

**Religion: Being and Becoming a Brahmin - A Critical Reading of  
Jayakanthan's Jaya Jaya Shankara**

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“What is the mission with which every Hindu child is born? Have you not read the proud declaration of Manu regarding the Brahmana where he says, that the birth of a Brahmana is for the protection of the treasury of religion. I should say that, that is the mission not only of the Brahmana, but of every child, whether boy or girl, who is born in this blessed land - for the protection of the treasury of religion.” - (Swamy Vivekananda To the youth of India 22)

*The Sanatana Dharma* is a set of principles, which are to be known to the individual. Hinduism as such has no scriptures but the status of scriptures is granted to Vedas. A good knowledge of the Vedas is insisted for being a good Brahmin. Hence, Hindu religion is called *Sanatana* Religion. Scholars on Hinduism state that ‘*Sruthi*’ [eternal truth revealed to humanity by inspired *Rishis*] consisting of four Vedas is the final authority. Annie Besant adds to this list the knowledge of Itihasas and the familiarity with the exploits of penance committed by the ancient saints. “The Vedas together with the Itihasas were withdrawn at the end of the *Yugas*. The *Maharsis* permitted by Brahma were acquired them by *Tapas*”. (Annie Besant 2)

Hindu *Sastras*, in the process of prescribing *Sanatana Dharma* for any Hindu individual, have established the authority of Vedas, celebrating the Itihasas, the greatness of Upanisads and belief in *Sruthi* and *Smrties*. According to Rig Veda, the Hindu society is divided into four class or sects. Brahmins are supposed to have born from the face of Lord Brahma, the creator of human race. The *Kshetreyas* from his shoulders, *Vaishiyas* from his thighs and the *Sudras* from his foot. Manu sees castes divinely granted,

“Hindus generally account for the four great castes - *Brahmins*, *Ksatriyas*, *Vaisyas*, and *Sudras* by saying that the first, the priest or the teacher was created from the head. The second the king or the ruler from the breast or arms, the third the agriculturalist and the tradesman from the thigh and the fourth the servant of the other

three from the feet of Brahma the creator”.(Encyclopedia of Hinduism 954).

Castes were accordingly classified based on the nature and the karma or work. The Bhagavad Gita Chapter 4, text 13 states:

“Catur varnyam Maya Srstam  
guna-karma vibhagasah tasya  
Kartaram api mom viddhy  
akartaram avyayam ”

(Translation given below)

“According to three modes of material nature and the work associated with them, I created the four divisions of human society. And although I am the creator of this system, you should know that, I am yet the Non-doer, being unchangeable.

The Lord is the creator of everything. Everything is born of Him, every thing is sustained by Him, every thing after annihilation, rests in Him. He is, therefore, the creator of the four divisions of the social order, beginning with the intelligent class of men, technically called Brahmins due to their being situated in the mode of goodness. Next is the administrative class, technically called the *Ksheteryas* due to their being situated in the mode of passion. The mercantile men called the *Vaishiyas*, situated on the mixed modes of passions and ignorance, and the *Sudras* or the Labour class situated in the ignorant mode of material nature”. (Prabhupada Swami 238).

Hindu way of life includes recitation of holy texts and also involvement in philosophical and metaphysical understanding about essential truth about life. The *Vedanta* philosophy is an attempt to know the meaning of human life in the context of world and God. In all the incarnations of the Lord, therefore, the same principles of religion begin with the acceptance of the four orders and the four status of social life. In all four stages of life [*Brahmachariam*, *Girhastham*, *Vanaprastham* and *Sannyasam*],

“The life was divided into four stages, or *asrams* : that of the *brahmacarin*, the student, bound to celibacy; that of the *grahastha*, the house holder; that of the *Vanaprastha*, the forest - dweller; that of the *Sannyasin*, the ascetic, called also the *yati*, the controlled, or the endeavourer” (137).

The importance is given according to the Shankara's *Advaita*, the divine consciousness of Brahma. *Advaita* literally means the non-dual. It is the philosophy of absolute non-dualism because; besides Brahman or pure consciousness, it recognizes nothing as real. *Advaita* - meaning non - dual or undifferentiated *Vedantha* of Adi Shankara. Adi Shankara taught within the philosophic tradition of *Vedanta*, a philosophy of non-dualism (*Advaita*) that the self (*atman*) and the Absolute reality are the same and are identical. Liberation is the overcoming of spiritual ignorance or illusion (*Maya*) caused by the super imposition of what is not the self (a distinct entity) on to the self. Shankara asserted that, truth is taught in the Veda and can be realized through renunciation. Twentieth century scholars, like Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, have stressed the importance of distinguishing Adi Shankara from his followers, especially with regard to the latter's emphasis on an unconditional renunciation characterized by an attitude denying any value to actions and the world. Text 1 - 12 of 18th Chapter in The Bhagavad Gita states:

“Life is duality and the perfection one dreams about can never be achieved on the material or mental plane. If the perfection is to be achieved or attached, duality is to be resolved not into oneness but into non-duality. Life then becomes nothing but meaning”.

