



VARAVARA RAO' S PRISON POSEY: THE WINDS AND LIBERTY

Dr.Satyanarayana Nemalipuri

Assistant Professor,

Dept.Of English & Humanities,

Anil Neerukonda Institute of Technology & Sciences.

Visakhapatnam

INDIA

Abstract: Prison literature is a sub genre of literature which can be produced by political prisoners within the walls of Prison. The prisoners always fight against the autocratic governments and find a solution for the contemporary social, political issues. They also share their ideological views through effective communication. The present paper focuses on Prison poetry of Varavara Rao. He writing has been taken up as a subject to explore the nuances of his literary outlook and self introspection in the backdrop of closed walls of a prison. Unlike other writings, prison writing is remarkable in respect of reality as it is poured out when the writer was in captivity and thus made him express his anguish and rebellion. His work has a peculiar character of writing with the intensity of humanity. The paper mainly evaluates select poems out of fifteen that are titled under *Swechha* (Liberty) which carry the undertones of the Emergency (1975-77) and times of his imprisonment are studied here. *Swechha Sahithi* (Hyderabad) a leading publisher of Telugu literature in the book *Varavara Rao Kavithvam 1957-2007*, gives a systematic poetry in 2008 by going deep into his poetry he notices self introspection of social, political and picks up the liberation and human rights aspects in general.

Key words: Prison literature-poems-liberty-emergency-imprisonment-social-political.

Many times when dictators challenged or questioned, the revolutionary would ostensibly be either killed or tortured or imprisoned. It so happens that they record their observations of the conditions inside and outside the prisons in their personal notes, diaries, letters, pamphlets, autobiographies and poetry forming a body of literature called prison literature. The paper is to study the prison writing of the leftist writer Varavara Rao as an exploration and representation of poetry during the time of the Emergency. Varavara Rao became a source of inspiration for research work as it has irresistible force and rhythm to capture the readers' attention. The range and variety of his achievement are quite astonishing. As revolutionary poet, he is the maker of not only modern Telugu literature of people's emancipation but also provoke the people's mind. His world wide acclaim as a social, political and leftist thinker, innovator in poetry and champion of the people's poet makes him a presence of minds of the people. He stood against slavery, oppression and exploitation and corruption of any kind by anyone whether he is a revolutionary writer, or a teacher or an activist. Most of his poems are like paintings, especially the delineation of minute details about each these poems and each will be just like a painting.

In this connection, it is not out of place to quote, poet and philosopher, R.M.Challa's writers' pledge that Siva Ramakrishna quoted in *R.M.Challa: A Poet and Philosopher*.

Come, let us seek the light, the true light
Of literature, the inner light of light
Quelling the darkness of ungodly night,
Setting aside all struggle, stress and strife,
Conquering hate through love, declaring war
On war, creating Grace from ugliness (*R.M.Challa: A Poet and Philosopher 27*).

Varavara Rao is a teacher, educationist, reformer, forecaster, revolutionary poet, columnist, critic of life and literature. His literary career has extended over sixty four years till today. In spite of his literary achievements and contribution to the world of Telugu literature unfortunately, his works have not received duly attention and objective appreciation from the critics. However one cannot deny the appreciations of the renowned revolutionary writers of Gugi Wa Thiango, (professor and Kenyan prison writer) Srirangam Srinivasa Rao (Sri Sri) (1977), Rachamalla Ramachanda Reddy (1968), Tripuraneni Madhusudhana Rao(1974), Chekuri Rama Rao(1986), Hema Latha, Shiva Sagar (1975).

During the imprisonment, the prison writers not only produce letters, diaries, pamphlets, notes, autobiography and poetry, but also a translation and create a sense of community with other writers and literary works. Varavara Rao wrote a full-

length book of literary criticism on Sri Sri's Maro Prasthanam in this jail. He came in touch with the writings of Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa Thiongo. He also translated two of Ngugi's books-the novel *Devil on the Cross* and the jail memoir *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*-into Telugu. He is a great reformer, who always strove to promote and integrity among the people and into the world.

