

U. R. Anantha Murthhy's *Samskara*: As an Ordeal for the Brahmin

Introduction

U.R. Anantha Murthty's 'Samskara' was first published in 1965 and it was made into a film in 1970. Samskara' is an important novel of the sixties. It is a religious novella about a decaying Brahmin colony in a Karnataka village, an allegory rich in realistic detail. Many social issues have been depicted by the novelist in the present novel. The prime issue is of class discrimination and injustice. Since, Vedic period, the Brahmin has been enjoying the high status and respect in the society across the India whereas the other class especially, lower caste people suffers from humiliation and injustice. The Brahmins are believed pure and scholars whereas the lower caste people are believed impure, untouched and illiterate. Here, in the present novel, the novelist through the character of Praneshacharya puts challenges to the so called scholar Brahmin. He enjoys high status in the village and among the other Brahmins also. He leaned Sanskrit form Kashi, town of learned Brahmins. All the other Brahmins come to him in order to seek the advice in critical situation and he advises them. His learning and knowledge have been challenged when the other Brahmins come to him to seek the advice regarding the burial of Naranappa.

Objectives of the Study

- (1) To study the novel in light of class discrimination
- (2) To understand the leading characters of the novel
- (3) To analyse the learnings of Praneshacharya as a Brahmin

Literature Review

Literature Review widens the ideas of the scholars. It shows the path for the further research in the same area or the field. The deep study of the past research helps the researchers to find the research gap. For the present study, recently published few selected research papers have been reviewed as below;

Dr. Rajneesh Pandey (2014) argues that both writers; U. R. Anantha Murthhy and Mahasweta Devi represent the miserable life of the subordinates of the society. The core of concern of them is to give voice to those who are not unvoiced. The condition these marginalized strata of society is miserable and unbearable. Both writers have portrayed

the infectious power policy of the people of the superior hierarchy of Hindu caste system that has exploited the marginal and tribal peoples in many ways in the name of religion, caste and so called established socio-cultural practices.

Muneer Ahmad Wani (2017) believed that Indian social and cultural life has two important aspects: religion and caste. Many critics and scholars of caste and religion have tried to demonstrate that the barrier is created, both socially and religiously, in Indian life, and that Hinduism is attributed to castectism. The caste system is a plague for Indian society that hinders all our claims to rule the world in the 21st century. This system simply exploits women and the lower castes in many ways on behalf of the so-called socio-cultural and religious institutions. The purpose of the paper was to discover how the upper classes and elites exploit the class of people trampled religiously, socially and economically.

Mahajan (2018) argued that the paper refers to the conflict i.e. Brahmin v/s low caste which has been prevalent since the time immemorial in Indian society. The Indian society has been largely structured in a very complex way, based on religious ideologies. The roots of such a system have been deeply rooted in the Indian psyche. U.R. Ananthamurthy's chief concern in Samskara is to give a direct reference to religion which sounds like sensitive and controversial topic. Ananthamurthy brings before his readers an individual in this novel, with boundaries of caste- living according to tough rules of community and finely a sickly sweet life, restricted by customs and rules of society, the loading of tradition now overwhelming a caste which is unable to adapt.

Parvathy. P (2019) argued that U.R. Ananthamurthy's Samskara draws a picture of a decaying Brahmin agrahara in the village of Durvasapura in Karnataka. The agrahara is famed after its great ascetic Praneshacharya, who is a much sought after scholar. The conflict in the novel arises when Praneshacharya is unable to find a solution to the samskara of Naranappa, a member of the agrahara. Since Naranappa had no children, a member of the agrahara had to do the last rites. But everyone was hesitant since Naranappa had not lived the life of a Brahmin. The paper traces the different meanings of the word 'samskara' through the life of Praneshacharya. The title is a pointer to the different phases of transformation that Praneshacharya undergoes.

Suniel Kumar and M. Narendra (2019) discussed the controversial debate interpreted as a decline of Bramhanical's orthodoxies, and people are open to the thought of modernism. "Samskara" - (rite of initiation, ritual, preparation, transformations, as well as the rites of death) has received the same number of praise and much criticism. The novel presents the double standards of the patriarchate, breaking Brahman's claims and attacking his superstitious credibility. The protagonist Praneshacharya dominates the Vedic scriptures and returns with the title "Jewel of Vedic Learning" of Banaras with penance and discipline. Narayanappa, another character from the epicenter, is a spotted man who denounces non- Bramhanical rituals in the same village of Durvasapura. Acharya represents a spiritual school (purity) where, like Narayanappa, a material school (pollution). Both are presented as leaves against each other, and are not identically affected by the traditions of their social environment.

Samskara: As an Ordeal

Samskara, the novel sets in Durvasapura agrahara, a Brahmin colony in Karnataka. The agrahara is famous for Praneshacharya, “the great ascetic, Crest Jewel of Vedic Learning” (17) who is looked upon by everyone within and out the agrahara with utmost respect and awe. On the other hand, agrahara is known by the villain Naranappa. The two characters are leaves with each other. While Praneshacharya is all that should be an ideal Brahmin, Naranappa is demonic according to the standards of Agrahara scholars. The novel begins with the death of Naranappa and subsequent calamities like palague, that strike agrahara. The conflict arises when the question of who, if there is any, must perform samskara, here the rite of death, of the man who did not live his life as a Brahmin.

