p113), ‘Sheratun alaa bai panatu’ (p122), ‘Mhaaherun ye sangava’ (p130), ‘Raja Shivaji sarakha putra, Jijai sarakhi mata’ (p158), ‘Danadan kudal, manman maati’ (p158), ‘Sashubai mhantat mala mala’ (p159), ‘Bhosalyachya muline Savantana Ghatali mal’ (p159), ‘Kuntiche pandav, Gandhariche Kaurav, Bala jo jo re’ (p159), ‘Kashi Kashi mhanuni lok jati ga dahvat’ (p 175), ‘Atmadynan anubhav shidhatil pandatil khun’ (p211), ‘Auta hatacha banavila mala’ (p215), ‘Ek sagun gun gaura!’ (p216), ‘Nall foduni pacha, keli oadi’ (p234), ‘Zol zol zolana’ (p239), ‘Gost gostichi, Rama kostyachi’ (p239), ‘Dagadacha Dev bolilto Kaisa’ (p252), ‘Aishe gele Kotyani koti, Radu Kaisa Ektya sathi’ (p252), ‘Jane Brahmand madi!’ (p259), ‘Chavarangachya sola nadi, Kheda mandila Shivshakti’ (p260), ‘Sasu tujhi pori hay ga Rakhumai Mauli’ (p275), ‘Aaji natichaga nat, dudha tupachi ga ukali’ (p284), ‘Aamhi jato amchya guava, Amcha Ram Ram ghyava’ (p292), ‘Maran majhe Maron gele’ (p293), ‘Sajavali Ambari, Chandani zumbare dulati’ (p294), ‘Mage bahuta janmi! Hech Karit alo aamhi!’ (p298), ‘Avaghechi te Janma Athavati maja’ (p299), ‘Jivale jhal jad, sangu tari konapashi’ (p306), ‘Walubaichi ho lavalhi mal’ (p308).

Again the presence of alien text is one of the salient feature of intertextuality and cultural hybridization. R.K. Narayan has mentioned a complete paragraph of Shakespeare's 'King Lear' in the very first chapter of *The English Teacher*. There are again passing references of 'Ivanhoe', Lamb's 'Tales from Shakespeare', Palgrave's 'Golden Treasury', Shakespeare's 'Sonnets', Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind', Taine's 'History of Literature', 'Pride and Prejudice', 'Bhagvad Geeta', Milton, Carlyle, Scott, Browning, Plato, Swinburne, Bradley, Beaumont and Fletcher and also an English movie 'Tarzon'. Compared with R.K. Narayan's plain, simple and very ordinary intertextuality of this kind, Anand Patil has used more complex, ironic and subversive use of innumerable, foreign and native texts. In *Ichhamaran*, Patil gives more than forty allusions from different poets, dramatists, novelists, philosophers from all over the world. The list of this kind Intertextuality consists of F.M. Shinde's poem 'Aai' (4 lines) (p12), Habibmiah's poem (5 lines) (p67), Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' (1 line) (p109), B.R. Tambe's poem (4 lines) (p109), Sant Dhyandev's poem (2 lines) (p114), Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar' (2 lines) (p124), Plato (2 lines) (p152), Emily Dickenson's poem 'Because I Could not Stop for Death' (4 lines) (p152), Sant Kabir (2 lines) (p152), Joyce Granefel (8 lines) (p153), Sant Kabir (3 lines) (p164), Khalil Jibran (1 line) (p177), A Sanskrit Shloka (4 lines) (p177), D.H. Lawrence's poem (4 lines) (p135), Francis Bacon 'On Death' (9 lines) (p195), Jonathan Swift (5 lines) (p196), Mark Twain (3 lines) (p196), Virginia Woolf (9 lines) (p196), An Anonymous poet (2 lines) (p197), Andre Morva (2 lines) (p197), Larak Fuko 'Maximus' (1 line) (p197), Allen Boody 'Getting Even' (2 lines) (p197), Thomas Browne 'Urn Burial' (1 line) (p197), Edmund Burk 'A letter to Matthew Smith' (3 lines) (p197), an