C.L.L. Jayaprada opined in her article "Form and Context: A Comparative Study of K.V.Ramana Reddy's *Detenue Diary* and Varavara Rao's *Sahacharul*."

Restore freedom of speech and other fundamental rights of citizens suspended in the Emergency. Since prison life gave both the writers an opportunity to read and reflect, their work contains an analysis and evaluation of several English and Telugu books of creative, historical and political writing as well as a preconception of their own lives in the new circumstances (*Prison Writing India* 94).

In the Poem "Woman", Varavara Rao depicted the position of women in a male dominated agrarian society. It is said that a woman is the person who sacrifices her dreams, her blood and herself in order to make her children happy. So are the followers of communism. The poet describes woman in his poem saying that her blood is sacrificed for the family with unpaid gratitude from the beneficiaries. He writes,

"your blood
gives life to
the agony of infant's hunger....."
(*Varavara Rao Kavithvam 1957-2007* 265-266).

He says that the services of woman are irreplaceable and the monopolist value even does not bring her the deserves so, he writes, "You are free when everything is expensive....." (*Varavara Rao Kavithvam 1957-*; then suggests that only her briefly emotions can change the parochial and authoritative society. He writes, "be purged with your tears
But your scorching anger could do." (*Varavara Rao Kavithvam 1957-2007* 265-266). For him woman stands for kinetic force if unleashed. He writes, "Remember, There is no victory until , The revolutionary sun dazzles in your eyes (*Varavara Rao Kavithvam 1957-2007* 265-266).

The poet thus vividly explains the condition of women in a male chauvinistic society. It is said woman tolerates the pangs of suffering behind the wall of male domination. She gives happiness to man losing all her individuality. It is an irony that she played half part of life of man but hers is the path of difficulty and suffering. The poet appeal to all women to unite and fight for their rights and the poet says that without their awakening, change cannot be possible.

In the poem "Poet is stream but not a Lion" he deplores the illness of the people who think that all the revolutionaries are lions. In this poem, the poet explains the nature of the poet and his clarity of a goal. He says that the poet is not a lion to roar but a stream that waters the roots of minds. Its nature is not only to flow down from mountains but also flow down slowly in to the plains. It flows through forests, canals and in small streams, and it sometimes floods crossing the limits. Revolutionaries are always like a river which changes its path in the forest flow like water on plains. They also know how overcome hindrances when encountered by obstacles.

The poet is not a lion
He is a flow in flux
He leaps down from the mountains
But also moves majestically on plains
He knows how to hide or
Override the obstacles, and
Stops when obstructed, but
Moves shattering the hurdles.
If time favours
like the river,
(*Varavara Rao Kavithvam 1957-2007* 269).

The poet uses symbols of brook, river, flow, movement, undercurrent, friction, heat, turbulence, and protoplasm as metaphors which means ensuing flood of revolution. The more the boulders act as hurdles the more will be the force of water to submerge the things. He wants the authority to see the invisible ripple currents which have the power to drag in everybody.

He abhors disloyalty and betrayal in the process of revolution under many pretexts. In this context he wrote a poem Not a Comrade, Don't Be a Renegade' to instill commitment in the followers of Communism. For him the sacrifice of Bhagat Sing did not go wasted.

At last he calls for the true candid, authenticate comrade who commits himself to the communist principles come what may and that comrade will never be forgotten. The poet says that many people who sacrificed their lives for the sake of the principles of communism are forgotten after a few days of the sacrifice. But it is not true. He emphasizes that no real comrade has ever been forgotten. He pleads that the pathway on which the vehicle of communism is driven should be plain, simple, visible and transparent. He writes,

No Comrade No
Don't pollute the path the people tread on
Let your skills and potential

Not be wasted on
 Throwing chilly powder
 In the eyes of the people
 Nor spreading the thorns
 On the path of the public
 He also says he could understand the feeble state of mind during tough times

Who said that the martyrdom of Bhagat Sing became useless?

