

# In Search of Unheard Voices: Monologism in U.R. Anantha Murthy's *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man*

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## Abstract

Women are frequently oppressed by patriarchal ideals, leading to their voices being marginalized in society. The research elaborates on how the male characters representing hierarchical structures suppress the central female characters, to remain silent or prevent them from expressing themselves, as depicted in *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976), a translation of the Kannada novel *Samskara* (1965) authored by U.R. Anantha Murthy. The novel *Samskara* (1965) is translated into English as *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976) by A. K. Ramanujan. A patriarchal society is portrayed in *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976), where rituals and superstitious beliefs take precedence over compassion. Chandri, the only female character, has a major role yet speaks the least, sometimes being overpowered by the male characters. Hence, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, women are subjected to societal, economic, and physical exploitation. The purpose of this paper is to analyse, from a Bakhtinian standpoint, the representation of women's voices in monologism discourse. This research critically examines the portrayal of female characters in *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976), highlighting how they are reduced to submissive figures under the control of dominant males. While the female characters have limited dialogue, overshadowed by the presence of male characters, they still manage to make a significant impression on the readers. In his narration, the author presents the ramifications of societal regulations in an authentic circumstance from a singular perspective (monologic) as opposed to employing multiple voices (dialogic). The paper clarifies the current state of women's voices with the novel, which is set in traditional India where gender norms were dominant and female dissent was banned. A prevalent theme in contemporary society, intersectionality in gender is portrayed in the novel. Thus, the article sheds light on the contemporary gender empowerment movement and the significance of empowering women's voices in all aspects of life.

**Keywords:** Indian Literature, women's voice, monologism, patriarchy, superstition beliefs

## 1. Introduction

U.R. Anantha Murthy's *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976) challenges the dominant patriarchal society and hierarchical caste system. The research attempts to examine the unheard voices of women in a patriarchal system through Bakhtin's discourse monologism. The dominant authoritarian discourse, according to Bakhtin, is monologism, in which one point of view stifles those of others. This paper focuses on the female characters' expression through the monologism concept, which challenges authoritarian (Patriarchal) discourse. The main character Chandri has the least utterances and is frequently overshadowed by the male characters. Like Chandri, Belli, and Padmavathi, other women characters are also exploited by upper-caste men because they belong to the low-caste. The article assesses how women were oppressed in the forms of caste factors, and gender roles which led to their voices being silenced. Bhagirathi, the invalid wife of Praneshacharya, Chandri, Naranappa's mistress and Padmavathi, village concubines are the women characters in *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976). Meenakshi Mukherjee states in the book *U. R. Anantha Murthy's Samskara: A Critical Reader* (2005), "The novella presents many opposed/opposing ideas such as varna/karma, allegorical/ realistic, purity/pollution, physical/metaphysical, self/other, rational/ irrational to trace a quest with all its complexities" (Kapur, 2021). *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976) consists of themes such as caste hierarchy and the power struggle between tradition and modernity. In 2015, Dr. Prem Singh commented that "Anantha Murthy has been influenced and inspired by the socialist philosophy propounded by Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia. In Lohia's doctrine of 'Sapt Kranti' (seven revolutions) 'nar-nari samata' (man-woman equality) comes first and foremost along with the question of caste" (Singh, 2015). Since Anantha Murthy fought for social equality for women in his writings even though the novel *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976) consists of the least utterances of its women characters, the in-depth reading unfolds several layers of meaning in it. Anantha Murthy sets this dichotomy background of the novel in a fictional traditional village and pictures the complexity of sociocultural beliefs and norms, class differences, gender, and sexuality.

U.R. Anantha Murthy is a prominent writer in 20th-century Kannada literature. Modernism in Kannada literature began in the 1950s with the emergence of the Navya movement. The writers from the Navya movement initiated to revolutionize Kannada literature and culture.

