

# THE GHOSTLY TONGUE OF THE OTHERWISE VOICES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SUPERNATURAL IN THE SHORT FICTION OF C. AYYAPPAN AND GRACY

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**Abstract:** The main objective of this study is to look at the different concerns which, the speculative fiction written by C. Ayyappan and Gracy deal with. Most of these works deal with the general problems of the society but the difference is that they are in the hands of supernatural elements. This gives us the idea that something more powerful than the existing is needed to solve the problems of this world. Ghosts are free to speak and express, they are the ones who decide their own fate and are not controlled by any other forces. It could be that these ghosts are the representatives of an expected future life or simply the expectations of a new world. Death for them is a new solution, a way to get an answer for what they have been searching in their real life, to take revenge or simply a platform to articulate their thoughts. Along with this, the gender relations and the Dalit identities, which these texts deal with, will also be discussed.

**Key Words:** Speculative Fiction, Subjugation, Gender, Humane Ghost.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Man's primitive stories were not about their interpersonal relationships, those were mainly naïve attempts to understand the physical world around them. Since then supernatural beings and events have been a part of their narratives, evident in genres ranging from mythology to the gothic. From the time immemorial onwards, the specter is something that haunts humanity. Be it a myth or stories of possessions or even real life incidents trigger unnatural questions of identities. In literature, this ghostly world has attained a prominent space, from Homer to Shakespeare and to the recent era, they have had a decent amount of audience. Mostly violent and with the thirst of revenge, revealing something unknown, the story of the supernatural was and still is being marveled around the world beyond the barriers of language and culture. As in every other languages Malayalam literature too had many experiments with the ghost fiction. We can see a lot many varieties of ghosts in different contexts, with different motives and different abilities. One of the main characteristics that separate a ghost work unlike other literary works is that of its instant horror. The freedom to do whatever they want to is what makes a ghost, in other words, a ghost is a free being. They do not abide by any rules or restrictions that this society demands. Most importantly, they are not tied to this world. Malayalam writers C. Ayyappan and Gracy worked on this genre of the narrative fiction, by bringing a new and indeed interesting narrative strategy using this freedom of a ghost in narrating their stories and by which gives away a series of messages to the readers. Their method is quite a revolutionary and a new way of exploring and employing the ghost image to produce societal messages, which are indeed sarcastic in nature.

Ayyappan was one of the foremost Dalit writers in Malayalam literature. He was born in Ernakulam district of Kerala. He is one of the main literary figures in Malayalam. Even though a great writer his reputation as a Dalit writer came recently. With his brilliant imagery and radical intervention in the mode of storytelling, Ayyappan remains as an outstanding voice. He is also considered as a modernist writer employing the modernist imagery in his work. Ayyappan's narratives can be easily identified with the lived experience of a person who experienced the margins of society. The lives and problems of a Dalit, gender inequality and the concept of masculinity, etc are the general themes in his works. Ayyappan always wrote within the cultural framework in which he belonged to, depicting the social and cultural problems that existed in the society. His stories work in a fictional world, a world that is quite similar to the society that we live in. Within this fictional framework, he pictures characters and stories that are symbolic

representatives of the problems of our world. Ayyappan says in an interview that his world of the narration is simply copied from his daily life. He talks about different incidents that appear in his stories that have really happened in his life, even certain sounds that the readers find in his works, is all taken from his own personal experience. His stories, on the whole, are a representation of the reality that he saw in his life.

Gracy is also a widely read writer in Malayalam literature. Her stories work as a societal critique which again like that of Ayyappan's, is focused on the normal lives of the people. She has won many awards including the Sahitya Academy Award. Her writings, mainly short stories present a world, which is unpredictable to the readers. Both in her narrative techniques and in the language that she uses there is an unpredictable magical touch. Her focus in her stories is the problems faced by women in daily life. Both Ayyappan and Gracy have written short stories that feature ghost as one of the main characters, which in many ways can be read along the lines in offering a similar message. In both these writers, we can see some similar patterns recurring. Some of these are, the social concerns raised through the narrative voice of a ghost, issues that of discrimination of the lower class, gender-based issues, etc. Also in these writers, we can see the idea of a victim who further takes the life of a ghost in order to take revenge or seek justices.

