Volga

Women deconstructing Paradigms

“I took up writing as an aid for propagating the ideas of feminism in the form of literature.”

(Streevadham Kosame Katha Rachana Chepattanu 254-255)
Popuri Lalitha Kumari popularly known as Volga is a pioneer of Telugu feminist literary movement. She was born on 27th November, 1950 in Guntur. Volga was her elder sister’s name. It was a Russian name christened by her father in memory of a girl called Volga who died in Nazi war on the day her sister was born. When Volga was sixteen years old her elder sister died and from then onwards Volga started using it as her pen name. Her father Venkata Subba Rao was a communist who widely read Russian Literature. As a result she also read Russian Literature in her youth and imbibed those ideas. Besides this she also read the works of Telugu writers like Srisri, Chalam, Kodavaganti Kutumba Rao, Malathi Chandur, Ranganayakamma, Vasireddy Sitadevi, Vishwanatha, Adavi Bapiraju, Dwivedula Visalakshi, Yaddanpudi Sulochana Rani and other writers.

She took her master’s degree in Telugu literature from Andhra University in 1972 and worked as a Telugu lecturer at VSR and NVR College in Tenali for thirteen years from 1973 to 1986. After working with Ushakiran Movies as the head of the Script Department for nine years she started Asmitha Resource Centre for women in partnership with Vasantha Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran. While working as a senior executive for Usha Kiran Movies she scripted and co-directed films like Thodu ‘Companionship’, Patha Nagaram lo Pasivadu [Small Kid in an Old Town], Amulyam [Invaluable] and Gulabeelu [Roses] and translated the screenplay of Richard Attenborough’s Gandhi into Telugu. The film Badram Kodukku [Beware Son] produced by her about child labour won two National awards and two state awards. Thodu won her the prestigious Nandi award. At present she is working as the General Secretary of Asmitha Resource Centre for women.

She is also working as a member of the editorial collective of the feminist publishing house and as a member of the Telugu advisory panel for National Book Trust of India. She started her career as a writer in her sixteenth year when her first short story got published in a college magazine. In 1972 her first story “Jailu Kaidhi Atmakatha” [Autobiography of a prisoner] was published in Srujana Magazine. She has to her credit six novels - Sahaja [Nature1986], Sweccha [Freedom 1987], Kanniti Keratala Vennela [Moonlight on the Waves of Tears 1988], Manavi [1989], Akasamlo Sagam [Half in the Sky 1990] and Gulabilu [Roses 1993]. Sweccha, a controversial book which created a
wave in her favour won her the prestigious Chatura award in 1987 and was sold over 50,000 copies. The same was translated into English as *A Quest for Freedom* by Ari Seetaramayya. Apart from being a novelist she has carved a niche for herself in the genre of short stories and has published four anthologies of stories - *Rajakiya Kathalu* [Political Stories 1992], *Prayogam* [Experiment 1995], *Bhinna Sandarbalu* [Different Situations 2001] and *Mrunmayanadham* [Melodies 2007]. Alladi Uma and M. Sreedhar have translated eight of her short stories and published them in the form of a book entitled *The Woman Unbound* (2001). Similarly another thirteen of her translated stories have been published as an anthology called *Political Stories* (2007). Apart from these she has edited some anthologies of poems and essays like *Maaku Godalu Levu* [We Don’t have Walls], *Neeli Meghalu* [Blue Clouds], *Nuurella Chalam* [Chalam of Hundred Years] and so on. She has also translated some works from Marathi like *Nenu Savithri Baiyini* [I am also a Savithri Bai] and so on. In discussing gender politics and writing for the cause of women she can be compared to the Bengali writer Mahaswetha Devi. While Mahaswetha Devi writes for the betterment of tribal women, Volga writes for the betterment of all women in general.

Whatever be the genre of writing, writers can reach the readers only when they follow a style their own. Volga writes for the cause of women and has her own style of writing. Like Shashi Deshpande she too writes about tears in the lives of women. She does not portray the problems in the lives of women and leave them to the readers for scrutiny. She takes up the entire responsibility of identifying the causes and analyzing the reasons. She does not stop with that. She even gives out a solution for the problems. Her pen has the power to sharpen the reader’s thoughts and ideas. She has given her readers, the scope to look at ordinary things with an extra-ordinary perspective. Thus her style of writing is to initiate the reader’s thought and her specialty lies in establishing her principles through powerful stories. She analyses even the trivial matters in such an explicit way that the readers after reading them feel, how they have missed to observe it all these days. She explains without the slightest hesitation all the experiences of a female body, which no other writer dares to. In a nutshell it can be said that she uses a surgical knife in analyzing and portraying the concerns of women.
Mostly she writes in the first person narration. She writes about the politics woven around women’s bodies without any fear and hesitation. Her works bastardize the canards that have controlled women’s bodies, their thoughts, experience, expectations and desires. Her narrative technique is so explicit that it makes the readers sympathize with her characters as one does with one’s acquaintances. Her stories disturb people, make them think, show them a new perspective not known earlier, persuade them to reanalyze the already known facts, show them a new path to see the male dominated society from women’s point of view and give them new rules. But they don’t contain the poetic beauty, satire, twist and euphemism which are considered as the common characteristics of stories. She has used narrative method or debatable form to give her readers an idea of the feminist movement. However her stories have not lacked humanity, sensitivity and feedback which are the common features of stories. As Kalpana Rentala puts it,

Volga has explained in detail the male dominance which has indirectly exploited the women in families….. Through her stories Volga has pin pointed the multi faceted family tortures in the three faces of torture, body politics and their social outlook. Her stories bring the gender politics to discussion from the family background built on reality instead of putting them in theoretical form. (n. pag.)

Volga’s works go beyond the Western conception of feminism and provide the strength and vision for Indian feminism portraying a zeal for a world with better human relationships shattering the myths woven around woman in the name of womanhood and motherhood. Through her writings she has proved that feminism is not confined to the problems of middle class or the upper class women alone but to the women of lower class and has written many stories centered around lower class women. She has proved through her stories that women of all ages irrespective of their caste and creed have been looked down by the patriarchal society and have been affected either directly or indirectly by it. All her works either directly or indirectly present an urge for self esteem, a thirst for individuality, a quest to know oneself and make the readers feel the empathy she has for these women. She proudly calls herself a feminist writer and says that she writes to propagate the ideas of feminism. She says,

I am a feminist. I proudly call myself as a soviet feminist…. I am not a writer who writes for the sake of writing. I took up writing as an aid for propagating the ideas
of feminism in the form of literature. (Streevadham Kosame Katha Rachana Chepattanu 254-255)

According to her, women do not face problems only due to cruel husbands. She feels that exploitation of women is present in all levels even by husbands who seem to be good. She feels that women started realizing this only due to the impact of feminism. The problems of women that were once confined to the four walls of a house have started gathering public notice. This is the change that has dawned upon the society due to feminism. Talking about the difference feminism has brought into literature, she says,

Before the onset of feminism, writers used to show women’s problems as personal problems through their writings. They used to consider that if the husbands are good and free from bad habits then the wives can live happily. Feminist literature started looking at women not as wives alone but as human beings. It taught women to create a separate identity for themselves in the society. It created women characters that instead of asking for a place in the hearts of men or near their feet started asking for their identity as an individual. It is feminism which introduced identity politics to the middle class women. (Streelanu Vaari Asthitwala Anveshanaku PRerempindame Streevada Sahitya Lakshyam 16-17)

As a feminist writer she looks at women as human beings and not as wives, daughters, and mothers alone. Her gallery of women consists of mothers, mothers-in-law, daughters-in-law, daughters, sisters-in-law, working women, labour women, housewives, deserted women, divorcees, widows, spinsteris, unmarried women and even unwed mothers. Most of them are teenage or middle class women. But there are some old women too. Almost all her women are rebellious in nature though they seem to be placid in the beginning. Most of them cross the threshold of their homes to live the lives they want. She writes as the champion of women.

