UNIT 2 SAMSKARA : THE NARRATIVE

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Chapterwise Summaries and Comments
2.3 The Narrative: Three Important Features
   2.3.1 Focalization
   2.3.2 Intertextuality
   2.3.3 Structure
2.4 Let Us Sum Up
2.5 Questions
2.6 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit is meant to enable you to get to know the text of Samskara intimately; to train you to look at major features of the narrative, particularly focalization and intertextuality; and finally, to examine the form and structure of the novel. After reading the study material, you should be able to examine a narrative critically, particularly with respect to focalization and intertextuality.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

After giving you a survey of Kannada literature and the Kannada novel, we can now zero in on the text of Samskara. Written in Kannada in 1965, it was made into a powerful film with Girish Karnad playing the part of Pranesacharya. The English translation of the novel came out in 1976. It is a short novel as novels go — only 144 pages. (Tamasa is 352 pages!) You should have no difficulty in reading it in one or two sittings. There is an interesting story about how the novel came to be written. U.R. Anantha Murthy wrote the novel in 1964, when he was in England doing his Ph.D. He was 32 at that time.

Anantha Murthy recalls how as a child of 13 he had met a former army man and had come to know of his romance with one of the loveliest dark girls from the untouchable huts and of their elopement and how he had written a story about it. The story was meant for a magazine which he and several other friends of his edited in Kannada, Sanskrit and English. He had written the story metaphorically in order to hide the true story from the elders of the community. The girl reminded him of the story of Matsyagandha, the fisherwoman with whom the ascetic Parashar had fallen in love. He rewrote the story in 1964 while doing research in England. What triggered off the writing was his visit to a film along with his English supervisor, Malcolm Bradbury.
...many years later in 1964, when I was 32 years old, I went to see a Bergman film "The Seventh Seal" in England with my friend and guide, the famous novelist Malcolm Bradbury. Seventh seal is a film on a Christian facing a belief crisis. It was a great and symbolic film, but I saw it without sub-titles. I was stirred by it. Often creativity is aroused by imperfect understanding and even misunderstanding. I told Bradbury, "Look Malcolm, as an Englishman you have to create your medieval times through learning and knowledge acquired with hard scholarship. But the medieval times are part of my consciousness; centuries can co-exist in the Indian mind." Malcolm said that my writing must reflect such an existence. I had to give the next chapter of my thesis on Marxism and fiction to him. What a boring and hard chapter to write and I wanted to evade it. What better ruse can there be if your teacher is a novelist? I told Malcolm that I have begun to write a novel and I did. 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. This was how Samskara was born in England.

The above accounts tells us several things about Anantha Murthy — his early distrust of the caste system, his early creativity, and most significantly, a clue about his choice of the mould in which he had cast the story of Samskara, namely the story of the love of the ascetic Parashar for Matsyagandha told in the Mahabharat.

Well, read on now. Do keep noting your reactions in the margin as you do so. This naturally applies if it is your own copy of the novel.

For your convenience we have given summaries of all the chapters in the novel along with comments and questions. But remember the summaries are given as an aid to your reading. They are not meant to be a substitute for the experience of reading the text.

All references to the text in this study material are to Samskara published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1976.

2.2 CHAPTERWISE SUMMARIES AND COMMENTS

Part One (Chapters I-X, pages 1-62)

Chapter I: Naranappa’s death creates turmoil among the Brahmins of Durvasapura.

Samskara is the story of a Madhva Brahmin colony, led by Pranesacharya, a devout Brahmin well read in the scriptures and the shastras. The name of the colony or agrahara was Durvasapura. Pranesacharya led an exemplary life looking after his invalid wife. For twenty years he had followed a routine that consisted of taking a bath, saying prayers, cooking for himself and his wife, giving medicines to her and reciting sacred legends before the Brahmins assembled in his house. He thought his salvation lay in his willing performance of duties to his ailing wife.
One morning Naranappa’s concubine Chandri came and told Pranesacharya of the death of Naranappa. Naranappa was a heretic in the colony and had defied every known Brahmin way of life. The news created a commotion in the agrahara. Pranesacharya’s first task was to go and tell all the Brahmin families in the agrahara that Naranappa had died, for no Brahmin could take meals while the body of a fellow Brahmin lay uncremated. Later the Brahmins assembled in Pranesacharya’s verandah to hear his verdict on who would do the funeral rites. The wives, distrustful of their husbands, had also come in through the back door. Naranappa had no children. So, the most important question was – who would do the death rites? Pranesacharya said that, according to the shastras, any relative could, failing which any Brahmin could offer to perform them. Garuda and Lakshmana were related to Naranappa but each of them had quarreled with him and were not interested in performing the rites. The unbrahmin-like actions of Naranappa were raked up. He kept a low-caste concubine, drank liquor, and ate meat, and desecrated the temple pond with his Muslim friends by fishing there. Most of all, he was charged with corrupting the young people of the agrahara and of Parijatpura also.

While the Brahmins were thus debating as to who should perform the funeral rites, Chandri offered all her gold ornaments to pay for the funeral expenses. This changed the entire situation.

The Brahmins now feared that someone else might be tempted to agree to perform the funeral rites and so they vied with one another in giving accounts of Naranappa’s evil deeds.

Finally, at Dasachrya’s suggestion it was decided that the Brahmins of Parijatpura who were smartas and were not so strict in their orthodoxy and who were quite friendly with Naranappa should be informed of his death. As for gold, Pranesacharya would decide who it should go to. He would of course study the sacred books to find a way out of the dilemma they faced.

**Comments/Questions/Activities**

1. Note the reactions of the residents of the agrahara to the death of Naranappa. While condemning him they reveal aspects of their own character.
2. In what way is Pranesacharya different from the other Brahmins in the colony? What qualities does he possess? Tick off the qualities that you would associate with him: asceticism, compassion, learning, piety, humility. Any other?
3. What does Naranappa stand for? Are Pranesacharya and Naranappa in opposition to each other?
4. List out all the anti-brahmin actions, which Naranappa is accused of. Which of these activities, according to you, are not objectionable?
5. Which two sins is the writer talking about here? The sin of gluttony and the sin of greed for gold.
6. Which is the incident that reveals the brahmins’ love of gold? Which of the characters are described as being most greedy?
7. **Purity and Pollution.** These twin ideas are very crucial for our understanding of the dynamics of brahminism in the novel.
8. Which characters are presented sympathetically in this chapter?
9. **Narrative:** The story is being told by an omniscient narrator in the third person.
10. **Tone of the Narrator:** How would you describe the tone of the narrator? Is it objective or is it ironic? I think it is ironic. One example of it is the narrator's description of the way the announcement stops the Brahmans dead in their tracks. 'Garudacharya was in the act of raising a handful of rice mixed with Saru to his mouth, when Pranesacharya entered and said: 'Narayana. Don't Garuda, don't eat. I hear Naranappa is dead, ....' (3)

Think of other examples.

11. **Intertextuality:** The first chapter refers to several other texts like Vatsyayana’s Manual on Love *Kamasutra*, Matsyagandha, the Fisherwoman in Ravi Verma’s painting, (8) and Manu (13). Make a complete list. What do you think is the purpose of these references?

**Chapter II: Durvasapura Brahmins go to seek help from Parijatpura Brahmins.**

The contrast between Naranappa and other Durvasapura Brahmins extends even to the flowers grown by them. Flowers in other brahmans’ homes were meant for the worship of god but those that bloomed in Naranappa’s yard were meant for Chandri’s hair.

