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Introduction:

Indigenous Drama or Theatre in India during British Rule was influenced and inspired by western classics in structure, form and poetic rhetoric which were chiefly written in English. At this juncture, the indigenous themes such as independence, equality and resistance in India have also developed emerging in English. Initially, the theatre/drama focused on unwritten stories, oral folk tales, stories from epics and myths. Along with all these themes, the post independence drama witnessed the development of indigenous themes related to caste, class, gender, social justice, etc.

Simultaneously, various new types of performative arts¹ have also been emerged in the recent theatre of India. Among them, street theatre practice has become a weapon to educate the weak and largely unorganized communities, to address their rights and to organize them. Street theatre performance has helped the target communities in order to assist them in articulating their resistance against the inequality caused by the greatly organized and professional organizations like developed communities (castes, societies, etc.), industrial unit managements or government institutions and enterprises.

The Telugu theatre has a long surviving history. "Evidence from sculpture and inscriptions indicates that theatrical activities flourished in the present south-eastern state of Andhra Pradesh as early as the second century B.C." (Lai 2004 476).

To overcome caste, class or gender issues in India, 'Street Theatre' practice have become a boon for various resistance movements for the target communities, particularly due to its easy mobilization in educating the public. At this point, we discuss a popular and influential Telugu street play named '*Daaham*' (2002) written by Telugu Feminist playwright Dr. M. M. Vinodini². which was translated into English as *Thirst* (2005) by Dr. Sunita Rani³. The translation of *Daaham* as *Thirst* in English is published in '*Staging Resistance: Plays by Women in*

¹ Street play, circus arts, mime, one act play etc.

² Dr. M. M. Vinodini is a social worker, activist, Dalit intellectual and writer who is working as an Assistant Professor in Yogi Vemana University, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh

³ Dr. K. Sunita Rani is a Faculty at Centre for Womens Studies, University of Hyderabad.

Translation' (OUP-2005) edited by Prof. Tutun Mukherjee, an eminent scholar and writer of comparative literature.

Daaham was projected to elevate spectators' responsiveness, consciousness and realization related to common and usual atrocities along with inequalities faced by the Dalit communities who have been suffering the untouchability in many aspects. In spite of the constitutional protection for the elimination of untouchability, *Thirst* portrays a distressing depiction of the caste atrocities faced by the downtrodden sections in rural India. The play offers a critique of the subjugation faced by the Dalits, more specifically the Dalit women and leads for collective endeavor; thus upraising the realization.

Life and Career of the author:

Guntur born Dr. M. M. Vinodini is a writer, poet, critic, social activist and playwright. She was graduated from AC College, Guntur and M.A., M. Phil and PhD from Telugu University, Rajahmundry. Presently, she is working as an Assistant Professor in Yogi Vemana University, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh. Her essays on Classical Telugu Literature Teaching (Pedagogy) and writings on Dalits, Stories and Poetry are popular. Her selected stories, poetry and essays have published and translated into English and many Indian languages. Some of her works have been published in Oxford, Penguin, etc.

Her popular play '*Daaham*' translated into English as *Thirst* and her poetry *Single Pole Hut* have been placed in the syllabus of M.A and M.Phil level at University of Hyderabad. Her 'The Parable of Lost Daughter' has been prescribed as a text book for Degree students of Kerala University. Her works includes a play *Daaham* (*Thirst*), *Vegu Chukkalu* (2014) (a critical volume) and *Black Ink Stories* (2015). She also has written above 50 poems and published 30 articles in avrious news papers. she also grabbed 'Savitribhai Phule Best Teacher Award in 2016 and many other awards for her contribution to the Dalit Women literature.

