# Reenchantment and Resistance: Study of Myths in U.R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara*

Sharanya DG

Birkbeck, University of London, United Kingdom

> I am not writing a novel, but an allegorical tale […]. Here is a novel that cannot be realistically abandoned. It cannot be realistically interpreted either. It has realism but it is an allegory. In allegory, realism gets changed. But in realism there is no place for allegory. So [Meenakshi Mukherjee] said this is a new Indian form. I came to know this from a critic. I was not aware of this when I wrote the novel.
> – U.R. Ananthamurthy, in conversation with Susheela Punitha (139)

U.R. Ananthamurthy, in conversation with Susheela Punitha, acknowledges the problem with categorizing his work, *Samskara* (1965), which has been hailed as an important text in the *navya* (modern) tradition of Kannada literature, within the existing genres of writing. Does this work belong to the realm of realism or to that of allegory? As seen from the quote above, Ananthamurthy reveals that he found an answer to this through Meenakshi Mukherjee, who argues that this is the new Indian form. Mukherjee reads the novel as one that provides an introspective exploration into "a man's disjunction with the reality that he had unthinkingly accepted all his life. The novel is an allegorical expression of the pain and ecstasy of his initiation into another reality" (426). Such a drastic shift into a different "reality" altogether, as well as the need for a change in the "Indian form," turns our focus to the existing sociocultural and political landscape at the time: that of Indian Independence from colonialism two decades prior and the resultant building of an Indian nation. How do works of contemporary literature, then, bring together the contradictory genres of realism and allegory to become the "new Indian form?" How does this new form respond to the social reality of its times, i.e., the persistence of colonial thought in the post-Independence period? I argue that the "new Indian form" is made possible in contemporary Indian literature through the use of myths.

*Samskara* was translated from Kannada into English by A.K. Ramanujan in 1976, and revolves around the question—"Who is a Brahmin?" The death of a heretic brahmin, Naranappa, disrupts a conservative *agrahara* (brahmin settlement) in Karnataka. In life, Naranappa had been an enemy of brahmanism: he desecrated several brahmanic codes by eating meat, fishing at the temple pond, drinking alcohol, living with a lower-caste woman, Chandri, and so on.

Although he had clearly given up brahmanism, he had never been officially excommunicated from the agrahara, and so had to be cremated accordingly. It is interesting to note the reason he had not been excommunicated from this brahmin colony: he had threatened to convert to Islam, and as one of the brahmins says, "[i]f he had really become a Muslim no law could have thrown him out of the brahmin agrahara. We would have had to leave" (*Samskara* 12). It is the modern secular law and the fear of a "polluted agrahara" (*Samskara* 12) that stood directly in opposition to the new social reality that allowed Naranappa to continue living amongst these conservative brahmins. "Crest-Jewel of Vedic Learning" Praneshacharya becomes responsible for deciding the proceedings of Naranappa's *samskara*, or the rites for a dead man. He thus sets on a quest to find the answer to what it means to be a Brahmin, and in the process, challenges "the reality that he had unthinkingly accepted all his life" (Mukherjee 426). The transformation of the protagonist, Praneshacharya, begins with this quest, setting in motion his own *samskara*—a refinement of spirit (Ramanujan, *Samskara* 119–120).[1] I argue that it is the critical use of the mythic framework that sets in motion the *samskara* of this upper-caste South Indian protagonist to grapple with what defines and guides his life and journey.

First, the mythical elements that serve as the protagonist's guides are identified in this article. Therefore, I begin in the same vein as Ramanujan does in his Translator's Note[2] - by acknowledging *Samskara* as one of the most important works of not just the Kannada navya movement but of contemporary Indian literature. "Contemporary Indian literature" here refers to Indian texts written after the Independence, following K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's categorization of Indian writings in English: "a convenient, rather than an absolute, way of dividing" in which "overlapping cannot be avoided" (38). For the purposes of this article, however, contemporary Indian literature refers to all post-Independence Indian literature, irrespective of language. Of course, this way of categorization makes it crucial to understand the social, cultural, and political contexts of a post-colonial India in order to discuss the literary text. The latter section of this paper therefore critically discusses the mythical elements identified in *Samskara* to elucidate the function of myths in the contemporary Indian context.

