

The Unheard Voices: Female Subalternity and Agency in Select Indian Novels “Samskara” By U.R. Anantha Murthy

Dr. A. Santha Devi¹, Dr. E. Justin Ruben², Dr. P. Santhi³, Dr. V. Arthy⁴

¹Assistant Professor (Sl.Gr), Department of Humanities, CIT

²Assistant Professor (Sl.Gr), Department of Humanities, CIT

³Professor & Head, Department of Humanities, CIT

⁴Associate Professor, Department of Humanities, CIT

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1306000211>

Received: 10 June 2026; Accepted: 15 June 2026; Published: 30 June 2026

ABSTRACT

U.R. Ananthamurthy (1932–2014) was a key figure in modern Indian writing. He significantly shaped Kannada and Indian writing with his important novel *Samskara*. As a leader of the *Navya* (modernist) movement in India, Ananthamurthy used fiction not only for storytelling but also to explore India's complex ties with tradition, modernity, and morality. The current study explores the expressive dimensions of Indian culture as manifested in his book *Samskara*, highlighting how the Kannada language—rich with cultural idioms, philosophical concepts, and oral tradition—is used to dramatize ethical dilemmas rooted in caste, ritual, and personal identity. Praneshacharya's spiritual crisis in *Samskara* prompts critical reflection on complex concepts through real-life experiences. The book possesses a local rhythm, reflecting colloquial speech patterns while employing modern narrative techniques. U.R. Ananthamurthy's broader intellectual and political life—including his role as a critic of religious orthodoxy and nationalist ideologies, and his active engagement in academia and cultural institutions—further contextualizes *Samskara* as a work of resistance and reform. This study expands the commentary on the central philosophical and moral tensions within U.R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara*, a novel that interrogates the foundational aspects of Indian religious and social life.

Keywords

Samskara, Kannada literature, Indian modernism, *Navya*, ritual and morality, dharma, expressive culture, caste, postcolonial India.

INTRODUCTION

Literature in its broadest sense is a single body of written works, which has a creative aesthetic merit blended with perpetual value. It is considered to be an art form, and the word is derived from a Latin word ‘Literature’ which means handwritten. Literature can be classified according to its narrative genre. Literature is a creative writing of familiar artistic value. Life teaches many things when people come under various situations. The two main objectives of literature are to delight and instruct. These two objectives bring social relevance to literature. Society is a group of individuals with shared beliefs, common ties, and general laws. Humans are members of society; they cannot live in isolation without following customs, traditions, beliefs, and rituals. Literature represents the social structure of mankind.

Joseph Conrad says,

‘Fiction is history

Human history

Or is nothing?’

Indian fiction is a later development in literature. In earlier writings it looks like letters, social, cultural, and political tracts. The development of the Indian press also contributed to the rise of journalistic prose. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the morning star of Indian Renaissance, brought some changes in society through his writings. Indian Renaissance paved the path for the development of Indian English Fiction. India was the fountain head of story-telling in ancient days. Fiction in the modern sense is the offering of the impact of Western literature on the Indian minds.

U.R. Anantha Murthy, a well-known writer, has been associated with modern literature as Poet, Critic, Short Story writer and novelist in Kannada. He is a renowned Kannada novelist. His several fictional works have been renowned internationally. He is quite prominent among modern Kannada writers in his bold depiction of cumbersome superstitions. His other novel Bharathipura has also become a classic, like Samskara. His other novels are Bhava and Awsthe. He has published more than fourteen books in Kannada. His Samskara (1965) has been translated into English. It was first published in English in the year 1976. It has also been translated into many other Indian and European languages. The mind has adapted into an award-winning film by prominent Kannada writer and film maker Girish Karnad in 1970. Samskara gained a wider readership after it was translated into English in 1976 by the renowned poet-cum-translator, A.K. Ramanujan in his 'Translator's Note', Ramanujan writes: 'I have tried to make this translation self-contained, faithful yet readable.'