List of Characters:

1. Shouramma (45-50 Years)

2. Ganga (22 Years)
3. Pushpamma (45-50 Years)
4. Punnamma (45-50 Years)
5. Yashoda (45-50 Years)
6. Daughter in law of Pedda Reddy (Between 20-25 years)
7. Sister in Law of Pedda Reddy (Aged 40 Years)
8. Dasu (Between 20-25 years, Son of Shouramma)
9. Raju, Prasad, Chandraiah, Dibbadu (22-25 Years)
10. Chinnemkati (40-45 Years)
11. Pedda Mala (60-65 Years)
12. Husband of Ganga (25 Years)
13. Tata - Grandfather (Aged around 70 years)
14. Narsaiah (Shouramma's husband)
15. Pedda Reddy (50-55 Years)
16. Chinna Reddy (50-55 Years)
17. Venkata Reddy (25 Years)

Analysis of the Play *Daaham (Thirst)*:

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The play has been written in five Scenes. Scene I begins in a thatched hut of Tata, a Mala elder who lives in Malapalli, a segregated colony from the mainstream village. The play starts with the cry out of Dasu about his mother Shouramma, who leaves the house to fetch the drinking water hours before. He later enquires about Ganga, his sister in law, after listening to the continuous bawling of their infant and comes to know that she goes to feed breast milk to the grandson of Pedda Reddy, leaving her own infant at home. On the other hand, his mother Shouramma was waiting for pitcher water at the 'well'. While Dasu shouting at Tata by querying the situation of the infant, who was howling for feeding and questioning the sacrifice of his sister in law, Shouramma enters the house by shouting at some women. Both Dasu and Tata came to know that she has been beaten badly by the 'Reddy Women'. Dasu then realized that his mother was attacked by the upper caste women because of her attempt to fetch water from the well. He also became conscious that she had been ignored by the upper caste women to get some water from

long time. Shouramma depicts the entire story with agony. Dasu becomes furious and tries to question the authority of the upper caste women and their atrocities on them. However, Tata, an elder grandfather stops him by explaining their inability out of their lower caste in the society with fear. After listening to the oldman, Shouramma also consoles her son in a helplessness condition.

The Scene II starts with the entry of the Pedda Mala, an elder leader of their community to Shouramma's house. Despite of suffering, he questions Shouramma for her squabble with upper caste women and seeks explanation about the confrontation. Narsaiah, husband of Shouramma also shouts at her for the whole thing that happened. After watching them in vain, Dasu becomes furious and demands the justice for the acts of violence by the upper caste. Although his argument is accurate, all the elders warned him to be in his limits and caution him for the future repercussions, if he dares to face the Reddys in the village. Subsequent to all the arguments, the Pedda Mala suggested Narsaiah to go to the Pedda Reddy along with him. However, Dasu argued that they do not have to go to Pedda Reddy's place since there is no fault from their side. He also raises the issue of inequality in sharing the water to all. Later, Narsimulu tries to wear his cheppals but leaves them immediately after listening to the warning that they will be beaten if they go to Reddy's place with cheppals. Dasu also tries to join them to go to Pedda Reddy's place, but the elders reject him to proceed. Scene II ends with the saga of the Shouramma and her family.

Scene III shows us how dominant the Reddys were. Pedda Reddy enquires Venkanna, one of his workers, about the transfer of information to Pedda Mala (an elder of Mala community) about the Shouramma issue. Afterwards, Pedda Mala and Narsaiah along with two others go to Pedda Reddy's place. Pedda Reddy attacks them verbally with imperialistic nature and warns them to be in limits. Pedda Reddy shows his oppressive attitude towards Peddamala, Narsaiah and others by targeting their status by caste in the society and forewarns them to survive in the village. He also blames Shouramma for giving birth to four children by comparing with a pig. At this point, Pedda Mala rebukes Narsaiah for his inefficiency to control his wife and questions Shoramma's attempt to fetch water in resistance. Here, one can realize that there is a clear impact of Caste hierarchy in the servitude of Pedda Mala and therefore he yells Narsaiah for the incompetence in

controlling his wife. Though Narsaiah begs Pedda Reddy to forgive Shouramma for the last time, he demands ten thousand rupees as a fine. Narsaiah incessantly requests by touching Reddy's feet to forgive, but he rejects mercilessly. The scene ends with the mandate that Narsaiah's family have to pay the penalty for Shouramma's arrogant approach with the upper class women. They also forewarn that if they fail to pay the penalty within time, Shouramma has to be unclothed and paraded on the donkey in the village.

