

PORTRAYAL OF DALIT WOMEN SUFFERINGS IN THE WORKS OF GOGU SHYAMALA AND JOOPAKA SUBHADRA'S NALLA REGATI SALLU (BLACK SOIL FURROW)

KIRAN KUMAR BODDU, SIVA NAGAI AH BOLLEDDU

Abstract: Dalit women are always being considered to be the weaker sex. They are forced and being suppressed by the male in the society. Dalit women are even worse they face the double discrimination one from the men of their own community and other from the upper caste men. These women hardly voice out their condition to the society. If they try to voice out also they will be harassed and molested within the community men and by the higher caste. The Dalit women are not allowed to have the freedom of their own basic needs like food, shelter and clothing. They don't demand for welfares but they long for self respect which is always a wish that never has been achieved in the history of Indian context. This paper will focus on the sufferings of the Dalit women in terms of caste and gender and how the Dalit women are being exploited in the family, society and job. Where ever they are they face the worst discrimination these issues are addressed in the work of Gogu Shyamala and Joopaka Subhadra edited short stories which will be brought to light in this paper.

Keywords: Caste discrimination, Dalit women, harassment, Sufferings

Introduction: Gogu Shyamala, the leading Telugu dalit feminist writer, thinker and activist in contemporary India is born in 1969 in Ranga Reddy district of Telangana State. She, as a Telugu dalit writer and activist participated in dalit women cause and issue invariably giving the voice to the most disadvantaged, less privileged and downtrodden. She, as the dalit women activist has played a vital and prominent role in unifying and collecting the unforgotten historical documents and manuscripts written by many dalit women in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. With the compilation of dalit women writings in Telugu has given an important place in Telugu dalit literature. Under her leadership crimes against women of all hues are taken up extensively by many organizations. To her credit, she attended third world conference against apartheid in Durban in 2001. Presently, she is a researcher at Anweshi Centre for Women Studies constantly working for Dalit women cause and issue. She writes for publications like *Bhumika*, *Prasthanam*, *Pratighatana*, *Mana Telangana*, *Praja Kala Mandali* and *Nigha*. Her collection of works include *Father May Be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket* (2012), and *Brave Heart Badeyya* (2008) that are written in short story form. Her other collection of dalit women writings in Telugu includes *Nallapoddu: Dalit women literature* (2008) and finally, it is *Nene Balaani: T. N. Sadalakshmi's Biography* (2011).

Nallapoddu is a collection of dalit women writings in Telugu belonging to different historical regions, historical background and culture. Moreover, these writers are situated in different regions of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states. This is the first dalit women's book available in Telugu which includes different dalit women writings from 1921-2002. It is a marvelous and meticulous task carried out by the

writer in approaching all dalit women writers personally and enquiring about their literary works and history.

On the other hand, Joopaka Subhadra is another eminent dalit writer and activist and prominent Telugu dalit feminist thinker and co-editor of *Nalla Regati Sallu* along with Gogu Shyamala, whose focus is extensively and exclusively on Madiga sub-caste women's condition and plight. She is the first dalit woman who contested in the employees' association in the secretariat of Andhra Pradesh. In 1992, she started a Women's Association for fighting against injustices and for rights, dignity and self-respect. Her important works include *Nagaramlo Naagu*, *Palle Koila*, *Shuddi Cheyale* and *Kongu*, a poem that has brought her name and recognition. Her writings are published in magazines and news papers like *Bhoomika*, *Andhra Jyothi* and *Vartha*.

Dalit women from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have started writing in Telugu mostly depicting the problems of caste and gender. These were initially Christian songs which reflected their faith and reverence to Jesus Christ. Here we can see the impact of Christianity in the lives of dalit women. Most of them accessed education in Christian missionary schools and depicted Christian values in their poems and songs. Earlier, there was not a single volume of dalit women writings in Telugu which would help readers to study dalit women condition. Some of the prominent contemporary dalit women writers in Telugu are Challapalli Swaroopa Rani, Joopaka Subhadra, Jajula Gowri, Swathy Margaret and Gogu Shyamala the writer herself. Dalit women writings in Telugu have portrayed and depicted in the poetry and short stories about the double oppression of patriarchy on one side and casteist oppression on the other side. These women have taken gender and caste

as sensitive issues of the victimization and humiliation. They have experienced and felt injustices of caste and gender both at home and outside the home. Their poetry and short stories were very thoughtful in nature, revolutionary in spirit, progressive in action and heart rendering.

