



OPPRESSION AND MARGINALIZATION OF DALIT WOMAN CHARACTERS IN THE SHORT STORIES BY GOGU SHYAMALA

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ABSTRACT

Telugu Language Dalit writer, woman activist, first generation graduate of her family Gogu Shyamala occupies a special place among the Dalit writers who represented Dalit aesthetics particularly Dalit women living experience. Shyamala has grown up witnessing the vagaries of changes in her family and in immediate Dalit society. Her stories are studded with gems of real life experiences of Dalit woman in Telangana where 'vetti' (Unpaid bonded labour) practice was rampant and the Dalit's were the victims of socio economic discrimination and caste stigma due to the ideology created by the upper caste hindus. Festivals, ceremonies, beauty of innocence, social practices, austere life style, struggle for bare necessities of life find fool's cape space in Shyamala's stories. Reader would be transported to the world of lush green fields where innocent dreaming children, simple dalit labourers, exploitative landlords consisting the Telangana social fabric making us to transcend our limited perception of the world around us.

My paper would delve deep into the construction of character, composition of their humours and their place in biased social web.

Keywords: *Dalit Consciousness, Women Experience, Ideology, Hegemony, Dominance.*

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In the story 'Trace it' when Sukkamma dies the whole village laments her death. Dappu is played by the young and the veterans. "She nursed her daughters and her daughters-in-law, but never troubled anyone herself. It is a death as good as gold'. Her death created an occasion for nearly ten villages around to meet and play dappu, the musical instrument especially played by Dalit community. Greatness of her life identified by her dalit community only. In caste biased society virtues of the under privileged go unnoticed as the ideology is created and nurtured by the power wielders as in Gramscian terms 'Power resides in ideology'. Even virtues need caste privilege for being recognised and praised.

Ellamma, Sammakka are mother and daughter respectively from the story 'Brave heart Badeyya'. Ellamma's son Badeyya is the only child from Madiga gudem who attends school, so his name Badeyya (Badi means school in Telugu). The family lives humbly on their own hardwork, they have their own identity in the gudem. In the evening when Ellamma goes to collect firewood for cooking she sees Ramreddy dora, a privileged caste member, she removes her slippers and resumes her work. The field is full of thorny bushes, thorns pierce her feet, blood gushes out and she loses her slippers too as a dog chews them into shreds. Ellamma laments 'isn't that dog's life better than mine, Badeyya?', More often than none life for a dalit woman becomes graver than a life of an animal. She has to remove her slippers even though she need them much to protect her feet. She comments 'Badeyya, as madiga it is our work to make slippers....I am born in the caste that makes slippers for everybody, but my7 own feet are left bare'..

During the religious reformation in Europe, John Calvin (1509-1564) French pastor and protestant reformer propounded a concept that the fate of every individual is predestined, everything is predetermined well before the birth of the soul, it is decided whether soul is going to be damned or saved. Even though the concept is against the Biblical scriptures, the theory has been accepted by many and this led to justify heinous practice of slavery in Europe. On the same lines to justify the plight of the downtrodden or dalits in India, upper

caste hindus resort to the theory of fate, 'karma'. Upper caste hindus justify their acts of suppressing the underprivileged, dalits and lowercaste making themselves shelter in passive contemplation of their imagined past karma.

Louis Althusser in his work 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus' clearly says that ideological state apparatus like religious and educational establishments fosters the ideology created by the few who are in power and makes all the followers (subjects) think and believe that obeying the rulers accepting the power and welcoming the dominant ideology is actually for their won benefit and turning against it is like harming themselves. In our religion context society is infested with the ideology which creates and gets created by the dominant few. In dalit literature we come across at many instances characters resorting to the role of fate, the presumed past karma, imagined result of the past activities making the sufferer obedient enough to undergo the hardships of caste stigma and socio-economic exploitation.

Sayamma's life in the story 'But why shouldn't the Baidla woman ask for Her Land?' is a glaring example of fate as her life is dedicated to the practice of Jogini. A jogini is a dedicated lady to the village deity. She has to live on the alms of the upper caste people and perform rituals whenever the situation demands besides being prone to sexual exploitation. Sayamma cannot escape her fate, she becomes jogini to the village deity Ooradamma. She vehemently asks dora if he makes his daughter a jogini as he denies her right to own her own land. The oppression is on body, soul and social life of the downtrodden women.

'Father may be an Elephant and mother only a Small Basket, but...' is another story in which we find Balappa's wife is the victim of domestic violence. Her life is burdened with the responsibility of looking after her family in the absence of her husband, yet she happily fulfils her responsibility working hard as agricultural labourer. She along with her family awaits her husband's arrival from town. When he returns from long absence every one thanks gods, she rushes to the mill brings flour, prepares rotis, feeds her husband. Yet she becomes the victim of domestic violence. When she asks her husband not



to go for toddy drinking, Balappa denigrates his wife saying, " You say it's not fair ? you've learnt to talk; what? Have I seen everything ? How do I know what you have done?'. She has no right to question her husband's habit of drinking toddy. He thinks his woman shall not question him. Dalit woman life is disturbed with the scenes of atrocities both outside the home and inside the home. Subaltern can't speak even at home. Dalit women are subjected to the violence at two levels interior and exterior. It seems their existence is prone to unending suffering. It reminds us of Thangam's life with Kathamuthu in 'The Grip of Change'.

The incident of Karnam trying to molest Bamma in the jowar field in the story 'Thataki wins Again', 'You are a small girl, are you ?, cursing her, he (karnam) thrust his hand into her blouse'. The body of a Dalit woman has no individuality, no dignity of its being alive. Dalit woman can't claim ownership on her body. Land and body disposes life.

In the story 'Raw Wound', when Balappa tries to rescue his daughter from the clutches of jogini practice, he is confronted with upper caste hindus. Balappa has to suffer near death in the hands of 'patela', has to lose his land and hut, he was dispossessed by the village. Entire village stood against him when he decides to send his daughter to school opposing devilish practice of jogini.

Oppression and marginalization remained no more neologisms for the woman characters in Gogu Shyamala's short stories.

Simone de Beauvoir says, 'One is not born woman, but, rather becomes one', but with dalit women it can be said ' one has not chosen to be a dalit but predestined to become a dalit' as caste is given not chosen.

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