

## Sacrilege in UR Ananthamurthy's *Samsaka* - A Study

**Miss. BHARATI H GANI**

Research Scholar

Department of English, KSAWU, Vijayapura, Karnataka

**Prof. P. KANNAN**

Research Guide

Department of English, KSAWU, Vijayapura, Karnataka

### Abstract

U.R Ananthamurthy, Professor of English, has written many novels in Kannada. He is a major writer in the New Literature in Kannada. His *Samskara* written in Kannada in 1965 and translated by A.K Ramanujan into English in 1976 has created attraction as well as repulsion in the public. It received attraction and repulsion owing to the sacrilege depicted in the narrative. There are two kinds of sacrilege depicted in the novel. The first kind refers to character of Naranappa and his associates. The second kind refers to the actions of Praneacharya. The death of Naranappa occupies the centre stage of the plot. The last rite for the corpse of Naranappa gives rise to complications and conflicts. The former takes place before the death of Naranappa and the latter after the death of Naranappa. There are several instances that affect the popular and established beliefs about the Hindu temples, Hindu Gods, Hindu norms, Hindu tradition and Hindu way of life. This paper attempts to study who commit the acts of sacrilege; how they are committed and why they are committed.

**Keywords:** Naranappa, Praneshacharaya, Chndri, Sacrilege, Attraction, Repulsion, Temple, Hindu belief, Hindu norms, Brahminic, Hindu Tradition Complication, Caste, Purity, Impurity, Sacred, Profane.

### Introduction

U.R Ananthmurthy was a reputed teacher of English at the University of Mysore. Besides his career as an academician, he has also written poems, short stories and novels in Kannada and most of them have translated into English and other languages. He is a recipient several honours and awards like Jnanapeeta (1994); Padma Bhusahan (1998); Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award (1983); Award for Literary Achievement (1994); Ganakrishti Award (2002). His major novels are *Samskara*, *Divya*, *Bhava*, *Bharathipura*. Being part of Kannada Navya Literature, he has dealt with the old controversial subjects in the new and contemporary perspective. In this paper, *Samskara A Rite for a Dead Man* is undertaken for the study to trace elements of sacrilege.

### Plot

The plot of the novel revolves around the conflicts regarding the last rites to the corpse of Naranappa as per the Brahminic tradition. The conflict arises because of Naranappa's profane acts. Naranappa is a Brahmin. He

has brought a low caste woman and lived with her until his death. He has caught the fish devoted to god in the pond of the Ganpathy temple and eaten it with his friends. He has consumed liquor. All these acts of Naranappa are considered profane and sacrilegious because the norms of Brahmanism prohibit such acts. His associate is Shripati. He is also Brahmin but pursues a liaison with a low caste woman for his gratification. If these are the sacrilegious acts from heterodox Brahmins, the orthodox Brahmin and authority of Vedas, Praneacharya commits adultery without being able to control his sensuous temptation. The acts of the latter also amount to committing a sacrilege as they are violating the Brahminic principles and norms. When the cremation is delayed by the quarrel among the Brahmins, Chandri completes the rites with the help of the local Muslims. This also needs to be seen as a sacrilege in the context of Brahmin rituals or traditions.

### Sacrilege in *Samskara*

As stated earlier, there are three types of sacrilege committed in the novel namely sacrilege committed by

anti-Brahmin Brahmins; by Vedic Brahmin and by a Dalit woman. In order to understand the context of the sacrileges in the novel, some concepts related to caste systems and Hinduism/ Brahmanism need to be taken into consideration. According to the myth of caste system by Manu, there are four *varnas* called Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra respectively. Lord Brahma is considered the creator. The people of these four *varnas* are created from the body of Lord Brahma. The *Brahmins* are born from the head/mouth; the *Kshatriyas* from the shoulder; *Vaisya* from the stomach/ thigh; and the *Sudras* from the feet of Lord Brahma. Their accusations were also based on their birth. The occupation of Brahmins was teacher/priesthood; of Kshatriyas warrior; of Vaisyas merchant/ farmer; and of *Sudra* servant to the three aforesaid *varnas*. These *varnas* were transformed into *jatis*/castes later. The fifth caste called 'Untouchables' was added afterwards. The observation of P.K. Kar is worthwhile to be illustrated regarding the caste system:

"Caste is a community as it is based on kinship and primordial affinity... The caste system is a segmental division of society. It is hereditary. There are regular caste councils to regulate and control the conduct of all members. Traditionally it is the hierarchical arrangement of castes according to different degrees of dominance and privileges. The Brahmins in India stand at the apex of the social ladder. A Brahmin is entitled to whatever exists in the world. The world is property and others live on his charity. In the caste hierarchy, the Brahmins are followed by the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. At the bottom are Sudras. Along with the untouchables, the sudras constitute the downtrodden section of the Hindu society". [CS, 39]

The caste system in India is not just a division of labours or occupations. It is characterised by the division of labourers with the inherent structural discrimination. The hierarchy is in the descending order. The Brahmins are considered highest and other castes like Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Sudras and Untouchables are placed one below another in the downward order. Thus the so called *avarnas*/untouchables are placed at the bottom of the order although socially the Sudras and Untouchables are treated same.

The norm related to purity and impurity in Hinduism which results in untouchables requires to be understood to study the treatment of sacrilege in *Samskara*. On the basis of birth, the castes are classified as touchable and untouchable. The first three *varnas* from the top are regarded as touchable and the last two as untouchable. It is based on the theory of purity in Hinduism about which Rameshwari Devi notes as follows:

For lower castes, impurity is permanent. Lower caste members suffer a kind of inherited defilement. The Barber deals with bodily wastes – hair and nail clipping; he washes the male corpses and his wife washes female corpses of higher caste *jajmans* (clients). The Washermen washes dirty clothing, stained by bodily excretions. The Sweeper removes human filth; he eats from pots spoiled by birth and death pollution pervading a *jajman's* house, he wears clothing in which a *jajman* died; he eats left-over food that has touched the mouths of others, or meat from dead animals. So, degrees of defilement relate to the ranks in a caste hierarchy. The Barber is less defiled than the Washerman, less defiled than the Sweeper, and so on. The idea of pollution-contagion is universal in Hindu India. Anything touched by a polluted person spreads the pollution to others who touch it. [RRRPMP, 157-58]

Naranappa is a wealthy Brahmin in Durvasapura Agrahara. He belongs to Madhwa sect in the Brahmin caste. He has died. While he was alive, he has violated all the norms of Brahmanism and purity. The first violation is to be living with a low caste woman. Although polygamy is permitted in all the five castes and their multiple sub-castes including the Brahmin caste, illegal and unauthorised cohabitation of a Brahmin man with a low caste woman is not admissible and acceptable according to the norm of Brahminism. Naranappa has challenged the norms of Brahmins and is openly recognised as heterodox Brahmin in Durvasapura Agrahara.

The author shows Naranappa's act of bringing a low caste woman Chandri from Kundapura as follows:

"For Durgabhatta, this was an internal issue. He sat unconcerned in his place, ogling Chandri. For the first time his connoisseur eyes had the chance to appraise

this precious object which did not normally stir out of the house, this choice object that Naranappa brought from Kundapura”[*Samskara*,9] Besides, he is also reported to be responsible for the death of his wife owing to his immoral character which Lakshmana narrates as : He went and mixed up with some woman. My wife’s sister became hysterical and died; he didn’t even come to the funeral rites.” [Samskara, 8]

The idols of various gods and goddesses are worshiped in the temples and under the trees in the Hindu religious culture. The idols are perceived as the replica of the gods and goddesses by the Hindus. They follow the norms cleanliness and other pious regulations in the worship of the idols of the deities. It is considered sacrilegious to disrespect such idols in any form. Yet Naranappa indulges in insulting the beliefs in such norms by throwing the idol of god into a river causing sacrilege to the Hindu spiritual beliefs which is illustrated here thus: “He comes to the river in full view of all the Brahmins and takes holy stone that we’ve worshipped for generations and throws it in the water and spits after it!”[*Samskara*, 8]

