

## **The Caste Question and Praneshacharya's Dilemma in Ananthamurthy's *Samskara***

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### **Abstract**

*The novel Samskara is seen as a criticism of Hinduism which strikes at the heart of brahmin dogma. Owing perhaps to his own sociological position of being rooted in the Madhava brahmin tradition of rural Karnataka, U.R. Ananthamurthy was grappling to come to terms with his own identity. Then, writing itself becomes a tool for interrogating the oppressive and highly graded practices of Brahminism in the reformist climate of the 1930s and 1940s.*

**Key Words:** *Caste system , discriminatory practices, religion, orthodoxy, gender*

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## **Introduction**

Ananthamurthy's novel *Samskara* has been closely debated and discussed ever since its publication in 1965. It was translated into English by A.K. Ramanujan in 1976. The novel is seen as a criticism of Hinduism which strikes at the heart of brahmin dogma. Owing perhaps to his own sociological position of being rooted in the Madhava brahmin tradition of rural Karnataka, Ananthamurthy was grappling to come to terms with his own identity. Then, writing itself becomes a tool for interrogating the oppressive and highly graded practices of Brahminism in the reformist climate of the 1930s and 1940s.

Interestingly, Murthy chooses to write in Kannada which has a literary history of more than thousand years despite his exposure to western education and modes of discourse such as Modernism, Existentialism and Marxism, and his constant involvement in English literature. Murthy addresses this issue in his paper 'Search for an identity- A viewpoint of a Kannada writer' where he rejects the contemporary Indian writers, "celebratory attitude towards Indian traditionalism" (107) as they being anchored in their social identities and Gandhian idealism which according to Murthy is problematic since such an ideological stance obliterates the possibilities of experimenting with new forms and techniques; essential for engaging with discourses of immediate concern. In a position of heterodoxy, Murthy adopts a strategy of using experimental mode of modernism to interrogate existential conflicts in the culture-specific-social-reality of the tradition-bound rural society of Karnataka. The following paper will attempt to delineate the issues pertaining to caste, gender and the quest for self-hood in *Samskara's* intertwined narrative.

The graded and hierarchical structuring of the society informs the theological background of the text and also assumes the centrality in the novel. Brahmins drive their superiority in the social ladder from the Hindu canonical texts where the classification of society into different *varnas* (sections) is based on the maxim of *purusukta* of *Rig Veda* which propounds that brahmins were born from the mouth of the primal being and hence they were superior and venerable. The brahmins are also called *dvija* or twice born, a theory propagated by the metanarratives of Sanskrit literature for attaining the ideological epistemological canonization, more so, in the period following post-Buddhism. As a result, they are venerable and above the ordinary masses who do not take the second birth. The dogma of pre-destination also plays an integral role in the acceptance of such manipulation by lower castes as they tend to get deluded by the glib philosophical stance of the brahmins. And, in order to ensure their superiority the caste division was made enclosed by strict adherence to

a code of conduct amplified by codes, customs and rituals which were aided largely by steadfast sustenance to the notions of purity and pollution through endogamy and prohibition of inter-dining. This notion of purity and pollution leads to untouchability by compartmentalizing segments of the society into social, cultural and physical subjugation endorsed by the textual culture. Rajagopal Parthasarthy in his essay 'The Passing of the Brahmin Tradition' argues that, "Caste is a fact of existence in secular India, and untouchability, though illegal, has not disappeared [...]" and propounds that "Durvasapura is a microcosm of brahmin India" (Parthasarthy 192).

In a Karnataka village, the street constitutes a social unit which is usually populated by a single caste. A street comprising of brahmin houses is called an *agrahara*, which is located in a fictional village Durvasapura, where the action in the novel takes place, is a place devoid of any spontaneity and growth as throughout the novel we can observe that no marriage and birth takes place over here. The *agrahara* is dominated by the Madhva brahmin population, who under their veneer of divine knowledge are driven by greed and superstition. Paradoxically, the ruling class of brahmins, being in a position of most privileged and revered, would never endeavor to vanguard the process of social reformation and allow social mobilization as it may pose a threat to their sovereignty. Subsequently, Murthy's socialist leanings allow him to critique a codified, rigid community of Brahmins, the protagonist Jagannatha of Murthy's another novel *Bharathipura* (1973) like Murthy, endeavors to annihilate the caste system, without which the dream of doing away with the social barriers which divide the society and ensuring equality and dignified life is nothing but a mere figment of imagination. In his regard, Murthy's choice of Praneshacharya, the spiritual leader of brahmins, who rises above the rest to initiate a contestation of what constitutes brahminism is interesting.

