International Journal of Enhanced Research in Educational Development (IJERED)
ISSN: 2320-8708, Vol. 14 Issue 5, September-October, 2026

Negotiating Caste and Gender: An Intersectional Analysis of Gogu Shyamala's Selected Works

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.55948/IJERED.2026.0943

ABSTRACT

Gogu Shyamala is a Telugu Dalit writer and activist known for Dalit narratives. She has deliberately spoken on women's victimization by caste and gender norms in orthodox society. This paper focuses on how women suffer under a caste- and gender-based society. This research could explore an intersectional analysis of Gogu Shyamala's selected literary works. She has been working as the voice of unvoiced people; Marginalised communities were muted until the existence of Dalit literature. This paper sheds light on the violence faced by Dalits and Dalit women rooted in caste. Dalit women have intersected many aspects like caste, gender, race, ethnicity, etc. This paper has a major discussion on the intersection of caste and gender in the narrative works of Gogu Shyamala. This paper emphasizes her selected narratives such as *Father May be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket… But, Nene Balaanni T. N. Sadalaxmi Batukukatha* translated as *I Am the Strength, the Life Story of T. N. Sadalaxmi. Father May Be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket, But…. Nallapoddu* translated as *Black Ellammalu, Nallaregadi Saallu* translated as *Black Furrows.*

Keywords: Intersectionality, Dalit Feminism, Caste, Gender, Resistance, Dalit Literature, Marginalized Studies

INTRODUCTION

Dalit literature has played a pivotal role in the resistance of marginalized communities. It has been depicting Dalit lives to portray the condition of Dalits in society and their treatment as inhuman; it examines social stratification created by dominant castes. It was unnoticed and muted until the 19th century. Dalit writers have been focusing on producing more Dalit narratives to convey Dalits' existence and rights through literature. Many ideologies and reformers share ideas to eradicate the caste system from society. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is a pioneer in the caste annihilation movement. His ideology influenced several Dalit literatures. Dalit male writers again overlooked women's oppression; they didn't consider women's oppression and suffering by the dominant caste or society. Women writers started their literary movement to protect Dalit women's rights and equal opportunities in society. Gogu Shyamala is a Madiga writer and activist in Telangana, an important Madiga community writer in Telugu, and an emerging female writer in contemporary Indian literature, influenced by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's ideology.

She has synthesised Dalits' marginalization and victimization by the dominant caste across generations through literary narratives. While examining dominant society, she has identified that upper-caste dominant society considered Dalits inhuman and treated them as a tool for their economic prosperity. She is the voice of forgotten humanity and unvoiced community. Mainstream literature depicts Dalit characters as minor, subordinated, immoral, and evil; therefore, Dalit writers like Gogu Shyamala are trying to curb and rewrite earlier Dalits' consideration and identity as inhumane, negligible, and a lower layer of society. She questioned the social caste hierarchy made by the dominant caste and argued that Dalits are also human beings who have equal rights to survive with dignity and respect among all. She has given a pivotal role to analysing Dalits ' central representation in narratives; it was neglected by upper-caste literature. Being a Dalit woman, she has rendered real Dalits women oppressions through literary works. She has examined Dalit women as one of the main subjects in her narratives.

She portrays the interconnected oppression of caste and gender experienced by Dalit women. She discusses caste and gender as meticulous subjects in contemporary literature. She focuses on Dalit issues in her narratives, especially Dalit women's issues. This paper aims to elucidate caste and gender are the primary subjects in the narratives of Gogu Shyamala. This research will examine her works named as *Nene Balaanni T. N Sadalaxmi Batukukatha, translated* as *I am the Strength, the Life Story of T. N. Sadalaxmi 2011. Father May Be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket, But… 2012. Nallapoddu* translated as *Black Ellammalu 2009, Nallaregadi Saallu* translated as *Black Furrows 2006.*

This paper will focus on caste as everyday violence, gender oppression within Dalit society, the intersection of caste and gender, and resistance and negotiation.
Caste as everyday violence: Gogu Shyamala's works describe untouchability, humiliation, landlessness, poverty, and labour exploitation in her narratives. For example, in the story *Father may be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket But...* "No son doesn't utter their name now. It will just give you heartburn. They put the entire blame on your poor father. They separated him from his family. They ruined us. The thief is one of them, but they blamed your father" (Shamala 19)

This narration is an example that shows us how marginalized community people has utilized and made them victimization for the sake of upper-caste people. T. N. Sadalaxmi is a biographical work that explores Dalits every day violence in the name of caste dominance. Dalits life is entirely dependent on dominant-caste landlords. Basically, Dalits don't have property, assets, and lands and also, they don't have a proper source of income to survive in this dominated society. Dalits have to face untouchability and caste humiliation in their everyday life. They have to digest landlords' violence and oppression as part of daily life. Most of the Dalits work as the daily wages' worker; their work is not permanent, and they have to search for a job for a piece of bread and to run a family.

Gogu Shyamala exclusively narrated gender oppression within Dalit society. Dalit women have suffered a lot in this society due to intersectional oppressions such as domestic labour, patriarchy, violence, and marriage. She has described how women suffer because they are women. Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement is from *The Second Sex:* "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". (Beauvoir 267) This statement is true: women are not born; they are constructed by social norms, especially patriarchal norms. Gender Discrimination: Gogu Shyamala showed concern for Dalit identity in literary works and focuses on Dalits' self-respect, community identity, cultural identity, and assertion of Dalits' existence in mainstream society, as well as Dalit women's gender discrimination. Her works portrayed Dalit women's intersectional experiences such as caste, gender, and patriarchal norms.

