



THE CONVENTIONAL INDIAN PRACTICES, THE SENSE OF MODERNITY AND THE CONSEQUENTIAL BATTLE: STUDY OF SAMSKARA BY ANANTHA MURTHY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE IMPORTANCE OF ITS TITLE

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ABSTRACT

India is a nation where two things are of great importance: Religion and Caste. The society has to be governed by the rules of different religions and their practices. If one wants to do different things, he/she has to suffer a lot. He/she would even be discarded from the community as well. The present paper deals with the conventional social practices which are persisting from the time immemorial. We find a constant struggle between conventionalism and modernism. They are two aspects of our society that are like mother-in-law and daughter-in-law who fight with each other by staying in the same house. There are still some areas and communities that follow their rituals very strictly and thus always find it conflicting with the modernism. The title here itself suggests the Hinduist belief in the traditional rituals. Though the word 'Samskara' has its minimum use in the novel, the subject matter revolves around the term 'Samskara' in every matter. It is not only the subject of the novel but also its form.

Key words: Brahmin, Caste, Upper caste, Low caste, Title, Rituals, Conventional, Modernity, Struggle, Religion.

INTRODUCTION

Old India had chiefly four castes: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Shudra. Amongst them, the Shudra were called 'the untouchables'. However, as the time passes, there felt a profound change in these old convictions and rituals, the perspectives have been changed, consequently the untouchables get their rights and are enjoying full freedom inside the nation at present. Some remarkable changes also occurred in Indian society such as demolition of Dudhpiti Pratha, Satipratha, Bal-vivaha, and starting of widow marriages, girl's education, etc. These



things brought a revival and helped to reconstruct the society. These changes in the society occurred only because of the awareness and enlightenment which was noticed by the social reformers like Kabir, Vinoba Bhave, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Annie Besant, to name a few. Similarly, the novel under discussion is a product written to change the traditional notions of our society. The novelist has beautifully expresses all the superstitions and the beliefs of different communities that are persisting in our society for quite a long. The conventionality and modernity are just two opposite forces conflicting with each other. Thus, we find a continuous struggle between conventionalism and modernism. They are two aspects of our society that are like mother-in-law and daughter-in-law who fight with each other by staying in the same house. The present novel is a perfect example of this.

Samskara is one of the masterpieces that won 'Jnanpith', to the writer Anantha Murthy in 1995. The beauty of novel lies itself in its publication, apart from the contents and subject matter, because the original Kannada text is translated into lucid English language by one of the greatest Indian English writers, A. K. Ramanujan. Consequently, it has been appreciated and read by English speaking world whole-heartedly due to its traditional yet powerful subject matter. This novel also helps the novelist Anantha Murthy to get recognized in Indo-Anglican Fiction. The characters are presented as being modern but at the same time traditional in their approaches. He, in his error-free language, has expressed the traditional Indian society and also tries to supply the possible solutions to change some of the rigid practices. The novel is a wonderful blend of reality and allegory. There are more meanings being expressed apart from the apparent meaning in order to express the thoughts and opinions of the novelist.

The title of the novel is quite unique and at the same time it has significance as far as Indian society is concerned. This novel was written in the sixties, the time around when India got its independence. Back in those days, the condition of Indian villages in South India was deplorable and people were quite rigid in their traditional religious practices. However, Anantha Murthy tried to present the realistic picture of that time in the novel, especially the practices of Brahmins. The characters that reside in Durvasapura, Karnataka look real during the course of the time. We can relate ourselves with them when we read about them. However, the title is full of religious connotations that every Indian reader would understand. Firstly, it refers to the concept regarding purity of human being/s. Secondly it is the name used for sixteen ceremonies. The third thing associated to title is the practice to turn a person to be perfect or mould him/her into a virtuous direction. The other meaning is either to prepare or get the things ready. The subtitle given here which is 'a rite for a dead man' generally means 'Samskar of Cremation'. According to the traditional beliefs and practices, a Hindu man/woman has to have a proper holy cremation. So, more or less this novel can also



be compared with *Antigone* where Antigone fights for the body of her brother in order to get it buried in proper way.

In the very beginning of the novel, we find a dead man whose death is occurred by plague. Scene of the last Samskara covers the whole novel. In spite of the help of Chandri and kept wife of Naranappa, cremation had been Ahmedbari. However, it is not known by anyone except Chandri and Mohammedan friend. Nobody wants to take part in his funeral because being a pure Brahmin Naranappa married a low caste woman. In this way the novel has become interesting. Naranappa is a spoilt Brahmin according to the villagers and the community members. They dislike him because he eats meat, drinks liquor, has Muslim friends, and all of the above sin he has done is to have illicit relationship with a woman of low caste despite of having his own wife. He has abandoned his wife for this woman and so everyone is at bad terms with him. He is living his life pleasantly and has no worries regarding ex-communication. He is quite critical about the Acharya and other Brahmins who pretend to be sacred. Acharya also tries his best to reform Naranappa but has not been successful.

What makes this cremation difficult is a fact that Narnappa has a relationship with the woman of low caste and thus he ceases to be a Brahmin according to the community. Praneshcharya tries to reform Naranappa but all goes in vain. He even tries to convince the people of his community after Naranappa's death to support him in performing his last rites but no one shows any kind of sympathy. Here, the title reflects as well. Unlike this incident, there is another case where Samskara reflects and that is the life of Praneshcharya who serves his community and people all through his life by following proper pattern, who also serves his wife without any motive or sexual desire. Even after her death he follows the practices rigorously. So, in this way the term and title *Samskara* is very important here.

One thing is to be noticed in the novel is the use of the title because the word 'Samskara' is not used frequently in the novel but remains hidden throughout the novel as its meaning is implied during the course of the novel. Nonetheless, many incidents of the novel directly refer to the Hindu rituals and are called Samskara. According to Brahminical beliefs there is no difference between the external and internal, social and individual, ritual and spiritual aspects in human being's existence. This is what the novelist has shown in the novel. Though the word has its minimum use in the novel, the subject matter revolves around the term 'Samskara' in every matter. It is not only the subject of the novel but also its form. In Praneshcharya's life, the final impression is that he pursues Samskara but he is also subject to the rapacity. He forgets all his rituals and principles once he falls a victim to his sexual passion. Thus, the novel describes the Samskaras but at the same time it is also a clear narrative of the decadence of Brahminism. There is a constant sense of suspense in the novel



as everyone thinks that the dead body of Naranappa has been lying in his home without proper cremation but the reality is something different as his cremation has already been done. Thus, it is in a way disregarding the conventional belief and following of modernity where practicality is more important than the traditionalism. The other thing which is surprising is the intercourse of Praneshcharya with Chandri which is not allowed in the traditional Indian Hindu Brahmin community but still is given here. It is also an aspect of modernism.

So, in conclusion we may say that this novel is a perfect example of the conflict between conventionalism and modernism. The struggle has not ended and never will. However, the novelist has surely supplies the inevitable aspects of our society and the major thing here is its title. We have already discussed it in a great length. So, like every title, the title of this novel is also important but at the same time it shows us the dark side of our blind faith in conventions and rituals. It teaches us that it is not always that we should follow traditions. Sometimes, according to situations, we have to choose different alternatives.

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