

Negotiating Subalternity in Sriranga's *Harijanvara*

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Abstract

This paper offers a subaltern reading of the Kannada Play "*Harijanvara*" [1934], written by Sriranga [Adya Rangacharya]. One of the most influential playwrights of modern Kannada theatre. He consistently engaged with themes of caste, gender and social reform, making *Harijanvara* an important early example of his commitment to dramatizing structural inequalities. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony and Gayatri Spivak's insights on subalternity, the analysis argues that dominant caste authority is sustained not only through political rhetoric but also through domestic practises, ritual ideology and internalised consent. The study examines how the play exposes the intersections of caste, gender and political hegemony.

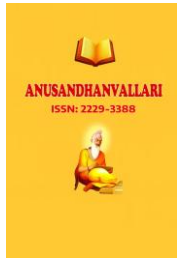
Key Words: Hegemony, Subalternity, Discourse, Ideology, Representation.

Introduction

The concept of subalternity includes class, race, caste, gender, ethnicity and minority. It is a sociological, political and cultural condition. It started by certain forces for socio political benefits. It started at certain point in the past and it has been maintaining. Subalternity, as both a material condition and a narrative construct, forces us to interrogate the ethics of literary representation. It raises critical questions about who speaks, who is represented and how power mediates voice in literary texts

When it comes to the representation of subalternity, Green argues, "Gramsci was concerned with how literary representations of the Subaltern reinforced the subalterns subordinated position. In historical or literary documents the Subaltern may be presented as humble, passive or ignorant but their actual lived experience may prove the contrary. Hence the integral historian has to analyse critically the way in which intellectuals represent the conditions and aspirations of the subalterns. [Green M. [2000], Gramsci Cannot speak: Presentations and Interpretations of Gramsci's concept of the Subaltern, Rethinking Marxism, 14(3); 1-24

The discourse on caste, hegemony and marginalized identities has remained central to modern Indian literary studies. Theatre as a dynamic and socio- politically responsive medium has played a crucial role in reflecting and interrogating unequal power structures within Indian society. Among the major contributors to modern Kannada Theatre Sriranga stands out for his ability to bring realism intellectual depth and social critic onto the stage. His 1934 play *Harijanvara* emerges as a significant dramatic intervention that foregrounds the politics of caste and the contradictions inherent in reformist rhetoric during the pre-independence period.



Written during the height of Gandhian activism -when social reform, temple- entry movements, and debates surrounding the term “Harijan” shaped public discourse- the play examines the gap between performative reformism and actual social transformation. While nationalist leaders spoke of uplifting Dalits, the entrenched structures of caste hierarchy continue to regulate everyday behaviour, ritual practises and socially interactions. Sriranga captures these tensions with remarkable clarity by situating the entire narrative within the Brahmin household of Doddarayaru, a politician who publicly champions Dalit emancipation but privately adheres to cattiest norms.

The theoretical framework for this analysis draws support on subaltern studies -particularly the ideas of Antonio Gramsci and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak - to understand how hegemonic power operates through consent, cultural practises and symbolic representation. Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony eliminates the ways in which dominant groups secure authority not merely through force but by shaping ideology.

By exploring Sriranga’s dramatic techniques, character dynamics and the interplay of public and private spaces, this article investigates how *Harijanvara* exposes the contradictions within dominant- caste reform movements and highlights the continued marginalisation of subaltern groups.

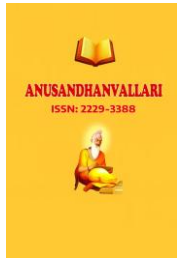
Subalternity, Caste Hegemony and Resistance

The play *Harijanvara* marks a significant moment in the evolution of modern Kannada theatre, as the playwright foregrounds the issue of subalternity- a theme that had received limited representation until then. There are eight characters in the play. Doddarayaru, who is preparing to gain power as the president of municipality. Venakka, his wife, a devout woman. Shyama, their son, who desires social reform. Vasantha Shyama’s friend and a young playwright who seeks to bring about social change through his writings. Anthappa, an assistant of Doddarayaru, Nabi Saab, a small merchant; Thathyachari, a follower of Doddarayaru; And Yamuna, a widow who works as a cook in Doddarayaru’s House.

