

## **U.R.Ananthamurthy's Samskara: A Religious Play**

**Mr. Noorullakhadari. M. Mutavalli**  
Lecturer in English  
K.U.P.G. Centre Haveri, Karnataka

### **Abstract**

Samskara is a Kannada language novel written by U.R. Ananthamurthy, The word Samskara means ritual in Kannada language. Novel begins in the village Durvasapura Western Ghats of Karnataka. Majority of the people who live in the street belong to the Madhwas community, people have traditional mind set and strictly follow the rules defined by their religion. The theme of the novel is the story of a decaying Brahmin agrahara in the old Konkan region.

**Keywords:** Brahmanism, Deviation from religious practices, Final rites and rituals of the dead body.

Novel Samskara, A Rite for a Dead Man begins in the village Durvasapura Western Ghats of Karnataka. At the beginning of the novel introduces us the daily routine activities of Praneshacharya, the activities are on mix of religious and domestic rituals. He begins his day by nursing and bathing his sick wife, it is understood from the first line of the novel. It is he who bathes her dress her up and feeds her with a essential food and administers her regular medicine. Then he crosses a small pond to reach a Maruthi temple which is other side of the pond and returns after worshiping to continue his recitation of the holy verses. The Brahmins of agrahara who respects him a lot, would become his audience to listen his recitation of holy verses and philosophical discourses every day.

Praneshachary sacrifices his life with a purpose, his wife realises his pain and agony that he is not enjoying his marital bliss that he lacks. Sometimes she suggest him to marry another woman which he denies, and have a bliss full hope. Nevertheless Praneshachary refuses a proposal, strong faith in lord Krishna's will that, one should not expect any reward for one's own destiny or toil. Moreover every day when they eat both of them request each one to eat first, then the incident shows us the mutual love which they have between them and the concern they have each other.

One day as per the everyday he is about to feed the Cow Gowri, suddenly hears the Chandri's agonised voice behind him and calling him acharya. Chandri is a low caste woman and a whore, Praneshachary maintained the distance before making conversation with Chandri and he starts thinking that conversation with her pollutes him. But he could not avoid and listens to the unpleasant news of Naranappa's death after suffering from four days long

fever. According to Brahmin community it was considered wrong to have food before performing the funeral rites of the dead. Acharya runs out to inform his fellow Brahmins to do the same, i.e not to have food before Naranappa's funeral rites have performed. Every soul in agrahara have negative impression that –

“Alive, Naranappa was an enemy;

Dead a preventer of meals; as a corpse;

A problem, a nuisance.”

The Brahmins of the village assemble before Praneshacharya,s house to listen to his instructions about the final rites and rituals of Naranappa. The woman folk was scared and prayed their husbands should not accept to perform the final rites. Praneshachary lists two problems were to be solved immediately.

1. The first is performing funeral rites for Naranappa.
2. Second is, somebody has to take initiative to perform the rites, since Naranappa is childless.

Garudachary, Dasachary a poor Brahmins of agrahara and Lakshmanacharya agrees with Acharyas words. When Praneshacharya announces that Naranappa's relatives should only perform funeral rites. Everyone starts looking at Garuda, and Lakshmana. But Lakshmana refuses to perform the rites and Garuda also gives the explanation and refuses by recalling the fighting a family disputes as an example to denies to perform the rites. Naranappa's illicit affair with Chandri is also become hurdle and others also joined the argument. Praneshacharya quickly notices that discussion was useless now, and he asks Lakshmana to give a valid reason for refusal. Lakshmana repeats the Garuda's statements and highlights Naranappas voices.

Anasuya, wife of Lakshmana feels proud for her husband for his reply and curses Chandri for the cause to creation of the problem. Chandri silently observes the situation and places all her gold ornaments before Praneshacharya and requests him to use for expenses of funeral rites. The ornaments attracts the greedy looks of other Brahmin wives and husband also thinks that some other Brahmin should not do the funeral rites and take away all the ornaments.

Durghabhata, who was also waiting to attack Madhawa Brahmins and also lusting for the Gold ornaments. There was a cold war between Smarta and Madhwa Brahmins because of Durghabhata. Praneshacharya pleases Durghabhata to be silent as it is necessary to inform about the death of Naranappa since he was there friend. The family of Lakshmana and Garuda are troubled by the pronouncement of Praneshacharya because the golden ornaments would be taken away. By the person who performs funeral rites. Now secretly all the Brahmins wanted to perform the funeral rites but not able to express the same in open.

Lakshmanacharyas wife Anasuya logically tries to claim the ornaments for her family as they are her dead sister's jewellery. But Garuda says according to decision of Dharmastala guru the ornaments should go to him. Praneshacharya silences both of them and request them to give importance to funeral rites not to the gold ornaments.

