

REPRESENTING THE LIFE OF A DALIT: A STUDY OF G.KALYAN RAO'S UNTOUCHABLE SPRING

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Abstract: The life of a Dalit is always pitiful and they lack in the basic needs like food, shelter and clothes. Being the original inhabitant of the land the Dalits lost their rights and self-respect. They were demeaned in the name of religion and caste. Dalit as a community has their own culture, religion, language and lifestyle. Though they were not powerful in the initial days by writing scriptures but they had a powerful art form. The art form was two sided one side it provided the form of entertainment and on the other side it asserted the minds of the Dalits. Through street plays, Jalsas, folk dance, drama and songs the Dalits had strong messages to be conveyed to their people with rich oral tradition. Through Dalit literature the unrepresented silence is voiced out and the writers are bringing out the real life of a Dalit into light their pain and suffering are brought out to make the people realize that how human being was so mean to do injustice to his own fellow being. The preposition of the paper will deal with the life of mala and madiga the Dalits of Andhra Pradesh through the novel *Untouchable Spring*. Their rich art forms, discrimination, sufferings faced are being registered in this paper.

Keywords: Dalits, Poverty, folk art, discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

Untouchable Spring (2000) was written in Telugu and later it was translated into English by... In this novel G. Kalyan Rao reveals the sufferings and pains of the Dalits with seven generations of history. That was where Reuben's father Yellanna was born he grew up sang songs and danced. Yellanna did not write songs he knew no alphabet. "All he had was a feeling heart, a sharable experience, tear-shedding eyes, swelling nerve, a turbulent blood-stream... that was it, the song would weave itself." (6) They called him singing Yelladu, dancing Yelladu but his father's sister Boodevi called him Yellanna. Yellanna was a great artist. Reuben was born in a great artist's family. Now Ruth is an heir to that family. When Yellanna sings the moving tune that combined untouchability and hunger would be heard. The place where those who belonged to the four castes lived was *ooru*. The place where malas lived – *malapalli*, where the madigas lived- *madigapalli* and all these parts put together formed Yennela Dinni.

Yellanna was born like everyone. "Oh, you upper caste people! I, an untouchable, am walking on your pure, regal paths. Move aside. Move aside". (7) He announced his birth like anyone else. Like each one's birth touching one father's heart, his too, touched his father's heart. 'A male', he shouted out to the caste elder. He filled with caste elder's stomach with toddy and felt elated. They named the child after his grandfather's name.

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When *Yerra gollalu* came to the ooru there was excitement all over because they would put up street plays for ten to fifteen days in a row. Boodevi was crazy for *Chenchu Natakam* she would go to play taking her nephew along. Karanams and kapus would sit close to the performers. Behind them, people from the washerman, barber and potter castes would sit. The malas would sit on the mala mound. The madigas would sit on the madiga mound. Those two groups would be far away from the arena. Sitting like that they would not be visible to the village elders and the elders of the other caste. The play would not begin till the karanam and kapus arrived. After they arrived they would praise him on skies. Then the *sutradhara* would begin the performance. Yellanna would say to his aunty that he cannot see the play she would get up and lift him and if the Karanam and kapus see her standing that would be in trouble. But she dare to stand for her nephew because of the play he would sacrifice his sleep. He asked his aunty that can he sit near the yerra gollalu but she refused in spite of her reusal Yellanna went near the performing stage and he stood and after sometime he found some people staring at him. When they came to know he was from mala they started attacking him they pelted stones on him he ran for his life. He jumped into the water and reached the shore and only then he knew that there was no waist cloth he started walking on the path. There he saw a crowd and he entered into it and they were singing dancing and applying vermilion all over the body and Yellanna applied vermilion and he to danced on when he shouted Urumula Naganna turned and saw and it was Yellanna it was nude Siva. When he asked about him he said that he was a mala and he is from Yennela Dinni. Then he collapsed to the floor. When he woke up he asked which place he was in and Urumula Naganna said it was Pakkela Dinni.