Doddarayaru, a major character in the play, belongs to Brahmin community. In his public meetings, he speaks eloquently about the development and upliftment of the Dalits while preparing to contest municipal elections. To secure victory, he seeks to appease all sections of society and strategically plans various schemes. However, in reality he lacks genuine interest or commitment to social reform. His mindset remains deeply casteist despite his public image as a reformer.

Doddarayaru’s son Shyama and his friend Vasantha believe that Rayaru is a true social reformer. To strengthen this image, Rayaru appoints Yamuna, a widow as a cook in his household- a symbolic gesture intended to project himself as a progressive leader. Inspired by this, Shyama decides to demonstrate his own social commitment by marrying Yamuna. Encouraged by his friend Vasantha who aims to create social awareness through his writings, Shyama plans to marry the widow Yamuna on the day “*Harijanvara*”, the very day on which Doddarayaru has scheduled programmes for dalit upliftment.

Thathyachari, a follower and member of Doddarayaru’s Brahmin community, informs him that people of their caste disapprove of keeping the widow Yamuna in his house as it is considered against the Shastras. He cautions that, at such crucial time before the municipal election, this act could harm Doddarayaru’s reputation and political prospects. Aware of the potential backlash, Doddarayaru decides to send Yamuna away until the election is over. However, his wife Venakka opposes this decision, as she finds it difficult to manage the household duties alone, especially during the busy election period. As the play moves towards its climax, Shyama with the support of his friend Vasantha announces his decision to marry the widow Yamuna on the very day of the election -an event Doddarayaru has planned to celebrate as *Harijanvara*, a day supposedly dedicated to Dalit upliftment. Shyama undeterred by his father’s opposition, firmly stands by his decision exposing the



hypocrisy and double standards of his father's so called the reformist ideals. This is the brief summer of the play.

The play reveals the tension between genuine reform and political opportunism, highlighting how caste consciousness and social conservatism continue to dominate even among those who outwardly claim to advocate for change.

Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony provides a powerful lens to interpret *Harijanvara*, as the play vividly portrays how ideological control operates beneath the surface of political action. The character of Doddarayaru embodies the hegemonic power of the upper- caste elite who maintain dominance not merely through political authority but through cultural and ideological manipulation. By organising events like *Harijanvara* and outwardly supporting Dalit upliftment, Doddarayaru constructs an image of benevolence that conceals the deep-rooted caste hierarchy, sustaining his power. This reflects Gramsci's idea that ruling class secures consent by shaping cultural values and social norms thus making its dominance appear natural.

The entire play is set within the household of Doddarayaru, a member of Brahman community. This spatial setting is deeply significant, as it becomes a microcosm of the larger social order where caste hierarchies are enacted, negotiated and challenged. By situating the narrative within a Brahmin household, the playwright creates a powerful contrast between public rhetoric and private reality. While Doddarayaru publicly advocates for the emancipation of the dalits in his political discourse, his domestic space reveals the persistence of caste prejudice, gender inequality and social conservatism. Through this contrast, the play exposes the hypocrisy of elite reformism and invites critical interrogation of how power and ideology operate in both public and private spaces.

The play opens with the words of Anthappa, a devoted follower of Doddarayaru, who recounts a song sung by schoolgirls in praise of Doddarayaru's character, achievements and contributions. This opening moment not only introduces Doddarayaru to the audience but also establishes the performative construction of his public persona. The repeated and exaggerated glorification functions as more than mere personal loyalty- it serves as a pointed commentary on how political figures are often elevated by followers. This dramatization reflects a wider socio- political pattern in which leadership is not solely defined by merit or institutional position but is continuously produced through symbolic acts of recognition by subordinates.

The play opens with the words of Anthappa.

