

# BY CASTE NONE IS SUPERIOR NOR INFERIOR EITHER; DALITS ARE EQUIVALENT TO ANY INDIAN; POETRY FOR DALITS, THE COUNTER DISCOURSES IN AP, INDIA

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**Abstract:** A significant development in 1980s is the emergence of Dalit poets who have enriched the modern Telugu literature with their poetry in Andhra Pradesh, India. In fact the remarkable entry of Dalit poetry has given a new dimension, a new viewpoint and a new effect to the literary and social circles of the state. But some men of letter felt that literature has, of late, lost its values because of the emergence of the poetry on the struggle for existence of religion, caste and gender. He points out that the modern movements changed the literary ideologies, its form and the order of evolution qualitatively. Struggle for the existence of religions, castes and gender are given more importance. As the by-product, the literary values were spoiled. From qualitative point of view, they may be right as poetry is travelling from macro to micro and universal to individual. But it is strongly felt that Dalit poetry has provided voice to the voiceless and the power to the powerless. This cannot be denied. All the dalit voices whether they are of dalits or non-dalits are brought together in the English research article, though I am not a research scholar, to express the strong internal social solidarity for them. Let literature be a mirror and reflect the contemporary society.

**Keywords—** caste spectrum, inseparable, racial-purity, social-hierarchy, untouchables, outcaste, social-reformer, downtrodden, illiteracy, mythology, patriarchal, gigantism, humanity

## I. INTRODUCTION

**Introduction:** The term Dalit is now an amalgamation of many castes. In other words, it is a broadened caste spectrum. Caste-system is still prevalent in India, especially with all its firm roots, stem and branches and firmer still where there is not much economic development. Many extraneous factors are strengthening it either for gaining political mileage or for

servicing self-centered interests. Caste-system has been a rigid social one in which a kind of social hierarchy is maintained by the heredity of a defined status in society, and it does not allow any liberty to move out of the position or status into which he or she is born, so to say, it is inflexible. In this connection G.S. Verma explains that the term, caste, was first used by Portuguese traders visiting India in the 16th century, derived from the Portuguese 'casta,' meaning family lineage, or race. To understand the present day caste-system, one feels that it is necessary first to know what has gone earlier.

## II. REVIEW

All societies throughout history across the world had developed their respective social hierarchies. These hierarchies had almost always been derived from occupations, division of labour and their perceived relative statuses. The unique feature of caste in India, however, has been its inseparable association with religion. The caste system appears to have evolved some time after the arrival, into Northern India, of the Indo-European tribes known as the Aryans, a nomadic tribe, around 1500 B.C., after the collapse of the famous Indus Valley Civilization. Aryan society had already been split into three groups, warriors, priests, and the general people probably to cater to the chief needs of the then society. The Aryans conquered the native people, who were described as darker skinned and with inferior features when compared to the Aryans. They were very meticulous about keeping the indigenous people whom they vanquished in the lower strata. The Aryans were also particular about retaining their racial purity and social hierarchy. Therefore they determined to add a fourth group of servants to the social system and the component was made up of the non-Aryans, the sons of the soil. Verma adds that the racial aspect of caste was clearly indicated in the term that emerged to describe the four groups - Varna, the Sanskrit word for colour. The four Varnas, in descending order of status, were then the



Kshatriyas, the king and warriors, the Brahmins, priests, the Vysyas, traders, and the Sudras, servants.

The most important thing is, the Brahmins gained their importance by sanctioning the divinity and authority to the ruler. In return they were treated as the representatives of God. In due course the Brahmins were able to contrive to reach the top of the ladder. In the meantime society developed, particularly after the Harappan culture had reached its zenith, the Aryan period initially represented a considerable step backwards. It means their social relevance began to sink. Meanwhile there had been enormous expansion of agriculture. In addition to that, trade and arts began to flourish. As a result of all these, Sudras became cultivators of the land and skilled artisans. Those who performed the most menial works, within the Sudras, like scavenging and cobbling in the society, had been left out of the respectable framework of the caste-system altogether. They were reduced to the state of out-castes or Chandalas (untouchables). Later, a new system of sub-castes or Jatis, was evolved. Here occupations played a pivotal role. It is at this level of Jatis the caste-system had primarily been cleverly put to operation. The persons of a particular Jati were controlled in various social aspects, especially in the matter of marriage; they had to remain within their Jati. As the social and economic conditions changed, the relative positions of some Jatis had ascended to the next upper rung of the social ladder to reflect the changing status.