## II. THE HUMANE GHOST

The general meaning of the word ghost is that of the soul or spirit of a dead person, who is considered as living or as appearing to the living people. We interpret them in many ways. Some of the most common interpretations are that ghosts are of people who did not live fully in this world until they wanted to, who seeks revenge, whose dreams and wishes were shattered, those who seek answers, etc. These supernatural elements create different kind of impacts, of fear, revenge, suspense and above all the idea of reason. Almost every supernatural element will have some kind of revelations to put forth. The modes of these narrations are usually that of a violent nature. The ghost fiction altogether provides an idea of some kind of altered consciousness. The short stories of Ayyappan and Gracy present the world of the supernatural in a completely different light. These writers use the image of someone who does not belong to this world (ghost) to depict the problem of this world. They present several social concerns, which they depict through the narrative voice of a ghost. Ayyappan's stories like "Prethabhashanam", "Kaaval bhootham", "Arundhadhidharshananyayam" etc are ghost narrations where all of these ghosts are representatives of their own problems and desires that were unattainable for them in their human life. Social problems like gender and caste discrimination are some of the prominent themes that he uses. Gracy, on the other hand, focuses more on the female identity and its implication in the society, her ghost stories like "Kaalu", "Maranandharam" are the best examples for this. The stories that these ghosts narrate are otherwise not heard. The ghost characters of these writers are not presented as people with evil supernatural powers or violence but they are more like human beings or in some cases more humane than the living. They are presented with negligible changes after being a ghost and the only difference is that they are all dead. This breaks the general pattern of what is expected in ghost fiction. They are like these people who suddenly got freedom from their state of oppression and have started questioning and claiming what was theirs. The general characteristics of these ghost characters are indeed interesting to study.

There is a moment in the life of each of the characters that serve as the crucial point in them becoming a ghost; this may be oppression, humiliation, lack of opportunity or even in many cases the lack of freedom to express one's thoughts. It is indeed the state of victimhood that creates a ghost in these stories usually, the ghost figure is associated with fear. However, in the stories of Ayyappan and Gracy, here we can see that fear is not the central idea. Moreover, we can find that these ghosts in some way or the other are very much humane. All these characters come from a violent background of oppression and subjugation, but when they take the new attire of a ghost, we witness the inception of softness or gentleness in their nature. People who assume a new spectral life as ghosts have a clear-cut aim to fulfill which was unattainable in their lives as a human being. These ghost figure in these stories act on a specific location and a small number of people, that they choose, but their mission has a universal appeal. One may say that ghost come either come to get answers or to give answers.

Often the general ideas associated with that of a ghost is of this outside the world image. They do not belong to this world of the real, but in these stories, they belong to this world but in a more liberated or free world. In Ayyappan's story's this is evident, his ghosts are in constant search for something, whether it be answers or simple revelations. The supernatural elements in Ayyappan's stories form a sort of a parallel world. They are friendlier and not blood sucking ghosts. There are even characters who long to die so that they can become a ghost, which is depicted as a new birth of an old life. Another interesting fact is that many people die in these stories, but not everyone becomes a ghost. It is as if one of those people who has something unfinished in this world comes back as a ghost.

"Kaaval Bhootham" is the story of a man, who was attracted to a woman in his human life. He takes the life of a ghost to take revenge on her who, ignored him and had an extramarital affair. Here many people die, her husband, the protagonist's mother, but not all of them become a ghost. Another interesting element in the story is that, even though Shankunni (the ghost) comes to take revenge, he is more kind towards Devi (his lover), this is evident from the text as he says that-

I watched the grey haired magician beat you until three canes broke into pieces. All that you told them were inflammable lies. Hit first, ask later: this was the shaman's method. Thus, at the end of your tether, you shouted out all the evil deaths that you knew or had heard about. Ittuli who drowned herself, Elamma who died when the rice boiled over on to her, Perekattu Kuttan who was trampled to death by the elephant, the spirit of Chothikunju from the south – how many lies you told them! None of these dead were in your body. But you were trapped when the magician asked for evidence for each spirit's leaving

you. Scared that you may die from flogging, somehow you thought of me. No way could I come close to you; yet I made you say that a branch of the banana tree would break as the sign of each evil spirit going away. Accordingly, I broke at the right moment branches one after the other including the one on which I had perched. You were saved for the time being. Then I made up my mind: I need to tell you certain things

We can see that he tries and saves his beloved from being beaten up by the magician and further reveals the truth. Shankhuni even states that he won't make many inconveniences in Devi's life. He has some kind of sympathy and kindness towards her.

The Dalit girl in the story "Prethabhashanam" is a victim injustice related to both caste and gender. However, at the end of the story gives her freedom to her lover's sister and leaves the world without harming anybody. In "Elumban Kochathan", the protagonist's own family denies him justice and compassion – in this story, his own sister does not care for him or gives him food, it is his buffaloes which takes revenge for him. Ayyappan in an interview recalls that it was his grandmother who told him the story, and that the buffaloes in her narratives were the manifestation of ghosts. All these characters were victims in their real life and lacked opportunities to speak. Their voice were silenced and they were never given any answers. The ghost life for them is quite like a new birth into their old circumstances, transformed through the acquisition of the additional dimension of freedom and still being humane in nature. Ayyappan's idea of the supernatural is quite different from the general idea of the ghost, here not merely because of that they are less violent but also that they all are victims of a certain sort. The relationship between the ghost and the possessed is fascinating. These spirits inhabit inside or around those characters that they want to fulfill their intentions. For example in the story "Prethabhashanam" the dead girl possesses the body of his lover's sister so that she can access her lover.

