CHAPTER 5

SLYPOLITICS IN ANANTHAMURTHY’S
PORTRAYAL OF DALITS

- U R Ananthamurthy – The Roots and the Fruits
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The poor don't know that their function in life is to exercise our generosity.

~ Jean-Paul Sartre

Acknowledging the influence Shivaram Karanth had on him, Dr U R Ananthamurthy writes - “My social conscience was awakened, while I was at high school in a village, by Karanth who dominated the literary scene of Karnataka for most of the 20th century (The Millennium Special: http://www.rediff.com/millennium/ananta.htm).” He was also greatly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi whom he reckons as a major force in the history of India. Being a Brahmin by caste, but coming on to the literary scene only after independence, and exploring different predicaments of the Brahmin community than Karanth did, makes Ananthamurthy an important novelist to be studied for our thesis.

U R Ananthamurthy – The Roots and the Fruits

Born in 1932 in the village of Melige in Karnataka, U R Ananthamurthy visited a traditional Sanskrit school at Durvasapuram; and grew up, as he says, as a ‘Gandhian socialist’ and later studied English and comparative literature in Mysore and Birmingham where, in 1963-66, he studied for a PhD under the supervision of Malcolm Bradbury. He was professor of English literature for several years at Mysore University, later Vice-Chancellor of the Mahatma Gandhi University in Kottayam, Chairman of the ‘National Book Trust’ and President of the Sahitya Academy (the Indian Literature Academy) in Delhi. Many guest professorships led him to Europe and the USA.
In his youth UR Ananthamurthy had leftist leanings and anti-establishment attitude. As a writer he revolted against injustice from days of Expo-70 agitation (1970) and later against the excesses committed by Indira Gandhi during emergency. Speaking on the influence of Lohia on UR Ananthamurthy along with Tejaswi and P Lankesh, the two other charismatic writers of the Navya (modernist) movement in Kannada literature, Gowda (2010) opines that while Tejaswi and Lankesh were in open admiration of Lohia's ideals for ending caste through inter-caste marriages and his rational dismissal of religious superstition, Ananhamurthy was skeptical towards the hubris of liberal modernist aspirations for destroying tradition. He even propagated that caste also be seen as a source of knowledge and creative talent.

Ananthamurthy began his literary career in 1955 with the story volume Endendhigu Mugiyada Kathe. Since then he has published five novels, one play, six short story volumes, four poetry volumes (including translation of Tao, Yeats and Rilke and Brecht) and ten essay volumes in Kannada and several pieces on literature in English. His main works include Samskara, Bhava, Bharathi Pura, and Avaste. Several of his novels and short fictions have been made into movies. His works have been translated into several Indian and European languages and have been awarded with significant literary prizes, including the 'Jnanpeeth Award' (1994), the most renowned Indian literature prize.

Ananthamurthy is known as an important representative of the 'Navya' movement in the literature of the Kannada language. As a writer, he is known far beyond this language boundary and is recognized as one of the important writes in India. To Ananthamurthy's central themes belongs the examination of the caste system, religious rules and traditions as well as the ambivalent relationship between the handed down cultural value system and the new values of a changing world.

Being a versatile writer he has dealt with varied genres like short story, novel, poetry and essays with equal masterly skill. Both realism and the metaphysical are woven together
superbly in the texture of his works. In the words of Ramesh Luthra (2008), “The inherent beauty of his writings lies in his understanding the complexity of Indian society with an appreciable ambivalence”. (2)

Speaking on the literary influences he has experienced Ananthamurthy has said,

“Although the following writers I mention are not Indian writers, they are spiritually Indian in the way they affected me — I mean such writers as the British D H Lawrence, the great Russian Leo Tolstoy and the French Albert Camus. Others whom I admire are old writers or ancient writers — people like Shakespeare and Veda Vyasa” (Ananthamurthy, U.R. The Millennium Special: http://www.rediff.com/millennium/ananta.htm).

Ananthamurthy has a unique ability to bring in the ancient Indian texts and connect them to the crisis of 20th century civilization and also relate it to Gandhian thought and Lohiaite socialism. Ramesh Luthra (2008, 3) has observed that, “Searching ethical authenticity of the self on the background of social, historical and political conditions along with adjustments and confrontations is the major theme underlying his earlier works like Samskara, Bharatipura, Awasthe and Clip Joint.”.

In the sections that follow, Samskara and Bharathipura of U R Ananthamurthy would be analyzed to explore his stances as a cultural revivalist. The novel Samskara sketches a search for identity by a brahmin (i.e. Praneshaacharya) and the search for identity by the braminical community in the transitional modern world. The protagonist of the novel ‘Bharathipura’ is a social worker, an Indian socialist. The novel tries to explore on the failure of the youth who have had the western way of education. Thus, there is a strong tendency on the part of the novelist to assign identities. The search for the individual identity or an identity of a group or of a community in these novels is basically driven by the cultural
notion that has moulded the psyche of the narrator. A lot of biasness towards the other or the Dalits becomes glaringly evident in the construction of their identity. Therefore it seems apt to analyze them in order to establish Dr U R Ananthamurthy to be a modern cultural revivalist.

**Samskara as Revivalism**

In the opinion of many critics Samskara (1966) is the most significant novel of U R Ananthamurthy. “Samskara” means culture as well as ritual. It also means death rites. It tells the story of a village priest who looks at the social and religious taboos of his environment and looks for the answer to the question: ‘What is ‘Samskara?’; ‘Is culture only maintained if tradition is followed with blind fervour?’ Ananthamurthy questions discrimination through the caste system, the repressive belief-practice of the Brahmins. The novel acquires a metaphysical dimension, while deeply rooted in its social and cultural milieu. Renowned writers such as V S Naipaul and Erick Erickson have commented on the work insightfully.

Describing the background and manner in which he wrote Samskara, Ananthamurthy (2005) says,

I don’t remember how this story was received in the manuscript journal which I had named ‘Tharangini’. I finished it within a week. Being away for nearly two years from my own land and people, the language Kannada with all its richness and the people whom I knew came back to me and I found myself rewriting the story, which I had written at the age of 13. But with a lot more in it than I could grasp in my tender years (65).

The above confession shows that the writing of Samskara was something that was waiting to be released due to its rootedness in the childhood memories and cultural crisis.
experienced by him in his childhood and the early youth. Needless to say, such pieces of creative writing carries within it much more of one’s culture and identity issues than a work written in relatively greater leisure and tranquility.

Further, recalling his childhood experiences that shaped the plot and the ideas of the novel Ananthamurthy (2005) says,

I was barely 13 years old when some momentous things happened in my little Agrahara. Everyone was talking about an imminent ‘Pralaya’. If everyone was going to be destroyed; I thought in my childish innocence, people will be very generous and my parents will not say ‘no’ to any indulgence of mine. I used to have dreams of rice Roti being eaten in the night previous to the Pralaya with all the honey and ghee my mother had kept locked. Not only Pralaya, but I was also witness to actual death all round me. Four miles away was my high school, which was closed because of plague in the town. People began to die along with the rats. In my village only the pariahs died. That was because, I had realized, the orthodox doctor had not gone to inoculate against plague - they were untouchables. Although I was surrounded by all these people, something in me was stirred against all these superstitious beliefs. My father used to read Gandhi’s writings in Harijan which used to come to our Agrahara (68).

Speaking of the inspiration for the character of Narayanappa in his novel, Ananthamurthy says,

Just then another queer thing happened in my Agrahara. An orthodox Brahmin who had joined the army had come back and he used to gather all of us schoolboys and drill us upon a hill. He also talked to us of far away places and the battles he had fought and so on. He had greatly impressed me. I was also privy to a
secret, which no other Brahmin in the village knew. This ex-army young man who spoke English had a secret romance with one of the loveliest dark girls from the untouchable huts, although, he came from an orthodox family. This was a secret of elemental importance, which had begun to shake my belief in the whole caste system (2005, 69).

Describing the relationship between the Brahmins and the Dalits in his village, Ananthamurthy states,

When the Harijans began to die they set fire to whole huts for everyone had died in the hut. They were thatched huts with no belongings and the Brahmins in my Agrahara whispered to one another that they were being punished by god for having dared to enter temples somewhere in North India under the guidance of the Kali of our yug - Mahatma Gandhi. The beautiful girl I referred to had seemed extraordinarily lovely to me. I had read the story of ‘Mathsyagadhi,’ the fisherwoman with whom Parashara fell in love and instantaneously produced Vedavyasa, the Sathyojatha. I was living in the world of Purana and reality at the same time (2005, 69-70).