## Mythical Elements in Ananathamurthy's *Samskara*

> Myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime

discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth.
– Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (3)

*Samskara* is set in an agrahara of orthodox Madhva Brahmins in the fictional town of Durvasapura in Karnataka. Mythical elements present in Indian literature are generally traced back to the dominant Hindu Puranas and Vedic texts, but the setting of the novel makes this all the more apparent. The town is named after the sage Durvasa, who is known for his anger-driven curses. In the *Dwaapara-yuga* (second aeon), Durvasa was performing his penance on the hillock in the middle of the river Tunga. During this time, the Paandavas, along with Draupadi, were said to have been staying in the forests at a place called Kaimara around ten miles from Durvasapura. In order to fulfil Draupadi's desire of taking a bath in the river, Bheema used his immense strength to dam the river. In the process, the river ceased flowing towards the hillock where Durvasa stayed. Sensing Durvasa's anger in his divine vision, Dharmaraja instructed Bheema to open up the dam. Bheema let the water flow by breaking the dam open in three places, shaping the path of the river as it flowed even in this *Kali-yuga*, i.e., the current aeon (*Samskara* 16). This forms the *sthalapuraana*, or "place-legend" of Durvasapura. The agrahara in this novel then becomes something more than a mere setting; it becomes the site where the distinction between myths and reality collapses.

   "Myth" has its etymological roots in the Greek word *mythos* which means word, speech, tale, or story (Anderson *et al.* 61). According to Mircea Eliade, myths are sacred stories that shape the lives and beliefs of different communities across the globe (*Myth and Reality* 1–2). Myths relate to the stories of those deeds of supernatural beings that led to the creation of a new reality, and therefore, Eliade argues, all myths are origin stories. This newly created reality can be the entire Cosmos or a fragment of it, an institution or even a particular kind of human behavior. The actors in these myths are recognized by their sacredness and hence are "supernatural beings" (*Myth and Reality* 5). The creation and recognition of these supernatural beings, along with their sacred powers, become a model for human activities and are understood to be "true history" (*Myth and Reality* 6). In other words, myths help make sense of the world around us. Moreover, they deal with realities: the existence of the world proves the creation myth, the mortality of human beings proves the myth of destruction, and so forth (*Myth and Reality* 6). Since all myths are considered to be origin stories, they are of "primordial time" or "the beginning" of a mythical past. The sthalapuraana that forms the setting of *Samskara* can be understood as the origin myth defined by Mircea Eliade. The history of the agrahara is traced back to the primordial time, viz., Dwaapara-yuga in the telling of this myth. Geography is therefore understood in this

novel in terms of mythical beginnings rather than the modern secular way of locating places. Moreover, for Eliade, the function of myth is to reveal models that guide human activities and rituals (8). The sacred and profane behaviors of human beings are informed by the values set by the sacred stories. Ananthamurthy, too, points out that the sacredness of a person in the agrahara is determined in the intersection of this myth and everyday reality, as it is believed that a truly pious man can hear Durvasa's conch early in the morning of *dvadashi* (the twelfth day of the moon) (*Samskara* 16). Here, we see how myths help shape the lives and beliefs of the community. Sacred spaces and time (such as Durvasapura on early dvadashi mornings) signify the reactualization of the myth itself, where the sacred time/space interrupts the mundane, "profane" world with the help of myths (*Sacred and Profane* 68–72). The structures or symbols of myths become the connection between heaven and earth, creating a passage for such transcendence (*Sacred and Profane* 63–64).

