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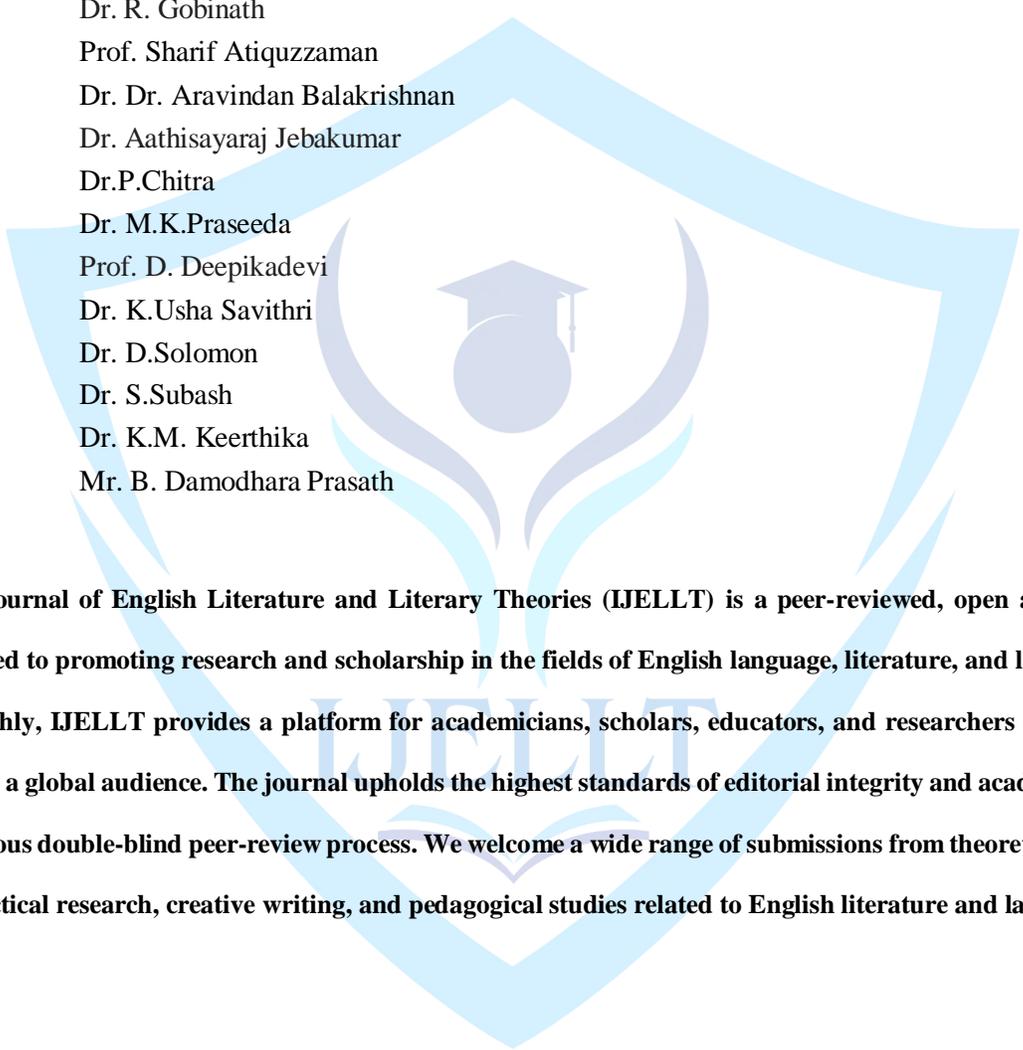
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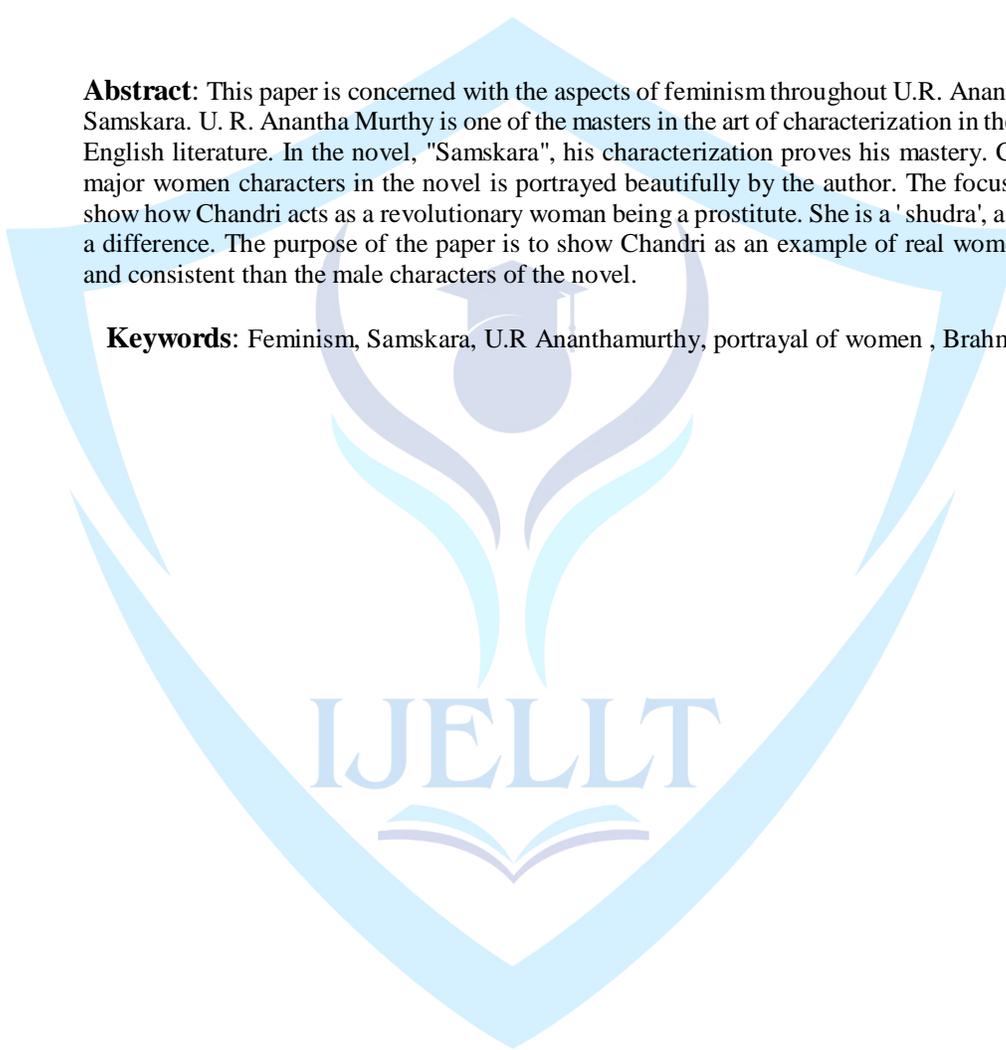
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**Chandri's Role in Challenging Brahminical Patriarchy in U.R Ananthamurthy's Samskara****Ranjana Gupta**, Research Scholar, University Department of English, Ranchi University