The brahmans of Durvasapura, hot and hungry, crossed the three-pronged stream of Tunga, entered the forest, and journeyed for an hour to reach Parijatpura. There they went to Manjayya’s house. Manjayya welcomed them warmly. When he heard the news of Naranappa’s death, Manjayya felt sorry and correctly inferred that he had died of plague, though he was afraid to speak the name of the disease. The Parijatpura folks were happy to get a chance to cremate a high-caste Brahmin but felt that Pranesacharya was the best person to decide on the question of morality involved in the task. Manjayya on his part unhesitatingly said that Naranappa was his friend and that he would spare no expense in performing the funeral rites properly.

**Comments/Questions**

1. The contrast between Naranappa and the rest of the Durvasapura Brahmins is stated in terms of day and night: “All day the smells were gentle and tranquil, the sandalpaste on the brahmans’ bodies and the soft fragrance of *parijata* and other such flowers. But when it grew dark, the night-queen reigned over the agrahara” (15). Notice that the focus here, as in the previous chapter, is on the question whether or not Naranappa was a Brahmin.

2. The priest of Parijatpura, Shankarayya, says ‘that a snake is also a twice-born’. What is he really referring to?

3. How do the Brahmans of Parijatpura appear in comparison to those of Durvasapura? Manjayya seems to be more generous.

**Chapter III: Pranesacharya’s attitude to Naranappa**

While the Brahmins were away at Parijatpura, Pranesacharya pored over his sacred books trying to find a solution to the dilemma they faced.
Naranappa had always been a problem for the agrahara. The real challenge was to test what would win in the end: his own penance and his faith in ancient ways or Naranappa’s demonic ways. The Acharya had promised Naranappa’s mother as she lay dying that he would look after her erring son and even fasted two days a week for him. Once when the Acharya visited to counsel him, Naranappa told him irreverently that since the Congress was coming back to power, they would have to open the temples to all outcastes. When the Acharya told him not to separate Shripati from his wife, he laughed loudly saying that only barren Brahmans lived with women who gave no pleasure. He too had discarded his hysterical wife for the same reason. He belonged, he said, to the hedonist school and lived by the precept of *Borrow, borrow and drink your ghee* (20).

He was critical of Garuda’s greed that had made him rob a poor widow of her property. Three months before his death, the Acharya visited Naranappa again in response to a complaint that he had fished in the sacred temple pond along with his Muslim friends. The Acharya feared that this desecration might set a bad example for the lower classes, who he thought, followed the right path out of fear. On that occasion Naranappa asked his concubine Chandri to bring liquor and had the effrontery to offer it to him. And he challenged him again saying that he would destroy brahminism (23). He in fact, accused him of telling juicy tales that excited his listeners and corrupted them. He went on to tell a thinly veiled story that paralleled the Acharya’s own practice of reciting legends of Shakuntala and other women from the Puranas, and the erotic effect they caused in a young listener. This young listener was so sexually aroused that he went and took a young outcaste woman bathing in the river in the moonlight. Naranappa drew the conclusion that it was he, the Acharya who had corrupted brahminism. The Acharya scolded him but later stopped reciting luscious puranic stories to his listeners. Naranappa advised them to discard their sick wives and take those that gave them pleasure.

Questions/Comments

1. **Allegorical character of the story:** The tussle is broadly between good and evil, between *punya* and *paapa*, ‘between the Acharya’s own penance and faith in ancient ways and Naranappa’s demonic ways’ (19-20). The conflict between Pranesacharya and Naranappa is again clearly stated by the latter: ‘All right, let’s see who wins, Acharya. You or me? Let’s see how long will all this Brahmin business last’ (20-21).

2. Whose story does Naranappa tell the Acharya? The story of Shripati’s liaison with Belli. See chapter v.

3. What is Naranappa’s charge against Pranesacharya?

4. What effect does it have on the Acharya?

Chapter IV: Focus on Garuda and Lakshmana’s greed and Dasacharya’s hunger

Two incidents held against Naranappa are Garuda’s son Shyma joining the army and Lakshmana’s son-in-law Shripati’s separation from his wife Lilavati, for both of which Naranappa was held responsible. This chapter focuses on the accusations leveled by Garuda and his wife Sitadevi against Naranappa and the counter-accusations made by Naranappa’s enemies. Garuda’s eye was on the money that would come to him if he were asked to
cremate Naranappa. He would then be able to secure the release of his only son from the army. With this intention he went to the Acharya, flattered him for his learning and finally confessed why he needed the money so urgently.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the thinking in Lakshmana’s household and on Lakshmana’s miserliness. His wife Anasuya was in tears at the loss of her sister’s jewellery to Chandri and blamed Garuda for ruining Naranappa through what she called black magic. At the same time, she accused Naranappa of making him go astray — he kept the company of Yakshgana players, visited a prostitute, and causing him to separate from his wife. Actually she had taught her daughter to twist her legs and not yield to her husband in order to teach him a lesson. So in order to forestall Garuda, his wife goaded him to go the Acharya. Lakshmana was more straightforward than Garuda and told Pranesacharya that he didn’t have any objection in cremating Naranappa.

Just then Dasacharya and some other Brahmans also joined Garuda and Lakshmana. The former confessed that he was tormented by hunger and asked for an immediate solution to the problem. He suggested that they could donate the gold to the Maruti temple, leaving both Garuda and Lakshmana crestfallen. Finally Pranesacharya promised to pore over the books throughout the night and asked them to go away.

Comments

1. The turnaround in the conduct of the characters after Chandri’s generous offer of gold is complete.
2. The denial of sex: Anasuya’s instructions to her daughter Lilavati are an example of the denial of sex practiced in the agrahara: ‘Don’t give in to your husband when he wants it. Knot up your thighs, like this, and sleep aloof. Teach him a lesson’ (31).

Chapter V: Shripati makes love to Belli, an outcaste, discovers Naranappa’s death and runs out.

This chapter takes us inside the consciousness of Shripati as he comes back to Durvasapura after spending a happy week with a drama troupe from Kelur. It was night and he was carrying a flashlight while crossing the forest.

We get to know about Shripati’s secret friendship with Naranappa, his love of dramatics, his desire to escape the Brahmin dump, and his liaison with Belli, an outcaste girl. Pranesacharya’s description of the erotic beauty of Shakuntala during his recital of puranic legends had excited him so much that he went and took Belli at the river (‘He had personally, carnally enjoyed the Acharya’s description.’) (38). It seems it was his story that Naranappa was telling the Acharya when the latter had come to counsel him to behave (Chapter III). The balladeer of the troupe had promised him a girl’s role. If he could find a part in the troupe, he could escape the Brahmin dump and its endless funeral food. After taking Belli in the outcaste hutments, he went to see his friend Naranappa but finding him dead ran away to Parijatpura.

When the child-widow Lakshmidevamma saw him running she shouted that it was Naranappa’s ghost.
1. Here we are given a direct, sympathetic view of Shripati, in contrast to Lakshmana’s wife’s accusation that Naranappa had corrupted her son.

2. This chapter mentions the celestial tempress Menaka and Kalidas’s Shakuntala as examples of erotic beauty. Chandri is spoken of as being “utterly beautiful, beyond compare” (38). According to Shripati ‘the best connoisseur of them all is Pranesachary, really one in a million’ (38).

Chapter VI: The seventy-year old widow, Lakshmidevamma, curses Garuda for robbing her; Pranesacharya returns Chandri her gold.

This chapter introduces the seventy-year old child widow Lakshmidevamma, known in the Brahmin colonies around for her sore temper, her resounding belches and her curses and offers proof of Garuda’s greed in taking away whatever little property she had.

