

# [‘professional caste, and take on the role](https://assignbuster.com/professional-caste-and-take-on-the-role/)

[Art & Culture](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/art-n-culture/)

‘ ProfessionalMourners’ is a short story written by Alagu Subramaniam, a writer originatingfrom Sri Lanka. Subramaniam belongs to the Tamil Brahmin community of north SriLanka. This short story is taken from an anthology of stories titled ‘ The BigGirl’. It speaks of customs and traditions from his own experience. The storyis narrated in the first person, and addresses several, themes which include hypocrisybehind social customs, rigidity of the caste system and the treatment ofwomen. Thestory is centred around four women who belong to the lower caste, and take onthe role of professional mourners. Their job is to attend funerals and mournfor the deceased, irrespective of whether they had any ties with the deceasedor not.

They mourn in order to create an ideal scene of a funeral. The storyalso features a small section of the Brahmin community i. e. the writer’sfamily. In the story, the writer’s uncle forces the people of the lower casteto attend his aunt’s (the writer’s grandmother) funeral.

This attitude of thewriter’s uncle shows the dominance of the Brahmin community over theother castes. It is also a strong indicator of the prevalence of the castesystem. Wealso see another instance of dominance when the Master of Ceremonies (thewriter’s uncle) goes to where the mourners lived.

That day, the mourners hadlost their mother and wanted to mourn for her. But the Master of Ceremoniesforced them to attend his aunt’s funeral instead, and threatened them to havethem flogged by the magistrate for their ‘ impudence’. He went so far as tocatch hold of their saris and drag them along the ground. This instance showsthe poor treatment of the Shudras (those from the lowest caste) and the poortreatment of women during the prevalence of the caste system. Yet, the story does not give out an aura of oppression of the people of the lowercaste, and their derelict conditions. Indeed, it shows how theBrahmin community held power and a high status in the society, and howthey used that to force their will on the others. But, the story can also beunderstood as a comical way to discourage such social norms.

The Masterof Ceremonies receiving a reprimand is a good example. Instead of approving ofhis misdeeds, his friends were horrified at his cruelty, and protested againstthe inhuman act of the Master. This criticism made him work harder in order tomake up for the reprimand. In fact, he worked so hard that he fainted and fellflat to the ground. This, indeed, is a comical way of expressing the writer’sdisapproval of the social norms prevailing at that time. It is clear from the narrative that the writer has not directly opposedand criticized such social norms. Instead, he has used the guests at thefuneral (who criticize the Master of Ceremonies) to do so.

This clearly showsthat the writer has used the elements of comic relief in order to highlight thesituation. Therefore, it can be rightfully said that the story is a satire onsocial norms and mores.