Scene IV is one of the prominent parts of the play which shows the resistance against the unending atrocities, recall of the past atrocities and the decision of collective action against the upper caste abominations on the downtrodden sections in the village. After all the continuous hesitation and reluctance, both elders and youngsters decided to see whether they will survive in the village respectfully or not. All the residents of Malapally (Dalit Street) gather and discuss the issue of Shouramma. Pedda Mala started thinking of the haughty ruling of Pedda Reddy. He then opined that there should be a limit for Reddys atrocities. Dasu, son of Narsaiah and Shouramma fires on them. Dasu wanted to attack them directly. But, Pedda Mala and Chinnemkati obstruct him. They explained about same kind attempt against the Reddys' dominance by Dasu's Uncle and his end. Dasu and other youth of the Dalit Street came to know by Chinnemkati, Punnamma, Pushpamm and Tata that Dasu's Uncle has been assassinated by Reddys for his demand of fifth array of pulley to fetch water from the well in their street for Dalits. Dasu's uncle was an intelligent and straightforward man among the Dalits. When Pedda Reddy's father visited the Dalit Street to dig a Well in the Dalit Street, Dasu's uncle demanded a separate array of pulley for their community. Pedda Reddy's father accepts his demand but deceives him by fixing a rotted log pulley which demolishes immediately after an attempt by Roshmmavva, an elder lady from the Dalit Street. Upper caste people interpret this as an ill omen and an inauspicious sign and say that Goddess Gangamma would go back to the depth. From then, Dalits lost their right to fetch water from the well, which indeed had dug by them. After listening to all this, Dasu, along with other youth, elders and his family, decided to protest against the Reddys in the village Panchayat. All the elders of the Dalit Street were convinced in contrast to their submissive approach to go ahead in protest. All the youth take a pledge to be ready for sacrificing their lives, if situation demands. The Scene IV ends with a clear note that there will be a protest in the panchayat for the brutal attack on Shouramma and exorbitant penalty on her.

Scene V is last episode in the play. Pedda Reddy questions the elder man (Pedda Mala) for the presence of entire Dalit Street in the Panchayat. Afterwards, Reddy asks the penalty and Dasu questions it. Pedda Reddy becomes furious and shouts at Dasu. But, Dasu along with Raju keep on questioning Reddy and seeks explanation for the penalty. They claim that it is upper caste women who attacked Shouramma and they have to be punished. Venkata Reddy becomes furious and threatens the Dalits to be in limits. He questions them on what authority they decide penalty in the village. Both Chinna Reddy and Venkat Reddy become furious and try to terrorize the people over there. Pedda Reddy later says 'Mala Shouri⁴ tried to fetch water from the shore of our village well. Instead of that, she abused the upper caste women.' However, Dasu questions the authority of deciding outlaws and questions their autocratic approach on the town trodden sections in the village. He later demands that the upper class women should apologize for their cruel attack on his mother initially. Venkat Reddy warns Dasu and says that the rules and norms are decided by the elders of the village. But, Dasu counters that they were decided by the elders of upper castes. In the meantime, a maid comes from Reddy's home and informs Ganga, who breastfeeds Venkat Reddy's son, to go Reddy's home immediately. Ganga's husband shouts at her. However, Ganga also rejects the request and reports that they should allow them to fetch water from the well to drink. Afterwards, the discussion leads to the chaotic condition where Venkat Reddy gets furious and abuses Dasu and his mates by caste. Chinna Reddy recollects the old stories of suppression and warns that they will end everyone who goes against them in the village.

In response to Chinna Reddy, Dasu asserts that they are not alone and can get many people involved from various places to face the atrocities on them. Later, Pushamma claims that the Gangamma (the Goddess of water) will not go away if the untouchables fetch the water from the well. She also asserts that they brought the water up. Punnamma also shouts at Pedda Reddy and states that they had dug the well and have every right to fetch water from the well. After a while, a maid comes again and requests Ganga to go Reddy's home for a crying child right away. Ganga's husband reiterates that she will not come unless the issue resolves. The maid requests

⁴ Shouramma, whose name was shortened as Mala Shouri by Pedda Reddy shows his caste centric attitude and his perverseness towards lower class women

Pedda Reddy to request Ganga and send her to the infant baby immediately. He later asks Gangi to go once. But, Shouramma asserts that Gangi will not go to feed until the problem dissolves. Venkat Reddy then starts speaking about the humanity of the Dalits who are refusing to send Ganga, who has been habituated to feed an infant baby. Prasad and Pushpamma replied him well by comparing the plight of their life for water and difficulties in providing a pit of water to their husbands during their meal which causes physical abuse and argument.