Anthappa: Day before yesterday when Doddarayaru visited the girls' school, a song was sung. Shall I sing it for you Venakka? The girls sang it- You should have heard them! I was moved, speechless...[coughs] Anyway, I will sing from the depth of my heart to praise the character of this great man. My voice [Clears throat, adjusting voice]

Welcome to you, Doddarayare

We girls bow before you,

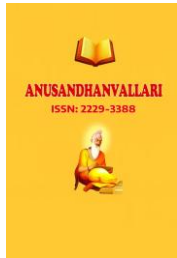
Mangalasutra to Municipality,

Your devotion reaches a every household,

You have held presidency ten times,

You are God in many avatars,

You are Vidyaranya for the school board (2005; 381-382)



The treatment of subalternity in the play is achieved not through direct representation of marginalised alone but through the subtle exposure of hierarchies within domestic and social spaces. The scene in which Anthappa recalls a song sung in praise of Doddarayaru at a girl's school exemplifies how the playwright critiques the process of constructing and perpetuating power. This glorifying song functions as a symbolic tool of hegemony- It projects Doddarayaru as a benevolent leader and social reformer while masking the contradictions in his private life. Through such sequences the playwright reveals how ideology operates through everyday cultural practises transforming individuals like Doddarayaru into revered figures whose authority remains unquestioned.

In contrast Venakka's position in the same household highlights the silence suffering of those who occupies roles within patriarchal and caste systems. Despite her proximity to power as Doddarayaru's wife, she remains voiceless, overworked and emotionally neglected. Her exhaustion and invisibility represent another layer of sub alternity- the gendered subaltern, trapped within the domestic realm. By juxtaposing Venakka's subjugation with Doddarayaru's public glorification, the playwright exposes hypocrisy of social reformers who advocate for equality in public but perpetuate oppression in private.

Venakka, though herself positioned as a subaltern within the patriarchal structure of her household, becomes a complex figure through whom the playwright exposes the internalisation of hegemonic ideology. Despite her subjugation by her husband, she continues to uphold caste-based notions of sacredness and contamination that are deeply rooted in Brahminical Patriarchy. Her strict observance of religious rituals and shastric codes signifies how the subaltern subject often becomes an unwitting agent of the very system that marginalises her.

While conversing with Anthappa, Venakka sarcastically remarks that

"The gods inside the house are not enough for him[doddarayaru], he even takes up the sins of the gods outside by saying allow Dalits into the temple" (2005; 384)

This statement reveals Venakka's own deep seated belief in the caste hierarchy and ritual purity.

In another conversation with Anthappa, Venakka refuses to eat food prepared by Yamuna because she is a widow. She tells Yamuna who works as a cook in her house not to prepare food. As she believes that eating food cooked by widow would defile the sanctity of her religious rituals.

Anthappa: You work hard all the time Venakka, why take the trouble to prepare food separately.?

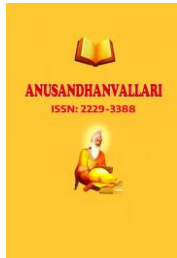
Venakka: Do you expect me to eat her food? She has been kept in this house merely because she lost her husband.s

Anthappa: But the girl's character is good and she has a strong mind.

Venakka: So, what? is her food pure enough for sacred offerings? (2005; 386)

This dialogue highlights Venakka's internalisation of ritual hierarchies and Brahminical orthodoxy. Despite being subaltern with patriarchy, she reproduces caste and gender prejudices by viewing widowhood as a form of impurity. The playwright uses this sequence to critique how hegemonic ideology operates through domestic and religious practises, revealing how oppression is sustained not only by dominant men but also through the participation of women who have absorbed the same belief systems.

This paradox reflects what Antonio Gramsci calls the" consensual aspect of hegemony" wherein the dominated classes accept and perpetuate dominant cultural values as natural and sacred. Venakka's adherence to ritual purity thus represents a form of ideological consent rather than conscious resistance. Through her



character the playwright critics how patriarchal and caste-based ideologies sustain themselves not only through external authority but also through the internal belief systems of those they oppress.

When Thathyachari, another follower of Doddarayaru warns him about losing the votes of Brahmin community because he spoke in favour of allowing dalits into the temple, Doddarayaru reveals his hidden strategy behind that statement. The conversation goes like this:

Doddarayaru:[Laughing] What kind of threat has come to them? [brahmins]

Thathyachari: The threat has not come from outside Rayare- We ourself have brought it upon us! This is the result of your speech yesterday- When you said,” Allow dalits to enter the temple!”

