

SPEAKING SELF, WRITING CASTE RECOVERING THE LIFE OF SANTRAM BA

CHARU GUPTA



Figure 1. Santram BA (1887–1988), reproduced courtesy of Madhu Chadha, granddaughter of Santram BA.

Santram BA,¹ who lived for 101 years (d. 1988), was a veteran Hindi writer and a radical caste social reformer from Punjab. He published more than one hundred books and booklets, including his autobiography, *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* (Experiences of My Life). A member of the Arya Samaj, he founded the Jat-Pat Torak Mandal (Organization to Break Caste, henceforth JPTM) in 1922. In spite of his vast writing repertoire, Santram has been marginalized in academic scholarship. His claim to fame has largely been that he invited B. R. Ambedkar to deliver

the keynote address at the May 15, 1936, annual conference of the JPTM. However, the invitation was canceled because of internal opposition, which was convinced that Ambedkar's views would be unacceptable and controversial. The text of Ambedkar's lecture became the classic *Annihilation of Caste*.²

The covers of Santram BA's autobiography require close scrutiny and need to be studied on their own terms for several reasons. Belonging to the Shudra caste, unlike other pioneering caste radicals like Ambedkar or Periyar, Santram, while he trenchantly critiqued caste, perceived caste reform within the paradigm of Hinduism, accounting both for his limitations and possibilities. Santram's life narrative is significant not only because caste suffering forms an

axis of his life but also because there are other layers discernible, as he hedges the middle ground between Gandhi and Ambedkar, bourgeois and subaltern, Arya Samaj and Ad Dharm, and love and hate for Hinduism. It is from this in-between space that Santram produced his anticaste rhetoric. Santram's allure lies in his *trishanku* (limbo, middle-ground) status. While studying his writings, one passes through crossroads and by-lanes littered with caste, reminding us of the routes traversed and those not taken, and our inability to "classify" or confine him in any definite slot. While he may appear dated amid other caste radicals, his quests are pertinent, leaving behind a legacy, a memory, something that stirs the oppressed while also baffling us by its constraints.

When Santram wrote his autobiography in the 1960s, he already had his life mapped out in distinct phases, which he painted in broad brushstrokes. Vivid and playful, *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* was also a piece of propaganda for challenging caste. Various episodes in the autobiography were slanted to fit larger scripts, as Santram's personal narrative was informed by such elements as his Shudra status, Arya Samaj, Ambedkar, and JPTM. Santram starts the text by underlining his ordinariness, while emphasizing caste as central to his identity:

I thought that writing one's autobiography was like flaunting one's greatness. . . . I am no extraordinary person. . . . My whole life I have just struggled against caste and served the Hindi language. But my friends stated that caste is the biggest enemy of India. To remove it is the biggest service to the nation. Your autobiography in a way would be a history of fighting against caste in modern India and of diffusion of Hindi in Punjab. . . . Thus I decided to write this book. . . . When anyone engages in social reform to get rid of caste, then not only strangers, even his own family and relatives oppose him. His photos are not published in papers. No statue of his is made. He has to burn on the pyre all his life. (3–6)³

M. S. S. Pandian argues that many Dalit texts "accentuate and underscore the self-conscious ordinariness of the lives narrated" (35) and the French philosopher Jacques Rancière states that "ordinary life has to be recognized not only as a possible subject for a poem but as a poetic subject par excellence" (175). Santram's autobiography represents such a framing with caste as its focus.

Through Santram's life and writings, this essay attempts to illuminate and rethink a social history of caste in early twentieth-century North India. It

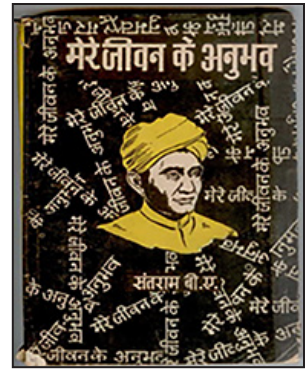


Figure 2. Cover of *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav*, 1974 edition.

examines the stories he told others about himself, his life, and his anticaste thought. Santram's responses to caste provide glimpses of Santram the individual, the anticaste reformer and the family man, and interplay his personal, literary, and social life. His autobiography underlines everyday caste taboos around *roti-beti* (food and marriage), the constraints of Gandhian and Arya Samaj politics, and critically attacks Sanatani Hindu orthodoxy. It defies any neat readings, embodying paradoxical constitutions of the caste self, social reform, Hinduism, and nation, and effortlessly moves between private and public, personal and political, self and nation, individual and community, and intimate and social. This essay argues that Santram's thought cannot be bound by rubrics of glorification or demolition; rather, his perspective symbolizes how reformers were entangled between contradictory currents in colonial India. Santram produced multiple meanings and mutable positions on caste, where on the one hand, he became a staunch advocate of intercaste marriages, and on the other enacted a language of caste reform and respectability with ambiguous implications. Equally, Santram's writings signify conflicting uses of modernity, where he relied on reason on the one hand and devotion on the other to attack caste. It is this dual straddling and mixed congregation of ideas that make his life narrative both a complex and politicized form of resistance and critique of caste, while simultaneously appearing as an account of accepted caste models and messages. His life thus suggests new socialities of caste, whereby caste was both enabled and transformed.

The essay further registers caste through intimacy by focusing on Santram's attempts to subvert endogamy and upend conformity by promoting intercaste marriages. Anthony Giddens observes how "the possibility of intimacy means the promise of democracy" (188). And according to Alex Lubin, "intimate matters" are inextricably related to "civil rights activism in the public sphere" (xi). Intimacy is experienced in love and pleasure, and also expressed through relationships and representations, associations and exclusions. Santram, too, called upon ideas of intimacy to get at the terribly material, embodied character of caste-gender dynamics and its divergent receptions in public life. By challenging endogamy and caste hierarchies, he folded caste into histories of intimacy, love, and marriage, and drew intricate and inextricable connections between caste and gender. This helped shape a counter-narrative of caste, symbolized in the JPTM.

LIFE HISTORY AND CASTE: SELF AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES

Rancière underlines that an individual life narrative "is not a choice of method within an alternative that would set the particular against the general, the individual against the collective, the short-term against the long-term, the

small-scale against the large-scale, or the cultural against the economic. . . . It is a way of putting the alternative. . . . Its principle is to bring out the general in the particular, the century in the moment, the world in a bedroom” (171, 176–77). In the Indian context, David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn stress that life histories in India reveal “a formation of self-in-society that is more complex and subtle than a mutually exclusive opposition between an all-subsuming collectivity on the one hand, and a rampant individuality on the other” (19). More recently, Udaya Kumar has stressed that self-narratives from nineteenth-century India “rarely speak of private interiorities” and the distinctiveness of individual life is not their focal point; instead, they become a pretext for revealing something larger (*Writing the First Person* 13–14). Similarly, Richard Eaton deploys the genre of life narratives to enumerate a social history of the Deccan over four centuries.⁴ It is in this context that Santram’s autobiography, too, might be seen to reflect his ethical-political involvement, as the self is in constant dialogue with social and public interventions on caste, providing an archive of individual caste memory and collective caste history. Other scholars have emphasized that self-reflexive writing in the autobiographical mode has long been a part of Indian literary tradition (Ramaswamy 1), and that “a normative use of the model of the modern biographical subject in the west might obscure the long and discontinuous history of this form” in India (U. Kumar, “Writing the Life” 56). Read through these critical lenses, Santram’s autobiography reveals divergent connotations seeking multiple purposes.

