

**Language of Resistance and Vulgarly in Telugu Poetry: A Study of Representative Poets of Movements**

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**Abstract**

*Language and literature are a part of culture and the latter also gets influenced by the former. Culture perishes when language and literature are neglected. At the same time a specific language and literature also decline when culture itself suffers due to any reason materialistic or otherwise. Leading poet of Telugu Sri Sri's master pieces Maha prasthanam and Maro Prasthanam reveal influences of the Western literature and indigenous imagery used. In the former, the language is mainly influenced by Sanskrit and Classical Telugu whereas in the latter the poet's attempt to adopt dialect or people's language is clearly visible. Some people downplay the language of Maroapasthanam as it ideologically and linguistically to an extent leans towards the extreme left. Digambara poets used vulgar language to show their disgust towards the exploitative society in the late sixties and early 1970's. While Dalit poets used language uninhibitedly, feminist poets found fault with vulgar expressions used by the Dalit poets as something objectionable and gender-insensitive. My paper studies the impact of language of resistance including the 'vulgar' language in Telugu poetry from revolutionary poets such as Sri Sri and Alisetti Prabhakar and a few other representative poets from the movements of Digambara and Dalit movements. In fact one finds the language of resistance including vulgar language as a means to express the anger and frustration towards the established order and shock the complacency of the community.*

Language and literature are a part of culture and the latter also gets influenced by the former. Culture perishes when language and literature are neglected. At the same time a specific language and literature also decline when culture itself suffers due to any reason

materialistic or domination by other cultures. All the three-language, literature and culture influence one another. Language is a powerful vehicle to pursue alternative politics and aesthetics. The language of poetry representing the marginalized at times respects no boundaries in projecting the alternative perspective. The language of literature has also been changing under the impact of social, historical and cultural causes. The language of poetry in Telugu has undergone many changes in its struggle against native conservative forces who collaborated with the British imperialists during the era of pre-independence. From the language of the classical to the present times of free verse much change has come in.

Modern Telugu literature shows many powerful voices against the status-quo. Many poets representing various movements such as Romantic, Progressive or Abhudaya, digambara, revolutionary, dalit, feminist poets used the language of resistance to question and undermine the exploitative system. There have been many poets who were inspired by the vision of another world without slavery and inequality. The romantic movement in Andhra Pradesh has been mainly concerned with nature, subjective suffering and sympathy for the poor from distance. The Progressive movement has been the precursor to other movements which challenged conventional society. The righteous anger of the poets who championed the marginalized classes such as workers, farmers, dalits and women have used the idiom of resistance unhesitatingly to call an end to the exploitative system. The poets at times used even vulgar or rude language to condemn the exploiters and to challenge the polite or gentle idiom which has been thought to be apt for poetry. Their aim is to shock and open the eyes of one and all and jolt the people out of complacency and layers of *maya* which made people passive. according Kolakaluri Madhu Jyoti, “Dalit’s is natural expression. Limitless expression. Their idea of beauty belongs to life and without any restrictions. (5) My paper makes the point that language is a weapon of criticism and at times an aid to the political project of criticism by weapons. This doesn’t intend to be exhaustive or comprehensive to include all the poets or their language but takes up representative poets from different movements and some of their poetic pieces for amplification.

The progressive writer’s movement began in 1936 at All India level and in 1943 in Andhra Pradesh and continued during 1943-1948, 1955-58 and after 1979 with many ups and downs.(KVR,421).Ramana Reddy mentions that the form and nature of the progressive movement was the collective result of poets such as Chilakamarti, Gurajada, Basavaraju, Unnava, Garimella, Settipalli, Tummaa, Chadalavada, Sunkara, Prayaga. Sri Sri gave literary respectability to progressive movement. “He gave it form and inspiration. It means he is the beginner of modern Progressive movement (1934-1964).” ( Reddy 249). Sri Sri, the leading poet in progressive movement and later in Revolutionary Writers’ Association paved way for a new language of resistance and uses words most dexterously. Influenced by world

