



Dalit Literary Narratives

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Abstract:

Literature about Dalits and by Dalits is a huge body of writing today. Autobiographical accounts as well as testimonies by Dalit writers from all over India have already been looked at as genres that locate personal as well as the suffering of a mass of people within the larger discourse of human rights. The present paper attempts to examine literary narratives by Dalits and place them as evidence of atrocities committed against them. The paper will also look closely at Dalit stories as typifying the Dalit lived experience. The stories also throw light on the rich and varied culture of these subaltern castes. It is worth noting that there seems to be a hierarchy even among the various kinds of Dalits. The literature analysed will cover stories that show the range of experiences and the cultural identity of the Dalits. The Dalit literary narrative will be looked at as a document that records the suffering of the marginalised and, therefore, as something that is different from a sociological study of the Dalits as an oppressed class. Themes like the right to property and the right to be treated with respect will be looked at. Issues like the Dalit woman as being a victim of double marginalisation will also be part of the focus of this paper.

Keywords Dalit, literary writing, language, woman, marginalization, rights, experience

Culture is one of the most complicated words in the English language. It is a word which, like others, has undergone a variety

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of connotative and denotative meanings. Raymond Williams, in his work, *'Keywords'* traces the evolution of the word 'culture', etymologically as well as historically and philosophically. It takes its roots from the Latin '*colere*' which means to 'inhabit', 'cultivate', 'protect', 'honour with worship'. Culture, in its early usage, meant primarily to nurture. When further development of the meaning of 'culture' took place, it started taking on a very different connotation. This can be attributed in part to the way the word evolved as a notion in Germany.

"Its main use was still as a synonym for civilization: first in the abstract sense of a general process of becoming 'civilized' or 'cultivated'; second, in the sense which had already been established for civilization by the historians of the Enlightenment, in the popular eighteenth century form of the universal histories, as a description of the secular process of development." (Williams, 1983, p. 89)

Today, the word is used to refer to a variety of ideas, depending on the discipline which employs it. In cultural anthropology, 'culture' is used to mean material production whereas in cultural studies, the same term indicates signifying or symbolic systems. Other uses of the term 'culture' include

'...the independent and abstract noun which describes the general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development, from the eighteenth century;(ii) the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group or humanity in general,...' (Williams, 1983, p.90)

Identity is an important term in the context of culture. Simply put, it signifies a person's notion and expression of his/her individual identity or group affiliation. Identity also refers to self image, self worth and individuality.

It is important to look at how identity formation takes place both within a caste group as well as outside- in the village community. Does culture in a sense form identities for people individually as well as a group? Does gender play a role in identity formation? Does the hierarchical structure within a particular community happen due to cultural considerations?

This paper attempts to examine how identity and culture play out in the life of the average Dalit. Short stories and autobiographical writings by Dalits will be looked at as showing up both the Dalit lived experience as well as pointing out to a culture which shapes their identity at least as far as the larger society is concerned.

The history of Dalit literature in Andhra Pradesh is not without its predecessors. Since the time of the Bhakti movement, there have been works denouncing the hierarchy of the caste system. Vemana, Potuluri Veerabrahman are poets who wrote against the caste system and about the inequalities and injustices meted out to the lower castes. The themes of the bhakti tradition make an appearance again in the Dalit literary tradition both before and after Independence. The only difference is that the perspectives of the two traditions are different. In Telugu literature, the problems of the Dalits and untouchability were written about by nationalist and liberal upper caste scholars. Social reformers like Gurajada Appa Rao and Veereshalingam are responsible for making the Telugu language a language for the modern age. Though Appa Rao and Veereshlingam wrote about the social evils of the caste system, their writings did not reflect any criticism of the ideological and institutional framework of brahminical Hinduism. (Sathyanarayana, 1995, p. 2).

