



**Rituals, Cultural Crisis and Modernity in
U R Ananthamurthy's *Samskara* and *Ghatashraddha***

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Abstract: It is a common saying about India that “Unity in Diversity” along with Indian’s are highly devoted to their culture and know the good etiquette to maintain social relationships. In India people believe in priest and they think priest as a bridge that connect them with God. Priests are very important because they make sure that the religious practices are done correctly, just as they have been for a long time. They know the Vedas and other holy writings very well, which helps them to make sure every ceremony is done the right way. In the same way the novel *Samskara* is an accurate estimate of the brahmin societies of all times which suffer the serious problems of backwardness despite having intellectuals among them. Reason behind all silly problems that emerge is that their energy is directed by age-old convictions, beliefs, customs, traditions and superstition. Ananthamurthy raises questions on very sensitive issues like rituals, *Samskara*, Caste, modernism, community opinions. He scans human weakness such as greed, sex, gluttony, and lack of human concern in the Brahmin community. Ananthamurthy’s characters favour freedom from the life in shackles of ritualistic performances. His novels shows that every person was born with *samskaras*, or mental and emotional patterns they had inherited through the karma they created throughout their past lives along with scriptures and different cultures traditions of India. The present paper analyses and summarize the cultural crisis, modernity and changing rituals in Indian Society on the behalf of Ananthamurthy’s *Samskara*(1965) and *Ghatasharddha*.

Keywords: Brahmin, *Samskara*, Rituals, *Shraddha*, Superstition, Adharma, Prostitute, Orthodox, Karma, Ethics, Varnashrama, Agrahara, Purgation.

Introduction

U. R. Ananthmurthy is concerned about the steep decline in the morality of Brahmins who treat women and members of other caste and community inhumanly. The Brahmins are seen to be using oppressive methods in the name religious cultural, and dominating voiceless subalterns. They themselves are highly disrespectful to the basic moral values. Ananthamurthy realizes that religious fundamentalism is creating obstacles in the progress of human society. In short, the writer directly or indirectly hinting to an urgent need of revamp in Hindu society to prevent moral decline in Hindu society. It’s the reason he has attempted to exhibit the vices and follies of religious dogmatism through this novel with an intent to eradicate social evils like untouchability, casteism, and communalism from the society. In his novels Ananthamurthy defines the difference in the cultural of India and how one community is different from others such as in the novel *Samskara* (1965) Madhwa Brahmins worship Lord Vishnu and their spiritual Guru is Madhavacharya although Smartha Brahmins worship both Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva as equal.

Rituals, Cultural Crisis and Modernity in Samskara

The novel *Samskara* opens with a routinized schedule of Praneshacharya who is a protagonist in the novel. After obtaining mastery over vedic scriptures, and earning a title “the Crest-Jewel of Vedanta” in Kashi during his religious training, Praneshacharya performs all religious rituals and discharges his religious duties as an ascetic religious authority in Durvasapura village. Bhagirathi the wife of Acharya, just to serve his selfish purpose of obtaining “ripeness and readiness” on his way to salvation and keep himself away from sensual pleasures of the world. He treats his Brahmin birth as a divine test for qualifying himself for salvation which means being saved himself from the penalty of separation from God.