Chandri was waiting at Pranesacharya’s house for his verdict. She had lived with Naranappa for ten years but the delay in cremating him unnerved her. As a prostitute she was considered to be sinless. “Born to prostitutes, she was an exception to all rules. She was ever-auspicious, daily-wedded, the one without widowhood. How can sin define a running river’ (43)? She ate bananas to allay her hunger and slept curled up on the floor.

Pranesacharya on his part was poring over books to find a solution to the dilemma facing the community. If his quest proved fruitless, it would be a victory for Naranappa. We are also given a glimpse of the Acharya analyzing his motives in not excommunicating Naranappa. Compassion for the man was the chief impulse behind his ‘inaction’ but not without a certain willfulness on his part, his belief that he could bring him back to the right path. It suddenly occurred to him that he should go the Maruti temple across the river and seek His help. He also thought of Chandri, gave her a mat and a blanket and a pillow and also returned all her gold ornaments. She would need them in her life.

Comment

1. In his self-analysis Pranesacharya is honest and admits to the presence of a strand of willfulness along with compassion in relation to Naranappa. This self-analysis gives a foretaste of what is to follow later in the novel, particularly in Part Three.

Chapter VII: Pranesacharya leaves the stench-filled agrahara and goes to the Maruti temple for divine guidance.

The rotting body of Naranappa filled the agrahara with unbearable stench and the Brahmans with superstitious fears. The rats leaped and tumbled and died, much to the unthinking delight of the children. The Brahmans distressed by hunger approached Pranesacharya again and he told them of his plan to go to the Maruti temple. Chandri followed him, waiting for his word at a safe distance in the forest.
Questions

1. Can you pick out an example of the superstitious fear felt by the Brahmins if the dead body was not properly cremated?
2. Notice that instead of deciding the question on his own, he asks Lord Maruti to give him a sign about what should be done. Later he recalls this moment when he is with Putta: ‘When the question of Naranappa’s death rites came up, I didn’t try to solve it for myself. I depended on God, on the old law books’ (106).

Chapter VIII: Dasacharya goes and eats at Manjayya’s house in Parijatpura.

Dasacharya, dying to eat, flattered Manjayya for being as good a Brahmin as anyone else and criticized his own community for asking the Parijatpura brahmins to do what they wouldn’t do themselves. He also criticized Garuda and Lakshmana for their greed. Manjayya offered him something to eat. At first he confined himself to uncooked food but later his appetite got the better of him and he ate whatever was offered, to his fill.

Comments

1. This chapter shows both Dasacharya’s hypocrisy and the brahminical code breaking under the weight of hunger.
2. Note the slightly ironical tone of the narrator.

Chapter IX: The Brahmins, waiting for Pranesacharya in heat, hunger and dread come out of their houses trying to shoo away the vultures that descend on the agrahara.

The death of rats, which was a result of the plague that raged in Durvasapura, filled both the Brahmins and the outcastes with superstitious dread. Chinni, the outcaste girl, who came instead of Beli to collect manure from the Brahmin houses, feared that people were dying because of the Demon treading on them. A vulture on the roof was an omen of death. And when Garuda’s wife spotted one sitting on their roof, she feared for her son and the couple prayed to the household god to forgive them for coveting the god’s gold. Soon, numerous vultures were seen descending on the agrahara. It was as if the Last Deluge had come. Everyone in the agrahara came out struck dumb with dread. Then began the effort to drive the vultures away. At Dasacharya’s suggestion they beat the bronze gongs and blew their conches as they did during the great offerings of flaming camphor making the vultures fly away. But they came back leading the Brahmins to beat their gongs and blow their conches again. This continued till nightfall when the vultures finally disappeared.

In the meantime, Chandri sat in the forest near the temple waiting for word from the Acharya. She blamed herself for causing all this trouble for him. But she did not forget to eat the plantains that she had brought.

Chapter X: Pranesacharya’s prayers to Lord Maruti go unanswered – he returns through the forest at night – meets and mates with Chandri.

Pranesacharya came back from the temple disappointed. The Maruti God had given him no sign. It was night. As he moved through the dark forest, he met
Chandri. She felt compassion for him and embraced his feet in gratefulness and wept. He on his part bent down to bless her and caressed her loosened hair. She held him close, made him lean against her breasts and fed him plantains. ‘Touching full breasts he had never touched, Pranesacharya felt faint. As in a dream, he pressed them’ (62). Then they made love to each other.

Comments/Questions

1. The important sentence is: ‘The Acharya’s hunger, so far unconscious, suddenly raged, and he cried out like a child in distress’ (62). The key word here is ‘hunger’ — physical hunger and sexual hunger, both of which Chandri satisfies. Chandri is all woman in one — both a mother and a lover. She feeds him like a mother and also satisfies his great sexual need.

2. The union between Pranesacharya and Chandri takes place amidst nature. He will revisit the scene of their lovemaking later. (See Part Two, chapter 5.) Can you think of any other similar union in literature that takes place in the forest? What about the union of Shakuntala and Dushyant in Kalidas?

Comments on Part One

Part One consisting of ten chapters gives us a picture of the Brahmin agrahara of Durvasapura and its decadent morality. They are top Brahmans, belonging to the Madhva group, followers of Madhavacharya. But they are extremely hidebound, stern believers in purity and rituals. The only member of the community who is a Brahmin in the real sense is their leader Pranesacharya who is not only highly learned but compassion incarnate. The novel is essentially his story — the story of his spiritual struggle, his self-awakening, his liberation, his re-birth. Even he has denied himself the pleasures of the flesh. His sexual union with Chandri doesn’t really come as a surprise. The writer throws several hints along the narrative. The reference to Sankara’s hunger for a full experience of sex and his entering the body of a dead king in order to enjoy himself with the queen anticipates Pranes’s own repressed hunger for sex (6).

If the novel is a narrative centrally concerned with the spiritual evolution of Pranesacharya, the first part of it marks a definite and important stage in it. First, he is already a spiritually evolved character who is sensitive to the discomfort and pain of others. His compassion for Naranappa is responsible for his not excommunicating him. When he realizes that Chandri is sleeping in the verandah without a mat or a blanket or a pillow, he gives her these things. He also gives back all her gold ornaments that she had given to him for meeting the funeral expenses. In meeting and mating with Chandri, he comes in contact with someone who is entirely different from him and who stands at the opposite pole of the social spectrum. But it is she who gives him his first healthy experience of female sexuality, such as he has not had so far. She infuses a new life in him. This experience means the beginning of the breaking of all barriers for him. In a real sense he goes beyond the cloistered and unhealthy world of the brahmans in which he has lived so far. Significantly this contact takes place in the forest, which signifies a free space where nature reigns and where the only rules that apply are the rules of the human heart. A good encounter to remember is that between Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale in the forest in Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter.
this initiation, questions of purity and rituals that seemed so urgent earlier are now no longer relevant. The Acharya has still to traverse a lot of distance but he must first shed the load of dead brahminism that has encumbered him so far. The next two sections deal with the next two stages in his spiritual evolution and rebirth.

Part Two (Chapters 1-6) (65-85)

Chapter I (65-68)

Pranesacharya and Chandri after the sexual union in the forest — Chandri cremates Naranappa with the help of Naranappa’s Muslim friends, goes away to Kundapura.

Pranesacharya woke up in the forest at midnight, his head in Chandri’s lap. At first he thought he was in a dream and wondered where he was and how he had got there (‘I clean forget where I came from and where I should go from here [65]). When he was fully awake, he asked her to tell all the Brahmins what had happened in the forest. He said that he himself had not the courage to tell this to them. He also added that he was ready to perform Naranappa’s funeral rites for he had lost all authority to ask anyone else to do it. Then they walked back together.

