

Caste System and Social Hierarchies in India – Historical and Cultural context in Samskara

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Abstract

With the cultural and historical prism of U. R. Ananthamurthy's pioneering work *Samskara*, in this research paper, the author examines the intricacies of caste and social hierarchies of India. The writer explores how the system of caste functions as a socio-religious system, controlling individual identity, social mobility, and communal concordance. Using historical analysis, literary criticism, and cultural studies approach, this essay positions *Samskara* against the backdrop of the Brahminical traditions of South Indian village life and analyzes the internal conflicts of its hero, Praneshacharya. The research demonstrates that *Samskara* not only condemns the dogmatism of the caste system but also emphasizes the need for spiritual and social change.

Throughout the course of this research paper, India's highly rooted caste system and social hierarchies are analyzed through critical examination of U.R. Ananthamurthy's trail-blazing novel *Samskara*. Situated in historical and cultural perspectives, the present research seeks to analyze how the novel questions Brahmanical orthodoxy and social stagnation and the inherent contradictions of the caste ideology in Indian society. *Samskara*, which appeared in 1965 and was situated in an imaginary Karnataka agrahara (village of Brahmins), is an insightful

microcosm for understanding the historical continuity and socio-cultural persistence of caste in post-independence India. The protagonist of the novel, Praneshacharya, Brahmin scholar, is a religious and moral leadership figure whose personal crisis of faith and renaissance is a gauge of the broader collapse of caste distinctions and religious orthodoxy.

The study draws on Indian sociologists' and historians' academic literature, such as that of

M.N. Srinivas and Nicholas Dirks, alongside critical theory by B.R. Ambedkar and contemporary caste theorists. By doing so, the essay attempts to illuminate the manner in which *Samskara* transcends literary boundaries to castigate broader social tendencies and advocate moral and religious liberty from the bonds of caste.

Finally, this essay contends that *Samskara* is more than an individual moral failure and religious redemption tale but rather a symbolic and philosophical inquiry into India's most enduring social institution: caste. The literary value of the novel is that it can dramatize the conflict between tradition and modernity, orthodoxy and reform, ritual and reality—making it a lasting work in the study of caste, culture, and identity in India.

Introduction

The caste system, which is a fundamental social institution within Indian society, is characterized by centuries of tradition, dividing social organisation, cultural practices, and the fate of people. Founded upon religious scripture and sustained by ritual and convention, the caste system has been an influential determiner of social contact and opportunity. This paper examines the caste system and its significance by considering U. R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara* is a forceful novel that demythologizes the orthodoxy and double standards in castes. Placing the action in a Brahmin society in traditional Karnataka, Ananthamurthy provides us with the microcosm of the entire Indian society and laments the moral decay caused by an obstinate observance of caste rituals (Ananthamurthy 3).

India's caste system, the oldest world system of social stratification known to history, has been the dominant force in shaping the historical, cultural, and religious identity of India. The hierarchically ranked division by birth of society into distinctive groups of superiors and inferiors has persisted for thousands of years in spite of reform movements and constitutional protection. According to the Hindu writings like the Manusmriti and transmitted from generation to generation of ritual and cultural observance, caste has controlled who has access to resources, education, power, and even religion (Ambedkar 43). Although the democratic constitution of India formally eradicated "untouchability" and prohibited discrimination on grounds of caste, the practice continues to seep into daily life in both explicit and implicit forms, especially in rural India, where caste continues to determine one's profession, marriage, and social relationships (Srinivas 61).

After Indian independence, Indian intellectuals and writers began to approach caste not just as a social issue but also as an existential and philosophical issue. Among them was U. R. Ananthamurthy, the prominent author of modern Indian literature, who launched a scathing critique of Brahminical orthodoxy in his 1965 Kannada novella *Samskara*. English-translated only decades later by A. K. Ramanujan, was praised for its philosophical analysis of the psychological, ethical, and social complexities of caste. *Samskara* is a book set in a Karnataka Brahmin agrahara and deals with the death of a profligate Brahmin named Naranappa. His demise precipitates a spiritual and ritual crisis among the populace, since no one is willing to perform the last rites on a person who had brazenly violated the teachings of their caste (Ananthamurthy 5).

