

DALIT STUDIES

(ENG4E16)



STUDY MATERIAL

IV SEMESTER

M.A. ENGLISH
(2019 Admission)

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ENG4E16: DALIT STUDIES

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SECTION A
THEORETICAL STUDIES

TOWARDS AN AESTHETIC OF DALIT LITERATURE
(Chapter 3&4)

Sharankumar Limbale (1965-) is a Marathi language author, poet , novelist, and literary critic. He has more than 40 books to his credit along with the widely read autobiography titled *Akkarmashi. Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* became a phenomenal work that dealt with the way in which literature was approached so far. This was one of the first works to have appeared in English by a Dalit author. Limbale was awarded the Saraswati Samman in 2020.

In the third chapter of the text *Towards An Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*, Limbale talks about the form and purpose of Dalit literature. The introduction suggests what disillusionment had happened after India became independent. There was a misconception that India's being free would resolve every issue it faced so far. At the same time, saying that nothing changed would be untrue.

From 1920s to 1956 , that is , the period from 'Mooknayak' to 'Mahanirvan' , (Mooknayak was a journal published by Ambedkar and Mahanirvan was a Marathi play written by Satish Alekar) writing was influenced by a single person named Ambedkar. The Dalit writers of this period became inspired by Ambedkar and their writing foreshadowed whatever was given to them by the great visionary. Setting up of Siddhartha College and Milind College by Ambedkar paved the way for many Dalit students to receive higher education. Yet, the Dalit writers had to struggle a lot in order to be heard. The savarna publications never heeded them at all. Following

such neglect , on March 2 , 1958, the first Dalit conference was held at Dadar. This conference passed a resolution that cultural importance of Dalit literature should be given importance. Once Ambedkar passed away, things again changed for the Dalits. A force that brought everyone together suddenly left a vacuum and this resulted in the formation of many splintered groups. Meanwhile, the atrocities against the Dalits continued to happen as well.

There appeared a different stratum in the society as the Dalits acquired education. They were educated yet couldn't do much with it since the physical atmosphere stayed the same for them. Poverty was a major issue that was not resolved even in the post-independent India. The transformation in the Marathi literature was something necessary. This happened with the emergence of better Dalit literature. Marathi literature was tied with the themes of soul and supreme soul. Marathi literature had the tradition of Sant literature, which was primarily concerned with the attainment of moksha , salvation. But this literature had nothing to do with Dalits since they never struggled to fight casteism.

Another rift the Dalit writers in Marathi had was with the tradition , or the established tradition precisely. They reject the Hindu tradition and claim the tradition of Buddha , Kabir , Phule , and Ambedkar. Talking about Modern Marathi literature , there is this literary time period from Keshavsut to Mardhekar, which falls in the pre-independence period. Though there are portrayals of Dalit characters in the works of middle class writers , they are often smeared with sympathy. Never could they see a Dalit character with self-pride. What the post war writers did to the world literature was favourable to the post-independence Dalit writers as well. The non-Dalit writers who wrote in mainstream magazines were different from the Dalit writers. Their style , aesthetics , and even content were sometimes heavily inspired from the western

Modernist canon. As a reaction to the rejection from the mainstream literary magazines , the new Dalit writers started their own little magazines. The writers like Raja Dhale and Namdeo Dhasal used to write prominently in these little magazines.

Limbale talks about the segregation practiced in the villages. There are separate settlements , cremation grounds and wells for Dalits. The nomadic and criminal tribes , so called by the upper castes in the villages, do not have even these privileges since they are supposed to fend for themselves by begging or stealing. It may be argued that the reality of all these groups, the nomads and other tribes is the same if the case of untouchability is put aside, but Limbale argues it is morally wrong to put aside the presence of casteism and untouchability while talking about Dalits here. Hence, it can be said undoubtedly that Dalit literature is born out of the pains of untouchability. One difference the rural writers did have with the Dalit writers was regarding caste system. The Dalit writers kept on talking about the unequal caste system because it was their lived experience whereas the rural writers didn't have to bother with such a harsh reality.

Limbale starts defining some terms associated with Dalit literature , starting with the very word Dalit. According to Limbale , the term Dalit is a very vast term that consists of everyone who is an untouchable. Similarly , Dalit literature speaks of grief in its raw nature. In other words , Dalit literature portrays attempts to find one's honour in life. The suffering of the Dalit is often portrayed in the mythology to be a way to salvation. Limbale says that the Dalit anguish is a collective one. The individual experiences do not vary much from each other. Dalit literature uses rejection to fight an inhuman system that made the Dalits slaves of the same system. One can say that, from this rejection arises the revolt to assert that a Dalit deserves all the respect and rights an

ordinary human being has. Along with this, the Dalit experience is what constitutes often the content of what the Dalits write. This experience is important because it is not a perceived experience as such, rather it is lived experience. Together with this, the idea of Dalit consciousness is also defined in the way that, such a consciousness is educative in nature since it makes the Dalits aware of what they went through in their lives.

It is remarkable that a Dalit writes out of social responsibility. It is often to teach, enlighten, or even wake up the less privileged Dalits who do not know how to manifest their lives in writing. A significant thing here is of the language used by the Dalits for articulating their thought. We see the style to be so different when compared with the mainstream writings. More than grammar or the so-called stylistics, they depend upon emotions and the truthfulness of what they say. There is this rejection of standard language since the standard language comes with a class. In other words, the Dalits have to do with segregation in every sense. Along with using different language and style, it was necessary to reject the epics as well since the portrayals of Dalits in the epics were rather not accurate.