**Abstract:** This paper is concerned with the aspects of feminism throughout U.R. Anantha Murthy's novel Samskara. U. R. Anantha Murthy is one of the masters in the art of characterization in the history of Indian-English literature. In the novel, "Samskara", his characterization proves his mastery. Chandri, one of the major women characters in the novel is portrayed beautifully by the author. The focus of the paper is to show how Chandri acts as a revolutionary woman being a prostitute. She is a 'shudra', a prostitute but with a difference. The purpose of the paper is to show Chandri as an example of real women, more powerful and consistent than the male characters of the novel.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Samskara, U.R Ananthamurthy, portrayal of women , Brahmin.



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Feminism is a movement which function for women with wider spectrum, covering issues like identity, independence, right to action in education, career and family. In this novel it is Chandri who is blamed for having spoilt Naranappa and defiled the entire Madhva community. The destruction of Samskaras is therefore blamed on the lower castes women and the ignorant subalterns. In the novel Samskara, Chandri faces subjugation and undergoes various social and personal restrictions by the caste Hindu Brahmins of the agrahra. Naranappa is ostracized by the community as he lives with a low caste woman named Chandri. Chandri also faces gender discrimination.

This novel has some aspects of feminism because the character Chandri speaks through her silence. This novel speaks of women who are marginalized one who belongs to the lower caste, dalit or prostitute. Women in this text represent majority of silent women of our country whose voices have been silenced under the burden of caste, class and custom. They are silent unable to articulate the oppression that has overpowered them for centuries. But here silence is the alternative language for woman like Chandri. Chandri registers some form of communication through her silence. Samskara enable us to see how the patriarchal structures across caste and community operate to subordinate women in the spaces they occupy and how possibilities of resistance could be read in their silences.