Chandri, however, did not want to do what the Acharya had asked her to do. She went to her master’s house but finding that his dead body had changed beyond recognition, rushed out in fear to the farmer’s section and approached Sheshappa to help her cremate the dead body. Sheshappa however refused. Then she went to the Muslim section where Abdul Bari, the fish merchant, agreed to do the job. They went and cremated Naranappa. The dead body, as she thought, was ‘neither Brahmin nor Shudra. A carcass. A stinking rotting carcass’ (68). Thereafter she collected her things and the gold ornaments that the Acharya had returned to her and set out for Kundapura without touching the Acharya’s feet.

Comments

1. Note that Pranesacharya doesn’t reproach either Chandri or himself for what happened during the night. There is no feeling of guilt in him for what has happened.

2. Notice also that the omniscient narrator withholds information from the Brahmins and Pranesacharya about the cremation of Naranappa. What purpose does this serve?

Chapter II: Plans of the Parijat Drama Group members to cremate their mentor Naranappa go awry.

Shripati and other members of the Parijat Drama Group were holding a rehearsal of a play in ManJayya’s house. From the conversation we learn that Naranappa had been the prime mover of the Group, had donated a harmonium, was an expert drummer and was a source of inspiration for it. After the rehearsal, the five members of the Group went to the riverside and drank liquor. They acknowledged that Naranappa was a dear friend of theirs, that Chandri was a matchless beauty. The least that they could do was to take his
body and cremate it secretly. With this intention in mind they went up to Naranappa’s house but found that the dead body had disappeared. They all ran away in fright. The sleepless Lakshmidevamma saw what she called ‘demons’ running away.

Comment

1. Here we have another, more positive side of Naranappa’s personality. He was a theatre enthusiast, a good drummer and a source of inspiration for young boys. In contrast to the other Brahmins he had a more creative constructive interest.

Chapter III: Pranesacharya’s new self-awareness – confusion in ideas – reports failure – the brahmins decided to consult Pt Subbannacharya at the Kaimar agrahara.

The Brahmins tormented by vultures, hunger and dread came to Pranesacharya but he admitted that he couldn’t get Lord Maruti to say anything and asked them to do what they liked. At Dasacharya’s suggestion they decided to go consult Pt Subbannacharya at the Kaimar agrahara. Since the journey would take them three days, they would send their wives and children to their in-laws.

Pranesacharya’s world had changed suddenly. All old beliefs seemed topsy-turvy. At sixteen he had sought to achieve salvation through self-sacrifice and had deliberately married an invalid woman so that he could serve her and thus earn merit. But his unforeseen experience of sex with Chandri changed everything. He had lost the old certitude of brahminism. Instead of a clear path he saw only an abyss.

The experience also gave him a new self-awareness. While giving a bath to his wife, he became aware of her ugliness. ‘For the first time his eyes were beginning to see the beautiful and the ugly’ (74). Flowers, female beauty and sexual pleasure – all had earlier been associated in his mind with divinity but now he wanted a share in them for himself. He still looked for Chandri. He felt light that he was no longer the guru. Part of his mind wanted Chandri to confess but he was also relieved to find that she was not there to shame him. But he was still confused about his real identity. ‘What manner of man am I?’

Comments/Questions

1. An important sentence here is this: ‘Must forget all words learned by heart, the heart must flow free like a child’s’ (75).
2. Pranesacharya begins to experience all natural desires.
3. This chapter marks the second stage in his evolution.

Chapter IV: The Brahmins go to Kaimara without Pranesacharya.

But Subbannacharya is unable to help – then they go to the monastery. Two brahmins are taken ill on the way.

The Brahmins went to Kaimara without Pranesacharya. He stayed back because of his wife’s periods. At Kajmara, Pandit Subbannacharya offered them food and they ate to their fill. But he had no clue to their dilemma. The monastery was their next destination. But at the insistence of the Kaimara
people they spent the night there and started the next morning. They had to leave Dasacharya there, for he fell ill. They walked twenty miles to reach another agrahara where they dined spent the night. In the morning they started for the monastery, which was ten miles away but without Padmanabhacharya who had also been taken ill.

Comments

1. We can guess the cause of the death of the two Brahmins – plague, of course.

Chapter V: Pranesacharya’s self-examination – his visit to the river and the scene of his lovemaking in the forest – wife’s death and cremation.

For a good part of the chapter we are inside the mind of Pranesacharya. He is all alone in the agrahara – except for his ailing wife and some crows and vultures.

The horrible stench in the atmosphere was unbearable. He saw a rat die and threw it out of the house. He felt extremely hungry and took some plantains with him, bathed and crossed the stream and sat and ate the plantains there.

He then tried to analyse his motives in taking Chandri. Did he take her out of compassion? No, he took her because the body’s ‘tigerish lust’, long repressed, leaped to the surface. In this battle with his self, it was Naranappa who had won. He realized that it was he and not Naranappa who had turned the agrahara topsy turvy. He had heard that a young man, inspired by his description of Shakutala, had gone to the river and slept with a low caste girl. In his fantasy he did what he had never done before – he stripped all the untouchable girls and looked at them. Who could it be? Belli, of course. He urgently wanted to caress her breasts.

The meaning of experience changed for him. Experience, he realized, did not mean doing what ‘one wanted but doing the unpredictable. ‘Experience is risk, assault.’ Given rainfall and the soft pressure of earth a hard seed breaks into sprout. ‘But if one is willful, it dries into a hard shell.’ He admits that he too had been a hard shell: ‘Till I touched Chandri, I too was a shell...’(80). He then wonders if God would come and touch her unmasked. The implication of this is that the individual must open himself to new experience and not set himself up against it.

Pranesacharya then enjoyed himself swimming around in the water and came out and dried himself in the sun. Later he went to the spot where they had made love. He abandoned himself to his surroundings and pulled out part of sarsaparilla creeper and smelled it, the smell ‘sinking into his fivefold breath of life.’

Later he went into the stream again and swam some more. It was time for him to give food to his wife and he went back to the agrahara.

He found his wife to be hot and feverish. There was also a swelling on the side of her stomach. He gave her medicine but it did not go down her throat. He didn’t know what to do. Soon his wife let out a shriek that struck him
dumb. He rushed headlong towards Naranappa’s house, shouting for Chandri. Then he remembered that there was a corpse there and he ran back to his own house and found her dead.

He cremated her with the help of four Brahmins from Kaimar agrahara. His tears flowed unchecked till all his weariness had dropped from him.

Comments/Questions

1. The death stench is contrasted with the smell of sarsaparilla and the latter smell is described as sinking into his lifebreath.
2. We find him enjoying the ordinary pleasures of life – the pleasure of eating and swimming and of drying himself in the sun and of sitting amid grass and flowers and creepers and trees.
3. His wife was ‘the field of his life’s penance’ and he watches the field burning down to ashes. The suggestion is that his penance is over and he is ready to take on a new path.

Chapter VI: All Naranappa’s property must go to the monastery, says the chief.

At the monastery, all the Brahmins ate the big meal prepared for the occasion. Later when they all sat around with the chief in the midst of them, he announced that Naranappa was still a Brahmin even if he had left brahminism and that it was their duty to cremate him. He also ruled that all Naranappa’s property must go to the monastery. Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya both tried to press their claim to the property but the chief rebuked them harshly. They apologized and hurried back to the agrahara for the cremation.

Pranesacharya on the other hand after his wife’s cremation didn’t return to Durvasapura. He didn’t think of either the fifteen gold lace shawls that he had won in arguments, or the basil bead rosary done in gold given by the monastery. He set out to go wherever his footsteps took him.