Once Limbale finishes defining the key ideas of Dalit literature, he goes on to talk about the charges against Dalit literature. The prime accusation that emerged against Dalit literature is that it is propagandist. It is often argued by the mainstream literary world that the Dalit literature doesn't have finesse and it is too raw. Another accusation Dalit literature faces is of its being univocal. This happens since the experiences in different Dalit narratives seem similar, because the atrocities faced by different Dalit communities do not differ much among themselves. The univocality is often more present in poetry rather than in prose. Since the Dalit experiences are often collective and a single experience both

reflects and represents the community, the presence of individuals doesn't really matter in the narratives. Those who say that Dalit literature is resentful have never seen Dalit life in close circles. This will be clearer when closely watched, since this resentment happens because of rage, anguish, and rebellion. The independent entity of Dalit literature happens because it is distinct in itself. So how has Dalit literature contributed to Indian literature? The answer lies in the fact that, the very experiences it shared were fresh. As a result of Dalit narratives, many people started telling their life stories.

Limbale concludes the third chapter saying that as long as such an unequal system exists in the society, the raw Dalit literary and non-literary narratives will continue.

The fourth chapter deals with the connections Dalit literature has established with Ambedkarism. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was a significant movement in the Dalit history. This had a far-reaching consequence as many Dalits left their allegiance with Hinduism and converted to Buddhism. The reason why a good number of Dalits converted to Buddhism was that, there were no caste hierarchies in Buddhism. They slowly started assimilating the Buddhist ways to their lives, like naming the kids, following the Panchasheel (the five essential precepts of Buddhism including abstinence from falsehood, Theft, killing, sexual misconduct, intoxication) etc.

It was in 1949 that the Dalit writers had established an organization for them called Dalit Sevak Sahitya Sangh. By March 1960, the name of the organization got changed into Maharashtra Boudha Sahitya Parishad, which has connection with Buddhism in name itself. Terming the literature produced in this convergence as Buddhist literature wasn't a logical thing at all, since it was purely Dalit literature in essence.

The Neo-Buddhist writers suggested that Dalit writers should study the Buddhist texts in all the languages it was produced. According to Limbale ,the truth is that , expecting Buddhist literature from Dalit writers is undesirable.

There have been accusations from the ones who support Buddhist literature against Dalit literature , since expressing the woes earlier didn't benefit the community at all. They argue that what benefit the repetition of the same activities will bring. Another accusation appeared was that Dalit writing was devoid of emotions. Limbale says that the primary purpose of Dalit writing is to make the savarna aware of their misdeeds not to move them to emotions. Hence, while one is exposing the injustices done to the community, there is nothing to be ashamed of. Tying the Dalit identity with Buddhism was a different thing altogether. The very philosophy of Buddhism suggested that misery came out of human desire, but when it comes to the Dalit misery, it doesn't arise from desire. No matter what, a Dalit confronts misery everywhere. Though Buddhism has nothing to do with caste system in its philosophy, the Dalits face the same mistreatment even after converting to Buddhism.

The fight was against the main characteristics of the caste system , such as , heredity , marriage restrictions, professions ,dietary rules , and hierarchy. What Ambedkar told his followers was revolutionary. He advised them to build self-respect and consequently live a life with self-pride. This was a fresh idea for Dalits since they have always been covered by the system. Ambedkar believed in the ideals of liberty , equality , and fraternity. He used to say that his philosophical roots were not political but religious. His ideology regarding literature was value based. More than societal and human progress, literature should also foster values, Ambedkar said. He said that he had to burn *Manusmriti* not because it was a substandard text in every sense. He burned it because that text

was used to crush his life along with many other Dalits' lives. In other words, Ambedkar couldn't accept a text that supported inequality. Similarly, Ambedkar couldn't accept Sant literature since it wasn't beneficial to overthrow the caste system.

According to Ambedkar, aestheticism didn't matter as long as you expose the issues to the mainstream society. Limbale extensively talks about many significant lectures made on Dalit literature. Most of them influenced the masses who attended them/ listened to them. Often, it is seen that the reviews of Dalit literature on magazines and newspapers are neglected or half-baked without much essence in it. It is easily understandable that the sincerity is lacking there. This happens since the middle-class critic has no idea of the Dalit life at all. Limbale says that Dalit writers should write for Dalit readers and not for the acceptance of savarnas. Altogether, the narrator talks about the way in which the entire Dalit literature has been critiqued and analyzed so far. Limbale calls for a rethinking when it comes to Dalit literature.

Answer the following.

1. Why should there be a separate genre called Dalit literature ?
2. How did Ambedkar shape the format of Dalit literature?

NATIONALISM, MODERNITY, KERALANESS: A SUBALTERN CRITIQUE

Dr.Pradeepan Pambirikunnu was a prominent critic in Malayalam who focused on Dalit aesthetics , culture , and much more. He was an accomplished social critic whose attention wasn't limited to literary articles alone. Pradeepan

was a well-known orator and a teacher. He focused his attention to often neglected realities of the sensibilities of Kerala , like the elitism in film music. Apart from writing many articles , Dr. Pradeepan penned a novel titled “ Eri” as well. His prime concern in writing was the epistemology and its relationship with society.

Nationalism, Modernity , Keralaness : A Subaltern Critique subtly narrates how the so-called progressiveness of the Kerala society has connived at harsh realities interconnected with caste and its applications. Pradeepan quotes the historian A.L. Basham to get to his focus area. Basham says that the salvation in the Indian context was too individualistic. From this cue, Pradeepan says that, it is not just democracy but caste also gets established thus. The writer says that, there used to be a hierarchy that worked strictly on the basis of caste. Kerala faced some crisis in relation to production as the so-called lower caste folks acquired better education and jobs.

