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**THE DIALECTICS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IN S.L. BHRAPPA'S NOVEL,
SARTHA- THE CARAVAN: A CRITICAL STUDY**

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Abstract:

The present paper aims to explore and critically analyse S.L. Bhrappa's novel Sartha- The Caravan as a dialectically discursive fictional work. It aims to reveal the complex structures of cultural and spiritual renderings of the struggle over values of righteousness in ancient India. The picaresque novel as set in ancient India is a telling rendering of India's spiritual quest. The physical journey develops into a spiritual quest of the individual as well as of the entire civilisation. The struggle between desire and renunciation, asceticism and householdry, various faith systems is also analysed as a critical engagement of Indian thinking with myriad aspects of life. The study also aims to focus on the cultural struggle as a necessary critical thinking about cultural values as presented in the aesthetic structures of the novel.

Keywords: *Dialectics, fiction, picaresque, Indian thinking, critical thinking, etc.*

Factors like religion and Dharma, social institutions, family institutions, knowledge systems, education, faith, value system, cultural philosophies and belief systems contribute vitally in the propagation and perpetuation of the sense of righteousness and sagacity. In most ancient civilizations of the world these factors fashioned and nurtured the sense of righteousness with regards to their respective dispositions and approaches to human life and the world. To mention a few, the ancient civilizations like Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Chinese and the Indus Valley civilization, popularly known as *Sindhu Sanskriti* in Indian languages, became the cultural inventories of the successive generations in their corresponding regions. These cultural inventories sourced the artistic, aesthetic expressions of the humans through their creative faculty. Thus, was created language and literature, shapes and drawing, colours and painting, sound and music, movements and dance. These aesthetic, artistic, creative manifestations of human experiences and imaginations drew a lot from the life, society and culture prevalent in different periods of human history and at different regions of the human world. These creations could not be believed to have happened in isolation from the myriad aspects of human life being felt, thought over, contemplated over and cognised by those who put them into effect. A perpetual exchange between the world without and the world within, between the outer, physical world and the inner, spiritual world, between the self and the world formulates certain directives for human conduct, behaviour, actions, choices, decisions and the whole way of life. The artistic, intellectual verisimilitude sourcing from the cultural inventories of civilizational consciousness settles the understanding and practice of righteousness.

Righteousness in Sartha- The Caravan:

Sartha - The Caravan is a completely authentic recreation of eighth century India in all its cultural, philosophical diversity. *Sartha* is a Sanskrit word which literally means a trading caravan. The novel is



remarkable for it works on two different levels- it is a physical journey across India as well as the inward spiritual journey of a scholar, Nagabhata, of the eighth century who is born into a Vedic tradition. Nagabhata has been deputed by King Amaruka who is also Nagabhata's friend, to secretly examine the caravans of other kingdoms. While being away from his family, Nagabhata learns about the cunning designs of the King who marries his wife. Nagabhata experiences an emotional turmoil due to this treachery practised against him by his friend and his own wife. It drives him to a lifelong journey through the mystical environments of eighth century India. His travels bring for us a glimpse of a fascinating world of strange customs, ancient kings and their concubines, religious visionaries, tantric, merchants, mendicants and spies. This display of cultural milieu of the times is intermingled with profound philosophical debates. The various mystical practices, modes of belief, customs and culture that existed in the ancient times of the eighth century present a dynamic and diversified picture of how these various practices and ideas collided against one another and existed as the ensemble of the same society in the eighth century India. The novel also reveals how the Vedic traditions now diverged into the Buddhist, Jain philosophy influencing the people to weigh and compare, question and refute, challenge and doubt and even reject and accept different views pertaining to the various philosophical ideas. The changing times brings a vista of changing minds in *Sartha*. The novel is a creative exploration of the roots of conflicting cultural and philosophical practices and beliefs in India. This exploration rounds up the conflict as a deeply ingrained concern about righteousness in various spheres of life including the cultural, philosophical, spiritual and intellectual.