According to Hindu belief system, on the basis of pre-ordained *dharma*, life can be divided into four ashrams or stages of, namely, *brahmacharya*, *grihastha*, *vanaprastha*, and *sanyasa* which are reserved for acquiring knowledge, performing household duties, spiritual pursuits and withdrawal from worldly duties respectively. Subsequently, the precepts of *Veda* and *Smriti* establish the householder to be superior of them all as he supports the other three. The scheme of four stages or *ashramas* upholds the *grihastha* (a householder's life) to be the best of all the stages as the householder practices the three duties: *dharma* (rightful duties), *artha* (earning income) and *kama* (enjoys carnal pleasures). The proper following of these duties enables the householder to attain salvation, that is escape from the end-less cycle of birth and death. In this regard, Praneshacharya's forsaking his household duties and

pursue a self-enforced celibacy is at once exhibits his excessive zeal for purity as well as not keeping in tune with the traditional Hindu way of life which he himself follows scrupulously. Praneshacharya's excessive zeal for purity is evident in the beginning when we find:

Chandri was Naranappa's concubine. If Acharya talked to her he would be polluted; he would have to bathe again before his meal. (2)

On the thematic level, *Samskara*, can also be read as a novel informed by the spiritual and existential crisis for Praneshacharya triggered by the central question in the novel as to who will perform the last rites of iconoclast Naranappa. The novel opens with the death of Naranappa, a brahmin of the Durvasapura agrahara, who had challenged the traditions from within the community as he consorted with Muslims, prostitutes and low-caste men and women. Throughout his life, he was always at odds with the orthodox brahmins and also succeeds in luring some of the Acharaya's disciples within his fold. Naranappa is a *Lokayatika* (Lokayata, a materialist school, which upholds that the only source of knowledge is sensory experience) who defies every norm and it is plausible that he represents the opposition to brahmin orthodoxy in the reformist climate of the 1930s and 40s when he tells Praneshacharya, "Your texts and rites don't work anymore. The Congress party is coming to power; you'll have to open the temples to all outcastes..." (20).

Naranappa had even dared the brahmins of agrahara to excommunicate him, and he will "become a Muslim" (13). But after his conversion to Islam, the brahmins of the Agrahara would have been forced to leave in a bid to escape pollution or in other words to maintain their purity. So, the brahmins somehow had to endure Naranappa's hedonist ways. And even in his death, he has come back to hound them, when the brahmins at the agrahara are confronted with an unprecedented dilemma- as to who will perform the last rites or 'Samskara' of the dead man? Should a non-practicing brahmin be treated as a brahmin in death? And since Naranappa consorted with Chandri, an outcaste, he stands polluted in the brahmin's eyes. And as the agrahara is populated by tradition bound brahmins which means that life cannot return to normalcy before the cremation of the dead man's body. Parthasarthy argues in his paper 'The Passing of the Brahmin Tradition', one potent possibility for the problem:

It is not uncommon for the corpses to be disposed of in the sea or river if the person dies of an epidemic or has no survivors to perform the funeral rites[...]. This possibility for the dispose of Naranappa's corpse is not explored by the brahmins. (Parthasarthy 193)

But since, Naranappa was a non-conformist to the brahminical way of life so anyone performing it would be contaminated by the act. The corpse of Naranappa by extension hints at the decaying structures of brahminical world. The question of performing the last rites, becomes an act of revelation, as we gain insight into the characters of the brahmins of the agrahara exposing their superficiality, envy, greed and deceit while still lingering to the notions of purity and orthodoxy. The brahmins though contemptuous of Naranappa's deviant ways of life are nonetheless jealous of his forbidden pleasures and when Chandri offers them gold ornaments for performing the last rites they are readily seen claiming their will.