As the Sudras were associated with manual labour, which was considered to be low, they were not allowed to have any intimate contact with the elite sections such as rulers, educators and the traders. But in course of time, there had been further classification of labour. Basing upon it within the Sudras higher and lower rungs came into being. Rajesh Mishra holds that much of the stigma against the Sudras and, in particular, the lower castes within the Sudras had been strengthened and justified through the religious concept of ritual purity. Eventually their touch and even their shadows had been considered to be polluting. This resulted in making the people of lower castes untouchables and even unapproachable. But the early twentieth century witnessed a change that took place owing to the broadened human horizons. As it is said that even the darkest clouds have silver linings, there were bright spots in the gloomy scenario. Many individuals, including Brahmins, fought against caste-system which, they felt, was a stigma to humanity as a whole. But the tragedy is all those social reformers could do almost nothing except destroying themselves. Yet again their sincere efforts and sacrifices had their own bearing on the society and slowly ushered in a great positive thought. They also worked as a launching pad for the people of the next generations to turn against the caste-system.

As a matter of fact, decrying the caste-system in Telugu literature especially in Telugu poetry is not a new phenomenon. It has been there ever since the times of Sri Krishnadevaraya whose depiction of a Maladasari in his magnum opus *Amukthamalyada* is an ever green example. In

the later times the intellectuals expanded their visions with a particular bent of mind to reform the society and wriggle it out of the superstitious mire of the caste system and untouchability. The great reformist poets like Vemana and Potuluri Veerabrahmam have dealt with the hollowness of the caste-system. They brought forth the maladies, particularly the most menacing problem of untouchability. They condemned the rigid system of caste which has been the root cause for the sufferings of certain of the meek and weak sections of the society in unequivocal terms. The result paved way for the appraisal of those sections against the oppression and depression. Vemana, a poet, philosopher and radical social reformist, crusaded against superstitions and decried caste-system and untouchability. He articulated his view that all the people in a village should have a cosmopolitan meal to get rid of castes. It is called *chaapa koodu* (a kind of cosmopolitan meal) in Telugu which was put in practice by Brahmanayudu, a ruler of Palnadu, a region in Andhra Pradesh. Vemana, in another poem, rose against treating Malas as untouchables. He opined that he who failed in keeping up his word was the real Mala.

In the same vein of Vemana, Potuluri Veerabrahmam, a prominent sage of olden days was perceptively able to prophesy certain happenings in future which actually have come true. He grew above the religion and tried to renovate the society. He consoled the then hapless sections of the depressed classes who were called Panchamas. He optimistically felt that sooner or later people would become conscious of the greatness of the neglected sections. The eminent social reformer and writer Gurajada Appa Rao also crusaded against several social evils. He took up the cause of untouchability and castigated the meaningless caste-system with a particular reference to Malas. He emphasized that people could be divided by their virtues and vices not by any other means. He went a step ahead and said that if goodness was Mala, he himself would become a Mala by all means.