Physical Desire and Spiritual Quest:

After reaching Mathura, the caravan changes its route and the leaders plan to go to another region for trading. Nagabhata had earlier told the leaders of the *sartha* that he wanted to join the *sartha* because it was heading towards Kashi. Now, if Nagabhata goes with them on a different route, Nagabhata fears that the leaders would become suspicious of his intentions behind joining the *sartha*. Hence, he chooses to stay back in Mathura. At Mathura, the whole town is busy in the celebration of the Janmashtami. The drama group performs a play on Krishna's life. Nagabhata happens to get introduced to Chandrika, the actress. They form a friendship. Nagabhata acts in a play and gains popularity as an actor. He gets a new name- Krishnananda for his popularity as the actor performing Krishna's role. While working as an actor in the play along with Chandrika, Nagabhata gets infatuated towards her. In order to get relief from the mental turmoil caused by his infatuation, he goes to meet her at her house. In response to Nagabhata's confession before her that he is seeking a physical intimacy with her, she tells him that they should not be guided by the senses and that unless the wildness of lust is controlled, the inner journey would not be accomplished. Nagabhata finds it impossible to control his sexual urge.

The above account of Nagabhata's inner struggle due to his yearnings for physical love with Chandrika and her ascetically infused rejection of his advancements present a dialectic situation. Nagabhata thinks that the withdrawal from natural urges for a sexual union with the woman he is in love with will leave his mind distracted and the impulses will not allow him to pursue the spiritual quest if they are not satisfied with the fulfilment of physical love. Chandrika, however, holds the view that desire itself is transitory and one can never attain fulfilment because the cyclical nature of the desire for carnal intimacy never allows a person to think beyond itself. It is very peculiar of such a dialectical debate that no one argument can be entirely false or entirely true. What Nagabhata states forms a basis of practical reality of human life and what Chandrika holds is the philosophical and ideal reality of human life. Both fill the mental, intellectual space of the human mind. At the level of ideas, again, this is not a conflict between two ideas with one true and another, a false one, but this is a conflict because both the approaches pose to question the truth of one another. Unable to resolve this



tension, the inner struggle of Nagabhata becomes more intense. He becomes immensely popular for his role of Krishna but his own real life issues get entangled. After Chandrika decides to leave acting, he lives with Sugandhi, another actress, and forms a sexual relationship with her.

Nagabhata gradually understands that sexual desire is ephemeral, it is born and it dies when satisfied, yet, it is born again till gratification gives the false feeling that it is the only reality. As soon as it is satisfied, it dies. Nagabhata realises that Buddha's teaching of 'life is just a string of birth and death' is the only truth of human life. He realises that life is ephemeral and transient. Transience is the daily experience of all of us. The inner struggle of Nagabhata becomes more intense. He becomes immensely popular for his role of Krishna but his own real life issues get entangled. This inner struggle results into a deep thinking on the issue of righteousness. The respective views avowed by Nagabhata and Chandrika indicate the ever existing cultural and intellectual struggle over the dialectics of spiritual quest and attainment of the supreme knowledge of righteousness. It is a quest for the most righteous path, the just ways of spiritual enlightenment.

The Vedas and Buddhism:

This cultural struggle and the dialectical quest for attaining the spiritual enlightenment through the understanding and adherence to various philosophical ideas continue for Nagabhata. At Mathura, after Nagabhata is separated from the *sartha* he was travelling with, he stays at a *Chaitya*, a Buddhist temple or monastery. In the company of Vajrapada, the Buddhist priest, and other *Bhikkus*, the Buddhist monks, Nagabhata learns that conversions and propagation have been two major causes for the spread of Buddha's Dharma. While criticising the Vedic tradition, the host also asks Nagabhata why the knowledge of the Vedas was allowed only to the upper classes in the Vedic tradition and points out that the concentration of Vedic knowledge on a particular section of the society is the cause of its loss of popularity. He argues that this practice has hindered the spread and propagation of the Vedic Dharma, while, Buddha's religion is spreading with conversions and propagation of philosophy to the masses.

At the *Chaitya*, Nagabhata meets *Stapati*, a sculptor who is hired by Vajrapada to create Buddhist murals and idols. Once, in a conversation *stapatitells* Ngabhata that Vajrapada, the priest is expecting him to convert himself into a Buddhist, only then he would be able to carve the Buddhist murals and idols. Nagabhata tells *Stapati* that carving the Buddhist idols on stone may not require the sculptor to practically proselytize himself to a different religion. He can visualize and carve idols like an actor who need not experience a role in his real life. He says, "We are actors, not characters". Nagabhata contemplates over the idea of truth according to the Vedic, Jain and Buddhist philosophy. Thinking of the thrust on conversions under Buddhism, Nagabhata decides to ask the *Bhikku* Vajrapada why they were compelling the sculptor to convert and why a person cannot stay in the religion into which he is born. He recalls a mantra in the Veda which means,

There is only one Reality. The wise call it by different names. Apart from the Veda, the *Shruti* which is the highest authority – there is also an injunction in the *Smriti*- the Bhagvad Gita which means, Whoever the devotee who wishes to worship the image of God in his own favourite form with total devotion, I will appear to him in that form and strengthen his devotion (Bhyrappa, 67).