The focal character of the novel, Praneshacharya, a well-learned and orthodox Brahmin scholar, is the epicenter of the moral dilemma of the people. Confronted with the dilemma of whether a heretic like Naranappa would be bestowed with the rites of a virtuous Brahmin, Praneshacharya is gripped by an inner turmoil. His own journey from orthodox strictness to individual sin and existential questing is but a segment of the war between tradition and modernity, ritual and ethics, caste sanctity and human compassion (Tharu and Lalita 224).

Samskara, according to this line of narrative, is not merely a story of a man's religious conversion but a judgment of the ethical inadequacy of caste as a social institution.

In a study of *Samskara*, this essay attempts to understand how caste works not merely as social stratification but as an ideology spread throughout society that impacts thought, behavior, and relations among people. The fascination of the novel with ritual purity, social conformity, and spiritual stagnation is a tes-tamony to the cultural embeddedness of caste in the Indian psyche. However, Ananthamurthy's version also presents hope for change, forcing readers to question the sanctity and pertinence of caste observances in a modern, plural society (Devy 90).

Furthermore, *Samskara* is a new response to the socio-political chaos of the time, primarily the rise of anti-caste leadership like that of B. R. Ambedkar and growing disillusionment with Gandhian conceptions of village purity. Ananthamurthy, in his modernist vision, condemns Brahminical boasts of moral rectitude and unmasks the internal contradictions in a system claiming to adhere to dharma (duty) but adhering to exclusion and hypocrisy (Ambedkar 66). His portrayal of Chandri, a woman of low caste, who is braver and more kind than those Brahmin men surrounding her, works to deconstruct the hierarchies of the castes and focus on the unsung voices of the system.

The central argument of this essay is that *Samskara* not only condemns the caste system as a repressive order but also investigates the psychological and cultural mechanisms through which caste reproduces itself. Through an interaction with historical, cultural, and literary understandings of the novel, the study hopes to contribute towards further understanding of how caste continues to determine Indian society and how literature can be a viable means for social critique and social change. Literature here is not merely society's mirror but also a weapon of resistance and reflection

Placing *Samskara* within the context of the traditions of caste practice and reformist discourse, this essay attempts to close the gap between literary imagination and sociological reality. Caste is more a cultural code than a social construction, inscribed in language, behavior, and power, according to G. N. Devy (102). Ananthamurthy's book, in its complex tracing of interior conflict and communal stasis, maps the imperative of shattering these codes—not merely by law but by philosophic and moral re-evaluation.

Literature Review

U. R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara* (1965) has had decades of academic debate, ranging from literary review and religious philosophy to postcolonial and Dalit studies. Thick theme density of the novel, soaked in caste politics, ritual purity, and existential moral predicament, has drawn Indian and international scholars. This literature review considers how various scholarly results have aided in understanding caste and social hierarchies in the course of the history and cultural findings achieved by the novel.

Ananthamurthy and the Navya Movement

Samskara evolved from the Kannada literary tradition of Navya (new) thinking that sought to interpret Indian tradition in a postcolonial, critical, and rational way. Authors such as H. S. Shivaprakash and M. K. Naik characterize Ananthamurthy as one of the most important representative figures in this line of intellectual tradition. Naik portrays that "Navya writers were not iconoclasts in the spirit of iconoclasm; they wished to reconcile the demands of tradition and

modernity by confronting their tensions" (Naik 215).

In this type of schema, *Samskara* is regarded as a novel that captures the crisis of morality of modern Hindu intellectuals who, upon familiarization with the dharma tradition and rites, begin questioning the social injustice embedded in them. Shivaprakash describes Praneshacharya's pilgrimage as capturing the Navya quest for "internal revolution"—a phrase that replaces outer rebellion with inner change (Shivaprakash 89).