Pradeepan aims at an often-neglected state of appropriation. Often, someone from the higher caste would be lauded as a reformist or renaissance hero, whereas if it was someone from a Dalit Community, the same attention would never be received at all. The author takes the instances of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Jyotirao Phule and how they are perceived in the social renaissance in India. The scenario in Kerala is not different at all; Mahatma Ayyankali is still called a “Dalit” leader , not a renaissance leader as such. This difference is what Pradeepan calls out.

Along with these notions, Kerala’s general conscience also nurtured a strange thought that, in order to thwart the caste system , caste doesn’t have to be abolished but one has to be a global citizen altogether. The author finds this Eurocentric notion to be not effective at all. The history of Kerala never

lauded the leaders like Poykayil Appachan, Krishnadi Aashan , or even Ayyankali because it was easy to replace them with the Savarna/ Elite leaders. In other words, the elite names were more accepted than the Dalit leaders.

Another sea change that took place was the emergence of a common caste. Many sub castes were integrated into a common caste called *Nair*. Instead of sub castes, community emerged which became stronger gradually. This community started to spread through many institutions. Gradually, caste became something of a standard or basis in Kerala as even electoral politics used caste for selecting candidates. Putting a caste surname became fashionable among the Keralites. This even extends to food items being sold in the name of upper caste names, whereas the so-called lower caste names never have even this privilege. The very cultural sphere of Kerala has produced even adages reeking with casteism. For example, *jaathyalullath thoothal maarilla* suggests one is born with qualities associated with caste and they can never be changed. Most often, the target of such remarks were the downtrodden, subaltern people in the society.

One of the prominent novelists of Malayalam, M.T. Vasudevan Nair, gets criticized by Dr. Pradeepan for his portrayals of elite class characters alone. The term called *Tharavadu* has a savarna /elite connotation since the downtrodden / Dalit classes never had such a term to denote even their houses. In other words, the very equivalent term for the word House in Malayalam became *veedu*. The appropriation never came from terms like *Pura* , *Chala* , or *Cheri*.

Some of the staunch advocates of Modernism in Malayalam never had to do anything with caste in Kerala since they were in a way a diasporic. The writers like Anand , O.V. Vijayan , and M. Mukundan stayed outside Kerala though they

prolifically wrote in Malayalam. Hence, the very characters they created didn't have the baggage of caste with them. Many of the protagonists the Modernist fiction in Malayalam contained were rather "global citizens" who could just feel that caste didn't even exist.

Even when the Dalit characters with bone and marrow existed in the works of P.Valsala , M. Sukumaran , or C.V. Sreeraman , they rather felt like part of some generosity , rather than reality.

Slowly, language , style , and the very aesthetics of writing changed as Dalit writers started writing. The style shed its elitism. Pradeepan concludes by saying these are the new movements one should look forward to, since they will decide how the new wave in Malayalam literature will be.

Answer the following.

1. Why do you think people like Ayyankali and Krishnadi Asan didn't get the recognition they deserved ?
2. Elaborate upon how caste system prevails even in a state like Kerala that takes pride in being the first when it comes to literacy.

DALIT WOMEN TALK DIFFERENTLY

Gopal Guru is an Indian Political scientist. After retiring from the political science Department, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Guru is busy running *Economic and Political Weekly*. The focus of Guru's writing most often revolves around the Dalit discourses, women, and obviously wide nature of politics. He has edited works like *Humiliation : Claims and Context*, *The Cracked Mirror*. Guru might be termed as someone who redefined Dalit discourses in India. Such scholarly gestures to unearth the Dalit perspectives in the

discourses proved that there were many works to be done. Often, they were neglected as elitism penetrated even academia for ages in India.

Dalit Women Talk Differently by Gopal Guru depicts an oft-neglected aspect of how patriarchy works. Guru starts talking about how women are treated globally and how the issues of women need global attention, irrespective of region, caste, class and many differences they incorporate. The most important idea Guru raises here is regarding National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW). There are apparently two different bases as to why should the Dalit Women talk differently: the external factors like , non-Dalit factors homogenizing the issues of Dalit women and the Internal Factors where the patriarchy works predominantly in the Dalit communities itself. Quoting Rajni Kothari , Guru says that a ‘discourse of descent’ appeared as a series of movements like trade unions making their way as the faith in the modern nation-state declined gradually.

The focus on external factors also doesn’t penetrate to the harsh reality the Dalit issues represent. Taking an example of a heinous crime like rape, Guru says that when a Dalit woman gets raped, it cannot be treated as something like an ordinary incident. Here , the case of caste needs to be taken into account. Atrocity towards a downtrodden woman should be treated severely.

Earlier , the Dalit women had acknowledged the radical feminism in the form of urban , non-dalit activists. In other words, the radical feminism was accepted. A pressing factor that needs to be considered here is that , while the purpose of the non-Dalit activists speaking for the Dalits is commendable, it also takes away the agency of the Dalits to speak up for themselves.

The moral economy was another bone of contention there. The moral economy of the organization called Shetkari Sanghatana wasn't helpful in addressing the poverty of the people there. Instead, it rather naturalized the poverty of the Dalits.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the way in which caste is practised among women themselves. There used to be skirmishes between upper-class , upper caste women and Dalit women. Often, the dalit women quote Phule and Ambedkar so that the non Dalit women do not own the dalit identity. But what it does is that it takes away the agency from them. In other words, the voice that needs to be heard gets silenced whereas the elite voices always get more attention.