A study of her stories reveals her real potential as a writer. Thirteen of her stories have been taken up for study. Her stories “Nose-stud” and “Marriage” talk about the problems involved in marriage, while “Agony” and “Into Light” discuss the problems a woman faces after marriage. “Experiment” shows living together as a solution for the problems of marriage. “Who are the real enemies?” shows how men try to play politics in mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship “Walls” show the role played by the society in spoiling the relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. “Companionship” revolve round the problems of widowhood. “Security” talks about the
suffering of women due to the infidelity of the husbands. “What is to be done?” discusses
the exploitation of women in the name of marriage. “A Political Story” and “Bhinna
Sandarbhulu” [Different Situations] depict how society tries to claim rights over the
breeding potential of a woman and sees her as a breeding machine and nothing else. Out
of these except “Different Situations” all the other stories have been translated into
English. In all these stories the protagonists face problems in one way or the other.
Almost all of them rebel at the problem and try to free them from the tormenting
situation.

Problems are not new to women. They sprout up suddenly in one way or the
other. For a teenage girl marriage becomes a very big problem. She should change herself
according to the tastes of the groom and his people in order to get married. This is what
happens in the story “Nose stud”. “Nose stud” is the story of an unmarried girl Rama.
Rama in her third year has got her nose pierced. But the hole has not been accurately put
up and as a result the hole has been made big with a scar around it. During her tenth year
when Rama’s grandmother who has got her nose pierced died, her nose stud is given to
Rama as promised by her grandmother. She doesn’t wear it as she is teased by her
friends. Rama does not bother about her scar on the nose till her bride viewing starts.
When all the four alliances in a row show the scar on Rama’s nose as a reason to deny
her, Rama’s father get her operated and the scar is made invisible. Even after that none of
the alliances get fixed up. Rama finishes her B.A. and starts working as a typist. Finally
one alliance gets fixed. The groom’s sister is Rama’s neighbour and the groom is
working as a lecturer. The groom’s party visits Rama’s house views her and leaves with a
satisfaction asking for the dates to be fixed up. That evening the groom’s sister asks
Rama to accompany her to get her nose holed. She says that it is the groom’s wish. Rama
goes in a frenzy and declines the offer saying that she will not get her nose pierced even
if it breaks up the alliance.

Rama is a “good looking girl with tanned white complexion with a pretty face.”
She has a “long braid and well proportioned body.” (17) But she does not consider beauty
as an important feature in one’s life and “is tired of hearing the girls talk disappointedly
about their noses.” (19) She does not bother much about the scar on her nose and feels
that it is not at all a problem. When anybody views it as a problem she retorts, “Why is it
a problem? It doesn’t interfere with my breathing. I can still smell things. I don’t have any nose related diseases. I haven’t even had a cold in four, five years. What’s the problem with my nose?” (19) She even misses the scar when it is removed through an operation. “The scar-less nose appeared to mock her. She is used to the scar. It had been a part of her. Now that it was gone, Rama missed it for some time.” (20) Like any normal she is not after fashions of the day. She is ‘astounded’ (21) to see the girls getting their noses pierced just for the sake of fashion. But like an ordinary girl she feels marriage is important for a girl. So she “feels as if a big burden is lifted from her shoulders” (22) when the alliance gets fixed up. But she feels hurt when she is asked to get her nose pierced for the sake of the groom and denies doing it. Hence she ‘declares with her nose twitching in anger and resentment, “I will not get my nose pierced even if that breaks this alliance.” (22) She is an assertive woman who doesn’t want to lose her self-respect at any cost. She is trying to understand the agonies of her parents to get her married. That’s why she accepts for the operation to remove the scar on her nose in spite of her reluctance to do so. At the same time she doesn’t want to yield too much to damage her self-will.

Rama’s mother is a typical Indian mother for whom marriage is more important in the life of a woman. She even curses her mother-in-law for getting Rama’s nose pierced which stands in the way of her marriage. She gets more tensed when a groom’s party visits her. She wants her daughter to pass through the test of bride viewing and hence is worried about her complexion.

The groom’s sister is a woman who thinks that women should get themselves transformed as per their husband’s tastes. Hence when her brother feels disappointed about Rama not having a nose stud she even without consulting Rama promises her brother that the problem can be fixed and hastens Rama to get her nose pierced.

Volga tries to show how the dowry problem gets manifested into several other problems and takes different shape. She gives her general view that problems persist due the inability of people in identifying the root cause. Volga says, “If one is able to understand what a problem is really about or identify where the real problem lies, one could easily solve most of the world’s problems.” (18) Without knowing that dowry is the real cause of problem in a marriage, people start discussing about unnecessary things like the beauty of the girls and so on.
Parents and girls feel happy and satisfied on getting a prospective groom. They feel that their sufferings have come to an end with marriage. But in reality the real agony of a girl starts with her marriage. As a wife she has to make many submissions and many compromises. If she refuses to do so, her married life is at risk. She is scorned at even by her own parents. She has to undergo the struggle all alone. The psychological torment of such a woman is inexplicable. This is the story of Sita in “Agony”. It shows the psychological turmoil of a boisterous woman whose enthusiasm is crushed to feet. It portrays the struggle of a woman against the paradigms of the society, the dos and don’ts prescribed for a woman. It also shows the inferiority complex of a man when his wife outfits him and the form it takes. Sita is bubbly woman filled with enthusiasm. Right from her childhood, she has been asked by her family members not to be so bouncy. She is working as a typist in the same college where she has studied. After marriage her husband finds her buoyancy repulsive and tries to suppress it in every possible way. He is a mediocre man who gets tired easily and finding the protagonist full of vitality and energy feels jealous of her. He tries to dominate her by asking her not to work in the pretext of love. When she declares that she would work he demands that she should give away her salary to him to which she doesn’t agree. It gives rise to a quarrel between them and he asks her to get out of his house. When she goes to her maternal home, her parents abuse her for her behaviour and compel her to go back to her husband. So she goes to her friend’s house, stays there for the night and starts living separately from the next day onwards. She lives happily with her two children. To put her in a tight corner, her husband takes away the children claiming that they are his. She is very much worried as she knows pretty well that her children need her love and care. So she meets a lawyer to fight for her children. But the lawyer makes it clear that as a man her husband has more rights over the children than her. He being the absolute owner, they are his property whereas she is only the kshetra ‘land’ for bringing the children into this world. He further informs her that if she sue for divorce, she may be given the chance of bringing up the children only for a few days till they are five years old. After that they will be given away to the father. She is even advised to go for a compromise with her husband. But she is not ready to submit herself to her husband even for the sake of her children and is determined to fight for her children at any cost - even at the cost of shedding her blood.
Through the story Volga tries to portray the influence of society on the life of women. When the protagonist is trying to make her life happy, the society is continuously trying to spoil her happiness. “Everyone around me tried to spoil my happiness, puncture my pride.” (355) The society tries to mould the girls into dolls but not into human beings. “Mother wanted me to sit like a doll like the rest of the girls. Dolls are for girls to play with, why girls should be like dolls?”(356) Through the story Volga tries to project that right from the childhood, gender discrimination has been imposed on girls. They are asked not to play certain games. Girls are meant to play only indoor games, but not outdoor games. When the protagonist demands to play marbles, they used to question her, “Is any other girl of your age playing marbles?” (356) She portrays how the girls are asked not to run but walk slowly. Her mother warns her,

“Look Sita! I shall not tolerate it any more if you run. Girls should not run like that. They should walk slowly. If you don’t stop crazy running and mad laughter, I will break your legs, beware!” (357-58)

Volga portrays the restrictions imposed by the society on boys and girls. The society which has imposed certain rules for girls has also imposed the contrary rules for boys. She argues that the society which asks girls not to run, demands boys that they should run and walk faster and asks girls not to laugh but demands boys not to cry. When Sita’s brother walks slowly her father demands, “Why are you dragging your feet like a female slut? Can’t you run fast and get back sooner?” (358). When Sita’s brother puts on a weepy face her father shouts, “Why are you crying like a woman? What’s that grumbling?” (359).