Autobiographies or life narratives have been the historical tool of the downtrodden, subalterns, and Dalits (Pandey 131–32), in which pain, suffering, and quotidian caste violence, combined with a language of personhood and collective rights, have often appeared as cultural capital (Ganguli 429–42; Hunt 176–208; R. Kumar 157–256; Pandey 131–93; Rege, 9–92). More recently, Laura Brueck has argued that the Hindi Dalit literary sphere signifies a “counterpublic,” and a distinct political and aesthetic movement (50), and Toral Jatin Gajarawala has emphasized that “Dalit literature is the space where realism now lives” (3). In his classic work, Paul Gilroy underscores that black autobiography is “an act or process of simultaneous self-creation and self-emancipation” (69). Reiterates Pandian in a similar vein:

Not bound by the evidentiary rules of social science, the privileged notion of teleological time, and claims to objectivity and authorial neutrality, these [Dalit] narrative forms can produce enabling re-descriptions of life-worlds and facilitate the re-imagination of the political. (35)

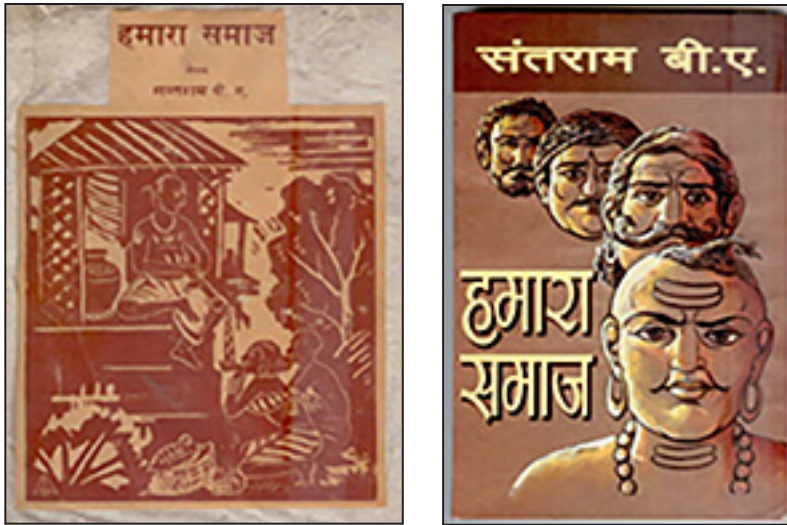


Figure 3. Covers of *Humara Samaj*, 1949 and 2007 editions. The 2007 cover is reproduced courtesy of Samyak Prakashan, Delhi.

Similar to many Dalit life narratives, caste provides the overarching framework of Santram's autobiography, as he imagines, constructs, and scripts memories of his subalternity. His autobiography becomes the landscape where divergent readings of stigmatization, suffering, contestation, and self-liberation come to be staged. When read in conjunction with *Humara Samaj* (Our Society), his most important book, Santram's autobiography highlights the centrality of caste in his life, while also bringing out the ambiguities of the times.

Both books have gone into several editions and are being published to this date, not by Arya Samaj but by Dalit publishing houses. Many of Santram's other books and booklets on caste have also found a fertile ground in Dalit publishing. Significantly, Satnam Singh, a leading Hindi Dalit writer, and Samyak Prakashan, a prominent Dalit publishing house, interpreted and published parts of *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* in 2008, adding a subtitle that boldly proclaimed the book to be the "first autobiography of Dalit literature."

Satnam Singh states:

It is sad that Dalit literature too does not include him [Santram]. . . . Taking into account the year of its publication, *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* is the first [Hindi] Dalit autobiography. Santram was also a fearless journalist of his times. He wrote in all prominent newspapers-magazines. In 1914 he took out the magazine *Usha*. His *Kranti* was a famous magazine of its times. . . . In this context, he may be hailed as the first Hindi Dalit journalist as well. (*Santram BA* 3)⁵

While Singh's claim may be disputed, it underscores the significance of Santram's autobiography, which operates on a register that overlaps with Dalit life testimonies. It is equally significant that Santram's name features in many Dalit anthologies and encyclopedia, underlining the profound heterogeneity of Dalit politics (Paswan and Jaideva 189–90; Kshirsagar 323–24). There has been a subversive drive among Dalits, as they have attempted to create genealogies of a long literary history of Dalit writing, which has sometimes encompassed a wider terrain of claiming the oppressed, pushing the boundaries of Dalit discourse. In his classic work, *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, Kancha Ilaiah shapes the word Dalitbahujan, whereby he articulates that in spite of contradictions “there are cultural and economic commonalities as well as commonalities of productive knowledge which mesh them [Other Backward Castes and Dalits] together like threads in a cloth” (ix). Similarly, Dalit Panthers cast their net wide and use the term Dalit in a generic, broad, and inclusive sense (Murugkar 237; Brueck 9; Shankar 67–74). This usage may account to an extent for the acceptance of Santram in Dalit anthologies.

FAMILIAL AND SOCIAL ROOTS: CASTE DISCRIMINATION, ARYA SAMAJ, AND PROMOTION OF HINDI

Santram was born on February 14, 1887, in Purani Basi, a small village in the Hoshiarpur district of Punjab. His father, named Ramdas Gohil, was a central Asian trader with business interests in Yarkand and Ladakh. His mother was Malini Devi. Santram was fourth among seven sons and one daughter (Santram, *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 5–6 and “Taunted” 2; Gopal 8). While economically his family had done well, Santram came from humble social roots, belonging to the Shilpkar *kumhar* (potter) caste, which came way below in the caste hierarchy, and had a Shudra status in Punjab. H. A. Rose draws on the work of Denzil Ibbetson, ethnographer par excellence of Punjab, to identify *kumhar* as

the potter and brick-burner of the country. . . . He is a true village menial, receiving customary dues, in exchange for which he supplies all earthen vessels needed for household use. . . . He also, alone of all Punjab castes, keeps donkeys. . . . He is the petty carrier of the villages and towns. . . . His social standing is very low,

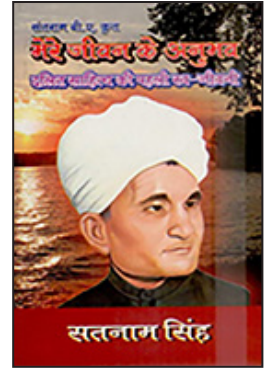


Figure 4. Cover of Satnam Singh's book, claiming Santram BA's *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* as the “First Autobiography of Dalit Literature.” Reproduced courtesy of Samyak Prakashan, Delhi.

far below that of the Lohar and not very much above that of the Chamar; for his hereditary association with that impure beast the donkey, the animal sacred to Sitala, the small-pox goddess, pollutes him; as also his readiness to carry manure and sweepings. (562)

It was also noted in the *Gazetteer of the Hoshiarpur District, 1883–4*, “Donkeys are kept by the potters (*kumhar*), who do a good deal of the carrying trade between Palampur and Hoshiarpur” (107). Many degrading caste sayings pertain to *kumhars*, marking their Shudra status. Goes one:

kumhar ki gadhi, ghar-ghar ladi

(The donkey of the potter is used by the whole village) (Singh, *Santram BA* 13)

Other sayings reveal the poverty of the *kumhar*:

kumhar ke ghar baasan ka kaal!
kumhar ke ghar chukke ka dukh!

(A scarcity of pots in the potter’s house!
A want of saucers in the potter’s house!) (Fallon 144)

And goes yet another:

dheel dhoti baniya, ulta munch subir,
bainda pair kumhar, ke teenu ke pehchaan.

(A trader wears a loose dhoti, the brave keep their mustaches turned up, and a potter is bare footed—this is the identity of the three.) (Singh 14)

Amid this background, Santram realized the importance of education very early. It has been pointed out how in colonial India, while untouchability and caste hierarchies were reproduced through educational institutions, the first generation of Dalit intellectuals increasingly saw education, knowledge, language, and print as central to their assertion (Auxiliary Committee 217–28; Ciotti 900; Constable 385). It has also been argued that print journalism helped nurture a Hindi Dalit counterpublic, boundaries of which were “located squarely in the interpretive framework of caste” (Brueck 50). Santram deployed these tools effectively in his critique of caste, as through his education, pen, and writing he literally made himself. He, too, like many other Dalits, viewed print and publishing as critical tools for claiming upward mobility and dignity (Satyanarayana and Tharu, *No Alphabet and Steel*). Santram studied in Bajwara, Ambala, Jullundur, and Lahore, acquiring his BA

degree in 1909, and started writing actively in 1912 (Santram, *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 9; Singh 13). Since then, all his writings appeared without his caste nomenclature and Santram proudly displayed his educational qualification and degree as his surname, signature, and distinct identity—Santram BA—which became an integral part of his name (Gopal). Practices and politics of naming and renaming have been central to challenging stigmatized pasts (Paik 217–18; Pandey 207–10; Rao 205–13; U. Kumar, *Writing the First* 6). Santram gave his name distinct meanings by explicitly linking it to education.

