



SOCIAL REALITY AND THE SHORT STORY

Introduction to Literature
August 22 & 26, 2025
IIIT Hyderabad

- Art of any genre never exists in a vacuum.
- All art is rooted in a particular social and political context, even if the artist is not openly political or not addressing social issues in their writing.
- Short stories of Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955)
- Aamir Mufti, “A Greater Story Writer than God: Genre, Gender and Minority in Late Colonial India” (2002)

Social Reality and the Short Story



WHO IS THE SUBJECT OF LITERATURE?

G. SHYAMALA (B.1969)



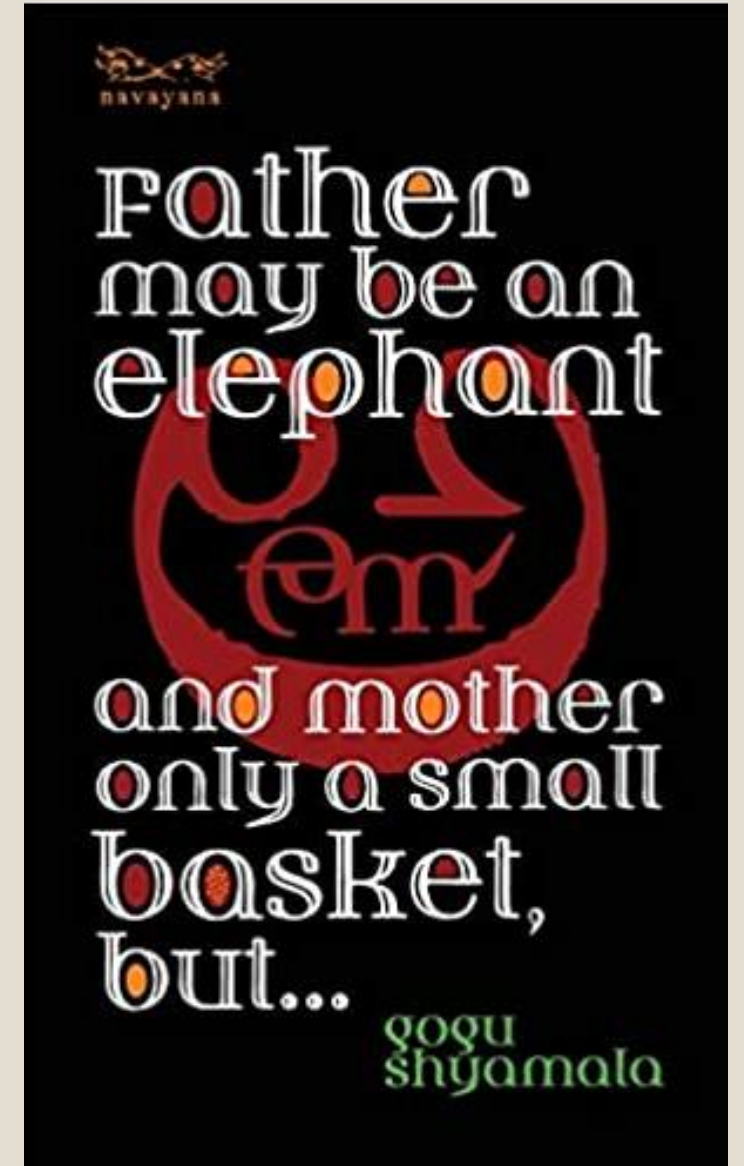
- Born in Rangareddy district, now Telangana
- Mother agricultural labourer, father daily-wage labourer, brother bonded to a rich farmer's family
- Family sent her to a school away from their village, too weak to work in the fields
- Went to a social welfare residential school, completed Class XII
- Went into politics
- Completed a Law degree in 2006
- Coordinator of Dalit initiative at Anveshi, Hyderabad, in charge of biographies of Dalit women political leaders

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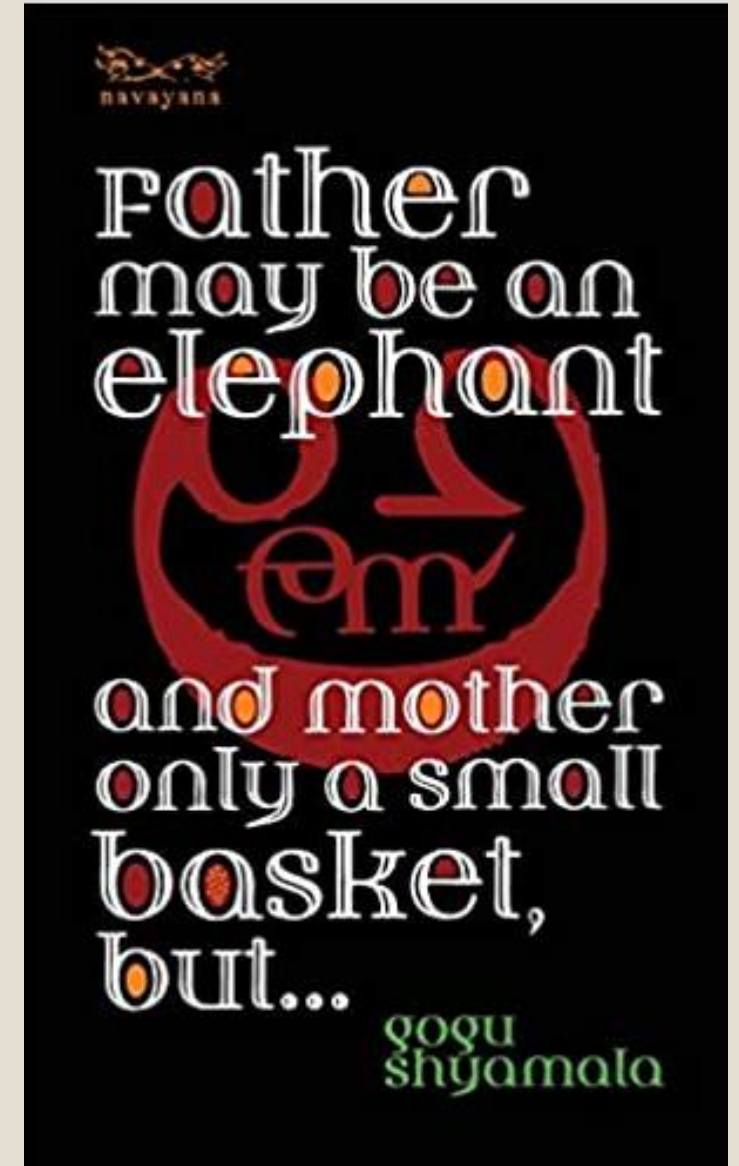