The temples are very significant in the Hindu culture. The deity called Ganpathi/Ganesh is regarded as a god of good omen and all spiritual functions begin with a prayer to Lord Ganpathy. There used to be a pond or tank in which the fish is left by the devotees. They are not meant for consumption. The visitors shall feed them some grains. Naranappa shows disrespect to the god by harvesting the fish and eating it with his non-Hindu friends. This is an act of sacrilege which is illustrated as follows:

And then those fish in the temple-pond. For generations they were dedicated to Lord Ganesha. People believe that anyone who catches the sacred fish will vomit blood and die. But this outcaste scoundrel didn't care two hoots, he got together his Muslim gang, dynamited the tank and killed off god's own fish. Now even low caste folk go there and fish. The rascal undermined all good Brahmin influence on the others, he saw to it.[*Samskara*,11]

Naranappa fails to adhere to the food norms of Brahmins. The Brahmins are restricted to the vegetarian food and prohibited from the consumption of meat and

liquor. It is reported that he has eaten the forbidden meat which implies beef and drunk alcohol in the company of Muslim friends. Lakshmana who is his co-brother exposes his violation of the prescribed food like this: “he, wilfully, before our very eyes, bring Muslims over and eat and drink forbidden things in the wide open yond yard” [*Samskara*, 8] The *varna* and character of the people are determined by the food of their consumption in the Hindu religion. The deciding factor purity and impurity is also based on the food culture about which Rajeshwari Devi explains thus:

Foods are related to the three *guns*: ‘Cool food’ (milk, clarified butter, most fruits, and vegetables) make *sattvagun*. ‘Hot food’ (meat, eggs, onions, and mangoes) make *rajogun*. Spoiled or stale foods make *tamogun*, as do beef and alcohol. ... The left-over food of humans makes *tamogun*. ... The different proportion of the *guns* in different *jatis* relates to caste diet, work and life-styles, marriage patterns, and inter-caste transactions. Different castes have different diets. Vegetarian castes would be more *sattvagun*; non-vegetarian, more *rajogun*. Those which drink alcohol and eat beef, and left-over and spoiled food would be more *tamogun*. The work of Brahmins makes *sattvagun*; that of scavengers, tanners, prostitutes, work connected with animal impulses of humans, makes *tamogun*. Occupations that maintain life in the ordinary world such as agriculturalists, herders, artisans, and traders make *rajogun* in their adherents. [RRRPMP,164]

In the light of the above description of three *guns* based on the food used by them, the act of Naranappa eating fish, meat and drinking liquor is not in accordance with the norms of Brahmins or *sattvagun*. He loses his status of *sattvagun*. He is stooped to the *tamogun* although he is a Brahmin by birth. Thus his behaviour amounts to committing sacrilege.

Naranappa is said to have spoilt a few more Brahmins in encouraging and helping them defile the code of Brahmanism. The Brahmins are prohibited by their regulation to join the army. It is so because their purity cannot be maintained in the army where non-vegetarian food and weapons are used. The occupation in army becomes under the category of not *sattvagun* but under

*rajogun*. So joining army is a taboo in the Brahmin life. But Naranappa has motivated Shyama to enrol himself in the army:

"By sheer power of example, he'd even stolen Praneshacharya's own wards and Sanskrit pupils-Garuda's son Shyama, Lakshmana's son-in-law Shripati. Naranappa had incited Shyama to run away from home and join the army". [Samskara,11]

Shripati is another Brahmin in the group of heterodox. It is Naranappa who is said to have misled him in his way of life. He is a disciple of Praneshacharya and attends his discourses on epics in his house. On one occasion, he is sensually provoked by his narration of Shakuntala and seeks the gratification with Belli who is a low caste woman:

One day he got into a description of Kalidasa's heroine, Shakuntala, in some detail. This young man listened. He was already disgusted with his wife, because the stupid girl complained to her mother that he came to her bed only to pinch her at night. But now the young man felt the Achari's description in his own body, felt a whole female grow inside him, a fire burn in his loins-you know what it means, don't you, Acharya-re?-He couldn't stand it, he leapt from the Achari's verandah and ran. He couldn't bear to hear any more, he ran straight to plunge his heat in the cold water of the river. Luckily, an outcaste woman was bathing there, in the moonlight. Luckily, too, she wasn't wearing too much, all the limbs and parts he craved to see were right before his eyes. She certainly was the fish-scented fisherwoman type, the type your great sage fell for. He fantasised she was the Shakuntala of the Achari's description and this pure brahmin youth made love to her right there with the moon for witness. [Samskara,23]

On another occasion, when the plague is spreading and his parents have died due to plague, Shripati visits her and indulges in courtship. It is depicted thus:

Shripati stepped softly and clapped his hands a little outside Belli's hut. Belli, her hair washed in warm water, wearing only a piece below her waist, naked above, waves of hair pouring over her back and face-came quietly out of her hut, and moved into the bushes in the distance. Shripati waited behind a tree

till she disappeared, looked this way and that to make sure no one else was about, then went to the bush where Belli crouched. He turned his flashlight on and off and embraced her, panting hard. 'Ayya, please, not today' Belli had never talked like that. Shripati was amazed, but disregarded her words and undid her waistcloth. [Samskara,34]

The act of Shripati is immoral not only in the context of Brahminism or Hinduism but in the context of humanism. Belli's father and mother have died due to the plague and their dead bodies are lying in their hut. Belli pleads with him not to force her for the copulation in that tragic situation. Yet Shripati turns a deaf ear to her pleadings and makes love to her rather by force. The reason accounted for his illicit affair with Belli is that his wife does not sleep with him. His wife has complained that he goes to her in the night only to pinch her thighs and thus she avoids sleeping with him. However, all these acts become sacrilegious towards the Hinduism which prescribes purity in all respects. Shripati pollutes the very codes of Hinduism.

Sacrilege by the Orthodox Brahmins: Praneshacharya is hailed as the *guru* for all the Brahmins in Durvasapura. He has studied the Vedas in Kashi and has been adhering to the norms of Vedic norms both in thoughts and deeds. He has married Bhagirathi and has been faithful to her although she is invalid physically without being able to give him the conjugal pleasure even once. Yet he has been looking after her in all respects. Although his wife asks him to marry another woman, he refuses in citing the words of Lord Krishna that one should do what could be done without the thought of reward or fruit. Such a pure priest does commit sacrilege in losing his control and sleeps with Chandri in the forest as follows:

She leaned her head on his thigh and embraced his legs. Overwhelmed with tender feeling, filled with pity at this brahmin who had perhaps never known the pleasure of woman, helpless at her thought that there was no one but compassion, bewildered by the right hold of a young female not his for her in the *agrahara* - overcome, she wept. Praneshacharya, full bent forward to bless her with his hands. His bending hand felt hot breath, her warm tears; his hair rose in a thrill

of tenderness at he caressed her loosened hair. The Sanskrit formula of blessing st stuck in his throat. As his hand played on her hair, Chandri's intense doubled. She held his hands tightly and stood up and she pressed m to her breasts now beating away like a pair of doves. Touching full breasts he had never touched, Praneshacharya felt As in a dream, he pressed them. As the strength in his legs ebbing, Chandri sat the Acharya down, holding him close. The Acharya's hunger, so far unconscious, suddenly raged, and he cried at like a child in distress, 'Amma!' Chandri leaned him against her breasts, took the plantains out of her lap, peeled them and fed them him. Then she took off her sari, spread it on the ground, and lay on hugging Praneshacharya close to her, weeping, flowing in helpless tears. [Samskara, 55]

Whatever reasons given for the justification of his act of seducing Chandri are not only absurd but also biased and illogical. The primary reason is that he has not enjoyed the conjugal pleasure with his wife even once on account of her ill-health. The beauty of Chandri is irresistible. He behaved like a child to a mother. They are all unacceptable. He is the village chief priest. He has been teaching the Vedas and Upanishads to the Brahmins of Durvasapura since many years. The dead boy of Naranappa is getting rotten in his house. Chandri is in mourning on the death of her so called husband. Under these circumstances, it is unimaginable that the priest and Chandri copulate. It is shown that Chandri cherishes it as a fortune to beget a child from such a renowned priest. It should be rather inferred as a sacrilege.