Meenakshi Mukherjee suggests in *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (1985) that Hinduism has two different faces:

One indicates the rigours of social practice, of the rules of purity/pollution binary and the power hierarchies they sustain. The other face is liberation for it liberates the individual through its myths- here the great epics and legends which the Hindu considers as sacred rescue him from the severe codes. ( Mukherjee, 175)

In this regard, it is interesting to note brahmin's lecherously gazing Chandri. Though Chandri is an untouchable and polluting in brahminical terms, yet she is being desired and objectified, "Like Matsyagandhi the fisher woman in the Ravi varma print hung up in Durgabhata's bedroom [...]. The same eyes and nose: no wonder Naranappa threw away the worship stone for her [...]" (8-9). So it can be argued that, by invoking the *Matsyagandhi* episode from *Mahabharata*, where sage Parashar violates an untouchable woman under the cloud cover in a boat. The epic reference is used here, to vindicate and legitimize the objectification of Chandri, a lower caste woman. Similarly, in Belli's case too we can find the same process of legitimizing the subaltern exploitation by the upper caste brahmins when we learn, "Shripati had taken Belli at the river when she had come to get water, only after he had heard the Acharya speak of *Shakuntala's* beauty" (39). The whole act is so subtly described to give it an impression of a natural act, where the claims to brahminhood are temporarily suspended for exploitation. Hence, the classical texts are invoked not just to exoticize but also to eroticize the body of the subaltern, which becomes a symbolic battleground for the brahmins to conquer and lay their claim to; hegemonic act exercised by the brahmins for their sustenance since the *Vedic* times. But what seems problematic is, even Murthy, in his trenchant critique in the face of a decadent system does not extend his sympathetic concern for the lower caste woman, more so, in case of Belli as she is projected as "ripe ears of corn bending before the falling rain" (40) and "alright for sleeping with; she was no good for talk"

(41). She passively accepts her status quo when she remarks, "Why should rats and mice come to our poor huts? Nothing there to eat. Our huts aren't like brahmin houses" (40). Mukherjee's observation in this regard is insightful:

The easy availability of lower caste women may also have imbued them with a greater erotic aura in the male imagination. (Mukherjee 72)

Perhaps, calling attention towards the issue of what qualifies as tradition could possibly also be a case of legitimizing and according sanctity to the vested interests of the brahmins through such portrayals. On the other hand, Smartas, supposedly lower caste brahmins or outcastes within brahminism were "unhappy over their friend's death, but quite happy they were getting a chance to cremate a high caste brahmin" (19). Such attitude is symptomatic of the Smartas psychological subordination which is inflicted upon them by the caste hierarchies.

At this point, it be worth mentioning briefly another Kannada novel, *Choma's Drum or Chomana Dudi* (1933) by K.Shivaram Karanth, the author of the novel, instead of getting swept by the Gandhian ideology, places that idealism in the real world of social sordidness experienced by the untouchables in the 1930's, in order to check the validity and weight they carry in a real life context. Such a narrative discourse informed by the agency of establishing relationship between the downtrodden aspirations and social and economic exploitation at the hands of those wielding power in the name of custom, add authenticity arising from its concrete specificity.

Choma, a widower, is the protagonist of the novel, belonging to the sub-caste of Holeyas: the lowliest of the untouchables, who nurses in himself a dream to "wield the plough in his own or a rented field and cut a proud figure. Dreaming of that great day and to prepare himself for it he had been rearing two oxen" (Karanth, 18). Though Sankappayya, his landlord, is not dismissive of the idea outright but he too fails to break the taboo when he confesses, "It is not my wish to deny you a field. But I do not want to do anything which others have never done" (Karanth 110). Choma's drum represents the releasing point of his repressed emotions, be it of ecstasy or sorrow or hopes or failures. In his moving account of an untouchables's plight, Karanth, avoids overt sentimentalization or lofty idealism as the protagonist, Choma, is portrayed as a drunkard, who spends his evenings drinking "his toddy" (Karanth, 16). What it signifies is the fact that though he is not an ideal character but by no means it implies that he should be bereft of his humanly rights which the social hierarchy of caste system insists on. Subsequently, in order to repay Choma's debts, Chaniya and Guruva, his two sons, depart for the plantation, which in reality is a place where no one had been ever able to clear a debt by working in a plantation, hinting at the economic exploitation of the untouchables and interestingly the plantation

is owned by the Christians, but the social hierarchical order is observed there as “the employees in higher grades were from upper castes” (Karanth 57).

What ensues is a series of misfortunes befalling on Choma’s head, as first Guruva elopes with a Christian girl, then, Chaniya succumbs to his fever. Later, Neela gets drowned in the river, and a brahmin boy who wanted to save him is stopped as the contact with an untouchable would amount to pollution. This misfortune makes Choma realize, “what it was to be an untouchable [...]” (Karanth 111). It compels him to question his faith as “since his own ancestral god had failed him, what was the harm in accepting the padre’s god?”(Karanth 113).