Caste, Ritual, and Social Hierarchies

The most straightforward critical approach to take towards *Samskara* is against the caste system itself. A number of scholars have written about the manner in which the novel exposes the degeneration of caste morals as models. Asha Varadharajan has claimed that the novel "unmasks the caste system as a structure of fear masquerading as moral authority" (Varadharajan 311). She tells us that the Brahmin freezing of Naranappa's death rituals marks not an observance of purity but a considerable anxiety over social loss of authority.

Similarly, D. R. Nagaraj, in his classic work *The Flaming Feet*, positions *Samskara* in an extremely wide tradition of Brahmin authors writing from inside the very same caste location.

Ananthamurthy, for Nagaraj, is a "renegade insider," a writer of novels who faults Brahminism from within by mocking its hypocrisies without abandoning Brahminism in toto (Nagaraj 133). This double vision allows the novel to condemn caste and escape didacticism.

Further, the feminist historian Uma Chakravarti connects patriarchy and domination of women's sexuality with caste. While reading *Samskara*, she notices the manner in which being a low-caste woman and sexual object double-marginalizes Chandri. She upsets the Brahminical preoccupation with purity but is the most ethically correct character of the novel (Chakravarti 47).

Ambedkarite and Dalit Readings

Ambedkarite critics have contended that *Samskara* condemns but does not adequately suffice in structural analysis or remedy. Others, including Kancha Ilaiah and Anand Teltumbde, have contended that the novel condemns the weakness of Brahminism but does not try hard enough to condemn the ideology of caste. Ilaiah, writing in *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, declares that "texts like *Samskara* demonstrate awareness but not accountability; they offer guilt but not justice" (Ilaiah 142).

But more is the perceptive reading of Gopal Guru. Guru contends that *Samskara* turns the axis of morality away from Brahminical ritualism towards subaltern ethics. For Guru, "It is not the Brahmin's failure that is tragic, but his belated realization that morality cannot be attained without equality" (Guru 96). This reading allows one to read *Samskara* not as an isolated critique, but as a transition novel opening to a broader ethics.

Existential and Philosophical Interpretations

Some critics have understood the philosophical underpinnings of the novel, specifically its relevance to existentialism. Ananthamurthy, after studying in England and coming into contact with Western philosophy, draws on ideas from Sartrean philosophy in the novel. Existential tension between commitment and liberty is manifested in Praneshacharya's identity crisis and religious crisis. A. N. Dwivedi contends that "Praneshacharya is a symbol of the modern man torn between inherited truths and lived realities" (Dwivedi 101).

The fundamental conflict of *Samskara*—self-conscience vs. obligation (dharma)—is a recollection of Kierkegaard's "leap of faith" philosophy, whereby the self is compelled to a moral decision without any guaranteed salvation. Therefore, it's not a condemnation of the caste, but a confirmation of humanity. Chakraborty reflects, "The real *Samskara* is not the ritual performed for the dead, but the inner purification of the living" (Chakraborty 54).

Postcolonial and Political Dimensions

Postcolonial scholars have also interpreted *Samskara* as a novel symbolizing post-independence India's socio-political collapse. Ashis Nandy, in his book on tradition and modernity, interprets *Samskara* as one of the novels involved in a larger cultural discourse over India's identity. For Nandy, "The novel dramatizes the inner civil war of a nation trying to be modern without rejecting its past" (Nandy 110).

The free-ended conclusion of the novel—a postcolonial feature—is resistant to closure and encourages the readers to wrestle with leftover issues relating to identity, ethics, and social transformation. Such fiction is necessary in postcolonial worlds, Partha Chatterjee contends, where "modernity must be made local, not just imitated" (Chatterjee 69).

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, cross-disciplinary research approach based on literary criticism, cultural analysis, and historical contextualization. Its overall objective is to critically analyze how U. R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara* mirrors, criticizes, and reimagines the India caste system, specifically that of a Brahmin community of South India. With the thematic richness of the novel and its profound exploration of moral philosophy, religious practice, and social structure, methodology draws on a variety of disparate scholarly approaches to provide a rich and multidimensional approach.

