



Deconstructing The Identity Of Dalit Women And Brahmanism In U.R.Ananthmurthy's Samskara

Prof. Vijay. F. Nagannawar
Research Guide,
Dean, Faculty of Arts,
Rani Channamma University, Belgavi.

Pooja Kamble
Research Scholar,
Department of English
Rani Channamma University, Belgavi

Abstract:

This article talks about the theme of Understanding the Identity and deconstructing it of the low-caste women characters and their portrayal that is significant in the framework developed by upper-caste men in the novel, which engages with the issues of caste and gender in terms of the conflict between tradition and modernity. The paper attempts to discuss how Brahmanic structures are constructive to the identities and sexualities of the lower caste woman, and also reveal how the female body is constructed by the Brahmin patriarchy, and how the low caste women as objects of sexuality are being approached by the upper caste men, by questioning their identity as Other, which society looks from polluted minds. It is a work that defines the cultural aspects of Brahmanism that is being polluted by violating its norms, and tradition in the shade of other caste cultural practices. The main focus of the work that is being highlighted is how the strong cultural roots that Brahmanism follow is affected by the low-caste women's existence. The development that it takes, makes us understand that Brahmin patriarchy ideologies are hindered by the practices that make their culture, and tradition pave the path toward modernity.

Keywords: Dalit woman, Identity, Tradition, modernity, Brahmanism, culture.

Introduction:

According to the dictionary meaning: The word '*Identity*' is a unique set of characteristics that can be used to identify a person as themselves and no one else. The word can be used in different ways in different contexts. On a personal level, identity often refers to a person's sense of self, meaning how they view themselves as compared to other people. Identity is described as whatever makes one person different from another. Identity is viewed in nonessentialist terms as a construct, and that constructs only produce meaning through an interplay of differences inside a system. The term "*Identity*" also infers to be like, however, it has been said that the mere act of representing someone is an act of making a difference. (Argyrou, 2013, p.100)

If we talk about the word '*Identity*' and try to break it into two segments, we get the word '*id*' and '*entity*'. *Id* (Freud, 2010) can be defined as: "the part of the psyche residing in the unconscious, that is the source of instinctive impulses that seek satisfaction by the pleasure principles and are modified by the ego and superego

before they are given overt expression. 'Entity', may be defined as; 'something that exists as itself, as a subject, or as an object, actually, or potentially, or abstractly, physically or not

The main focus of the study is the concept of the Identity of Dalit women, which is portrayed by Brahminical ideologies throughout history is been redefined in the perspective of the study by Deconstructing the Identity of Dalit women in the work of U.R. Ananthmurthy's novel Samskara.

As J. Hillis Miller, the pre-eminent American deconstructionist, has explained: "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. The general descriptor of deconstruction is 'to dismantle to reconstitute what is already described'. Deconstruction, according to Caputo (Caputo, 1997) is essentially an anti-essentialist critique, not set out to destroy traditions and infrastructure, but to 'open and loosen things up' (Argyrou, 2013).

Samskara: A Rites for a Dead Man (1965) written by U. R. Ananthmurthy and translated by A.K. Ramanujan in 1976. The novel gives a brief analysis of the caste structure in the village Agrahara, where the Brahmins occupy a supreme position and the authoritative grounds of their thinking of superiority complexion ruined, by the Brahmin himself named Naranappa, who gave up his Brahmanism in building a connection with a low caste women Chandri. The Death of Naranappa, which becomes a major asset of the novel through which it develops, makes them understand that the religion they were following was not pure and sacred and fall back to dismantle their values, ideologies, and supremacy. This realization of corrupt religion and de-brahmanisation seen in the life of Praneshacharya, the Crest jewel of Vedic learning is the local guru of the Brahmins, who pave the way to understanding the meaning of life at the end of the novel.