Samskara is a serious novel, which deals with the traditional ritual of the cremation of the dead body of a Brahmin, Naranappa. There is an uncertainty about who can or ought to perform the cremation rites for the anti- hero Naranappa. This creates a crisis of faith and religious observances. This novel is symbolically and literally linked with the fatal spread of plague in Durvasapur. This also creates a spiritual and existential crisis in the character Praneshacharya, the hero of the novel. He is introduced to us as a learned ascetic. "Crest-Jewel of Vedic Learning". This article seeks to explore the round character Chandri and how she possesses the profundities and complexities of the human mind and how she develops with the changing circumstances. Her portrayal also indicated the readiness for an extended life. She is first introduced to us Naranappa's concubine and lowborn prostitute. Throughout the novel, Chandri and the other lowcaste women of the novel is compared with the classical heroines, mythological and celestial temptresses which establishes them as cultural symbols of feminine pulchritude.

Sharma (2005: 130) is convinced that Chandri is someone who 'stands outside the social fold and in total freedom...a free agent without the shackles of the purity/pollution binary'. According to (Sharma, 2005: 130), she 'comes out as a better human than the so-called cultured brahmins'. Likewise, in another context, Paranjape (2002: 214–5), praises Chandri's rare commonsense, and believes that: 'If anyone has her bearings [in the novel], it is Chandri.... I think we should follow Chandri's example', in recognising the dead for what it is and in embracing the flux of life and living.

Chandri is a prostitute but with a difference. Chandri is the handpicked concubine of Naranappa noted for her beauty and sex appeal. She is shunned by the Brahmins of the agra-hara, even though Naranappa always treated her with a sense of equality, even eating the food cooked by her. She has ungrudgingly accepted her secondary social status and learn to act accordingly. She has internalised completely her traditional inscription as a casteless 'nityasumangali'. (see Kersenboom, 1998). Chandri's self-representation as well as her thoughts and actions proves that in the novel. According to Chandri (Murthy, 1999: 44): ...no sin will ever rub off on her. 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....

Chandri's decisions in the novel are perfectly intelligible. She holds Praneshacharya in great esteem. She goes to the house of Praneshacharya to inform him of the demise of Naranappa. she reveals her personal interest in seeing that he gets a proper funeral: 'If they don't give him a death-rite according to the Books, he'll surely become an evil spirit. She'd eaten his salt' (Murthy, 1999: 45–6). Being a prostitute by class or caste, she have an outlook which lacks in the highcaste Brahmin women. She is not a money minded prostitute. She is a worshipper of love and loves all without any impurity of the heart and soul. In a noble and silent gesture, she undoes the jewels gifted to her by Naranappa and places it at the disposal of the acharya for the funeral expenses of her late lover.

Here she behaves more like a wife than like a mistress. This reveals that she is a grateful, kind, compassionate, humane, refined, cultured woman and these qualities makes her a samskari human being as compared to the male and female Brahmin characters in the novel, who boast of their high birth and samskars. This shows that she is cut apart from the general run of prostitutes who develop liaison just for money and money only. It also reflects her genuine attachment to Naranappa. Chandri's offer of gold was an act of faith in man which the agrahara could not project in a crisis. Her gold only exposed the vacuity of the order" (Sundari 68). Praneshacharya is moved by this act of her, appreciates it before his invalid wife, Bhagirathi, "how pure Chandri's heart was, how she laid down all her gold and what new complications arose from that generous act" (41). When the night falls he asks Chandri to take rest in the dining-room of his house, gives her a mat, a pillow and a blanket to sleep comfortably and also returns her gold saying, "Naranappa is dead. But you've your life to live" (42). It is Praneshacharya alone who is compassionate towards her in her distress and she also finds only in him the support after Naranappa.

Chandri also possesses an acute practical sharpness. Regarding the cremation of Naranappa, according to the text, Chandri returns to Naranappa's house after her sexual union with Praneshacharya in the forest because she is embarrassed for Praneshacharya's sake and does not wish to mortify him any further with her presence in his house. On reaching Naranappa's place (Murthy, 1999: 69-70):

Her groping hand felt the open door. 'Ayyo O God, hope no fox or dog has entered the house and done things to the body....'. She felt distressed, forgot her fears, went in swiftly ... and lit the lantern. A horrid stench. Dead rotting rats. She was grief-stricken that she'd left the body orphaned, unprotected, the body of the man who'd antagonised the whole agrahara for her sake.... Only one thought burned clear: it's rotting there, that thing, it's stinking there, its belly swollen. That's not her lover, Naranappa. It's neither brahmin nor shudra. A carcass.

