

**IMAGE OF WOMAN IN TELUGU DALIT LITERATURE**S.M.Basha^{1*}, M. Farida Begum²^{1*}(Lecturer in English, Osmania College, Kurnool (AP), India)²(Lecturer in English, KVR GDC (W), Kurnool (AP), India)**ABSTRACT**

This paper is an attempt to explore dalit sensibility in terms of the portrayal of image of woman in Telugu Dalit literature. It tries to give an account of the anguish expressed by the dalit writers regarding the tripartite suppression of the dalit women besides analyzing the socio and cultural factors responsible for the emergence of 'dalitvatam.' There is a discernible focus on how the image of woman conceptualizes the refulgence of dalit movements.

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The noted dalit poet Shivasagar views the emergence of Telugu Dalit Literature as the revolutionary one:

Casting a smile on his lips,
Shambuka is beheading Rama;
With his axe
Ekalavya is chopping the thumb of Drona;
With his little feet,
Bali is crushing Vamana to *Patala*;
And
Piercing needles into his eyes,
Slicing his tongue,
Pouring lead into his ears,
Manu is turning over in the graveyard.

(Principles of *Literary Criticism*, 536)
(Translation by authors)

However, Telugu Dalit writings, delineating the quest for freedom of people and victimization of socio-economic and cultural inequalities, are often considered the most fervent reflections of the predicament of the oppressed. They deal with the subjugation of the marginalized in the name of caste, class, religion, and male chauvinism in a patriarchal setup. The element of protest and quest for identity characterize dalit literature as that of African American Literature in which one finds a discernible and powerful voice, longing to be heard.



Gurram Joshua's portrayal of the untouchable as a unique identity evoking strong emotions may be regarded as the voice of rebellion. His "Gabbilam" serves as the means of reconstructing Dalit identity and subversion as the way to relocate the untouchable who has been terrorized by the "four hooded cobra of Hinduism" in the main stream. His poetry reflects the spirit of protest and his poetic sensibilities finding a fervent expression wage a war against unfair and prejudiced social practices.

The anguish expressed by the Dalit poets and writers forms the essence of Dalitvatam as seen in the Telugu Dalit Literature. However, Dalit literature and Dalit Movements are quite inseparable. The role of women in Kaaramchedu, Chundur and other movements is historical and forms the impetus to the dalit movements. The dynamics of enslavement of a dalit woman and the subsequent upsurge of protest which would assuage her identity in the backdrop of conventional attitudes and traditional practices of patriarchy, define the image of woman that has conceptualized the refulgence of Dalit Movements.

Characterized by the element of protest, most of the Dalit writings of Telugu literature depict the image of woman as an essential feature of the ultimate struggle. A dalit woman is a common and recurrent subject of victimization more than a woman of middle class when sex, caste, class are the defining parameters of oppression. Attacks on dalits, especially on women, are coaxed by the distressing element of untouchability. As rightly pointed out by Vimal Thorat, in the overall social scheme of the Hindu caste system, dalit woman is located at the bottom. In the first instance, she is molested and raped in order to settle the old scores but when her character becomes the topic for public scrutiny, she is subjected to a second rape. Rape has been a major tool of subordination against woman.

The mechanics of complex relationships between caste and woman's subordination permeates the entire village structure in particular with sexual abuse and violence as the means of intimidation. "Most of the gang rapes in India are instances of the rapes of Dalit women, who are

victims of the regular admittance that the other men have on their sexuality. Quite often the right of reparation is also denied to them." (Bhagawat, Dalit Women in India: Issues and Perspectives)

Arundhati Roy opines that the Dalit Struggle for justice and equality could be the Dalit women writers' question whether democratic nature of India assures them of liberty, equality to everyone irrespective of their sex, caste, colour or creed. The stereotype of dalit woman's body is an unhealthy image about female sexuality; they are often treated as harlots. The engagement with this notion is to be dismantled. Obviously the hegemonic socio, economic, cultural and political structures of oppression restrict the mobility of Indian Dalit women and patriarchy in all spheres of life itself is an enemy to her.