The protagonist of the story Sita is a girl “bubbling with enthusiasm, running, jumping and laughing all the time.”(355) and who is happy at being born a woman. “I never regretted that I was born a woman… I rejoiced at being born a woman. At every stage in my life I was happy that I was a girl.” (355)

In spite of the society trying hard to grim her down she is never downhearted.

Everyone around me tried to spoil my happiness, puncture my pride. Yet I never felt dispirited or disheartened. I would find some or the other reason to feel happy about myself - and be proud of myself. In fact, I could always find some new reason, new energy to do so. My zest for life never waned. (355)
She tries to be on par with the boys of her age, trying to play the games they played and behave like them. Unlike the girls of her age she doesn’t prefer indoor games. “I liked playing karra-billa.” (356) And “The game of marbles in which one had to target and hit a marble from a distance appeared to me much more interesting and challenging.” (357)

She can’t understand the logic behind making women cry and then claiming that women’s crying is a bad trait. “Ordering girls not to laugh, making them cry and again considering crying a woman’s bad trait - all these appeared confusing to me then.” (359) She is proud being a girl. She proudly declares, “I am bouncing because I am a girl”. (359) She never feels shy but feels proud. “Things about which the world expected me to feel shy, I never felt shy about them. In fact they appeared to me things about which I could feel proud.” (360) On attaining puberty she is not ashamed but scared and confused. “I was not ashamed but definitely scared. Since I did not know anything about my body, I was confused. I didn’t want to feel shy and I was not unhappy either.” (362) For her being a woman is something to feel happy. Hence she can not accept others trying to suppress her for her being a woman.

She frankly expresses her love and desire for sex and is shocked to learn that her husband is irritated at this behaviour of hers and learns to suppress her emotions. As any other normal she feels happy and fulfilled on learning that she is pregnant. With pride she feeds her baby.

That day, the day I knew I was going to become a mother, something happened to me. I could reach out to the sky. Along with the joy that swelled in my heart, a small fear too was born in some corner. …… I used to feel fulfilled whenever the baby moved inside me………… I was egger for the arrival of that little one drawing life from me……. I was proud that my blood was turning into food for my child. (367)

Her enthusiasm does not diminish even after becoming a mother of two children, working at home and in the college and which is the cause of problems in her marital life. I used to be full of vitality despite work at home, tending to children and doing office work. That enthusiasm was not to my husbands liking. He had many suspicions. (369)
She can not tolerate her husband’s authority and imposed prohibitions for no rhyme or reason. “Accepting his authority was not possible for me …. With the awareness that I was an individual now there was no question of any submission to the prohibitions imposed by my husband.” (370) But she is not a feminist or a revolting kind of a person. Till her husband put sanctions to her working she spends her salary only for the family. It is only when he orders her to quit her job, she refuses to spend her salary for the family. “Till then I used to save a hundred rupees and spend the rest of my salary on the house hold……. I questioned him how my salary was acceptable to him my job was not.” (371)

She is self-confident and courageous and can’t be disheartened by either her fights with her husband or his expelling her out of the house. Even when her parents refuse to give her a shelter, she does not lose heart and succumb to her husband but starts living alone. In spite of all this happening her enthusiasm and vitality do not shrink a bit. “I felt exhausted but not drained. My nerves did not weaken. This struggle gave me courage, didn’t dishearten me.” (373-374) But as a mother, her children are her weakness. When she finds that her children are taken away by her husband, she feels drained.

When I asked, the teacher said, ‘Their father came in the afternoon and took them home.’ My heart, as it were, stopped. All my strength and stamina dissipated. Legs trembled under me. Eyes giddied. Extreme terror in the heart. Uncontrollable grief welled up from my entrails. Do what? How to bring back the children, Limbs were as if paralyzed. Weakness overcame me. Never before did I experience such a situation’ (374)

But this is only a temporary shrinking. In no time she regains her stamina and resolves to be courageous to fight back for her children. She is the one who thinks that crying is not the solution for any problem. She cautions herself even in the worst of the situations, “This weeping would not do. This weeping would drain my heart. This grieving would ruin my body.” (377)

Her mother is an average Indian mother who has a lot of restrictions for her daughter, expects her to behave according to the code of behaviour ordained for women.

Mother used to beat me for not keeping in place mytidily combed hair. (355) Mother wanted me to sit like a doll like the rest of the girls. (356)
She even has restrictions as to which game Sita should play and abandons her playing marbles. She forces Sita to play the indoor games must against her wishes.

The one hundred and fifty marbles I won, my mother threw them away into the canal. She warned me that she would break my hands if I ever touched marbles again. She made my father buy a carom board for me. (356-357)

She feels that giving birth to a daughter and her growing up is a curse. “Mother used to appear as if she was feeling guilty for having given birth to me who grew to be so big at twelve.” (360) But she knows the value of education and is bent on getting her daughter well educated. “Somehow mother wanted to send me for higher education.” (363) She is docile and submissive. Though she has some motherly love for Sita, she can’t do anything against her husband’s wishes and hence can’t support Sita all through her problems.

Sita’s paternal aunt is a woman fit to the proverb, ‘A woman is a woman’s enemy,’ Right from the childhood she is against Sita in each and every thing. She can’t tolerate to see the enthusiasm and vitality of Sita. “If I look a little excited, she used to feel as if chilli powder was rubbed into her skin, she would sputter in irritation.” (359)

She feels that girl should never be happy and lively. She retorts, “That’s what! Why that liveliness? After all a girl. Why is she bouncing like that being a girl? Neither modestly nor obedience!” She fumed. (359) She provokes Sita’s father not to send her for higher studies and not to send her for job.

Sita’s maternal aunt is a woman who can understand Sita’s vitality and who supports her. “Oh, this one! She has been like that since birth. Very active” said my maternal aunt. She was the only one who never scolded me.’(359).

Sita’s friend Bharathi is a true friend who gives her shelter and helps her in times of her need. Thus the story has a gallery of women with a mother, a daughter, a friend, and aunts. If some are traditional and opposed to women’s empowerment, some are unconventional and support such women.

Through the story Volga voices against the deep rooted gender-discrimination in the society. She shows how women are dominated by men and how the society supports such an attitude. Through the childhood of Sita, she portrays the suppressions a girl has to undergo in the name of the gender discrimination. Later through the marriage of Sita she
unveils the domination of men on women, his authority over women. She beautifully adopts questioning technique to voice the women who are not supposed to have rights over their children.