Comments/Questions

1. Pranesacharya has cut off his ties with his past. The shawls, the money and the gift given by the monastery do not matter to him any more.
2. In going along an unaccustomed path, Pranesacharya is undertaking an experience that involves risk taking. (Please see page 80)

Comments on Part Two

This section marks the second stage in Pranesacharya’s spiritual evolution. In the first part he failed to lead the community aright and had a sexual experience with a prostitute that turned everything topsy-turvy. In the second part, his last palpable tie with the agrahara is snapped in the form of the death of his wife. Equally importantly, he realizes what all he has missed in life in terms of physical pleasure and sensations. So now he ventures forth on an unplanned journey, leaving all his learning and rituals behind. The last sentence is important: ‘Meaning to walk wherever his legs took him, he walked towards the east’ (85).
Part Three: (Chapters I-II) (87-135)


We are inside Pranesacharya's restless state of mind. He had decided to go wherever his feet took him. His mind was overactive and he wanted to still it. Earlier, whenever he had to still his mind he would recite the name of Vishnu but now he had to stand alone, without god. He wanted to be like a kite in the sky - a mere awareness, floating still and self-content. He thought of the illiterate saint Kanaka for whom God was an urgent awareness, a wonder. But for him God had been a matter of routine, a set of multiplication tables, learnt by rote. So he tried to distance himself from god.

But he thought he was deceiving himself for he found himself going near the habitations of men. He sat under a jackfruit tree and tried to sort things out. Why had he left the village after cremating his wife? Because of the unbearable stench. But why didn't he want to meet the Brahmins waiting for his guidance? He was hungry and the question remained unanswered. If he met a farmer he would bring him fruit and milk. So he moved on. He met a young farmer herding buffaloes to the tank, his mouth full of chewed betel nut. He had one fear - fear of being recognized. Fortunately, the farmer had not recognized him. The farmer mistook him for a mendicant going around on his collection. This implied the loss of all his lustre and influence. This was his first lesson in humility. He asked the farmer to get him some milk and plantains, which the latter did. The farmer wanted him to give him something with a spell on it to bring round a new bride who sat sullenly in a corner but having left everything, Pranesacharya decided to make an excuse and not perform any more brahminical functions. The farmer told him of a three day car festival at Melige some ten miles away, where he could go for his collection.

The thought of Naranappa brought into focus how he came to make love to Chandri. It was an undesired moment. He had not sought it. The outstretched hands touched Chandri's breasts but having touched them, desire was born. It was at that moment that the desire to take Chandri was made. If he lost control, the responsibility was still his.

God had never been an urgent need for him as it had been for a fellow student at Kashi, Mahabala. For Mahabala God was a hunger. He himself had never experienced such love for God. But a time came when Mahabala changed the course of his life. One day he discovered him living with a prostitute. Pranesacharya then realized that he had seen Mahabala in Naranappa. He had lost in the case of Mahabala. He didn't want to lose again. He even doubted if the moment he united with Chandri came 'unbidden': 'It must have been the moment for everything within to come out of hiding like the rats leaping out of the storeroom'. He was still confused about where to go, he was a veritable Trishanku. So he decided to walk away, unseen, unidentified.

It was at this point that he was joined by a young man named Putta. At first he tried to shake him off but Putta wouldn't leave him.
1. Pranesacharya had decided to go wherever his legs carried him. But did he follow this? Pick out a line that tells us what he did in actual fact.
2. How did Pranesacharya’s lesson in humility begin? (See page 92)

Chapter II: The story of the Durvasapura Brahmins – Pranesacharya arrives at a new equation with himself, decides to confess to his fellow Brahmins.

It is a long chapter that holds several different strands of the story together.

In Parijatpura, Manjayya realized that the deaths of Naranappa, Dasacharya and Pranesacharya’s wife indicated the outbreak of plague. He immediately went to the city to inform the municipality to send in doctors and take other measures to stop the epidemic.

The Brahmins, disappointed at the monastery, made their way towards Durvasapura. Gaurdacharya voiced the general reluctance of the Brahmins to cremate the decomposed body of Naranappa. Subbanacharya tried to put heart into them. They also realized that the cows were alone there, with none to look after them.

In Durvasapura, Belli lost her parents to plague. The neighbours set the thatched hut with the dead parents inside on fire. Belli, frightened, ran away from the village.

Putta stuck to the Acharya like sin. The Acharya wanted to be alone and think but Putta wouldn’t leave him. Putta didn’t know that he was Pranesacharya. He thought he was merely a mendicant Brahmin going on his beggarly rounds. He asked him a riddle. Pranesacharya was able to solve the riddle but he didn’t want to tell him the answer, for that would mean becoming friendly with him. He chose to be called dull-witted, much to the amusement of Putta.

Then Putta asked Pranesacharya to ask him a riddle in turn but the latter said that he didn’t know any.

Putta then told him about the death of Shyama, an actor of the Kundapura troupe. They came to a place where the road branched. The Acharya saw a chance to evade Putta. When Putta chose one, he chose the other but Putta said that both roads led to Melige, one of them was a little longer than the other and stayed with him.

Putta started becoming more familiar with the Acharya. He asked him about his marriage and told him that he had two children. But his wife was always clamouring to go to her parents. He beat her but that didn’t seem to have any effect on her. But for this one weakness, she was very clean and good in everything. They both laughed. Putta then compared the ways of women with the track of a fish darting in the water.

The Acharya fell into a reverie. The talk of the riddle reminded him of the riddle of his own life. The decisive moment in his life came when he chose to turn in the dark of the forest but his decision to lie with Chandri affected not only himself but the entire agrahara. ‘That was the root of the difficulty, the anxiety, the double-bind of dharma.’ That decision ‘gouged [him] out [his]
past world, the world of the Brahmins, from [his] wife's existence, [his] very truth' (106). As a consequence he was shaking like a piece of string in the wind and wondered if there was a release from it.

The familiarity with Putta continued. Putta gave him coconut and jaggery. Then he asked him another riddle. The Acharya solved it but his mind was still on his own situation. He realized that he could free himself from the Trishanku-state by become responsible for himself only by an act of will. So he thought he would give up his decision to go wherever his legs took him and instead go to Kundapura and live with Chandri.

Meanwhile Garuda, Lakshmana and the other Brahmins returned to Durvasapura. Fortunately, there were no vultures on the roofs anymore. Performing the death rite for Naranappa was the first priority. But they didn't find Pranesacharya there. He had probably gone to the river. They were afraid to go into his house. So they decided to wait for him and started making a stretcher for the body.

Comments

While journeying with Putta, the Acharya keeps thinking things out. As a responsible person, he wants to take on the responsibility for his actions on himself. This marks an important stage in his spiritual development: 'I've become a mere thing, by an act of will I'll become human again' (107). He takes an important decision – not merely to go where his legs take him but to do what he wants. Going to Kundapura and starting to live with Chandri was one such idea.

Pranesacharya at the Melige Tank with Putta

Pranesacharya stopped at the Melige tank with Putta to wash his hands and feet.

The Acharya was afraid lest people in Melige should recognize him. But there was comfort in the thought that all the Melige Brahmins were Smartas and they were unlikely to notice him in the bustle of the festival. But fear dogged him still. He wanted to root it out completely. Naranappa had lived with Chandri fearlessly. But if he were to live with her, he would probably cover his face.

Putta disclosed that his father was a high class Brahmin who kept his mother better than he did his wedded wife.

At the Melige Festival

Melige looked quite a colourful place because of the festival. The temple chariot had been pulled by ropes and stationed in the middle of the town for offerings of coconut and fruit. Putta and Pranesacharya also bought coconut and bananas to offer to the god.

