



---

## TWO WOMEN WRITERS' VIEWS ON "FEMINISM AND DALIT FEMINISM" VOLGA AS NON-DALIT WRITER AND SIVAKAMI AS DALIT WRITER

**Dr. CHEKURI RAMESH**

Assistant Professor of Telugu, SSRJ Arts & Science College, Khammam

### ABSTRACT

The concept of Dalit feminism is not a sudden flux of transformation of dalit women into acknowledgeable identity in society. The reason that elevated dalit feminism in the society as a unique expression of dalit women's oppression is that it started questioning the feminist movement's attitude in excluding dalit women and focusing more on only upper-caste and middle class women. The act of mainstream feminism to exclude dalit women from both representation and recognition as a group forced to face many difficulties and obviously has led to separate literature as Dalit women literature.

Key words: Feminism, Dalit feminism, Representation, Recognition, Identity.

### Introduction

Exclusion Now, the arising questions in the context of feminism and dalit feminism, what is feminism? Do women get freedom or individual identity through feminism? How is this feminism reach to very ordinary dalit women in society? Academicians observe this concept of feminism as a classroom contextualism or intellectual property. Thus, they limit it to framing of ideology. But, feminism is not an ideology which is shaped in intellectual classroom discussions. It is started with movements which addressed women problems and seeking right to equality. Later, a feminist theory has come with the response of some scholars who introduced women studies, gender studies and so on. But, these theories are emerged from feminist movements which aim to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experience. It has developed theories in a variety of disciplines in order to respond to issues such as the social construction of sex and gender. But, there is criticism from their part, which considered only certain sections of women such as white, upper-class and middle-class, and educated women but, left the lower class and lower caste women from feminism. This led to the creation of ethnically specific or multiculturalists' forms of feminism. Hence, feminism cannot be considered as an ideology which is commenced at a particular time of human history. Feminism is a united project which cannot be completed by individuals alone. It appeals us to a strenuous and community education, men and women together must serve. It is a collective assignment with acceptance, resolution, endurance, listening, and astuteness can attain its goal.

### Barbara Berg defines:

"Feminism is a wide-ranging movement implementing numerous phases of women's emancipation. It is the freedom from sex-determined role freedom from



society's oppressive restrictions, freedom to express her thought fully and to convert them freely into actions." (1980: 3)

In the male-dominated society, men are regarded as superior to women; but feminist movements have shattered the framework. Feminism assisted women to break the restraints, to raise their voices against the oppressive culture, tradition, and society. Indian society has always been highly hierarchical. The several hierarchies within the family concreting age, sex and ordinal position, congenial and fine relationship or within the community referring to the caste lineage, learning, occupation and relationship with ruling power have been maintained very strictly. The present media presents a new image of woman who resolves her complications pertaining to her subjectivity, the conflicts between tradition and modernity in Indian society. But at the same time she rethinks the conflicts regarding the record of experimental aspect of lives related to modern realities, because, she becomes every day's instance of rape and killing and yet, she remains as present day unresolved progression of modification. These new representations of women instead of getting away with gender differences and gender discriminations preserve them under a new semblance. The sexual access to dalit women from the dominated castes earlier regarded as the right of the dominant castes, has been drastically constituted by dalit politics and named as rape. Not only this consideration forced a re-conceptualization of the beliefs about the subject of rape, but it has in very noteworthy way to redefine dalit politics itself. Dominant groups, by definition, set the restrictions within which the dependents are operated. The dominant group holds the power and authority in society comparative to the dependents and governs how that power is suitably used. Whether it is replicated in defining who gets the best jobs, whose history will be taught in school, or whose relationships will be authenticated by society, the prevailing group has the utmost power in defining the structure of the society.