In another poem Gurajada Appa Rao came down heavily on Dharma that divided people into higher and lower castes. He accused that the one who practised that caste-system undoubtedly had a dirty mind. It means that it is the dirty mind that splits people. A peculiar phenomenon of those days needs a mention. Some of the upper-caste poets more specifically hailing from the Brahmin community took cudgels against untouchability. Mangipudi Venkata Sharma, born in an orthodox Brahmin family, produced the first ever full book *Viruddha Bharatam* in 1915 against the practice of caste-system and untouchability in an epic form. The national poet of the freedom moment, Garimella Satyanarayana, having been thoroughly influenced by Gandhi and his principles, composed poetry disapproving untouchability. In his famous song *Makoddhee Tella Doratanamu* (we don't want this White Bossism) he exhorted people to treat untouchability as a sin. Gurrām Jashua, a great modern and reformist poet, hailing from the Dalit community, disparaged the wickedness of the caste-system and expressed his total disapproval of it. He



vehemently deprecated the social system in which one was considered low and other high. In a poem Jashua went to the extent of questioning the very origin of the panchamas, the fifth caste, which was never there before. Many social reformers emerged on the poetic horizon later.

But when Ambedkar came onto the centre stage as a staunch leader of the downtrodden and the oppressed, he became the central figure and he was able to win their trust. Though he was born in an untouchable family, he grew into a great educationist. He was a lawyer and social reformer who devoted his life to strive for the rights of the oppressed classes and improve the quality of the lives of the untouchables. Ambedkar visualized that the depressed classes would not be able to live with a decent social status in India. And so he demanded a separate state for the people of the scheduled castes. But his demand was turned down by many prominent leaders of the day. Owing to this one sole reason, when the first general elections for the Lok Sabha were held, Ambedkar floated his own party named Scheduled Castes' Federation of India and fielded his party candidates in many constituencies. Ambedkar himself contested from a constituency which is now in Bangladesh now. In those elections, to his utter astonishment and dismay, all his candidates including himself were defeated. Later, on the recommendation of Gandhi, Ambedkar was taken into the Cabinet led by Jawaharlal Nehru. His devotion to the cause of the uplift of the downtrodden is unquestionable. Due to the mighty efforts of the other centered people, considerable attention of the politics and government was drawn to the prevailing practice of segregation and discrimination on the grounds of caste in the society. All these led to substantial social transformation. Especially, after independence, there had been a great change in the situation. A policy of positive and constructive discrimination was established guaranteeing a large quota of seats in colleges and professional institutions as well as in the civil services and jobs to the depressed classes, now collectively known as Dalits. The new Indian Constitution solemnly expressed its belief in a secular and democratic system, without any destructive discrimination either by caste or creed.

Noticing the changes and feeling the necessity, the government issued orders that one should not be insisted on mentioning the caste or religion anywhere like in application forms of all types. It is just voluntary. In addition to that there has been an encouragement to inter-caste marriages in order to usher in a social change. Though, in the beginning, the caste-system was rigid, of late there has been a sea-change in the scenario. It has become possible because of industrialization, modern education, economic development and mobilization for education and jobs. Though there is a considerable change, it still requires undergoing a thorough transformation. Indeed the caste-system has turned out to be a bane not only to some of the suffering castes but also to all the others. But when literature, especially poetry, was freed from the monopoly, it started reflecting the veracity of the

contemporary society. The more the days went-by, the more poetry came nearer to the common man even in his own dialect. As a result there are more and more poets, barring castes, writing poetry to question the injustice. According to Khadar Mohiyuddin, the present era is remarkable for the struggle for the existence of everyone.

The Digambara (Naked) and the revolutionary poetic movements paved a constructive way to two strong branches in Telugu poetry namely, Dalit and Feminist poetry. Both the branches have become potential ever since their inception. In fact the out-gone decade of the twentieth century had been enriched by the entry of the both. Their poetic identity and objective have been certainly unmistakable. At first the word Dalit means only scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. But the meaning of the word Dalit was broadened after the origin of the Dalit Panthers Party in Maharashtra in the year 1972. Later all the backward classes and even minorities were also included in it. They stood united, in spite of many internal differences among them, to get what they desired and abandon what they detested. By and large the current years have witnessed the uplift of Dalits. They now look upon them only as a part of social reform. Here the notable thing is Gandhiji's lifelong dedication to the cause of the Harijan boost up including his living in a Bhangi, a lower caste, colony has not been considered to be good enough for Dalits to secure a rightful and respectable place for them in society. Political organizations have, however, helped little and sometimes even positively hindered the attempts to reduce the divisions among the castes in the society. The Dalit poets and the writers felt that along with economic development, there should be social development too. But in fact, the former may fetch the latter. This want came out in the form of Dalit literature that consists of almost all the branches but the domineering one is poetry.