Myths are stories manifested through symbolic language that transcend mundane life and help in defamiliarizing the visible world. Sage Durvasa is often associated with Lord Shiva and is even said to have been born out of Shiva's anger. This brings in an intertextual layer for reading the novel, as the visible reality of Durvasapura is now encoded in our imaginations by Shiva and what he symbolizes. According to A.K. Ramanujan in the Afterword to *Samskara*, Shiva is the mythical reference to the "complex relations between asceticism and eroticism" (123) in Hindu mythologies, where the ascetic is often tempted by the erotic. This struggle continues in the residents of the agrahara as legacies of Shiva. Naranappa, Mahabala, and Shripati were brahmins from the agrahara who gave up the ascetic ideal for eroticism. Ananthamurthy also depicts other brahmins in the agrahara as those overpowered by greed and lust, bringing out the hypocrisy of brahminism within such communities. Praneshacharya had married "an invalid" in order to follow the path of celibacy, "get[ting] ripe and ready" for salvation (*Samskara* 4). However, he too is afflicted by this struggle when he sleeps with Chandri in the forests near the Maruti temple. A drunken Naranappa even foreshadows the sexual union of Praneshacharya and Chandri by reminding him of Puranic myths:

> Lust and anger, I thought, were only for the likes of us. But then anger plays on the nose-tips of people who try to hold down lust. That's what they say. Durvasa, Parashara, Bhrigu, Brihaspati, Kashyapa, all the sages were given to anger… Look, Acharya-those are the great sages who set the tradition, right? Quite a lusty lot, those sages. What was the name of the fellow who ravished the fisherwoman smelling of fish, right in the boat and gave her body a permanent perfume? And now, look at these poor brahmins, descended from such sages! (21)

By alluding to these sages, the novel portrays Naranappa as the manifestation of the shadow archetype of Praneshacharya. According to Carl G. Jung, the Shadow archetype represents the repressed part of the self. Characters such as Naranappa and Mahabala—a friend of Praneshacharya from Kashi who gave up his vedic studies to "[find] 'reality' in a whore in the holy city itself" (Ramanujan, *Samskara* 123)—stand in for what would become of Praneshacharya if he gave in to the sexuality he has repressed. This is recognized by Praneshacharya himself following his intercourse with Chandri: "At the touch of Chandri's breast, the animal leaped to its natural self and bared its teeth" (*Samskara* 71). The mythic framework associated with the setting of the novel's reality informs the value and actions of people living in there and allows upper-caste men like Naranappa and Praneshacharya to make sense of their experiences.

A clear dichotomy is noticed in characterizations in the first part of this novel, which seems to follow the structure of characters in Hindu puranas. Praneshacharya is the chaste Brahmin, whose polar opposite is Naranappa in the first part of the novel. Praneshacharya is considered to be the epitome of brahminhood, and is given the title of *vedaanta-shiromani* or "Crest-Jewel of Vedic Learning" as he studied Hindu scriptures in Kashi. He even married Bhagirathi, "an invalid," in order to follow the path of celibacy, and get "ripe and ready" for salvation (*Samskara* 4). On the other hand, Naranappa is despised by the members of the agrahara for his hedonistic ways of living. He involved himself in several taboos of the agrahara by eating meat, drinking alcohol, befriending Muslims and even living with a low-caste woman, Chandri. He constantly challenged brahminhood during his life at the agrahara, and continued to do so even in his death. However, the moral nature of such a dichotomy is challenged by Ananthamurthy. A dichotomy can also be seen in the contrast between the lower-caste women and the brahmin women of the agrahara in the novel. As A.K. Ramanujan points out in the Afterword, the brahmin women are portrayed to be "sexless and unappetizing" (123) with their sunken breasts and smelly mouths. However, the lower-caste women such as Chandri and Belli are compared to the likes of Shakuntala and Menaka, who disturbed the penance of many great sages. The sexual union of Praneshacharya and Chandri in the forest near the Maruti temple is informed by these characterizations and mythical structures.

Praneshacharya, in his quest to find an answer to the question plaguing the entire agrahara, follows the narrative arc of the hero's journey outlined by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell defines myth as that which is common to all human lives. This is described by the "Monomyth" or the hero's journey, which contains within itself all mythical stories. While myths are deeply rooted in the community, they share a similar structure of the hero's journey. Every mythical story across cultures shares a similar

structure of this hero's journey, following the "rites of passage" of separation, initiation, and return (Campbell 28). Within such a framework, characters are recognized through archetypes. The mythical hero achieves a "world-historical, macrocosmic triumph" by the end, which may be physical, spiritual, or moral, but there is little variation in the journey or roles of these characters (Campbell 30). Most religious myths culminate with the potential of the hero being realized. The manifestations of this monomyth in various cultures across the world help defamiliarize the visible. Myths are capable of expanding one's horizons in an attempt to understand the universe and, therefore, one's own innermost nature (Campbell and Moyers xviii). This means that myths shed light on the potential of human knowledge and experience (Campbell and Moyers 5). This kind of self-knowledge becomes necessary for the hero's journey.