The novel was written when U.R. Ananthamurthy was in England and experiencing a socio-spiritual conflict. Religion and passion are intertwined here. They are tied together in ways that shape the whole story. Samskara is a novel which portrays a decaying Brahmin community of the South Indian Village. The central theme of the novel is whether religion is merely to be upheld by the rituals, legends and myths are to be practiced. The novel deals with a contemporary and unconventional set of values. In this novel, sex and other human instincts become useful instruments in the hands of the author to expose social evils. Violence against women manifesting itself in various forms such as rape, molestation, stripping, eve-teasing, abducting and kidnapping, trafficking of women, forced prostitution, domestic abuse, wife battering, harassment in the workplace and cruelties to them in various physical, emotional and psychological forms has been a global phenomenon leading to their oppression, suppression, repression, victimization, and marginalization. U.R. Ananthamurthy in his novel Samskara ironically exposes the assumed moral superiority of the upper caste Brahmins who claim to be the Samskari ones caste-wise but are actually depraved as human beings, by showing the low caste harlot Chandri as a kind-hearted human being as compared to the Brahmin men and women, but who, being the daughter of a prostitute has to continue suffering the plight of the women of her class 'ever auspicious, daily-wedded, the one without widowhood,' entertaining men perpetually. U.R. Ananthamurthy's novels like Samskara, Bharathipura, and Bhava portray the social set up with too many curses and stigma that trail the Indian women. They are dubbed as 'immoral women' without anybody caring to go back to the causes which forced them to transact their bodies and lead a pathetic life of silent suffering and humiliation every day and night. These narratives of the silenced women also voice the hypocrisy and immorality of the custodians of the protection of morality of their nation, such as the religious and political leaders, police and men in power, who should be curbing the fresh trade, are, in fact the virtual owners and supporters of these brothels. These silenced women have a dream to lead a respectable family life of love and self-esteem, but most of them do not want to go back to their families, to which they once belonged because they know their families will not receive them.

The word 'caste' is used in everyday life to distinguish one person from another. The Bhagavad Gita tries to make sense of caste system through Guna Karma and Dharma concepts. Like actions matching your role in society. The understanding of the caste system which permeates and controls social, economic, political and religious life in India is absolutely vital while interpreting the Indian reality. It is true that social and racial differences in some form or the other persist in other parts of the world, but the kind of caste system found in India is characterized more by its exact characteristic features like the complexity, elaboration, and rigidity than by such features which share with caste structures elsewhere. Dalits spent centuries stuck outside regular society doing dirty jobs for pennies. Cleaning latrines. Sweeping streets. Landless labor jobs that barely kept families fed let alone educated. They survived in Hindu villages and therefore did not have the advantage of terrestrial seclusion like tribal people. They were forced to serve all classes of people and perform all the "dirty" jobs. They were also barred from entering society in every sense, prohibited from wearing decent clothing and ornaments, and were considered untouchable. Blunt says 'At all times, the Brahmin priesthood has endeavored to keep them segregated, not only from the society, but from the Hindu religion and the Hindu ceremonies; they were not

allowed to hear, much less study the Vedas; they must not enter the temples; they must carry on all ceremonies without using the mantras and no Brahmin would carry out any domestic ceremony for them. Thus, it can be concluded that Dalits suffered oppression at the hands of the upper castes for centuries; their economic condition remained ruthless, they were educationally backward and they lacked political skills to hold their own against the upper caste leadership of the country. Their low status came from systems stacked against them everywhere - money issues, political power gaps, cultural norms working together against them.

In 'Realism and Reality: The Novel and the Society in India', Meenakshi Mukherjee opines that 'the significance of Samskara as a modern Indian novel lies precisely in the author's attempt to exploit the tension between two world views. Here, the identity determined by Karma and Varma is shown in collision with the new awareness of the self, partly conditioned by existential thinking'.

