CHAPTER - VI

THE EXPLOITATION OF WOMAN: TWO NOVELS OF
GEETA NAGABHUSHANA

INTRODUCTION

Womens’ writing in Kannada is often ridiculed as the one, which did not deserve serious consideration. True, most of them did in fact indulge in the depiction of much clichéd and emotion-filled family dramas or the mundane feminine aspirations of food, dress, jewellery, beautification and gossip. But looking at writers of such eminence as M.K.Indira, Triveni, Sara Abubaker, Vaidehi, Geeta Nagabhushana and others, the observations appear not only uncharitable but prejudiced as well. The Bandaya School of literature in Kannada has sheltered inter-alia, three major offshoots of creative expression in it, representing the sensibilities of, the dalit, the woman and the Muslim. Woman writing received a major fillip thanks to the awareness created by the Bandaya movement. Women writers identifying themselves with the movement are bold, assertive and talented as well. The result is well discernable. The talent of women writers in Kannada came to be openly acknowledged, when the Central Sahitya Academy announced its award to Geeta Nagabhushana in 2005- first time ever to a woman writer in the history of Kannada literature.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Among the women writers today, Geeta deserves a special mention for her meaningful contribution to Kannada literature. Using a theme and a
content more relevant to the contemporary society, and told in her own daring style Geeta’s works have stunned many a reader for the exuberant narrative as well as the crude reality that unfolded through them, an endeavour no woman writer had attempted hitherto. In a way, Geeta successfully came out of the confines of the women’s literature, which, with its characteristic stress on the tender and sentimental, had never been considered seriously.

Geeta hails from Gulbarga, a district and a divisional head quarters situated near the northern tip of Karnataka. The region comprising of the districts of Bidar, Gulbarga and Raichur is known as Hyderabad Karnataka, which was under the administration of erstwhile Nizams. The region is characterized by a very hot climate, an arid soil and frequent instances of drought and famine. Backward as it is, Hyderabad Karnataka was the hub of feudal practices till recently.

Evidently, Geeta has gone through the harshness of life obtained at the Gulbarga region. The texture of the society thereat is very well known to the author which explains the authentic account one comes across with while going through her literary works. As critic Gurulinga Kapse opines that the Gulbarga region is ‘special in its environment, language, pains of the exploited and sharp sensibilities of women’. Geeta herself gives an account of how the pains of the innocent and illiterate rural women, the exploitation they are subjected to, the tortures and atrocities they undergo and their being subjected to decadent social practices such as their solemn pledges to Mapur tayi, bettale seve (worshipping in the nude) and Jogani system (Devadasi system) left an indelible impression on her at an early age. The loathsome practices to which women were subjected to carried the sanction
of society and religion. Yet, not much was known about them or the region in the echelons of literature.

Belonging to a backward caste named kabbaliga, Geeta is also well versed with the pain and anguish of women suffered in these societies. For her, the pain, hatred, violence, anger, insults heaped on women was nothing new and the society at large endorsed such atrocities. Deeply disturbed by such a situation, Geeta took to writing in the true spirit of Bandaya. Hers is a quest with a multi-dimensional approach. It is an approach of a socialist, humanist and feminist put together. She is perturbed by the double incidence of exploitation on the women belonging to the downtrodden communities. She says:

‘It is true that the upper caste men and the system as a whole have been exploiting the dalit women. Also, it is equally true that the men belonging to the very own communities of these women, knowingly or unknowingly, subjected them to severe violence.’ Observing so much, she is aware of the limitations of a rural dalit woman for whom the word rebellion did not exist and who puts up with every insult heaped on her without even letting out a murmer.

With this reality working deep in her psyche, Geeta depicts the lady protagonists in her novels as the ones who do not compromise with circumstances. They do not put up with the injustice heaped on them. They fight against the system with whatever little might they have, just as the caked up and dry cow-dung burns at the first spark of fire. But put up against the fire - power of an atom bomb, the social system that is, their protestations prove futile. Geeta does not take this as a deterrent. As long as
the fight is on, they are on the right path. Traversing in the said path may often cause a value predicament. Such a predicament is insignificant for Geeta as she firmly believes that ‘it is life which is more important for the poor, not the values.’

