Appendix

An interview with Prof. Aravind Malagatti, the author of Government Brahman.

This interview is conducted by the research scholar, Shrinivas K. on October 09, 2015 at Kuvempu Institute of Kannada Studies, University of Mysore, Mysore.

Shrinivas: Today, both Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Bihar Chief Minister Jeetan Ram Manzi claim themselves as Dalits. Based on this political phenomenon, do you think there is a need to redefine the word ‘Dalit’?

Malagatti: In the context of your question, there is no need of a new definition. But, in other context I have told that conceptually there is a need. My definition of Dalit is not just related to SC/ST, it is beyond that. One should not define based on government’s facilities. Because, many in SC category there are many non-SCs, in ST category there are some other people who are not STs. Therefore, it’s not possible to have cultural study or historical study or the concept of Dalits’ essence’s study, based on government framework. Today’s reservation had philosophical basis in earlier days. Later, due to vantage various castes were included, and its structure itself was ruined. Many people are out of SC category that resembles SCs. So, keeping the list of castes before, one cannot certify who is Dalit and who is not. It is should be classified on philosophical basis. I have defined that Dalits are those who are called Panchamas or untouchables, being exploited economically, socially, politically, educationally and religiously, and live outside the villages; untouchability becomes the major parameter here.
Untouchability exists between castes; there are sections and untouchability among Brahmins. So, here untouchability should be the parameter, not caste.

Shrinivas: So, one is Dalit by experience, not by caste?

Malagatti: Yes of course.

Shrinivas: The concept of ‘Dalit’ stands on Ambedkar’s ideals, in which real untouchables are left out or forgotten. Who should be blamed for this, ourselves or politicians?

Malagatti: Politicians, influential politicians. Such changes cannot be done by common people. They are the one who change things. Common people have to just rebel against it. There is no other way. But, that rebelling attitude is becoming subordinated because of internal conflicts. Some have experienced less pain, some have experienced more pain. So, the stand of accepting that the conflict is not healthy, will make us little soft. Politicians take benefit of it.

Shrinivas: Let me come to your autobiography. After reading your autobiography in Kannada and its translated version of English, do you feel that you could get another better form than the existing English version?

Malagatti: See, Kannada is Kannada. It is difficult to say that the English version is cent per cent perfect than that of Kannada. But there are efforts to reach that perfection. But, that’s not the ultimate. It is easy to raise questions regarding possible revisions, things to ask, changes to be made. But, it is necessary to accept and appreciate a text like this when there is no scope for such text. So, it not possible to bring same text like Kannada version of Government Brahmana. Some have said to me that English version is not as effective as Kannada. May be their English is better one!
Shrinivas: When it comes to dialect, for instance, grandmother’s songs and words like ‘heat’ (bedige), do you think the English translation could have been better?

Malagatti: In that case, provide better option through critique. A text gets a form through the process of refinement in course of time. Therefore, if you come across such portions, bring it to my notice. I will try to use it wherever it is possible.

Shrinivas: Many Dalit writers use ferocious language. In your language there is gentleness. What could be the reason? Is it your style or intentionally done?

Malagatti: I have used such language intentionally. If you read my first collection of poetry, it is fierce. I didn’t feel like writing *Government Brahmana* in the same way. Because, whom do you want give the ember of fire? When you wish to take the society towards transformation, if you reproach and spit fire at other, will they change? If you convince them of their mistakes, they will change. If you verbally abuse and indict them, it will provoke them to drop a clanger. That creates gap in the society. My writing is not just for Dalits, it is for non-Dalits too. But, in my poetry when I say, “Gandanaguve Sharadamba” (I will become man/husband of Sharada), language seems to be unpleasant to hear. When Siddalingaiah writes, “Ikkarla vadirla” (hit them, beat them), other would immediately react and say, “if you beat, will we be quite?” Instead of that we can push symbolism ahead. Hence, I have changed my language. Some have called it an undertone. For social change, there is no need of bloodshed; even change of mind is also a big one. My autobiography has the ability of changing a common reader. A reader, who had
read it, shared the changes in him. Non-Dalits have appreciated it, and Dalits have flaunted it on their heads.

**Shrinivas:** Why haven’t you mentioned the names of individuals in your autobiography?

**Malagatti:** Yes, if an individual’s name is mentioned, he is convicted. There are thousands of such individual. Here, issue is important, not person; not even me. I don’t wish to be in my autobiography. My ‘autobiography’ is just a dummy; through it I put forward problems. It is the autobiography of Aravind Malagatti that tells theoretical issues. I have not written about the path of struggle. If it is written in that manner, it will take the dramatic form. What is important is to transform the society, not to self-gloryification.

