

Surekha Nelavala

Jesus Asks the Samaritan Woman for a Drink: A Dalit Feminist Reading of John 4

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Zusammenfassung:

Wenn ich als Dalit (Unberührbare) aus Indien die Erzählung von der Samaritanischen Frau lese, beeindruckt mich besonders die Tatsache, dass Jesus, ein Jude, die samaritanische Frau nicht nur um Wasser bittet, sondern es auch annimmt. Hiermit macht er einen grossen Schritt auf dem Weg der Befreiung, der allerdings in Kommentaren und Interpretationen kaum berücksichtigt wird. So werde ich von den jüngeren und vielversprechenden Ansätzen innerhalb feministischer Exegesen ausgehen, um das theologische Gespräch zwischen der samaritanischen Frau und Jesus zu beleuchten und ihren Lebenswandel zu verteidigen. Mein eigener Ansatz ist sowohl autobiographischer Kritik als auch Cultural Studies verpflichtet. Dem Verständnis der Cultural Studies von Fernando Segovia folgend werde ich ausdrücklichen Gebrauch von meiner eigenen sozialen Verortung machen, um den antiken Text und Kontext in meine Gegenwart zu übertragen. Ich lese aus der Sicht einer Dalit-Frau und fordere den Text heraus, auf die besonderen Unterdrückungen, die Dalit innerhalb des Kastensystems erfahren, zu antworten. Dabei nähere ich mich dem Text nicht von einer allgemeinen Situation der Dalit-Frauen her, sondern aus der Erfahrung meiner speziellen Lebenssituation.

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Introduction

As a resourceful text for the liberation of women, the story of the Samaritan woman and Jesus has yielded numerous layers of feminist interpretations.¹ Third world scholars emphasized her multi-faceted oppression in order to address issues of identity and context in addition to that of gender.² Consequently, the story has been considered beyond the traditional and typical interpretation of the woman's character as a demoralized, sinful woman in search of men for sexual pleasure; a threat to women in her community; a malicious female of bad conduct, and so on. In feminist readings, she

is rather emphasized for her knowledge of tradition and her logical and competent participation with Jesus in his extensive theological dialogue. She is also acknowledged for her role as a spokesperson, a missionary³ and the mediator between Jesus and her community.⁴

In addition to highlighting the liberating characterization of the Samaritan woman, feminist readings also addressed her victimization and denigration of her character in the text in the light of ancient social context. In most of the readings, Jesus was typically seen as the giver,⁵ the liberator, the one who reached out to the needy,⁶ and the emancipator, as opposed to the Samaritan woman, who is presented as a receiver. This perspective exemplifies the patronizing aspect of liberation even in feminist and other contemporary readings. Such a model of liberation maintains marginalization and hierarchy, where one is considered as a giver and the other as a receiver. Although it is a comforting and hopeful interpretation of Jesus as emancipator of women, this reading supports the traditional hierarchical tendency, placing Jesus in a superior ‘giver’ position and maintaining the power disparity between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

Is Jesus truly a giver in the context of the story? Was he absolutely self-sufficient when he approached the Samaritan woman? Was he not in a need of a drink? Stephen Moore points to the power disparity that was maintained even in feminist discussions. He says that the male as a missionary in the superior position and the female in a lower one remains essentially undisturbed. Countering such a position, he asks if Jesus’ need is any less than that of the Samaritan woman, suggesting that Jesus’ own need in approaching the Samaritan woman is an important factor in interpreting the text.⁷ Although readings of feminist interpreters and the other contemporary scholars of the marginalized are uplifting and somewhat liberating, they also leave me with a sense of discomfort. The model of liberation that is being suggested in a majority of the readings is the patronizing liberation that is given out of the generosity or kindness of the privileged.⁸ True liberation, however, calls for a participatory approach of transformation from both the privileged and the discriminated-against.

Speaking from a victim’s point of view, from a Dalit context, true liberation for Dalits is possible not just when they speak out for equality and justice, rather when they succeed in bringing transformation in the society, where others also affirm their human identity with respect and dignity. Therefore, I, as a Dalit woman, approach the text looking for

an interpretation that is truly liberating to Dalit women in particular and the community of the marginalized in general. I find such liberation in the model of mutual reconciliation of both the oppressed and the oppressor that involves acceptance, repentance, and a radical transformation particularly from the privileged groups of the society. In this essay, I, thus discuss and interpret Jesus' role as an example where Jesus executes reconciliatory model of liberation in his encounter with the Samaritan woman.

Kwok Pui-lan suggests a “contrapuntal reading” where ‘encouraging and liberating experiences of both the oppressed and the oppressor [are] to be viewed and read together’, as a helpful hermeneutical agenda for the liberating role in a postcolonial situation.⁹ Similarly, Dalit feminist interpretation¹⁰ also emphasizes the role of the oppressor's openness to self-liberation and reconciliation as crucial and essential hermeneutical principles for the liberation of the oppressed. Thus, a reading from a Dalit feminist perspective of the story of the Samaritan woman diverges from patronizing liberation that positions Jesus' action as liberating to the Samaritan woman and thereby to her community. It rather suggests a paradigm shift to interpret Jesus' act as primarily a self-liberating act that comes from self-transformation and reconciliation which is crucial for Jesus himself, first to meet his physical need and second to fulfil his own mission.

Introducing Dalit Feminist Hermeneutic: Methodological Discussion

Official degradation, fixed low status, permanent social stigma, complexity of inferiority, ongoing physical repression, a sense of shame, and legitimate untouchability have been typical features of Dalit life in India.¹¹ Coming from such a context, as a Dalit Christian Woman and as a Feminist biblical reader from India, I propose the need to re-read the scriptures from a Dalit feminist point of view which affirms identity and provides dignity. Dalit feminist hermeneutic begins with a question: “Can the Biblical text do this for Dalits?” My aim is to seek an answer for this Dalit feminist question while seeking liberation from the biblical text at the same time affirms and oppresses Dalit women. When there were mass conversions from Dalit men and women into Christianity, the Bible was regarded and honored as a liberating book. But it has slipped into the hands of upper caste converts and Dalit convert males who interpret the Bible primarily through their lens of caste hierarchy and patriarchy. Given this patriarchal reality, can the Bible be liberating for Dalit women as well? How can the Bible be

relevant and liberating to the context of Dalit women who face discrimination as an integral part of life? Voicing of Dalit women, I affirm my difference from those who are stereotypically described as Dalit women and situate my self as a Dalit feminist biblical reader and arguing that my subjective experience shapes my standpoint.