With the Gandhian movement in full force, the emphasis placed was on eradication of social evils and the need for unity. This was done through the medium of the written word. The belief was that with a free nation, oppression along various lines within India would be abolished. In this context, novels such as Unnava Laxminarayana's *Malapalli* (1922), 'Harijan Hamlet' and Ranga's *Harijana Nayakudu* (1933) are socially significant literary works. However, even though the problem of untouchability and the evils of the caste system are exposed in these works, the solution offered is within the framework of the caste system. In this sense, it is not a true representation of the oppressive hierarchy that the caste system is known to be. The works of the non Dalit scholars is therefore, seen as overlooking the fundamental problem of the caste system. These scholars did not see the seriousness of the oppressive and vicious cycle that the Dalits had been living in. The Dalits were thus looked upon a mass of people who were to be

pitied. This was primarily due to the fact that these nationalists were distanced from the reality of the lived experiences of the dalits. The 1940s did not see too much success with regard to proper representation of the discrimination that the average Dalit faced. The writers of this era were hugely influenced by Marxist ideology and therefore only advocated a classless society, failing to see that oppression in India was more along non class lines. They failed to comprehend the problems of a complex and highly stratified caste ridden society. These writers were mainly from the upper castes and hailed largely from middle class homes. Therefore, the nationalist movement was one where Dalit participation was negligible mainly because the ideology did not get conveyed to the Dalit masses.

The struggle for emancipation of the dalits was marked by the establishment of the Adi Andhra Mahasabha. Intellectuals like Bhagya Varma Reddi, Gurram Joshua and others like Sundu Venkaiah, Kusuma Dharmanna, Vemula Kurmaiah, et al, provided the much needed leadership for the dalit movement. The Mahasabha was established in order to speak in favour of achieving political equality. The writings of the 1930s and 1940s had to do with the abolition of the caste system, untouchability and the critique of the brahmanical caste system and the culture of the caste system. Dalit intellectuals were the products of missionary institutions that had spread far and wide in Andhra. Bhoi Bheemanna, in his play "Ragavashishtham", interprets the marital relationship between Arundhati, a woman of the lower caste and Vashishtha, a sage as a means to express the right and ability of the lower castes to claim a higher social status. (Sathyanarayana, 1995, p.8)

The bitterest critic of Brahmanism was Kusuma Dharmanna. In his poem, "we do not want the rule of black landlords", he describes the miserable living conditions of Dalits. The Adi Mahasabha made a demand for the use of public wells, temples and educational institutions by Dalits. (Sathyanarayana, 1995, p.9-10). The Dalits in various parts of the state carried out acts (offering worship in temples meant for caste Hindus, wearing footwear and walking through the streets of the village etc) that resulted in violence. This further strengthened the Dalit identity as a distinct one. Therefore,

Dalit writing now centred on discrimination and caste oppression. Gurram Joshua, in his poem, "The Bat" details the misery of the Dalits and makes a Dalit, the hero of his piece. He severely criticises the caste system and actually terms the Hindu social order the four hooded Hindu cobra. (Sathyanarayana, 1995, p. 12). Bhoi Bheemanna in his play "Paleru" highlights the need for education for the Dalit masses. Only through education can a Dalit expect to lead a life that is respectable. Thus, one can see that the Dalit writers on account of having been born into this stratum of society had immense raw material and so, were able to give shape to Dalit writing as a kind of literary writing that has today become very significant.

It is in this context that writers like Gogu Shyamala become very important. Their writings mirror the lived experience of the Dalits. Gogu Shyamala, a Dalit writer from Andhra Pradesh writes about a woman who is deprived of her land. In her well known story "But why shouldn't a Baidla woman ask for her land?" (Shyamala, 2012, p.53). Shyamala recounts the happenings which centre on Sayamma, also called Erpula Saayamma or Baidla Saayamma. It is worth noting that both prefixes 'Baidla' as well as 'Erpula' denote her identity within her caste group. The former denotes her caste group; the latter, her social function. The caste hierarchy is very rigid with 'patel' being used to describe an upper caste villager. The story has references to terms like 'patwari', 'karnam' and 'dora' all of which denote the position of the men with regard to both the caste they belong to and consequently the professions they are in. The 'karnam', for instance, is the record keeper of accounts in the village and belongs to the upper castes. It is worth noting that while the upper castes are described separately, the lower castes are mentioned in a series as belonging together, despite the fact that they carry out various jobs and their occupations are varied. For example, the gollas are shepherds, the mudirajus are fruit and vegetable sellers, the chakalis are washer people and so on. Nevertheless they are not considered important enough to be acknowledged as separate groups each with a unique part to play. In a sense, this detail brings to light the fact that there exists a certain identity politics in the village. The lower castes are in a sense, visibly invisibilised.

