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**‘LIMINALITY: A PROBLEM OR A STATE?’ CRITICAL ANALYSES OF  
U R ANANTHAMURTHY’S *BHARATHIPURA***

**SRUTHY B**

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**Abstract:** Bharathipura, the second novel written by U R Ananthamurthy, the writer of the acclaimed work *Samskara*, is a piece of work which created a widespread wave in Indian literature. Ananthamurthy’s works are fascinating revelations of how the contemporary world recreates and reconstructs the past to protect its hierarchical structure. The complex web of tradition and modernity is the main context of Ananthamurthy’s fictional works. Bharathipura is about practice of untouchability in a traditional society that is evolving into modernity through new economic forces brought only in a certain class of people. This paper entitled “‘Liminality: A problem or a State?’ critical analyses of U R Ananthamurthy’s *Bharathipura*”, discusses the concept of liminalities in the novel in different perspectives. The literal meaning of the word ‘liminality’ is ‘being an intermediate state, phase or condition.’ We can see the liminalities of the protagonist throughout his journey. Jagannathan, the protagonist, who studied abroad tries to bring changes in society through his revolutionary act and tries to break the oppressive caste hierarchy of his small town called Bharathipura. He decides to act by forcing the untouchables to gain their liberation by touching a sacred object and polluting it. But what follows is interesting- the strange reversals, irrational developments, and unexpected twists and circumstances. These make or bring dichotomy than a solution and deepen the practices which he wants to eradicate from his society. Ananthamurthy is a man who had the courage to stand against the course always. He also creates a state of liminality in the minds of readers’ through his works. Let this paper be a humble attempt to pay tribute to U R Ananthamurthy who passed away recently creating a big vacuum.

**Keywords:** - liminality, modernity, myth, untouchability,

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**Introduction:** U R Ananthamurthy is a key figure in the post-independence era of Indian Writing in English. His works are considered as the milestone of modernism in Kannada literature. His creative works deal with all illogical, irreconcilable aspects of an entire society in the most ambivalent manner. *Samskara* the controversial novel is enough to show his style of writing. The complex web of tradition and modernity is the main context of Ananthamurthy’s fictional works. Bharathipura is the second novel by Ananthamurthy. It appeared in 1973. It discusses the practice of untouchability in a traditional Indian society that is evolving into modernity through new economic forces brought only in a certain class of people. This paper entitled “‘Liminality: A problem or a State?’ critical analyses of U R Ananthamurthy’s *Bharathipura*”, discusses the liminal state of the protagonist and the possibilities arises from the state which will be helpful to turn into one’s inner self.

The word, ‘Liminality,’ derives from the Latin word ‘limen’, which means ‘threshold’. The literal meaning of the word is ‘betwixt and between’. Liminality is a word which has its own significance in various realms. This word first appeared in the field of psychology in 1884. It has a prominent place in Anthropology too. In literature it has both rhetorical and practical values. In ‘Liminality and Communitas’, Turner defines liminality as ‘neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and

ceremony.’

*Bharathipura*, the novel chosen, is about modernization, a growing economy, socialism, and the struggle of individuals to move beyond their caste and class interests. The story happens in Bharathipura, an imaginary South Indian village. It is comfort and going well in the web of myth, superstitions and caste system. The central character is Jagannatha, a Brahmin whose family wealth makes him the richest man in town. He has been in England for six years. When he returns to Bharathipura Jagannatha is terribly disappointed by the rigid and stultified society. He detests the hierarchies prevailed in the society in all fields. Hierarchy is there even in the name of God-‘Manjunnatha’ for high class and ‘Bhootherayya’ for untouchables. Neither the higher castes nor the lower caste have a problem with this ancient arrangement. Hierarchy itself is Holeyaru’s awareness and rights. The long years made them accept this hierarchy as their real scenario. So there are no problems and demands. They are leading a peaceful life.

Jagannatha, with the influence of western education and thought, wants to shake up society. Jagannatha, who has driven by the intense impulse to break the oppressive caste hierarchy of his small town, decides to act by forcing the untouchables to gain their liberation by touching a sacred object, called ‘saligrama,’ and thereby polluting it. He assembles the Holeyaru youth (‘Holeyarus’, the submissive,

spectral, dark skinned lowest caste of Bharathipura) and convinces them that they are still embryos in the womb of god, that's why the caste still not found their voice in history. For this should be the first step towards God, God must be challenged and overthrown. The community is not thrilled by the idea and they are hard to convince too. Jagannatha's thought reveals this clearly. "life has ceased to be creative here. Manjunnathaswami is the cancer of our lifestyle; this very town is a cancer, growing for him" (Murthy 5) and "people believed that Holeyaru will spit blood and die if ever they enter the temple of Manjunnatha. They are convinced that Bhootharayya will hold such people by their feet and drag them around until they spew blood" (30). This is not only because of the Brahmins regarded the Holeyarus as lowly born but also because over a period of time they started believing that they are really untouchables. The whole novel is about how he manages to create awareness among people who refuse to break the tyranny of old bonds.