Autobiographical stories of Dalit women, which are otherwise unheard, unseen, and unnoticed, can powerfully counter patriarchal and caste violence, and will bring rich nuance and a critical base for interpreting the text. Thus Dalit feminist hermeneutics strongly asserts the importance of Dalit women's experience as being the crucial base for their approach as it not only invokes insight but also consciousness. In Dalit women's context, each story is closely linked with their community. Similarly, I regard the text as having a particular message and relevance to the context and the question of Dalit reality. Dalit feminist hermeneutic, is interested in the text in itself rather than in its historical claims and, Dalit feminist hermeneutic aims to search for liberation and/or its relevance for the context of Dalit women. Dalit feminist hermeneutic seeks answers to their questions and concerns and hope from the biblical text. Being true to the aspect of Dalit conversion to Christianity,¹² Dalits continue to search for liberation, particularly, in the teachings of Jesus, as it is portrayed in the biblical text. Thus, Dalit feminist hermeneutic engages in its conversation with biblical text with a view that Christianity is liberating and that Jesus is the liberator.¹³

Methodologically, my inquiry into the story of the Samaritan woman from a Dalit feminist standpoint begins first, with the reflection on and a narration of my own experience, experience which also involves the stories of other Dalit women. I narrate a story of a Dalit woman to whom I am closely connected by my experience of common social location, although distanced by my different social status. By stating the similarities and differences between the Dalit woman in the story and myself, and other Dalit women who resonate with the character in the story, I will try to clarify and explain the validity and authenticity of my representation of Dalit women. Second, I seek to connect the social reality of a Dalit woman to the social reality of the Samaritan woman: to resonate, reflect and appropriate the story of the Samaritan woman from an inter-contextual critical reading. Third, as a Dalit feminist reader I interpret Jesus and the woman in the story of the Samaritan woman as exemplifying mutual reconciliation, and argue that the reconciliatory model of liberation is the most powerful one for liberation, as it deconstructs the power disparity between the oppressor and the oppressed. In the process of interpretation, both contextual and personal experience will

be made explicit not only in my voice and interpretation of the text but also in my choice and critique of other interpretations. Thus, a Dalit feminist interpretation of the story of the Samaritan woman reflects the intersection of autobiographical and contextual criticism in its critical interaction with a feminist lens on the text.¹⁴

Contemporary scholars have rightly pointed out the radicality of Jesus' initiative in his crossing gender, ethnic and moral boundaries in order to reach out to the Samaritan woman, which brings her liberation. While affirming the deep sensitivity that Jesus had for the marginalized, and his radical initiative to cross boundaries of gender, ethnicity and morality in his ministry, I also argue as a Dalit feminist that his initiative for crossing boundaries is first a self-transformative act. Three aspects of Jesus' act in the text, which I emphasize will be key elements for articulating such transformative liberation that are important and essential in interpreting the story from a Dalit feminist context. First, the initiative of Jesus in asking the Samaritan woman for a drink that is drawn from her vessel, despite the fact that it is strictly prohibited for a Jew to share common vessels with Samaritans.¹⁵ Second, the emphasis on Jesus' own needs to actually drink water from the Samaritan woman and its significance for transformative liberation. And, third is highlighting the importance of Jesus' self-transformative act for the fulfilment of his own mission.¹⁶

Thus I argue that what is crucial for a Dalit feminist interpretation of the text is to dwell on Jesus' original motive: to have drink from the Samaritan woman to quench his thirst, a motive which transforms him, and eventually transforms the tradition. Drinking water from the Samaritan woman on the material level is what transpires, even though emphasis on the spiritual water distracts the original at a later stage in the story. What else would have gained the trust of the Samaritan Woman, if not for her witness to Jesus' act of reconciliation and acceptance? What else could affirm Jesus' reconciliatory attitude, if not his actually drinking water from the Samaritan woman?¹⁷

The Samaritan Woman and the Scholarly Claims

The Samaritan woman has traditionally been portrayed as an immoral and inferior person in contrast with the divine, superior, pure, sinless, male character of Jesus. Similarly, in addition to her immorality, her incompetence in comprehending Jesus' metaphorical and spiritual language is emphasized, in contrast to his superior wisdom.

The Samaritan woman, was famously known for her marital history, her presumed sinfulness, promiscuity and deviant behaviour more than for the ironic force of her ignorance. The unusual setting of “being alone at the well” “at noon” substantiated with the detail of ‘five husbands’, and in connection to her otherness as a “Samaritan”, is seen as evidence that she was an immoral and sinful woman, to her utter disadvantage.¹⁸ The detail about the time of the day has been used widely by interpreters to support their view of the moral character of the woman, rather than to support the realism of Jesus’ need to approach her. Determination of her moral character was also built around the details of a woman being seen alone in the public space at an inappropriate time: it is more likely for women to go to the well to fetch water in the mornings or in the evenings and usually in company with the other female friends and neighbors.¹⁹ These details led readers to conclude that the woman is a sinner and that she must have purposely avoided the other women, deviously pursuing her immoral interests.

These scholars have, however, neglected to ask the text for the alternative possibilities before they drew their conclusions. Could she possibly have run out of water at home so that she was desperate to get some water immediately? Was it her routine to go out at noon by herself? Or was it just a coincidence that she happened to go there on the day when Jesus happened to be there? Or if she went alone to the well with a devious reason, then, was she shocked or disappointed to see Jesus? Scholars were quick to arrive at conclusions regarding her moral character, inferring it from setting and circumstances, but were biased to completely overlook the implications of the setting when Jesus approached a woman in solitude. If the setting of the scene contributes towards judging intentions, should it not equally apply to both Jesus and the Samaritan woman? Even though both Jesus and the Samaritan woman inhabit the same setting, the female is being judged to her detriment, while the privileged male is simply accepted. Donna N. Fewell asks, “How do readers come up with these unflattering images of the Samaritan woman? How do they know so much about her and her story?”²⁰ Where did they draw her image from, even though the socio-historical context of the Samaritan woman is most unlikely to support the above interpretations?