Textual and Literary Analysis

Subtly underlying this enquiry is close reading of *Samskara* that uses literary analysis as a methodology for untangling symbolism, characterization, thematic approach, and narrative construction. The book is not only a cultural relic but also a philosophical work questioning orthodox Hindu values and the morality of caste-based religion. Character development, particularly of Praneshacharya, is placed under the microscope, and how his inner conflict mirrors tensions in broader society is analyzed. Literary devices like irony, allegory, intertextuality, and stream of consciousness are analyzed to see how Ananthamurthy builds a critique of Brahminical hegemony (Ananthamurthy 35).

Additionally, due attention is given to the representation of ritual action, death, pollution, and transgression in the novel. Dialogue and narrative silence are examined to reveal sub-commentary about society. Actions between Brahmins and non-Brahmins, particularly how Chandri is treated, are also examined to emphasize the gendered nature of caste oppression.

Historical Contextualization

The history of *Samskara* is placed within the general historical period of caste in India. These involve allusions to classical Hindu scripture texts, for example, the *Manusmriti*, and contemporary anti-caste reformist literature by intellectuals such as B. R. Ambedkar and Jyotirao Phule. The historical part also goes back to the colonial influence on caste categorizations, i.e., that of Nicholas Dirks, whose view is that the British united caste more firmly by applying it in their administrative and ethnographic pursuits (Dirks 22).

Framing the novel historically, the research sheds light on how Ananthamurthy's criticism is historically situated but culturally particular. The *agrahara* in *Samskara* is neither a figural literary setting nor a historically evocative social organization but one of the Brahmin religious power as well as of moral decline during an era of social transformation (Srinivas 78). The 1960s when the novel was composed were a decisive point in Indian socio-political history with growing Dalit consciousness, socialist agitation, and collapse of Gandhian moral idealism. These threads of history are woven in to the literary critique to demonstrate how *Samskara* interacted and engaged its era.

Sociological and Cultural Theory

Sociological insights have been incorporated into this research in order to recognize caste as a lived and evolving system. M. N. Srinivas's "Sanskritization" theory, or how lower castes model upper-caste practices in pursuit of social mobility, is employed to examine characters like Naranappa and how he defies ritual authority (Srinivas 89). Bourdieu's "symbolic capital" and "habitus" can also be applied in examining how caste norms are internalized and enacted daily among characters.

G. N. Devy's cultural and linguistic framework is applied to examine the use of silence, speech, and moral rhetoric in upholding the periphery of caste. The research also applies Susie Tharu and K. Lalita's feminist readings to examine the entanglement of caste and gender in the lives of privileged yet marginalized women such as Chandri through their liminality in society (Tharu and Lalita 226).

Comparative and Interdisciplinary Perspectives

While *Samskara* is the primary text, this study draws comparative references to other caste-based narratives in Indian literature, such as Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* and Bama's *Karukku*, to situate Ananthamurthy's work within a larger

literary tradition of anti-caste writing. These texts help in understanding how different castes and subaltern voices experience and resist social hierarchies.

An interdisciplinary lens allows the research to bridge literature, history, religion, and politics. It treats Samskara not just as a fictional narrative but as a social document that reflects lived realities, spiritual dilemmas, and ideological shifts. This approach also recognizes that caste is not merely a sociological category but a deeply embedded cultural system that must be analyzed through both structural and subjective dimensions.

Data Sources and Citation

Primary data for this study includes the English translation of *Samskara* by A. K. Ramanujan (Oxford University Press, 2002). Secondary sources include books, scholarly journal articles, and research papers on Indian caste systems, religious orthodoxy, and literary criticism. All references are cited in MLA format, ensuring academic rigor and credibility.

Context Analysis: Historical and Cultural Framework of Caste in *Samskara*

History of the Caste System

Over centuries, this stratification firmed up into a more entrenched system named *jati*, with an enormous number of hereditary sub-castes and an additional fifth group of outcastes—later known as "untouchables"—beyond the *varna* system altogether (Ambedkar 32). The classic Hindu lawbook *Manusmriti* formalized many of the laws and taboos of the castes, laying down intricate rules of purity, pollution, occupation, and social interaction (Doniger and Smith 119).