According to the Hindu mythology, a person has to pass through the sixteen *Sanskar* and the last Sanskar is known as Antim Sanskar, means the cremation. With the Antim Sanskar, the cycle of the man is over. It is believed that if the Antim Sanskar is not performed perfectly, the soul of the death does not get salvation and wanders in the Pret Yoni, becomes ghost or witch. So, the Antim Sanskar is a ritual of thirteen days after the burial of the dead body. The grave problem of the Antim Sankar arises in the beginning of the novel and lasts unto the end of the novel. With the curse of the novel, many incidents take place which throw lights upon the class and caste discrimination. Naranappa’s burial has become an ordeal for the scholar Brahmin, Praneshacharya.

Everything that was prohibited in the agrahara attracted Naranappa. He drank alcohol, became friends with Muslims, fished in the sacred pond, He ate meat and even lived with a woman from the lower caste. He abandoned his legally married wife and lived the life of a libertine. He lived among the Brahmins, with his head high, often making them jealous of the life he lives. The novel describes the Brahmins as greedy, materialistic and selfish. Naranappa has constantly exposed his samskara (here, refinement of the mind) or its absence. The morale of agrahara resorts to Praneshacharya for advice when they meet the appropriate samskara dilemma (last rites) for Naranappa. Thus begins the transformation, a samskara for Praneshacharya.

Praneshacharya is the leader of the Durvasapura agrahara. He is in his late thirties. He was a great Sanskrit scholar and got 15 lace shawls and silver platters by winning arguments on religious topics with other super-pundits. He learned Sanskrit from Kashi and knew the Vedas and the scriptures thoroughly. He enjoys his high status in the village among the other Brahmins. The Brahmins come to him to seek the advice for the critical cases and he advises them. His learning is challenged when the issue of Naranappa’s burial comes to him.

Praneshacharya and Naranappa are foils to each other. Praneshacharya is everything that Naranappa is not. Sanskrit learning and an ascetic life were Praneshacharya’s samskara (way of life). By marrying an invalid, Praneshacharya has even turned his marriage into a penance. But Naranappa questioned everything that was deemed normal by the standards of the agrahara. Naranappa had once lectured Praneshacharya on the hypocrisy exhibited by the so-called scholars of Vedas and Puranas. His words shook Praneshacharya for a moment and made him think that what Naranappa says

might be true. Naranappa challenged the very philosophy behind Praneshacharya's life. He asks:

Now, you explicate it, Acharya-re- didn't the Achari himself corrupt the Brahminism of the place? Did he or didn't he? That's why our elders always said: read the Vedas, read the Puranas, but don't try to interpret them. Acharya-re, you are the one who's studied in Kashi- you tell me, who ruined brahminism?...You read those lush sexy Puranas, but you preach a life of barrenness. But my words, they say what they mean: if I say sleep with a woman, it means to sleep with a woman; if I say eat fish, it means eat fish. Can I give you Brahmins a piece of advice, Acharya-re? Push those sickly wives of yours into the river. Be like the sage of your holy legends- get hold of a fish-scented fisherwoman who can cook you fish-soup, and go to sleep in her arms. And if you don't experience God when you wake up, my name isn't Naranappa (25-26).

Naranappa's words lingered in the Acharya's mind for so long that even when he sat for prayers, he "couldn't still the waves in his mind" (26). Praneshacharya cannot sleep during the whole night for the same matter. He preaches the society but when the issue of the burial of Naranappa comes to him he cannot give the advice to the Brahmins. He tries to seek the answer from the book of Manu and also referred Vedas and Puranas but cannot get the answer. At last he decides to seek the solution and answer from the God Hanuman and he visits the temple and prays for the long time but he neither gets any sign nor answer and returns disappointed. When he returns from the temple, he meets Chandri, the low caste lady, the mistress of Naranappa. He attracts towards her and unconsciously makes love with her. Thus, he cannot control over him and makes his soul impure.

Thus, a learned and scholar Brahmin cannot make the solution of the Antim Sanskar of Naranappa and he hates himself for that and leaves the village left his possession there.

Conclusion

Anantha Murthy through the present novel *Samskara*, throws lights on many social issues. Praneshacharya, the great learned scholar cannot make the solution of the burial of Naranappa. All his learning and knowledge is challenged by the Brahmins and ultimately he leaves the village and cannot bear this situation. Thus, *Samskara*, the novel is really an ordeal for the so called learned Brahmins.

References:

Primary Source

Ananthamurthy, U.R. *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (trans.) A.K. Ramanujan (1978) New Delhi: OUP, 1989.

Secondary Source

Kumar, Suniel and Narendra, M. "Purity And Pollution In Ananthamurthy's Novel: *Samskara*." *International Journal Of English Language, Literature And Translation Studies*, vol. VI (1), Jan. – March, 2019, pp. 242-244.

Mahajan. Ankush. "Caste Prejudices in U.R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man*." *Language in India*, Oct. 2018, pp. 110-116.

Pandey, Dr. Rajneesh. "U. R. Anantha Murthhy's *Samskara* and Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*: An Attempt to Voice the Unvoiced." *An International Refereed e-Journal of Literary Explorations*, vol. II (3), Aug., 2014, pp. 612-619.

Parvathy, P. "A Rite for a Living Man: A Study of U.R. Anantha Murthy's Novel: *Samskara*." *IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature*, vol. VII (2), Feb. 2019, pp. 63-66.

Wani, Muneer Ahmad. "Superiority and Social Injustice in U.R. Anantha Murthy's *Samaskara*." *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, vol. V (4), Nov. 2017, pp. 792-795.

Shah Maulika Dilipbhai, Contact No.: 9054647357,

Mail Id: maulikashah53@gmail.com

Sahityasetu.co.in