The work reveals the truth that it encounters the Brahmin male self and their aspects to know lower caste subjects. The philosopher of Existentialism Simone de Beauvoir developed the concept of 'Other' in the 1949 book *The Second Sex*, to explain the workings of Men- Women's binary gender relations. The construction of the authoritative postcolonial upper caste male, following the modern western ideas, to the dominant counterparts as subjects of being as Other is turned to mere objects of desire

The work focuses on a society that follows rituals and regulations rather than humanity, which is a major aim of individual living. It shows how the culture and tradition that are a source of the existence of Brahmanism, starts losing its essence in connection to other out-caste people, who indirectly influence to change their ideologies that are practiced from their roots. The statement was given by the elderly Brahmin character of Agrahara, Laksmidevamma, an ill omen that Brahmins used to call her. She had suffered at the hands of Garudacharaya and his family, who have ill-treated her and taken up all the jewels she had. She always cursed them for their behavior and their existence. She is the only witness who knows all the reality of the Brahmins and shows her pain, agony, and suffering by cursing the people of Agrahara. When the delay was taking place in cremating the dead body of Naranappa, they could not decide who should perform this funeral as Naranappa has given up Brahmanism, and the people were in confusing to take the step that may violate their values and religion. She says:

'You villain! A golden man like Naranappa became an outcast and got himself a harlot. You fellows call yourselves brahmins, you sit there and don't want to take out a dead man's body. Where has your Brahminism gone, you rascals? Don't you know you'll fall into the lowest hell reserved for outcastes and perish there? In this agrahara, in all my born days, have I seen a body -kept uncremated all night? Not once. Rama, Rama, the times are rotten, rotten. Brahminism is in ruins. Why don't you shave your heads and become Muslims, why do you need to be Brahmins, you!'

This statement makes a mark that how Brahmanism is in ruins and its sacredness is degrading by keeping the dead body uncremated. As the Brahmins, who follow their religion has lost their sacredness as for the people of Agrahara, religion becomes more important than humanity. As Naranappa has given up religion and lived life on his wishes has made him an outcaste and the religion is not permitted to accept such a person and perform his last rites. Is this a true religion teaches us?

In the novel, the major discussion is based on women centering that is more important, through which the whole plot is developed. The characters of women from both upper caste and low caste give an outlook of how they are treated and differentiated with their identity that is connected with their caste. The conflict between Tradition and Modernity becomes the source to analyze and articulate caste identities and understand gender relations in society. In our Indian culture, the issues of hierarchy placed in Hindu society, and the caste system has played a significant role in dividing the outlet of Brahmin and the outcaste. The major difference in tradition-modernity, male-female, individual- society are all centered on the opposition of Brahmin and the other caste.

The novel begins with the devotional Brahmin Praneshacharya who is worshipped as a god to the people of Agrahara. His day begins with the caretaking of his sick wife Bhagirathi, he carried out this responsibility for more than twenty years. He thinks that this sacrifice and penance will provide him salvation in life. It shows how Praneshacharya dedicated his life to the duties of his wife and shows his responsibilities that he carried out faithfully, as it gives the picture of a cultured person with values and respect for women.

This shows that the character of Praneshacharya is filled with the respect that he has towards women, it may be his wife or other women from Agrahara. He treats equally to women and does not differentiate based on caste. The duties he performs towards his lawful wife and the concern he talks about in matters of Chandri, who is always been disgraced with humiliation by the other Brahmins of the Agrahara. The behavior of Pranescharya towards Chandri makes her feel the difference in her outlook that gains the respect that is filled with feelings she develops towards him.

The death of Naranappa who has destroyed all the rituals of being Brahmin and carried out impious acts that showed his disapproval for his fellow Brahmins and neighbors of Agrahara. He has disrespected his culture by polluting himself by taking up drinking, spending time with Muslims and eating meat with them, and catching fish from the pious temple pond with his Muslim friends. This impurity made him cast his lawful wife and build a relationship with the low-caste woman Chandri, despite this behavior the Brahmins never disconnected him from their conservative village of Agrahara.

Naranappa, a Brahmin by birth but violates all the laws and goes against his religion equally shows that the religion which they pretend to be pious is draining its essence from the corrupt minds of Brahmins they follow and is not based on grounds of humanity. It is filled with the difference that is made based on caste and at the stake of humanitarian values. So he gives up his values and involves himself in maintaining good relationships with other caste people and developing relationships with Chandra. He provides her with all the pleasure, but still Chandri lacks the concern and respect from Naranappa, which she gains in Praneshacharya where her soul is blessed that is sacred.