It has been noted that Dalit autobiographies constantly recount experiences of humiliation, thereby making a “public claim regarding the norms that govern the treatment of each other in society” (U. Kumar, *Writing the First* 17). Santram’s autobiographical memory, too, is infused with caste prejudices and attempts at carving out a life of dignity. He was harshly reminded of his Shudra status through some humiliating and bitter encounters in school and college, which form a vital part of how Santram represents himself in *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav*. He narrates:

When I was admitted in class four in Ambala, my caste was also mentioned in the register. . . . My co-students constantly harassed me, calling me by my caste name *kumbar*. And why would they have not done so when even a saint and poet like Tulsidas ridiculed *kumbara*. . . . I took the students’ taunts quietly and painfully. (16)

At another place he writes about his experience in college:

In my boarding house, the kitchen in which I had food was orthodox. . . . One day a few fellow students . . . quarreled with me and kept a chit on my seat stating that since I belonged to a low-caste, I should have my food outside the kitchen, or else they would take the matter to the principal. . . . I angrily declared that forget the principal, even if they take the matter to the governor, I will have my food inside the kitchen only. (17–18)

Through such memories, Santram imaginatively weaves an “I” out of the contours of caste stigma. Santram’s retelling encompasses everyday caste humiliation, myths of food and skin color, and a critique of caste intellectuals and scriptural Hindu texts, through which he shapes a multipronged critique of caste in private and public life.

Amid a contentious, casteist atmosphere, the teachings of Dayanand Saraswati and the spread of Arya Samaj in Punjab, which theoretically distanced itself from casteism (Jones 204), came to acquire a special attraction for Santram. Scholars have pointed out how many Dalits and “low castes”

became followers of Arya Samaj, critically contributing to the creation of the first generation of Dalit intellectuals in Punjab (Juergensmeyer 72; Jones 309–10; Adcock, *Limits* 128). Many of the Ad Dharm activists, too, were initially associated with Arya Samaj (Juergensmeyer 27, 35–37; Ram 326). While in 1901 the Arya Samaj membership consisted overwhelmingly of Hindu “upper castes,” by 1911 the Punjab membership had quadrupled through the entry of other castes. The census estimated that as many as two-thirds of the Arya Samajists of the region hailed from the “lowest castes” (*Census of India, 1911* 123–24).⁶ Hoshiarpur particularly proved a fertile ground as it boasted of a large number of “untouchables,” approximately 23 percent of the population (Juergensmeyer 72). Significantly, both Santram and Mangoo Ram, the dynamic leader of the Ad Dharm movement, hailed from Hoshiarpur. Mark Juergensmeyer points out that Arya Samaj’s ideology became particularly popular among the urban Hindus of mercantile castes (38). Santram covered this median ground by belonging socially to the Shudra caste while being economically associated with the urban mercantile class. His attraction for the relatively progressive ideology and egalitarian principles of Arya Samaj has to be understood in this educational, urban, and social context, which also ultimately proved to be his drawback. At the same time, like many other “low castes,” Santram selectively appropriated or rejected the ideological underpinnings and teachings of Arya Samaj to suit his objectives of social status and equality (Rawat 136–44; Adcock, *Limits* 159). He was a supporter of vegetarianism, *shuddhi* (reconversion through purification), and *brahmacharya* (celibacy), the last of which he slowly came to reject totally. Arya Samaj’s ambiguity regarding caste on the ground to an extent indicates the inconsistencies within Santram, even when he was in constant conflict with his Arya Samaj “upper caste” fellows and lamented the various hurdles in his way.

Santram’s love for Hindi developed in conjunction with the headway that Arya Samaj was making in Punjab. He narrates in *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav*:

Hindi was taught in no school of Punjab. . . . I did not know any Nagari script till the third year of my college. In my adolescence I considered Persian to be the sweetest language, Iran to be the best paradise on earth, and Saadi, Omar Khayam and Firdausi the greatest poets. . . . However, Lahore and Arya Samaj changed my views dramatically. . . . Those days *Saddharma Pracharak*, the mouthpiece of Arya Samaj was published in Urdu. I used to read it with great enthusiasm. Its editor . . . Swami Shraddhanand announced a date from which the paper would switch over to Hindi. . . . To read the paper I started learning the Nagari script. . . . I left my love for Persian in favour of Hindi. (133–34)⁷

Santram was fluent in English and Urdu, and picked up Marathi and Gujarati from his second wife, Sunder Bai (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 109). His

Hindi writings comprised a wide range of subjects and many translations, including of Alberuni and I-Tsing (142). Santram pitched himself as a promoter of Hindi language, creating a name for himself in the print-public life of the Hindi world, and was most influential via his books, pamphlets, and journals against caste.⁸ He edited two monthly magazines, one in Urdu called *Kranti* and the other in Hindi entitled *Yugantar* to spread the message of JPTM, both of which ceased publication after the partition of India. Post independence, he was associated with *Vishwajyoti*, published from Hoshiarpur (136).

In Santram's hands, immersed in the world of Hindi, print became a significant, if ambivalent, site for the transformation and contestation of caste. On the personal front, a series of calamities—the death of his first wife, Ganga Devi, in June 1924, and of his son Ved Vratt in May 1928—profoundly affected Santram's transition into early adulthood, which he describes painfully in *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav*.

After some years, his friend from JPTM, Bhumanand, persuaded Santram to enter into an intercaste marriage and with this marriage, Santram began a new phase of his life. Though Santram's extended family was well off, he constantly talked of his poverty and financial difficulties since he was uncompromising on his principles and never had a permanent job, nor was he ever satisfied with any jobs he did have (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 19, 32–33, 44–46).

In the rest of this essay, I take fragmentary examples from Santram's autobiography and other writings, parts of which are also a life narrative and history of JPTM, to underline how and why Santram attempted to create a hybrid liberal domain that traversed the middle ground between Gandhi and Ambedkar on the one hand and Arya Samaj and Ad Dharm on the other, the contradictory uses of modernity in Santram's critiques of caste, and his explorations of intimacy and intercaste marriages. These efforts highlight how Santram sometimes swam within the boundaries of Hinduism but more often went against its mainstream tide.

SELF AND SOCIAL HISTORY OF JPTM

Deeply impressed by a fiery speech delivered by Parmanand in Lahore in November 1922, Santram and a group of his friends formed JPTM, which Santram named. Eighteen people were initially associated with the organization,



Figure 5. Cover of JPTM's magazine, *Yugantar*, published for four years, beginning January 1932.



Figure 6. Left: Ganga Devi, first wife of Santram BA, died June 1924. Right: Ved Vratt, son of Santram BA, died May 1928, fourteen years old. Reproduced courtesy of Madhu Chadha, granddaughter of Santram BA.

including two women (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 184–85; *Jat-Pat* 1). Unlike other radical regional caste movements, JPTM was largely an urban-based movement among the literates.

Parmanand was JPTM's president in the beginning, but as its secretary, Santram was the driving force behind it. Articles were published on JPTM in newspapers, and the organization launched monthly journals like *Jat-Pat Torak*, *Kranti*, and *Yugantar*, with Santram as editor. JPTM also published many booklets against caste and distributed them free of cost. JPTM members also attended various Arya Samaj meetings and festivals, preaching against caste (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 185–87; *Jat-Pat* 2–3; Santram, *Caste Must Go* 1–2). JPTM's first priorities were to break the birth-based caste system and to promote intercaste marriages, focal points to which I will return later.