This is stated by Lord Krishna himself. Thus, the immensity of philosophical polarity makes Nagabhata feel emptiness within him. This agonising emptiness is caused due to Nagabhata's exposure to the diverse and dialectical views of the Vedic and the Buddhist philosophy. He finds that



both the philosophical approaches question each other. He fails to understand as to why there is so much of emphasis under Buddhism on conversions and propagation of the principles while the practice of any faith takes us to the understanding of the same ultimate Reality, the same Divine principle. His point of view in this regard is developed by his association with the Vedic philosophy. However, he also agrees with the critical view stated by Vajrapada that the Vedic knowledge remained restricted only to the priestly and upper classes while the masses remained uninformed of its philosophical soundness. Besides, the Vedic philosophy apparently became standardised due to its proliferation only as a means to spiritual quest. This apparent isolation of the Vedic Knowledge from the practical, day-to-day life of the masses resulted into the ignorance of the common people towards it. Thus, common, ordinary people wished for an alternative faith system in the form of simpler principles which they could identify with their own life and life's concerns. This wish provided a scope to the propagators of Buddhism to attract the masses towards it. These considerations leave Nagabhatta with confusion regarding which would be the most righteous path to be undertaken for his spiritual quest. Again, the dialectical nature of the philosophical views pushes him into depression. He undertakes a spiritual quest.

Once, while watching the movements of people on a riverbank, while Nagabhatta is seated at leisure, lost in a pensive mood, a sage approaches to him and tells him to practise '*sahasrara*' – the ultimate stage of meditation without which 'there will be no peace', and after saying this, he disappears. Nagabhatta learns meditation, the inner strength of a *Sanyasi* - an ascetic person. He attains the ability to read the minds of others through meditation. Nagabhatta experiences some inner strength of reading other people's minds through meditation. He exerts this as a power to know of himself as having attained control on others' minds. But, his ascetic guru checks him for entering into other people's minds through meditation. Nagabhatta attains self-realisation. He understands that a true yogi should never yield to these attractions. However, a few days later, he again practises this power and tries to understand Shalini's, his wife's mind. He understands that his wife has been infidel to him and she has formed an illicit relationship with the king Amaruka. Thus, the excessive and unchecked use of the yogic power of meditation by Nagabhatta, leads to depression again because he violates the norms of righteousness of the practice of meditation and yogic powers. He acts against the instructions of his guru about not using these powers for personal aggrandisement or for attaining supremacy over others. But the mundane and personal anxieties keep him tied up to the baser feelings. Once again, we find Nagabdhatta tilting between the attraction of such powers and absolute renunciation under the yogic principles. Unable to resolve this enigma of 'what is righteousness?', a little later, Nagabhatta encounters a *vamachari*- a tantric.

Ascetic, Tantric and Buddhist Ways

This dialectical struggle over the righteous path for spiritual enlightenment pushes him further to explore the tantric ways of attaining spiritual enlightenment. Under the tutelage of the tantric guru, for Nagabhatta, all established notion of ascetic life and meditation get subverted and are challenged by the *vamachari* tantric-sage. After his exposure to the tantric practices Nagabhatta thinks that in yogic practice, the 'curiosity' of trying to enter in others' minds is forbidden, while, in the tantric ways, nothing is a taboo. He does not appreciate the rules and regulations of the ascetic life which prevent one from trying out what he wants. He holds it unnatural. Now, he thinks that suppressing the natural tendencies would not get him anywhere. He learns and practices the technique of entering other people's minds with his esoteric powers. A few days later, his tantric guru leaves him but before leaving he asks Nagabhatta to perform one tantric ritual called, *Yoni Pooja*- worshipping the female genital and entering it with the male genital of the devotee. The queerness of the ritual startles him but Nagabhatta's passion for acquiring the tantric powers is so overwhelming that he suppresses the



thought of its weirdness. In order to attain absolute powers through the tantric methods, Nagabhata presses Chandrika hard to offer herself for the ritual of *Yoni Pooja*. After many efforts to change her mind and agree to offer her for the ritual, Nagabhata finally succeeds and he performs the ritual with Chandrika. Right after the incident Chandrika asks him to stay with her at her house for over a month.