Feminist readings have dismissed such judgmental and misogynist interpretation of the Samaritan woman, attempting to reinterpret and reconstruct the story paying keen attention to the socio-historical context of the ancient tradition. They see her as a victim of the marginalization and exploitation of multiple oppression as ‘a woman’, ‘a Samaritan’, ‘a religiously inferior’, and ‘ethically charged’. Jean K. Kim says that the

dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John's Gospel has caught the attention of third world scholars because of their experience of multiple-layer victimization similar to that of the Samaritan woman in the story.²¹ The Samaritan woman is further victimized as 'a character' in the text and as 'a sexual object' in the interpretive tradition. She is marginalized, discriminated against and re-victimized both by the text and by the tradition. For example, Linda McKinnish Bridges points out that even though the Samaritan woman is the central character in the story, she remains nameless, without any identity in the text. Similarly, traditional interpreters have refused to give her an important role in the story.²² Luise Schottroff explains her victimization as sexual exploitation. She says, "The Samaritan woman is described as a woman in an extreme situation of sexual exploitation. The man with whom she now lives did not even offer her the security of a marriage contract."²³

Portraying the Samaritan woman's ignorance as a key motif in her characterization can also be considered as victimization. For example, Musa Dube points out that the Samaritan woman, who first thought that Jesus was just a simple Jewish man, discovers that he can give her living water which leads to eternal life (v.10); that he is greater than Jacob; that he is not only a prophet, but the "Saviour of the World" (v.42). Dube says this gradual unveiling of Jesus' identity characterizes him as an extremely superior traveller who thus surpasses all other local figures.²⁴ The superior-inferior disparity is strongly evoked in the ironical conversation between Jesus and the woman. The text on the one hand reveals her knowledge, because she counters almost every statement that Jesus makes with sense and logic as well as with the knowledge of history and tradition. But on the other hand her knowledge, logic and sense are vanquished by the power of Jesus' knowledge.

Feminist critics of the text, however, attempted to explain, re-read and re-interpret the irony and the vivid disparity that existed between Jesus and the woman. The irony of the conversation begins when Jesus twists the water metaphor, when he offers water instead of receiving water, contradicting his initial request. While the most natural response to Jesus' act would be to be perplexed, the Samaritan woman is interpreted discriminatorily as ignorant because she doesn't understand.²⁵ Jean K. Kim argues that the author used the ignorance of the Samaritan woman as the means through which Jesus' identity is revealed progressively.²⁶ Using a metaphor of colonial experience, Musa Dube reacts to the sharp division maintained throughout the story between those who know, i.e. the colonizer, and those who know nothing, i.e. the colonized. The

Samaritan woman is characterized on the one hand as an ignorant native, morally/religiously lacking, and on the other hand, Jesus is characterized as knowledgeable and omniscient.²⁷ Moreover, she is portrayed and interpreted not only as an ignorant native²⁸ but also an ignorant woman who is confined to the private sphere and has limited intellectuality in contrast to a man who, as patriarchal culture supposes, knows better. Her intellectual inferiority was not only developed by the traditional interpreters, but by the author himself to elevate the superiority of Jesus as knowledgeable, while portraying the woman as ignorant.²⁹

Thus the Samaritan woman is repeatedly presented as the one who misunderstands Jesus, conveying that she is incompetent to converse with him, whether or not Jesus in the text supports the view. This portrayal not only demeans the woman's capacity, but also Jesus' capacity to choose the right partner. Why did Jesus choose to talk to her seriously and at length if he thought that she could not comprehend his words? What is so sparkling about the woman that Jesus could not stop his conversation with her, if not that she was an interesting and competent conversational partner?

On the other hand, scholars have noted and regarded John's gospel to be generous towards women, portraying them as disciples, apostles and even missionaries.³⁰ Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza contends that the women in John's gospel are the paradigms for apostolic discipleship and leadership in the Johannine community.³¹ Similarly, Ingrid R. Kitzberger, while confirming the allegations of male bias, says, "the Gospel of John shows an outstanding interest in female characters and remarkable sensitiveness concerning their characterization".³² She also says that it is important to be aware of the text's rhetorical ambivalence in moving towards liberating truth.³³

However, it is no surprise that the women and their stories have been used to meet the ends and priorities of patriarchal textual interpretations. If the Samaritan woman's role in the story is used only to meet the primary concern of the author, it calls for a reconstruction of her character all the more to liberate her from textual victimization. What could be her real life beyond the role that is given to her in the text, given her socio-cultural context? Is it possible to liberate her from the patriarchal image that is given to her? What is needed to overcome the temptation of seeing her as a prototype of sexual sin, prone to evil, and seducer of men³⁴ as Jesus, perhaps did, when he approached her in a non-judgemental way?³⁵

The Samaritan Woman – Dispute of her Marital Life

The question of the Samaritan woman and her five husbands has been a pressing, conflicting and perplexing issue for biblical scholars who attempt to interpret the text in light of its socio-cultural context. What is marriage for a woman in late ancient society? A social norm? An economic necessity? Security? Or is it sexual pleasure? Feminist biblical scholars have struggled to understand the complexity of the issue of five husbands, and have interpreted her marital status in several ways against those uncritical examinations and quick conclusions. They have tried to unpack the mystery with various explanations, such as forced levirate marriage,³⁶ divorce or widowhood in a given socio-historical context.³⁷

Gail R. O’Day understands that “there are many possible reasons for the woman’s marital history....Perhaps the woman, like Tamar in Genesis 38, is trapped in the custom of levirate marriage, and the last male in the family refused to marry her....”³⁸ Consecutive marriages of women were not regarded immoral in the Samaritan woman’s social context, as there are incidents in the Bible where successive marriages are mentioned without attributing any immorality to them.³⁹ Consecutive marriages in case of widowhood could actually mean discrimination by the tradition, which seems to deny the emotional aspect of a woman who is forced her to remarry over and over again. However, there is no hint regarding the marital life of the Samaritan woman, that she has been victimized or forced into those marriages. Rather, she is celebrated by Jesus’ prophetic statement on her marital life, which is generally suspected to be the result victimization in most of the feminist readings.⁴⁰ But in what Jesus says in the text there is neither a moral judgement nor condemnation of her life.

Linda McKinnish Bridges wonders, “Perhaps she was just old and had outlived all five husbands, for the text does not give her age, and in her later years, she probably gives up on legal marriage contracts and lives with a man who is not her husband.”⁴¹ She also thinks that it is possible that her five husbands deserted her and that she is their victim.⁴² If none of these scenarios is actual, could she be an adulterous woman, and yet influence the whole village? If she were an adulteress or a prostitute, would it be possible for her to convince her community instantly of another strange ‘man’? What would the typical response of the community to her witness of a foreign man if she had a questionable moral character be?