Scholars have highlighted that in colonial India, caste became a protean category for colonial capitalism, social reform, and Hindu nationalism, with the decennial census playing a central role in strengthening politicization of Hindu religion on the one hand and, on the other, "secularizing" and challenging configurations of caste (Banerjee-Dube xv–lxiv; Bayly 1–96, 144–86; Dirks 3–18; Cohn 224–54). In *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav*, Santram entwines a part of his life narrative with JPTM's movement in 1931 to remove the

caste-based column from the census and from forms at colleges and universities. This activism made JPTM famous and accelerated its mobilization, as people from all the big cities of India started joining it (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 187–88; *Jat-Pat* 4–5; Santram, *Caste Must Go* 2; “Anti-Caste” 44; *Census of India, 1931* 395–96). It was noted in the 1931 census of Punjab:

At the same time a tendency was noticeable for persons of low castes, well placed in life, to return no caste, and there had been a propaganda in this connection, particularly by the *Jat Pat Torak Mandal*. . . . Instructions . . . issued . . . were that “no caste return” should be recorded in cases in which the person enumerated had a genuine objection to the caste entry, having ceased to observe caste in his marital and inter-dining relations. (*Census of India, 1931* 325; Maheshwari 106–09)

Interestingly, Juergensmeyer considers the 1931 census and the campaign of Ad Dharm around it as its “crowning moment” when “everything came together” because the movement was successful in listing Ad Dharmis as a religious community, separate from Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus (72–80). Moreover, the movement exacerbated tensions between the Ad Dharm and the Arya Samaj. Santram’s move in the 1931 census acquires significance amid this background.

JPTM and Santram, while close to the ideology of Arya Samaj, also had deep tensions with it and more so with the Ad Dharm movement. Santram lamented religious conversions, firmly supported *shuddhi*, and advocated vegetarianism. He framed his critique of caste by embracing the “lower castes” within a Hindu fold, and also attempted to “improve” some of the perceived characteristics and practices of the “lower castes.” Yet, even in these arenas, he did not just replicate the teachings of Arya Samaj but often questioned and radically reinterpreted them, condemning and chastising their continued caste prejudices. For Santram, *shuddhi* did not so much symbolize a militant Hindu nationalism; rather, it was a way of assertion by the “lower castes” for radical caste reform (Adcock, “Brave” 261–86). As Lauren Berlant and Jay Prosser say: “Sometimes conventionality is a defense against norms too, a way to induce proximity without assimilation . . . and sometimes it’s a way of creating another, counter conventional, space” (181). Some of the cartoons published in Santram’s journal *Yugantar* transgressed normative discourses of caste. One 1933 cartoon in the journal shows a Brahmin male ogling a sweeper woman and, while desiring sex with her, categorically refusing to perform her *shuddhi*.

While Santram did express anxieties over religious conversions to Islam due to romance, love, and marriage, unlike many writings of Arya Samaj,



Figure 7. Cartoon published in *Yugantar* in October 1933: “You are sensuous, titillating and intoxicating, look at me with a smile! Even if I carnally embrace you, I will still always be a Brahmin! However, no purification of yours can be conducted; dear you will always remain a sweeper woman” (“Uncouth Brahmin” 26).

there was no vociferous polemic in his writings against Muslims, *pirs*, or Islam. Santram appreciated the broadmindedness of Muslims in accepting such marriages within their fold and disparaged the narrowmindedness of Hindus in this regard (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 48–53). Even his attitude toward missionaries and Christianity appears soft. In fact, he drew selectively from Islam and Christianity to make his arguments. He dramatically wrote: “If I had been an untouchable, then to get rid of this slavery, I would have become a Muslim” (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 206). Critiquing Santram, a paper called *The Hindu* stated: “On reading Santram’s articles, if his name is hidden, it appears that you are not reading a Hindu lover but a supporter of Miss [Katherine] Mayo” (qtd. in *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 212). Santram thus seems to represent a somewhat “syncretic” culture, drawing from varied religious idioms to build a case against caste. And yet his overall framework remained that of a Hindu ethos. Thus he argued that the Chuhras (sweepers) had two different religious traditions. One, under Muslim influence, took Lal Beg as its icon of worship, and the other recognized Maharishi Valmiki

as the teacher of the Balmikis. The former had to be forgotten actively, he argued, while the latter had to be championed (*Humara* 124; Prashad 98–99). This distinction underlines the paradoxes in his positions.

Even while functioning within the paradigm of Hinduism, Santram’s Shudra background and his radical stances against the *varnavyavastha* (caste system) and intercaste marriages faced stiff opposition both from the Hindu orthodoxy and the Arya Samaj. Even the progressive and iconic Hindi writer Nirala revealed his Brahmanical leanings in opposing Santram. In a long article titled “Varnashram-Dharm ki Vartman Stithi” (The Present State of *varanashramdharm*), Nirala expressed his deep sadness at Santram’s formation of JPTM and scathingly criticized both intercaste marriage and interdining (836–43). Santram’s inherent contradictions with Arya Samaj are even more illuminating, as his views brought him in direct conflict with the leading ideologues of Arya Samaj, and he remained socially marginal to the organization, excluded from established hierarchies of power. Santram eloquently

demonstrates these conflicts by narrating an incident from his life when he was working as an agriculturist in Patti in 1914–16:

Something occurred that created a huge furore against me in society. I ordered many texts from agricultural departments of countries like Australia, America, France and England to improve my yield. My wife Ganga Devi did not believe in pollution taboos from before and got food cooked from a Muslim woman. It came to my mind to manure my fields with bones of dead cattle lying around. I collected a huge heap of it on my land when my friend, the famous story writer Sudershan, came to visit me. He was at that time the editor of *Arya Gazette*, and when he chanced on the heap of bones he was extremely angry with me, stating that in spite of being an Arya Samajist, I was indulging in this sin. I argued with him stating . . . that these bones were of dead animals . . . and a rich source of manure. . . . But he did not listen. . . . He wrote a stinging statement against me in *Arya Gazette*. . . . Hindu press condemned me in strong terms . . . threatening to drag me to the court. . . . A deputation of residents of Patti questioned me. . . . I argued that if they had no objection to keeping their match boxes, which were prepared from phosphorous, the essence of bones, inside their sacred kitchen, they should not oppose me providing manure to my lands. (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 38–40)⁹

Many such incidents occupy the pages of *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav*, where Santram underlines that while JPTM was categorically against *varnavyavastha*, it was a sacred doctrine for the Arya Samaj (Santram, “Taunted” 2). The constant negotiations and tensions reached a breaking point, whereby Santram finally dissociated from Arya Samaj (Juergensmeyer 38–39), and was drawn to Buddhist ascetic traditions (Singh 3). His autobiography thus often invokes narratives associated with Dalit movements. And yet, unlike Mangoo Ram or Ambedkar, Santram could never bring himself to move away from a Hindu paradigm and often enacted a language of caste respectability with ambiguous implications.

His relationship with Dalit organizations and leaders appears equally troubling, and he did not fit into Dalit movements of the time. While repudiating caste in no uncertain terms and being a staunch advocate of intercaste marriages, he could not become a champion of the Dalit cause like Mangoo Ram. In fact, he never acknowledged the existence of the vibrant Ad Dharm movement though both he and Mangoo Ram hailed from Hoshiarpur and their periods considerably overlapped. Juergensmeyer states that the JPTM “was not a model for the Ad Dharm, since its urban, reform Hindu, intercaste composition was quite different from what the Ad Dharm would embrace” (39). It may also be argued that JPTM, like the Arya Samaj, was worried about the increasing assertiveness of the Ad Dharm movement and hoped to blunt its edge by absorbing Dalits within its fold and into a pan-Hindu

identity. Significantly, Santram also led a strike of sweepers in Jullundar in 1938 (Kshirsagar 323). Both Mangoo Ram and Santram drew partial inspiration from Arya Samaj, but both found its ideology restricting, rebelling against it in different ways—Santram from within, and Mangoo Ram from without. The choices that Santram makes in his autobiography, where his tensions with Arya Samaj are repeatedly stressed while erasing and silencing Ad Dharm, underscores his median positionality.

