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Aayushi International Interdisciplinary Research Journal (AIIRJ)		Special Issue No. 45	ISSN 2319 638x
21.	Mr. Arvind D. Patil	Gender Discrimination in Maya Angelou's Selected Autobiographical Work: A Feminist Perspective	56
22.	Dr. Pranjali Pandurang Bharate	Meaning And Explanation of Gender Discrimination	59
23.	Dr. Manohar D. Dugaje	Oppression of Women in Vijay Tendulkar's <i>Kamala and Kanyadaan</i>	61
24.	Dr. Farjana Motilal Tamboli	Parenting in Modern World	64
25.	Dr. Rameshwar Rathod	Psychological Conflict In Sadanand Deshmukh's Baromaas	66
26.	Dr. D. S. Choudhari Ms. M. B. Ghogare	The 21 st Century Relevance of the Assimilatory View in Anna Bhau Sathe's Short Story <i>Sapla</i> or <i>The Trap</i>	68
27.	Dr. Vaibhav Popatrao Agale	Exploitation and Supression of Women In Bapsi Sidhwa's <i>Ice-Candy- Man</i>	70
28.	Adel Saleh Naji Muthanna Maj. Dr. Yashwant A. Doke	An Analysis of Fading Parent-Child Relationship in the Essay <i>TV as Babysitter</i> by Jerzy Kosinski	72
29.	Dr. Anuradha Jagdale	Commercialization of Education : Of Globalization	74
30.	Ajit S. Pachore	Depiction of Protest in Marathi Dalit Literature	76
31.	Mrs. Prof. K. L. Shinde	Emergence of Voices: A Study of Dalit Literature	78
32.	Gokul Hanumantrao Surwase	A critical discourse on Dalit Literature and Literary Theory	82
33.	Prof. Devendra Vitthal Madane	Issues and Concerns Of Farmers In Indian Politics	84
34.	Prof. Nagesh Sambhaji Gaikwad	The Impact of Globalization on Literature: A Critical Study	86
35.	Dr. Sagar Sadashiv Waghmare Dr. Ani John	Gricean Approach to Beckett's Waiting for Godot	88
36.	Dhanaji Vitthalrao Thore Dr. Yashwant A. Doke	A Study Political Mission of Dalit Literature in Indian Civilisation	91
37.	Dr. Amar Uttam Sontakke	Exploitation of the Farmers in Nectar in the Sieve of Kamala Markandaya	94
38.	Mr. S. D. Chavan	Problems of Minorities in India	98
39.	Dr. Chhaya R. Dapke	Dalit Literature: The Agony of Discrimination	101
40.	Dr. Suresh Shrirang Patil	Representation of Woman as a Fighter in the Select Novels of Tara Moss	102
41.	Kranti V. More	Constitutional Provisions of Minority Rights: A Survey	106

The 21st Century Relevance of the Assimilatory View in Anna Bhau Sathe's
Short Story *Sapla* or *The Trap*

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Anna Bhau Sathe was a prolific as well as a versatile writer who has Marathi Ballads, Marathi Lavanis (A Marathi Folk Dance), travelogues, novels and plays to his credit. Influenced by the socialist revolution and the cause of the proletariat upheld by the Marxist governments, he wrote a ballad entitled "A Ballad of the *Stalingrad*". Curious to know how the communist state was, he visited Russia and wrote a travelogue describing his journey from Mumbai to Moscow. He described his wonder to see how "comrade" (as he puts it) Lenin's revolution and Marx's philosophy had flourished there. He writes that he was mad after the idea of visiting Russia once in his lifetime (Sathe 281). He had a hope that the revolution would be of great help to the welfare of the proletariat all over the world. From this perspective, his novels portray the untouchables and the "have-nots" as the heroes. This in part contributes to the fact that his novels are widely discussed by the critics and the social thinkers.

Though the novels of Anna Bhau Sathe has been the subject of many detailed studies, his short stories have escaped attention of the critics. The short stories are seen as of little scope and significance. However, the short stories often present some speculative situations which are more profound than the ones we meet in his novels. The short stories, being short in their scope, provided the writer with an opportunity to put forward the issues related to the discrimination of the people on the basis of caste. The traditions and the societal customs make the life of the downtrodden or the Dalits unbearable. His literature is often studied under the title of Dalit Literature. Baburao Bagul has defined Dalit literature as: "The established literature of India is Hindu literature. But it is Dalit Literature which has the revolutionary power to accept new science and technology and bring about a total transformation. Dalit is a name of a total revolution; it is a revolution incarnate" (Bagul qtd in Bala 039). Though Dalit literature is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and has revolutionary aspirations, Anna Bhau Sathe does not promote the violent protests or the armed rebellion to rescue the untouchables from the yoke of unjustly Vedic religion and its outlet in the caste based societal order.