Thus, we find that the novel has its inspiration and roots in Ananthamurthy’s personal experiences of his community and its relation to the Dalits and others. His preoccupation in this work is the challenge of making the Brahmin community relevant to the turbulent, modern era. Therefore it would be interesting to see how he depicts the identity of the Dalits who are seen as very essential to this entire process.

Critical response to Samskara has come from many different perspectives. Ramanujan for instance, sums it up as a “religious novel, a contemporary re-working of ancient themes” (1978, 143). He sees the characters in sets of polar opposites, one acting as a foil to
another, and concludes that the novel “naturally” tends to be an allegory. Its theme, for Ramanujan, is the “complex relations between asceticism and eroticism”:

The mythology of Shiva details the paradoxes of the erotic ascetic, the god-heretic. The erotic plagues the ascetic; the two are also seen as alternative modes of quest, represented here by Naranappa and the Acharya. They speak the same language (Ibid.).

In Praneshacharya, he says, “brahminism questions itself in a modern existentialist mode (a mode rather alien to it ...)” (Ibid., 141). On the other hand, for V. S. Naipaul (1977), the novel dramatizes one man’s search for identity and the novel “takes us closer to the Indian idea of the self, and without too much mystification” (104). The Acharya’s obsessive, almost neurotic, reliance on the scriptures, he believes, represents Ananthamurthy’s indictment of the Indians’ social mythography:

Knowingly or unknowingly, Anantamurti (sic) has portrayed a barbaric civilization, where the books, the laws, are buttressed by magic, and where a too elaborate social organization is unquickened by intellect or creativity or ideas of moral responsibility (except to the self in its climb to salvation). These people are all helpless, disadvantaged, easily unbalanced; the civilization they have inherited has long gone sour; living instinctive lives, crippled by rules ... they make up a society without a head (1977, 109).

_Samskara_ is thus about the Indian society and psychology, Naipaul argues, because it reflects all the weak threads in India’s social fabric. “When men cannot observe, they don’t have ideas; they have obsessions,” he says, and “when people live instinctive lives, something like a collective amnesia steadily blurs the past” (112). Praneshacharya’s “neurotic uncertainty about his nature” (109) reflects the central crisis of the story (Rath: 2005, 101-2).
Rajalakshmi (2004, 42) opines that the text of *Samskara* suggests that spiritual India alone can bring peace to the victims of modernity. The novel states that spirituality is the soothing balm for stricken modern Indian minds. In her opinion, the coexistence of tradition and modernity takes a different dimension here. The conflicts and contradictions faced with the onset of modernity and the nation seem to get resolved through the spirituality of the traditional set up.

Shashikala (2005, 9) observes that although it is true that independence has brought liberation to Indian society at the same time it brought with it the responsibility of constructing its own life and society by freeing itself from the alien rule. In the changed new situations the reverence for the tradition, ideal etc., which had been provided by the pre-independence time were re-examined and they indicated the emergence of situations to be redefined in fulfilling this responsibility. During this time by the influence of the western psychology, philosophy, scientific research, the roots of the concept of the understanding of life itself was shaken. Though India had not experienced the intensity of the outcome of the Second World War, we were influenced by the search for the human being and the influence of the worldly relationship of the western world. Therefore, in the post-independent society search for the models of life, still not clearly available model and at the same time the new philosophy, thoughts that were available from the westerners prepared to see the society differently. Therefore, as aptly described by K V Narayana, “this is a restructured world”.

Rao (2005, 64) argues that though *Samskara* was written in 1965, there are enough indications in the novel to suggest that it is set in the early decades of the 20th century, the time of the early Kannada social novels. However, the fact that *Samskara* does not belong to the same ‘time’ is brought out by Praneshacharya’s cogitations, through which Ananthamurthy thinks aloud on issues like brahminism, authority, code of conduct, etc. Similar issues were brought to the fore and discussed in the early social novels and the solutions
offered were a cleansing of society and reforming its institutions. *Samskara* explores the issues at greater length, but refrains from giving any final closure to them.

As a cultural revivalist the narrator of *Samskara* brings in a change that was happening in the community due to modernisation, Brahmins visiting hotels, getting exposed to ways of the city, certain western modern means of living. He does it some times with the help of Putta to the character of Praneshcharyya or Manjayya,

The thing that had disturbed Rich Manjayya was really the series of deaths occurring one after another. Naranappa first, then Dasacharya, then Praneshcharyya's wife. It meant only one thing, an epidemic. Experienced in affairs as he was, in the exchanges, the markets, the law courts and offices of Shivamogge, he'd just laughed at the other brahmins' explanations. They all believed that these disasters were due to Naranappa's untimely death and the brahmins' dereliction of duty in not performing his final rites. Of course Manjayya had said unhappily, 'How awful! Dasacharya is dead! He came and ate *uppittu* here only the day before yesterday.' But he was fearful inside that he'd let that brahmin into his house. He'd had his suspicions already when they came to tell him that Naranappa died of fever and a bubo, after a trip to Shivamogge. And now he was afraid even to name the dread disease. Why overreach oneself, he felt. But when he heard that rats had been running out of the agrahara and falling dead, and carrion birds had arrived to eat them, his suspicions became certainties. His guess was correct, as surely as there are sixteen annas to a rupee. The *Tayinadu* newspaper that came yesterday, though a week old, had printed the news in a corner: 'Plague in Shivamogge'. Naranappa did bring the plague into the agrahara, and plague spreads like wildfire. Being inert all this while, bound to some blind belief and not doing the dead man's last rites — was like drawing a slab of stone over one's own head. Fools. Even
he had been an idiot. Standing in the front yard, he suddenly called out, ‘Fix the carts, at once!’ Can’t waste a minute. The plague will cross the river and come to our agrahara. It’s enough if a crow or vulture brings in its beak a single plague rat and drops it – everything will be finished here.’ He stood outside his house and announced in a shouting voice so that everyone could hear: ‘Till I return from the city no one should go near Durvasapura.’ As the leader of the agrahara, he didn’t have the heart to scare them with his suspicions of plague. The bullock cart was ready. He sat against the pillow inside the curved wagon, and ordered the cartman to drive to Tirthahalli. In his very practical brain, the decisions were well formed already: one, to tell the municipality and get the dead body removed; two, to call in doctors and get everybody inoculated; three, to get rat exterminators and pumps, fill the ratholes with poison gas and stop them up; four, if necessary, to evacuate the people from the agrahara. For quite some time he muttered to himself like a chant—‘The idiots, the idiots!’ (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 103-4).

The Narrator tries to depict modernity in yet other ways:

Another crowd around the sodawater shop. Still another, around the man with the performing monkey. Children’s toy trumpets, balloons. In the midst of these noises, a demon, an evil spirit. A town-crier. Beating his tom-tom, he announced in his loud town-crier voice: ‘There’s a plague in Shivamogga! The epidemic of Man! Anyone going to Shivamogga should stop at Tirthahalli and get an inoculation! That’s the order of the Municipality!’ People listened to him with interest, and drank more sodawater. Laughed in guffaws at the antics of the monkey. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 126)

Thus, the novel very powerfully brings out how despite the advent of modernity the
tradition and ritual-bound Brahmin community had failed to recognize the rottenness of their civilization and belief-system.