(Prabhupadaswami 795 - 805)

If being is equal to living with and amidst illusions, the stage of becoming is the attainment of divine consciousness: which is seeing the *Brahman* in inside one's Self. This is the state of perfect knowledge. Any one who attains this state of knowledge becomes a Brahmin and attains the illumination of the *Brahman* in his self as well as in others. So this stage is known, as “I am thou” *tathuvamasi* - The reality of this and that, the identity of this with that, the recognition of that identity is attainment of *Moksha*. *Advaita Vedanta* makes a philosophic understanding of life for a Hindu from a philosophical plane. It takes up the question of the real and unreal, the illusion and the reality, and the self and the other. The *Advaita Vedanta* concludes that the understanding of the non-dual is the essence of the knowledge. This is explained by the theory of *Atman* and *Brahman*. The former is the soul and the latter the god. The basic premise of non-dualistic *Vedanta* is that the *Brahman* is in every soul and the final bliss lies in understanding this fact. From the non-dual theoretical position the theory of being

and becoming could be understood as reaching the stages of bliss by the supreme knowledge of the Absolut There are strong opinions regarding emphasis given to faith and practice rather than birth in the question of one being considered a Hindu. Swamy Sivanandha also observes that,

“a Hindu believes in the facts of *karma* birth, death, reincarnation; he observes *Varnasarma Dharma*; he worships his ancestors; and above all he subscribes to the spirit of Vedas, performs evening and morning prayers, rituals for the dead, and one who performs the five *pujas* is a Hindu”. (10)

In real terms, these practices are mostly followed by one section of Hindu society known as ‘Brahmins’ and therefore, others also follow these ideas. According to Chinmayanandha, a twentieth century religious philosopher, scholar and interpreter of The Bagavad Gita says, “There is space and scope for modifications and reformations in the practices, which have reached us as conventions”. Hence, he remarks,

“If the existing religion is too old, outmoded and obsolete and if the fundamental values of life preached by it cannot solve our day’s problems, we shall without regret discard the whole lot and strive to discover new principles and laws of right living. If religion is but a dictatorial declaration of a scheme of living, which has no reference at all to our day-to-day existence and cannot solve our pressing problems we shall banish the old religion and take a new culture and a more desirable unit for man is and should be primarily concerned with life here rather than in the hereafter.”(Chinmayanda 65).

Hence, it is claimed that Hinduism is not a closed system or a static religion and could be adapted even to the modern times of living. Therefore, this larger framework of the possibility of adaptation or flexibility provides the stations of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’. This study equates ‘being’ with a stage of *Atman* unconscious of the *Brahman*, and the stage of ‘becoming’ with the stage of identifying with the Absolute. Since Brahmin is equated with *Brahman* in ideal terms, these stages are termed as “Being Brahmin and Becoming Brahmin”. This is to say no one can become a Brahmin by birth and any one can become a Brahmin by attaining the divine consciousness.

Jayakanthan takes up the question of being and becoming a ‘Brahmin’. A Brahmin is one who does not die. This means being a Brahmin is having this

consciousness of *Brahman* and deathless *Brahman* in one's self. At the same time living as a Brahmin involves practicing sacred rituals, which may help the Brahmin consciousness. However, this Brahmin consciousness is not assured to a Brahmin for one has to negotiate and dispense with the illusions and lack of knowledge. Hence the dilemma is caused by the duality of reality and appearance, good and the evil, truth and the *maya*. Such a state of consciousness is available to one who becomes a Brahmin. Strangely this may sound paradoxical for a Hindu, who believes that one has to live the life of birth granted as Brahmin, a *Kshetreyya*, a *Vaishya* or a *Sudra*, following the *dharma* of each caste in which one is born. If one has to accept and lead the granted god ordained life, where is the chance of becoming a new being? Jayakanthan addresses this in his novel *Jaya Jaya Shankara*. In other words, he takes up a strand-interpretation in understanding the Hindu *dharma* or '*Sanatana Dharma*'. As the world changes, new values and ideas emerge. In this progressive world, will *Sanatana Dharma* be a regressive practice? Will the transition from being to becoming is only an attainment of a consciousness. Is this consciousness available to all human beings who make an effort to remove the clouds of illusion and receive the illumination of the *Brahman* within? This philosophical thought seems to run through the minds of every Hindu.

The question of being and becoming inevitably occupies a central place in Jayakanthan's negotiation with Hinduism especially when he figures out the meaning of knowledge, the role of guru, and the practice of the *Sanatana Dharma*. Hinduism offers a specific practice module for life, which involves the levels of negotiating with the tradition and changing living conditions. The saints or the gurus provide counseling and guidance in choosing the right ways and means offered by Hinduism. At the same time, Jayakanthan speaks a lot through his characters on the knowledge of Hindu wisdom. It is not merely acquisition or appropriation of holy texts but negotiating with the reality, which includes involving oneself in a kind of spiritual experience in identification of the illusion and facing the reality. These stages could be termed by a single word known as "consciousness" or "experience". The protagonist and the major characters of Jayakanthan are like any other modern Hindu immersed in contemporary life consisting innumerable problems thrown by modern times.