His decision of marrying with an invalid woman is a sign of his own selfishness for which he uses a poor woman as an object to climb a ladder to heaven. His denial to worldly pleasures and faith in stern religious idealism shows his hypocrisy, when later he copulates with Chandri, a Dalit woman and craves for sexual pleasure. After practicing his rituals and high religious precepts, he not only remains a confused and ordinary man who blindly believes in religious dogmas, but goes to the level of Naranappa, an antagonist who throws away Brahman orthodoxy and lives with a Dalit concubine. The writer shows how Brahmins practice untouchability avoiding a touch or even a conversation with Dalits for the sake of maintaining purity. It has been shown how initially Praneshacharya was more worried of his purity when she came his home to inform him about Naranappa sad demise: Chandri was Naranappa's concubine. If the Acharya talked to her, he would be polluted; he would have to bathe again before his meal. But, once he gets associated with Chandri physically, he craves for her body. This shows clear hypocrisy on the part of Brahmins who normally avoids physical touch with Dalits in society for a fear of getting polluted, but they don't mind sleeping with their women. On the other hand, Naranappa a catalytic agent who affects change, favors modernism ideology and rejects brahminhood. He selects the path on intercast and brings home Chandri, a prostitute or lower caste, from Kundapura, a nearby town. He drinks alcohol eat nonveg food and invites muslims to eat meat. According to the *Garud parana* which is one of 18 Mahapurans in Hinduism, one of those who eat tamasic and meat of the creature, the fierce messengers of Yamaguchi up and feed them their own flesh. In the novel Naranappa throws Saligrama, the holy stone which is believed to represent Hindu's God Vishnu, into the river, and spits after it. If the flowers in the backyards of the other brahmins are meant mainly for the altar, and if their women wear only withered flowers gathered from the altar in their hair which hangs at their back like a rat's tail, Naranappa grows the night-queen plant in his front garden. Its intense smelling flowers are meant solely to decorate Chandri's hair which lies coiled like a thick black cobra on her back. Naranappa, with his muslim friends catches sacred fish from the temple tank, cooks and eats them. Naranappa's only ambition in Naranappa dies but his actions struggle to correct the society. The immediate complicated question is, “Who should cremate Naranappa?” Every Brahmin is afraid to volunteer, because he fears that his brahminhood would thus be polluted because Naranappa was theoretically a brahmin when he died. The holy books and Lord Maruti offer no relief to Praneshacharya to find the answer. But Chandri, a prostitute has an answer not for the right person for cremating but for the enigmatic acharya and stinking orthodox society. Naranappa dies but his actions struggle to correct the society. The immediate complicated question is, “Who should cremate Naranappa body?” Every Brahmin is afraid to volunteer, because he fears that his brahminhood would thus be polluted because Naranappa was theoretically a brahmin when he died. Life seems to do everything that destroys the brahminhood of the Agrahara. His only sorrow

is that hardly anything of it is left to destroy, except for the brahminism of Praneshacharya. (Ananthmurthy, Pg22)

The holy books and God Hanumana offer no relief to Praneshacharya to find the answer. But Chandri, a prostitute has an answer not for the right person for cremating but for the enigmatic acharya and stinking orthodox society. In a moment Chandri projects acharya to the world of ordinary mortals. A long list of rituals seems him futile. It is said that “Wealth remains on the earth, cattle in the cow-shed, wife inside the house, the relatives at the crematorium, and the body on the pyre, but on the way to the other world, it is one’s actions (Karma) that alone follows” .(Subhashita,Pg20).

A beautiful verse in the *Bhagavad Gita* translates to say that as the embodied soul continually passes, in this body, from childhood to youth to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death. The body is like mere pair of clothes but it is the atma which is unchanging and the body is like mere pair of clothes. It is the soul which is unchanging.

The brahmin of Agrahara are utterly decadent, prejudiced, filled with desire selfish, greedy, jealous. Their brahminhood consists solely of fulfilling rules, following traditions which are thousands of years without understanding reasons and logic behind them. They are afraid that if the rules are not followed disasters will fall upon them. In this way the agrahara of Durvasapura is nothing special as forty or fifty years ago many villages and towns in South India had such Agraharas. Therefore, novel is a fiction far away from the real Indian culture and it does not work as a lamp post to guide the souls wandering in dark. The society of Agrahara village is in the changing phase of life style and reflects socioreligious and socio-psychological reality. Agrahara system is disintegrating and Samskara depicts losing reins of actual religious understanding, which on the part of the writer seems a mere presentation of mundane reality rather the holding mirror to move the mass in the right direction. Ananthamurthy’s most potent brahmin character Praneshacharya is the most fickle one, a mere book worm with sound retention capacity and reasoning and the least rationale to turn his knowledge into action. Society has been in great need for change in the right direction whether in late sixties, nineties or in the present time. And the novel presents merely the change of ethics but not the destination the change will lead to.