Geeta represents that rare section of women writers who dared to question the system. Influenced by the Pragathisheela writers like A.N. Krishna Rao, Kattimani, M.K. Indira and others initially, Geeta turned later on to the Bandaya mode. The latter provided her a greater scope to highlight the social evils of the rural women belonging to the down trodden communities. In Bandaya she found a forum, of like-minded individuals with social and economic backgrounds similar to herself, which spiritedly put up a new literary movement in Kannada. There emerged a new generation of literates who wished to make literature as their medium through which they can fight the social evils. Just fifty years before, education to Shudras was not only inaccessible but unheard of as well. But the neo-literates now proved a point that creation of literature was not an exclusive prerogative of the upper castes for the talent bore no correlation with caste or religion.

Going however was not easy for Geeta in the beginning. Firstly there were threats through mail, then through telephone and later a direct attack on her life in order to ensure that she quit writing or made amends to her approach. To her credit, Geeta stood on her ground firmly, with an unwavering resolve to continue with her literary fight against the social evils. Saraswathi Chimmalagi highlights that Geeta is one of those rare personalities who got stronger by every hardship that came their way. Born in the pre-independence era to parents who were utterly poor and illiterate,
Geeta was resolute enough to pursue education and took to writing amidst an upper class that was highly derisive.\textsuperscript{10} Ms. Chimmalagi further compares Geeta to a lotus that blossomed in the slush of backward Hyderabad region and in the house of a backward community.

‘Born in an insignificant village named Savalagi, she rose like a full moon in that sky of Kannada novel. Combining the aspirations of both Pragathisheela and Bandaya movements, Using the strong native lingo of Gulbarga, Geeta highlighted various facets of exploitation in that hypocrisy and lust ridden world dominated by men and the tearful existence of women in it. It is a matter of great pride that Geeta has brought out as many as 31 literary creations living amidst the situation aforesaid.’\textsuperscript{11}

It is clear that the theme of subjugation and exploitation of rural women belonging to the down trodden communities is the mainstay of Geeta’s novels. The oppression itself has various dimensions such as:

1. Social, where a women is treated as an object of pleasure and fit enough to be subjugated.
2. Economic, where the financial dispensations discrimated against her.
3. Religious, where in the name of gods and goddesses she serviced the physical needs of upper class/caste men. And
4. Physical, where she is subjected to sexual exploitation at the earliest available opportunity.

A writer of significance for the past three decades, Geeta’s contribution is well acknowledged. Recognition has been accorded to her through honorary membership in the Karnataka Sahitya academy (1993-95),
Pustaka pradhikara (1992-94), Gulbarga university senate (1980-85), selection committee for film awards and as a towering glory, appointed as the president of Karnataka sahitya academy. (2005-08). Her novel ‘Baduku’ has been conferred with the central sahitya academy award in 2005. She has also been conferred with the ‘Rajyotsava’ award, a top award from the government of Karnataka.

WORKS SELECTED FOR THE STUDY

The process of evaluation of Geeta’s novels will necessarily revolve around four of her novels namely:

1. ‘Hasi mamsa mattu haddugalu’ which depicts the sexual exploitation of a helpless woman
2. 2.’Dange ‘which deals with the rebellion of a woman against her paramour who is out to kill her daughter.
3. ‘Mapura tayiya makkalu’ which deals with the exploitative devadasi system and
4. ‘Baduku’ which depicts the plight of women spread over 4 generations.

Of the above, first two novels have been chosen for this study. Main reasons for their selection is that the first novel deals exclusively with the theme of exploitation in a world dominated by mean minded men. In the second the man is accommodative but only till it suits him and he turns murderous when his social standing is threatened. This novel deals with the rebellion of woman, a rare phenomenon in the literary parlance. Strictly speaking the third novel also should have been included in this study. As the
study has already becomes voluminous and the canavas too big it is decided to confine the study for the first two novels only.

HASI MAMSA MATTU HADUGALU –THE STORY

Hasi mamsa mattu haddugalu deals with the story of a helpless woman named Lacchi who is subjected to cruel sexual exploitation not only in the village she lived but also in such places where the shelters belonged to the government namely the jail and a remand home situated in the urban locality.