literature showed new path to Telugu poetry and translated poems of famous French poet Swinburne, Russian Poet such as Pushkin, American poet Poe and revolutionary poet such as Pablo Neruda. Though he has started with the influence of classical literature and Romantic poetry, he soon embraced progressive and revolutionary language of resistance and made a deep impact on the modern Telugu poetry. He took inspiration from Gurajada, the author of drama *Kanya Sulkam* and considered the father of Modern Telugu literature. Sri Sri's master pieces *Maha Prasthanam*(1950) and *Maro Prasthanam*(1980) reveal influences of English, French on his language and imagery used. In the former, the language is mainly influenced by Sanskrit and Classical Telugu whereas in the latter the poet's attempt to adopt dialect or people's language is clearly visible. Some people downplay the language of *Maroapasthanam* as it ideologically and linguistically leans towards the extreme left. While Sanskrit influence and revolutionary content of *Mahapasthanam* made it unassailable from conservative as well as progressive critics, the dialect used in *Maropasthanam* got less appreciation even from so called progressive people. Chalasani Prasad, in his preface to *Maro Prasthanam* notes ever changing quality of Sri Sri and writes "those who want poetry and poets to be nonaligned and beyond life and common people won't like songs of *Maropasthanam*" (Prasad, preface to *Maropasthanam*, 7)

Sri Sri's lines

"Who carried the bricks/ To build the Taj Mahal?

Not about the palanquin of the lords/ Who are its bearers?" firmly revealed his bias for the working classes. His clarion call for another world stirred the young and the progressive minded.

The same poet in *Maropasthanam* (1980) wrote a poem 'Yesterday's jatkawala' in people's dialect. Writing about the anguish of the owner over the death of horse, he writes that he hasn't suffered so much even after the death of his son or the elopement of his wife and expelling the thoughts of suicide, he says:

I will not die/live till death/kill those worth killing"

He also wrote that

"Swing swing swing to the gallows/ When you swing, the enemy's hearts get nervous."

"Where is revolution?/There your food, There your house

If you weep aloud/ None will come towards you

...

'Swim in the streams/ Of blood red / Brother my sibling"

( Maropasthanam 11)

In his poem, 'Jhumjha' Sri Sri writes,

“In kurukhsetra of Bharat / I will flow Bhagavdgita of new age

Making the flames speak/ Enable the singing by blood’(21)

Sri Sri himself doesn’t feel shy of using vulgar words if necessary. Mourning the death of his friend Kompella Janardhana Rao , he writes “Have you gone my friend/ unable to live in the world of the bastards” in *Mahapratahnam*. In his poem ‘Good Morning’ in he writes as follows

“The head fallen in the night/ Says ‘good morning’ in the dawn

The star fallen in the moonlight at night / Says ‘good morning’ in the dawn

The semen out in the sleep at night/ Says ‘good morning’ in the dawn

the vulgarity flowed in the night of literature/ Says ‘good morning’ in the dawn.”

Anisetti Subbarao writes in his poem, “Whose Children are You?” as follows:

*“O my bosom friends!*

*The laws of this world / offer the plates of leaves discarded/ Offer the iron bars*

*In the books of the judges/ Lines of letters black / Nooses around your necks!”* (Chaitanya Dehali, 40-41)

He also says that on seeing the orphan children, the stony heart melts and flows compassion whereas the kind heart turns hard and fights the world.

Gurram Joshua can be called precursor of Dalit consciousness and imbibed nationalistic spirit . He wrote more than seventy works and emerged as the leading poet against heavy odds personal and social. He writes in his verse autobiography, *My Story* as follows:

Observed history of birds countless

flying in colours beautiful

Reared baby Crows and mongoose

not for fun but as my children

Read the story of Gandhi hidden

in the cobweb of spider

Realized the love of dogs for master

by giving a handful of morsels

Grasped that in gaining peace

Animals are superior to man proud

over his “birth superior”

Why tales ten thousand?

While the progressive writers have been questioning the status-quo in Andhra, there arose a movement against the Nizam in Telangana. The Telangana armed struggle led by the Communist party of India during 1946-51 gave rise to many poets such as Dasarathi,

Suddala Hanumantu, Kaloji and others. Dasarathi, a famous progressive poet who participated in Telangana armed struggle later wrote as follows;

“Until those who use *brahmastra* /Against a sparrow

No peace on the earth/ No end to the war...