However, the question of the Samaritan woman's marital life was addressed differently by other scholars. For example, Kim suggests that the marital life of the Samaritan woman is mentioned only to point out the superiority of Jesus' omniscient intuition of her life. She concludes, "In short, at the cost of her shameless past, Jesus' identity is gradually revealed."⁴³ Musa Dube claims that the negative characterization of Samaritans is intended to assert Jesus' religious superiority,⁴⁴ and the Samaritan woman is used as a scapegoat in the narration. In other words, is it just a narrative plot which John uses to make the Samaritan woman confess that Jesus is a prophet? Foreign women were discriminated against not only on ethnic and gender grounds, but also on the perception of dominant moral grounds.⁴⁵ The details of the Samaritan woman in Jesus' speech were taken literally to her detriment, while the rest of his speech is interpreted symbolically.

Some scholars have preferred a figurative reading of the text to the literal reading in terms of pagan idolatry.⁴⁶ Symbolic interpretation for 'five husbands' was regarded as a potential liberating reading⁴⁷ because after all, John's gospel is a symbolic narrative containing the images like water, sacred place, light, life, food and harvest. The themes of mission, discipleship, faithful witness, living water, and eternal life are also closely linked to Christological revelation in John.⁴⁸ Some scholars even wonder if the Samaritan woman herself is a figurative image, representing some or all Samaritan women or her community.⁴⁹ However, neither her marital life nor implications of her implied immoral life are developed in the text, and the question of what significance her marital history has for the story remains unresolved..

Despite the author's efforts to prove Jesus' superiority in contrast to the inferior Samaritan woman, she represents polarized aspects: On the one hand she is seen as alienated, discriminated against and exploited, but on the other hand she seems to be independent and brave. The Samaritan woman in the story portrays unusual behavior in several aspects, namely, going to the well alone, going at noon, talking to a man in public, and having a relationship with more than one man. Although her unconventional traits have the potential to create suspicion and curiosity in the community, she does not let this influence her life. She takes charge of her life and does not regard it as shameful to act differently. She becomes, in a way, a liberator of her own self by not confining herself to the expectations of society, giving her the opportunity to meet Jesus. Thus the Samaritan woman can be indubitably viewed as unconventional in her characterization in the Johannine account.

Quenching Jesus' Thirst – For Whose Advantage? The Woman? Or Jesus?

The dialogue between Jesus and the woman begins with Jesus' request for water, in a public place, at the well. Scholars in contemporary readings have invariably discussed the cultural opposition to public discourse between male and female in order to prove the point that Jesus transgressed popular Jewish custom. However, my question of Jesus' act dwells primarily on the reason why he approached the Samaritan woman; what implications this has for the liberation process of both Jesus and the Samaritan woman, and what is the message of Jesus' transformative act of privileging and the oppressed in general and for Dalit context in particular?

John's introduction of Jesus' approach to the Samaritan woman in the story is initially realistic, but it becomes complicated and puzzling as the dialogue progresses. To resolve Jesus' desperate condition, John embraces the tactic of irony and distracts the emphasis from Jesus' pressing need of physical water to the Samaritan woman's supposed need of spiritual water. Is she really in need of spiritual water? Or again, is it Jesus' own need that compels him to offer living water to the Samaritan woman? Who is in need? Who needs to transgress? What are the repercussions?

The Johannine account does not record detail, even though the setting of the scene demands that Jesus be thirsty and in need of drinking water even from a Samaritan woman. The heat of the day and the progress of the journey explain Jesus' thirst and tiredness. As Teresa Okure says "The realism of Jesus' physical tiredness is further accentuated by the reference to the time of day, 'noon'".⁵⁰ The argument that Jesus shared the drinking vessel and drank water from the Samaritan woman can be affirmed without much scholarly intervention. Verse 6 asserts that Jesus was weary from the journey. The Greek tense⁵¹ indicates that he had become tired and remained exhausted. Obviously Jesus was both hungry and thirsty and to his relief, he saw a woman who came to draw water from the well. He at once took advantage of the situation and asked her for a drink.

Does it really matter whether Jesus took water from the Samaritan woman? It is not enough that he asked for water? What brings liberation to the Samaritan woman instantly is sharing that vessel and so invalidating the tradition that assumed her to be impure? It is a powerful action on the side of Jesus for the liberation of the Samaritans,

who are stigmatized as untouchable and impure. It is a definite sign of his reconciliation. If not, what would be the message that Jesus in the Johannine account conveys to the marginalized? What is the impact of Jesus on those who question the injustice of ethnic and religious discrimination?

In the beginning of the story Jesus' physical tiredness, thirst for water and hunger for food are clearly indicated by the reference of the time of the day (4:8,31).⁵² But at a later part of the story the aspect of Jesus' need to quench his thirst is eliminated. The author, however, succeeded for centuries in diverting the readers' attention away from seeing Jesus as the one in desperate need and actually indulging in drinking water that is drawn from the vessel of the Samaritan woman. For example, Brown interprets this strategy of Jesus approaching the Samaritan woman for water, so that when she mocks him he shows her the real reason for approaching her: that is, not for his need, but rather for him to meet her need of having living water.⁵³

Stephen Moore's question: "Are Jesus' own needs in this scene really any less than those of the woman?" challenges interpretations that undermine the physical need of Jesus.⁵⁴ Interpreters have repeatedly conformed to the view that the Samaritan woman was the one who was in need, thus elevating Jesus' kindness and humility in reaching out for the needy.⁵⁵ What is missing in the interpretative tradition, however, is the question who decides one's need? Is it oneself or the other? Is it not the traditional and condescending attitude of the privileged to suggest what the needs of the oppressed are? In the text there was absolutely no hint on the side of the Samaritan woman until Jesus told her about his living water with a promise that she will never be thirsty again if she drinks them. Is Jesus marketing his need to offer living water by provoking a desire in the Samaritan woman? The Samaritan woman, being in the underprivileged status, does not refuse either Jesus' request for physical water or his offer of living water; rather, she helps him to fulfil both of his needs.

