



My Elder Sister's Nose Pin Was Lost Here Only

Maakka Mukku Pulla Geenne Poyindi

Contemporary essays by
Joopaka Subhadra

Translated by
K. Suneetha Rani



Joopaka Subhadra is a Dalit womanist writer and activist who has published extensively in Telugu, including essays, columns, short fiction, and poetry. She has edited anthologies, translated fiction into Telugu, and served on the editorial committees of various journals and magazines. Her works include *Ayyayyo Dammakka*, a collection of poems (2009); *Rayakka Manyam*, a collection of short stories (2014); *Charitralni Cherigipostu*, a collection of essays on literary criticism (2021); *Reservation Bogie*, a collection of short stories (2021); *Telangani Kaitala Donthulu*, a collection of poems (2024). Subhadra has

translated the Tamil Dalit writer Bama's book *Sangati* into Telugu as *Sangathi*. She was honoured with almost 40 awards, including the Best Writer Award from the Telangana State Government. She has been writing a column titled *Gunugupulu* in the Sunday Supplement of the Telugu daily Andhra Jyothi since July 2023. *My Elder Sister's Nose Pin was Lost Here Only* is the English translation of a column titled *Ma Akka Mukku Pulla Geenne Poyindi*, written by Joopaka Subhadra for *Bhumika Streevada Patrika*, a Telugu feminist monthly journal, from 2007 to 2015. The column is a critical commentary on various issues related to society, politics, and movements, but focusing on the marginalised identities such as caste, gender, and region.



K. Suneetha Rani is a Professor at the Centre for Women's Studies, University of Hyderabad. Currently, she is the Dean of the School of Social Sciences. She was with the Department of English for 16 years before joining the Centre for Women's Studies in 2011. Her areas of interest include Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, Comparative Studies, New Literatures in English, Translation Studies and Feminist Pedagogy. Her PhD in English Literature is on Australian Aboriginal Women's Autobiographies. She translates from Telugu to English and English to Telugu. She has extensively published research articles and translations

in English and Telugu. Her major publications in English include *Australian Aboriginal Women's Autobiographies: A Critical Study* (2006), *Flowering from the Soil: Dalit Women's Writing from Telugu* (Translation of Dalit Women's Select Writings from Telugu) (2012), *English in the Dalit Context* (co-editor) (2014), *Vibhinna: Voices from Contemporary Telugu Writing* ((co-editor) (2015), *A House on the Outskirts and Other Stories* (Translation of Devarakonda Balagangadhara Tilak's select short fiction from Telugu)(2016), *Influence of English on Indian Women Writers: Voices from the Regional Languages* (2017), *Identities and Assertions: Dalit Women's Narratives* (2017), *The Rock That Was Not* (Translation of Githanjali's Select Short Fiction from Telugu) (2019), *Critical Discourse in Telugu* (2021). Her book-length translations into Telugu include *Neeli Needa: Australia Adivasi Ammayi Atmakatha*; *Daarulu: Tappinchukune Daarulu*, and *Dweeparagalu: Srilanka Strila Sahityam*. She is the editor of Gender Handbooks in Telugu and English for teachers and students of 6-8 and 9-12 classes assigned by Samagra Shiksha, Telangana and funded by UNICEF. She is the President of the Executive Committee of Bhumika Women's Collective, Hyderabad, a non-profit organisation working against gender-based violence. She has recently completed a research project on gender assumptions among adolescent boys, assigned by the Department of Education, Government of Telangana, and funded by UNICEF, Telangana.

RUPKATHA TRANSLATION PROJECT

My Elder Sister's Nose Pin Was Lost Here Only

Contemporary Essays

Maakka Mukku Pulla Geenne Poyindi

By

Joopaka Subhadra

Translation

K. Suneetha Rani



Rupkatha Books

A Rupkatha Journal Initiative

My Elder Sister's Nose Pin Was Lost Here Only

Translated by K. Suneetha Rani from *Maakka Mukku Pulla Geenne Poyindi* by Joopaka Subhadra, first published as a serial column in *Bhumika Streevada Patrika* from December 2007 to December 2015.

Edited by Tarun Tapas Mukherjee

Published under

Rupkatha Translation Project 2025

In collaboration with

Belarusian State Economic University, Belarus

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

Université d'Artois, France

Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium

Published by

Rupkatha Books

Raghunathganj, Murshidabad, West Bengal, India.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21659/rtp0126>

ISBN 978-81-975130-0-8

First published in digital format in India in 2026

Copyright © 2026

Translated essays with K. Suneetha Rani

Editorial materials with Aesthetix Media Services (OPC) Pvt Limited

Distributed digitally under Creative Commons Noncommercial 4.0 International License

Cover design by Tarun Tapas Mukherjee.

Printed digitally in India by Aesthetix Media Services (OPC) Private Limited. www.aesthetixms.com
Typeset in Constantia.

Contents

• Introduction	viii
• Foreword	x
• Translator's Foreword: Nose Pins, Placenta Pots and Fragrances of the Soil	xiii
• Essays	
1. Batkamma Is Distanced from Us	1
2. They Struck off Our Case Like They Fell a Tree	4
3. Do We Have to Remain off the Stage?	7
4. If You Push Us to the Streets, We Will Crush You to Pulp	10
5. Ramabai Ambedkar Carried Dung Baskets	13
6. No, We Don't Want Buffaloes	16
7. You Jailed Me but Can You Jail My Politics?	19
8. Why Should We Carry Chalam?	22
9. Where Are We in Media?	24
10. Sadalakshmi, an Everlasting Idealistic Gem	27
11. How Can the New Parties too Forget Women?	30
12. Sarees Torn and Blouses Pulled	32
13. Are Madiga Writings Not Fit to be Literature?	34
14. Savitribai Phule Sowed the Seeds of Letters	37
15. Mattipulu: Emergence of St, Sc, Bc, Minority Women Writers	40
16. Won't You Let Women Live?	44
17. The Practice of Jogini Women on Rangam Should Be Banned	46
18. Casteist Patriarchy Is the Root Cause of <i>Kongu</i> Identities	49
19. How Can You Make Women in Movements Irrelevant?	52

20. Telangana Is the Land of People's Sammakka and Sarakka	54
21. We Would Have Happily Danced If This Bill Was for All Women	56
22. The Supreme Court Judgment That Broke the Iron Shackles	58
23. How to Thrash Caste Discrimination?	60
24. Honour Killings Are Inhuman	63
25. Saw the Jail and Caught a Fever	65
26. Men's Conspiracy to Blame Women Guilty	68
27. Is Micro-finance Meant to Kill or to Nurture?	71
28. Shhh...Silence	74
29. What More to Be Done for Telangana	77
30. Hail the Million March	79
31. Ritual Oblation Cannot Secure Telangana	82
32. What about the Telangana Madiga Maisamma?	85
33. Mire Must Be Exposed	88
34. Are We Despicable in Our Telangana?	91
35. Is the Dalit Women Leadership not Allowed to Grow?	94
36. Equal Status and Equal Share	96
37. This Battle Is a Live Hearth	98
38. Wish I Had Bashed Them Up	101
39. Are Class Four Women Employees Equal to Us?	103
40. Let's Go to Teertham, Timmakka!	106
41. Sorrows Shared in Pondicherry	109
42. Why Are Temples Built in Offices?	112
43. Tributes from Flowers of the Soil to Chandrasri	114

44. All Women Are Cleaners But...	117
45. Come, Let Us Go to the Telangana Parade	120
46. Dalit Women Should Be Allowed to Celebrate Batkamma	122
47. The Twisting Tongues Should Be Scorched	125
48. Where Is the Gender Quota in the Sub-plan?	127
49. Phulan Devis of the Nirbhaya Society	129
50. A Literary Meeting - Some Tidings	131
51. The Distress None Was Concerned About	133
52. That Night	136
53. Kalekuri Dismantled Caste	138
54. Chardham Pilgrimage Commercialised	140
55. Chandrasri....	142
56. Seemandhra Employees	144
57. Was It Liberation or Merger?	146
58. Bravo, National Commission for Women!	148
59. Rangavalli the Memory of a Warm Winter	150
60. When the Seemandhra Secretariat Ceases to Exist	152
61. No Place - No Time	154
62. Women of the Soil Demand a New Telangana	157
63. How to Protect the Girls?	160
64. Preparations around Telangana	162
65. Long Live Phulan's Inspiration and Consciousness	164
66. If Scavenging is Sacred, Why not Other Castes Do It?	166
67. We Don't Want the Wing Representation	168

68. We Are with You	170
69. Male Rule Sans Women	173
70. Their Grief Makes Us Forget Ours	175
71. Atrocious Feudal Lords Should Be Hanged	177
72. Would the Crow Ever Be Considerate of the Bull's Wound?	180
73. The Auspicious Breaking of <i>Taali</i>	182
74. If The Cow Is Lakshmi for You, Keep It in Your House	184
75. Jogini Prohibition Act in the New State	186
76. Not Sins but Lives Are Being Lost	188
77. Malecracy's Atrocities Did Not Stop	191
78. Politics of Rama's Lineage Are Not Allowed	193
79. Did Not Spare the Schools	195
80. The Wound That Shattered Our Dreams	197

INTRODUCTION

Many serialised articles, novels, and short stories originally published in Indian regional languages have been translated into English. These serialised essays and narratives are important for showcasing regional literary trends to a wider readership. Such trends are particularly evident in some prominent Scheduled languages of India. *Randamoozham (The Second Turn)* by M.T. Vasudevan Nair, a popular adaptation of the *Mahabharata* from Bhima's point of view, was serialised before being published as a book. *Zindaginama* by Krishna Sobti, an authentic record of Punjab before Partition, was originally serialised in Hindi. Later, it was translated into English. *Pathinettavathu Atchakkodu (The Eighteenth Parallel)* by Ashokamitran, which first appeared in Tamil in serial form, was translated into English by Gomathi Narayanan. Digital platforms like Pratilipi and StoryMirror play the role of modern curators of serialised Bhasha literature, publishing articles and stories in original Tamil, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Hindi and Bengali to be translated into English.

The translation of serialised Dalit writing is an important phenomenon in the context of regional language literature. *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature* (1992), edited by Arjun Dangle, first appeared in original Marathi in magazines or as individual columns before being translated into English and anthologised. Another important anthology entitled *Homeless in My Land: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Short Stories* (1992) follows a similar pattern. These translations are instrumental in representing regional Dalit writing to a global readership, with a special emphasis on the "pain, trauma, and oppression" of Dalit communities and their narratives of resistance.

Joopaka Subhadra is a Dalit feminist author-activist who has published essays, columns, short fiction, and poetry in Telugu. *My Elder Sister's Nose Pin was Lost Here Only* is the English translation of a column titled *Ma akka Mukku Pulla Geenne Poyindi*, which Joopaka Subhadra wrote for *Bhumika Streevada Patrika*, a feminist monthly journal in Telugu, from 2007 to 2019. The column offers a poignant commentary on themes connected to society, politics, and movements, with a particular focus on marginalised identities in relation to caste, gender, and religion. K. Suneetha Rani translates between Telugu and English. She has published extensively in both languages, including research articles and translations. This translated volume will carry on the legacy of previously published regional-language literature available in English translation. It will apprise the global audience of the

exemplary leadership of the first Dalit woman minister of Andhra Pradesh, Sadalakshmi, and her tireless efforts to end discriminatory practices in Hindu temples. The evils of the Jogini system, prevalent under different names across India, are critically enumerated and castigated in several articles. The socio-political rhetoric of the original Telugu writings is rendered in English to globalise the regional ecosystem of caste-based disparities. This anthology would be a valuable addition to the pantheon of translated and serialised works by regional writers of the Indian subcontinent.

Prof Indranil Acharya

Professor, Department of English Literature, Language and Cultural Studies

Vidyasagar University, West Bengal, India

FOREWORD

The writings of Joopaka Subhadra offer a profound enquiry into the various shades of caste and its deleterious impact on lower castes. These broader questions of inequality are also examined in the light of struggles for regional autonomy and the various dimensions of development. Her key writings also possess eco-literary sensibilities that question hegemonic literature's obsessions and tropes about Dalits. The ideology of hegemonic culture and the struggles of writers from the margins are foregrounded amid her acerbic delineations. The fragmentation within the oppressed (sub)castes and their fields of literature is curated through the distinct sub-cultural-castes' argumentations. Those sharp critiques invite readers to understand a world of unending suffering among the subjugated sections. The indistinguishability of Dalit lives from the life worlds of sexual minorities, women, and Bahujans, and from other social and economic locations, is constantly explored to expand the meanings of genuine political convictions among subjugated sections in Indian society. Therefore, the pathologies of caste and gender are rearticulated to examine impending threats to democracy. Joopaka Subhadra unfolds the cancerous growth of a dehumanised society through her relentless perspectives. The nature of resistance against all forms of oppression is equally mapped through Dalit feminist internal critiques of Dalit communities and other so-called progressive Brahminical political forms of various hues. Her audacity, therefore, needs to be understood as a critical re-reading of social and political decadence.

The author also warns of the disastrous future of Dalits due to the thoughtlessness and consequent political/cultural inertia of the community. Interestingly, such a radical critique by Joopaka Subhadra does not parody or fall into the usual critique of Dalit movements by the Brahminical intelligentsia and upper- and middle-caste-dominated political groups. She debunks the hypocrisy of upper-caste-dominated academic institutions and their patronisation and conscious suppression of the assertions of the people from below the caste-class order. Some of her writings demonstrate how the notion of the common good is fractured in the midst of brutal social cleavages. It thus exposes some of the fallacies of the conceptual rigmarole within dominant academic institutional spaces as well. Her writings are ostensibly concerned with the possibilities and impediments related to the social and political voices of the oppressed castes and genders. At the same time, it resists the theoretical reductionism of the Brahminic scholarship that

romanticises and homogenises the Dalit, Adivasi, and queer struggles. The homophobia within the Dalit and upper-caste communities is noted in a rigorous manner.

The political erasure of Dalit women in particular and Dalits in general, especially in the struggles for the independence of a region like Telangana, is often treated as an unending question throughout her writings. It needs to be analysed as a departure from the clichéd scholastic reproduction of social movements and their politics of citations. Joopaka Subhadra grapples with the intersections of diverse societal polarisations and their vibrant assertions. She thus points out how new forms of exploitation and epistemic oppression of Dalits are being carried out through forms of political solidarity around the region. An analysis along those lines does not belittle other forms of solidarity among the lower castes in a cynical fashion. She tries not to disorient solidarity among Dalits by complicating the idea of solidarity. On the other hand, it should be seen as a theoretical nuance regarding the idea of solidarity.

The complexity and weight of her writings add new subtexts to the ongoing social, cultural and political dialogues among the sidelined castes and genders across India as well as the globe. Her unique recognition of the political and the social in the light of Dalits and the region provokes us to rethink the politicisation of language, religion, and region. It offers new directions to critical understandings of the ruling caste-classes' recursive strategies and grammar. The upper castes and their paroles of power, and their deployment at various levels of mainstream life, are continuously challenged through the ethical writing of Joopaka Subhadra. She speaks to the reader, or to one who wants to learn politics and culture in a systematic fashion. Her rigorous understanding of cultural and ideological transitions, therefore, is far from the arcane monologues of the new-age politicians and postmodern academics. She seeks to question the politics of food culture ingrained in organised religion. The co-option of visual culture by totalitarian forces is also a core theme of her writings. The humiliation of Dalits through media bias is further asserted in the age of much-contested digital sovereignty. Rooted in the genealogy of anti-caste thought and praxis, she underscores the necessity of returning to those pioneering icons to alter the current moments of caste-linked tyranny. Joopaka Subhadra considers this an open-ended way to problematise the past and the present. Her stories become apt arenas for strengthening political momentum. She investigates the changing forms of politics and anti-modernity in the neoliberal phase of socially regulated capitalism.

Her astute observations on the existence of the precariat Dalits and the question of urban relations challenge the tedious accounts of urbanisation and Dalits. Her writings reveal certain worlds of law and justice that are manipulated by the upper castes to convert Dalits into criminals. The modernising power of social change through law is depicted as torpidised by anti-legal dictums and modern variants of caste. Joopaka Subhdra, therefore, engages in deep reflection on the epistemic priority of Dalit women and Dalits through the selfless collectives of Dalit intellectuals from various states in India. Suneetha Rani attempts a serious engagement with the writings of Joopaka Subhdra through her meticulous translation. It orients us to travel through the quintessential thoughts of Joopaka Subhdra. Her thoughts enable us to attend to the social ramifications of caste and citizenship. These writings may enlighten those who want to delve into the social and political awakenings from the margins of India.

Dr. Smita M. Patil

Associate Professor

School of Gender and Development Studies, IGNOU, India

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

Nose Pins, Placenta Pots and Fragrances of the Soil

Rain means fragrant earth, pricking droplets, and binding water streams. Rain rages, gets dense, comes down, returns, drowns, and drags along with it. Changes its colour according to the soil, adjusts its speed by the season, and decides its direction by the ups and downs. It interrogates, makes us hop, hugs with affection, and aims the arrows of questions. This volume of Joopaka Subhadra's essays is similar to such rain. The essays that showered once a month are now consolidated into a book. How the lightning reaches the readers also depends on their locations and experiences.

Maakka Mukku Pulla Geenne Poyindi (My Elder Sister's Nose Pin was Lost Here Only) held a mirror up to conflicts, identity movements, and protests from December 2007 to December 2015 in *Bhumika Streevada Patrika*, a Telugu-language feminist magazine. This column was like a commentary and an archive of the ongoing history. Each essay haunts and pricks like an arrow, jolts us up, and stays in our thoughts. The author has critically examined landmark developments in history, from the Dalit movement to the life struggles of transgender communities. Her location, Telangana, is a battleground, a wounded land; its movement is a hot furnace, fighting for a state of their own, for self-respect, and rights. Then, what about the Dalit women? What is the status of Dalit women? In the author's words, Dalit Bahujan women are the defeated under the defeated. Telangana Madiga Maisammas have become irrelevant in movements and have disappeared.

Dalit Bahujan women have no place and time in this male, casteist society. They continue to remain off-stage. Women of the downtrodden sections are caught in jails, hospitals, on the roads, secretariats, victimised by domestic violence, sexual assaults, and allegations of black magic. Subhadra has a pertinent question about when these women will access their rights and human rights. She agonises when the collective, united sorrows will mobilise into a movement. She moves to tears, forgetting Dalit women's hardships, looking at the struggles of transgender and hijra people.

Rain does not end with pouring and drenching; it also argues, struggles, and demands rights and equality. Subhadra presents a brilliant discussion of Ramabai Ambedkar, Sadalakshmi, and Savitribai Phule, who inspired and transformed the lives of Dalits and Bahujans. She remembers the phenomenal women who disappeared from history, like

Chandrasri and Phulan Devi. She questions why Dalit Bahujan women have to carry Kandukuri Veeresalingam, a social reformer whose reform applied only to women of privileged castes. Her questions become sharper when she asks why the reformers and writers did not have the sense that women have not just mind and heart but also caste and labour.

Similarly, she wonders why Dalit women's leadership is not allowed to grow. Where is gender equality, and what is equal participation in Telangana built on the foundations of social justice? How did the small shrines of goddesses built by Dalit Bahujans and Adivasis become brahmanical temples? Why did people's Batukamma become a government celebration? Subhadra argues that Batkamma should be democratised to make it accessible to women of all castes.

While she is on the subject of the Srikrishna Committee and the Telangana movement, Subhadra raises an important issue about shifting locations. All are equal in the movement, but why do women cook on roads, Madigas polish shoes, and washerfolk wash clothes to express their dissent? Women and marginalised communities are mobilised to strengthen the movement, but not to function in decision-making roles.

Subhadra insists that women do not want to remain mere women's wings in associations, organisations, and movements, and demands a place not in the kitchen but in the village panchayat. She discusses the association of women writers of marginalised communities who came together with literary and political consciousness. She also draws our attention to the absence of women on stage, even in movements and post-movement separate states. Women might come together, occasionally, as women. Still, they are not free from hegemonic authorities that they use against other women, not just in the movements but also in the workplace.

These essays closely examine diverse identities, hierarchical societies, politics of various kinds, and movements, combined with sarcasm, humour, anguish, fury, protest, resistance, and solidarity with those caught in the whirlwind of discrimination yet moving forward with all their strength. They further sharpen Dalit literature and Dalit feminist ideology.

These essays span three phases in the political evolution of Telangana: before the emergence of the latest phase of the Telangana movement, during the movement, and the formation of the separate state. Subhadra offers a critical commentary from a Dalit feminist perspective on these phases, connecting them to the larger politics of caste, class, gender,

religion, region, sexuality, and politics, not just in Telangana but across the country, invoking the historical contexts where necessary. The essays help us understand not just the emergence of the state but also the Dalit feminist thought that evolved across three phases, with intersectional and multiple dimensions of identity consciousness, the question of region looming large in the background. There are repetitions in the essays. This will give us an idea of how the author understood these issues in the changing caste-gender politics, for instance, by remembering Chandrasri and Phulan Devi or by critiquing the jogini system.

I am a researcher-translator and an insider-outsider to this volume. Ideologically, I am in solidarity with the Dalit and Telangana movements. But, geographically and socially, I am an outsider, though I do not come from privileged social and regional locations. I aimed to translate Subhadra's thoughts and tone into English. I do have a difference of opinion with her. I do not agree with some of her arguments and statements. But this is primarily Subhadra's text. So, I set aside my disagreement and role as a researcher, and made the translator stand in the forefront.

Thanks to Subhadra for asking me to translate these essays into English. At different points in my research, I have analysed these essays. But, translating all of them was a different experience as I had to follow the thought that continued for eight years, published every month, at a stretch. Thanks also to the Rupkatha Translation Project for readily accepting the proposal.

Dr K. Suneetha Rani
Professor, Centre for Women's Studies, University of Hyderabad.

Batkamma Is Distanced from Us

(December 2007)

Recently, Telangana Batkamma reverberated even in Delhi. We were delighted. Last year, Bharat Bhushan toured the Telangana villages, filled the eyes of the camera with Batkammias, framed them in mirrors and celebrated the festival of flowers in their homes for many people. I bloomed with joy looking at those photos.

But what is the point? The relationship between Batkamma and our women is like “rejoice while looking at it and cry while narrating it”. This Batkamma spreads its fold for the flowers not generally touched in villages like *tangedu*¹, *jilledu* (milkweed), *katla* (morning glory), *gunugu* (buffalograss), *beera* (ridge gourd), smears, sings and plays for them. But, such Batkamma has kept women of Dalit communities at a distance. I don't know why she kept the Dalit women, who taught song and play to trees, hillocks, sweat, leaves, weeds, wind, and dust, at a distance! I don't know whose jealous eyes caused this.

Batkammias keep Dalit women at a distance and so are getting drowned in water without even touching Dalit women's colourful songs and playful games. This Batkamma festival is also called the *Saddula* (food offerings) festival. The celebrations begin in the evening of the *petra amasa* (new moon day on which offerings are made to the ancestors) in *atram* (*asveeja*) month. It is called *engili pulu* (spittle flowers). Batkamma is made for eight days, with flowers available during that season. Women gather in their respective localities and place these Bathukamma in a round rangoli drawn by them with red earth. They dance around it, clapping and singing. On the ninth day, the leisure castes who have time to gather a large number of flowers take Batkamma to the lake. Shudra castes, busy slogging, cannot gather many flowers, so they make small Batkammias around which they dance and sing till it is dark. Then, they distribute *sattu pindi*², groundnut balls, green gram

¹ Tanner's Cassia. State flower of Telangana.

² a traditional dry roasted powder made of lentils/grains or rice mixed with sugar

balls, and sesame balls as *palaarams* (snacks/offerings). These are called *saddulu* (offerings). All the villagers, including men and women, children, and older people, gather at the lake to see the women who look like floral Batkamma. The numerous colourful flowers gathered there make it difficult to distinguish between flowers and women. But, it pricks like a thorn not to see a single Dalit woman in that gathering.

The song is work, and work is a song for Dalit women. When I asked her when, how, and why Batkamma was distanced from them, my grandmother unravelled the details.

My dear, long ago, all women, irrespective of superior and inferior differences, went to the lake with the Batkamma and played. Our grandmother also did not know when it happened. It is said to have happened much before that. A woman from our village was tired of toiling all day. There was a stream on her way. She went there to wash herself. As it was getting dark, she hurriedly collected the flowers around her house. She did not find a new pot, so she took one used and kept it in the attic. She arranged flowers in that pot. She searched the pots and vessels but could not find a single grain. She agonised, thinking, 'Let distress strike this house. Not a single grain. What shall I do? It is a festival. It seems Batkamma will curse if *palaaram* (offerings) is not distributed. It is getting dark as well.' Meanwhile, the meat pieces drying up on the line looked like a bosom friend to her. 'No one distributed meat in the past. What will happen? Meat is also food, is it not? Is this poison or what? Which gods have refrained from eating meat? They have all eaten meat,' she convinced herself, and she thought, 'I can distribute the pieces to all if I take a big piece of meat.' She took a large piece of meat from the line and roasted it over a mud stove. She wore a good saree and blouse, oiled her hair, and hurriedly combed it. She took the meat piece from the mud stove, dusted the ashes, placed it on the Batkamma and started for the lake.

Crows and eagles sensed the meat and followed her as she carried the Batkamma. She would have reached the lake in a while. Would the thieving eagles let her? They probably thought they couldn't grab it once she reached the crowd. A giant eagle grabbed the meat piece on the Batkamma like a chick and flew away. On seeing this, the villagers said, 'how shameful, you put a meat piece on Batkamma. The eagle took it away. What have

you done? The eagle took your Batkamma along with the meat piece. From now on, your people cannot play Batkamma', and restricted them from playing Batkamma. They did not heed the wailings and arguments of our village women. Batkamma slipped away from the hands of our women. Our people cried oceans during the Batkamma festival. Our women have not lost the wish to play Batkamma, but when they watch the village women celebrate Batkamma with songs and dance, Batkamma seems to look at them angrily through her eyes of flowers.

But, my dear, now our women are playing Batkamma, setting aside that restriction. Paper Batkammass are sold in cities, and people dance around them, it seems. When our people play Batkamma, the villagers look down on us and ridicule us behind us. 'Why do they need the dignity that they don't deserve? Why do these women have to play? They are insulting Batkamma by playing it'.

They Struck off Our Case Like They Fell a Tree

(January 2008)

We are like the trees in the forest. We did not go to them, nor did we hear about them. We did not say black or white to them. We are unaware of their moves and ploys.

We live like trees, streams, birds, and beehives in the forest on our own. We don't know about your language and demeanour. Did we come to your concrete jungles? Did we even reply to you? Then why are you throwing rocks into the lakes of our lives? Who gave you the authority to oppress us? Cursed be those who created your morals. Burnt be your morality. You did the *panchanama*³ without taking any blame. You protected the culprits. We only wandered in the concrete jungle like the troubled dogs. Human rights, it seems, maybe they don't apply to us. Our human rights were buried deep in the earth. Although the facts stood straight in the shades of the trees in concrete jungles, the judges tied a cloth to their eyes and did injustice to us. No complaint, no inquiry.

Those wretched wolves wore police uniforms and held bayonets. Let there be a death in their house, let thieves stab them, let their throats be slit, let such agony fall on them, let their future generations die of our curse, let them be ruined. It seems they struck off our case after the enquiry. Tomorrow, they will cut us like the trees in the forest.

Our grief knows no bounds. It is the same agony, same story, starting from Ekalavya, Komuram Bheem to Vakapalli. You are ruining all the living beings in the forest, such as us, trees, hillocks, birds, and others. Let your sight be cursed; our entire forest is being destroyed by the market like a baby abandoned by its mother. Your eyes are vicious. From time immemorial, all kinds of people have eyed our forest and on us. One fellow said there are stones; another said there are gems, and someone else said there is bauxite– they used

³ A *panchanama* is a document that records the findings and evidence of an offense or crime at its scene, and is translated to "record of observation by five people" in English.

monstrous machines to dig up and loot our mother forest and stake it in the market. We never harmed our forest. You are finding reasons to charge us with allegations of theft.

That day, the wolves with guns tortured us, saying *annas* came; we naively took a dip in water, assuming some curse. We didn't know that it would betray us. Will the wounds go to the wind if we dip in the water? Ask our barren fields that witnessed it if the wounds are not found in your inquiry. They will answer like a slap. Ask our shifting fields. They will show the places where we struggled. Our trees will elaborate. Ask our leaves; they will show you the traces. The insects will narrate the truth in detail. The birds will speak, beating the drum of their wings. Come to the forest. The truth will be clear. The surroundings will tell you the truth. They have all seen our broken bangles, torn clothes, bruised skin and our grief turning into streams.

Our wounds have not dried up like the flowing blood. They are still burning in our stomachs. Our evidence was sufficient to bind the wolves but you did not have the guts. You are all one. Will one wolf catch another or reveal the truth? You did injustice to us to protect those boynets. Your concrete jungle came together to protect them.

Those ministers looked like *mayala fakirs* (tricksters). We believed some human rights sirs would do good to us when they trustingly spoke to us. But, we did not know that they hugged us but had knives in their stomachs. How would we know that they were glittering outside but rotten inside? We thought you would do justice to us by penalising and imprisoning the ones who destroyed us. Morality is like a stream in our country, oozing kindness and forgiveness. That's why our people bathed our wounds of your atrocity and accepted us in caste and family. We have still not allowed your concrete jungle morality to enter our forest kingdom. If we were in your country, we would have gone to the wind like dry leaves away from our caste and family. It seems there are many women destroyed like us in your country. Let the concrete jungle be on fire. Our country is better.

All your concrete people look the same to us. Tell us how to identify and recognise the ash concrete bayonet. We never forget our forest people if we see them once. Why go that far? We easily recognise the trees, birds, leaves, weeds, streams, paths, and all living

beings, despite their several forms and colours, even if we see them once. We can identify any creature behind the leaves, but we could not identify the people of your country. We can list millions of trees and beings in our forest without fail. Can you do that? We can understand what we know. You can understand what you know. Then, how do you become intelligent, and how do we become stupid? Instead of trying to understand this, you look at us like animals in the forest.

Some people from your country stood by us shouting and arguing. We were taken from place to place like fish out of the pond. But we did not get justice. On one hand, you say nothing has happened to us. On the other hand, you promised to give us cattle and money to try to extinguish the fire blowing in us. Such are your concrete jungle's ploys. You ask some random questions like Kaika and Mandhara. You trouble us by asking vague questions. It was you who asked us reverse questions, and it was you who blamed us for saying unconnected things. We don't have sixty kinds of morals like you.

Our words and deeds are like a fort. Our morals are like herbal medicine. Our morals do not prioritise loss of life over loss of modesty.

We understand your conspiracy to drive us away from this forest like the trees by convoluting our case to save the wolves. You drew out the hillocks, birds, trees, all living beings, and bauxite from our mother forest aiming the bayonets. We will not allow your ploys to drive us away from our mother's womb.

Your eyes are vicious like the ominous bird. We will save our mother forest like her children from your eyes and the attacks of crows and eagles. We will not come into your concrete jungle even when we are dead. You will only come to our country one day. Then, we will settle your scores.

3

Do We Have to Remain off the Stage?

(February 2008)

Recently, a Bahujan gentleman concluded that women in our dalit bahujan communities enjoy liberty and equality in abundance, claiming that they are not subject to as many restrictions as upper caste women, and do not endure the same ordeals.

It is not men who should be saying this. If women are asked, they will sieve the facts like fire about their agony and anguish. Dalit bahujan women are the defeated placed below the defeated. If asked, our Yellammas and Poshammas will unveil all the details.

The liberty of toiling for wages on par with men, the democracy of having to take care of home and children, providing for firewood and food when there is no money for provisions and vegetables, and equality of drinking arrack together have all been imposed on us. If they discuss these matters with us in public, they will know that these are our so-called liberty and equality.

We don't want liberty at the stove, but the one at the village council. These Dalit Bahujan communities had women in authority earlier. Now, gradually, these men are pushing us to the background. We are absent from upper-caste people's parties. We are not even like the rice grain in gruel in Dalit associations. Not even a single woman was heard or seen in Dandora to Nangara.

These people scream out that there are no women in upper caste people's political parties, lower caste people lack opportunities, and face oppression. But what are they doing? They are following the systems of the upper caste people. It is commendable that they protest against the upper caste practices, but it is a pity that they mimic the same. Women seem to be getting the same treatment everywhere. They are thinking of ruling the world by placing women at home and men at work. They do not know that even in the *Puranas*, Allirani's reign exists, but not Arjuna's. That's why they continue to distance women.

We don't find women in the communist revolutionary parties that claim absolute equality as their ultimate goal, even on an extensive search. But, they want women to be in large numbers in their cadre.

From the ruling classes fighting for separate Telangana to the intellectual forum claiming to be progressive Telangana supporters, to playing *dhum dham*, we don't get to see women on stage. Even among the Madiga, Mala, and Dalit communities that proudly proclaim their matriarchal values, women are there only to see and rejoice, and to narrate and cry. Women are not seen in Dalit Mahasabha, Madiga Dandora, BC associations, and Nangara and Erukala associations. But they wish to have a number of women offstage. Some leaders do not allow their women even off the stage. Such is the justice within the social movement.

The feminist leadership that argues and fights for gender equity does not have any agendas or programmes on the foundations of the caste system that lead to inequality among people of the same gender. Here, too, Dalit, Bahujan, and minority women are excluded from the feminist platforms.

Let us think that the upper caste parties and associations are unjust, and they do not allow lower caste people to step in. Then we will ask about the lower-caste associations. Where is our share? What is our leadership? Remember that you cannot be leaders without us.

Caste associations emerged in the past ten to twenty years. Women are not seen even in a single caste association as they are intolerant of women's representation. They remember Ambedkar every day. But, they do not implement the ideals of Ambedkar, who gave up the ministry, for he believed that men and women are equal. How can we believe you when you say our women have equality when you do not even allow women to enter? What is our share and discussion in people's associations, meetings and mobilisation of the oppressed? Where is our voice in the forum for minority empowerment, equal rights and social alliances? Don't we need political empowerment? We are the ones who experience and agonise all kinds of attacks in this casteist society. We are pushed into the well when

the issue of politics and power comes up. This is your politics. Your crowns will fall if a woman is seen among the raising hands on the dais in any political alliance. It would be good for you to remember that a Chamar woman, Mayavathi, could access political power in Uttar Pradesh, which was not possible for any valiant Dalit man in this country of myriad castes.

But, it is painful that they celebrated Mayawathi's victory without inviting a single woman and declared it a success. Let us hope for the Mayawatisation of the dais in future.

If You Push Us to the Streets, We Will Crush You To Pulp

(March 2008)

Gaurementu Saaru...

We are wearing away like broomsticks sweeping the streets for twenty to thirty years.

We slogged day and night. We were destroyed when thieves, deceitful dogs, and human-looking dogs attacked us. We lost our lives at the speed of drunk and driven motors. If there are potholes on the roads, you fix them hurriedly. Are we worse than concrete roads? Don't you see the dents in our lives?

We swept the roads clean like mirrors. We waited for our jobs to become permanent as if we were waiting for a pilgrimage all these years. Our hands have swollen blood vessels like concrete clearing your garbage. You brought these machines and threw away our lives like garbage on the road. You created a competition between our broom hands and machines.

You are exhibiting these machines to boast of your progress. But, we know the hidden intentions. Don't think we do not know. We can say which road goes where, which is made of mud, concrete, cement, or tar, and how much it costs. You put forth these machines to get bank loans in developed countries, beg for leftovers, and lick their feet. Would you throw us into the well and turn our lives into kutchra roads for the sake of those pucca roads?

These cities are growing with villages around them. That's how the awareness about good and evil grows. People are unable to digest this. They claim machines are cheaper than human labour. They show the machines and eliminate humans to boast of the country's development. Machines have become fashionable for you in the place of humans with flesh and blood. These machines are meant to drag our poor lives onto the streets in the developing countries' competition with the G Summit. The roads accustomed to our

sweat are full of ups and downs and potholes. How can machines that sweep the smooth roads in developed countries sweep such roads in our country, ridden with seven kinds of exploitation⁴? You are planning to replace us, the municipal people, who have been sweeping against all odds with such machines, spending crores of rupees. Now, you will know what machines are and what humans are. You remind us of the one without sorrow buying a lean buffalo.

We clean the roads of all kinds of dirt that society looks down upon. We have left the villages for the cities. But, drainage cleaning and scavenging have stayed with us. Many societies, but not the caste system, have been swept away in the streams of time. Sanitation work has been imposed on us untouchables from the times of kings to capitalists.

Your government offices and railway stations that claim development and modernity have people of no other caste but us to clean the toilets and tracks. The upper caste Hindu society closes its nose and mouth and stays away. But we do this menial work for survival and live pathetically. You are snatching that food by bringing in these machines. We have no guarantee for our work and life. You snatched our leather, pushed us into the graveyard, and attained power. Now, you are forcing us onto the roads by bringing the machines. We are capable Dalit women. The skill of delivering children is ours. We are the tattoos that smear greenery on this earth. We are the ones who comb and decorate the roads.

You think humans are becoming smart, but machines will never raise their voice. They won't ask for a hike in salary or regularisation. They won't ask for protection at night. In order to avoid these, you are aiming for commissions in the name of these machines, for crores of money in the name of repairs, and wishing for these machines. You might think that machines have no hunger, thirst, or voice. But, they have their own misery. Their lives will also end up in garbage. Are they better than our sweeping hands? Several years ago, when machines were brought to replace humans, they revolted like we are now. Sir, please listen. Why should we burn ourselves mimicking the developed countries? We have no

⁴ Such as exploitation of food, water, labour, clothing, livelihood, home, family.

shortage of working hands. We have the muscle to break the hills. Your treasuries will go empty spending on the food, work, and disease of the white elephant-like machines when compared to the minimal wages you throw at us.