Equally, Santram walked the line between Gandhi and Ambedkar, not fully opposing the “disturbing faults” of Gandhi, particularly his leanings toward Sanatani Hinduism, nor fully supporting the “superior merits” of Ambedkar, particularly regarding conversion. Santram’s telling of his life not only contributes to the Gandhi-Ambedkar debate on caste but, by falling between their grids, signifies a third stance. He was uncomfortable with and for both of them, even though he appears closer to Ambedkar. Santram had some sharp exchanges with Gandhi. He narrates an interesting incident in an interview:

I led a deputation of the JPTM to Gandhi at Lahore and requested him to help our movement. But the Mahatma said that caste was a good thing as it eliminated hard competition in the choice of profession. . . . At this I replied—“Mahatmaji, it is a good thing for a Brahman, or Kshatriya, or Vaishya boy to follow the profession of his father, but how can it be in the interest of a sweeper boy to continue to remove night soil and clean latrines for generations? Mahatmaji, you are a Bania by caste; your hereditary profession was to sell salt, oil and flour. Why don’t you go and earn your living by selling those commodities? Why have you come here to preach politics and ethics?” At this there was laughter in which his wife and Seth Lal Bajaj also joined. (Manchanda 18–19)

Santram was in dialogue with both Periyar and Ambedkar, finding affinities with them. He published an article on Periyar in *Viduthalai*, the leading Tamil daily, in June 1953 (Santram, “Individual”; Manchanda 6). However, he appeared to be closer to Ambedkar, toward whom he often expressed great admiration rather than any overt criticism, and yet he was troubled by him, which is reflected in the cancellation of the JPTM Conference to which Ambedkar was invited. Many members of JPTM, on reading the text of Ambedkar’s speech, found it too hot to handle, especially his direct, scathing attack on Hinduism and support of conversion. Though never directly stated, Santram seems to be in implicit agreement with some of the objections, though he continued to remain Ambedkar’s personal friend (Santram, “Taunted” 7). In an exchange between Santram and Ambedkar, the latter wrote:

I admire your efforts for breaking up the caste system. But allow me to say that I do not agree with the way you are attacking the problem. I do not see how you can break up caste without annihilating the religious notions on which the caste system is founded. I cannot develop the argument now. . . . In the meantime I must leave it to you to deal with the question in the way you like. (Ambedkar, “Religious Notions”)

Significantly, Santram went on to translate *Annihilation of Caste* into Hindi and published it under the banner of JPTM (*Jatibhed*). He also published it in Urdu in his journal *Kranti* (Kshirsagar 323). The persistent problem with Santram remained his continuous reliance on Hindu idioms and on “upper castes” even in the realm of intercaste marriages. Yet, today, Santram’s writings find greater acceptance from Dalits than among liberal Arya Samajis, even when his larger history is almost forgotten. Santram was no Mangoo Ram or Ambedkar; yet what he had to say about his life and his times tells us much about modern histories of caste. He signified a liberal premise and a middle ground and ethos, at times bound by his contexts and at others envisioning ahead of his time. His stances on intercaste marriages offer the most lasting legacy for anticaste politics, while also bringing forth his contradictory uses of sacred and secular, devotion and modernity, to which I finally turn.

TRANSGRESSIVE INTIMACIES: INTERCASTE MARRIAGES, SANTRAM, AND JPTM

prem na dekhe jat-kujat.
bhookh na dekhe jutha bhaat.

(Love does not see any caste boundaries.
Hunger is indifferent to food taboos.) (Santram, *Antarjatiya* 31)

Roti-beti (food-marriage) taboos have been central to caste practices of spatial and bodily exclusions. Endogamy, a cornerstone of caste, also reveals the pervasive imprint of caste on women’s bodies. Even while operating within heteronormative paradigms, intercaste marriages have produced daily policing and everyday violence, along the lines of what Foucault calls the alliance model of sexuality, where—through arrangement of marriages—relations and boundaries of caste and religion are policed (106–11). Increasing anxieties and fears around Dalit conversions forced Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha to support intercaste marriages at a rhetorical level,¹⁰ but on the ground there were fraught debates and uneasiness on the question, as most reformers underwrote an exclusive grammar of difference in sexual regimes (Gupta 77–84). Significantly, Ambedkar argued that intercaste marriage was



Figure 8. Intercaste marriage performed by JPTM between Vijay Kumar MA (Vaishya) and Chand Rani BA (Brahmin). Santram on extreme right. Reproduced courtesy of Madhu Chadha, granddaughter of Santram BA.

the hallmark of Dalit progress and the most important solution to annihilating caste, since it challenged the relationship between maintenance of caste purity and control of women's sexuality (*Annihilation* 59–64; Rao 232–33).

Santram made a categorical intervention in this arena by bringing together caste, gender, sexuality, and desire in his discourse on intercaste marriages, making it a vehicle of his anticaste articulations. While hailing the arrival of JPTM under the leadership of Santram, the editor of *Indian Social Reformer* highlighted the limitations of reform movements like Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj:

But very little has been done by the Arya Samaj and other bodies to break the citadel of caste system by the arrangement of inter-caste-dinners, inter-caste-marriages. . . . These movements, instead of coming forward boldly and frankly to champion the cause of social reforms, have become part and parcel of the orthodox retrogressive Hinduism. . . . It is with this object of infusing a new spirit that JPTM has been started recently. ("League" 320)

The first and foremost rule of JPTM was to break the birth-based caste system and to promote intercaste marriages. It was this central theme that propelled Santram's critique of caste and JPTM's activities. JPTM's rules stated that the only Hindus who could join the organization were those who pledged not to marry within their caste, and if married, promised the same for their children. There was a separate department of JPTM to promote intercaste

marriages, which maintained “a register in which all eligible candidates for intercaste marriage” were entered (*Jat-Pat* 4; Santram, *Caste Must Go* 2). A list of such marriages was published in JPTM’s booklet *Madhur Veena* and in the 1929 directory of JPTM (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 188; “Jat” 550). A review of the activities of the Mandal in 1939 stated that “at the least computation such marriages must be 500 in number” (*Jat-Pat* 4). JPTM had a limited, largely urban-based membership and following, but it cut across regions and functioned with intercaste marriages as its central paradigm. In his writings, including his autobiography, Santram gives many examples of intercaste marriages that he and the JPTM promoted and facilitated.

However, it appears that most of these intercaste marriages pertained to the top three *varnas*, the “twice-born” castes. Rather than vertical, it was horizontal alliances between the top three *varnas* that were more often encouraged in the name of intercaste marriages. For example, Santram describes an incident in 1914:

I had two friends Parmanand and Bhumanand. Parmanand was Arora by caste and Bhumanand a Brahmin. . . . Parmanand requested me to persuade Bhumanand to marry his younger sister. . . . Bhumanand agreed. . . . His father, family and friends opposed it and no one came for the wedding. . . . It was a brave act to break caste taboos at that time. (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 36)¹¹

Santram often faced threats for facilitating such marriages (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 56–59). Largely due to his efforts, intercaste marriages became a symbol of progressive urban modernity, operating through JPTM mainly among a small circle of elites. It was a sincere effort to break caste, but it often provided a view from top down, and a perspective from above, revealing both Santram’s limitations and possibilities. Yet, it is to be noted that after the death of his first wife, Santram himself remarried a Maharashtrian Brahmin virgin widow Sunder Bai Pradhan in December 1929.

This was an interprovincial widow remarriage. It was also an intercaste *pratiloma* marriage—most attacked by the orthodoxy—between a Shudra man and a Brahmin widow, similar to Ambedkar’s second marriage. In a sense, the central focus of intercaste marriages allowed Santram to underline how caste permeated our most intimate spaces, and to show that it was in such arenas that caste needed to be challenged the most.