What would the story of the Samaritan woman be if she refused his request? Would Jesus proceed with a discussion of living water? Moore interestingly notices that in John's account in two instances physical thirst evidently preceded the spiritual thirst, as though the physical thirst is a necessary precondition to satiate spiritual thirst.⁵⁶ The down-to-earth, weary, thirsty and hungry Jesus turns out to be a powerful,

philosophical and knowledgeable person. How did he change so suddenly? How did he regain his strength? Is it because the Samaritan woman gave him water before he fainted? Jesus recovers from his fatigue and enthusiastically converses with her further by introducing several matters that were unknown to her. In other words, it is the water given by the Samaritan woman that energizes Jesus to move on with his second need; that is, to offer his living water and thereby reach out as savior of the world.⁵⁷

Introducing Dalit Woman's Context: The Lives of Dalit Women

Because of my parents' career as elementary school teachers and our dislocation from their parents' native villages, we had the experience of living among upper caste Hindus, which made us feel somewhat liberated in one sense, but in another sense, we lived with shame and fear that our identity, which is either hushed or muted, would be spoken of openly. We constantly found ourselves not being able to fit boldly into the caste community, while at the same time not being able to associate with Dalits either, as they would typically fit themselves into the stereotyped Dalit patterns of life. To maintain distance, we usually addressed them as 'they' as opposed to saying 'we'. All those efforts to be distanced from other Dalits, however, did not overcome the experiences of being shamed and carrying shame in our psyche as Dalits.

One person whom we would associate with was Penchamma, a 12 year old Dalit girl, a residential maid servant of our neighbor friends. Penchamma, for whom I always had a special compassion, fondly and respectfully⁵⁸ addressed me as 'akka', meaning elder sister. Now, I recognize the compassion I shared with her to be my Dalit consciousness and the commonality that was unknowingly connecting us. Penchamma was treated as untouchable even though she lived in the same house with our neighbours. Her sleeping place was usually a mat on the floor in a corner of a room; her plate and glass were separated from the other utensils in the house. She was strictly forbidden to use any of the household vessels, except for cleaning or washing them. This, however, was regarded as natural by both servants and employers, and therefore Penchamma or her family were not particularly offended.

A famous saying in India is that "the poor are always hungry". Penchamma being a poor girl with limited access to fancy foods, developed a curiosity and desire for the special food that the family ate, which was not usually shared with her. One fine day she sneakily tried to eat from a plate that had leftover food on it, and which was to be

thrown away. The man of the house saw her do so and took advantage of her mistake to sexually molest her. She was threatened that if she complained to the lady of the house, he would let them know of her fault. Scared to death, she pleaded with him for forgiveness and said that she would never do it again. Seeing her vulnerability the man attempted to molest her again, but this time she resisted him. Being worried by his mistake, the man complained about Penchalamma to his wife, about how she has been messing and polluting their things despite several warning by him. Obviously, Penchalamma was not asked for any explanation, but instead mercilessly thrown out and told not to come back to work again. The next morning Penchalamma came to my house crying and explained to me the details of the incident. She told me that she would not dare tell anyone else for fear of damaging to her reputation, and that she was blamed by her parents for her mistake and for losing the job that earned her living.

Penchalamma's story is not just an illustration for multiple layers of victimization, but also reveals how she was interlocked in discrimination and how critical is her way to liberation. Issues of untouchability, sexual exploitation, poverty and child abuse are strongly interrelated here, resulting from several factors of Penchalamma's reality. Her complex identity as a Dalit, as a young girl, as a child of poor parents and her individual responsibility as a child laborer have been used and abused to the utter disadvantage of the girl and for the benefit of the exploiters. For instance, Penchalamma's untouchability was not an issue to the man when he wished to use her body for his pleasure. Similarly, her impurity was not an issue to the family as long as she worked as a machine to clean their dishes. What would her story be if she exposed her master? It is most likely that it would backfire to reflect badly on her moral character, because she has neither experience representing her case nor the ability to offer proof against the man, who will readily dismiss her allegation like the Samaritan woman. What exposes her to abuse is the vulnerability of her place in a societal hierarchy, and what guards Jesus is the elevated status of his place in the same hierarchy.

While being a victim, Penchalamma resists further victimization in two areas: First, she silently resists untouchability in her attempt to eat off the daughter's plate, and thus silently claims that she is not impure and untouchable, although she cannot assert her identity, Second, once she overcomes the fear of being physically abused or of losing employment, she does not let the man take undue advantage of her mistake and victimize her further. However, as a result of her attempt to transgress boundaries, by

her own will, Penchamma receives a severe punishment and faces violence. Is Penchamma's experience of violence any different from that of other oppressed persons, who characteristically face violence in attempting to cross boundaries?⁵⁹ But then, what is the most usual response when the oppressor attempts to reach out to the oppressed for reconciliation? Reconciliation is far easier and liberation is more readily attainable when the oppressor decides to smash the discriminatory boundaries. Is what is taken forcefully true liberation and freedom, even if it demands bloodshed and violence? Is true liberation something that is generously given by an individual or a group of people? Or is true liberation that reconciliation that calls for acceptance and change on both sides that brings peace and justice?

Inter-contextual Reflection: the Dalit Woman vs. the Samaritan Woman

There are striking parallels between the story of Penchamma and the story of the Samaritan woman as well as critical differences in the roles that they have played as oppressed women. Samaritans are considered unclean and untouchable because of their religious differences with Jews as Dalits are also regarded unclean and untouchable by the religious interpretation of Hinduism. Likewise, both Dalits and Samaritans were prohibited from sharing common vessels with their so-called superior counterparts.⁶⁰ Although some scholars argue against the strict prohibition of contact among Jews and Samaritans and the absolute observance of the tradition by all Jews⁶¹ one must agree that the tradition is popular enough for the author to make a statement that 'Jews do not share common vessels with the Samaritans' in the text. This substantiates the Samaritan woman's response to Jesus' request in a way that would not draw any controversy among readers. Rudolf Bultmann points out that the story of the Samaritan woman assumes local knowledge in its readers.⁶² Thus the tradition of untouchability seems to be well accepted and internalized in both the Samaritan woman and Penchamma, because they neither actually question it nor do they express any sense of offence. Yet, Penchamma realizes the discrimination against her when it becomes explicit in the form violence. But the Samaritan woman interestingly does not describe herself as a victim at any stage in the story. However, some feminist scholars regard the woman as a victim and have even taken her to be a victim of multiple social factors.⁶³

One other common aspect of commonality in the two stories is of transgression. In Penchamma's story, her transgression was not in fact touching the plate, but eating out of one is forbidden to her. In other words, it is not her hands that bring impurity but it is

the contact with saliva while eating that seems to bring impurity, an impurity that is inherited from birth. Similarly, Samaritan women are viewed as having inherited impurity genealogically, being the descendents of impure blood. Denigration of the Samaritans is found in many ancient sources such as the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, the writing of the first century historian Josephus, and in rabbinic writings. For instance Rabbi Eliezer says, “He that eats the bread of the Samaritans is like one that eats the flesh of Swine,” suggesting impurity of food that comes in contact with the Samaritans.⁶⁴ J.A. Montgomery however, argues that the two groups did intermingle, and he gives extensive evidence for ambivalence between Jews and Samaritans rather than mere hostility.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the Samaritan woman’s statement, ‘How is that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Woman of Samaria?’ communicates that she is one of those many or few Samaritans who experienced alienation and hostility from Jews. Evidently, by her experience the Samaritan woman’s recognizes the unusualness of Jesus’ request and his attempt to transgress the popular boundaries between the two communities. Her response presupposes Samaritan uncleanness and gender inferiority.⁶⁶ It reflects the inferiority that is internalized among the oppressed. The fact that Jews do not share anything with the Samaritans and treat them as impure⁶⁷ does not seem to hurt or offend her.