Let us begin by analyzing the initial lives of the protagonist of these stories before they became a ghost. What is that leads to their spectral transformation? In almost in all the ghost stories, some violent or unjust incidents lead to the emergence of ghosts. The girl in the story "Prethabhashanam" was sexually exploited and humiliated on account of her low caste, in spite of her being educated. In the stories of Ayyappan, the people who are subjected to this violence willfully transforms themselves into a ghost by committing suicide. For them, this is an opportunity of a new life. By committing suicide, Ayyappan's characters acquire the freedom to begin a new and a free life as compared to their old life. They commit suicide thinking and desiring of a possible new life. It could be this freedom that they gain from the new ghost life that makes them more humane, that at least they are now not in the hands of other people who control their life, suggesting the importance of freedom in one's life to be more humane.

The ghosts constantly interact with the humans around and are just like others. In the story "Kaaval bhootham", the protagonist commits suicide to take another form of life and lives with the object of his attraction in his life as a human being. Shankhuni, the protagonist of the story, kills his father: it is interesting that he is not provoked by the abuse and sexual taunts that his father directs at him and his mother but loses his control when his father stops him from committing suicide. Similarly in the story "Arundhadhidharshananyayam", the protagonist says that by committing suicide he is not going to die, but is taking another life, or is going to be born again. He wants to die so that he can find his beloved. For him, this new life as a ghost will offer those opportunities that he missed in his actual life. After death, they rather become the God of their own fate. There is also enlightenment when these characters become a ghost.

Gracy's fictional world of the supernatural is in many ways similar to that we can see in Ayyappan's fiction. The world of supernatural adjust them into the living world and thus forms a natural habitat for those who have taken the form of spirit, they talk and interact as others do. All the ghosts that appear in Gracy's stories are victims and at the same time, they are mostly harmless. In Gracy's fiction, we can see those who have committed suicide and those who are murdered, unlike in that of Ayyappan's stories, where all the characters commit suicide. In the story "Orotha and the spirits", we can see the protagonist, a human being speaking to many spirits who have committed suicide when caught of their inability to act or control their own life. She mocks and questions these spirits when they ask her for a piece of meat to eat. These spirits inhabit a cashew garden, which is left open to anyone who wants to commit suicide. This is simply a world of spirits within the real world; they are not separated from the actual world rather they co-exist. What makes them different is that they are dead. In the story "Kallu", a spirit appears before everyone who tries to insult her daughter she is quite the same as a living mother who at any situation will protect her children. In the story "Marannanatharam", the protagonist after committing suicide, wants to speak to those who have gathered to mourn her death. She criticizes all those fake people who are acting sad. She wanted to say these when she was living but could not do so. Here the thing to be noted is that the ghost even if they have the probable intention of revenge, they remain passive and does not hurt anyone even though they have the power to do that.

Now the question is what these ghosts actually do. They all are born out of certain circumstances or out of their wish to be reborn. These stories are also, about what they do after being born as a ghost. Here the very normal idea of a ghost taking revenge in a violent way is absent. They do their revenge in many stories but not in the general expected way of a stereotypical ghost, that we all are familiar with. In the story "Kaaval Bhootham" the ghost punishes his lover by making her forever pregnant and not letting her die. He denied the right to die for her, which she believes as an escape. In the story "Kaalu" the ghost of the mother, appear before everyone who tries to assault her daughter but does not hurt anyone other than frightening them. In a way, they are taking revenge but not in a violent way. Their freedom itself is an act of revenge through which they communicate, suggesting that these ghosts have now acquired the freedom that is denied to the worldly people. One of the motives behind this depiction may suggest the possible gain that they receive via death, and the revenge is simply in exhibiting this freedom. What these ghosts do is representing their vulnerable situation in a different way and tracing possible resolutions. The general ways of representing the problems of the underrepresented



people have proved useless many times and by these stories, these writers try to convey the need for an alternative mode of representing their problems. It could be that these ghosts are the representatives of an expected future life or simply the expectations of a new world. They all speak from their state of victimhood and in some way searches for their solution or takes revenge. Death for them is a new solution or a way to get an answer for what they have been searching in their real life. Here, death is represented as a possibility.

In the stories like *prethabhashanam*, there is also some kind of maturity happening to the person once they become a ghost, which kinds of leads to awareness or enlightenment. The protagonist of the story is no longer that girl who was a passive object for sexual pleasure, she is now someone who took another life to find her love and by taking any risk attaining that. In her human life, she loved Kunchako even after knowing that he has no such feelings. When alive she has no courage to take her revenge or even to speak up and thus considered suicide as an option. After death she asks to give heed to her words, she then in her new life tries to get her love back in any possible way. It should be also noted that when she realizes that she could not materialize her wish she accepts it and takes everything back to normal. Here comes the element of maturity that the girl shows after becoming a ghost. In her humane life, she stayed as a slave and wept for all that was happening in her life. She needed Kunchako more than anything, for which she even gave up her life. However, here as a ghost she accepts it and goes back to her grave.