The last point Guru puts forward is that of Dalit Patriarchy. The patriarchal dominance has often been neglected by the same activists who advocated the progress of the Dalits. So, in a way, there is a political marginalization happening even though both the genders try to smash the same casteist notions. In this battle, there is an internal battle between two genders. The male, as has always been, tries to dominate the cause. This domination takes place not just in the political scenario but happens even in the literary field. The writing of the Dalit women has been neglected because of this reason. On a close scrutiny, it is revealed that along with caste and class identity, gender positioning also matters. Another important idea is that, the Dalit men reproduce the same mechanism their elite counterparts use to subjugate their women.

The need to talk differently becomes a valid argument for Dalit women, which in turn foregrounds the identity of Dalit Women as well. There are also other issues like the distribution of resources like better education differently allotted to different strata of Dalits in the society. Altogether,

the Dalit women from Maharashtra are moving beyond the caste and religion barriers set up by the Hindutva forces.

Answer the following.

1. How does patriarchy in their own community subjugate the Dalit women ?
2. Why does the author say that Dalit Women need to speak differently?

SECTION B : POETRY

SONG : POYKAYIL APPACHAN

Poykayil Yohannan (1879-1939) , known as Poykayil Appachan alias Kumara Guru Devan was a renowned Dalit activist and poet from Pathanamthitta. Appachan also founded a socio-religious movement called *Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha*. Though he joined the Marthoma church , he understood that he was still mistreated for being a Dalit. No matter whichever church he joined, he was always mistreated. It was at this juncture that he decided to found his own religious sect.

Song is one of the powerful manifestations of Dalit experiences in Malayalam. It was during this time that the Renaissance in Kerala was taking place led by reformers like Sri Narayana Guru. There was the elected legislative parliament called Sri Moolam Praja Sabha. After Ayyankali , Poykayil Yohannan was elected to this assembly. Yohannan was a reformer too. He encouraged his people to throw away superstitions.

The song is in the form of a lament. This works in the form of a reminder to his people as well as the elites. His people have struggled in the soil to make the land fertile but at the end of the day, nobody remembers them. In other words, all the songs are about others. No song is ever heard about his community anywhere. They, the one who toiled in the hard soil, became nothing less than a bystander to eulogies given to upper castes. Appachan says that there are narratives running parallelly. There are histories written about other people. Yet, none can be heard about his community anywhere. Appachan suggests that Dalit literature never finds space in the mainstream literature. It is neglected just like Dalits are neglected in the society.

Appachan reminds us of one thing: the need to rewrite the history. History has been unkind to Dalits and such subaltern communities always. It becomes a lament when we see that an entire community is erased from the memory of the society. The history becomes the history of the elites, the savarnas. The oft repeated lines from the song summarises the essence of what Appachan has to say. He says that ,

“*Kanunneeloraksharavum ente vamshathe patty
Kanunnundanekam vamshathin charithrangal*”

(*I can't see even a single letter about my clan but I see histories written about many other clans*).

Answer the following.

1. Why do you think history hasn't recorded the deeds of the subaltern at all ?

DREAM TELLER : PRATIBHA JAYACHANDRAN

Pratibha Jayachandran is a Tamil Dalit poet and short story writer. Like all the Dalits, he was also a victim to the atrocities until education saved him gradually. Pratibha moved to Pondicherry from his native place and got himself indulged in literary activities. His first anthology of poems appeared in 1985.

Dream Teller was originally written as *Kanavukal Solbavan* in Tamil. Like the title suggests, this poem talks about the ambitions and dreams of Dalits and how and why they were detained from pursuing these dreams. The speaker in the poem tells us about the urge of a Dalit, especially the creative urge. The casteism practiced in the society is seen in the lines of the poem in the form of grief and frustration. Though the Dalit wants to write and be heard by the others, it

never comes out as there is always this fear of being a low born. In other words, the life of a Dalit is a life of denials. Wherever he or she goes, they are denied things, services, access to knowledge, and so on. Even the very act of thinking or the agency to think is hijacked by the others.

Pratibha talks about the dreams of Dalits because, like all the other human beings, Dalits are also entitled to see dreams. They are creative. They love to write, but coming out in the open as a Dalit from the Dalit community is tougher since the rest of the world has always been cruel to them.

The poet concludes the poem on a positive note, thinking that someday, he and his clan will receive space for manifesting their life. As someone who “tells” his dreams, it is inspiring since many others will be influenced to dream more about their passions and ambitions.

Answer the following.

1. Why are the Dalits restrained from even dreaming about their future?

IDENTITY CARD: S. JOSEPH

S. Joseph (1965-) is an Indian poet who writes in Malayalam. Some of his poems talk about the harsh realities of Dalit life in Kerala. Joseph is an awardee of Kerala Sahitya Akademi.

His poem *Identity Card* is a representation of Dalit identity in a so-called progressive society. The poem talks about two students, presumably lovers. They used to partake the food together. They were from different religions but it didn't matter too. The narrator was immersed in poems of Neruda. This might mean how romantic he was.

As the poem unravels the way it deals with identity card and the way it was lost and found, the reader gets into the inner play of caste. The details of the stipend received were marked in red ink on the identity card. The girl finds it. She remarks the same. From this juncture, the poet brings us to the present, saying that he doesn't look at a place where a boy and girl forget themselves loving. He says that they might leave after sometime. This becomes a strong social poem with the last line. The speaker says that even if both of them live together, there will not be a record of stipend received on their identity cards.