The life which fought a great war / Against the darkness is eternal

the halo of poetry-/ The habitat of peace on the earth.” (Chaitanya Dehali, 81)

A lull in the progressive writers’ movement has taken place due to the embracing of the parliamentary path by the Left, the end of Telangana armed struggle and gravitation of many erstwhile poets into films and other fields for their livelihood after 1951. When the entire literary scene has turned drab, digambara poets entered the scene with their language of resistance and vulgarity to shake the sleeping conscience of the nation on May 6, 1965. Although many took exception to their language Sri Sri and others supported them as they saw revolutionary potential in them. Among *Digambara* poets Jwalamukhi, Nikhileswar, Cherabandaraju marched along with the revolutionary ranks and embraced jails and mental suffering. Cherabandaraju died in jail due to cancer worsened due to the governmental apathy and repressive policies. True to their name ‘Digambara poets’ exposed the grotesque nature of exploitation in a matching language and not in sanitized or doctored language of the respectable middle class folk. Their words shook the people pretending asleep and proved effective in firing the imagination of the people. The gentle and decent poetic language has had its day. Maha Swapna, A digambara poet writes in his poem ““Glanirbhavati Bharata” as follows:

I am coming Digamabara poet

I am the Sun rising in the night

...

*With wounds of syphilis of various countries*

*With banyan fruits full of insects*

*While the earth is fallen and turned prostitute*

*When it is rotten and smells foul*

*I am being born a digambara poet*

*...I am coming the digambara poet*

*The fierce naked lion breaking the stagnant pillar of poetry*

*To enable the trees walk*

*To enable the buried rocks speak*

*To resurrect the corpses in the graveyards* (Chaitanya Dehali, 60)

Another poet Nikhileswar writes in his poem , ‘The Raga of Destruction’ as follows in the background of attack on Vietnam by America :

*“Over centuries soaked in semen  
I can’t carry these gods and holy books  
I can’t carry these jails shackles laws  
I can’t carry these wars and fractured history “* (Chaitanya Dehali, 64)

Cherabanda Raju, the digambara poet who later turned to revolution wrote as follows:

Bringing a beautiful woman  
Imprisoning her in a room  
Parading her in a fantastic palanquin  
Holding and hanging to her feet  
Poet ! When do you cure yourself of chronic disease? (Chaitanya Dehali, 61)

Digambara poets wrote that their poetry means “telling truth nakedly” ( Ramana Reddy 416) Marxist critic KV Ramana Reddy criticized them saying that” like common critics they also assumed that in Marxism there was main contradiction between individual and society, freedom and power.” (412) .But Ramana Reddy also appreciated them saying that they were not “insubstantial reverberations to American Beatniks or the English angry young men’ but theirs is the sigh of a volcano which is erupting from their hearts without the exaggeration of metaphors”(415). He finds fault with them for rejecting all isms and for their apolitical stance.(414)

Kalluri Syamala in her preface to her anthology, Chaitanya Dehali writes that “digambara poets were determined to uproot the atrocities in contemporary society and wrote with wild emotions. Though such emotion was natural in that historical backdrop, the influence of digambara poets didn’t last long.”(xiv) She also wrote that the wild emotional articulation in the revolutionary writers’ experiments and images in 1970’s led to moving away from the digambara poetry. Both digambara and revolutionary poets brought forth socially committed poetry. ( Syamala xv)

The Revolutionary Writers’ Association was born in 1970 with Sri Sri as its president as a reaction against stagnation and response to the revolutionary movement in Srikakulam and Naxalbari. In the words of Ramana Reddy what differentiates the revolutionary poets from other is their identification with Marxism , not mere verbal loyalty”(119) He also says that the progressive poet evades the real sufferings of human lives calling himself as humanist. He doesn’t come out of the circle of bourgeois nationalism at any cost. The ‘progressive’ poet is none other than literary representative of the bourgeois ideas who

entered and settled down amidst the great movement of the working classes”(160) Sivasagar, Cherabandaraju, Kodavatiganti, Raa vi Sastry , Tripuraneni, Panigrahi Subbarao, Gaddar, Vangapandu , Varavara rao, Chenchaiyah and many others contributed to the growth of revolutionary literary and cultural movement.