Jayakanthan believes in liberating Hindu religion from Manu's stigma of birth. Jayakanthan states that birth is not a hindrance in following a religion.

Jayakanthan believes in the freedom of space given in Hindu religion, asserts the need and understands the tradition of *Sanatana Dharma* in right perspective. At the same time, he accepts in the dialectics of life. His choice of characters is drawn from the high caste Brahmin families and the supposedly low caste Harijans. Their lives of interaction and absorption reveal Jayakanthan's interpretation of Hindu *Dharma* as at once in subservience and transcendence to *Sanatana Dharma*. For him, the essential point is to understand the religious rituals at one level and accepting new perceptions at another level. Very subtly, Jayakanthan tries to zero down the conflict between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins by arguing that the clash is imaginary and a delusion. True enlightenment lies in wading through the illusions and understanding the other. A true believer in Adi Shankara's philosophy may have no difficulty in accepting both the Brahmin and the untouchable as the same for in both lies the '*Brahman*'. If a Brahmin can become or can attain *Brahman* so can be a Harijan. Attainment of such a consciousness is becoming a Brahmin.

Young Shankaran is the key character in Jayakanthan's *Jaya Jaya Shankara*. He is born in a middle class Brahmin family and later elevated to the status of a guru; He is inducted into the *ashram - Shree Madam* as an ascetic boy. His boyhood friend however happens to be Adi who hails from a Harijan family. According to the predominating caste equations, the two are supposed to be at the extremes in their social order and by strange pervading modes of practice the contact between the two is prohibited, including the body touch. This theme of two friends one being an untouchable, another being an Acharya [a holy saint] comes handy to Jayakanthan to announce his standpoints on the issues of Absolute Truth and true experience. Both Shankaran and Adi become Brahmins, one readily accepting the *Brahman* in the other. Adi worships Shankaran and Shankaran worships Adi, both in their own way.

“Eventually Adi would stand up and his voice would announce his departure: “ I beg your leave Samy, .....” in his mind's eye, Shankara would prostrate at Adi's feet. For Shankaran God presents Himself in Adi's form, long staff in hand!” (JJS 40)

Both these characters Adi and Shankaran become fine illustration of Adi Shankara's theory of *Brahman*, the Absolute Truth being available to one who dispels the

illusion. Jayakanthan details the meetings of Adi and Shankaran as boys and as adults. Both derive an experience of *Brahman* during their meetings.

“Whenever he saw him, [Adi] Shankaran was reminded of the immortal Tamil classic Thirukkural [verses written in couplets by saint Thiruvalluvar] because, his name Adi occurs with reference to God Almighty in the very first couplet of the classic. Shankaran completed his virtual sunset prayers. Adi collected the few goats which strayed away and was guiding them to the other side of the river”. (JJS 35)

The boyhood meetings give energy to them to seek a path of life ordained for them. The relationship between Adi and young Shankaran is significant because it is unique and meaningful in several aspects. Jayakanthan transcends the Manu’s code of untouchability. According to ‘*Smrti*’ low cast men are barred from touching others. Jayakanthan brings ‘the holy’ boy and the ‘outcaste’ boy close to each other, and he goes one-step forward in cementing the union of two socially kept apart minds into spiritually fused beings. Jayakanthan insists on the fact that the friendship of young Shankaran, a Brahmin boy, with Adi, a Harijan boy can break caste barriers. The two characters represent two generations of practicing and preaching Hindu religion. Jayakanthan portrays their childhood friendship thus:

“Adi and Shankaran were genuine friends who would believe that such a bond could flourish between the *agraharam* [living place of high caste Brahmins] and Moongil Kudi on either side of the Shankarabaranam River?” (JJS 35)

Adi was born in a lower caste. Learning of Vedas, Sastras and Sanskrit are beyond his dreams. When the lower caste people or the so called Harijans were not given the right to learn Sanskrit, the Vedas and the Sastras, Jayakanthan presents an ideal friendship of a Brahmin boy and a Harijan boy, both brought up in different places. While *Agraharam* teaches young Shankaran the Vedas, Mantras, Sastras, and Sanskrit, Adi dwells in the Harijan Slum--Moongil Kudi and is brought up by his uncle, who treats him like one among the goats he rears up. He learns Vedas, Mantras, Sastras and Sanskrit from Young Shankaran during their meetings. Jayakanthan brings it out thus:

“ .....Adi would drift towards Shankaran, stop at a respectful distance, lean on his long staff and stand reverentially with eager

anticipation. Shankaran would share with him in detail the many stories he had learnt. Sometimes, the sessions would run for long. Adi would lean the staff on his shoulder, squat on the ground and keep listening intently. Late evening darkness would fall like a curtain between them. And the conversation would continue. Eventually Adi would stand up and his voice would announce his departure: “ I beg your leave Samy.....” In his mind’s eye, Shankaran would prostrate at Adi’s feet. For Shankaran God presents Himself in Adi’s form, long staff in hand!” (JJS 39-40)

Adi once saves Young Shankaran from the whirlpool. From that day onwards, Shankaran sees Adi, not just like a friend but he sees Lord Shiva in him and he starts worshipping Adi. Shankaran regards Adi not only as his friend but he sees him a step above, equal to god. Jayakanthan brings out, through the two myths, how Shankaran accepts a Harjan boy as God, and how Lord comes in the disguise of a chandala boy, to save Adi Shankara. Myth is constructed as a reality Shankaran undergoes a mythological experience and he suffers the same experience of Adi Shankara. Adi Shankara is saved from the crocodile where the prime God comes in rescue of Him. In the same way, Adi rescues young Shankaran. Jayakanthan stresses the fact that it is difficult to escape from tradition. Jayakanthan’s narrative mixes the myth of Markandeya and Adi Shankara, as he presents the incident in the novel.

“When Shankaran was speeding towards the center of the river, Adi shouted, “Samy, do not go in that direction. A bad vortex, turn to your right... No, no, not in that direction.” Shankaran turned to look at Adi. He lost his bearings and was proceeding headlong in the path of peril. For a while he could faintly, hear Adi’s pathetic shouts. Then hell broke loose. He was overwhelmed by the vortex. Waves closed in on him like a hundred pythons in a synchronized onslaught... He was sinking into a bottomless nowhere...

Shankaran remembered the Markandeya story! “Yama dare not come near you if you embrace God tightly”.

Where is God? Is there a spot where he is not present? And, is the omnipresent God Absent in this very vortex?

The seasoned Adi plunged into the very center of the vortex. Desperate attempts to reach Shankaran; got a good grip on Shankaran's luxuriant tuft of hair!

In the womb of the vortex, a drama was unfolding in Shankaran's mind's eye: Markandeya hugging the Sivalinga, Yama perched on his buffalo, eager to use his rope of death... a granite black Shivalinga suddenly materialized in the dark deep. Shankaran hugged it passionately.

The two lives were saved by a miracle. One was carrying the other.... "Samy you have won"! Complimented Adi. Shankaran was chanting many *Slokas* in soft whispers. He found in Adi Lord Shiva Himself resuming him from the jaws of death". (JJS 45-46)

Shankaran feels happy that he has been saved Adi but at the same time, he is unable to accept his wet clothes from Adi's hands. The Brahmin consciousness in him does not allow him to touch them, which were 'polluted' by Adi. Shankaran tells Adi, "Adi could you please throw these garments into the water? I shall then get them dried". (JJS 47). Though Shankaran feels ashamed of this he cannot avoid saying this to Adi as his tradition -*Aachaara* -- insists the fact of such act as a mark of purification. At the same time fear, grips Shankaran at the very thought of his father as to how he would react to this incident. Their friendship is kept secret. However, when Shankaran reveals the fact to his mother, she is shocked to know that her son was saved from the grip of death by a low caste boy. And Jayakanthan brings out her reaction thus: She says, "It was God Almighty who had come in the form of that untouchable child and saved you". (JJS 48). This comment is followed by a story, which she tells her son Shankaran,

"Adi Shankara had camped in a forest with his disciples. The disciples were busy cooking food. A chandala boy was watching the proceedings from behind a tree. Shankara observed this, but kept quiet. The disciples brought a morsel of food to the teacher as initial *nivedana*, the ritual offering. He advised the disciples to go ahead with their lunch. Without their knowledge, the Saint went up to the Chandala, gave him the morsel and asked him to eat it, 'without anyone watching'... After a few minutes, he came back to

the Saint with the morsel still in his hand and confessed to a problem: 'Samy, there is no place with no one... Lord Shiva is everywhere, observing everything'.

"The great Adi Shankara prostrated at his feet saying, ' You are my guru'. Everyone realized later that. God himself had made his appearance as an untouchable". (JJS 48)

When his mother completed the story, Shankaran invoked Adi's figure in his mind and paid obeisance. Since then, Adi always occupied the center of his prayers. (JJS 48). Jayakanthan illustrates the story of Aryambal and Adi Shankara where Adi Shankara undergoes the same experience of young Shankaran. Shankaran narrates the story to Adi thus:

"As usual, Aryambal and her son had gone to the river for bath. The mother finished her bath and stepped ashore. After finishing his dip in the river, it seems that child Shankara placed one leg on the shore step, but could not take out the other leg from the river. He shouted 'Amma!'. The mother sensed the terror in the voice and rushed to her child. 'I am caught in the vice like grip of a crocodile'-so saying Shankara was sinking deeper and yet deeper into the river. The mother shouted, 'Oh god! Is there no one to save my darling?' Sinking up to his neck, Shankaran said, 'Amma, God will certainly save me. If I resolve to take to *sannyasin* this very minute, and if you endorse my resolve, God will come to my rescue'. What would the poor mother do? 'Anything is okay for me. I want you alive'. She endorsed his *sannyasin* resolution.... When the mother and child were joyously returning home, Shankara refused to step into the house..... 'Child, you must be hungry. Come in and have your food.' Standing at the doorstep in his wet clothes, Shankara told his mother, 'Amma, please excuse me. I am now a *sannyasin*; I am not in a position to come in and partake of food. Please give me some alms'. So saying, he held out his hands: *Bhikshamm Dehi*". (JJS 42-43)

Thus Jayakanthan brings out through myths how Shankaran accepts Adi Shankara accepts Adi as a divine Thus Jayakanthan brings out through myths how Shankara accepts Adi as a divine person. Lord comes in the disguise of a

Chandala boy who is accepted as a guru by Adi Shankara, who is considered as a guru by many. Young Shankaran revisits the village Shankarapuram as Acharya Swamigal, and sends Krishnaswamy, one of his assistants, to invite Adi to have his *darshan*. Krishnaswamy comes back to Swamigal and says about Adi thus: “It seems he was a Harijan in his *poorvaashrama*”. (JJS 78). Swamigal laughs at this remark of Krishnaswamy and clears his doubt as he adds,

“If he alone is a Harijan, are all the others Sivajans?” he said dismissively. “Okay, what else did he tell? Old story?, His name? Is he not Adi?” (78)

This shows his concern and his mood of ignoring the birth status of his friend Adi. Swamigal further gives his opinion about Adi,

“If a person takes to the study and instance of the Vedas as his life’s mission, should it matter as to which caste he belongs? The man whom I identified, he is one such Guru. That he is born a Harijan should only remind us of Lord himself appearing as an untouchable in Adi Shankara’s Life . . .” (JJS 79)

One of the key aspects of this relationship is the revelation of the fact that one can become a Brahmin only by the consciousness of a *Brahman* and no Brahmin, just because he or she is born a Brahmin cannot be considered a Brahmin in a meta physical sense. Jayakanthan believes in the reality that every person can become a divine person provided he or she is illuminated with the knowledge of reality. Thus Adi, a Harijan is elevated to a status of a guru and the future Acharya, Young Shankaran considers Adi as god and guru. Young Shankaran practices the *Aachaara* and only Adi initiates his Braminization process. Jayakanthan aptly uses the Markendaya myth and the Adi Shankara myth as revelatory to Young Shankaran. Markendaya survived by his faith in Lord Shiva young Adi Shankara did not ostracized the Chandalas. Thus Jayakanthan calls for a kind of social equality by way of portraying the emotional unity of both Adi and Shankaran. If life is a current of waters the vortex is identified as a place of danger by Adi, and for Shankaran Adi becomes Lord Shiva, the Saviour. Thus Jayakanthan as the culmination of equality visualizes the name ‘Adi Shankara’, and hence he shows Adi and Shankaran as two different characters of two different classes and status. But for a person who is conscious of the Absolute, the apparent divisions like status, class and caste are just illusions.

Jayakanthan brings out in the novel *Jaya Jaya Shankara* the different mind setup of Brahmin brothers Mahalinga Iyer and Sadashiva Iyer. While Mahalinga Iyer strictly follows the Brahminical traditions and rituals, Sadashiva Iyer though strictly adheres to the Brahmin customs, he believes in the concept of 'becoming a Brahmin' rather than being satisfied with his Brahmin birth. Jayakanthan portrays the two brothers Mahalinga Iyer and Sadashiva Iyer as oppositional forces then prevalent in the Indian society. Mahalinga Iyer represents the tradition, the Hindu Dharma of the Brahmin way of life. Sadashiva Iyer represents the new generation neo-literate benefited by English education and entertains a vision of new values like equality, freedom and progress. Jayakanthan thus portrays Sadashiva Iyer:

"He was waiting for an appropriate time. The time did arrive for the younger brother of Mahalinga Iyer, the sentinel of *Sanatana Dharma* in the village. With Gandhi cap perched on his head, and a drum made of cowhide slung across his chest, Sadashivam arrived. As if striking at the very heart of an ancient civilization, he was beating the drum as an accompaniment to his call for action. The children of the village had assembled at the temple ground to watch the fun". (Emphasis added by the researcher).

