



Marginalized women in August Wilson's *Ma Rainey Black Bottom* and K. A. Gunasekaran's *Paliyātukal*: A Comparative Study

Dr. K. SELVAM

Assistant Professor, Dept of English and Foreign Languages Periyar Maniammai University Thanjavur

KEYWORDS : African American Theater, Comparative Literature, Dalit Theater, Marginalised

The basic concept of Comparative literature is evident and it confines two literature of different identity and it is recognized as the most important academic activity. It is widely believed that, an analysis of literature with the influence of creating new writings. In a literary note – 'Drama' can be defined as the imitation of action with dramatic art, music, settings and dialogues. Playwrights produced plays to satisfy the needs of audience. In a certain point, the composite nature of theatre was switched over to exhibit the pains and sufferings rather than from entertainment.

The present study is treated with Analogical study of two writers who belongs to different nationalities. This significant study points out the chosen theme of discrimination, marginalization and exploitation of women in the society. A. O. Alridge one of the famous comparatists defines 'Analogy' as a resemblance in style, structure, mood between works which have on other connections. The literatures taken for study remain African American Theater and Dalit Theatre of Indian Literature. Black Theatre and Dalit theatre are called as protest theaters. They deal with the life of suppressed people.

August Wilson emerged as a significant voice in America during 1980's. He started to write as a way of effecting a social change. Critics highlighted Wilson's works as a new history of Black America frustrated by racism which Wilson experienced from his early age. His plays centre upon the past history, presenting it in twentieth century. His play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is taken for discussion.

Wilson obtains materials from a fusion of history and his personal life experience and imaginations. His literary aim traces the unexplored landscapes of black experience which gives African American history a real status in this century. His first play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* was performed in 1984 attracted many people for his dramaturgy. This play presented his authentic black experience and history which are different from what mainstream literature and society presents. The play is an exploration of racial discrimination. The action of the play takes place in a recording studio. The musicians in the studio are waiting for Ma Rainey the singer. The characters can be classified into Whites and Blacks. There are four Black musicians along with a white owner of the recording company and a white manager for Ma Rainey. The play consists of two acts; first act contains monologues and dialogues. All the musicians discuss their past happenings in their lives.

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom begins and ends in one day in Chicago in early March 1927. Blues singer Gertrude 'Ma Rainey's' white record producer and white manager are preparing for Ma's arrival at the recording studio. Forty-one-year-old Ma, who is always dressed to the nines, befitting her royal status as 'Mother of the Blues', is to record songs with her band, which is comprised of guitar and trombone player Cutler, bass player Slow Drag, piano player Toledo (all in their mid-50s) and trumpet player Levee (in his early 30s).

Producer Mel Sturdyvant is representative of the cultural culture, as he is willing to use Ma's talent for financial gain without respecting her as a human being. Though Irvin, her manager, is not drawn as negatively as Sturdyvant, in some ways he is more dangerous, since he pretends to be Ma's ally, though Ma is quite aware that this is not the case. Ma symbolizes the black society. Though Ma possesses an authentic talent, she can only be a diva in the studio while Sturdyvant and Irvin are recording her songs. Once the recording session is done, Ma becomes just another disenfranchised black woman in American society.

Out of frustration Ma Rainey angrily complains that the white people are exploiting her for the voice. They earn a lot with her voice. She bursts out in anger and replies to Cutler that they like her voice but not her as a human being:

MA RAINEY. They don't care nothing about me. All they want is my voice. Well, I done learned that, and they gonna treat me like I want to be treated no matter how much it hurt them... As soon as they get my voice down on them recording machines, then it's just like if I'd be some whore and they roll over and put their pants on. Ain't got no use for me then. (64)

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, Wilson urges his audience, specifically his African-American audience, to consider the consequences of unexamined black rage. Black folks are not naturally full of fury, but rather these emotions are incited by external occurrences, like oppression, one's location, or rejection by dominant culture.

