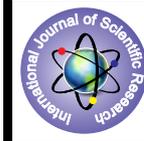


Women In Telangana Peasant Movement: An Exploration In Sociology Of Literature



SOCIOLOGY

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ROLE

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ABSTRACT

The main thrust of this paper is to sociologically analyze the significant role of women portrayed in the Progressive Telugu Literature related to Telangana Peasant Movement. The present study seeks to overcome this dissociation between the cultural/literary and the social/political spheres, by looking at these phenomena within the perspective developed in sociology of literature. Women played a crucial part in the heroic Telangana Movement and made innumerable sacrifices and showed enormous courage and determination which were depicted in Progressive Telugu Literature. Literature in this respect, is Sui genesis, represents a resource of society, which can perform its social function, through its own 'truth'. It is possible, by doing so, to propose a reading of Progressive Telugu Literature which will simultaneously yield an understanding of the role of women participants in the Telangana Peasant Movement.

The main thrust of this paper is to sociologically analyse the significant role of women portrayed in the Progressive Telugu Literature (PTL) related to Telangana Peasant Movement (TPM) of 1940's and 1950's. The PTL as well as the TPM attracted scholarly, ideological, partisan and popular attention during the period of cultural and socio/political movements. But, mostly these two developments have been handed in dissociation from each other. The present paper seeks to overcome this dissociation between the cultural-literary and the socio-political spheres, by examining these phenomena within the perspective developed in sociology of literature. It is possible, by doing so, to propose a reading of PTL, which will simultaneously yield an understanding of the role of women in the TPM.

Before venturing into the sociological analysis of different forms of PTL in order to focus on the role played by women in TPM, it is important to give a brief description of the Telangana Peasant Movement and related literary movement and the methodology adopted for the analysis.

Owing to the obvious structural constraints, traditional India had experienced a number of peasant uprisings before and after independence. The Revolt in Telangana and the adjoining districts of Andhra delta between 1946 and 1951 was one of the post-war insurrectionary struggles of peasants in India (Desai, A. R. 1969). It was launched by the Communist Party of India (CPI) as a sequel to the shift in its earlier policy of collaboration with the Congress, giving way to a strategy of encouraging or initiating insurrectionary partisan struggles.

The social conditions were oppressive in Telangana districts, with innumerable illegal exactions like - pay nazaranas (presents in kind or cash given to Nizam) at the time of birth of a child in the family, marriage or death etc. The 'vetti' and 'vet-tichakiri' (bonded labour) systems in Telangana were in all-pervasive social phenomena affecting all classes of people, in varying degrees (Khusro, A. M. 1958). The landlords, Deshmukhs etc. received 'vetti' and exaction from different service-caste people such as weavers, washer-men, taddy-tappers, potters, barbers, shepherds, merchants and villagers.

The worst of all these feudal exactions was the prevalence of keeping girls as 'slaves' in landlords' houses. When landlords gave their daughters in marriage, they presented these slave girls and sent them along with their married daughters to serve them in their new homes. These slave girls were used by the landlords as concubines (Sundarayya, P. 1972). Thus the 'vetti' system had made the life of the Telangana people one of utter degradation and of abject serfdom. It had ruined man's self-respect completely.

The Andhra Maha Sabha (AMS) was established in 1930 with an intention of reforming the socio-economic conditions of the Telangana people. Slowly, it got momentum and the Communists took control of the AMS around 1940. The AMS gradually gains

strength and popularity in the rural areas and step by step, the movement took the form of a peasant upsurge culminating in a major revolt between 1946 and 1951.

Where do we go from this scene of competing ideological 're-constructions' and sectional, specialized, theory-laden analysis generated by the academia? For us, the point of departure, from available literature, is provided by the founding theories of revolution and social transformation (Marx and Engels, 1970). It would, therefore, be illuminating to turn to literature, to comprehend the dynamics and dialectics of the TPM from the 'inside' as it were.

Progressive Telugu Literature

In many parts of India, groups of writers, mostly young, were feeling the need for making a break with the supine and escapist literature with which the country was being flooded; of creating something which will make our 'art' full-blooded and virile by focusing on the world comprising the constantly changing, human society in the grip of antagonistic forces; ideas and institutions going under and rising up, deadly struggles being waged between nations and classes, between progress and reaction (Pradhan, S. 1979).

