

Treatment of Dharma and Casteism in U.R. Ananthmurthy's *Samskara: A Rite for the Dead Man*



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Abstract

Religion plays an important role in Indian literature. Indian society also concentrates on two important aspects: casteism and dharma or salvation our ancients books like Vedas and Purans also advocates following dhrama in order to moksha. U.R. Ananthamurthy is Samskara concentrate on the dharma of Brahmins by portraying the character of Praneshacharya and Naranappa. The books also show the effect of practicing casteism by Brahmins. This paper concentrates on how praneshacharya are of the characters is appears to be a sinner while at the beginning of Samskara, he is considered a crest jewel Brahmin in Agrahara. Is he performing his dharma sincerely? Is there are caste bias experienced in Agrahara?

Keywords: Dhrama, Casteism, Salvation, Hinduism, Brahmin, Rituals.

Introduction

U.R. Ananthamurthy was a famous writer and critic in Kannada language and considered as one of the leading activists of the Navya Movement. He was awarded Jnanpith Award. For this contribution in Kannada literature, and also been awarded Padma Bhushan by the Government of India. He is famous for *Samakara*, *Bharthipura* and *Bhava*. Casteism, Untouchability, Dharma are the most important issues which are raised by Ananthamurthy through his works. *Samskara: A Rite For the Dead Man* is published in 1965 and it is made into a film in 1970. Originally It was written in Kannada and it was translated into English by A.K. Ramanujan. It is a religious novel based on the role of Dharma. The main plot of the novel is about a decayed Brahmin at Agrahara in Durvasapura. In Hindu Religious, a person performed many paths, towards salvation depending on his or her caste. If a person fulfills all rites of one's dharma, then one comes closer to liberation that is moksha. For a Brahmin, this means treating his life according to the four life stages: Brahmacharya (student), Grihastha (householder), Vanaprastha (retired) and Sanyasa (renunciate) and performing the Vedic rules. Dharma can be loosely translated to mean

"duty...religious...justice...
Law...ethics...principle...and
right" (Flood, 52).

Aim of the Study

The aim of this paper is point out two important aspects of Indian culture that is dharma and caste. It depicts the dogma and artificiality of Brahmins at the name of religion. How Praneshacharya and Naranappa perform their dharma in order to get moksha as well as exploitation of low caste people at the name of religion and culture will be the aim of this paper?

Review of Literature

"...Samskara means religious purificatory rites body, mind, and intellect of an individual so that he may become a full-fledged member of the community" (Maheswari, H. The philosophy of Swami Rama Tirtha).

"..Ananthamurthy has portrayed a brahmin civilization where the books, the laws, are buttressed by magic, and where a two elaborate social organization is quickened by intellect or creativity -except to the self in its climb to salvation" (Naipaul V.S. Indian a wounded Civilization).

"...Birth learning does not make one brahma. Good Conduct alone does. However learned a person may be he will not be a brahmin if he is slave to bad habits. Even though he may be he learned in the four

Vedas, A man of bad conduct falls to a lower class" (Rajagopalacharya, C. Mahabharata. Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan).

"...This novel is interpreted as a forceful of the decaying brahminical practices and people are open to modernism. I would like to emphasize that there is also another dimension to this novel. The focal point in the novel is not about practices followed by the orthodox Brahmins; their struggle to keep their practices untouched and always kept in high regards. It is rather a moral and spiritual journey of one through what might be called as a "Fortunate Fall" defines the theme of this novel" (Book Review #6-Smaskara by U.R. Ananthamurthy, <http://booksrevisit.blogspot.com/2014/03/Smaskaranov-elreview.html>).