- “little stories” (Lalita 251), quoting Susie Tharu: “world of the little, subaltern traditions, as against that of the great traditions” (qtd in ibid.)
- Dalit language, social culture, and histories are encased and memorialized in these stories; does it without nostalgia (253)
- Lives (esp. of children) who do not find a mention in mainstream children’s literature.

LANGUAGE



“These stories are written in a variant of Telugu used by dalits in the Tandur region of western Telangana. Academic and official Telugu is sanskritized and has an upper caste, Andhra slant. The placing of the Tandur variant on the written pages involves considerable artistry and not a little technical effort since it involves open battles and subtler skirmishes with the history of the standardization of official Telugu, its grammar, vocabulary, orthography, and even punctuation” (“A Note,” 245).



- Goddess Ooradamma seeks propitiation through sacrifice
 - Erpula (soothsayer/oracle) was a woman from the Baindla caste (this is a Dalit caste).
 - Dalits see them as priests; upper-castes see them as a kind of unpaid sex-worker.
 - Highly respected figure in temples of goddesses; no ritual function in temples of gods, only “God’s wife.”
 - Saayamma has been a jogini (Dalit woman bound to be sexually available to the whole village); freed by her uncle. Now she fulfills only ritual functions of a soothsayer or oracle.

But Why
Shouldn't the
Baindla
Woman Ask
for Her Land?

- The festival is **less about devotion and more about asserting power and control** and showing people who is in charge.
 - Landlord has visions of goddess (she communicates with him).
 - Festival is a test to see how many “lower-caste” people are under the control and influence of the landlord.
 - Useful for us as readers because it demonstrates to us the **nexus of government and socio-economic (feudal) power that controls the village:** dora, patels, patwaris.

Ooradamma Jatra

- **Saayamma wants the land** that her paternal aunt had been given by the “Nizam Sarkar” (59), which has been appropriated by the landlord. This is seen as **audacity that is unacceptable**.
- “The dora didn’t expect her to be so **brazen**, openly asking about the land encroached upon and being cultivated by his cousin” (59).
- “**You shouldn’t talk so loosely, and that too in front of everyone**” (59).
- “If we give her the slightest chance to talk, she starts digging up things from the past. She doesn’t allow anyone else to intervene. The problem is, **she does not know her place and doesn’t know how to talk to her superiors**” (59).

Saayamma's Land

- The landlord and other officials deny that Saayamma owns any land. They tell her that if her aunt owned any land, the records would exist with the relevant official.
- **They pre-empt any attempt on her part to seek truth:** “How can you ask for the village records? That is not at all the proper way to proceed” (61).
- **But Saayamma has receipts of taxes** and claims that she is not only the successor to her aunt’s ritual function but also her property (61).

Saayamma's Land

- **Saayamma bangs her fist on the table in anger.**
- She tells the dora to make his own daughter erpula.
 - **What does this signify?**
- Her anger and statement coincides with a tree falling and thunder crashing around them.
 - **What does this mean?**

Saayamma's Land

- Saayamma's Place in her Family and Community
 - Only girl in a family of boys; raised with a lot of affection.
 - Madiga and Baindla women keen and cry at Saayamma's husband's funeral; they use an effigy and conduct all the necessary rituals that she is denied by her husband's family.
 - Saayamma's father tells her brothers to take her home:
 - "Saayamma's father walked up unsteadily, leaning on his staff, and lovingly smoothed back her hair. He tied up her loosened hair into a knot and sprinkled some cold water on her face" (67).

Saayamma's Land

Works Cited

- Shyamala, G. “But Why Shouldn't the Baimdla Woman Ask for Her Land?” *Father May Be An Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket, But ...* Translated by Sashi Kumar, Navayana, 2012. 53-68.
- No author. “A Note on the Translation.” *Father May Be An Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket, But ...* Navayana, 2012. 245-47.

Quiz 1 Template

1. What is point of view? What are some of the points of view possible in literary texts? Use an example from the texts we have read in class and explain how point of view shapes our reading of the text. (10)
2. What is the role of ambiguity in a literary text? Why do writers write ambiguous texts and how does this shape the reader's experience? Write citing examples with explanations from the stories we have read and discussed in the class. (10)