She considers that it's her duty to cremate the rotting body of Naranappa. Gathering courage, she goes alone in the night to the cart-man Sheshappa's house and on his refusal to meddle with "a Brahmin corpse" she seeks the help of a Muslim fish merchant Ahmad Bari (an outcaste), a friend of Naranappa to cremate the body in the dark of night with the firewood lying in her house. Through this humane act, she breaks the tradition and caste barriers like Naranappa and "gets the better of Praneshacharya: she takes the burden off the Brahmin's hands, but exposes the inhumanity of orthodox Brahminism that permitted itself to be trapped in ritual hairsplitting when faced with life-and-death issues"(Parthasarthy 195-96). Chandri's initiative in Naranappa's cremation is important because it is an enabling step for the subalterns. It is revolutionary because it points towards contesting the Brahmins.

Chandri's silence speaks more than words in Samskara. She articulates resistance to patriarchal limitations not through speech but through her action in silence. Through her actions she resists the dominant. She sacrifices her jewels to meet Naranappa's rites of burial. This exposes not only the hypocrisy of the Brahmins but also the greed of their Brahmin wives. Her participation in Naranappa's burial is also a rejection of Brahminical order. She celebrates her sexuality by initiating the Acharya into sexual pleasures thus using her body to speak the language of celebration. Thus Chandri's silent journey through the novel could be read as a rejection of a dominant and oppressive patriarchal language and the acquisition of an alternative language of her own. Thereby Chandri converts her silence into a form of resistance. Chandri is as A.K.Ramanujan says, "earthly and amoral, ideal of untroubled sexuality "having a position of advantage and is compared with the apsaras and goddesses. She is not confined by the social order, rules and regulations. Simon de Beauvoir's observation is fit for woman like Chandri :

"The more women assert themselves as human being, the more the marvelous quality of the 'other' will die in them".(Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 173)

In the whole course of the novel she is the one who presents herself with more mature vision than anyone in the whole Agrahara even than the authority, Acharya. Though she is of low caste, she is not different from Brahmin wives and she is in many ways more free than the Brahmin women because she is not tied down to duty of just an onlooker. The duties of the Brahmin wives do not apply to her. Chandri is the perfect woman. Chandri in many ways symbolizes domination, free exercise of desire and a kind of sense which is not only common but more practical according to the nature of world. She represents a woman who is very much conscious of her identity and for that she has the capacity to exert it in a way that is not possible for Brahmin wives.

Chandri initiates Acharya in his act of transgression. As Naranappa's low caste mistress' she plays a crucial role in helping cultivate the inner rebel in his personality. This is echoed in the words of Julia Kristeva. "In women I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies".

She is a prostitute and she belongs to lower caste yet she stands for the forces of renewal in a two fold way. First, as someone related to the heavenly nymphs, and transcending human social categories, and secondly as a representative of her very caste or social rank she is an epitome of nature. Chandri's body is described in terms of all natural elements like the earth and the river, and like the river Tunga she cannot be defiled or polluted. There is an aura of wholeness, an unconscious self-sufficiency about her, she was' natural in pleasure, unaccustomed to self reproach'. Chandri is a nityasumangali, that is a perennially auspicious woman.

Not only that, Chandri is also responsible in the transformation of Praneshacharya. In the arid sexless life of the Acharya, Chandri comes as an angel and lets him sow the seeds of joy into her. Thus, she serves as a symbolic figure bringing in fertility to the arid Acharya for his regeneration and to herself for reproduction. She combines the symbolic figure of the earth mother and Venus Aphrodite. She is both the mother and mistress to the Acharya.