During his stay at Chandrika's house, through the homely care and concern of Chandrika, Nagabhata is slowly transformed into an ascetic yogi. She convinces him about the tantric way being a debased way of life. Chandrika argues with Nagabhata on the issue of the ritual performed. She considers that the entire ritual is disgusting and the cause and medium both are despicable. The very act of performing this ritual by worshipping the female genital and entering it with the male genital of the devotee requires a selection of the female whose identity and relation with the devotee need not be such that the devotee will be under any moral stress since the outer form and manifestation of the ritual is that of sexual intercourse. She proves her point by asking Nagabhata if he could have performed the ritual with his own mother. This creates confusion in Nagabhata's mind as the prohibition of a mother's body for such a ritual itself signifies that the tantric tradition also considers certain things as a taboo. This contradicts with the general discourse about the tradition that it does not forbid anyone anything.

Thus, we find that once again Nagabhata is grappling with the cultural struggle within himself between the most righteous paths of spiritual enlightenment. Every path he tries, from the Vedic to the Buddhist, from the ascetic to the tantric, puzzles him as soon as he is exposed to the discrepancy between the ideal, theoretical, the scriptural, the philosophical principles of righteousness under these ways and the practical, behavioural, social difficulties in maintaining one's own unabated and strict adherence to a single philosophy. The dialectic nature of the relationship of these various practices does not allow Nagabhata's mind to settle with a singular, monolithic way of spiritual enlightenment. He realises that his gradual involvement into a particular mode leads him to question and be curious about the other modes. He also finds out that one cannot be antagonistic to the other modes while he is involved into one. One cannot be even indifferent to this pressure of dialectic relation among all these practices. As a keen seeker of the supreme knowledge of spiritual contentment he finds that the absolute knowledge does not dissuade a person from enquiring into the other faith, belief and knowledge systems. The symbiotic relation of the various faith-systems advances as the dialectical function among them. This function keeps the enquiry into the righteousness of each path ever-alive. Hence, after he realises, under Chandrika's guidance, that the tantric path too is not the ultimate path, he feels the spiritual emptiness and inertia again.

Nagabhata meets Bhikku Vajrapada and Vishwakarma *stapati*. He learns that *stapati* has converted to Buddhism. Nagabhata has a philosophical encounter with Vajrapada. He realises that his thoughts are inclined to the nihilistic and existentialist ideas. He agrees immediately with Vajrapada when he asks him to go to Nalanda, the place where he could learn more about the philosophical formulations of Buddhism and where he could find answers to his questions, find the real meaning of 'vacuity' and 'non-existence' and thus attain peace. At Nalanda, Nagabhata finds that more than the Buddhist themselves, it was the non-Buddhists who donated liberally thereby showing their tolerance of another religion. They had regular debates and discussions on philosophical issues pertaining to various belief-systems. Hieu-en-Tsang, a Chinese traveller's visit is also mentioned. The total atmosphere is filled with philosophical discussions and scholarly debates over many issues. Many Vedic Pandits became Buddhists. Nagabhata recollects his memories of the Vedic learning at the traditional school of his guru Mandana Mishra.

Nagabhata encounters the complexities of Buddhism. He realises that he had come to Nalanda to learn the sweetness of Buddha's philosophy to attain peace but the original single path of Buddha had been subdivided into *Vaibhashika Sautrantika*, *Yogachara*, *Madhyamika*, these had been further



subdivided into *Vajrayana* and *Sahajayana* and they were now fighting with one another. The discordant atmosphere of intellectual antipathy in the practices of some followers of Buddhism causes disappointment to Nagbhata. He realises that the philosophical intricacies and complexities of learning will not help him attain peace. Next, he goes to Gaya to practice meditation again. Nagabhata interacts with some followers of the Vedic traditions. He asks if they know that Buddha has rejected the Vedas. Their reply conveys the essence of the dialectical cultural struggle as the intellectual tradition of India. Their reply is, “Even condemning god is a kind of worship. In fact, the man who condemns god is a greater devotee than a mere flatterer.” (Bhyrappa, 164).