Women have a variety of roles in society to fulfill. From the time they are born, until they draw their last breath, they go through a number of 'performances,' all of which are significant, eloquent and compelling. But the sad fact is that in spite of efficiently executing all her roles, she is still considered weak and second to men. Indian men exercise too much of domination over women that she is most of the time pushed into a corner or relegated to the fringes of society. She is devoid of a voice and identity and has to rely upon the male counterpart for expressing her essence.

Women behave, think and work very differently from the way men do. They are said to be physically, psychologically, and physiologically very distinct from men. In many spheres of society, women exhibit more responsibility than men. However, it can be witnessed that the tradition and culture of women's lifestyles all over the world has not undergone any change in terms of rights of women. Women are treated differently than men in terms of rights and dues in the modern world. Men continue to dominating women and marginalise them, many a time clipping their wings. The basic problems that affect women from performing their roles in society spring from their helplessness, lack of opportunities for education, restricted mobility and lack of autonomous status.

In Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* the protagonist, Maya, is largely affected by her childhood upbringing in her father's home because in Indian culture there are seen different norms for raising the male and female children. Being a girl, her life is always under close scrutiny and surveillance. The patriarch restricts the intellectual growth of women; moulds and conditions their psychological development. The novel is an ironical dramatization of Maya's consciousness of her inner self against the backdrop of the domineering patriarchy. She is emotionally handicapped to adjust with the social expectations due to her restricted, unnatural childhood upbringing. She holds her father responsible for her 'unnatural' development as a human being who is incapable of building social relationships. Maya develops the sense of grudge against her father which later on develops into hatred. She revolts against the authority of her father by taking vengeance on him by killing Gautama, her husband who represents patriarchal authority.

Gender equality is imperative for the realization of human rights. However, widespread discrimination and bias against women persist globally. Discrimination against women in the world is still a significant problem. Even though significant progress have been made against it in many Western countries, it is still devastating throughout the world. Passive submissiveness and obedience were the trademark of most women across the world. Women always remained a silent figures, restrained and subdued by patriarchal forces. Though this attitude underwent a slight change in many places, there are still many countries today where women are still treated as second-class citizens and undergo all sorts of unimaginable hardships. They face numerous perils and are vulnerable to various impasses. Prejudice with regard to gender and marginalization have become the order of the day for many of them. Many women all over the world also face physical assaults which can sometimes be truly brutal and vicious. Men often try to assert their power and masculinity.

The term Dalit is a modern construct. Etymologically, the word Dalit is derived from 'crushed,' 'ground,' and 'destroyed,' leading to the meaning of 'depressed.' The term came into use in the early 1900s alongside Dalit social movements. These communities occupy the bottom rung of India's traditional hierarchy; they exist outside standard Hindu caste classifications but face heavy social restrictions under the system. India's caste framework assigns status based on ancient Hindu principles. Four main castes, split into countless subgroups, structure

society. Most of the nation's 40 million bonded laborers come from Dalit backgrounds. Their work rarely provides enough to feed their families or educate their children. Poverty and illiteracy hit these groups hard as a result. Conversion out of Hinduism doesn't erase caste barriers either. Religions like Islam and Christianity preach equality but still mirror caste divisions in practice across India. Leadership roles remain with dominant castes even within these faiths, while Dalit members continue to face overt discrimination.

Take Tamil Nadu's Christian communities for instance. Dalit believers get separate burial grounds from higher-caste Christians there. Caste systems and racial hierarchies share deep historical roots across civilizations by the way. These structures keep popping up through different eras and cultures somehow. These patterns persist even when belief systems are altered or societies are theoretically modernized, though not always in practice.

The whole setup shows how deeply these divisions get baked into social fabrics over centuries making them tough to dismantle completely despite laws or changing attitudes over time. Dalits basically carry this legacy daily through limited opportunities and systemic barriers that just don't quit no matter what steps get taken officially speaking anyway. It is one of those things where tradition clashes hard with modern ideals about equality but old systems die slow deaths if they die at all truth be told.