Rituals, Cultural Crisis and Modernity in *Ghattasharadha*

Shradh is one of the most significant and noble ritual of the Hindu religion accomplished to satiate one’s ancestors. In the scriptures mention a variety of debts on an individual one among these is *Pitra Rin* which can be only cleared by offering Pind Dan. Shraddha, originally a Sanskrit word, is combination of two words "Sat" meaning truth and "Adhar" meaning basis. So, it means anything or any act that is performed with all sincerity and faith. It is said, “Shraddhyaa Kriyate Yaa Saa”. As Shradh in Varanasi is an act which is performed with utmost devotion to pay respect towards and serve the interest of dead parents and ancestors. The decline and collapse of the rigid way of living of the scholarly brahmin community in Karnataka with the suppressed position of women within the community highlighted. It is said that the person who performs [Shradh in Kashi](#) with a pure devotion and peaceful mind is said to be free from all the woes of the material world in the same way the story *Ghattasharadha* based on an orthodox upper caste Brahmin community in Southern Karnataka. The story seems to suggest that the particularity towards the brahmanical laws and edicts is a part of the community’s social fabric and world view. Life in such a community is depicted quite vividly in the story which exhibits the various layers prevalent in such a society.

In the story Nani, who has come to study from Udupa, a Brahmanic teacher. The story begins with Udupa leaving on a journey for about three months on religious work. He leaves instructions

with his daughter to take care of his three students. Nani is the youngest student in his gurukul and seems quite attached to the Acharya's daughter who he calls "Yamuna". At the beginning of the story, we get to know that Yamuna is pregnant from her affair with the village school teacher. She does not want people to know about this secret but people in the community already suspect. The neighbours, her father's students and others in the community seem to be spying on her activities and she is oblivious of the same. Nani sees these events unfold and is unable to understand its implications or people's reactions. After some time when Yamuna's condition becomes more apparent and she is unable to hide her secret its consequences begin to emerge. The upadhyaya who was entrusted with looking after the education of the students in Udupa's absence stops coming to their house, his classmate Ganesh is taken away by his father and Shastri, the oldest of the students leaves the house and begins living with his friend the Sahukar's son. Yamuna is seen to disconnect herself from the community and withdraw further into her grief and worry. The teacher who impregnated her refuses to take responsibility for his actions and instead convinces Yamuna to abort the child, and she is hell bent on killing herself.

Nani hurtles through these events confused at their unfolding and how it constantly disrupts his idea of the world he knows. He is unable to make sense of the degeneration of his comfort zone. He has seen his only ally in an alien environment, Yamuna falls apart, he has had to seek the help of the lowest caste, Kateera, to save her, he has defiled his purity by stepping foot in the house of a shudra when Yamuna goes to abort her child. Nani faces a maelstrom of emotions and sensations that he can make no sense of and the nature of events reflect in the reader the frustration that that small boy must be feeling, not for the breakdown of his world but for the ridiculousness of the logic driving the Brahmanic world. The story ends Yamuna is shaved bald and is abandoned under a banyan tree and Nani being taken away from Yamuna by his parents and her excommunication from her society where her father performs her last rites – Ghatashraddha, which means a ritual where death rites are performed for a living person in order to suggest ostracism from society.

Conclusion

To conclude it can be said that culture is the soul of any nation and on the basis of it, we can experience the prosperity of nation's past and present. The first difference that is evident between the Brahmins and the lower caste is that of complications in social life. The life of Brahmins is full of complications while the life of the untouchables is remarkably simple. Ananthamurthy highlights the cultural, faith and psychological issue of the people in different situations, modern times and circumstances because the culture of India is one of the oldest and most distinctive in the world. The four Vedas including its four types of embedded texts – the Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads. In all of the scriptures Vedas and the *Bhagavad Gita* broadly accepted by Hindus such as in the novel *Samskara* (1965) Pranesacharya followed it on the other hand in *Ghatashraddha* the Vedic school based on rituals. Although Indians have been heavily influenced by Western culture, this does not imply that they have lost their cultural values. In the modern time the word privacy is given greater importance and the love and respect towards other especially elders are decreasing day by day. India is a nation where two things are of great importance: Religion and Caste and there are still some areas where community follows their rituals very strictly and thus always find it conflicting with modernism.

Ananthamurthy highlights the importance of community and faith he said that we are not independent by ourselves, without any kind of relationship to a community, to relatives and to other individuals, it is not possible for you to live in seclusion, all by yourself. Since it is not possible to live in absolute isolation, our lives are inevitably full of connection with others around us. We must

remember that life is bestowed on man not for personal profits but for communal good. Ananthamurthy remarkably proves that caste system has no sanction in the religion and at the same time proves that orthodoxy too is an alien concept for Hinduism which is dynamic and mobile and always ready to accept changes.

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