K.V. Puttappa, Gopalakrishna Adiga, A.K. Ramanujan, and U.R. Anantha Murthy the most prominent writers and thinkers in the Modernism or Navya movement, introduced subjects to writing styles in Kannada literature. As a result of the Navya movement, the writers of Kannada literature won recognition for their writings. Kannada writer U.R. Anantha Murthy received the Jnanpith Award (1994), which is the oldest and highest literary award in India. The essence of the Navya movement is reflected in Anantha Murthy's writings and it incorporates themes of contemporary socio-political issues like gender and caste discrimination. The most renowned novel in the era was Anantha Murthy's *Samskara* (1965) which deals with the ancient versus the modern way of thinking, spirituality versus secularity. *Samskara* (1965) is considered a masterpiece of Kannada literature. The novel critiques the oppressive and patriarchal social practices that become a part of the Indian tradition as superstitions and rituals that complicate the well-being of simple human life. The paper is divided into sections. The first is a brief summary of the novel to refer to the setting in which women were silenced, followed by a detailed description of the characters in the novel and their few utterances. Finally, the paper attempts to investigate Praneshacharya, the hero of the novel. Praneshacharya's conscience challenges social beliefs in a hierarchical society, despite the fact that he is portrayed as a dominant figure with an authoritative ideology.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature review consists of scholarly articles to understand the existing research on the implications of Bakhtin's theory and the research on the novel *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976). This section is organized chronologically to identify the research gap that has existed in earlier studies, beginning in the past and progressing to the present. The theological article "The Silence of the Wives: Bakhtin's Monologism and Ezra 7-10" (2022) by Christopher B. Hays examines the sacred text by applying Bakhtin's concept of monologism to biblical texts. Drawing upon an ethical lens, he examined the text and deduced that it encompasses a multitude of perspectives. The mission and character of Ezra have been elaborated upon. The utilization of multiple voices serves to denote the dialogic nature of the text, which is independent of the authorial voice.

Jaishree Kapur's "Response to the Reception of *Samskara: A Critical Journey* (2021)" analyses the adaptation of the novel *Samskara* (1965) into the film. According to the research, Girish Karnad diluted the novel's binary and rendered it devoid of its true essence. Due to the fabricated sociopolitical issues that accompanied the novel's adaptation, a substantial divide exists between cinematic storytelling and oral tradition.

In "Women Individuality: A Critique of Patriarchal Society in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*" (2021), Abdalhadi Nimer Abu Jweid examines the text by employing Bakhtin's dialogism and elucidates the fabrication of the character. The research focuses on the individuality and social advancement of women. Furthermore, the paper focused on Woolf's voice as dialogic through the characters in the novel to create the original voices for women in society.

Osayimwense Osa in "Putta as an Albatross as a Catalyst in Praneshacharya's Transformation in U.R. Anantha Murthy's *Samskara*" (2019) represents Putta as an Albatross for Praneshacharya to change his psychological burden from narrow life of asceticism to a fuller life of humanity. The author used the word 'albatross' metaphorically to indicate Putta's bond with Praneshacharya and Putta becomes a catalyst of transformation in his life. He also compared Praneshacharya and the Mariner in Samuel Coleridge's *A Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1834).

Hayriye Avara's "Combat of voices: Female Voices in Iris Murdoch's *Nuns and Soldiers*" (2017) emphasizes feminist dialogism and search for female characters' voices through Bakhtin's concepts of centripetal as monologic and centrifugal forces as dialogic. The researcher finds the female voices as heteroglossia, dialogic and centrifugal discourse and it struggles with dominant, hegemonic, monologic and centripetal discourse. The article analyses the dialogic discourse of the female characters in the novel *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980).

Parshant Kumar's (2016) article, "Samskara: A Bakhtinian Reading" analyses *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976). The article provides an assessment of the novel's relevance to general issues of language, culture, and society by examining Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony that are reflected in the novel and incorporating the other voices within it. Praneshacharya's internal conflict, according to Kumar, is a reflection of broader societal conflicts between the dominant Brahminical culture and the outcast lower castes.

Ali Jamali Nesari focused on the teaching approach by using Bakhtin's Dialogism and Monologism in his article "Dialogism versus Monologism: A Bakhtinian Approach to Teaching" (2015). The research states that monologism is followed by many institutions but it does not create an efficient learning environment. It recommends teachers integrate Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to attain a successful and effective teaching-learning environment.

Sharon Pillai's "Gender Representation in U.R. Anantha Murthy's *Samskara*" (2011) explains the author's depiction of female characters and the representation of gender in the novel. The paper focuses on the sexual exploitation of female characters such as Chandri, Belli, and Padmavathi. The gender relationship is discussed by scrutinizing the novel's representation of feminine beauty through cultural lenses, as well as how individual well-being and empathy can lead to social change.

A compilation of articles pertaining to Bakhtin's discourse and the novel *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976) constitutes the literature review. Bakhtin's dialogism is employed as a methodological framework in the articles, which interpret diverse facets of the book while emphasizing Praneshacharya's status as an inspirational figure among the villagers. Further research is required to examine Praneshacharya as the novel's main or authorial voice through monologism. This research aims to analyze the perspectives of female characters.