[The conversation continues revealing Doddarayaru’s hypocrisy. He clarifies his hidden strategy behind speech]

Thathyachari[Disappointed] What can I say, Rayare? Despite all our efforts, the Brahmins might still give their votes to others- especially after that speech. If only you hadn’t said those words yesterday!

Doddarayaru: [Showing mock pity] Ayyo, foolish man! Even the Brahmins are losing their wisdom. If they had thought a little, they would have understood the secret behind my words. Why did I say that Dalits should be allowed into the temples? Think about the profit, Thathyachari! Nowadays, the Dalits are getting into positions of power. If this continues what will be the future of brahmins? So, isn’t it better to fill up new kind of madness into the minds of Holeyas? Allowing the holeyas into the temple means, binding them to the temples. Keeping them busy with worship and rituals. Otherwise, tomorrow they will enter all the positions- in the municipality, local boards and councils. Contamination doesn’t stick to the temple, does it? (2005; 396-397)

This conversation between Doddarayaru and Thathyachari unveils the political hypocrisy hidden beneath the language of social reform. Doddarayaru’s advocacy for “allowing dalits into the temple “is not an act of emancipation but a strategic deception to maintain upper -caste dominance under the guise of liberalism. When he confesses that his statement was meant only to” enthuse the youth” and allowing dalits into the temple would” bind them to the temples” and prevent them from entering public positions. The play exposes how caste elites use symbolic inclusion to ensure structural exclusion.

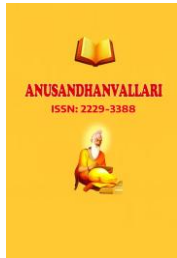
Shyama, the son of Duddarayaru and his friend Vasantha often discuss ways to bring change in society. Vasantha a young writer dreams of writing plays to spread awareness about social change.He shares a scene from the play he wants to write:

Vasantha: [Describing] this is a temple. Its door stands at the centre of the stage. There are many steps. A dalit man lies there unconscious. Blood flows down the stairs from his injured head. Stones lie scattered around- pelted by people. There is silence for some time... then suddenly thunder inside the temple... A divine figure appears. Looking at the unconscious Dalit, he says...” Today, my incarnation has ended. He shall be the king of this earth hereafter. Let the stones that killed him build the temple for him. Let his flowing blood become the sacred river, Ganga. Let this place become holy. The divine figure disappears. Instantly a temple rises there.”

Shyama: [Shaking his head] che! It is heartbreaking, Vasantha. But you must write this play first. (2005; 382)

This sequence reflects a stereotypical notion of Dalit emancipation prevalent in dominant social narratives. Although Vasantha and Shyama engage in discussions about bringing social change, their understanding remains superficial and sentimental. Their dialogues reveal an eagerness to present themselves as progressive and socially conscious youth, yet their perspective lacks a critical interrogation of caste power structures.

In the scene, Vasantha imagines, the dalit figure is symbolically bound to the temple, reinforcing the religious and cultural frameworks historically used to contain and spiritualise dalit identity rather than liberate it.



This idea echoes Doddarayaru's statement about wanting to "fill up a new kind of madness into the minds of Dalits", a strategy to divert dalits from asserting their rights in public and political sphere.

Although Vasanta and Shyama may not share Doddarayaru's conscious intent of strategic deception, they nevertheless operate within the same hegemonic framework that naturalises caste hierarchies. The scene appears to celebrate dalit transformation; it in fact reproduces a hegemonic discourse of inclusion without empowerment, masking the persistence of structural inequality beneath an aesthetic of emotional redemption. Through this sequence, the playwright seeks to problematize the dominant, sentimentalised notion of dalit emancipation, exposing how even well-intentioned narratives can remain confined with hegemonic frameworks that deny authentic subaltern agency.

Thathyachari, while discussing the possible loss of Brahmin votes following Doddarayaru's statement supporting the temple entry of Dalits, adds that there is another source of discontent -the presence of Yamuna. He explains that several Brahmins are disturbed, because Doddarayaru has kept a widow Yamuna in his house, which they consider a violation of the Shastras. However, Doddarayaru's decision to keep Yamuna is not motivated by any progressive intention to challenge the inhuman rituals imposed on widows but rather for his personal convenience- She serves as an unpaid cook in his household. Despite his earlier rhetoric of reform, Doddarayaru, fearing the loss of electoral support, eventually decides to send Yamuna away exposing the hypocrisy and self-interest underlying his so-called social concern.