However, Belli’s compromises at the plantation also point up the issue of untouchables being exploited, if not on social grounds then on economic grounds. But as mentioned earlier, the girl with whom Guruva marries belongs to Christian community, but her family members are also coolies at the plantation underscores the fact that change in faith doesn’t necessarily warrant a change in fortune as Choma wavers in his resolve, “Could one escape death or sorrow or other vicissitudes of life by being a Christian? These were common to all human beings” (Karanth 118). A social and economic problem finds it hard to be resolved through the exigencies of the faith as Choma declares, “God! Children! Whose children? Are they God’s children? If they are my children let them dance. If they are God’s, let them die!” (Karanth 77). Perhaps the reference to God’s children is to bring attention to Mahatma Gandhi giving the untouchables euphemism of ‘Harijan’, in an attempt to bring them within the Hindu folds only to be later discarded by B.R. Ambedkar and other Dalit intellectuals as patronizing. Consequently, the dream of taking to farming which he clings on to till the end, consumes him suggesting the manner in which casteism can impinge on human aspirations and desires.

In *Samskara*, for Praneshacharya, critic Suresh Raval argues, the crisis becomes an occasion which fashions his “moving away from an unreflective relation to his rigid tradition and its stultifying implications for his society to a greater critical self-consciousness” (Raval 118). Consequently, it allows him to interrogate his agencies of thought process and its constitutive mechanisms. Subsequently, “the Crest-Jewel of Vedic Learning” (6), Praneshacharya, fails to find any answer concerning the dilemma confronting his society in the religious scriptures. Praneshacharya’s anxiety leads him to the temple of Maruti in the middle of the forest where he waits in vain, for a flower to fall from the Maruti’s idol, a sign of divine intervention. Upon Failing, when he decides to return he meets Chandri, the outcaste mistress of the deceased, who all along had been waiting for the

Praneshacharya's declaration of the god's decision. As Chandri is an outcaste, she is looked down upon and by other brahmins who though desire her but publically despise her, see Praneshacharya as the only ray of hope. But the turn of events unfold in such a manner that Praneshacharya undergoes transformation in the hands of Chandri who happens to touch him unintentionally. They both embrace each other. The act of transgression is inextricably connected to Praneshacharya's failure to find any solution to the problem which threatens to subsume the entire agrahara in its wake. Ramanujan, in his Afterword, opines that having forsaken *kama* (lust) from his household, he had to find it outside his customary space, in the forest; his sense of *dharma* had to be undone and remade by it. This act of transgression also leads to Praneshacharya's rebirth in metaphorical terms:

It felt as though he'd turned over and fallen into his childhood, lying in his mother's lap and finding rest there after great fatigue. (67)

More importantly, the act is enacted in a space located outside the static and codified world order of agrahara where time is at a standstill and the smell of wet earth and grass in the forest are allegorically juxtaposed - an area of naturalness, a place of natural growth of feelings where Praneshacharya becomes more sensitive to his needs as, "Acharya's hunger, so far unconscious, suddenly rages, and he cried out like a child in distress" (63). Paradoxically, the release of repressed desires in Praneshacharya culminates in the loss of innocence which leads to the transformation from a child to man and from a mistress to a mother. With Chandri he experiences something which was denied to him with his invalid wife. He contemplates that Naranappa had a more fulfilling life than him and realizes that breaking the convention and taboos does not necessarily violate nature, and the fear is the tool through which culture exercises its oppression.

The sexual copulation of Praneshacharya and Chandri is not presented in negative terms but instead it stands for regeneration and positivity. Praneshacharya even attempts to vindicate his union with Chandri by giving it textual sanction by referring to chance encounters between the saints and *apsaras* of the classical age which were not bound by social taboos; the ascetic-erotic dichotomy. As a result of Praneshacharya's newly born sensitivity, "for the first time his eyes were beginning to see the beautiful and the ugly" (76). Ironically, it is Chandri, an outcaste who initiates Praneshacharya into the acknowledgement of his forsaken *kama-dharma* and awareness of the rigid and archaic traditions, is a marginalized figure who is outside the folds of the society. She is a prostitute, and because she is of a lower caste she cannot lay claim to her place in agrahara. Chandri's presence hints to the custom of Devadasis, the former temple-dancers, who also fulfilled the carnal desires

of the priests, also by the virtue of her profession she is paradoxically, outside the hegemonical society and yet recognized by it. Like the river Tunga, her presence is felt in the village but remains unfettered. “Tunga, river that doesn’t dry, doesn’t tire” (44), the constantly flowing water thus negated the stasis that had engulfed Durvasapura. By juxtaposing Praneshacharya and Chandri, the priest and the shudra, the novel foregrounds the ideological and sociological underpinnings of the author. Murthy was influenced by Karl Marx, Mahatama Gandhi and Ram Manohar Lohia and in this regard the modern intellectual per se is exemplified by Praneshacharya and Chandri, socially lower in caste hierarchy poses a challenge to the existing order and calls for a revolution for social transformation.