The 'Baindla' are the priests of the untouchable castes, usually very few in numbers. The 'erpula' is a soothsayer, traditionally a woman, from among the baidla caste. The higher castes view the 'erpula' as a kind of prostitute whereas the lower castes view her as a kind of priestess. In temples in the rural areas, the jogini is revered as an oracle- a mouthpiece of the divine. In other temples where the deity is male, the jogini is only the 'wife' of God and has no other ritual function. In the absence of economic support and backing and no specific ritual function, the jogini may be forced to take to the flesh trade. Even though 'matangi' is the generic name given to madiga women, all matangi are not joginis. Over the years, leaving or donating a woman to the temple became a culturally sanctioned practice. These women were looked upon as the sexual property of the entire village. What one sees in this practice is the gaze of the upper castes. In a sense, they along with the others sometimes, make it difficult for the jogini to live with dignity and self respect. Not only is the baidla woman, therefore marginalised because she is of the madiga caste, but also sidelined because she is considered a woman of disreputable character by the upper caste villagers.

Within the highly layered caste structure there are more divisions. Saayamma's husband belongs to the mudiraju caste which is higher in the hierarchy of caste. On his death, his people do not allow her to mourn his death when his corpse is brought to the mudiraju house. When the baidla people want to take away the corpse, they are stopped and the reason given is that Saayamma's husband, Sendrappa was born in the mudiraju caste and his last rites will have to be carried out by his father. They do not even recognise Saayamma as Sendrappa's wife. They say "She was not made a wife by the caste. She's only a mistress." Saayamma's identity and status as the wife of Sendrappa is not recognised. This shows up the fact that caste lines even within the Dalit castes are deeply entrenched. In this instance, one can see the double marginalisation within the subaltern castes. They further contend that there is no need for argument and justification as the mudiraju are a higher caste than the baidla. The baidla make a likeness of Sendrappa and bury the corpse in the madiga burial ground. In the night there is a telling of funeral stories and a lamp is lit near the head of the effigy before it is laid to rest in the burial ground.

The story recounts the incident where Saayamma is asked to come to the patel's house and discuss the proceedings of a fair or *jatra* to appease Ooradamma, a village deity. She brings up the topic of the land entitled to her which is now in the hands of the village head. The piece of land she mentions is property that has come to her through her aunt who used to farm on it. It is 'manyam' land. 'Manyam' refers to land gifted by the Nizam for services rendered for the village, including conducting of rituals and prophesying at the Ooradamma festival.

This detail brings to mind a similar practice that existed in Tamil Nadu. The collector Tremenheere submitted in 1891, a report entitled the 'Note on the pariahs of Chingleput'. An essay that appears in *The Changing Identity of Rural India: A Socio-historic Analysis* examines the conflicting opinions over rights of the parayars in colonial India. In it he examined the mirasidar system of land management which did little for the lower caste peasants. According to the collector, the attempts on the part of the paraiyars to acquire land were resisted by the mirasidars who were Brahmin or Vellala. The isolation of the Dalits from the land thus compelled them into a state of bondage under the landlords. (Basu, 2009, p302) The British government following the report submitted by the collector of the place in 1891 gave away lands to the Dalits. (Thirumavalavan, 2007, p 253). These were termed 'Panchami lands'. These lands were later unfairly seized by upper castes. Thol Thirumavalavan, in his speech delivered in 2007 at Pursaiwakkam to pay tribute to language martyrs, asks for the retrieval of the Panchami lands. This speech appears as an essay in the *Oxford Anthology of Tamil Dalit Writing*.

When she does bring up the topic of her land to the village head and other elders and wealthy landlords of the village, the *dora*, or the most powerful landlord of the village whose cousin is now in possession of the land, gets furious and can barely control his anger. He admonishes her for talking so brazenly and says: "You shouldn't talk so loosely, and that too in front of everyone." (Shyamala, 2012, p. 59) This is, despite asking whether she can talk about what is due to her from the past.