There is this general idea of mocking God in these writers. Both God and Ghost are supernatural powers but there is this situation where God stands answerless and ghost get going to find the answers, which they finally do. There is also this character in Gracy's story "*Shipaiyude sankirthanam*", where he mocks and criticizes god for being partial and sidelined to the rich and neglecting the poor. God's in Ayyappan's stories are not taken very seriously; they, in fact, are the subjects of the ghost's sarcasm. He is this old grandfather figure in "*Kaaval Bootham*" whom the protagonist blames and does not even care about. In "*Prethabhashanam*" too this happens and God remains to answer less to the questions asked. Also, it is God who kills humans in the stories and not a ghost, which is another supernatural power. When Shankhuni talks about taking revenge to the Magician who beats Devi for the sake of money, he says that he will ask "*Bhagavathi*" (a goddess) to take revenge for him and kill the Magician. In addition, the Goddess in "*Arundhadidarshananyayam*" kills people when she wakes up, for no particular reason. God is presented as someone who plays with the life of people and it is ghosts who come to question that. This itself is a question to the existing patterns of the society and a suggestion of a need to change. There are also instances of sarcasm, where ghost mocks God and his justice. God is presented as someone who is secondary or less good than that of the ghost and the one who does wrong calculations. Here both the supernatural powers, that is the ghost and the God is compared, in which the ghost emerges as stronger and more humane.

It is important the note that the ghost retains his or her identity when transforms. The only difference in here is that of the platform or the form in which they speak. Only someone from another space could understand, spot or question the mistakes more precisely, which are prevalent in a society. Ayyappan's ghosts do this; they take a new form to criticize the injustice of their world and represent them. Ayyappan through his stories may be suggesting that an alternative life may be the solution to the problems of this life. His ghosts are free to speak and they are the ones who are responsible for their own destiny. Moreover, they even have the freedom to choose and express. This is quite the same in the short stories of Gracy, where the ghost speaks when they as humans were unable to do so. In other words, they are the most simple and subaltern ghost who stays within their world. There is some kind of compassion that a reader feels towards these ghosts. They put forth problems in a usual way, at the same time they themselves find the way towards the answer in an unusual way. There is this image of the other world. Where the characters are not those who surrender to fate, they try to make their own fate.

### III. GHOST STORIES AND GENDER IDENTITY

Gender construction is a major concern in the stories of both C. Ayyappan and Gracy. They present the problems faced by women through their narratives. In many of their ghost stories, the figure of the ghost is that of a woman who was once victimized. Such figures get the strength to narrate their stories and to take revenge on their oppressors after they are dead. The world of the supernatural offers to these women possibilities that were denied to them in the world in which they lived their lives. There are stories where women take the attire of a ghost to take revenge, to talk aloud, to find answers, and even to find people. They bring an alternative or an unusual mode of representing gender issues and vocalizing their problems. They do not merely raise the questions in many cases, but there are also probable answers or solutions that readers can find. These writers invoke issues of gender both directly and indirectly, and they constitute an important theme in their stories. Various kinds of oppression and discrimination faced by women regardless of their caste or social position are represented through an alternative mode of narration.

Many of Ayyappan's stories deal with issues of masculinity. His short story "*Prethabhashanam*" presents the voice of a dead Dalit girl, who gets the courage and opportunity to speak after she takes the form of a ghost. The story is of a female ghost who comes back to the world to regain the person she had loved. She reveals truths about the incidents of the past, which is now unclear for others especially to the girl on whom the ghost possesses. The protagonist who remains unnamed assumes a universal image of the women oppressed. She belongs to a lower class that made her even more vulnerable. The story unfolds by depicting the different levels of discrimination that she had to face in her life. From a very young age onwards, her master's son "Kunchako" in whose house her mother used to work sexually abuses her. She eventually falls in love with him; she narrates the incidents of her life to Kunchako's sister as-

I'd come to your home, one monsoon day to tend to the paddy that had been spread out to dry on the attic floor. I moved backwards, bend over, stirring the grain, and found myself in your brothers arms. I was confounded at first, then exited as I realize Kunchako's hands were finding their way through to their goals. Soon I blossomed red between his lips. Descending the attic stairs, Kunju said: 'Now, now, don't tell this to anyone!' I got a bit scared. I was a fool even then. The same foolishness made me ask him six or seven years later: 'Kunju, will you marry me?' the response to that was a sincere counter question, 'How can I marry you?' I was pained by the helplessness of that question. Surely no Christian- even if he is a primary school teacher- can marry the daughter of the Pulaya women who comes to work at his house

and further when she asks him whether he loves her, he mockingly smiles at her. She finally commits suicide when she understands that he has no love for her. She then becomes a ghost, inhabits the body of Kunchako's sister, and narrates the incidents that that happened before and after her death. The girl in the short story, who when alive was sexually exploited and was helpless, thus takes the form of a ghost and take possession of a living person in order to give voice to the story of her troubled life.