The short stories however, do not put forward a grim situation. They do not just take cathartic joy in the expressive outlet to the traumas and the injustices inflicted upon the untouchables. There are some stories which also record the battle that the untouchables can wage on the discriminatory caste-system. The characters in the stories present the situation of struggle done by the untouchables. The characters are often the people who simply ask dignity and self-respect. Veteran Marathi writer P. K. Atre has commented on the short stories of Anna Bhau Sathe in the following words:

If we are to describe Anna Bhau Sathe's short stories in a sentence then it will like this that they are the stories of the people struggling for life. These are not the people who would falter and accept defeat. They all want to live with dignity and at the same time, they also want to win this battle by protesting ferociously with dominating mindset (of the upper castes) (Atre in Upadhye 317).

His short story *Sapla* (The Trap) is a noteworthy example of the above observation. The story deals with the struggle of the characters to earn a life of self-interest while keeping the social order as it was. The real inspiration behind the story, according Bajrang Korde comes from an agitation called by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar where he appealed to the lower castes that they should not pull the dead cattle nor should they eat the beef (Korde 33). Rupa Vishwanath also cites a similar example of an incident that occurred in Trichopally village. Dealits in the village opposed to perform the demeaning services that the upper caste people asked them to provide (Vishwanath 329). In this story Anna Bhau Sathe does not offer a utopian social order where the caste system has completely collapsed. He does not oppose to the distribution of the work on the basis of caste, rather he wants its low dignity and inhuman treatment on the basis of the work should be eradicated. Though he appears to be in line with the ideology which supported the caste-based distribution of work on the grounds that it distributed the work and avoid competition and collision of interests, he is more a realist than an idealist. He chooses sympathy over rebellion for the rights. His stories, though influenced by the Marxist revolution, do not ignite the violent protests. They rather emerge as the lessons in ethics. "More than any other Marathi short story writer the ethical concerns find a forceful outlet in the short stories of Anna Bhau Sathe. By sympathetically identifying with the characters and their lives, Anna Bhau's verbal portraits do imbibe human values in the minds of the readers. (Upadhye 318)"

In the aforementioned story, there is a game foiling a trap by putting forward a counter-trap. The first trap is set by the caste-system which forces the lower caste people to do the undignified work and then condemns them for doing it. It is counter foiled by the untouchables by refusing to do the undignified task.

This entraps the upper castes. They counteract this trap with prohibiting their goats and cattle to graze in the heath farm. The untouchables feel entrapped. In their turn to counter-act, they purchase the heath farm and entrap the upper-castes. It ultimately ends in reconciliation between the two parties. The terms of these are decided by the lower castes. Their demands are simple and not many that they be treated like humans. It is concluded in the words of the character Hariba who works as the mouthpiece of the author, "This soil belongs to all. We all should live like the children of a mother" (Sathe 343). He also underlines the need for cooperation and coexistence as their lives are inter-dependent. This assimilatory view at once forgives the ones who are themselves the victims of the caste based social order and it also frees the untouchables of the burden of vendetta. The rebellious outbreak to the injustices in the past would not be helpful hence, he chooses a path of appealing to both the halves of the society to behave ethically. He tries to restore their sense of propriety and sympathy.

The story, though it often walks on the brink of suggesting a rebellion, does not point to any of it. It rather ends with a solution to the problem with consensus and humanitarian concern. Here, neither the untouchables seem to object for forever to pull the dead cattle, nor the writer. They all agree that if treated with kindness, they will do the same work which they recently saw as undignified. The story only suggests that there can be a rebel to demand a good treatment. The untouchables seem to have reached to a solution to the problem but they just pass by it. When the untouchables own the land, they have their upper hand at the hustle but the writer doesn't stop there. The untouchables carry their old lives but, presumably, with some dignity. Does it mean he suggests a status quo to the situation? He knows the Russian society and Christian religion and the most powerful Indian Vedic religion. Therefore, to ask of the complete reshuffling of the social tasks and the social roles, would be far too ahead of his time, though he would have appreciated it the most. Now when the Constitution and the Indian democracy has ensured its citizens the equality of opportunity, dignity and status, the assimilatory view puts forward a peaceful solution to the conflicts related to the social divisions based on the caste-system.

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