## 3. Methodology

This study uses Bakhtin's theoretical framework to investigate how literary texts might shed light on a person's varied beliefs and complex,

yet unheard-of opinions. Monologism refers to the concept of a singular voice that has dominance over others. The study investigates the manner in which male characters dominate and suppress the voices of female characters in the novel *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976) by employing Bakhtin's concept of monologic discourse. Anantha Murthy portrays the main character of the novel, Praneshacharya, as a person who speaks in a monologue and asserts dominance over others. Thus, the emphasis lies on individuals like Praneshacharya who establish a setting where one voice prevails, while others, especially female characters, face difficulties in articulating their thoughts. "Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word" (Bakhtin, 1984). Women's voices are entirely suppressed in relation to their gender and caste identity. This research highlights the need to consider the perspectives of individuals, without any bias based on gender or social class, using Bakhtin's theory. Praneshacharya has attempted to speak for others in an effort to further monologic discourse. While Naranappa, a rebellious character, presents different viewpoints, he is perceived as a challenging voice. Furthermore, feminist ideals are in opposition to the monologic consciousness depicted in the novel.

Moreover, the article utilizes dialogism, which is emphasized in later occurrences within the narrative. Bakhtin's concept of dialogism suggests that the presence of numerous voices allows for a comprehensive understanding of the relevance of multiple voices within a text that coexist harmoniously. The concept of dialogism is explored by depicting the transformation of the character Chandri and Naranappa's revolutionary perspective on the world. According to this research, female character Chandri, follows the principle of dialogism, while the patriarchal culture of Praneshacharya is seen as monologic. Additionally, the study focuses on the minor characters who challenge the dominant narrative and their influence on dialogism, despite their secondary role and limited presence in *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976).

The research centers on the transformation of the narrative's trajectory from a monologic to a dialogic structure, employing Bakhtin's framework. The utilization of monologism in *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976) clearly demonstrates the influence of socio-cultural power dynamics in shaping the viewpoint of an authoritative individual. However, rational and contemporary thinking encourages individuals to accept and value a diverse range of perspectives and opinions.

#### **4. *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976) Overview**

*Samskara* (1965), which was first published in the Kannada language, gained popularity with readers, and critics. The novel was adapted into a film in 1970. The film was initially banned due to complaints of hurting religious sentiments. However, the ban was eventually lifted, and the film went on to win the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in 1970. Despite being a Hindu, U.R. Anantha Murthy critiques traditions and rituals in *Samskara* (1965), leading to controversy in both the book and the movie adaptation. The novel *Samskara* (1965) is translated into English as *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976) by A. K. Ramanujan. The narrative unfolds in the fictitious town of Durvasapura, inhabited by orthodox Brahmins as a community. The opening scene of the novel is set amid the chaos that follows the death of an anti-brahmin named Naranappa due to the epidemic. Everyone distanced themselves from Naranappa because of his secular behavior, such as socializing with Muslim acquaintances, consuming meat, and living with a low-caste concubine named Chandri, a fisherwoman from a lower caste. He challenges superstition by intentionally killing the revered fish in the temple pond, despite the common belief that such an act will lead to his death. Naranappa remained a member of the society in spite of his repeated acts of rebellion.

If a man has no children, his relatives are obligated to perform the cremation following Hindu tradition; however, no one has offered to assist in the burial of Naranappa. Everyone is averse to performing his last rituals out of concern that they will become 'polluted'. Therefore, the people seek the counsel of Praneshacharya, a Brahmin spiritual leader and sage tasked with devising a resolution to this dilemma. Praneshacharya marries an invalid wife, who is unable to engage in marital relations, to uphold his celibacy. Naranappa poses a spiritual challenge to Praneshacharya both before and after his death. Praneshacharya spent time fasting in the wilderness due to his apprehension about addressing the people who were eagerly anticipating his comments. He fervently prayed to the heavens because he was distressed and had not received a response from his sacred texts or Lord Maruti. Praneshacharya saw Chandri in the forest after he lost consciousness from exhaustion. She knelt and received blessings to express her gratitude because she believed that Praneshacharya was suffering greatly because of her error. Praneshacharya inadvertently touched her breast and became aroused, leading to their unintended intimacy. This incident has had a significant impact on his life, and he begins to realize that there is another way to live. His encounter with an odd Putta while wandering through the forest was a one-of-a-kind occurrence. Praneshacharya's life journey of self-realization from spiritual leader to secular human is the plot of the novel. The novel follows Praneshacharya as he transforms from a spiritual leader to a secular individual on a path to self-realization. The multiplicity of characters in the novel may conceal the monological effect, but regardless of gender, the authorial voice of Praneshacharya dominates all the characters.