The title of the book *Nalla Regati Sallu* is very apt and suggestive. It symbolically represents the madiga sub-caste women as daughters of the land, as they emotionally attach to the land and depend upon it for their livelihood. Even the picture on the front cover page indicates that --a woman holding a plough and tilling the land. In addition, *Nalla Regati Sallu* is a compilation of short stories on madiga sub-caste women. It is edited by Gogu Shyamala and Joopaka Subhadra. It gives a full account of socio- economic, cultural and political conditions of rural madiga sub-caste women in Telangana. The text is purely written in Telangana dialect. It had emerged out of a context when Telangana consciousness and madiga consciousness were together growing up. Telangana consciousness includes that of a separate agitation for statehood whereas Madiga consciousness includes that of dandora movement that demanded equal distribution of reservation jobs in government sector. This book principally presents distinct forms of identities that Madiga subcaste women carry out in their life including that of language identity, sub-caste identity, region identity and religion identity. These identities overlap and are inseparable parts of every dalit woman.

“Not welfare, but Self –Respect”, is the slogan of dalit women in India. Dalit women’s first and foremost basic need is ‘Respect’ irrespective of caste, class and gender. They do not desire anything but Self-Respect to identify themselves as human beings. Dalit women are in need of Self-Esteem, Self-Sufficiency and Self-Identity that would empower and emancipate them to have a better standard of life. They have been denied of basic needs for many years and for many reasons and now they are embarking on towards those dreams to stand firm against all odds of hierarchical casteist society. Their dream and vision is not a bed of roses. However on their journey towards self-identity and self-empowerment they have to pass through such issues caste, gender and class. These diverse issues constitute a stumbling block for dalit women to accomplish the desired goal.

The body of dalit woman as a site of violence: Sexual violence is a regular and routine phenomenon of oppression of dalit women at home as well as in the society. It is so prevalent that it can bring a major threat to the lives of dalit women socially, economically and psychologically. Dalit women face sexual violence predominantly from their families and dominant caste groups. Basically, sexual violence occurs based on the notion of caste and religion.

These two categories are pre-determined principles which sanction sexual violence openly. In the name of religion, dalit women are considered sexual objects simultaneously caste comes into play in the context of sexual violence of dalit women. Sexual violence is mostly perpetrated by upper caste men on dalit women. They take the advantage of their position of high rank in the society as belonging to upper caste community and take law into their hands and sees that no dalit women would get justice after being raped or sexually exploited. The writer exposes the criminality of upper caste man how dalit women are sexually being exploited. The whole village is surprised and shocked at the act done by Chinakka, a Madiga woman in the story of “Chinakka”. In their words “What happened to Chinakka? How did she do such an act? From where did she get such courage and strength?” (89). Chinakka kills an upper caste man for assaulting her daughter sexually. We cannot test the patience of a dalit woman in terms of exploitation, violence and discrimination. If something happens or goes wrong against upper caste men and women, police rush in within a fraction of second and file a case against the culprit whereas in the case of dalit women, neither they arrest the culprit nor file a case. Police are the watch dogs of upper caste communities. Therefore, the total law and order are in the hands of upper caste communities at village level.

Dalit women are seen as sexual objects rather than sexual subjects. An upper caste woman acts as a messenger, mediator and interlocutor in sending a dalit woman to her husband. An upper caste woman, Reddamma approaches very humbly and requests Chinakka, “Reddy, my husband has been persecuting me. He told me to bring you to quench his sexual desires” (92). This only shows how complicated caste system is, how the body of a dalit woman is available and how the upper caste women have certain rights but yet not a voice to match her husband’s.