Considering caste to be a disease, Santram said that it rested on the four taboos of touch, occupation, food, and marriage (*Humara* 3). Relentlessly questioning Manu¹² and endorsing Ambedkar, he passionately promoted intercaste, interregional, and interreligious marriages as central to the



Figure 9. Santram BA (in center) with his second wife Sunder Bai. Reproduced courtesy of Madhu Chadha, granddaughter of Santram BA.

eradication of caste. He offered multipronged arguments to disrupt the logic of endogamy, resorting to sacred, religious, devotional, and scriptural discourses on the one hand and relying on social, secular, modern, scientific, and rationalist arguments on the other. Selectively quoting from ancient texts, he constantly reiterated past examples of *anuloma* and *pratiloma* intercaste marriages. For example, Pramatta, a Brahmin woman, married a barber and gave birth to Matang, the great *rishi*. Arundhati, a Kshatriya, was married to Vashishth Rishi, son of a prostitute. Their son Shakti married Adrishyanti, a Chandala girl. Shakti's son, Parashar, the great *rishi*, married Satyavati, a fisherman's daughter, and was father of Vyas, the writer of Mahabharat. Bhim married the demoness Hidamba, and Ghatotkatch was their child (*Humara* 11–14). Santram included in his list leading personalities like Gandhi, Paramanand, Nehru, Gokul Chand, and Raja Narendra Nath, who themselves had intercaste/interregional marriages, saying that none of them could be excommunicated from Hindu society (“Hindu Rishis” 6).

From here he easily moved to modern, scientific, and “secular” arguments, intermeshing them with equality and justice. Paul Gilroy talks of the African American autobiographer Frederick Douglass, who brought “the illumination of reason to the ethical darkness of slavery” (59). In India, the anticaste thinker Periyar passionately invoked radical empiricism and a verifiable view of science (Geetha and Rajadurai 514). In a similar vein, Santram used enlightened modern discourses and rationality to counter caste. Santram wondered, “Why such Hindu kings like Ramchandra, Harishchandra,

Krishna, Shivaji and Pratap did not think of . . . providing education and full citizenship rights to untouchables and Shudras?” At another place he stated, “Attempting to take help of *shastras* in finding solutions to eradicate caste and untouchability is like washing dirt with more dirt” (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 222). Santram adapted a Western liberal model to a distinctly Indian register, which helped him in molding a new caste self. Santram often resorted to quoting from scholars like the German American anthropologist Franz Boas, a prominent opponent of ideologies of scientific racism, to support his arguments (*Humara* 124). Further, similar to many Dalit narratives, Santram selectively praised the British rule: “For many untouchables and Shudras, the British rule is an unmatched God’s gift. . . . Untouchables will be very foolish to prefer a Hindu-dominated state over the British rule” (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 208).

Replete with discussions of “difference” and “sameness” and its varied connotations, Santram interrogated notions of homogeneity, oneness, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge, singular identity, and binarity, and stressed the advantages of what he called “crossbreeding,” which, he argued, led to the birth of a stronger and more creative third. He stated,

It is a universal principle of science that the mixing and coming together of two different products leads to a better and nicer third. Thus oxygen and hydrogen, when combined, produce the best and the purest product of water. . . . When horses and donkeys cross breed, the khachar is born, more powerful and stronger than the two. . . . Similarly inter-caste marriages lead to better relationships, more equitable society, and stronger nation. (*Antarjatiya* 1–2)

Santram argued that endogamy was an inferior form of marriage and even equated it with incest—a marriage between brothers and sisters. Simultaneously, he stressed that the coming together of the intellect and brain of the Brahmin and the physical strength of the Kshatriya would lead to a better progeny. Within Santram’s arguments, however, also lay their limitations, domestications, and occlusions, as he sometimes recast stereotypical and essentialist perceptions pertaining to the “characteristics” of different *varnas*, as noted in the previous sentence. He appropriated ideas around national growth, development, progress, masculinity, and particularly eugenics to push for intercaste marriages, with dubious and double-edged implications. Lack of masculine power, weakness, lower levels of intelligence, constant defeats of Hindus in past wars, unhealthy progeny, weak nation—all were depicted as evils of endogamy. Inversely, he stressed, intercaste marriages ensured stronger, healthier, and brighter children; diversified occupational categories; increased masculine strength; and were central to Hindu progress (*Antarjatiya*

5–15). Visions of selfhood, equality, progress, freedom, modernity, and rationality were imparted in Santram's narrative in conjunction with Hindu religious, traditional, and ritualistic paradigms, revealing an argumentative pendulum swinging between the spiritual and the material.

Santram undercut caste power through his arguments, at times inadvertently reiterating stereotypes. Once at the annual conference of Arya Samaj, Lahore, there was a debate between Santram and Ramdev, a teacher at Gurukul Kangri, on *varnavyavastha*, with the latter supporting it and Santram vehemently opposing it. Santram stated in a light vein:

You people say that people should be branded with their *varna* label, and men-women with same label should marry. . . . Now suppose the husband and wife are of the same *varna*, and have similar characteristics—both get easily angry, and tend to fight. Their qualities are the same. In such a home, there will be constant arguments and fights. As opposed to this, suppose one of them is calm and quiet, then there are much fewer chances of their family life breaking. . . . Similarly, marriage in same *varna* is not good. (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 199–201)

The language of disparaging binaries and boundaries could implicitly reinstate them. In an article published in the famous magazine *Sudha*, Santram replied to various objections leveled against intercaste marriages and contended that one Amritlal Rai had said that these would lead to clandestine sexual relations, romance, and elopement with women, domestic servants, or “low caste” men. Santram replied, albeit in a patronizing tone, that even the *dasi* could be beautiful, talented, and virtuous and that there were many fair and attractive Chamar women. He went on to disdain the argument that such alliances would greatly lower the ideal of women's purity and honor (“Antarjatiya” 596–608). At the same time, he challenged not only caste hierarchies but also patriarchal hegemonies through his accounts of intercaste marriages. He stressed that due to practices of endogamy, in *jatis* where women outnumbered men, there had been a phenomenal growth of dowry, whereas where it was the inverse, where men outnumbered women, the latter were sold as commodities and sex trade proliferated (*Antarjatiya* 17). He attacked the policing of women's desires whereby women laughing loudly or going out at night were viewed with suspicion, and he blamed the Ramayan for preaching false notions of women's purity (*Humara* 97–100). Questioning that exclusive endogamous marriage could in any way be regarded as more positive, stabler, or better than intercaste marriage, he underlined that intercaste marriages were more robust, rich, and meaningful.

On the side, it is to be noted that Santram also proved ahead of his times on questions of sex and gender. While initially believing in *brahmacharya*, he

soon gave up the idea, arguing that it caused more harm than benefit (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 84–85). He became deeply influenced by Marie Stopes, exchanged letters with her, and translated some of her writings. For example, Santram translated her book *Married Love* as *Vivahit Prem* in 1925¹³—and penned a treatise on sex and sexual pleasure titled *Rativilas* (Tandon 307). In an article written in the magazine *Madhuri* in 1924, Santram argued that intricacies of sex and erotic life of the conjugal couple needed to be discussed explicitly. He went on to support the “true” publications on sexual science, which was also publicity material for sex manuals (“Rati” 601–05). Santram was also an advocate for birth control, a belief that Periyar may also have influenced.¹⁴ For example, Santram translated the English book *Contraception* into Hindi in 1926, calling it *Dampati Mitra* (Friend of Married Couple). The book contained various methods of birth control and gave agency regarding reproductive rights largely to women (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 161). Santram wrote:

Some people severely criticized the book, calling it obscene and threatened me with a court case. . . . But several thanked me for publishing it. . . . The publisher . . . told me that wives of many Arya Samajis, who had criticized the book, had secretly bought it and read it with great enthusiasm. (*Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* 161–62)¹⁶

In these writings, too, Santram straddled multiple terrains, as on the one hand he drew from classical works on *kamshastra* (sexual science), referring to them as beneficial, and on the other relied on Western sexologists and eugenic arguments to underscore pleasure and desire as important facets of modern sexual life. Lauren Berlant argues:

Central to the development of narratives that link personal life to larger histories, and to practices and institutions of intimacy, desire also measures fields of difference and distance. It both constructs and collapses distinctions between public and private: it reorganizes worlds. (13–14)

Santram’s insights and narratives on marriage, sex, and pleasure not only conjoin the private and public, they open up an interesting ancillary terrain of textures of touch, sexuality, and intercaste registers of desire, intimacy, and transgressive sexual norms.

