

The SPL Journal of Literary Hermeneutics

A Biannual International Journal of Independent Critical Thinking
Double-blind, Peer-reviewed and Open Access Journal in English



Vol. 5 Issue 2 Monsoon Edition 2025 e-ISSN 2583-1674 Page no. 226-232

www.literaryhrm.org
www.cavemarkpublications.com



Moral Consciousness and Limitations of Theology: A Comparative Exploration of U. R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara*

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Research Article

Keywords: Theology, moral consciousness, rituals, casteism, religious boundaries, U. R. Ananthamurthy

Article History

Received:
June 17, 2025

Revised:
June 21, 2025

Accepted:
July 1, 2025



ISSN 2583-1674 (SPLJLH)



Abstract

Aims: *The main objective of this research is to make it clear that theology based on tradition and classical rules is not capable of solving moral crises at all times. This research also establishes that the need for moral consciousness is inevitable in a person's life. Through the characters of the novel, it is shown how tension arises between theology and moral conscience and how moral consciousness inspires man to make more humane and prudent decisions.*

Methodology & Approach: *This research is mainly based on literary and philosophical analysis. Also, the difference between theology and moral consciousness has been clarified using the comparative method. The approach of this research is interdisciplinary and comparative. From a philosophical point of view, it will be studied how moral consciousness goes beyond the limits of theology and answers the profound questions of life.*

Outcome: *The analysis of the research shows that theology, being based on tradition and discipline, fails to solve the changing moral crises of life. This study shows that when society remains bound by the limits of theology, it is unable to solve real human problems.*

Conclusion and Suggestions: *This research concludes that theology is unable to provide the ultimate solution to the complexities of life due to its limitations.*

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In Indian culture, the Dharmashastras define the limits of morality, social order, and personal responsibilities in addition to directing religious behavior. Nevertheless, an internal conflict that takes the shape of moral consciousness emerges when religious norms start to show up as inflexibility, hypocrisy, or inhumanity. This issue is told in the well-known book *Samskara* by U. R. Ananthamurthy, which follows the spiritual development of Praneshacharya, a scholarly Brahmin who is torn between religious orthodoxy and moral obligation. In addition to being a classic of Kannada literature, this work holds a significant position in the current intellectual discourse in India.

The plot of *Sanskara* is set in a tiny Brahmin village where the creation of a fallen Brahmin named Naranappa causes a moral and religious dilemma for the entire Brahmin community. The inadequacies of religious texts are demonstrated here—no one is capable of making any judgments or exhibiting even the most basic human empathy. Praneshacharya's internal struggle at this point pushes him beyond religious dogma to humanistic ideals. This paper, through *Sanskara*, explores how religious texts—which are meant to act as the moral compass of society—confine themselves to rigid frameworks under certain circumstances. At the same time, individual self-awareness and moral reasoning give rise to a consciousness that dares to take decisive steps in favour of humanity.

In this study, we will analyse *Sanskara* not only as a literary work but also as a medium for profound socio-philosophical discourse. Drawing on contemporary research papers, philosophical concepts (such as Kantian moral philosophy, Gandhi's principles of truth and non-violence), and comparative studies of religious and spiritual texts, we aim to examine how this novel goes beyond literature and becomes a powerful commentary on morality, religion, and the human condition.

In India, religion influences more than just worship or rituals. It plays a huge role in everyday life—in what people eat and drink, what they wear, how they marry, and how they are cremated. Ancient texts such as the *Manu Smriti* and the *Yajnavalkya Smriti* laid down rules for living in society, especially based on Brahmin traditions. These texts discuss caste divisions, proper conduct, and ideas of the pure and the impure. Example: In the novel *Samskara*, a Brahmin named Naranappa dies. He had broken many religious rules—he ate meat, drank

alcohol, and lived with a prostitute. Because of this, the other Brahmins did not want to cremate him. They thought he was unclean and didn't know what to do. This reflects a major problem with Dharmashastra: it focuses more on religious rules and purity than on basic human compassion, even after someone's death.

Praneshacharya is the main character of the novel. People in his village respect him as a learned and religious man. He has spent his life following strict religious rules—taking care of his ailing wife, remaining celibate, and teaching others from the scriptures. Example: After Naranappa dies, no one knows what to do with his body. Everyone looks to Praneshacharya for guidance. He goes to the temple to find answers, but the scriptures don't give him any clear direction.

This leaves him very confused and upset. He begins to wonder: if religious texts can't help even in such a critical situation, are they really enough? Praneshacharya's inner transformation begins when something unexpected happens—he sleeps with a widow named Chandri. This shocks him as it is against his beliefs and conduct in his religious life. But this incident forces him to think deeply about who he really is. This moment shows that religious rules do not always have solutions to life's most difficult problems. When these rules fail, people turn to their own experience, feelings, and sense of right and wrong. Through this, Praneshacharya begins to understand morality in a new way—not from books, but from real life.