Machines are like Alsatian fur dogs for idle countries and people who don't have to toil. But, if they come to compete with us, whose hunger is never satiated, we will crush them into garbage.

Ramabai Ambedkar Carried Dung Baskets

(April 2008)

Recently, the life story of Ramabai Ambedkar was introduced to the literary world of Telugu through a translation. Her story invokes the streams of grief for Dalit men and women, particularly for those involved in movements.

It envelops us with a darkness that disrupts our sleep.

Santiswaroop had written Ramabai Ambedkar's life story in Marathi years ago, and now Dr. G.V. Ratnakar has brought it to Telugu.

It is astonishing to know that the life partner of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who gave the spirit and direction to the Indian Constitution, carried dung baskets to look after the family. The companion and children of Dr Ambedkar, who identified the structures of caste in Indian society, fought for emancipation, and created constitutional provisions, reservations and democratic rights for the downtrodden and women, died of starvation. Dr Ambedkar resigned from the ministry in protest when the Hindu Code Bill he designed for women's upliftment was defeated in the Parliament. The women activists of those days have extensively documented how Dr. Ambedkar officially supported several women's movements. Surprisingly, the family of Dr Ambedkar, with such an illustrious history, lived in penury with no food and medicines.

Ambedkar lamented in his writings that Ramabai had to tear a piece from her saree to cover their son's dead body because they could not afford a new cloth.

Ambedkar's sacrifice of his ministry for the Hindu Code Bill is probably Ambedkar fulfilling Ramabai's wish for the cause of women after Ramabai's death, in response to her questions, "Is it not written in the books you read how men should respond to women and families?"

Ramabai Ambedkar's history as the wife of a great social reformer, politics entwined around it, and her family circumstances resonate with the lives of the partners of the poor

Dalit leaders in contemporary movements. We cannot say that Ramabai Ambedkar's life is intertwined only with Ambedkar's political life.

Anveshi friends read this book, understood the gender, caste, family, social, and economic politics against the backdrop of 8th March and invited people from diverse social backgrounds to an engaging discussion.

Based on their social backgrounds and understanding of movements, they tried to weave and design theories and give judgements.

Wasn't it irresponsible to ignore his wife and family?

How do we look at Ramabai in the context of women's emancipation movements?

Was it fair to discourage Ramabai when she wanted to enter the movement?

Ramabai was poor and was orphaned in childhood. Poverty haunted her even after her marriage to B.R. Ambedkar. Drudgery, family, children, relatives, and husband were her entire world. She was not educated. She might not have been able to politically analyse the movement her husband was leading, its greatness and its philosophy. She might not have gained anything personally from the movement. But, she indeed contributed to what Ambedkar proposed for the lower castes. She supported Ambedkar's political moves and his movement life by carrying dung baskets and starving without food. We cannot blame individuals for her suffering, sorrow, agony, hunger, and poverty. It is the economic depression that the caste system has planned for the lower castes.

If we examine Ramabai's life, gender, and family without understanding the foundations of the caste system, we will be faced only with stereotypical questions. If we do not understand and pay attention to the undemocratic caste system, arguments will emerge saying that gender is stronger than caste.

Gender politics with food, clothing, livelihood, education, and position are not the same as gender politics without food, water, and comfort. We cannot treat these as equals. Which dimensions should we search for in Ramabai's poverty, disease and death? Which

gender has to be blamed? We have just started to collect tools to measure and examine these complexities.

We do not get to see such terrible poverty in the case of the wives of leaders such as Gandhi and the other contemporaries of Ambedkar. Ambedkar's wife did not have comforts and servants in discussions and movements. That is caste. It is continuing. The economic comfort available to the movement leaders of the upper castes is not available to the movement leaders from Dalit communities.

We do not generally come across the life stories of Dalit leaders and women leaders who led significant political and social movements in our society. It is indeed significant that the life story of Ramabai Ambedkar, the companion of a great Dalit leader who gave direction to the casteist society, is published now.

6

No, We Don't Want Buffaloes

(May 2008)

Last week, our Sammakka came home crying, "Selle⁵, the buffaloes the government gave us dropped dead. What shall I do? How do I pay the loan?" My Akka⁶ is like a bridge between our village and us, carrying news about the village, crops, fights, beatings, and everything else. She is not literate but she can meticulously narrate a million things.

I consoled her from the sorrow of the dead buffaloes and enquired about the details. I asked her, "You bought them recently. How did they die so soon? Don't you have to nurture them well? They perhaps died due to lack of water and fodder". "Water and fodder? No, Selle, four of us at home stopped going to labour and instead collected grass for the buffaloes and carried water for them. We slogged for them. Cursed be those buffaloes, each one ate a cart full of grass and drank thirty pitchers of water daily. How can we afford it, dear? Ours is a famine-struck village with no pitcher full of water for us to drink. Where can we get that many pitchers of water for the buffaloes? How would we have survived if our buffaloes ate and drank like this? We would have been dead, unable to nurture them."

"Did I not take the cattle of the Sudra community of the village for wage grazing? I nurtured many of them till they delivered and handed over the mothers and babies to the owners".

When I asked her what wage grazing meant, Akka started talking, "Oh, did you forget it after living in the city, dear? Pregnant cattle are sent to our SC homes for wage grazing in villages. They are our responsibility from conception to delivery. We have to take care of their food, water, and everything. After labour, we have to nourish the calf and hand it over to them. They will calculate some money as wages for that work. It is called wage grazing. Women in that village do not know how to care for the cattle, and so send them

⁵ Chelli, meaning younger sister.

⁶ Elder sister

to our houses. I have nurtured hundreds of cattle like that. Not a single one died in my house. But, I am unable to handle these two buffaloes. Alas, unmanageable buffaloes, selle. I have not seen such buffaloes in my lifetime. Don't know where they were born. My hands cannot reach them; they are that huge. Not a single hair on their bodies. The entire family served them, but they did not survive. They had to be bathed every day. They should not get exposed to the sun, rain, or cold. We have to protect them like our lives. There should be no stench around them. The place where they are tied should be clean like a mirror without any garbage. Apart from this, we should give them medicines on alternative days and take them to the doctor. We don't have all these comforts. How can we provide for them? But, we valued their arrival and did everything we could even though we had nothing. We slept outside and put them in the hut as they required more space.

Alas, Selle, we don't have a drop of coconut oil to apply to our hair. But, we have to apply coconut oil all over their bodies and massage them daily. How can I massage such a big buffalo?! I called two or three young men and got the massage done. Our neighbours laughed, saying, "They are fortunate, Sammakka. Their life is better than ours". We served them without rest and sleep, but they collapsed like mounds. What is the use? We have a debt now. They were royal cattle. How can we poor nurture them? We will get the sin of torturing the voiceless cattle to death.

Despite knowing about our poverty, the government gave us the buffaloes, boasting, "They will give vessels full of milk. You can lead a relaxed life. You will become a millionaire". Leave alone milk, they died without a place, water, green grass, medicines and a doctor. Probably, our nourishment was inadequate for them. I did whatever I could. Are they not expensive? Not a penny or two, each one has cost fifteen thousand rupees. How do I repay the debt to the government in these times of famine? Farmers' debts have been condoned, it seems. Wish these debts were also condoned. We are ruined after buying these buffaloes. Instead of giving us the buffaloes we can handle, they are imposing these buffaloes upon us. Government people said, "Your buffaloes give only three to four litres of milk. These buffaloes give ten litres. You will build houses and mansions". We believed it to be true.

We have to spend two to three hundred rupees a day on water, fodder, oil, medicines, and the doctor for those buffaloes. What would we save on their milk except a debt of one hundred to two hundred rupees daily? We have a debt that we borrowed for the maintenance of the buffaloes, not just the bank loan. Our buffaloes ate a bundle of dry grass, grazed in the forest, drank some fodder, and gave four to five litres of milk. We could make some money by selling milk and we had no debts to be paid.

But, the government people came again and proposed to give us the buffaloes. People pounced on them to beat up.

The Pasukranthi Scheme has been imposed on Dalit castes and tribes as a varna dharma economic system and a ridiculous scheme by the upper caste rulers. We clearly understood the secrets of the dead cattle that people like us are burdened by the dried up and diseased cattle with various hybrids and pesticides that ate wheat grass in Punjab and Haryana during the green revolution. It was to benefit the upper caste rulers to get their commission.

You Jailed Me But Can You Jail My Politics?

(June 2008)

I received a call from the daughter of Suguna, MPTC of Madikonda village, when I was working on a project at Anveshi on Dalit Women's Administration in Panchayat Raj. She said, almost pleading, "Madam, they put my mother in jail. She wants to talk to you. Will you come?" I eagerly asked, "What happened? Why did they put her in jail? Who put her in jail?" She cried, "How can I tell you on the phone? My mother will tell you everything when you are here. You come fast. Some jealous donkeys must have done this". I told her I would come and went to the jail to meet Suguna.

Suguna studied up to the seventh class. No one in her community had studied more than her. She has two daughters. Her husband died when the children were still young. She wanted to educate them but got them married due to pressure from cousins. The village was reserved for S.C. women in elections. The villagers discussed among themselves that Suguna was educated with no strings attached and was amenable to the villagers. They made her contest and ensured her success. Suguna is a straightforward person. She is just and helpful to people.

I went to Warangal jail, applied for a mulaqat (meeting), and met Suguna. Suguna narrated the story, "Akka, the mandal president, deputy sarpanch, and police conspired against me and put me in jail. I curse them. The Mandal president is grudgingly against me as I asked about elderly people's pensions and funds and pointed out the condition of borewells in the village in our meetings. In one meeting, he mocked me, "Your husband is dead. Why do you need politics? Sit quietly. Why does a woman need to know about the accounts? Is any other woman talking in the meeting? You are the only one, as if you are Indira Gandhi". He humiliated me. No one stopped him even when he said to me, "Why are you alive?" Unable to take his words, I went to the police station in tears. I did not say anything to that fellow, Akka. I talked as they asked us to talk and share problems. For that, this Mandal president belittled me in public. That fellow hates me as I do not belong to his

party. He thinks low of me as I don't have a husband. He blabbered like that as I had nobody to support me and talk on my behalf. I thought the police would take care of him and beat him to a pulp. So, I complained to the police. But, the police did nothing.

I was tortured even more for going to the police station. I was scared of going to the mandal office. They were increasingly spitting at me and abusing me on the pretext of driving the dogs and foxes away. Fed up with a life tortured by all, I consumed pesticides. People noticed and rushed me to the hospital. I survived, but the police filed a case against me for attempting suicide. They threatened to put me in jail.

Unable to bear their torture, I stopped travelling on party work and meeting work. They thought I had become trouble for the Mandal president and the deputy sarpanch. Sometimes, meetings happen at my house. They suspected that I was gaining popularity in politics and provoked my community people to attack me. "What, you woman, did you think this is a locality of family women or loose women? What kind of meetings are you holding with men? You are insulting the community," they attacked my house and tried to kill me. I managed to escape. They spilt around the paddy spread for drying at the door, saying, "Who brought this?" They broke the water pitchers in the bathroom.

Cursed be this MPTC position. I won unnecessarily. I was at home, but was dragged into the public. I did not mind when they called me a shrew and a loudmouth. As if I were being insulted less, they are attributing prostitution to me now. The fellow died, leaving me in such hardships. Wish he had taken me along with him. Had I failed to escape and stayed at home, they would have killed me. Akka, who can I complain to in the village and community? Which god will come to my rescue? Those police people are rogues. I was scared that people might come back to kill me if I kept quiet. I went to the police station and complained of a threat to my life. I threatened them that I wouldn't keep quiet if you responded the way you responded to my previous complaints. I would go to the human rights people and media, create a stir, and drag your lives into public. The fellows thought this woman might do what she said and feared losing their reputation. The sub-inspector, deputy sarpanch and mandal president conspired, dug out the previous attempt to suicide case, and put me in jail.

What wrong did I do? I came to politics to do good for the village and the community. They put me in jail. Can they put my politics in jail?

8

Why Should We Carry Chalam⁷?

(July 2008)

Magazines have brought up Chalam for a major discussion again.

It is a commendable attempt to collect the opinions of women from different backgrounds on Chalam's writings. This did not happen all these years.

Till now, Chalam and his writings have been categorically thrust on all women. Without thinking about the responses of women from diverse backgrounds to Chalam, they propagated that Chalam was a reformer for all women. They circulated it and gathered support. They suppressed the words and voices of women from Dalit and lower castes and unilaterally declared that Chalam emancipated all women. It is a democratic practice to listen and recognise the opinions of lower caste women in such contexts. Chalam's literature revolved around women in *agraharas*. It is necessary to evaluate Chalam's literature only with that purview. Chalam can be called a great reformer in that realm. He can be called a good writer. But, when his reform and literature do not have a connection with the entire society, why should the Dalit and lower caste women bear Chalam?

Chalam might have responded sensitively, shrewdly, emotionally, and humanely to the problems of brahmin women. He might have condemned male dominance and inequality in the name of traditions and superstitions and might have written for the emancipation of those women. But he could not show such an attitude or response to Dalit women. Chalam grieved about the minds, hearts, and responses of women of *agraharas*. Why didn't it occur to him that women have caste and labour apart from minds and hearts?

Similarly, he never discussed what should be given to women who have caste and labour apart from brains. In that case, why should Dalit and lower caste women, tormented by caste oppression, exploitation of labour, male dominance, and evil practices such as

⁷ Gudipati Venkata Chalam (1894–1979) is considered to be the first feminist thinker and writer in Telugu

jogini and basivi⁸, carry Chalam on their heads? Dalit women's participation is crucial and more in social production. Should we take it as a coincidence that there is no participation and representation of these women in social, economic, and political issues literature? He never glanced at the specific problems of women with diverse social backgrounds. He spoke only about gender control. He did not even look at the issues of gender control which are under social control.

Let us leave it to Chalam's social consciousness and individual freedom as a writer to write or not write about lower caste and Dalit women. But, the objection is about applying Chlam's literature to all women in society. We have no problem if Chalam is looked upon as a reformer of women in *agraharas*. But, we will oppose it if he is called the reformer of all women.

Why should Dalit and lower caste women carry literature that does not belong to them and that does not have any concern or reference to their problems?

Chalam made an enormous literary endeavour to eliminate the social evils obstructing brahmin women's progress.

As Ambedkar said, social reform in India means only the eradication of the caste system. If society is not reformed before achieving independence, caste discrimination will turn into a demon confronting us from every direction. Chalam was not bothered about such consciousness.

Chalam, like society, perceived Dalit women as vulnerable sex symbols but not differently. We understand this from his story "Madiga Girl".

⁸ Devdasis from Dalit communities

Where Are We in Media?

(August 2008)

In the previous issue of *Bhumika*, Kondepudi Nirmala powerfully discussed many facts, hardships of journalists, obstacles to opportunities, and, on the whole, at whose feet the journalists' heads are bowing.

It is commendable that she discussed how the voices of journalists are being smothered under the hegemonic management, particularly when there is a war going on against the media management. It was a big war between the Dalit and lower castes and the media management going on in the past few days, direct as well as cold war. It is not pacified yet. In fact, this war should have happened between journalists and the management first. But, in the recent war between media managements and Dalit and lower castes, the journalists protected the managements. They were protected mainly by the journalists.

The media management staged a show that you are us and we are you, tricked the journalists and succeeded. The journalists ought to have joined the Dalit Bahujan castes and stood against the hegemonic attitude of the media management in this war between the media and the Dalit Bahujans. Instead of giving equal representation to all social sections in society, the media has been representing them in a humiliating manner. They treat women of Dalit and lower castes in a derogatory and ridiculing manner. Although, in principle, no one should be insulted based on one's gender, caste, and class, we do not see this principle being followed in TV channels and newspapers.

The media management is turning media freedom into a precious commodity like a sky lamp and glorifying it. Is media freedom truly not affected by caste, religion, region, gender and wealth? Is it beyond all those? If it is, why are only upper-caste men from Coastal Andhra managing the media? Should this be considered a coincidence or media freedom? The dynamics of one group controlling another under the guise of media freedom

raise serious questions. Why don't the factors like the market, investment, and income resources touch the media? It is unjust to apply the glamorised media freedom to these.

There are very few Dalit and lower caste people and non-Dalit women in the media. There may be one Dalit woman in a million. Post-women's movements, one page in print media and half an hour in electronic media are allotted for women's issues. However, they focus on fashion, cooking, and rangoli tips for non-Dalit women. Women of the hegemonic castes in the *Puranas* are chosen as models. We cannot see even a bit of the problems of Dalit and lower caste women and their movements. If it happens once in a blue moon, they hail the non-Dalit women as the flags and the agenda leading Dalit women. Women might have a page in magazines, but Dalits do not have the space of a needle head. The anti-arack movement by the wives of the alcoholics does not become news. But the non-Dalit women who support them will expand to fill the cameras and letters in the media. The camera lens cannot even identify the faces of women leaders in the struggles of Madduru, agricultural labourers, Tuniki leaves, beedi workers and scavenging women. The weapons of letters do not reach out to them. Is it media freedom not to focus on these women and not to create an opportunity to take their problems to the world?

We all know how often Dalit women's writings, opinions, and articulations are reflected in print and electronic media.

There are several SC, BC, Minority, and Adivasi women, Telangana poets, artists, critics, scholars, and writers who have never appeared in newspapers and TVs. Shall we call it media freedom, not to engage with them, brush aside the new voices of identity movements, but constantly circulate a few people of hegemonic castes, that too from coastal Andhra?

In fact, the war between the upper caste media managements and Dalit Bahujan castes applies to Dalit and lower caste women, too. But, where are they in the war? Half the Sky calculation is fine. But, Dalit women are still searching for their corner in that half.

Representation of Dalits, BCs, and non-Dalit women in the media is limited. The Dalit and lower caste, Adivasi, and Minority women from Telangana are even far away.

Media compounds are like the prohibited temples for them. They don't have the space of a needle's head in the media.

Even if we see a Dalit woman in the media, she is not considered a journalist, anchor, programmer, operator, or editor. She is seen as a sweeper, cleaner, and scavenger only. When the media management is not different from the casteist society in their perception of Dalit women and confining them to certain occupations, why should Dalit women respect and carry media freedom on their heads? Is it media freedom not to consider, declare, follow, and practice social justice?

Recently, an uneducated Dalit woman from an NGO who had never stepped into a temple went to a landlord's house and into his puja room and took a video while he was eating and worshipping, standing in front of him. So, the experts on empowerment of women decided that she got international recognition, and what else could be the development for Dalit women. Such experts and NGOs might have that kind of understanding. It might be a great achievement for them but not for Dalit women.

The media kept Madiga and Dalit women at a distance of thousands of miles. However, history tragically overlooks the fact that Madiga women gave their voice like a declaration, gave their heart, gave the drum, and put on footwear for the journey of history.

Sadalakshmi, an Everlasting Idealistic Gem

(September 2008)

It is four years since Sadalakshmi, the deputy speaker and endowment minister in the first assembly of Andhra Pradesh, passed away on the 24th of July.

She lived all her life in politics.

She lived with politics as life and life as politics. Sadly, the organisations failed to give her recognition and respect whether she was in Congress for thirty to forty years, worked for TDP, launched a separate Telangana party, or established the Jagjivan Ram welfare organisation.

Sadalakshmi was the first-generation Dalit woman politician after independence. The men of privileged communities and Dalit men such as P.V., Kasu Brahmanandareddy, Damodaram Sanjivaiah, Vengal Rao, and Anjaiah who worked with her were given a prominent place in the political history, government, people, and parties. Their names were memorialised as government buildings, parks, statues, project canals, and roads. Governments and parties celebrate their death and birth anniversaries with grandeur. Media people conduct meetings and discussions about them. Tragically, no one recognises and respects Sadalakshmi, the first Dalit woman to devote her entire life to politics, the endowment minister and deputy speaker in the first assembly. Politics remains under the control of men from privileged communities, even 61 years after independence. Dalit women today are in an undemocratic political development, which does not allow another Sadalakshmi to grow and establish a stable political life.

Sadalakshmi was not an ordinary Dalit woman. She swallowed the essence of politics. Hers was not a short-lived political life. She was a political stalwart for sixty years. She never compromised on her political life, family, and caste. She was a woman who easily set aside her family and its hegemony for politics. Her life was spent in everyday societal

struggles as a politician and woman, belonging to a region and a caste, instead of the pleasant, cool times and circumstances of life.

Why was a Dalit woman politician with such a history subjected to oblivion? It is not just the political parties of the privileged communities, but also the caste, regional, and gender associations did not bother about her. She was a woman from a scavenging caste. Non-Dalits did not bother about her ruling the state or keeping quiet. Dalits too did not carry her on their head. The Telangana associations also did not pamper her. Did they even recognise the value of the history of her struggle when she established a separate Telangana party thirty years ago? People like Chennareddy, who hijacked the Telangana slogan, crushed it, and sold out, became great Telangana leaders. They receive great honours. But, we don't get to hear and see the name of Sadalakshmi, who led an uncompromising struggle for Telangana with conviction in the Telangana organisations. This is the level of awareness they are manifesting.

Even the Telangana BC writers who argue for writing history from the perspective of lower castes fail to see Sadalakshmi's social service. But, they beautifully engraved the tributes to a disciple of Sarojini Naidu who died in America on her death anniversary. This is their understanding of region and caste. It was not easy for a Dalit woman to function as an endowment minister in the first assembly. It was a tightrope walk to work in the endowment ministry that functioned under the control of brahmin, hindu, and manuvada people. She faced the humiliation of not being allowed into the temple even though she was a minister. But, later, she confronted. The endowment ministry is like an *agrahara* with no place for Dalits. She fought for the participation of Dalits in such a ministry. She fought a monstrous battle to implement reservations for Dalits for recruitment in the endowment ministry in executive committees, temple committee chairs, and directors.

Similarly, she distributed the endowment lands to the landless Dalits. She fought tooth and nail, arguing for the functioning of the economic system not just for the benefit of brahmins, but according to the reservations. But the casteist manuvadis did not allow that change. These are a few examples from her political life. No other political leader fought such battles.

Sadalakshmi is a woman with Ambedkarite awareness. She established the Jagjivan Ram Welfare Association as a follower of Jagjivan Ram and tirelessly worked for the development of Dalits. No Dalit association bothered about the inspiration of the political battles she fought and led. No Dalit association celebrated her death anniversary. This is the level of awareness of the Dalit organisations that survive citing the name of Ambedkar.

Not one or two people opposed her when she was alive. Upper caste men, people of her caste, community, family, everybody opposed her. But she was a gem of a woman who never compromised. She stepped into politics resembling a magic house of hegemony, corruption, oppression, conspiracy, and scheming, established her permanent residence, and left a Dalit impression as an ideal leader in her own way.

Incidentally, she shares her birthday with Jesus and her death anniversary with Gurram Joshua and Periyar E.V. Ramasamy. It is unique.

People who know her praise her as a great, resilient, questioning, self-respecting, kind, and fearless politician. Where is the recognition and respect that Sadalakshmi deserves? Don't the Dalits need her life experiences? Is it not discrimination that governments, ruling parties, and opposition parties have not even erected her statues so far? At least now, the oppressed caste associations and leaders must take the political experiences and battling spirit of Sadalakshmi, who relentlessly fought for the development of the downtrodden sections to the larger public.

How Can the New Parties too Forget Women?

(October 2008)

The print and electronic media have been bombarding us with the news of Chiranjeevi's political entry. Finally, Chiranjeevi entered politics, owing to either this bombardment or Kalam's words. He started on social justice as soon as he entered, and people's heads reeled and eyes shone. Some even had tears as it was a new word that they had never heard. We have written social justice even in our constitution. Nowadays, it has become glamorous and fashionable for people to use that word. It has gone into a new bottle.

Chiranjeevi cited social justice, but there is no explanation. He had no history of social service, even if he wanted to know the details of social justice. He collected people's blood and eyes for his bank. This hero never visited or helped the people who died fighting for tickets to his movies. The younger heroes at least visited the families of the deceased and helped them financially. Chiranjeevi has been dancing as a movie hero for the past thirty years. Did he even help that much as a human service, asked the newspapers.

In fact, the lower-caste, lower-class people and women ran Chiranjeevi's movies successfully for 100 to 200 days. They devoted their wages earned from rickshaw pulling, auto driving, cobbling, breaking stones, and doing hard labour to Chiranjeevi's movies, watching them repeatedly. They made him grow big. But, how much responsibility does Chiranjeevi have for them? These poor people and women were not seen anywhere, left or right, in Chiranjeevi's flag and agenda.

There are many other social problems here. Several movements have happened and are still happening. Chiranjeevi never declared solidarity with caste, regional, and gender identity movements. Nor did he show concern for cotton farmers' suicides, privatisation of the public sector, and movements by the workers of informal sectors such as weavers, beedi workers, and construction workers. He never spoke. We should appreciate Aamir Khan and Shabana Azmi for their social responsibility. Aamir Khan supported Narmada Bachao Andolan and did not change his stand despite facing threats. Even before she became a

member of the Parliament, Shabana Azmi stood with the slum dwellers and fought against the illegal demolition of slums in Bombay. The Hollywood hero Jackie Chan gave half of his income to his family and half to society. Our hero Chiranjeevi has no such history in his life.

It is not merely referring to categorical social justice. There should be clarity about who requires what justice. That will decide who gets what. He is promising a smiling Andhra. But he forgot about women. His song referred to all occupations except cobbling. No woman or Dalit was represented in his party. This is Chiranjeevi's social justice. Not a single woman was on the dais when he launched the party. He had Mother Teresa as the women's representative on his banner. Mother Theresa does not represent all women. Her life is that of a service hermit who is untouched by the problems of society, family, caste, patriarchy, working class, and financial politics. Does she represent women struggling with mundane issues? Is it women's empowerment to have her picture? Women's problems were not mentioned in Chiranjeevi's song, agenda, and flag.

His political opinion on Telangana is acceptable. But, is it social justice to skip referring to the Dalit sub-caste movement fighting for the past fourteen years?

The month of August 2008 gathered immense political demand with the emergence of new parties. The film hero Chiranjeevi, who never touched upon social issues, and the TDP leader Devender Goud, as the Telangana BC, launched new parties, which is good. But, it is troubling that these parties do not talk about women and do not make women part of their parties.

Sarees Torn and Blouses Pulled

(November 2008)

The fever has clung to me like a poisonous insect for the past month. It is ruining even the strongest people. Fever worked its way with increased strength, pulled me to the bed, and stalled my work. I joined the battleground of diseases called NIMS to conquer this adamant fever.

Not a single worker was seen since I joined the hospital. Nurses and doctors were only running around in the rooms. Rooms and bathrooms were stinking. We could not understand as we were preoccupied with our problems. We thought perhaps that's how it is in NIMS.

The following morning, a worker came with a broom to sweep. The lady in the adjacent bed asked her, "What, Eswamma, you did not come yesterday. Were you on leave?" She is ten days senior to me. She knows the names of everyone around. "Do we even get leave? We are not even permanent staff. Yesterday all of us contract workers went to the director to ask for what we were promised to give in the agreement. Our director immediately called the police and had them beat us black and blue. They tore our sarees, pulled our blouses and created a stir without considering that we were women. Death be on the police. Don't they have women like us? Won't our suffering touch them? Such injustice?" She showed us the bruises on the chest, legs, and back. I too sat up when I heard her. I wondered how she came to work after getting such a beating. I wanted to know her sorrows, dismissing my fever as trivial in comparison to Eswamma's suffering.

The angered adjacent-bed woman and her attendant asked her sympathetically, "Alas, why did they beat you so badly?" Tears welled up in Eswamma's eyes, "I have been working in this hospital for the past twenty-three years. I joined for a salary of 450 rupees. They have not made me permanent even now, and there is no hike in salary. After so many years of service, they are now giving 3,900 rupees. From that, they take five hundred rupees for the contractor and some P.F. and give us 3,400. How do we survive with that money,

you tell me? We have to pay house rent. Can we pay for rice, lentils, salt, and vegetables from this salary? What can we buy with hiked prices in this money? How can we bring up children? Not one or two; we are eight hundred contract workers in this hospital. Management takes work from a small number of workers and pays them the lowest salaries in this big NIMS hospital. What can we do? What is it with work? We can do any amount of work. But, they should give us money for the labour, shouldn't they? They did not give. When we asked, they got us beaten up by the police.

When we persistently fought for the salary hike, permanent status, and uniforms, they issued a GO last year with a minimal salary hike but snatched our D.A. When we staged a dharna questioning this in front of the labour office, the management agreed to our demands. But, even after one year, they do not give us what they have agreed to. They beat us up when we asked them yesterday. Amma, are we asking for charity? We slog. We clean the nose and ear-breaking stench. We clear the injuries, wounds, blood, pus, excreta, and vomiting of people suffering from diseases. Would others do such work except us, Mehtars and Madigas? We can't eat food after cleaning that dirt and stench. We clean the filth around the patients and keep the hospital clean like a jasmine flower. Our clothes get soiled while doing that work. What will they lose if they give us two pairs of clothes yearly? They collect millions of rupees from the patients but don't pay for our hard labour.

We were away for half a day, and the whole of the hospital stank like a heap of dung. Management was in shock. They did not talk about the DA, pending payments, permanent service, or two pairs of clothes that they agreed and signed, but threatened us to get people from outside and got us beaten up by the police. I came back scared of losing the few morsels and losing my children to starvation. They think that working-class people are good for nothing. We will continue creating a ruckus until we get what our labour deserves. We won't give up." She left, tightening the broom.

Are Madiga Writings Not Fit to be Literature?

(January 2009)

The classical language status of Telugu is being happily celebrated. But, it does not make any difference if the Telugu language, which does not serve the interests of the majority of people, gets the classical status, contemporary status, or modern status. Nothing is achieved whether the status is given or not when the Telugu language spoken by people is not respected. We will know where the ancient language is if we go to the most downtrodden communities in rural areas. The classical Telugu language is still alive there.

The government that drove away, set aside governance, and insulted Telugu, and functioned with a borrowed language unfamiliar to people, has no moral right to celebrate the classical language status of Telugu. The government that has been encouraging Telugu for the poor and English for the rich, and that has completely forgotten Telugu, has no right to celebrate.

On one hand, it is the political context of a people's movement for Telangana. On the other hand, discussions on Telugu of which region and which Telugu of which region got the classical language status. The government did not pay attention to all these but launched a month-long language festival, from 15 November 2008 to 15 December 2008, to celebrate the Telugu language, brimming with classical language status.

The invitation to Telugu language celebrations was filled with the privileged castes from Seema and Coastal Andhra. It has no place for Dalit, Bahujan communities, Muslims, and Dalit women from Telangana. Telangana is known for the Madiga community and Madiga literature. But, this invitation did not allot a single alphabet for Madiga literature. No Dalit women writers from Telangana are included in the poets' meet. The cover page of this invitation has no single picture of a Dalit woman or a Muslim. It was an eye wash; they included one Reddy and two brahmin writers as Telangana writers. They are asking us to adjust with the old mats spread on the floor. We are demanding a place with self-respect and social justice for Telangana.

On the first day of the Telugu language celebration, the Telangana Dalit, Bahujan, and Muslim writers staged a dharna against the Andhra bias.

Telugu does not mean only Seema and Coastal Andhra.

Boycott the language celebrations where the Telangana identities have no representation.

Does the ancient Telugu belong to the privileged castes?

Long live the literatures and the identities of the marginalised.

Oppose the Andhra hegemonic caste literary politics.

Long live Telangana language and culture.

Why felicitations to the hegemonic Andhra Telugu and handcuffs to identity literatures?

Those who were sloganeering and distributing pamphlets were arrested.

The ones who shouted the slogans in the dharna, carried the banners, and were arrested included 80 per cent of Madiga women writers.

The Telugu language celebrations committee was compelled to invite Telangana writers owing to dharnas, agitations, arrests, and protests. But it came with a wicked condition: having to do the programme without using the word Telangana. Many Telangana writers disagreed, but some quickly embraced it like a boon and decided on the programme. One B.C. writer unilaterally, without even consulting any others, prepared an invitation in the model of the Andhra invitation letter without Madiga and women's writings. Madigas opposed this, saying, "You expect us to be in the front row for protests, slogans, and arrests. But, you are driving us away from decisions and organisation. This is unjust."

Madiga literature is being extensively published in Telangana. Without understanding the specific identities of the Telangana region and organising categorical literary meetings with Telangana writers as Dalits, they are oppressing Telangana Madiga

literature. Even the Telangana Writers Association, which claims to be the literary association of the oppressed voices of Telangana, refuses to recognise Telangana Madiga literature. Even while the Lambada and Koya tribal literatures without a script are discussed in meetings, but Madiga literary identities are resented. Are Madiga writings not fit to be literature? When the literature without any movements is held on a pedestal, not recognising the Madiga identity literature fighting for a clear distribution of social justice, is a conspiracy. Calling Madiga literature as Dalit literature is as oppressive as categorising Muslim literature as minority literature. Even the Madigas who are asking these questions are set aside. This is the hegemonic caste literary politics against Madiga writers and their writings.

Savitribai Phule Sowed the Seeds of Letters

(February 2009)

Savitribai Phule was the first teacher who established special schools for Shudra and Dalit communities and women who were denied human rights in the caste system and educated them as early as 1848. Throughout her life, she struggled for the education of women and the untouchable people. She rebelled against the brahmanical hegemonic Hindu society and campaigned against alcoholism. She mobilised movements for the development of workers and farmers. Savitribai Phule was a social reformer who co-founded Satyasodhana Samaj along with Jyotirao Phule and worked for social justice. The British government recognised her as a good teacher and a great social worker. But, the Brahmanical hegemonic India took one hundred and fifty years to recognise her contribution. The Central government released a stamp in her honour as a token of that recognition.

The Andhra Pradesh government recently decided to celebrate the birth and death anniversaries of Jyotiba Phule owing to pressure from the politically conscious caste associations. Savitribai Phule, who equally served the society, belonged to a bahunjan Mali caste. She was born on 3 January 1831 in Nayagaon of Khandala area, Satara district of Maharashtra. Her parents were Lakshmibai and Khandoji. She did not come from a caste confined to cooking and home but from a caste that survived on hard toil. She stepped into Jyotiba Phule's house as his wife when she was nine. There was no woman in his house by then. Till the end, she continued as a social movement activist and leader. She ran the Satyashodhak Samaj uninterruptedly even after the death of Jyotiba Phule.

Jyotiba Phule demonstrated a thousand times more gender democracy towards Savitribai Phule when compared to men who say, you stay at home, and I will lead the movement. Phule shared his education, awareness, and every book he read with Savitribai. Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* was one such book that immensely inspired Phule to walk towards human rights, liberty and equality. With such shared awareness, Savitribai could

become the first Indian woman teacher of the first girls' school despite severe obstacles from the Hindu Brahmin society.

Why do girls and untouchables need education? Although people abused her as a woman roaming around the streets and teaching, cursed her as harmful to society and against tradition, and poured filthy water on her, Savitribai withstood all the humiliation and taught women from marginalised communities. She agitated against the social evils, such as sexual atrocities and child marriages, in the name of Kolhatis and tamasha on Dalit women. She also fought against problems such as Sati, widowhood, and stigma against illegitimate children. Savitribai, coming from a marginalised community, ran movements against the brahmanical hegemony on the one hand, and on the other hand, she provided shelter for the brahmin woman victims. She fought for the eradication of social evils to which they were subjected.

Savitribai Phule's reform movement was not confined to her community but she showed zeal for service to all victims in society. Histories did not give any recognition or value for her broad-mindedness. If Savitribai were born in a hegemonic brahmin caste instead of a marginalised caste, the entire history would have prostrated before her social service. The brahmanical hegemony and the Indian histories forgot about Savitribai Phule as she was born in the Mali caste but questioned the caste system and its values, and agitated on behalf of the marginalised communities.

They believe brahmin reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ranade, and Dayananda Saraswati are the only social reformers. Credit and authority in the Brahma Samaj and Prarthana Samaj established by these reformers went to the brahmin castes only. Those samajs were established to address the concerns and reform of the specific communities. But, they propagated them as universal and societal throughout history. We don't come across lower caste people or their problems in the Brahma Samaj. Don't know how many samajs like Phule's Satyasodhak Samaj were forgotten across the country! Savitribai Phule was not just an activist but also a great writer. We can mainly cite her works such as *Kavya Phule (1854)* and *Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar (1892)*.

Savitribai Phule was a great practitioner. She adopted children who had no social acceptance. When her husband passed away in 1890, Savitribai Phule dismissed the patriarchal values, protested against the restrictions, and conducted the final rites against the social conventions. She conducted hundreds of intercaste marriages, including that of her adopted son. She faced severe opposition. She got a well dug in her courtyard and quenched the thirst of the untouchable people.

That great social activist continued to offer education for Dalit and Bahujan castes and women, strived for the eradication of social evils, and ran the Satyashodhak Samaj even after the death of Jyotiba Phule. She passed away on 10 March 1837 with a plague that she contracted while serving the plague patients. Governments should celebrate Savitribai Phule's birth and death anniversaries to expand and respect her life as a model. Her birthday, 3 January, should be declared as Indian National Women's Day as she was the first woman teacher who taught marginalised communities and women. One university should be named after her. There is a need to include her inspiring life story in the textbooks.

Mattipulu: Emergence of St, Sc, Bc, Minority Women Writers

(May 2009)

This is the age of identity movements. The future also belongs to identity movements. The present social scenario is the movements by S.C., S.T., B.C. and minority sections independently fighting for their rights, empowerment, share, and development with a spirit of emancipation.

The role of women from the downtrodden social sections is crucial in this struggle. It is hugely political that the problems of marginalised women who construct and develop society as the forces of production are not recognised anywhere. Their identities are invisible in society and literature. Even Communists, caste associations, women's organisations and mainstream feminists have overlooked and trivialised women of these castes. S.C., S.T., B.C., and minority women writers understand this as oppression.