For that matter even the animals which sacrifice their lives in the name of experiments to save humans are martyrs. He writes,

Don't you accept that Spartacus
 A deserving revolutionary?
 And was it a dog's death
 For Lyka which was sent on voyage to Moon?

The fault, the poet writes, is not in the comrades but the attitude he has which is, of course, natural for any novice. It is the failure to have a positive attitude that makes a comrade a renegade. The poems considered and studied are remarkable not only for their intellectuality and for their intensity but also for the boldness of images. What is far more significant is the fusion of life, liberation and rebellion. There is more to abandon than awareness in the reflection of life, through this experience; he built up an all pervasive relationship with nature - a nature mingled intimately with humanity. Hence the poet sees it as one of the forces within him and the force of external nature. He assumes the skepticism of people and approves that the ideals of Maoism are being embedded in the minds of current generation. He expressed his belief in the poem 'Maoist Thinking is flourishing'. He says that power can be obtained by the barrel of a gun. But when people are not ready to take the guns in their hands how can the freedom come? Now the trend is towards Maoism because the budding youth took to Maoism and their efforts flowered with the light that Mao showered upon those buds though Mao is dead. The impact of Maoist thoughts still linger in the minds of young generation who are ready to bring out drastic social changes.

The poet is confident that the present youth who are the makers of history can easily implement the Maoistic principles in their land and undertake struggle and emancipate the people from feudal lords as in China. When the class Cultural Revolution emerged in China, they freed its people from the oppression, when Maoism was still in its infant stage. But now Maoism is of twenty seven years old. So the poet expects much more powerful struggle to liberate people. He writes, Mao is no more the thought process of him prospers! He is a thousand months old.

A clear transformation is visible in his personality from the days of youth to adulthood. At every stage certain element of love for the things he chose summed to be ultimate, but as he ages further the preceding commitment which he thought true was changing its way for the new attachment. He writes mentions about this transformation in the poem 'Song Electra'. He says that In his early childhood he thought that there is no substitute for the sweetness of love and affection and in youth the sweetness of unparalleled friendship. He writes,

I thought there is no substitute
 For affection in sweetness
 In youth I thought
 Nothing could stand out before friendship.

Climbing up the hills and mountains results in bleeding wounds, scratches, abrasions, contusions and sometimes gushing and excruciating skin cuts, All these pains will be forgotten by the climber when he reaches the top of the hill or mountain as it is his aim, and target. From there he could see the Sky very near and clear. He learns how to live in the struggle to reach his destiny and to reach new heights. He writes,

How happy it is when looking up the hill
 Through the bleeding wounds

Ordinary lovers or friends feel dismayed when they are separated from each other, since physical separation makes them feel they could not breathe without the other as each body covets the other in mundane satisfaction. He found that the separation for a revolutionary cause is priceless because it is the yearning for the dreams of the poor. Such selfless sacrifice of toil, turmoil and the perseverance to reach the destination, smearing with drops of tears, keeps the garland of separation fresh always and the fragrance of steadfastness on the path of revolution which beacons the light for martyrs is worth living. Thus, the poet in his poem shows the way to true fulfillment.

Varavara Rao wanted that in the name of communist principles, violence, exploitation and gullibility which is practiced in the name of communism should be routed out. People should not be cheated, nor to be misled. One should keep the path of revolution meaningful, accountable to coming generations. It should attract the public to join hands with the revolutionaries for a social cause and for uplifting the status of the suppressed and the oppressed. His plea to the comrades is that they should not be turned out to be a renegade despite all adventures that they may encounter in their journey, of in keeping the principles of communism alive. He requests those communists to save the manifesto which collected gathers dust before they become dust. He appeals very earnestly that though they fail to be called comrades let them not become renegades.

Thus, the poems which depicted Varavara Rao as a leftist as well as a revolutionary poet; the poems depict the people of India in particular and of the world as a whole and at last display the unique style of Varavara Rao. As a man, as well as a poet He longs for freedom, liberation of every individual in society.

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