In the story, we see that it is not only the protagonist but also her mother was an object of sexual abuse. Her master had exploited the mother and in a similar way, the master's son exploited her daughter. It is as if the chain of exploitation and subjugation continues because their objects are women and further because they belong to a low caste. These Dalit women can only suffer and pass on their suffering to their next generation. This story is a clear example of the double discrimination that lower caste women face. Oppressed people lack a voice, and even when they articulate their problems and sufferings, they will be ignored and not listened to.

The majority of women characters who appear in Ayyappan's stories are victims of some kind. For example in the story "*Kaavalbhootham*" there are three female characters other than Devi, the main female character, and all three of them are sexually exploited. The first one who is the mother of Shankunni, the protagonist and the ghost of the story, who is constantly abused and doubted by her husband, who doubts that she has several secret lovers including her relatives and even her son. The second, Devi's elder sister who was sexually abused when she was young and the third Shankunni's own sister who is raped, made pregnant and not accepted by Issac, Shankunni's main enemy in the story. There is a description of Isaac watching girls crossing the river; "At festivals in churches and temple to pinch and pummel the bums and tits of women- that was his favorite pastime. I was amazed by what he did in Malayattoor church. He spent the whole day walking across the river looking at women wading through the water that came above the knees. No one suspected him. No one has gone all the way to watch wet female thighs." Here as it is clear that not even a single women who appear in the story remain free from predatory harassment by men. In addition, we can say that Devi, the female protagonist is also a victim because even though the ghost comes in search of her lover he could not find him and instead punishes her by making her pregnant forever. It is evident that both in the main narrative and in the minor narratives that appear, the victimization of women is prominent.

This aspect of victimization more clearly depicted in the story "*Arundadhidarshananyaym*". Here even the Goddesses who appear throughout the story are cursed; they were thrown out from the domain of Gods for enjoying the smell of fish that was being cooked in a low caste family. Even women who possess supernatural powers and those who are worshipped have a history of oppression. The story revolves around a young man, his situations that finally lead him to suicide, that he thinks that will be an answer to his questions, and through which he can find 'Geethu', who was possibly raped and then she committed suicide. There is a reference in the story to an evil spirit of a young man who was killed long back. He was the lover of Geethu's aunt, but when found out by her family he was killed. He took revenge by becoming an evil spirit. His main hobbies were to disturb the women of his lover's house. He used to throw stones at them, blindfold their eyes and pinch their chest, etc. The magician who comes to eradicate this ghost too was influenced by this ghost.

The story "Pulliyangam" describes an altogether different situation. It depicts the perfect image of women called as "Ezham Nilayaile Kanyaka" she is depicted as that kind of beauty, which even makes people think of marriage, but she is always kept inside her palace. She is the daughter of the local lord who constantly abuses women. The girl along with other oppressors assumes the form of a tiger and takes their revenge. The girl in "Mazhavillu" is shown as a self-sufficient woman who lives in the company of nature. She is initially portrayed as a strong person who is capable of living on her own. She is raped and killed at the end of the story. However, she continues to live as a spirit within the man's body. All these stories offer images of oppressed women who take revenge on their oppressors in their own way.

In Gracy's stories too, crimes committed against women appear as a major concern. Her ghosts, as in the story "Kallu", can be seen as a response or resistance to female sexual exploitation. '*Kallu*' tells us the story of a mother who was killed while she was trying to protect her only child from being raped. She dies by killing the person who came to assault her child, the child is left alone with no one in her family. Many attempts to sexually assault the child happen from many people including police officers who are supposed to protect her. However, before anyone who intends to hurt the child, a ghostly image of her dead mother appears and protects her. This image of the mother is visible only to those who have harmful intentions towards the child. The ghostly mother is both a fearful figure and an image of resistance. Although the child is left alone without a family, the mother's spirit creates a domain of protection around her that is invisible even to the child. This story thus works with ideas of fear and of a protective symbol that stays with the child whose life and safety are threatened.

Even in stories like “Orootha and the Ghosts”, in which Gracy presents a ghostly world within the human world, we find images of female freedom. A group of ghosts who committed suicide inhabits a cashew garden. One of them had taken her life because she had a relationship with her cousin and had become pregnant. This made life impossible for her in the real world, but in the ghostly domain, she is completely free and lives among the other ghosts. Gracy puts forth the idea of a ghostly place, which is better for the victim’s survival than the real world where she would have been judged and harmed. The image of a female victim as a ghost provides us with many answers. What is represented in the ghostly voice are the possible solutions that were never achieved in real life, but should be made possible?