Oppression continued to prevent the women of marginalised communities from accessing the fruits of development and representation. Men's identities are taken into consideration while dealing with S.C., S.T., and minority identities, and women of privileged communities are considered while dealing with women. In between, women of the oppressed sections become invisible. This has happened and is happening in history and literature. Writers of hegemonic castes, religion, region, and gender ideologies are reigning in literature. By bulldozing. Caste patriarchy and hard labour imposed on women of oppressed sections are not reflected respectfully and importantly in culture and literature. Starting from Gurajada, Chalam, and Kodavatiganti, writers discussed women of their castes. But, it was propagated as a discussion about all women. Hence, women of the oppressed sections oppose this and question the feminists of privileged sections and associations for not understanding this.

The male writers of caste movements are either trivialising or glorifying the identities of women from their communities. In the name of holistically addressing the regional, religious, and gender issues of the women of oppressed sections, women of

privileged communities are appropriating their intellectual capabilities, hijacking them, and trying to expand their scope.

S.C., S.T., B.C., and minority women writers have started questioning all these tendencies. The historical context of their search and excavation of the foundations of their identities is the formation of Mattipulu, an S.C., S.T., B.C., and minority women writers' forum.

The state-level inaugural meeting of this forum was held in the progressive media centre, Hyderabad on 22 March 2009. It was followed by a public meeting in the evening. Shajahana, G. Vijayalakshmi, and Joopaka Subhadra conducted this meeting.

The meeting commenced with a song on Mattipulu written by Chandrasri, the coordinator of the Dalit Women's Theatre. The S.C., S.T., B.C. and minority women writers invited discussions on the historical need for a common forum, recognition, diversity, and solidarity of identities, and intersections of patriarchy. Women writers such as Joopaka Subhadra, Surepally Sujatha, Gogu Syamala, Kannaram Jhansi, Aruna (author of the novel *Elli*), Jalli Indira, Dr B. Sarojini, Jwalitha, G. Krishnaveni, Putla Hemalatha, Shajida Khatoon, Rajeswari, Nasrin Begum, Vinodini, Anita, Jalaid Vijaya, Pachhanuru Anuradha, Javeria, Sridevi and others attended the meeting. They all opined that meeting for the purpose of identity literature, discussing unique identities, and getting organised is a great historical context and need. The meeting proposed to bring out a poetry collection as there was a need for a magazine to reflect the self-esteem of the S.C., S.T., B.C., and minority women writers, to strive to bring the lives of the women of marginalised communities of all regions into literature, mobilise women writers from all the districts to conduct meetings. It was decided to take up the discussion on diverse identities, diverse solidarities, and caste patriarchy in the next meeting.

The public meeting of the Mattipulu S.C., S.T., B.C., and minority women writers took place at 6 pm Shajahana invited the speakers and Joopaka Subhadra presided over the meeting. Gogu Syamala, Dr. M.M. Vinodini, Dr. Jalli Indira, Putla Hemalatha, Jwalitha, Wajida Khatoon, and G. Vijayalakshmi were the speakers.

Gogu Syamala said that let alone development, life itself has become a problem for Dalit women and that no one is addressing this viciousness. She said that the communists, progressive intellectuals, feminists, and women's organisations are not looking at caste as an enemy. She reiterated that caste is an enemy for the downtrodden castes and demanded that the rest of the society recognise this. Dr M.M. Vinodini stated that the sufferings of Dalit Christian women are different and criticised the vicious culture of the Hindu orthodoxy against Dalit Christian women. While attacking caste and gender discrimination, she asserted that caste is stronger than gender.

Jwalitha said that the B.C. women's livelihoods are not recorded anywhere in the literature and reiterated the need to do so.

Dr. Jalli Indira pointed out that according to *Smritis*, Dalit women are like the menstrual clothes of the brahmin women and that the same notion continues even today. Research in universities has yet to explore the downtrodden communities in different fields. She called out to rewrite history from the perspective of the women of the marginalised sections.

Wajida Khatoon said that we should fight against the social evils against Muslim women and that their lives and experiences have to be documented.

Putla Hemalatha said that Dalit Christian women's literature has to be more prolific.

G. Vijayalakshmi discussed the pertinent patterns of oppression of the B.C. women and said that Mattipulu will try to focus on the identity conflicts and diversities of the oppressed castes.

The speakers, Dr Vijayabharathi, Prof. Jaya Salomi, and Nagamma Phule, could not attend the meeting due to unavoidable reasons but conveyed their inspiring messages.

“The effect of patriarchal ideology is severe on the women of oppressed sections when compared to women of privileged communities. Women of the oppressed sections have no opportunity to escape like the women of the privileged communities. Women of the oppressed sections encounter family, caste, labour, and exploitation by the upper-caste

men. Even highly educated and highly placed women are also facing this discrimination. We need Mattipulu as a forum to change this perspective”. Dr. Vijayabharathi

“Manuadis changed the indigenous women into devadasi, matangi, and jogini women, and destroyed their lives. Their agonies and stories have sunk into this land over thousands of years. Their abounding sorrows will come out if this land is excavated. As Phule and Ambedkar observed, this *manuvada* culture will continue till the emergence of an alternative culture. Let us build a world of our own, enjoying the fragrance of the mattipulu”. Nagamma Phule.

“It is an absolute truth that human beings are not one. Differences are manifested in different dimensions every day. The differences between men and women are considered to be a social problem. However, differences among women are not evaluated. That should also be considered a social issue. Soil has a unique fragrance. Mattipulu will inevitably acquire that fragrance”. Prof. Jaya Salomi.

The Mattipulu forum resolved the following.

1. This forum will strive to document the lives of S.C., S.T., B.C., and minority women in literature.
2. This forum will work against all forms of hegemony, including caste patriarchy and hegemonic caste patriarchy.
3. This forum will support all literary identities.
4. This forum supports the formation of separate Telangana and S.C. categorisation.
5. This forum opposes the displacement of the adivasis in the name of development.
6. This forum will work for S.C., S.T., B.C., and minority quotas in the women's political reservations.
7. This forum demands that the culture of the labouring classes, such as S.C., S.T., B.C., and minority lives, should be included in textbooks and that the ideologies and perspectives that are humiliating for them should be deleted.

16

Won't You Let Women Live?

(July 2009)

The newspapers and channels in the past week or ten days are filled with news about assaults and killings of women. Male frenzy and cruelty are aggravating not only by sexually assaulting women but also by killing them. This is a wicked genocide against one gender. Perhaps slitting the throat, axing to death and pouring kerosene have become old techniques. Now, the patterns and methods of killing have changed. Acid attacks and petrol attacks have increased. Arshad pushed Sameera from the Charminar as if suggesting a new method of killing. My heart feels wounded, and my mind feels raw watching all this. Women have been crushed as much as possible in society. With no freedom and comfort, they live without any human rights just because they are women. It is the same for lower caste and upper caste women. If they had had enough to eat, lower-caste men too would not have allowed women to go out. Women have no right over the wages their hard labour has earned. Despite such violence at home and outside, women continue to live strong and tough. These men are not letting them live. Women are being ruined. They are not even allowed to live. What happened to the laws? What are the police doing? Where did the courts go? Despite all the above, women are being assaulted everywhere and in every form. There is a frenzy to kill women. Why are such frenzy and cruelty to kill women on the rise? What is the drawback in men? What are the reasons behind this violence? My stomach is burning.

Some social intellectuals state that culture plays a predominant role in this. Which culture, whose culture, and who is nurturing this culture? To hell with this culture. Whose media is propagating such a culture without any human values? Which groups and sections in society decide and define the culture? Who is controlling the culture? Who is trading the culture? The question and the discussion are- which castes, sections, and genders are doing this.

Our Constitution identified people oppressed on the basis of their social status and gender and provided protection for them. It placed the responsibility of implementing such measures, rights, and laws on the governments. Officers and employees in the administration, police, and judiciary of the government must work on behalf of the aggrieved with the spirit of the constitution and laws. But, that has not been happening. The perspective of government officers and employees is not changing despite the laws made to address gender and social status-based oppression. They imbibe oppression in society and practice discrimination in the implementation of laws.

The accused who pushed Sameera from the Charminar was a moneylender. The police ignored the temptations and threats that she faced due to her poverty and carried the accused on their shoulders. Police and media did not respond much when an acid attack took place on a tribal woman waiting for labour in the Secunderabad labour adda on 22 June 2009. Was it not because she was a tribal woman? The people from the dominant social groups occupy the authoritarian positions in government. So, they practice discrimination against the aggrieved. Women are looked upon as sex symbols in society. Police look at the lower caste women as the vulnerable sex. Police are not behaving with human responsibility towards the oppressed genders and groups. Moreover, they are protecting the culprits, resorting to murders, attacks, and atrocities. Except for one or two, no attacks and killings of women have been proven as crimes so far. Society thinks that women can be subjected to assaults and killings if their conduct is not good; it is not a crime. Those who implement laws also have a similar perspective. The government has to specially train them to be sensitive to the aggrieved women, castes, and communities. The employees should be trained in gender and social dynamics with the spirit of the Constitution.

The cultures of the labouring classes should be promoted as an alternative to the market culture perpetrated by the media. The accused should be handed over to the aggrieved groups where the law has failed. Otherwise, the male arrogance will continue to resort to acid attacks.

The Practice of Jogini Women on Rangam Should Be Banned

(August 2009)

The twin cities have turned into bonam⁹ pots in the past week or ten days. Hundreds of bonams being carried to Posamma and Maisamma temples, dances by Potarajus, village songs, drum beatings, processions, and meetings of the political leaders—it was all commotion. Men's songs complaining against women were also heard. Songs like

Hey you, brother-in-law, where is your elder sister

I can't deal with her; I can't dance to her tunes

and

You trickster, Maisamma, let us go to Maisaram. Don't trouble me and vanish. Don't bother me for some time were reverberating in the bastis.

But, these bonams had no Hindu strings and political celebrations previously. Ten years ago, in the *bastis* (slums), there used to be small shrines of Posamma, Maisamma, and Uppalamma in five to six square yards. One could touch the ceiling by stretching the hand. *Basti* people used to offer a hen, share their pain and pleasure, and fulfil their wishes. There were no priests and no chantings. Gradually, those small temples expanded into big shrines in hundred square yards with Hindu pomp and prosperity. One brahmin was appointed with a house adjacent to the temple for daily worship. The Hindu system strengthened with a house and livelihood for the brahmin priest. The effort to turn people, particularly B.C., S.C., and S.Ts, has been going on strongly with lamps, incense sticks, and offerings.

Against this backdrop, the temples of Posamma, Maisamma, Uppalamma, and Mutyalamma are being sanskritised as the shrines of Hindu deities. They were changed to Mateswari temple, Bhagyalakshmi temple, Jagadamba temple, and Simhavahini temple.

⁹ Bonam means meal or feast offered to the goddess. Bonalu festival is celebrated in Telangana.

Names of some temples such as Darbar Maisamma, Nalla Pochamma, and Thotla Pochamma are still intact in bastis that firmly resist the above changes. The village goddesses such as Poshamma, Maisamma, and Mutyalamma are Dalit and Adivasi women with significant histories. They are not Hindu deities. We don't know whether these village goddesses had husbands like Siva for Parvathi, Vishnu for Lakshmi, and Brahma for Saraswati. Even if they had, they were anonymous. They were not under the control and custody of husbands like Lakshmi, Parvati, and Saraswati. There is no evidence to say that the village goddesses depended on any men like Lakshmi in Vishnu's heart, Parvati as half in Siva's body, and Saraswati in Brahma's face. Histories tell us that the village goddesses were Dalit and Adivasi women.

The older people in villages say that the respective goddess did good to the village, was adventurous, and fought throughout her life. Labouring classes, particularly women of labouring classes, believe that village goddesses are strong, learned, and possess powers to ward off hardships. Bonalu is part of their worship rituals. Village goddesses exist all over the country. But, *bonalu* is celebrated as a festival only in Telangana. Baniya, brahmin, and viswabrahmins do not carry or celebrate *bonalu*. Only S.C., B.C., and S.Ts celebrate it.

More exciting than the *bonalu* festival is the *rangam*¹⁰ celebration the following day. It is the main event of the festival. Making a jogini stand on an unbaked earthen pot and predict the future is called *rangam* climbing. It is known that the jogini who climbs the *rangam* on the *bonalu* festival in hundreds of temples in the twin cities are Madiga women. From Swarnalatha who climbed the *rangam* in Secunderabad Mahankali *bonalu* to Suseelamma who climbed the *rangam* in Lal Darwaja *bonalu*, they are all joginis. But, *rangam* climbing is illegal. The Jogini system was abolished in 1988. Those who conduct events related to jogini women, encourage, enjoy, or participate, will be imprisoned. But, then, why are the governments pretending to be unbothered even though the illegal activities are being publicly conducted? Crime is a crime even if committed in the name of devotion and celebrations.

¹⁰ Performing the oracle in *bonalu* celebrations.

Rangam is conducted in the presence of the political leaders who should be accountable to society, and the media that should create awareness in society and people, openly encouraging and enjoying the anti-legal jogini system. Manuvada media is not criticising such evil practices that are taking place in the name of devotion. The media has to become aware of and spread awareness among people about the superstitions and evil practices celebrated in the name of Bonalu. But, the media is being irresponsible, encouraging evil practices, and glorifying and sanctifying political leaders and priests, thereby trying to establish superstitions and social evils such as the jogini system.

At least by the next Bonalu festival, the government should take measures to stop making jogini women climb the rangam. Accordingly, priests dependent on thousands of temples celebrating bonalu in Telangana and political leaders who encourage the temple committees with donations should be discouraged. The government should take measures to spread awareness.

Jogini law and the related punishments should be extensively circulated.

The political leaders who attend the bonalu celebrations at the temples as chief guests, contribute huge donations, and encourage the bonalu and jogini system for their vote bank politics, and their cadre, should be prohibited from going to the temples. If necessary, they should be taken into police custody. Women should mobilise on a large scale to eradicate the evil jogini system that is oppressing Dalit women, Madiga women in particular.

Casteist Patriarchy Is the Root Cause of *Kongu*¹¹ Identities

(October 2009)

Patha Srilakshmi's article, published in the September issue of *Bhumika* observes that there are two perspectives in two women's poems, and concludes that the difference between the social status of the *kongu* is the reason for the perspectives. It is convincing. When I wrote on *kongu*, many people thought that I was opposing *paita*¹². They asked me, too. But, it should be understood as a diverse social expression rather than an opposition. It is not correct when the essayist said that I refused to recognise *kongu* as an invisible hand of patriarchy, as if I were trying to defend patriarchal oppression. It should be noted here that there are diverse patriarchal oppressions similar to the expressions of women from diverse social sections. Dalit patriarchy is a slave to the hegemonic caste patriarchy. There is a difference between a patriarchy without masters and a patriarchy with masters. It should also be noted that the oppressive patriarchy and the oppressed patriarchy are not the same. At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that Dalit men are like feudal lords in oppressing their women.

Hegemonic caste patriarchy did not allow its women to come out. It confined women to home but provided food, water, clothing, fire, servants and other facilities. Because there is wealth. That's why the law made a provision for the distribution of wealth. Patriarchy in Dalit castes has no such capacity. They struggle to provide groceries and firewood. That family will get a fistful of grains only if they go out and toil. If they imitate the hegemonic caste patriarchy, the family would die of starvation. That's why the Dalit patriarchy had to send their women out.

Paita is considered sacred. The wicked values woven around women's sexuality and bodies by patriarchy are protected. *Paita* remains a burden and does not budge an inch, slip, or move. Such a *paita* has to be burnt to ashes. I don't contest the burning of *paita*,

¹¹ End of a saree

¹² End of a saree. Referring to a previous poem on saree end.

but I contest the stand that all women have the same experience. A single expression cannot be universal. Kongu is not sacred for women of all social sections. Dalit patriarchy could not weave the values of holding the *paita* securely on the chest. A Dalit woman cannot toil if the *kongu* is on her chest. She can do a million things if she tucks it around her waist. She cannot move on if she has to cover herself with *kongu* like a *dorsani* or a *patelavva*¹³. That's why the Dalit patriarchy could not weave it around their women's bodies as much as the hegemonic caste patriarchy could. If they do, Dalit men cannot survive. However, patriarchy under masters can be sharper, harder, and more severe when compared to patriarchy that has no masters. This has to be discussed from the perspective of Dalit women's experiences.

Srilakshmi, in her essay, says, "Subhadra says that patriarchy oppresses upper caste women while hunger oppresses Dalit women". What needs to be understood here is that upper-caste women have to agree that they are being oppressed by patriarchy.

I am asking if it is emancipation from patriarchy or emancipation of women. Which women are subjected to oppression only by patriarchy? Only the women of hegemonic sections. Dalit, B.C., Adivasi, and minorities face oppression not only from patriarchy but also are surrounded by caste-related oppression, male domination at home and dora's domination outside, dorsanamma's domination, authority, hunger, caste evil practices, labour exploitation, religious traditions, domestic violence, and atrocities. It is the dominant caste patriarchy that deprived Dalit women of education, health, employment opportunities, and property.

No Dalit woman can say that she is not subjected to the authority of patriarchy. We cannot find a woman not subjected to male dominance in the entire world. It surrounds women's lives in some form. The casteist patriarchy confined the toiling Dalit, B.C., Adivasi, and minority women to certain works and sports. These women are facing the authority that deprives them of any rights over their labour.

¹³ Women belonging to hegemonic castes and families with power. Dorsani is related to Dora (lord) and Patelavva to Patel.

For instance, from sowing the seeds in the field to gathering the grains in the sieve, the yield reaches home with women's labour. However, women are distanced from the basic work, such as ploughing. However, excelling they are in that work, male dominance does not allow women to plough. In our neighbouring village, some women were penalised for ploughing. Chindu men do not allow their women to play Chindu Bhagotam¹⁴. Chindu Ellamma of Nizamabad had to literally wage war against her community and family to play Bhagotam. Madiga women contribute their labour in a hundred ways to prepare the drum. But, the Madiga patriarchy prohibited them from playing the drum.

Instead of concluding that contemporary times are the reason for women poets to say burn the *paita* or cannot ruin the *kongu*, the essayist should be discussing the casteist patriarchal contexts.

Dalit women are not saying that the patriarchal values woven around women's bodies and sexuality are unnecessary and irrelevant to feminism. But, that alone does not have to be made into the central and universal issue. How did the lower caste women live? What happened to them in history? What is their literature? What is their art and culture? What are their experiences? Indian feminist theory has not considered them. There is a serious need to recognise such dimensions, gaps, and politics.

¹⁴ A form of folk performing arts

How Can You Make Women in Movements Irrelevant?

(January 2010)

Telangana is a land of wounded history. All kinds of people have come to Telangana over the generations and deceived us. Telangana lost its own identity and remained a stranger to herself. Its shoulders hardened carrying the language, culture, and history that is not hers. Telangana and Dalit women have many similarities in their lives, fate, good and evil, and identities. Telangana, like Dalit women, never ate her full and slept to her content. Dalit women slog throughout the day but do not get food to their full. Similarly, Telangana has abundant water, resources, mines, and wealth. But, the situation is like the head workman's wife starving.

What is the reason? Some anonymous outsiders have been looting Telangana land, sites, water, jobs, and livelihoods. They have been trading in the name of development. Activists, artists, reformers, and writers of this land have been eliminated. Should we not drive away such politics?

It may not be the Dalit, Adivasi, B.C., and minority women who will develop when Telangana happens. Even then, we want Telangana. We will fight for it till the end. We have many doubts because we have been deceived in many movements. We began the Freedom Struggle with a question about our independence. The problems of lower castes and women have remained the same post-independence.

After the declaration by Chidambaram, Andhra migrant rulers who invested in the business and earned billions have been protesting, claiming that they have developed Telangana and that it is their birthright to stay together. They are inciting common people, citing the loss of jobs and livelihoods and the onset of famine. Only the S.C., S.T., and B.C. students studying in government colleges and universities are sacrificed everywhere. Students of corporate institutions did not enter the movement in Telangana. The same is the case in Andhra. It is Dalit, Adivasi, and B.C, people who sacrificed their lives from 1952 to 1969 to 2009 in the movements for separate Telangana. They were arrested and led the

movements. It is the result of their sacrifice that Telangana is going to materialise soon. The true tribute to them would be to build a Telangana that would protect the interests of the sacrificing sections. But, the question is, would the exploitative castes and sections let it happen? It is a good development that such discussions are taking place in employees, students, and women's associations.

The Dalit sub-caste movement and the Telangana movement happening in the state are related to social justice. Both movements were suppressed. A conspiracy is being hatched to weaken these movements in the name of unity and homogeneity. The results of the movements are almost coming closer but moving away. The movement to remove the regional inequalities is picking up momentum with the Telangana movement. It would be great if a similar attempt is made to remove the inequalities of caste, gender, and internal inequalities among Dalit castes. It is condemnable that the recognition and identities of the lower castes are going to the wind in movements. Where did women's identities disappear in the Dalit sub-caste movement? Similarly, where are the interests of women, Dalit, B.C., and Adivasi people? Students, women's associations, and women participated on a large scale in the recent December Telangana movement. But, the media did not bother about them, rather pushed their aspirations and voices into silence.

Telangana women held a deeksha camp in Gun Park on 2 December. The media mainly covered the messages of the leaders who visited the camp. Sadly, the women who conducted the camp and their speeches became irrelevant to the media. Women have faced similar discrimination in employee associations and student organisations. Women were beaten up and arrested but continued to protest in camps. We are witnessing the conspiracies to invisibilise and misrepresent women in the history of the Telangana movement. Women have been half of the history of the National Movement, Telangana Armed Struggle, and the present Telangana movement, and have been fighting. Women, particularly Dalit, B.C., Adivasi, and minority women, must create the context to question the movements about recognising their identities.

Telangana Is the Land of People's Sammakka and Sarakka

(February 2010)

Telangana flourished with the Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi cultures. The discrimination of men and women in Telangana differs from that in other regions. Telangana women, except dorsanis in gadis¹⁵ are not the ones never exposed to the sun. They have been neck-deep in movements for generations now. Struggles are not new to them. They took up the rifles and fought Telangana armed struggle; they snubbed Visunuru doras; they spilt chilly powder in the army's eyes and drove them towards the outskirts; they are the inheritors of Sammakka and Sarakka who fought for their self-respect; they are Ailamma's descendants; they tucked the pallu around the waist and fought and are fighting, turning into sickles. We have to write our own histories for recognition in history. No one will invite us and offer a seat. Wherever it is, we have to question them for our identity.

The roots of matriarchal values are not entirely buried in Telangana villages. Except for one or two districts, there is no ban on temple entry for lower castes, Malas and Madigas. Muslims visit temples such as Vemulawada. All castes celebrate Muharram in villages.

The religion in Telangana is different from Hindutva ideology. More than male gods, goddesses such as Ellamma, Poshamma, Maisamma, Sammakka, and Sarakka are worshipped. Rituals related to the vaidika religion are neither seen nor fit in Telangana.

Telangana has an intense culture of carnivals. Each district celebrates twenty to thirty carnivals. Telangana people celebrate collectively to eternalise the name that fought for a group and a people. There are many carnivals, such as Sammakka and Sarakka, Ailoni, Nagolu, Kottakond Buguloni, Komrelli, Ellanthakunta and others. Each carnival has a great history of struggle.

¹⁵ Residence of the feudal lords

Telangana women lived in lush green villages, eating vegetables and fruits. Now, they are starving and migrating to cities. Andhra feudal lords have sown commercial crops in Telangana lands that have always grown food grains, added pesticides and turned them into poison pots. Telangana lands have turned into barren cattle. Minor irrigation has been crushed. They built projects on rivers and turned water towards their regions. Hence, Telangana farmers, women agricultural labourers, and labouring women have been pushed into difficult-to-survive situations. They migrate to cities and slog for twelve hours in small factories. Yet, they are unable to survive. They are not paid the wages they deserve. The construction women labourers are getting buried under the buildings for which they carried stones. They are slogging as domestic workers. Lambadi mothers are selling their children, unable to raise them. They are living without dignity of labour, wages for labour, human dignity, and human rights. The entire family works as beedi workers throughout the day, yet they have no work security. Why did their lives become unsafe with a threat to their life and dignity in the informal sector? The discussion about inequality in education, employment, and gender is distant in such terrible conditions.

Telangana women's lives are all histories of resistance. From Ailamma to Belli Lalitha, they all questioned society and fought for equality. Chindu Ellamma tied anklet bells to her feet and played Chindu Bhagam, which was played only by men until then.

Dakkali Rajakka pushed the tradition of only men narrating *Jamba Purana* to the attic and sang the *Jamba Purana* with patam¹⁶. Yashoda Reddy announced the Telangana language and accent to the world. Sadalakshmi, the deputy speaker, and Eswaribai led the Telangana movement in 1969. Telangana women are mobilising on a large scale to attain Telangana with the spirit of social awareness inspired by such women.

¹⁶ Scrolling pictures

We Would Have Happily Danced If This Bill Was for All Women

(April 2010)

Governments, political parties, and women's organisations pompously celebrated the hundred years of International Women's Day on 8 March. It is not just a celebration of a hundred years. The Women's Reservation Bill will be introduced in the Parliament on this day. Hence, this furore. Wish political meetings happened under women's leadership, at least on this day. Men of the political parties presided over the meetings. These leaders are afraid of women's empowerment even for a day. They are worried that women might occupy all spaces if they are allowed. Women leaders of women's organisations do not allow that empowerment to the working class and lower caste women, even on this day. 8th March is a day when women declare their solidarity with one another. It is an occasion to decide on one's goal. There should be equality for women among women and with men.

The channels can see only women of Banjara Hills status but not women of slums, who are distanced from letters in print media, too.

Happy to see that the women's reservation we have been waiting for decades is finally approved in the Rajya Sabha. But we would be happier if this bill applied to all women. All of us women would have danced in the streets. But the male world does not like to see those celebrations. Wish Ambedkar were with us now. He introduced the Hindu Code Bill for women and resigned from his ministry when the bill was not passed. He fought in solidarity with women. Where are such women supporters now?

While some women are celebrating the approval of the women's reservation bill in Rajya Sabha, B.C., minority women, who are more than half of all women in number, are unhappy for being excluded from the fruits of the bill. It can be said that the legislation, in a way, divided women. They are divided into women who get political benefits and who do not. Those who say all women are socially and politically one should understand this division. It might appear noble and democratic at the surface level to say that all women are one, all humans are one, there is no gender difference, and no caste-religion difference.

However, when they are not one and are divided into different sections, castes, and religions, it would affect the benefits of diverse identities to call them one. Now, unity, solidarity, and mobilising are being weaponised to repress identities. We come across Malas attacking sixty S.C. castes, Seemandhras¹⁷ against Telangana people, women of hegemonic castes against Dalit, B.C., Adivasi, and minority women with these words that look superficially democratic.

The bill has divided women into those with political opportunities and those without. This bill has created a bigger problem. This bill may not be able to show a solution to women's concerns. If women of the privileged class enter the legislature, they might discuss only their problems. In fact, it is the Dalit and Adivasi women who are majorly affected, as the bill was not approved. The reservations meant for Dalit and Adivasi women turned futile as the 33 per cent women's reservation bill was not approved as per the constitutional directions, leaving them distanced from the legislature.

Let us hope this bill will be passed in Lok Sabha tomorrow. However, women of all sections and castes may not get justice. What will they lose if reservations are applied to all women? They delayed the bill for so long, blaming each other. In fact, they are all scared that they might lose their seats. All men are one in this regard.

The Women's Reservation Bill is the first step towards women's empowerment. It cannot be achieved if a woman from the family of zamindars, jagirdars, doras, and patels becomes the political representative. The final victory for women is possible only when untouchable women, scavenging women, jogini women, and landless oppressed women occupy leadership positions in the legislature.

¹⁷ Rayalaseema and Andhra

The Supreme Court Judgment That Broke the Iron Shackles

(May 2010)

Society, particularly men, missed a heartbeat when they heard the judgment given by the Supreme Court of India on 23 March 2010 that premarital sex is not a crime. A sensational judgement. Many people had sleepless nights. They relentlessly ranted on the television channels. Discussion paves the way for progress. That's why discussions were probably not extended. Some men, as well as some women, flared up on the well-known Tamil actress Khushbu for saying that premarital sex is not wrong. Some discussion happened in the media in that context. Twenty cases were registered against Khushbu in different places. An enquiry was also conducted. Finally, the Supreme Court opined that premarital sex and living together were not crimes.

Our Indian social system is still being controlled by Manuvada, patriarchal, casteist, and inheritance practices. Ambedkar, in his essay "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development", says that the caste discrimination against Dalits and the patriarchal dominance of women started more or less around the same time. Vedic, caste, and male values, and male hegemony can be cited as the reasons for the oppression of Dalits and women. If we carefully examine the lands, politics, business, industries, and lineages, we notice that the values convenient for men, Hindus, and the upper castes are still reigning. Similarly, the Hindu male iron shackle ideology still controls women's sexuality. This judgement applies only to men and women who have attained the majority age but not to those who have not.

It is unfortunate that the tradition of perceiving women as objects of sex and personal belonging still exists. Men's government continues to run in families as the heads. Men are functioning as the decision-making agency. The same situation prevails in all fields of society. In many places, women's fundamental rights are also not represented. In some places, discussions do not even happen in that direction. This reflects the abysmal status of women in society. Women losing rights over their sexuality and body is a historical

tragedy. The Supreme Court's favourable judgement on an issue that has been discussed for decades by feminists makes it a memorable day.

However, this judgement is not radically new for Bahujan and tribal women. Re-marriage, widow marriage, and premarital understandings have been integral to their culture. So, this judgement does not sanction any rights to women of these communities. This issue concerns only savarna Hindu women.

Similarly, pre-marital sex based on different kinds of understanding is an old practice. We can cite many examples, such as Kunti and Satyawati from *Mahabharata*. We can observe the grave contrast in the freedom enjoyed by women of the Puranic times and contemporary women in Hindu society. The vedic society and literature that portrayed women as unrestricted seekers of liberty have woven the hegemony of control on women's sexuality and body in reality. It is still going strong. In this context, the Supreme Court's judgement is radical. A favourable discussion on women's sexuality and living together should happen in political parties, people's associations, and among their leaders, at least now. Let us hope that women leaders working in communist and revolutionary organisations, in particular, will shed their silence on male devotion and initiate a public discussion. We are witnessing a positive conversation at the national and international levels on the demands put forth by the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) communities.

It is heartening that the Supreme Court's judgement dismantled the oppressive notions related to women while serious movements and discussions are happening for the proper representation of women for their complete empowerment in the legislature. It is a step towards achieving freedom and empowerment for women in the struggle between the oppressive moral values partial to men's and women's battles for freedom. The judgement is a slap on the feudal and patriarchal society that controlled women's sexuality like their possession.

How to Thrash Caste Discrimination?

(June 2010)

A television channel displayed a caption, “slipper shot for those who ask you about your caste”. Then, how should those proclaiming that only brahmins can prepare the offerings and not other castes be thrashed? Are there any discussions around this? No. An order was issued that the offerings in Vijayawada Durga temple should be prepared only by brahmins and not by other Shudra castes. This order by the Endowment Department is a violation of the constitution. According to the constitution, everyone has all the rights irrespective of caste, religion, and region. But, no punishments are implemented for such violations.

In fact, Durga is not a brahmin goddess. The shudra castes established her as a goddess with their belief systems as the historical foundation. The brahmin priests slowly occupied the Durga temple, which was outside the Hindu brahmanical practices. They hegemonised the temple, citing incense, lamps, offerings, chantings, and recitations. The Shudra castes used to perform all tasks in this temple for thirty years. The brahmin priests who have entirely appropriated the temple are arguing now that the laddus made by the Shudra castes are polluted and that laddus will become sacred only if brahmins make them. The priestly class is wielding the power granted by the Hindu religion and its undemocratic and inhuman beliefs on society. They are swallowing the small temples of goddesses such as Poshamma, Maisamma, and Uppalamma as the Hindu-patented temples.

Jyotirao Phule rightly observed that people of one caste do not always need to stand between God and their disciples. Shudra castes have been preparing the offerings for thirty years. The brahmin priests who have already acquired the financial authority over the temple are now eyeing the offerings. They state that shudras should not prepare offerings and that it will degrade the value of the offerings. The livelihoods of the shudras are destroyed in the name of sacredness. Such people should be prosecuted by law. However, governments, courts, and laws also follow the Hindutva ideology. So, it will not happen.

Article 17 of the Indian Constitution prohibits caste discrimination. The Protection of Civil Rights Act of 1955 also protects citizens from caste discrimination. How legal is it to provide special facilities and invitations for some castes and prohibit and drive away some other castes when the temple is a public place?

Notice any temple in the state or the country. Those who guard the footwear, the cleaning staff, torchbearers, the chariot pullers, and play the auspicious instruments are all from Dalit and Shudra castes. Isn't it caste discrimination to permanently assign these works to some people? How do we thrash such discrimination? Is it not caste and religious discrimination to reserve Vedic schools and universities, Vedic chantings, offerings, financial transactions in temples, ornaments, temple lands, and priesthoods to brahmins? Depriving the Shudra castes of their livelihood in the name of Hindu religious sacredness is also a violation of labour laws. Marx compared religion to opium. But the Hindu religion is not merely opium. It is poison.

Religion and caste might appear as different entities. But, the religious dharmas preserve the caste system. The Hindu religion and its ideology are dictatorial and inhuman. It inevitably emphasises caste hegemony. Ambedkar believed that caste will be annihilated if the Hindu dharmasastras that form its foundation are dismantled.

They say that all are equal before God but do not allow Dalits into the temple. They do not allow Dalit Bahujan people as priests. If all human beings are the same, with bodies filled with blood and flesh, how will only the brahmins apply sacredness to laddu?

The Dalit, Adivasi, and Bahujan people, who constitute 98 per cent of the population, have their customs, traditions, and belief systems. But, they do not come under the Hindu religious system. The brahmin priests, constituting less than two per cent of the population, do not involve themselves in any physical labour, but conduct the religious dharmas, morals and regulations, customs and traditions and impose them on the Bahujan castes. There is selfishness, exploitation, inequality, injustice, inhumanness, and authoritarianism behind this. People upholding secular and democratic values should

condemn the undemocratic and manipulative arguments that label food as a sacred offering and attempt to convince that it acquires divinity only if brahmins prepare it.

Honour Killings Are Inhuman

(July 2010)

Women, Dalit men and their families have been subjected to honour killings for generations. Of late, men and women in love or married in their lineage are being dragged into the caste panchayats and inflicted with the death penalty. They even warn laws and courts not to interfere as this issue concerns the honour of their lineage. It is said that such instances mostly happen in Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh. However, many might not have come to the media's attention. Honour killings are wicked social evils. Human rights movements have been pronouncing that no one, not even the courts of law, has the right to kill humans. At least now, we should welcome discussions around honour killings.

There is no specific punishment in law for those who fall in love with a person of their lineage and gotra. Hence, the caste panchayats are issuing judgements. Even small systems that perpetuate patriarchy, hegemony, and oppression are supporting and defending such killings. They provoke families by saying, the girl is not good; eliminate her; the girl likes a fellow not of our caste, kill them both. Police, families, castes, and society more or less approve of such killings.

The hegemonic caste panchayats might impose death penalty but Dalit caste panchayats do not. They scold the couple but do not punish them with the death penalty. The discussions should not be confined to the killings of those married within the lineage but should also extend to the killing of lower caste men and their families for loving and marrying upper caste girls. The hegemonic castes continue to kill Dalits and women in the name of patriarchy and honour. It is prevalent in different forms. Women are killed by husbands or lovers, alleging that they looked and talked to someone else. The fellow who pushed his lover, Sameera, to her death from Charminar said, "She had other relationships, that's why I pushed her down in rage", and turned the case into sympathy for him. The entire system is filled with opposition against women and lower castes. Caste, family,

political parties, panchayats, male dominance, courts, and laws are all involved in honour killings. What is worse is the courts' support for honour killings. They revealed their casteist patriarchy in the cases related to Mathura and Bhanwari Devi. Similarly, a judgement that is casteist to the core was delivered in the case of Sushma Tiwari. Her crime is loving and marrying a Dalit man, though she was a brahmin by birth. She met a Dalit man from Kerala when she was a student in Delhi. They moved to Kerala to escape the threats from her family. But her elder brother hounded the Dalit man and his family to death. She escaped as she was not present there at that time. It was the boy who married her. But the killing did not stop with him; the entire family was targeted and killed. Such indiscriminate rage!

Sushma Tiwari approached the Bombay High Court, and the accused was given the death penalty. However, the highest court in the country, the Supreme Court, said something shameful. If this is considered wrong, it happened as part of the responsibility of the family members to scold when something that everyone considers wrong happens in the context of the Indian social circumstances; this is not a small mistake that can be forgiven, but at the same time it is not a grave wrong to give a death penalty, the Supreme Court said. We live in a social system where courts deliver such undemocratic, unjust, and inhuman judgments. This judgment does not respect the constitution. Does highlighting the social circumstances as the context not mean supporting the caste system? The Supreme Court ridiculed the concept of equality, equity, all human beings as equals, and all human beings having equal access to rights, by making it questionable. The caste system destroys and dismantles humanity. All forces in society have to come together to pull it down. Sushma Tiwari argues that the caste system that kills people for exercising their choice should be dismantled. She is fighting for the death penalty for her brother, who killed her husband and his family. Media, women's organisations, and the entire society should support Sushma Tiwari's struggle. Women's organisations, Dalit Bahujan associations, and NGOs must seriously oppose and fight for the elimination of honour killings in whichever form they are and condemn the inhuman judgments given by the Supreme Court.

