

Yellanna: A Representative of the Struggles of Early Dalit Poets In G. Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring*

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Abstract - G. Kalyana Rao tries to trace the history of the struggle of the Dalits and their struggle in different forms. He also tries to trace the history of the Dalit Literature through Yellanna whose transformation is from a common boy to 'Mala Bairagi'. The struggle of the Yellanna is not the struggle of a person but it is also the struggle of all the Dalit poets, philosophers and artists who have sacrificed their life for the sake of their community. He moves from place to place to arouse the consciousness of Dalits with the help of his songs which are songs of all the subalterns and downtrodden who even don't have the bit of human rights. Yellanna's journey is the journey of all the early Dalit Poets and their struggle.

Keywords - Dalit, Revolution, subaltern, struggle, art.

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INTRODUCTION

G. Kalyana Rao is one of the famous novelist, short story writer, essayist and playwright in Telugu language. He is an active member of Virasam, which is a revolutionary writer's association. He is also associated with the Dalit and revolutionary perspectives of Telugu literature. He is known for his diction of harsh reality of Dalit and deprived classes of the society. He is the editor of 'Arunatara' magazine in Telugu, which portrays current and prevalent issues related to Dalits in Andhra Pradesh. He also holds an esteemed position in the Virasam (A Revolutionary Writers Association). Apart from this novel, he has written many plays like *Dawn*, *Satire*, *Caste*, *Lockup*, and *Untouchable Spring*. He had written critical analysis and explanation on the roots of Telugu Drama. In all his works, we can see the question of Dalits and their struggle against caste oppression and women's powerful role in social activities. He is known for his famous novel *Antarani Vasantam* which was translated into English as *Untouchable Spring* (2000) by Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar. It was first serialized in Arunatara Magazine.

Rao tries to draw the history of Dalit Literature with the help of his imaginative characters which are not only the characters but the representative of an age of Dalits. Rao shows that Dalits were devoid of education and literature from the time of Manu. The narrator Ruth criticizes Manu and The Manusmriti for the creation of the discrimination of the society. "Dalits as a community has their own culture, religion, language,

and life style." (*Untouchable Spring*, 14) The art form was two sided one side it provide the form of entertainment and on the other side it asserts the mind of Dalits.... Through Dalit literature the unrepresented silence is voiced out to make and the writers are bringing out the real life of a dalit into light their pain and suffering." (Saranya, 47) Arjun Dangla defines "Dalit literature is one which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India. It matures with the sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary" (265)

Yellanna, the first protagonist of the novel, is much interested in music and literature. He "sang whatever song she sang. Carried by her aunt, he would watch puppet show." (11) He represents those early artists and prophets who started Dalit literature in oral tradition. Those early prophets of Dalit community worked for the reawakening of the consciousness of the Subaltern community. Their literature is the literature of revolt and the spirit of Dalit Community. Yellanna represents those is much interested in art and literature. But the hierarchal status of the society decides who can be an artist or not. The people who watched the performance of Natakam sit according to the hierarchal status of the society as well.

"Karanams and kapus would sit close to the performers. Behind them, people from the washermen, barber, and potter castes would sit. The malas

would sit on the mala mound. The madigas would sit the madiga mound"
(*Untouchable Spring*, 11)

When Yellanna tries to watch the performance from the near, he was beaten and forced to leave the village by the people of upper classes. That was the beginning of his journey as a literary prophet because early Dalit literature was flourished in the oral tradition. Most of the early dalit literary figures were Dalit prophets and philosophers who raise the consciousness of the Dalit community. They use to teach the people about the stories of their struggle through stories and puppet shows in oral tradition. Pedarasi Peddamma is a prominent figure in the telugu oral tales whose life was also full of struggle as Yellanna.

When Yallenna lost his path, he reaches to a place Pakkela Dinni where "Ganga Jatara festival was taking place." (17) The sound of the jatara festival makes him forget that he is totally naked and he started dancing in the festival. "There was no state of untouchability and caste in the movement. He appreciates the art and dance of the untouchables." (17) It was so fascinating that the people forget their pain and problems. "Urumula Nrityam of Malas" is one of the famous dance form used in Ganga Jatara. Just like overflowing ganga water, the dancers also dances with aggression as the overflowing Ganga water.

Vermilion dance form is a ferocious dance form. The dancers dance as if the war is taking place and the dance floor is a battlefield. It feels to Yellanna as "furious Sivas seeming to dance the tandavam of deluge... illusion, reality, dance, war, grotesque, life-like dance." (20)

Urumula dance is a form of Telugu dance form which is performed with Urumula (a short of drums). The art and literature of the untouchable was very rich. They have the different songs for each and every occasion. Ruth, the narrator of the novel remembers about those songs:

"Planting, the saplings, they sang the sowing songs. Plucking weeds, they sang the plucking songs. Reaping the harvest, they sang the harvest songs. They hid life in those songs. They made them voice, love, sexuality, humour, compassion, not artificial like great poets wrote, but very naturally, like air, water, sun, moon, and stars."
(42)

Yellanna was a true artist who does not want any kind of recognition. "Didn't dance to be known. Did not sing. Art was in their veins. In their blood. In depths of their hearts. In their very sweat." (43)

The art, dance and literature of the dalits are not only to please gods but also to express their emotions, their

revolt, and their sufferings. Yellanna also uses his art to express the suffering of dalit community and their expectation of the society.