Yellanna was sleeping but Urumula Naganna was not able to sleep Yellanna's arrival seemed to have caused some turmoil in him. It was three days since Naganna came to Pakkela Dinni. Urumala dancers were leaving but Naganna stayed to collect money and go he did not know what to do with Yellanna. He woke him up and gave his dress and food and he asked him about his past and he narrated the whole story with tears. Dharamaram Urumula Naganna was famous not only in Anantapuram but also in the coastal areas. It was Urumula Chandrappa who had taught Naganna the nuances of playing the Urumulu. He told him the secrets of puranas. He gave him to the world as Urumula Naganna and went away. Naganna had a special place in Ruth's memories the same intensity of rage Reuben experienced when he spoke about Yellanna. In reality Chandrappa is like Sinnabba father's younger brother. But when he was about to die he told Naga to call him Appa and he shouted at him calling Appa and he passed away smiling. The left out money of the Chandrappa was distributed among the troop and he formed a new troop and he gained a name as Rayalaseema. Urumula Naganna's voice,dance was remarkable and he knew numerous secrets of purunas and he outsmart any learned person. As soon as he heard that Yellanna was mala and he was from Yennela Dinni he remembered the

hurt that the past has inflicted. Naganna has been born in Yennela Dinni, his father Narigadu and mother Latchimi also was born there. He tells about the days he spent with his mother and father in Yennela Dinni. The palm tree has been entwined with the lives of mother and father. Naganna's childhood was spent among the palm tree by eating the kernel and drinking the palm juice and being in the shade of tumma groves of Yennela Dinni. Yellanna said he was Yerrenkadu's son and nephew to Boodevi. When Yerrenkadu was a small boy at that time even Boodevi was not born. Yerrenkadu's father was working as a watchman at the elder karanam's mango grove. It was a kind of bonded labour.

In Yennela Dinni these wretched people's lives remained mere desire. They were distraught and ruined due to their desires. It just happened with father Narigadu. There was heavy rain and continuous storm in the place mala and madigas would almost be covered by water it was at time the people gathered and talked about going to mound where upper caste people lived. The father took Naganna on his hip and mother placed the basket on her hand. "If you want to live, come along. Whoever comes in the way will be the targets of this axe... those who want to live, come along... we'll die anyway... Yellamma too has been submerged. Come, come, you coward bastards... come on, you..." (32) The people started following him. "For the first time, the untouchable storm fell on the ooru. For the first time in the Yellena Dinni, so many malas and madigas were walking amidst houses of upper caste, on their paths, in the middle of the ooru, crossing the lanes of the temple... walking towards the mound." (32) They were on top of the mound at higher level than upper caste. They had confidence that they will not die. In the morning it appeared as if malapalli and madigapalli was washed away. Whatever they carried they cooked and they ate. The water has wiped out malapalli and madigapalli. That day no one had food to eat it was getting dark father was missing and in the night the four people came on the heads with bags full of rice they broke the sahuakar's shop and now people would gather and they would be talking only about us. They started cooking the rice and they ate greedily. The people spoke "They tell us not to live on heights. The stream tells us not to live on low-lying areas. If we come to the top, they'll kill us. If we are in the lower areas, the stream will kill us. No matter what, death is inescapable. But ... listen...listen to our words. We aren't born only to die." (35) Naganna could not sleep he was awake listening to the conversations of the elders. The next day it was normal nothing happened but in the evening the people carried a corpse and it was the death of his father. People cried aloud and they knew who was behind the murder. A month after father's death it became necessary to bid farewell to Yennela Dinni. When he was leaving Yennela Dinni he cried a lot. He felt uneasy leaving father, palm trees, ridges of the rice field, crabs running, tumms grove and everything else. He felt as if his childhood came to an end in Yennela Dinni. Then he came to know Urumula Chandrappa and they drove in the cart and got down in Dharmaram as it was the birth place of

Chandrappa and they stayed there and he grew to marriage age and he got married to Ramulu after his marriage his mother bid him farewell and it was final farewell of her. She died on Chandrappa's lap and Ramulu was pregnant and Chandrappa said that if it was a baby girl he would name it as Latchmi and if it was a boy he would name it as Naraiah. Unfortunately Chandrappa died and unable to deliver, Ramulu also died.