The girl in the story “Marananadharam,” unable to face problems in her life, commits suicide by taking sleeping pills. After her death, she wishes to talk to the people who have gathered around to mourn her death. She starts from her father, who appears to mourn her but she feels that he is actually happy inside because he now no longer has that burden of looking after a female child and spending money on her marriage. Then she talks to her aunt, the one who educated her and whom she says that was denied a life because she was employed. She questions her for not giving her that privacy which she wanted in her life. She also talks to her brother, whom she says is interested only in sleeping and eating. The assets of the dead girl are now with him. She asks him whether her property is safe in his hands. She meets her younger sister who was married out of turn before her, which is not regarded well in society. She says to her that she does not have anything more to give to her; in addition to the jewelry, she gifted her at her marriage. After this, she meets her mother whom she blames for not understanding her, although she knows that she is another helpless woman. When she finally looks around, she saw her boyfriend, who had promised to live together with her but had left her after he got a job. She asks no one to cry for her because in reality, no one cares for her. It is told in the story that after she said what she had in her mind, her thirst was thus quenched and everything slowly melted into the coldness of death. It is quite evident that in this story too all women characters are presented, victims. A father who considers a female child as a burden, a lover who just needs the body of a girl, a mother and a sister who are totally helpless and have their own problems, and an aunt who is educated, employed and self-sufficient, but is still under the control of the patriarchy.

The general characteristics of women in these writers are that of dependent individuals who cannot stand by their own and need help which in turn makes the way in exploiting them. After being a ghost, they possess the freedom to break this and be free individuals. In many of these stories, women characters recognize their strength after being a ghost, after which they try to take revenge and voice their thoughts. Interestingly, they show a sense of compassion for their fellow beings. For example, in the story “*Preathabhashanam*,” the ghost seems to behave to the girl whom she possesses with compassion foregoes any plans for revenge on her and at the end of the story leaves her by bestowing her own freedom upon her. This may be because they, as women, are all in some sense or the other victims. These ghosts seem to wish that the pattern of exploitation of which they were victims did not extend to future generations. A female body is and was always a subject to the male gaze this too is commented on here. The kind of maturity these characters arrive at after they become ghost may be considered as the real revenge they seek. They freeze the world for all those who acted against them. The ghost, in contrast, appears to have arrived at a position where it is safer than it was in the real world.

Women are often considered as powerless and weak in nature. This is one of the major elements of discrimination on the basis of gender, as it prescribes what a woman should be and not be, without recognizing what one actually is and what one aspires to become. Gender norms impose a set of expectations on every woman. They demand that women conform to certain roles in order to be accepted or to be considered as normal. In this framework created by gender expectation, you are to live in the rules created by the society. The image of ideal women upheld by society stipulates guidelines on how a woman should behave, talk, walk, etc. Norms regarding how a woman should be, form a total template, where every single thing is prescribed and which should be followed in order for one to be accepted in society. It will not be wrong to say that gender roles and norms as they function today serve as an instance of grave injustice. Although changes have been introduced in the domains of law and politics, they all seem to be superficial differences and not constitute any substantial change.

#### IV. THE GHOSTS OF UNSPOKEN WORDS: DALIT VOICE IN AYYAPAN

Dalit’s and their identity is generally associated with the discrimination and humiliation, as they belong to a lower class set by the society. Often they are treated as someone who does not belong to the normal section of the society. The victimization and crimes against Dalit’s were ongoing for a long time and is still prevalent in our society. There is no proper representation of their thoughts and feelings in the popular culture. There were many works on Dalit literature, but Dalit literature written by a Dalit himself was absent for a long time in our society. Even though present, they are not given proper prominence in the mainstream literary works. Therefore, Dalit literature as a genre itself is a comparatively recent phenomenon. There are a lot of debates on the topic of Dalit consciousness, that is the acceptability of a Dalit work is different when it is written by a Dalit himself and when somebody else represents the life of a Dalit. Ayyappan quotes an example for this by saying that someone who is not pregnant cannot give birth to even a stillborn, and there for an experience of a person cannot be replicated as it is by any other person. “A Dalit’s literature is what Dalit literature is all about”, says Ayyappan. He further says that, “One will only become a Dalit when he himself and the society accepts him as a Dalit. No one becomes a Dalit by birth or any certificate. Self-consciousness and social position is the most important thing. A Dalit who has a mind to accept the truth, the confidence to be sincere on ones on experience, will find himself a proper space in the social sphere, this is one of the main ideas of Dalit writings.”

Ayyappan in his short stories depicts a realistic portrayal of a Dalit by using plenty of imageries and superficialities. A reader can find out in these superficial narrations, the implications of the real, and many underlying truths. His suppressed characters appear



as a ghost, mad people and even as animals. This unnatural representation is what makes Ayyappan's narrative more real. They simply tell the reader that the normal way of representing their problem is not working and we need something new and strong enough to make the voices of the underrepresented people more clearly. A ghostly voice of a Dalit is the simplest example, even though it is practically impossible, his suggestion is a more evident representation of the problems of the underrepresented that may make a difference. Ayyappan's stories often take the voice of a first-person narrative, many of his ghost characters take a new life to speak of their oppression. Here he narrates his stories with the voice of the oppressed itself. In this new voice, they free to articulate. The ghost narratives itself offer a different world that is different from the usual.