There were noises of reed-pipes and smells of camphor and joss sticks everywhere. A man showed various scenes in what he called the Bombay Box. Putta paid money to have a peep but told Pranesacharya not to go away.
leaving him behind. The Acharya tried to slip away but Putta caught up with him. Pranesacharya wanted to get rid of him but he couldn’t bring himself to scold a person who was offering him friendship unasked.

Putta seemed interested in everything he saw. He threw a coin at the girls performing a feat. He bought ribbon for his wife and coloured pipes for his children. At the soda shop while the Acharya declined to drink anything, Putta drank a bottle of orange soda. The whole thing was a round of ‘expectation, experience and contentment’. But the Acharya stood outside this world of ordinary pleasures. It seemed that he was incapable of involvement in anything. ‘To fulfil my resolution I should be capable of his [Putta’s] involvement in living. Chandri’s too is the same world. But I am neither here, nor there. I am caught in this play of opposites’ (112).

They came to a coffee shop where Putta forced the Acharya to have some coffee. Since the Acharya was thirsty, he even enjoyed the drink.

Putta then suggested that he should go and have meals at the temple. He felt tempted to do so—he hadn’t had any meal for days but the period of mourning was not over yet and he was afraid of polluting the temple. The belief was that if he did so, the temple chariot wouldn’t move an inch. On the other hand Naranappa even ate the holy fish and no untoward result followed. His mind told him to fulfill his resolve to live with Chandri fully or else give up the whole thing.

Comments

The Acharya’s brahminical fears assail him again. The point of comparison, as always, is Naranappa. He realizes that the only way to liberate himself from fear is to do a thing fully: “His mind mocked: ‘What price your resolve to join Chandri and live with her. If you must, do it fully; if you let go, let go utterly.’”(113)

The Cock fight

The two went to see a cock-fight. There were two roosters leaping at each other with knives attached to their legs. People sat watching the bloody spectacle with absolute concentration. Pranesacharya felt as if he had suddenly dropped into a demonic world. It was ‘A demon world of pressing need, revenge and greed’ (117-118). This sent him into panic because he wondered if this cruelty was part of the world where Chandri lived. He felt himself to be unequal to the task of living in such a world.

The cocks were wounded but after stitches had been put on their wounds they were ready to fight again. Putta even wagered with a stranger and won the bet.

Pranesacharya suddenly felt a fatherly affection for Putta. If he had a son, he would have brought him up lovingly. Ironically it was at this point that he asked Putta to let him go his way. Putta felt disappointed but still offered to go part of the way with him. Pranesacharya then said he had to go to a goldsmith to sell the gold ring on his sacred thread. He needed the money to go to Kundapura. Putta said he knew one and took him there. There while he kept insisting that the goldsmith should not settle for less that fifteen rupees, the Acharya agreed to sell it for ten rupees.
Visit to Padmavati

Putta then took him to someone he knew who turned out to be a prostitute, Padmavati. The sight of her aroused his desire. But he wasn’t ready to take the plunge. Putta suggested that he stay the night there and could leave for Kundapur the next day. But later, sensing his confusion, he said that they would come back after he had had his dinner at the temple.

Comment

1. The sight of Padmavati reminds the Acharya of the offering of full breasts in the forest, Belli’s earth-coloured breasts and the death of his wife, Bhagirathi (120-21).

The Acharya’s cogitations again

The Acharya was torn on the inside. ‘In between he must decide, here, now. Decide to give up a quarter-century of discipline and become a man of the world? No. no. Naranappa’s funeral comes before all else. After that come all other decisions’ (123).

Comment

1. His sense of responsibility never deserts him.
2. The narrator continues to withhold information about the cremation of Naranappa. The idea is to enable the readers to get the reactions of different characters to this crucial necessity.

At meals in the temple

At the temple when Putta asked the Acharya to go in and have meals, the latter suggested that he should come in too and have his food. He needed his company. But Putta said that he was a Malera and he was likely to be discovered. So he sent the Acharya inside alone.

Pranesacharya’s one great fear was of being detected. The discovery of his identity and that he was still in the pollution period after his wife’s death would create a scandal. The festival might have to be cancelled. He felt dizzy and sat down quite reluctantly.

His mind was in utter confusion. What should he do to overcome his dread? Should he sleep with Padmavati? Or should he start living with Chandri?

The Brahmin who sat next to him was looking for a suitable groom for a young girl who was yet to reach puberty and he asked him to help him find a suitable match. One of those serving the feasting Brahmmins said that he had seen him (Pranesacharya) somewhere, perhaps in the monastery. This alarmed him no end. The only way for him to overcome his fear was to take responsibility for the funeral and make a clean confession. He had to come to a final decision. If he didn’t tell the agrahara Brahmmins and didn’t cremate Naranappa properly, he wouldn’t be able to escape fear. If on the other hand he decided to live with Chandri without telling anyone, the decision wouldn’t
be complete, wouldn’t be fearless. Either way the decision was agonizing. He prayed God to take the burden of decision from him.

The man who had partially identified him, recalled his name and went in to tell the Sahukar about it. Pranesacharya saw his chance and ran out for his very life.

Putta thought that the Acharya was running away from the temple to answer an urgent call of nature. The Acharya thought of what he had to do at the agrahara. He would reach the agrahara by midnight and would come clean about everything without a trace of repentance or sorrow. ‘In full view of the frightened Brahmans, I’ll stand exposed like the naked quick of life; and I, elder in their midst, will turn into a new man at midnight’ (134). So he told Putta that the real reason for his getting up suddenly from dinner was his decision to go to Durvasapura at once. Putta reminded him that Padmavati would be waiting for him. At this he lied to him saying that his brother was deathly ill in Durvasapura. At this Putta offered to go with him to meet Naranappa in Durvasapura for a business deal. Finding it impossible to shake Putta off, he resolved to confess to Putta and see the effect it had on him.

Just then, a covered wagon came along which was going to Durvasapura. The wagon had only room for one person. At Putta’s persuasion the Acharya agreed to go alone. The journey would last four or five hours. Pranesacharya was anxious, expectant.

Comments/Questions

1. Does the novel reach a definite end?
2. Does nature also reflect Pranesacharya’s mood?
3. Will he go and live with Chandri?
4. Do you think the Acharya will be reborn ‘a new man’ at midnight? Is it an anticipation of the freedom of the country? Of Midnight’s Children?
5. What is the new equation that Pranesacharya has arrived at with himself?

Self-check exercise

Who speaks the following? Or whose thoughts are these?

1. How can Brahmin eyes see anything, dimmed by looking for meals? (Part One, Chapter V)
2. ‘After all we’ve received Brahmin births only to take on others’sins.’ (Part One, Chapter IV)
3. ‘I’ve become a mere thing, by an act of will I’ll become human again. I’ll become responsible for myself. That is...that is...I’ll give up this decision to go where my legs take me, catch a bus to Kundapura and live with Chandri. I’ll then end all my troubles. I’ll remake myself in full wakefulness...’ Part Three (107).
4. ‘Understanding the way of a woman is just like tracing the track of a fish darting in the water – that’s what the elders say’ (106).
5. ‘That decision, that act gouged me out of my past world, the world of the Brahmans, from my wife’s existence, my very faith’ (106).
6. Pranesacharya stood outside this world of ordinary pleasures and looked at the gathered crowd (112).
7. It became clear that he didn't have the skills to live in this world of sharp and cruel feelings. One part of lust is tenderness, the other part a demonic will (114).