Praneshacharya's *call to adventure* comes from the death of Naranappa. The impending samskara of this "anti-brahminical brahmin" (*Samskara* 119) raises the question of what it means to be a brahmin. In this structure, Chandri becomes the mentor who helps him *cross the first threshold* into the world of sexual and material pleasures. By sleeping with Chandri in the forest, he undergoes a "rite of initiation" (*Samskara* 120) and leaves his familiar world. Here, he has completed the Separation stage and started the Initiation stage of the Journey. This, along with his wife's death, marks the beginning of the *samskara* (transformation) of Praneshacharya. Stepping out of the agrahara after cremating his wife, he wanders aimlessly until he meets Putta. Putta becomes a mentor figure as he guides Praneshacharya through the unfamiliar world of sexual and material pleasures while exploring the sacred time and space of a *rathotsava* (temple car festival). In the words of A.K. Ramanujan, he becomes "Praneshacharya's initiator into the mysteries of the ordinary and the familiar, the purity of the unregenerate, the wholeness of the crude" (121). Amidst the crowds of the festival, the divisions of purity and impurity created by his brahmanic ways break down. He becomes one with the world around him, remembering the "famous monistic formula" given in the vedas—*tattvamasi*, or "That art Thou" (*Samskara* 103). As expected in the structure of the Journey, this transformation is not easy and becomes the point of rebirth for the Hero. Praneshacharya recognizes this throughout his journey: "O God, what's the root of this dread? Are these the first pains of a rebirth?" (110). This realization allows him to grow affectionate towards Putta, seeing him as his own son (101). In overcoming his casteist ways, Praneshacharya finds a way to resolve the conflict and decides to be the one who performs Naranappa's final rites, and also to confess about his sexual encounter with Chandri. This decision marks the beginning of the Return stage of his Journey. However, this stage is left incomplete, as the novel ends with Praneshacharya anxiously

waiting to reach Durvasapura. As Ramanujan eloquently puts it, "the novel ends, but does not conclude" (125).

It is important to note that in this journey, the realization of the *apotheosis* stage comes from the Vedas. The Vedic *mahaavaakya* "tattvamasi" becomes the revelatory source for resolving his dilemma, which is also comprehended in terms of myths in Hindu scriptures. When plagued by the question of Naranappa's samskara, Praneshacharya remembers that compassion is "the right way of dharma" (*Samskara* 42). In an attempt to understand the actions of Naranappa, Praneshacharya finds compassion. He remembers a tale from the Rigveda, where the gods answered the call of a disgraced brahmin who was addicted to gambling instead of answering the call of the other brahmins who had held sacrificial rituals. There is also a reference to the mythic tale of Jaya and Vijaya, the gatekeepers of Vaikuntha. On being asked to choose between returning to Vaikuntha after seven lives as a devotee of Vishnu and returning after three lives as his enemy, they chose the latter (42–43). Moreover, Praneshacharya compares his state of dilemma to that of Trishanku who was stuck between two worlds (*Samskara* 85). King Trishanku, who had asked Sage Vishwamitra to send him to heaven, was denied entrance by Indra, leaving him hanging between the celestial and terrestrial worlds. Praneshacharya, having slept with Chandri, was suspended between the world he knew and the world of sensual pleasure that he had just experienced. It is the framework of the Hindu tradition that helps Praneshacharya question and make sense of his world and continue his journey through the course of the novel. This mythic framework forms the allegorical crux for the "pain and ecstasy of his initiation into another reality" (Mukherjee 426).