Ma's power affords her a temporary release of her furor, while the older band members have learned how to suppress their resentment, preventing it from turning into a more dangerous emotion. Levee will not employ either option; instead, his rage becomes uncontrollable. This rage occurs in primarily two locations, the band room and the studio, both of which are tied to America's racial hierarchy.

Ma Rainey pathetically points out that, the Whites will respect or consider Blacks, if they were able to make some money for using them. Otherwise they will treat Blacks as dogs in the home:

MA RAINEY. If you colored and can make them some money then you alright with them. Otherwise, you alright with them. Otherwise, you just a dog in the alley. I done made this company more money from my records than all the other recording artists they got put together. And they wanna balk about how much this session is costing them. (65) ||

Subaltern writing in literature has its central focus of contribution from the society which establishes the historical milieu the subject of the past. In south India the Tamil regional theatre has its own specific nature of development. The arrival of Europeans, their traditions and cultures influenced people. Such influence found all over India. Though South India is blend with strong traditions, rituals and cultures incorporated with the western adaptations. Similarly Dalit literature has its unique impact in regional literature. Theatre becomes a tool for protesting and explaining the sufferings of the underdogs. Many writers emerged and represented Dalits through arts and performances, but the contemporary society still has its hurdle in focusing the absolute reflection. K. A. Gunasekaran projects the politics of native Dalits in Indian history. The plays depict the truth that all the incidents treated in the plot are not mere story but incidents in history. His play *Paliyātukal* is taken for discussion.

Dalit writings are the tools for social construction. The marginalised society became creative and progress in this hostile society. The literal word 'Dalit' is used widely nowadays. But in another way it is misunderstood in various senses. People uphold India – culturally, traditionally all through decades together but the so called upper cast people claimed themselves as superior and divided fellow human beings in the name of caste. Gandhi used 'Harijan' to denote suppressed people where as Dr. Ambedkar used the word 'Dalit' in all his writings and speeches. The scattered people who were named downtrodden suffer in the hands of upper-class people in all the means of life and

still exist in different forms.

Probably all historical events carry the fact and cause for a change in the society. Paliyatukal is one of his famous plays. It was staged in Pondicherry. The play begins with a conversation between Mulk Raj Anand and Dr. Ambedkar. Initially play speaks about caste discrimination in the play finally ends with feministic perception.

The opening scene begins with the conversation between Mulk Raj Anand and Ambedkar. They discuss the discriminations prevailing in the society. Simultaneously the stage directions indicate the plot of the play. Playwright uses chorus with a song. The song gives the message and the pain of underdogs. The suggestive meaning of the song conveys the four Varna system of Hindu religion. The singer sings and tries to propagate the problem. The conversation concludes by signifying the law for the suppressed people, who work in the fields, can own their land. Ambedkar was one of the members in the committee in manipulating the law for nation.

An announcement in the public forum is made. The announcer uses 'Parai' to announce a message. The story is about a broken wheel of Goddesses chariot, all the village people gathered together to discuss the problem. The man who is considered as village head speaks among the gathering. He replies when answering the reason for chariot wheel which is broken because of the mistake done by any underdog, "It may be due to the mistakes committed by dwntrdden" (20). With more arrogance, village head adds an example also. He quotes the story of Akalaivan, a courageous warrior of bow & arrow. For the only reason that he belongs to low class community, his talents were not appreciated. His guru offered him to cut his thumb finger which will help greatly in arching an arrow from bow. This historical incident can be viewed as respect of student teacher but the fact behind the scene is to discriminate a dwntrdden.

Everybody believed that Goddess asked the villagers to offer her a sacrifice. Specific requirement for sacrifice would be a human being. The crowd subsides after the offering demanded by the women in the name of Goddess. Udumban, one among the people shouts at the crowd to remain silent. Being innocent he proclaims others regarding the right given to them by the caste Hindus:

UDUMBAN. Our people are in evitable in this village we guard out village, can any good or bad things will happen without us? We are the first one to announce any news to village. Such privileges are given by out village caste Hindus (24).