People have a wrong notion that revolting wives alone suffer while submissive wives enjoy the protection of their husbands and hence submission is the key role for a happy married life. It is not the truth always. Sometimes wives who are submissive also suffer in the hands of avaricious husbands. If Sita suffers for not submitting herself to her husband’s exploitation, Saraswati of “Into Light” suffers due to her submissive nature. “Into Light” is the plight of a lady officer who has become a puppet in the hands of her greedy husband trying to exploit her in every possible way. Saraswati is an officer in a responsible post in the Secretariat. Right from her childhood she has been trained to be an obedient wife who does not act against her husband’s wishes. Her husband Parthasarathi is a lawyer by profession but takes care of his wife’s job much. He decides which file she has to sign and which file she shouldn’t. He makes the deal and takes bribe on her behalf. All Saraswati has to do in the office is to sign in the files he asks her to and repeat her husband’s words in her defense both to her superiors and her subordinates. When she does so, she has a surge of hatred towards her own self and imagines herself to be an insect.

Things take a sudden turn when Anil Kumar joins as her sub-ordinate. He prepares a file and asks Saraswati to sign it while Parthasarathi warns her not to sign it. Sarawathi is squeezed between Anil Kumar and Parthasarathi in this matter. When Anil Kumar looks at her with hatred, she feels as if she looks at her own image. When Anil Kumar scolds her saying that, “A prostitute is better than her” (96), those words stir up something in her. All these days, she has been under the misconception that she is following the words of her husband as a Pativratha [a chaste woman]. But when she hears that by doing so, she is no less than a prostitute, she feels like walking out of her married life. Added to that when she pleads her husband that she will sign that file alone which Anil Kumar is demanding her to, her husband blames her that she has an affair with Anil Kumar. After a lot of inner tumult Saraswati finally regains self-confidence to sign the file against the wishes of her husband. Saraswati compares herself to a yellow insect caught into the amorous snares of a Python. This insect is symbolic of Saraswati
where as the Python is symbolic of Parthasarathi. When Saraswati gains the confidence to act against the will of her husband the python in her imagination suddenly vanishes and the insect turns out to be a fluttering bird. Anil Kumar with his concern and compassion brings her to senses and gives her the courage to face the reality. With a resolution, she calls Anil Kumar to her home, hugs him and kisses him passionately and signs the file which her husband has asked not to. Then she informs Anil Kumar her decision to take divorce from her husband and get transferred to some other place. In the meantime she plans to stay with her parents for a while and if they don’t agree to her decision she plans to travel all around the country till she gets a divorce.

Saraswati is a docile and submissive woman. Right from the childhood she has imbibed the traditional values in her. She acts in accordance with the traditions that demand how a woman should be – walking softly, talking in a feeble voice, not raising her head in front of strangers and so on. In spite of her high education she goes “about the house cutely and pleasantly in the same way – as a small girl, as a sweet little parrot. (86) She “couldn’t stir out of the house alone” and needs her father “to chaperone her.” (86) She is brainy and can “read any lesson only once and recite it from memory.” (86) But in spite of her intelligence she is not wise to understand the ways of her husband. She considers him as her god. On the day of her marriage,

She touched her husband’s feet reverently. Those turmeric smeared feet were to Saraswathi like Sri Rama’s. She realized that very moment that those feet were indeed meant to be worshipped. (87)

She firmly believes in the vow of chastity and thinks that to be a good wife one must abide by one’s husband in all aspects. She surrenders not only her life but also her job to her husband. She says, “He and I are one and the same. I’ll do exactly as he says. My job and my life are all his.” (89) According to her to be a chaste woman “she must do what he wants her to do. She must go along with him- in thought, word and deed.” (89) Her innocence and timid nature paves way for her husband to terrify her. He makes her feel terrified and the fear induces a lack of confidence in her self. A warning to be always careful, a fear that she will slip and fall at any time, overcomes her. In her sleep she has nightmares that she is falling off from a great height.
When she was climbing steps, a fear that she would slide down. Trembling in her soles. Her knees would weaken. Her palms would be sweaty. (87)

Her docility makes her husband exploit her. As a result she does not do justice to her job. “All that she does is to sign on the files Parthasarathi asks her to; and to defend her decisions, repeat his words like a parrot to both her superiors and subordinates.” (88)

Gradually she realizes her position and feels repugnant about her own inability to act against the amorous snares of her husband. In her repugnance she compares herself to a yellow crawling insect. The reason is like the insect she also gets frightened at the slightest irritation. She inwardly hates herself for being a puppet in the hands of her husband. “Disgust- distaste – she feels repugnant towards herself. She finds her signature repulsive.” (89) In spite of her hatred towards her behaviour she follows him blindly as a result of the imbibed traditions. That’s why when Anil Kumar retorts to her, “You are a prostitute, a down right prostitute is better than you” and “you have sold your body, your individuality and everything to your husband.” (96) she feels relieved. She feels as if she has been relieved of a great burden weighing all these days. She muses, “She is not a 

Saraswati’s mother is portrayed as a traditional mother who makes her daughter “worship (Gods) in many ways” (86) and teaches her daughter to be “an obliging wife, a pativrata like Anasuya and Arundhati.” (86) For her marriage occupies the predominant position in a woman’s life. Hence when Saraswati is preparing for the Civil Services she is “adamant that Saraswati should get married.” (86) When Saraswati has a problem with her husband due to her individual thinking, her mother “terrified Saraswati repeatedly
telling her that a woman had nobody else to fall back on except her husband.” (90) On the whole she is a conventional mother who tries to make her daughter a docile, submissive wife and not an individual with independent thoughts.

Thus the story depicts the pitiable condition of the working women in the hands of male chauvinism and patriarchy. In spite of their economic independence they are not free to act according to their wish even in the office. Without merely presenting the problem, the author has shown how such women can transform themselves into assertive women. The story shows “the growth of a working woman into a professional.” (Vijayashree 190)

Men like Parthasarathy try to threaten their wives and keep them under control all the time. They even suppress the intelligence of their wives by continuously warning them that are incapable doing anything. The result is that the wives gradually forget their real stamina and turn out to be slaves for such husbands doing only what their husbands ask them to do. Like Saraswati of “Into Light” Sobha of “What is to be done?” is also subjugated by her husband and is treated like a fool incapable of doing anything on her own. Like Saraswati Sobha too undergoes transformation and finally learns to overlook her husband. If Anil Kumar helps Saraswati to overcome her fear for her husband, Shobha’s friend Shanta helps her to come out of her sorrow state. The story “What is to be Done?” deals with the gender discrimination meted out to women. It also portrays how women (especially Intelligent Women) are suppressed by their husbands and how their intelligence is subdued. It is the story of two friends Sobha and Santha. Of them Sobha is very intelligent and smart. But she is humble and submissive. She does not want to do anything that would irritate her parents. So immediately after completing her B.Sc she marries a scientist according to her parents’ wish and settles as a housewife.

Santha is not as smart as Sobha. But she is ambitious and courageous. She always tries to do what she feels like doing. As a result she faces a lot of problems at home with her parents and her brother. She does not consider the problems and goes ahead with her way of life. After completing her degree, she fights with her parents and continues her studies and finishes her M.Sc. After completing M.Sc she goes abroad to do M.S. and becomes a scientist in a Research Institute in Hyderabad. She loves Ramkumar, her fellow student studying in some other college. But since he couldn’t get admission in
M.Sc he did his B.Ed and settled as a teacher. He wants Santha to give up her studies and get job in the same town and marry him. Since she is not prepared for that kind of a life, Santha bids goodbye to him. She completes her studies as per her wishes and soars high in her career. She remains a spinster. As a result she has to bear the criticism of her colleagues. They spread all kinds of rumour on her behaviour. In spite of her success in her career, Santha feels some vacuum in her life. She is unable to analyse the reason for her misery.