Reddamma, the wife of Reddy approaches Chinakka, and tells that “How can you live alone, you have lost your husband, you have to educate your children and feed them. Come to my house, Reddy will take care of you” (92). Chinakka accepts to the demands of upper caste woman, out of necessity. She submits her body to upper caste men in order to bring up her children and feed them. Lack of resources in their hands forces them to submit their pride. On the other side, all the resources in the villages are in the control of dominant castes. Dalit women, when they go for some kind of help to upper castes’ house, they take the advantage of the situation and sexually exploit the woman. It is dalit women’s helplessness that forces them to submit their bodies to upper caste men on some occasions. In the words of Chinakka “Reddy, please help me, my husband is on his death

bed" (93). She fell on the feet of Reddy. Immediately, he thinks from the point of sexual benefits, he looks at the body of Chinakka again and again. He takes care of her husband as if only to get something back from her.

Most dalit women are afraid to show their faces to upper caste men as they sexually exploit them. In the words of some of dalit women, who advise Chinakka "Never show your face to Reddy. His eyes are evil eyes... he will pounce upon you like a tiger" (91)". Upper caste men treat dalit women as a prey for satisfying their sexual desires. It is ironic that the upper castes forget caste or untouchability while imposing corporal punishment or while indulging in heinous crimes and while committing rape and while desiring dalit women's bodies. If an upper caste man ab(uses) a dalit woman as a sexual object nobody dares to question him. If on the other hand a dalit man has an affair with an upper caste girl, everyone questions but puts him to death. Why is the law not applicable to everyone? Why does the law cater to someone and not to the other? In the words of women, "Nobody in the village came forward to question Reddy's affair, everyone was afraid of him, since he is the chief head of the village" (93).

Sexual exploitation and violence should be seen like a culture of diffusion from one generation to the next generation. If father indulges in such crimes his sons or relatives usually take the advantage of it. It will be continued as inherited responsibility just like owning of property. For instance, Reddy, an upper caste, sexually exploits Chinakka, by giving her all possible privileges and benefits. Subsequently, Chinakka's daughter Adhimma is also sexually exploited by Reddy's brother-in-law. An upper caste, Reddy's brother-in law says to Adhimma, a dalit girl after being raped "Don't tell your mother about this incident. If you tell, I'll kill you as well as your mother. Don't fear, as my brother-in law is taking care of your mother, I'll also take care of you. More than your mother I will be taking care of you" (94).

Dalit women's lives are deeply rooted in the established conditions of socio-political village atmosphere. The social conditions of dalit women have not allowed them to come out of their misery and sexual exploitation. They think that their fate cannot be changed and they have to live in that drudgery until they die. Chinakka's daughter gets education; she is conscious of the exploitation and violence and tells her mother "Why should we live here? Let us go to the city and live a dignified and respectful life" (94). It is education that brings awareness of the present condition and makes one to think rationally to fight against such exploitations.

Violence of culture: Dalit women face caste cultural violence in terms of food that they eat, the dress that they wear and the work that they do. In the story of

"Prashantham" an upper caste man questions Durgamma, a dalit woman "You low caste bitch, be careful and do not talk much. Have we ever eaten food cooked by you?" (269)". Cultural violence mostly occurs within the scope of socio-political institutions as these are maintained by upper caste groups. It can also be seen among inter-caste marriage couples. Cultural caste consciousness among upper castes is so prevalent and rampant. But among lower caste groups cultural caste consciousness is not so visible. If a dalit girl marries an upper caste boy, are cultural practices of a low caste girl accepted? Will they give due respect and consider it as equal to their culture? Whereas if an upper caste girl marries a low caste boy, there won't exist the question of cultural differences among dalit communities. The whole family welcomes the upper caste girl heartily and gives liberty and freedom to follow her own culture. The father of the boy who is dalit says in the story of "Manyam", "whether it is good or bad, both of you liked each other. Whatever it is, it is done. I don't bother that my son has married an upper caste girl who has a different culture. Let both of you be happy. Your caste (upper caste) communities won't accept my son. Moreover, they will not allow my son to enter into their house (Subhadra, 19)". When a dalit girl enters a Brahmin colony after her marriage with an upper caste boy, this is what she encounters in the story of "Madiga Bhatuku" "What is your name? What is your caste? Why do you look so black?" (236). She questions herself again and again "Why should I live like a Brahmin girl by hiding my own caste and culture. My husband has insisted that be patient, whenever there is a discussion regarding my culture" (236). There are always cultural differences among upper castes who don't allow other caste group's culture to be seen as refined and standard. As a husband who promised before marriage to stand by her side during moments of discrimination, has himself started discriminating.