This hierarchy of order was religious and social as a means of ensuring Brahminical control and ritual purity. It was not merely a social division, but metaphysical, dominating life from birth through death. The *agrahara* of *Samskara* is an extreme version of this arrangement—a Brahmin colony strictly controlled and where each move is predetermined according to *dharma* (duty), and infractions, such as those of Naranappa, are seen as threats to cosmic and social order (Ananthamurthy 8).

Nationalist and Postcolonial Reactions to Caste

By the early 20th century, caste had become a major concern in Indian political debate.

Reformers like Jyotirao Phule, Periyar, and above all Dr. B. R. Ambedkar launched bitter critiques of the system. Ambedkar, a Dalit himself and one of the prime framers of the Indian Constitution, reasoned that the caste was not just division of labor but division of laborers through religious violence and social ostracism (Ambedkar 49). In his classical book *Annihilation of Caste*, he argued that Hinduism, unlike other world religions, preserved social inequality in the guise of divine order (Ambedkar 65).

Constitutional equality after 1947 did not eradicate caste discrimination deeply entrenched in Indian society. Political freedom took little to rid centuries of social conditioning, especially in rural India where caste hierarchies still controlled access to land, education, and justice (Dirks 152). *Samskara*, published in 1965, has to be read against this background—a period when India was formally democratic and secular but still beset by feudal and ritualist mores. The murder of Naranappa in the novel may be read as metaphorical murder of traditional authority and a clash with modern issues of ethics and freedom.

Cultural Geography: The *Agrahara* as Microcosm

The action of the novel is placed against the canvas of a small *agrahara* of Karnataka—a classical Brahmin village which was an ideological and spiritual microcosm of orthodox Hindu society. An *agrahara* is not only a village, but a religious institution, where each and every one of the residents is expected to lead life as prescribed by codes in scriptures. The spatial organization of the *agrahara*—segregated, self-contained, and self-ruling—is an ideal metaphor for the exclusivist ideology of caste. It is a Brahminical cosmology of purity, ritual, and intellectual detachment from worldly matters elevated as the greatest virtues.

Here, Naranappa's transgression of meat-eating, drinking liquor, co-habitation with a woman of low caste (Chandri), and neglecting observance of Vedic rituals is an extremist deviation. His rebellion is existential, not egoistic; he is rejecting the very roots of caste morality. Actually, his presence in the *agrahara* is a physical and symbolic pollution, compelling the society to understand the frailty of its so-called moral asceticism (Ananthamurthy 17).

Religion, Ritual, and Morality in Indian Culture

The concentration on ritual in the novel—especially on the act of performing death rites—uncovers the role of religious practice in enforcing caste divisions. Death is a time of maximal spiritual moment in classical Hindu theology, and

unpaid or improper rites can cause upheaval in the soul of the deceased. But in Samskara, this holy moment is the moment of stuck indecision.

The failure of the Brahmins to agree on who should conduct the rites on Naranappa reveals the moral duplicity that lies behind their faith. They value ritual cleansing above devotion to spiritual obligation—i.e., caste has outweighed humaneness and compassion (Tharu and Lalita 225).

Praneshacharya, a character who is respected for his ascetic discipline and Vedic learning, is revealed as lacking a soul in spite of his scholarship. His ultimate sin—having sex with Chandri—is only a part of the desecration of the sacred-profane distinction upon which the cleanliness of caste is based. His failure is less a single personal lapse from virtue than a wholesale condemnation of a moral system that reduces morality to correctness of ritual at the expense of right action. This is in conformity with Ambedkar's contention that caste morality was a priori at variance with democratic and humanist values (Ambedkar 77).