The queer ways in which the Brahmin community finds interesting ways of adjusting to modernity, without letting go its well-guarded social status and privileges, is also brought out well in the novel:

'This is a brahmin restaurant. They've brought it along all the way from Tirthahalli just for the festival. It won't pollute you. There's a special place inside for orthodox Brahmins like you.' ‘No, I don’t want any coffee.’ ‘That won’t do. Come. I have to buy you some coffee’ said Putta, and dragged him in by the hand. Praneshacharya squatted on a low seat unwillingly. He looked around timidly, fearing the presence of some familiar person. If someone sees the Crest-Jewel of Vedanta Philosophy drinking a cup of polluted restaurant coffee. . . ‘Thuth, I must first rid myself of such fears,’ he cursed himself. Putta stood a little further off, respecting the Acharya’s brahminhood. ‘Two special coffees,’ he said to the waiter standing in front of him. He paid two annas, drank the tumbler of coffee, cursing it. ‘Awful coffee at these festivals.’ Praneshacharya was quite thirsty; he even liked his coffee. With a new access of spirit, he came out. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 115-6)

The narrator even takes Praneshacharya to a cock fight - the scene that clearly depicts the cultural gulf that exists between the ritual-ridden upper-caste, Brahminical society and the others. It also brings out the disdainful attitude of the culturally secluded, yet superiority-stricken Brahmins towards the popular culture and life-style:

‘Wait a bit, Acharya-re. Look there,’ said Putta. At a distance on a hill was a group of low-caste folk standing in some kind of trance. ‘Come, let’s go there. I’m sure it’s a cock-fight.’ Praneshacharya’s heart missed a beat. Yet he walked
with Putta, troubled by a sense of fate. Standing at a little distance away from the group, he looked on. The smell of cheap toddy made him gag a little. The people sat on their heels watching two roosters snapping at each other with knives tied to their legs, leaping at each other, flapping their wings. People squatted on their toes all around the fighting roosters, mouths gaping. Praneshacharya had never seen such concentration, such sharp cruel looks. All their five vital breaths seemed to converge in the eyes of those squatting people. And then, the two roosters: a swirl of wings, four wings, four knives. Kokk, kokk, kokk, kokk. All around them, forty, fifty eyes. Red-combed roosters, flashing knives. The sun, flash, flash. Flicker. Glint. Spark as from flintstone. Ah, what skill. One of them struck, struck, and struck. Swooped and sat on top of the other. Praneshacharya was in a panic. He had abruptly dropped into a demoniac world. He sat down, in utter fear: if in that nether-world where he decided to live with Chandri, if in that depth of darkness, in that cave, if the cruel engagement glinting in the eyes of these entranced creatures is just a part of that world, a brahmin like him will wilt. The two masters were making throaty sounds to egg their roosters on, and the sounds didn’t seem to issue from human throats. It became clear that he didn’t have the skills to live in this world of sharp and cruel feelings. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 116-7)

Ashoka (2003, 48-9) argues that ‘Samskara’ is a continuation of ‘Ghatashraddha’. According to him the symbolism of Ghatashraddha gets largely extended in Samskara. The epic that Ananthamurthy had intended to create takes its complete form here. If read as a complete story of the agrahara without reading it as the story only of Praneshacharya, multifacetedness of Samskara gets revealed. In a similar way it should not be read as the story of the last rites of Naranappa only. The abundance of meaning of the word Samskara cannot be forgotten. In the cruel world of Ghatashraddha, there is no character of
Praneshacharya who would indicate the strength of the other world. It means in a work of art like this a system which gets expressed in its weakness itself. But in many ways Samskara has won all these limitations. All the elements of agrahara of Ghatashraddha are in Samskara. But the absence of Praneshacharya makes the picture of agrahara complex here. If in Ghatashraddha in the activities of Shastri and his friends a primitive rebellion becomes visible in Samskara the rebellion of Naranappa gets a theoretical strength. In face to face of Praneshacharya and Naranappa, a basic form of a model of image and reflection of the stories of Clip Joint, Suryana Kudure moves about. In the expansion of space-time the novel genre indicates a great ambition of rolling from story - long story genre. ‘Samskara’ has got extended from a single conscience to multiple consciences from the point of view of a narration. The characters of Mahabala and Putta provide different bases for the multiple searches. However, dense the evil world of ‘Ghatashraddha’ is in one sense it is very limited. But, the intention of Samskara is very vast.

The novel attempts to explore the identity dilemmas of the Brahmins’ in the modern world the words of Durgabatta, who as a response to the words of Shankarayya, priest of Parijaatapura says,

.... But our dilemma is something else: is Naranappa, who drank liquor and ate meat, who threw the holy stone into the river, is he a Brahmin or is he not? Tell me, which of us is willing to lose his brahminhood here? Yet it’s not at all right, I agree to keep a dead brahmin’s body waiting, uncremated’ (19).

The narrator depicts the internalization of the varna system by the other caste groups by way of explaining the elation in them for getting a chance to associate themselves with a Brahmin, no matter what the circumstance is: ‘The Parijaatapura folks were unhappy over their friend’s death, but quite happy they were getting a chance to cremate a highcaste
Brahmin. They were partly pleased because Naranappa ate in their houses with no show of caste pride' (Ibid.).

Even the way political dynamics affects the identity of the Brahmin community is brought out in the words from Naranappa to Acharya who had gone to convince and Naranappa back to the ways of the Dharmashastra, "your texts and rites don't work anymore. The congress Party is coming to power, you'll have to open up the temples to all outcastes', and so on irreverently' (21).

The narrator also reveals the conflict and challenge experienced by the Brahminic community by other/alternative schools of thought which are usually depicted in poor light by the Brahminic community in these words of Naranappa: 'You fellows – you Brahmins – you want to tie me down to a hysterical female, just because she is some relative, right? Just keep your dharma to yourself – we’ve but one life – I belong to the “Hedonist School” which says – borrow, if you must, but drink your ghee’ (21).

The narrator awakens the Brahminic fold to the inherent danger to its usual ‘business’ due to the changed circumstances; once again through the character of Naranappa,

Your Garuda, he robs shaven widows, he plots evil with black magic men, and he is one of your Brahmins, isn’t he? ...Let’s see how long all this Brahmin business will last. All your brahmin respectability. I will roll it up and throw it all ways for a little bit of pleasure with one female (21).

Shashikala (2005, 24) opines that for Praneshacharya of Samskara the new world of experience opens up itself only after his new experience with Chandri. This experience made him an outsider to the life style of till now (Shashikala: 2005, 68). Ananthamurthy (1978) elaborates this saying that the sudden experience with Chandri, keeps Praneshacharya, who was searching an answer for the last rites of Naranappa, outside the way of life of till now. Incidents that happen one after the other, make him to re-introspect the tradition,
heritage which he had lived with belief. The engrossment in the lineage gets a crack. Then the feeling came for him, 'like a baby monkey losing hold of his grip on the mother's body as she leaps from branch to branch, he felt he had lost hold and fallen from the rites and actions he had clutched till now' (75).

Thus, it is quite clear by the plot and the mode of narration of the novel that by bringing the rebel/revolt against brahminical system to the fore the narrator of Samskara is trying to sensitise a community which is becoming irrelevant to the times. The call for reform is evident in the picturing of various instances that Naranappa and some other Brahmins who rebel against provide for. Even by narrating various weaknesses of the Brahmin community of Durvasapura the narrator ironically intends to reform the ways of life of a community. The acts of Naranappa which seem villainous from the context of a community which exists by its ritualistic way of life is actually a presentation of different ways of revolting against a community which has not been flexible enough to change to the modern ways of life. The threats and challenges faced by the brahminic community are revealed through various depictions and dialogues:

He comes to the river in full view of all the brahmins and takes the holy stone that we've worshipped for generations and throws it in the water and spits after it! Condone everything if you wish - but didn't he, willfully, before our very eyes, bring Muslims over and eat and drink forbidden things in the wide open front yard? If any of us questioned him in good faith, he would turn on us, cover us with abuse from head to foot. As long as he lived, we just had to walk in fear of him.' (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 7).

The novel also shows how even when a Brahmin wants to break away from its decadent tradition how the Brahminic community 'clings' to him to protect the community
from the ‘bad influence’ of the other:

It's true Naranappa had thrown out brahmin ways, but they had still clung to him. Angry, mad, strong-willed man-he had capered and somersaulted, said he would turn Muslim if they excommunicated him. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 45)

The original question was really why he hadn't helped excommunicate Naranappa all these years. It was because of Naranappa’s threat to turn Muslim. By that threat, the ancient codes had already been defiled. There was a time when the brahmin’s power of penance ruled the world. Then one didn’t buckle under any such threat. It's because the times are getting worse such dilemmas torment us . . . (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 47)

Thus, it is quite clear that through the character of Naranappa the Narrator tries to harbinger the change in Agrahara/in the life of Brahmin community. The narrator tries to sketch various shifts/changes that are occurring within the community and thereby asks the people concerned to be on the guard. Actually the instances which are narrated speak about the attractions and allurements of the popular culture to the Brahmins as much as the process of modernisation that was taking place:

For Naranappa had been his one secret friend in the whole agrahara. He'd left home over a week ago. He made friends with the balladeer of the Kelur troupe, stayed with him wherever the troupe stopped, ate with them, went to their night shows, slept all day. In his spare time he'd gone to the neighbouring villages and persuaded them to invite the troupe for performances. He'd forgotten the whole world for a week happy in greetings and casual conversations. And tonight he was returning, flashlight in hand, singing loudly, in the scary forest dark. His hair was brushed back, uncut; he'd grown it long; down his neckline, because the
balladeer had promised him a girl’s role in next year’s play. After all, his tongue had been trained by Praneshacharya, hadn’t it? The balladeer had admired his pure enunciation, his clear voice. Shripati had heard enough Sanskrit and logic and ancient epics from the Acharya to give him enough culture for the ad-lib dialogues and profundities of these players of epic plays. If only he could get a part in the troupe, he could escape the brahmin dump, escape the endless funeral cakes and funeral porridge, escape all that living and dying for jackfruit curry. The thought filled Shripati with joy; so he wasn’t scared any more of the dark forest. He’d also had a drink of toddy in shaman Shina’s hut, and being a little high on it, didn’t shiver any more at the fearful silence of the forest. Two bottles of toddy; a flashlight pouring forth brilliant light at the touch of a button to the great amazement of peasants what ghost or demon can touch a man armed with these weapons? (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 36-7)

Special mention is made of the dangers inherent in the influence the bad examples from within the community have on their youth by ‘corrupting’ them and alienating them from their (superior) culture and traditional status:

Who induced Garuda’s son to run away from home and join the army? Naranappa, who else? Praneshacharya had taught the boy the Vedic scriptures, but what mattered finally was only Naranappa’s word. That fellow was hell-bent on corrupting our young people. . . ’ (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 10)

The narrator also tries to awaken the community to the dangers inherent in the anti-modern practices of their own community, the practices such as the black magic, which need to be given up in order to make itself relevant to the modern era:
In the agrahara they gave all sorts of reasons why Garuda’s single son and heir, Shyama, had run away from home and joined the army. Garuda’s enemies said, that the son couldn’t take his father’s punishments any more. Naranappa’s enemies said he had incited Shyama to join the army. Lakshmana’s opinion was different – the black magic Garuda used against Naranappa’s father must have boomeranged back on himself, why else should Shyama go wrong and run away in spite of Praneshacharya’s teaching? Anyone who uses black magic, like the Ash-Demon who wanted to bum his own creator, ends up burning himself. Lakshmana’s wife, Anasuya, smarting over Naranappa who had sullied her mother’s family name, used to blame him also on Garuda: if Garuda didn’t resort to black magic why would a well-born man like Naranappa have gone astray and become an outcaste?

(Ananthanurthy: 1978, 27)

In the following paragraph of the novel the narrator puts together the many forms of influences/pressures experienced by the Brahmin community – the personal examples by the rebel/deviant Brahmins, the attraction of the popular culture, and the symbolism and the ideology of the political parties:

Meanwhile, in Parijatapura, in Rich Man Manjayya’s spacious terrace, several young men from four or five agraharas – Shripati, Ganesha, Ganganna, Manjunatha and others had gathered to rehearse a play. Right in the middle was a harmonium, donated by Naranappa to their drama troupe. When he was alive, he had to be present for every play. Without his encouragement, the Parijata Drama Group would never have been born. He was the prime mover; he added some money of his own to what the young fellows got together and bought them ‘sceneries’ – backdrops – from Shivamogge. He also gave them ideas about acting style. In
the whole neighbourhood, he alone owned a gramophone. And had with him all the records from Hirannayya's plays. He would wind up the gramophone and play them all to his young friends. When he heard about the Congress Party here and there, he came to the village and taught the boys the new fashion of Congress uniform, of handspun knee-length shirts, loose pajamas and white caps.

(Ananthamurthy: 1978, 71)

The voice which demands change in the attitude of the Brahmins towards life in the modern era is conspicuous. Criticism of various types of attitudes and values is very well brought out in the novel:

You villain! A golden man like Naranappa became an outcaste, 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 brahmnism 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! (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 43)

The brahmins bowed their heads: they were afraid, fearful that the lust for gold might destroy brahmin purity. But in the heart of every one of them flashed the question: if some other brahmin should perform the final rite for Naranappa, he might keep his brahminhood, and yet put all that gold on his wife’s neck.

(Ananthamurthy: 1978, 10)

Let’s see who wins in the end - you or me. I’ll destroy brahminism, I certainly will. My only sorrow is that there’s no brahminism really left to destroy in this
place-except you. Garuda, Lakshmana, Durgabhattachakahaha-what brahmins! If I were still a brahmin, that fellow Garudacharya would have washed me down with his *aposhana* water. Or that Lakshmana - he loves money so much he'll lick a copper coin off a heap of shit. He will tie another wilted sister-in-law round my neck, just to get at my property. And I'd have had to cut my hair to a tuft, smear charcoal on my face, sit on your verandah and listen to your holy-holy yarns.' (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 23-4)

...That's why our elders always said: read the Vedas, read the Puranas, but don't try to interpret them. Acharya-re, I you are the one who's studied in Kashi - you tell me, who ruined brahminism?' (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 25)

The narrator tries to reform a community which has given up to certain evil ways. He lists goodness of the community in the character of Praneshacharya to hint at the strengths of the caste-community which need to be recovered and revived for the present:

If one looks at it, was it only his threat to become a Muslim and pollute the agrahara that had kept the Acharya from excommunicating him? No, there was also compassion. The infinite compassion in his heart. As the thought flashed, Praneshacharya reproached himself, saying, 'Che! Che! that's self-deception.' That wasn't pure pity, it covered a terrible wilfulness. His wilfulness couldn't give in to Naranappa's. 'I must bring him back to the right paths; I will, by the power of my virtue, my austerities, my two fasts a week. I'll draw him to right thinking'. Such was his uncontrollable wilfulness. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 47)

...body wilts in age, lust will leave it but not compassion. For a human, compassion is deeper-rooted than desire. If such compassion hadn't worked in him, how could he have tended an ailing wife through the years, uncomplaining, and never once falling for other women? No, no, only compassion had saved his humane brahmin nature. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 47)
Compassion is projected as the noble element of vedic culture. This is in continuation with the politics of selectivity of one’s past according to the demands of the time, as seen in the saga of cultural reformation and revivalism:

For a human, compassion is deeper-rooted than desire. If such compassion hadn’t worked in him, how could he have tended an ailing wife through the years, uncomplaining, and never once falling for other women? No, no, only compassion had saved his humane Brahmin nature. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 48)

Compassion, the right way of dharma, being humane brahminhood. They all twist together into knots and torment him. The original question was, why had Naranappa gone sour, become venomous? The Books say, one gets to be a brahmin only by merit earned in many past lives. If so, why had Naranappa thrown his brahminhood into the gutter with his own two hands? It’s amazing how, to the end, one works out one’s nature. Praneshacharya remembered a tale from the Rigveda. (Ibid, 48).

The narrator often rings the bell of danger and extinction of the Brahminical community and thereby tries to bring in certain change in the attitude of the people of that community:

If you really look - how many real brahmins are there in this kali age, Manjayya? (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 56)

‘I ask you, where are the real brahmins today? I’ve nothing against Garuda, really. Just because we get stamped and branded five ways by the guru once a year, do all our sins get burned away? I didn’t like those fellows wanting you to do what they themselves won’t do. Whatever you may say, Manjayya, Praneshacharya is our true Brahmin. What lustre, what ascetic penance!’ he chuckled. (Ibid.)
The angst of the community for their traditional beliefs not working for them in the modern context is also depicted through concrete instance:

And then those fish in the temple-pond. For generations they were dedicated to Lord Ganesha. People believe that anyone who catches the sacred fish will vomit blood and die. But this outcaste scoundrel didn’t care two hoots, he got together his Muslim gang, dynamited the tank and killed off god’s own fish. Now even low caste folk go there and fish. The rascal undermined all good brahmin influence on the others, he saw to it. And then, he wasn’t content with ruining our agrahara, he had to go and spoil the boys of Parijatapura too, make them run after dramas and shows. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 11)

The above description also reveals the antagonistic feelings cherished by the Brahmins towards the Muslims who were thought of even by the reformers and cultural revivalists as the enemies of Indian society and culture. There are some more instances that elaborate this antagonistic attitude:

He threatened to become a Muslim. On the eleventh day of the moon, when every brahmin was fasting, he brought in Muslims to the agrahara and feasted them. He said, “Try and excommunicate me now. I’ll become a Muslim, I’ll get you all tied to pillars and cram cow’s flesh into your mouths and see to it personally that your sacred brahminism is ground into the mud.” He said that. If he had really become a Muslim no law could have thrown him out of the brahmin agrahara. We would have had to leave. Even Praneshacharya kept quiet then, his hands were tied too.’ (Ibid.)