8. ‘O God, what's the root of this dread? Are these the first pains of a rebirth? Is it the kind of fear that will be quenched if I sleep with Padmavati tonight? Will it be quenched if I go live with Chandri? What's my decision worth? Am I forever to be a ghost of a man, hovering in indecision?’ (125)

9. ‘But if I don't tell the agrahara Brahmans, if Naranappa's body is not properly cremated, one cannot escape fear. If I decide to live with Chandri without telling anyone, the decision is not complete, not fearless. I must come now to a final decision. All things indirect must become direct. Must pierce straight in the eye’ (129).

10. In full view of the frightened Brahmans, I'll stand exposed like the naked quick of life; and I, elder in their midst, will turn into a new man at midnight' (131).

11. Minute by minute his own responsibilities seemed to grow. Naranappa's challenge was growing enormous, like God Trivikrama who started out as a dwarf and ended up measuring the cosmos with his giant feet' (33).

2.3 THE NARRATIVE: THREE IMPORTANT FEATURES

The study of the narrative is an important critical activity and we expect that by the time you complete this postgraduate course successfully, you will have acquired a certain minimum skill in analyzing different examples of narratives. The best way to do this, would of course be to begin with simpler, shorter narratives like the short stories in this paper. You could concentrate on one short story, examine it closely and ask some basic questions about it. Some of these questions have been discussed in the study material on Bhisham Sahni's Tamas. Please look up the discussion on analyzing narratives there.

Here we shall focus on two critical terms in connection with the narrative: focalization and intertextuality.

2.3.1 Focalization

(i) Following Gerard Genette in his Narrative Discourse (1972), it is important to distinguish between narration and focalization, between the person who tells the story (the narrator) and the person whose vision is being verbalized by the narrator (the focalizer). The terms used earlier were point of view or perspective. These terms were found somewhat inadequate. The term focalization was preferred as being more abstract and more technical. Mieke Bal refined Genette's concept of 'focalization,' 'developing, for example, the difference between the subject and object of focalization and assigning an autonomous role to the focalizer.' (Narratology: An Introduction, 115)

(ii) The person who tells the story and the person who sees may be the same person but they need not be. As Rimmon-Kenan points out in her book, a person is perfectly capable of both speaking and seeing, and even of doing things at the same time. But a person, she says, is also capable of undertaking to tell what another person sees (72).

(iii) Focalization may be either external or internal. The focalizer may be outside the story or he may be one of the characters in it.

(iv) Similarly, the focalized may be viewed from the outside or from the inside.

So far as Samskara is concerned, the story is told by a fictive omniscient narrator who stands outside the action of the novel and who tells the story in the third person. He is omniscient because he has the godlike ability to enter into the minds of all the characters and know what their thoughts are. Naturally he is also the chief focalizer. We can call him narrator-focalizer.

Where do his sympathies lie? Though he stands outside the action, we are never in doubt about who the prime focus of the action is or where the narrator’s sympathies lie.

What narrative strategy does the writer adopt? The writer’s choice of an omniscient third person narrator-focalizer is very apt. It gives him enough flexibility and manoeuvrability. Since Samskara is a novel of changing, conflicting attitudes, it is important that the writer should have enough freedom to present the adversarial point of view as powerfully as possible.

His choice of an omniscient narrator allows him to probe the minds of all the characters and it particularly enables him to present Naranappa as a worthy opponent. Notice the two meetings between Pranesacharya and Naranappa that the former recalls. The Acharya had gone to plead with him not to separate Shripati from his wife. Naranappa replied with a guflaw and asked: “O Acharya, who in the world can live with a girl who gives no pleasure – he snarled” (20). Later, when the Acharya went to ask him not to present a rebellious example like fishing in the sacred pond with Muslim friends before the people, he offered him liquor and threw a challenge to him about who would win in the end. He in fact tried to turn the tables on the Acharya and accused him of corrupting the brahminism of the place and told him a story about how his (the Acharya’s) story about Shakuntala had so excited a young listener that he had gone and taken an outcaste girl who was bathing at the river.

The omniscient third person narrator comes in handy in the opening scene of the novel where there is a kind of conflict and where varying viewpoints are presented. Pranesacharya is, of course, the chief character but we also get to know the points of view of other characters – Garudacharya, Lakshmanacharya, Dasacharya, Durgabhata and the wives of Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya and Chandri.

The focalizer can view the represented events from outside or from the inside. A great part of the novel is concerned with the Acharya’s thought processes and his reactions to others around him. Notice how the narrator-focalizer enables us to see him seeing himself. This begins early and lasts till the end. An early example of this is this passage in chapter one of Part One.
He would smile and pat his wife who was trying to get up, and ask her to try and go to sleep. Didn’t the Lord Krishna say: Do what’s to be done with no thought of fruit? The Lord definitely means to test him on his way to salvation; that’s why He’s given him a Brahmin birth this time and set him up in this kind of family. The Acharya is filled with pleasure and a sense of worth as sweet as the five-fold nectar of holy days; he is filled with compassion for his ailing wife. He proudly swells a little at his lot, thinking ‘By marrying an invalid, I get ripe and ready’ (2).

From the second sentence onwards we are in the mind of Pranesacharya. This kind of self-analysis occurs with greater frequency in the latter part of the novel. *One of your tasks should be to be alert to passages of his self-reflexivity, his constant need for self-analysis.*

We not only see Pranesacharya watching himself but also other characters like Naranappa, Chandri, Putta and Padmavati. That means he also serves as a focalizer, so far as these characters are concerned.

Another important character, who is also a focalizer is Putta. He remains with Pranesacharya and therefore with us through most of the third part of the novel and his view of the Acharya forms an important stage in the evolution of the Acharya.

So the narrator-focalizer’s vision is supplemented by that of Pranesacharya and Putta. If the Acharya keeps a tab on himself, there is Putta who does so on behalf of common humanity. It hardly needs to be said that by the end of the novel Putta has emerged as a friend and companion of the Acharya, on whom he can depend.

The points could be summarized as follows:

1. **The novel is a third person narrative, which is told by an omniscient narrator.**
2. **The narrator is also the agent who sees. He could be called the narrator-focalizer.**
3. **But the narrator-focalizer is not the only focalizer in the novel. Pranesacharya is the most important character and he is also the most important focalizer in the novel.**
4. **An important focalizer is Putta. The narrator doesn’t take us much inside the mind of Putta but he views Pranesacharya in a manner that brings him down several steps from his precarious perch (Because he doesn’t know this is Pranesacharya, Crest Jewel of Vedanta, etc. he is behaving as he would with a common mendicant brahmin on his beggarly rounds [104].)**
5. **We get to know other characters like Garudacharya, Lakshmanacharya, Dasacharya, Durga Bhatta, Naranappa but we don’t stay long in their minds.**
6. **The narrator’s tone is important. There is never a moment when Pranesacharya or Chandri aren’t sympathetic figures. On the other hand, characters like Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya are shown up from the first to be guilty of the sin of greed.**
7. The first chapter is a remarkable piece of writing. It is essentially a
   dramatic scene. It contains two crucial events – the death of
   Naranappa and also Chandri’s offer of her gold to meet Naranappa’s
   funeral expenses. While the first sets the novel in motion, the second
   exposes the greed of the Brahmins of the agraharā and shows how
   decayed the Brahmins are.

2.3.2 Intertextuality

The term, *intertextuality* coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966, refers to a textual
   practice that is quite old. Stated simply, it refers to the presence of one text in
   another. This is what Jonathan Culler has to say about it: ‘Recent theorists
   have argued that works are made out of other works: made possible by prior
   works which they take up, repeat, challenge, transform. This notion
   sometimes goes by the fancy name of ‘intertextuality’. A work exists between
   and among other texts, through its relations to them’ (*Literary Theory*: 34).