It was a consciousness, in many ways vague and undefined, of those things which led to the formation of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) in 1936. This gave a great impetus to the Progressive Writers' Movement (PWM).

In Andhra, the Telugu PWA, a local branch of All-India PWA was established in 1942. In his presidential address, Sri Sri (1955) underlined the over-riding importance of using the people's language in its living forms so as to communicate to the masses the core of the progressive vision.

The PWM, like all movements with comparable aims in the cultural sphere, is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon, representing a conjuncture of the core of creativity, hopes and aspirations of the social subjectivity, on the one hand, and the stubborn structure of the restrictive, exploitative and repressive, of historically developed society, in its inexorable objectivity and impersonal operation, on the other hand. It, therefore, marks the infusion of the 'political' into the domain of the seemingly 'a-political' sphere literature and reactivity.

Women's Participation in the TPM

Women played an important role in the TPM. They actively participated in the movement for land, agricultural labour, wage struggles, and seizure of landlords' grain, Brigg's Plan of evacuating the Koya, Chenchu, and Lambadi tribes from their hamlets in the forest areas or from the scattered hamlets in the plains. They were with their husbands and brothers, fighting the Razakars and Nizam police and later again the Congress Razakars and Nehru's armies and the police. They had joined the military and political squads and underwent all kinds of difficulties and

joys of life in the forest and hills and in the fields in rain and in sun. They acted as couriers, as political agitators and in new centers as organizers of people's movements and mass organizations (Sundarayya, P. 1972).

Women were brutally tortured and inhumanly exploited by the Razakars, Nizam and Nehru's police and military. They were molested, raped and terribly beaten up. Their children were tortured and killed before their eyes. Their husbands and brothers were hunted, arrested and killed in their very presence. In some cases they had to remain in their houses with small children and very old when their husbands had gone to join the fighters and the guerrillas in far off secret places (Sundarayya, P. 1972).

The story of their heroic and stubborn resistance in defense of their personal dignity, against molestation, torture and rape, was an inspiring one! Their awakening to new social equality, to a new moral and culture life, their stubborn fighting quality, gives a glimpse of that tremendous revolutionary spirit and energy that is smoldering in our economically and socially oppressed women folk.

Among the women who fought for land were, Ailemma of Palakurti village, Kumari, Mattayya's wife of Mukundapuram village, many Lambada peasants' widowed wives from Vodapalli, Kondropolu, Moddulukunta villages; Golla Muttayya's wife from Salaramiagudem, a Lambada peasant Veerarami's wife. In the process of getting land some lost their lives. There were many such cases, which run into scores in the whole of Telangana struggle. All this has become part of the folk lore of the movement.

Women participated in large number in all agricultural labour strikes or in seizure of grain from landlords' and Deshmukhs' warehouses and 'gadis'. In all the demonstrations and raiding women were in the forefront shouting slogans with flags in their hands. Thousands of women workers in the Godawari forest belt participated in the struggle to increase the wages for pricking of beedi leaves. Among the strikes and struggles of agricultural labourers that took place in twenty villages during this period women were in the leading positions in the strikes.

When armed police were attacking the villages, women were at the side of their men, handing them stones for their strings. Along with their men folk they faced the brutal lathi-charges and firings. Women insisted that they would accompany their men folk in agitations and were ready to face any consequences.

In many instances/cases police had to ultimately yield to the pressure created by women to free their men folk. In many fighting areas, women took extraordinary precautions to take care of the guerillas and squads, sheltering and billeting them in their houses and in a large number of cases, keeping day or night vigil, while the guerillas or leaders were sleeping or resting. The women supplied food to the guerillas and party leaders at any time of the night or day with lot of care and warmth. Sundarayya (1972) narrated in his book, some of his own experiences and expressed his gratitude and humility to the women folk who fought battles against the enemy. He wrote, "Who can forget those glorious events, those inspiring stories of courage and suffering of women?"

In Nereda, one of the strongest villages of the movement, women were tortured terribly. They were forced to wear pyjamas and tied the bottoms of them. Then chameleons were put into their private parts. They were bitten by chameleons and all of them were ill for several months. Some others were not allowed to breast feed their babies. Against all these odds, women were never revealed the whereabouts of the hiding men folk (Machineni, V. R. 1983).