Saw the Jail and Caught a Fever

(September 2010)

I have so far seen men's prisons. But, for some reason, I could not see women's prisons. Recently, I went to Chanchalguda women's jail with Sathya. It looked like Cherlapally prison's sister. There is no difference. High walls, latches, locks, and patterns of mulakat are all the same. I was so affected by seeing them that I caught a fever. It seems the architecture of prisons is the same everywhere. We wondered about the meaning of the prison symbol of two keys leaning on each other like the police. The male police there said it symbolises bandobast. We laughed at the police's interpretation of the symbol.

Generally, one woman's prison is affiliated with each district. However, the Cherlapally Central jail, with two thousand prisoners, has no affiliated women's jail. There are only two prisons exclusively for women prisoners in the entire state. One is Chanchalguda in Hyderabad, and the other is Rajahmundry. The warden, home guards, and other prison employees must be only women. But, there was a policeman as a guard in this prison. Every prison has A, B, and C categories. Prisoners in the A and B categories are provided facilities on the court's instructions based on their social background and influential social class. But that was not the case in the women's prison.

Although Sathya had obtained prior permission, we had to wait outside for two hours, along with the policemen. The policewomen and the superintendent inside strictly adhered to the rules of the British times. Our pens and papers were also looked upon as the accused. Mobile phones were also kept in remand. Sadly, even the nurse, teacher, doctor, and all women appointed for the prisoners' welfare also behaved like the police and spoke the police language. In a male-dominated criminal society, a caste unequal criminal society, a patriarchal oppressive criminal society, a labour exploitative criminal society, an unjust criminal society, some women end up in prisons, committing crimes and some others are accused of committing crimes. They reach there with many sorrows, anxieties, and fears, leaving their village, relatives, and friends. There won't be cool words that greet them as

human beings. The prison staff snub them like pelting stones and beating them with a staff. Counselling should be held for everyone. Not just one, but everything about the prison can cause a fever.

But, the board will be boasting high. The prison department keeps the convicts sent by the court for their protection and serves society. The lines they have written, that they will treat the prisoners with humanity and generate respect for the law before sending them out, remain prisoners there. There might be around two hundred women in that prison, including those convicted, those who are in remand and their children. 99.9 per cent of these women belong to S.C., S.T., and B.C. communities. The majority of them are B.C. women; next to them are S.C.s, followed by S.T.s. 70 percent of them landed in prison on the charges of killing their husbands. Whether the husband died of alcoholism or was killed by a family member or a relative, the wife is accused of his murder and sent to jail, it seems. Thirty per cent of women landed there on theft, dowry, and cheating charges.

Surprisingly, the majority of women prisoners were accused of killing their husbands. If this were true, there wouldn't have been so many atrocities and violence against women. These women prisoners did not look at one another as criminals. They were all friendly, free, and happy. No one was pathetic and sorrowful. But, they were not healthy. We met the women in remand. We could not meet the women political prisoners and those who were serving their sentence. The cases in remand were petty. They would come out with some help. One teenage girl approached us, saying, "My mother is a railway labourer. I came here on a cheating charge. I am pregnant. Please tell my mother that I am in prison". One woman said, "My man died of alcoholism. My in-laws sent me to prison. Don't know when I will come out of here". Everyone laughed when a fifty-year-old woman said, "When crops failed, two to three families came to the city for survival, planning to pickpocket. I escaped four times but was caught the fifth time. Police showed me four jewellery shops, told me to agree that I had committed theft, and assured me they would save me from the case".

Their faces went dark when the prison staff came. We couldn't free them, but we freed our bags and mobile phones and walked out with Sathya. Their struggles gripped me in the form of a fever.

Men's Conspiracy to Blame Women Guilty

(October 2010)

Men have erased women of diverse social backgrounds from history to suit male privilege. As if this is not enough, there are increasing incidents that blame women as guilty in new forms. Men are carefully enacting things through women without being affected. It could be the Khairlanji incident, the arrack tenders, or the recent (15 September 2010) incident in Kahitapur. Women were pushed to the forefront in all these incidents. Men are conspiring to thrust the sins of mass of corruption, injustice, and inequalities on women. Women of all castes must be careful against such conspiracies.

In the Khaitapuram village of Choutuppal Mandal, Nalgonda district, one SC and one BC older people were accused of black magic; their hands and feet were tied, they were bashed up, pushed onto the pyre, and burnt alive by the men of that village on 15 September 2010. But, they pushed the blame onto the Dalit and Bahujan women and fled from the village. They made the SC and BC women, who strongly believe in superstitions due to their illiteracy and poverty, tell the police that they only killed the above two and that the police can do whatever they can. The women were jailed, but the criminals escaped scot-free. Women of Kahitapur village were not isolated. They were part of councils formed on the principle of equality. The male world used them to exploit their belief in banamati, superstitions, and illiteracy. Our cattle are dying, our children are dying, and our people are bedridden due to their black magic. That's why we killed them. Now, our village is improving— they said in male voices, shook off their sari ends and tucked them around their waists. SC and BC women gathered as an army, beat up Ellaiah and Narsimhaiah, poured kerosene, and burnt them alive. They did not even consider that the two men were Dalit Bahujans, old, and could not walk or see properly. Superstition was a mere external reason, but other motives were behind it. They sat and enjoyed demonically while the two men were screaming, crying, and yelling as they were burning. Women who are acknowledged for their kindness and compassion, face atrocities and killings, encounter social evils, and

know about the wounds of sorrow—how could they do this? There is no evidence of women's groups killing even a single person when they were facing violence, force, and injustice. They unanimously said that they killed the two men for doing banamati. Where does this women's awareness disappear when women are violated and killed? If they do such things for themselves, they would save women from atrocities. Can anyone say why all the banamati murders are happening only to Dalits?

In fact, Dalit Ellaiah's piece of land was in between the lands of the dominant castes, which became a crime. That piece of land being closer to the lake became a drawback. It angered the dominant castes. They could not snatch the piece of land from Ellaiah. They could not please or scare the Dalit Ellaiah. That's why they incited the superstition of black magic in the village. The seasonal fevers and road accidents were also added to their account to provoke people. Rumours were spread. They might have thought the case would not be strong if it were women, or they might have thought, let women face it, they made the women the scapegoats. Women also believed the rumours and got provoked without understanding the hidden agendas and without the awareness that banamati is a superstition. Ants have to come together to kill the serpent, but here, ants are killing the ants.

Can the Khaitapuram Dalit Bahujan women kill the men of dominant castes who disrobed women, made them play Batkamma naked, and paraded them in the village like they burnt Ellaiah and Narsimhaiah to death? Victimised people killing one another is nothing but a conspiracy by the men of dominant castes. In Khairlanji of Maharashtra, too, a Dalit family was unhumanly murdered; mother and daughter were raped, sticks were pierced between their legs, were thrown into the canal for owning a piece of land. Kunbi caste women administered all this, but the minds behind this were of men.

Women filing tenders for arrack is similar to this. It is primarily men who consume arrack. But, it is mainly women who face the disastrous consequences. Women shoulder the burden of home, family, and children. It was women who fought against alcoholism and brought the prohibition of liquor. But, the tragedy of this decade is women filing tenders for arrack. Men encourage and incite women to venture into such anti-social, anti-

human, anti-women, atrocious, and unjust activities. Men weaponise women and get them into tricky situations. Such tendencies affect women, particularly women of the production castes. Men of dominant castes are turning women of production castes into criminals. This is what has happened in Khaitapuram.

We are witnessing that men of all castes are similar in controlling women. The ongoing caste movements, such as Dandora, Tudum Debba, Erukali Sangham, BC Sangham, and United Andhra Pradesh, are not allowing women. If a woman forcibly enters, they are strategically driving them away. How can we call them social movements? How can they claim that status when they do not give a needle's space to women? Women are distanced from such movements, but they blame women guilty in order to carry out their agenda without getting affected. Women of all castes should become aware and conscious of such injustice. Governments should also take measures to eradicate superstitions and protect human rights.

Is Micro-finance Meant to Kill or to Nurture?

(January 2011)

Our Lachakka is from the Mulugu forest village of Warangal. She has some land for shifting cultivation. She cultivates it and also goes for labour work in others' fields. She gathers tendu leaves in the forest. Recently, I learned that she was working at the chilli powder mill in Warangal. I wondered about this sudden development. I agonised, thinking that the fate of migration did not spare our Lachhakka and cursed the famine. She was drying chillies when I went to the mill to meet her. I couldn't control my grief to see our Lachakka in the blazing sun. We shared our grief. I asked her, wiping my eyes, "What happened, Akka? Why did you people come here? You didn't want to let me know, did you? What misery fell on you to leave your home and place and come to do this work?"

Our Lachakka started to narrate her story, "What shall I tell you, Selle? Cursed be the debts. We reached this situation due to our debts. Not just one, we have to pay the loans to the bank fellow and also to the morning credit people of Monday and Wednesday, and evening credit people of Tuesday.

The DWCRA groups immediately did not reach our wada¹⁸. They distributed the money in the village. Women of our wada joined the women's group only four years ago. They bombarded us, saying that we would prosper if we joined the women's groups, would eat well three times a day, would have no scarcity of money, and would quickly get loans for less interest. We saved a daily rupee, credited it in the bank, and got loans. But banks will not give us loans for our needs. We have to provide them with a guarantee and show surety and go around the bank till our feet are tired. Banks are located not in our village but in the mandal. The travel expenses will come to one or two thousand rupees. We have to skip our work. Even those loans sanctioned are cut down for some deductions. They ask ninety-nine reasons. We are breathless by the time we answer all the questions. The bank

¹⁸ A locality where Dalit communities live; it is affiliated to a village but away from the village.

loan does not suffice for anything. The lakes are dried up, so there are no crops. We don't even get the sowing work. The dry land has no grass for the cattle. We had to take on debts for medical expenses, food, clothes, and every need. In such circumstances, the credit people came to our house and offered loans for low interest rates. They seemed like gods. Morning credit people, evening credit people, Monday credit people, and Tuesday credit people came and asked for the photograph of the husband and wife and the family ration card. They trained us for two to three days on their procedures, details of loans, how to pay back the loan, on which day, and for how many weeks. We have to stand in a line when they come, and all the women who took loans from them should hold one another's hands and sit in a circle. They make us sit like the accused. Initially, we did not know about them, but we needed money, so we borrowed. We came to know later that Selle, Yama's messengers, are better than they are. Once we get stuck in this, that loan scares us, whatever we are doing. The week comes back in a glimpse. Not a penny left in hand. Those fellows do not accept even if it is twenty-five paise less. They abuse mothers and sisters. They attack us with their rowdies. No one can stop them. Even the police do not care. Those credit fellows have no sympathy. They bash up men, provoke the women in the group and make them abuse others. We are so belittled that we feel like dying to protect our honour. Oh, Selle, cursed be their debt; it is like taking a loan from Yama's messengers. They might oblige if we touch their feet, but these credit fellows do not consider. Scared of them, we cannot eat to our fullest, and we cannot sleep peacefully. We cannot dare spend a rupee. We ate broken rice instead of rice and raw chutney instead of curry to save money. Despite doing all this, we could not pay their loans. Many of us from the wada locked up our homes and joined this company. We are starving and diverting our blood to the credit people. We are suffering fevers due to our fear of these people. What can we do? We will gather all our money and send a person to the village once a week to pay the loans. Otherwise, they will come here and attack us. Why would we come here and suffer like this, leaving the house behind, if the banks and governments functioned well? We would eat gruel and porridge but happily stay in the village. People in the neighbouring villages are dying, unable to bear the abuses and the insults by the credit people. All these are burdening women of lower

castes. We will never take loans from them even if we are dead. They ate up our hard toil. We are paying seventy thousand for a forty thousand rupees loan every week. They started giving loans in the name of women and destroying them. They said DWCRA and women's groups claimed to empower women with loans. Are they meant to kill women or nurture them? If they ever come to our houses offering to give loans, we will beat them up with broomsticks.

(The microfinance people are called chitti people in villages. They all have names, but the villagers call them morning chitti people and evening chitti people.

Shhh...Silence

(February 2011)

The people of Telangana did not think that the Srikrishna Committee would change the fate of Telangana and erase the lines of boundaries. They thought it was futile to appoint a committee. Some even protested against it and blamed it as a means of delay. The Srikrishna Committee wandered here and there, submitted its report by 31 December 2010, and washed its hands off. They made people stand on their toes, boasting to show the stars and put off the sun. What happened on 31 December 2010? Nothing happened. People were taken by tension, but nothing happened. The deception returned. Surprisingly, it did not weaken even amidst such a strong movement. Osmania was burning as the centre of the movement, while other universities in Telangana had become sites of struggle. Four hundred children of Telangana sacrificed their lives in one year. Telangana is questioning the value of replacing such sacrifices. Telangana has been burning daily as dharnas, bandhs¹⁹, hunger strikes, blockades, roarings, discussions, celebrations, and slogans. While people's aspirations were seriously reverberating, the Srikrishna Committee made recommendations in favour of a united Andhra and mentioned only one recommendation in favour of the separate state. The committee's approach worsened the wounds of Telangana.

In fact, there was no trust in the Srikrishna committee. People from all castes, classes, writers, students, employees, women, Dalit women, working-class people, farmers, and labourers submitted hundreds of representations strongly expressing their aspirations for the state of Telangana. But, none of them reached or impacted the committee. It became a mere trumpet in favour of Seemandhra. As an M.P. said, Seemandhras might have already impressed upon the Srikrishna committee.

¹⁹ Closed in protest

The Report did not list the accurate social justice statistics but tried to prove with numbers that Seemandhra leaders ruled the state for longer than Telangana. In the past forty-two years, reddy, brahmins, and kamma have ruled for the longest time. In between, only Damodaram Sanjeevaiah, a Seemandhra Dalit Mala, was the chief minister, but he was not allowed for even two years. There has not been a single chief minister from the sixty Dalit castes, women, Dalit women, and BC castes in these sixty-three years of independence. The oppressed communities have had no place among the rulers and those with decisive power in the movement.

Only those with cars, money, and power dominate even in the movements, representing all the dominant communities. When Telangana lawyers fought for Telangana's share, the outcome reached the dominant castes, such as reddy, brahmin and kamma, but not the SC, ST, and BC lawyers. When questioned, they say not to bring up the issues of caste, religion, and gender in the context of the movement and not to create divisions. Questions about social justice should not be raised and should not be heard. Silence. The Srikrishna committee disregarded many issues as irrelevant. There was no discussion on the sacrifices of Telangana children. But, it lied, saying that SC, ST, and BC youth did not get jobs not due to regional discrimination but due to their lack of skills. The committee invisibilised the forces and reasons that prevented skills. The Srikrishna Committee Report ran into seven hundred pages in two volumes. But, there is no discussion on social justice, distribution of education, employment, and resources in governance. Leave alone a page; social justice does not find a single paragraph or a letter in the report.

The forest lands that the Adivasi women have lost, the poverty that made them sell their children, the migration of Dalit women, and workers in the informal sector slogging and starving with no education, employment, or equal wages have not found a place in the report. The hardships faced by farmer-labourers, Dalits, Bahujans, and minorities and the reasons behind them are also not cited.

The Srikrishna committee has meticulously shown the development around Hyderabad and the entire Telangana. Surprisingly, though several women's organisations, feminist movements, and women's NGOs are working, the report does not mention the

development of Telangana women and their share in Telangana. Sadly, women's participation in the Telangana movements that proclaim the unshaken foundations of matriarchy has been rendered irrelevant.

People of Telangana, irrespective of their age, aspire for a separate state. They long to breathe the air of freedom without the Seemandhra domination in the separate state of Telangana. It is deadly for the movements to have internal discrimination and to consider it a crime to cite discrimination and inequality.

Once the movement takes off, all are equal. There should be no place for caste, religion, and gender. However, only women cook on the roads, only Madigas polish shoes and the washer community washes clothes in protest. Don't question this injustice now. Silence.

What More to Be Done for Telangana

(March 2011)

Telangana has become a battleground now. The aspirations for Telangana are exploding like detonators. Employees, students, lawyers, doctors, teachers, RTC and Municipal workers, senior citizens, and women are walking on the path of struggle with a determination to fight till Telangana is achieved. They are waging the war in Telangana.

They have been relentlessly fighting for the past fifty-five years, proclaiming their wish to get their Telangana that was forcibly united into Andhra Pradesh. They are proclaiming that Telangana is our birthright. They have been offering their blood in sacrifice. Ranging from Fazal Ali Commission, Gentlemen's Agreement, Mulki Rules, 610 G.O., Six Point Formula, and Girglani Commission to the recent Srikrishna Committee, they are all fraudulent. Isn't it a crime against people for the rulers to crush the constitutional promises of government for people and respect for people's aspirations, and twist their words? The declaration of Telangana by the Central Home Minister on 9 December 2009 proved to be a big false promise. When the rulers' words turn out to be hollow sounds of no value, who should the Telangana people trust? They cannot trust either the insider or the outsider. All are fraudsters.

The Andhra migrant rulers shot almost four hundred people to death in 1952 and 1969. Nearly five hundred youth of Telangana sacrificed their lives from 2009 till now. Some burnt themselves with petrol, some others going against the train, hanging themselves, and consuming poison. All these are murders only. Apart from this, they have been fighting, doing hunger strikes, bandhs, sloganeering, and rasta rokos, and have taken to the streets for a separate state. On the other hand, they are turning into song and dance with dhoom dham. They held the mulaqat²⁰ programme, met the leaders of Telangana Congress, TDP, and CPM, washed their clothes, polished their shoes, shaved their hair, distributed roses,

²⁰ meeting

touched their feet, and cooked food. They are constantly conducting camps in every street and staging non-cooperation with the slogan, one more blow and Telangana. They are proclaiming that this non-cooperation will continue till the Telangana bill is introduced in the Parliament and appealing to the employees not to work in offices, not to pay taxes, and not to take the ticket in the bus.

The Seemandhra people looted the resources, education, jobs, and self-respect of Telangana people for sixty years, amassed crores of rupees and are raging now to say we will not leave Telangana; we will not disturb the united state; we will agitate if Telangana is given. Seemandhra leaders' rage reminds us of those who came to beg but looted the house.

The Telangana movement is on one side, with restrictions on the other. The Seemandhra Congress leaders injured Osmania, where a relentless war of 365 days and 24 hours is burning. The rifle roars, tear gas shells, rubber cartridges, pellets, stone pelting, arrests, and jails have become routine there. A war of this magnitude for decades has not happened anywhere in the world, not even in the First and Second World Wars.

Movements have been going on for this long, and with this level of loss of life. But Telangana is yet to happen. What else can we do to express a people's aspiration and a democratic right? How else can we articulate? We have tried all forms of protest, movements, and struggles. What else can us Telangana people do to achieve our aspiration of our Telangana?

Seemandhra leaders disregard Telangana people's aspirations and well-being, as Telangana is the centre of their business. But, what about the Telangana political leaders? The Telangana Bill would have been launched in Parliament long ago had these leaders been genuine. They will shed their selfishness and temptations and stand for Telangana if taught a lesson. Then, Telangana will definitely be a reality.

Hail the Million March

(April 2011)

Some statues on the tank bund were toppled during the Million March on 10 March 2011. All those statues were of the men from the Seemandhra ruling castes. Katta Maisamma, who was pushed underneath the tank bund, would have taken a head bath and celebrated the happiness of getting rid of the burden. Most of the statues on the tank bund are those of men from Seemandhra ruling and feudal castes.

Seemandhra women, Dalits, BCs, Adivasis and minorities do not have to worry. Telangana activists manifested social consciousness beyond regionalities by sparing the statues of Molla, Potuluri Veerabrahmam, and Joshua. These statues convey the social and universal perspectives beyond regionalities, apart from the regional consciousness. This toppling was not done out of momentary rage, agitation, or impulse. It is a declaration of cultural resistance against the age-old hegemony of Seemandhra feudal lords over Telangana lands, food, water, livelihood, language, accent, art forms, literature, politics, and self-respect.

The Million March of 11th March will be marked in the history of Telangana as the dawn of the Telangana Renaissance. People of Telangana should celebrate it. Installing and worshipping statues is not part of Telangana culture. Telangana has no idol worship. It was imported from Seemandhra. History proclaims that large-scale reform movements against idol worship happened during the Freedom Struggle. Those movements did not reach Telangana because the disease of idol worship did not exist here. People of Telangana believed that nature has all the forces. They remembered the powers and greatness of their ancestors, recovered from exhaustion, and drew inspiration. Stones, rocks, trees, anthills, and lakes have no idols. At the most, there might be a high seat made of mud. Even in the festive celebrations, the high seats symbolise their names. The renowned Sammakka and Sarakka, too, have no idols. Sammakka gadde and Sarakka gadde are two small high seats of mud. The brahmanical religion barged into festive celebrations and destroyed the

pictures of Kali and Durga with lamps and incense sticks. It is trying to design idols for Sammakka and Sarakka against the people of Telangana. Apart from establishing the idol culture, which is not part of Telangana culture and history, it is unjust to forcibly install the statues of men of Seemandhra ruling castes who have nothing to do with Telangana language, literature, and art forms. How can they forget the saying that the king of one village is a servant in another? They might be great in their region. But, if they are thrust on the head and shoulders of Telangana, they will be toppled. Potti Sreeramulu sacrificed his life for the state of Andhra, which included Madras. But, it was twisted and celebrated in Telangana, saying that Potti Sreeramulu became a martyr for a separate state for the Telugu people. It is discrimination not only in installing the statues of Seemandhra ruling caste men and turning Telangana lands into parks and graves for them, but also in not having a single statue or grave for Telangana people, including P.V. Narasimha Rao, who served the country as the Prime Minister. What are the reasons behind invisibilising Telangana artists, activists, literateurs, social scientists, and political leaders such as Chindu Yellamma, Dakkali Balaiah, Chakali Ailamma, Komuram Bheem, Daida Vemulapalli Devender, Dunna Yeeddasu, and T.N. Sadalakshmi? When we examine the social perspectives and historical contexts of those whose statues were toppled, there is no evidence of their support for regional political aspirations and their caste and gender consciousness. They have done more harm than good to the oppressed castes and women. A Kannada king, Sri Krishnadevaraya, is projected as the symbol of the Telugu language and its people. But, why didn't the Kakatiya rulers, who were Telugu people, who ruled for centuries, patronise the Telugu language, culture, and art forms, and not become the symbol of the Telugu language and people? Surprisingly, not just the Seemandhra people but also the Telangana people have set aside Kakatias and installed Srikrishnadevayandhra Bhasha Nilayam at the centre of Hyderabad. Kakatias were shudras among shudras. Hence, their caste, more than the region, might have decided their place in history.

Literary histories have represented Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu as the pioneer of all literary forms. He is applauded as a great social reformer. However, people like

Bangalore Nagarathnamma have articulated how vicious and aggressive he was towards Devadasi women and their writings. Veeresalingam's book *Telugu Kavual Jeevita Charitra* (Life Stories of Telugu Poets) does not include poets from Telangana. This book says that *Radhika Santvanam*, written by Muddupalani, is obscene because the author was a courtesan. It addresses her derogatorily as that thing. The claims of his reform of social evils against women turn into a lie here. Unfortunately, Veeresalingam, who was inhuman and mean towards an author like him, was hailed as a reformer. He used his authority and hegemony to file criminal cases against Bangalore Nagarathnamma, who questioned his vicious culture and patriarchal ideology and put her behind bars. He incited police attacks and got a ban on *Radhika Santvanam*. People with such social histories will wash out if not today, tomorrow. Hail the people of Telangana who manifested social justice by not toppling all the statues of the Seemandhra people on the tank bund.

Ritual Oblation Cannot Secure Telangana

(May 2011)

Suddenly, the TRS party and the Telangana leaders from the dominant castes remembered Ambedkar. On the one hand, they are leading the marginalised castes and are oppressing the marginalised caste leadership; on the other hand, they are organising meetings on the need for smaller states as advocated by Ambedkar. The TRS leader initiated a Chandi Yagam, which contradicts Ambedkar's ideology, on the birth anniversary of Ambedkar.

The Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi and minority communities of Telangana opposed the Chandi Yagam initiated on Ambedkar's birth anniversary while the movement was gaining momentum, but they could not prevent it. Telangana Dalit leaders and secularists could not stop the manuvada forces despite their fiery objections.

Telangana's culture is not that of yagnas and yagas. It is a culture of labour closely connected to nature. The Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, and minority people are the majority here. Their cultures influence the Telangana culture. Except for one or two districts, we do not come across the institution of temples in Telangana. KCR may not be aware of this. Goddesses like Yellamma, Pochamma, Maisamma, and Uppamma are worshipped in villages, but they have no temples. They are revered as neem tree, banyan tree, lakebund, and boundary-throne. They do not have daily lamps, incense, and offerings, except the annual offering of chicks, coconut, and food. This cannot be associated with the Hindu religious system.

In contrast, villages in Seemandhra have temples for each caste. The temples belonging to village elders accumulate wealth, similar to those of the dominant castes. They have brahmin priests, daily worship, and various offerings. In contrast, the smaller temples, like those of Nukamma and Polamma, only have ceremonies once a year or every five years, with no regular worship or offerings. Temple culture indicates idle practices rather than the industrious ethos of the Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi communities.

KCR, a feudal lord of the Telangana Velama caste, chose to conduct the Chandi Yagam, which contradicts the beliefs and cultural practices of the majority in Telangana, to promote Hindu religion, manuvad, and casteism in the region. He claims that the Chandi Yagam will bring prosperity to Telangana. If that were true, countless lives in Telangana would not have been at stake over the years. Why would we need political parties, elections, or movements? KCR and his family could simply perform rituals. The Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, and minority communities of Telangana strive for a secular Telangana founded on social justice and aspire for the small states that Ambedkar envisioned. Many students from these groups have sacrificed their education, future, and lives in this struggle. No ritual oblation can account for their sacrifices.

Superstitions and rituals cannot lure these majority groups advocating for Telangana. It is clear who KCR represents by initiating yagas that harm and oppress these communities, especially on Ambedkar's birth anniversary.

If those in power belong to hegemonic Hindu castes, social justice and democracy will wither, while social tyranny will thrive. The dominant castes monopolising land, natural resources, and various sectors will push for exploitative and oppressive caste values, a pattern evident throughout history. The previous chief minister, Rajasekhara Reddy, renovated thirty thousand Hindu temples, appointed thirty thousand brahmin priests, and funded various religious activities.

Similarly, K. Chandrasekhara Rao, who claims to advocate for Telangana, consulted numerous brahmin priests and informed them of his family's longstanding commitment to rituals and worship. He promised to amend the Endowment Act if Telangana was formed, transferring temple management and worship to Brahmin priests and establishing unmatched Vedic schools. He pledged to build a temple in every village if a separate state was achieved. This approach imposes his religious beliefs and superstitions on the people of Telangana, reflecting his ignorance, tyranny, and exploitation.

It is detrimental to force religious matters into collective issues when religion is fundamentally personal. Jayendra Saraswati warned that Hindu spirituality would diminish

and the identity of the Hindu religion would be compromised if Telangana were formed. He instructed his followers to strengthen Hinduism, revealing the underlying mindset of Telangana's society.

Chandi yagas and their complexities pose a direct threat to Dalit, Bahujan, and minority castes of Telangana, who are fighting for a Telangana rooted in social justice and dedicated to dismantling Hindu casteist dominance.

What about the Telangana Madiga Maisamma?

(June 2011)

The production castes of Telangana have endured imprisonment, faced legal cases, and made sacrifices for the Telangana movement. However, the leadership of this movement has largely remained with the feudal lords of the dominant castes. Employee associations find themselves compelled to call for strikes or cancel them based on the directives of these feudal lords. This illustrates the current situation of the production castes in Telangana.

Those who, in the past, celebrated and protested against the feudal lords of Telangana are now reassuring them that they will follow their lead, essentially becoming echoing parrots for the lords' calls. While the establishment of Telangana seems to be within reach, it continues to feel elusive. In this context, Madiga Maisamma raises important questions for the feudal lords of Telangana. Doras and Patels, I am Madiga Maisamma. Telangana has thrived on my hard work and dedication. The streams of my sweat enriched the crops, fruits, forts, towers, roads, lakes, forests, trees, coal mines, and projects. I am asking with that courage. Will my livelihood be guaranteed in the separate state of Telangana? Will my children get education and government jobs instead of becoming child labour? Will my girl children cease to be made joginis? Will our labourers, who constitute ninety per cent of the population, live with dignity? Will we at least get wages? Will we get rid of our slavery? Will we become landlords and industrialists and occupy the chairs?

Lakes, lands, businesses, and chairs belong to you. Although your lands have been prospering in our hands and sweat for generations, they did not become ours. We don't belong to our village and are pushed to the outskirts. You said all Telangana people are one after conquering the Andhra feudal lords. One means equal, is it not, dora? Will it come true? Will you allow us into your street? Will you allow us to sit on the pial outside your house? Will you respect us if we come to your home? Will you break two glasses? Will you allow us into the village councils? The Andhra people indeed looted Telangana land, water,

education, resources, employment, and business. Equally actual is the fact that the Telangana lords have snatched the lands from our Bahujan castes. It is true that they made us do bonded labour and did not allow us to access education and employment. It is true that our literature and art forms were ignored, that our human rights were curtailed, and that they manifested cruel casteism against us.

Telangana got projects, but there was discrimination in the distribution of water. The landlords harvested three crops a year and educated their children in cities. We lost the little land we had to the projects and carried stones as labourers. Lands were not watered, nor were our parching throats and our thirst quenched. The hegemony of the feudal lords and the bonded labour has not disappeared yet. The placenta-pots of casteism are still intact. Our lives are mere sooty kitchen rags despite the battles we fought. Not just the Andhra feudal lords but also the Telangana feudal lords are looting us. The humiliation of playing Batkamma naked is still fresh as a wound. There are thorns under our beds. Will our riches hidden under your beds remove them? The Telangana movement is flourishing with song and dance. But, we are still addressed as hey you and called derogatory names in villages.

We thought the Telangana flag on our children's graves would bear images of bracelets, neck chains, earrings, nose pins, hair ornaments, and sickles. We thought it would reflect the toiling Bahujan women of Telangana. But, could you tell us why the Telangana Talli²¹ looks like the woman feudal lord and the elder sister of the Andhra Mata?

You alleged that the Andhra people looted our assigned lands. Kudos to you. But let us also talk about the assigned lands under your control. Are we not the people who beat the drum, move in groups, sing, dance, and die in the Telangana movement? It was our children who died in the Telangana movement thirty years ago (1969). Their sacrifice was blown to the wind without leaving a trace. The story would have been different if they were the children of the feudal lords. Their names and villages would have become mythologies for generations. They reached the cities when people drove them out then, and now they

²¹ Mother Telangana

are returning to villages in the name of the Telangana movement. Earlier, one lord boasted of bringing Telangana. Your stories are like this. We have faced blows and have fallen flat. Dora! You said you would increase the quota for Dalits and Muslims in reservations and establish Vedic schools for Brahmins if Telangana comes. What about our Bahujan women? As Mallmmas, Yellmmas, and Maismmas ruled in the past, our Madiga Maismmas will also rule the future Telangana.

It is not new for our people of all ages to burn and collapse to death in movements across generations. You should also be reduced to ashes like a burnt broom. If asked, Sakali Ailamma, Kodurupaka Rajamma, and Dudala Salamma will narrate your stories and torment like *Jamba Purana* on the scroll.

Mire Must Be Exposed

(July 2011)

Four days ago, a television channel called me to invite me to speak in a discussion on sexual harassment of women in the workplace. I wondered why we had to discuss this again and felt sad that the problem had not been resolved. In 1995, the Supreme Court issued some instructions and orders to prevent sexual harassment of women in the workplace. Women's organisations responded to this on a large scale. They went to every office, conducted meetings, explained the orders of the Supreme Court, generated consciousness, and widely circulated them. We can understand the seriousness of the problem from the need to discuss it even today.

Such harassment and violence in workplaces are faced by higher-level officials than by lower-level employees. But such things don't come out. Even if they do, they don't sustain. Recently, a woman employee exposed the IAS Officer's sexual harassment after silently bearing it for a long time. Women's organisations agitated and got the accused arrested. Very soon, the accused resumed his job. The punishment that he got for sexually harassing and torturing a woman subordinate was to make him sit idle at home for a few days. Why was he not jailed? The Women's Commission, too, was proactive in getting him suspended. However, the Women's Commission had to function without a Chairperson, owing to some forces that probably took revenge. Women's organisations should have protested when the accused resumed work. When asked, the woman employee said, "My life was ruined. At home, outside the office, among relatives, they see me and point to me as if I were a strange animal. They whisper that she was the one who complained against the officer and the one who faced humiliation in office. This torture is no less than the torture that fellow resorted to. That officer escaped to safety in the name of leaves and transfers. How many men were punished in the past seventeen years? What happened now in the harassment cases? The fellow who tortured me and wronged me has pompously rejoined unhurt. I was on the streets, violated, humiliated, and scandalised. What justice

did I get? No Supreme Court order could save me and protect my freedom, rights, and dignity as an individual”.

Women employees have no safety in the Secretariat, which claims to be an awakening and a crest jewel that rules the states. Women have to face discrimination, indifference, ridicule, and contempt at every step. If the Supreme Court orders, which turned into legislation later, are not implemented here, how would the subordinate offices implement them? The Secretariat has approximately two thousand women employees, from sweepers to gazetted officers. Sexual harassment happens extensively in a normalised manner. Women employees think that nothing will happen except for them to be scandalised if they complain. Women's organisations are also a reason for this. We come across obscene writings in lifts and on the walls of women's restrooms. L Block lift has male genitals etched in different angles. When women complained, a male officer drove them away, saying, “What is there? Why are you creating a ruckus? We can get it painted. Why do we need an inquiry? Why should we increase our workload for some fellow writing something? I have a lot of work. Don't irritate me”. Women employees got it painted once. But, it became a routine. Women became thick-skinned, repeatedly fighting.

According to the law, a complaint box must be kept in the workplace where there are women employees, and an enquiry vigilance committee should be constituted with a woman IAS officer. But nothing of this sort has happened so far in the Secretariat. There are no boxes and no vigilance committee. If there is no legal protection for women in the highest office of the state, like the Secretariat and the law is being violated, can we even talk about small offices and private offices?

Thanks to globalisation, office systems have also changed. There used to be fifty to a hundred employees in one hall. Now, walls are built, and cabins are made. Earlier, all women would come together on one scream. But now, people are divided. Men and women, even if they are of the same cadres, have different facilities. Male officers enjoy AC cars, rooms, furniture, servants, etc. Women officers have none of these. They cite a lack of budget. Thus, violence, humiliation, and discrimination have become routine in the

Secretariat. These will not be set right unless women raise their voices and create a ruckus. The mire must be exposed.

34

Are We Despicable in Our Telangana?

(August 2011)

Telangana has been simmering like gruel. Telangana does not afford to eat in peace and relax. It is surrounded by the relentlessly ringing bells of the movements. These might subside after the formation of Telangana. Resignations, discussions in Delhi, bandhs, and sacrifices have started again. On the one hand, meetings were held by people's JACs of Andhra and Telangana, deliberations were held in Delhi, and Delhi leaders voiced Seemandhra's concerns. On the other hand, Dalits are demanding for their land, water, education, employment, industries, and ruling power in Telangana of tomorrow. Madigas say SC categorisation must be done before resolving the Telangana issue. How do the Dalits benefit from a separate Telangana state? Velamas and Reddys will benefit. The movement is happening under their leadership and control. Our castes are sacrificing our lives. The Assembly has not resolved the issue of Telangana, but SC categorisation has been resolved three times. Hence, categorisation must be decided first.

Some intellectuals and writers from oppressed sections argue that our sections will not benefit and will not reap the fruits of a separate Telangana, even though we are part of the movement and our castes are sacrificing their lives. But we want Telangana. We and our names will not remain tomorrow. We know that political, financial, and social justice will not reach us. But we want Telangana.

In this discussion, movement, and agenda, Telangana women, who are half of the state's population, are invisibilised, sadly. This applies to Telangana women of all castes, but it is undoubtedly the failure of the Telangana movement. Does the Telangana movement not have the responsibility to make Telangana women part of all people's organisations? When asked why women are being set aside in employee associations, political parties, student organisations, and different JACs, the answer is that women do not come forward. Such an irresponsible attitude of the movement!

Although women turned into cartridges in the armed struggle of Telangana, their names are not to be found in history. Telangana is considered to preserve matriarchal values. Telangana men boast of women fighters who tucked the saree end around the waist and fought. Would no one care why women are not half of the movement? Where is the failure?

No one is talking about Telangana women. No one is responding to such unfair social dynamics and undemocratic practices. Telangana is the aspiration of not just men but also women. Women remain anonymous, though they are integral to the movement. This anger has no platform or voice.

Telangana women are very colourful at the bonalu and Batkamma, as they are in other places. Women mobilised on a large scale can only be seen carrying bonalu and dancing around Batkamma. Even there, men come in to discuss and debate.

It is the bonalu time in Telangana now. This bonam is filled with the aspirations for Telangana. The fag end of the Telangana movement is reflected in the full bonam pitchers. Telangana has been celebrating bonalu every year, hoping it was the last bonalu in the dependent Telangana. Unfortunately, even on the occasion of bonalu, Telangana Manjeera writers did not remember women and women writers. They invited Seemandhra writers, who earlier described Hyderabad as a whore in their writings, to give their message. But, they did find women writers in Telangana. Like the Seemandhra poets, they, too, dismiss saying that there are no women poets and writers in Telangana. Telangana women writers faced similar discrimination and humiliation in the All India Telangana Writers meetings held last month. Women poets and writers had no place in any session, including the inaugural. There were many Telangana women writers in the audience. But, they were not invited and recognised. They allowed a couple of women writers to be present in the last session when most people had left. Probably, they felt relieved that they had given women an opportunity.

Writers should be ahead of society and the state in consciousness. It is not appropriate for writers to set aside half of the writer's world and not recognise women

writers like men in society who discriminate against women. A writer is like a lamp for society. They must answer the questions about their human values and progressive practices for conducting meetings and gatherings without women. How can we consider such discrimination democratic?