Lacchi, a holeya girl who is orphaned by the death of her parents, is forced to live a lonely life at Bhimalli. Her plans to marry Kashinata, did not materialise during the life time of her parents as he belonged to madiga community. Due to the onset of drought every one in her community migrate to bigger cities like Bombay, Hyderabad and Bellary in search of livelihood. Lacchi stays back at the village as her lover Kashinath, being a bonded labourer to the house hold of Kulkarni, is not allowed to leave his master’s household unless the loan taken by his forefathers got liquidated. Kulkarni’s lustful eyes fall on Lacchi, but disappointed by the latter’s protestations to sexual overtures he frames her in a false theft case and hands her over to the police. In the station she is gang raped, and being unable to pay the fine imposed by the court for the theft, she is also jailed. Kashinath too abandons her after hearing the rape that had taken place in the station. Nowhere to go after the jail term, Lacchi is shifted to a remand home. The matron of the remanding home gives lacchi away to her ‘friends’ who gang rape her in a travellers bungalow. Later Basanni, a class four government employee and a sex maniac, marries her and makes her pregnant. He too feels cheated after
knowing the jail and remand home incidents and abandons her and the child. Unable to bear the cruelty and intimidation, Lacchi tries to kill herself and the child by jumping into the deep water pits that surrounded the fort, but is rescued by a passerby. Lacchi is saved but the child is dead. She is booked for twin offences—for allegedly killing her child by throwing it into the water and for attempting to commit suicide—and is jailed again, this time for life. Too shocked at the turn of events, Lacchi turns a man hater, dumb and incohesive losing all interest in the life around in her.

The central point here is that the sufferings of Lacchi are a direct result of the cruelty unleashed on her by the feudal lord Kulkarni and a system which was not only inhuman but also impassive.

**DANGE – THE STORY**

The novel Dange deals with the rare theme in which a woman named Durgi rebels against her paramour when the latter weaves a plot to murder her daughter for having dared to marry his own son. Hitherto the relation was fine. Even the fact that Durgi, the protagonist, belonged to a very low caste had not deterred her paramour Kulkarni Govindappa from pursuing a relationship with her. But the marriage of Durgi’s daughter to his son was one thing he could not take as his standing at the society suffered. A high class Brahmin, his caste was not a deterrent for a ‘relation’ between himself and Durgi and his son with Durgi’s daughter but his traditional and oppressive mindset did not approve of a marriage between the latter duo.

Durgi, orphaned by the death of her parents had no alternative but to live with the family of her step-sister. On one occasion the step-sister’s husband rapes her and to conceal the thing marries Durgi off to an idler
named Mallappa. Mallappa was a good for nothing fellow, could not earn a farthing and in the end deserts his wife and infant daughter to join a group of sanyasis. Durgi leaves the village and goes to another named Karelli-paati where she meets Kulkarni who had a crush on her on an earlier occasion. He takes upon the responsibility of ‘keeping’ her, provides food clothing and shelter and takes good care of them as if Durgi was his second wife. Life was smooth for Durgi till the day her daughter Savitri now a grown up and educated girl reveals that she and Kulkarni’s son are in love with each other and planned to get married shortly. Being children of the new era, the caste factor did not bother them much. But it bothered Kulkarni and his wife a lot. An infuriarated Kulkarni plans to have Savitri murdered by hired goons. Alarmed by the turn of events, Durgi, kills Kulkarni by pushing him off the speeding train in order to save her own daughter. Durgi’s maternal instinct scores over a cruel and hypocritical society.

**SETTING**

Both the novels are set in villages of Gulbarga region. They are remote and far removed from a civilized way of existence. Lacking in amenities and basic infrastructure, these villages are the breeding grounds of ignorance, misery and suffering. Irrespective of the names with which they are called, they are all alike as far as their backwardness was concerned. Tough living conditions, abject poverty, oppression and superstition characterized all these villages be it Bandelli, or Bhimalli or Karelli-pati. The majority of the population thereat lived at bare subsistence levels. The people mostly were wage earners with a few lucky being the marginal farmers. The farmers were totally dependent on the mercy of rain god for survival. Drought and famine plagued the area quite
often forcing the villagers to migrate to far off cities like Bombay, Hyderabad and Bellary. The author describes the situation as under:

‘No water to drink. No work to do. With stomachs pasted to their backs, people stared at the sky every second. It looked like an eternal oven. The fire-spitting Sun was surrounded by white clouds which looked pale just as patients suffering from tuberculosis.’¹²

The effects of such an existence were terrible. There was poverty, hunger, mal-nutrition, diseases, misery and suffering everywhere. Life in such situation was further worse for the women folk for they were compelled to sell their bodies in order to keep the family going.

