

**Joopaka Subhadra** is a powerful Dalit woman writer and an activist who has been instrumental in establishing *Mattipoolu* (SC, ST, BC and Minority) Women Writers' Forum. Her short story collection, *Rayakka Manyam*, contains vignettes of different aspects of Dalits. Subhadra has a poetry collection, *Ayyayyo Dammakka* and contributes political essays, book reviews, songs and journalistic pieces to a well-known feminist journal, *Bhoomika*. She has co-edited *Nalla Regadi Sallu* (a collection of Madiga women's stories) and *Kaitunakala Dandem* (Madiga poems), both of which have had an impact on the Telugu literary scene. She has also translated the well-known Tamil Dalit woman writer, Bama's *Sangati* into Telugu (via the English translation).

Translated from the Telugu to the English by K Purushotham

Avva, my mother—  
she's not a wick-lamp, safe in wall's ledge  
she's the sun went astray in the rug of the sky,  
she's a famine in the stretched out phallu  
of the mother-earth.

Avva, she is a timeless full-moon,  
she's an embodiment of struggle without dawn  
her head, like an empty-grain in the mortar,  
rebels against the pestle.

The rising sun at the cockcrow  
warms itself in avva's eyes  
she sweeps the stars of the dawn, and  
smears dung-water on the front-yard  
waking and feeding us, she leaves for work  
neither the cow in the forest nor the calf at home  
longs for each other.

Avva quite often falls in the furnace of  
ayya, father's anger because of bad meals,  
a granule of sand or a hair in meals  
or to grab her wages for drinking.

Avva, she is like a served-plate for us all  
having become seeds in furrows,  
she sprouts as green crops  
planting and weeding in knee-deep paddy fields  
ceaselessly working even after dusk  
that's my avva!

It's my avva, who blew songs into the village,  
while working the ridges in paddy fields  
when avva gets at work, her sweat  
turns into a fountain in the desert-sink  
she's an incessant flame in the mud-stove.

I can't remember sweet memories of  
clinging to avva's waist  
I never heard her sing me lullabies  
or tell tales feeding me baby-food with  
her hardened hands that formed soot.  
I had no occasions of napping in her lap, yawning.  
The memories of my screech for food,  
holding a dented bowl in the hands

are still fresh.

My avva, she's a drumbeat on the broken drum  
teaching the earth to bloom and to give fruit,  
becoming leather for cheppulu.  
Hers is like the agony of a top to  
escape the string of the landlords.  
Though she fed mother-earth with her breast,  
the lords kept her at a distance from the yield.

My avva, she's a course-slab at the doorway that  
heaped sorrow as a stack of history  
tightening the phallu round her waist,  
my avva is a question,  
flashing a sickle in her hand.

May the languages be doomed! They never accessed  
the brinks where my avva wandered.  
Original: mA avva, dukkAlni dumni pOsukunna tokkudubanda

Kamala Hemmige, a poet in Kannada, writes with remarkable restraint, irony and a self-directed criticism in her poem "Gini" (The Parrot). The English translation preserves this deceptively casual tone which is more effective for the irony that never gets heavy-handed. The tone therefore seems to be just 'right' for the contemporary style in verse.

GINI (The Parrot)  
**Kamala Hemmige**

Since the door lies  
wide open  
I can freely fly. Can float  
away, easily, like a boat.

Wonder why  
I don't. She doesn't keep me,  
like Khanderaya, hasn't  
clipped my wings.

I don't complain  
that she gives me daily  
cashew nuts and guava.

My fault  
that I suddenly demanded  
ripe tamarind.  
My fault  
that I remain silent,  
knowing how to speak.

(Translated from Kannada by Tejaswani Niranjana [Tharu & Lalita, Vol.II 582-83])