Praneshacharya feels "compassion" for her when they come upon each other in the forest at night, is then "bewildered," then feels "a thrill of tenderness," then "faint" then "hunger...raged," and, finally, "he cried out like a child in distress, 'Amma!'" She helps in the liberation of Acharya. In the beginning Acharya is the crest jewel of vedic learning, worshipper of Vedas and the followers of scriptures, by the end, he finds himself to be a true priest, a Brahmin who has the knowledge of everything in this world. After his sexual union with Chandri, he experiences the feelings of tranquility and rebirth. His relation with Chandri gives him a sense of elation and fulfillment, which he has never experienced before. Chandri is represented as selfless, giving and caring. She is a life-giver. She mediates between the world of Praneshacharya and Naranappa. She initiates Praneshacharya into the material world of physical and sensual pleasure. She acts as the catalyst for his initiation into the real world of men. She is not only a symbolic figure but a real woman who desires for a child by Praneshacharya. Social norms defining codes for wives, and widows do not apply to her yet she desires a child by Praneshacharya. Though a very natural instinct, it also reflects her internalization of Hindu concepts regarding prostitutes. "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" (68). Matsyagandhi is the scriptural representation of the lower caste woman in the text. Chandri hopes to be as blessed as Matsyagandhi was in the myth. The lower caste woman believes that she can hope to attain salvation by serving and satiating the sexual passion of the God-like Brahmin ascetic.

Praneshacharya's experience in the woods with Chandri liberates him and initiates him into a new vision of life. From the perspective of the traditional social order of the "ashramas" with its four stages of life, he thereby passes over the second stage entirely, that of a householder. Physical love and procreation, the circle of death and birth from which he wishes to escape finally catches him at a place, in a forest, where he would have abandoned them forever entered into the next stage of life. In a sexual union he experiences his own rebirth as an overcoming of death. Union turns into a kind of liberation. Chandri releases him from the rigidity of his ritualised life and brings him back to the soil. This experience also liberates and empowers Chandri.

A new praneshacharya is born, redeeming the old one of his life of deprivation and asceticism. A new chandri is born too, the old one cleaned away by her pregnant meeting with the holy man. She too silently moves away from Durvasapur, taking her jewellery and sari with her without informing Praneshacharya. Her decision of not meeting him before leaving adds it would make such a noble man feel small before her. This speaks of her good samskars as compared to the other Brahmins. She is presented as a great human being. Thus we see that Chandri's belonging to a lower caste in no way makes her a base and lower human being. Rather she possesses the basic human quality -compassion, the right way of dharma and being human Brahmin-hood.

U.R.Anathamurthy presented Chandri as a revolutionary woman, a woman who speaks through her silence and a woman who asserts her opinion of right and wrong and speaks through her good intentioned act. She is a real samskari woman inspite of belonging to a low caste. Chandri breaks away the decadent customs of Brahminism and helps Praneshacharya to attain his liberation. Thus Chandri is a very important character in the novel. Though she is a prostitute, she brings the message of brotherhood in the novel as she makes no distinction between Hindus and Muslims. She is also the character who acts as an anti-Brahminical instrument in the novel, to conclude, we may say:

Besides being beautiful, everyone's sex object, a prostitute. She is an exception to all the rules, a running river that doesn't dry, doesn't tire. She is the opposite of the Acharya's ascetic outlook.

Thus we see that Chandri's belonging to a lower caste in no way makes her a base and lower human being, Rather she possesses the basic human quality "Compassion, the right way of dharma, being human Brahmin-hood"(Sundari 48). has very appropriately summed up her qualities, how samskarta, refined and cultured she is:

She has a conscience that is lovable. At least, she is not thankless, she wants the funeral rites to be performed for the separated man, with whom she had spent a good many intimate moments. The money paid or the ornaments gifted, do not compensate the feelings, however fake or rehearsed. She is the only person who demonstrates man's love for man. She does not pack up or go to her village (Kundapura) the moment Naranappa dies. Rather she offers all her gold for the Samskara of her man.