There are two more instances of sacrilege Praneshacharya is committing. After the death of his wife and her cremation, he leaves Durvasapura and arrives in Kundapura. A man called Putta identifies him and conducts to the house of Padmavati. She receives only the quality and high class customers in her house and sleeps with them. Putta has taken him and introduced him to her. Padmavati feels impressed that a great priest and Vedic scholar has visited her:

"She bent forward to put down the platter, the top of her sari sliding, breasts thrust forward, eyes heavy

with a look of pleading. A string of fire in his chest. His eyes looked on, fiery." [Samskara, 105].

Praneshacharya can not claim innocence about his visit to the house of Padmavati. Although Putta has taken him there, the rise of his sensuous longing is evident in his thoughts and behaviour. The very temptation towards her needs to be viewed as a sacrilege. He has also fantasised the beauty of Belli. He longs for the mud coloured bosom of Belli whom Shripati has been already wooing.

He also commits another sacrilege. In the Hindu and Brahmin culture, the family in which death has occurred are treated polluted for a certain period of thirteen days. It is called intense mourning period. The family members are untouched during this time. They should not participate in any rituals or ceremonies. But Praneshacharya participates in the chariot festival in Kundapura stealthily. It is also an act of sacrilege.

The caste Hindus or Brahmins have desire for one or things unethically. While some of them are greedy for the wealth of Naranappa, some male Brahmins have lust towards Chandri and Belli. These characteristics are also of sacrilege as such things are prohibited in the Hindu ideals.

There is third act of sacrilege also in Chandri's cremation of Naranappa. There are two groups among the relatives of Naranappa in Durvasapura aghara. One group argues that Naranappa has committed violation of Brahmanic norms and codes and thus he is no longer a Brahmin. He is not entitled for the Brahminic ritual of cremation or the last rites. The other group argues that he has been not excommunicated formally by the society of Brahmins and thus he remains a Brahmin. So he should be given the last rites as per the tradition. Praneshacharya who is unable to take a decision goes to the Maruti temple to draw the flower. He is not given any verdict there also.

### Conclusion

The study of *Samskara* exposes that there acts of sacrilege committed tow groups namely the heterodox Brahmins and Orthodox Brahmins. Naranappa, Shripati, Shyama belong to the first group. Naranappa is a self declared rebel against the Brahmins and their culture. He violates the most important codes of conduct prescribed in the Vedas and scriptures. He pursues extramarital affairs

with a low caste woman. He throws the idol of God into a river. A similar event is depicted in *Bharathipura* also. He has caught the temple fish and devoured it with his Muslim friends. It amounts to defiling and violation the norms of god and worship in the Brahmin spiritualism. He has eaten forbidden meat and consumed liquor which also amounts to committing sacrilege. Shyama joins army on the motivation of Naranappa. Shripati has extramarital liaison with Belli. Their acts affect and cause down fall to the age-old principles of Hinduism.

The other group consists of Orthodox Brahmins like Praneshcharaya, Lakshaman and the other Brahmins. Preneshacharay courtship with Chandri who is already a partner of Naranappa when his dead body still remains not cremated. He indulges in such an unethical act when he

returns from the Maruti temple in the forest. He keeps on fantasising the thighs and breasts of Chandri and Belly. He visits a brothel in Kundapura. He participates in the Chariot festival during the morning time. The other Brahmins are embodied with the greed for wealth or lust for Chandri. All these factor lead to an inference that sacrilege is the predominant theme in *Samskara*.

### References

1. Ananthamurthy, UR.
2. Devi, Rajeshwari. *Religion, Rites, and Rituals Puranic and Modern Perspectives*, Jaipur: Mangal Deep Publications, 2006.
3. Kar, P.K. *Conflict & Society*, New Delhi: Dominant Publishers and Distributors, 2003.