At this juncture, Sobha’s husband Ram Mohan joins as a Research Assistant to Santha. One day while chatting with him, Santha discovers that his wife is her childhood friend Sobha. Immediately Ram Mohan invites Santha for lunch the next day. Santha is enthusiastic to meet Sobha. At the same time she is also nervous thinking of their sudden parting. Immediately after Sobha’s marriage, before her departure to Hyderabad, Sobha has visited Santha and has informed Santha that she is frightened of her husband. On being pinioned she has even informed that she (Sobha) is frightened of her husband even while kissing him. This has raised many doubts in the mind of Santha. The next day she goes to Ram Kumar’s room and raises the same doubt to him. As a reply to her question, he kisses her and Santha finds delight in it. Santha informs the same to Sobha and weeps bitterly for Sobha. Sobha gets agitated at the very idea of Shata going to Ram kumar’s room and having been kissed by him. So she pulls Santha out of her house and has stops talking to her. Now recalling all this, Santha is filled with mixed feelings of enthusiasm and doubts for Sobha.

The next day Santha visits Mohan’s house. There she notices that Mohan is ill-treating Sobha. In their privacy after lunch, Sobha bursts out how Mohan has discovered her intelligence and in order to suppress her continuously criticizes her making her a fool of herself. He doesn’t even allow Sobha to pursue her studies. For three months both the friends continuously rack their brains on what to do and finally conclude that Sobha has to apply for the law course.

According to the plan, one day Santha comes at 12 O’clock and picks up Sobha. They both go to the university. On the way they come across a procession of women fighting for rights. They are distributing some hand outs inviting everyone to join a meeting that evening. Santha asks Sobha if they both can attend the meeting. She fears
that Sobha would say no keeping the return of her children from school in mind. But to her surprise Sobha answers in the affirmative. They both attend the meeting. In the meeting a woman beedi worker talks in detail about the problems they face and how unsupportive their husbands are. Inspired by the beedi workers words, Santha says that she has understood the vacuum in her life and that she decides to fight for the cause of all her fellow women. By the time they return it is nine o’clock and Santha gets worried about Sobha’s family. But Sobha having inspired by the beedi workers words says that she is not worried and declares her decision to fight for her educational rights. The story ends with an optimistic note that the night is also prompted by their enthusiasm and is waiting for day break.

Sobha is portrayed as a beautiful girl with a “smiling face that one would want to see again and again.” (158) She is a wise girl who can not do anything that irritates others. She is modest and “never said a word more than necessary or did anything that shouldn’t be done.”(158) She never wants to do anything without telling her parents. She says, “I don’t know. I never do anything without telling my parents. I’ll never do anything they don’t like.” (158)

She is hard-working and helpful. She helps her friend Santha for hours with physics and math. When they participate in debates and competitions as a team she goes “to the library to research and collect all the information they both needed.” She “would calmly make up for her friend’s inadequacy and argue their point convincingly enough that in the end they would win as a team.” (159) But with all these accomplishments she is humble and not proud. From Santha’s observation, “Though she was ahead of her friends in all her endeavors, she was always dearly friendly with them and nobody ever had a reason to be angry with her.” (159) She is never jealous of her friend Santha. Even when Santha wins the competitions or in the elections due to the efforts of Sobha, she never feels a bit envious of Santha. Santa plays the role of Madhuravani in Kanyasulkam instead of Sobha since Sobha’s parents don’t allow her to play that particular role. Sobha trains Santha and as a result Santha is thoroughly applauded for her performance. Even then Santha doesn’t feel envious of Sobha but feels happy. “Finally Santha played the role of Madhuravani. … The artists and literary people of the town were all there and
Santha was drenched in their acclaim. Santha felt very sorry for Sobha, but Sobha gave her a big hug and congratulated her.” (163)

The traditional values have been ingrained into to that extent that she can’t do anything against her parents’ wishes. She considers it a sin. “If there is something that shouldn’t be done – in her judgment or that of her parents – she stays away from it, with no regret whatsoever.” (172)

With all her intelligence she too behaves like an ordinary, tradition bound woman when it comes to marriage. For her the sole purpose of a woman’s life is to get married and to rear children. She prefers marriage to education. She is ready to give up her higher studies to get married. When Santha asks Sobha why she can’t refuse her marriage preparations and insist that she wants to study further, she retorts,

“No matter what degree I earn or what job I get, I have to get married and raise children. That is what is important, isn’t it? Then, why not give importance to that when we make future plans?” (174)

She is too conventional to think that mother’s home is a temporary shelter for a girl and she is bound to go to her mother-in-law’s finally. She asks Santha, “Whether our mothers buy things or not, can we stay with them forever? Don’t we have to go our in-law’s place in the end?” (181) She can’t tolerate women who cross their limits. According to her, going to a man’s room is something unconventional. She scolds Santha for going to Ramkumar’s room, “My foot. Don’t give me this crap. I suspected you were crazy, but going to his room. That’s the limit! What if something happened?” (185)

Like a normal girl who looks forward for marriage, she gives utmost importance for bridal decorations and feels that they alone make a marriage.

Sobha consulted as many books for and worked as hard at bridal preparation as she had at preparing for an essay or a presentation. Only now she was on tenterhooks…..One had to wonder whether she thought marriage was defined by this decoration. (177)

After marriage “Sobha has changed a lot. She has put on weight, lost some color, and developed dark circles around her eyes.” (191) Her vexation in life makes her smile artificial. Everything for her is in relation to her husband. Hence when her childhood
friend becomes her husband’s superior, she too views her in the same way. She informs Santha, “You are my husband’s boss now, right?” she laughed. (192)

Her self-respect makes her regret for her losses in life. She stays awake many nights thinking of her bygone days. She can differentiate between true love and bossism. When her parents tries to control her she knows that it out of love and so it isn’t difficult for her to defer to her mother’s wishes. When she understands that her husband out of inferiority complex is trying to suppress her by bossing her, she can not accept it.

“To tell you the truth, he is an idiot, uncivilized creature. He recognized right at the start that I was smarter than him, so he started to intimidate me, put me down, just made it his goal to prove to me that he was better than me.” (195)

She gains confidence with Santha’s friendship. Her yearning for education is so strong that it can’t be suppressed for too long. She has taken a bold decision to continue her studies without her husband’s consent.

Over the last ten years, Sobha pleaded with him several times to allow her continue her studies, but was severely turned down. This time, she chose not even to try. (200)

She turns bold and determined towards the end and gets ready to reach her goal. When Santha expresses her doubt of Mohan causing her a trouble for going home late, she denies it saying, “I am the one who should cause trouble. It is late…. For my life. It is time to start the struggle without further delay. I will fight no matter what happens. Now I know what I want and what I should do.” (204)

Santha is a courageous, rebellious girl right from the beginning. She is ready to face any kind of tantrum to achieve what she wants. She is ambitious and competent. She is very different from her friend Sobha who is modest and humble. Because of her “want-it-all” nature, she faces a lot of problems at home. But nothing can stop her soaring high. “She would remain disturbed for a while, but couldn’t help resuming participation in the competitions.” (159)

Like Sobha she too has imbibed the traditional values that dominate Indian society. She is frightened of the stigma the society attaches to the girls who move freely with boys. Hence she cannot escape the pang of guilt when she goes with a boy to a restaurant to drink a cup of coffee. When her friend Ram Kumar invites her for a cup of
coffee, “Santha walked with him reluctantly. Even after sitting down in the restaurant and drinking a glass of water, she remained uncomfortable.” (171) She explains her dilemma to Ram Kumar,

I would really like to sit with you for a while and chitchat, but I am afraid I may be doing something wrong. …. It wouldn’t be surprising if this cup of coffee becomes an instrument in maligning my character. What if somebody says, ‘this girl goes to restaurants with boys.’ (172)

