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HEDONIST SCHOOL OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY IN CONTEXT OF  
U.R. ANANTHAMURTHY'S SAMSKARA

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ABSTRACT

UR Ananthamurthy's novel *Samskara* published in 1965 is one of the self-reflecting text about the Brahmin's belief systems. The major event of death of Naranappa marks as an eye-opener for all the other Brahmins in the Brahmin agrahara in the old Konkani region. Their illusion of being Brahmins directed by "satvik gunas" gets shattered when there is a realization of hedonistic attributes in their personalities. This paper focuses on illustrating charvaka/ hedonistic philosophy in *Samskara*. Term "samskara" has multiple layer of meanings- at a literal level it means death rites, at other levels it means purification, Brahmin beliefs, conception or notion. Subtitle of the text "A Rite for a Dead Mam" asserts one possible meaning of samskara as a funeral ceremony but it also becomes the stimulator for self-realization of other Brahmins including Praneshacharya. At this point we witness the inclusion of concepts of "astika" and "nastik" concepts.

Keywords- Astika-Nastika, Brahmins, Charvakas, Hedonism, Samskara, Sages, Upanishads

Introduction

Indian philosophy constitutes two principal schools of thought astika and nastika, based on three yardsticks: Vedas, Brahman, afterlife and god. Hedonist school in Indian philosophy traces back to 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, entitled Charvaka School which propounds hedonist way of lifestyle rejecting teachings of Upanishads and Vedas, disbelieving the ideas of deity, afterlife and hell-heaven. Sarva-siddhant-samgraha, states, for them "swarg" includes "sweet food here" and pleasure in company of "damsels". Aiming on individualistic desires, self-regulation which stands in opposite to Brahmanical school which propounds austerity and believes that an individual is regulated by sacred scriptures rather than his individual will. This paper thematises omnipresence of hedonist school in *Samskara* taking into consideration the body-soul dichotomy for salvation, theme of caste transgression and search for "truth" and individuality.

Charvakas

Charvakas believe that truth and integrity is not found in sacred scriptures or "sruti" rather is perceived by senses; rejects Varna system and promotes "net-pleasure". This school of philosophy is often referred as heterodox and its practitioners are referred to as atheists or "nastik". It basically dissented the

hegemony of Brahmins and Vedas. This school is known as “Lokayat” in Sanskrit which means “practical” or “wordly”. Like Epicureans, they believe pleasure as ultimate aim of humanism-

“Yaawat jeevait sukham jeevait rinam kritva graham peebait.”

Literal translation in English is -

“While life is yours, live joyously;  
none can escape Death's searching eye:  
When once this frame of ours they burn,  
how shall it e'er again return?”

### In context of *Samskara*

U.R. Ananthmurthy places hedonist school of philosophy within context of Brahmanical asceticism as *Samskara* as set in Navya period of Kannada literature. Navya period characterizes “anti-god”, “anti-Vedas”, “decadence”, “individualism”, “anti-tradition” and so on. He was influenced by spiritual-crises in Christianity in movie *The Seventh Seal* of Ingmar Bergman and depicted sterility in Brahmanism. *Samskara* is a portrayal of decadent Brahmanism as Charvakas, like Naranappa, Shripati and Mahabala (all Brahmins) pose threat to the Brahminical authority and Vedas. This is the reason Udipi Rajgopalacharya remarks Ananthmurthy as the one who “criticizes tradition from within”.

### Naranappa as chief hedonist

Chief Hedonist in *Samskara*, Naranappa staunchly asserts that he belongs to Hedonist school which states -“borrow, if you must, but drink you ghee”. This is self-reflective of anti-Vedic materialism. He reflects the prodigious appetite for 3 M's – “madira (wine), mamsa (meat) and maithuna (copulation)”, which are pleasures for Hedonists and sins for Brahmins. Also, as per nature of Hedonist he influenced Shripati who left his Brahmin wife to take an outcaste concubine like Belli because she rejected him maithuna. Also, Shyama is influenced by him who left agrahara for joining “army”.