The Brahmin women characters in the novel are portrayed as disfigured, ugly, and unattractive for sexual pleasures and greedy about external pleasures that ar saw when Chandri takes the step ahead by providing her gold jewellery and adornments to the men to perform the cremation of her lover Naranappa. The temptation for getting these gold many of the Brahmin wives owes their husband to allow themselves to perform the death rites, it causes fights and quarrel among families to perform these funeral to gain this greed for gold, shows the nature of these Brahmins that is insensible and unworthy in their cultural practices of Brahmanism that is sacred in religion.

On the other hand, low-caste women like Chandri, a prostitute offer her jewellery to meet the expenses of the death rites of Naranappa. It shows that the character of Chandri is different from other Brahmin women which is not filled with any greed or selfishness. Chandra feels that she must help the Acharya to perform the last rites of Naranappa, by giving up all the jewelry she had. It is given by Naranappa and due to him she has lived a life of comfort and respect, who had gone against the Agrahara and maintained a relationship with her. It shows her human nature to return help, in need of once. This quality is found missing in Brahmin women, as they always think of their benefits in life. And the other women like Belli, an untouchable girl who extends the relationship with Shripati, a Brahmin, who does not expect any money or gifts in return for a relationship that she builds with him. Padmavati, a prostitute does not show any bargain for money when Putta takes Praneshacharya to her house.

The main part of the novel is to perform the last rites of Naranappa and decide to consider him a Brahmin, despite all his acts which were against Brahmanism by this act we come across many such aspects that make us think or analyze how character development of the Dalit women are taken place. Where Garudacharya raises the question about his relationship with a low-caste prostitute Chandri, which they feel that she is the only reason for his misdeeds to Brahmanism. He says:

Oh no, a Brahmin isn't lost because he takes a lowborn prostitute. Our ancestors after all came from the north- you can ask Praneshacharya if you wish- history says they cohabited with Dravidian women. (Ramanujan, 1976, p.7)

The existence of the Dalits gives the reference to the terms. In southern India, Dalits are sometimes been referred to as Adi Dravida, Adi Karnataka, and Adi Andra, which mean first Dravidians, Kannadigas, and Andra,s respectively. These terms were first used in 1917 by Southern Dalit leaders, who believed that they were the indigenous inhabitants of India.

Chandri is an object of hatred for all Brahmin women of Agrahara. As Anusuya, Lakshmanas's wife starts to curse her:

May tigers trample her at midnight, may snakes bite her, this whore, this seducing witch! If she had not given him potions, why should he, Anasuyas' own maternal uncle's son, why should he push aside his kinswomen, calls her an invalid, squander all his property, and throw all the ancestral gold and jewels on the neck of this evil witch! She looked at the four-strand gold chain around Chandri's neck and the thick gold bracelet on her wrist, and could not bear to think of it. She wept loudly. If only her sister had been alive, that gold chain would have been around her neck- would a blood-relatives corpse lie around like this without even the benefit of a rite? All because of this filthy whore- won't someone brand her face! (Ramanujan, 1976, p.8)

The statement of Anasuya towards Chandra describes that it is because of her that the relationship with her sister was destroyed and the gold that Naranappa gave to her all belong to her sister. It also makes the idea clear that low-caste women are not meant to have a relationship with upper-caste men and they do not have the right to dress well or live a desired life of comfort. They are denied from gaining all the respectful positions that every woman should get in society. It always shows that if upper caste men build a relationship with low caste, the questions are raised on the character of a woman itself and not on the man, due to his superiority. The fault of women, particularly if they belong to a low caste is measured in any aspect.

As these Brahmins depict these women as beautiful, attractive figures for sexual intercourse. According to Mukherjee (1985, p.172), it is common practice in Indian novels that 'Outcaste or lower-caste women are often endowed with a greater sexual vitality than their high-born counterparts'. When Durgabhatta, can't stop sightseeing over Chandri when she is present on the veranda, where the discussion was taking place about performing the death rites of Naranappa. He describes his lustful view and calls her 'Chitrni':

A real 'sharp' type, exactly as described in Vatsyayana's manual of love- look at her, toes longer than the big toe, just as the Love manual says. Look at those breasts. In sex, she's the type who sucks the male dry. Her eyes, which should be fickle, are not misty with grief and fear, but she looks good that way. Like Matsyagandhi, the Fisherwoman in the Ravi Varma print hung up in Durgabhatta's bedroom, shyly trying to hide her breasts bursting through her poor rag of a sari. The same eyes and nose: no wonder Naranappa threw away the worship stone for her, ate taboo meat, and drank taboo liquor. One wonders at his daring. One remembers Jagannatha the Brahmin poet who married a Muslim girl. (Ramanujan, 1976, p.9).