She is a true friend who comes to the aid of Sobha in times of her need and really wishes that everything should be alright for her friend. When Sobha is in a hassle and does not know, what to do, Santha takes up Sobha’s problems on her shoulders to rescue her. But she doesn’t have the same compassion for Ram Kumar, her lover. When Ram Kumar objects her going abroad for pursuing M.S. she relinquishes her love for him and goes abroad. She doesn’t want to give any false promises to her lover. On being badgered she replies Ram Kumar she may bid farewell to him after going to America. Like a feminist she tells her lover that there is nothing wrong if women pay back to men the same ill-treatment they are paid. She says,

No, nothing, not really. There is a possibility every one of your suspicions will come true. I will get ahead of you in education. Then we may not treat each other as equals. I might look down upon you. So what? Aren’t men looking down upon women today? (188)

She remains a spinster not because of her undying love for Ramkumar, but because “she didn’t have the patience or the desire to give birth to and raise children.” (190) Only after achieving her goals and reaching a saturated position in her career, she feels a kind of vacuum in her life and continuously searches for some meaning in her life. Though she appears to be unconventional, her conventional feelings make her feel sorry for her way of living. Though she has achieved a lot, she feels she hasn’t achieved anything because she doesn’t have a family of her own. Before meeting Sobha she broods of her current position, “Yet there was some dissatisfaction….. some turbulence …. loneliness …..” She thinks that she “would put on a lifeless smile when Sobha told her about her life….. Should she hide dissatisfaction with her life, the weariness, the loneliness….” (190)
She is not proud of her position and doesn’t want to show off her superiority to Sobha. She tries to behave friendly as she had been in the past. Hence she denies to eat with Mohan leaving out Sobha and insists that she would dine with her friend. With her friendship she makes Sobha come out of her passive state, boosts her confidence and makes her continue her studies. She gets inspired by the beedi workers words and feels, “It is not enough to fight for myself. I should fight for all of us women. I should join others and fight for the common good, that’s what I should do.” (204) Thus she is portrayed as a woman of feministic ideas right from the beginning. Though she rarely appears to be conventional, those feelings of conventionalism fade out immediately and she gets transformed into an unconventional woman fighting for the cause of women.

Right from the childhood women are taught to be under the security of men. They bear the atrocities of men only for this security. But in fact the truth is something different. Under the control of men, women are always insecure. They lose their self-confidence and have to be continuously on the run to please them. They are always worried about losing their love and try their best to gain it. But this reality doesn’t dawn upon women very easily. It takes time for women to realize the real situation. But once they realize, there is no turning back and nothing can prevent them from achieving their goals. That’s the reason why men continuously suppress women in the name of traditions glorifying womanhood and motherhood. Like Sobha of “What is to be done?” Dhanalakshmi of “Security” also has this realization very late in her life. The difference is that for Sobha, it is her friend Santha who has come to her rescue. But surprisingly for Dhanalakshmi, it is her husband’s lover who tries to safeguard her.

“Security” is the story of a spinster Sujatha who at the age of thirty-five knowingly falls a prey to the amorous advances of a married man, Raja Rao. Till then she has several times evaded such men cleverly. But this time she too gets interested in gaining the love of Raja Rao and hence accepts his proposal. What has started as an affair gradually starts obsessing her. She starts to yearn more for Raja Rao and hence nags him to give divorce to Dhanalakshmi. She strongly believes that Raja Rao’s wife Dhanalakshmi is ugly with coarse manners. Her friend Geetha warns her against her affair and advices her that she has been foolish in yearning for Raja Rao’s love. One Saturday evening she goes to the Birla Temple in search of peace in the presence of God.
After coming out of the sanctum sanctorum, she sits near the flower patches to get some breeze. There she happens to see a sad woman who is being comforted by her friend. In spite of her sorrow the woman is “strikingly beautiful, deserving of a second glance”. From their conversation Sujatha understands that the beautiful woman is none other than Raja Rao’s wife, Dhanalakshmi. Sujatha is attracted towards Dhanalakshmi and tries to develop friendship with her. Dhanalakshmi too gives a positive response and explains Sujatha the agony that she has come across in life. Looking at Dhanalakshmi’s good nature and the turmoil she is facing, Sujatha immediately decides to quit from the life of Raja Rao and starts evading Raja Rao from that very day. Finally one day she informs Raja Rao that she wants to cut off her relationship with him. She doesn’t yield to his threats and is strong in her decision. In the mean time, Dhanalakshmi too leaves Raja Rao, puts her children in a residential school, joins in hostel and searches for a job. Sujatha with the help of her friend Geetha finds a job for Dhanalakshmi. Raja Rao gets transferred to another town, refuses to pay maintenance to Dhanalakshmi and goes away. Unable to make the both ends meet with her income, Dhanalakshmi plans to start to a working women’s hostel. Sujatha and Geetha help her in the process. Now Dhanalakshmi’s children stay with her and she is happy with her life. Sujatha and Geetha too join the same hostel. All the three enjoy life. But Sujatha feels guilty of having shattered Dhanalakshmi’s happy married life. When Sujatha reveals the truth to Dhanalakshmi who she really is, Dhanalakshmi instead of feeling angry with Sujatha thanks her for having given her a wonderful life. According to her, her life with Raja Rao was miserable and insecure. Now she feels more confident and happy. Both Sujatha and Dhanalakshmi feel happy about being masters of their own lives.

Through the story Volga tries to boost the morale and confidence of women who have been deserted by their husbands. She shows how women can lead a happy life without the support of men. She also depicts where the real security of a woman’s life is – not with her husband but within herself.

Sujatha is an unconventional woman who doesn’t care for the traditional norms of the society. At the age of thirty-five when she learns that Raja Rao a married man of forty years with two children is attracted towards her, she without trying to escape it “does everything to enhance her appeal, carefully observes his moves towards her and responds
favourably.” (109) She doesn’t feel guilty of her act of beguiling a married man. Instead she even feels more authoritative in having him exclusively for herself. Hence she nags him to divorce his wife. “Sujatha gradually became restless. She was more determined than ever to make Raja Rao her own…..Somehow she had to liberate him from Dhanalakshmi.” (111) She falls a prey to the pretensions of Raja Rao and thoroughly believes that he is not happy with his wife and she alone is giving him all kinds of comfort including food. She in her confused state doesn’t even try to reconcile how Raja Rao would have lived all these days if what she believes is true. She ponders,

He was not happy with her (his wife) she decided. Having noticed that Raja Rao thoroughly enjoyed the dishes she made, she concluded that Dhanalakshmi had failed as a wife even in feeding her husband. Why shouldn’t he be hers when she had provided him and continued to provide him with comfort in so many ways? (112)

At the same time she is filled with feelings of sisterhood the moment she watches the grief of Dhanalakshmi. Hence she decides to get out of the way of Dhanalakshmi by quitting from Raja Rao’s life. When it doesn’t work as she plans (even after her quitting Raja Rao, he does not go back to his wife), she even helps Dhanalakshmi in all possible ways to stand on her own. Thus she tries to compensate for the havoc she has created in Dhanalakshmi’s life. She doesn’t want to pose herself as a redeemer for Dhanalakshmi and hence voluntarily reveals the truth (who she really is) to Dhanalakshmi. “On several occasions Sujatha felt like revealing to Dhanalakshmi who she was, but could not bring herself to do it. But one day she did muster enough courage” (123). On the whole she is portrayed as a woman who initially becomes a prey to the amorous snares of a man, but corrects herself and finds a way out for all her problems and those of a victimized woman.