Women's Portrayal in PTL

There were many writers who portrayed women's role in fighting for their land. One among them was about a lady martyr of the Telangana struggle named Chilakamma, a brave young lady from Giripuram. "Chilakamma Pata" (a Kolatam folk song), (Unknown Author 1972) was very popular among women folk. She was a source of inspiration of ladies. It was a provocation song, which portrays the tragic death of the party activist Chilakamma.

Illustrating the vengeance showed by the landlord the author com-

posed-

"Lord of Danasayipeta, Wanted to take vengeance Oh! Chilakamma

Thirty police were; Sent over you; aiming only to kill you Oh! Chilakamma

Portraying, how she attacked the police, the author says -

On to the coming police men; she took out chill powder; threw it over them

Then just to escape from those cruel police-

She jumped into the well; Then one among the thirty police men; whose eyes were full of chill powder; also jumped into the well! Oh! Chilakamma"

In "Telangana Veerayodhulu" (Telangana Heroic Warriors) (Ramanjaneyulu, T. 1966), a bardic recital, the author narrates how cruelly the Razakars and military police behaved with the women.

"They raped even the newly delivered ladies; they cut the new born babies into pieces;

They stripped the pregnant women; and stabbed them in their stomachs;

They tied the ladies in hay-stacks; and burnt them to death".

These women were tortured because they refused to reveal the whereabouts of the comrades and guerilla leaders.

They worked in the Dalams (wings) and helped the guerillas in different possible ways.

Depicting these, the author points out-

"The ladies used chilly powder, Pestles, Yokes, Plough-tails, Cart bells etc., to fight against the common enemy, the Razakars and military police".

During Nizams rule, in Telangana, the exploitations of Patels and Patwaris are very common. They treated the women folk as dolls and behaved as if they are their own property. In "Gopi Devi" (Unknown Author, 1972), a folk song which was a quite enthusiastic song in Telangana villages, the mother-in-law of Gopi Devi, tells her daughter-in-law, about the true personality of Patels and Patwaris. She narrates to her daughter-in-law, the ways and means of avoiding the Patels and Patwaris, since they are the people who spoil the minds of daughters and daughters-in-law.

In "Manabhanga" (Rape) (Anjaneyulu, K. 1956), the author said that he did not have words in Telugu to express his feelings. He said that "it is a hell". So, instead of Telangana he said, it is "Hellangana". Portraying the atrocities of police, authorities and their followers, the author briefly wrote about an incident. Getting doubt on a hobby girl, that she was helping the Sangham (Association), the police officer tortures her at mid night.

In "Udayani" (Dawn) (Gangineni, V. 1950), the author depicts the heart burning feelings of lovers and of mother and son. In "Mother to son", mother informs her son, in a letter, that the enemies, after his leaving, have raided the house and have taken away his young wife because she did not reveal his whereabouts. She asked her son-

"Turn at once, hero of annihilation, Rise with Vengeance of thousand fold, Squeeze the blood off their hearts, And only then, come to, Provide peace to her soul".

In "Potugadda" (Native land) (Sunkara & Vasireddi, 1953) the authors portrayed the socio-economic conditions of Telangana; the atrocities and exploitations of the landlords; and the people's revolt and sacrifices of women for the sake of the movement.

In "Mundadugu" (Forward Step) (Sunkara & Vasireddi, 1980) the authors depicted how women used to take initiative to fight against landlords.

Vimala, the daughter of a peasant supported and encouraged the helpless peasants to fight against the landlords' atrocities. She took night classes and asked the peasants to stand along on one rope and brought unity among them.

In another most popular play, "Maa Bhumi" (Our land) (Sunkara & Vasireddi, 1980) the role played by women was heroically depicted.

This play depicts the fight between poor peasants and rich landlords. In accordance with the Communist Party ideology, the play advocates "Land to the tiller" and provides a vivid picture of the development and culmination of a revolt. Portraying the courageous role of the women folk in those days, the authors illustrated how mother and daughter fought against the police and the landlord. When the landlord tried to misbehave with her daughter, Kamala, Seethamma, the mother, at once attacks the landlord hitting him on his head with a pestle. Seeing this, the police attacked Seethamma. But, Kamala, immediately, with presence of mind, throws chillipowder on their faces.