The Dalit poets have never been in favour of using imaginative and romantic poetic interpretations. In one sense theirs is rather a down to earth approach and perspective to present the sordid realities around them as they are. The poets have realized that the first impediment to pour out their woes is the high flown language. The Dalit poets are reluctant to use the convention ridden poetic diction as it is Sanskritic or brahminical which they felt, had kept them away from the main stream. The poets also realized that the poetic diction had been elitist. They felt that the poetry had closed the doors against the Dalits who had not been able to master the language and diction. Now the poets have realized that a living language, whatever might be its dialect and accent, would always discover and create its own vocabulary, idiom and syntax to enable its users to express their thoughts and feelings straightaway without much difficulty. Therefore they decided to take up the living language of the common folks. Dalit poets have drawn the attention of the public with their strongly worded vivid pictures of heinous discrimination meted out by the upper caste people. But here lies a noteworthy point that should not miss the attention of all the thinking sections. The point is, within the Dalits, especially in the scheduled castes,



yet there prevails untouchability. For instance, Malas keep Madigas away from contact i.e, the former section doesn't allow the latter to enter their houses. The former thinks that it derives elevation and purity by keeping the latter away from all types of contacts and dealings. This segregation is apparent in the Rayalaseema regions.

In this respect Endluri Sudhakar, a well known Dalit poet, expresses his heart rending agony on the segregationist attitude of Malas on Madigas in his poem Dandora (Proclamation). He complains that the major part of the benefits of reservations in jobs and educational institutions are being enjoyed by Malas while Madigas have to remain as the passive recipients with the left over trivial portion. Sudhakar questions straight off as to who laid the barricade between Malas and Madigas. He, in a bemoaning tone, writes that it is not only in the so-called upper castes but also within the dalit sections there are ladder steps of insult, injustice and inequality, of course in a veiled form. He distressfully admits that the sentiments he poured out are truly out of his personal experiences. That shows untouchability persists still even among the scheduled castes themselves. But there has been no poetry on it or an effort, at least, to bring down the discrimination between the two castes. Nobody has so far tried to wipe out the discriminatory sense of one against the other. Through their poetry the Dalit poets stir the people's thought and ask them to intense soul-searching or even shocking the readers with their unsparing language. The reason behind the effort and endeavour of the Dalit poets is to achieve social parity and also attain the political power.

It is a little difficult to classify the Dalit poets according to their standpoints, or the specific areas they are very particular about. In spite of the very slight variations, one thing is common to all. They all write, hoping for a quick social change, in free verse with free flow of expression full of feeling and experience. Besides, some of the poets give graphic descriptions of some incidents which are really of deplorable nature. Positive social transformation and sharpening awareness have been the crying need of the hour for them. In order to reach a noble end, noble ways and means are to be employed. The greater the goal, the greater the path should be to attain it. But often the language and expression of the Dalit poets turns quite aggressive. Quite often the needle of their wrath points at one caste or one religion. The blurb of The Black Rainbow has a tiny poem of Sikhamani. Particularly the Brahmin caste is blamed there, but it is conveniently winked at the Brahmins who had fought against the supremacy of one caste on the other and wrote, and some are still writing, Dalit poetry. The other thing is, if there had not been the hundreds of years of thought provoking old literature, still supplying the needed vocabulary, how could one have a medium to express their feelings? But it is felt that the generations of subjugation has made the Dalits feel so.