Let there be any number of forms of discrimination by any number of people, but we want Telangana. We claim a half share in Telangana. Our hands should be half of the hands raised on the stage. But, the conspiracies and hegemonies are not allowing us. We want our share in the land, education, employment, and ruling power in the Telangana of tomorrow.

Is the Dalit Women Leadership not Allowed to Grow?

(September 2011)

Recently, a meeting was held in Chennai under the Caste Out of Development banner. It was more like a workshop. Dalit associations, women's organisations, Dalit NGOs, and women's NGOs from the South Indian states of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh participated in it.

Concerns such as- what should be done for the development of Dalits, why Dalits are not developing despite the laws made by the government, state and central schemes and reservations in education and employment; what are the reasons and how to alert the government to address the loopholes; and how to generate awareness in society- were extensively discussed. Various Dalit organisations addressed the issues from their perspectives.

The participants mainly came from Kerala and Tamilnadu, but none came from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. When asked about this, the organisers said that there are no organisations or NGOs under the leadership of Dalit women in Andhra Pradesh. The Dalit women's organisations and NGOs addressed many issues with authenticity. They included scavenging women, construction workers, domestic workers, and workers from organised and unorganised sectors. Their leaders are not from privileged castes, as is the case in Andhra and Karnataka. Their leaders are Dalit women. In consultation with the cadre leaders, Dalit women leaders narrated how they struggle to achieve empowerment and face caste and gender discrimination in their work field. It was fair that Dalit women led their people, and the NGOs worked under their leadership. Women's organisations and NGOs in Andhra Pradesh were working either under the leadership of women of privileged castes or under the control of men. Why don't they have Dalit women's organisations and NGOs under the leadership of Dalit women? Andhra Pradesh is not favourable for the working class Dalit women to independently establish their associations, analyse and voice their problems. Which unknown forces and invisible plots are hindering Dalit women's

leadership in fighting against the situation they are facing? The leaders of women's organisations such as Mahila Chethana, Chaitanya Mahila Samakhya, AIDWA, POW and NGOs such as Asmita and Anveshi are women from dominant castes. They claim to uplift Dalit working-class women but do not allow Dalit women's leadership to grow.

Sadly, women of dominant castes are continuing to lead Dalit women in organised and unorganised sectors. When will Andhra Pradesh have the social justice of Dalit women leading the women of their communities, like it is in the case of Tamilnadu and Kerala? When will the dominant castes that do not know the value of labour and that have no connection with labour cease to lead the toiling Dalit, BC, and Adivasi women? Is empowerment achievable for Dalit women among men and women of dominant castes and Dalit men? Being dependent and ruled, they cannot discuss their problems from their perspective. The women's organisations led by women of dominant castes do not seem to understand Dalit women's issues such as caste, family, illiteracy, sexuality, exploitation, and Jogini system from a Dalit gender perspective to resolve them. Dalit women face the threat of losing their unique identity as the gender perspective of the hegemonic castes is being attributed to Dalit women. Thus, they remain away from development. There are Dalit women's NGOs such as Jogini Vimochana Samstha and Dalit Shakti, but the controlling remote is not in their hands.

Women of labouring lower castes are under the control and authority of organisations working on communism, revolution, and Dalit women, with men and women of dominant castes as leaders not just in Andhra Pradesh but in the entire country. This should change. Unless Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi women free themselves from the above control resembling Dhruvarashtra's embrace, they cannot discuss their exploitation and analyse their identity unhesitatingly and independently from their perspective and fight their battles. Only then can they walk towards empowerment.

36

Equal Status and Equal Share

(October 2011)

Half in the sky, half in the earth, and half in the globe, Only to boast. People go silent when asked about sharing.

It has become a civilised fashion to say half in the sky. How does it make women happy to say you are half in the sky that cannot be reached, and half in the galaxy that is never visible? What count is this? We want clear shares apart from the statistics. Equal status. Equal share. Still, the politics of setting half the world, its shares, and its partnerships continue. Not just the male world of the dominant castes but also the men of the oppressed castes demanding equal justice and equal share are setting aside half of their people. We can see the unfair invisibilising of women in partnership in movements.

The need to decide the distribution of social justice in Telangana is being discussed among the oppressed castes, as there are dominant castes in leadership in the ongoing Telangana movement. But, the dominant castes are untouched and unshaken by it, which in itself is hugely political. Dalit Bahujan intellectuals say that we need social Telangana, not just geographical Telangana. Agreements related to social justice have happened in several movements in the past, particularly between the dominant castes and the oppressed against the backdrop of movements. Sadly, there were no women on either side of the groups in such agreements.

The agreements that spanned the national movement to separate Andhra, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana happened in the 1952 and 1959 movements. An agreement on equal partnership and social justice for the oppressed sections was made under the leadership of Ambedkar in the National Movement. But, would the Hindu Gandhi agree to give an equal share to Dalits? He was wary of Dalits sitting on their heads, resorted to blackmail politics, and defeated the depressed castes. In these agreements and failures, we do not see women's contribution and participation on Gandhi's or Ambedkar's sides. Women who are subjected to the utmost oppression should be given importance. They should be

compensated for the opportunities they have lost in the past. The gentlemen's agreements made in Andhra state and Andhra Pradesh turned redundant. Dalits and women were not part of these gentlemen. When we scan the histories of movements, we notice that women remain invisible in groups.

Women are set aside even in the ongoing Telangana movement. Previously, they put women on the front line in movements, processions, dharnas, hartals, and chorus slogans, if not for partnerships. However, with the advent of television channels, men pushed women to the background, occupying the front lines. If any woman questions why women are not allowed, they present the safe argument that they never objected if women wanted to come. But, no forums, groups, or contexts interrogate the depths of gender politics.

The Dalit Bahujan intellectuals arguing for social Telangana and social agreements are forgetting the share in social justice for women, who are half of Telangana. They are asking for the construction of Telangana state on the foundations of Bahujan Dalit societies but not saying a word about equal justice and equal share between genders. It is good to ask for social agreements between the dominant caste political parties and S.C., S.T., B.C., minorities of Telangana. However, Dalit Bahujan intellectuals are not demanding population-based representation in education, employment, and livelihood. They are demanding that agreements must be applied to women, and gendered injustice and inequality must be addressed. Those who are raising slogans of justice for SCs, STs, B.C.s, and minorities are not proposing equal justice and partnership for women. How can we consider such people as social intellectuals and judges?

Now is the context where identities are agitating. Caste, religion, gender, and region have their own identities. We all have the social responsibility to discuss gender identities while we are debating caste, religion, and regional identities. Being silent on the share of those who are half of the world cannot be called social justice.

37

This Battle Is a Live Hearth

(December 2011)

Roads, villages, wadas, streets, and offices were awakened with Jai Telangana slogans in the past forty days.

The school bells stopped ringing. Children played cricket on the roads and flew kites from the terrace. Students hung their school bags on the wall and went for wage labour in villages. RTC buses did not come onto the roads with their punctured tyres. They rested in the depots in the name of Jai Telangana. Not a single piece of coal was dug out, and no electricity came out in Singareni. It showed us absolute darkness. Employees shut the files and made dharnas, rasta rokos²², cooking, human chains, vows, and Batkamma in front of their offices. Men, too, played Batkamma in some places. The atmosphere in ten districts in Telangana turned into the Telangana slogan, shaking Delhi. The region echoed the Telangana slogans. The wage labourers suffered beyond imagination. The prices went up, starving the working class. They were ready to die but wished for Telangana. The Telangana of social justice was flowing like waterfalls in this intense movement. People are waiting for Telangana as if waiting for a pilgrimage.

There are around one and a half million teachers in Telangana. They are the ones who take the lead in every movement. But, then, the schools had to be shut, due to which the education of SC, ST, BC, and minority students of government schools were drastically affected. The teachers of private schools have not been part of this movement. A few private schools on the main road might have been shut during the All People's Strike, but others ran uninterruptedly. The education of the lower castes was affected due to different kinds of strikes. Those children dropped out of school to remain bonded labourers, wage labourers, sweepers, and menial workers. We should welcome the discussion around it happening this time. The revolutionaries rejected this education, calling it Macaulay

²² Blocking the roads

education or slave education till the dawn of the new democracy, and deprived the lower castes of education. When will the new democracy arrive; After how many generations? Should people live illiterate and uncivilised until then? However, the children and families of these revolutionaries mastered the same slave education and Macaulay education. These educated revolutionaries are always prepared with Macaulay education to boss over the lower castes distanced from education.

Telangana is also a political issue. As the feudal lords claim, it will not come tomorrow or the day after. Education of the children of the Telangana intellectuals with all facilities and those who passionately argue against education till the advent of Telangana is not disturbed. It is only the lower caste children who will remain bonded labourers without education and a future. On one hand, the Right to Education Act proclaims that children should be inside the school but not outside and that compulsory education should be implemented. On the other hand, scholars complain that the Act is not being appropriately implemented due to the government's lack of commitment. The upper caste intellectuals are not thinking about the school children becoming dropouts due to the movements. The intellectuals on the government's advisory committees on protecting the Right to Education Act are not sensitising the teachers who are shutting down the schools to participate in movements about their social responsibility. Teachers are assigned the duties of census, elections, counting of votes, etc, by the government. Isn't the government advised not to send teachers on such responsibilities, leaving the schools and the students? The government advisors belong to the privileged castes. They are not bothered about the education of the lower castes. They do not talk and respond about the education of lower caste children for fear of not finding workers in their fields and houses, not being able to do their work, and losing their authority if the lower caste people get educated.

When it comes to Telangana, different political hegemonies are preventing the separate state. Even the people's exploiters have become people's leaders in the name of the movement. People's consciousness of self-respect kindled again, and the feudal lords who were driven away earlier also played a role in it. In a sense, this is a victory. But, it failed to create the confidence that the future Telangana belongs to all of us among the

oppressed, women, and sections. This is a serious failure caused by the upper caste leadership, lack of transparency and accountability, and the leaders who threatened to kill themselves, remaining safe but creating an atmosphere for others to sacrifice their lives. Almost seven hundred Telangana youth have sacrificed their lives.

People remained unaffected despite the shutdown of schools, children not going to school, and a lack of electricity at home, with the hope of Telangana. My mother, me, and my daughter, women of three generations, have been fighting for Telangana. Our battle continues to be a live hearth across generations and against deceptions.

38

Wish I Had Bashed Them Up

(January 2012)

Ten days ago, my relative Chinni called to say that the police refused to take the case and that he tried to hit her, abusing her and rebuking her for going to the police station and asking him to register the case. I asked her about the details of the case.

She cried, saying, "Akka, I work as a sweeper in a hostel under outsourcing. We owe money to my brother-in-law. He should have asked his brother, fought with him, and called for the panchayat with elders. Instead, he came to my workplace and abused me. Cursed be him, he used such cuss words. I told him not to abuse me but to question his brother at home and take him to the panchayat, but not to abuse me at the workplace. He got furious and hit me, holding my hair". I said, "Why are you crying? Couldn't you hit him back? Wish you had bashed him up.

"He cannot stand before me, akka. He is tiny. But I did not hit him to avoid the blame on me. I thought of getting him rebuked in the panchayat and the police station for hitting me". I asked her if she did that. "It would have been good, but police fellows did not register the case. After taking his abuses and beatings, I went to the police station sorrowfully and angrily and complained that the scoundrel had hit me and abused me when I was on duty at the hostel. We have a police station in our village. The police knew that it was my brother-in-law who hit me. It did not matter if he hit me in the name of the debt, but I should not have abused him, it seems. The sub-inspector pounced to hit me, shouting, are you a woman? How can you call your own brother-in-law a fellow? You are shameless to come to the police station; get out of here. I was so furious that I thought of beating up the sub-inspector, whatever the consequences. He asked me if my husband had not come with me. He abused my husband when we pleaded with him to file the case for beating up a woman at her workplace. He insulted us saying, 'You fellow, can't you convince your wife? How can you keep quiet when your wife insults your own brother? Who will keep quiet if

your wife abuses? You are telling us only about your brother beating her. What about your wife abusing him? He hit her, unable to bear her abuse. Should I write a case for that? She will be fixed if put behind bars. We will file a case against her. You can complain to whoever you want to. You did not return his money, and on top of it, your wife abused him. So, he must have beaten her. Where is the evidence for his hitting her? He asked her to pay back the loan and your wife came to the police station alleging that your brother hit her. Tomorrow, she might come to complain that he molested her. Your wife is such kind'. We helplessly returned home weeping.

My stomach churned listening to Chinni. What is this about the police and police stations? Taking SC women so lightly?! It seems it is common to address SC women in a derogatory manner and not take the injustice inflicted on them seriously. When I enquired with the leaders in the neighbourhood, they said it is common in police stations in villages, and we cannot change it; they are used to it. It added fuel to the fire. I suggested they file an SC, ST atrocities case against that police fellow, but Chinni's husband said, "No, sister. He won't let us survive if we go against him in our own village. They will cite connections with Annas and thieves. Leave it, he will face the consequences of his sins". But, Chinni, who took beatings by her brother-in-law for no fault of hers and took insults for approaching the police station for justice, was bedridden with fever.

The gentlemen who scream about misuse of SC and ST atrocities act should look at cases like this. Is this Act being implemented properly and fairly? Are the cases being registered? If there are cases against those who abuse SC women with caste names, the jails in the country will be inadequate. Where will the SC women go to complain about their problems if the police system that is supposed to implement justice violates the law? Only when these women mobilise can they change such police stations.

Are Class Four Women Employees Equal to Us?

(February 2012)

An issue has been debated between the women employees of two social groups in the Secretariat for the past twenty years.

The fourth-class employees have been arguing that they were also part of the Secretariat women's welfare association and should be recognised as Secretariat women employees, and their problems should be addressed. However, the Secretariat Women's Welfare Association has members ranging from typists to D.S. and Additional Secretaries. By-laws do not include attenders, sweepers, and record assistants as members. In fact, the association was formed with the SC women of the clerical cadre. There was a ruckus when the by-laws were being prepared. The women employees of the privileged communities in the registered women's association argue that sweepers and attenders are mostly women of SC, ST, and BC communities; they will bring in cheap disputes; they are not decent; they will create many headaches; we cannot solve such cheap conflicts; and the association will lose its dignity. They might want to contest on par with us. Can we bear this?

The fourth-class women employees say you have established the Secretariat women employees' welfare association. We are also Secretariat employees. You have not explained which women. That's why we are asking. The association belongs to us, too. We should also be given membership. Our problems should also be considered. We should also be invited to all meetings.

There are nine hundred women employees of all categories in the Secretariat, and these women are up to 200 in number out of them. They are demanding that they should be made part of the association, as they are also the women employees of the Secretariat, or the name of the association should be changed. SC, ST women of all cadres and male employees of the Secretariat support this argument, but upper caste women and some B.C. women are outrightly rejecting. Our association has to face several problems if we allow

the lower cadre, sweepers, those who carry our files, clean our cups, and illiterate, crude, and lowly people to join the association on par with us. They will contest in the association as members. Should we allow them to sit on the stage on par with us? Can we put the officer and the attender at the same level? One woman clerk said, let us allow them as members, but let them give it in writing that they will not contest the elections and sit on par with us. One woman officer said, let us allow them to contest elections if they wish to, but let us not vote for them.

An SC woman officer said that they are not being allowed also because of their caste, not only as sweepers, gardeners, and attenders. An upper-caste Seemandhra woman clerk replied that there are SC women in the clerical cadre, but they are not restricted in the association.

You are unable to remove us from the upper cadres because of the constitution and democracy. Are we socially equal to you? We are constitutionally equal to you in cadre. Otherwise, you would have driven us away like the class four women employees, said the SC woman officer. This discussion took place in the recent general body meeting of the women employees association. It concluded without the class four women employees, their representation, voice, and argument. When it was pointed out that they should have been invited, as there can be no discussion about them without them being present, the upper caste women expressed their arrogance, saying that they would not be invited as they were not members and that it would become a cheap market if they attended the meeting.

When this essayist was the founder-president of the Secretariat Women Employees Welfare Association, the class four women employees freely participated in meetings. The association worked on their problems, too. But, later, when an upper caste woman officer became the president, the restrictions on the participation of class four women were introduced. Once, lunch was hosted on 8 March, which was considered the day of the emancipation of women. The fourth-class employees' plates were snatched during lunch, and they were driven away from the gate. Those women protested against the president. Not a single woman, except the essayist, has won the employees' association elections, an association considered instrumental in the Secretariat. Employee associations, including

the class four employees association, are all led by men. It is undemocratic that such gender discrimination and internal gender oppression in the Secretariat that issues orders for the entire state.

Despite thinking that we are all women, the upper caste women did not allow them into the association in the name of cadre. The class four men refused to allow them despite them being of the same cadre. Against this backdrop, the class four women employees decided to reject other associations and start their own association.

Let's Go to Teertham, Timmakka!

(May 2012)

Jatara (fair) is also known as *teertham* (pilgrimage) in Telangana. It is known for its carnival celebrations. Previously, carnivals used to be the major centre of publicity and information circulation for villagers. Each village celebrates at least ten carnivals, for instance, Buguloni jatara, Yellamma jatara, Edupayala jatara, Kottakonda, Ailoni, Illentakunta, Kotanche, Nagolu, Komurelli, Kunkumaiah, Nattiteertham, Medaram, and many others. The Sammakka Sarakka jatara of Medaram is the biggest in Telangana.

A jatara is like a perennial river that carries the names of those who fought for their group's rights, lives, and well-being as a memory for generations. The villages they lived in, their names, and memories became jataras. Villages become empty when a jatara is celebrated. People living in different places and who parted their ways long ago get to meet here. They share information about their lives, such as children, relations, good, bad, death, and birth. The local deals happen in jataras, similar to weekly markets.

However, regardless of their poverty or riches, people, particularly Bahujan communities, from children to the elderly, passionately go to jataras, considering it a responsibility. Jatara is a space where people who migrated in search of livelihood and married women who left for in-laws' houses return to share about crops, cattle, hardships, prosperity, and ups and downs in life. Jatara is like a relaxing confluence to recollect and share the changes in life.

Jatara is like a respite for Bahujan community women who are suffocated in hard toil, battles of livelihood, wage labour, field labour, and housework. Most jataras are celebrated for local village gods and goddesses who fought against local problems. Jatara is but a remembrance of the histories of people's struggles.

Sammakka Sarakka jatara takes place in Medaram. These two women fought against taxation in the Kakatiya kingdom, resisted royal authority, and lost their lives in the battle.

Medaram Sammakka Sarakka jatara is celebrated in their memory. There are no temples or shrines there. Their forms and images are worshipped as a stone and a high seat under the tree.

Houses have no locks in villages. At other times, women raise a million questions about cattle, poultry, and children to leave their homes. But, during jataras, they somehow adjust everything and start travelling for celebrations. As far as possible, people do not let go of the opportunity to attend the jatara under any circumstances. The jatara is a solace and a relaxation to discuss problems, find solutions, conduct panchayats, and talk till one recovers from exhaustion. The introduction and utilisation of new goods happen here. Civilisations were exchanged in jataras in the past. The *sidem*²³ and jogini predictions can be seen in the jataras of some districts of Telangana. But, we get to see Sivasattulu²⁴ rather than joginis in Sammakka Sarakka jatara. Sivasattulu and joginis are different. Sivasattulu are supposed to be possessed by a god. The social evils inflicted on joginis do not apply to them. People come by bullock carts to attend jataras. The bullock cart turns into a shelter to cook, eat, and sleep on the way. They roam all over the jatara looking for relatives, friends and acquaintances. They find some, take them to their bullock cart, feed them, and serve them drinks respectfully. This is reciprocal and considered to be a great respect.

Young people enthusiastically go to jataras. They buy things for themselves and for their loved ones. Men buy bangles, pins, chains, perfumes, hair ornaments, flowers, earrings and others for women they like. Women's happiness knows no bounds when their men buy things for them in *jatara*²⁵. Similarly, women also happily buy lungis, towels, and bracelets for men they like. They buy delicacies for each other. Children's joy knows no bounds. They rejoice in the eateries, balloons, and flutes. Not all children can buy these.

These jataras have been turned into Hindutva celebrations for the past few years. The construction of temples and the practice of incense, lamps, offerings, mantras, and vedic rituals are extending to affect the nature and greatness of jataras. The forces polluting

²³ A ritual

²⁴ Shiva and Shakti

²⁵ Fair

the natural celebrations of human relations should be prevented. Let us go to the jataras that protect the green forests and the waters of the Jampanna stream.

Sorrows Shared in Pondicherry

(June 2012)

A women's organisation called Sparrow organised a four-day workshop with Dalit women writers in Pondicherry from 19 April to 22 April 2012. Women writers of chandal, padali garoda, mahar, paraya, pallar, and madiga communities from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Bengal attended the workshop.

There are no platforms for Dalit women to gather, share, and discuss in the name of education, employment, political parties, NGO meetings, women's conferences and women writers' meetings in India. Although many Dalit women are educated, employed, writers, artists, and activists, the privileged caste women do not accept them, and the men from Dalit communities do not support them. Dalit women have not occupied the decision-making positions in the All India Dalit and women's conferences so far. Dalit women's lives, histories, experiences, and struggles have not seen the light of day yet. It is a welcome move from Sparrow to work in that direction and conduct a workshop for Dalit women writers as part of it. It seems they had to work hard to locate Dalit women writers. They agonised that they had to work hard to identify twenty Dalit women writers from six states and that even the renowned feminist writers could not suggest them from their respective states. (When Sparrow Lakshmi called me for the details of Dalit women writers, I gave the names and phone numbers of Subhadra, Gowri, Syamala, Swaroopa Rani and others– K. Satyavathi, Editor, *Bhumika*)

On the first day, we interacted with Chandraben Srimali from Gujarat, Urmila Pawar and Dr Jyoti Lanjewar from Maharashtra, Arangamallika, Bama, Kavin Malar, Sukirtharani from Tamilnadu, Saraswati from Karnataka, Joopaka Subhadra from Andhra Pradesh, Kalyani Thakur Charal, Smritikana Havaladar and Manju Bala from West Bengal. That evening, we watched the play *Mulagapudi*, based on renowned Tamil writer Bama's short story. The theatre group Kattiakaris brilliantly performed how the caste systems are

favourable to the women feudal lords and cruel towards Dalit women when there is a tussle between them. The theatre group belongs to the Indian School of Drama. Almost twenty-five artists, including children, transgender people, IT professionals, journalists, and sex workers, enacted the play.

On the second day, Sparrow Lakshmi inaugurated the workshop and said that a positive change is possible if we understand that women's lives, histories, and struggles were for their self-respect and human dignity. Sparrow records the experiences, lives, histories, art forms, and struggles based on caste and gender; the present workshop of Dalit women writers is part of that recording.

The Dalit women from six states who attended the workshop were not only writers but also are associated with movements as journal editors, publishers, theatre artists, artists, journalists, political leaders, and social activists. The workshop facilitated the articulation of their narratives about their writings, lives, and inspirations.

The Sparrow coordinator said that they had done several workshops with feminists of privileged communities and recorded their lives and writings previously. Now, it is the turn of a workshop with Dalit women writers. The Dalit women writers became emotional recounting their lives, writings, and experiences. They talked, shedding tears about the humiliating experience of their education, mothers' hardships, poverty, untouchability, problems they faced as Dalit women, food, friends, writings, and experiences. It is the same emotion from Bama to Sukirtharani. This three-day sorrowful celebration culminated in loud collective grieving of all the Dalit women writers on the fourth day. I have neither shared nor seen such collective grief in any other meeting.

Generations of hardships and repressed tears turned into boundless lakes. These are the shared sorrows of oppressed communities, matriarchies, and ancient agonies of the untouchable people who were denied human dignity, particularly women.

This is the explosion of the collective grief in solidarity that overcame the linguistic difference and physically mobilised. Similar to the blades of grass crossing the barren lands and uniting into a thick rope, we returned with dreams and pens in the hope of those

emotions turning into the empowerment of caste, gender, and labour cultures across Jambudweepa.

Why Are Temples Built in Offices?

(July 2012)

There was an uproar over the renaming of the Nalla Pochamma temple in the Secretariat to the Jayadurga temple. A friend of mine from the village called me and asked me innocently how a temple was constructed in the Secretariat that runs the entire state.

Previously, there was no temple in the Secretariat, but every department held Sai bhajans on Thursdays. Holy water and offerings are distributed to all in the department, including the officers. They quietly watch all this with awe from 10.30 am to 12.30 pm. Those who are not religious also take this opportunity and pretend to be religious to please the officers. It is torturous for Christians, Muslims, and atheists on that day. They go out roaming to escape the nuisance of bhajans, camphor offerings, and food offerings. Donations are also collected for these religious activities. Men and Dalit women are not seen in all this. Only women of privileged communities and BC communities are involved in this.

This is an office with employees of different religions. Our efforts to counter the claims of the Hindu religion as the majority, high, and great and attempts to turn the offices into temples did not succeed. We told the Secretary, "Sir, this is an office. Conducting religious activities in the office is undemocratic. Please stop this." He said, "What is your loss in this? How much time are you wasting? Are you continuously working from 10.30 am to 5.30 pm daily? This is just two hours a week", and looked at those who pointed out as wicked people and sent them away. We informed the media channels, but they did not take it seriously. There is a mosque constructed in one corner of the Secretariat. This Secretariat building was constructed by the Nizam, but the Seemandhra government demolished it and constructed new buildings. They did not collapse the mosque in the corner, suspecting objections from the Muslim employees. In fact, they renovated it, though it was not seen from the outside. One room in a corner hall was allotted to the Christians as a prayer hall. But, now, a big temple appeared in front of the CM's office in the centre of the Secretariat.

They created a nuisance with yagnas and yagas for one week. Employees could not work amidst that disturbance. The noise pollution and Hindu religious pollution ruined the office atmosphere and turned it into a temple complex. The place where this temple was constructed was the cycle stand for the class four employees. They used to gather and hold meetings there. Subsequently, the fourth-class women employees put a small stone, applied vermilion and turmeric, and lit a lamp. They arranged bricks around it and worshipped it. They met there and had lunch together. It became a meeting place for the class four women employees. Later, a cement wall of a half-metre high was raised around it. Clerks and officers did not go there. When enquired about this small shrine, class four employees sometimes said it is the Yellamma temple and some other times the Poshamma temple. Mostly, women attenders, sweepers, and gardeners used to sit there under the tree. They had no seats inside the office, so they cleaned the place and used it.

A Seemandhra lobbyist had a two-metre platform acknowledging his profit and fulfilling his vow. Thus, the temple became a meeting point for the outside lobbyists. As it is right in front of the CM's building, YSR visited this temple, and he was ceremoniously welcomed there when he became the Chief Minister. Sadly, the class four women employees were not allowed into the place that they created when the status of the Pochamma temple was elevated. This is the Hindu conspiracy. The brahmins introduced lamps, incense, offerings, chantings, and a chest and issued an undeclared prohibition for these women. That place has now become restricted for class four employees and women employees to go near it and sit there. Telangana employees protested against the change of name from Nalla Pochamma temple to Vijayadurga temple. But, sadly, they did not oppose the religious construction affecting the secular democracy and did not demand the dismantling of religious constructions in offices.

Tributes from Flowers of the Soil to Chandrasri

(August 2012)

Chandrasri is a beautiful song, a green song, a black song, and a flowing song. Several revolutionary and Dalit platforms rejoiced in Chandrasri's songs. Chandrasri is a rare and brilliant artist who was involved in revolutionary and Dalit movements. She sang, danced, composed music, and infused Dalit consciousness into words and songs. Chandrasri speaks in an Ongole accent but her roots are in Telangana. She belongs to a Dalit family that migrated from Janagama to Chirala of Ongole district for livelihood on a military job generations ago.

However, Chandrasri opposed middle-class family values and caste discrimination and joined a revolutionary party when she was in intermediate. Her parents tried to prevent her from participating in movement-related activities and singing songs. She left her parents and family and joined the revolutionary party as a full-time activist. Those who came to see her for the last time cried, recollecting that her dance and songs had reverberated in villages from the time when she was very young.

Chandrasri's family was into Christianity for three to four generations and followers of Ambedkar. Although Chandrasri was a full-time member of Jana Natya Mandali, she married a party member out of her caste on Ambedkar Jayanti in 1985. During her movement life, she was with Kondapalli Anasuyamma in Rajahmundry Central Jail, taught revolutionary songs to the prisoners, and conducted political classes, it seems.

Later, she inspired people as the Prakasam district member of Jananatyamandali and as a Dalit woman in solidarity with the Karamchedu movement. She went underground but came out unable to fit into the caste and family values in the revolutionary party. She came out of her intercaste marriage, unable to bear the caste harassment and humiliation. She said familial restrictions, inter caste marriage, and caste oppression shredded her life into pieces and that she went through the sorrows of a lifetime by the age of twenty-five.

She thought all those that bloom are flowers and all those that grow are fruits. She was a Dalit woman unaware of the venom, bitterness, and thorns behind them. Dalits in this country are cursed, and Dalit women are their slaves. Chandrasri's life serves as a lesson to know Dalit women's lives in this society.

I first met Chandrasri in 1998 at the Lelle songs meeting at the Press Club. Her songs were unforgettable. Those who attended the meeting might still remember how she took the audience into another world with her songs.

She came out of the revolutionary party and a casteist family and worked with a Dalit Bahujan perspective. She played an active role in different Dalit organisations and state-level meetings conducted by Ekalavya Kalamandali. Her role was crucial in the movement against the death punishment for Chalapathi and Vijaya Vardhan. Chandrasri raised as a song in the struggles against atrocities on Dalits, land issues of Dalits, problems of tribals, and in the celebrations of birth anniversaries of Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule, and Savitribai Phule. She continued her lifestyle even in her search for a livelihood. She worked in NGOs and wrote songs, essays, dance dramas, and village talks. She could sing folk songs, revolutionary songs, and classical music with ease. She narrated *Burra kathas* and *Oggu kathas*²⁶. She released music albums such as *Nalla Sureedu*, *Dalita Mahila Gaanam*, and *Ambedkar Suprabhatam* through her Dalit Women's Theatre. Not just the media, music associations, and art associations that recognise only men as artists, but also Dalit cultural associations and art associations kept women singers and artists at a distance. It is painful that no art associations except Kalyana Rao, Mastarji, Indravelli, and this essayist approached Chandrasri's songs despite her work with many Dalit art associations and organisations. The silenced song must have grieved around the muted Chandrasri. Hundreds of crows gather around the dead crow. We did not have the solidarity of crows. Chandrasri was not just our fellow being but also a brilliant artist, a cultural activist who devoted her song and art forms to the service of society as long as she was alive, a Dalit woman who left her home and became one with the movement. She was caught in the

²⁶ Burra katha and oggu katha are folk performing arts

snare of liberty and collapsed with cancer. Dalit organisations and art associations should have supported her as a community responsibility. They should have bid her farewell with respect and support on her untimely demise. Nothing of this happened. This will remain in history as the failure of Dalit literary and cultural organisations and associations.

Posthumously, her identity was distracted as Satyamurthy's follower and Jananatyamandali artist. In fact, till her death, she lived with the Ambedkarite identity and a distinct Dalit perspective. Her voice resonated with the struggles of Dalit life. She wished for a future for Dalits built on the foundations of Ambedkar-Kanshi Ram thought and strived for it. She might have been a Jananatyamandali member twenty years ago, but not later. She might have been a follower of Satyamurthy when he was in active politics, but not later. Instead of saying this, portraying her still as a member of Jananatyamandali and a follower of Satyamurthy is invisibilising her Ambedkarite identity.

Chandrasri resisted the caste system and hegemonic family structure and wished for the democratisation of woman-man relationships. She sang and wrote in support of the Dandora movement for fair distribution and against the hegemony and oppression by more privileged sections in Dalit communities.

A tearful tribute and farewell to the phenomenal Chandrasri who was a member of Mattipulu, an SC, ST, BC, and minority women writers' forum against the casteist, gendered, literary hegemonies on women and writings of marginalised communities.

All Women Are Cleaners But...

(September 2012)

A meeting of the Feminist India Yahoo Group was conducted by the Council for Social Development, Southern Regional Centre, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad, on 21 and 22 of July. Almost a hundred old and new feminists attended the meeting.

Most of the participants were from metropolitan cities, upper castes, upper middle class, educated backgrounds, and from NGOs. Around ten Dalit women were also there. They were all from the South Indian states. I went along with the friends from Anveshi to listen to the feminist agendas and perspectives in the current social circumstances and to share the practical insights of the women of the soil.

On the first day, opinions on the achievements of feminism in the past thirty years and the future aspirations were shared. Problems and experiences of upper-caste women in the context of globalisation were discussed. They raised several issues that required constructive solutions, such as disabled women, problems of mothers with disabled children and the increasing violence on them. Experiences of violence cannot be understood in one framework but one has to touch the depths of it to work. No one talked about the problems of Dalit, Adivasi, and Muslim women. In Andhra Pradesh, several questions are being raised from different perspectives about Dalit women. Introspection is required to not get the expected results despite several research studies conducted from the feminist perspective.

Voices of Dalit, Adivasi, Minority, transgender, and queer voices, and problems of the disabled are muted in the feminist movement. It has to analyse the questions coming from them. There is no end to dowry violence. The health, sanitation, and mental health of women are also not taken seriously.

There should be a serious debate on the atrocities against Dalit men and women by women of the privileged castes, such as Khairlanji and Lakshmimpeta.

Women's development programmes have largely failed. No welfare. There should be a movement against the expansion of the state. Discussions continued, perspectives shared but discussions could not be in-depth on any particular issue.

On the second day, there was a Dalit women's panel discussion. This panel has to be considered crucial for this meeting. Dalit women from A.P., Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka conducted this panel. Ruth Manorama of the National Federation of Dalit Women, Rekha Raj, Gogu Syamala, Saraswati, and Vimala Vardhan participated. Ruth Manorama introduced the panel, saying that brahminical society does not allow women to grow, and does not allow Dalit women to progress in politics at all, but our agenda is the political growth of women. Syamala from A.P. explained that Sadalskhmi, Eswaribai, and Sumitradevi have proved how Dalit women in politics can bring in reforms for the elimination of casteism and patriarchy. They fought for the representation of Dalit women in the temple trusts. They suffered police beatings in the Telangana movement of 1969. For them, there was no difference between the assembly and home. They understood that hegemonic oppression is the same in both places. They claimed that Dalit women's rights are human rights.

Rekha Raj spoke on Dalit movements, feminist movements, and communist movements in Kerala, "Debates on Dalit women are happening from different perspectives in Kerala. But Kerala is a Nayers' state. Language, dance, song, speech, food, clothes, politics—all belong to nairs. That is represented to the world as Kerala culture. If Malayalis are only nairs, who are we? Our culture is not Nayers' culture. There is no similarity between our culture and the Malayali culture presented outside the state. There are no movements in Kerala where Dalit women are not there, be it the communist movement, the Dalit movement, or the feminist movement. All of them have happened with our partnership. Although Dalit women are part of feminist movement, their problems and their recognition are not there. The Chengal land struggle belongs to Dalit women. With the experience of working in several movements and learning lessons from there, Dalit women have started to collate their own identities. Kerala Dalit Women's Federation was

formed in that direction, as also a Kerala Dalit Women Writers Federation with twenty members.

Sawaraswati came from the Safai Karmachari Sangathan of Karnataka. She unsettled the gathering with her sharp questions. Why do only men and women of our caste do sanitation work? What is the reason for the absence of other castes? All women do the cleaning work. But, Dalit women have to clean the filth at home as well as in public places. Non-Dalit women are questioning society as to why they have to do the cleaning work at home. Feminist movements and social movements should talk about the gender politics of cleaning work in public places. The feminist movement has made gender politics in cleaning the public filth irrelevant. No programme on this so far. There should be a movement against the politics behind confining Dalit women to scavenging as their livelihood. Upper caste feminist women do not understand this agony. They fail to see the upper caste conspiracy behind the infliction of sanitation and scavenging work on Dalits as their traditional occupation.

Sadly, the human waste is still being cleaned with hands and humans, only Dalits have to get into manholes to clean them, and machines are not used despite the loss of their lives, even in the wake of scientific developments. The feminist movement should choose Dalit women's politics as its agenda, for they sacrifice their lives to preserve cleanliness in public places.

Come, Let Us Go to the Telangana Parade

(October 2012)

The political parties make a hungama on 17 September but go quiet after that. One says it is liberation and the other says it is union. Telangana supporters say that Indian imperialism annexed the Telangana state. In fact, 17 September is the memory of a massacre and bloody tragedies. The independence of 15 August 1947 was not celebrated here. Nizam and the Deshmukhs, Bahadurs, Reddys, Velamas under him squeezed the sweat and the blood of local people like hounds and accumulated crores of rupees. The Hyderabad state had the reputation of being the richest state in the world. It was not the sweat and the labour of the Nizam and his subordinates that generated this wealth. It was looted by exploiting and starving the common people. Pearls sold in shops and Golconda diamonds were all people's sweat drops. When Nizam refused to join the Indian union, the Indian army systematically occupied the state on 13 September 1948. It massacred millions of Muslims and Nizam's soldiers in this process. These blood-soaked memories, tragedies, and martyrdoms are neither recorded nor remembered.

No meetings are conducted on how the merging and liberation happened and the blood that was shed. There is a need to discuss this silence, violence, massacre, and annexation. These discussions have to be a systematic force like the work done by Phule and Ambedkar.

The historians have proved that the British Empire could sustain for generations due to their pact with the Hindu brahmanical system, which was hand in glove in overthrowing the Muslim dynasty, reformed the social evils in their castes enjoying the high positions in government, and preserved the casteist Hinduism without reforming the stinking caste system. In continuation of this, the government hand in glove with the local Hindu brahman forces, attacked the Muslim Nizam state, killed millions of people, occupied the high positions, and ruled the state. We will come across brahmins in social, economic, and

political fields in the Hyderabad state after its merger. For instance, P.V. Narasimha Rao, Burgula Ramakrishna Rao, Prakasam Pantulu etc.