Santram thus seems to occupy paradoxical social sites—appropriating caste as a sign of privilege in some cases while disparaging it in others. He simultaneously moved on two registers to support intercaste marriages—the first one invoked a scriptural, theological, and ritualistic language, while the second was anchored in arguments of modernity, eugenics, nation, equality, and egalitarianism. This deft combination of hybrid means, whereby through

various modes of articulation he described spaces and possibilities of intercaste marriages, had ambiguous implications. On the one hand, he opposed essentialized characteristics of different *varnas* and of women, and on the other his language of healthy progeny, of difference, of powerful nation had a potential to reinstate caste and patriarchy. But then, woven alongside was also the belief that children of intercaste unions not only inherited the qualities of both parents but also did not belong to one or another of the constructed caste categories and instead occupied a third, liminal space. While gendering intercaste marriages, he on the one hand upheld ideologies of productive and reproductive labor, and on the other, inherent in his arguments was also a plea to refigure relationships between women and men. Herein lay Santram's paradox: he used a version of the poison as its own remedy. At the same time, the disruption of endogamous marriages signified a challenge to caste difference and a transgressive space of intimate desires.

CONCLUSION

Santram's autobiography and other writings are not merely literary ornaments; they are communicative acts through which he evolves his own anticaste idioms, codes, and practices. Infused with Santram's agency, *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav* is not just about an individual but carries within it varied, uneasy, and aching caste attitudes of the era. Santram's life and writing act as an archive of anticaste thought in a particular context, becoming a site and repository of the social history of caste in modern India. His narrative offers a richly textured account of his private life and public commitments, whereby his anticaste tropes endeavor to reach a hybrid, liberal ground, jostling between Gandhi and Ambedkar, and between Arya Samaj and Ad Dharm, a process fraught with fissures. Individual, private life and collective, public histories coexist in his narrative, as both are caste marked. Santram's life and writings cannot be easily slotted as they ride on uncertainties with a deep hankering to get rid of caste without letting go of Hinduism. He navigated sacred and secular, devotional and modern discourses and brought the theological and the social together to refute caste, inescapably representing multiple and diverse subjectivities, which were often discordant with each other. In spite of his deep frustration with the Arya Samaj, he attempted to amalgamate Arya Samaji and anticaste ideas. Santram deployed social reform through largely urban, educated, "upper caste" characters, whereby terms of Hinduism were subtly reworked and reinstated. At the same time, Santram constantly negotiated with a contentious associational discourse around caste, which permeated his personal and social life, endeavoring to "unread" its dominant inscriptions.

Santram's writings also contribute to creating a counterarchive of caste, as he selectively took on the language of Arya Samaj, Ambedkar, and intercaste marriages. Recalcitrant histories of caste may be gleaned by studying Santram's life narrative. His vernacular articulations are often rooted in a cross-referential counterarchive, which is in dialogue with other hegemonic texts, and produces a history of anticasteism through a hybrid liberal paradigm. These enunciations open Santram's life to subversive appropriations and emancipatory practices of caste dissent. It is perhaps for this reason that Dalit writers and intellectuals have claimed Santram more than members of the Arya Samaj. His dual identification as a Shudra and a Dalit at one and the same time, as within and outside Arya Samaj, produces a radical edge to Santram's life. Similar to Phule, Periyar, and Ambedkar, his trenchant critique of endogamy provides the intersection between anticaste thought and gender, challenging connections between sexual regulation and caste reproduction. Santram's erudite enunciations in support of intercaste marriages call upon ideas of caste intimacy as a way to get at the terribly material, embodied character of caste and gender dynamics and as a way of breaking the shackles of the *varna-jati* complex. However, since it was annihilation of caste rather than sexual freedom per se that was Santram's focus, there was an instability in the otherwise radical connections he drew. It is important to resurrect the circumscribed life of this half-forgotten caste reformer, which is laden with radical possibilities.

NOTES

1. Santram used his attainment of a baccalaureate degree as a kind of honorific.
2. See Ambedkar's preface for more information (i–viii).
3. All translations from Hindi are mine, unless otherwise stated.
4. See also Karlekar.
5. Reiterated also in personal interview with Satnam Singh.
6. The trend continued in 1921 (see *Census of India, 1921* 181).
7. Reiterated in his interview (Manchanda 1).
8. Many of these texts have been republished by Samyak Prakashan, Delhi.
9. *Arya Gazette* was an organ of the Arya Samaj.
10. For example, in its seventeenth session in Poona in 1935, the Hindu Mahasabha resolved “in favour of complete liberty of inter-marriage between all sections of the Hindu community,” including with Harijans.
11. Also mentioned in Manchanda (4).
12. Once, while critiquing Manu, Santram was asked by a learned scholar if he was more knowledgeable than Manu. At this Santram replied, “Yes! Manu did not know what is meant by ‘telepathy’, what is a ‘telescope’, how did a rail run, while I know about all

these things. If Manu was something, he may have been in his times. At present our knowledge is much greater." See Manchanda (8).

13. Also mentioned in a Catalogue of Books for the new year of a publisher, *Naye Varsh* (44).
14. For a discussion on the larger politics of birth control in colonial India, see Ahluwalia. On Periyar and birth control, see Hodges; Anandhi (39–66).
15. Santram also wrote another book on birth control called *Santan Sankhya ka Seema-Bandhan* (Control of Number of Children). I have not been able to locate the book, but it is mentioned in a Catalogue of Books, *Naye Varsh*.

WORKS CITED

- Adcock, C. S. "Brave Converts in the Arya Samaj: The Case of Dharm Pal." *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice*, edited by Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir, Oxford UP, 2012, pp. 261–86.
- . *The Limits of Tolerance: Indian Secularism and the Politics of Religious Freedom*. Oxford UP, 2014.
- Ahluwalia, Sanjam. *Reproductive Restraints: Birth Control in India, 1877–1947*. U of Illinois P, 2008.
- Ambedkar, B. R. *Annihilation of Caste: Speech Prepared for the Annual Conference of JPTM of Lahore but Not Delivered*. B. R. Kadrekar, 1936.
- . *Jatibhed ka Uchhed*. Translated by Santram BA, Jat-Pat Torak Mandal, 1937.
- . "'Religious Notions on Which Caste System Is Based Should be Destroyed': Dr. Ambedkar's Letter to Jat-Pat Torak Mandal." *Tribune*, 11 Dec. 1935, p. 5.
- Anandhi, S. "Reproductive Bodies and Regulated Sexuality: Birth Control Debates in Early Twentieth Century Tamilnadu." *A Question of Silence?: The Sexual Economies of Modern India*, edited by Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, Kali for Women, 1998, pp. 139–66.
- "Anti-Caste Census Campaign." *Indian Social Reformer*, vol. 61, no. 3, 20 Sept. 1930, p. 44.
- Arnold, David, and Stuart Blackburn. "Introduction: Life Histories in India." *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History*, edited by David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn, Indiana UP, 2004, pp. 1–28.
- Auxiliary Committee of the Indian Statutory Commission. *Review of the Growth of Education in British India*. Government of India P, 1930.
- Banerjee-Dube, Ishita. "Introduction: Questions of Caste." *Caste in History*, edited by Ishita Banerjee-Dube, Oxford UP, 2010, pp. xv–lxiv.
- Bayly, Susan. *Caste, Society, and Politics in India: From the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, Cambridge UP, 1999.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Desire/Love*. Punctum Books, 2012.
- Berlant, Lauren, and Jay Prosser. "Life Writing and Intimate Publics: A Conversation with Lauren Berlant." *Life Writing and Intimate Publics*, special issue of *Biography*, vol. 34, no. 1, Winter 2011, pp. 180–87.
- Brueck, Laura. *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature*. Columbia UP, 2014.