Society hasn't changed much. It still retains the so-called traditions based on religion and caste. The people fall in love nowadays observing everything about the caste, creed, and colour. The poet in S. Joseph deals with this in a nonchalant manner. It is like a statement coming from someone who has seen repeated scenes like this every day. The red ink may be read as a red flag. One should stop there. A single red mark on an identity card defines one's identity altogether. The poem talks about how much segregated we all are. In other words, how caste works as an indelible red mark on the pages of the identity cards of life. The religion as well as the caste play a bigger part here. The girl was almost fine with the boy's Christian identity but she wasn't able to feel the same way in relation to his Dalit identity.

Answer the following.

1. The poet says that he doesn't look at lovers anymore. What makes him say so?
2. Write about the metaphor of red mark on the identity card.

WHICH LANGUAGE SHOULD I SPEAK ;

ARUN KAMBLE

Arun Krushnaji Kamble (1953-2009) was an Indian Marathi language writer, professor, politician, and Dalit activist. He was the president and founding member of the movement called Dalit Panther.

Which Language Should I Speak is a poem of contrasts. Consisting of mere two stanzas, Arun Kamble portrays the refinement and raw usages of the same language. In other words , privilege defines the so called gentleness. Looking at the very first stanza , we see a character of grandfather swearing at grandkid. He calls him son of whore outright. This doesn't mean that he is hated there. The grandpa tells him to use the language as used by him and other people of the community. At a glance this might mean to advise using the swear words. Well, never. This is suggestive of the fact that one should use the language defining one's community. In other words, language acts as a root of one's identity. Forgetting the language here means forgetting ones' home, one's roots.

The next stanza is stark contrast to what we have seen. The same grandkid is in the attire of a student now. He is being advised by a Brahmin teacher to use the language correctly. What would be this correct language? That is a language devoid of rough sides, totally polished. In other words, a language that has no soul.

While concluding the poem, the narrator in the first person leaves a question to the reader. Which language should he speak? What kind of a language will complete him? It doesn't have a finite answer. Yet, one may say that the narrator

might eventually move towards his parent language, his roots, and his home.

Answer the following.

1. Write on the use of contrast in the poem.

SHAMBUKA : G.SASI MADHURAVELLI

Sasi Madhuravelli (1959-2004) was born in Madhuravely ,near Kottayam. Sasi started writing poems in the 1980s. Unlike the earlier Dalit expressions in poetry, Sasi's poems differ in their articulation, which is more forceful. Often, the expression goes beyond personal experience and considers the community at large.

Shambuka is a poem in which Sasi attempts a reworking of the Ramayana. Mythologically, Shambuka was the Sudra who was killed by Rama. The poem travels through present and past with enough ease. The poet remembers Shambuka , whom he treats as a martyr. The poet says that Vedanta was not the cup of tea of the one who went to do the tapas. In such a situation, Shambuka didn't have a role to play that was worthwhile. Shambuka , in the words of the poet , was just a steed. Was that steed spared of torture? No. It was harnessed and whipped.

This may be treated as a symbol of what has been happening for ages. The Dalits have been tortured for ages. The plight of Sita isn't any different. She was even treated like chewed betel and at last spitted. The Ebony children refer to the Dalit kids who are tortured by hunger.

The shift of mood in the poem happens towards the last stanzas. The narrator asserts that salvation doesn't come from tapas. And he writes off the gods totally. Salvation doesn't

come from gods according to the narrator. The hope in the poem appears in the last stanza. From Shambuka, poet draws a long line to Valmiki, the first poet. He hopes that someday, Valmiki will be reborn as kaattalan, in his pristine form. That will be the day of salvation for everyone. The poem ends on the word Shanti, just like T.S. Eliot concluded *The Waste Land*. In other words, the poet says that the total salvation will happen only when Valmiki is reborn someday, not as the one who wrote Ramayana but as someone who was born as a Dalit.

Answer the following.

1. How does the poet connect Shambuka with Valmiki, the sage poet?

UNDER DADAR BRIDGE: PRAKASH JADHAV

Jadhav is a downtrodden Dalit poet who rose from very substandard premises in his life. He had even worked as a porter for livelihood. Often, the poems of Jadhav talk about identity crisis as expressed by many other Dalit poets in India. Jadhav and his poetry became famous when the film maker Amar Kanwar used the poem *Under Dadar Bridge* for a film titled *A Night of Prophecy*. His poems were criticized for using profane language in them.

Under Dadar Bridge is a poem that reminds the reader of screams. There is nothing soft in it. A good part of the poem is written in the format of exchange between a mother and son. The mother is seen as a beggar while conceding to men because she can't resist them. There are instances in the poem where the reader is introduced to the raw usage of words: words without any sophistication of the modern society.

This exchange questions the masks in the society as well. The boy wants to know who his father was. The mother

doesn't have an answer. Helplessly she says that she doesn't know since it was not merely a single man who used her physically. There were many and one among them might be his dad. The atrocities against the Dalits are seen here, since had it been the case of someone from a higher caste, the things would have been different.

One day, the mother dies. That was when the son realized that he was left alone in the world. This is more than a lament or an elegy. Though emotionally the poem accepts the form of an elegy, the imagery and the diction make it more than a mere elegy. To a question like what his religion, may tell him that he was neither Hindu nor Muslim. She adds that he was an abandoned spark of lusty fires.

While concluding, the boy in the poem is still under the Dadar Bridge. Now the roles have changed and he is the one who begs now. He remembers that it was because of her, the passersby throw coins at him. Altogether, the poem becomes one long narration of scream and frustration, and grief coupled with anger. The narrator becomes someone who couldn't undo the injustices hurled at him.