What comes through this exchange is the layered structure of the village society. Saayamma is sent out and a discussion ensues. The

'dora' speaks of Saayamma not knowing her place and the fact that she "doesn't know how to talk to her superiors". One member of the upper caste even asks "Why do these riff-raff need land?" The karnam (village record keeper) says that one should be able to sweet talk Saayamma into involving herself in this festival because they cannot afford to displease her as she has many well wishers from other castes. What can be seen is also the fact that only caste Hindus seem to be holding land and with the taking away of land belonging to Saayamma her identity and place both as a citizen of the village as well as her position as land owner in the village is undermined. So, in other words, the lower castes are important enough to be called to perform certain duties, but are not important enough to be fellow land owners along with the upper castes. Yet the upper caste villagers are apprehensive of angering Saayamma and other caste people as they make up the major work force and as a united force of people can make life difficult for the higher castes.

At one point in the story, Saayamma actually bangs on the table with her fists. The dora's eyes grow wide and at one stage in the conversation the elders stand too shocked to react. Even at the end of the story as Saayamma is carried away by her brothers, she shouts threats at the dora. She feels that the curse of the village will be lifted if the corrupt landlords are taught a lesson. What can be seen here is the fact that Saayamma is doubly marginalised- firstly on account of being a Dalit and secondly on account of being a woman.

The double marginalisation of Dalit women does not stop at being deprived of land rights. The upper caste male gaze also perceives women performers as women available and easy to get even when they are just tilling their fields or putting up a performance. The identity of the Dalit woman is thus a fragile one.

Shyamala's short story "Jambava's Lineage" displays the stigma attached to women performing for an audience. The old lady, Ellamma, speaks of her youth when she would perform for an audience of various castes. The rich landlords or 'dora' would throw money at her and when she bent to pick up the money, they would throw more money at her. As if this wasn't enough,

some people would thread currency notes together to form a garland and put them around the neck of Ellamma. They make it clear that the money thus offered is an advance for further services that the woman performer is required to render. The high caste people would say "You slut!" to which Ellamma would ask them to consider her their younger sister. The artiste is not respected for his/her art. It is much worse if the artiste happens to be a woman. The fact that the woman stands out from the crowd and performs a piece of history/culture of a community for an audience is considered an act of shamelessness. The irony of the whole incident is that there are large crowds of people that gather to watch the performance. If the performer is looked upon as a person of questionable reputation, aren't the people watching and enjoying what is a perfectly aesthetic performance disreputable as well? The mindset of people like this is that women and girls, especially of these castes, are easily available and loose of character. The woman's identity is nothing more than that of an object of sexual gratification.

It is repulsive to note that punishment of perceived offences is primarily sexual violence visited upon the hapless woman labourer. Gogu Shyamala also writes in her story "Tataki wins again" of a young girl's 'offence' of watering her fields earlier than the neighbouring fields are watered. The landlord decides to take revenge and lies in wait for the little girl one day. He seizes her and says "What makes you come here like a man and water the groundnut fields? You mala and madiga don't even know that girls have to be kept at home! You are a small girl, are you?" (p.97) We read that he puts his hand in her blouse. This one sentence indicates that sexual violence of a more serious kind would follow if the victim did not somehow free herself from the clutches of her captor. In the above tirade of the landlord, one can also see the gender role stereotyping which is part of the lived experience of the various castes. The land owning communities do not let their women folk come out and participate in the farming of their land. They are more or less confined to activities within the home. That is not the case with the subaltern castes. Men and women work

together on the fields. Even children help their parents in the fields doing whatever they can to help ease the burden on the parents. Women thus carry out a range of activities, both domestic and farm based. Besides, the mala-madiga castes also cannot afford to keep their girls and women at home because of their dire poverty.

The village dora in “Why shouldn’t a baidla woman ask for her land?” wants a grand festival arranged for the appeasement of the Goddess. The discussion then shifts to the village deities. Not only does one see layering, but also ‘othering’. The karnam speaks about how the purohit said that the village goddesses are not part of the Hindu pantheon. “These Ooradamma, Mysamma, Pochamma, Ellamma and so on- we don’t have them. These mala-madiga and the sabbanda-only they worship such deities and we should let them.” (Shyamala, 2012, p. 60).

It is ironic then, that the dora should actually see a dream in which Ooradamma appears and asks for a festival to be held in her honour. The festival of Ooradamma is also a time to see how much in control of the lower castes the landlords are. The landlords and other wealthy people in the village would like the services rendered by the mala-madiga people but would like them to be completely under their mercy. Yet they follow a policy of exclusion and othering when it comes to living spaces as well as belief systems of themselves as against the subaltern castes. The deities of the mala-madiga people are looked at as occupying a subaltern position and belonging to a totally different culture. They are therefore looked upon as occupying a space way beyond the pale of the higher castes.