Shripati, another character and a friend of Naranappa, even wants to give up the practices of Brahmanism like Naranappa. He feels if he could get a part to play in a drama troupe, it would make him give up the practices of Brahmanism, like endless funeral cakes and funeral porridge and jackfruit curry. On the way near to Durvasapura, his body filled with pleasure thinking of his wife. He says:

Who cares if his wife tightens and twines up her thighs? There was Belli. An outcaste, so what? As Naranappa would say—who cares if she's a goddess or a shaven widow? But Belli was neither. Which Brahmin girl, cheek sunken, breast withered, mouth stinking of lentil soup, --- which Brahmin girl was equal to Belli? Her thighs are full. When she's with him she twists like a snake coupling with another, writhing in the sands. She'd have bathed by now in water heated in mud pots outside her hut; she'd have drunk her father's sour toddy, she'd be warm and ready like a tuned-up drum. Not utterly black-skinned, nor pale white, her body is the color of the earth, fertile, ready for seed. (Ramanujan, 1976, p.33)

The thinking of Durgbahatta and Sripati that is explained in the statement, where he looks at Chandri with lustful sight and Sripati describes Belli in comparison to his wife shows that the thinking of the Brahmin men in describing the physical attributes rather than understanding her internal attributes of pain and sorrows. She became an object of gaze to the men as she belong to the low caste, and rather a satisfying object of their greed. Physical qualities become most important than internal qualities. If there would be other women of upper caste, the gaze of looking would be the same?

It shows how Ananthmurthy describes the beauty of the low-caste women in comparison to the upper-caste Brahmin women. The disregard for Brahmin women in terms of beauty or lack of it is again expressed through Brahmin characters who are involved in sexual relationships with low-caste women. It also makes us understand that Brahmin women are born to perform domestic work and their duties towards family. On the other hand, the low caste women are described as dark brown with a sensuality born to fulfill the sexual desire of upper caste men.

Praneshacharya every evening used to read the Puranas and described the beauty of Shakuntala, which Shripati hear sitting on the verandah and out of the feeling takes Belli, an outcaste woman at the river where she came to get water. He described:

Belli was carrying a pitcher of water on her head, the rag on her body had slipped, and as she stood in the moonlight bouncing her breasts, the color of the earth- she'd looked like Shakuntala herself. (Ramanujan, 1976, p.35)

After enjoying personally Acharya's description 'of Shakuntala in the form of Belli, Shripati walked straight away to the outcaste hutments situated on the hillside. He stepped softly and clapped his hands outside Belli's hut. Sripati's love for Belli is only to satisfy his physical greed, so he is neither interested in listening to her talk nor about her feelings when she talks about the fears of the death of Pilla and his wife due to the plague. She remains only a desirable object for Shripati, more than a respectful being, due to her low caste who are always looked upon to serve physical pleasure.

Sripati wrapped on his dhoti again, put on his, shirt took out a pocket comb, combed his cropped hair, and ran in a hurry, flashing his light. Belli was all right for sleeping with, she was no good for talk. If she opens her mouth, she talks only about ghosts and demons. (Ramanujan, 1976, p.36)

After satisfying his physical ends, he does not wish to stay there any longer. We could not find any compatibility between Sripati and Belli in terms of heart or mind. The relationship that is maintained is only to satisfy his lust, like Naranappa he does not dare to accept her and stay with her and look after her needs of living a comfortable and respectful life. He uses her, as per his needs. It shows that Belli like low-caste women are accepted as of convenience. At once satisfied he no longer thinks of her and moves away. As even the Brahmin youth of Durvasapura and Parijatapura wishes for her company for satisfying their lust, though they will not dare to take her because of her low caste origin and fear of being ostracised from society.