‘For survival people sold the very idols of gods they worshipped. Which other god could there be in front of the god of food? The modesty of young women got bare in the markets of Gulbarga.’¹³

The conditions aforesaid occur in the region at regular intervals. The authors tone represents only the reality, not sarcasm, when she describes as under:

‘If Gulbarga district witnesses a good harvest one year, the next four years it will see famine.’¹⁴

Amidst the sea of miserable existence there appeared a few islands of affluence. A handful of people, belonging to the upper caste and class, owned the major portion of cultivable lands and remained unaffected by the hardships caused by an unkind nature. As a rule, the fertile lands belonged to them, and the ready access to the nearest water source helped
to keep their plantations green so that they were not unaffected by the drought or famine.\textsuperscript{15}

There are times, rarely though, the region witnesses heavy rains. Even then it is misery for the poor and the downtrodden, whose huts get submerged or inundated in the floods caused by heavy rains. The upper class remained unaffected for they lived in the comfort of their pucca houses. However, heavy rains caused them worry too, for they were afraid that the crops in their fields may get affected.\textsuperscript{51}

In such a situation, education, sanitation, medical facilities, transportation sounded like lofty and impracticable ideals. The rich sent their wards to nearby towns for education but for the poor it remained a distant dream. They readily believed that the misery in the current life was due to their sins committed in an early life or due to the curse of the gods or goddesses they worshipped. Superstition leads to unhealthy cultural practices such as the nude worship, child marriages, the devadasi system, and others.

\textbf{LAND HOLDINGS}

The novels do not state the exact land holdings of the individual owners of the villages concerned. However, going by the contents of these novels, it is easily understood that the land holdings were disproportionate. Few individuals belonging to the upper echelons of the society owned most of the lands available in the village(s), rendering the remaining with paltry or no holdings at all. Author’s description needs to be cited here:

‘To the north of the rivulet, right on its banks, there lies the banana and sugar plantations of Chembassappa Gowda. That long and black
stretch of lands with alluvial soil, further up on the left bank, belonged to Baburao Kulkarni. Belonging, in this context, means owning through usurpation. Poor man’s lands were pawned against loans at exorbitant rates of interest which in the longer run grew beyond the repaying capacity of the loanee resulting in the forefietment of lands.’

The impact of interest, compounded visciously, was indeed back-breaking. The Insolvency was a foregone conclusion, and the thumb impressions of the ignorant villagers which authorized the forced sale was a mere formality to adjust the lands against the outstanding loan. The poor man is rendered landless in the bargain. Memories of this injustice do work upon the psyche of these hapless individuals when they express a glee over every hardship that fall upon the usurper.

The debt trap apart, lands were also usurped by sheer opportunism. The lands of Dyavappa were usurped by entrapping him in a legal tangle. Dyavappa had raped his own daughter-in-law, and made her pregnant. Unable to live with the shame and humiliation the daughter-in-law committed suicide. Under such circumstances, the most acceptable course of action would have been to hand Dyavappa over to the police and let the law take its course. However in this instance, the wise men of the village, under the guise of saving him from the impending prosecution, usurp all his lands and hush up the case recording a false reason to the death of Kashevva, the daughter-in-law. The author voices her anguish through a character as under:
‘This should not have happened. But has been happening all along for generations together. The rule by men does prescribe its own standards of justice.’

The author’s voice may sound feminist, but the fact remains that the ownership of lands in an Indian village is generally with the upper caste Gowdas, Kulkarnis, Patils and such others. The rest of the population is left with meagre or no land holdings at all. Such people languish by toiling in the lands of the upper class owners, for a paltry remuneration as wages. Bondage of labour against a loan or obligation, although illegal, persisted in the countryside.

**FEUDAL RELATIONS**

The society as a whole was polarized in to two blocks. One was the block of landowners who were few in number but by virtue of their ownership of large areas of cultivable lands and plantations, and with their access to the water sources were the powerful masters at the village. They lived the life of comfort, leisure and authority. Financially sound, thanks to the accumulated wealth for generations, they remained unaffected even during the periods of drought, famine or natural calamity.

The other block consisted of small and marginal landowners, the landless and the serfs. The landowners enlisted them for labouring in their fields for works such as sowing, de-weeding, maintenance and harvesting. Wages were paid mostly in kind and on rare occasions in cash. The remuneration was barely enough for subsistence. The surplus accrued was for the benefit of the masters who maintained a high standard of living at the cost of the labouring class.
The household chores of the affluent were attended to by the hired labour or those who served them by tradition for generations. The system of bonded labour was in vogue. The bondage was either hereditary or against an unpaid loan availed from the master. In the latter case there is no relief from the bondage until the loan got repaid fully. Ex: Kashinath is not allowed to go out into the city to make an earning during the drought. Kulkarni is insistent that he clear his dues first before he ventured out.

‘You, bastardly individual, your loan is yet to be repaid. How can you leave my job and go just like that? Wherever you go, I will have you located, brought back and break the bones of your posterior. Understand?’