Brown the white man, recognizes the contribution of Vemana in Telugu language. The upper caste people criticize him because he tries to recognize the art and literature of the dalit writer. Rao also tries to trace the history of Dalit literature and found that the dalit literature was very rich in its theme content and have its own aesthetic beauty. But most of the historian does not like the roots of drama in the untouchable literature. The acting and dance of Yellanna like artists are not considered as a part of main stream art and culture. Yellanna became very popular with the passing of the time. The growing popularity of Yellanna is not accepted by the upper caste people.

"Yellanna was a natural actor. Not just an ordinary person. Veedhi Bagotam is a great representation of the combination of song, music, dance, and expression. A society. A culture. A living art of turning gods and goddesses into true village folks, of conversing and of performing amidst people without the obstructing curtains." (78)

When he was performing amid the people, the narrator starts the performance "Has the Karanamgaru come have the Kapus come?" (79) But the upper caste people don't come to see his performance. Thought they start the performance with the dedication of the upper caste people that hurt the arrogance of the upper caste people. They think Naganna and Yellanna as the big criminals. Their performances are considered to be the criminal activities as they feel that they are equating with the karanam and kapus. They thought to teach them a lesson. They made Dibbalamitta where the performance is taking place, a battle ground. People of the upper caste don't like the growth of the untouchables. The art, performance, farming, singing, dancing, is meant for the upper-caste. The life of Yellanna artist has reaches to the point where he started thinking his self respect more important than his performance. An artist started thinking to be a revolutionary. In this dispute Naganna has to lose his life.

Yellanna who is a pure artist turned into a revolutionary. Art and revolution go hand in hand which is one of the main characteristics of the Dalit literature. The aesthetic beauty of Dalit literature lays in "Turmoil, agitation, revolt. The turmoil is art. That agitation is song. That revolt is dance." (94)

The death of Naganna has totally changed his life. He decided to leave his house and teach the people of mala and mediga to raise their voice against the exploitation and discrimination of upper classes. His

transformation from Yellanna to 'mala bairagi' is the transformation of common man to a literary artist.

Whoever tries to encourage the Dalit literature, they have also lost their lives. Pedakoteswarudu is the potter who writes dvipada (Couplets) is much impressed with the fame of the Mala Bairagi. He decided to write the poems of Mala Bairagi. When he comes to know that he is near of his village. He started to search him. When he met him, he offered a pot as a gift for him. When the people come to know about that they revolted against him.

"They saw the upper castes chasing him. They saw sticks, crowbars, spades, and axes in their hands. They saw the Brahmin running ahead of everyone.....Potter Pedakoteswarudu is a pool of blood. The last written record of mala Bairagi. Yellanna being burnt away." (104-105)

After his death, Yellanna remains in the funeral pyre of Pedakoteswarudu. That incident hurt him a lot. He left the village and started moving from village to village. He became so much into his art that he forget his family

His songs were now centered on the suffering of malas and madigas who are not considered the part of the main stream. The following song shows the pathetic condition of the Dalits who are always remained in the receiving end of the society as well it is also an example of the aesthetic beauty of the Dalit Literature.

"Listen Subhadra

The mouse drank the water under the roof.

Listen subhadra

How will it rain at a cloudless place?

Listen Subhadra.

How will the stream fill up without rain?

Listen Subhadra.

How will the field became wet without the stream filling?

Listen Subhadra.

How will we plant saplings without the field getting wet?

Listen Subhadra.

How will the corn flower without planting the saplings?

Listen Subhadra.

How will the grain fall without threshing the yield?

Listen Subhadra.

How will the granary fill without the grain falling?

Listen Subhadra.

How to pay back namu without the granary filling

Listen Subhadra.

The namu is paid back, hunger remains.

Listen Subhadra.

The yearlong crops are measured out to the landlords.

Listen Subhadra.

The mouse drank the water under the roof."

The songs of Yellanna are dedicated to Subhadra but these songs are the examples of exploitation of the upper-castes. His songs are full of pain and agony of dalits who are dying because of hunger as they have to pay 'namu'. Namu is a kind of grain given to the poor people during the non harvest times. They have to pay extra sack during the harvest time.

He is also called the master of performing arts. It is said that Veedhi Bagotams is the beginning of Telugu drama. "He taught the dramatic art to malapalli. He made them perform." (127)

'The Mala Beiragi' has been remained for a longer time away from his home. He along with the worker of Buckingham Canal he came to the village during the time of cholera which has taken the life of the half of the population of the village. That has threatened the other people as well. When Yellanna came to the village he was also suffering from cholera. He has lost his eyesight and he only recalls the name of Subhadra. When Yellanna meet Sivaiah, he doesn't recognize his son; he only recites the name of Subhadra. He takes the last breath in the lap of Subhadra.

With the help of Yellanna, G. Kalyana Rao tries to show the journey and struggle of early Dalit poets and writers. Early forms of Dalit literature survives in oral tradition. Yellanna is Kabir, Madara Chennaiah, Gora, Chokha, Mela, and Karmamela and many more who are the early poets of oral tradition.

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