Language, Power, and Cultural Violence

Language in Samskara is another instrument of cultural domination. The sheer use of Sanskrit and other liturgical idioms in the agrahara works to reinforce the epistemic power Brahmins exercise over knowledge and truth. Chandri, the simple Kannada-speaking lower-caste woman whose sorrow is both immediate and real, is socially below others even when she is full of true human compassion. The novel therefore contrasts Brahmin passionlessness with emotional truth of subaltern voices, thereby mourning prejudice against moral authority belonging to the scripturally literate (Devy 101).

As G. N. Devy illustrates, Indian caste is not only social but "a cultural grammar, a way of being, embedded in language, expression, and bodily behavior" (Devy 95). Ananthamurthy's text

discloses to what extent caste is written into daily life, not only by institution practice but also through widespread means of exclusion, silence, and shame.

Results

The close reading and contextual analysis of U. R. Ananthamurthy's Samskara show that the novel is a multi-valent critique of the caste system, laying bare its internal contradictions, moral deficiencies, and psychological toll to people and groups. Some of the key conclusions of the study, based both on literary data and theoretical consideration, are:

Exposing Caste-Based Hypocrisy

The strongest among the revelations of the analysis is that of moral and ritual hypocrisy within the Brahminical order. The novel shows that the caste system, although seeming to maintain dharma and purity, mainly acts as a way to defend privilege instead of virtue. The Brahmins in the agrahara will not cremate Naranappa out of moral and philosophic confusion, but because of fear—fear of ritual contamination, fear of attracting deviance from practice, and fear of attracting the price of Naranappa's revolt (Ananthamurthy 11). The reluctance of the Brahmins is a betrayal of the hollowness of their spiritual authority.

The caste system, as the novel presents it, is rigid but ultimately disintegrating. It breaks down when faced with real moral dilemmas of everyday life. It is a truth, and one that Ambedkar himself subscribed to, that "Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible" (Annihilation of Caste 50). Samskara illustrates this aphorism by showing a dogma-stagnant society.

Brahminical Decentralization of Power

The other important effect is the dissipation of Brahminical moral authority. But in Samskara, even the Brahmins themselves cannot agree on a habitual ritual requirement. Their appeal to Praneshacharya's edict and their inability to enforce it once he has departed indicate a breakdown of collective agency.

Even Praneshacharya, the most learned and respected among them, is shown as being spiritually conflicted and ethically lost. His final downfall—sleeping with Chandri—is a sin, but one of emancipation from the stern moral compulsion that has unmanned his humanity. His tale becomes an allegory for Brahmin identity in post-colonial India where scholarship and achievement cannot replace moral value or human empathy (Tharu and Lalita 227).

Re-centering of the Subaltern Voice

Though space for narrative is Brahmin in the context of talk and intellectual argument, emotional and moral space in the novel belongs to Chandri, who is lower-caste. Though ostracized socially, she alone has courage and honor. She weeps for Naranappa genuinely, accompanies his funeral, and later leaves the agrahara in quiet solemnity—neither seeking sanction nor fearing censure (Ananthamurthy 45).

The figure of Chandri subverts the caste hierarchy by presenting virtues of compassion, responsibility, and emotional intelligence—virtues that are not available from the Brahmins. As Gopal Guru argues, "The Dalit subject is not simply the oppressed, but the ethical subject who exposes the failure of upper-caste ethics" (Guru 92). Samskara thus substitutes conventional morality and allows the subaltern voice to be heard—not via reason, but via action. Dissolution of Sacred-Profane Dichotomy

The novel shatters the traditional Hindu polarity of sacred and profane upon which ideology of caste rests. Praneshacharya, whose existence is an existence of sacred texts, fasting ritual, and exegesis of scripture, is drawn to body, sensual, and polluting. His affair with Chandri, symbolized at first as falling from virtue, becomes a test of self-realization. He realizes that his previous moral stance was not out of sympathy or knowledge, but out of pride and fear (Ananthamurthy 63).

This perception is a negation of the belief that ritual can be the sole guarantee of morality. The novel proves that real morality grows out of empathy, experience, and personal transformation—and not out of imposing the precepts of caste. In this sense, Samskara agrees with Ambedkar's observation that "Ethics is the real basis of religion, not ritual" (Ambedkar 70).