People keep talking about progress but ground realities for marginalized groups often tell different stories even now decades after independence movements and constitutional reforms tried addressing these issues head-on you know how it goes sometimes right. Anyway caste concepts and racial divides both stem from humanity's knack for creating hierarchies they're just packaged differently across regions and historical periods is what I'm saying here basically. The whole situation remains pretty complex when you dig into actual lived experiences versus textbook definitions of social structures you know what I mean yeah that's kind of how it is still today unfortunately.

U. R. Ananthamurthy shows his verbal dexterity and dramatic genius by beautifully describing the scorching afternoon of Durvasapura and equating it with the depressed state of mind of the Brahmins in the agra-hara. The technique of interior monologue is used when Praneshacharya goes on analyzing in his mind how all his long-cherished ideals and penance melted away like ice melting with the first ray of sun as Chandri touched him. Looking into Chandri's compassionate eyes, all his asceticism vaporises and vanishes into the void. He has introduced an innovative technique. He parallels the outside conversation with the conversation inside the mind of Praneshacharya. Dialogue is paralleled with the interior monologue. Praneshacharya while sitting in the meal line at the temple answers the queries of the Brahmin sitting next to him. At the same time, his mind is seriously engaged in arriving at the root of his dilemma and resolving it. He thinks:

This is the root of my agony, my anxiety. Even when I slept with Chandri, unknown to everyone, I involved the wife of the entire

Agra-hara in my act. As a result, my life is open to
the world'. (Samskara -130).

The tempo of the novel is wave-like. Samskaras mark those key turning points in life that people still talk about. These rituals have historically functioned as tools within older cultural systems to shape who someone becomes over time. They cover everything from before birth throughout the life of a Hindu and into the afterlife, guiding funeral practices and subsequent spiritual traditions. The term itself carries multiple meanings encompassing cultural practices burial rites specific ceremonies each one plays its part across different stages personal development transitions between phases existence which maintains spiritual connectivity.

There are sixteen main sacraments.

Pre-Natal Samskaras : 1. Garbhadhana 2. Punsavanam 3. Simantonnayana

Post-Natal Samskaras: 4. Jatakarma 5. Namakarana Samskara 6. Niskramana Samskara

7. Annaprashana Samskara 8. Chudakarma 9. Karnavedha 10. Upanayana & Vedarambha

11. Keshanta 12. Samavartana 13. Vivaha 14. Vanprastha 15. Sanyas 16. Antyeshthi.

Among the several meanings of the word Samskara, some of the important ones are culture, funeral and ritual.

The Brahmins, who with their purity and willingness to atone for the sins of others earn their special place in the caste system, are tainted by this Agrahara id, as Ramanujan reminds us frequently. Their ego is demonstrated in their concern for piety, even though that too is tainted by the self-oriented fear of retribution from the gods. As adversaries, Naranappa champions the communal id, and Praneshacharya the communal ego. Naranappa's fabulation about the holy Achari, whose virtue covers up the sins of the villagers and allows them to commit more sins, symbolically suggests that the brahmins have replaced the natural formation of ego with a dogmatic and ritualistic religion, that the negotiation of the situation, how to handle the funeral rites, demonstrates that the Super Ego of the Brahmin is not properly formed, stifled by the supplantation of ego formation by religion.

The other Brahmins in the Agrahara were grave sinners – they knew every kind of sin - sins of gluttony, sins of avarice, love of gold. But then, this Achari's terrific virtue covered up all their sins; thereby perpetuating their transgressions.

But religion may not substitute for the arbiter Super Ego as seen in Garuda's question about the ancient sages' oversight a few pages later: 'Is it possible they didn't think about the problem, or what?'(29). Undoubtedly, the threads of religion, society, cultural practice, individual and communal psychology are present in the novel, and these critical approaches testify to its rich complexity. The subtitle of the novel suggests that, if the central event of Samskara is 'A Rite for a Dead Man,' then we encounter a number of structural problems.