## Functions of Myth in a Post-Independence India

> My text does not exist in free space that some Westerner can read and understand; it exists in my context. I am a critical insider.
> – Ananthamurthy in conversation with Punitha (140)

Having identified various mythical elements embedded in the setting, characterizations, and narrative arc of this novel, it is now pertinent to explore what functions myths serve in contemporary Indian novels such as *Samskara*. *Samskara*, as a novel, is a modern literary genre and form that emerged in the West and was brought to India by colonialism. Christian missionaries set up printing presses and published the Bible in various regional languages. English was

introduced into the education system as the medium of instruction. Orientalists during this period studied and translated Indian texts, bringing Indian literature to a global front (Iyengar 37). Indians began writing about India in a language foreign to them and in a form that had emerged in a foreign context. Ananthamurthy is one of the pioneers of the *navya* ("new" or modern) movement in Kannada, and *Samskara* is a modern novel that discusses the existential position of Praneshacharya in his social reality. This form of writing is informed by an emphasis on individuality, which was a focus of modernity. The advent of modernity in Europe is closely tied to colonialism. According to Walter D. Mignolo, modernity is a European narrative that hides its darker side, since coloniality, or "the colonial matrix of power" (2), cannot be separated from modernity. In fact, for Mignolo, coloniality was "the hidden agenda […] of modernity" (1–2). Modernity was conceived as "a double colonisation, of time and space," where the temporal colonization was the "Renaissance invention of the Middle Ages" (6). In such colonization, the European En*light*enment was created as a tradition of its own while simultaneously inventing the European Middle Ages as *Dark* in opposition. The other side was the spatial colonization, where non-European traditions were invented that had to be superseded by those of Europe. Modernity in non-European countries became synonymous with the ideas of "salvation and newness," which were then associated with the idea of progress and development as well. It is, therefore, no surprise that modernity gets translated as "navya" or "new" in many Indian languages, including Kannada. Western modernity that came to dominate thought in colonial nations nevertheless hides that these ideas of salvation and newness, of progress and development closely follow the logic of coloniality (Mignolo 3–6).

Modernity leads to a feeling of loss or decline in contemporary cultures, according to Charles Taylor in a lecture titled "Three Malaises." As sources of this condition, he cites individualism, the primacy of instrumental reason, and the "soft despotism" and consequent loss of freedom (1–12). The glorification of individualism leads to the loss of hierarchical order in society. Cosmic orders such as the *Great Chain of Being* were discredited in Western Modernity. The Chain of Being divides the natural world into four kingdoms, namely —Mineral, Plant, Animal and Human. There is a progressive gain of qualities as one moves from the lowest (mineral) to the highest level of being (human), the qualities added being *life force*, *consciousness* and *self-awareness*, respectively (Schumacher 24–26). Modernity is seen as a reduction of everything to the lowest (mineral) level of being. The loss of hierarchical order, as seen in this light, is the loss of these qualities. This leads to a decline in order and meaning in the world, causing *disenchantment* with the world. Disenchantment is a term used by Max Weber to describe the loss of belief during modernity. There is

no sense of a broader vision as individuals focus on their own lives. According to Taylor, life has been "flattened and narrowed" (Taylor 4) due to such narcissism in modern society. The dominance of colonialism is not just limited to the economic, social, and political spheres but is also present in the cultural sphere of the colonized countries. There is a need for resistance—to stand stronger against colonial and neo-colonial forces, with a "higher and more creative culture of resolute struggle"—and each blow, no matter how small or big, is a victory (Ngũgĩ 3).