The place occupied by the houses of Brahmins of Dhurvasapura are appears to be the same. Brahmins happily goes to the each others houses and gets flowers for the worship and known the welfare of others, it was a kind of friendly ritual they followed. But Naranappa's house was not visited by a single soul, because flowers grown there were ment for Chandri's hair, and Naranappa's house was also known for keeping snakes to protect the gold that he had.

Madhawa Brahmins sent by Praneshacharya from the well-known place of Dhurvasapura to Parijatapura to inform about Naranappa's death, and also to enquire about if they would be willing to perform the final rites and rituals for him. Brahmins who lived in Parijatapura are Smartas, there first visit to Manjaya's house where they treated as guests with all possible hospitality and felt very happy after reaching that place. Parijatapura Brahmins give their consent to perform the rites because he mingled with them very easily. Naranappa was friend to them without any caste pride, and they also considered it as pride to perform his rituals because Naranappa was Madhwa Brahmin.

Shankaraya, the Parijatapura 'priest admits that it is important to perform the rites without delaying further. But Durghabhatta another Smarta Brahmin doughts the catse of Naranappa. Shankaraya refuses him and suggests all the people of Parijatapura to follow the instructions of Praneshacharya. Praneshacharya refers religious texts for Naranappa's funeral rites, while the Madhwa Brahmins are in Parijatapura to inform about Naranappa's death. Then he remembers all the miss deeds of Naranappa in the village and he uphold the way Naranappa made Garuda's son Shama and Lakshmana's son in law Shripati to got out from Brahminical tradition. Shama fled from home and join the army while Shripati followed the foot steps of Naranappa. He even remembers the day when he brought muslims with him to the Ganapati temple and cooked the fish.

After Shama's fled from the house his parents Garudacharya and Sitadevi hoped for son's return to home. But after the gap of three months they got the letter that he joined the army, and penalty of Six Hundred rupees should be paid for his release. Hence Sitadevi wishes her husband to get a chance to perform the rites and gets Gold to release her son. Garudacharya does not want his situation to become like Naranappa, for that he decides to release his son from that that his son would perform his final rites and rituals. He approached Acharya to allow him to perform the rites and from that he could release his son from army.

Praneshachary is busy going to search in holy text to find solution, meanwhile Anasuya also tries to get golden ornaments. She herself relates to Naranappa because her

sister is Naranappa's first legal wife. Before she does not want her husband to perform the funeral rites, but after knowing that she gets Chandries gold then she also tries to establish bond. All emotions revolve around the gold and not Naranappa's dead body. Anasuya raises her voice against Naranappa because he spoiled her son in law Shripati. When Lakshmanacharya comes from Parijatapura, she urges him to go to Praneshacharya and accepts to perform the rites and rituals. Lakshmanacharya is that sort of person he tries to get oil for his head without spending a penny. Now he puts his eyes on Chandries Gold. Then the argument takes place between Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya comes to an agreement that the Gold should submit to court of Dharmasthala guru and give that person according to the decision of the court. Meanwhile Dasacharya complains about the rotten smell of Naranappa's body and urges Acharya to dispose it. But Acharya tries to find solution in holy text till late evening but unable to find.

Now introduces us to shocked Shripati who is not aware of Naranappa's death because he was out of Durvasapura, and joins a drama trope from Kelur. After spending some time with drama troope on the night of Naranappa's death he walks through a dense forest to Durvasapura, while nearing the village he sees a hut burning in the light of the fire. Then he sees Belli walking to a bush after having bath in warm water, he tries to express his laugh to her but she prevents him saying that if he does so he would die due to some super natural power. She said Pilla and his woman died and they burn their bodies in there hut. She attributes her death to unknown demonic power. After this Shripati is scared and goes to Naranappa's house, thinking of spending a night at his residence. Since the door is opened he hesitatingly enters the house and sees dead rats laying on the floor. Then he sees Naranappa laying on the floor, Shripati thinks he is in deep sleep. But he removes the blanket he sees his body as cold as dead rat.

Lakshmiddevamma, an old lady associated with ill fate and bad luck in Agrahara. She was given marriage at the age of Eight and at the age of ten she lost her in laws and at the age of Twenty she lost her parents too. After this Lakshmiddevamma became orphan, Garudacharya's father takes care of her and grabs her property. Later the responsibility of taking care of Lakshmiddevamma fell on Garuda. But Garuda's wife Sitadevi ill-treats her and the continues quarrel between Lakshmiddevamma and Sitadevi insist Garuda to keep Lakshmiddevamma in a separate ruined house and decides to give one rupee every month for her life.