In Samskara, U.R. Ananthamurthy tells a story using three interconnected levels. Each level represents a different dimension of meaning and critique. These levels interact to enrich the novel's exploration of tradition, morality, and identity within a declining Brahmin community. They are:

- Linguistic Level: Play on the Word "Samskara"

The word Samskara has multiple meanings in Sanskrit. Ananthamurthy takes advantage of this ambiguity:

Ritual Meaning: Samskara refers to sacred rites or sacraments, such as birth, marriage, and death rituals, that uphold social and religious order.

Psychological Meaning: In Indian philosophy, especially in Vedanta and Yoga, samskaras are subconscious impressions or mental residues formed by past actions. These shape behavior and perception over lifetimes.

Etymological Play: The word also suggests "refinement," "cultivation," or "moral discipline." This invites reflection on what it means to be truly "cultured" or "purified."

This linguistic duality creates a central tension: Is spiritual purity achieved through external rituals or through internal change? The crisis over the dead scholar's funeral forces the community to face this question.

- Social and Cultural Level: Critique of Caste and Orthodoxy

At this level, the novel critiques Brahminical orthodoxy and the hypocrisy in caste-based social structures. The community of Pampakshetra appears spiritually stagnant. It clings to ritual purity while being morally and intellectually bankrupt. The refusal to cremate Praneshacharya, despite his scholarly status, because he ate food cooked by a non-Brahmin, exposes the absurdity and cruelty of caste rules. Women, lower castes, and dissenting voices are pushed aside, highlighting the oppressive nature of a tradition that values form over substance. Ananthamurthy uses the isolated, almost mythical village setting to symbolize the insularity of orthodox communities and their resistance to change, even amid moral decay.

- Existential and Philosophical Level: Crisis of Identity and Authenticity

The deepest level of the novel is existential. It focuses on individual consciousness, moral responsibility, and the quest for authenticity. Praneshacharya, the protagonist, represents this crisis. He is a learned man caught between his intellectual doubts and the deep samskaras of his upbringing. His journey, especially his relationship with Chandri, a low-caste woman, becomes a metaphor for breaking free from conditioned behavior and facing desire, guilt, and liberation. The novel questions: Can one rise above inherited beliefs? Is true samskara possible without self-awareness and ethical courage? This level goes beyond the specific context of a Brahmin community. It speaks universally about the human struggle to live authentically amid tradition, fear, and desire. Samskara gives us this picture of a community where people are all tangled up with each other. Caste interacts with economic factors and gender relations. Social hierarchies combine with religious beliefs and taboos, forming a complex web of connections. Relationships become complicated when multiple factors operate simultaneously.

‘The darkness of Brahmin heads filled with chants they did not understand.’ The desire and the ability to understand the texts is lost and as Praneshacharya in his moment of helplessness points out ‘God has become to me a set of tables, learned by rote. Not awareness, a wonder...’ It creates a stagnating society, a society that reads the Vedas, the Puranas but refuses to go beyond them. This captivity is what leads to intolerance whereby the text is seen as paramount to the human ability to reason.

In the first novel Samskara, it is found that ‘Dharma’ has become only a pretext to justify the misdeeds of the brahmins of the orthodox village Duvrasapura. This village is at risk of disappearing because the brahmins living there have not experienced a true moral and spiritual renewal. U.R. Ananthamurthy portrays women of varied kinds in this novel. But the character of Lakshmidamma stands out as unique among these women characters. She alone has the courage to reveal the hidden side of the brahmins. But the brahmins of the agrahara fearing that she would be taken seriously by other people, call her a mad woman. She had turned sixty over ten years earlier and was the eldest resident of the agrahara. Her life was like a purana by itself. Married at eight, widowed at ten Garuda’s father has taken custody of the meagre property and jewellery she has. He managed Naranappa’s father’s property too. After Garuda’s father’s death, Garuda takes up this charge and he decided to give her a monthly allowance of a single rupee. In front of his house

She shouts:

‘You villain! A golden man like Naranappa became an outcaste,
Got himself a harlot. You sit there and don’t want to take
out a dead man’s body. Where has your brahminism gone,
You rascals!’ (Samskara 43).