While in the novels of Karanth it is the affinity and conversions to Christianity that are depicted as the great threats to Indian society in the novel Sanskara of Ananathamurty
it is to do with the Muslims. The community is indirectly warned of the inherent dangers associated with this affinity with 'the other' in the following words:

....is Naranappa, who drank liquor and ate meat, who threw the holy stone into the river, is he a brahmin or is he not? Tell me, which of us is willing to lose his brahminhood here? Yet it's not at all right, I agree, to keep a dead brahmin's body waiting, uncremated.' (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 19).

The narrator projects the Muslims as the other. In all the threats of Naranappa to his community he would declare himself and say he would join Muslims if excommunicated.

......bring Muslims over and eat and drink forbidden things in the wide open front yard? (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 7)

And then those fish in the temple-pond. For generations they were dedicated to Lord Ganesha. People believe that anyone who catches the sacred fish will vomit blood and die. But this outcaste scoundrel didn't care two hoots, he got together his Muslim gang, dynamited the tank and killed off god's own fish. Now even low caste folk go there and fish. The rascal undermined all good brahmin influence on the others, he saw to it. And then, he wasn't content with ruining our agrahara, he had to go and spoil the boys of Parijatapura too, make them run after dramas and shows.' (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 11)

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a Muslim no law could have thrown him out of the brahmin agrahara. We would have had to leave. Even Praneshacharya kept quiet then, his hands were tied too.' 

(Ibid.)

The original question was really why he hadn't helped excommunicate Naranappa all these years. It was because of Naranappa's threat to turn Muslim. By that threat, the ancient codes had already been defiled. There was a time when the brahmin's power of penance ruled the world. Then one didn't buckle under any such threat. It's because the times are getting worse such dilemmas torment us . . . (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 47)

Chandri takes the help of a Muslim to cremate the dead body of Naranappa by paying a Muslim. Even in this instance the narrator makes it a point to explain why the Muslim cremated Naranappa's dead body. First, she offered him money, and second, Naranappa had helped him to buy bullock cart when most needed. And the Muslim does it without the knowledge of the Brahmins:

She walked straight to the Muslim section. She offered them money. She went to Ahmad Bari, the fish merchant. His late master, Naranappa, had once loaned him money to buy oxen when he was bankrupt. He remembered that, and came at once with his bullock-cart, secretly loaded both the body and the firewood into it, drove to the cremation-ground before anyone knew, kindled a flapping flaming fire in the dark night and burned it to ashes-and left, twisting his bullocks' tails, goading them with various noises to run faster. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 70)

Within a couple of hours after his wife's death-rite, and the Acharya's decision to go where his legs took him, the people of Parijatapura came to know everything—
everything except that actually a Muslim cremated Naranappa’s body. The young fellows of Parijatapura who had, in a brief moment of heroism, meant to perform their friend Naranappa’s final rites, but had fled for their dear lives—they had sealed their lips, unable to speak of what they had seen. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 103)

What is more subtle yet equally disturbing is the fear expressed by the narrator of the Dalits getting emboldened and out of control by the negligent attitude of the rebel-Brahmins like Narnappa:

The last time he saw Naranappa was three months ago, one evening on the fourteenth day of the moon. Garuda had brought in a complaint. Naranappa had taken Muslims with him that morning to the Ganapati temple stream, and before everyone’s eyes he’d caught and carried away the sacred fish. Those free-swimming man-length fish, they came to the banks and ate rice from the hand—if any man caught them he would cough up blood and die. At least that’s what everyone believed. Naranappa had broken the taboo. The Acharya was afraid of the bad example. With this kind of rebellious example, how will fair play and righteousness prevail? Won’t the lower castes get out of hand? In this decadent age, common men follow the right paths out of fear—if that were destroyed, where could we find the strength to uphold the world? (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 21-2)

The narrator also brings out the natural effects of inter-caste marriage (propagated as the gateway for annihilation of the caste system by Ambedkar). Because, Naranappa has married a lower caste woman he tries to break a ritualistic living. All his acts might seem as acts of frustration but deep down he tries to bring out the hollowness of that empty living. He challenges his community men quite openly to keep him outside the fold, but deep down he is aware it is not possible to excommunicate him:
Naranappa didn’t behave as a well-born brahmin, that he’s a smear on the good name of the agrahara, it’s a deep question-I have no clear answer. For one thing, he may have rejected brahminhood, but brahminhood never left him. No one ever excommunicated him officially. He didn’t die an outcaste; so he remains a brahmin in his death. Only another brahmin has any right to touch his body. If we let someone else do it, we’d be sullying our brahminhood. Yet I hesitate, I can’t tell you dogmatically: go ahead with the rite. I hesitate because you’ve all seen the way he lived. What shall we do? What do the Law Books really say, is there any real absolution for such violations? . . . (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 9)

The novel also hints that the Brahmin community needs to innovate new ways of surviving and thriving in the modern era rather than depend too much on the rule-book:

Suppose one didn’t get an answer in the Books. Not that I mean we can’t get it there. Suppose we didn’t. Haven’t you yourself said, there’s such a thing as a dharma, a rule for emergencies? Didn’t you - what - once suggest that - if a man’s life depended on it we could feed him even cow’s flesh - such a thing wouldn’t be a sin-didn’t you say? What do you say-a story you told us once - Sage Vishvamitra, when the earth was famine-stricken, found hunger unbearable, and ate dog-meat, because the supreme dharma is the saving of a life? - What do you say? . . . (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 30)

Further it the novel also shows how the traditionally brought up Brahmin women had lost their ability to quench the thirst for the novel sexual relationships aroused in their men due to the exposure to modernity:

She had married her daughter to orphan Shripati, but then her own blood-kin
Naranappa had misled him and perverted him. That serpent eats its own eggs. Who knows what awful things he poured into her son-in-law’s head? Shripati hardly stays home, hardly two days in a month. Roams from town to town, on the heels of Yakshagana players’ troupes; keeps the company of Parijatapura boys. News had reached her through Durgabhatta’s wife that he even had a prostitute or two. She knew long ago he would come to ruin; ever since she’d seen him one day sneak furtively in and out of Naranappa’s house, she knew he’d gone astray. Who knows what godawful things he ate and drank in that house? No one could escape falling for that woman Chandri. So Anasuya had taught her daughter a trick, just to teach her roving son-in-law a lesson: ‘Don’t you give in to your husband when he wants it. Knot up your thighs, like this, and sleep aloof. Teach him a lesson.’ Lilavati had done exactly as she was told. When her husband came at night to embrace her, she would come crying to her mother, complaining that he pinched and bit her — and she started sleeping next to her mother. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 31-2)

Shripati didn’t learn his lesson. Anasuya’s methods didn’t work with him, though these had once worked on her husband and forced him to give in to her. Shripati cut off his brahmin tuft, wore his hair in a crop, Western style, like Naranappa. He saved money and bought a flashlight. He had taken to roaming round the agrahara every evening, whistling obscenely (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 32).

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:

For Durgabhattach, this was an internal issue. He sat unconcerned in his place, ogling Chandri. For the first time his connoisseur eyes had the chance to appraise this precious object which did not normally stir out of the house, this choice object that Naranappa had brought from Kundapura. 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 now misty with grief and fear, but she looks good that way. Like Matsyagandhi, the Fisherwoman in the Ravi Varma print hung up in Durgabhattach’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. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 8)

The narrator does not lose any opportunity, or rather seems to create various occasions, to describe the physical features and the ‘natural’ attitude of the Brahmin male towards them; a tendency that is rooted in the age old caste-system that has given supreme rights to the Brahmin male to gratify every sort of sexual lust, especially when the woman happens to be from one of the ‘lower’ castes:

He couldn’t stand it, he leapt from the Achari’s verandah and ran. He couldn’t bear to hear any more, he ran straight to plunge his heat in the cold water of the river. Luckily, an outcaste woman was bathing there, in the moonlight. Luckily, too, she wasn’t wearing too much, all the limbs and parts he craved to see were right before his eyes. She certainly was the fish-scented fisherwoman type, the type your great sage fell for. He fantasied she was the Shakuntala of the Achari’s description and this pure brahmin youth made love to her right there-with the moon for witness (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 25).
The skillful narrator places these incidents of Brahmin patriarchic advances (in fact, excesses) towards Dalit women within the ancient ‘Indian’ setting by profusely making references to the vedic myths and texts:

You read those lush sexy Puranas, but you preach a life of barrenness. But my words, they say what they mean: if I say *sleep with a woman*, it means *sleep with a woman*; if I say *eat fish*, it means *eat fish*. Can I give you brahmins a piece of advice, Acharya-re? Push those sickly wives of yours into the river. Be like the sages of your holy legends – get hold of a fish-scented fisherwoman who can cook you fish-soup, and go to sleep in her arms. And if you don’t experience god when you wake up, my name isn’t Naranappa. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 25-6).