U. R. Ananthamurthy in his novel *Samskara* depicts that the Brahmin community, which considers itself the most pious and superior, has become selfish and superficial from within. Their lives are no longer guided by truth or moral values. They follow religious rules in the name of tradition, but have lost true spiritual thinking and compassion. True moral behavior comes from inner self-awareness and spiritual understanding. Merely following rules is not enough. Unless we see all beings as equal and treat them with empathy, our behavior remains incomplete and hollow.

Samskara also shows the deep discrimination between Brahmins and lower castes. The lower castes are labeled "untouchables" and are forced to live away from the village. They are poor, work in the fields, and live a life without respect or basic amenities. If someone in their family falls ill, it is often blamed on evil spirits rather than the real cause.

Dharma affects life from before birth to after death. It deeply influences our thinking, relationships, and life decisions. Casteism is a practice in Hinduism that has been studied and criticized by scholars in India and abroad. The novel *Samskara* does not only discuss religion and caste, but also shows how religious rituals, such as funeral rites, have become mere traditions. These rituals are often so complex that true human emotions and humanity are sidelined.

Ananthamurthy does not preach. Rather, he shows the truth through stories. He wants the readers to think for themselves and decide what is right and wrong. In Hinduism, it is believed that the ultimate goal of life is moksha – liberation from the cycle of birth and death. But what is the right path to achieve it? This age-old question forms the core of *Samskara*. The author raises this question through the character of Praneshacharya, a learned Brahmin.

The funeral rites of Brahmins are rigorous and full of rules. They fast for several days, and if any rule is broken, they fear that they will lose their Brahmin identity. In contrast, the funeral rites of the lower castes are much simpler. They simply burn the hut of the dead person, and the ritual is considered complete. For example, the novel says: "...and they burnt the hut." (*Samskara* 40) When the novel was published, controversy erupted over criticism of the Brahmin community. Some argued that the caste system is part of religion and cannot be questioned. But Ananthamurthy answers this in one of his essays: "In the world I was born into, people believed that castes were created by God and could never be changed." (17)

Initially, Praneshacharya is a firm believer in caste and ritual purity. He avoids talking to Chandri, an untouchable woman, for fear of becoming impure. But one day, when he eats inside a temple—which is considered impure—nothing happens. The procession continues to the temple. This shows that the fear of impurity is just a social illusion. Ananthamurthy writes: "Hinduism is different for each individual. It is both a worship of God and an excuse for selfish actions. It says that every being is a part of God—and yet it divides people into castes." (2007:305)

Chandri embodies abundant and explicit sexuality, which is portrayed through sharp realism. Being an untouchable woman, she is prevented from performing the last rites and cremation of her dead lover Narayanappa. Born to a

prostitute, Chandri remains devoted and fulfills her role as Narayanappa's consort for ten years. After his death, she seeks continuity by wooing Praneshacharya, inspired by her mother's belief that prostitutes should conceive from holy men. For her, Acharya represents that ideal – in looks, virtue and charisma.

When Acharya touches Chandri, it is spontaneous and transformative. Their union is depicted not as sin, but as pure, spontaneous bliss beyond moral judgment. The meeting unleashes a wave of existential questions in Acharya, disrupting his rigid spiritual life. Their union symbolically echoes the episode in the Mahabharata where sage Parashara, overwhelmed by lust, unites with Matsyagandhi in a boat – an act of both transcendence and transgression.

In addition to being a masterpiece of literature, U. R. Ananthamurthy's *Sanskara* is a potent philosophical reflection on the long-standing tension in Indian society between religion, caste, and morality. This book demonstrates how religious writings become lifeless, insensitive, and mechanical when they are restricted to societal norms and outward behavior, cutting them apart from morality and compassion. This tension is exemplified by Praneshacharya's struggle, in which self-realization and moral consciousness give him a new course when religious laws are unable to guide him. His experience demonstrates that religion is meaningless and unfinished if it lacks human sensibility and reflection within its outward rigidity.

Sanskara makes it apparent that when religious writings contradict human compassion, their flaws are revealed. Social justice and moral truth are hampered not only by caste inequality but also by concepts like purity and impurity. The author conveys the idea that morality should be judged by a person's compassion, honesty, and integrity rather than by their caste or social standing through characters like Chandri. Religion is reduced to a burden of tradition if it is separated from humanity. According to Ananthamurthy, morality is derived from experience, reflection, and interpersonal connections rather than just from the Bible. He makes the point in this book that self-acceptance and moral consciousness, rather than merely following rituals, are the keys to emancipation.

Last but not least, *Sanskara* offers a significant discussion between religion and morality in which the author challenges the reader to consider if religion is actually practiced in accordance with laws or if it has something to do

with the soul's truth and humanity's protection. This novel tells us that moral decisions are incomplete unless they are inspired by the basic element of humanity and compassion.

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