The play-let "Veeranari" (Valiant lady) (Raja Rao, 1948), illustrates the valiant woman character, who sacrifices her life in saving the lives of the Sangham leaders. It also reveals that women folk too in their own way helped carrying on the peasant movement. It is to be pointed out that the feudal system looked at women only as an object of pleasure and enjoyment. In this play-let, a young lady attacks the Amin, a police officer, when he tries to molest her, with a knife, not bothered of any consequences of her life. With her inordinate presence of mind and amazing valour, she sets free the Sangham leaders, although she bleeds to death, and thus she was rightly called 'Veeranari'.

In a short story "Vadisala" (The Sling) (Prasad Rao, P. D. 1947), the author characterizes Yenamma, a very brave sentry lady. On seeing the Nizam's military coming towards the village, she blows the trumpet, so that the volunteers and guerillas come to know about the military's arrival. She joins the Andhra Maha Sabha volunteers and starts using the sling she bravely repulsed the army and finally gave her life for the leaders and the movement.

In Telugu literature, there have a host of women novelists. A few of them were progressive writers, who dealt with peasants and their problems. Vasireddi Sita Devi dealt mainly with peasants and in "Matti Manishi" (Clay Man), she picturized the rural life of peasant families and in "Samata" (Equality), and "Vuritadu" (Noose Rope), she depicted social conflicts in day to day life.

In "Prajala Manishi" (The People's Man) (Alwaru Swami, 1955), the most important issue was 'land'. The Deshmukh occupies one of the peasant's lands illegally. The peasant's mother, Annamma, stands

against it and never allows the Deshmukh's men to plough it by standing stubbornly amidst the field.

In "Gangu" (Alwaru Swami, 1965), the author depicts how women, belonging to middle and upper class families, developed interest in Andhra Maha Sabha and started working for the upliftment of the poor people. Gangu was the title character of this novel. The author tried to portray how even the landlord's daughter got interested in political ideals and joined the Communist Party. She had got complete understanding of the ill-effects of feudal system; exploitations and atrocities towards women folk and other villagers done by her father.

"Mrutyunjeyulu" (The Conquerors of Death) (Sivarama Krishna, 1947), was the first ever published novel which depicts the Telangana Peasant Movement and was published well in advance to the 'Police Action'. The novel portrays through various episodes how the landlords and their assistants procure women folk for their enjoyment. The author gives an appreciable account of the Sangham and its activities. Tortured by the landlord and his men, Ramulamma, a peasant's wife joins the Sangham and later leads the women's Dalam (wing).

"Simhagarjana" (Lion's Roar) (Lakshmi Kant Mohan, 1951), was the only novel which depicted the 'Police Action'. The author brought out the social conditions of Telangana during those days, especially, the atrocities on women. The activities of Communist Party through their Dalams were portrayed significantly. The author depicts the women's Dalams led by Seeta, the heroin of the novel, who had joined the Party after suffering tremendous mental agony for her lover and people of many villages.

In "Mrutyuvuneedallo" (In the Shadows of Death) (Rama Mohan Rao, 1962), the author narrates the sacrificing nature of the women in those days for the sake of Communist Party, Sangham and Dalams. For instance, Sattemma not only sacrificed her love for Dalam but also raised money by selling all her jewelry for the cause of buying weapons for the Dalam. Shashi Rekha, the landlord's wife joins the Dalam when she came to know about the Deshmukh's atrocities, the police's misbehavior and Dalam's good activities.

Concluding Reflections

The tiny material presented till now was aesthetically 'raw', untreated 'ore'. Nevertheless they are 'speaking' materials. It is thus that they have reached their listeners and readers, as speaking materials; and they continue to circulate as living and enlivening resources precisely because they 'speak' and we can 'hear'. This reaching out of the literary product to the receiving subjects, then, triggers of transformations in the subject, who concurrently is the subject of social action and therefore, also the subject of history making in the present for a better more humane future. This then, is the dialectical interface between literature and society, culture and politics. Thus, it is that one overcomes the abstraction generated 'dissociation' between these spheres. And with this the central task of this modest, exploratory inquiry has been tentatively achieved.

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