The dominance of Western language and thought is palpable in the literature of post-independence India. The narratives of emancipation and enlightenment of the post-Independence period resist not just the colonial powers but also the dominance of the Western modern paradigm. Along with the need to sustain a nation with one's own narratives, there is a need to resist the modernizing forces as well. Gandhi's notion of *swaraj* is deeply rooted in such resistance. The use of myths in such a context can be seen as textual resistance against the matrix of powers of modernity/coloniality. With the disenchantment of the world, the focus of Western modernity is limited to the lowest (mineral) level of being, where the language used is literal and precise. It focuses on a rational means of communicating, i.e., *logos*, which has often been placed in binary opposition to *mythos*. Myths, on the other hand, have the function of transcendence; the hero's journey described by Campbell is the journey towards self-awareness and thus, higher levels of being. The language of myths is figurative and symbolic. Using defamiliarized language in myths helps relate to both, the material and the spiritual world. This kind of reenchantment of the disenchanted modern world reflects the mystical function of myth (Campbell and Moyers) and resists the colonial and modern matrix of power. The mythic framework used in *Samskara* critically evaluates tradition itself and, at the same time, resists the dominance of Western modern thought. This resistance can be seen in the hero's journey, as Praneshacharya becomes more and more self-aware in relation to the world around him. The reference to the constellation of the Seven Sages[3] through the course of his journey indicates the interconnectedness of the cosmos. By alluding to the *saptarishi* (seven sages), there is a sense of Praneshacharya being guided by these mythic sages through the course of his journey, specifically when he sets out to return to Durvasapura (*Samskara* 118). The use of the symbolic language of myth allows for a novel written in the modern realistic mode to be an allegory. *Samskara* thus uses its mythic framework to emphasize on the higher levels of being and reenchant the world, resisting against the dominance of coloniality/modernity.

In an interview with Chandan Gowda, Ananthamurthy discusses the dominance of western thought in India today. The understanding of the *loukika* (worldly) and *aloukika* (other-worldly) in binaries is a result of

the domination of western thought. He points out that the Vedas are concerned about the *loukika* just as much as they are about *aloukika* (*Life in World* 66). In *Samskara*, Ananthamurthy brings the two together in the character of Praneshacharya. Having lived his life as an austere brahmin, Praneshacharya is a character of the aloukika. After sleeping with Chandri in the forest near the Maruti temple, he is overcome with the guilt of taking pleasure in the loukika. However, his journey leads him to the *rathotsava* in Melige, which becomes the space where the two collapse. Praneshacharya is guided into the world of material pleasure by Putta. It is in this sacred space that Praneshacharya realizes the truth of tattvamasi, which helps him resolve his dilemma. By bridging the divide between the loukika and aloukika in *Samskara*, Ananthamurthy asserts a mode of thinking that exists in India, while rejecting the dominance of western thought.

The dominance of the West is also seen in the use of English in Indian literature. It has been argued that Indian writing in English is western-oriented and is limited to the language of the urban middle-class population. K. Satchidanandan discusses the influence of English in the everyday lives of Indians, which makes Indian writing in English an important part of Indian literature (5–7). Ananthamurthy explicitly discusses the political and cultural choice he made of writing in Kannada in his interview with Chandan Gowda. Languages in the world are "divided into higher and lower on the basis of political influence" (*Life in World* 61). As someone who had "something to tell in his own language to his own people" (61), Ananthamurthy decided to write in Kannada. This was his way of rejecting the dominance of English over Kannada. Moreover, it is difficult to convey the ethos of a community in a language that is foreign to it. The language of the story is a crucial aspect of the culture depicted in the story. This is why Ananthamurthy claims that he would not even have thought of a story like *Samskara*, had he planned on writing in English (61). However, there have been writers like R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, among others, who have managed to translate the Indian ethos into English. Ananthamurthy argues that this kind of translation is possible because of the plurality of languages in India; multiple languages co-exist in India, and Bhakti poets like Shishunala Sharifa have used multiple languages in the same poem (*Life in World* 101). There is a constant need to translate between multiple languages in everyday situations. Languages in a community thus acquire qualities of the other languages. Ananthamurthy claims that Kannada literature has now acquired the qualities of English, whose prominence today is a legacy of imperialism. But this should not be a one-way transaction. English must also acquire the qualities of the local languages in order to dilute its dominance, which is how writers like R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao use English to tell the stories of Indian communities (*Life in World* 105–106). A resistance to the dominance of the language of the West

can be noted in this kind of assimilation of languages. The question of language used in writing therefore becomes a cultural and political choice.