Venkat Reddy questions them that how they are surviving without taking water from them with a satirical tone. Shouramma replies him saying that they go for miles together on foot to the lake where pigs and buffalos swim and fetch the dirty water. Pedda Reddy tries to object her remarks and claims that it happens only during heavy summer due to drought. Punnamma contradicts Reddy's claims and affirms that the well do not affect with heavy summer. Indeed, water from the well is being used by upper castes for their toilet, cleaning dishes, bathing and finally for pouring water mixed with cow dung in front of their houses. On the other hand, she adds, they do not get water for wetting their throats. At this point, Punnamma doubts that how can they think of Reddy's kids. Chandraiah then assume that if they look after the baby Reddy, he then will kick on their chest in future. Meanwhile, daughter in law and sister in law of Pedda Reddy and his wife Yashodamma along with the infant baby presents at the Panchayiti. Daughter in law of Reddy begs Gangamma to feed her son to give him life. Ganga reacts but maintains stability. Daughter in law supplicates her uncle Pedda Reddy, husband Chinna Reddy and another Uncle Venkat Reddy to give life to her dying son. Pedda Reddy then requests Ganga again to fee the baby. But, Ganga's husband affirms that she will not feed until the Panchayati dissolves. Pedda Mala also claims that they do not believe Reddys because of their continuous deceitful atrocities. Pedda Reddy then promised that they will give fifth pulley and facilitate water for all of the Mala Palli. Unpredictably, Ganga straightaway affirms that they are not fighting now for fifth pulley which is their right. She states that they will fetch water from the well, does not matter whether they give or not. The reason for coming to this Panchayiti is to question the brutal attitude of upper class women who attacks Shouramma physically and abuses all the lower class women as pigs. They have come to seek the apologies from them. Pedda Reddy then accepts their mistake and assert that they will not repeat it. But, Dasu demands apologies from the Upper Class Women who attacked his mother. The play finally ends with apologies from the daughter in law

of Pedda Reddy and at last, Ganga takes the baby into her lap to feed. Thus, after initial hesitation and reluctance, the elder Dalits along with the determined youngsters shows the collective revolution against the upper classes and their atrocities.

Gender and Caste subjugation in Rural India: An outlook of *Daaham (Thirst)*

Vinodin's *Thirst (Daaham)* portrays the issue of caste-gender and resistance of the Dalit women after long struggle. The ideological commitment of the author hints the elaboration of social conditions of Dalits in rural India and their subjugation. The depiction of Dalit women struggle for water remind us of "the violence, oppression and structural inequality engendered by casteism"(Gajrawala, 2013:1). Furthermore, the revolt of the Dalit women in the drama strengthen Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's idea of "radical program of education and rights-based advocacy for the lower castes- within a framework of accusation (against the oppressors) and revelation (of the conditions of Dalit life)" (Zelliot qtd in Gajrawala, 2013:2). Vinodini's outlook on caste and its impact on the subjugation of Dalit women reminds us the perspective of Vasantha and Kalpana Kannabiran's "caste and gender as twin mediators of oppression from the outset"(1991:2131). To substantiate the gender and caste impact on the oppression, Scene I emphasizes the two-facedness of the upper caste Reddy women's social discrimination of Dalit woman named Shouramma due to her attempt to fetch water in their absence. On the other hand, the same upper caste women allows a Dalit women i.e. Ganga to breastfeed their infant baby in private. It shows us the dual mentality of the upper caste women and their gruesome practice of untouchability, particularly in the rural areas across the country.

The very first Scene of the play draw the attention of the reader/audience to know the truth that Ganga is raising the grandson of Pedda Reddy on one hand, and on the other hand, Shouramma enters her house after being attacked by upper caste (Reddy) women in regards to water to drink. Therefore, the play gives us a hint that the dichotomy of upper class Reddy's towards oppressed caste (Mala) women, who are not allowed to fetch a pitcher of water from the well but allowed to feed their infant baby. Dasu's use of images such as calf and tiger, "Wee nothing to feed the calf in our own home but the tiger in the neighborhood must be fed!"(Sc 1, 492) shows us that the agony of Dalit women in the village by the upper caste has become normal and

unquestionable. Shouramma has been portrayed as the symbol of initial resistance in the play. Even though the upper caste women attacks her physically, she dares to say that they are all like pigs and questions Pedda Reddy's younger brother's wife as 'she is so proud, as if this village is her father's property' (Sc 1, 493). However, Tata and other elders scared to face the situation afterwards.