From then he started performing for Gangamma's songs with vermilion dance. He lost everyone in his life. When he saw Yellanna he felt like talking for some time. He felt like telling Yellanna the *Puranic* secrets. He felt like sharing with Yellanna the steps and movements Chandrappa has thought him. "Yennela Dinni has chased away this child only for him. Naganna thought that he had come searching for him alone. Yellanna told about Boodevi more than his father and mother and it reminded him of his childhood days he wanted to drink toddy so that he would come out from tired and he walked towards the fields of Pakkela Dinna he saw Yellanna accompanied him and he spoke to him and asked him whether he could learn to dance. He asked him whether he would come to Dharmaram to learn Urumu. Then he went near toddy tree and he drank the toddy and he gave it to Yellanna and he told the story of his birth and when they reached malapalli the people said that they should stay there have food and collect the money and then leave home. After the meal they slept and when he woke up he caressed his feet and felt that he was the one to whom he wanted to teach his art. Yellanna got up and said that his aunty would be crying for him. Many years later Ruth heard the voice of the bird as Reuben imitated it. Ruth feels that both Yellanna and Naganna are walking together in front of her to Yennela Dinni.

In Ruth's words that is a beautiful scene. It was a wonderful journey one of them is known and the other needs to be introduced. "In this country caste is more important than art. Art is also weighed in the scale of caste." (41) Ruth thinks over it again and again.

"They ploughed the fields. Made beds. Watered them. Plucked weeds. Protected the cobs. Harvested the crop. Prepared the threshing floor. Threshed the grain. Heaped them. Separated the chaff from the grain. They did everything. Half hungry, under the stars in the sky, on sand mounds, folding their knees into their bellies, they slept. They did not get hold of the fields. They did not get hold of the field beds. The grains did not belong to them. Without anything belonging to them, they rained sweat on earth. Like that, they were kept cruelly away from the fruit of their toil." (42)

The song was born from every work done on the earth. Planting, sapling, plucking weeds, harvesting the crops and laboring, the coolie mother sang. To forget hunger, to forget the child crying out for milk, to forget the pain of the bent back, the pallavi was heard from the silent voice. Reaping the harvest they sang

the harvest song. "They hid life in those songs. They made them voice sexuality, humour, compassion, not artificially like great poets wrote, but very naturally like air, water, sun, moon and stars." (42) In truth the memories of Ruth are the representation of pain and hatred. "All of it happened like that. It really happened like that. Nagannas and Yellanas did not go after recognition. Didn't dance to be known. Didn't sing. Art was in their veins. In their blood. In the depths of their hearts. In their very sweat." (43) Reuben used these words repeatedly. Naganna used to think his dance was only to worship Ganga and only to please Siva. Now again Ruth thinks of the past which Reuben told her. Naganna and Yellanna entered Yennela Dinni and Naganna thought that it was the village of his childhood after many years he is steeping there. When he left he went with his mother and now he came back as a companion to Yellanna. "That day he tied his childhood in a bundle and left. Today he was coming back carrying pain and loneliness." (43)

Pittodu brought up Yellanna in a different way when Sulochannamma saw her first she said "She looks like the Karanam daughter and praised the girl's colour, hair and dress." (69) Finally Pittodu accepted for the marriage and they gave three rupees and six anas as bride price and got them married. Subhdra did not come in the way of Yellanna. She got pregnant and delivered a male baby. Naganna named it as Sivaiah. They started enacting the puranas in the stage. Naganna thought all the things which Chandrappa had thought to him. It took three months for him and the other artist to learn the dance and drama and one day they started to enact on the stage. Enacting in the stage gave them fame and but the problem came when the enactors has to ask before the play wheather the karnams has come but when Naganna and Yellanna performed they never asked but they said "Have the great 'pedda mala' and the 'pedda madiga' who is as great has come?" (79). The way the people reacted irritated the karnams and it became a major issue. It was a shame for them when the people reacted like this and they could not digest that change. "In their eyes, Naganna and Yellanna appeared like big criminals. They thought they ought not to swallow the heinous act of raising the mala and madiga to the level of a karanam or a kapu. They thought of teaching them both a lesson." (79)