The short story "Elumban Kochathan" by Ayyappan in this context is interesting to look. Kochathan is in deep trouble, he has lost the buffalos of his lord. He cannot return to his place until he finds these buffalos. He wanders around in the forest in search of the lost animals. He is starving and is worn out. He then plans to visit his sister's house for some shelter and food. Sister, on the other hand, makes him work hard with her husband and does not give him anything to eat. He leaves her house; in despair, in learning that even his own blood is not willing to help him. On his way back is called by his cousin sister, she feeds him enough and gives him proper shelter. When he wakes up the next morning, she helps him by telling him a way to get his animals back. He does that and eventually finds his animals back, that too, a hundred times more than that of the one that he lost. He then returns them back to his lord and the lord happily accepts him back as he has now brought more than what he took. He further takes his revenge on his sister by killing her with his bulls, which are not considered as normal bulls but the ghost.

Here in the story, at the initial reading, it is a simple story of a man who takes his revenge with the help of his ghostly buffalos. However, if we look deep into it we can find that the lord and subject image is the main idea that is prevalent in the story. He returns the buffalos and plans to leave. When he goes back, his lord calls back and says to him that he should come to work from the next day onwards. He is tied to his master and has no escape from it, no matter whatever he does. He comes from the next morning and starts doing his hard job in the field with his buffalos. In addition, when he brings the animals back the lord out of happiness and tells him that he can ask whatever he wants. Suddenly lord's wife calls him inside and whispers to him. Kochathan understands this and tells the lord that he need nothing else than some food. This section clearly shows that even if there is a situation where there are opportunities for the lower class people, which they totally deserve, they are denied of it.

In the story, "Bhranthu" Ayyappan depicts a more realistic portrayal of the life a Dalit man and his family. The protagonist here is well educated and employed. The whole story is about a well-settled man who lives in a high-class society and his unwillingness to accept his family who belongs to a lower caste. His sister is brought to him as she has gone mad, his friends ask him to help them take her to the hospital, as he is her brother and now in a good situation. He refuses that thinking of his own status, and about the possible shame that would come to him in accepting his own family. Even the protagonist Krishnankutty belonged to the same caste, but when he gets a proper job and reputation, his past is forgotten, he is now a well-accepted man in the society, whereas his family members can be evidently seen as lower caste people from their color and attire and is rejected by the society. He also talks about how his younger daughter avoids his mother and goes to her friend's home. Even children who belong to this so-called upper- middle class society are trained in humiliating the lower class people, no matter who they are. The author makes us think the plight of an uneducated or economically poor Dalit, in this society. This is clear when we see the incident of Krishnan's mother coming to his home to meet his child for the first time, by seeing her, girl marched off to her friends place shutting the door behind. He talks about the hurt and humiliation that his mother had to face from his young daughter as he says that,

There is nothing much wrong with that you might think, but you should realize that the next step has disastrous consequences for me! Many residences of the quarters will visit the hospital. Some of them will surely notice the difference between me and my relatives. Forget the mad woman: she is not the real issue. The issue here is the people caring for her. their appearance and mine will become the object of scrutiny, and then inevitability my neighbors will comment, though Krishnan has, by some chance, become respectable and a well known teacher, all the rest of his lo is awfully backward. There can be no doubt that this would cause me shame!

Here, even though Krishnan has affection for his family he cannot exhibit it as he lives in the middle of an elite group of where being a lower class means something really lame and unacceptable. There is a reference to his wife that even though she is from a lower class background, her fair skin does not reveal that. People intentionally hide the fact that they belong to a lower class in order to get respect and acceptance. He says that "My wife accepts my people, but only in principle." This is exactly the situation of our society too we accept the lower class people, but only in principle. The protagonists here have to choose between his people and his reputation. Moreover, he chooses his reputation, as he cannot afford the ridicules of those around him. The story ends when Krishnan asks that, now you have listened to my problems, you might have understood that there is absolutely nothing wrong with me? He does what is necessary to survive in his surrounding, and this is what the world does to the lower caste people and thinks themselves as not guilty as it is a social stand that is necessary to survive with reputation.

In the story, "Prasthavana" somebody is asking to give heed to his words. He is revealed as the ghost of someone who was a servant of the house, he came forward o speak what he had in his mind. He died because of the humiliation that he faced in the house before, his master spat on his face, he was angry for that and further it is said that he died out of shame. He took a second life as a dog, now they fed him but finally tried to chain him. Suddenly he reveals that he is their old servant. They kill him. He takes a third life, this time much stronger, he tells them to let him speak, and that it is his blood that runs through their veins, the whiteness of their skin is due to the hard-working hands of his and his black color. Overall, he says that they are part and parcel of him. It is because of

them that they are living. He says that they cannot further do anything to him as he is dead three times and now, if someone is capable of doing something then, that is God himself. However, he killed God and cremated him in his own grave. He again asks them to not open the grave again because the foul smell of the god decaying inside the grave would be totally unbearable for this world. Through this, he tries to picture the decaying side of religion that totally divides people.