In response to Udumban's speech, the crowd replied the atrocities of the caste Hindus against them.

GROUP 2. We should not learn. When we point out the mistakes done by them, we will be punished by pouring boiling oil in our ears.

They can touch our women. When they come we have to step out ten steps. We can beat Parai, but no permission to enter into temple. You are talking on behalf of such caste Hindus (24-25).

After serious discussion the village heads decide Chinnandi, a low class villager to offer himself to sacrifice. Chinnandi refuses to do so; Udumban consoles Chinnandi that the decision is taken by Goddess not by villagers. When he offers himself the whole community will be honoured. Chinnandi understands the wickedness of the cast Hindu villagers. He believed that they fixed him as victim to satisfy their vengeance. So he decides to leave the village during night.

The villagers choose Udumban to sacrifice after Chinnandi escaped from village. Udumban becomes the victim and his hands are tied firmly. His wife shouts at the caste Hindus and others who support the in human act of sacrificing. The caste Hindus consoled his wife by telling that, Goddess has placed here blessings to her husband. So that she will get fields and 5 bags of paddy per year. Besides everything she is concerned about her husband only.

Suddenly Udumban interrupted the village heads and raises a doubt:

UDUMBAN . Saints! Shall I ask a question?

HEAD. Yes please (Silence)

UDUMBAN. Is it supposed to give a sacrifice?

HEAD. Yes.

UDUMBAN. Does our casteless Goddess differentiate male and female?

HEAD. (Thinks, and looks at Udumban's wife) Not like that sacrifice to God that's all

UDUMBAN. Priests! let all the pride, which I get, shall go to my wife. Let she be sacrificed to Goddess (32)

Udumban changes his mind and tries to offer his wife. She refuses to accept, more over she questions the caste Hindus, whether they offer sacrifice only from low caste people. Everyone was left in chaos. Udumban's wife did not accept the change. People claimed that, goat is the softest animal; similarly paraiah's are softest people. Caste Hindus compromised everybody and justified the act of killing in the name of sacrifice "Udumban's wife will be one among the goddess, she will guard this village" (34). One man kills Udumban's wife in the name of Goddess.

III

Dalits and African Americans are remarked as the marginalized in their respective societies. It is important to examine how the marginalized women negotiate their identities inside and outside their groups in the context of caste within patriarchal society. The historical subjugation of peoples based on their race and caste assume a further paradigm of gender discrimination when the women struggle for identity and respect not only against the respective caste and class conscious people who have historically exploited them sexually but also against the men of their own groups who often fail to acknowledge their rights and contributions in the struggle against oppression. Moreover, economic issues have also caused the struggles of underprivileged women and have divided feminists of color from white feminists in America and Dalit feminists from upper caste and urban feminists in India.

The question of African American and Dalit women is a critical concern that shows further internal differentiation among these groups while indicating a similarity between the African American and Dalit consciousness. Just as Black feminist studies has established that African American women and their contributions to the making of both their racial consciousness and that of American identity is impossible to ignore or undermine, similarly, a budding Dalit feminism is emerging in different parts of India.

To sum up, the discriminations are alike; only the situations are different. Both the artists present their views on discriminations in different platforms. The cultural values are portrayed through plots and characters, underscoring the universality of the subtext of both August Wilson and Gunasekaran.

Works Cited

1. Wilson, August. "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom". *Three Plays*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991. Print.
2. Gunasekaran, K. A. *Paliyatukal*. Chennai: Kavya Press, 1999. Print.
3. Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to literary and Cultural theory*. 2nd ed. New York: Manchester University Press, 2002. Print.
4. Wellek, Rene. Austin Warren. *Theory of Literature*. New York: Harcourt, 1948. Print.