Adding to this, the Dalit woman is described positively in her physical appearance as compared the Brahmin woman who gets depicted as her counterpart. Dalit woman easily gives up herself to the whims and fancies of the upper caste man. Her physical appearance though described in positive light, the tone of the description can have a devastating value in the making of the identity of a Dalit woman as could be seen in the following paragraph:

As he neared Durvasapura, his body warmed to the thought of the pleasures awaiting him. 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 colour of the earth, fertile, ready for seed, warmed by an early sun. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 37)

For the men in Durvasapura, to talk about the Dalit women in a very loose and obscene manner is nothing unusual as it goes very well with the double-standards propagated by their culture:

The talk turned again to girls. They measured and judged all the lowcaste women. Only Naranappa had known anything about his affair with Belli, so Shripati listened to their conversation quite calmly. It was good these fellows didn’t set their eyes on Belli. Even if they did, they would be afraid to touch an untouchable. All for the best (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 73).

However, for the narrator the issue of inter-caste sexual encounters is not as simple as it seems. This is because the sexual relationships with the ‘lower’ castes can lead the Brahminic community to face many dilemmas related to one’s identity; not because their caste culture prohibits it (rather it finds nothing wrong with it) but because abstinence from sexual gratification is projected as a greater virtue. This is especially true in the case of those who desire to be respected within the Brahminic community, which has shown an obsession with regard to matters of sex, by marking themselves off as someone superior even within this assumedly superior caste. Hence, what Foucoul had said about the modern Western society (as seen in the section on Literary Theories and Criticism in our first Chapter) seems to be applicable even to the Brahminic community:

He'd heard that a young lad went to the riverbank and slept with an outcaste girl there, after hearing his description of Shakuntala. The Acharya's fantasy dragged in all the untouchable girls he'd never thought of; stripped them and looked at them.
Who is it? Who could it be? Belli, of course; yes, Belli. Imagining her earth-coloured breasts he had never before reckoned with, his body grew warm. He felt wretched at his fantasy. Naranappa had said mockingly: to keep your brahminhood, you must read the Vedas and holy legends without understanding, without responding to their passion. Embedded in his compassion, in his learning, was an explosive spark, which was not there in the others' stupidity. Now the tamed tiger is leaping out, baring its teeth. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 82)

Naranappa had guzzled at her body like a ten year old, tearing and devouring like a gluttonous bear at a honeycomb. Sometimes he leaped like a raging striped tiger. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 45)

The conflict between the natural human tendencies (which places even the Brahmin at the same level as people belonging to other caste groups) and the desire to set oneself apart from the rest as someone above the worldly desires is brought out very well in the novel. However, the conflict is also tinted by the caste bias as the object that tempts is not the woman of the same community but the one that belongs to the caste groups that is otherwise thought of as despicable in every sense of the word:

His hands itched to go caress Belli's breasts, thirsting for new experience. So far he didn't even live; doing only what was done, chanting the same old mantra, he had remained inexperienced. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 82)

There is also romanticization of the profession of sex work the Dalit woman is engaged in. It has many utilities for the Brahminic male, whose tradition-bound culture is projected as the one that has lost all the charm of the normal human pleasures:

Born to a family of prostitutes, she was an exception to all rules. She was ever-auspicious, daily-wedded, the one without widowhood. How can sin defile a running
river? It’s good for a drink when a man’s thirsty, it’s good for a wash when a
man’s filthy, and it’s good for bathing the god’s images with; it says Yes to everything,
never a No. Like her. Doesn’t dry up, doesn’t tire. Tunga, river that doesn’t dry,
doesn’t tire. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 44)

The narrator, who presents the intricacies of the many interests and adventures of
the Brahmin male and their related implications to their community with keen involvement,
does not hesitate to present their women in a very negative light. A typical tendency of
the chaturvara system, which is also the propagator and custodian of patriarchy:

But these brahmin women, before they bear two brats, their eyes sink, cheeks
become hollow, breasts sag and fall - not hers. Perennial Tunga, river that doesn’t
dry up, doesn’t tire. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 44-5)

The Brahmin women are juxtaposed against the Dalit women who are ever charming
and waiting for an upper-caste man to come by! Thus, the narrator is engaged
in an act of reinforcement of the caste prejudices prevalent among the upper-castes:

Shripati waxed quite enthusiastic: ‘Whatever anybody may say, whatever Brahmins
bray - I swear- what do you say? – in a hundred-mile radius is there any woman
as lovely, as bright, as good, as Chandri? Take a count. If you find one, I’ll give
up my caste. What does it matter if she’s a whore? You tell me, didn’t she behave
better than any wife with Naranappa? If he drank too much and vomited, she
wiped up the mess. She even wiped ours up, didn’t she? Anytime, even at midnight,
when he woke her up she cooked and served him, all smiles. Which brahmin
woman would do so much? Stupid shaven widows!’ He spat out the last words.
(Ananthamurthy: 1978, 72)

Worse still, the narrator portrays the Dalit woman as the one with a great desire
to be impregnated by the upper-caste man. Thus the narrator attempts to enter into the fantasy world of the Dalit woman in order to read her mind for us; in the process revealing his own casteist biases:

From the distant shrine she could hear the sound of the bells rung by the Acharya. The holy sound of temple bells took her back to an experience that had moved her. Just as she was remembering her mother's words, hadn't the Acharya come close with mat and pillow, holding a lantern in the darkness, and called her 'Chandri', ever so softly? Suddenly she regretted that she was past thirty. Ten years she'd lived with Naranappa, she still hadn't had a child. If she had borne a son, he could have become a great musician; if a daughter, she could have taught her to dance, classical style. She had got everything, yet had nothing. She sat there looking at the little birds that whirred and perched on the trees. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 54)

Even when the narrator prepares the setting for the sexual union of the Brahmin protagonist with a Dalit woman the compulsion to bring in spirituality is not set aside. Thus, even the moment of 'lapse' or 'weakness' from the cultural framework of the Brahmin is projected as 'temptation' and not as a natural desire. This leads the reader to wonder as to whether the difficulty in emptying the vedic, cultural baggage is that of the protagonist or the narrator himself:

Praneshacharya felt strange standing like that all on a sudden with a woman in the dark of the forest. He searched for words. Remembering his own helplessness, overcome with sadness, he stood there murmuring, 'Maruti... Maruti.' (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 63)

It seems as though it is Chandri who initiates to have sex with Praneshacharya. He
is depicted as an innocent individual. And, that same innocence of his that puts him in dilemma and makes him to ponder over his existence.

Listening to his gentle grief-stricken voice, Chandri suddenly overflowed with compassion. The poor man. Famished, distressed, he had suffered and grown so lean in a single day for me. The poor brahmin. She wanted to hold his feet and offer him her devotion. The next second, she was falling at his feet. It was pitch dark, nothing was visible. As she bent over as if overcome with grief, she didn’t quite fall at his feet. Her breast touched his knee. In the vehemence of her stumbling, the buttons on her blouse caught and tore open. She leaned her head on his thigh and embraced his legs. Overwhelmed with tender feeling, filled with pity at this brahmin who had perhaps never known the pleasure of woman, helpless at her thought that there was no one but him for her in the agrahara – overcome, she wept. Praneshacharya, full of compassion, bewildered by the tight hold of a young female not his own, bent forward to bless her with his hands. His bending hand felt her hot breath, her warm tears; his hair rose in a thrill of tenderness and he caressed her loosened hair. The Sanskrit formula of blessing got stuck in his throat. As his hand played on her hair, Chandri’s intensity doubled. She held his hands tightly and stood up and she pressed them to her breasts now beating away like a pair of doves. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 63-4)

Touching full breasts he had never touched, Praneshacharya felt faint. As in a dream, he pressed them. As the strength in his legs was ebbing, Chandri sat the Acharya down, holding him close. The Acharya’s hunger, so far unconscious, suddenly raged, and he cried out like a child in distress, ‘Amma!’ Chandri leaned him against her breasts, took the plantains out of her lap, peeled them and fed them to him. Then
she took off her sari, spread it on the ground, and lay on it hugging Praneshacharya close to her, weeping, flowing in helpless tears. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 67-8)