Intertextuality appears to be a special feature of the narrative texture of
   *Sanskara*, for there are many references to Indian tradition in the form of
   myths, parables and characters from epics. There are perhaps western
   references too.

So far as the writer is concerned, these references reflect a consciousness that
   is not only cultivated but is also soaked in ancient Indian lore. Naturally the
   text demands a similar consciousness among the readers who can understand
   the text in all its complexity.

What is the role of these references? These references help to root the novel in
   the Indian context and provide it a kind of scaffolding for its themes. These
   references serve a variety of purposes – they are used to anticipate, to mirror,
   to illustrate and generally to root the text in the Indian soil.

1. The central relationship in the novel is that between Pranesacharya and
   Chandri and is modeled on the union of the ascetic Parashar and the
   fishergirl, Matsyagandhi, mentioned in the Mahabharat. I suggest that
   this latter relationship serves as a kind of archetype of what Anantha
   Murthy apparently considers to be the most desirable sexual
   relationship and references to this and all other sexual relationships
   mentioned in the novel are an attempt to establish the authenticity and
   the centrality of this parallel.

A cluster of references connect the Chandri-Pranesacharya relationship to this
   archetype and to other relationships. The references in the first part of the
   novel help to anticipate the union between Chandri and Pranesacharya. Chandri
   as Matsyagandhi is held up as an example of erotic beauty that is
   irresistible. The first time this comparison is made is in the consciousness of
   Durgabhata who hangs a picture of Matsyagandha by Ravi Verma (8). This is
   followed by Naranappa’s reference to ‘Quite a lusty lot, those sages’ and then
   to ‘the fellow who ravished the fisherwoman smelling of fish, right in the
   boat’ (22). The story (told by Naranappa) of how Shripati, sexually aroused
   by Pranesacharya’s recital of Shakuntala’s beauty takes Belli on the river
   bank, is also meant to anticipate the sexual union between Chandri and
   Pranesacharya. Shripati himself thinks of Menaka the temptress who
   destroyed the penance of Vishwamitra (37).
Samskara

There is another reference unrelated to the Matsyagandha myth that prefigures the Acharya’s union with Chandri, namely the reference to Shankar who in order to experience sex entered the body of a dead king and had sex with the queen (6). As Bruckner suggests, Pranesacharya takes the place of the deceased Naranappa and has his first experience of sex with Chandri.

The references to Matsyagandha, Shakuntala and Menaka serve another purpose. As the Afterword to the novel suggests, ‘Lowcaste and outcaste women like Chandri and Belli are hallowed and romanticized by references to classical heroines like Shakuntala and Menaka, the temptress of the sages’ (142).

In Part Two, there is an allusion to yet another beauty – celestial in origin this time – to Urvashi, but the focus is on the Acharya. Pranesacharya is cogitating within himself and imagines asking Chandri to ‘tell them’ but he realizes that she wasn’t there. His Urvashi has walked away (75). The reference is to the Urvashi-Pururuya story, said to be the first love story in the world, in which Urvashi disappears after spending some time of enjoyment with the king, leaving him desolate. Later the Acharya wonders if the ancient sages face such a conflict. He mentions two: Parashar and Vishwamitra (96).

The standard Indian image of man torn with conflict is Trishanku and the writer resorts to it several times. Looking within himself he tries to analyse the decisive moment when he took Chandri and his responsibility in the entire episode: ‘In that moment, decisive of which way I should turn, the decision was taken to take Chandri. Even if I lost control, the responsibility to decide was still mine….What happened at the turning? Dualities, conflict, rushed into my life. I hung suspended between two truths, like Trishanku’ (See Part III, 96). There are other allusions to Trishanku also. I wonder if the writer in his allusions to turning intends a reference to T.S. Eliot’s Ash Wednesday also.

Exercises

1. Pick out all allusions to Pranesacharya-Parashar-Chandri-Matsyagandha in the text and figure out their narrative purpose.

2. Pick out the references to Trishanku, that depict the Acharya’s state of mind after the sexual union with Chandri and state their purpose.

The references to Parashar-Matsyagandha and to Shakuntala and by implication to Dushyant also help to strengthen the allegorical nature of the characters. (For a full discussion of intertextuality in the novel, read ‘Dimensions of Intertextuality in Anantha Murthy’s Novel Samskara’ by Heidrun Bruckner in D. Chitre et al. (eds) Tender Ironies, A Tribute to Lothar Lutze, New Delhi: Manohar, 1994, 152-83).

3. In the conflict between Pranesacharya and Naranappa, the latter is presented as a formidable character in the novel and even though he is dead when the novel opens, his strength seems to Pranesacharya to be growing. In the Acharya’s consciousness Naranappa’s challenge appeared to be growing: ‘Naranappa’s challenge was growing, growing enormous, like God Trivikrama who started out as a dwarf and ended up measuring the cosmos with his giant feet’ (33). The great irony is that by the end of the novel, Pranesacharya is of Naranappa’s party and he knows it fully well. There are numerous other reference also.
One final point. These references and allusions also serve as a kind of shorthand for the writer and help him to condense his presentation. For a person well read in ancient Indian literature, no detailed explanation is necessary. The allusion to Urvashi is an example (Part II, chapter 3, 75).

Here is another exercise for you to do. Can you add to the list of references given below?

1. Reference to Gita – Didn’t the Lord Krishna say: Do what’s to be done with no thought of fruit (2)?
2. Reference to Shankacharya’s hunger for full experience by entering the body of a dead king and enjoying with the queen (6).
3. Reference to Jagannatha the Brahmin poet who married the Muslim girl and his verses about the alien breasts (8).
4. Reference to Manu’s texts (14).
5. He remembered the first maxim of yoga, ‘yoga as the stilling of the waves of the mind’ (89).
6. Reference to the illiterate saint, Kanaka (89-90).
7. All things direct must become direct. Must pierce straight in the eye (129).

One activity that the student can be asked to do is to hunt for intertextual references in the novel and find their significance.

2.3.3 Structure

We can now say a few words about how the narrative is organized. As you will notice, there are three parts in the novel and they coincide with important stages in the life of its principal character Pranesacharya.

1. **Part One** consists of 10 chapters and ends with the failure of his brahminical mission at the Lord Maruti temple and sexual union with Naranappa’s mistress Chandri.
2. **Part Two** consisting of 6 chapters and ends with the death of Pranesacharya’s invalid wife and his decision not to return to the agrahara but to walk wherever his legs take him.
3. **Part Three** consisting of 2 chapters, one short and the other long, sees a spiritually agitated Pranesacharya traveling with a half-caste young man Putta and arriving at a new equation with himself. The guided tour of the fair and the festival that he undertakes with Putta makes him aware of ‘a demonic world of passion and sensation’. His uncertainty ends his decision to go back and confess to the Brahmins and hopefully, to begin a new life with a new identity for himself.

You will notice that as the narrative proceeds it withdraws itself more and more into the consciousness of Pranesacharya. His quest for a new identity is in a fair way of bringing fruit.

2.4 LET US SUM UP

Getting to know the narrative and all its details and their significance is the solid foundation on which a complete understanding of the novel is based. There is simply no substitute for it. The concept of focalization is a key
concept in the discussion of any narrative and once you master it, you will be able to use it in analyzing the other novels and short stories in and outside your course. Intertextuality is another important concept that will open up several other literary texts that you read.

2.5 Questions

1. Write a note on the significance of the opening scene of the novel Samskara.
2. Discuss how the narrative of Samskara has been organized.
3. Write a note on the love-making scene in the novel.
4. Discuss the importance of Putta's role as a focalizer.
5. What is intertextuality? In what ways do the references help strengthen the theme of the novel?

2.6 Suggested Readings