anonymous Japanese writer (3lines) (p198), a Budhdhist Holy book (4lines) (p198), Upanishad (4lines)(p198), Daily Maharashtra Samachar (15 lines) (p229), Dante's 'Inferno' (3lines)(p233), Lilacharitra 'Muktabai Bhet' (5 lines)(p247), Daily Kolhapur Samachar (14 lines) (p254), Bhagvad Geeta (2 lines) (p255), a Sanskrit shloka (2 lines)(p270), Bhagvad Geeta (1line)(p276), Chanakya 'Arthshastra' (2lines)(p279), Song- Babulki duaye leti ja(2lines)(p292), Song-Ye mere vatan ke logo (2 lines)(p293), Thomas Hardy 'In The Cemetery' (2lines)(p294), Marathi translation of Wordsworth's poem (8lines) (p299), Marathi translation of Henrik Mane (9lines) (p305).

Besides these large number of allusions from different works, Anand Patil has also provided passing references of more than fifty texts and their authors in *Ichhamaran*. This provides a strong flavor of cultural hybridity to the text. This larger space for folkloric intertextuality in *Ichhamaran* than *The English Teacher* once again confirms the belief that “the literature produced in Indian languages is more deeply rooted in the native culture than Indian writings in English, which has always been looking towards the west”⁴ and so the literature in indigenous languages gives reflection of folkloric intertextuality more faithfully than Indian writings in English.

Similarly if we see the use of language in both novels, R.K.Narayan in *The English Teacher* uses a simple English and never attempts to mix the flavor of Tamil or any other Indian language into English. Even, there is no distortion of the rules of English grammar. He uses common Indian English idioms without bringing any change into their structure. This reflects a typical use of English used by the Brahmanical elite class and also shows zenith of acculturation of modern English educated people of particular class/caste. But at the same time, he also employs a number of words from Indian languages like jukta, pyol, Appa, Yogi, dhal, puja, swamiji, mantras, Gurus, veena etc. Similarly, Patil in *Ichhamaran* has used simple Marathi, but he also includes a large number of sentences from Konkani, Hindi and English to which he calls as “Komahinglish”. He has also used a number of shlokas in Sanskrit. This use of “Komahinglish” in *Ichhamaran* reflects the process of indigenous linguistic hybridization, which is an important ingredient of popular culture. Again Anand Patil's use of a large number of folksongs, folktales and innumerable proverbs and a wide variety of abusive terms are true signifiers of rustic life. He introduces his culture in a language that is slightly Sanskritized in plain standard prose narrative, but dialogues are in pure native dialect. His authentic portrayal of folkloric rituals, fairs, festivals, jokes, brawls, and combination of standard Marathi with native rural dialect are true to life characters.

It was in 1945 when *The English Teacher* was published and at that time the caste system and untouchability were predominant in Indian society including Tamilnadu. Though in the first part of the novel, R.K.Narayan has realistically described the South Indian culture, he has never exposed the caste system or untouchability in the novel. Even, in his novel *The Vendor of Sweets*, his protagonist Jagan hypocritically claims that, “Well, we don't believe in caste nowadays.”⁵ or in *The Guide*, Raju says, “Things have

changed. There is not caste or class today”⁶. It shows that R.K.Narayan in his novels did not want to expose the caste system or untouchability which was important markers of Indian Hindu culture during his period. Thus, the humanism reflected in his novels can be said as pseudo humanism. In this regard, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar has given a clarification about this attitude of Brahmin authors in his book *The Untouchables*, as he says,

“The old orthodox Hindu does not think that there is anything wrong in the observance of untouchability. To him it is a normal and natural thing. As such it neither calls for expiation nor explanation. The new modern Hindu realizes the wrong. But he is ashamed to discuss it in public for fear of letting the foreigner know that Hindu Civilization can be guilty of such a vicious and infamous system or social code as evidenced by Untouchability.”⁷