"At nine o'clock on the Maha Shivaratri morning, the Harijans of the Moongil Kudi will enter the Shankaralingeshwarar temple. The evil infecting our nation and our Hindu religion will be exorcised on that holy morning. All Hindu patriots should assemble in strength to give the Harijans a hearty welcome." (JJS 32-33)

Mahalinga Iyer however is angered at this and could not control his grief. Young Shankaran sees *Brahman* in everything, while Mahalinga Iyer who was himself considered as people's leader - the village leader -- is not able to experience the *Brahman*. Jayakanthan while devoting his space to the problem of embarrassments of the traditionalist also is all appreciation for the 'brave deeds' of Sadashiva Iyer. This is subtly suggested by the reference to Sadashiva Iyer's reading of secretly circulated versus of Subramaina Bharathi, well known Tamil poet of nationalist school. While Mahalinga Iyer is not ready to put his son in the English school, Sadashiva Iyer bravely names his female child as Swatantra Devi - Goddess of freedom. The two different attitudes point and counter point are very well portrayed in the parallel characterization of the

Brahmin brothers. Mahalinga Iyer is worried by his brother's deviant ways of Brahmin and he is equally concerned that this new fervor should not engulf his son Young Shankaran.

“Mahalinga Iyer found the whole thing somewhat strange. He had a vague misgiving that something unwanted was just waiting to happen. He was overtaken by a nameless dread that his brother had lost his bearings. But Sadashivam's exhortation was punctuated by Vedic authority and marked by unassailable logic. The more he heard, the more Mahalinga Iyer feared that he was himself on the verge of a nervous breakdown, something terrible was going to land on them like a ton of bricks. In an attempt to protect little Shankaran from the onslaught of these new forces, he hugged him close to his chest” (JJS 25-26).

Here Sadashiva Iyer transcends the limitations imposed by Manu's caste code and subjects himself to any flexible interpretation of socialization. In fact his faith and quest lies in changing the tradition. He is making a new reading of *dharma* based on equality while the traditional *dharma* had been conditioned by graded discriminations. In such discriminations, the fact is that every living human being is made of god and has godhead inside him. Sadhasiva Iyer, born in a traditional Brahmin family is ready to accept the Harijans as his brothers and even fights for their temple entry. He tries to convince his family that all are equal before God. He tells his plans to Mahalinga Iyer:

“Yesterday in the farmer's house I was treated like an untouchable and they gave me bananas and a glass of milk.. My ritual purity must be preserved it seems! We are going to run an Ashram in the Moongil Kudi untouchables Slum. We will be enrolling Harijan children and giving them Sanskrit, English and Tami education. I have been chosen as a president of the *Ashram*. Sadashivam was narrating proudly”. (JJS 30)

Mahalinga Iyer is shocked to hear this. He is unable to accept his brother Sadashiva Iyer's ideas. Sanskrit and Vedic knowledge cannot be made available to all and sundry. It is the privilege of the Brahmins to have access to the divine knowledge. This illusion makes him angry.

“What dangerous ideas ensnared you? evil days have landed... same terrible is going to overwhelm our Jati . . . Look Sadashivam! As

long as I am alive this violations of *aachaara* will not be permitted. I shall lie across the temple will that fill you and your Gandhi with immense satisfaction?" (JJS 31)

Mahalinga Iyer, represents a kind of Hinduism which disagrees to accept the change in Hinduism and which adopts the rituals mechanically carried out. Mahalinga Iyer is not able to accept any change or reform in the Hindu religion, which his brother Sadashiva Iyer dreams for. In spite of 'Being a Brahmin', he is not able reach the state of illumination. However his son Shankaran sees Adi in form of Lord Shiva and worships him; though he very well knows that it is against his father's wishes. Sadashiva Iyer, much against the wishes of his brother and family, fights for the upliftment of the Harijans along with the Gandhian people. From the *agraharam*, he goes to the Moongil Kudi *ashram* and teaches the Harijan children Vedas, Mantras, Sanskrit and English. This act represents Sadashiva Iyer's quest for enlightenment.

While Shankaran reads the magazine titled 'Harijan', brought by his uncle Sadhasivam, Mahalingam is worried thinking his son Shankaran would follow the path of his brother Sadashivam, He speaks about Nandanars and paanalzvaars. (Mythical and literary characters, who have been seen with illumination by the grace of god, in spite of their being born in low cast family). For this Sadashiva Iyer answers thus,

"Are these slum dwellers Nandanaars and Pannazhvaars? This question is being raised. A humble worker like me cannot answer the respected elders. Gandhi whom I worship has answered this question. My brothers whom you curse as pariahs, fallen ones and Chandalas, I worship them as my gods. So says our Gandhi." (JJS 34)

But for Mahalinga Iyer, the temple entry for the Harijans was beyond his tradition. He is not able to accept it. He says,

"Unlike the great Nandanar and Pannazhvaar, there is no one in the Moongil Kudi Slum hungering for a darshan of Lord Shiva. If there is any such real demand anywhere, let the temple entry be organized there". (JJS 34)