Chandri, Garuda, Lakshmana, Durgabhatta, Anusuya, Sita Devi, Lakshmidamma, Belli, Padmavati, Putta play important roles in this novel. When Naranappa took Chandri as his concubine, she asked him not to corrupt himself. Chandri, who has been a good wife to Naranappa throughout her life, now wants to give him a ritual cremation. She even feels sorry that she left the body of the man who had antagonized the whole agrahara for her sake orphaned and unprotected. Keeping the dead body uncremated, first they discuss whose duty it is to cremate the one who had no son. Chandri gives all her gold to meet the expenses at that time. The very people who refused to do the rites under the fear that they might be excommunicated because of their action are now prepared to take any risk and suspend all their pseudo-values and are willing to perform the rites; and all these just for the gold they would get. As Chandri loosens her four-strand gold chain, her thick bracelets, her bangles and offers them. They shed all their pretensions. After that only they are ready to discuss who has the right to perform the death rites.

Samskara gives us this picture of a community where people are all tangled up with each other. Caste dynamics influence this, along with money matters and how genders interact. You’ve got social hierarchies mixing with religious beliefs and taboos too. It all forms this messy web of connections, you know. Relationships get complicated when so many factors come into play at once. Even the natural things a human being has such as body hair and body shape are sources of discrimination for a woman. This clearly demonstrates that women

are the most discriminated group in the world. Women have lived in a male-dominated society for too long; it is hoped that the uproar in Hollywood can affect other women who are discriminated in other fields of life to speak up. African Americans were indeed an easy target during the times of Martin Luther, but in this time and era women are more discriminated Gender Discrimination which really should be unheard of is sadly still acute and persistent in the world around us today. Women are still being denied the right to be independent and fend for themselves. Most women are victims of sexual harassment. Violence against women manifesting itself in various forms such as rape, molestation, stripping, eve-teasing, abducting and kidnapping, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, domestic abuse, wife battering, harassment in the workplace and cruelties to them in various physical, emotional and psychological forms has been a global phenomenon leading to their oppression, suppression, repression, victimization and marginalization. Ann Duffy in a thought-provoking article, 'The Feminist Challenge: Knowing and Ending the Violence' rightly states, 'The lives of almost all women, regardless of class, caste and age, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability or disability have been distorted by violence and the expectation of violence. The pain, humiliation and traumas especially of the experience of sexual violence have drastic impact not only on the material, emotional and psychic life of the victims, in social sphere too they suffer humiliation, neglect, segregation and marginalization and are treated as 'the fallen ones' though without any fault of theirs.

U. R. Ananathamurthy's heroines, like Chandri and Lakshmi Devamma, are not vulnerable but they are powerful and more consistent than heroes. Their tranquility could be anything; other characters interpret, describe and manipulate the heroines' silence in their own way but them examples of real women. In *Samskara*, Chandri deals with harsh treatment from the Brahmin community in their agrahara village. The caste system puts tight social and personal restrictions on her. Naranappa gets shunned for living with Chandri, who is from a lower caste. After his death, she handles his cremation through his friend Abdul. The villagers blame her for corrupting Naranappa's life.

Anasuya, part of Naranappa's family, curses Chandri viciously. The exact words were, "May tigers trample her at midnight, may snakes bite her, this whore, this seducing witch". Brahmins accuse her of ruining their community's purity through Naranappa's actions.

Women from lower castes like Chandri and Belli face sexual exploitation regularly. They have no way out. They still show respect to Brahmin authority despite their own suffering in this rigid hierarchy. These women stay silent victims trapped in systemic oppression, unaware how deeply caste defines their hopeless situation.