In *Samskara*, the writer contradicts many possible means of salvation including that a Naranappa and the of a staunch Brahman Praneshacharya, at first glance a saint and sinner. However, it is not clear throughout the novel who, either of these two was actually performing his dharma. The novel portrays the conflict between two ultimate ways of life, the stoic and the hedonistic. The former is represented by a renowned and true Brahmin, Praneshacharya and latter by an anti-brahminical Brahmin Naranappa as he did not follows any rules of Brahmin society so he was outcasted by Brahmins from the community. He left his wife for Chandri, a low caste woman and started to eat meat and company with Muslim people. The novel starts with the death of Naranappa. Then a question arises, whether or not a Brahmin man in agrahara can perform the funeral rite for Naranappa. The whole story of *Samskara* revolves around the attempts to solve this complex problem. Being the wisest man of the community, Praneshacharya attempts to answer this riddle. He has studied the Vedas in Kashi. From here, Praneshcharya's spiritual journey begins. Here, Ananthamurthy makes it clear to the reader to analyses whether or not praneshacharya truly follow dharma in the ways he has lived his life. During this time, Chandri secretly cremates Naranappa's body. Now, the question of death-rites of Naranappa no longer exists and the reader pays attention to the issue of praneshacharya's dharma and a path to moksha. It is obvious that Praneshacharya has experienced Brahmacharya Ashram. His knowledge and education are mentioned every time throughout the novel. In this stage, a student is expected to abstain from physical pleasure and sexuality. The celibacy of this stage is essential to retain energy for Vedic study. Hinduism believes that semen contains energy that "Can be sublimated for a religious purpose" (Flood, 63). After completion of the study, a brahmin boy enters into the stage of Grihastha Ashrama. In this stage, a person is expected to marry and experiencing sexual desire. But Praneshacharya never truly crossed to this stage, because he married an invalid woman named, Bhagirathi. However, with Bhagirathi, Praneshcharya never able to fulfill that desire. On the other hand, he deliberately chooses Bhagirathi to marry in order to avoid sexual desire. He tries to move from the life of a student in

brahmacharya ashram to the life of a saint or a forest dweller in which a person abandon desire. Being a staunch brahmin, praneshacharya tries to become best by combining all four life stages. On the other hand, attempts to survive in the society among his relatives and other brahmins, while on the other hand, he tries to attain spirituality and separateness from this world, but he never able to give up the world at any stage in order to move to next stage of life.

Naranappa, on the other hand, experiences all kinds of worldly desires. He has an illicit relationship with a low-caste woman Chandri, does not follow. He starts to eat meat and drinks liquor. He does not take his responsibility as a householder and leaves his life for Chandri. He ignores the brahminic tradition completely. In this way, neither praneshcharya more naranappa completely followed their dharma. However, at the end of the novel, Praneshcharya felt repentance on his past mistakes and learn a lot from them. *Samskara*, raises the issues of religious, caste-system, culture and salvation. Caste system plays as dividing factor among humanity. It is a very crude and satanic system which dehumanizes human beings. One cannot gain fame in accordance with one's deeds and personal traits but every action will hearken to the caste that a person belongs to. Porter shows the impact of the caste system as:

Caste represents the most memorable comprehensive and successful Attempts ever made by an order to oppress humanity in its own interest It enactments never to be reunited, separating Aryans from other peoples By impossible barriers, permanently fixing their occupations, interest Associations, and aspirations. As men were born so they must remain. Their course of life was prescribed their places after death predetermined. (Porter, 25)

Title of the novel is also symbolic and it means moral and religious duties of a person. Maheshwari maintains: "Samskara means religious purificatory rites body, mind, and intellect of an individual so that he may become a full-fledged number of the community" (16). The novel raises the issues whether the brahmin really civilized and cultured enough to comprehend the real meaning of Brahminism. The transformation of Praneshacharya for orthodox brahmin to pragmatic realism is interesting to see the process of purification. After completing the study in kashi he returned to Durvasapura with the title of "crest jewel of Vedic learning" (Murthy, 6). He is famous for his prudence not only in Durvasapura but in all near about villages.

Infact, Murthy want to disclose the Brahmins of Agrahara misinterpret the scriptures according to their convenience. Our scripture maintains that one cannot become brahmin only by the virtue of his birth in brahmin family;

Birth a learning do not make one brahma. Good Conduct alone does. However learned a person may Be He will not be a brahmin if he is slave to bad habits. Even though

he may be he learned in the four Vedas, A man of bad conduct falls to a lower class. (Rajgopalacharya, 189).