In early literature, masters of the basis used the sexual services of women in servitude apart from using their labor. This is a practice that has continued through the centuries. Women of the lower orders were not regarded as grains, or family women, as women of the upper castes were since even their children could be denied to them by their masters. The sexual availability of lower caste women was part of the material structure of domination by the higher castes, something that both men and women of the lower castes, were forced to accept. In Rajasthan it was customary for the Rajput bride to enter her affinal household accompanied by a daroga woman who would also be married to a daroga man in the same village; she worked

in the mistress's household but was also expected to provide sexual services to the Rajput men of the household. (Chakravarti, 2018, p.81)

This statement gives a clear picture that women of lower caste were only used for sexual satisfaction like Belli and Chandri, but society will not give the acceptance of her as their lawful wife or become grains or even the relationship between them will not get any respect, these were the condition of Dalit women.

Uma Chakravarti (2018), an Indian historian who deals with the issues related to gender, caste, and class tries to characterize the two faces of the caste system and gender:

If we take this argument forward, we need to recognize that cultural oppression as it operates in the lives of Dalits and women, especially on women of the lower castes, is far more dehumanizing than economic exploitation, which we understand as the dominant feature of class, by itself. The consequences of caste-based exploitation, where access to material resources is closed to the lower caste, are more pernicious than class-based exploitation and appropriation of surplus- which in any case in India is almost invariably drawn from Dalits by depriving them of dignity and personhood.(Chakravarti,2018,p.07).

The solution was not found in any holy book and knowledge gained by Praneshacharya for the right way to perform the death rites. Lastly, he goes to the temple of Maruti to ask for help, but after long hours of fasting and prayers there was no solution provided, exhausted with failure of his deeds he returns from the forest, where he comes in contact with Chandri, falls themselves prey in one another arms and develops a sexual encounter which destroys Praneshacharya's spiritual crisis that was long been purified for gaining salvation. When he realizes it:

It was midnight when the Acharya woke up. His head was in Chandri's lap. His cheek was pressed into her low naked belly. Chandri's fingers caressed his back, his ears, and his head. As if, he had become a stranger to himself, the Acharya opened his eyes and asked himself: Where am I? How did I get here? What's this dark? Which forest is this? Who is this woman? (Ramanujan, 1976, p.59).

Praneshacharya, in his whole life never sensed the feeling of touching any woman, he experienced the new world in contact with Chandri's intercourse. His life turned to achieving the liveliness which was lost in the sacrifice that he made to himself from worldly pleasure, which made him realize the living of Naranappa with Chandri, despite disapproval from the whole agrahara. He tells Chandri to reveal the truth about the night to the whole Agrahara. And he also tells her that by this act he has lost all the authority of deciding good deeds for the whole agrahara, by disgrace he decides to perform the funeral rites of Naranappa.

Chandri does not respond to the saying of Praneshacharya and goes straight away to Agrahara Naranappa's house as she does not dare to expose Praneshacharya in front of all the Brahmins and ruin his life. So she takes up all her courage and with the help of Ahmad Bari, a Muslim friend of Naranappa performs the funeral rites. And decide to leave for Kundapura morning with all the expenses she has with her to lead a life on her own.

Ananthmurthy who described Chandri's character as a kind and generous woman who lived with Naranappa for long 20 years and never stepped outside the house, was only seen after Naranappa's death. And other Brahmin who always saw her with lustful eyes. But Praneshacharya never talked to her or never praised her beauty as he always showed respect to women. She becomes a medium of the object for personal needs for both Naranappa, who uses her for his freedom and lust, and Praneshacharya, for his self-realization.

After Praneshacharya's wife's death, having sexual contact with Chandri made him suffer with the question that was creating havoc in his mind. The search for self and his identity was lost by violating the values and rituals that he followed his whole life. To find the answers for his self-revelation, he takes up the journey into forests and cities on foot with a conflict in his mind to confess his misdeeds to his fellow Brahmin in agrahara or go in search for Chandri to impart his life to this new outlook of world that he sensed in longing with Chandri. He says:

I am sin, my work is sin, my soul is sin, my birth is in sin.' No, no, even that is a lie. Must forget all words learned by heart, the heart must flow free like a child's. When he caressed Chandri's breast, it didn't occur to him to say, 'I am sin.' Now he was quite happy Chandri wasn't here to shame him. Thoughts after waking are different from the thoughts when one is unaware. He became aware, this life is a duplicity. Now he's involved in the wheel of karma. To relieve this misery, he must lose awareness again and embrace her, must wake up in that misery, for absolution one must return to her. The wheel, the wheel of karma. This is the life of 'Passion'. Even if he had left desire, desire had not left him.

