



Sahitya Akademi

28 July 2012

meet the author

Geeta Nagabhusan





Geeta Nagabhushan

Geeta Nagabhushan was born on the 25th of March 1942 in Savali, a small village in Gulbarga District. Her parents Shantappa and Sharanamma settled in Kalburgi town for the sake of their livelihood, where Shantappa was a labourer at MSK cloth mill. The poor and illiterate couple belonged to the extremely backward Talavara caste. Geeta (first named Shanta) was their eldest daughter. Shantappa, a freedom fighter, had associated himself with leaders and other freedom fighters. Being aware of the significance of education, he sent Geeta to school. Let alone girls, even boys of Talavara caste did not attend school in those days, inviting criticism of those around them. However, Geeta, passionate about learning, continued her studies.

Geeta who had a hard life from her childhood, had to walk bare foot in the scorching sun to attend school in Kalburgi. She wore patched dresses. Nevertheless, she was always ahead in studies. She would carry hot *rotis* and *dal rasam* for lunch in an aluminium carrier. She experienced difficulty in swallowing the dry lunch. Her primary school teachers punished her for not possessing books. For this reason, her mother wanted to take her out of school. Shantappa's friend Eeranna, himself poor, bought her books.

Geeta's mother did not want her daughter to study, worried that no one would marry an educated girl in their caste. She thought that an uneducated groom would never marry an educated girl. But the father and the daughter were for further studies.

While in high school Geeta borrowed the books of her friend Meera Jaaji, a girl hailing from a rich family. Geeta underwent a lot of suffering due to poverty and her caste. However, this suffering prepared her for a life of struggle.

Geeta worked as a clerk at the District Collector's office in Kalburgi after completing matriculation. But in those days no girl worked in an office amidst men. Although discouraged by her mother, her father supported her. She completed PUC and B.A even while working and was ambitious of pursuing the Masters Degree. It was impossible as the Post-graduate Centre of Karnataka University at Kalburgi had not been established then. There was only one at Dharwad. She resigned her job at the office and joined a local school as a teacher. Fortunately for Geeta, Shivaji University, Kolhapur in Maharashtra, had started Post-Graduate centre in Sollapur. Geeta successfully pursued her Master's Degree Course from this centre.



Geeta with her mother



*From Geeta's family album*

Meanwhile, Geeta's first marriage ended in a divorce due to incompatibility. Later, Geeta fell in love with Nagabhushan and married him. But her troubles did not end. Nagabhushan, who had married just for fun, did not shoulder any responsibility. She suffered a lot of humiliations and violence at his hands. Since it was a love marriage between Geeta and Nagabhushan (who belonged to a different caste) she was isolated from her parents, relatives and friends and became almost an orphan. There was none to protect her from domestic violence.

The Management of the school in which Geeta worked compelled her to resign due to the incident involving her love marriage. She was in search of a job for six months. Gradually she rose to the positions of the Headmistress, and then a Lecturer and later the Principal of the educational institutions run by Sri Nagareshwara Welfare Society. The path traversed by Geeta till she became a Principal was not a bed of roses.

Geeta began writing in the 1980s. Her first story **Kshitija** was published in the weekly magazine **Sudha**. Short stories and novels are her forte. There were no good newspapers in Kalburgi then. Periodicals were never to be found. Thus she had to depend on Bangalore for the publication of her writings.

The oppression, harassment, suppression and resistance of women living in her native village and those who lived in slums and hutments became the base of her stories. She began writing boldly about the sexual exploitation of destitute and low caste women by the patriarchal society, by several rich lechers in the name of god and religion. Her novels caught the attention of readers. Her articles appeared regularly in the Kannada weekly magazine **Lankesh Patrike** and added a new dimension to women's writing in Kannada. The novel **Neela Ganga** was serialised in **Lankesh Patrike** and was later published in book form by **Patrike Prakashana**. Later the novel **Hasi Maamsa mattu Haddugalu** was serialised in the Kannada weekly magazine **Taranga**. The novel **Maapura Taayiya Makkalu** appeared in the monthly magazine **Mayura**. The novel exposes the wretchedness of upper class patriarchy that pushes adolescent girls into prostitution by way of offering them to a goddess.