Aliseti Prabhakar writes:

*Is history born*

*Out of the iron box of the money lender...?/*

*Or/ the nipples of the breasts of /modern film star..?*

*Or/ hatched under the hat of the politician?/ No*

*Bloodshed is the preface of history/*

*Drop of sweat is its basis /Hunger is its stimulus.* Prabhakar 50-51

K.Siva Reddy writes in his poem, ‘Speak’ as follows:

*Let us not beg the right to speak/ Let’s speak naturally like air, freely fearlessly...*

*Let’s speak shamelessly and fearlessly*

*And truthfully* (Chaitanya Dehali, 135)

When revolutionary movement faced severe state repression in the late 19’s and nineties and revolutionary poetry has become repetitive and sloganeering, there emerged dalit movement and dalit movement poetry in Andhra. The killing of dalits in Karamchedu, Neerukonda and Tsundur by the upper caste people led to the dalit struggles and strengthening of dalit consciousness. Works of anthology like *Dalit Manifesto* , *The Sharpening Song*, *The Thickenig Song* provided impetus to the dalit literary movement. Dalit poets have come into their own. Among dalit poets the work ‘Nisani’ written by four poets Khaja, Paidi Teresh babu, Madduri Nagesh babu and varadayya has become known for its frankest expression in questioning the caste oppression. Teresh Babu writes

*Writing is not new to us/ when you were frogs in the wells of slates*

*We turned the verse of crop on the hearts of the mother earth*

*When you were paper boats in the oceans of knowledge*

*We turned into metal scripts on the brow of the factories*

*the letter became chaste in the fire when it fell into our belly*

*Weapon has got motherhood when our fingertips touched it.( SV,111)*

Writing about their certainty of direction and time that became their disciple, he writes as follows:

*So far-*

*Six-feet of death that played with our lives*

*Has adjusted into a six- inch member on our bodies.( SV,112)*

Sikhamani, another poet in his ‘Language of Noisy Chappals’ writes as follows:



So far...

I am a sound of imitation /I have lost my real voice in cacophony borrowed voices  
Now I am turning / Letter into a raw hide and curing it in lande\* ( Madhu Jyoti,67)  
( \*Digging a hole in the earth for curing rawhide)

Katti Padma rao in his poem, 'For the sake of A Word' writes as follows:

*"That mother told only one word/ My son Silence/  
You will certainly die/ But live for one word deathless  
You will conquer death with that one word."* (Chaitanya Dehali, 106)

Kalekuri Prasad in his poem 'For the Fistful of Self-respect' writes as follows:

*I am dependent for ages in a free country  
Subjected to insults, atrocities/ Rapes, tortures/  
Held my head high for a fistful of self-respect....  
I am no victim but a martyr/ A Flag of rebelliousness flying  
Shed no tears for me/ If you please  
Bury me in the heart of the city/ I'll bloom like a bamboo garden that sings melody of life*  
( Chaitanya Dehali, 126)

There are many other dalit poets and leaders such as Siva Sagar, Bojja Tarakam, Satish chandar Gaddar, Goranti Venjkanna, Masterji, Sudhkar, Sunar raju, Sikhamani, Swaroopa Rani, Gowri Shankar etc.

The marginalized people have been seen for ages as uncreative, uncouth, untouchables, invisible, uncultured and beyond the pale of literature by the conservative literature. As a reaction to this exclusion of their language and lives, Some dalit poets cared nothing for 'polite' language in expressing their anger of ages. Varadayya wrote of the impending day when they could kick ' in the dash' of every rascal and Teresh spurned the idea of nonviolence of the upper castes through writing about the rapes of their sisters. ( SV,113) Here the poet's anguish at the hypocrisy of the verbal chanting of nonviolence and real atrocity on dalit women by the upper castes has been expressed.