It would not be out of place to refer to Kancha Ilaiah’s opinion on the subject of deities. In his well known work, *Why I am not a Hindu* he refers to a range of deities and what they are worshipped for. Each of them has a particular portfolio and the wrath of each deity results in particular mishaps. For instance, the rains are delayed because Polimeramma is angry. Also she is supposed to guard the village from evils that come from the outside. She is in a sense, a ‘border’ goddess. Once in five or ten years a buffalo is sacrificed to appease her and the blood mixed with rice which is eaten by the Dalits and Muslims of the village. The village is then closed for one week.

The high or low level of water in the village tank is due to the benevolence or wrath of Kattamaisamma. Once in five years a major festival to please Kattamaisamma is celebrated wherein a number of sheep and chicken are slaughtered. Rice mixed with the blood of the sacrificed animals and birds is sprinkled in the fields. This will ensure that the harvest is good. (Ilaiah, 1996, p. 95) Crops are stolen because of the fury of Potaraju, another of the deities. There are no temples for Potaraju. Only a stone with turmeric on it is evidence of his presence. (Ilaiah, 1996, p.97)

Apart from this, there are caste specific deities like Beerappa who looks after the welfare of sheep and goats. The Dalitbahujan also believe in their dead returning if they have unfulfilled dreams or desires. It is therefore at variance with the Hindu pantheon of Gods and Goddesses. There are also village specific, area specific Goddesses. Yellamma, Mankamma, Maremma, Sammakka, Sarakka are some of them.

Ilaiah argues that these Gods and goddesses are “culturally rooted in production, protection and procreation”. (p. 100). Anyone can come to seek their help. There are no barriers of language, priests and so on.

Ilaiah also speaks of the most important deity Pochamma who concerns herself with curing of disease. There is no need to have a mediator in the form of a priest. Her relationship to people is caste and gender neutral.

This apart, even though the landlords seem to have deities like Ooradamma as part of what their ancestors used to believe in, there is a distancing of the upper castes from what they consider to be the belief system of the mala-madiga castes. The karnam also says that these kinds of festivals to appease these various subaltern goddesses are part of tradition and should therefore be carried out without any compromise on the way they are performed. This only goes to show that the caste Hindus in the village have a connection to an ancient, tribal, non Aryan past- one that they have renounced at least partly in favour of the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses.

Deification is also an aspect of the Dalit culture that merits mention. One sees that the pantheon of Dalit gods has many

Goddesses and Gods. As mentioned earlier, each of the dieties would look after a particular aspect of the farming activities. In this context, it is necessary to look at the belief system of the Dalits. Iyamam, a Dalit writer from Tamil Nadu, has authored a story titled "The Binding Vow". In this story, Ponnuruvi, a young girl is impregnated by the landlord's son. When the caste elders decide to get them married, they are cruelly betrayed. Ponnuruvi's body is found floating in the tank used by the upper caste people. Since Ponnuruvi's father is no more, her mother is left to fend for herself. Soon, there is a small shrine at the foot of the banyan tree. After a few years, the place becomes a place that takes on the appearance of a pilgrimage spot especially just before Pongal. The belief is that Poonuruvi Sami as she is referred to, is the one who sends the much awaited rains around Pongal. Young women visit her shrine with bangles and kumkum and pray for the long life of their husbands. In every household, there is at least one girl who is named after Ponnuruvi Sami. What comes through in this story is the process of deification. The Dalits revere Poonuruvi for her purity of spirit and intention. The fact that she has been exploited also goes in her favour. A landlord actually exclaims that people have gone and deified a 'paraichi'. The upper castes do not find any reason for worship of Ponnuruvi. She is just another paraichi who has been found dead and whose body has defiled their tank. It is apt to refer to what the karnam says in Gogu Shyamala's story "Why shouldn't a bairndla woman ask for her land?" He says that the purohit has said that their goddesses are only Lakshmi, Gayathri and Saraswathi. Ooradamma, Mysamma, Ellamma and the others are part of the subaltern castes and the upper caste elders feel that they should allow the Dalits to worship them.