Literature as Social Critique and Cultural Intervention

Finally, the study confirms that Samskara is more than a novella or religious fable but an act of cultural resistance. Through the medium of fiction, Ananthamurthy resists the originary myths of Indian society—myths used to justify inequality in the name of religion and purity. By resisting these myths, the novel is a strong critique of the existing order and adheres to a tradition of socially committed literature.

As G. N. Devy argues, "The function of literature in India must go beyond the aesthetic; it must participate in the reconstruction of the social imaginary" (Dey 106). Samskara does this by causing readers to recognize the paradox in their own system of values and to see alternatives from an ethical, equal, and introspective space.

Conclusion

U. R. Ananthamurthy's Samskara is a novelistic exploration of high texture on the origins of the caste system, moral hypocrisy, and socio-cultural consequences. In Praneshacharya and Brahmins of agrahara, the novel reveals how religious ritualism and social conservatism crumble when confronted with moral and existential questions. Very far from providing reductionist critique of caste, Samskara maps slowly the moral and psychological terrain negotiated by people trapped in hierarchies, custom, and belief.

One of the major conclusions that emerge from this study is that caste functions not just as a social and institutional order but as an internalized morality code deeply ingrained in the minds of the individuals over whom it exercises control. The dilemma of Praneshacharya is greater than one of externals—of whether or not to cremate Naranappa—a dilemma internal as well, of self, of conscience, of authenticity. His eventual departure from the village is a representation of both a breakdown of caste-based power and an early religious awakening—a rejection of family doctrine and a drift toward personal autonomy.

The novel's portrayal of Brahmin society serves to depict the weakness of a hierarchical society in which ritual dominates ethics. In their anxiety about pollution and decay, the Brahmins are incapable of responding with strength or compassion. Their malfunction is juxtaposed with the unspoken strength and integrity of Chandri, and suggests that virtue is outside the remit of castes. This reversal of moral authority is a fundamental challenge to Indian literary culture, deauthorizing immovable binary oppositions of filth and purity, profane and sacred, Brahmin and Shudra.

In its unobtrusive characters and symbolic richness, Samskara reveals the cultural logic underpinning caste hierarchies. It illustrates how the ritual purity doctrine can also be a tool of moral evasion rather than one of spiritual ascension. The book conveys as well the extreme sense of disaffiliation generated by caste, particularly among such persons as Praneshacharya, who are restrained by filial duty and pulled by emergent moral skepticism. His fall is not tragic in the classical sense but a break that must occur—a fissure in reality through which actual change could be achieved.

Additionally, the socio-religious and historical context of the novel itself is a microcosm of the general crisis of post-colonial India: harmonizing ancient tradition with the demands of modernity and justice. While India was struggling to

adopt democratic values, constitutional equality, and the vestiges of Brahminical superiority, Samskara telescoped these contradictions in a mini society. And then it transcends the novel—it is a political and philosophical treatise on having to recreate Indian society in terms of justice, compassion, and human person dignity.

The study confirms that literature is a tool of social intervention. Literature is an acceptable area of study for political science. Samskara is not so much a product of the time it was written nor a timeless work of literature that can, within the extent of surviving time, evoke chords in arguments of the times regarding caste, morality, and change. Although the novel never makes things easy or revolutionary plans, it still has the value of conveying to the reader some impression of the call and suffering of caste cruelties. To this degree, it requires intellectual examination but above all moral responsibility.

Briefly, Samskara is a critique and an appeal—a critique of a system of inequality masquerading as spiritual order, and an appeal to individual and collective consciousness. It establishes definitively that the eradication of caste must begin not merely through political agitations or social reform but through transforming consciousness. It is only when individuals begin to question the moral foundations of their culture-acquired identities that real change is able to sprout and propagate. For that purpose, Ananthamurthy's novel remains a breakthrough in challenging generations to transcend the samskaras which they inherit—and must build.

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