Many upper caste women writers were writing prior to Geeta's appearance on the literary scene. Critics ignored the novels of women writers who belonged to rich and educated families, and ridiculed them as kitchen literature. Geeta's writings significantly differ from these. Her writings brought out the exploitation and the resistance of innocent women living in slums. She selects rural themes noteworthy for her employment of Javari, a Kannada dialect spoken in the villages of Hyderabad Karnataka region.

Geeta's novels depict opposition to conservatism and resistance to patriarchy. Popular with readers, her works have won critical acclaim as well. Thus Geeta treads a path that is different from her contemporary writers.

**Hasi Maamsa mattu Haddugalu:** This is a story of exploitation of an innocent village girl Lacchi, by the Kulakarni of the village and the police. It is Lacchi who ultimately tries to kill the Kulakarni who exploited and shattered her. She throws the baby boy born to her in to the lake just because of its gender and tries to kill herself. Someone saves her, but the child dies. Lacchi is imprisoned for having killed the child, and attempting suicide. This is a novel that portrays a fierce form of her protest. The novel was serialised in the Kannada magazine **Taranga** and was made into a film titled **Hennina Koogu**. When just four episodes of the novel were published, the film director pair Dorai-Bhagawan secured the rights of the novel.

**Dange:** It is the story of Durgi who murders a rich man who has a liaison with her and tries to kill her daughter. The rich man of the village brings Durgi, a widow, to his farm house. She has a daughter from her deceased husband. The rich man's son studies in the same school as this girl. Later, both of them study together in the college at Kalburgi. They fall in love and are intent on a registered marriage. Then the rich man takes Durgi to Bangalore where his son is studying. He hires a professional killer who is already on the train to kill Durgi, who overhears the rich man discussing the plan to kill her. She asks him to stand near the door to get some fresh air and pushes him out of the train. The rich man dies. This is how a lower caste takes revenge.

**Baduku:** The *magnum opus* which secured the Sahitya Akademi award for Geeta has Subaltern culture depicted throughout. There is no single protagonist. In fact this is the story of the life of a community.

As Geeta herself says in the introduction to the novel "How shall I speak?", this novel is a sincere attempt to highlight several aspects of her childhood, and the experiences she underwent then. It talks of unravelling several masks and revealing the true character of unembellished rustic women, of the joys and sorrows of people living in slums, of their problems, anxieties, customs, beliefs, tradition and rituals. Metaphorically, in the novel Geeta conspires to sever the tongue which has become hard eating sweets and other dishes of elite culture with food related to folk culture such as *maize roti, kadubu* and *pundipalya*.

She has written what she saw of slum dwellers and directly experienced and heard from their mothers, grandmothers as also other women. This novel is a melange of all these experiences and is the true story of the common people of her district written in Javari. Geeta says that lust, drinking and hunger are the three integral features of the lives of these people.

**Maapura Taayi Makkalu:** There is a place called Chinchooru in Gulbarga district. The presiding goddess of the place is called Maapura Taayi. Dalits themselves conducting the worship in the temple is a tradition here. People of all castes worship the goddess. But the vows of offering something to



Receiving Honorary Doctorate from Gulbarga University



Chairperson of the 76th All India Kannada Literary Conference at Gadag

the goddess are unique to the Dalits and they are more related to women. Any Dalit facing a problem, promises the goddess that if the problem is resolved, the daughter of the family will be offered as *Jogini* or the daughter will be taken in a procession in the nude.

The practice of letting a girl be a *Jogini* means pushing a pubescent girl to flesh trade in the name of the goddess. First, a rich man of the village or the village chief or some influential man of the village gives some money, half a sovereign of gold and a new saree to the parents of the girl and elevates her to the *Patta* and sexually enjoys her. Thereafter, she has to wear a *paradi* (veil) on her forehead, and string of shells around her neck and wander from house to house, and roam cities, fairs and markets dancing and singing songs in praise of the goddess and seek alms. If this is the manner in which she lives during the day, at night she has to sleep with every man who comes to her without refusing anyone.