Interestingly, the portrayal of lower caste women, namely, Chandri, Belli, Padmavati is marked by potent sexuality which points towards the patriarchal and hegemonical construct of the brahminical worldview where ostensibly patriarchy works within the caste system and both are aided and sustained with the help of the other. However, that potent sexuality quite explicit in lower caste women is absent in the description of brahmin women who are depicted as frigid and dwarfish braids as opposed to life-affirming sensuality accorded to lower caste women:

The colour of earth, fertile, ready for seed, warmed by an early sun (37). Subsequently, judging a woman’s worth on the basis of her sexuality from a phallogocentric lens is reductive and problematic as women have a much more significant role to play in the larger arena of life. And though the lower caste women’s touch or even their sight is considered polluting and yet pursuing physical pleasures with them under the cover of darkness is acceptable; exemplified through the experiences of Chandri and Belli with brahmin men as mentioned earlier. Consequently, Naranappa’s understanding of women as one suitable for male libido and conducting a phallogocentric critique of brahmin ideologies and practices, fails to provide an alternative for women’s emancipation in *Samskara*.

Interestingly, the upper caste brahmin women, even though, are themselves victims of patriarchy, refer to Chandri as, “This whore, this seducing witch! [...] if she had not given him potions why should he push aside his own kinswoman and throw all the ancestral gold and jewels on the neck of this evil witch!” (7) and when Anusuya warns, “if any low caste man is allowed to pick up his dead body, I’ll die of shame” (32), clearly, brahmin women too have internalized the caste and patriarchal subordination and exploitation where the seductiveness of the lower caste is cursed but the upper caste male goes undetected. Since the brahmin women too are enmeshed in notions of purity and pollution, ostensibly, they make the subaltern stand outside the doorsteps for some part of rotten food:

Chinni begged standing at a distance: please ayya throw a morsel for my mouth, ayya. Sitadevi went in, brought some betel leaf, threw them at her. (58)

The brutality of the caste system makes an individual, a subaltern, literally stand outside the folds of humanity. Consequently, these untouchables were compelled to live on the fringes of the village, far away from the upper castes and outside the folds of the Hindu religion. Ironically, the social and religious significance of the tasks performed by the untouchables made them an indispensable part of the social and cultural order.

In this respect, the portrayal of Chandri it can be argued, is an attempt on the part of the author to contest the depiction of the subaltern woman as a passive victim lacking agency. Chandri subverts her perceived role and is also empowered by it and her desire for upward mobility can be comprehended in this light. Chandri, it can be argued, represents the material conditions imperative for self-realization. In the beginning, Praneshacharya, had resolved to reform Naranappa, who had proved to be posing challenges to his own brahminism. Praneshacharya, defends the decision to not excommunicate Naranappa from the community on the grounds of compassion but he reproaches himself by saying, "that's self-deception. That wasn't pure pity" (47). He is aware that, "if such compassion hadn't worked in him, how could he have tended an ailing wife through the years, uncomplaining, and never once falling for other woman?" (48). And it is this self-perceptive-image which gets transformed in his union with Chandri:

I slept with Chandri. I felt disgust with my wife. I drank coffee in a common shop in a fair. I went to see a cock-fight. I lusted after Padmavati (132).

Praneshacharya doesn't feel disgusted or indulges into any self-reproach by these thoughts as he acknowledges them as his reality. The transgressive act becomes a tool for Praneshacharya to question the protocols of religiosity immersed within the entire brahminical tradition as he contemplates:

Not a repentance for sins committed. Just plain truth [...]. The truth of my inner life. Therefore this is my decision (132).