Gender oppression within Dalit Society: this is one of the most distinctive characteristics. Being a Dalit woman, she can easily recognise Dalit women's oppression, marginalization, and suppression; she has portrayed autobiographical experiences in literature. She brings Dalit women's lives to the mainstream, which have been neglected since ancient times. She has drawn the attention of the modern reader to the fact that not merely upper-caste women are oppressed but also Dalit women. Dalit women have faced triple oppression such as caste, gender, and patriarchal norms, whereas she has been facing oppression by her own community's male dominance, which is presented in the story *Father May be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket But…*

"My father pounced on my mother, 'You say it's not fair? You've learnt to talk! What? Have I seen everything? How do I know what you have done?"

Mother went inside quietly and sat at the stove, adjusting the firewood. What? You! You don't say anything! I am asking you…. What have I seen? "He kicked her hard on her back. My younger brother and I screamed. Father looked daggers at us. Scared of him, we quietly hid in a corner. Father beat her like she was cattle. She was wailing, saying, "Oh mother, I am dead, he'll take my life." But father did not stop" (Shyamala 24).

Dalit women are exploited in several aspects, such as economic, social, and political, even though they are honest and do hard labour in the Dalit community. 'Ballamma's character in the story *Tataki* is an example of women's dedication and perseverance. Dalit women do domestic hard labour. She has been used for all the social aspects as well as upper-caste men's sexual desires; Dalit women have faced sexual violence in the dominant society. Dalit women have built resistance, tolerance, and courage to face triple marginalization. Dalit women are portrayed as leaders, workers, mothers, caretakers, decision-makers, and community builders through Gogu Shyamala's narrative.

Intersection of Caste and Gender: Dalit men experience caste oppression, upper-caste women experience patriarchy, and Dalit women experience both simultaneously. Gender discrimination is the core subject in her works; she has used Dalit women as the narrators and main characters. Most of her stories are narrated by Dalit girls; for example, stories like *Tataki Wins Again and Father May be Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket But…* women have been treated as the second sex due to patriarchal norms. Dalit women have experienced sexual exploitation, for example, in the story *Tataki Wins Again:*

"Tataki! You bloody witch! You are a small girl, are you? What makes you come here like a man and water the groundnut fields? In our houses, girls like you don't step into the field. Your mala and madiga don't know that girls have to be kept at home! You are small, are you?" Cursing her, he thrust his hand into her blouse (Shamala 97). Can this line provide us with sufficient sources to identify the condition of upper-caste women and Dalit women in the hands of men in the patriarchal society? Both upper- and lower-caste women have suffered from gender discrimination. It causes social discrimination, which is the distribution of unequal labour between upper and lower castes.

Intersectionality theory is a concept that was developed in the 20th century. It is a critical theoretical framework that examines how multiple forms of oppression and discrimination intersect and overlap in the lives of marginalized individual communities. Intersectionality theory's factors include Caste, gender, class, race, religion, ethnicity, disability, physical appearance, and sexuality. These multiple factors are the reasons for women's oppression and causes of women's depression.

Resistance and Negotiation: Gogu Shyamala, through narrative works, asserts Dalit women's freedom and equality among all. Dalit women's resistance is not through revolution but through education, labour, collective strength, self-respect, oral traditions, and community. Dalit women participated in every anti-caste movement, but she didn't recognise as men were in society. Dalit women are neglected by upper-caste men and Dalit men and also neglected by upper-caste women in their mainstream literature. She asserts Dalit women's education in her works. For example, in the work *Raw Wound*

"We have brought up these children skipping a meal every day. We are sending them to study so that they will not be bound to our slavery. How can I give my daughter as a Jogini after having watched her grow under my own eyes? My stomach burns. I feel more dead than alive." (Shamala 143)

Gogu Shyamala has been focusing on depicting Dalit women's issues and problems, which are neglected by mainstream women's literature as well as Dalit male literature. Being a Dalit woman, she has real experience of intersectional oppressions like caste, gender, and ethnicity. She has narrated Dalit women-centred stories and fictions and given priority to Dalit women's social issues. Dalit women have experienced multiple oppressions due to social stratification; they are neglected by patriarchy system, and own community, and mainstream women.

CONCLUSION

However, Dalit female literature has been representing the cause of their victimization, oppression, and negligence. The primary issues of Dalit women in the contemporary world are due to the caste-based society, which has been unnoticed by dominant society and literature. Caste and gender are two important literary aspects in the study of Dalit female literature, and this paper focuses on the oppression of Dalit women in the name of caste and gender. Dalit women have to face intersectional aspects such as caste, gender, patriarchy, race, etc. Dalit writers used caste and gender as their weapons to produce literature. Gogu Shyamala has been exploring Dalit women's oppression through literary works and has used caste and gender as the roots of her examination of caste-based society. She has used oral and folklore forms of literature to synthesise rigid social norms and stratifications. This paper has discussed Dalit women's double marginalization and intersectionality. Gogu Shyamala has been portraying Dalit women's issues through her works such as *Father May Be an Elephant and Mother Only a Basket But…, I am the Strength, the Life of Story of T. N. Sadalaxmi, etc.*

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