Again, there is a little cultural space for the representation of other ethnic groups than Brahmans in R.K.Narayan's *The English Teacher*. To the other extreme, although *Ichhamaran* describes Maharashtrian Maratha culture, it is replete with Brahmans, Kunbis, Mahars, Kumbhars, Kostis, Wadar, Nhavis, Saraswats, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and what not. The novel also shows Anand Patil's strong criticism against the caste system, which divides and hampers the progress of the society, as he says,

“हे ख्रिश्चन मिशनरी वृत्तीने मदत करायला तयार असतात. हिंदू मंडळी जातियवादाच्या बिळातच बळी जातात.”⁸

(The Christians are always ready to help others with missionary zeal. But Hindus succumbed to the narrow attitude of casteism.)⁸

Anand Patil has not only criticized the caste system but also exposed how the caste discrimination and untouchability is existing in the postmodern era in Indian society. The caste discrimination and untouchability are existing for thousands of years in Indian society which have still their effect and people are unable to remove it completely from their unconscious mind. This deeply seated caste discrimination and untouchability in the unconscious minds of some of the upper caste people towards Dalits is clearly shown by Anand Patil, when he describes Suman, wife of Raghu, uncomfortable to hand over her child to a Dalit, as he says,

“रघु कडील बाळ गोंदयाने घेताच सुमनचा चेहरा जरा पडलाच. गाव सीमेवर बाळाला पहिला स्पर्श असूश्याचा व्हावा याचा तो परिणाम होता.”⁹

(As Gondya took baby from Raghu, Suman was dispirited. It was the result of an untouchables touch to the baby on the village border.)⁹

It indicates that presently the untouchability is no longer existing in Indian society, but the stigma of untouchability is not wiped out completely and for removing it, a new cultural literacy is needed in Indian society. As both writers belong to Hindu religion, their writings show a considerable influence of Hinduism. A large number of references of Hindu deities, philosophy, traditions, mythology, rituals, festivals etc. can be traced out in both the novels. In *The English Teacher*, we get a number of references of Hindu mythologies, deities and rituals, but the novel does not give a single reference of other religions than Hinduism. On the other hand, in *Ichhamaran*, Patil gives a large number of references from Hinduism, but at the same time he also provides a number of allusions

from other religions like Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Confucius etc. which shows a higher degree of Cultural Hybridization in it. Though the novel exhibits Anand Patil's strong affiliation with Hinduism, it also provides his bitter criticism of some evil customs and traditions in Hinduism which is completely absent in Narayan's work. Patil has not only criticized the caste system in Hinduism, but also the dominance of the priestly class in it and different rituals, traditions and customs which maintain this dominance and help to exploit the lower castes, as he says,

“पुरोहित वर्गाने पोटासाठी तयार केलेल्या भ्रष्ट पोथ्यापुराणातील कित्येक विधी शोषणाच्या वाटा खुल्या करणाऱ्या आहेत, असे त्याचे ठाम मत होते. त्याला पुष्टी देणारी धर्म निरपेक्ष विधींची कल्पना जांफी गोरेरनही मांडली होती. विचारांच्या या वादळातून वाट काढीत रघू आजीच्या मृत्यूनंतरच्या शेवटच्या दोन्ही विधींचा विचार करीत होता.”¹⁰

(Raghu was of the firm contention that several rites and rituals in some corrupt ancient religious scripts and legends written by the priestly class for earning livelihood pave the ways for exploitation of the lower classes. In support of it, Joffe Gorer had asserted the concept of secular rites. Raghu finding the way out of such hurricane of thoughts, reflected over the last two rites after the death of Aaji.)¹⁰

But with this bitter criticism to the evil customs and traditions in Hinduism, Patil's *Ichhamaran* shows a very strong influence of social reforms in India, which were started by Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Sahu Maharaj, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, Periyar and other great leaders. Even, the protagonist Raghu marries Suman (Hira) because he is inspired by the thoughts of social reformists like Phule, Agarkar. But at the same time, he shows his concern over the backward and rural areas that are still far away from these social reforms, as he asks,