Jagannatha decides to conduct two events and that is the highlight of the novel. One is he made the Holeyaru to touch the 'saligrama', the sacred stone held in great reverence by his ancestors, and the other is he organises the temple entry movement. His aim is to desecrate the images of belief. His attempt is to destroy the feudal order by attacking its centre, the main concern of the Westerners in the modern age. But he realises that imposing a change from outside can be counterproductive. In a moment of introspection he wonders the profanity he felt by forcing the Holeyarus to touch the saligrama. More than Holeyarus he is the one who felt more sacredness to saligrama.

Jagannatha wants to eradicate the dominance of caste and untouchability, the prevalent problems which existed in both Nehruvian era and post-Nehruvian era. This is the main course and it is clear too. He thought, "My position, my prestige, my duty towards this people has been pre determined" (44.) He has some personal intention too. It is visible in the letter to Margaret, "I've failed you because I'm not yet a man. Through the Holeyaru, in this act of getting them into the temple, I'll be a man again..... To put it symbolically, Margaret, I've been amusing myself with a mirror until now. I can't be true to myself if I don't have a mirror" (31). He wants to prove himself that he is a 'man', as per the norms of society. He wants utilise the situation as, "That way, I could easily justify my aimless, drifting lifestyle" (32). But his attempts are followed by strange reversals, irrational developments, and unexpected twists of circumstances, by which the object becomes more sacred and powerful than it was earlier leaving the untouchables more vulnerable than before.

The anguish, which he has already, become more rigid. He overlapped with his egos. On the day he decides to break the profanity of saligrama he felt, ...the whole situation was absurd...In a flash, Jagannatha saw that he himself was making a ball of stone into the saligrama by wanting to make the Holeyaru touch it. And yet, he stood as if he could not move. Was he doing it for the Holeyaru or for his own self, to reject his Brahminism? Was he becoming an ascetic like Adiga through such a renunciation? He felt confused; Marx and Russel, from whom he had learnt so much, seemed to be evaporating from him. (156-157)

He also felt this state in his personal life too that is with Margaret. He met Margaret in a pub in England and stayed a few days together. He is happy, because he "didn't want to be attached to any woman; I wanted to lose myself in many, but that was not possible. So I held forth on free love" (32). During those days he did marriage proposal to her even though "Jagannatha was not all keen on marriage; it was only his fear of losing Margaret that made him talk to her about it" (40). One who does not believe in the institution of marriage tries to use it as a safeguard of his feelings, because of the unknown fear. The conflicting thoughts, traditional and modern, make him enter into the liminal state and from that churns out the feelings, anguish and dread to Jagannatha.

This state of Jagannatha reminds state of 'Trishanku,' a mythical character in Indian mythology. The word 'Trishanku' has come to denote a middle ground or limbo between one's goal or desires and one's current state or possessions. He is in 'Thrisanku's Heaven,' a liminal state. Traits of 'Trickster' are also visible in him. Modern day Trickster has to represent the yearnings of those who wish to regain their individualism, liberty and freedom. Peculiarities of a Trickster like, ambiguity, anomaly, and situation inverter is visible in Jagannatha. This states of betwixt and between help him to manifest his powers. Jagannatha enters into the social life in order to prove himself. He is in an existential anguish, which haunts him all the time. In an interview Ananthamurthy says, "My works try to capture this confrontation of the individual with the temporal and the timeless" (Murthy 268). The anguish is from within and he lacks enough courage to face it. That is why he tries to prove himself through the social activity. But he admits his dread even when he urges others to profane saligrama and when he reads the letter from Margaret, which reveals her marriage with another man. In front of the people of Bharathipura he is a person who is having great conviction but as an inner call he is hearing the echo of lukewarmness. Jagannatha is not able to overcome his liminal state.

It is haunting him like anything. Towards the end the protagonist realises his state and is ready to accept that. The novel ends in this point. The realisation of his liminal state may help him to manifest his powers and find out his real self.

**Conclusion:** The liminal state arises from the confrontation is not a problem but a state, which provides opportunities to know oneself. Turner in his work, 'Betwixt and Between: The liminal period in Rites de passage' defines 'state,' as a more inclusive concept than status or office and refers to any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally

recognised. One can decide whether s/he has to go through the state or escape from it. It is each one's choice. Ananthamurthy's almost all characters' background is this state, Praneshacharya in *Samskara*, Dinakar in *Bhava* and Krishnappa in *Awasthe*. Each one has taken the courage to accept their state of liminality. That itself shows the strength of Ananthamurthy's characters. He also creates a state of liminality in the minds of readers' through his works. Let this paper be a humble attempt to pay tribute to U R Ananthamurthy who passed away recently creating a big vacuum.

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SRUTHY B

Research Scholar/Gandhigram Rural Institute/  
Gandhigram Deemed Uty. Dindigul; 624302)