Nalini Natarajan (1999) has produced the most detailed study of gender politics in *Samskara* so far. Expressing her dissatisfaction with the text's delineation of women characters in general, as well as Chandri in particular. (Natarajan, 1999, p.159-60) writes:

If the realist sections of *Samskara* erase upper-caste women's labor and sexuality, the existential sections could be read as erasing the prostitute's claim to subjectivity through Art.... Chandri is portrayed without any sense of cultural talent (in singing and dancing) usually associated with her class. The existential text fails to provide any visible subject positions for women. The attempt at portraying interiority in a male subject suggests the possibility of any interiority of women.

Praneshacharya who takes up the journey for the self-realization of his existence goes on his way, where he is accompanied by a young man named Putta, a pimp who makes him enjoy the pleasures of carnival, games, and a cockfight that was all restricted to their values culture inside the conservative agrahara, and also take him to Padmavati, a prostitute. She even had a relationship with Naranappa but it was not revealed to Acharya. At last the experiences of the world full of passion and pleasure which he tried to avoid long ago and dedicated himself to his values and responsibilities towards his Brahmin-hood have made him self-realization of life

Conclusion:

The caste conflict between the people in the Agrahara paved the way to lose the humanity among them. The religion, rituals, and tradition of Brahmanism collapse and go into self-realization among the characters in the novel. It brings a change in their thoughts and understanding of the reality of true meaning in life. It also gives a clear picture of the low-caste women characters that are depicted and makes us understand that they are meant to fulfill the sexual desires of the upper-caste men, and their portrayal made us believe that the treatment made to them was not respectful in the society. It also gives an analysis that there is a difference in thinking and treating the low caste women by Brahmins like Garudacharaya, Durgabhattacharya, and Shripati on one hand and Praneshacharya on the other. The comparison made between the Brahmin women and lower caste women shows the respect and dignity she expects being a woman was deprived of her. The place, the position the Dalit woman deserves was prohibited to her in every sense by her identity and caste made her suffer in the hands of the upper caste men. Many of the writers still try to understand the low caste women's conditions in society from different perspectives that the hunt still carried out in many of the works.

Works Cited

- Ananthmurthy, U.R. Samskara. Translated by A.K. Ramanujan, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print
- Argyou, V. (2013) The Gift of European Thought and the Cost of Living. Berghan. New York; Oxford.
- Beauvoir. Simon de. The Second Sex. Penguin Books, 1949. Print
- Bodhale, B, Anand, and Karankal, G, Rajesh. Religious Dogmatism and Moral Degeneration in U.R.Ananthmurthy's Samskara-A Rite for a Dead Man: JHERS, Vol.4, Issue 2, Oct 2016.
- Caputo, J.D.The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion.Indiana University Press. 1997.
- Chakravarti, Uma. Gendering Caste: through a feminist lens. Revised Edition. Sage Publications. 2018.
- Manavalli, Krishna. Caste, Desire, and The Representation of the Gendered Other in U.R.Ananthmurthy's Samskara, Ghatashraddha and Akkayya.2001.
- Monika, A. A study of Indian Structure of Caste: Bharathipura by U.R.Ananthmurthy June 2018.
- Mukherjee, Meenakshi. Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India. Oxford University Press.1985.
- Pillai, Sharon. Gender Representation in U.R.Ananthmurthy's Samskara: SAR, Vol.31 (2), pp. 135-153
- Ramakrishna, R, S. Suragi. OUP India. Dec 2017.
- Singh, Manish. Shades of Caste and Class and the Women in Samskara. 2015
- Singh, Prem. Women Characters in U.R.Anantha Murthy's Samskara: A Lohian Reading. 2015
- Wani, Ahmad, Muneer. Superiority and Social Injustice in U.R.Anantha Murthy's Samskara. Vol.5, Issue.4 November 2017.