The dialogue unfolds as follows:

Doddarayaru: Yamuna, How many years have You been in our house?

Venakka: 4 years...to the coming Tulasi festival.

Doddarayaru: Yamuna, not a single word of blame has ever been spoken against you. Not a single mistake has been found in your work. Yet, because of my social service, even if it is not your fault, we are now in a position to remove you from your job.

Venakka: what?

Anthappa: Listen completely, Venakka.

Doddarayaru: Yamuna, think for yourself. If you stay here for one reason, I cannot be elected in the coming election. And if I am not elected there will be no emancipation for the Holeyas. This society cannot survive without their Upliftment. On one side helping you by giving you shelter is one duty; on the other, dedicating my life to uplift thousands of ignorant orphans is another. Both are good works but they contradict each other. For the welfare of the majority-whether It costs my life or another's- We must sometimes be cruel, isn't it?

Vasantha: [Interrupting softly] here...

Venakka:Ayya, what kind of talk is this? To Uplift the Holeyas, you send away this orphan brahmin girl?

Yamuna: [Instantly] I... I am not a Brahmin! [cries]

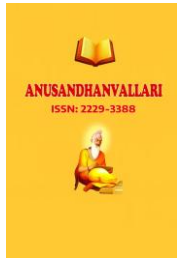
Doddarayaru: What?

Anthappa: Aaah...!

Thathyachari: Ayyo...

Venakka: Yamuna, don't sit there dazed-come, Let's go. Useless discussion! [Stands up]

Anthappa:Ah... What is your caste, then?



Yamuna: [Covering her face] I don't know.... certainly not.

Thathyachari: [Angrily] What? [Yamuna stands up in fear]

Venakka: Why do you frighten her? Leave her alone! What does the caste matter to one who allows Holeyas to touch? Men are strange!

Doddarayaru:[with authority] Sit quietly! [to Venakka]

Yamuna, don't be afraid. Speak whatever you wish.

Shyama: [Gently]: Don't be afraid Yamuna, in this house your caste doesn't matter.

Thathyachari: I say the same- but still one must know the caste, right? [Grins sarcastically]

Yamuna: [In a trembling voice] I truly don't know. No one has ever allowed me to touch them. As far as I know I was married, yet even then no one touched me. After that I thought, maybe I belonged to Holey community. I heard,Rayare, that you uplift the Holeyas, so I came here. [Weeping] ayyo, I am not Brahmin, Rayare! Please don't hand me over to the Brahmins! In the village, the Brahmins told me to stay there disfiguring myself. So, I ran here.Rayare, I swear by your slippers on my head, I'm not a Brahmin. I am one among the impure holeyas. Don't hand me over to them.

Venakka: [Wiping her tears, going near Yamuna, placing a hand on her back] Silly girl! Who told you anything now? How can women live if they take men's words to heart? No, don't cry... Who said you're not a Brahmin?

Yamuna: [Hugging Venakka] Ayyo, Venakka... I don't want to be a Brahmin!

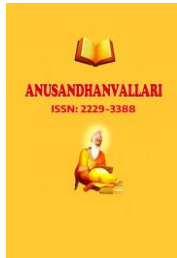
(2005; 419-420)

In this episode Yamuna is doubly silenced, both by her caste and her gender. The character of Doddarayuru once again embodies the symbol of dominant hegemony in society. The playwright powerfully depicts the plight of the subaltern through Yamuna whose voice and existence are constantly negotiated by those in power. Venakka's concern for Yamuna is practical rather than political. She wishes to keep her because Yamuna manages the household work efficiently. Even when Yamuna confesses that she is not a Brahmin, Venakka remains indifferent as caste identity holds little immediate consequence for her domestic reality.

For Doddarayuru, however Yamuna's caste becomes a political obstacle- he must send her away to preserve his electoral image and retain upper caste votes. Yet the scene takes a subversive turn when Yamuna herself declares "I am not a Brahmin, please don't hand me over to the Brahmins". Her words expose the hypocrisy of caste purity and invert the notion of Brahmin Superiority.