The book contrasts India's constitutional laws with the harsh realities of religious and social codes still controlling daily life. The writer carefully layers how caste and class shape identity for these women. Multiple pressures crush them—tradition clashing with modern legal frameworks that don't reach ground level. Laws on paper versus lived experience. The narrator also brings out the natural effects of inter-caste marriage (propagated as the gateway for armihilation of the caste system by Ambedkar). As Naranappa has married a lower caste woman, and he tries to break a ritualistic living. In his effort of showing the cracks in the Brahminical family system the narrator projects the Dalit women as the culprits due to their spontaneity and natural talent towards gratifying the male sexual desires. Whenever the narrator has a chance to describe a dalit woman mostly he does it from the point of her physical appearance. Usually she is portrayed as a seductive woman. The women of *Samskara* are symbols for the women of the rest of their caste, and the attitude that the novel takes toward them reflects how women of their own caste ought to be treated. Chandri, a dalit woman, is treated badly by people of higher castes, but the novel reveals that the Brahmin women are treated just as badly, and women being abused by their husbands is not exclusive to Putta's wife or Anasuya's daughter Lilavati. Men outside family circles sometimes exploit widows through social vulnerabilities. Lakshmiddevamma's documented case demonstrates this pattern clearly. The lack of familial protection frameworks leaves certain women exposed to predatory behavior from unrelated males seeking financial or social advantage. Historical records show multiple instances where widows faced systemic manipulation after losing spouses, particularly in communities without strong inheritance safeguards for women living alone.

Regarding the character of Putta's wife, the domination is only exerted by physical force but she rebels in the psycho-hierarchy form in her consciousness and this rebellion pushes Putta to beat her again and again. Through these narratives of the victimized prostitutes, the writer has expressed his unease with the entire social system in

which these prostitutes, pushed into sex trade because of various family and social compulsions, continue bearing exploitation, humiliation and abuse from their pimps, clients, police and local authorities. U. R. Ananthamurthy disapproves of the orthodox Brahmins' meaningless adherence to rituals and their hypocrisy.

CONCLUSION

The novel explores significant themes such as culture, faith, and personal choice. Ananthamurthy plays a vital role in examining how individuals navigate their duties, desires, and doubts when confronted with societal, religious, and personal conflicts. The story goes beyond merely criticizing traditional Brahmin practices—it illustrates how rigid adherence to rituals can hinder just and ethical action, particularly evident in the complex circumstances surrounding Naranappa's funeral.

Characters like Praneshacharya appear to embody moral virtue but are internally conflicted by suppressed desires and fears. In contrast, marginalized figures such as Chandri and Lakshmiddevamma, though dismissed by the Brahmin community, display deep emotional strength and a nuanced understanding of right and wrong. Their actions expose the emptiness of rules upheld by patriarchy and caste hierarchies, challenging the perceived moral superiority of such systems. The community's tendency to prioritize material gain over ethical responsibility, its perpetuation of violence against women, and its mistreatment of lower castes all underscore the deeply entrenched flaws within the societal structure.

Ultimately, Samskara reveals the fragile foundations of a society rooted in authoritarianism, rigid moral codes, and inherited traditions. Ananthamurthy invites readers to reflect on the consequences of suppressing human desires and overlooking ethical dilemmas. By contrasting personal conscience with societal expectations, the novel emphasizes the need for transformation and advocates for a shift away from dogmatic ideologies toward a more compassionate and empathetic understanding of morality. The examination of unheard voices effectively illustrates the theme of silence in the novel. These female characters, such as Chandri and Praneshacharya's wife, are rarely granted the opportunity to voice their perspectives. Their suffering and desires are often disregarded by the Brahmin authority figures. Chandri must navigate the aftermath of Naranappa's death alone while the men debate rituals and caste dynamics. She is viewed as a challenge to be addressed rather than as an individual with agency.

Then there's this idea of female subaltern stuff from that Spivak theory everyone talks about. Chandri's situation checks all those boxes when you think about it. Lower-caste woman involved with a Brahmin man? She's getting pushed down from every angle—gender rules, caste hierarchy, social norms you know? But here's the thing—she's literally just there to kick off the main drama about burying Naranappa right? Never gets to be part of how things actually get resolved though.