After returning from Gaya, Nagabhata resumes his learning in Buddhism at Nalanda. One unfortunate incident takes place at Nalanda during this period. One octogenarian student of Buddhism, Prajnaghana, who has been living with a feigned identity with this name, is exposed and his identity is revealed to everyone that he is the great Vedic scholar Kumarila Bhatta whose authority in Vedic knowledge is unmatched and many Buddhist scholars were defeated by him in logical debates and philosophical contests. The students at Nalanda become furious over this and they beat the old man badly. He is compelled to leave Nalanda. Kumarila Bhatta was quite frustrated to see that the teachers at Nalanda resorted to a mere condemnation of the Vedic philosophy. They used irony, sarcasm instead of logical argument and reasoned criticism. The students would accept that as proper evaluation. At the Veda school of Mandana Mishra too Buddhism was criticised. This conflict in the most prominent spiritual philosophies upsets Nagabhata. As a dispassionate seeker of knowledge, Nagabhata finds that the Vedic and the Buddhist priestly classes were going to the extremes in their adherence to their chosen paths. He finds that the dialectical method of understanding the essence of all philosophies was no longer seen in the practice of these monks. Once again, the issue of the righteousness haunts his mind compelling him to judge the worth of philosophy in terms of its practical observance in life.

Nagabhata leaves Nalanda looking for Kumarila Bhatta. He reaches the *ashrama* of Kumarila Bhatta. Kumarila Bhatta replies to the disciples who had asked him not to go to Nalanda and convert himself to Buddhism in order to learn the secrets of Buddhism with a vow of winning the debate between Buddhism and Vedas that until one masters the secrets of a particular persuasion, it is not possible to criticize and condemn it. That is why he had ventured out his stay in Nalanda as a Buddhist with a disguised identity. After having been exposed, beaten up and expelled from the Buddhist school of *Nalanda*, Kumarila Bhatta feels that he has committed a mistake and must do penance. He realises that to achieve a victory in the debate against Buddhism he should not have incurred the sin of forsaking his Vedic tradition adopting another. He holds a view now that the Vedas are self-sufficient. They do not need to survive through the condemnation of opposing faiths. ‘They do not have to shine forth by the secular means of defeating other beliefs.’ As a punishment of his ‘sin’ of abandoning his faith in order to learn another faith, Kumarila Bhatta immolates himself to death and sacrifices his life.

This incident leaves Nagabhata shattered. He fails to understand how a man could end his life as a penance for his deviation from his long-cherished path of spiritual faith. In order to seek answers on this, he goes to meet his guru Mandana Mishra- the most revered and the most committed practitioner of the Vedic tradition. Nagabhata meets his guru, Mandana Mishra, and he tells him about Kumarila Bhatta’s sacrificing his life. Nagabhata tells him that in spite of rejecting the Vedic dharma, the Buddhists are happy, contended and their religion is growing. Mandana Mishra holds a view that their temples and structures have come up because of the patronage of kings and merchants. The number of Buddhist mendicants has increased. To become a Buddhist one has to become a mendicant. They insist on the way of becoming a *sanyasin*- an ascetic sage in order to follow the teachings of Buddha. People practising various Professions did not become Buddhists because that would require them to give up their Profession. How would they look after families? The artisans, carpenters,



farmers, carpenters, leather workers, chariot drivers, ironmongers would continue worshipping their forest deities because rejection of social, Professional order would not be possible for the whole mankind. Answering Nagabhata's question on there being no caste systems in Buddhism, Mandana Mishra says that the society formed under the Vedic dharma has a caste system based on the Professions and jobs performed by different people. There is a rejection of occupational and vocational culture in Buddhism because of their insistence on abstinent life as a *sanyasin*, hence, they advocate rejection of material life.

Oneness in Diversity:

In this way, we find that Bhyrappa presents Nagabhata's struggle over the dialectical nature of the culture of spiritual philosophy and practices. The panoramic view of this struggle shows that in spite of the intense competitiveness among these various faith systems, in spite of the philosophical differences in the teachings, these faith systems existed as the counteractive forces developing each other. These diverse spiritual philosophies or practices did not stay away as indifferent from each other. They collided with, crashed into and corrected each other. They opened up the possibility of a permanent 'reorganisation' of their respective principles and values by questioning, challenging and refuting each other. Thus, they were saved from becoming static corpus of stagnant or unchangeable ideas. This dialectic and even often conflicting consistency of interrogating the value system propagated by various spiritual philosophies kept their tenor of self-reflexivity ever-active. This self-reflexive nature of various spiritual practices in India leads to its immense diversity of culture.