- “Caste and the Census.” *Indian Social Reformer*, vol. 61, no. 25, 21 Feb. 1931, pp. 395–96.
- Census of India, 1911*. Vol. I, part I, Superintendent Government Printing, 1912.
- Census of India, 1921*. Vol. XV, part I, Superintendent Government Printing, 1922.
- Census of India, 1931*. Vol. XVII, part I, Khan Ahmad Hasan Khan, Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1933.
- Chadha, Madhu. Personal interview. 25 Jan. 2016.
- Ciotti, Manuela. “In the past we were a bit of a ‘Chamar’”: Education as a Self and Community Engineering Process in Northern India.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 12, no. 1, Dec. 2006, pp. 899–916.
- Cohn, Bernard S. *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*. Oxford UP, 1987.
- Constable, Philip. “Sitting on the Verandah: The Ideology and Practice of ‘Untouchable’ Educational Protest in Late Nineteenth-Century Western India.” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2000, pp. 383–422.
- Dirks, Nicholas B. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton UP, 2001.
- Eaton, Richard M. *A Social History of the Deccan, 1300–1761: Eight Indian Lives*. Cambridge UP, 2005.
- Fallon, S. W., editor. *Hindustani-English Dictionary of Idioms and Proverbs*. 1886. Star Publications, 1991.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley, vol. 1, Vintage, 1978.
- Gajarawala, Toral Jatin. *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste*. Fordham UP, 2012.
- Ganguli, Debjani. “Pain, Personhood, and the Collective: Dalit Life Narratives.” *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 33, no. 4, Dec. 2009, pp. 429–42.
- Gazetteer of the Hoshiarpur District, 1883–4*. Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1885.
- Geetha, V., and S. V. Rajadurai. *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothee Thass to Periyar*. Samya, 1998.
- Giddens, Anthony. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Stanford UP, 1992.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Verso, 1993.
- Gopal, Madan. “A Hundred Years of Writing.” *Times of India*, 16 Feb. 1987, p. 8.
- Gupta, Charu. *The Gender of Caste: Representing Dalits in Print*. U of Washington P, 2016.
- Hindi Mahasabha. Seventeenth session in Poona, 1935. Hindi Mahasabha Papers, M-3, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi, India.
- Hodges, Sarah. *Contraception, Colonialism and Commerce: Birth Control in South India, 1920–1940*. Ashgate, 2008.
- Hunt, Sarah Beth. *Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation*. Routledge, 2014.
- Ilaiah, Kancha. *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture, and Political Economy*. Samya, 2002.
- “Jat Pat Torak Mandal, Lahore.” *Indian Social Reformer*, vol. 36, no. 35, 1 May 1926, p. 550.

- The Jat-Pat Torak Mandal*. General Review, 1939.
- Jones, Kenneth. *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab*. 1976. Manohar, 2006.
- Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Religious Rebels in the Punjab: The Ad Dharm Challenge to Caste*. 1982. Navayana, 2009.
- Karlekar, Malavika. *Voices from Within: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*. Oxford UP, 1991.
- Kshirsagar, R. K. *Dalit Movement in India and Its Leaders (1857–1956)*. M. D. Publications, 1994.
- Kumar, Raj. *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation, and Identity*. Orient Blackswan, 2011.
- Kumar, Udaya. *Writing the First Person: Literature, History, and Autobiography in Modern Kerala*. Permanent Black, 2016.
- . “Writing the Life of the Guru: Chattampi Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru, and Modes of Biographical Construction.” *Biography as History: Indian Perspectives*, edited by Vijaya Ramaswamy and Yogesh Sharma, Orient Blackswan, 2009, pp. 53–87.
- “League to Abolish Caste System.” *Indian Social Reformer*, vol. 33, no. 20, 13 Jan. 1923, p. 320.
- Lubin, Alex. *Romance and Rights: The Politics of Interracial Intimacy, 1945–1954*. UP of Mississippi, 2005.
- Manchanda, Shyam Lal. Interview with Santram BA, oral history transcript. 15 May 1971, accession No. 238, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi, India.
- Maheshwari, Shriram. *The Census Administration Under the Raj and After*. Concept Publishing Company, 1996.
- Murugkar, Lata. *Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra: A Sociological Appraisal*. Popular Prakashan, 1991.
- Naye Varsh ka Suchipatra*. Rajpal & Sons, n.d.
- Nirala, Suryakant Tripathi. “Varnashram-Dharm ki Vartman Stithi.” *Madhuri*, vol. 8, no. 1, Mar. 1932, pp. 836–43.
- Paik, Shailaja. “Mahar-Dalit-Buddhist: The History and Politics of Naming in Maharashtra.” *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2011, pp. 217–41.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States*. Cambridge UP, 2013.
- Pandian, M. S. S. “Writing Ordinary Lives.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 43, no. 38, Sept. 2008, pp. 34–40.
- Paswan, Sanjay, and Paramanshi Jaideva, editors. *Leaders: Encyclopaedia of Dalits in India*, vol. 4, Kalpaz Publications, 2004.
- Prashad, Vijay. *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community*. Oxford UP, 2000.
- Ram, Ronki. “Untouchability, Dalit Consciousness, and the Ad Dharm Movement in Punjab.” *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2004, pp. 323–49.

- Ramaswamy, Vijaya. Introduction. *Biography as History: Indian Perspectives*, edited by Vijaya Ramaswamy and Yogesh Sharma, Orient Blackswan, 2009, pp. 1–15.
- Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Literature*. Translated by Julie Rose, Polity, 2011.
- Rao, Anupama. *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India*. Permanent Black, 2009.
- Rawat, Ramnarayan. *Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India*. Permanent Black, 2012.
- Rege, Sharmila. *Against the Madness of Manu: B. R. Ambedkar's Writings on Brahmanical Patriarchy*. Navayana, 2013.
- . *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Reading Dalit Women's Testimonios*. Zubaan, 2006.
- Rose, H. A., editor. *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*. Vol. II, Civil and Military Gazette P, 1911.
- Santram BA. "Antarjatiya Vivah." *Sudha*, July 1929, pp. 596–608.
- . *Antarjatiya Vivah hi Kyun?* Jat-Pat Torak Mandal, 1959.
- . *Caste Must Go: A Word About the Jat-Pat Torak Mandal, Lahore*. Jat-Pat Torak Mandal, 1938.
- . "Hindu Rishis and the Caste." *Tribune*, 28 Feb. 1936, p. 6.
- . *Humara Samaj*. 1st ed., Nalanda Prakashan, 1949.
- . "Individual Collections: Papers of Santram BA." List 430, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi, India.
- . Letter to Marie Stopes. 16 Mar. 1930, MSS no. ADD 58578, Stopes Papers, Department of Manuscripts, British Library, London, England.
- . *Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav*. Hindi Pracharak Pustakalya, 1963.
- . "Rati Rahasya." *Madhuri*, vol. 3, no. 1, December 1924, pp. 601–05.
- . "Taunted and Scoffed by Orthodoxy: Anti-Caste Movement in the Punjab: Experiences of a Social Reform Leader." *The Sunday Observer*, 13 July 1952, pp. 2, 7.
- Satyanarayana, K., and Susie Tharu, editors. *No Alphabet in Sight: New Dalit Writing from South India, Tamil and Malayalam*. Penguin, 2011.
- . *Steel Nibs Are Sprouting: New Dalit Writing from South India, Kannada and Telegu*. Harper Collins, 2013.
- Shankar, S. *Flesh and Fish Blood: Postcolonialism, Translation, and the Vernacular*. U of California P, 2012.
- Singh, Satnam. Personal interview. 9 Feb. 2016.
- . *Santram BA krit Mere Jeevan ke Anubhav: Dalit Sahitya ki Pehli Sva-Jeevni*. Samyak Prakashan, 2008.
- Stopes, Marie. *Married Love*. Translated by Santram BA, Saraswati Ashram, 1925.
- Tandon, Ramnarayan, editor. *Hindi Sevi Sansar*. Vol. 1, 2nd ed., Lucknow, 1951.
- "Uncouth Brahmin." *Yugantar*, Oct. 1933, p. 26.

Copyright of *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* is the property of University of Hawaii Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.