Bama Faustina Soosairaj, the representative spirit of modern Dalit writings, in her novel 'Sangati' (1994) portrays dalit women's experience of rape, casteism, domestic violence, poverty, exploitation both by upper castes and their own and shows how economic exploitation is also coupled with sexual exploitation. While picturing the most appalling conditions to which Dalit women workers are exposed, she confesses the mental anguish of a Dalit woman through Paati: "If you are born into this world, it is best you were born a man. Born as women we only toil in the fields and in home until our very vaginas shrivel." (Sangati,7) This is further substantiated when Bama's grandmother says: "If upper castes men clasp eyes on you, you are finished, They will drag you off and rape you. That is for sure." (8)

Dalit women suffer from a tripartite suppression of caste, class and gender. Marriage is also a double enslavement for them. The plight of women is attributed to their unquestioning adherence to the conventional attitude, practices and superstitious custom. Education and self-empowerment are the panacea for all these evils. It is true that one is not born a woman and one becomes one by cultural constraints. It is always woman who is often accused of sexual misconduct while men are allowed to go scot-free and women



are blamed and punished. They are forced to remain as subhuman entities as their voices are throttled and the true stories of oppression are unheard. The innumerable incidents such as naked parading of Mahadevamma, stripping of countless dalit women in public, censuring of their heads, compelling them to commit suicides after making them fall a prey to love and proposed marriages, disowning them after labelling them as women of sexual promiscuity, acid attacks, enslavement of women by the patriarchal chains etc. depict the plight and exploitation of dalit women but all this not without an underlying current of protest and quest for identity.

The prevailing inequalities and manifestations of oppression at the roots of every Indian village structure, sternly guarded by the upper castes, form the basis of the realism in dalit writings. "Nalla Poddu" (Dalita Sreela Sahityam), the reformative spirit of the movement, is indeed a pioneering work. Yendluri Sudhakar glorifies the beauty of Dalit woman and laments that she could not find place in classical literature. He says that "the iron bowl which she carries on her head while at work, is mocking at the crown of Miss Universe. As a tigress when she is going for reaping with a sharpened sickle, the surrounding Nature's bounty surrenders at her feet." In *Neelika*, he says that all the letters that abandoned her beauty have been entranced by him.

Katti Padma Rao, the noted dalit writer considers 'black' a good omen. He uses the symbols like 'black crow,' 'black hill,' 'black tar,' 'black ocean' etc. to heighten the effect of black identity. In his *Black Lotus (Nalla Kaluva)*, he decodes the untouchability as 'tella jaati tegullu,' (the white man's blight). Bhoi Bheemanna's works like *Paleru, Kooli Raju, Gudiselu Kaalipothunnai* etc. consisted of 'dalit consciousness.' Dalit Literary Movement of post-independence era is able to draw its inspiration from Kolakaluri Enoch's works. His *Uura Baavi* depicts the plight of the underdog and the struggle for the rights over the water body. *Muniwaahanudu* presents the realistic account of the entry of an untouchable into the temple. In response to the heinous episode of Mahadevamma, a dalit woman's stripping and gang

rape, with the powerful use of imagery, Juluri Gauri Shankar fumes:

What a country is this?
 What justice is this?
 Stripping her off unitedly,
 Lo! Worship the *Adi Shakti, Paraashakti*,
 And the lost chastity.
 (*Dalita Kavivam: Paraamarsha, 79*)
 (Translation)

Satish Chander in his "Panchama Vedam" confesses that the principles of Manu that have denigrated dalits are realized as the 'Vatsayana Kamasutras' and is immensely pleased that the birth secrets of dalits are not mentioned in 'Manu Dharma.' Ravuri Bharadwaja who dedicated his Jnanpith Award winning novel "Paakudu Rallu" to Koteswara Rao, acknowledges his gratitude to a Dalit woman, Paddakka who fed him during his starvation days by naming his daughter Padmavati after her. Sundara Raju in his "Vaasanaleni Puvvu" asserts his dalit identity which is reflective of the discrimination of the whole nation. He declares: "Yes I'm Dalit, concealing nothing, I'm the least, the nation's snout." (81)

K. Sudershan questions the deeply indebted masters who have exploited them since ages when they would pay the principal amount as the reservations being only the interest amount. Though there is a radical change in the outlook of the people of urban spaces consequent on globalization or transculturalism, the rural India in its most of the chunks still nurtures the discriminatory attitude towards fellow human beings in terms of caste, class and gender which would surely be annulled by means of refinement of minds and hearts, assured by literary awakening to provide a plausible answer to Indravelli (Anonymous Poet) whose 'angst' may be assuaged very soon:

May be, they are Dalits in India,
 May be, they are Blacks in South Africa,
 What ever may be the country,
 Suppression is universal.
 Born-enslavement is the ultimate truth.
 (154)Trans.

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