Except for Praneshacharya, all other Brahmins in Durvasapura are narrow minded and selfish. When Chandri offers her jewelry to praneshacharya, most of the brahmins, who earlier reuses their relationship with naranappa, are compelled to think over the cremation of the dead body. The brahmins who are considered the highest caste, perform a ritual for common people called 'Samskara' for the purification of the soul but here the question arises-Are they themselves pure? Throughout *Samakara* we come to know that all brahmin people are secretly involved in anti-brahminical activities. On the other hand, in order to maintain the purity of their caste, Brahmins practice untouchability and avoid conversation with low-caste people. Even praneshacharya the wisest Brahmin of Agrahara worries about his purity, when she came to his house to inform him about Naranappa's death "Chandri was Naranappa's concubine. If the Acharya talked to her, he would be polluted, he would have to bath again before his meal" (Murthy, 4).

Brahmins believe that not only the low caste woman pollutes them but also the women of their own caste are pollution for them during periods. The experience of Brahman men at night with Bellie and Chandri in the novel invoked of bad Samakara's disguise for the fair sex. Here, the paradox is that Brahman can have sex with low caste women but cannot talk to her. Ananthamurthy, has successful depicted the Indian society which is full of caste prejudices and superstitions at the name of the religion V.S. Naipaul sums up Ananthamurthy's portrayal of Indian society in following words: "Ananthamurthy has portrayed a brahmin civilization where the books, the laws, are buttressed by magic, and where a two elaborate social organization is quickened by intellect or creativity -(except to the self in its climb to salvation)"(109).

Praneshacharya the best of brahminsmakes every effort to obey his dharma. He is the dharma of brahmin to cremate the dead body as soon as possible unless the dead person is not paid funeral rites properly then. Any person in their community could not eat food and pay their regular prayer. Praneshacharya says: "If there want it a way around the samskara's no one would ever become enlightened."(28). During the middle of the novel we see that praneshacharya himself develop a physical relationship with chandri (low caste women). Now, he sees himself a sinner. He feels repentance for his deed psychologically. He thinks that he has violated his 'dharma' now he has lost all his authority in society as well as religion. He compares himself with Naranappa and feels isolated from society. He

compares his fell as "a baby monkey losing hold of his grip on the mother's body" (Murthy, 75).

After that fell, Praneshacharya decides to obey his dharma for moksha not by becoming a part of society but by remaining isolated from it. He decides to leave agrahara after completing the funeral rite of his wife. He leaves for forest during this journey, he experiences the physical world around him. He recognizes the beauty of this physical world it is Chandri. When he reaches car-festival along with Putta, he realizes his real position in the world, but putting a glance at all the scenes at the festival he realizes "That it thou" (Murthy,121). Everything around him seems to be a part of him, "All that is You"(Murthy,121). But soon he came to realize that he is not only a part of good deeds of the world as well as the bad thing too. Here the experience his oneness with the world. He comes to realize that he is not only a part of the brahmin world but of the low caste world. He knows that he is not completely isolated from desire nor should be totally stranger to its fulfillment. At the end of the novel, Praneshacharya is still in dilemma. He does not reach any definite decision on what to do. He merely gets on the cart and left towards Durvasapur.

Conclusion

In short, being himself a brahmin U.R. Ananathamurthy is very sincere about the depiction of a brahmin, who treat other castes inhumanly in the veils of morality and religions. Brahmins are observed to dominate low caste people. Such kind of dogma, create obstacles in the progress of society. The portrayal of the character of Praneshacharya and Naranappa clearly depicts that it is not easy for a person to follow his dharma that leads a person to salvation. Praneshacharya realizes his mistake and felt repentance in the middle of the novel. All in all, a study on Samskara come to reveals that Praneshacharya was unable to fulfill is dharma because he never experiences any of four ashrams completely. At the beginning of the novel, he appears to be a saint but the further study points out that he was unable to distinguish from common men.

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