Sikhamani's lyrical voice has a special appeal in the contemporary contributions of Dalits to Telugu poetry. He depicts reality with surrealist imagery and at times causes

suffocation to the reader. He has created his own poetic idiom. Some Dalit poets accept non-Dalits writing poetry on Dalits. They feel that how one reacts and reflects to the same thing is important. But Sikhamani has a different opinion. Sikhamani's poetry has gained much acclaim due to his live portrayal of his bitter experiences. But when he switches over to question the social dichotomy and the injustices meted out to the Dalits, suddenly his language becomes obscene which reminds the reader of the earlier Digambara poets. Some poets and critics, though they do not question the form and the content, raise objection to his acidic vitriolic language. This is found in the poem he wrote on reading about a heinous incident where a Dalit was forced to eat the faecal matter for entering a temple in Karnataka. In the poem Badhala Chettu (A Tree of Pains) he compares all his pains and pangs with a tree. Sikhamani writes that he doesn't want to run away from the distresses and torments of life. Whenever he faces them, the memory of the tree gives him a kind of solace. It shows his philosophical bent of mind. The poem reminds the readers of the time-tested proverb that sweet are the uses of adversity. He writes that his distresses are also a source of poetic thought in him.

In the poem Caste - Colorlessness he holds Dharma to be responsible for the caste system which has degraded a man to an animal. He would abstain from all jewelry, costume, colours and acting as these give one different apparition. To be like humans no such things are necessary. The rainbow has all colours except the black. Therefore as a Dalit poet he wants to break down the bow of colours. The poetry of Endluri Sudhakar, has three qualities piety, pity and protest. He says that modern poetry is his heart and soul. His poetry is simple and uncomplicated. He holds that Hinduism is responsible for the degradation of Dalits. Therefore, he develops a kind of aversion, as many Dalits do, towards Hinduism. Fearless presentation is his chief characteristic and he openly declares that he cannot remain in the congested compartments of narrow ideology. Liberty is the essence of life. He traces it to his long-felt war-dream. He writes that pain and poetry are alike to him, whenever the former enters his mind, the latter gives him solace. His poem I Am the Foreword to Tomorrow's History, depicts his love for freedom, poetry and progress.

Sudhakar becomes furious in the poem Foot Prints. He emphasizes that there is no point in asking whether a Dalit has any talent. He lays blame on the people who having stolen his land and snatched his art, now are accusing him of his lacking talent. Sudhakar remembers the dark history which recorded the generations of humiliation and maltreatment towards Dalits. He writes that the miseries and the agonizing tearful stories are still preserved in the minds which have suffered the acute pain. Now he wants his people, who are ill-treated in the days gone by, should assert themselves for their place of pride. Karamchedu and some other bloodbaths had a strong bearing on Dalit psyche as also poetry. In fact one can conclude that Dalit poetry has attained a literary status and emerged as an 'ism' in Telugu literature after the successive caste carnages.



Hailing from the teaching community, Katti Padma Rao has become one of the prominent poets of Dalit movement. He provides a new dimension to the branch of Dalit poetry. He asserts that all the Dalit movement speeches in actual fact have poetic shade as they pour out heartfelt feelings. A portrayal of vivid images of various aspects of the lives of Dalits is found in his poetry. Padma Rao opines that poetry should come out of life, movements and social struggles and conflicts. He feels that non-Dalits can also write Dalit poetry as he himself writes non-Dalit poetry like Feminist poetry. Indeed Katti Padma Rao came into light as a champion of the Dalit cause and poet after the heinous Karamchedu caste carnage. The way Katti Padma Rao chooses to denounce the Brahmanic casteism is rather baser and rude. He pours out in the poetry all his sad and bitter experiences he had undergone. In his poem Odi - Badi (Lap and School) he wrote that his grandfather was rather better than his school teacher who ill-treated him. Padma Rao wrote that the teacher was incapable of teaching, short tempered and had little knowledge. He often comes down on the mythological character Manu who was said to be solely responsible for defining the division of all the castes in Hindu society. But as a matter of fact, the social system was carved out by Lord Krishna and He declared it in the Bhagavad-Gita that according to the modes of material nature and the work associated with them, the four divisions of human society are created by Me.