SECTION C: SELF NARRATIVES & FICTION

MADNESS : C. AYYAPPAN.

C. Ayyappan (1949-2011) was a powerful proponent of the Dalit writing in Malayalam. He tried manifesting the Dalit life through a strong and intense style and consequently reworked the Malayalam aesthetics in relation to Dalit literature. He was born in Keezhillam, Ernakulam. Having worked as a Malayalam professor in various colleges, he retired as a principal. His two significant anthologies are *Uchayurakkathile Swapnangal* and *Njanundukal*.

The story *Madness*, titled as *Bhranthu* in Malayalam, in which it was originally written talks about the stigma surrounding the Dalit communities even in progressive societies like Kerala's. The story takes the form of a monologue. Dealing with madness as a metaphor, C. Ayyappan narrates the story of Krishnan master, who belongs to the downtrodden/ subaltern community. Recounting a visit from a group of people who wanted to treat his sister who was mentally challenged, Krishnan master narrates how the society might perceive a supposedly rash act he had done. The good-natured people who came to ask his help to bring his sister to the hospital were shocked when Krishnan master didn't cooperate with them at all. He told them that he was not going to go with them.

Gradually, the narrator gives his reasons. One of them was that, he had married someone outside his community, a supposedly upper caste one. The impact was that, he was forced to forget his roots. His wife didn't like his family. She wasn't able to identify with them at all. Even severe was the case with his daughter since she couldn't even stand meeting his mother, who was clad in a shabby saree. So, even if he

went to the mental hospital with his sister, it wouldn't have been easy to connive the fact that his neighbours would make fun of him for doing so.

Concluding the story, the narrator says that his former classmate had asked him if he himself was mad or not. Recounting the incident, he replies that he wasn't mad because he foresaw everything before shutting them out. He knew what would be the consequences if he did accept his sister and illness. He would be socially alienated. His friends would mock him.

The story ends saying that the narrator affirms he is not stupid like his friend thought him to be. Well, while analyzing this, one reaches the conclusion that it is tough to be a Dalit in a society no matter how educated he or his friends are. The subaltern will not be accepted at all. He or she will have succumbed to the demands set up by the society, that always obeys the elite class. Madness is a title that leaves an important question as to who is mentally challenged at the end. The answer isn't a pleasant one since it always comes back to the same people who ask the question.

The narrator might seem to be a pompous guy at a glance. But there is a moment in the story where he says that he was drooping because of inferiority complex. That has kept him chained forever. He asks what else he should have done as no circumstance was favourable to him ever. The story penetrates into the heart of the reader and reveals that we are living in a fake world.

Answer the following.

1. How does social stigma play a part in the story *Madness*? How does the author use sarcasm here?

SARASWATI VIJAYAM: POTHERI KUNJAMBU

Potheri Kunjambu (1857-1919) was a novelist who fought caste oppression through his creative works and social intervention. He wrote the novel *Saraswati Vijayam* when Kerala was undergoing radical changes amidst caste oppressions. The novel was written in 1892. Kunjambu had set up a school in Kannur for Pulaya community. He was derogatorily called *Pulaya Kunjambu* by caste Hindus.

Often, we see that caste issues sprout from the rift from a higher caste and lower caste. Kunjambu was attacked by his own community when he stood for another lower caste. He was ostracized by his own people as they couldn't digest that someone from their community (Thiyya) was standing up for the Pulaya community.

The novel begins with the attempts of killing someone from Pulaya community. Obviously, the caste plays an important part here. The novel moves back and forth from past to present. The reader is brought to a court room where they argue about the alleged murder of someone called Marathan before 15 years. It was supposed that it was Ramankutty Nambiar who carried out that heinous act but he denied it in court. At the same time, Raman Kutty Nambiar doesn't deny that he had manhandled Marathan. Four other persons named Kuttyassan, Deen Muhammed, Abdurahman, Ezhuthaneentakath Moosa give their statements as witnesses. As the trial proceeds, it is revealed that the judge is none other than Marathan, who was supposed to have been killed earlier.

In fact, Marathan was beaten by Raman Nambiar for singing louder. They used to believe that the people from Pulaya community should not sing. Kuberan Namboothiri with Raman Nambiar conduct an interrogation to know more about Marathan , who was singing earlier. They understand that

Marathan was attending school under the guidance of a white man who stayed far. They give an ultimatum saying that they should evacuate their huts soon.

As the novel concludes, we see that Marathan has accepted another name called Yesudasan. He was educated and became a judge through his struggles. Kuberan Namboothiri wasn't able to identify him at all. At the end of the novel, we meet the titular character named Saraswati, who is the granddaughter of Kuberan Namboothiri. The judge decides to send Kuberan Namboothiri scot free. Saraswati reveals that she has married Yesudasan. The novel ends on a handshake between Kuberan Namboothiri and Yesudasan.

Considering the time in which it was written, Saraswati Vijayam was a revolutionary one. It should be remembered for its content rather than the literary quality it possesses. The novel was far ahead of its time when we consider the content. It is no wonder that it requires rereading in the future to know how difficult it was to write such a novel during those times. Potheri Kunjambu should be appreciated and remembered for his brave feat in every sense as we still live in a society where inter-caste marriages still arouse suspicion and hatred.

Answer the following.

1. What do you think about the conclusion of the novel? Why was it revolutionary?

JOOOTHAN: OMPRAKASH VALMIKI

Omprakash Valmiki (1950-2013) was an Indian writer and poet. He was well known for his phenomenal autobiography. He portrayed the life of a Dalit in its raw nature without adding any spice to it.