The author in her foreword to the novel '*Swecha*', analyses the differentiation between words like '*Swecha*' (freedom) and '*samanathwam*' (equality). She senses that without equality, freedom exists but equality has no significance in the absence of freedom. She also argues that:

"In order to cultivate equality, in order to live mutual accepting equal rights and opportunities, women have to obtain freedom first. The freedom does not come from anybody but women have to recognize necessities for their existence." (1987:2)

Woman is forcefully hurled to rigid traditions, pointless opinions. In most of the middle class families, women lead dependent life either on their male family members or on other women. This happens mostly with widows as they lack right to property. The character, Aruna from the novel *Swecha* symbolizes an educated woman from middle class family, who questions her day today situations in family restrictions towards women and she thinks of her own freedom and she inspires to



take decisions from societal norms which curb women's freedom. The writer brings Aruna's mental development step by step. The writer also suggests woman to recognize relationship with society and her family and her existence, significance and her oppression in all these relationships.

“Swecha, samanathwam ani rendu ga pilchina, chaalamandhiki aa renditiki theda ledhannatlu aalochistharu. Samanathwam lekunda swecha untundhi gaani swecha lekunda samanathwaniki ardhm undadhu.”

Translation:

“Though, words like freedom and equality is called as separate words, so many people feel that there is no variance between those two words. Freedom exists in the absence equality but equality has no meaning deprived of freedom.” (1987: 2)

These feminist works in reflecting narrative themes comprise of analyses of women's oppression and applications for overcoming it. However, there are also momentous variances among feminist writers from to present times. Different interpretations of the disadvantages to which women are subject, allied to different conceptions of what would constitute an improvement, gave rise to distinctive and sometimes irreconcilable feminisms. This paper mainly divulges two women writers approach to dalit problems, Volga, being non-dalit writer facilitating her idea on women and dalit women problems in a village. On the other hand, dalit women writer explicate in detail picture.

In observing Volga's novel from Telugu literature, the essence of existence of a person or movement is vital and prominent. A novel titled '*Aakasamlo sagam*' by Volga deals about upper caste middle class women and Dalit women's village situation. The novel is published in 1992. The main protagonist of the novel is moderate educated Dalit Maala woman Jacintha. She comes back to village in difficult situation where she cannot continue her studies with financial problems. After returning from education, she goes for daily wage work. She acquires communist ideology when she was studying. She also has read some progressive literature. The novel talks about Dalit women's facing exploitation, violence by upper caste people and also deals with middle and upper caste women's problems regarding sexual violence and patriarchy's atrocities. Though women work at fields all the time and struggle to grow the crop, they do not have right to sale the crop and it is taken by male and they enjoy the benefit (money) gained out of women's toil. The rivalry in the village starts when two upper caste groups fight on where to build the panchayat office. Maalapalli, a residence of dalit Maala community, faces problems of this situation and many prominent men go away from village. Jacintha with the help of her friends and communist women's group gathers all women of the village irrespective of castes and proposes to build toilets for women at the place adjacent to panchayat office. Communist party calls back women group and orders not to involve in reforming acts. But the cadre helps Jacintha to fight back. All women regardless of castes amalgamates on a thought to build the toilets as they



face so much inconvenience and discomfort every day, as a result they build toilets along with help of head workwoman. This incident consolidates all women and gives self-progression to every woman. But, some upper caste men do not digest the development carried by Jacintha. So at last, Jacintha with her caste and gender disparities is raped and killed brutally by upper caste men. In later part of the novel, women's group leader Veena from middle class and non-dalit consolidates all the women from various castes and explains them how Jacintha is killed. She also reminds the past deaths of dalit men, dalit women and upper-caste women by upper caste men. She jolts them saying that Jacintha is killed not because of constructing toilets but because of going against male's supremacy. So, she suggests them to fight against these atrocities which will not happen recurrently in the village and to get justice from the court. Volga describes Jacintha's pain very empathetically while encountering rape brutally by upper caste men. She describes:

“Jacinthaku peddhaga arvalani undhigaani gonhulo nunchi keechumannna dhvani thappa peddha keka raaledhu. E lopala iddharu thalupulu vesesaru, another two Jacintha nu kindha padesi notlo guddalu kukkaru. Jacintha penugulaaduthunte kaalu chetulu virichi pattukunnaru. Jacintha kallu bayatiki poduchukochettlu chusthundhi. Chudatam thappa mari emi cheyaleni thana nisahayathwam meedha yuddham chesthundhi. Vallalo okadu Jecintha meedha paddadu. Ye yuddhalu, ye sathruthwalu, ye raajya kaankashalu, ye vaarasthwa unmaadhalu magavadini aa paniki prerepinchayo aa kshanamlo pasuvu ga maaratam yetla saadhyapaduthundho-Jacintha kopam tho avamaanamtho jwalinchi pothundhi. Jeevithaanni gurinchi kannu kalalanni mukkalu mukkalai pothunnayi. Panthulammai pasi pillalaku paatalu chepudhaamanukunna Jacintha-pallelo andhariki praanamaipoyina Jacintha...” (92)

### **Translation:**

“Jacintha wants to shout loudly but except sobbing no voice comes out. Meanwhile two people closed the doors; another two pushed her to the ground and put in clothes in her mouth. They caught her hands and legs with dead level. Jacintha looking as if her eyes are thumps out completely. In state of her defilement, she is fighting on her debility as she is not able to do anything. One among them occupied her. What wars, which enmity, which kingdoms of desires, which heredity monarchy lunatics induce male to do this act- that fraction of moments how is it possible they turn in to animal behavioral-Jacintha flaring with anger and shame? All her dreams of her future life are breaking, cracking in to pieces. Jacintha's wished to become teacher and teaches lessons to children-Jacintha as everybody's life in village...”

This particular section of the novel depicts the poor condition of women to face against rapes and to pass on to deaths consciously. Jacintha as educated dalit women and as communist ideologist hopes for betterment of village and women irrespective of castes. She tries to change the society within her purview of ideas and in a way to create awareness in village women on gender and caste



discriminations. Though, she succeeds in constructing toilets, she fails to save her life from rape and death which are enforced ridiculously by ancient Indian law books. Volga brings very efficiently the existence of individual and women group to fight against atrocities caused by caste system and patriarchy. Though Jacintha is killed brutally but her wish and fight does not go in vain. Her next inspires take up the issues and try to establish justice to women. The problems may vary to Indian women according to their castes but the discrimination is common but lower castes' women face various discriminations and violence of their caste cluster.

Though, some of non-dalit writers represent dalits' problems in their works, and it is appreciable from their gesture, yet, the main problem remains that it is quite difficult for non-dalit writers to bring the real pain and depiction of worst situations of dalits. Mahasweta Devi's writings show us the treatment of subaltern, caste and gender but her works are depended on ethics and politics of contemporary society. When it comes to dalit women writers' works, they have carried forward rightly the exact dalit women's life, village setting of dalit women, and their part in developing their culture in their writings. Thus, dalit women writers have pictured coherent and sociological aspects of dalit women problems, since they draw their churn of writing from reality and it is completely diverse from mainstream feminist literature. Sharankumar Limbale in his interview states that:

“Dalit literature is a new literary stream of the post-independent period. Not only it is new, its form and purpose too are different from those of savarna Marathi literature. Therefore, it cannot be appraised using traditional aesthetics.” (Towards: 115).

Upper-caste men and women have superior complex even if they write for dalits. As a result, they undervalue or underrate dalit literature written by Dalit women and they do not even acknowledge their effort. In their sense, they judge that dalit literature does not accomplish the aesthetics criteria of mainstream literature. The basic difference to be noticed between literature of the non-Dalit writers and the Dalit writers is that non dalits consider romanticism of life and dalit writers' present realism in struggle. In this regard, Harish Mangalam, a Dalit writer remarks:

“Non-Dalit writers describe the beloved's cheeks by comparing them with roses and liken the beloved's lips to rose petals. Dalit writes use words such as the beloved's cheeks were like hardened lumps of jaggery and her lips were like wrinkled black clay.” (*Trivedi Tongues*, 161: 62)

Hence, mainstream women writers cannot put themselves to the level of dalits' experience and they disgrace dalit women writers. They have to lose the ego and dignity in order to express dalits' problems. Hence, they observe and judge dalit writings with upper caste's mentality. As a result, they cannot justify Dalit literature and Dalit aesthetics.