Dhanalakshmi is delineated as an intelligent woman of strong composure. She too is unconventional. Unlike a tradition bound woman, she doesn’t consider her husband her everything and endure his infidelity. She boldly walks out of her married life and shows him that she can live without him. She even considers marriage a business deal and says that she has incurred heavy loss in her business since her husband has cheated her. Talking about her marriage she informs Sujatha, “When I look back it all looks like a business deal. Back then I thought it was profitable deal, but now it looks like I lost
everything.”(118) When she finds how running a women’s hostel is profitable she courageously decides to quit her job and start one. Though she is emotional and psychologically dependent on her husband in the beginning, she gradually learns to come out of her dazed state and starts planning her future in a confident way. On the whole she is portrayed as a confident woman lucid in her thoughts and who doesn’t want to accept her husband’s betrayal. She is very different from the protagonist of Shashi Deshpande’s “A Day Like Any Other” who accepts her husbands infidelity with no difference. She instead of finding fault with Sujatha for having spoilt her married life is thankful to her for helping her to live an independent, secured life. Dhanalakshmi has the courage which Volga wishes to see in women. She handles the infidelity of her husband with more confidence. As Volga has said,

Women should empower. In between a husband and wife, anyone can go ahead in any path. Wives should not consider husband and children as the sole purpose of their life. They should try to come out of that circle. They should create a world of their own. Wife need not feel depressed for the husband’s treachery as if her life has come to an end. She should think that she has a life of her own and has her own existence. She should take her life into her hands and go ahead with her life. (Volga’s Interview: Strila Rachanalu Vaari Jeevithalonunchi Choostaru 76)

Marriage is given utmost importance in Indian tradition. It is considered inevitable for both men and women. Everything in the life of a man or a woman is in someway or the other interlinked to marriage. But marriage is not the key to all the problems of life. Instead it is the Pandora box which creates all chaos in one’s life. It gives the authority for a man to boss a woman. Dhanalakshmi understands this very concept and frees herself from the clutches of marriage only after undergoing a lot of suffering. But Sunanda of “Experiment” has clearly understood the drawbacks of marriage and stays away from it. She even comes out with an alternate for marriage – the concept of “living together”. It is an experiment which has all the benefits of marriage leaving out negative aspects of marriage. In it both the members involved have the freedom to break off their deal any moment they feel it inconvenient to them. This is the very theme of the story “Experiment”.

Narendra is a government employee aged twenty-five. He is living with his parents and two sisters - Girija and Vanaja. Sunanda, his colleague is a straight forward
woman of unconventional thoughts and behaviour who cannot tolerate any kind of male chauvinism but is gentle towards her subordinates. Though Narendra appreciates her, he is so terrified of her that he cannot tolerate the very idea of loving her. He cannot imagine a life with her - a life in which he should sloth a part of the day in kitchen, and be cautious most of the time not to annoy her. On the other hand he wants to marry an ordinary girl, who does not stand on equal terms with him and who looks at him with awe and respect. When he is confused with these thoughts, his father’s friend brings his daughter to their house. The intention of the elders in bringing her is to make Narendra and the girl meet each other and share their ideas so that they can get married. But Narendra compares her with Sunanda and finds her very down to earth with third-rate tastes. He questions the girl about the New Economic Policy which scares her and hence she denies marrying him. In the mean time Rammohan, Narendra’s cousin pushes aside Narendra’s fears about Sunanda and encourages him to marry her. Sunanda and Narendra love each other and it goes on well for a month. When Narendra’s parents pressurize him to get married, he proposes his marriage to Sunanda. Sunanda laughs at the idea and rejects it and suggests ‘living together’ as an alternate. According to her they can live together without getting married (going through the traditional ceremony) and live as husband and wife at their will.

Narendra who is annoyed of this idea marries Sandhya, an alliance fixed up by his mother. Sandhya is a girl trained for marriage right from her childhood. She is under the misconception that to make her life blissful she has to set up a separate family and beget children. She succeeds in the process but gets estranged from Narendra who is torn between his family and wife.

After setting up a separate family she pesters Narendra to earn more and bring his share of property. In the process Narendra gets infuriated and beats her, which leads to their separation. All through this he continues his friendship with Sunanda and she gets transferred to Anantapuram. Narendra after getting separated from his wife vacates the house and settles with his parents. Both Narendra and Sandhya take away their things. After a few months a boy is born to Narendra. On receiving the information, he is very much upset and cries secretly. At this juncture Sunanda comes to Hyderabad to get transferred to Hyderabad. On seeing Sunanda Narendra feels a surge of hope and
informs her that he is ready to ‘live together’ with her divorcing Sandhya. Sunanda goes to Anantapuram without giving him a reply. After some days he gets a letter from Sunanda in which she blames Narendra for fearing the society and refusing to ‘live together’ with her earlier. She tells him that she is looking forward to a man who is ready to wash his dirt and slush with his pure thoughts and is ready to “experiment with his invaluable life to bring about a possible transformation in the world.”(47).

Volga through the character of Narendra depicts the psychology of present day men who want intelligent and submissive wives. Though Narendra is good and appreciates Sunanda’s self-respect, he is frightened to have her ‘as his wife’. He is doubtful if he “will be able to treat her as an equal?” (2) Through him Volga shows the expectations of men to have “an ordinary girl – a girl who doesn’t stand on equal terms, a girl who treats him with awe and reverence as if he were her God” (3) as their wife.

Sunanda is a sprightly and hard working woman who “does any amount of office work competently. Her person, her table, her work is neat, tidy and well done. She is always smiling except when talking about male arrogance and superiority.” (1) She has compassion for women in general and “she is sad – when she reads about atrocities on women in the papers, when people talk about women’s problems. Her eyes fill with tears.” She is full of self respect and “cannot accept any special privileges given to her for being a woman.” (1) She is filled with humanity. Just as she does not allow anybody to boss over her, she makes sure she does not boss over those below her. With her superiors she is point-blank but friendly to the office boy. She is a modern woman who discusses vociferously world politics, feminist literature, the pros and cons of existentialism, the lyrical melody in Amjad Ali Khan’s sarod and the hand of Hindu fascism behind the destruction of Babri Masjid. Unlike a normal Indian woman she never talks about cooking. “The brightness of her wise looks is all over her face. Tall, well-built for her height – everything is good. She stands upright with self-confidence. Her spontaneous, straightforward, independent nature sometimes frightens men.” (7) “She is firm, courageous and at peace with herself.” (8) She hates the very word marriage that involves fighting everyday. She tells Narendra, “Marriage, married life – being together and fighting everyday like husband and wife – I don’t like all this. I am not ready to live like that now.’ (16) She is ambitious and competitive. Unable to tolerate her father’s male
atrocities and get married as per his wish she leaves her house after passing her Intermediate. She takes up a small job, continues her B.A. and M.A, writes A.P.P.S.C exams and settles in a job. She is happy with her present life and doesn’t want to give up her space for the sake of family. She informs Narendra, “For myself, for some space for my own self, I came away dissociating from my whole family. I am not willing to give up that space to rebuild another more or less similar family.” (17)  She doesn’t believe in glorifying motherhood. She doesn’t want to change herself for the sake of children. With confidence she invites Narendra to experiment with life by “living together”. She has a different approach towards problems. “She appears to listen sympathetically to his pain but looks at it from a different perspective. She shows him an aspect he has never seen.” (44) On the whole she is an unconventional, considerate woman with modern outlook.