The character of Yamuna is crafted as a subtle yet profound symbol of resistance against hegemonic forces that operate through caste ideology, patriarchal belief and ritual practise to preserve social hierarchy. In Gramscian terms hegemony functions not merely through coercion but through consent by making domination appear natural and moral (Gramsci,1971). Doddarayuru, as a representative of the dominant class, uses reformist rhetoric and moral authority to sustain this consent. Against this backdrop, Yamuna's quiet defiance- her declaration "I don't want to be a Brahmin" becomes an act of ideological subversion. Though Yamuna does not articulate a political argument, her words embody a counter-hegemonic consciousness "that challenges both caste privilege and gendered subordination.

At the end of the play, several crucial moments unfold- the discussion between Doddarayuru and Nabi Saab, the episode of lifting a child belonging to Holey Community from a drain and the marriage proposal between Shyama and Yamuna. These sequences are crafted with remarkable symbolic depth and dramatic precision.



In this particular conversation, Doddarayaru, Anthappa and Thathyachari attempt to convince Nabi Saab, a merchant and leader of the Muslim community. Knowing that, Nabi Saab is displeased with Doddarayaru's apparent support of Dalits, they try to justify their position and clarify their misunderstood social stance. Ironically, Nabi Saab himself shares the same discriminatory attitude towards Dalits, considering them impure and untouchable.

The conversation proceeds as follows:

Nabi Saab: Look Doddaray Saab, why should I fear to speak the truth? we have heard that you are supporting the Holey and Madiga people. Both these communities are engaged in impure work. We don't want their eyes even to fall upon us. I'm only telling you the truth.

Thathyachari: Though I have explained much, he doesn't believe me. Their position and ours! -what relation is there between us?

Nabi Saab: It's not just about the holeyas, it is something like "Harijan story..."

Doddarayaru: [as if stuck by sudden idea] Oh... I understood! Someone who is jealous of us must have conveyed false information to you.

Nabi Saab: Leave it, Doddaray Saab.

Doddarayaru: How can we leave it, Nabi Saab?

Thathyachari: Yes, I say the same!

Doddarayaru: Don't I know our own people after serving them for 20 years? Muslims are our neighbours. They are also deeply religious like us. They are simple and sincere. We are like the right and left hands of this country's progress.! Can I leave them and support the Holeyas -who are always like thorns in our feet?

(2005; 438)

In this discussion Nabi Saab's discriminatory attitude toward Dalits reveals the internal contradictions within subaltern politics. Although he belongs to a religious minority -himself a marginalised figure, he attempts to assert superiority over Dalits to safeguard his socio-political position. The play critically examines this complex socio- political relationship by showing how caste-based hierarchies intersect with religion and politics. In this sense, Nabi Saab is not merely a character but a symbolic representation of the way hegemony functions in Indian society by dividing and fragmenting the marginalised.

In this episode, Doddarayaru articulates his stance in support of Muslims, declaring, "Can I leave them [Muslims] and support the Holeyas who are always like thorns in our feet?". This statement reveals Dadarayaru's deep seated caste prejudice and his political consciousness regarding potential threats to his dominance. His words are not merely an expression of personal bias but a calculated reflection of the anxiety of the upper castes to preserve their hegemony.

After the discussion with Doddarayaru, while leaving Nabi Saab notices a child who has fallen into a drain. He doesn't touch the child because it belongs to the Holey community. Instead, he informs Doddarayaru and others who are present there. Anthappa asks him to pick up the child from the drain. But Nabi Saab refuses, saying that he cannot touch Holeyas child and leaves the place. Nobody comes forward to help the child. Finally, Venakka steps into help

Venakka: [out of concern]: Ayya, can't anybody lift the child from the drain?

Thathyachari: You go, Venakka. Nothing will happen- It's a Holey's child!

Venakka:Ayya, doesn't a Holey's child feel pain? So many men are sitting here, can't you see it? [She moves towards the door]

Doddarayaru[angrily]: Hey, What is your business outside the house?

Venakka:Ayya, what will happen? Poor child, its bleeding, somebody bring some water, I will hold the child. [She hurries outside]

(2005; 441)

In this scene, Venakka's words are remarkable. She ignores the idea of defilement and goes ahead to touch and help the child.