The story can be read as a future rising of the oppressed. He was killed many times, made work hard, was treated badly and even was subjected to worse humiliation from which he rises. The story simply is of a man who was born for himself, but lived for others in his entire life and was humiliated. He tried to take a new life where he experienced the same plight of oppression. The third time he breaks all that came in his way and stands before them to voice his thoughts. The protagonist tells them that without him they are nothing. This can be related to our society, where if there were no lower-class people, obviously there would be no upper-class people. There should be an oppressed section for the oppressor to exist. The protagonist, when he comes for the third time ensure that nothing would stand against his freedom, for that he kills God, who for him, was unjust forever. The ending of the story is indeed interesting as he says that do not open the grave, in which God is buried, that is a warning made which mocks religious righteousness. The protagonist at a point says that your fragrant fair body is because of my sweaty dark body, your intelligence is because of my ignorance, and finally says that you cannot kill a person many times. The story can be read as a response to an age-old history of an oppressed man towards the oppressors with a strong voice that he ultimately gains from his sufferings.

In the story “Oru Vishadhikaranakuripu” a group of employees does a protest march against the problems, they have regarding their work and salary. Even though they are marching for their own benefit, most of them are ashamed of doing the march and they look around or raise slogans. There were many people on the roadside on which they were marching, prostitutes, beggars, their children’s etc. After some time, the people marching heard more strong slogans that were raised behind them, when they looked back it was the same beggars and others whom they saw on the roadside. When they listened carefully, they were even raising the same slogans that they were saying. They could not understand anything. After some time, they were not visible behind but they were marching ahead of them. The government employees who were marching are now relived as now that they are on the front, they can easily cheat them and they took a deviation to escape from them. Suddenly they are seen marching and coming right against them. Now they saw something new too, a long sword in the hand of their leader, every one of them saw a man with a sword in front of them and then they ran away. The story depicts the real fight that is staged by the real oppressed in society. They protest without any shame. They initially follow the employees thinking that they represent similar problems as they do. When they find that, they are ashamed and more week in that, they go forward and lead the march and at the end when they find that they too are not ready to stand with them, then goes against them. This is a story where actual suppressed people take over the space. Those who claim to represent their problems fail and ultimately the take the step forward to represent their own problem and to go against what comes in their way.

There are other stories of Ayyappan where the Dalit characters, even if they are educated and employed, faces a lot of difficulties and above all are oppressed. Many of them find their own death as a probable option by which they can find answers or take revenge for their situation. The girl in the story “Preathabhashanam”, which was dealt with in the previous chapter, opens up the level of discrimination to a higher step. Women are an already suppressed section, when they belong to a lower class then, the situation will be much more difficult for them. They all are in search for answers for the oppression they have been suffering for ages.

Ayyappan in his own interview talks about an incident where he himself was humiliated when entered into a Hindu Ezhava household and as he was a Dalit, as they were considered as pollutants. Ayyappan’s work thus has a realistic experience of a Dalit that he had experienced in his own life. He thus completely suits to the definition of Dalit writing given by Sharankumar Limbale, as Limbale says that Dalit Literature is “writing about Dalit’s by a Dalit Writer with a Dalit consciousness”, into which Ayyappan completely fits in. Being discriminated from the socio-cultural mainstream society is the main thing that a Dalit has to face. Even though everything is similar between a Dalit and another person that is never understood, they are either untouchables or simply the outcasts, Dalit’s are the name of the last caste. The Humiliation and oppression that they had to face were there from time immemorial is still continued, we should ensure that this is not transferred to the future. In the book “Humiliation Claims and Context” by Gopal Guru, we can read Sanjay Palshikar saying that,

To be humiliated is to be rendered inferior or deficient in some respect by others in a deliberate and destructive way. It is a deeply distressing experience. It is something one cannot get over easily, and those who have to face it every day see in it a constant threat to their sense of self worth. Ordinarily humiliation is taken to be an unwelcome assault on human dignity. Such as assault can be condemned by a bystander as well as by those subjected to it.

This idea of the bystander is indeed very much important, as not just a Dalit but also anyone who stands beside can respond to this humiliation and oppression. Dalit’s are the worst affected section of the society because of the caste system as they lack social and economic opportunities or are denied to them. The magnitude of the problem that they experience is therefore beyond what can be expected.

## CONCLUSION

The works of both Ayyappan and Gracy differ from the normal way of speculative fiction. They take a completely new and less experimented method in order to bring the impact of the social injustice that they want to convey through their work. Another important factor is that these writers do not simply limit into some specific theme. They try to depict the entire section of the society



in their works. We get to see a lot of people and their world, educated and illiterate, employed and subordinate, men and women and even the supernatural world of god and ghost. The stories of these writers are a world in themselves; they work around giving not just an idea about something in particular but as a whole. The short stories of C. Ayyappan and Gracy thus take the readers into their world of supernatural events and connect it to the real world. They offer a narrative that is new and more realistic. Moving away from the traditional notions of ghost fiction, these writers explore beyond the limits providing a completely new experience.

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