Agency comes up big time when you look at Chandri's choices though people might miss it at first glance. Her move to ditch the Brahmins' rules about handling Naranappa's body? That took guts even if she did it quietly. Taking off with her gold stash was basically her middle finger to the whole system keeping her down. Thing is that was her only way to push back without getting crushed completely by their stupid caste games you know? Silent rebellion but still counts as rebellion when your options are that limited anyway.

WORKS CITED

1. Anand, Mulk Raj. *Untouchable*. Penguin Books India, 2001.
2. Anand, Vaishali. "Expressive Dimensions of Indian Language and Culture: Through Samskara." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (IJELS)*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2021, pp. 178–184.
3. Balasubramanya, Narahalli. "Samskara." *Masterpieces of Indian Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, 1998.
4. Bhattacharya, Ajita. "Exploring Malignity in U. R. Ananthamurthy's Samskara: A Critical Insight." *The Creative Launcher*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2021, pp. 22–29, <https://www.thecreativelauncher.com/index.php/tcl/article/view/342> .
5. "Between the Epistemic and the Accursed: U.R. Ananta Murthy's Samskara." *OpenEdition Journals*, 2019, <https://journals.openedition.org> .

6. "Individual versus Communal Morality in U.R. Anantmoorthy's Samskara." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, vol. 7, no. 5, 2020, pp. 98–105, <https://www.the-criterion.com/individual-versus-communal-morality-in-u-r-anantmoorthys-samskara/>.
7. Gupta, R.K. "The Ghost and the Demon: An Approach to U.R. Ananthamurthy's Samskara." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, no. 161, 1981.
8. Gupta, Yashodhara. "The Good, The Bad and The Holy—A Book Review of Samskara by U.R. Ananthamurthy." *The Antonym Magazine*, 2020, <https://www.theantonymmag.com>.
9. K D, Binu. "Appropriation of Dalit Agency: A Critique of U. R. Anantha Murthy's Samskara." *Pen2Print Journals*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2021, pp. 10–16, <https://journals.pen2print.org>.
10. Kaur, Tejinder. "Raising Issues Related to Caste Defined Samskaras: A Study of U.R. Ananthamurthy's Samskara." *Journal of Indian Writing in English*, vol. 34, no. 1, edited by G.S. Balarama Gupta, Jan. 2006.
11. Marasinghe, Sachini. "Cadaverous Images of the Caste System: An Analysis of U.R. Ananthamurthy's Novella Samskara and Mahasweta Devi's Short Story 'Douloti the Bountiful'." *Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities Research*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2020, pp. 122–130, <https://jsshr.sljol.info>.
12. Pillai, Sharon. "Gender Representation in U.R. Anantha Murthy's Samskara." *SAGE Open*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2019, pp. 108–115, <https://journals.sagepub.com>.
13. Ramanujan, A. K. "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay." *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1989, pp. 41–58.
14. Rana, Meenakashi. "Reflection of Cultural Stalemate in U.R. Ananthamurthy's Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man." *Pen2Print Journals*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2020, pp. 30–35, <https://journals.pen2print.org>.
15. Santha Devi A. "Dharma, Desire, and Doubt: Ethical Dilemmas in U.R. Ananthamurthy's Samskara" *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, vol. 30, no. 6, Series 5, 2025, pp <https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.30-Issue6/Ser-5/C3006051719.pdf>
16. Sharma, Milan Swaroop. "Rituals in Conflict With Modernization: A Critical Perspective on U.R. Ananthamurthy's Samskara." *I-Scholar Journal*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2021, pp. 16–22, <https://i-scholar.in>.
17. Tagore, Rabindranath. *Nationalism*. Macmillan, 1917.
18. Trivedi, Khushbu A. "Conflict Between Rituals and Rationality in U.R. Ananthamurthy's Samskara." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, vol. 30, no. 6, Series 5, 2023, pp. 17–19, <https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.30-Issue6/Ser-5/C3006051719.pdf>.