#### **5. Monologism in *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976)**

Bakhtin asserts that a "Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any decisive force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality" (Bakhtin, 1984). Similarly, the male-dominant characters in the narrative exert dominance over the female characters. Praneshacharya is the sole voice heard; the thoughts of the other characters—especially the women—are ignored. Research characterizes Praneshacharya as an authoritative figure, whereas Anantha Murthy depicts him as one of the main characters in the story. The narrative starts with the death and cremation of Naranappa's body. When the question arises over who should perform the ritual, they say, "Acharya, you are our great scholar, your word is Vedic gospel to us. Give us the word, we'll do it" (Murthy, 1976). The whole village is under his spell and is willing to follow his decisions since

“Acharya has won all sorts of arguments with all the super-pandits” (Murthy, 1976). Durvasapura village became famous for the reason that “Praneshacharya, the great ascetic, ‘crest-Jewel of Vedic Learning’” (Murthy, 1976). As described by Bakhtin’s concept of ‘monologism’, this demonstrates how Praneshacharya captivated people’s attention. The majority of the novel's dialogue occurs within the protagonist's internal monologue, emphasizing the novel's utilization of stream of consciousness. Naranappa tested Praneshacharya when he was alive, and he continues to do so even after his death. At times, Praneshacharya ponders, “The real challenge was to test which would finally win the agrahara: his own penance and faith in ancient ways, or Naranappa’s demoniac ways” (Murthy, 1976). The defeat of having a sexual relationship with Chandri shatters the carapace in which Praneshacharya had been living for all these years as the dominant voice in the novel. His understanding and wisdom are characterized by extremely idealistic ideas. Praneshacharya's soliloquy progresses the plot more than the actual occurrences. He acknowledges that marrying an invalid has led to an investment in the spiritual realm. Upon awakening in Chandri's embrace in the jungle, Praneshacharya admits his defeat in the battle against Naranappa: “I tried to win a victory here over Naranappa. But I was defeated, defeated– I fell flat on my face” (Murthy, 1976). After committing adultery with Chandri, he decides to leave the uncertain position. He journeys across the forest in search of Chandri and eventually begins to believe that his wife is unattractive. After his wife's cremation, he abandoned the village in a state of defeat and embarked on a quest to locate Chandri and discover the meaning of his existence. During that time, he established communication with an outsider, named Putta. He apprises Praneshacharya of his intention to physically abuse his wife, as well as the nature of their dispute. However, he provided no reply or advice concerning his transgression. Praneshacharya, who wielded considerable influence to scrutinize Naranappa's secular actions, refrained from advocating for other oppressed women.

The research demonstrates how the overarching theme of patriarchy is embodied in the character Praneshacharya in the novel. Women were historically marginalized in socio-cultural aspects, such as infanticide, child marriage, and brutality against women, and by religious zealots like Praneshacharya who exerted control over women. Although women have made great progress in the modern era toward empowerment, their current economic challenges remain unsolved. The suppression of women's voices persists in both public and private spheres in the twenty-first century. For example, women in economic opportunities were not compensated equally and were even fired or terminated during pregnancy.

Women professionals in India earn lesser and lesser than their male counterparts on every step up in their career as reflected by a widening of gender pay gap as one rises up the organisation hierarchy, according to the findings of a research on ‘The Glass Ceiling- Leadership Gender Balance in NSE 200 Companies’ by IIM Ahmedabad’s Arun Duggal ESG Centre for Research and Innovation. (Bhattacharyya, 2022)

The research reinforces the discussion on violence against women and marital rape as demonstrated in the novel. This illustrates how the novel's premise is still applicable to the contemporary world. Women characters in the novel were double marginalized by the upper caste people and by the ideologies of a monologic male dominant society. The author voiced the unheard voices of those women and exposed their economic struggle which is prevailing till now in a new phenomenon.