The people possessing a non-dichotomous, non-dualistic, non-divisive, non-partisan, non-dogmatic ethos of consciousness and culture struggled a lot to realize the quintessential truth of various philosophies. This struggle was participatory in the sense that it engaged the scholars, followers, experts of varied faith who participated in the process of articulatory examination, verbalised deliberations of contesting epistemological, philosophical, religious, spiritual and metaphysical principles and practices. This struggle of ideas, struggle of philosophies did not happen in the manner of 'ignoble armies, clashing by night', nor was it undertaken by the contesting members as a crusade against the followers of other faiths. Otherness was not a defining logic of identifying people from different faiths as 'non-believers', it was for them a way of believing differently. This attitudinal clemency sourcing from the civilizational altruism shaped the 'inclusive' comportment of the people in India even in the times as old as the eighth century. This also granted a character of 'tolerance' to their cultural struggle. The people heedless of physical violence as a necessary method of spreading the dominion of one's own religious dogmas aiming to establish their political rule in ancient India did not recognize the lethal challenge to their culture, philosophy, faith and religion primarily because they did not grasp the 'exclusivist' and 'sectarian' mind set of the invaders who came from the Arabian land. The Vedic and the Buddhists could not prevent the destruction of their establishments and their institutions like the *sartha* under the aggressions of the Arab invaders because they did not resist the invasion by staying united.

The Termination of Dialectics:

One result of this lack of social unity owing to the differences of faiths was that the society could not resist the Arab dominion as a single community which further led to establishment of the rule of Arabs in different regions of India. Nagabhata learns about this from the leaders of the *sartha* who have returned from their travel into the regions of India under the newly founded Arab rule. Jayasimha, the friend of Nagabhata asks him to perform the play of Krishna in the regions under Arab rule and bring in awareness among the people to unite against their tyrannical rule. Nagabhata and Chandrika, along with other members of the group carry out this campaign in a subtle way through



their plays. However, the spies of the Arab rulers see through their plan and both Nagabhata and Chandrika get arrested. During their arrest Nagabhata is tortured immensely to reveal his identity and his plan but he endures the torture uprightly with his yogic strengths. The interrogator finally starts a conversation with Nagabhata asking him to change his religion and embrace Islam. To this Nagabhata replies saying that in the Vedic tradition also there is a practice of conversion but it is carried out as an academic argument between two philosophers. These arguments are made logically and rationally and the debate ends on a consenting note when both the debaters accept the point of view that emerges through the discussion. The interrogator gets perplexed when he hears about 'debate about religion'. He says,

“We do not subject religion to argument.”

Nagabhata says, “But you subject it to the sword?”

The interrogator evades the question and replies, “Certainly. Be that as may.”

Being himself from an absolutely foreign faith system trying to understand how the Vedic civilization tolerates differences in the spiritual philosophy and in practices, the interrogator poses his next question to the captive Nagabhata,

“How many creeds do you have?”

Nagabhata replies him saying that one cannot count their number.

Each creed has many branches. Among Vaidiks alone there are Purva Mimamsakas, Naiyayikas, Vaiseshikas, Samkhyas, and Yogis. Among Buddhists there are Hinayanas and Mahayanas. Among Hinayanas there are Vaibhashikas, and Sauntrantrikas, and among the Mahayanas there are Yogachara followers and Madhyamikas. Among Jains there are Svetambaras. Besides, there are tantrics, Pashupatas.... (Bhyrappa, 265)

This reply shows bewilderment on the interrogator's face. He interrupts Nagabhata asking, “Then is yours not a single country?”

The interrogator asks this question because, he clarifies it himself, no king will allow so many creeds in one country under his rule. This question reflects the thought process of the interrogator who represents a totally different faith system. The monotheist, monolithic system of his religion does not allow him to believe that there could be one cultural ensemble represented by the people of different faiths living in one country. Nagabhata's pertinent reply to this question reveals the dialectical co-existence of various spiritual philosophies as the eternally consistent and eternally contemporaneous aspect of the culture in India. He says,

All our kings allow all religions to flourish. Religion is a private matter of each individual. Belief is the province of the mind. Each man's personal, intellectual understanding is what his creed is. There are as many minds as there are people in the world. There are as many beliefs as there are individuals (Bhyrappa, 265).