This realization towards the end is important as he indulges into guilt and remorse immediately after the act of transgression and breaking the caste taboos initially, and he finds himself incapable of coming to terms with his state of pollution with other brahmins of agrahara. Chandri, despised and spurned by brahmins, manages to get the Naranappa's corpse cremated by a Muslim friend. Meanwhile, plague looms over agrahara compelling the brahmins to leave the village one after the other, and death of Praneshacharya's wife, Bhagirathi, provides him a sense of

freedom from obligation. Bhagirathi's very name is a synonym for river Ganges, which stands for, in Hinduistic outlook, life and salvation. As a humanly figure, Bhagirathi is emblematic of the systematic oppression meted out to women within the *varanashrama* theory as we learn that Praneshacharya chooses her as she could possibly be the altar for achieving the spiritual salvation as he believes it to be "Lord's ordeal for him, waiting to test him whether he had the strength to live and act by non-attachment" (75), thus underscoring the utilitarian outlook towards women that functions to perform various male centric purposes. Possibly, allegorically, Bhagirathi represents the sterile and dysfunctional tradition of *agrahara* mapped within her crippled body, waiting for rejuvenation and revitalization. And in cremating Bhagirathi's body, symbolically, Praneshacharya, liberates her from the confines of custom. Subsequently, after performing the last rites of his wife, Praneshacharya, sets himself on an indefinite journey for shaping his remaining life. Seen from this perspective, Praneshacharya's quest can also be read as an attempt on his part to get his crippled Bhagirathi or by extension, his displaced consciousness, to revive and provide that imperative flux to life for attaining the realized self-hood.

The indefinite journey, it can be argued, in allegorical terms leads Praneshacharya to the interior landscape of his mind. Overwhelmed by the fear of being recognized, he meets Putta, a half-caste who attaches himself to Praneshacharya on his journey even after several attempts on the part of Praneshacharya to disassociate himself from him:

Putta of the Maleras struck to Praneshacharya like a sin of the past (106). Subsequently, Praneshacharya develops paternal feelings for Putta who remains amicable with him. Putta spurs Praneshacharya to break all the taboos one after another, and introduces him into the world beyond the confines of caste and brahminical orthodoxy: the world epitomized by the material and carnal pleasures informed by violence represented through cockfight, buying and selling that Padmavati indulges in, lies and deceits and succeeds in dismantling Praneshacharya's sacred ritual space. So much so that Praneshacharya begins to contemplate:

What price your resolve to join Chandri and live with her? If you must, do it fully; if you let go, let go utterly. That's the only way to go beyond the play of opposites, that's the way of liberation from fear. (113)

Gradually, Praneshacharya realizes that both worlds are imperative to the experiences of being, "one part of lust is tenderness, the other part a demoniac will" (117). When Praneshacharya is recognized as the Great Pundit from Durvasapura during his visit to the temple, he decides to flee away from there, and decides to go

back towards his old agrahara on the evening of the fourth day. His experiences culminate in much anticipated celebration of crisis of conscience which makes him realize that in a ritualized existence what is usually lost is the man's simple relationship with God. His attempt at going back to Durvasapura can be seen as an attempt to reconcile the irreconcilables and only way of overcoming the present fear is to take responsibility for performing Naranappa's last rites and to admit to the brahmins of the Durvasapura about his altered reality.

As we have seen, the death of Naranappa, provides an occasion for an alternate way of life; a life free from the codified existence. It allows Praneshacharya to interrogate and question the concepts of caste and *dharma*. But for Naranappa's death the things would have remained the same in agrahara, even when he was alive, he was the one who challenged the status quo of brahmin orthodoxy. The iconoclast Naranappa, mocks the contradictions in what Praneshacharya preaches. In a way Naranappa represents everything that is repressed and denied outlet in Praneshacharya. Mahabala, the Smarta brahmin, is a fellow disciple of Praneshacharya in Kashi, who like Naranappa, lives against the theological codes for instance cohabiting a prostitute. Putta, who aptly slips into the different roles: of a riddle master, a procurer, a gambler, is not beset by any moral dilemma. Hence, all three characters, Putta, Mahabala and Naranappa in some way or the other define Praneshacharya through their embodying the polarities and opposition. They all compel Praneshacharya to question the inhuman discriminatory practices and social codes which orthodox brahminism has come to represent.

### **Conclusion**

The open ending of the novel, *Samskara*, affirms the commitment of the novel's form to modernism despite dealing with a traditional content and subjectivity. Ananthamurthy explores how the differences of caste, class and gender function through social institutions and the manner in which they affect human interactions and relationships. In addition to it, the fictional representation of an Indian dilemma premised on traditional Indian culture and ethos in a literary mode that is western. Ramanjun in his Afterword notes that it is a movement and not a closure. The novel ends with Praneshacharya still on the road, but his redeeming factor is that though he cannot resolve the contradictions between stability and flux and between tradition and modernity, he becomes aware of them and his fall on the social plane becomes a tool, therefore, to find his real self.

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