The Dalits have myths surrounding each of their castes. The main character of Jambava's Lineage, Ellamma, is part of the performing troupe which enacts the legends, histories of various communities. The Nizamabad Chindu Ellava Troupe in the story is a famous one which goes from one place to another performing. The Jambavapuram, for instance, is a collection of myths which concern themselves with the origin of the madiga. It does not have religious significance; it instead is about the importance of the madiga as a caste and the identity of the madiga. Therefore, Jambava is not referred to as 'devudu' or God but as

‘Jambavathatha’ or grandpa or ‘Jambavamuni’ or sage. Jambava is believed to be the first human who emerged from Jambudweepam. The cultural identity of the madiga, therefore is tied to their allegiance to the Jambupuranam. Jambu is believed to have existed before the creation of the earth, sky and the oceans. In addition, he is said to have created the holy trinity of the Hindu pantheon- Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. It is interesting to note that there are no hierarchies as one can see in the traditional epics (Ramayana and Mahabharatha) of castes. What one can see instead is the association of each caste to Jambu through a specific cultural lineage and this link is usually through leather. In recent years, there have been additions to the many myths that are part of the Jambupuranam.

The chindu are a group of performing artistes who travel from place to place putting up performances in each village. Their presence in the village is believed to signal a good harvest. They are a subcaste of the madiga and perform one important defining story for each caste- the Mala Chennaiah for the mala, the Pandava myth for the mudiraju. They go from street to street and perform the dance drama pertaining to the caste that resides there. The glossary that is part of Gogu Shyamala’s volume of short stories namely, *Father* may be an elephant and mother only a small basket, but... gives the importance of these stories: “These origin stories are owned by specific communities as markers of their identities.” (p. 237).

Apart from all this, the chindu are a closed community with the specific culture of practising the Chindu Bhagotam (a dramatic representation of a set of stories already described in sufficient detail above).

Ellamma states at one point in the story that the chindu are the preservers of the various myths and cultural identities. When she is called names by her male audience, she defends herself and members of her clan by saying: “I take care of you by teaching you your history and culture”. From what we read in the story, it is clear that Ellamma, a woman is one of the main performers. It might be necessary to see that women do play a very significant role in the protection and preservation of cultures of the various subaltern castes. It is heartening to note the pride with which

Ellamma speaks of her art and the importance and merit of what she does for a living. "By continuing grandfather Jambava's legacy, we have become the breath of the labouring-singing people." This sentence shows what value the subaltern castes place on their identity. In some sense, Ellamma seems to suggest that their cultural identities are their *raison d'etre*. Ellamma speaks of how the madiga and other subaltern castes lost their land after the arrival of the Aryans. She also speaks of how the chindu do not think of a hierarchical structure when they see the other high castes. What is being established is also the fact that hierarchisation is basically a feature of the Aryan culture.

The fact that women are the main repositories of culture and history and in a sense the preservers of identities is borne out by Bama as well. She writes, in her work *Sangati*, of the Dalit women as singing songs to suit every occasion. It could be at a wedding, a funeral, a cultural festival or even a coming-of-age (puberty) ceremony of a young girl. There are songs that are sometimes composed on the spur of the moment. There are songs to celebrate the planting season, the harvest season and other farming activities as well. For instance, there is a song to celebrate the physical maturity of a young girl. One word that is important in this context is 'pushpavati'. It means the blooming of a bud to become a flower. Similarly, here it means the girl who was a bud has, on attaining puberty, become a flower. An elaborate ceremony accompanies these festivities. The 'pushpavati' is given a bath and dressed in new clothes. The girl is given presents and given good food to eat. She lives for sixteen days in a separate hut outside her home. These songs reflect the lived experiences of the dalit.

Another aspect worth noting is the way people of the various subaltern castes are spoken about and the way in which they are referred to. In Shyamala's story "Why shouldn't a Baidla woman ask for her land?" the characters are referred to by their caste. For instance, a character called Narasamma is referred to as Madiga Dunnolla Narasamma. It is important to note how the caste elders and non subaltern castes address the madiga and other dalit castes. They use half names such as 'Elli' for Ellamma, 'Antiga' for Antappa and so on. In addition, even high caste children would address a dalit elder in the diminutive. However, non-formal ways

of address among various members of the dalit community are used more as endearments rather than as disrespect. Sometimes, in order to show closeness, the suffix 'anna' (older brother) is used among Dalits.