It is not only the immobility that characterizes the bonded labour but the physical torture that ensued a minor error as well. The novels make the mention of several such characters namely, Kalya, Kamya, Bhimya, Kashalappa Phakirappa, Kashinath and so on.

Since the labour available was cheap and plenty, and mostly landless, the novels do not indicate an existence of any arrangement of cultivation on rent or on crop sharing basis. Forefeiture of lands against an unpaid loan was the desired option of the landowner. As the majority of the labourers were illiterate, the contents of loan documents remained unknown. The quantum of loan mentioned in those documents will be several times higher than the loan received. On some occasions the loan documents were fraudulent, where the thumb impressions of an illiterate farmer or the labourer were forged. Dyavappa is forced to sign away his
lands to the Gowda of the village, for not referring the case of his daughter-in-law’s suicide to the police.

The exploitation did not remain confined to the physical and financial level. Apart from subjecting the poor to hard labour, paltry wages, and an inferior social standing, their women were subjected to sexual exploitation too. The sexual favours were claimed as a matter of right. The exercise of this right assumes ridiculous proposition when the Kulkarni of Bhimalli orders Phakkirappa to bring his newly wed wife to him. Kulkarni demands that he should be the first to ‘taste’ the new bride arriving in the village. In the days of drought when the entire village had gone in search of livelihood elsewhere, Kulkarni attempts to take advantage of a starving Lacchi, in return of a pumpkin taken from his garden. When denied, Lacchi is framed in a theft case and handed over to the police, ruining her life forever.

‘Keeping’ a woman is seen as a status symbol. But, however well kept a woman is, she is not an equal to the legally wedded wife. Savitri, daughter of Durgi, observes the changing times as under:

‘For only satisfying their bodily urges, the upper caste men ‘kept’ the low caste women. We too served them faithfully; some times more than their wives, for the entire life…but the times have changed. Now, if they want us they will have to marry and take us to their homes as wives….’

Durgi, anguished by the folly, of such a relation gets vocal:

‘What value a Madiga woman like me has in front of Kulkarni? It depends on his estimation. We not only pledge the power of our arms, but
our youthfulness, our desires, dreams and what not… Our entire life is on sale and they have been the purchasers.…’

The Gowdas, Kulkarnis and Patils also acted as dispensers of justice in personal disputes that arose in the village. Forming part of the village panchayati, an informal village court, they decided which case should go to the police and which did not. Cases of all communities, other than the holeyas and madigas were referred to them for deliberating and passing judgement. For holeyas and madigas, where the cases were first deliberated in their respective caste panchayats, they acted as the appellate authority.25

EXPLOITATION- ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL

Economic exploitation is evident from the fact that the wages paid to the workers were meagre and barely enough for subsistence. They were paid mostly in kind, only occasionally in cash, limiting whatever buying power they had to the minimum. There were differential wages for men and women, the former getting more than the latter. Kashinath’s toil fetched him only a roti from the Kulkarni household.26 Even during the famine, Lacchi was paid only a rupee per day.27 Kulkarni does not allow even a bird to sip water in his well.28 Lacchi’s taking away of a sweet pumpkin is regarded as an act of theft. There is hunger and starvation everywhere during the drought. People are forced to go to far off cities in search of livelihood. While in cities, the men subjected themselves to rigorous labour and women resorted to beggary and prostitution.

Poor, ignorant and docile, the villagers were, exploited not only in the village but in cities as well. Be it a hospital or a remand home or a jail or a traveller’s bungalow there is exploitation everywhere.
The novels record instances of religious conversions taking place in the hope of a better livelihood.\textsuperscript{53}

**EXPLOITATION-SEXUAL**

In both the novels, the main focus is on the aspect of sexual exploitation of poor and low caste women. The novels record numerous instances where men belonging to the affluent sections of the society used women belonging to the downtrodden communities to fulfil their carnal desires. Some of the instances quoted in the novels may sound bizarre but fit in to the type of society depicted thereat.

Firstly, there is this bizarre notion about the ‘right’ of a village lord who wanted to be the first man to enjoy a newly wed bride. The man to whom the bride is married to has to offer his wife first to the village lord and ‘take’ her only thereafter. The notion is not discreet but loud and clear. The Kulkarni of Bhimalli fumes on Phakkirappa for ignoring the village custom, by not sending his newly wed wife to him.