Jesus’ disciples’ questions and apprehensions on their return reflect the socio-cultural patterns and gender relationships in their society. But Jesus obviously breaks boundaries in his conversation with the Samaritan woman: the boundaries of gender, the boundaries of ethnicity and the boundary between the so-called chosen people and the rejected.⁶⁸ Although one cannot argue that all Jews were necessarily hostile to Samaritans and treated them as impure, one must note that the hostility and discrimination was exercised enough for the woman to be astonished. Thus Penchalamma and the Samaritan woman, by their social identity experience untouchability, impurity, misrepresentation and ethnic discrimination. In addition to the pressing untouchability in both stories, women’s sexuality is used as an object with serious implications either for sexual exploitation or moral abuse: Penchalamma was sexually exploited and the Samaritan woman was morally abused.

Although the two women have many similarities, they also have crucial differences in the way in which they addressed the issue of discrimination. Penchalamma attempts to cross her boundaries by doing what is prohibited, that is to eat out of a plate that

belongs to the upper caste people. The upshot of her act was severe punishment executed on her by so-called superiors who got away with violence. She accepted her punishment with fear and guilt and shows no indication of rebellion or vengeance. On the other hand, the Samaritan woman stayed within her boundaries and showed no interest in crossing them; rather, she thinks twice even when Jesus approaches her to ask for a drink.⁶⁹ Did the Samaritan woman rigidly stay within her boundaries in all circumstances? Obviously the woman possesses the characteristics that are beyond social expectations, at the risk of being perceived as the deviant. Her openness to engage in dialogue with Jesus the stranger and her ability to conduct herself beyond the norms certainly play a key role in the process of liberation for herself and her community.

The above two examples of women however, advocate the idea that it is not advisable to provoke the powerful. But does the text affirm the same popular message? In the story of the Samaritan woman, the twist of transgression takes a different direction. It is the superior Jesus who transgresses, who crosses his boundaries, and who initiates the transformation. Jesus' transgressing approach in the story brings transformation not only to the woman but also to her community. The liberation process in this incident proves uncomplicated because a superior Jew who considered the Samaritans impure and untouchable came forward to break that belief system. Additionally, a so-called superior male, who traditionally would have denigrated the female as of worth only for her sexuality, came forward to engage her in a theological discussion. Obviously, when the superior made efforts to transcend boundaries there was little or no resistance from the other side. Would it have been the same response if the Samaritan woman had approached Jesus, offering a drink, assuming that Jesus was not ready to transcend the boundaries? Would her experience have been any different than that of Penchalamma, the Dalit girl in the story? In the light of the two stories and of Jesus' powerful initiative for reconciliation and transformation, I argue from a Dalit feminist perspective that the transformation of the privileged has more potential for the liberation of the oppressed than the cry of the oppressed themselves, and is the quintessential element for the true liberation. Thus, the story of the Samaritan woman calls for the responsibility of initiative and participatory transformation from both the oppressed and the oppressor.

Conclusion

Upper castes treat Dalits as untouchables and impure and therefore they do not share anything common with them. But even though Dalits have been loud and clear in voicing their rights, their humanity and their commonality with other castes, they not only continue to be oppressed, but are even punished, tortured and humiliated to create fear in others and weaken their resistance. From this backdrop of Dalit status in India, and from the story of Penchalamma, Dalit feminist interpretation of the story of the Samaritan woman emphasizes primarily three points: First, while accentuating the importance of the oppressed to claim justice by resisting discriminatory practices, it calls for reconciliatory transformation on the part of oppressors, as Jesus exemplifies. Second, Jesus' use of border-crossing as a means of liberation is evidence that crossing or breaking boundaries is the core move for the liberation of the oppressed. Third, Jesus' role being crucial and effective for the liberation of the Samaritan woman and her community, Dalit feminist interpretation calls for the privileged to take an active and effective role for the liberation of the oppressed.

¹ Cf. Adeline Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998); Ingrid R. Kitzberger, "Border Crossing and Meeting Jesus at the Well" – An autobiographical re-reading of the Samaritan Woman's Story in John 4:1-44," in *The Personal Voice in Biblical Criticism* (ed. Ingrid R. Kitzberger; New York: Routledge, 1999), 111-27; Stephen D. Moore, "Are There Impurities in the Living Water That the Johannine Jesus Dispenses? Deconstruction, Feminism, and the Samaritan Woman" in *Biblical Interpretation* 1 (1993), 207-27; Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4.1-42* (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988); Gail R. O'Day, "John" in *Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom, & Ringe, H. Sharon; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992) and *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); J.E. Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4.1-42* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991); Linda McKinnish Bridges, "John 4:5-42" in *Interpretation* April (1994), 173-176; Christine Lienemann-Perrin, "The Biblical Foundation for Feminist and participatory Theology of Mission" in *International Review of Mission*, vol 95, 368 (January 2004), 17-34.

² Cf. Musa Dube, “Reading for Decolonization (John 4:1-42)” in *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space and Power* (Reprint eds. Musa W. Dube and Jeffrey L. Staley; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 51-75; Jean K. Kim, “A Korean Feminist Reading of John 4: 1-42” in *Semeia* 78 (1997), 109-20; Jose David Rodriguez, The Challenge of Hispanic Ministry (reflections on John 4) *Currents in Theological Mission* 18 (1991), 420-26; M.P. Hogan, “The Woman at the Well (John 4:1-42)” in *The Bible Today* 82 (1976), 663-69; Sandra M. Schneiders, “Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 12 (1989) 35-45.