His faith lies in practicing the tradition that is followed traditionally by him, accepting the faith as it is without any change. As a result, there is total confusion in the family. Mahalinga Iyer is not able to tolerate this, is upset. He decides to

leave the village. He leaves his son Shankaran in the *Shree Madam* and goes to Varanasi with his wife so as to purify himself from the sins, for he thinks that, as an elder brother, he had failed to stop his brother from going against the tradition of Hindu *Dharma*. The *agraharam* people treat Sadashiva Iyer as an out caste and keep him away from the *agraharam*. He moves to the Gandhi *Ashram* with his sick wife and daughter once for all. Sadashiva Iyer is also shown not only as English educated individual. But he is also well grown in Hindu Philosophy. He is brother felt that he is circumventing Hindu philosophy to prove the equality of all beings so that his pro-harijan arguments could carry weight. In his confused state of mind Mahalinga Iyer seeks the guidance of the Archarya Swamigal. Hence Jayakanthan stresses that it is difficult to escape from tradition, being born in a Brahmin family.

Jayakanthan's novel seems to be a spiritual quest and the odyssey involves special migration of places accompanied by transformation of minds. The odyssey in the new lands involves the migration of major characters from one domain to another domain. This experiential process elaborated by Jayakanthan may be taken as the process of becoming a Brahmin. In other words this involves dispensation of illusions and encountering the reality. The carry over value of *Sanatana Dharma* and the injunctions imposed by Manu codes are in one way or other illusions and they have to be removed to face the *Brahman* in one. In such illuminations, divisions disappear and all are equal.

Spiritual, political and social in the process, the characters emerge as new beings, enlightened individuals, and liberated souls. Shankaran from Shankarapuram *agraharam* Shankaran goes to the *Shree Madam*. Adi, who follows Sadashiva Iyer, joins the Gandhi *Ashram* and gets sanskritised, who later runs the same *Ashram* founded by Sadashiva Iyer and marries his daughter, the Brahmin girl Swatantra Devi. Now Adi is transformed from a Harijan to a learned wise man who, lives with his wife two sons and a daughter. Adi's elder son Mahalingam is a sort of rebellious youth who represents the modern generation. While Adi spends his time on his spinning wheel recreating his age-old days, his son Mahalingam does not wish to subscribe to his parent's faith and practice and seeks a new meaning for life in the company of progressives who are critical of Gandhi and his passive resistance philosophy.

The concept of reality is very often clouded in illusions known as transitions and transformations. But for one who sees the reality these changes are

meaningless. While many human made ideas and concepts become obsolete with time. The *Brahman* alone remains the same. Anyone who attains this consciousness becomes a Brahmin. Jayakanthan illustrates this with analogy of the toddler's cart. Mahalingam is not willing to follow the same old principles of his parents. Mahalingam says,

“This cart is indeed useful for a toddler to learn walking. But the parents should also be prepared to put it away in the attic when it has outlived its utility. It is rational to expect the children to grow old with the toddler's cart?” .... Vedavalli lifted her eyes from the spinning wheel, could not figure out the allegory and said, “No parent, would of course, do such a thing” The mother who was collecting and arranging the stock of freshly spun yarn, clearly understood the significance of the analogy. “Appa and Amma learnt to tread life's path with the Ashram toddler's cart. Life is not frozen but is relentlessly on the move. Like the pushcart disappearing into the attic. So has the Ashram” (JJS 121)

Adi who is not able to tolerate his son's behavior gets heated up in fury and orders Mahalingam to walk out of house. Here Jayakanthan makes the vibrant and young youth come out of his house in search of his values, ideas and principles -- in search of a new identity. Jayakanthan feels that modern life suffers from the pressures of time and one should not attempt to stop anything that disappears. The question of creation and destruction, the attempts dear to the scientists and the atheists, are not there for a divinely conscious *Sannyasin*. Sathyamoorthy, son of Singarayar, guides Mahalingam later. Sathyamoorthy is a young professor who agitates against the socio-political milieu, for which he is put in jail. But the jail again reflects the cruel harassments of the Jailer; who tortures the inmates. Sathyamoorthy changes the cruel mind of the Jailer through his arguments with him.

Jayakanthan, is rated as progressive writer who keeps his allegiance to a socialistic idealism of Indian Congress Party. While the party suffered a drubbing in general elections during late sixties he emerged as an unofficial spokes person of the Congress Party in Tamilnadu to counter the victorious Dravidian parties, founded by C.N.Annadurai. In TamilNadu the anti - EV.Ramaswamy Naicker popularly known as 'Periyar', who was a strong atheist and severe critic of Hindu

ideology, spearheaded Congress wave. His party Dravida kazhlagam was devoted to the social cause of equality and justice for all sections of society including women. Periyar felt that this has been made impossible because of the Hindu religion which enforced a kind of caste division among the Hindu communities which he felt was the handy work of high caste Brahmins to keep in subordinated position all other sections of the society for which it enthroned Manu. Slowly the Dravidian parties marginalized the Brahmins and discredited the Hindu tenets of life as evil designs of despotic Brahmins who controlled the Hindu faith. Hence Jayakanthan takes upon himself the task of defending the best in Hinduism and justifying the *Sanatana Dharma* in his own subtle argumentative fashion. Jayakanthan emphasizes that it is difficult to escape from tradition. He approves the change in social life and yet is not against Gandhi's views.