“शाहू महाराजांनी शिरवाडयाच्या कांबळयाच्या पोराला फौजदार केला होता. पण फारशा सुधारणांचे वारे या डोंगरात का पोहचले नाही? रघू शेतामध्ये गेला म्हणजे असा भरकटत जायचा.”¹¹

(Sahu Maharaj had appointed Kamble's son (an untouchable from Shirvade) as a Police Inspector. But why did this flow of social reforms never reach to this hilly region? Raghu was always engrossed by such thoughts whenever he went to the farm.)¹¹

In *The English Teacher* and in his other novels, R. K. Narayan shows a strong influence of Indian Independence struggle, but he does not show any influence of social reformist movements, which were prominent in India during his time. No doubt these reformist movements were for the betterment of the Indian society and they have their influence in Indian literatures also. R. K. Narayan in his novel does not criticize any of the evil traditions or customs of Hindu religion as Anand Patil has done in his work, at the same time it shows a complete absence of influence of social reformist movements in India. It clearly indicates how the ideology of a particular caste/class dominates the process of creative writing, which does not allow the writer to support the trends which are against the ideology of his own caste. It also reflects R. K. Narayan's hidden support to the old social system in India, which maintains the Cultural Hegemony of priestly class. This particular trait in the works of large number of Brahman writers once again support Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's argument,

when he points out the lacuna in Brahman writers and intellectuals which does not enable them to produce a great revolutionary like Voltaire, who remained honest with his views and protested against the Catholic Church, as Dr. B. R. Ambedkar writes in his book *The Untouchables*,

“.....unfortunately no Brahmin scholar has so far come forward to play the part of a Voltaire who had the intellectual honesty to rise against the doctrines of the Catholic Church in which he was brought up ; nor is one likely to appear on the scene in the future. It is a grave reflection on the scholarship of Brahmins that they should not have produced a Voltaire. This will not cause surprise if it is remembered that the Brahmin scholar is only a learned man. He is not an intellectual.”¹²

However both the novelists have a very striking similarity in their novels, as they strongly criticize the Indian politics and politicians. They reveal the dark side of Indian politics, which is dominated by bourgeoisie class in India. Both fictions describe how the politicians, whether in modern era or in post-modern era, are too much selfish; engaged in corruption and leg pulling of each other. The novels also present the bourgeoisie class in India, who are engaged in exploiting the common masses and behave in such a way, which is anti-national; confirming the view of Frantz Fanon, when he states, “..... they organize the loot of whatever national resources exist. Without pity, they use today's national distress as a means of getting on through scheming and legal robbery.”¹³ In this regard, the malpractices in Indian politics in colonial period, especially in Malgudi municipality as shown in *The English Teacher*, is very much appreciable. The work shows how the President, Vice-President and members of Malgudi municipality are busy in the battles against each other, disputed elections, walk-outs and no confidence motions, instead of attending the different problems of people, as the writer says,

“Malgudi had earned notoriety for its Municipal affairs. The management was in the hands of a council with a President, Vice-President and ten elected members; they met on the last Saturday of every month and battled against each other.”¹⁴

The novelist has also described the selfishness and rivalry among the politicians, which makes them insensitivity towards different problems of people. Because of this, the problems remain unsolved for years and years. In the novel, Narayan ironically comments on the insanitary conditions of Anderson Lane,

“There was every sign that the Municipality had forgotten the existence of this part of the town. Yet it seemed to maintain a certain degree of sanitation mainly with the help of sun, wind and rain.”¹⁵

In this regards, Anand Patil goes one step further and describes the post colonial reality of India in which sometimes people have to face the anger and retribution of some politicians, if they don't act according to their will. In *Ichhamaran*, the writer has highlighted the harassment of the people of Shirvade by an M.L.A. by using some goons, because the people did not vote in one election as their demand of construction of an approach road to the village was completely neglected, as Patil states,

“शेरगाव जवळ आले. याच गावच्या गुंडांना हाताशी धरून वरिवडे-शिरवडे-पारगावच्या रस्त्याची कोंडी आमदाराने केली होती. त्याला एकदा पाचशे मतांनी पराभव पत्करावा लागला