This sloka of Bhagavad-Gita signifies that it is Lord Krishna himself has created the four social divisions or varnas namely Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vysya and Sudra. But Manu never used the word Panchama, the fifth division. Holding Manu to be responsible for the degradation of some sections, Dalits often reprimand him harshly. In the poem Neelo Neevu (You're within Yourself) Padma Rao vents out his fury and calls him the enemy of humanity. He curses that Manu hereafter had to live not in colonies of Brahmins, but in the musical instruments of both the Malas and Madigas. In the last lines of the poem he reached the peak in his hatred towards one particular religion and wrote that unless and until Hinduism was demolished, Manu could never be eliminated. Another Dalit poet, Adigopula Venkata Ratnam, in his short poem Jasmine Creepers under a Banyan Tree, has shown a pertinent point that there are many invisible hindrances to the development of the Dalits. The poet remembers that when he went to school in his half torn garments, the teacher sent him back with a condemnation that he would be unfit either for education or for cultivation. He was labelled as a thief and deprived of normal life. He, therefore, writes that the lives are like the jasmine creepers under a banyan tree. The problem is, the creepers have neither life to live nor death to die.

Maddhuri Nagesh Babu is another prominent Dalit poet. His entry has lent an aura to Dalit poetry. He uses beautiful as well as curt and repulsive language to express the sum and substance of his thoughts. In the long poem Ratchabanda, he juxtaposes the conditions of a village before and after the strife of a caste in which there was massacre on one side. The

poet writes that before the man-made calamity, the village looked like a heaven on the earth. He remembers his childhood activities like crawling, walking, running and all. In the first half of the poem, his language is aesthetic. But in the latter part it turns a little obscene and acrid due to the changed state of affairs. The peaceful situation is shattered, there is loss of lives, the sweet memories assumed bitterness, the relations are cut off, the village looks like a burial ground and the whole village is left to dogs. Neither the government nor the courts do any justice. The tone of voice of Nagesh Babu acquires a revolutionary temper in the last part of the poem. It reminds one of the words of Sri Sri that if justice, equality, opportunities are denied to the needy, they can choose the path of disruption.

Similarly, Nagesh Babu mentions certain extremist thoughts suggestive of a rebellious attitude to dawn on the villages. Then the police, the courts and all would turn into deadwood. Chikkanavutunna Pata (The Thickening Song) is a Dalit anthology appeared in 1995 and it was edited by Lakshmi Narasaiah and Tripuraneni Srinivas. The editors have justified the anger of Dalits in their poetry. In order to discover and depict the reasons for the prevalent illiteracy and poverty among the oppressed and the depressed castes, one has to look into the caste and religion. He asserts that only then it can be a truly people's literature. Lakshmi Narasaiah opines that Dalits have come into the open society because of the influence of the Communist movement.

But Lakshmi Narasaiah feels that they came out considering themselves to be the working class alone. He ardently hopes that this country can be bettered only when the Dalit lot is improved. This line of thinking is obviously seen in the present day Dalit poetry. The anthology, Chikkanavutunna Pata, consists of about 100 poems, all are written by S.C, S.T, B.C and Minority poets alone. Lakshmi Narasaiah observes that the poetry put in writing non-Dalit poets is rather less in volume. He expects that it should be more and more. But the non-Dalits should write Dalit poetry with a commitment of disowning their caste and religion. But in the anthology there is not even a single poem written by the Dalit woman who in fact is a legitimate half of the Dalit community. Pointing at the glaring lapse, Lakshmi Narasaiah looks into the future optimistically and hopes that the Dalit women will write poetry reflecting their own woes, gender concern and all. The editors write that the more the Dalit – women's view point strengthens, the more the Dalit poetry assumes comprehensiveness. Lakshmi Narasaiah believes that Marxism had better assimilate the philosophies of the social reformer Phule and Ambedkar.