Jayakanthan elevates the character of Adi throughout the novel. Adi is born in a low caste and yet he enjoys the commendations of high caste Brahmins. Shankaran knows that Adi is in every one, the Brahman is in every *Atman*. Jayakanthan stresses that birth of an individual does not determine the factor of being a Brahmin. What is significant in Adi's character is that he is Brahminized. Hence becoming a Brahmin is the higher state of illumination than being born a Brahmin. Jayakanthan describes the visit of his holiness Acharya Swamigal to Shankarapuram after a long time, he recount his early days of leaving the village and its people including Adi.

"The picture framed in his mind came back in a flash: Shankaran leaving Shankarapuram for *Shree Madam* in the bullock cart that morning; Adi's figure disappearing in the horizon. The Acharya Swamigal's lotus eyes softly closed: "whatever my station in life you would be the object of my prayers". (JJS 65)

However now the times have changed, Adi is no more the young shepherd boy with his staff in his hand. He is seen describing by the Acharya thus:

"He was standing near a fence abutting a cowshed. What a difference between the figure frozen in his mind and the one in flesh and blood before him! Pure khadi dhoti, a short-sleeved shirt, the towel respectfully tied around this waist. And palms joined in homage - this was his Adi. (JJS 66)

Swatantra Devi's description of her husband's character is also meaningful and significant:

“My comrade whom I have adopted as my dear husband as in a *Swayamwara* is the noblest Brahmin I have known in my life. I stand witness to this, as the only child of a great Brahmin who embodied the best in the great tradition rooted in spiritual involvement and committed to national welfare. As enjoined in the Sastras he has no interest in material goods. He has internalized the Vedas through the time - honoured process of ‘learning by hearing’. What he learnt he shared. Still he called himself a Harijan. He has invested that term with profound meaning. He takes food only to the extent he considers it necessary to support his spiritual growth. The noble norms of life and conduct that he learnt, imbibed and adopted from my father have been given up by everyone else, by the Asharam itself but he is a great social being who adheres to those norms with steadfast commitment. Except the silk saree I am presently wearing, each strand of our garments is spun by us . . .” (JJS 89).

Later Krishnaswamy comes back to Adi and says how Archarya Swamigal had high esteem and honour for Adi.

“Why this shower of gold Sovereigns for me? Why all this paraphernalia of elephant ride? What is important for the head of the madam is his character, his integrity, and his austerity. And, he embodies all these high qualities - Swamy was full praise for you”. On hearing this, Adi joined his palms in prayer and said to himself Sat Guru. (JJS 83).

These events reveal to the aspects of Adi's growth during his life, the first being his acceptance in real terms as a Brahmin by not only his wife Swatantra Devi but also by the Acharya. Even after a long time, the Acharya is able to figure out the divine, the Brahmin and the *Brahman* in Adi's person. Adi's wife declares that he is the novelist. Brahmin, true to the meaning of Gandhiji's declaration of Harijans, son of Hari, son of God. Even Krishnaswamy who entertains the mundane views about caste divisions has to declare that Adi has grown so much that he is not an untouchable. When Adi's states, “You call me Harijan or by any other name - I am seen only as an untouchable.” (P.84) Krishnaswamy: “ Shiva Shiva, you are by

no means untouchable. We cannot touch you, we cannot reach you - you have risen so much.”(JJS 84). In Krishnaswamy’s terminology and reading the very term ‘untouchable’ gains its most positive meaning that Adi is a grown up person, a true *Brahman*, in an untouchable place to the caste Brahmin Krishnaswamy. Thus Adi succeeds in himself being acknowledged or rather Brahminised by people who are born Brahmin. And when people queue up to get the *darshan* of the Acharya Swamigal, and get his blessings, Swamigal wishes to have *darshan* of his own Lord Parameswara, who comes in the form of Adi - The saviour or the Almighty who saved his life from the jaws of death.

The faith that the Vedas and Sastras are meant only for the Brahmins is seen in Jaya Jaya Shankara. Jayakanthan in Jaya Jaya Shankara explains how people are moving towards social changes from the religious order. Further he highlights the socio-religious theme, without diverting Hindu religious ideas and tradition. He glorifies the ideal state of Hinduism in the first two chapters of the novel. The concluding chapters of the novel underline the point or the view of the present day’s society in the name of caste, which Jayakanthan does not accept. He strongly believes that all are equal before God. But the Indian caste system does not allow the dalits to enter the temple and perform rituals and poojas. Jayakanthan opts for the Hindu religion, which is against the evils of caste system.

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