Surprisingly, the Telangana movement did not provide a clear understanding on the serious historical issues related to 17th September. This is an important historical context for Telangana. Political appropriation started here. But, some forces are creating a false facade around 17th September, and burying histories. There is a need to dig up the invisible depths.

On one hand the Telangana districts are going on a parade. The call for one from each house and flag in the hand to shake Delhi with our collective voice for Telangana is echoing. For sixty years, the Telangana people have been driving the Seemandhra capitalists and political leaders to their places. What kind of self-respect is it to sacrifice Telangana youth and cling on? Thousands of Telangana Bahujan youth died in the past sixty years but the Seemandhra political leaders and capitalists are not moving from the pedestals they have built for themselves in Telangana. There are trees, fields, villages, crops, water, seas, gold mines, stones in Andhra Pradesh. They left them behind, came to a place that is not theirs, occupied land and water, and ridiculed our demeanour, language, and accent. Why do they continue to stay here despite being asked to leave!

The Telangana movement has its roots in society. Samaikyandhra movement came to counter it. Similarly, the Dandora movement is a social movement aiming for fair distribution among SC communities. Mala Mahanadu emerged as a counter movement to prevent the equitable distribution. Dandora associations are nervous about the Telangana movement, a movement of social justice, accepting Telangana Mala Mahanadu, a counter movement, as its partner, and not announcing the Telangana Dandora castes as its partner. If the ruling castes have the consciousness of achieving the state despite the diverse castes, the Madiga Mala Dalit castes will not think of power. But, the caste is divided into fragments. Whatever might be the issues, let us first move to the Telangana parade.

Dalit Women Should Be Allowed to Celebrate Batkamma

(November 2012)

Batkamma is a festival of flowers, a women's festival. It is a festival where flowers and women sing, dance, clap, and celebrate. It is a festival entwined around Telangana where the villages and girls bloom like flowers. People of all ages gather at the lake in the evening. B.C. and O.C. women allowed to play Batkamma take different kinds of food and distribute it to the villagers. Dalit women are told not to play Batkamma, and that the village will not tolerate their flowers and songs. Although there is a village and caste ban on us, we Dalit women go to the celebrations to see the lake, flower Batkammias, and villagers, and to hear the songs. Dalit men, especially Madiga men have to fetch flowers for Batkamma for the feudal lords and carry them to the lake. They will be sweating, their hands paining as they beat the drum, but all that they get is a rupee or two used to remove evil eye on Batkamma, and a few fistfuls of the Batkamma offerings. Dalit communities are bonded labourers even on a festival day.

Ecology is destroyed but caste systems and castes are not. Flower Batkammias are gone as the paper Batkammias replaced them. But, Batkammias did not come to Dalit women's hands. The prohibitions and casteist systems are not destroyed despite the destruction of ecologies and environments. During the migrant rule and globalisation later, water, lakes, ponds, flowers, cattle, birds, language, cultural resources, and festivals in Telangana were ruined and continue to be ruined. In such times, Telangana movement and Jagriti women have proclaimed the biologically and culturally diverse *saddula* Batkamma as the portrayal of Telangana life and culture. But, they should have taken up the agenda of lifting the prohibition on Dalit women carrying Batkamma, singing songs, and making women of all castes and religions participate in Batkamma festival. Despite the movement, there is a socio-cultural ban on Dalits playing Batkamma in some districts of Telangana. In some places, they are playing to prove the point that flowers and Batkamma belong to them, too. But, this prohibition is similar to the ban on their temple entry. Ignoring and

dismissing this, Batkamma is made into a political Batkamma sloganeering Batkamma in every village and taking processions in urban areas. Telangana movement must alert people to notice the ban on Dalits from playing Batkamma, initiate a meeting and a discussion, and resolve that Batkamma belongs to all Telangana women, all women should play and sing in all villages, and work towards it.

People celebrate Batkamma as a sentiment, wondering if they will see the Batkamma festival the following year. Different ideologies that established themselves with the help of movements partly succeeded in erasing the biodiverse saddula Batkamma from urban areas; they could separate it from rural areas. No movements questioned the undemocratic and unjust practices that confined Batkamma to some selected women.

Dalit women's lives are tuned according to trees, hills, fields, lakes, ponds, cattle, birds, and blooming forests. The wicked people who distance Dalit women co-existing with nature and biological diversity from this ecology should be set aside. However great they are, the festivals that keep some people away from ecology and ecological diversity belong to the hegemonic castes. It is Dalit men who carry flowers and Batkamma to the lakes and the streams beating the drums for those who do not allow them to play Batkamma. Although they are not allowed to touch or carry the flower Batkammias, Dalit women wear floral sarees and go to see the village sing and dance; pamper little girls like Batkammias, sing to the satisfaction of the lakes, and declare their bio-cultural diversity. The entire village blooms like a single flower and the moon. The human values of Batkamma songs can be seen more in Dalit wadas. It is anti-social and anti-justice to inflict a ban on such reality. There are several disputes preventing Dalit women from playing Batkamma.

Batkamma should belong to all women. Only then, Batkamma will be democratised. It is a cultural tragedy of Telangana that the cultural bans preventing women of the outskirts to play Batkamma are continued even in the Telangana movement. The Batkammias of the villages should go to the wadas. The ban on the wada women playing Batkamma should be eliminated. Women of villages and wadas should play together. The leaders of Telangana movement should take up this socio-cultural responsibility. We talk about biodiversity and regional distribution; we should also talk about the diversity of

cultural ecology and the environment. Movements get rid of social evils and diseases. In this process, the village Batkammās should reach wadas and women of all communities should play Batkamma and sing the songs of the moon. The Telangana movement should take the initiative in that direction.

The Twisting Tongues Should Be Scorched

(December 2012)

Newspapers and channels are making noise for their benefit. It is the Dalit communities that are becoming scapegoats in this noise. When a movie was alleged of downgrading brahmins, Dalit organisations protested even before brahmins did, submitted a memorandum to the collector, and announced their devotion to brahmins.

But, brahmins never opened their mouths in solidarity to question untouchability or when Dalits' problems and feelings were hurt and never declared their support in any form. But, Dalits have broad minds and broad hearts, so they never thought about it. These male Dalit organisations and women's organisations never protested against the evil practice of making joginis in their communities. The men of Dalit communities do not take it seriously or support when hundreds of joginis present their woes to the commission in the same collectorate where Dalit men did a dharna that brahmin feelings were hurt. They do not talk when movies downgrade Dalit women and talk meanly about them. Perhaps they convince themselves of the direction of the casteist system. The media enjoys provoking Dalits. There is no hungama or protest about atrocities on Dalit girls in Haryana, even if there are, they last only for a day. When the Khap Panchayat suggested child marriages to prevent sexual assaults, the discussion of atrocities on Dalit girls was diverted to child marriages. This casteist and manuvada Hindu society is not concerned about the fact that sexual atrocities are mostly happening on Dalit girls. If it is discussed and the caste mire is dug out, hegemonies cannot survive and the pedestals will be shaken. Hence, the diversion.

Surprisingly, women's organisation across the country mobilised against rape on Mathura, Ramija Bi, and Maya Tyagi twenty five years ago. They conducted discussions, dharnas, and movements, and did not allow the society to sleep. But, they are not concerned about the atrocities on Dalit girls in Haryana. Dalit organisations are not at all

bothered as if it is not their issue. Very rarely have the male Dalit organisations fought for women of their community.

Dalit organisations have to conceptualise a worldly perspective on a democratic and equitable society. Dalit groups have fought with this perspective in the past. They were defeated and driven away to the outskirts as the excommunicated. Dalits with such inhuman sufferings should fight against inequality of caste, religion, gender, and region. It is humiliating for Dalit communities to welcome Purnanandaswamy's visit and garlanding Ambedkar's portrait by him, recently. Purnananda, who is doing a Hindu yatra, does not deserve to garland the portrait of Ambedkar who led a life against Hinduism. But, it was done with the support of some Dalits and Dalit communities were deeply hurt by that gesture. That's why they condemned Purnananda's garlanding of Ambedkar's portrait. All Dalit organisations should have unanimously condemned it. Elevating Purnananda is to trample Dalits to further depths. Emancipation of Dalits will take ages if they don't have the consciousness that Hindu dharma is caste dharma which created untouchability, and that it should be annihilated.

The leader of Telangana movement abused a Dalit, woman, a senior minister by saying that he will scorch her and wondered how she was born to a great woman who participated in the Telangana movement. Can he say such feudal things about women of his community? Will he survive after saying? He talked like that, emboldened by the casteist society that Dalit women can be abused. The ancient, violent notions of Dalit lives with no values caused it. Those who praised Eswaribai as a great woman did not bring out her inspiration by celebrating her birth and death anniversaries. Did they put her photograph in their organisations and party offices? Such respect and ideals are not put into practice. How can Dalits trust such people? The blunder cannot be erased with an apology. It should be shown in practice. They cannot tolerate even if Dalit women wear nice clothes. This is caste arrogance. People who have adopted movement names and communist names should also question this.

Where Is the Gender Quota in the Sub-plan?

(January 2013)

From the United Nations to the Central and State governments, they have been talking about the empowerment of women and gender budgets. Similar are the demands of the political parties, movement associations, and NGOs. We appreciate it as a great thought. However, governments are yet to take measures for gender empowerment, particularly women of marginalised communities, in gender budgeting and not making any attempts to implement empowerment of women with special schemes. Dalit and Adivasi communities have achieved the SC and ST sub-plan act after a rigorous battle. It should be welcomed. It was recently approved by the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council of our state and became an act. But, Dalit and Adivasi women are agitating that there is negligence in allotting specific shares for Dalit and Adivasi women, due to which women will remain on the fringes of the development and welfare projects.

There are 96 castes (61 and 35) of the SC and ST categories in the states. Their population is approximately 2 crores and 20 lakhs. They are subjected to extreme exploitation and suffering in a casteist society and are constantly distanced from opportunities. Women of these communities are further neglected. The first preference should be given to the welfare of women of these castes and tribes in a country and a government that claims to be welfare-oriented. The SC, ST sub-plan funds should have been utilised for SC, ST welfare in the past thirty years. Instead, the government breezily diverted the funds. The SC, ST welfare was spent on ring roads, Hussain Sagar cleaning, environmental preservation, cars for ministers, renovation of offices, and luxuries. The Dalit activists stated that more than thirty thousand crore rupees of SC, ST funds have been diverted by the governments in the past thirty years, depriving development for the already deprived communities.

SC women will constitute less than 1 per cent of the beneficiaries of the SC corporation. Similarly, men are the beneficiaries in ST corporations and BC corporations. The State Finance Corporation has only upper caste men as beneficiaries, even though the corporation belongs to all. Anyone, irrespective of their gender, caste, and religion, can be a beneficiary of this corporation. But, we don't come across men and women of marginalised communities and women of privileged communities as beneficiaries of the corporation. Similarly, Women's Corporation is meant for all women. But, those who get loans, debts, and benefits from this corporation are all from the privileged castes. There might be a couple of B.C. women, but no SC, ST, and Muslim women. Thus, corporations have been occupied by the hegemonic groups. The caste-based welfare is taken by men of those communities, while women's welfare is taken by women of privileged communities.

The Women's Corporation was formed for women's empowerment, welfare, self-employment schemes, and agricultural loans. But those loans do not come to women of Dalit and tribal communities, as women of privileged communities grab all the benefits. The SC and ST men and women are kept uninformed about such corporations. This is the status of women of marginalised communities in the state. Against this backdrop, Dalit organisations, intellectuals, government, and political parties are requested to design a separate gender budget in the SC, ST sub-plan instead of making the sub-plan categorical, thus depriving the women of these communities of the benefits. A few modifications are required in the SC, ST sub-plan:

1. The SC and ST women of each district should be considered a special unit.
2. The Act should be amended to provide self-employment schemes, house plots, poverty alleviation programmes, agricultural lands, loans, and other welfare schemes specifically for SC and ST women.
3. The Act should be amended to allot specific funds for joginis, manual scavengers, sanitation workers, and disabled SC and ST women.
4. The funds should be allotted based on caste and gender identities.

49

Phulan Devis of the Nirbhaya Society

(February 2013)

Several women came, lectured on the Rameezabi case, and called us for protests when I was in the high school hostel. It was a big movement then. Women's organisations mobilised on a large scale. Now, the Delhi gang rape incident. Looking at the strong forces of the country moving against evil, violence, and crime, even women in the Parliament expressing tearful protest, and clamour for justice, for a second, I thought, inequality and violence in society would long have disappeared if society had the responsibility.

Statistics show that a rape occurs every seven minutes in India. The number would have come down if the Delhi-like response had been there. The Delhi gang rape was criminal and violent, but the comments made by political leaders, religious fanatics, and babas were even more criminal and violent. They commented that such incidents will not happen if women wear proper clothes; what business do the girls have to roam at night; there are no rapes in Bharat (villages) but only in India (urban areas); this wouldn't happen if the girl pleaded with them as brothers; she is also at fault, and tried to preserve and perpetrate the criminal attitudes. Women should agitate to eliminate such ideologies. It is a lie that atrocities happen to women who do not dress properly. Do the hegemonic atrocities that ruthlessly happen to Dalit and adivasi women, destroying their rights take place due to the dress code of Dalit and Adivasi women? Did police rape Vakapalli tribal women due to their scanty dressing? Were Priyanka and her mother of Khairlanji raped and killed for roaming at midnight? Who should be blamed for not reporting the brutal murder and mutilation? No humanitarian responses and democratic ideologies say a word when told that ninety-nine per cent of atrocities are on Dalit and Adivasi women, according to official statistics and surveys.

A revolutionary leader went beyond religious fanatics and babas in his opinions when he said that Nirbhaya would have been safe had she cooperated with the assailants; this incident would have been one of the thousands of unknown atrocities; there is a

situation to accept sexual atrocities killing one's consciousness; Nirbhaya woke up crores of people and brought them to the roads as she refused to do the above. How cruel. What kind of social analysis is it to blame women for the atrocities against them?

The country was muted when twenty Dalit girls were raped in one month in Haryana. Vakapalli women did not get justice at all. This casteist society did not even look at it as a grief. Atrocities against Dalit and Adivasi women have become normal and normalised.

Surprisingly, media, organisations, and political parties responded as if the Delhi gang rape kind of incident had never happened. However, we should hope that such a humanitarian response continues, the victims of perpetrating violence get justice, and violence decreases. But, we cannot hope for it in this casteist, unequal, and undemocratic society. Caste plays a major role in atrocities against Dalit and Adivasi women going unnoticed. Society does not consider the dignity and life of Dalit women as valuable. The casteist society is calm and dismissive of such atrocities because it has normalised them. Movies, serials, and other media do not change such values. But their themes and issues disseminate male preference over women, religious values, and caste values. They, too, contribute to such casteist sexual assaults. We cannot prevent sexual atrocities unless we control this inhuman, toxic culture. Every woman should take inspiration of Phulan Devi's struggle. She courageously confronted the feudal male dominance, familial male dominance, dacoit male dominance, and state male dominance. Phulan Devi was a poor, common woman from a backward caste. She unsettled the state, male chauvinists, and dacoits. We should understand that looking at her as a mere dacoit is a biased perception of her socio-economic background.

Women should celebrate Phulan Devi's birth and death anniversaries to inherit her strength and courage. She should shine like a weapon in women's minds. Women need not set her aside like the upper caste patriarchal system labelled the rebel Phulan Devi as the dacoit Phulan Devi. If women do, they will suffer the loss.

A Literary Meeting - Some Tidings

(March 2013)

Recently, I attended the All India Dalit Literary Conference at Belgaum of Karnataka state. Belgaum is a border district located between Karnataka and Maharashtra. Karnataka reminds us of Basaveswara's bhakti movement. When we are about to reach Belgaum by train, we can see a huge fort on the right side. Our fellow passengers, native of Belgaum, told us that it belonged to Queen Chennamma, who valiantly fought against the British forces. Her husband's name was Somappa Nayaka. She fought a relentless battle against the British with her general Sangoli Rayanna's support. A train is named after her. Belgaum district is close to Goa. That's why Belgaum is cool and warm with winds from the Arabian Sea.

The streets, hotels, constructions, language, culture, and food have more of a North Indian character than a South Indian one. Generally, we see not more than a thousand people in any all-India conference. But, the All India Dalit Literary Conference was attended by more than ten thousand people. Kumara Gandharva Ranga Mandira is five to six times bigger than Ravindra Bharathi. The hall was packed, and the audience was crowded outside the hall, too. The stage and chairs had all turned blue. Usually, people mobilised for meetings of the political parties or caste associations will be a few thousand in number. First time I saw such a huge number was at a literary meeting. A large number of people came by lorries, tractors, bullock carts, and buses. The audience comprised both educated and uneducated people. Almost a hundred book stalls were set up outside the meeting and provided the facility to watch the conference proceedings on TVs set up outside. A retired Professor of Gulbarga University, Chennanna Walekar, presided over the conference. There were crowds outside but the sessions on politics, literature, and history were seriously conducted inside the hall. Not a single English word was heard in the sessions. There were three images on the stage, those of Buddha, Basaveswara, and

Ambedkar. They have chosen these three as the major visionaries to move ahead with consciousness. Maratha consciousness was also seen there.

Many speakers observed that Buddha is our dawn and alphabet is our path; Dalit literature is embedded in folklore which preserves our knowledge and art forms. It was impressive that bahujan writers donated their books or books by other bahujan intellectuals to the conference. A Muslim leader called Shahid Memen gifted a book by Paigambar Mohammed, a renowned writer from Karnataka, on Eswar-Humanity. It was pleasantly surprising to note more than twenty book stalls with Muslim literature. They had an extensive Muslim literature with Muslim history, culture, spirituality, modern life, Islamic precept, ideal life, social service, and Allah's sacred words.

There are touchable Dalits and untouchable Dalits in Karnataka. The Constitution recognises the untouchable castes as Scheduled Castes. I could not understand why some touchable castes are also included in the list of Scheduled Castes in Telangana. Kale, Beda Jangam, Lambadi, Vaddera, Bhajantri, and other castes are considered touchable Scheduled Castes while Adi Dravida, Holiya Dasari, Madar, Madiga Chamar, Chaluvadi, Adi Jambava and other castes are considered untouchable SCs.

Women performed folk art forms in the cultural programmes. Yellavva, Basavappa Madara, Gauravva Kambale narrate the story while beating the drum. Two men accompanied them, singing chorus and playing instruments. The performance was spell-binding. It was disappointing that great Kannada writers like Devanoor Mahadeva, Siddalingappa, and Saraswathi, except Anasuya Kambale, were not present in the conference.

The Distress None Was Concerned About

(April 2013)

Curse on these casteist and patriarchal systems. Several species are getting extinct in the environment and ecology, but not casteist and gender violence. Violence, atrocities, and murders are increasingly targeting women of untouchable communities.

Despite an Act on the prevention of sexual atrocities, killings and atrocities against women are continuing. No one is exempt, ranging from an infant to an older woman. How to stop this? What to do in prevention? This is not just a woman's problem but a problem for the entire society, including men. Geddam Jhansi of Dalit Stree Shakti invited people working in social movements, media, and bureaucracy as the jury for the seventh state congress last month and laid out the sorrows of the Dalit girls killed, raped, insulted, and subjected to injustice.

A fourteen-year-old girl of the Budaga Jangala community, with begging as her occupation, was thrown out of the hostel by the teachers. Unable to bear the insult, the tender girl burned herself alive. She saw no purpose in a life without education. A little child was not allowed to access education. The Right to Education Act has gone futile. The girl's father wept, remembering his daughter with curly hair, a straight nose, and good looks. The teachers beat her, asking why the beggar needed a nose pin, anklet bells, and a fair complexion. She endured all the violence and humiliation to get an education. But the teachers did not allow her to continue and drove her towards suicide. The protection mechanism could not do anything for such teachers. One mother cried that her daughter promised to get a job and resolve my hardships, but was raped and killed in the church. The minor Dalit mothers were deceived by the upper caste men in the name of love on one hand, and murders and insults in the name of love on the other hand. Laws and the police do not punish the criminals who say yes to love but not to inter-caste marriage and leave

the young girls as minor mothers. In another instance, a mother cried her heart out, her husband raped her daughter and that fellow is not being punished.

Jayamma witnessed another hell when her husband poured acid on her face and she was almost dead. She is unable to continue with her job with her burnt face. Her woman boss told her not to show her face, not to face her, not to be in her surroundings. Not just that she restricted Jayamma from her presence, but she also restricted her from meeting with other employees. She questioned, what is my mistake? I am the victim. Instead of punishing the wicked people who disfigured my face, why am I being tormented and distanced from others? They do not oblige my request for a transfer. They dismiss my request for my superior's transfer, at least. No One's bothered about my grief.

The jury members were shaken listening to such sorrows, tears, memories, and destruction. We could not bear to see and hear the deadly violence against Dalit children and women. It was an agitation combining anger and distress. We agonised thinking of solutions to these atrocities. Laws, police, and justice did not come to our rescue.

Jhansi asked a question addressed to the jury members, particularly the electronic media members, "The atrocities you witnessed and heard are only the tip of an iceberg. Why are the atrocities and assaults constantly happening to Dalit girls and women in rural and urban areas? Why are they alone being victimised? The entire country came together on the Delhi gang rape issue. Newspapers and channels worked around it as the major news item. Governments, political parties, people's organisations, and women's organisations protested in one voice. But, why are the several Dalit Nirbhayas victimised almost every day, being ignored and not even appearing as news?"

Media people said, media freedom is also confined to the freedom of the dominant; media too has caste, religion, region, and gender motives; Media is not above these; Civil societies should lead the media on the path of consciousness. However, the jury could not answer Jhansi's question.

Dalit women are unable to lead their lives as human beings. Normalising of insults, atrocities, and killings of Dalit women should change. The sad stories Dalit Stree Shakti

compiled have criminals such as fathers, husbands, men and women of other castes, who do not consider Dalit women as human beings and let them live as human beings. How far is the day when Dalit women access citizenship rights and human rights!

52

That Night

(May 2013)

Akka, I won't go to his house. I will stay here and do some work. I can't deal with him any longer. It is the same row since our marriage. I cannot live with him. He is like Yama. He might come in search of me. Don't send me with him. He doesn't do any work. He doesn't get anything for home. I have to arrange everything. He happily roams around. He steals money from home, drinks, beats and abuses me. That's his routine. I obliged him by thinking of children. But he has started a new tantrum. He suspects me of having another man in my life. I cannot bear his torture. I told him to leave me alone as we do not get along. He will not, it seems. Akka, somehow help me get the divorce from his torment. I cannot digest the food. He comes to the hostel where I work, hides behind the walls, and roams around the hostel as if he is monitoring me. He arranged for some hostel workers to keep an eye on me. He suspects if I comb my hair, dress up well, or look neat. I hate myself. He might come here by tomorrow morning. Please send me somewhere. Chinni cried and pleaded with me the entire night.

Chinni works as an outsourced employee in a hostel in their village. Her husband is torturing her, suspecting a relationship between Chinni and the watchman working in the hostel. Chinni is the only wage earner in that house. The family will starve without her salary. She thought smartly and joined her children in a residential hostel. She is self-respecting and hardworking. She does everybody's work in the hostel. The hostel staff thought that she alone can do all the work, even if others are not around. She is polite and courteous to everybody. She obliges them and does their work without saying no. She has a good reputation in the village. Her husband could not tolerate it. He spread the rumour that she is in a relationship with a man in the hostel, and she is not listening to her husband. He spread this to his relatives. Chinni asked for intervention by the panchayat. Chinni pleaded with the panchayat members. Ayya, you are a gentleman. You only tell me. You must be having sisters and daughters like me. I work breaking my shoulders at home and

outside and running the house. He is husband for the sake of mentioning but he does not do anything. You know about it. Although he does not work, drinks, does not bother about home and children, I work from 5 am to 9 pm in the hostel, and arrange everything for him at home, and also educate my children. He could not tolerate this and attributed his suspicion to me. When the hostel people call me about the warden or the work, he says the watchman is calling for me. If I put flowers in my hair, he alleges it is for the watchman and abuses me. I can't live with him. Please write the divorce papers. I cannot be with him. I will bring up my children. I cannot bear his torture. I want divorce papers. Do justice and save me.

The panchayat members said that this fellow won't leave you; he wants you, it seems; he has brought an Endrine bottle to drink if the divorce papers are written; he wants you to quit your job in the hostel. Stop working there. Chinni said, my work gives me food, provides education for my children, and enables me to live with dignity. His presence and absence do not matter. I don't want a husband who suspects me. He will starve me if I quit my job. I will not leave my job but leave this fellow. The panchayat members found fault with Chinni's decision and supported that fellow. In such circumstances, Chinni reached our house without informing anyone. We respected Chinni's decision and decided to question her husband.

Kalekuri Dismantled Caste

(June 2013)

The renowned singer-poet and writer Kalekuri is like a boundless ocean whose depths cannot be understood by the casteist social values. His life smashed the courtesies and glitters of the pseudo society. He fought till the end of his life without getting caught in the snare of family. Kalekuri Prasad is a question aimed at the literary society and the casteist society. Sadly, death swallowed him even before he got the reply.

It is close to Chandrasri's death anniversary. The Mattipulu women writers resolved to bring out an anthology in her memory. A month ago, when I was emailing and calling Chandrasri's friends and acquaintances to request them to write about her, I crossed paths with Kalekuri through a friend who said Kalekuranna wants to write about Chandrasri, and asked me to speak to him. I was overwhelmed by surprise and excitement for a minute. I had not seen him in the past five to six years. I did not know where he was and how he was all this time. I heard he had health issues. But, when I called him now, his voice sounded clear and firm but not hoarse and weak. Several people were worried about him. I felt happy that he has recovered and that he will again soar to touch the sky as a wave of literature. I asked him to write about Chandra as he was her friend. He asked for two days' time and assured me that the write-up would reach me on the third day.

When I called the friend who suggested I should remind Kalekuri about his essay on Chandrasri, he said, Kalekuri anna left us half an hour ago. Kalekuri spread the song of life like a Dalit cuckoo. His song on a flower bloomed in Karmabhumi brought him close to women. The song was sadly and inspiringly sung for girls in villages. They found solace singing this song for the peace of the dead women's souls.

We did not meet him in movements, but we used to sing his songs. The songs he wrote about women and child labourers with his pen name Yuvaka inspired us. We deeply wished to see the poet when we sang his songs.

As women who faced discrimination and oppression from men, we waited, wanting to see Yuvaka, who had such empathy and anguish for women and talk to him.

I saw Kalekuri Prasad for the first time when I went to Bhopal for a meeting on the Bhopal Declaration. I used to read his writings fondly even before that. His songs and writings were filled with anguish and agitation. I read his column in the *Vaaritha* newspaper without fail. His column was heart-rending. It is said that Kalekuri was gender-conscious, courteous and respectful to women. He greeted women like a raindrop in a hot desert. His words are like a soothing memory for women facing male oppression and cruelty.

Many activists and writers admired Kalekuri Prasad. He wished for the destruction of the family system and wanted to live beyond family as a commune. Those immersed in familial hegemony did not support and appreciate Kalekuri's lifestyle. Starting from the elite society to the Dalit society, they labelled him as an anarchist. He was a humanist who wished for humans living as humans with equal opportunities and dignity, irrespective of their caste, religion, and gender. Many people tried to limit him to family, get him stuck there, and own his pleasant smiles but failed.

Kalekuri explored literature from a Dalit perspective. He travelled the difficult path of torturing himself in search of untouchable footprints in this country's profile, distanced himself from people, moved closer to alcohol, remained beyond family, and invited death in protest. It is perplexing why this great movement poet and a poor people's bosom celebration, who is sensitive to others, destroyed himself. A ray of hope, a Dalit youth was tragically ruined by some dark forces.

Chardham Pilgrimage Commercialised

(July 2013)

In the past, a few people who had leisure went to pilgrimage for peace of mind, and to fulfil the vows taken in difficult times after they were done with their responsibilities. But, in recent times, it has become frenzy for thousands and millions of people to go to pilgrimage centres and Kumbh melas. Tourism has become a religious visit and a temple visit in India. Not just a religious visit, but tourism has become extremely commercial. Char Dham violence is a consequence of this. Religious tourism combined with commercial activities has led to global warming and swallowed the pilgrims like an Anaconda.

Tourism lured, comforted, and rushed people through bhakti channels, and killed them. It was not the floods that took the lives of people in Chardham, but it was human-made destructive currents. The major culprits behind the Chardham genocide are the media, the Uttarakhand government, and the priesthood system. It is criminal on the part of the media to perpetuate superstitions and erase reasoning, while it is criminal on the part of the government to pound and destroy the ecology in the name of development and projects. Thousands of people were swept away without leaving a trace. The local people were safe. Only the pilgrims were killed.

Why did thousands of common people go there? To pray for their rescue from suffering, grief, and mundane problems. The media is nourishing these weaknesses and luring the lower and middle classes caught in problems by showing certain tablets as a cure for all ailments and certain pilgrimages as a solution for all problems.

The majority of the victims belonged to the bahunjan castes, who are the majority in India and in the Chardham incident. They were deceived by the false promises of the media. The reason behind their problems and hardships is the casteist political and social system. The reason behind this system is Hindu religious principles. Thousands of common people

saved penny by penny, starving themselves and their people, went to see God to save themselves from their hardships and were consumed by death.

They went with their strong faith in God, and God could not rescue Himself in the floods. Now, the Chardham victims are pleading with governments instead of God. Not the God they trusted, but the army rescued seventy-three thousand people caught in the floods. This fact is clearly visible and yet the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand declared a great yaga in Haridwar. This is the irrationality that does not allow us to get out of the abyss of superstitions. Governments are attributing human-made destruction to God and evading responsibility.

The human-made destruction is responsible for thousands of deaths that left no traces of the dead in Uttarakhand. They levelled the green mountains and filled the earth with projects and suffocating pollution. Earth, mountains, water, and trees reached a saturation point, came together and destroyed the human-made obstacles and the humans who created the obstacles.

The governments that should direct people towards scientific and logical perspectives are utilising tourism and its commercial benefits to continue the exploitation they are resorting to. They are diverting people towards spirituality to prevent them from questioning governments about their problems. Against this backdrop, people whose economic problems, social oppression, unemployment, injustice, and lack of minimum facilities are not addressed are becoming dependent on God, blaming their fate, donating their hair and money in pilgrimage centres, believing in the illusion that this will solve all their problems. Governments, media, the Hindu religion, and priests are perpetuating this for their social, economic, and political gains and to prevent the protests by political leaders against them. We need governments like those of Mayawati, who said, Give donations to us, but not to temples.

55

Chandrasri....

(August 2013)

It is one year since the renowned social artist and activist Chandrasri left us on 7 July 2012. This is the context when we must discuss the manu dharma politics, male Dalit politics, and savarna women's politics woven around the life and death of Chandrasri, who lived like a movement song and movement artist.

She was a common Dalit girl studying Intermediate in Chirala before coming to the revolutionary movements. Inspired by listening to revolutionary songs in the village, she, along with her songs, marched towards Jananatyamandali like a movement. She came as a full-time member, leaving behind her family for the song that dreamt of the egalitarian society. She married a man from the party who liked her song, without thinking about his caste and religion. Later, she resisted the restrictions of her husband, who turned from a man who she should not sing in public but should confine to the home, and the revolutionary manuvada casteist politics and gender discrimination. She left that man and the revolutionary party that elevated men and came out with an infant.

Later, she stood by the victims like a blue flag and brought alive the Dalit song in Karamchedu and Chundururu Dalit movements. There was not a single village in the Telugu region that did not hear her song. Chandrasri sang the songs of black suns along with K.G. Satyamurthy in Ekalavya Kalamandali and later established the Dalit women's theatre for the blue moons.

Syamala and I had plans to establish a Dalit Women's Theatre with Chandrasri in the forefront. We contacted a women's NGO but it did not work out due to a lack of trust in Dalit women as well as due to some other reasons. But Chandrasri did not let the proposal go down. She started the theatre on her own, single-handedly. Only she could make it possible. She was multi-faceted. She could write, dance, and enact plays and monologues. Song was her life. If she were an artist from a privileged caste, her reputation

would have touched the skies. She turned the Savitribai Phule monologue into a song and sang. She did not stop singing even though cancer was taking life out of her. She thought Ambedkarism could liberate the Indian casteist society, learned music in her last days, and handed over the album Ambedkar Suprabhatam to society.

Many people compare the similarities between Chandrasri and Kalekuri Prasad. Both are Dalits, had intercaste marriage, affiliation with a revolutionary party, association with Dalit movements, and failed marriages. Both lived in art forms and could not fit in the framework of family. Both questioned and resisted social oppression. Both ended their lives abruptly. Dalit organisations owned and respected Kalekuri Prasad, but not Chandrasri. She did not receive a respectful farewell from them on her death. It is not fair for Dalit men and Dalit organisations to follow different values for an independent and rebellious man and an independent and rebellious woman. The revolutionary organisations that claim to resist manu dharma but follow Manu dharma, too, ignored Chandrasri.

The Dalit organisations that question all forms of oppression tend to manifest gender discrimination. Dalit magazines quickly publish special issues with cover pages of the dead brahmin scholars, declaring their slavery. But, sadly, the Dalit magazines did not recognise the Dalit woman Chandrasri, who lived as a social activist and a movement song. Women's organisations, too, did not bother about the life of an activist and artist. Women's organisations, Women's NGOs, and feminist organisations could not offer solidarity and solace to Chandrasri's song and art when she was battling with cancer.

The lives of upper-caste women who enjoyed an independent and free lifestyle were not ruined or destroyed. Feminism strengthened their freedom. They settled into common family life and society after a free and independent lifestyle, with the support of men from Dalit and Bahujan castes. But this did not happen in Chandrasri's case. The upper caste feminist women could not show the broadmindedness that they showed for women of their caste towards Chandrasri. The caste discrimination from the same gender and the gender discrimination from the same caste dismissed Chandrasri. Feminists did not say a word about Chandrasri's social life. Chandrasri's life should serve as a lesson for Dalit women.

Seemandhra Employees

(September 2013)

For three days following the announcement of separate Telangana on 30 July 2013, the Seemandhra employees protested in the Secretariat, saying that they are favourable to separate Telangana but are concerned about their children's future and the protection of their rights in Telangana, particularly in Hyderabad.

From the fourth day, their tone changed. How did they separate Telangana as they wished? Who did they ask? We will be ruined. Our jobs and employment will be gone. We won't have a drop of water to drink. We have no future. We are unable to sleep a wink. What will happen to the houses we built here? We all wanted to live together. Is it wrong? We will not allow the state to be broken into pieces. We want Samaikyandhra (united Andhra). Sometimes they said Hyderabad belongs to all of us, and some other times they said Hyderabad belongs to us and the Secretariat belongs to us. They resorted to undemocratic protests. They signed but did not work. Instead, they staged protests, slogans, dharnas, and provocative speeches. Seemandhra employees incited them and polluted the Seemandhra districts, projecting as if the entire Andhra was protesting, to cater to their benefits.

Seemandhra employees provoked and looked upon the Telangana employees as the culprits working in the same corridor, but Telangana employees brushed it aside and assured them that they would stand by the Seemandhra employees if their rights were violated. Yet, Seemandhra employees impetuously looked daggers at them. There is no evidence of employees suffering when the states of Punjab, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand were formed. There is a constitutional process of creating new states. The Seemandhra politicians are showing the fear of water scarcity. Jalamandali and Bachavat Committees are there to decide on the allotment of water. Don't the white collar voices know about it? Seemandhra political leaders have always intimidated and lured

Seemandhra people. It is their mistake not to prepare the Seemandhra people. Now, they have intimidated the Seemandhra people with the fear of not getting water and jobs, and brought them onto the roads as a counter movement. They started in Seemandhra districts and one or two places in Hyderabad and are trying to magnify them with the help of the media.

It is atrocious and vicious for the Seemandhras who lived in Hyderabad for three generations since 1953, secured jobs, settled in their lives, and now are ridiculing the Telangana announcement and starting counter movements in the name of united Andhra.

Seemandhras have lived with us for the past sixty years, witnessed our identity movements, movements for our state, and our sacrifices. Instead of manifesting humanitarian values and respecting the Telangana announcement, they are agitating to prevent the fulfilment of our aspiration. What should we say about it? What human relations and bonds are left between people to stay together? It is all othering and discrimination.

Although you lived with us for sixty years, you looked at us as the other, and showed your authority and appropriated our land, jobs, resources, language, history, and civilisation. We are fighting as a perennial movement due to your oppression. Some Dalit organisations from Seemandhra stood by the Telangana people and led the supporting movements in the past sixty years. None of the Seemandhra upper caste groups ever supported the Telangana movement. Small states will lead to decentralisation of power and an increase in jobs. We hope the Bahujans living in Hyderabad, as Seemandhra, will welcome and respect the Telangana announcement, support Telangana people, and refuse to carry the flag for the Seemandhra hegemonic upper caste leaders. Bahujans and bahujan women should prosper in Seemandhra and in Telangana.

57

Was It Liberation or Merger?

(October 2013)

How many arguments around 17 September 1948! One Hindu party looks at it as liberation while other parties look at it as a merger by the Indian army. Communist parties joined their voice to this argument. At least some histories reveal that the Hindus who were jagirdars, zamindars, and deshmukhs in Nizam's rule joined hands with the Hindus in the national movement and resorted to a mutiny.

17th September is an accurate example to prove how people distort history according to their political benefits. The distortion might have buried the facts deep, but they are gradually surfacing now. The 17 September military action cannot be considered liberation because liberation is when people are rescued from all forms of exploitation. If this was liberation, why did the Telangana armed struggle, Mulki movement, communist struggles, naxalite struggles, coolie struggles, Andhra go back, tribal and women movements happen? Is it liberation to escape from the Muslim rule? This is Hindu hegemony and a distortion of history.