Cambridge Advanced Learner's dictionary gives the meanings of 'vulgar' as 'not suitable, simple, dignified or beautiful', 'common or not in the style preferred by the upper classes of the society' or 'rude and likely upset or anger people, especially by referring to sex and body in an unpleasant way.' For ages the exploitation has gone on and resistance to is thwarted in terms of language and practice. Language has been sanitized, upgraded or refined to brand some words and things as beyond the scope of respectable literature. Against this Sri Sri wrote that dog, a matchstick, a piece of soap are all poetic. People resort to coarse or swear words when their anger reaches the peaks and polite classes impolitely and violently



subjugated the marginalized for very long. Having kept them under inhuman and uncivilized conditions they contemptuously dismissed the language of the marginalized as unfit for poetic respectability. The songs and vocabulary of the people had to be relegated to the substandard position whereas Sanskrit and regional languages influenced by them have been given the upper hand. Dalits who have been excluded from Sanskrit language do not accept its supremacy and propel their own language which has been more natural, richer and frank.

Teresh Babu writes, *"There's gentlemen's language. Same poetry/Stagnant themes, Outdated styles, Vomited expressions;"* (qtd. from Madhu Jyoti, 53) pointing out this linguistic domination, Khadar writes, *'Dream stop coming in my mother tongue/ My ideas too resort to the language of the majority.'* (qtd. from Madhu Jyoti, 56). In the poetry of the angry young dalit poets, the physical and cultural violence by the upper castes is castigated to jolt them out of complacency perpetuated for ages. The gentlemen and ladies have been embarrassed, ashamed, angry and stated complaining against the direct and 'vulgar' language of the common people. Dalit poets have expanded the domain of language, literature and culture by writing in their own idiom, questioning the elite language and by demanding inclusion in the national culture. Their literacy and cultural movement has been a valiant battle to extend the boundaries of political and cultural democracy.

In feminist movement which targeted patriarchy there are many poets such as Jayaprabha, Volga, Kondepudi Nirmala, Mahejabin, Savitri, Rajani, Hymavathi etc.. Jayaprabha remembers Kunti of the Mahabharata as follows:

*"She's spark of fire never quenched/ A baby fish of five colours in the mouth of a royal whale*

*A jasmine creeper crept over iron chains/ A flute silent'* (Chaitanya Dehali, 150)

Rajani in her poem, *Abortion Statement* writes as follows:

*Alas! / If only there were pills to dry heart-*

*As there are to dry milk!* (Chaitanya Dehali, 176)

Mandarapu Hymavathi in her poem, 'Adjust' writes,

*'Adjust' these letters / demand sacrifice of woman's life!* (Chaitanya Dehali, 106)

The feminist writers such as Volga, Vasanta Kannabiran, Kalpana Kannabiran pointed out how vulgar language has been the cultural property of the upper castes imposed on dalits and rape has been the weapon in subjugating women across the ages and the need for forging new insight and new language. (SV, 119-120)

The language of resistance questions the different structures of oppression such as family, private property and the State. The Progressive, digambara, revolutionary, dalit and feminist poets challenged the status-quo with their powerful language. There have been differences among them in their perception of the enemies and solutions to the fact of exploitation. The

revolutionary poets pointed out the limitations of the progressive poets and digambara poets. Dalit poets questioned the revolutionary poets regarding ignoring caste issue in the name of class exploitation whereas the feminist poets who challenged gender inequality posed questions to the revolutionary and dalit poets for underplaying gender issue and the use of the 'vulgar' words some dalit poets. While some critics like Denchanala Srinivas and Lakshmi Narasaiah supported the language of dalits as an expression of their indignation, Marxist critics such as Chenchiah criticized it and Addepalli Ram Mohan Rao expressed cautious optimism. The feminist critics such as Volga, Vasanta kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran pointed out how vulgar words undermine woman's status further. All these literary controversies helped in clarifying the issues involved and helped dalit literary movement to march ahead.

It can be concluded from above that language of resistance in modern Telugu movement poets has broken the restrictions on language. It has harnessed the full force of language in challenging the status quo. Notwithstanding the shock or horror expressed by the gentle folk, it exposes the naked exploiting nature of the system. In spite of the apparent permanence of the present order, the language of resistance has future. Papineni Sivasankar, a poet questions the murders of the farmers in his poem, 'When the Plough is Broken' as follows:

*I'll question those who mortgaged the spine of the nation  
In transactions across the continent  
I'll question black money its watchdogs  
Cursed by corpses ( Chaitanya Dehali, 162)*

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