The depiction of the moments experienced by the Praneshacharya and Chandri after the sexual encounter conforms to the stereotypes promoted by the vedic literature: Acharya is preoccupied with the moral and ethical dimensions of the act while Chandri is only encompassed with the elation of having ‘achieved’ something precious:

Chandri was afraid that Praneshacharya might scold her, despise her. There was also a hope in her that his touch might bear fruit in her body. And a gratefulness that she too might have earned merit. But she didn’t say anything. (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 67)

They crossed the stream together. Out of embarrassment she let Praneshacharya go ahead, and when she reached the agrahara a little later, she had anxious thoughts: Why is it everything I do turns out this way? I gave the gold out of my good will, and it made nothing but trouble. And now the Acharya is in trouble, trying so hard to get the funeral rites performed right. But Chandri was a natural in pleasure, unaccustomed to self-reproach. As she walked the agrahara street in the dark she remembered - the dark forest - the standing, the bending - the giving, the taking - and it brought her only a sense of worthwhileness, like the fragrance of flowers hidden. The poor Acharya, it may not strike him the same way. Now one should not go back to his verandah and trouble him further. A great good fortune had suddenly rushed into her life. She couldn’t speak of it in broad daylight before those dry brahmin folk as the Acharya asked her to, and expose him to their mercy-she couldn’t do it. But then, - what was she going to do now? It wasn’t right to go to the Acharya again, and she dreaded going to her dead master’s house. What could she do? (Ananthamurthy: 1978, 68).
Kanch Ilaiah (1992) argues that in a casteist social structure, one of the symbols of upper caste hegemony is control over women’s sexuality. The entanglement of caste and the control over the sexuality of women are usually seen as originating from the same source: the patriarchic, unequal chaturvarna system. In institutions like sati and widowhood we find patriarchal power and caste domination inextricably intertwined. However, while upper caste women are made to suffer horribly for relationships they might develop with lower caste men, their men are not despised, if not admired, for their use of Dalit women for their sexual gratification. Ilaiah further argues that upper caste men refuse to drink the water carried by untouchable women, refuse to eat the food touched by them and if the body of an untouchable woman touches them in public they bathe, but in private, as and when the upper caste men want them sexually, lower caste women have to surrender themselves. In other words, their body is untouchable but their sexuality is not. In the minds of these men the act of rape is the only contact with lower caste women that does not threaten the men’s caste. Unfortunately, the novel Samskara fails to break out of this traditional, oppressive mold.

Rath argues that the readers have often questioned the ambivalence of the samskara: samskara of what? Of whom? For what? He further argues that samskara in the novel could be seen as that of the entire Brahmin village, a cleansing purgatorial penance by the living not for but against the dead. Rath (Ibid.) opines that,

The impurities accumulated by years of Naranappa’s unrighteous living must be removed, and the first step in the process is the removal of the agent or what is left of him. Viewed thus, Naranappa may have departed, but his essence is still there, and the essence is not in the body but in the souls of the villagers. Then there is not one corpse but many, as the demon of Naranappa’s spirit has settled in every brahmin in the agrahara. The cremation of the decomposing body,
then, is of secondary importance; the villagers must first wash their own decomposed lives. The long trip for spiritual advice now makes sense, for even after the Muslims have cremated Naranappa the corpse of a communal stench remains to be attended to, and the villagers do it as a team, learning along the way that their true adversary in the game was not Naranappa, that they are playing against themselves (2005, 112).

Raval (2005, 125) states that the novel *Samskara* dramatizes the implications of an unexamined relation that a community and its religious leader have to the tradition they have been brought up to believe in and cherish. This tradition, left unexamined, neither sustains and supports them, nor provides them with meaningful or regenerative solutions to the problems and crises they face at crucial moments in their lives. The protagonist, however, becomes something of a witness and testifier to a kind of demythologization and deconstruction of that tradition, achieving on some level a capacity for self-examination and self-reflection and thus hinting at the possibility of a new conception of self and even of community.

But, what Rath, Raval and many other critics like him fail to see is that the inner struggle, conflict and contradictions that are narrated throughout *Samskara* are not resolved at the end of the novel. The conclusion of the novel turns to spirituality of India as the innate strength of the nation. However, the spirituality proposed is the one derived from the fragmentary, unequal vision vedic Brahmanism. This spirituality in the opinion of Gupta (2000, 2) has its base in the ‘book view’ derived largely from sacerdotal Hindu texts, which has provided rich rationale for the caste system. This is the reason why the members of the upper castes find the caste system extremely agreeable. It justifies the caste system in terms of purity and pollution, giving the impression that all castes – high and low – abide by this single, overarching, textual hierarchy. It is because of this spirituality, argues Gupta
(Ibid,) that the members of high castes do not feel that they are being unduly over-privileged.

Sharma (2005, 134) asserts that any closed system when it operates with the force of religious sanction is bound to give way in face of serious challenges of crises and changed perceptions of its members. This is true of any system, socio-economic or religious/sectarian: “Each cultural form,” as Georg Simmel observes, “once it is created, is gnawed at varying rates by the forces of life. As soon as one is fully developed, the next begins to form” (Turner: 1990, 78). However, in the novel Samskara the next is yet to figure in the consciousness of the Acharya and his fellow Brahmins. It is mainly because the novel tries to avoid a serious exploration of the dilemmas and predicaments of the Brahmin community as a result of their false, fragmentary vision of themselves and society due to the invention and propagation of the chaturvarna system. Thus, the novel fails to engage itself very seriously with issue of caste system and tries to hind behind the abstract and problematic construct of tradition which is in the Indian context nothing but a long saga of caste-class politics, scripted and sustained by the elites.

Thus, from the above analysis of the novel, Samskara, it becomes quite evident that the concern of the narrator is only the revivalism of the ‘nobler’ aspects of Brahminism in which the ‘lesser humans’ like the Dalits have only a subsidiary, supportive role to play while the ‘others’ like the Muslims are to be treated with suspicion.

Dalits as ‘Outcastes’ in Bharathipura

Ananthamurthy wrote Bharathipura while he stayed with the dramatist Subbanna in Heggodu, a small village in Malenad, set in the hilly regions of Karnataka. Nagaraj (1996, vii) believes that this minor detail introduces us to some of the major themes of the novel, because Bharathipura has fictionalised the historical experiences of this very part of the country. The said village which has a deceptive and sleepy appearance has survived all
the traumatic experiences of post-Independence India. Heggodu is a conservative little village dominated by Havyaka Brahmans, a community known for Vedic learning, gambling and fanning. Nagaraj (Ibid.) further opines that the novel could not have chosen a better place for its birth. Brahminical orthodoxy has faced many complex challenges in the form of inter-caste marriages encouraged by Subbanna’s innocent-looking theatre activities.

Ananthamurthy wrote this novel in the seventies, a time when all the major political ideologies were undergoing a painful phase of self-interrogation. Thus, the novel is expected to naturally carry all the tensions of those turbulent years of intense discontent which led inexorably to the Emergency (1975). Marxism was posing a real threat to democratic socialism because of a profound change in people’s attitude to certain Gandhian notions about the self, society and history.

Locating the context in which the novel was produced, Nagaraj (1996, viii) argues that Bharathipura was written during a period of self-doubt and despair for the author and, hence, the novel was a sincere effort on his part to overcome them. The self-image of the political theory of change that informs the novel, according to Nagaraj, also suffers from the above mentioned fear of self-dissolution. In his opinion, Bharathipura is Ananthamurthy’s Tintern Abbey, to draw on an analogy from the history of English literature. Bharathipura too one can see the same desperate effort on the part of the writer-revolutionary to reaffirm his commitment to the ideal of revolution. Amidst the rage of self-doubt there is a touching effort to believe again. Thus, if Samskara was an outgrowth of the stirrings of the inner-world (primarily drawing from the childhood experiences and memories) Bharathipura was an effort to compromise Lohiaite socialism with one’s own vision of cultural solution to the issue of social justice, derived mainly from modern cultural revivalism.