Western scholars also recognize the triple faceted oppression of the woman in this story, as a woman, a Samaritan and a polygamist – see for example Donna Nolan Fewell, “Drawn to Excess, Or Reading Beyond Betrothal” in *Semeia* 77 (1997), 23-58.

³ Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger observes that in the end the Samaritan woman’s missionary achievement is diminished, when the townsfolk tell her that it is no longer on account of her words that they believe. However, it can be seen as ‘diminishing her achievement’ or as ‘reaffirming’ what she said implying that they see it for truth what forever she represented. Cf. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, “How Can This Be?” (John 3:9): A Feminist Theological Re-reading of the Gospel of John” in *What is John: Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel Vol II*, (ed. Fernando Segovia; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 19-41. 36.

⁴ Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad Books, 1984), 327-28; Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scriptures* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991), 186-94; In some church traditions she is also given a name as Photini, as she is interpreted as the one who gave light to her village. She is remembered for her apostolic mission every year in Orthodox tradition on the fourth Sunday after Easter.

⁵ For example Teresa Okure emphasizes Jesus as the one who exercises humility even though he is the one with the gift of God to offer. Cf., Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach*, 95.

⁶ For example Jean Kim says that the story of the Samaritan woman in John’s Gospel has caught the attention of third world women because of Jesus’ intentions to break ethnic, religious, gender and moral barriers (Kim, “A Korean Feminist Reading”, 109-20).

⁷ Stephen Moore, “Are there Impurities”, 207-27. Musa Dube also expresses uneasiness with the kind of interpretation that reads Jesus as a giver and the woman, as receiver (Dube, “Reading for Decolonization,” 66).

⁸ In his article Stephen Moore discusses and counters several feminist readings that affirm the same view. See Moore, “Are there impurities”, 207-27.

⁹ Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial imagination and feminist theology* (Louisville: WJK press, 2005).

¹⁰ Dalit feminist interpretation in Biblical studies is still in its preliminary stages and is being recently experimented with in Biblical studies. For some more discussion on Dalit feminist interpretation see Surekha Nelavala, “Smart Syrophoenician Woman: A Dalit Feminist Reading of Mark 7:24-31” in *The Expository Times* 118.2 (2006), 64-69.

¹¹ Dalits are the untouchables, by their caste being treated inhumanly for approximately 3,000 years. Although constitutionally, Dalit were given equal rights after the independence of India in 1947, their plight has not changed much in social reality. Dalits continue to suffer untouchability although its intensity may differ at times depending on the setting.

¹² Dalit conversion to Christianity in India was mass conversion. In other words it was a social movement of Dalits, who rejected Hinduism which treated them as untouchables and tortured them under the legitimacy of casteism.

¹³ Dalit feminist hermeneutics standpoint, in fact, differs with some post modern hermeneutics such as postcolonial hermeneutics which regard the Bible as a colonial symbol, and inter-faith hermeneutics who regard all religions and all scriptures as equally liberating, holy and containing the word of God.

¹⁴ For a discussion on the inevitability of intersection of autobiographical and contextual biblical criticism see, Stephen Moore, “True Confessions and Weird Obsessions: Autobiographical Interventions in Literary and Biblical Studies” in *Semeia* 72 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995).

¹⁵ John 4:9b affirms that the astonishment of the Samaritan woman comes from the prevalent tradition, that is “Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.”

¹⁶ John’s description of Jesus insists that Jesus’ mission is for the world (3:16), a world that includes the Samaritans. See other references in John, 3:16; 4:35-38,42; 8:12,23; 9:39; 12:31 and 13:1.

¹⁷ In this essay, what I aim to convey is not that Jews were reigning over Samaritans, but to describe the historical relations between Jews and Samaritans, and keep to the small and limited picture concerning the relationship of the two groups as we find it in

the Gospel of John and few other ancient sources. Dalits also seek for acceptances in day to day relationships among the other caste people in India, and do not seek for political liberation. Here I also acknowledge that both suffered from the Roman imperial impact just as all Indians were once under the British rule prior to Independence.

¹⁸ See for example Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 188; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John I* (New York: Crossroad (1968-1982), 432.

¹⁹ Jerome H. Neyrey, “What’s Wrong with this Picture, 77-91.

²⁰ Fewell, “Drawn to Excess”, 26.

²¹ Kim, “A Korean Feminist Reading”, 109-20.

²² Bridges, “John 4:5-42”.

²³ Luise Schottroff, “The Samaritan Woman and the Notion of Sexuality in the Fourth Gospel” in *What is John Vol II* (ed., Fernando Segovia; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 157-181. 174.

²⁴ Dube, “Reading for Decolonization”, 37-57.

²⁵ Eugene J. Botha with his critical literary approach says that the concept of living water is a popular concept with in the Johannine community, and the readers know what Jesus meant. *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman*, 131.

²⁶ Kim, “A Korean Feminist Reading”, 109-20.

²⁷ Dube, “Reading for Decolonization” 37-57.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ On the other hand scholars have regarded John’s gospel as more generous towards women and it has been a comfortable dwelling place for feminist scholars.

³⁰ See for example Raymond Brown’s influential article on the importance of women in John’s gospel, which provided a good lead to pursue feminist explorations in John’s Gospel R. Brown, “Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel,” *Theological Studies* 36 (1975), 688-99; Sandra M. Schneiders, “Women in the Fourth Gospel”, 35-45; T. Karlsen Seim, “Roles of Women in the Gospel of John,” *Aspects of the Johannine Literature* (ed. Lars Hartman and Birger Olsson; Uppsala: University Press, 1987), 56-73.

³¹ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 333.

³² Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, “Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala. Two Female Characters in the Johannine Passion Narrative,” in *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995), 564-586.

³³ Kitzberger, “How Can This Be”, 34.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ According to the text, Jesus does not pass any judgmental comments on the Samaritan woman and her life although one could argue that Jesus’ mention of her marital life could have imply judgment.

³⁶ Gail O’ Day, *The Word Disclosed: John’s Story and Narrative Preaching* (St. Louis: CBP, 1987), 41-42.

³⁷ See for example ‘Sevenfold Levirate Marriage of a woman’ in Mark 12:23. Consecutive marriages among men and women is not however rare in the antiquity. Cf. Schottroff, “The Samaritan Woman, 162.

³⁸ Gail O’ Day, “John”, 293-304.

³⁹ See for example for levirate marriages in Deut. 25:5 and Mark 12:18-27.

⁴⁰ Schottroff, “The Samaritan Woman,” 164.

⁴¹ McKinnish Bridges. “John 4:5-42”.