The work highlights women as passive victims, contrasting with the protagonist Praneshacharya's notable compassion and actions, which captivate readers and critics. The minor characters in the narrative express sympathy towards Praneshacharya due to his wife's chronic illness, lack of children, and possessions, “Poor man, his wife’s chronic invalid-no children, nothing. This man who speaks so beautifully about Kalidasa’s women, does he feel any desire himself?” (Murthy, 1976). Praneshacharya believes that by marrying someone who is disabled, he becomes mature and prepared, “By marrying an invalid, I get ripe and ready” (Murthy, 1976). He married the ailing woman, who later became bedridden for life, solely to pursue asceticism. But his kith and kin and all other clans portrayed him as a sacrificial figure for helping a poor woman. Praneshacharya, being monologic, did not disclose the motive for his act of service and resisted his selfishness. The novel has limited instances of Bhagirathi interaction. Even in those utterances of her, Bhagirathi's words show her generosity and decency, even though she is shown as being invalid. Bhagirathi, Chandri, Naranappa's courtesan, Belli, a low-caste lady, Padmavathi, a concubine, and Lakshmiddevamma, the eldest woman of the fictitious city of Durvasapura, all have a notable influence. Similarly, women's viewpoints have been overshadowed or deemed insignificant in India’s historical and literary works in the androcentric social system. Samhita Arni's *Sita's Ramayana* (2018) retells the epic story from Sita's perspective and *Chandrabati's Ramayan* (2020) was the exception to this norm.

Thus, recent research has underscored the importance of highlighting the voices of marginalized women. The concepts of "voice" and "voicing" have become crucial in exploring these lost voices in women's narratives (Avara, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to examine the gender disparity, the rights that women are denied, and the ways in which women challenge the monologic, or singular, point of view. The male protagonists of *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976) exploited the female characters physically, emotionally, and economically. Lakshmiddevamma, the village's eldest person, entered into matrimony at the tender age of eight and subsequently lost her spouse at the age of ten. Her mother-in-law and father-in-law both passed away when she was fifteen, at which point her blood relative Garudacharya's father claimed ownership of her property. Garuda and his wife abandon Lakshmiddevamma following the death of his father.

The couple then evicted her and forced her into the dilapidated old house of her spouse. She remained there by herself thereafter. She approached Praneshacharya with her grievances. He had contacted Garuda and offered him counsel. Garuda resolved to provide her with a single rupee as an allowance every month. Consequently, she had developed a strong animosity towards Garuda. Praneshacharya occasionally obtained rice from the brahmins for her. Lakshmiddevamma's misanthropy had intensified as she aged. (Murthy, 1976).

Therefore, Praneshacharya continues to act as a centripetal force. 'Monologism' refers to the literary device wherein characters endowed with centripetal qualities suppress the text's numerous voices, opposing ideas, and divergent perspectives. The objective is to increase their visibility while preserving a common ideology (Rasheed et al., 2022). Praneshacharya, in his capacity as a religious scholar, exhibited no empathetic regard for the elderly woman. On the contrary, he continued to play a crucial role in upholding a patriarchal society that places great emphasis on mystical rites and beliefs. Lakshmiddevamma, an elderly woman, is reviled by her own community as a portent of misfortune, and she bemoans her property to the villagers passing by along the road. The patriarchal society suppresses her voice due to her lack of property rights. Notwithstanding reaching the age of seventy, her relatives take advantage of her for their financial benefit. In accordance with the customs and rituals of the upper castes, widows are not empowered to independently manage the property of their families. The presence of cultural patriarchal beliefs that stigmatized the widow's existence in India is discernible in the character Lakshmiddevamma.

[T]hey called her Lakshmiddevamma the Ill-Omen. She cursed and drove away with her stick all the naughty boys, and also the brahmins who, any time they met her head-on, walked back four paces to undo the ill-luck. But no one really cared. They called her Sour Belch. But her best known name was Half-Wit Lakshmiddevamma. (Murthy, 1976)

Certain social stigmas and cultural conventions prevalent in nations such as India due to the dominance of monologic ideology hinder widows from leading a normal life. For instance, they were restricted to donning solely white sarees, forbade from attending any auspicious events, compelled to tonsure their hair to appear unattractive, and even jewelry was not permitted. These traditions remain rigorously observed in the villages. Traditional practices and sociocultural beliefs complicate the most fundamental aspects of human existence. These practices have been denounced by a multitude of authors in Indian literature. Arundhati Roy asserts in *The God of Small Things* (1997), "The widow is always considered an inauspicious being as if her husband's death has tainted forever" (Roy, 1997). Tamil writer Perumal Murugan in his novel *One Part Women* (2010) shares the myths of widowhood as:

It was his mother who had raised him. And she made sure no one had the chance to say that a child raised by a widow would amount to nothing. She was adamant that they be treated equal to everyone else. She knew everything from ploughing the land to drawing water for the fields. "We should not depend on anyone"; she would say. One year she could not find anyone to sow seeds. They said, 'Nothing would grow when sown by a woman in white', clearly referring to her widow's attire. She tried calling a few people, but to no avail. Then she said, 'Let whatever grows grow. Or may be nothing will. Then that's fine too. I don't care'. And she sowed the seeds herself. Nothing happened; her yield was as good as anyone else's. (Murugan, 2010)

In both sections of the narrative, women are forbidden from expressing their sexual desires. Instances have been narrated in the novel that women have experienced implicit molestation. Belli, a woman from a lower socioeconomic stratum, is widely recognized for her physical attractiveness. Shripati, Lakshmana's son-in-law developed a romantic interest in Belli's physical appearance after being drawn to Praneshacharya's depiction of Shakunthala. Belli harbored apprehension about the fast-proliferating disease in Durvasapura. Subsequently, Shripati encounters Belli, although he displays a reluctance to heed her cautions; he contemplates, "Belli was all right for sleeping with, she was no good for talk. If she opens her mouth, she talks only ghosts and demons" (Murthy, 1976). Not only was their voice muffled, but the males also paid little regard to the women's emotions during the intimate interaction.

'Ayya, please, not today.' Belli had never talked like that. Shripati was amazed but disregarded her words ....

Shripati was impatient. She was saying something, was somewhere else. He had come to her with such urgent desire, here she was prating about someone croaking. She had never talked like that at such times. (Murthy, 1976)

The article highlights how women are subjected to non-consensual sexual exploitation. Shripati coerced Belli into his company and engaged in sexual intercourse, disregarding her objections. This observation illustrates the subordination of women to males, and women are merely puppets in the hands of men, even while articulating their sexual inclinations. The article "Criminalizing Marital Rape in India" (2023) asserts that marital rape and sexual violence perpetrated by spouses are not classified as criminal offenses under the Indian constitution.

Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which criminalises rape, makes an exception for "sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age." No reason is stated for this exclusion, which takes away a married women's bodily autonomy, and stripes her right to life, dignity, and freedom of choice. (Sabhapandit, 2023)

Subsequently, the clause was amended resulting in the age of women being raised to 18 years. However, this raises concerns regarding the legal standing of women who experience marital rape beyond the age of 18. Sexual violence perpetrated against women, particularly in the context of marital rape and forced pregnancies, gives rise to significant mental and physical health well-being. Due to the dominant patriarchal society and caste system, the marginalized women, Beli and Chandri engaged in an illegal living relationship. These women were shunned by their upper-caste male counterparts, who stared at Chandri with voyeuristic eyes even in the burial home. In contemporary times, a significant proportion of married women are deprived of the autonomy to determine their sexual desires and reproductive choices. The female characters in *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976) experience oppression from those belonging to the upper caste, as well as from their community men, husbands, and even their fathers.

Putta is the second most prominent character in the narrative who possesses monological qualities. Nevertheless, Anantha Murthy omits details, such as the precise location of Putta's birth. This individual was a member of the Malera community. Subsequently, Putta

elucidates his spouse's conduct to Praneshacharya. As a result of Putta's inability to provide for his wife's frequent requests to visit her parents' residence, he assaults her. Putta contends that his father-in-law is an eminent individual who never challenges his assertions. Putta perceives his mother-in-law as irrational and foolish for her remark, "What right has my son-in-law to beat my daughter?" (Murthy, 1976). The exploitation of women is rationalized by masculine ideology, which establishes their societal status and prescribes how they should conduct themselves, think, and feel in their capacity as women. Bakhtin (1984) argues that the fundamental attributes of Dostoevsky's novels consist of "[A] plurality of independent unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is, in fact, the chief characteristics of Dostoevsky's novels" (Bakhtin, 1984). The characters possess the ability to express dissenting opinions and even engage in acts of rebellion against the author's perspective. Patriarchal civilizations exhibit gender bias by enforcing prescribed gender roles and practices that exclude women.

Padmavati, an inhabitant of the neighboring town who engages in prostitution, is introduced to Praneshacharya by Putta. The description of her beautiful "Long hair, not yet oiled after a bath; plump fleshy thighs, buttocks, breasts. Tall, long-limbed. A gleam in the eyes, an expectation" (Murthy, 1976) serves as evidence that women are admired only for their feminine pulchritude.