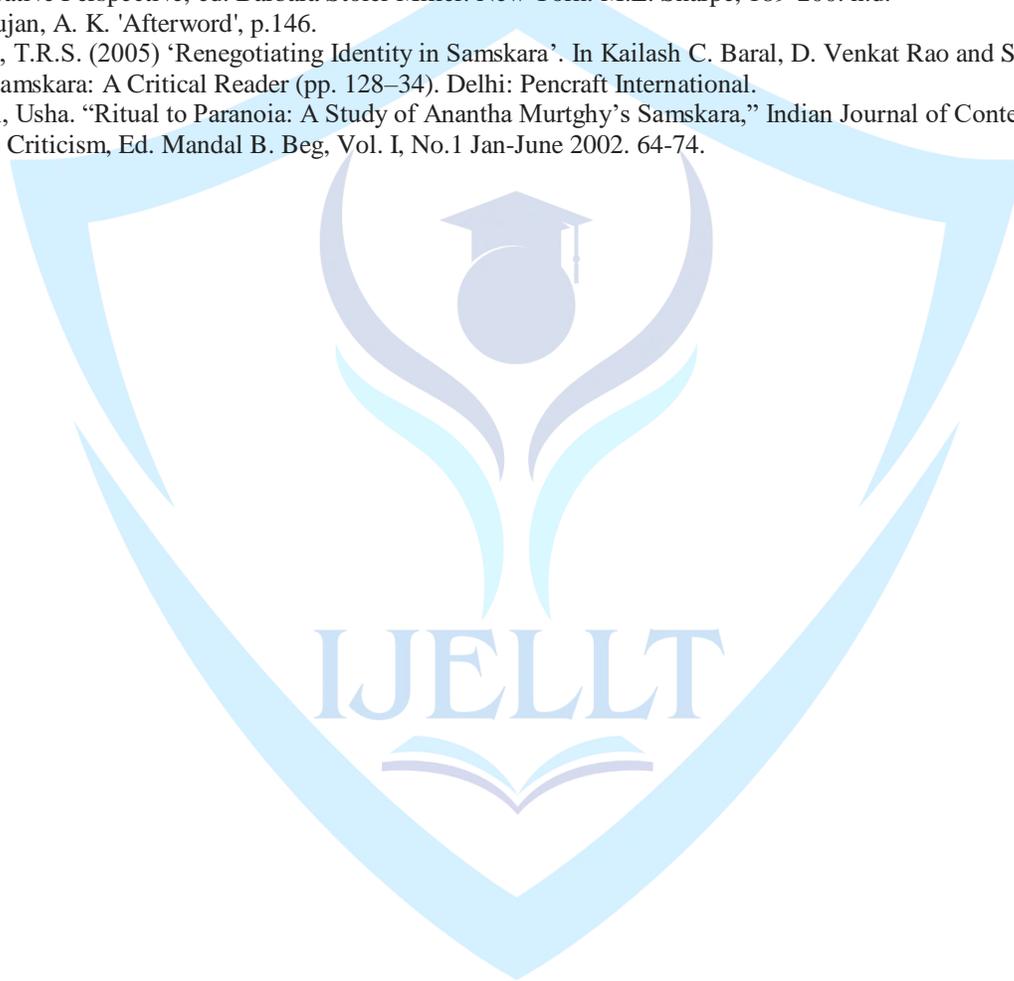
She is another Antigone running towards uncertainties for certain basic values She goes back as she came, somewhat mellower perhaps, but never richer. Before she goes, however, she trounces the Acharya's pride" (Sundari 72).

We see that being a subaltern in that social set up though she cannot speak openly and assert her opinion of right and wrong but she speaks through her good-intentioned acts which cross the boundary of caste-laid norms.

From the feminist point of view, the novel *Samskara* completely belies women's hopes and aspirations. Nowhere in the novel do we hear the real feelings of Chandri, Belli, Bhagirathi and other lower caste women. Even the upper caste women are within the shackles of their caste. They do not attack the social system based on hierarchies but try to make the most from within its confines to their advantages. The upper caste woman's domain was to maintain the ritual purity of the Brahmins. The Brahmins enforce repressive control over the upper caste women's sexuality. The text represents them as sexually repressed and unattractive. This is used to legitimize the sexual transgressions of the Brahmin male. Chandri occupies a space that is ambiguous in the text. As a prostitute she falls outside the social order. She epitomises the position of the outcaste in Hindu Brahmin society. She lives with Naranappa and does all the wife's duties yet she is not his wife. She has no legal right over the properties of Naranappa yet she is the one who inherits Naranappa's gold and cremates him. Ananth Murthy imbues Chandri with a positive and regenerative potential. She is represented as selfless, giving and caring. She is like Mother Nature and is compared to the Tunga River which washes away all sins. She is a life-giver and she mediates between the world of Praneshacharya and Naranappa. She speaks through her silence and through her *samskaras*. Her actions are louder than her words. She is capable of independent actions and practical thinking. After the cremation of Naranappa's body she silently disappears from the village and proceeds to Kundapura thereby guarding the honour and dignity of the Acharya. Throughout the novel, Chandri is represented as a real woman with all the " *Samskaras*" ( *Sanskaras* /good qualities) which the decadent Brahmins lacked.

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