**Shrinivas:** So, you are giving a new dimension to the genre.

**Malagatti:** Of course! Some say that Kannada Dalit autobiographies are derived from Marathi. No. When I began to write, no Marathi Dalit autobiography was translated into Kannada. I knew that autobiographies were being written over there. But, certainly there is difference between my autobiography and Marathi Dalit autobiographies style; the structure differs. They write an autobiography step by step in the form of novel. You look at any Marathi Dalit autobiography, it follows chronological order. The path of struggle is interpreted from critical perspective; one gets confused whether it is an autobiography or something else. *Government Brahmana* is problem centered text. Incident like “The she-buffalo on heat and the he-buffalo after her” reveals the stigma of untouchability attached to animals like human being. Incident like “When Handyas hose was slashed” tells that even a dog experiences the banishment. I have to show the giant form of the problem and its deepened roots in our society. I have selected only those incidents
that reflect the real problems. Everything can’t be told, but objectivity myst be maintained. Like that, water related issues are told through instances. Social problems are the protagonists of my autobiography. I have told this naturally, not exceeding factualness. Reader is not a fool; he will come to know when text is deviated from factuality. He starts to criticize the text. Then the purpose of a Dalit autobiography will be vanished. There is such a accusation on Marathi Dalit autobiographies. A true autobiography affects the reader. So, an autobiographer must be cent per cent sincere.

**Shrinivas:** There is much focus on your childhood experience in your autobiography. Why?

**Malagatti:** I didn’t intend to highlight my childhood, I wanted to highlight problems. The structure of my autobiography’s second part is different. There is more information in my poetry about my autobiography. It is important to know which form is suitable to which matter. The subject matter of play, poetry, novel and autobiography will vary. All problems cannot be told in one form. Interests of each form’s readers are different.

**Shrinivas:** Are there any changes in stylistics and objectivity in the second part of your autobiography?

**Malagatti:** When it comes to style, I delayed one year due to the confusion; whether to write in novel form or earlier form. If it is short and written into parts, readers can read it in bits. If it is lengthy, it may be difficult to readers. Approximately twenty Kannada autobiographies have followed this style. Instead of historiography, it is named as ‘autobiography’ because, the life incidents are told in the form of stories. *Government Brahmana* is acutely new in terms of style, structure, language and subject. It is problem centered autobiography,
transformation oriented autobiography. It is not self-glorifying autobiography, or not a story of self-pity.

Shrinivas: How did modernity help you in paving your identity?

Malagatti: I haven’t expressed directly, I have done indirectly. To talk about my caste and my ex-girlfriend, isn’t it an issue of identity? Was it possible to narrate such incidents, if one didn’t have confidence in own thoughts? One can speak fearlessly of one’s identity only after leaving behind old tradition. Such events come across even in Siddalingaiah’s autobiography. But, it becomes adjunct as small tales. His second part of autobiography is completely restricted to struggle. Here, *Government Brahmana* can be read as a story, a problem, an experience or stories in relation to each other. I have spoken more about identity and modernity in the second part. There also I have not talked about latest issues unlike in poems. There, I have discussed my role and position in my village and globalization. For instance, I say, “Ganakakku hakiddaare janivaara” (Sacred thread is put even on computer). Tomorrow, untouchable is the one who writes with pen.

Shrinivas: So, dalit is lost in this modern world. How should he endorse it? How should he protect his essence of Dalit?

Malagatti: I have written, “Matte kudiyaakakeniside bogaseyoddi, etti hakida neeru” (Again want to drink, the poured water with my cupped-hand). Pouring water is a mark of untouchability. I feel as though I want it. That untouchability is bearable. But, untouchability in city is danger. It cannot be distinguished. Deeds and words are completely different.

Shrinivas: How should Dalits be cautioned there? How should they face such challenges preserving their identity?
**Malagatti:** Hanging yourself in the name of identity is not correct. Put your identity into fire if you can’t gel with the society in the name of identity. Identity is necessary. Till when? We need identity till we gain the self-confidence to face challenges. But, identity must not be the reason for split in society. Identity should unite society. If you go on to say ‘Dalit and non-Dalit’ till your death, what is the meaning in social consciousness? I don’t consent the preservation of Dalitism in the name of identity. To some level it is necessary. After reaching that level, we should make it a habit to think like other common people. Fuming over non-dalits is not life. Living all together itself is society. Failed to do so, we cannot be human beings. Dalit movement says, “Be humans, treat us as human”. At the end, if we ourselves don’t get such mentality, what is the use of the Movement? Therefore, there must be boundary line to the question of identity. It is not correct to build wall of in the name of identity. We should love human demos. We should not love it based on caste. There is not meaning if we love caste while we condemn the same caste system.

**Shrinivas:** In recent days, it seems Dalits have forgotten Dalit. Why?

**Malagatti:** Those, who have come from vulnerable conditions, will not forget. Those, who have been brought without pain, cannot live like conscious people. There are factions among Dalits. We need to overcome all that. If we can’t… then we don’t have any moral right to blame upper caste people. But, the caste roots have spread so deep that it is not easy to uproot it.

**Shrinivas:** We shall work towards it, sir.

**Malagatti:** Good luck.