



LANGUAGE OF A FEW DALIT CHARACTERS IN KANNADA PLAYS

Dr. Raja N Visiting Professor Dept. of Performing Arts Bangaluru	Dr. Thammiah R B H O D Dept of English Padmashree Institute of Management and Sciences Bangaluru
--	--

Speech constitutes an integral part of performance on the stage. A failed speech results in a failed character and in turn an ineffective performance. The playwright makes a choice of the language by taking many things in to consideration - the theme, the setting, socio-political scenario, choice of characters, overall effect so on. It is a difficult task to choose a language that perfectly fits the play on the stage. The language clearly determines the 'shape' of the play.

In this paper we attempt to present our observations on the choice of language of a few dalit characters in Kannada plays. For convenience we have chosen three plays written by writers of different background. They are JALAGARA by K.V. Puttappa, SANKRANTI by P. Lankesh and ODALALA by Devanooru Mahadeva. The first play of this study is JALAGARA - a sweeper, written by one of the towering personalities of Kannada literature- K.V.

Puttappa. The protagonist believes that his work is the right form of offering to lord Shiva. He sweeps the streets while the others go to attend pooja and fair at the temple. There are some stock characters like superstitious people, exploitative priests in the play. At the end lord Shiva himself comes before the sweeper. Shiva claims himself to be a sweeper and the protagonist as his brother.

In JALAGARA, Puttappa tries to achieve a simple thing-sweeper's worship who believes in his work is far superior to the crooked priests. Here sweeper, probably lowly among the lowest speaks highly sophisticated language. He seems highly cultured in Brahminical practices. At some point in the play by listening to his songs and speech two priests consider the person to be of divine qualities. This is precisely what Puttappa wants to achieve. A sweeper can become a true Brahmin. Hence this



sweeper speaks more sanskritised Kannada than the priests themselves.

While watching the play it becomes difficult to accept Jalagara. Certainly there is an incongruity between the sweeper and his language. He sounds more like the playwright who was a university teacher and less like a sweeper. This results in lack of real touch to the character.

My second choice for this study is SANKRANTI written by P. Lankesh. SANKRANTI revolves around the love of a dalit boy and a Brahmin girl caught in the turbulent times of 12th century revolution spearheaded by thousands of washer men, barbers, shepherds, minstrels, beggars, cobblers, peasants, grave diggers as rightly pointed out by H.S. Shivaprakash in MAHACHAITRA. In the socio-political history of Karnataka, 12th century was a cauldron of many revolutions. It was the best of times and the worst of times. King's authority, priestly hegemony, caste rigidities revolutionary zeal were at the loggerheads. A simple love affair between a boy and a girl adds fuel to the fire of the disturbed time.

In SANKRANTI I would like to focus on the language of ujja, an elderly dalit and his son Rudra. Basavesha visits the dalit colony and insist the dalits to give up the practice of consuming liquor and meat, traditional worship and beliefs in order to become sharanas-followers of veerashaiva faith. Rudra becomes a sincere follower of Basavesha. Ujja, his father pretends to be a sharana before his son but in reality he is not. The playwright brilliantly differentiates between Ujja and Rudra through their language. Rudra consciously tries to speak the language of his master Basava. Ujja remains loyal to his roots. Through this father-son duo Lankesh tries to bring out one of the contradictions of the play- the intrinsic and the imposed.

The final play for this paper is ODALALA. It is a stage adaptation of the novel written by Devanooru Mahadeva, one of the highly acclaimed contemporary dalit writers of Karnataka. ODALALA explores the undying spirit of survival of a dalit family headed by an old widow Sakavva. She symbolizes the never ending quest for survival. Sakavva lives with a huge family



to feed amidst utter poverty. She is a victim of the system, but amazingly Sakavva never feels victim hood. In fact she considers herself a big landlady as she possesses a small hut.

Sakavva's yearning for survival is evident in her searching for a lost rooster throughout the play. In order to compare sakavva's languagei has kept another famous dalit character as a reference point. Choma a bonded labourer dreams to 'own' a piece of land. That is the ambition of his life. He miserably fails in fulfilling his ambition. This failure is conspicuous in Choma. He speaks with folded hands and low voice. He accepts that he is cursed to die as a bonded labourer. On the contrary in spite of old age and failing body Sakavva speaks with authority. The playwright uses the language of Chamarajnagar locality to bring in more authenticity.

Now we request the attention of the audience to the three plays that we mentioned. As a representative works of language used the dalit characters in the plays range from Brahmin cal to authentic dalit. While JALAGARA stands at the

extreme of sanskritised Brahmin cal sophistication, Sakavva speaks rustic 'impure' dalit language. Lankesh's Ujja captures the contradiction between the extremes. While terming the language of these characters as 'real' and 'not so real' we should not forget the socio-cultural background of the playwrights and what they wanted to achieve in these plays. While Puttappa hailed from a farming family and taught at the university, Devanooru Mahadeva was born and brought up in the same 'dirty' streets where Sakavva searches her lost rooster. Lankesh is a writer who consciously remains close to reality.

To conclude a character draws his/her strength from the language he/she uses on the stage. This is more so in respect of characters representing a specific caste/community. Real characters speak real language, those who do not, remain away from reality. In this respect we have some finest example in Kannada theatre which I tried to give you a glimpse. Let me end with a hope that playwrights make their characters real by making them speak real language.



Reference

1. Bengal: A Panorama of Theatre in India.
2. Collected works of Kuvempu
3. Odalala Devanooru Mahadeva
4. Collected works of P Lankesh
5. Sahithya Vimarshe: Dr. C N Ramchandran : Karnataka Shithya Academy