When Atchireddy's father -in-law came to visit his daughter he heard the karanam and Atchireddy talking about Atelladu. He said after listening to everything "If it were me, I would kill those two basterds" (79). When he knew that there was a performance in his place Dibbalamitta he sent word to a man of what must be done. Bukkireddy sent word to the mala and madigas elders the day before the performance. He told that "if Atelladu's performance took place in Dibbalamitta both the palles would be reduced to ashes." (80) If they want to perform they should not call the pedda mala and the pedda madinga the way the karanams and kapus were called. Naganna found it strange and felt that the life was taking him on a different direction. He sent word to Polayi and Mataiah's nephew Musalaiah. All gathered and they planned to make the mala mound cultivable as the karanam's

used the land for bonded labour they even occupied devadasis land so these people started clearing the land of the mala only after the third day the elders in the ooru arranged the meeting karanam and Atchireddy and the other reddy's gathered and when the issue was put up Naganna came forward to tell that it was he who did it and he thought to tell it to karanam when the work was over. This time in the meeting karanam found many difference in the way the people talked. The meeting ended as the karanam got up and said "Families shouldn't sit on our heads. But they aren't clearing up the mala's mound for families to live, right?" (87) The malas and madigas made the malas mound cultivable. They shared the piece of land with each other. They ought to remember Narigadu and Mataiah. Their sacrifice, courage, the blood they shed and the history continued like that. The karanam did not consider much for the mala's land but it irritated him.

The day for the performance in Dibbalamitta was nearing and they were cautious that the people from different places came toward Dibbalamitta in order to support the karanams and reddy's. Naganna felt why should he perform in the ooru by representing everyone and told that he was not a cattle in their shed to do what he wishes? The day of the performance came and it was a dilemma whether to address the gathering or to perform. "The palles did not dare have a performance addressing the elders with respect. Doing such a thing needed lot of courage. Therefore, Yellanna thought not to perform would be the best way to save self-respect." (89) Yellanna said to the people that lets not perform now let's do it on another time. That day the walk to Yennela Dinni was very heavy. It was a great defeat to Naganna he never spoke a word. In the night he sang the song and Yellanna was with him after sometime he told that he felt sleepy and he closed the eyes and he never opened the eyes again.

"Yellanna did everything for Naganna. Till he performed everything, he remained with a strong heart. After everything was over, he felt as if nothing was left for him and everything in front of him had come to nought. He remained all alone staring in all directions. He was searching Naganna in every direction. He brought to mind every word Naganna spoke before his death." (92)

All the people from the village took advance for the performances were coming and going back he was returning the advances he was not able to perform without Naganna. Life was full of inexplicable agony, dryness, a loss that could not be filled, a thirst that could not be quenched. Yellanna became completely sage-like and dumb. Only shadows were lurking about his creativity. The relationship between the society and himself was weakening. He sang. Till now happiness and contentment alone were the reason for his singing. "How he came and how he went away! What did he do and what did he leave undone before he went away! The Urumula mala. Yennela Dinni's Nagannas. Narigadu's son, a great artist. What in fact did

he search for?” (93). Narigadu, Mataiah, Naganna standing in front touching his heart, water gushing out of the eyes they were floating out every second. He sang about the story of Naganna everyone around cried he said “One brave man died a heroic death. Another brave man repaid the debt of blood of that brave man. There was land behind both these people. There was self-respect.” (95) Yellanna left the village and he had no intention to come back. He roamed around and sang song which ever village he went he went first to malapalli and madingapalli and in every song he remembered Subhadra. The Dalits lived with their own rich tradition of art form their plight is represented in this novel. Till the end the Dalit personalities never gave up their self respect and dignity.

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