Vinodini describes the reactions on caste bias by three generations in her play, the first generation Tata's stunned responses which shows as Shouramma's disrespect and contempt will lead to the extreme levels. Later, Pedda Mala, an elderly Dalit representative of Mala community scolds Shouramma for her offensive⁵ act. Afterwards, Narasaiah, who belongs to the second generation reverberates the self obligatory prejudice, "If there's no water, we'd have lived drinking urine"; in contrast, Dasu discharges it as nonsense. (Scene 2, 495). Finally, the problem will be addressed successfully through the characters like Dasu, Gangamma, Prasad and Raju by the end of the play. Vinodini discloses Mala women's usual harassment through Shouramma by upper castes over the images of vultures and carcass. Shouramma says "... Even if people are dying of thirst, you won't give a drop of water, so you are the pigs, I said. That's all. They jumped on me, pushed my chest, and threw me down. They beat me, kicked me ... pulled me by my hair ... broke my pitcher and said go and cry wherever you want" (Sc 2, 495). Shouramma's effort to access the restricted water and her encounter with the Reddy women highlights that women of diverse castes experience gender in a different way- the reactions of the upper caste Reddy women portrays their participation with the graded discriminations in caste hierarchies.

Nonetheless, Vinodini depicts Mala women as partaking in the unmasking of patriarchal ideas of maleness. The Mala community's patriarchal approach is evident in Pedda Mala who begs mercy for Souramma's rashness and scolds Narasaiah (her husband) in public:

"You are incapable of controlling your wife. Why have you taken birth as a male (spits). Thoo. Shameless fellow, motherfucker! Will you die if you have no water one day? I've noticed it's only your wife who cannot wait at the well for water even for a day. This

⁵ Although Shouramma's action is not an inappropriate thing, Pedda Mala considers Shouramma's action is highly questionable and wrong due to generation gap.

should happen to you for having married that kind of a wife. Now fall at Reddy's feet ... and ask for forgiveness"(Sc 3, 497).

Afterwards, In Pedda Reddy's caution to parade Shouramma naked (Sc -II), he is making a statement on her easy ease of access as a public woman and remarks on her character out of her caste. Vinodini's depicts the female characters presenting a subaltern feminist critique by highlighting caste as gendered. Pushpamma and Punamma also represents as the voices of resistance through their firm stand during the panchayat in the last Scene of the play. Ganga plays crucial role in dissolving the major issues and supports in protecting the Dalit women self respect. Thus, the play gives us a clear indication of Dalit women characters as resistant and bold enough to face the atrocities and revolt against the caste gender bias. Vinodini portrays the empowering awareness and realization of the Mala community.

Conclusion:

Vinodini's *Daaham (Thirst)* tries to emphasize the Dalit women's suppressions with regard to their survival in the rural areas and awakes the audience/readers to understand the atrocities, discriminations and prejudice in hierarchical society. It also depicts the success story of the subalterns who fight against the inequalities based on the caste. The portrayal of everyday struggles of Mala Women gives us an idea of subjugation and real plight of Dalit women in the country. In other words, the significant aspect of *Thirst* lies in its reclamation of missing Mala women's practices and description of usual forms of subjugation and discrimination faced by them. It can be noticed that the play portrays the growing consciousness of Dalit women who are showed as forceful, brave and clever in their questioning of feudal society and enactment of united struggle in protecting their self respect in front of the upper caste dominants.

Highlighting the nexus between caste and women, Vinodini's *Daaham (Thirst)* describes the dissimilarities in the way gender is practiced by the upper caste women and the Dalit women. Thus, the play tries to illustrate the breakdown of feminism in the context of caste, particularly in rural India. Vinodini also depicted the major women characters of *Thirst* such as Shouramma, Ganga, Pushpamma, Punamma and Chinnenkati as rising women who have widened the

consciousness through their brave act of collective resistance in gaining the identity and protecting the self respect. Simultaneously, the play portrays the saga of Dalit women particularly living in rural areas across the Indian Nation.

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