Another aspect to be pondered upon is food that is used to in her community is now forbidden to eat. When her husband asks, "What vegetables should I bring? She replies immediately "fish". But her husband says, "No more fish, it gives a bad smell, tell me about vegetables. Let us eat whatever I bring" (235). This is nothing but a one sided cultural imposition on a dalit woman. Prohibition is also imposed on her. Whenever her husband is out of home, she would bring meat, cook and eat. As she lives among Brahmin community, her neighbours would complain "See, don't be cultureless and behave like Mala and Madiga girl as you behave in your village. You have to adopt our culture as you live among us. Why did you bring beef? Never does that again, if you want, go to your Mala and Madiga's friend's house to eat" (236). The liberty of a dalit

woman is completely constrained and manipulated in terms of taking of her own food by upper caste husband. When a dalit girl reaches the house of upper caste community after marriage, we see how they treat and keep her within the four walls of brahminical world. Nobody talks with her; she lives her life as if there is no life in her body. In functions, she is humiliated, insulted and ill-treated, "No shame! How many times do I have to say this to thick-skinned Madiga woman? How can she sit with us and touch these holy things? She behaves like Madiga girl, does not know where to stay and how to behave. This is undesirable. This Madiga bastard has polluted" (241).

Dalit women are daily wage earners and it is upon their shoulder the entire family is run. She takes the responsibility of the family with utmost care whereas the husband usually exploits her economically. Whatever she earns out of her sweat and blood will be squandered by her husband either for smoking or drinking. On the other hand, upper caste groups exploit dalit women by grabbing and confiscating the land which belongs to dalit women and which is their only source of livelihood. Dalit women are made landless and they are exploited economically, first by grabbing their land and then by giving them meager wages which is no measure of their work. In the story of "Darileni Bavulu", Erakka, a dalit woman utters the following words, "Only high caste and high class communities have lands. Let there be mud in their mouth! If only they die, we get our own land. They

have grabbed our lands; they have played with our lives. They have poured mud into our mouth. They have made their children happy and prosperous and our children are crushed under their feet" (249). Erakka, questions the upper caste Reddy for grabbing the land "You have taken the land from my mother-in-law unjustly. She got her land because of her laborious work. Now give it back, I have to cultivate it" (249) As she asks her right of holding land, Reddy, the landlord retorts that "You bitch, how you can ask me for that land? How dare you? This woman does not have any sense, what to speak and what not to speak in a context" (110). Reddy is so furious and angry with Erakka for asking land time and again. He even threatened her "Have the lands come out of air? These low caste women are like this. They create all fuss about lands. If we give them a chance, they will climb on our heads. We have to keep them where they have to be" (110). Dalit women are more attached to land because their life revolves in and around the land. From dawn to dusk, they spend time in the field. But then the only economical resource of dalit women is being grabbed by dominant caste group leaving almost nothing to the powerless.

Conclusion: Thus, the writers present very vividly how dalit women suffer in their day to day life. The moment they step out, they face the problems be it caste discrimination or gender discrimination. The narratives show the double discrimination of dalit women on the lines of caste and gender is inevitable and unending process.

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Kiran Kumar Boddu

PhD Scholar, School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Vellore

Dr. Siva Nagaiah Bolleddu , Assistant Professor (Senior)

School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Vellore.