The very word joothan refers to the leftover food on a

plate. Omprakash Valmiki was from the sweeper caste. Because he was born in a lower caste, he had to face so much discrimination ever since childhood. The segregation of Dalits to a backward area in the village shows the cultural untouchability that was blatantly practiced. Valmiki stayed in front of a stinking cowshed of an upper caste man. There used to stay the people from the lower castes like Chuhra , Chamar , and Jhinwar. It was a different kind of life altogether. Untouchability was practiced between upper caste and lower caste people.

Valmiki remembers his different teachers in this self-narrative. There was Sewak Ram Munshi, who had no issue with anyone he taught. He used to teach every kid irrespective of their caste. He was fine with sitting with them on the floor. It was in this school that Valmiki learned the alphabets. One day, Valmiki's father got into a fight with his teacher and this resulted in forcing Valmiki out from the school. He decided to enroll Valmiki in another school nearby. This was a government school and they thought everything would be better since it was a government school. Things were so different there as Valmiki was asked to sit on the floor instead on a bench. He started tasting what untouchability was. It was a unanimous attempt from the part of both teachers and students in that school to drive away Valmiki. They even used to make him sweep the floor, and sometimes the entire school as well.

Valmiki had two other classmates from the same caste. They were named Ram Singh and Sukkhan. Both were smart and industrious kids. It was the hobby of the upper caste kids to taunt all three whenever they could. Valmiki reached fourth class to receive his punishments in the severe forms imaginable. He had a headmaster called Kaliram. Valmiki was asked to make a broom by climbing a teak tree in front of the school. He wasn't satisfied with a broom. Valmiki was made

to sweep the entire school that day. Moreover, Valmiki was reminded by the teacher that it was his family vocation to sweep. The next day followed without any change. The third day was going to be the same but Valmiki hid in a corner to avoid sweeping the school that day. Eventually, the headmaster found him and asked him to sweep the school again. Valmiki wasn't ready to do so, but was afraid to deny the headmaster. He was made to sweep the floor again. It was at this juncture that the father of Valmiki passed through the school and what he saw infuriated him. He stormed to the room of the headmaster. Though he was threatened, he didn't flinch.

Bringing him out, the father begged many schools to enroll his son but none of them considered the plea. At last he goes to the Pradhan of the school and with his permission, Valmiki was given chance to pursue his studies. Valmiki was taunted and beaten no matter how he was dressed. He could never equate the term guru with anyone who taught him in school. They used to call him names whenever possible.

Valmiki narrates an incident where an upper-caste named Sukhdev Singh Tyagi who denied giving any food to him and his brothers when there was a wedding at his house. He said the joothan (leftover) itself was enough. Valmiki's mom didn't like it at all and she stopped going there altogether for household work. After many years, the same person came to Valmiki's house to have a meal.

Later, after his brother died, it was tough for Valmiki to continue his studies. His Bhabhi, brother's wife had to pawn her last piece of jewelry so that he could go on with his studies. He gradually grows friendships with upper caste boys in the class. Valmiki was even made the monitor of the class.

Life in the *basti* was tough. When it rained, they would have to find another shelter since their houses would be

soaked in rain. When once a teacher narrated the story of Dronacharya who had to feed water mixed with flour to his son Ashwatthama, Valmiki asked why weren't the untouchables mentioned in the epic who had to quench their thirst as well as hunger with *mar*, the rice water. He was obviously chided. He was made to sit in an awkward position and thrashed.

This is a narrative smeared with no colourful images. Whatever Valmiki wrote was straight from his heart. He didn't add anything to enrich what he experienced. It was raw portrayal of life in its true colours. It is quite significant that some of the best Dalit narratives are autobiographies, not fiction. This is because fiction cannot portray lived experiences better than nonfiction at all.

Joothan paved the way for many other autobiographies to emerge in the history of Dalit literature. This was one of the primary attempts to narrate Dalit personal experiences. Joothan still inspires many people in India to narrate their life with honesty and not with shame.

Answer the following.

1. What is the significance of the title “Joothan”?
2. Narrate the mistreatment Omprakash had to undergo when he was a student?

OUTCASTE: A MEMOIR : NARENDRA JADHAV

Narendra Jadhav (1953-) is an Indian economist . educationist, public policy expert, professor and writer in English, Marathi , and Hindi. Narendra Jadhav is considered an expert on B.R. Ambedkar.

Outcaste : A Memoir was published in Marathi in 1993. This was originally titled as *Amcha Baap An Amhi*. Being born to Damu in the Mahar community, Narendra had a long way to

go to reach where he is today. The memoir uses the period spanning for around 80 years. We mainly follow three persons while reading the narrative. The first one is Damu, his father, the next is Sonubhai, his mother, and third, Narendra himself. There are four parts in the narrative/autobiography. These are titled as *Up Against Bondage*, *Towards Freedom*, *The Struggle*, and *Making of the Second Generation*.

One of the important aspects in the work is the memory about the forefathers. This is significant because in order to know more about the history of the plight of these Dalits, one should know how and why these forefathers struggled and faced humiliations. The autobiography uses so many dialects like Marathi, Hindi, Butler English, and English in various parts. Damu was so much into Ambedkar and this made him fall in love with progressive movements. Though he was illiterate, he was positive about the need of abolishment of the caste system. It can be clearly seen that Narendra was inculcated with the sense of Ambedkar because of his father's intense passion towards the same. Damu used to work as a Yeskar, someone assigned with the village duties. This is when he confronts social boycotts and the way in which human beings are treated worse than animals. Damu did not want to flinch about the scenes he was a witness to. He stood against them and decided to fight. Damu was an advocate of self-respect no matter what he did.

