



Register Number:

Date:

ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BANGALORE-27
M.A ENGLISH - III SEMESTER
END SEMESTER EXAMINATION: OCTOBER 2019
EN 9218: Indian Literature -- Dalit and Bahujan Literature

Time – 2^{1/2} hours

Max Marks - 70

A. Read this excerpt from *The News Minute* interview of Gogu Shyamala and answer the questions below.

“There are two types of Dalit narratives that you will read and hear about. Either the person is a hero who fought all odds, or a victim. With my writing, I try to present them as normal people like everyone else, to try and battle the mainstream stereotype.”

In one of the stories (from her book -*Father May Be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket, But...*), a young girl named Bamma, wary as she is of the village dora, is nonetheless not willing to put up with his nonsense. The story is named after Tataki, whom Valmiki calls a rakshasi, but whom Dalit discourse identifies as a Dalit woman who protected the forests and was killed by Rama.

These stories are drawn from her own life. “My book is entirely based on my experiences - things that I have seen, heard or felt. I do add a few elements here and there to brighten up the book, but the writing is largely from experience.”

In a strange way, one of the stories in the book could easily be applied to the discussions about students who avail of reservations, and which were heard after Rohith Vemula's suicide. BayiTalam (Bottom of the Well) raises questions about caste, privilege, and access to education. A group of teachers from Hyderabad happen to watch Dalit boys enthusiastically playing all kinds of games in the well. Taken aback by their intelligence, they wonder what caste these boys belong to, and how they might shine with an education. This between the teachers in the story is a study in attitudes and perceptions. At the mention of Rohith's suicide, the sign of a frown appears on Shyamala's face.

“The purpose of universities is knowledge. Any person, irrespective of his background, can go to a university to learn. However, there is discrimination even here as most of the professors are upper caste and they aren't empathetic to the background of a Dalit student,” she says. As far as Rohith is concerned, we are losing a little focus of the main issue with all the incidents that followed and all the politicians going in and out of the campus. He was a student filled with hope and was pushed to commit suicide,” she adds.

The time is ticking and it is time for the last question. What is the biggest problem she faces as a self-identified Dalit feminist? “Being a Dalit woman is hard. In the Tsundur massacre for example, all those widowed women from the killings did not have anyone to turn to. They raised their children, worked hard to feed them, and still had to go to court to fight the case. This lack of a support mechanism in the patriarchal system really makes it hard for them,” she says. Even in everyday life, she says, women are stronger. “I remember (women)

agricultural labourers who would gather together, make sure that all the work was done, and ensure that the landlords gave them every rupee they earned. I always saw them being bold and courageous. But, that does not deny the difficulties that they face living in a patriarchal society," she says.

I.A. Answer the following questions in 100-150 words. (2x15=30)

1. It is the English language and the Savarna publishing world's failure that there is no market for stories like Shyamala's that are written from experience. Comment.
2. How do characters like Bamma and Saayamma help in resisting mainstream imagination of Dalit women? Use specific references from your reading of Gogu Shyamala's work.

B. How has reading Ambedkar enabled your understanding of Indian history? What has prevented our history textbooks from giving us a better understanding of the man? Answer in 200 words. (20 marks)

C. Read this extract from a poem by Namdeo Dhasal.

*Release me from my infernal identity.
Let me fall in love with these stars.
A flowering violet has begun to crawl towards horizons.
An oasis is welling up on a cracked face.
A cyclone is swirling in irreducible vulvas.
A cat has commenced combing the hairs of agony.
The night has created space for my rage.
A stray dog has started dancing in the window's eye.
The beak of an ostrich has begun to break open junk.
An Egyptian carrot is starting to savour physical reality.
A poem is arousing a corpse from its grave.
The doors of the self are being swiftly slammed shut.
There's a current of blood flowing through all pronouns now.*

I.C Answer the following questions in 100-150 words. (2x10=20)

1. Do we see a different Dhasal if we don't analyze his poetry through his politics? Is Dhasal's poetry different from his politics?
2. What can the cat, the stray dog, and the Egyptian carrot tell us about location in the poem? Does Dhasal allow the reader to travel beyond this location?