⁴² McKinnish Bridges. “John 4:5-42”.

⁴³ Kim, “A Korean Feminist Reading”, 112. For similar positioning see also, Ernst Haenchen, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John* vol 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 221.

⁴⁴ Dube, “Reading for Decolonization”, 68.

⁴⁵ Esther Fuchs describing Delilah, a foreign woman, writes “The characterization of Delilah reflects the Israelite fear and distrust of the foreign woman. Delilah’s successful deception of Samson spells a lesson in national as well as in sexual politics; do not trust women, especially if they happen to be foreign and beautiful.” Cf. Esther Fuchs, “Who is Hiding the Truth? Deceptive Women and Biblical Androcentricism” in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (ed. Adela Yarbro Collins; California: Scholars Press, 1985), 137-144.

⁴⁶ Charles K. Barrett says that the woman represents the Samaritan people belonging to five different tribes, each worshipping a different god, in his commentary on *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 253.

⁴⁷ Moore, “Are there impurities”, 207-27.

⁴⁸ Cf. Dorothy Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 64-65.

⁴⁹ For more discussion on symbolic representation of the Samaritan woman see, Jane S. Webster, “Transcending Alterity: Strange Woman to Samaritan Woman” in *A Feminist Companion to John Vol 1* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine; New York: Sheffield Academic Press,

2003), 126-142. Figurative representation of the Samaritan woman is seen problematic by some feminist scholars.

⁵⁰ Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach*, 87.

⁵¹ The Greek word for “weary” is *kopiao* (from *kopos*, in secular Greek) As we might express it, Jesus was exhausted.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (The Anchor Bible 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966), 177.

⁵⁴ Stephen D. Moore, “Are There Impurities”.

⁵⁵ For example see Schnackenburg, *The Gospel*, 426; Brown, *The Gospel*, 177.

⁵⁶ Moore, “Are There Impurities in the Living Water That the Johannine Jesus Dispenses? Deconstruction, Feminism, and the Samaritan Woman” in *A Feminist Companion to John Vol 1* (ed. Amy Jill Levine; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 78-97 (90).

⁵⁷ Musa Dube interprets Jesus’ reaching to the Samaritans and the Samaritan woman as the imperialist ideology of expansion and promotion to replace native religion and culture. See Dube, “Reading for Decolonization”, 69.

⁵⁸ It is customary and cultural in India to address elders by attributing to them some relationship such as sister, brother, uncle, aunt, grandma or grandpa in informal setting, which is considered to be respectful. Between different age groups people do not address one another by first names.

⁵⁹ It has been proved time and again that the initiation of rebellion from the oppressed against the oppressor has mostly ended in violence, massacre or further victimization in Dalit context. For instance Joseph D’Souza discusses the plight of Dalits who resist oppression and who continue to fall prey to upper caste violent attacks. He gives numerous examples where Dalits have been violently attacked in response to their resistance. He says, “Efforts by Dalits such as Surekha Bhotmange, to demand their rights have provoked a brutal backlash from higher caste groups. In fact, incidents such as these, where witnesses, or those that seek judicial remedy, are brutally savaged, have become depressingly common. A Dalit rights activist from Punjab, Bant Singh, campaigning for the rights of landless or marginal farmers, has come under vicious attack a number of times. Members of the upper-caste, landowning community gang-raped his daughter. He pursued the case and secured the conviction of those responsible, who were sentenced to life imprisonment. Supporters of the rapists then organized further retribution: on 5 January 2006, Bant Singh was so badly beaten that both his

arms and a leg had to be amputated” in his article “The End of Upper Caste Propaganda in Global Forums,” n.p. Cited 1 March 2007. Online: <http://www.josephdsouza.com/>.

⁶⁰ The common tradition is that the caste people do not share common vessels and for the most part the tradition is observed. However, there are exceptions, depending on progressive thinking that caste people adapt to, and on certain social accomplishments that Dalits have achieved. Therefore, I acknowledge and appreciate the exceptional cases where untouchability is observed in its minimal sense or absent. Similarly, it is a tradition that Jews in general do not share common vessels with the Samaritans, and there is a certain amount of impurity associated with the Samaritans (John 4:19).

Charles Kingsley Barrett cites from Nidah 4.1 that ‘the daughters of the Samaritans are menstruants from their childhood implying that they are all the time unclean women. For discussion on untouchability and impurity associated with the Samaritans, see Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 32.

⁶¹ It is not historically substantiated that there was absolute alienation of the Samaritans on the side of Jews because there was neither a monolithic Judaism nor a normative Judaism. Thus it is not possible to determine to what extent Jews adhered to these laws. For different sects within Judaism in the Pre Christian era see Mathew Black, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1961), 48-60. The life of the people varied depending on whether they were liberals, conservatives, village folks, literates, city dwellers, and so on although there was a definite amount of hostility between Jews and Samaritans. James D. Purvis says that there was an ambivalence that existed between the two communities in *The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Origin of the Samaritan Sect* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 13; see also his work on “The Samaritans and Judaism”, in *Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters* (ed. Robert A. Kraft and George W.E. Nickelsburg; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 87. J. Bowman notes the differences in Jewish-Samaritan relations as each of the gospels presents a different view with relation to the subject. See his article on “Samaritan Studies”, in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 40/2 (1958), 298-327 (298-299). For more information on Samaritan-Jewish connections see also Leonie A. Archer, *Her Price is Beyond Rubies: The Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 61-62; Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 232.

⁶² Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 177.

⁶³ For example see Dube, “Reading for Decolonization “ and Kim, “A Korean Feminist Reading,” 109-20.

⁶⁴ Cited from m. Shebiith 8.10.

⁶⁵ James A. Montgomery, *The Samaritans, the Earliest Jewish Sect: Their History, Theology and Literature* (New York: KTAV, 1968), 158-168.

⁶⁶ Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, 1991), 215.

⁶⁷ The statement is valid as it is stated in the account as a matter of fact.

⁶⁸ O'Day, "John", 293-304.

⁶⁹ However, it is important to note that there is no evidence that the hostility between Samaritans and Jews was such that transgression of boundaries could yield in physical violence against the Samaritans (or Jews).

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Surekha Nelavala hails from India and is presently writing for Ph.D. in Biblical Studies at Drew University, New Jersey, USA. She has authored a monograph, "Paradigms of Authority in the New Testament: Women's Perspective" and a few articles in international journals. Her present work is mainly on Dalit feminist hermeneutics and she also works in areas of intercultural, postcolonial and feminist hermeneutics.