Lakshmiddevamma takes the matter to Praneshacharya, but Garudacharya does not relent. Therefore whenever she is annoyed with Garudacharya, she stands in front of his house and curses at him from the bottom of her heart. Oneday she sees somebody running out of Naranappa's house and she thinks that it is Naranappa's ghost fleeing from his house. Lakshmiddevamma bangs at the doors of the houses in agrahara and tries to inform the people. But it is Shripati fleeing out of Naranappa's house after seeing his dead body. He is as pale as Ghost and he crosses Thunga river and reaches Nagaraja's house at Parijatapura.

Chandri lying in the veranda of Praneshacharya and notices that it is Shripati fleeing out of her house, she is able to notice him as hunger pained and awake. She has never slept at night without having food. Hence she goes to the backyard and eats ripe plantain left on the tree, then goes to Thunga river and drinks water. Then she is being afraid of going to her house, and goes back to Praneshacharya's house and use the veranda to sleep by covering her face with her sari.

Praneshacharya is still trying to find solution from religious texts, but he does not find any satisfied answer. He walks restlessly on veranda and reflects on two reasons for not miscommunicating Naranappa-

1. Naranappa always threaten that he would get converted as a muslim.
2. Praneshacharya's compassion towards Naranappa.

He was quite confident that Naranappa could be convinced and he can be brought back to normal life. But that could not happen when he was alive. Compassion is a trend of Praneshacharya, he is so compassionate towards his disabled wife. His mind then shifts to another solution, as going for solution in religious texts has gone waste. He thinks of going to temple of Maruti early next morning and fall at the feet of god to get solution for the problem. The thought of going to Maruti temple relaxes him a bit, then he gives Chandri who is in veranda a Mat and the Pillow to sleep and returns all her jewellery and goes to his bed.

Dasacharya who constantly complains about the stink which is spreading in the village, and was unable to tolerate the harsh law that adults won't had food until the final rites and rituals of dead Naranappa. He is unable to control his hunger and added to his anger finally decides to have food and goes to Tunga river without being noticed by anybody. In the river he takes bath and goes to Manjappa's house in Parijatapura. He meets Manjappa at lunch time, Manjappa eats Uppittu a kind of dish in Karnataka increases his hunger. In order to please Manjappa he criticises all men who visited Parijatapura previous day. Manjappa knows that Dasacharya would be willing to have food with him and asks him whether he had bath and Dasacharya said that yes he just dipped in river. Manjappa offers food to him, Dasacharya desire to eat food and the fear that the people would not invite him for any ritualistic work if they had come to know that he had food before Naranappa's final ritual. When Manjappa promises that he would never reveal in front of any one, then Dasacharya agrees to eat.

The stink of dead rats as well as Naranappa's dead body makes restless for agrahara people. In the morning of the second day of the Naranappa's death women tries to stop their children going out of the house thinking that Naranappa's ghost might touch their children. But Venkataramanacharya's children go against their mother's order because they are excited to see rats dying. The Brahmins of the agrahara meanwhile gather to find a quick solution to Naranappa's funeral rites. They are unable to tolerate stench of the dead rats as well as the dead body of the Naranappa. Durghabhata and Dasacharya blame the

rest of the Brahmins for the delay in Naranappa's funeral rites, therefore Garudacharya ignores the problem of claiming the Chandri's gold for some time in order to give funeral rites for Naranappa.

The Brahmins depend on Praneshacharya for every decision. Hence they gather in front of his house and he comes out to express his desire to visit the temple of Maruti to get solution. Brahmins accepts the decision and hoping that agrahara become normal again. Then Praneshacharya goes to the forest to visit Maruti temple, he takes with him some flowers to worship the God. After the ritualistic bath at the Tunga River he replaces his old sacred thread to new one and walks two miles in to the forest. At the temple first he cleans the Maruti idle and smears sandal paste to it then sits in front of the idle to present his confused thought at the feet of the Lord and he does not find any answer, gets disappointed.

Chandri meanwhile unable to face the angry Brahmins in agrahara follows Praneshacharya to the forest. While coming to the forest she takes Banana's on the lap of her sari and she also takes a dip in Tunga River hence her body is completely wet. She sits at a distance from temple watching Praneshacharya. On his way Praneshacharya meets Chandri and impressed by her beauty, he wakes up at the middle of the night then he find himself lying on the Chandri's lap. Chandri rushes to home and finds that Naranappa's body is started to rotten then gets it cremated secretly leaves the village forever.

Praneshacharya is left himself in a complex situation, whether he has to disclose his sexual act with Chandri are else keep quiet about it. Feeling confused he leaves the village but guilt never leaves him. Finally he decides to own up his realistic act comes to the village and story ends there.

**Conclusion:** Here in the play Samskara the writer U.R. Ananthamurthy very brilliantly expects his reader to find solution for all the problems of the society and find a right solution to lead a peaceful and happy life.

#### **REFERENCES:**

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