In 1926, Damu married Sonubhai and from Ozar they move to Mumbai. Damu wanted to be a great father to his kids. He held Ambedkarism close to his heart and saw salvation through the words of Ambedkar. Narendra had to overcome many struggles while he was growing up. Once he outperformed all the other students in the class for a test in Sanskrit and his class teacher said he had lost his faith in education system. Earlier, he used to remark that Jadhav was government's son-in-law since his fees were waived. Jadhav

understood that at times even untouchability was not practised when the person was of a higher status with enough money.

Jadhav was of the opinion against Gandhiji. Gandhiji advised people to go to the villages whereas Ambedkar told them to go to the cities. For, cities slowly adapted the changes in class, often not to the changes in caste.. He was always a man who said that one should be lions and not goats. Goats are the ones who get sacrificed not the lions. One shouldn't beg for one's rights but struggle to earn them. Jadhav goes on to marry an upper-caste woman. Once Phule and Ambedkar entered the picture, the influence of Gandhi among the Dalits slowly waned. Damu says that Gandhi was another face of Hinduism, maybe a soft one. No matter what, the Hinduism didn't allow the Dalits to enter the temples. They were prohibited from many rituals. So, according to Jadhav, it was idiotic to go after a religion that was not beneficial for the upliftment of the Dalit communities. Damu decides to leave the religion behind and he has a justification to this. He says that he does this to be a better human being.

The last one in the genealogy, Apoorva, daughter of Jadhav is outspoken about her decisions. She says somewhere that she knows what her father and her grandparents went through, but she is no longer going to be the same. The autobiography is in a way a challenge to Hinduism as well. This is an outstanding story of someone who stood against the odds and fought the way forward as well. Outcaste may be read as something of a declaration against the religious and nonreligious atrocities one experiences. Jadhav and his parents chose to be lions instead of goats.

Answer the following.

1. Discuss the significance of Ambedkarism in the life of Narendra Jadhav.

GYPSY GODDESS : MEENA KANDASAMY

Ilavenil Meena Kandasamy (1984-) is an Indian poet , novelist , translator and activist from Chennai. As a writer, Meena is more focused on caste annihilation, feminism, and so on. Meena's collections of poetry include *Touch* (2006) and *Ms. Militancy* (2010).

The Gypsy Goddess narrates the story of Dalit agricultural workers and the ways in which they were hacked to death by the upper caste landlords. Set in the district of Tanjore, the novel is a gripping story of grief, despair , and anger. *Gypsy Goddess* is based on a massacre happened in Kilvenmani on a Christmas day in 1968. Meena narrates the evolution of Marxism/ Communism on a parallel note here. One sees the use of language in the novel to be so vivid.

A popular communist leader is killed and the farm workers decide to go on a strike. They are bullied into work by the landlords. They set up fines, use police, yet none of them works to persuade the farmers who are adamant. Many Dalit women are assaulted there. At last, a group of goons attack a row of villages and set fire to them. Around 42 villages were burnt down that night. The bodies found the next day were disfigured. Even after such genocide, many of the perpetrators were left scot-free.

Marxism, as we noted earlier, plays an important part here. Some of the union leaders among the workers in the paddy fields followed the ideology and this was something that infuriated the landlords. They perceived it as if it was some poison that entered the land. In fact, it was an ideology they feared since, if people united, landlords wouldn't be able to exploit them at all. The landlords in one of the meetings say that it was a proud thing to have acquired so many cases heaped upon them. They were really happy there have been

cases of murder, rape, and other physical abuses.

Just like seen in all the other cases filed against the upper-caste folks, here too the cases are dropped gradually. All the people mentioned in the charge sheet present fake alibis. The novel suggests what could be done with money. Slowly, it was treated as a crime without any culprits.

The genocide takes place on a Christmas night in 1968. The peasants demand for a raise of six measures of paddy so that they could sustain their lives. There is casteism everywhere as presented in the novel. There are four parts in the novel : Background , Breeding Ground, Battleground, and Burial Ground with a Prologue and an Epilogue. We start with the letter written by Gopalakrishna Naidu to the Chief Minister of TN about a potential murder case going to be framed against him. This was a time in which Marxism was gaining momentum in the rural areas of Tamilnadu. In the novel, we don't find a specific protagonist, rather it becomes a novel that reaches out to an entire community. Her narrative is too direct. Often , the points of view dangle from first person to third person effortlessly. She criticizes the way in which history is written often. In her own words , it goes thus :

“it is common knowledge that no land would ever be found interesting until a white man arrived, befriended some locals, tried the regional cuisine, asked a lot of impertinent questions, took copious notes in his moleskin notebook.”

The men and women of Kilvenmani are treated in the same manner throughout the novel: they are abused, whipped, and women are often raped. Yet one idea stands out : the women do not flinch.

Kandasamy mocks the traditional manner in which chronicles are written. The predators are praised often without any tinge of shame at all. Since Meena is primarily a poet, we

see that her expressions are precise, too direct without beating around the bush.

This is not a novel to be read for the sake of understanding the story in it. This is more about the ill treatment an entire community faced during the highhanded regime of the landlords. It isn't a mere novel that talks about resistance but a novel of memory; the memory of charred bones and dreams.

Answer the following.

1. Critically comment on the unusual narrative style of Meena Kandasamy?