Congress, other ruling parties, and the communist parties call it a merger. When a big country merges into sovereign India, mere army attacks and mutinies do not happen. Merger happens amicably with agreements and treaties spelling out benefits, protection, and rights. But, Patel's army suddenly surrounded the state, targeted and massacred millions of Muslims, occupied the state, and forced Nizam to give a declaration of surrender. Can this be called a merger?

British Andhra viewed the Nizam's state as an independent country. That's why, when the great poet Joshua, in his long poem Gabbilam, lists the places and cities his bat crosses on its way to Kasi, he does not refer to Nizam's Telangana state. He considered it a separate country.

The ruler of Telangana, Hyderabad, was a Muslim. The zamindars, jagirdars, deshmukhs, patels, and patwaris working under him were upper-caste Hindus. The 17th September attacks happened as they looked at the Nizam more as a Muslim but not as a ruler. It was the Hindu movement that happened in the name of the National Movement. This Hindu weapon destroyed the Communal Award that Ambedkar proposed for Dalits. It was Gandhi's Hindu argument that launched the Poona Pact and restricted Dalits to slavery. Similarly, jagirdars under the Nizam joined hands with the Hindu fanatics in the national movement and contributed to the mutiny, annexation, conquest, and massacre. It is said that the jagirdars tortured people for taxes and conducted brutal feudal attacks on people. The Telangana Hindu jagirdars joining hands with national Hinduism ignored Rudrama Devi, who built and ruled a large Telugu empire (owing to the manuvada that prevents women from freedom- *na stri swatantra marhati*) and established Srikrishna Devaraya Bhasha Nilayam at the centre of the Hyderabad city with Srikrishna Devaraya as the Telugu icon. Telangana suffered a multi-faceted loss for four generations due to many such activities.

The 17 September 1948 army action suddenly attacked the state from different directions, massacred millions, and occupied the state without any counterattack. And, it deprived the people of special protections and rights. This was favourable to Seemandhras. Hence, within three years of coming out of Madras State, they occupied Telangana and Hyderabad.

Bravo, National Commission for Women!

(November 2013)

Governments establish women's commissions claiming to help women. But, so far, no commission had Dalit, Adivasi, B.C., and minority women as members. If they think women who are ahead in education and employment are equal to Dalit, Adivasi, BC, and minority women with no education, employment, human dignity, and human rights, with life as a challenge, then women of these sections should also have a representation in women's commissions. But, governments can see only women of the ruling castes with limitless opportunities as women and ignore women of marginalised castes and their representation. This is an injustice for the oppressed women.

So far, laws in India have been made without recognising the hierarchy of caste and caste-based development, monopolising the upper caste women as the only women, and basing the laws on their lives. But, laws were not made based on the perspectives, lives, and experiences of the Dalit, Adviasi, Minority, and B.C. women.

Women of oppressed castes are subjected to caste and gender exploitation without human rights, human dignity, better living standards, and facing violence, humiliation, and sexual atrocities. Their lives have turned into an everyday ordeal. Living itself is a big challenge for them. The National Women's Commission probably realised that the laws related to women are not made to provide protection and security to these women. It is a good initiative to introduce the women's reservation bill in the Parliament. But, this bill should be debated and finalised in the streets, villages, tribal and dalit villages, and forests instead of being confined to Delhi. Many women are unaware of this initiative by the National Women's Commission. The purpose of this bill will be fulfilled only if it is discussed across the country. Or else, it will also remain a bill for the benefit of a few women, like some other bills.

Probably it was inevitable for the National Women's Commission to recognise the identities of the women of the ruling castes, the ruled and the oppressed castes. That's why it was included in the bill that SC and ST women should be extended financial assistance by the government during elections. This is a positive development. The Commission should ensure that this discussion reaches the last woman if such issues are to be included in the bill. Minority and MBC women should also be given financial assistance in elections.

There is one more adventure to the credit of the National Commission for Women. Usually, governments establish their organisations for their support. But, the National Commission for Women, despite being a government organisation, strongly recommended that the special powers for the army should be withdrawn. This is a milestone in the history of women's commissions.

People of Kashmir, Eastern states, Chhattisgarh, particularly adivasi women of these regions, are facing sexual atrocities and violence by the army and police, and are constantly fighting. The screams and sorrows of these women are not reaching the (un)civilised world. There is no security for the lives and dignity of Adivasi women in the green forests. Civil societies and organisations are raising their voice, but there is no response from governments. The Vakapalli incident is an example of the government, laws, and courts protecting police and army from sexual atrocities and assaults they have resorted to. Women's organisations and societies helplessly writhed at the unjust judgments on Vakapalli women.

Women's struggles and Irom Sharmila's fourteen-year resistance speak volumes on the army atrocities in Kashmir and the eastern states. The media is not bothered about this.

It is commendable that the women's commission recommended the withdrawal of the Special Powers Act to the accused and the culprits in uniform. Women's organisations and movements should pressurise governments to implement this recommendation.

59

Rangavalli the Memory of a Warm Winter

(December 2013)

The month of November can be named after the martyrs. Several revolutionaries were killed this month. Farmers and labourers were in hectic field work this month. Informers thought it was the right time for them to track the revolutionaries and make money. The police subjected them to different restrictions and pressure, and killed those working in the revolution and movements. We have always celebrated male martyrs but never women martyrs. Several women became martyrs in encounters. But, sadly, they were forgotten by the patriarchal movement culture. The theory highlights that revolution is for a society without gender discrimination and with equal opportunities. But it is not implemented. This could be the reason women martyrs are pushed into oblivion.

Stri Shakti Sanghatana, in their book *Manaku Teliyani Mana Charitra* (1986), raised a pertinent discussion about the revolutionary forces ignoring women's participation in movements. That book, too, overlooked Dalit and Adivasi women's histories. That's a different story. But no corrections have been made till now. Half of the world is still being ignored in all movements, including the revolutionary movements.

It is a new development that a meeting was held in memory of Rangavalli, her life and her movement life were discussed, and a book was published recently.

Rangavalli came from a rich, ruling caste. Although she came from a hegemonic, exploitative caste, she came to our Dalit and tribal villages. She was a good and great woman who gave up her luxuries and comforts to contribute her bit to the new society by emancipating the exploited. She was honest and humanitarian, and showed unique humaneness towards fellow humans, particularly Dalits and Adivasis.

Her actions were ideal. I have seen many upper-caste women in movements, and I have worked with them, too. I have experienced more of their inhuman hypocrisy. When I went to her house, an upper-caste woman comrade showed me a toilet meant for their

domestic help outside. It was worse than the public toilet, and I had to rush out of there. Such is the treatment for fellow comrades. Dalit and Adivasi women have faced distancing and humiliation in words and deeds, both direct and indirect, from these women. Rangavalli was a little different.

She chose an activist from a BC community as her life partner. She used to play the nurse for the suffering people. She always carried medicines and tablets for cough, fever, stomach pain, headache, and small ailments with her. Seeing her, it felt that class solidarity is thicker than blood relations.

There are no women leaders even in the revolutionary groups and organisations that demand equality and equal justice. Why? There are no women leaders among students, farmer labourers, or workers' associations. Why? We sought support from upper-caste women, including Rangavalli, in our impatience and opposition to the male leadership in the above groups. But that support and the chorus voices are yet to join us. It is all silence. It is the Dalit women who face undeclared censorship

Police killed Rangavalli, a Lambada girl, Anita, and two boys on 11 November 1999. Wish the book on Rangavalli had memories of Anita included. It has been fourteen years since Rangavalli became a martyr. At least now a book has come out in her memory. Rangavalli was a great revolutionary activist who was never arrogant and hypocritical but always revealed her attitude of service and humane love. For me, the memory of Rangavalli means the touch of love that enveloped me in a rally when we met for the first time. When I suddenly came to attend meetings in Hyderabad without even carrying a blanket, Rangavalli folded her sarees and covered me warmly. Those warm winter memories are still fresh, wrapped around my neck.

When the Seemandhra Secretariat Ceases to Exist

(January 2014)

Sadly, there were no Telangana employees in the Secretariat who could confront the Seemandhra employees who claimed the office and its surroundings, and threatened against the entry of others, tore the Telangana bill into pieces, and stamped their feet on it. Tearing of the bill extended to the Assembly. The bill is precious for the Telangana people. It consists of sixty years of movement aspirations, sacrifices of Telangana youth, the battlefields where the Osmania University students kept their future and lives at stake, the screams of struggles, and slogans by Telangana people in one voice. The Telangana bill is the dawn that the four-crore people have been aspiring for.

We were portrayed as rowdies in our own land. Telangana employees and Seemandhra employees have been working together in the same Secretariat for the past three to four generations. But their reaction to the Telangana bill reveals that Seemandhra employees had daggers in their stomachs. We were subjected to insult, injustice, and discrimination, but we were together, and we shared friendship. Isn't it inhumane to tear the Telangana bill into pieces, burn it, and stamp on it? Seemandhra employees have failed to show minimum human respect, fraternity, and empathy towards Telangana employees, but behaved like a spear by the side. Telangana employees in the Secretariat could not resist or prevent such vengeful reactions.

Seemandhra employees are being crueller than the political leaders in their attitude towards Telangana employees. Their words and actions are becoming increasingly provocative. The Telangana leadership that should effectively confront this is divided into Velama and Reddy, and has divided the employees and kept them under its control. How can the Seemandhra employees disrespect and insult the bill that is precious for Telangana people, but then exercise their options and continue to live in Telangana? They should introspect on how cruel they are in attacking fellow Telangana employees who have shared

friendship with them, and have gratitude and collegiality for living in this state happily and comfortably for sixty years.

Let the states get divided, but we should live together as people. Seemandhra employees of the Secretariat are worse than political leaders in their behaviour. They rebuke, saying, You learnt civilisation from us, we established schools and colleges and taught you education; we established hospitals and provided healthcare to you. Now, you have gathered the courage to get the bill to drive us away. They took daggers at us like enemies. They are not on talking terms. The walls are raised high. No greetings.

All these are on one hand. Telangana employees silently tolerated all these. But, they are unable to bear the Telangana bill, which is equivalent to their life being torn and stamped under their feet. But the Secretariat Telangana movement leadership seems to be unaffected. If affected, they should have made a ruckus, held protest rallies, lodged complaints, and elicited apologies. Nothing of that sort happened. It proves the Seemandhra authority, arrogance, and mob rule reigning in the Secretariat. The handful of Telangana employees in the Secretariat are competing against one another as Velamas and Reddys and are unable to resist Seemandhras together.

Seemandhra Kammas and Reddys are leading the ruckus in the Secretariat from behind. BCs and SCs, including women, are running the united Andhra movement in the Secretariat with the support of the leadership. Telangana employees' leadership in the Secretariat, divided as Velamas and Reddys, and divided into SC, BC, minorities, and women, is weakening the Telangana movement in the Secretariat. This reminds us of the baby crying when the mother cries.

Let us wind up this year's events at the end of the year. The Telangana bill will not stop next year, whoever prevents it. At least next year, let us welcome democratic values and respect that do not hurt one another.

No Place - No Time

(February 2014)

The diary release programmes of Telangana employees, workers, teachers, lawyers, and other organisations happen like a carnival on the advent of the New Year. They happened like a movement during the Telangana struggle and continued to happen after the announcement of Telangana. On this New Year, I received a call from an unknown number.

Hello, who is calling?

My name is some Reddy. I am the President of the Group One Employees Association. You are also a Group One Employee, aren't you? I sent a message. Did you see?

Yes, I saw it, I said.

Ok, good. You should come along with your women colleagues for the diary release programme. All our Telangana leaders are coming. I mentioned in the message that so and so Raos, Reddys, and Gouds will speak at the event.

There is no woman mentioned in your message.

There is no place to mention all the names. So, I did not.

They are also inviting me to meetings in the New Year. I thought it was a good development. Names might not have been mentioned in the message. But they will have a place on the stage.

I curiously asked about the women officers and women speakers at the meeting.

The stage is not sufficient for big leaders. Where will the women sit on the stage? If there is some space, we will seat one or two women. You attend the meeting.

I will come if you invite women to speak, invite them onto the stage, and not make them sit in the rear rows on the stage.

Why discuss all these things? You come with your colleagues. Why do you want to come up to the stage where there are no chairs? There are several chairs off the stage. Sit comfortably and listen to the meeting. You should definitely come.

Women have no place in the messages and on the stage. Even if there is, there is no time to give them the mic. It is not the phones and the stage that do not have the space but it is the minds of these people that have no place for women.

The Telangana movement did not bother about representation for women and did not recognise it as a serious issue. That's why Telangana leaders are uncertain about the inclusion of women. That no forces in society are bothered about it can prove very dangerous for women.

Round Tables by people's organisations have been happening extensively post-Telangana announcement. They are centred on Social Justice in Telangana, Women's Empowerment, and Reconstruction.

A Bahujan organisation leader invited me for a round table on Women's Empowerment in the Reconstruction of Telangana. I was unhappy about the exclusion of women in the meetings, so I went to this round table hoping to see the groups of bahujan women and to speak. The major speakers in the round table were men, and the leader who organised the round table presided over the meeting. Women of the Bahujan castes were seated on both sides of the tables.

I was angry about men reiterating their authority in the name of women's empowerment. Meetings are conducted under the leadership of men, with priority given to men. Women are to speak in the time left after men speak. Also, women of the upper castes are given the first priority, and then women of the oppressed castes are given an opportunity.

The leaders attending the Women's Empowerment speak only about women, but not about women's empowerment. They touch upon every other issue except this. One speaker gives a call for armed struggle and another for life sacrifices. Who should do this? The ones who speak do not sacrifice anything. Their children study in Seemandhra or in

other states and go abroad from there. But those who sacrifice their lives in movements are students from the oppressed sections.

They waste time in irrelevant talk and leave soon after their speech. They have no responsibility towards women's empowerment and they don't bother to listen to women. Organisers should also be honest, responsible, and democratic towards the other half of the world. The Telangana movement could not record the histories of women who fought for Telangana. Yadavarni fought when the Golconda fort was under siege, it seems. When Chennareddy left the Telangana movement and moved away, Sadalakshmi, Eswaribai, and Zeenat Sajida led the movement. It is not the reconstruction of Telangana but the new construction of Telangana that should happen. Caste and gender discrimination should be eliminated in the newly constructed Telangana.

Women of the Soil Demand a New Telangana

(May 2014)

The Telangana movement had millions of aspirations. The geographical Telangana is aspiring to evolve into a bahunjan Telangana. No agreement on social justice took place in the Telangana movement. Although many Bahujan Telangana youth sacrificed their lives, it is only a geographical Telangana that was achieved. Only when this geographical Telangana transforms into a Bahujana Telangana, it will become a new Telangana. If reconstruction of Telangana happens as the Telangana ruling castes are claiming, it will be beneficial for the hegemonic castes. Telangana of the past has a history of bonded labour and feudalism. Then, would the reconstruction of Telangana mean invoking these systems? We should think.

The lakes are dry, minor irrigation is affected, and the lands are contaminated with pesticides in Telangana villages due to Seemandhra politics. This affected agriculture and compelled small farmers and farm labourers, particularly women, to migrate to the cities. Women struggled without proper and equal wages in the huge villa and apartment construction projects. They slogged as domestic help. No education and no livelihood. Telangana marginalised women are dragging their lives without the dignity of labour, human dignity, and human rights. Dalit women are becoming cleaning brooms in an insulting labour. Lambadi mothers are forced to sell their children out of starvation. Beedi makers' labour is turning into burning beedis. Telangana marginalised women are pushed into violence in the informal sector, devoid of security for their dignity and life. Handloom workers are dying of scanty wages. No limit to starvation deaths. They are becoming prey to fluorosis with no clean drinking water.

Telangana Dalit women are being subjected to casteist social evils, violence, and atrocities in the form of jogini and scavenging. Their husbands took loans, migrated to Bhiwandi, Dubai, and Muscat, were deceived, and died, while SC, ST, BC, and Muslim women live a death-in-life situation in terrible poverty along with their children.

Seemandhra capitalists have occupied the adivasi lands as resources for their companies and are driving the adivasis away. Although the oppressed castes and women are at the forefront of movements, they are unable to get the results. Similar to the way they are made to stand in the forefront in Batkamma, Bonalu, cooking, banner holding, sloganeering, and sacrificing their lives, they should be kept in the forefront while distributing the results of a separate state.

There should be appropriate recognition for the struggle of Telangana women. In proportion to the population ratio, women of all castes should be provided opportunities for education, employment, and political participation. The marginalised women should be given fifty percent reservation in all fields. Oppressed women with no land should be given at least three acres each. Bonded labour and child labour should be eradicated. Issues of illiteracy, untouchability, atrocities, assaults, violence, and caste-based hegemony in Telangana should be noted. The following recommendations are essential for the new Telangana.

There should be a residential hostel for marginalised women in each mandal.

Three acres of land should be allocated to each marginalised woman in her name.

Every political party should reserve at least fifty per cent of the seats for marginalised women.

Women of marginalised communities should be provided with reservations in the private section too.

Industries that enhance livelihood opportunities for agricultural labourer women should be established.

Loans should be provided for women of the production castes on priority.

Women should be given loans on the basis of caste in women's corporations.

Fifty per cent of the loans in BC, SC, and ST corporations should be given to women.

Employment opportunities should be provided at the village level to begin with.

Child care centres should be set up in villages.

Marginalised women's leadership and empowerment in political systems should be increased to fifty per cent.

Ensure that the future chief minister is a marginalised woman.

Every mandal should have a women's police station for the safety of women.

Justice Punnaiah Commission's recommendations should be sincerely implemented for the annihilation of caste.

Marginalised women demand the implementation of the above suggestions in the new Telangana.

— Association of the Marginalised Women

How to Protect the Girls?

(June 2014)

Sexual assaults, kidnappings, and atrocities on girls, particularly teenage girls, in the past five years. Parents have to protect their girls like gold. They are shivering till the girls return home. Earlier, girls used to go to schools, colleges, and jobs on their own comfortably. But that is not the case now. We are living in dreadful times when girls are in constant fear at home and outside.

Some parents are accompanying girls to schools and colleges. Protection of girls who go out to work has become very difficult. Girls are living in fear amidst insecure circumstances. The atrocities run into hundreds and thousands every day.

We had a misdemeanour that such assaults are confined to urban areas and have not spread to villages and forest villages. But my head reeled when I came to know about an incident in my relatives' family. A sixteen-year-old girl, a first-generation student, belonging to a forest village called Buddapalle. There is no hierarchical caste structure in the village. Only people of two castes, Madiga and Lambadi, live there. Marriages and disputes happen only between the two castes. They do shifting cultivation in the forest. I admired this forest village untouched by caste hegemony, caste frameworks, and uncivilised societies outside.

In such a village, a girl studying intermediate was raped by boys of the same age from her relatives raped her when nobody was at home, stuffing the cloth in her mouth, and tying her hands and legs. Insulted and agitated by this, the girl consumed monosulfon, slipped into a coma, and is struggling between life and death in the hospital. The parents are not well-to-do. But, considering the scant facilities in the government hospital, they admitted her to a private hospital. They sold their bullocks and cart, and mortgaged land to pay the hospital bills. They did not even know that a case should be filed with the police.

With the help of some socially active groups, a case was registered with the police, and the culprits were arrested under the POCSO and Nirbhaya Acts. The socially active groups did not know much about these acts. How would the common people, who were too rural and uneducated, know about them?

Governments did not bother about the hospital expenses for a girl being treated for a coma in the hospital. The Nirbhaya Act states that the victim should be provided rehabilitation, but only after the judgment is delivered. What will be the fate of the victim in the meantime? Should she die without proper treatment and help? If the district legal services authority is approached for help and rehabilitation according to the Nirbhaya Act, they will send it to the Collector and wash their hands. Questions are asked about admitting the victim in a private hospital; advice is given to admit her in the government hospital; and assurance is given to consider. Some financial assistance by Asmita, Dalit Help Desk, support from Child Care, Bhumika, Human Rights Forum, and Dalit Stree Shakti gave some solace to the family.

Had the governments quickly extended financial help or even credit to the poor Dalit victim women, the girl's parents would not have taken loans beyond their capacity. The girl recovered to some extent as the parents were determined to save her, even mortgaging their lives.

The credit for taking the teasing and atrocities against girls' culture to the forest villages goes to the television and films. Why has the number of murders, atrocities, and kidnappings gone up? What is the solution to prevent them? The governments and civil societies should take the laws to the people instead of limiting themselves to merely making laws. There should be an extensive circulation of information about POCSO and the Nirbhaya Act in villages.

Preparations around Telangana

(August 2014)

The recent meeting organised by the Telangana Vidyavantula Vedika (without women) on the occasion of Prof Jayashankar's death anniversary had Amitabh Pande as the chief guest. He is a retired IAS officer from Uttarakhand. He said many good and great things. But the male intellectuals did not take them to their ears and minds. He said that Uttarakhand did not achieve the expected results after its formation as a separate state. Because the control of corporate companies on state resources should be prevented, the government should work more than using its authority; state powers should not be centralised; no government can progress without participation and empowerment of women in the construction of a new state. Don't know how much of this was understood by the male intellectuals, but the Telangana women felt happy about his words. Telangana government, politics, and leadership should consider his words. The male groups here are not talking about gender justice and participation in the construction and development of Telangana. Moreover, they are impatient and mocking at the articulate women. Let us take a look at the facts and history. Did the Telangana movement happen and achieve without women? There are not just men but also women among those off the stage in groups, carried banners and flags, suffered beatings, encountered tear gas, raised slogans, had cases registered against them, and became martyrs. The students of Osmania University can clarify these counts.

Telangana leaders are making irresponsible statements such as, there are no women; do we prevent them if they come; what can we do if they don't come? If that is the case, why are millions of women attending Bonalu and Batkamma celebrations? What forces are mobilising women for their political gain? Why are they not doing such mobilising for partnership and leadership? The male intellectuals boast of their arguing for social justice and democracy. But, why are the Telangana male intellectuals, political leaders, and social activists not arguing on behalf of women when women are deprived of minimum political representation, such as MLA seats, ministries, MLCs, membership in advisory boards,

nominated posts, standing committees and councils? Is it not social justice to support women and women's partnership?

Did only men agitate in all people's strikes and non-cooperation? Women faced several insults of not being allowed into leadership roles and partnerships in the Telangana movement. Women were confined to participation in the movement, but with no recognition and respect. There are women in all JACs in Telangana. But, after the achievement of Telangana, we don't see their representation. It is not a coincidence that social activists and democrats do not recognise this as a drawback. The male authority repressed our voices into our hearts, alleging that we were against Telangana and advising us not to talk about any discrimination, as the Telangana issue would be distracted if we talked about anything else, when we asked about our partnership and leadership in the movement and gender equitable justice. This is the tragedy that Telangana women, ranging from the marginalised to the privileged, are suffering. In fact, Telangana women's historical identities are battling identities, Molla's writing identities, Rudrama's ruling identities, war identities holding guns and wearing the garlands of cartridges, and Adivasi Sammakka Sarakka's struggles. Telangana women are the successors of Palakurti Ailamma, Sindellamma, Sadalakshamma, and Eswaribai. Such identities are being oppressed now. Women are mobilising and emerging as a Telangana women's power to alert women and confront injustice. This is a promising development.

Long Live Phulan's Inspiration and Consciousness

(September 2014)

Women's organisations, revolutionary organisations, and caste organisations did not significantly respond or condemn when Phulan Devi was murdered on 25 July 2001 when she was a member of the Parliament. But Anveshi organised a big meeting condemning Phulan Devi's murder. When I suggested a meeting in our office, both men and women refused to hold a meeting for a dacoit, fearing that others would follow her model. The white collars were frightened to sign when we tried to collect signatures. It was women who suffered the loss as men filled their fears in women, women joining the chorus instead of countering it, and not following Phulan Devi's personality, fighting spirit, and rebellion. The upper caste male media portrayed Phulan Devi as a murderer, dacoit, and an unwoman, thus separating her from the womenfolk. Unfortunately, the other social movement fields continued this. Several friends recollected Phulan Devi, who was pushed into oblivion in 2001, after the Nirbhaya case.

Such relentless atrocities against girls! They might reduce if the girls become Phulan Devis themselves. Some friends said in our discussions that Phulan Devi's consciousness and courage should be passed on to women as a counter and confrontation to these atrocities. Some opinions, such as why the squads shouldn't be formed against atrocities and violence against women, and for economic equality, strengthened this argument.

Although there are several bahujan women in history who were strong, powerful, fought battles, and served society. But, they are not remembered, recognised, and drawn inspiration from, nor is their social consciousness taken forward. Mattipulu women writers decided to install such forgotten strong women as a torch to society and celebrated Phulan Devi's birth anniversary. We invited women of all social groups.

Phulan Devi was a poor, uneducated, lower-caste woman from the Godak Purva village of Jalal district in Uttar Pradesh. She described their lives as the house flies on the dogs. She was married when she was eleven years old to a thirty-year-old man as his second

wife and was subjected to forced sexual violence. It was not in her personality to tolerate any form of injustice. She confronted her mother, father, uncle, his son, patel of her husband's village, patel's son and daughters, police, thakurs, and dacoits, and suffered extreme beatings.

She became an enemy to her cousins when she fought for her land; an enemy to the Patel's family for asking wages for her labour; she was subjected to atrocities, but continued to fight against gender and caste discrimination. She suffered physical torture and atrocities by the age of fifteen.

Phulan Devi said that it was not merely her poverty that subjected her to violence, multiple atrocities, and insults, but also her being born in a lower caste. Atrocities on Phulan Devi were not discussed much, but her becoming a dacoit and taking revenge on the Thakurs by massacring them became a huge discussion and disturbed the Indian upper caste men's sleep. Consequently, they facilitated the surrender of the Chambal Queen and Bandit Queen in 1983. She was kept in jail for eleven years before she was released in 1994.

When she complained of stomach pain in jail, surreptitiously, her uterus was removed, it seems. No action was initiated against the doctors who removed her uterus to prevent the birth of Phulan Devis.

The Samajwadi Party gave her the ticket to contest elections in 1996. Congress, BJP, and other parties agitated across the country against the entry of a dacoit into politics. But Phulan Devi won the election as a Member of Parliament and served the society in several ways. She initiated special provisions for women's safety in rural areas to encourage bahun women in education and employment. But the upper caste Thakurs did not rest till they killed her. The upper caste male world might have killed her, but women should keep her memory alive to draw inspiration from her struggle and awareness.

If Scavenging is Sacred, Why not Other Castes Do It?

(October 2014)

I am reminded of my maternal aunt when I hear of scavenging or see the scavenging workers. Her name is Mallakka. She does sanitation work in her village. Once the scavenging woman did not come to clean his house, a panchayat office employee asked my aunt who sweeps the roads to do that work.

She thought she might lose her job if she refused to do that work; a scavenging woman is also a woman like her; when she could do that work, why can't Mallakka do it? She tied a cloth around her nose and cleaned the filth for ten days. But, she could not remain herself. Her husband and children complained of the stench from her and did not allow her to touch vessels or cook during those ten days.

I still clearly remember her words. They are treating me like this and keeping me at a distance for doing this work for ten days. What would be the agony of those who do this scavenging regularly? No one should live like this, either at home or outside. Cursed be this work. Stomach churns at that stench. People should clear their filth on their own. If they hate their filth, how much would others hate it? Lower caste women are considered easy and cheap labour, so they make us do such dirty work. Wish the plague on them.

Recently, a journalist called Bhasha Singh travelled across the country and wrote a book titled *Unseen* on scavenging, and Bejawada Wilson, the convener of Safai Karmachari Andolan released it in Hyderabad. The book states that manual scavenging is prevalent in all states of India without exception. Bhasha Singh articulated scavenging women's experiences, resistance, and agony in Kerala and West Bengal, ruled by the Communist Party that claims egalitarian societies, to Punjab of the green revolution.

Madiga women do this work where there are no scavenging women. They clean the toilets in trains as well as the railway tracks. Why only women of our castes have to do such demeaning work? Like my aunt said, is it because we have no other livelihood, or is hunger

worse than this work? I writhed in pain, thinking why such cruelty, meanness, and abjection are thrust on our women alone. Why is scavenging mechanised like many other professions? Gandhi glorified it, comparing it to the sacred service of a mother to her children and describing it as a profession that is like a mother to society. If it is that sacred and motherly, why can't it be decastified and opened to other castes? There is no reply to this question. People do not venture to talk about the institutionalised viciousness that compels the untouchable scavenging and Madiga women to clean the human excreta. Ambedkar questioned Gandhi's notion of sacredness in those days, which is why can't your castes take up this work if it is considered sacred? But there was no reply.

The upper caste society that practices untouchability and does not cross the caste walls denies the existence of caste and joginis. But, casteist violence, caste-based murders and aggression are an everyday reality. They cannot see the millions of *joginis* in Bonalu celebrations and the Balkampeta Yellamma celebrations. They argue that men and women are equal without any differences or discrimination. Then, what causes murders, assaults, and attacks every day? Who is responsible? Scavenging also faced a similar gaslighting. In 2012, when the National Human Rights Commission held a meeting on reports on scavenging, all states, including Andhra Pradesh, gave NIL reports. What can be done with the systems that close their eyes to the facts revealed by the Safai Karmachari Andolan? Denial is an institutionalised conspiracy for a comfortable escape, and a means to continue the vicious practices. People may not understand the anguish and grief unless they are born as women in the scavenging castes.

The Safai Karmachari Andolan fought for twenty years, achieved the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013. The Supreme Court judgement of 2014 recommended ten lakh rupees ex gratia, but the government mechanism that ought to take the ex gratia to the victims is not honest.

It is unfortunate to coexist in a country with people who state that the untouchable castes have been scavenging for generations as a divine responsibility and activity; otherwise, they would not have continued in this profession for this long.

We Don't Want the Wing Representation

(November 2014)

Since the times of the origins of jobs and employees' associations, women employees have had no separate associations. The true women's empowerment is not to be seen, though from the World Bank to political parties, and governments have been screaming about it. Leave alone empowerment, even democratic participation is not to be seen. Still, there are no women in the employee and workers' associations. If there are any, they are co-opted. Contesting and winning elections is not accessible to women employees.

There are no women leaders who have contested and won in A.P. and Telangana NGO associations. They nominate the woman they wish to, one who does not open her mouth, as the convener of the women's wing. Women are allowed to be nominated for only one post. We have witnessed the oppression of independent women's employees' associations. They insult by saying, "What will you do with independent associations? Can you launch movements and strikes? Can you go to jail? Can you conduct discussions with officers and the Chief Minister? What can you achieve when even we are flabbergasted? What will happen to your families? Homes will be ruined. Or, they label us as daring and firebrands. They tore our women's handouts and banners during the elections. They placed condoms in women's toilets, wrote obscene things in lifts, and threatened us in many ways. Despite this, we launched the Secretariat women's employees' association, worked on women's issues, and achieved some success, moving away from the wing location.

The women's wing culture in AP NGOs association was dumped on the Telangana NGOs association, and women continued as wings even in the movements. Telangana employees' associations and JACs were full of men. When asked, they said Let Telangana be formed. Now, the independent Telangana state has dawned. A few women employees aspiring for women's empowerment and equal participation of women in all fields started the Telangana Women Employees Union (TWEU). Women's wings in employee unions are not working for women. Women employees are in degrading conditions in the wings. We

launched the women employees' union to address such conditions, to work, mobilise, and organise for women as an autonomous entity. Soon after, we submitted a report along with a few recommendations on Telangana women employees' problems to the Kamalanathan committee. Kamalanathan was surprised that so far, nobody had discussed and reported on women employees' problems. This tells us about the representation of women employees.

The study taken up by our union revealed that the Telangana women did not get even five per cent of the 33 per cent of reservations facilitated by the NT Ramarao government for women. Number of women employees among 9,80,000 employees in the United Andhra was 2,91,000. The number of Telangana women among them was very low. Probably, they are not even a hundred among the 240 women employees in the Telangana Secretariat. The TNGO association did not say a word about Telangana women's vacancies. We submitted a comprehensive report to the Kamalanathan committee with all explanations and a recommendation for women representatives in all committees. Now, we have started to work on the problems of teachers in districts on Sundays.

68

We Are with You

(December 2014)

Rachana, Bittu, and Vyjayanti from Telangana Hijra Intersex Transgender Samithi invited me to their meeting at Indira Park on 10 October 2014. My childhood memories associated with them transpired again. They are more untouchable than the untouchables in society.

There was a hijra basti adjacent to Bellampalli Singareni Collieries settlements. Then, forty years ago, it was the *basti*²⁷ where *kojja*²⁸ fellows lived. We no longer use that humiliating word. I still remember all of them by name. They were very respectful, courteous, and loving. They used to pamper children. They called women as akka and men as bava. I felt good and precious to be in their company and in their presence. Some revealed that they were men in a saree with grown hair and some did not.

A tormenting experience from my childhood still bothers me. A man called Rajanna lived in our neighbourhood hut. He wore the loincloth tightly till his knees, wore a tight banian with sleeves, applied kajal and bindi. Rajanna spoke in a low voice. He went for tank-digging work. He pampered children with biscuits and peppermints and played with them. When my family members hit me, he carried me around, pampered me, and bought treats for me. I wished to stay with him. Such love was not there in my family. So, I wished to stay with him. Women addressed him as Rajanna, and men as Rajalu. Although he was self-reliant, his younger brothers and relatives abused him and thrashed him. They rebuked him, saying, change your female mind; wear good clothes; why are you acting like a woman? Go and get your wife, and we feel ashamed of you wherever we go. Rajanna cried a lot. Unable to understand, I too cried helplessly along with him. Rajanna agonised, to hell with these elders; why don't they allow me to live my life; they got me married despite my objecting to it; what can I do; I am not meddling with them nor am I interfering; why do they come to my house, abuse me, and hit me; can someone tell them about justice; to hell

²⁷ slum

²⁸ eunuchs

with justice; where is the God? I did not know why Rajanna was being insulted, assaulted, and ridiculed. But I hated those who did that. Later, Rajanna went away somewhere. After some time, I came to know that something had happened to Rajanna and he died. But I did not know the details. Whenever I remembered him, I wondered why they tortured him like that and what they would lose if they allowed him to live the way he wished to. Family and society wounded him all over and killed him.

With a hijra basti adjacent to our basti, my bond and love for Rajanna, my being a close witness to violence and aggression on Rajanna, I developed respect and affection for hijras. Later, the organisations in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, their self-respect movements, meetings, and discussions moved me closer to them.

It is not just male and female, but there is vast gender diversity in society. The upper caste misogyny has been cruel and mean towards transgenders and hijras. It resorted to assaults and atrocities against them. If men and women of lower castes hate transgenders and hijras, it should be understood as a reflection of the dominant patriarchal ideology.

We get to read in histories and puranas that hijras were employed in royal palaces for the protection of women and that a large number of hijras sacrificed their lives in the process. Ayyappa is a hijra born of Vishnu in female form and Shiva. Men wear Ayyappa strings on a large scale and sing bhajans, praying for the protection of Ayyappa. But, the same hijras are not recognised as humans; inhuman assaults, insults are inflicted; and their human rights and laws are not implemented. With the vicious suppressive practices in society, their living as human beings is challenging.

Formation of a Hijra transgender intersex samiti in the independent Telangana is a welcome move. The Telangana government should establish a welfare centre for them as per their request. According to the NALSA judgement delivered by the Supreme Court, they should be provided and implemented in the work sector. The assaults on them should be recognised as crimes, and a separate Prevention of Atrocities Act should be made. All the laws implemented for women should apply to hijras. There should be separate toilets

for them in public places. They have put forth many more demands to society. Let us support their struggles.

69

Male Rule Sans Women

(January 2015)

Do we women exist in Telangana? Where are we? What has happened to us? What should we do when political, financial, social, cultural, educational, and philosophical helplessness surrounds us? What can we do? We see ourselves as living corpses. We are all caught in this anguish; an obsession overwhelming us in pieces and streams.

Women, particularly Bahujan women, ruled countries in the 13th century, that is, seven hundred years prior to the present times, which are claimed to be in democracy. This century should be declared as the Bahujan women's empowerment century. Rudramadevi ruled over the Telugu during those times. People in Karnataka sing that Yellamma ruled Mysore. Razia Sultana of the slave dynasty ruled the imperial Delhi. These are only a few to cite. That period needs to be excavated to see how many more such rules were there. I feel curious and respectful of those times called feudal, but they revealed such mature attitudes towards women. Gender democracy can be seen seven hundred years ago, but not now, when the entire globe is being considered a village in terms of development. Earlier, we opposed the saying that the past is better than the future and supported that there was hardly anything good in the past. Probably, it was not correct. Where are the women in the new Telangana? If we check for women in leadership, authority, empowerment, recognition, and respect, it becomes obvious that they still have not achieved equality. Probably they will ask us to adjust with remnants, residues, and leftovers as they do in wedding feasts.

The Telangana movement did not happen without women. It took all care to prevent women from coming into leadership, though women participated in the movement. Women fought constructive battles as members in all JACs, such as those of political, employees, teachers, lawyers, doctors, RTC, nurses, and lecturers, but they were not considered for leadership roles. Women stood like a fence in non-cooperation, all people strikes, long walks, rasta rokos against the Andhra state. They suffered lathi beatings and

stopped the vehicles and meetings of the Andhra leaders. Their hands and shoulders were roughened from carrying Telangana flags and banners. They raised slogans, took out million marches, lined up at the seas, and rail rakes, but did not know that they were involved only to show the crowd strength, be it playing Batkammam or carrying bonalu. The results will never reach women.

Struggles, Naxal struggles, Dalit movements, Dandora movements, too, did not recognise and respect women. They erased women from their histories. The results of those movements did not reach women similar to the results of the Telangana movement, even after achieving the state of Telangana, not reaching women.