‘Hey you bastard! Don’t you know the tradition of this village? You can have your marriage consummated only after the village Gowda and Kulkarni tasted your wife first.’\textsuperscript{29}

Durgi, after being deserted by her husband Malappa, is hounded by the Gowdas, Kulkarnis and other rich men of the village for sexual favours.\textsuperscript{30} Lacchi’s life is ruined for not succumbing to the seduction of Kulkarni.\textsuperscript{31} Durgi is pestered relentlessly by Irapagasi Gowda. By falling in to Kulkarni Govindappa’s trap Durgi gets a respite from her otherwise hard life but at the end is on the verge of losing her only daughter. Kulkarni Govindappa is agreeable for a relation between his son and Durgi’s
daughter but opposes the marriage tooth and nail. He even hatches a conspiracy to eliminate Savitri when the latter is firm on marrying his son. The old priest of Bhimalli tries to molest Lacchi.32

Violation of women was a common practice in the villages depicted. Women from the down trodden communities were particularly vulnerable. The author’s observations on this phenomenon is candid enough to drive home the point:

‘It is true that the upper caste men and the system as a whole have been exploiting the dalit women. Also, it is equally true that the men belonging to the very own communities of these women, knowingly or unknowingly, subjected them to severe vilolence’4

Durgi is raped by Hanumanta, the husband of her step-sister.33 Dyavappa uses his own daughter-in-law for sexual gratification.34 Basanni inflicts brutal sex on his wife Lacchi.35

Outside the village, the police and other government functioneries proved no different than the village lords. Lacchi is gangraped by the policemen36 and also by the ‘friends’ of the president of the remand home.37 The latter make use of the government traveller’s bungalow for the heinous act.

Being helpless and lacking courage to take on the system, women tend to resign to their fates.38 Rarely though; some of them rebel against their men and act decisively.39

The brutal sufferings inflicted by men on their women on some occasions resulted in disastrous consequences. Lachi turns to become a
man hater for she now believed that men are born to slit the throats and suck the blood of women.\textsuperscript{40} Lakkavva deserts her husband complains to police and have her husband, gowda and Kulkarni arrested for hushing up the suicide of Kashevva.\textsuperscript{41} Durgi kills her paramour by pushing him out of a speeding train.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{THE CASTE FACTOR}

The social stratification in these villages was made on the basis of caste. As usual Brahmins headed the heirarchy followed by Lingayaths and other sudras. Most of the village lands were owned by either a Brahmin or a Lingayath. All respectable jobs such as, the job of police patil, the village accountant was held by the upper caste people. They lived in houses built by brick and mortar. They headed the village panchayats and dispensed justice to the village folk. The lower caste people were expected to rise and pay respect to their caste superiors. As the author describes ‘the Brahmin and the Banajiga (Lingayath) Gowda were conscious of their madi (purity).\textsuperscript{43} It is a different matter altogether that they consume toddy and keep dalit women for their mundane pleasures.

People belonging to all other castes were reduced to the status of small and marginal farmers, the landless and the serfs. Among the landless there were agricultural labourers, serfs and bonded labourers. Sudras, other than Lingayats were further divided in to various castes and sub-castes. Occupation was the main criteria for caste division. Kuruba (The shepherd), Beda (hunting community), Kammara (the smith), Kabbaliga (fishermen), Eeliga (The toddy tender) Lambani (wandering nomad), Uppara and Kataka were some of the castes that figure in the novels. The
occupations observed are the land-based activities, animal husbandry, fishing, toddy tending, smithy and others.

In such a caste-ridden society, it was only natural that the impending marriage between a Brahmin boy and a dalit girl causes consternation among the villagers.

**UNTOUCHABILITY**

Practice of untouchability is an accepted way of living for the people of the villages appearing in the novels. Holeyas, Madigas and Dohars are the untouchable castes living in the area. They lived in separate settlements outside the village. Their habitat is marked by thatched houses and dirty lanes. A touch, from them was considered inauspicious. They were not allowed to touch even the toddy trees in the village. Bewildered, the author wonders why at all it was inauspicious for a dalit to touch a toddy tree when the toddy itself is in much demand by the superior castes.⁴⁴

The Holeyas and Madigas lived in separate settlements. Inter-marriage between them is not permissible. Kashinath’s proposal to marry Lacchi does not materialize as Lacchi fears her father’s disapproval.⁴⁵ No wonder then, the marriage between a Brahmin boy (Kulkarni govindappa’s son) and a dalit girl (Durgi’s daughter) causes so much consternation in the society.

However, when it came to have relation with a dalit woman, the upper caste Gowdas and Kulkarni ignored the untouchability aspect. Forgetting Durgi’s caste origin, Kulkarni even eats the food prepared by her. Irapagasi, a gowda, vies with Kulkarni to have sexual favours from Durgi. But the relation is purely extra-marital. They were opposed to a
marriage outside one’s caste, but not for a relation. Govindappa would not have had any objection to his son having an affair with Savitri. He gets upset when they make their intention public to get married. Even Durgi tries to remind Savitri of their caste origin. An educated woman, Savitri is firm in her conviction. She follows the path set by the 12th century poet and social reformer Basava.