In *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o discusses how the two functions of language—as means of communication and as carriers of culture—are interlinked: "Communication creates culture, culture is a means of communication" (Ngũgĩ 15–16). Culture carries with it the body of values a community identifies with. This happens through "orature and literature" (16), which in the Indian context refer to myths. Myths become an integral part of the shared language of the Indian community. K.V. Subanna maintains that Ramayana and Mahabharata are simply languages from which several texts emerge (qtd. in Ananthamurthy, *Life in World* 71). A.K. Ramanujan in his essay "Three Hundred Rāmāyanas" argues that there is no "original" Ramayana, but there are several tellings of it. He even claims that no one in India and Southeast Asia reads the Ramayana or the Mahabharata for the first time as they "are there, 'always already'" (158). By becoming part of the language itself, these texts need not be read to understand such references (*Life in World* 87). At this juncture, it becomes important to consider the translation of *Samskara* into English for the sake of non-Indian readers (not just the non-Kannadiga readers). By adding an Afterword and Notes at the end of the novel that annotate mythical references, Ramanujan attempts "to translate a non-native reader into a native one" (*Samskara* ix). The introduction of mythical settings, characters, or situations in everyday language holds certain significance, for which non-Indian readers would require translations.

Myth is the thread responsible for continuity in civilizations (*Life in World* 70–71) by providing a link between tradition and the present. Myths, however, are not simply repetitions of the traditional, but are brought into the current context. Adapting the myths to a current context bring in inconsistencies and contradictions in the mythic framework itself. These inconsistencies have "dismayed and angered" those heralding modernity, according to A.K. Ramanujan in his essay, "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?" (44). Ramanujan compares the nature of morality advocated in the West to India to understand the "inconsistencies" embraced by the Indian culture. Kant's moral imperative is to act as if "the maxim of your action were to become through your will a Universal Law of Nature" (qtd. in "Indian Way of Thinking" 46). Manu, on the other hand, lacks universality: "To be moral, for Manu[4], is to particularize" ("Indian Way of Thinking" 46). He discusses the laws and ethics of each caste in detail. It is not just the crime that is taken into consideration, but also the questions "who did what, to whom and when" ("Indian Way of Thinking" 46). This "pervasive emphasis on context" is an insistence on particularism as opposed to the tendencies of universalism in modern thought.

Modernization can therefore be seen as a movement towards the context-free from the context-sensitive in India: "an erosion of contexts, at least in principle" ("Indian Way of Thinking" 55). Indian literary texts tend to place importance on context, bringing in inconsistencies and contradictions that disturb those who seek to universalize. This kind of contradiction is depicted in characterizations of the polar opposites, Naranappa and Praneshacharya in *Samskara*, when Naranappa is manifested as the shadow archetype of Praneshacharya. This is recognized by Praneshacharya as well, when he compares his state of dilemma to that of King Trishanku, stuck between two worlds (Samskara 85).

The use of myths in Samsk*ara* goes beyond the pedagogical and sociological function described by Campbell.[5] It becomes the critical framework used to evaluate existing social order. Ananthamurthy gives the example of a scene from the Mahabharata to illustrate the role of critical evaluation in the Indic tradition. In this scene, Duryodhana asks Krishna to reveal his *vishvaroopa,* or cosmic form:

> In your vishvaroopa, you know anyhow that the war will take place. But as an emissary of the Pandavas, you come and say, "Don't fight the war." And you sit in my heart and say, "Fight the war." Who is this god who tells me that I should fight the war? Who are you to say that I should not fight the war? (*Life in World* 84–85)

This kind of enquiry is important, according to Ananthamurthy. Following tradition blindly only preserves the past instead of making it useful for the present context (67). Without a critical evaluation, myth loses its function, which also leads to repetition instead of continuation in the culture of the community. However, the blind repetition of certain realities can make myth lose its cosmological function. Similarly, a ritual performed every day loses its meaning and merely becomes a habit. In such cases, myths simply perpetuate the existing social orders; as Edward Said points out in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), this leads to culture becoming a source of identity. Therefore, with the given understanding of culture, there is an attempt to be uncritically loyal to one's own nation or tradition while denigrating others. There is a strong sense of differentiation between "us" and "them," which then produces various kinds of religious and nationalist fundamentalism (Said xiii). Ananthamurthy is highly critical of such use of tradition and culture, especially in the contemporary political scenario, where blind following of political leaders would give rise to fascism (*Life in World* 83–84). In these cases, there is an attempt to preserve the past without bringing it into the present-day context. This insistence on being "context-free" ("Indian Way of Thinking" 55) in an attempt to preserve one's traditions can be seen as the pervasion of modern thought as well.