Some of the 46 poets who contributed to this anthology are influenced by the progressive and revolutionary poetry. The poets prefer universality to inward-looking. On the contrary Yakoob, a famous modern poet, in his poem, I Speak of My Secular Dream Only, disparages the growing importance to religion which a child gets even before it is born. He disapproves of everything that is given significance except to



man. He points out at the deterioration in place of progression. He asserts that he doesn't belong either to Adam and Eve or to the forbidden fruit but to the ape as Darwin had theorized. Dhanamoolam Idam Jagath (It's Money that Rules the Roost) is paraphrased by the poet Sambhuka as Kulam Mayam - Idam Jagath, (It's Caste that Rules the Roost) He sees the pollution of the meaningless caste everywhere and in everything. It suggests that the paradox of human life has been decided by caste where it particularly has no place. He feels that in each and every matter caste turns out to be the principal consideration. Thus the poet Sambhuka has brought into light a pertinent issue in the society. P.C. Ramulu, another poet of Dalit clan has given a picture of the deplorable condition of the washer men who have become drooping due to bearing the loads of clothes on their backs. They have to live on underpayment and without basic amenities. Neither the government nor the local bodies tried to better their living and working conditions.

Ramulu sympathetically comments that the washer men wash all the clothes with not even a thread on their bodies except a loin cloth. At last the poet warns that the washer people would soften the backs of the haves. He emphasizes that the social bossism would no longer go unchallenged. In his poem, Colosseum, a minority poet, Abbas has taken his progressive stance and conveys his discontentment over the dwindling values in the people who are advancing scientifically and technologically while regressing morally and socially. He expresses his disapproval of the prevailing hypocrisy in the society. The poet exhorts that positive improvement in thought and action shows the way to a better tomorrow. He vehemently condemns the sacrifice of truth for belief. Caste and religion reduce man to a speck. The poem underlines the importance of scientific temper and universality. The poem, Amma..... Nenontari Vaanne (Mother, I'm Still Alone) draws sympathy for the poet S. Mogilaiah Sagar. He feels insecurity, lack of confidence and nostalgia. His yearning is to go back to his mother's lap and be fed by her. Sagar feels pinched everywhere in the society as no one addresses him affectionately. The poet complains that there have been promises to better his lot in all the ways from many quarters. But so far no promise has been realized. Despair and disappointment have become common for him. He says that he has stopped his voice proclaiming the facts, lest it should become an 'ism.'

Cornerstone may not be beautiful, it may not be seen over the ground as it is steeped deep under a building but it decides the strength, safety and life of the structure. Unless the ground crew works, no aeroplane takes off. G.R. Kurme in his poem, Cornerstone, writes about a man who does the menial jobs in a village. He is never reluctant to attend any of his duties, besides he performs them with utmost care and concern. No matter whether it is the watchman's duty at the burial ground or the duty of carrying carcasses to fling; the man in no way feels mean. The poet shows the importance of the lowest machinery in the villages. There will be chaos if the

mechanism ceases to work. The chief editor of Padunekkina Pata (The Sharpened Song) the second major anthology of Dalit poetry, which is published after Chikkanavutunna Pata, Lakshmi Narasaiah brings to light, in the foreword, the changes that have taken place in the society after the publication of the latter. Padunekkina Pata consists of 156 poems and noticeable thing is there are six women poets. It has been edited by twelve poets while Lakshmi Narasaiah being the chief editor. A comprehensive and elaborate Dalit vision is achieved besides; a wider variety of poetry is produced through this anthology. As all these objectives have been accomplished, the anthology is titled as Padunekkina Pata.