The non-Dalit writers can present dalit women's problems, but not as appropriate as Dalit women writers. As a result, Dalit women writers are not content with the literature of the mainstream writers. In the mainstream feminist literature, the genuine difficulties of dalits pains, humiliations, traumas, miseries, atrocities, alienation, and sufferings for centuries together cannot be justified in Hindu women's tone emotions. They can only elevate the need for pity and sympathy by setting some minor changes within the existing unequal framework of Indian caste-system. So, Dalit women writers wish for representation of the reality in the literature. And it is the result of appearance of one dalit literature into force. Gogu Shyamala writes that:

“Antaraanithna rupumaarina  
Vettichaakiri swabhavam rupumaaraledhane yedhaardham  
Oka deshame lone inni sathru sarihaddhulunna sathyam  
Oke jaathilo inni kulaalendhukunnayane prasna  
Oke janderlo inni gendarlu ela perigayanna spruha”

**Translation:**

“Though untouchability annihilated  
It is truthful that the nature of bonded labour is not annihilated  
The question is in one race why so many castes  
Awareness is in one gender how so many genders have raised”

In these four lines the poet comes up with major questions and their unsolved distress suffered by lower caste women in India. Because lower caste women first face the caste system's irrationality then gender absurdity and finally as low economic position face bonded labor and its consequences. All these problems are always encircles the lower caste women and rupture them harshly. The poets mean to say that with caste system, even the gender is divided accordingly because, with caste the status of women again divided and determined.

Although Dalit men are victims of casteism, Dalit women are doubly oppressed than dalit men and mainstream women. They are reprimanded and dehumanized not only by upper caste men but also by men from their own community. The relegation of women and their complete ostracism is clearly reflected in the writings of Dalit men. In exceptional circumstances, when dalit women are essentially specified a voice or representation in Dalit men's autobiographies as in *Tiraskrit*, the narrative is based on conservative stereotypes. The observations are perpetually on their ethical character and the representation is always that of mothers or wives engaged in archetypal roles that society labels for



them. Dalit women's contributions in serving the family and their struggles in making a livelihood are completely inattentive. This discriminatory obliviousness shown by dalit males represents their unpreparedness to recognize Dalit women's impact to the family, to the community and to the Dalit movement at large. The absenteeism of these women in the men's narratives is not only deliberate but also intended. These men decline to accord their women equality even in literary representation. The stereotyping of dalit women has led to an alternative voice from the women themselves.

Dalit women's personal narratives not only contest their nonappearance in Dalit men's narratives but also opine the apprehensions contributed by women each corner of all sections. These unconventional interpretations amenably condemn the patriarchal edifice in the society, thus, reproducing women's complications with detailed issues in Dalit society. The sufferings confronted by these women under the patriarchal order are thus verbalized. Dalit women's autobiographies are very honest and outspoken about all kinds of exploitation and subjugation that these women had to tolerate both within and outside their society. They also give coherent interpretations of their contribution to the larger cause of the Dalit community. Dalit women procured certain painful time to overthrow the oppression as women and as well as Dalits by inspired usage of life experiences through social and literary movements. Though, Dalit men and women fight for common cause, yet Dalit women has extra burdens to think of patriarchy and its oppression as well.