Like Ananthamurthy himself, the protagonist of *Samskara* becomes a "critical insider" through the course of the text. In a speech titled "Towards the Concept of a New Nationhood: Languages and Literatures in India," Ananthamurthy defines a critical insider as "insiders to our tradition, but they are critical of this tradition even if they are within it" (241). Having learned the Vedas in Kashi, Praneshacharya becomes responsible for solving the dilemma of the agrahara. He is described in the beginning of the novel as a man who dedicatedly does his daily chores. He had been following the daily routine of "bath at dawn, twilight prayers, cooking, and medicines for his wife" (*Samskara* 3) for twenty years unfailingly. He married a disabled woman and spent his married life serving her with compassion. His life had clearly been defined by Brahmin tradition. The narrative, however, depicts this with a hint of irony, as Praneshacharya swells with pride, thinking: "By marrying an invalid, I get ripe and ready" for salvation (4). Naranappa's death pushes Praneshacharya to undertake the hero's journey and break away from his routine. It is the critical inquiry into his traditional life that allows him to step away from his casteist beliefs and find resolution to the central conflict of the novel.

The use of myth in the plot, setting, characterization, imagery, language use, etc. of contemporary Indian literature like *Samskara* help in reenchanting the world. These are the mystical and cosmological functions of myth, as described by Campbell. The turn to myth helps this upper-caste man resolve conflicts, highlighting the pedagogical and sociological functions of myth. Such use of myths in contemporary Indian literature helps restore meaning and order in the face of colonial anomie. By craftily entwining reality and myth in its narrative and realism and allegory in its form, Ananthamurthy creates "a new Indian form" of literature and thereby resists the dominance of modernity and colonialism in his novel. However, criticality is important when turning to myths in order to avoid religious and nationalist fundamentalism. Ananthamurthy's fiction and critical work highlight that this turn to myth is not simply "blind repetitions" of the traditional life but is understood in relation to the world around us today.

Notes

1. The numerous meanings of this word hold significance in the novel, and Ramanujan discusses the importance of the title and the various ways it can be translated in the afterword to the novel. In fact, Ramanujan's translation of the novel dedicates the epigraph to the multiple dictionary entries for the word "Samskara."

2. Ramanujan begins his Translator's Note to the novel with the statement, "U.R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara* is an important novel of the sixties" (ix).

3. He looks at the constellation right after he wakes up at night in the forest, having had sexual intercourse with Chandri (see *Samskara* 59). The novel also ends with a description of the night sky as Praneshacharya returns to Durvasapura: "A perfectly clear constellation of the Seven Sages," see *Samskara* 118.

4. Manu is the speculated author of the Manusmriti, a foundational text that formed the legal and social basis of Hinduism. Ramanujan here is drawing a comparison between Kant's and Manu's stance on morality: while Kant's work outlines the moral imperative for European modern cultures, Manu's work forms the framework for Hindu moral sensibilities.

5. Joseph Campbell traces four primary functions of myths in an interview with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*. The mystical function refers to the crucial role of myths in opening up a dimension of mystery in the universe and revealing the enchantment of the world. The second function of myth is cosmological—myths give answers but, in doing so, allow more mystery to seep in. Humans can learn how to make fire or figure out the process of oxidation. But *what fire is*, remains a mystery. Next is the sociological—myths perpetuate certain social orders. This function brings in the differences in myths across time and space. Power is "mythologized" for holding authority in everyday life, moving beyond mere coercion to hegemony. For example, the authority of judges over the law is understood by the robes they wear and the way a courtroom is structured (xiv). Another function of myth is pedagogical; it teaches us how to live our lives. The mythical stories of a culture are relatable to human life circumstances (Campbell and Moyers).

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