There is another interesting episode in the novel Dange. Girija, a born dalit and an accomplished musician, is consorted by Sethji, a marwari individual who had fallen for her music and dance. He came after her, leaving his home, family and everything. They lived together like a husband and wife.46

A dalit man having relation with an upper caste woman was a heinous crime but only when it becomes public. One such instance is quoted in the novel ‘Hasi mamsa mattu haddugalu ‘where the dalit labour Kalya is shown to be having sex with Heerabai, wife of Kulkarni. The affair is clandestine but remains a well guarded secret.47

Coming to food habits, dalits made a feast out of the dead cattle. Phakkirappa makes a pun of this habit:

‘We are born to eat the flesh of their dead cattle. You, violators of your own mothers, why don’t you eat the flesh of gowdas and Kulkarnis? Because your teeth are not that strong…Because those ill-born have removed your teeth, up to the very roots of them, so that you won’t attempt to eat their flesh.’48
SUPERSTITION

SubJECTED to live in that harsh geographical terrain which experience drought and famine every alternative year, sometimes three years in a row in a block of four years, suffering from abject poverty, penury and the resultant anguish made the villagers to grow superstitious. The prophecies of godmen like ‘Humuka Sidda’ were believed readily. Bhimalli Lakkavva, the goddess of the village Bhimalli, was devoutly served for they believed in her powers to bless or curse the devotees. Mapura tayi of Chunchoor is a much revered goddess. It is in her name, several women turn in to Devadasis and indulge in religious prostitution. God Hirodya is believed to bless barren women with children. Savadatti Yallamma, Jivanigi Ambabai, Ranaja peer and other gods and goddesses were worshipped devoutly. An accident, ill luck or even an unexpected happy event were all believed to be the curses or blessings of these gods and goddesses.

CONCLUSION

Geeta Nagabhushana is known to her bold and no-holds barred narrative. The society at large observable through her novels was the one the author was closely associated with while she grew. From close quarters, she saw the atrocities, insults, injuries and inequalities heaped on women by the feudal society. She, painfully observes that the low caste woman had to bear with double incidence of oppression and exploitation, from the society at large and from her own men as well. The incidents of exploitation and oppression in her novels selected for this study may be categorized as 1. Economic-where the discrimination in wages outside and living on or snatching away her earnings by her men 2. Lack of freedom to
take her decisions in matters concerning her own life and 3. Sexual exploitation, both inside and outside her home. Survival in such circumstances becomes painful and harrowing.

Geeta’s style may appear harsh but it is a reflection of a rebellious mind, for rebellion has become necessary for a woman, to express herself forcefully and demand proper treatment from the society at large. It is in this context her works deserve serious attention. The current chapter has taken care of this imperative need of seriously considering the works of a woman writer to bring about a sense of completion to the approach of our study.
FOOT NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Geeta Nagabhushana when asked on her immediate provocations to take up writing. From an interview in Kalaburgiya Spandana p-77

3. Ibid p-79

4. Ibid p-79

5. Ibid p-87

6. Ibid p-83

7. Ibid p-78

8. Ibid p-90

9. Ibid p-84

10. Dr. Saraswathi Chimmalagi. From the editors note, Kalaburgiya spandana Pub by Karnataka sahitya academy 2004.

11. Dr. Saraswathi Chimmalagi. Ibid
12. ‘ಚಿತ್ರದ ಬಾರೆ, ಭವಿಷ್ಯದ ಚರ್ಘುಮಾಣ. ನೆಲೆಯಾದ ಮುಂಕುಂದು ಸಂಕ್ರಾಂತಿಯ ಅಧರಿಸಿದ ಅನುಮಾನ. ಅವರು ಮುಂಸಾಯಿಯ ನೀಡುತ್ತಿದ್ದರೆ ಬಲಿ ಚನೆತು. ಮೊದಲಾದರೆ ಸವಾಲು ಈ ಸಂವಾನ ನೆಲೆಗೆ ರಚಿಸಿದರೆ ತನ್ನ ಪ್ರತಿಯೊಂದು ಭೂಮಿಯ ವಿವಿಧ ಅಧಿಕೃತರು ಸೇವನೇ ಈ ಹೋಸೆಯರು.’  From the novel Hasi Mamsa Mattu Haddugalu by Geeta Nagabhushana. Published by Kannada pustaka pradhikara 1978 p-45


14. ‘ಧ್ವಾನದ ಸ್ಮರಣ ವ್ಯಾಖ್ಯೆಯನ್ನು ಕ್ರಮಾಂಕವಾಗಿ ರಚಿಸಿದರೆ. HMMH p-44.