Dalit women writer, Sivakami's novel '*The Grip of the Change*' illustrates dalit women's encounter in rural areas with sexual assault from outside their castes when they go for work, and within family boundaries at home. The novel depicts the main protagonist, Thangam's discrimination and sexual assault by both her own family members and upper caste men. It is seen as quite obvious and natural in village atmosphere. She is not given her husband's property after his death, but demanded to offer her body to her brothers-in-law. Often, dalit women are married to excessively older husbands, or sexually harassed or raped by fathers-in-law or brothers-in-law. Later, she is seduced and raped by an upper caste landlord, Udayar and she is even beaten up in the street when it is known to landlord's wife. After that, she is provided with some justice by Kathamuthu, a dalit leader but, she is made to depend on him for everything and she is brought to his house as third mistress. She was cursed and ill-treated for a mistake she hadn't committed. What could such helpless women do, when their own sisters betrayed them? Her sister-in-law, Valliammai indeed took pleasure in abusing her, she says in the novel that:

“They beat her up. Good! Why did they leave her alive? That whore thinks too much of herself. She thinks that she's very beautiful. That's why she went after



that Udayar. When she loses her shape, he'll throw her out, and she'll be in a state worse than dogs." (2006: 28)

Dalit women hesitate so many times to fight back or to report in police stations for the sexual harassment and caste discrimination as they lack education and confidence to contest atrocities. Though, Dalit women come as group and protest against the discriminations, it would not reach to a level of justice determination. As a result, these constant observations ignited dalit women to engage in writing poetry, and other writing forms in every language and it is evident in the form, content and the emotions that they express. Their writings deliver a kind confidence in Dalit women to contest these kinds of atrocities. Dalit women used language as their armament and defense, a fistful weapon to outbreak the oppression executed by Hinduism for centuries. Dalit women acquainted their ways of learning to perform in literature and constructed self-respect from their humiliation. They have become thriving literary boulevards from nothingness caused by Hindu religious scriptures which denied a basic humanity and have been outcasts for centuries. Today 'untouchable' voices rule Telugu literature. Their writings show the aggressive gale of pain in dalit poetry.

Literature of the Dalits represents an alternative culture, refusing to be a subaltern any longer. A dalit text is subversive, but not necessarily intimidating. It relates itself to cultural context and speaks for the revival of sociological approach to literary arts. It opposes the obsessive concern with the formal accomplishment, the linguistic expertise and the modernist tendency to look for the meaning of the text within the text itself. It inaugurates a new era of cultural transformation in the Indian context, and inevitably reaches out to the global phenomenon called postmodernism.

### References:

1. Berg, Barbara. *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism: The Woman and the City, 1800-1860 (The Urban Life in America)*. UK: Oxford University Press, 1980.
2. Limbale, Sharan Kumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit literature: History, Controversies, and Considerations*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004. Print.
3. Limbale, Sharankumar. *The Bastard*. Trans. Daya Agrawal. An extract from *Akkarmashi. Poisoned Bread*. Ed. Arjun Dangle. 1992. Bombay, Ind: Orient Longman, 1994. 113- 23. Print.
4. Shyamala, Gogu. "Gender Consciousness in Dalit Women's Literature." *Gender Pratiphalaanaalu. Gender Consciousness and its Consequences*. Warangal: Kakatiya University, 2005.



5. Sivakami. *Interview by Chatterjee, Madhusree. Most Gender.* The Indian News P, 3 May 2010. Web.10 Jan. 2014
6. Trivedi, Darshana. “*An Interview with Harish Mangalam.*” *Tongues of Fire: A selection of Gujarati Dalit Short Stories.* Trans. and eds. Darshana Trivedi and Rupalee Burke. Ahmedabad, Ind: Gujarat Dalit Sahitya Akademi, 2000. 160-72. Print.
7. Volga Interview. “*Streelanu Vari Asthitwala Anveshanaku Prerepinchadame Streevadha Sahitya Lakshanam.*” ed. Prajasakthi Sahitya Spec. Issue of Darpanam. 532. 16 -17. Print.
8. Volga, *Aarhi Rajakeeya Kathalu.* Hyderabad: Vishaalandhra Book House, 1993. Print.