In this way, the story of Bharathipura focuses on many political and cultural issues.
Jagannath, the protagonist of the novel just returned from England, hopes to demystify the sacredness of the holy stone in the temple for the benefit of untouchables, brings it out of the temple, and insists on their touching it. They shudder and recoil - but seeing Jagannath’s frenzy, the frightened untouchables barely touch it and withdraw. Whereas for the untouchables the sacred stone is still the holy object - whether inside or outside of its location, Jagannath - surely an implied addressee of the West - is caught between these two responses - between continuity and discontinuity of filiating objects with faith. His foolhardy act, he realizes, can neither disturb the responses nor enable him to partake of them. His remorse and the ineffectiveness of his adventure agonize him. The West’s address betrays him and he isn’t yet ready to address the West from the response that his adventure evoked - his failure to comprehend faith. It is this ambivalent act of sacrilege that Latour seems to value. For him Anantha Murthy effectively evokes the experience of the cultural iconoclasm. (Baral, Rao, Sura: 2005, 15)

Bharatipura, according to Chakravarthy (2008, 13-4), is not an entirely different story, nor is its protagonist Jagannatha totally different from Praneshacharya. “Bharatipura” is the altered locale of the agrahara of Samskara with its own hierarchical structure and sacred order. Jagannatha happens to be the modern Indian who, because of his Western, rational education, and liberal notions of justice and equality is an alien in a territory that is his by inheritance. If Praneshacharya “becomes” an alien in Samskara, Jagannatha’s “being” as a liberal is by its very conviction alien to the land he originates from.

Ananthamurthy locates the experience of ‘alienness’ in one’s own land because of one’s intellectual and moral choices. Jagannatha has to ‘find’ his authentic self as an ‘outsider’, and is a contrast to Praneshacharya who has to renounce his status as a prominent ‘insider’ and has to ‘discover’ his authenticity as an ‘alien’, the experience of which is actually the burden of history imposed upon him. Jagannatha’s ‘alienness’ is an individual choice made
in the face of history. While the ‘sacred’ collapses for Praneshacharya forcing him to seek his authenticity by moving out of the traditional space into the public realm, Jagannatha has to return to the traditional space and break its ‘sacred’ order to seek his authentic self. The paradoxical nature of the historical situation is what Ananthamurthy’s texts portray as the “irreconcilable duality” of the socio-cultural condition and the contradictions of the individual existential self.

Jagannatha’s attempt to desecrate the sacred shaligram is his only moral choice to establish equality and justice in a caste-ridden society which dehumanizes both the upper caste people and the untouchables. In the opinion of Chakravarthy (2008, 14), the struggle to bring “conscientization” to the untouchables by forcing them to “touch and defile” the shaligrama is not an act of iconoclasm as many social scientists have argued. Describing Jagannatha as an iconoclast is the construction of theoreticians who do not comprehend the enormous difficulties, challenges and intense agony of conscientious individuals who need to find modes of ‘ethical action’ to concretely realise their deep humanistic values in a context that has the power to neutralise, and, even, annihilate, every progressive step. The great tragic irony is that Jagannatha’s ‘ethical action’ ends up by only reconstructing and reinforcing the dehumanizing caste hierarchy of the community and, further, by consolidating its notion of the ‘sacred’. “Bharatipura” is a great classic dealing with the paradoxical dilemma of the liberal Indian.

Recounting his experience of writing the novel, Ananthamurthy remarks,

In my second novel “Bharatipura”, I set out with a conscious rationalist purpose. My western-educated hero, Jagannath, returns to his temple-town in search of his identity. He wants to authenticate his existence through action in the world of his childhood, the temple-town. He feels this can be done only by destroying his relation
to the god of the temple-town who controls not only the emotional life of the inhabitants, but the economic realities of the place also. The god, Manjunatha, had been installed some centuries ago in the temple as the over-lord of an indigenous deity Bhootharaya, whom the original inhabitants - now the untouchables had once worshipped (2008, 324).

He lays his trust in education and the social processes in overcoming the caste barriers. This, as we know, is in line with the thinking of many of the social reformers and the nationalists like Gandhi, as seen by us in our discussion of the caste question in the third Chapter:

I shall not go into the details of what happens in the novel. Suffice it to say, the myth triumphs in the end. There is also a hint that with education and unavoidable social processes, the untouchables will become touchables sometime in the future, and they will also become respectable like the other middle class people. In the meanwhile, Manjunatha, the god is installed in the temple. The priest's son who throws the idol into the river for personal vengeance against his domineering father, gets deified in an absurd series of events. Does any change take place in Bharathipura? (Ananthamurthy: 2008, 325)

‘Yes’ and ‘No’ is the answer of the novel, “Bharathipura” Of course I pleased no one, neither my radical friends nor the reactionary status-quoists, by this. I was putting my own rationalism and political radicalism to test in the novel. The form and content of the novel, with its blend of allegory and realism, didn’t seem to work as satisfactorily as in “Samskara”. I was biting more than I could chew – which I don’t regret. (Ananthamurthy: 2008, 326)

Ananthamurthy opines that the solution to the problem of caste should be sought in
the cultural and rather than the political realm. This, as seen by us in the second and third Chapters, is in direct contrast to the opinion held by Ambedkar:

In my political action - whatever little a full-time teacher like me can do - I have not wavered all these thirty years. Remained democratic socialist. But with regard to cultural questions, I am increasingly and agonizingly growing ambivalent. "Bharathipura" was written about a decade ago, at a time which also saw the rise of activism among the scheduled caste radicals and rationalists in Karnataka. Some of my intimate friends, whom I respect and with whom, politically, I have a lot in common are among these activist groups and therefore my dilemmas cause me and also my friends bafflement and pain. They often feel very angry and also, naturally, intolerant with my dilemmas. (Ibid.)

Despite all these clarifications provided by Ananthamurthy it is quite clear for the alert reader that the philosophical fascination of the narrative viewpoint tries to privilege the character of Jagannatha at the cost of others. The novel attempts to compensate the resistance offered against this unbalanced projection of the Dalits in favour of the upper-castes by the humanist and the artist persona of Jagannatha. Thus the novel is made to appear rich with subtle aesthetic tensions. This further is augmented by portraying women characters in a very positive light (as opposed to what the author had done in the case of Samskara). In spite of all these elements in the novel helping it escape from becoming a high brow theoretical novel, the politics of projecting the Dalit characters in such a negative, stereotypic manner cannot be sufficiently justified.

Thus, the portrayal of Dalits in Bharatipura goes against the spirit of self-respect movements of the Dalits, about which Ananthamurthy was definitely not unaware. Rodrigues (2008, 7) opines that self respect in dalit-bahujan thought is directed against the construction
of a self which seeks to place itself over and above the others in an order of ranking, and where active engagement with the world through labour, productive and reproductive, is seen as defiling. It emphasizes the idea that a human being, in order to sustain and reproduce herself or himself, should not be put to indignities by the community around her/him. However, the novel fails to capture even the slightest glimpse of this nation-wide movement of the Dalits.

The novel as a complex work of art is the world of traditional viewpoints ably represented by conservative Brahmins. The sophistication of their well articulated positions is matched only by the equally coherent ideas held by westerners, socialists, Marxists and the Gandhians in the novel (Nagaraj: 1996, xii-xiii). Yet another hidden motif in the novel is revealed in the manner in which it deals with the connection between Jagannatha’s suspicions about his mother’s honour and his rebellion against the caste system. Nagaraj (1996, xiii) believes that the Lohiaite perspective of the segregation of caste and sex throws light on this particular aspect. By provoking the untouchables to enter the temple, Jagannatha tries to transcend both caste and sex segregation. Up to a certain extent the two remained separate in his consciousness and the moment he realizes the link between them, he understands his dual nature too. This realization accounts for a new phase of ideological growth in him.

Nagaraj (1996, xv) notes that soon after the publication of Bharathipura, there arose, expectedly, a heated debate on the artistic merits and the political desirability of the novel. Even the socialists were divided over the merits of their much celebrated comrade’s second novel. They had no problems whatsoever in endorsing the world view of his first novel Samskara, for it was a product of Lohiaite melancholy and rage against the caste system. What was the “message” of Bharathipura? Some argued that the novel was a passionate statement of disillusionment with the very idea of change and revolution, while others questioned this reading and said that Ananthamurthy was only trying to criticize the radical
self esteem of the middle classes. What really drew criticism was the portrayal of Dalits and the lack of interiority in their characterisation. It is perfectly understandable if Dalits are seen as lifeless objects by the protagonist, but what is to be suspected is the narrative viewpoint which also unconsciously reinforces such a perception.

Thus, although lots of critics have shown the cultural revivalist agenda of Ananthamurthy in the novels Divya and Bhava and thought of most of his other novels as above the related biases it seems quite clear from our analysis of the novels Samskara and Bharathipura that the politics of cultural revivalism is very much operative even in these works of his and reinventing the traditional roles for the Dalits also very much part of this preoccupation.