Don't think that the woman's a common prostitute. No, sir. No low caste man has been near her. And she isn't the kind of spirit that'll accept any ordinary Brahmin either. Not for money, not for a few coins. Didn't you see for yourself? She has an estate. Even the ancient sages would fall for her, she's like that. (Murthy, 1976)

All low-caste women are compared to deities in the novel, and their beauty is extolled as though it were extraordinary. This article elucidates that the male characters exert authority over the sexuality of their female counterparts and deny women the honor that they merit within a patriarchal society. The research draws attention to the emotions of women whose voices are suppressed and ignored in society as a result of the strong influence of the masculine voice. The deeply ingrained gender disparities and cultural standards that still rule modern society are reflected in the research. *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976) portrays female characters who speak for countless silent voices in the actual world, in a world that is increasingly striving for gender equality and amplifying the effect of marginalized voices. On the other hand, the transformation of Chandri serves as a compelling exemplification of the dialogic element inherent in the narrative. The characters Praneshacharya and Chandri serve as metaphors for the novel's monologic and dialogic parts, respectively. Initially, Chandri was portrayed as a victim, and Praneshacharya as the dominant spiritual leader. However, later on, a spiritual awakening brought about by an unintentional intimacy turns everything upside down.

## 6. In Search of the Dialogic Voices

Dialogism according to Bakhtin's discourse, is the text's ability to freely flow multiple voices, unique points of view, and diverse truths without any one voice taking precedence. In addition, it dismisses monologism, which acknowledges a singular interpretation of reality and viewpoint (Avara, 2017). In order to draw attention to the male-dominated monologic community's reluctance to hear the female perspective, certain feminist theorists and critics employed Bakhtin's "Dialogism" and inspired feminist dialogic discourse. This feminist dialogic approach influences a realistic situation from a single perspective (monologic) and then from multiple perspectives (dialogic). According to Bakhtin, the moment when a character attains consciousness serves as a vital illustration of how to effectively navigate the authoritative voice. Ultimately, Chandri transforms into a defiant, dialogic individual.

The female character, Chandri, who is Naranappa's concubine, has a prominent role in the entirety of the narrative. She is an outcast fisherwoman who lived with him for more than ten years. Despite being the main character throughout, Chandri speaks less than her male counterparts, Praneshacharya and Naranappa. The research identifies Chandri as a revolutionary figure in the narrative, who knowingly or unknowingly breaks myths and religious beliefs as:

It's true, Naranappa had given up brahminhood. Ate with Muslims. She too did. But no sin will rub off on her. Born to a family of prostitutes, she was an exception to all the rules. She was ever-auspicious, daily wedded, the one without widowhood. How can sin defile a running river? (Murthy, 1976).

Chandri expresses dissent with the norms and beliefs upheld by the villagers. It is forbidden for any Brahmin in the hamlet to eat, drink, or take a bath before Naranappa's body is cremated. She ate plantains because she is not the kind to fast, and reasoned, "These things don't apply to me" (Murthy, 1976). Chandri exhibits a higher degree of selflessness in comparison to the others due to her rejection of the notion that gold merits reverence and her unreserved donation of the precious metal to cover the costs of Naranappa's funeral. Anantha Murthy illustrates her disposition through the incident of cremating his deceased lover Naranappa's body: "She was grief-stricken that she'd left the body orphaned, unprotected, the body of the man who'd antagonized the whole agrahara for her sake." She cremated Naranappa's body with the assistance of his Muslim friends, and

Chandri wept, came back home, collected a few of her silk saris in a bag, bundled up the cash in the box and the gold ornaments... she decided to catch the morning bus to Kundapura and walked towards the motor route in the forest path with her bundle in her hands. (Murthy, 1976)

The research provides evidence supporting Chandri's transformation from a timid individual to a strong woman. Women from lower castes had no legal status and were referred to as concubines. Despite Chandri living with Naranappa for almost ten years, they never married or produced offspring. The caste system and cultural conventions refer to her as Naranappa's concubine or mistress, despite the modernist disdain for the institution of marriage. Chandri is accused by the upper-caste women in the novel. Due to her gender, caste, and

socioeconomic level, Chandri holds the lowest rank on the social ladder. In John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), Eve was held responsible for Adam's decline; in a similar vein, Chandri is held accountable for the downfall of Naranappa and Praneshacharya. Chandri was held guilty by opponents for being the woman who fed Praneshacharya the "forbidden fruit."