The plight of such women disturbed Geeta who visited such fairs with her mother from her childhood. Many questions bothered her. Why is this custom found only among the Dalits? Why is it that people of upper castes are forbidden from taking such vows? Why does the goddess turn the girl who has just attained puberty and come to serve her, into a prostitute? Why does the goddess make the girl go in a procession in the nude? Why is the chastity of adolescent girls auctioned in fairs? **Maapura Taayi Makkalu** is a novel written as an attempt to seek answers to such questions.

Geeta has several firsts to her credit. She is the first woman writer to be conferred the **Nadoja** title (honorary doctorate) by the Kannada University. She is the first woman writer to be nominated as the President of the Karnataka Sahitya Academy.

The exploitation of innocent villagers, their problems and their lives must be depicted in all literatures. The literature of slums and shacks must also be recorded in Kannada literature. Geeta has been arguing with conviction and determination that the lives of the poor, the destitute and the innocent people must be included in Kannada literature.

When she wrote the novel **Maapura Taayi Makkalu**, Dalits themselves opposed her. When she gave interviews and published articles about the procession of Dalit women in the nude in Kuduremoti in magazines such as **Taranga** and **Lankesh Patrike** she received death threats over phone from the pontiffs of a few *Mathas* (religious institutions).

But she has lived through all that. The *Jogini* custom of the goddess Maapura Taayi and the procession of women in the nude have been banned by the government.

## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Novels

1. Taavareya Hoova	1968
2. Chandanada Chiguru	1969
3. Mahamane	1970
4. Maralina Mane	1971
5. Saptavarnada Swapna	1973
6. Maapura Taayiya Makkalu	1978, 2005
7. Hasi Maamsa mattu Haddugalu	1978, 1998, 2005
8. Aaghata	1980, 2001
9. Avantara	1982
10. Chakkiya Hareyada Dinagalu	1983, 2005
11. Badalaaguvu Bannagalu	1984
12. Neelaganga	1986
13. Preetsiddu Nimmane	1986
14. Mohva	1986
15. Ninna Tolagalalli	1987
16. Ninnolavu Nanagirali	1987
17. Savati Srigandha	1988
18. Nanna Ninna Naduve	1992
19. Chaitrada Haadu	1993
20. Dhummassu	1994
21. Erilitagalu	1995
22. Aasaregalu	1996
23. Nanna Olavu Ninna Chelavu	1997
24. Dange	1997
25. Abhimana	1998
26. Baduku	2001, 2005
27. Kaage Muttitu	2002

### Edited

28. Khemanna	1998
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### Short Story Collections

29. Jwalanta	1989
30. Avva mattu Itara Kathagalu	1993

**Research Publication:** *Duruga Marugiyara Samskruti* published by Karnataka Sahitya Academy

### Films:

- **Hasi Maamsa mattu Haddugalu** was made into a film which gained the appreciation of critics.

### In Translation:

- **Hasi Maamsa mattu Haddu** has been translated into Marathi.
- The story **Chikka mattu Rickshaw** has been translated into Hindi, **E Lokavella Ghora** into Telugu and **Kaage Muttitu** into Hindi.

### Television Serials:

- Several stories such as **Garbha**, **Bangaari**, **Avva**, **Jogini**, **Satta Hennina Sutta**, **Jeevana Chakra** and **Erilitagalu** have been made into television serials.
- Many stories and plays broadcast on AIR from Gulbarga, Mysore, Dharwad and Bangalore stations.

### Honorary Doctorates:

- Conferred Honorary Doctorates from the Kannada University, Hampi (Nadoja) and Gulbarga University.

### Prominent Awards:

- Daanachintamani Attimabbe Award 2002 (Karnataka Government's highest award)
- Karnataka Sahitya Academy's honorary award 1995
- Karnataka Rajyotsava Award 1998
- Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel **Baduku** 2004

### Position held:

- President of the Karnataka Sahitya Academy from 2005 to 2008
- President of the selection committee of Daanachintamani Attimabbe Award 2001
- President of the Gulbarga District Sahitya Sammelana 2000
- President of the 76th All India Kannada Sahitya Sammelana held at Gadaga 2010



Receiving Sahitya Akademi Award from Prof. Gopi Chand Narang, former president, Sahitya Akademi