### Other hedonist Brahmins

Surprisingly, most of Brahmins of agrahara reflected deception, debauchery, gluttony, greediness and schadenfreude. Instead of having “satvik gunas”, Brahmins are materialistic, self-indulgent, individualistic and selfish. Lakshamana loves money, Garuda is the one who “robs shaven widow” like Lakshmiddevamma and they both fight over Chandri's gold. Dasacharya is a glutton who rushes to eat in Parijatpurawhen Naranappa's body was rotting in Durvaspura. Shripati consumes liquor and commits adultery with low caste concubine Belli after getting desirous for female beauty like Shakuntala of Kalidasa. Durgabhatta has hung seductive portrait of Matasyagandhi in his room. Naranappa utters to Praneshacharya that he'll “destroy Brahmanism” but his sorrowfulness that “there's no Brahmanism really left...except you”, is absolutely apt; later even this “Crest jewel of Vedic learning” who lived forty years of his life according to ascetic beliefs, observed celibacy even in Grihastha-ashram and obstinacy from earthly sins faces a dilemmatic conflict between Mahayogi and Mahabhogi i.e. ascetic Shiva and erotic Shiva and leaves austerity. This dichotomy between austerity (tapa) and desire (Kama), erotic-ascetic and god-heretic arises after “sacred moment” with Chandri.

### Body-soul dichotomy

Ananthmurthy, very strategically inculcates the body-soul dichotomy for attaining salvation in *Samskara*. Twentieth century novels depicts this dichotomy, as in *Sons and Lovers*, between buxom Clara and spiritual Miriam. According to Brahminical Hinduism, complete renunciation, celibacy and suppression of desires and body, paves path for salvation or nirvana; focusing chiefly on soul and agape love. Whereas, Hedonist school focuses on the supremacy of body over soul and believe in attaining ecstasy from erotic experience and individualistic pleasure. This is what Naranappa and Shripati experiences and later Praneshacharya too. “Sacred moment” with Chandri provided self-enlightenment about his individual identity, mechanical asceticism. From a rootless “ghost”, he has become “demon” with human passion and experience. Jean Jocelyn of *The Spire* states that individuals are generally unaware of the lustful erotic layer hidden in

them, as in case of Praneshacharya. Once his layer is removed he became his own Self, from a “tamed tiger” to a “new” one searching for eroticism and food. Ananthmurthy rightly asserts that even if Praneshacharya “had left desire, desire had not left him”. So far, treading on the path of austerity, he mechanically performed his monotonous routine and chose an invalid wife Bhagirathi so as to gain salvation in afterlife by making her “sacrificial altar”. He sought answers of dilemmatic life from sacred scriptures and “monkey god Maruti” but he experiences “truth” only after “sacred moment”. Praneshacharya put aside “consolations of recitations” and holy names. He now rejects the scripture’s hegemonic authority which controls individual like Ideological State Apparatus and asserts his self-identity.

#### Reference of prominent sages in *Samskara*

Moreover, Ananthmurthy named famous sages who has attained salvation by method of Mahabhogi i.e. erotic Shiva like sage Vishvamitra seduced by Meneka and sage Parashar attracted to Matasyagandhi (outcaste lady). 1960s as stated in anothology *Tantra: Hedonism in Indian Culture*, believed that sexual pleasure gives highest mystical experience. Also in anthology *Hinduism and 1960’s: The Rise of Counter Culture*, we witness advent of “hippie trail” and Kama sutra with hedonist lifestyle. Even the vocabulary used by Naranappa: “darkness” of night, “lustful” flowersemitting “nocturnal fragrance” mesmerizes agrahara by its “serpent-binding spell”, represents eroticism and pleasure. Later on, after sensual encounter with Chandri, vocabulary of “tiger” for Praneshacharya and “serpent” for Chandri depicts male and female sexuality.

Furthermore, Hedonists rejects the Chaturvarna system laid by Manusmriti, for them occupation not decided by caste but by passion. Hence, we see Shyama (Brahmin) leaving Durvaspura for joining Army which is harshly criticized by people of agrahara for according to them it is downward transgression for a Brahmin to take an occupation of Kshatriya. We see ascetics like Praneshacharya and Brahmins like Naranappa and Shripati transgressing their caste boundary and enjoying sexual pleasure with outcaste girls like Chandri and Belli. Also, material gain is denunciative for Brahmin according to shastras and he should be austere and preach goodness but here all Brahmins are non-purified, thus the rigidity of caste system if seen dissolving in this novel.

#### Conclusion

To conclude, rather than depicting Hedonism in sense of school of thought, Ananthmurthy has shown Hedonism as an inherent trait in a rational human being because no character is seen austere or purified i.e. with “samskara”, rather they have traits of Hedonism. The reference to various stages in the text reflects that Hedonism is not just a philosophy operating Hedonists but it is rather an inherent trait in every being who seeks happiness. The Brahmins in the text lived in the illusion of being true Brahmins operating their lives on “satvik gunas” but their behavior depicted the presence of hedonistic principles in their innate beings unveiling that illusion.

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