This article examines how the author reflects his beliefs through the character of Naranappa. Usually, readers concentrate on the rebirth of Praneshacharya, but this article focuses on the obscure characters in the novel. For example, Chandri's voice is initially unheard, but she transforms into a dialogic voice with diverse points of view. Chandri's transformation is intended to demonstrate resistance to the suppression of voices based on gender, caste, and class. Bauer describes the functions of the feminine dialogic voice:

For the object is not, ultimately, to produce a feminist monologic voice, a dominant voice that is a reversal of the patriarchal voice (even if such a project were conceivable), but to create a feminist dialogic that recognizes power and discourse as indivisible, monologism as a model of ideological dominance and narrative as inherently multi-vocal, as a form of cultural resistance that celebrates the dialogic voice that speaks with many tongues, which incorporates multiple voices of the cultural we (Bauer, 1991).

On her voyage from stigmatization as an outcast to a symbol of liberation for Praneshacharya and Naranappa, the authoritative voices oppress Chandri and transform her into a modern revolutionary figure. Through Chandri, Praneshacharya attains self-realization during his lifetime. *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976) by U.R. Anantha Murthy questions the androcentric system of Indian tradition as he strives for a modern perspective on human existence. Furthermore, the paper underscores the contrasting distinctions that exist between the modern-day Naranappa and the traditional Praneshacharya.

The demise of the Naranappa, who triumphs by defying stereotypes and rituals, serves as a catalyst for the community. In the novel, the Brahmins of Durvasapura village consider themselves superior to the Smarta clan since the Smarta clan Brahmins contaminated their lines by mixing with other communities. Dasacharya, a member of the superior clan, ate food from Smarta's residence, which is considered a sin, but because he had been hungry for a long time, he violated their clan's rules. Similarly, Chandri, a low caste born, fed plantain to a great religious scholar Praneshacharya when they were in the forest; both occurrences break food taboos adhered to by the power structure's protectors, which represent the modern perspective. With or without his knowledge, Naranappa, as a modernist, influences other secondary characters with his ideologies. According to the novel, friendship and compassion are the keys to destroy caste hierarchies. At one point, Shripati and his troupe were prepared to cremate the body of their deceased companion Naranappa. Anantha Murthy challenges casteism through the incident of Naranappa's cremation by his Muslim companions, who are neither members of his community nor a lower caste. Manjayya, Naranappa's close companion, is the individual who is most affected by his passing. Throughout the novel, Manjayya identifies the epidemic and plans to take the necessary precautions to break the chain of spread of the plague in the village.

In his very practical brain, the decisions were well formed already: one, to tell the municipality and get the dead body removed; two, to call in doctors and get everybody inoculated; three, to get rat exterminators and pumps, fill the ratholes with poison gas and stop them up; four, if necessary, to evacuate the people from the agrahara. (Murthy, 1976)

This research examines the importance of minor characters, namely Dasacharya, Manjayya, Shripati, and Ahmad Bari, a Muslim companion who performs Naranappa's final rituals. The paper examines the characters as polarised individuals, such as modern and traditional, dominant and unheard voices, and religious and secular. Even though they are not among the primary supporting characters and play only a secondary role in *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* (1976), the research highlights the minor characters and their influence on dialogism.

## 7. Conclusion

To sum up, even though the novel was published in 1976, this research suggests that the challenge that U.R. Anantha Murthy addressed is still relevant today. The United Nations' 2023 Sustainable Development Goals agenda is regarded as an urgent call to action for all countries worldwide. Three of the seventeen goals are gender equality, good health and well-being, and reduced inequality. This work provides a comprehensive analysis of monologism within society at large, focusing specifically on the character of Praneshacharya. Similarly, there exist male-dominated, authoritative systems in society that stifle the expression of women's voices, even in contemporary times. However, it is imperative to prioritize the empowerment and well-being of women in all facets of socioeconomic progress. The narrative primarily focuses on Praneshacharya's transition from a religious to a secular identity and his quest for meaning in life. However, Chandri's evolution from a voiceless individual to a resilient and self-reliant lady is overshadowed by his influence. The article encapsulates the essence of evolving characters who challenge those in positions of power and effectively reflect on the multitude of voices by adhering to Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. Furthermore, the research primarily centers on the marginalized perspectives of women and the Bakhtinian discourse of monologism. Future research on the multifaceted theme of *Samskara: A Rite to Dead Man* (1976) could be carried out by analyzing it from the perspectives of psychoanalytic theory and Indian spirituality.

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Amirthavarshini V R has conceptualized, collected resources, analyzed, and wrote the original draft.

Dr Bhuvanewari R is the corresponding author and supervisor. She edited, reviewed and developed the final draft.

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