The diverse social identities have hopes, aspirations, and dreams in the new Telangana. But the allocation of tickets for elections revealed the place given to women. The Telangana political party's male-dominated politics did not allot even thirty to forty seats to women out of 119 MLA seats. Unfortunately for the new Telangana, not a single woman, out of the six MLAs, was given a ministry.

There is no state in this country, except Telangana, where there are no women ministers. There is no woman minister in the cabinet of Telangana, even after the expansion of the cabinet. This reflects on Telangana's women's self-respect. The rulers might build mansions and strive for development, but it cannot be complete development if it ignores half the population of the state. The appointment of women's protection committees alone does not mean the empowerment of women.

70

Their Grief Makes Us Forget Ours

(February 2015)

Jasmine, a transwoman, invited us for a bonam last Sunday. We had a lot of travel-related work, but we set aside everything and went. Revathi from Tamil Nadu had also come. Jasmine and some other chelas live in the Apurupa colony of Chintal area. Recently, Telangana hijras have formed an association. When they invited the supporting systems on that occasion, Krupakar and I attended. Both of us have hijras in our families, childhood bonds, and experiences. But, we got a humanitarian perspective to look at them closely and respectfully, and to share their opinions and thoughts from Bitturaja, Revathi, Rachana, Chandrika, Chitra, Jasmine, and Harika.

Our society has a phobia of hijras and suffers from a psychological ailment of looking at hijras as extremes and lowly, with fear, anger, and avoidance. Will such a society provide a livelihood for hijras? Hijras live without any human rights.

There were almost twenty people when we went for the bonam. They served us repeatedly with love. They are all beautiful people. We sat together after that joyful feast. Rachana said, we should not clap and play. The present generation hijras are educated. Akka, please help them find jobs. Chandrika said, yes, Vyjayanti and I have got jobs. Each one of us should find jobs, small or big. We should stop roaming near shops, houses, bus stands, trains, and clap, and do sex work. What is our life but precarious, with daily attacks and harassment by the police and rowdies? Let us change our lifestyle. Leave alone the old generation, the new generation hijras are educated. Be it an attendant or a sweeper, we should find jobs.

Bittu said, we should demand reservations in jobs, the establishment of a hijra welfare department, implementation of housing schemes and pension schemes for hijras. As we were discussing a representation with the above issues to the government, we received bad news. Harika and Jwala of Uppal were arrested and beaten up by the police, bleeding from the mouth, and were beaten between the legs with the lathis. The pain was

overwhelming for us. We got into our respective efforts to stop the assaults. We called the P.A. of the Home Minister and an ACP, but they did not take it seriously. We were offended when they said, it is all common for them. When Harika went into a shop begging, a woman abused her as shameless, pretending to be women insulting women, and complained to the police, it seems, that the kojja woman hit her and created nuisance. It was a lie. Harika is not that kind of person. Will the police listen to people like Harika? Any complaint against them is irreversible. Facts are not examined. This society looks at the very presence of hiras as a nuisance.

Recently, Pravallika, a hijra, was killed in Kukatpally. No human rights organisations agitate on this. Hijra association people are not heard when they go to the police station. No accountability and no serious inquiry into that case till now. Another trans woman was stripped off, beaten between the legs, made to stand for four hours, abused, and insulted in the same police station. Hijra association people went there and agitated.

We agonised thinking that untouchable women are victims of humiliation; their needs are not fulfilled; they have no human rights or even the respect that animals get. But, the agony of transwomen and hijras often overshadows our grief. No civil society is moved when rowdies and police thrash, attack, and kill them. They face insults and extreme opposition at every step in their daily lives. Society does not even look at them as human beings. Transgenders, too, are human beings. We all have the responsibility to protect human rights.

Atrocious Feudal Lords Should Be Hanged

(March 2015)

Oh Avva of women's organisations! Oh Ayya of movement organisations²⁹! Shall we go to support Kavali Rani fighting to release SC lands in Nellore from the encroachers? Shall we go to console her by getting the atrocious balija doras who stripped her off, thrashed her like garbage, urinated on her face and into her mouth, arrested? Kavali Rani is from the Dalit village of Ulava Palla in Nellore. She has been fighting against the balija feudalists who occupied the government lands for which she was brutally assaulted. That incident happened on 6 January 2015 but till 8 January 2015, the media did not talk about it. The SC organisations of the district protested against the insults and assaults that Kavali Rani suffered, but there was no response from the civil societies.

In Rani's words, "My father and I were working in the fields around 4.30 in the evening on 1st January 2015. Suddenly, three balija men came and kicked my father in the ribs. My father collapsed. One of them held my hands behind me and the other two removed my clothes, hit me with sticks, abused me as a bitch, and hurled terrible curse words. They tried to rape and kill me but they noticed the cattle grazers close by. They said, you bitch, you escaped; you drink our urine, you madiga wretch, and urinated on my face and into my mouth, and ran away". The tractor driver saw them. He was from another village. The Dandora organisation took Rani to the hospital the next morning and complained to the district SP with a demand for the arrest of the assailants. The police said there is no strong evidence; the cattle grazers belong to the victim's community, so their witness is invalid; tractor driver is from another community; we can take his witness; but he is from another village; we will not arrest the assaulters until the tractor driver comes and gives his witness. Shall we be with her while she is grieving, where to go and what to do to get justice?

²⁹ Avva means mother and ayya means father

Kavali Rani showed her responsibility towards helpless afflicted people. Her land was not encroached. But, when the six acres of land were given to shelterless poor people like her aunt's family and the family of a limbless man, Kavali Rani is fighting for those weak and helpless people.

Long time ago, in 1956, the government distributed five hundred acres of land to three hundred SCs in the Ulavapalla village, Dagadarti mandal, Nellore district. This land was taken from the CJFCS (Central Joint Farming Cooperative Society). Later, Balijas occupied the SC lands through different means. Balijas of Ananthavaram were comfortably cultivating 30 acres of SC lands. These thirty acres include the six acres of land that belong to the above three families. Kavali Rani submitted representations, went from office to office, and to the court. She exposed the encroacher balijas before the government officials, like the collector, RDO, joint collector, MRO, VRO, Human Rights court, SC ST Commission, JC courts, and the grievance day. She endured several insults and hardships. Judgements went in favour of the balijas as the officials ranged from the joint collector, RDO, to MRO. But, the circumstances changed when the Balijas could no longer use their influence; they felt stuck and used their caste's atrocious and arrogant revenge on an SC woman. Even now, Rani refuses to leave the land.

Rani's land struggle has to be looked upon as a livelihood struggle of the SC castes against land-related encroachment, injustice, and privileged castes. Land and water are life sources, and they belong to nature and every living being. The atrocious upper caste arrogance that turned this land and water into wealth, forcibly snatching the land from SCs without a small piece for them, and drinking water are not new to us. We have been fighting against them for generations, says our heritage.

SC women had to face filthy problems in the previous year. Women of our community do not have the luxury of eating to the full and sleeping deeply, at least in the new year. Kavali Rani, who is tirelessly fighting a land dispute on behalf of her helpless people, is a model for women. When Balija feudals encroached upon hundreds of acres of SC lands in Ulavapalla, people who were compromised gave up their lands, fearing that they could not live under them if they protested; they may not call them for wage labour;

they may not allow them to live in the village; they might be targeted, and might lose their livelihood. But Kavali Rani is waging an uncompromising land struggle in the same village. The Baliya rowdy feudals who assaulted and humiliated Rani to suppress her movement should immediately be arrested. The encroached lands should be distributed among the SCs. Shall we join Kavali Rani in this endeavour? Shall we get the feudal lords who urinated on Kavali Rani hanged?

Would the Crow Ever Be Considerate of the Bull's Wound?

(April 2015)

The National Commission for Women held a round table conference on problems faced by devadasis in India on 23 April 2015 at a hotel in Hyderabad. Usually, there is no prior information about the NCW's visit, the problems it responds to, and the women it meets. It was surprising that this time it came to address the devadasi and jogini issues, though the agenda was commendable. At least now, there is a meeting held to discuss the social evils women are subjected to.

There is hardly any evidence of the NCW Chair and members taking an interest in oppressed gender issues, including them in the agenda, and finding solutions. So far, there has not been a Dalit woman appointed as a Chair or a Secretary of the National and the state women's commissions. Women of privileged communities who are given crucial responsibilities in the commissions may not be able to fathom the problems faced by women of the oppressed sections, their caste, social, financial, and political concerns. If SC, ST, BC, and minority women are included in the commission, they will be able to expose the inhuman circumstances in which the most downtrodden women are living, with issues such as child marriage, illiteracy, labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, lack of human rights, to society and the government. The Telangana government claimed one hundred per cent protection of women by establishing SHE teams as an eye wash, but seems to have forgotten about the appointment of the women's commission. It is not even referring to the appointment of the commission. They silently hushed up the topic. Where is the need to hush up? Are there no women in Telangana who can handle the commission? Telangana women are feeling hurt about it.

The self-respect of Telangana women was wounded seeing one chairperson for the Andhra and Telangana women's commissions in that meeting. The number of jogini, basivi, matamma, and devadasi is higher in Telangana. Reports confirm their presence in Rayalaseema, and Prakasam and Nellore districts in Andhra. The Jogini system is prevalent

all over India. It is called Natti in Assam, Ganika in Odisha, Bansi in Goa, Mura in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, and Poliki in Haryana. Men outnumbered women at that meeting. They came as researchers and NGOs working on joginis, and they only spoke to a large extent. Some jogini women and some women also attended the meeting. Most of these women were from Telangana.

The national and state women's commissions organised this meeting but they did not seem to have an understanding on the issues such as to which castes do women made into joginis, basivis, devadasis, and matammas belong; why are they being sacrificed to this social evil in the name caste and religious traditions; Dalit particularly Madiga women are married to deities and turned into basavammas and jogammas for the well-being of the village; they are assigned begging as the profession; made into the collective sexual capital of the village; women should collectively eradicate this cruel system. If they had, they would have submitted a substantial report with a course of action for the eradication of the Jogini system to the governments. They resolved to celebrate the Bonalu festival without Joginis.

When it was proposed that 8th March this year could be celebrated as an anti-jogini system campaign, the chair of the National Commission for Women dismissed it, saying International Women's Day cannot be combined with the Jogini system. When explained at length, she said we will consider it for next March. When they suggested a recommendation to the government on a special pension for Joginis, as they are not getting widow pensions or old age pensions, the commission people said they will ask for a single woman's pension. How can single women and Jogini women be equated? There was a lengthy discussion around this.

Women of privileged communities in Telangana said we will do it if the commission people do not take up the anti-jogini campaign on 8 March. But they conducted a meeting without mentioning it in posters and banners. The Raghunadharao Commission, appointed in 2011 on Jogini issues, researched for four years and showed statistics given by the SC Corporation in 1988. How do we understand this?

The Auspicious Breaking of *Taali*³⁰

(May 2015)

Breaking of taali is not an ordinary issue. The waist threads of Hindu patriarchal society were loosened. They lost sleep, and their ground was shattered. The Hindu manuvada male clouds rattled with thunder and lightning. It was chaotic like an elephant's rampage on a glassware shop.

Dravida Kazhagam party leader Veeramani's call is a happy occasion for women. The founder of this party, Periyar Ramaswamy laid the radical foundations for such reforms. This is a part of self-respect established for liberty and equality of the oppressed castes. This programme to break the nuptial threads reminds us of Periyar Ramaswamy. Telugu states have also witnessed reforms and activities against manuvada and Hindu upper castes by rationalist, atheist, progressive communist organisations and parties. Some feminists got married and conducted marriages with the exchange of garlands on stage against traditional marriages. But, there were no cultural movements against traditional marriages and no programmes on breaking the nuptial markers. This move by the Dravida Kazhagam party should be understood as a programme to thrash the Hindu hegemonies. Nuptial thread is a slave license, a license of hegemony for the man. It is not looked upon as a mere thread or a chain with two dollars. The Hindu upper caste society attributes sacredness to it, and the necks without it are looked down upon; women with it are looked upon as auspicious, and women without it are looked upon as those opposing male hegemonies and values, and confronting the slavery of women.

But, marriages in Dalit castes and Adivasi societies do not have the practice of tying Taali. They do not have the trash values and purities in Hindu castes and the practice of not allowing women without it to have water or to come out. Some people from Dalit and Adivasi communities are wearing a taali now, imitating Hindus, but women in villages do

³⁰ Thread that the groom ties around the bride's neck during the marriage ceremony. It is considered to be sacred and symbolic as a marker.

not have a taali around their neck. Even if they have, it would be a thread with a safety pin or a key. Some women don't even wear that thread but have bare necks. They do not carry the burden of taali.

People listen to the marriage conductors speak about the origins of marriage in the stage-garland marriages. Yet, the Hindu families force women to wear the chain with two lockets. If the woman refuses or questions, other women are made to implement male authoritative controlling agendas, saying people should know you are married, or else they will take you easy; they cannot quickly say anything if it is on your neck; they will be scared; is it heavy or what; it is a shield of protection and a mark of respect for us. Men should also have the markers of marriage, shouldn't they? When asked, the Hindu male societies hush us up as they have no answer. Such evils are not observed in Dalit, Adivasi, Christian, and Muslim societies. The Hindu organisations like Shiv Sena and political parties like BJP that turn into hunters with taali threads forcibly getting tied as hanging threads on Valentine's Day agitated against the taali breaking programme in Tamilnadu and approached the High Court. It was remarkable in the legal system that the judge of the High Court allowed permission for this programme as his contribution. This judgement is evidence of revolutionary changes that the judiciary, together with social movements and reform movements, can lead to. However, the upper caste government could not approve of the judgement and gave a stay on it, saying that the taali breaking programme and the judgement are belittling the majority people's culture and traditions. The majority is a myth. It should be understood as the degradation of the select Hindu upper caste male oppressive culture. When there are protests and agitations against the taali breaking, why are the progressive, revolutionary, rationalist, and atheist forces not conducting the taali breaking programme all over the country? They should introspect.

74

If the Cow Is Lakshmi for You, Keep It in Your House

(June 2015)

What is this filth on the road? Whose cow is this? Who tied it on the road? It is all dirt and stench. How do we walk? Whose cow is it? The road is filled with filth. People are not able to walk. A woman was shouting while holding her nose. Daily, I am going to the office, closing my nose, unable to bear the stench. I thought of questioning this nuisance on the road, but could not as I had to hurriedly rush to the office. There is a small colony adjacent to our basti. We have to cross the colony to reach the main road. A brahmin family in the colony had tied a cow and a calf in front of their house by the road. Dung, urine, and cattle feed created a mess. That unbearable stench caused headaches. When the woman questioned about the stench, I too joined her to know what was happening. Adjacent to that were people ironing clothes.

The neighbouring house's brahmin family say the cow is Lakshmi. It is auspicious to see its face in the morning. Cow's dung, urine, and stench are good for health, it seems. People around are asking them to clean up the dirt on the road and tie the cow and the calf in their yard. Ask that Brahmin family. We too find it difficult. People every now and then feed rotis, vegetables and other things to the cow and the calf. If they don't eat, they leave the things there themselves. They all together create an unbeatable stink. Wish they would clean it every day. The family has tied them here, to see their faces in the morning, fold hands, and fill cow's urine in bottles, but do not clean the surroundings.

Don't they have the space? If they love the cow and call it a mother, why are they leaving it to the wind and sun? Won't it die? There is a big space in front of their house and in the lane next to the house. Why spoil the road? Does this not come under Swachh Bharat? Or, is it an attempt to create Swachh Bharat with cow's filth?

We were yelling and talking, but none came out of the house. They were observing us from inside behind the grills. Finally, we both resolved to find a solution for the stench. The house is not small; it has a spacious courtyard. When you say the cow is sacred, its face

is Lakshmi; seeing its face is auspicious; its dung and urine can cure all diseases. Why do you have to tie the cow by the road and create a nuisance for people? When you have tied it on the road, you have to maintain cleanliness. You are not doing even that. They have appointed a woman to do the cleaning and she is not doing the work well, it seems. Worshipping the cow, calling it sacred and Lakshmi, comparing cow's milk and ghee with nectar, and drinking cow's urine as therapeutic is not sufficient. You should create a healthy atmosphere around it and clean up its dung and dirt. Going by their words, it is virtuous to clean the place where it is tied. They don't do the cleaning, and they don't allow the cow inside. But the passersby struggling with stench and dirt are told that you should not do that, it is Lakshmi, fold hands, it is a friend of Hindus. Anyway, we created a ruckus. We called them out and told them to tie the cow inside the yard and not dirty the road with filth and stench. We sent the cow mother from the road and the sun into the walls of their house.

75

Jogini Prohibition Act in the New State

(July 2015)

Last year, the Telangana government announced the Bonalu festival as the state festival on 2 June 2014. Telangana women employees went to meet the chief minister with a request to not to have joginis in the bonalu festival of the new Telangana with several reforms and aspirations, but, we could not meet him. Some Telangana people's representatives dismissed it, saying that there are no joginis in Telangana. But, a Dalit woman, smearing turmeric all over her face, with vermilion marks, flowers in her hair, a kinnara-like instrument in her hands, a garland of lemons on her neck, in a terrible form, goes around the temple along with Poturajus, mixes sacrifice blood in rice and sprinkles it around and predicts the future. Does all this not happen in Bonalu celebrations? Isn't it the state festival?

Jogini system is a social evil that is like a curse on women of Dalit Madiga castes and a couple of BC castes in Telangana. In lower castes, particularly the Madiga caste, if girls have sharp features and good complexion, or someone in their house is sick, or she is the only daughter, the village elders will pressure the parents, saying, what you, Yella, you are starving despite having a good-looking daughter at home. If you make her a jogini, you will get god's wealth. If you make her a jogini, you and the village will prosper. They trick and lure the parents, do not allow the girls to study, get them married to God and make them god's wives and turn them into mistresses for the entire village.

No one should marry joginis. If they marry, they will die. That's why joginis should not get married. But she can be used as a sexual commodity. No offence, it seems. No one will die, it seems. What kind of beliefs are these? How vicious is this practice against Dalit, Madiga, and downtrodden women? No reforms addressed this social evil.

Caste associations, particularly Madiga caste associations, do not see this as an assault and destruction of their caste and the women of their caste. It must be due to either their backwardness or helplessness. Dalit and Madiga caste associations agitated and

staged dharnas against an insulting portrayal of a brahmin woman in a Telugu film. But, they are not conscious about the evil practice of jogini against their caste and women of their caste in the name of religion, which makes women into jogammas and a common commodity for the men of the village.

Communist and revolutionary associations were also not concerned about this social evil. How do we understand the generations-old apathy of the caste associations about the women of their castes getting ruined unjustly in the name of the tradition.

The leaders who organise huge meetings for the representation of women and boast of fighting for women, have they ever opened their mouths about women of their caste being sacrificed in the name of jogini? Did you ever recognise that the jogini system is a destructive attack on our castes and our women? Did they realise that their women are ruled by religious and hegemonic caste traditions and ever resist the tradition of pushing their women into prostitution in the name of god's wife?

There are about fifty thousand jogini women in Telangana, now. It has been more than one year since we got Telangana, and we celebrated the manifestation of the new state. But civil societies and governments are talking about the Jogini Prohibition Act. The Act was made in 1988 in the united Andhra. But, still, Andhra Pradesh has not formulated the rules for the implementation of this Act. The Prohibition Act should immediately be made and implemented in Telangana. According to GOMS 139 dated 29 December 2009, an order states that the children of joginis can be registered with their mothers' names instead of their fathers'. But it is not being implemented. Several children of joginis could not access scholarships as the online applications had no option to enter the mothers' names, except the fathers' names. Joginis are not getting pensions anyway. Since they are wives of gods and gods never die, they cannot be considered widows, but they are eternally married women. So, they don't get a widow's pension and an old age pension. Sadly, jogammas revolving around the Secretariat for a separate jogini pension, as they do not get any other pension, have no support from any associations.

76

Not Sins but Lives Are Being Lost

(August 2015)

Whoever I spoke to in the past ten days narrated the tales of the pushkaras, as either they returned from there or were about to go there. Television and newspapers were full of news about pushkaras. People were galvanised to take sacred baths, and twenty-nine of them lost their lives on the very first day. Media and governments strongly reiterated that a sacred bath in the river celebration will cleanse sin and guilt, but people lost their lives.

Bhakti channels, TV channels, and governments transformed into devotion mafia, bulldozing people, saying they will be blessed if they take a bath at the first auspicious time on the first day. Governments, instead of following democracy, are following religiousocracy, tricking people in the name of pushkara baths, rituals, temples, and shrines, and wasting people's money. Although twenty-nine people lost their lives on the very first day, governments, media, and priests are convincing people against the natural fear of losing their lives or anticipating danger, and compelling them to run after the pushkaras. These three institutions take the credit of making people into fools and devotion into a hysterical mood.

The media is encouraging irrational devotion and superstitions, distancing people from logic. Governments, too, are following the religious bodies and continuing religious practices instead of following secularism. It is polluting the environment and water, diverting water from the projects to the Pushkara baths, leading to a scarcity of drinking water and water for agricultural purposes.

People have lost their lives. But, the media is convincing people to go there. Why did they trust the media? Because, they are facing hardships and sorrows. They are anxious to get rid of their daily problems and mundane challenges, and are pushed into a psychological condition where the safety of their life becomes secondary.

Earlier, only some people, that too, brahmin priests used to take a ritual dip in pushkaras, it seems. It had nothing to do with the Bahujan castes. Later, governments and media schemed to get bathing ghats constructed, but only urban Andhra hegemonic Hindu castes went there. But, thanks to the new Telugu states, priests, governments, and media together are bombarding people, also the rural people, that your life is a waste if you do not go to pushkaras and that you will get rid of sin and guilt, and they will prosper.

Media channels and newspapers are inciting sentiments that Swarnandhrapradesh and Golden Telangana will flourish if the two Telugu states take a dip in the Godavari river, and the Chief Ministers of the two states took the dip in the inaugural ceremonies of the pushkaras. Such extreme bulldozing about first dips and good karma led to the death of twenty-nine people.

Media and governments are luring poor and middle bahujan caste people who are facing problems, saying that they will be healed with certain neck chains, they will get rid of problems if they go on pilgrimage, their psychological and physical pollution will be cleansed with pushkara baths and that they will be blessed.

Casteist political systems and casteist social systems are responsible for the hardships of the people. Ambedkar said long ago that Hindu dharma principles are the foundations of these systems. People are caught in the web of debts they incurred to take part in pushkaras.

Governments should lead people towards scientific rational perspectives and rational knowledge perspectives. Instead, they are contributing to superstitions and the bhakti mafia to facilitate exploitation.

To prevent people, particularly the Bahujan castes, from resolving their problems and questioning governments, they are made into spiritual fools and diverted towards hysterical devotion. The exploited shift their entire burden onto god, who does not exist and convince themselves of their fate. Battling with poverty and stress, they go to pilgrimage centres and pushkaras. There should be movements to bury the vicious and

criminal governments and media that are keeping people in a suffocating, religious, ritualistic trance to prevent them from revolting.

Malecracy's Atrocities Did Not Stop

(September 2015)

Governments, rulers, and thick-skinned institutions have been casual about the news of murders, atrocities, kidnaps, sexual harassment, workplace harassment, domestic violence, assaults, and aggression as random incidents. Will their eyes open or hearts break if they go through the unravelling of the statistics by the National Crime Records Bureau?

Crimes against girls and women continue to happen in hundreds and thousands every day. Governments are not serious about this spree of violence. There is no societal discussion on this violence and the social, economic and cultural factors leading to this violence. Unless women's organisations and women come onto the roads and agitate, the accused are not put behind bars. Governments punish one or two offenders as eyewash and boast of their commitment towards the safety of women, and trick people into believing it. But, violence, assaults, and killings on women are continuing to increase. Times are changing, rules are changing, new laws are being introduced, but violence against women is not changing and is not stopping. The male world has become a criminal system with no place for women to live as human beings. The search for a solution to end violence against women is limited by the framework of law, crime, and punishment instead of focusing on the roots of institutionalised economic, social, cultural, and gender hegemonies in society. So, crimes against women are on the rise.

On one hand, women are living in fear of men. On the other hand, the rulers and leaders of our country boast of respect and dignity that exist nowhere else in the world except in India. The fanatic phallocracy has been chanting for generations about the worship of women, but massacres women instead of recognising them as fellow humans. Male arrogance resorts to such destruction and terrorising, but governments, rulers, and political parties filled with men are all quiet. No two sections will be equal in an unequal society, and it applies to women as well. The violence against women is also not the same for all women. Women of the ruling castes have the power to influence the systems. The

entire society echoes in response to violence and assaults on them in one voice. It becomes history. But, innumerable assaults, murders, and atrocities on women of the Bahujan castes do not even become news items, nor do they find support from the systems.

NBRC has documented the registered and recorded crimes on women. How about the unrecorded crimes that are ten times more than the ones recorded? Where are the organisations and systems that inform us about the social identities of women on whom the unrecorded violence happened?

Women have been fighting for equality between men and women and representation in all fields, from work to governance. As a result, the constitution ensured that men and women are equal, and those who treat women as inferior, torture them, and violate their rights are liable to punishment. Leave alone slavery, women are living in precarious conditions to safeguard their lives. No protection outside, and no protection inside the house. Women are being haunted by a fear of dangers in the form of father, grandfather, husband, brothers, son, grandson, anytime.

People's representatives and political leaders who should be responsible towards society and women blame women and girls for the violence they have suffered. They fume on women blaming their dress, evening shopping, and mobile phones, and defend the offenders for having fun.

Governments, courts, and police should get rid of their hegemonies, search for social, economic, and cultural reasons behind this chauvinistic terrorism, and establish systems for women's protection. Governments should systematically work to protect the women's rights guaranteed by the constitution as a result of women's movements, and work towards gender equality. Police and legal systems should be strengthened. The male world should be sensitised. Every system should be transformed to enable women to live with self-respect.

Politics of Rama's Lineage Are Not Allowed

(November 2015)

The Hindu organisations celebrated the advent of the Hindu regime after 800 years, when the BJP won at the centre. But, as the historian Murad Ali Baig said, there were no Hindu regimes. Only Buddhist, Jain, Muslim, and Christian rulers had regimes. He says India was never a Hindu country and that the concepts of India and Indian also began three hundred years ago. Prior to that, Indians lived as Tamils, Andhras, Marathas, and Bengalis. These concepts took shape from the movements against British India. Similarly, the religious words such as Hindutva and the Hindu religion also emerged like that, according to this historian. Before the coining of the word Hindutva, people identified themselves as Vaishnavas, Shaivas, Buddhists, Sikhs, Ravidasas, and Kabirpanths depending on their faith and choice. The untouchable SC castes identified themselves as Yellamma people, Poshamma people, and Maisamma people by their faith.

We still come across such identities in Telangana. We could not understand when our teacher in school said we belonged to India and we were Hindus. Because, those worlds were not in circulation in our houses and villages. We were told that Orugallu (Warangal) and Kannagaram (Karimnagar) are two countries, and our people are the Poshavva people. We, as children, believed what the teacher said and what was written in textbooks as the truth. But, after reading the above historian, I believe that our grandparents spoke the truth.

Hindutva is reigning now and implementing the Hindu agenda on the bahujans. It is spilling venom on the Bahujan castes in the name of India vs non-veg, India vs reservations. It is all turning into an assault on the indigenous people of India.

Our beef is being banned, we are being labelled as Hindus, and our reservations are being suppressed. They want Rama's offspring, but not the illegitimate children, to come into power. Continuing Rama's lineage and turning Rama into an ideal are connected with the following.

1. Rama dharma was to blatantly oppress the production castes, that is the Bahujan castes. The killing of Sambuka, the backstabbing of Sugriva, and utilising the adivasi castes and then insulting them as monkeys are examples of this.
2. Rama did not show any ideal behaviour towards women. He suspected his wife Sita and sent her to the forest. He severed the nose and ears of Surpanakha, the woman who fancied him.
3. Rama endeavoured to protect varna dharma and caste dharma.

The Hindutva that attempts to reinforce the regressive system of monarchy has chosen Rama as its ideal. But, Rama was opposed to the Bahujan castes and an enemy of the indigenous people of India.

There is a proposal that *Bhagavadgita* should be declared as a national treatise as it is the sacred book for Hindus. It is said that violence is the primary message of *Gita*. Attempts are being made to declare *Gita* as the national treatise to validate violence on the Bahujan production castes by the privileged castes. The Hindutva organisations are leading Modi as Arjuna playing the role of Krishna.

They want every Hindu woman to have four children. As Kancha Ilaiah rightly said, SC, ST, BC people of this country are not Hindus. Are women meant to be mere childbearing pouches? Women should aim to move from wage labour to ownership, illiteracy to education, unemployment to employment, slavery to independence, and dependence to empowerment. The male religious politics should not decide how many children women should or should not give birth to. Society should enable women to make autonomous decisions.

Did Not Spare the Schools

(December 2015)

My sister's daughter moved to the city recently, as her village was affected by famine and there was a scarcity of work. Her husband found work as a watchman in an apartment complex, and she started doing housework. That apartment is close to our house. She joined her daughter in a private school close to her house, as the government school is far away. She could not afford the school fees, but she took a loan.

Akka, it came to almost seven thousand rupees to buy black ribbons, white ribbons, white shoes, black shoes, a school bag, a bag for a lunch box, a tie, a belt, two sets of uniforms, books, notebooks, and fees. I thought it was a small school, but it is too expensive. My niece Mutyalu agonised but also rejoiced, saying, my daughter is hardly four years old, not even as tall as the ten rupee note, but it cost me so much. Where will I get the money every year? This year, I took money from you. But when I see others, I strongly feel like educating my daughter, even if I have to sell myself. I am so happy to send her to school with that dress, shoes, and bag. I feel as if I am sitting on an elephant.

Mutyalu was happy, but she was annoyed about her daughter not eating properly. She came home with her child the other day. Akka, look at my daughter, she is all bones. She was alright even when we were suffering due to famine. We fed the children well, whether we ate or not. She has not been eating the curry since she joined this school. They should convince the children to eat well and eat everything in school. The child looks sad and doesn't know what they said. She asked for mutton curry daily when we were in the village and ate one piece with each fistful. She wouldn't have meals without it. Now she is not touching mutton and has completely stopped eating. I wondered if she was unwell or had a low fever, and took her to the doctor. He said nothing is wrong with her.

What else happened, akka? I do not understand why she stopped eating mutton in the four days of joining the school. She does not eat non-vegetarian food. If I forcibly put it in her mouth, she throws up. She eats only dal and vegetables. She eats it with pickles or

chutney when we cook eggs or mutton at home. Look at her, her eyes are sunken without strong food. What to do, akka? How will she grow? One day, I packed egg curry in her lunch box. Other children do not get eggs, it seems. They all laughed at the child and complained to the teacher, it seems. The teacher made her sit at a distance and asked her to eat the lunchbox. She is a kid, and I don't know how much she was affected. She came home and cried. She stopped eating non-vegetarian food out of fear. It is not all good that teachers make the children sit at a distance if they bring egg, mutton, and chicken, scare them not to eat, and beat them if they eat. Where will they get the strength if they don't eat non-vegetarian food? Tongue thickens if children eat mutton and they don't study well, it seems. What is the relation between education and food? When I asked the teacher, she said, Brahmin children are there, they don't like it, why bother them, this is the school policy, it seems.

I thought, oh, the food intolerance has spread to schools as well.

80

The Wound That Shattered Our Dreams

(January 2016)

The advent of Telangana will be the end of all our hardships. We should fight for Telangana. Telangana will not come if we sit quiet and passive. We should sacrifice. There won't be beggars, labourers, illiterates, landless people, dowry, unemployment, farmers' deaths, suicides, temporary posts, outsourcing, and bonded labour in Telangana. Let us all unite to achieve the golden Telangana, where all of us will happily live with equality. Untouchable Dalits will be placed high. People, movements, and revolutions believed these words. One can understand that common people can be hoodwinked with the magic of words. But, how did even the revolutionary powers that have been leading long-time movements for new rules and new democratic revolutionary societies support and carry such power-mongering and exploitative politics? Why was there no discussion on the social factors during the peak of the Telangana movement?

It is all fine about fighting for Telangana and achieving it. How about equal opportunities for women in this? There was no discussion on castes, equality, dominant politics, or distribution of resources. But, women were invisibilised in JACs, silenced, and manifested impatience to create leadership, participation, and representation for them. When questioned, the progressive leaders said, let Telangana come.

Movement forces, revolutionary forces, exploitative forces, and politics in power ditched the Bahujan castes of Telangana. It was the youth of these castes who sacrificed their lives for Telangana.

Osmania University turned into a battleground; the careers of the youth of these castes were at stake, and they were charged with serious cases. Telangana was achieved with their sacrifices. It entered with a billion dreams in 2015. However, the ruling in Telangana showed the cruel killings as encounters.

Telangana belongs to all of us. Let us live in harmony. Are we in Seemandhra to fight among ourselves? Why do we need dharnas and strikes? Telangana is not poor. There are rivers and lakes. Let us enrich them with Mission Kakatiya. From the chief minister to the sweeper and officer to the attender, we are all equal. We are all children of Telangana. Let us eat together. Let us share what all we have. Let us not do strikes like worthless people. We will educate our children from KG to PG. No child should be seen outside the school. No one should go to Dubai or Muscat. The word unemployment should not be heard. Let us distribute land for the landless. Let us get our girls married (distance them from education) and send them to their in-laws with the help of Kalyana Lakshmi and Shadi Mubarak. We don't want farmers' deaths and labour systems. All of us should prosper. 2015 proved these earnest words to be hollow. It is a wound that shattered the dreams of Telangana.

Revolutionary forces and movement forces, joining hands with the agenda of exploitation, rushed the Telangana people from villages and cities. We can never forget the brutal police murder of Swati in 2015. In order to make us understand that movement politics is different from power politics, and to draw a cruel line to explain this, Shruti was brutally killed.

They made us believe that contract workers and outsourcing employees will be regularised. But, they kept quiet. They said Safai workers are gods on the earth; any salary is less for them. But, instead of regularising their services, they threatened them when they went on strike, and threw some amount like alms instead of a hike in their wages. The new Telangana government is not affected by the Asha workers' strike. Not a single woman is given a ministry. Women are kept away, even from MLC positions. The Commission for Women is not to be seen in the vicinity. Women are seen in crowds once a year for the Bonalu and Batkamma celebrations. Now, men are seen in that place.

It is proven that the promises are futile. The status quo is being observed. Words had no boundaries, but actions have not even begun. They are lighting up temples and shrines, immersing themselves in pushkara celebrations. Telangana welfare will be decided

by yagas, it seems. If yagas can achieve everything, they could have done only yagas. Our children would not have died for Telangana.

Joopaka Subhadra is a Dalit womanist writer and activist who has published extensively in Telugu, including essays, columns, short fiction, and poetry. She has edited anthologies, translated fiction into Telugu, and served on the editorial committees of various journals and magazines. Her works include *Ayyayyo Dammakka*, a collection of poems (2009); *Rayakka Manyam*, a collection of short stories (2014); *Charitralni Cherigipostu*, a collection of essays on literary criticism (2021); *Reservation Bogie*, a collection of short stories (2021); *Telangani Kaitala Donthulu*, a collection of poems (2024). Subhadra has translated the Tamil Dalit writer Bama's book *Sangati* into Telugu as *Sangathi*. She was honoured with almost 40 awards, including the Best Writer Award from the Telangana State Government. She has been writing a column titled *Gunugupulu* in the Sunday Supplement of the Telugu daily *Andhra Jyothi* since July 2023. *My Elder Sister's Nose Pin was Lost Here Only* is the English translation of a column titled *Ma Akka Mukku Pulla Geenne Poyindi*, written by Joopaka Subhadra for *Bhumika Streevada Patrika*, a Telugu feminist monthly journal, from 2007 to 2015. The column is a critical commentary on various issues related to society, politics, and movements, but focusing on the marginalised identities such as caste, gender, and region.



K. Suneetha Rani is a Professor at the Centre for Women's Studies, University of Hyderabad. Currently, she is the Dean of the School of Social Sciences. She was with the Department of English for 16 years before joining the Centre for Women's Studies in 2011. Her areas of interest include Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, Comparative Studies, New Literatures in English, Translation Studies and Feminist Pedagogy. Her PhD in English Literature is on Australian Aboriginal Women's Autobiographies. She translates from Telugu to English and English to Telugu. She has extensively published research articles and translations in English and Telugu. Her major publications in English include *Australian Aboriginal Women's Autobiographies: A Critical Study* (2006), *Flowering from the Soil: Dalit Women's Writing from Telugu* (Translation of Dalit Women's Select Writings from Telugu) (2012), *English in the Dalit Context* (co-editor) (2014), *Vibhinna: Voices from Contemporary Telugu Writing* (co-editor) (2015), *A House on the Outskirts and Other Stories* (Translation of Devarakonda Balagangadhara Tilak's select short fiction from Telugu) (2016), *Influence of English on Indian Women Writers: Voices from the Regional Languages* (2017), *Identities and Assertions: Dalit Women's Narratives* (2017), *The Rock That Was Not* (Translation of Githanjali's *Select Short Fiction from Telugu*) (2019), *Critical Discourse in Telugu* (2021). Her book-length translations into Telugu include *Neeli Needa: Australia Adivasi Ammayi Atmakatha; Daarulu: Tappinchukune Daarulu*, and *Dweeparagalu: Srilanka Strila Sahityam*. She is the editor of Gender Handbooks in Telugu and English for teachers and students of 6-8 and 9-12 classes assigned by Samagra Shiksha, Telangana and funded by UNICEF. She is the President of the Executive Committee of Bhumika Women's Collective, Hyderabad, a non-profit organisation working against gender-based violence. She has recently completed a research project on gender assumptions among adolescent boys, assigned by the Department of Education, Government of Telangana, and funded by UNICEF, Telangana.



Price Globally Free