It is expressed, through this anthology, that when social dignity and economic welfare both are ensured, then alone the development of the Dalit community can be achieved. The Dalit vision explains as to which one of the two major factors decides or affects the other. Some of the poems in this anthology charge that caste system has played a very pivotal role in depriving the Dalits of social dignity and wealth. Some Dalit poets trace out that even the fame and prestige and the movements of the media are guided by the caste. The poems written by some women poets, that lend specialty to this anthology, deal in detail the injustices meted out to them socially and domestically. These poets denounce the upper caste mentality as well as the patriarchal system. The live depiction of the plight of a servant girl is by G. Vijaya Lakshmi in her poem Panipilla (The Maid Servant) is heart rending. Her eyes are perennial rivers of flowing tears. She has lost the habit of calling 'mother' and is used to call 'madam'. Scullery is her place and takes a square meal only in her dreams. She is so ignorant to know that she is sexually abused. The cost of the molestation she is subjected to is just a hundred rupee note. The torments become doubled because of her being a girl.

The heart rending account of a poor mother moves the heart of the readers in another poem. She is the early riser in the house; finishing the domestic chores when she reaches fields, the landlord starts abusing. After the daylong labour, taking the meagre daily remuneration she reaches home getting totally enervated. There the husband is ready to grab the money for his drink. Another poem of the same poet, Challapalli Swarupa Rani portrays her helpless mother who faces discrimination both in and out of her house. At home she is a slave to the husband and in the street she is a low caste woman. The husband budes before everyone but he wants his wife to do the same before him. The mother has to live amidst several enemies all the time. At times her heart longs to revolt against her husband but she is scared of the society. Nagnamuni, one of the Digambara poets, apologizes the whole Dalits as a poet who has written poetry on Berlin wall, Somalia hunger but failed to write on the mundane man in the vicinity. He condemns the poets who write poetry on romantic themes while conveniently paying no attention to the downtrodden, their degeneration, the massacre and all. At last



he writes that economic equality fetches social equality and class struggle yields required results without abolition of caste. By and large, the hour of need, from the Dalits' point of view, is a purposeful meaning to their existence and respect to their personality and self. They want to get themselves freed from the yoke of segregation and discrimination. The Dalits must be able to assert themselves socially and live with all their dignity. In addition, they want economic development. It is strongly believed that through their writings and movements Dalits will attain this someday. Ever since the emergence of Dalitism as a special social philosophy to propagate its ideology and to inspire the hitherto dejected sections to fight against social injustice, Dalit poetry has attained a separate entity and identity in Telugu Free Verse. Now there are many budding poets poetizing the melancholic conditions of the downtrodden to draw the attention of the public and the establishment as well. Of late there has been change in the tone and tenor of Dalit poets. The feelings of hostility and ill will are diminishing and so the poetry has acquired gentleness. Consequently Dalit poetry is read not only by the Dalits but also by the non-Dalits. It has now gained a place of its own without which the Modern Telugu poetry can never have a complete picture of its own.

### III. CONCLUSION

Telugu poets, both dalits and non-dalits produced poetry in the past, but it was only after 1980s. It is already quoted at the very beginning. They started producing powerful counter discourse. Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh has not only given birth to too many poets but also empowered the existing popular poets with dalit consciousness. The poetry has to be read against the backdrop of social and economic injustice that dalits endured for many centuries. A majority of the poets, in addition to the proclaiming self-respect for dalits, questioned and protested against the existing social structure in their words and deeds. Some of the poetry was written by well-known and low, profile poets. Undoubtedly all the poems express of powerful emotions. There are some poems with philosophical ideas too. In the present socio-economic and political scenario, social justice is the most considered issue. All the poems certainly give a vivid picture of dalit life in India. And they remain a valuable source for students and scholars who are genuinely interested to have an in-depth study of dalit literature. A recent collection of poems, edited and compiled by T.Bharati, asks people to devote to the abolition of caste, racism, sexism, and related intolerance. They must overcome and see a day where casteism in particular, the world's oldest systemic system of structural hatred and disenfranchisement is driven from the face of the earth. Each and every one of this country and the world has the duty regardless of your faith or ethnicity to esteem all people equally, and do all that they can to bring in a better world and society. A world without casteism is an idea whose time is now. Walk in the light of humanity and be a bearer of light and hope to others.

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