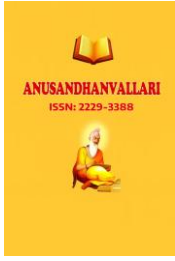
In this context, the character of Venakka, attains momentum beyond the hegemonic framework. Although she is the wife of Doddarayaru who embodies the hegemonic power structure and herself belongs to the Brahmin community, Venakka's worldview stands in contrast to that of her husband. The sense of empathy and human concern qualities that should define every individual are profoundly articulated through her actions. Despite Doddarayaru's criticism and disapproval, Venakka demonstrate moral courage by transcending caste boundaries.

A devout practitioner of religious shastras and rituals, Venakka "crosses the line" both literally and symbolically when she steps forward to rescue the Holey's child. This act signifies not merely compassion but a moment of transformation, challenging the rigid codes of purity and pollution that sustain caste hierarchies. Through the creation of characters like Venakka and Yamuna, who gain agency and voice within a dominant patriarchal caste order, the playwright envisions a possibility of social reform and cohesion. These women by asserting their ethical sensibility against oppressive norms become sites of resistance and moral awakening within the narrative.

At the end of the play two significant and compelling incidents occur simultaneously; Venakka, rescuing the Holey's child from the drain and Shyama publicly announcing his decision to marry the widow, Yamuna. These parallel actions led by Venakka and Shyama are entirely unexpected and profoundly shocking to Doddarayaru, Anthappa and Thathyachari. In this moment, both Venakka and Shyama acquire narrative momentum and indirectly challenge the hegemonic discourse that structures the socio-cultural order. The act of Venakka touching the child from Holey's community and Shyama holding the hand of Yamuna, a widow, unfold at the same instant- producing a double shock for Doddarayaru. Through this carefully crafted sequence, the playwright attempts to explore possible modes of negotiating the socio-political crisis embedded in caste gender hierarchies.

At the very end, Vasantha's utterance of the word "*Harijanvara*" carries two distinct connotations. On one level it refers to the day of celebration for Harijans [Dalits], a term earlier used by Doddarayaru merely to gather political support and enthuse the youth without any genuine commitment to social upliftment. On another level, Vasantha's pronunciation Hari-Janvara invokes the symbolic tearing of Janivara the "sacred" thread worn by Brahmins. The tearing of the "sacred" thread metaphorically represents the annihilation of the caste system, a structure that sustains hegemonic socio- political and cultural power in society. Thus, the play ends not only with dramatic tension but also with strong ideological gesture aimed at dismantling entrenched caste hierarchies.

In this context the observations of eminent scholar Meti Mallikarjuna become particularly relevant. He states: "Drama's original design of discourse is to impart thought processes and perspectives through dialogues. That means drama itself is a form of discourse. Plays depend primarily on the dialogues exchanged between characters on stage. Through the analysis of these dialogues, the influence and impact of plays can be understood. The relationships between characters emerge through their speech. Dialogues filled with emotions and feelings reflect power relations and rise issues of caste, class, communal tensions, religion, gender and



more. Speech is not only an expression but also a perception. The linguistic shifts within the dialogues reveal the ideological position of the play.”

Conclusion

By invoking this perspective, it becomes evident that the playwright employs language with great intelligence and sensitivity to engage with the socio-political issues that shape the world of the play. The dialogues act as critical tools to reveal, question and destabilise the hegemonic structures that govern caste, gender and power relations in society. In this light, the play *Harijanvara*, interrogates the multi-layered experience of subalternity. It operates as a discursive space where language, dialogue and action become instruments for articulating resistance.

The play critically examines how dominant caste leaders often instrumentalise the language of reform to consolidate political power rather than to challenge the foundations of caste hierarchy. The domestic Sphere, depicted through Venakka's strict adherence to ritual purity and her discriminatory attitude towards Yamuna, becomes a powerful site where hegemonic ideology is reproduced and normalised. By staging these tensions between appearance and reality, reform and ritual, consent and coercion, Sriranga compels audience to confront the persistent structures that silence and marginalize subaltern groups. The play thus retains its relevance even today, offering valuable insights into the politics of representation, the complexities of caste and the enduring struggle for genuine social justice.

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