15. HMMH p-47

16. ‘ಚುನಾವಣ ಭವಿಷ್ಯದ ವ್ಯಾಖ್ಯೆಯನ್ನು ಕ್ರಮಾಂಕವಾಗಿ ರಚಿಸಿದರೆ. ಭೂಮಿಯ ವಿದ್ಯೋತನ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಯನ್ನು ಕ್ರಮಾಂಕವಾಗಿ ರಚಿಸಿದರೆ. ಅವರು ಚುನಾವಣ ಭವಿಷ್ಯದ ವ್ಯಾಖ್ಯೆಯನ್ನು ಕ್ರಮಾಂಕವಾಗಿ ರಚಿಸಿದರೆ. ಅವರು ಚುನಾವಣ ಭವಿಷ್ಯದ ವ್ಯಾಖ್ಯೆಯನ್ನು ಕ್ರಮಾಂಕವಾಗಿ ರಚಿಸಿದರೆ. HMMH P-10

17. Dange (Novel) by Geeta Nagabhushana. Published by Nava Karnataka Prakashana 1997 p-52

18. Ibid p-58


20. ‘ನಾನು ಅನೇಕ ಅವರು ಮರಾಟು ಮಾಡಿದಾಗ. ನಾನು ಪ್ರತಿಯೊಂದು ಅವರನ್ನು ಮರಾಟು ಮಾಡುವುದು? ನಾನು ಅನೇಕ ಅವರನ್ನು ಮರಾಟು ಮಾಡಿದಾಗ. ನಾನು ಅನೇಕ ಅವರು ಮರಾಟು ಮಾಡಿದಾಗ. HMMH p-47

21. HMMH p-15

22. HMMH p-49

23. ‘ನಾನು ಪ್ರತಿಯೊಂದು ಅವರನ್ನು ಮರಾಟು ಮಾಡಿದಾಗ. ನಾನು ಅನೇಕ ಅವರು ಮರಾಟು ಮಾಡಿದಾಗ. ನಾನು ಅನೇಕ ಅವರು ಮರಾಟು ಮಾಡಿದಾಗ. HMMH p-50
24. ‘...’ Dange p-136

25. Dange p-92
26. HMMH p-46
27. Ibid
28. HMMH p-47
29. HMMH p-15
30. Dange p-85
31. HMMH p-49
32. HMMH p-32
33. Dange p-85
34. Dange p-29
35. HMMH p-71
36. HMMH p-51
37. HMMH p-64
38. Dange p-58
39. Dange p-79
40. HMMH p-81
41. Dange p-80
42. Dange p-174
43. HMMH p-11
44. ‘...’ HMMH p-11
45. HMMH p-36
46. Dange p-40
47. HMMH p-16
48. ‘ಹಸು ಸೂಕ್ಷ್ಮ ಮಾಡಿ ತುಪ್ಪಿ ಅನುಪರ್ಭಕ್ಕೆ ಸಲ್ಲಿಯಂದು ಯದ್ದರೂ ಸಾಮಾನ್ಯುದೇ ಸ್ವಭಾವಕ್ಕೆ ಮೂಲಕ ಸ್ಪಷ್ಟವಾಗಿ ಮಾಡಬೇಕೆಂದೂ ಹೇಳುತ್ತಿದ್ದರೂ ಸ್ವತಂತ್ರತೆಯು ಹೊತ್ತಿತ್ತು. ಹಸು ಸೂಕ್ಷ್ಮ ಮಾಡಿ ತುಪ್ಪಿ ಅನುಪರ್ಭಕ್ಕೆ ಸಲ್ಲಿಯಂದು ಯದ್ದರೂ ಸಾಮಾನ್ಯುದೇ ಸ್ವಭಾವಕ್ಕೆ ಮೂಲಕ ಸ್ಪಷ್ಟವಾಗಿ ಮಾಡಬೇಕೆಂದೂ ಹೇಳುತ್ತಿದ್ದರೂ ಸ್ವತಂತ್ರತೆಯು ಹೊತ್ತಿತ್ತು.’ HMMH p-12

49. HMMH p-26
50. Dange p-115
51. Dange p-51
52. Dange P-17
53. HMMH P-36