Bama's short story titled "Annachi" details speech as used by the upper caste landlord and that used by the Dalit. The landlord Chandrashekhar who Ammasi's father works for, demands that Ammasi get up and give him a seat on the bus. Ammasi flatly refuses. The landlord asks him whether he is Madasami's son to which Ammasi replies in the positive. The landlord says angrily, "While your Ayya is standing, is it right for you to keep sitting, not paying him due respect?" (p.9). Ammasi, not one to fall for the false show of closeness, says "When did you become my Ayya?" (p.10).

Ammasi tells his listener about another incident wherein he gets into an argument with a landlord. He arrives as a replacement for someone else. The landlord objects to his clean appearance. Then he says that it is already very late. Ammasi replies, "Annachi, only you have a wrist watch, I don't. Only you can tell the time, Annachi." The landlord flies into a rage and starts abusing Ammasi.

"Who is Annachi, da? To whom am I Annachi, da? A paraya mother fucker dares to call me annachi?" (Bama, 2006, p. 13).

Ammasi gets into trouble with the people of his caste for calling the landlord 'Annachi'. The headman asks him at the meeting as to why he addressed the landlord as 'annachi'. Ammasi says that he said it because the landlord is older and that had the landlord been younger than he, he would have addressed him as 'thambi' (younger brother).

The headman then asks him whether any parayar or pallar (both subaltern castes) has ever addressed a naicker (landlord) as if they were related by blood. Ammasi replies that he finds nothing wrong in addressing the landlord the way he did as he did not call him 'mama' (mother's brother) or 'machan' (brother in law). If he had used any of these terms that indicate kinship, he would have been at fault. 'Annachi' was uttered only as a term of respect. Ammasi then proceeds to tell them that he had been rebuked just the previous week for addressing the koravar Irulappan, the drain

cleaner as 'annachi'. If he cannot address a drain cleaner as annachi nor can he address a landlord (naicker) as annachi, what else is he to address them as? If he addresses them by their name, it will be an insult especially if they are older. He cannot address them as 'mama' or 'machan', because they are kinship terms. On the other hand, the landlord does not have a problem referring to himself as Ammasi's "Ayya" if it serves his own interests. If by using a kinship term, he can get a seat and travel in comfort, it is fine to use it. However, if a Dalit uses it to denote respect for an elder while explaining his point of view, it is considered trying to rise above his station. Not only that, the paraya is taken to task for daring to speak using terms that denote closeness.

What place do the paraya and other subaltern castes have in the eyes of the higher castes? Do they not have the right to even explain their actions, presence/ absence to the higher castes? In the lines quoted above, it is clear that there is a great deal of double standards at work when it comes to speaking and being spoken to with the subaltern castes at the receiving end all the time. The politics of exclusion is at work at all levels.

Shyamala who writes in the dialect of Telugu that is spoken in Tandur (Telengana) prefers to keep the local usage and terms of address rather unconventional. Even for readers of Telugu, the language in which the original is written, the nuanced idiom is evident. The language is replete with a particular kind of vocabulary. This is done so as to preserve the reality of the social world that Shyamala is attempting to portray. The reader is thus led into the world of the village and the kind of life that various people in the village live. Shyamala's stories signal a new voice in Dalit literature. She has chosen to break away from the earlier kind of writing which showcased the oppression that the caste hierarchy imposed on the Dalit. However, this seems to be the trend in Tamil Dalit literature as well. Raj Gautaman, in his essay "Dalit Protest Culture" exhorts fellow Dalits to speak in their native colloquial Tamil: Speak in your Tamil. Speak in your language that has been despised as *cheri* Tamil and colloquial Tamil! Transgress the elitist order of spoken language laid down by 'hegemonic culture'. (Gautaman, 2012, p. 268).

It is important to note that the retaining of the local language, vocabulary as well as ways of address is also a way of establishing a unique identity for the Dalits. It is almost as if the writer is making a case for the world of the Dalit (lived experiences, language used as well as worship) to be considered different and significantly so. The fact that certain culture specific terms in each of these stories in the regional languages are retained in the original so as to retain the flavour of the Dalit idiom only serves to further reinforce the unique culture and identity.

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