This account disturbs the interrogator and he explodes calling this state as 'anarchy.' Nagabhata vehemently opposes him and states that this is not anarchy, this is, 'order', expressing his willingness to argue further to prove his point. The interrogator recognises that Nagabhata sounds like a well-informed scholar. Unable to locate any common cord connecting the various communities practising different faith systems, the interrogator asks Nagabhata,



“What is the common factor of all your creeds?”

Nagabhatta answers, ‘righteousness’.

The interrogator asks, “What is righteousness? Is it not God?”

Nagabhatta counters the interrogator saying that

God does not need righteousness. Jainism, Buddhism, and Samkhyas disregard God. Though God is accepted by the Purvamimamsakas they accord him only limited powers. Many creeds believe that there is no need for God. Belief in Him is not necessary to lead a righteous life (Bhyrappa, 266).

This reply by Nagabhatta infuriates the interrogator. He finds it sacrilegious that even a non-believer can claim to be righteous in this country. His own cognitive structures formed under the fundamentalist faith system of the institutionalised principles of the religion he follows do not allow him to see that there could be a system as varied and divergent as the one found in India could ever exist in the human world. It is obvious that in the early times of the first Arab invasions of the regions of India in the eighth century, when these invaders came in contact with the unique civilization and the whole way of life in India, their response to this inherently plural yet the culturally cohesive society living in India was that of bewilderment, refusal and rejection. Such is the dialectically replete nature of the faith systems in India that the faith system functioning with a singular frame of mind can never grasp the core of its essence. The person like the interrogator swayed by the ‘us versus others’ dichotomy of reason, determined by such ‘mono-logic’ religions, fails to understand the ‘dialogic’ and ‘symbiotic’ relation of multitudinous population living in India.

The absolutist and monotheist divinity and faith of Islam and the inherently liberalist, pluralistic and polytheist divinities, faiths in the Vedic and other traditions in India when set themselves against one another in a debate, the dialectical approach of merging differences at a meeting point gets terminated. No philosophical, intellectual deliberations, debates and dialectics are possible when words get replaced with swords. What the novel *Sartha* hints at towards the end as the Islamist intervention in the culture of dialectical, intellectual debates on philosophy, divinity, spirituality; is dealt with as the main theme in the novel *Avarana-The Veil*. What the researcher perceives in this ‘foreign intervention’ in the name of invasion, subjugation of the then India as the ‘termination of dialectics’ is discussed in detail and illustrations from the novel *Avarana* in the fifth chapter of this thesis called, ‘Moksha – Knowledge that Liberates- History, Philosophy’.

Thus, we find that Bhyrappa’s novel *Sartha* is a part fictional and part historical account of how the immensely diverse cultural practices of spiritual philosophy set the concerns related to righteousness as the common temperament of all these diverse faith systems. Nagabhatta’s spiritual journey through his encounter with Buddhism and all its doctrines, the Vedic philosophy and its different traditions, including the *Advaita* philosophy of AdiShankaracharya, the ascetic ways, the tantric means and his final most revealing encounter with Islam, all these major happenings carried out on the physical and the psychological plane, bring to light the dialectics of righteousness as the quintessential feature of cultural struggle over spiritual philosophy. It is also remarkable that the novel *sartha* is a very explicit textual testimony of the aspect of righteousness as the most integral dialectical issue treated by Bhyrappa in his novels. The debate between Nagabhatta and Chandrika on ascetic ways and tantric ways, the debate between Mandana Mishra and Adi Shankaracharya on ‘ritualism and renunciation’ and the final debate between the Arab interrogator and Nagabhatta on righteousness is a confirmation of the features of Bhyrappa’s novels as stated in the current chapter as well as in the title of the present thesis. The scholarly debate between Adi Shankaracharya and Mandana Mishra is



discussed at length in the fifth chapter of the present thesis. The primary feature of this debate is that it is a philosophical, epistemological and cerebral debate of the dialectic nature. Hence, discussing it exclusively will give the researcher a scope to reveal most of those aspects of the debate which substantiate the argument made into the present thesis.

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