Narendra’s mother Shantamma is an ordinary woman who thinks that marriage is the essence of life and coaxes Narendra to get married and she succeeds in her attempt. As a wife and mother she is a good woman who does her responsibilities. But she is no better than an ordinary mother-in-law who forgets her humanity to protect her authority over her son. When she has favourable circumstances she is good natured, but turns an arrogant lady when the conditions are not favourable. She even goes to the extent of threatening her son not to set up a separate family by not taking food for two days. When she finds it is inevitable she gets adjusted to the new circumstances and becomes normal with her daughter-in-law. She feels sorry about the life of her son when he gets separated from his wife. “Now and then Santamma thinks of the happiness her son has lost and shed tears.”(39) She advises her son to forget his difference with his wife and come to good terms for the sake of her grand children. “She’s come home, I believe. The delivery was easy. Today’s the fifth day. Go and see my dear. If both continue to be vengeful, children will be ruined.” (43)

Narendra’s wife, Sandhya is an ordinary woman who has fallen prey to the clutches of society which has taught her that “her prime duty is to cultivate enmity with her in-laws and make her husband listen to her.”(26)  She does not try to compromise with her in-laws. On the other hand she tries to pick up a quarrel with them even on trivial matters.
She also thinks that marriage is her life support; She assumes that in married life, her main responsibility is to live with nobody to compete with her and see that there is no danger of any kind to her own security; that to have children and bring them up is her next duty and there won’t be any problem if she can fulfill both of them. (26)

She is money-minded and pesters Narendra to make money. When he doesn’t heed to her words she gets into the business of making money. She thinks that the sole purpose of a woman is to have complete control over her husband and the duty of a man is to earn more and fulfill all his wife’s desires. She cares for neither moral values nor human bonds. She is callous to target Narendra’s L.I.C & P.F for her future use (in case any thing happens to him). She even pesters Narendra to ask for his share of property and when he doesn’t heed to her words she leaves the house in a huff. In general she is one of the many women created by the society who “crudely use the very perverted values the society created as arms to fight for usurping power within the same family structure.” (46)

Swarna is a normal girl whose interests are mediocre. She is interested neither in music nor in current affairs. With the green stoned golden jhumkis, pearl necklace, golden bangles, latest fashion sari, she appears to be a costly girl who doesn’t want a man interested in new economic policy to be her husband. For her the aim of life is to decorate beautifully and watch T.V and films. She doesn’t have any knowledge of the outer world. When Narendra asks her about the new economic policy she is taken aback and refuses to marry him.

Vanaja and Girija are portrayed as pampered daughters who do not have any purpose in life. All they know is to read their books and do some petty things for their brother. Much is not said about them.

Through the story “Experiment” Volga tries to portray the impact of society on the lives of men and women. Knowing the genuineness in Sunanda’s proposal of living together he does not agree to it due to his fear of society. Through the characters of Swarna and Sandhya, Volga projects the way in which the society has conditioned women with feminine qualities. Swarna has grown up with the idea that the job of girl is to decorate gorgeously, watch movies and get ready for marriage and Sandhya has been brought up with feelings that her prime duty is to cultivate enmity with her in-laws and
make her husband listen to her. She tries to see that she has nobody to compete with her and there is no danger of any kind to her own security and thus attempts to hold on tight to her life support. Thus the society has moulded her into a callous woman.

The same society that has created women like Sandhya has created women like Sunanda too. With the impact of globalization and the changes in the economic and political scenario, more women like Sunanda are coming up. They hate the very idea of marriage. But all of them are not successful in holding to their policies till the end. Some compromise for the sake of their parents. Some make some changes to their principles and feel satisfied that they are still holding on to their principles. The story of Rajani in “Marriage” is also a similar one. Rajani too like Sunanda hates marriage right from the beginning. She joins M.A. Psychology only to escape marriage. She advises her friends not to get married and not to spoil their life. But the same Rajani suddenly decides to get married. Her bosom friend Nirmala is shocked on hearing the news of Rajani’s marriage. When she enquires Rajani about it, Rajani informs her that she is entering into marriage as a business deal, since she can’t get a better job. She even informs that she will not involve herself into the deal of marriage with emotion but as an employee or a businesswoman. She says that she will fight for her demands as an employee and if she finds her husband arrogant, she will kill him. But after meeting Rajani’s fiance Vivek, Nirmala doubts if Rajani has lied to her and if she has really fallen in love with him. Because Vivek informs Nirmala that he knew that Rajani shuns at marriage and that he too hates marriage. He informs Nirmala that what actually he and Nirmala are doing is that they are going to live together, but for the sake of their parents they are acting as if they are getting married. He assures Nirmala that he and Rajani are going to live as friends and not as husband and wife. Rajani gets ready to make some sacrifices for the sake of Vivek since he too is ready for such sacrifices. Nirmala is eager to see what is really going to happen. The story ends but doesn’t conclude.

Rajani is an unconventional woman who hates the very idea of marriage. For her “anything is better than marriage.” (100) According to her it is a human sacrifice. Hence she has never attended the marriages of any of her friends. She says, “I can’t witness torture. Will anybody but a fool go to observe a human sacrifice? …Does it make any sense to go all decked out to witness a death?” (101) She even used to hate love. For her
loving a man means ‘changing a peaceful life into a nightmare’. (101) She tells her friend that she has agreed to get married considering it a business deal. She considers her husband as an investment. She says that ‘she will fight for her rights as an employee. She will do whatever a businesswoman would do to make a profit, a good return on her investment.’ (106) She doesn’t have any regard for the traditions. She calls love a lust and says that it is easier for married woman to enter into an affair than an unmarried woman. In the name of marriage she is entering into a deal of “living together” and she is ready to make some sacrifices for the man she loves on condition that he too makes some sacrifices. Though she talks much about feminist ideas, without her knowledge she too is being absorbed into the institution of marriage. But she doesn’t admit it before her friend.

Nirmala is a unconventional girl who doesn’t believe in the institution of marriage. But she doesn’t want others to follow her principle. Though she hates marriage she does try to force it onto her friends. “She is not much worried that Rajani has not been much interested in marriage.” (102)Like Rajani she never has objected to the marriage of her friends. She even considers marriage as a need for women to have their sexual desires fulfilled. At the same time she doesn’t find much difference between ‘living together’ and marriage. According to her both are one and the same. “It is like saying that grandma is an old woman.” (108) She easily traces out that Rajani is “pulling her leg” (107) by saying that she is marrying as if she is entering into a business deal. She strongly believes that Rajani is in love with Vivek and feels that “getting into business marriage is far better than falling in love with someone like this.” (108) She too feels that love demands sacrifices. Thus both the women in the story are filled with feminist ideas and have their own concept of marriage. Both of them have some aversion to marriage. Through the story Volga tries to show ‘living together’ as an alternate for marriage.

Women right from their childhood dream of a happy married life. As a result they start believing that if their husbands are free from bad habits and seem to be good their lives are blessed. They don’t even have the slightest doubt of their future standing at crossroads. Like Rajani who is dreaming of a blissful life, the protagonist of “A Political Story” too marries with lot of hopes and desires. She doesn’t realize the politics involved in a woman’s life till she sees the real face of her husband behind the mask. It is only then she starts contemplating on the truths beyond the myths woven around women. The
theme of “A Political Story” is the atrocities women face in the name of marriage, and how they are considered as mere procreators. When they become incapable of bearing children, the contract of marriage becomes void. Here a juxtaposition of two similar situations is given - one is the husband losing his right hand fingers and the other is the wife losing her ability to beget children. The indifferent behaviour of the family members towards a woman who cannot beget children is made clear.

The protagonist of the story lives with her husband Madhusudhan Rao who works in a factory in Hyderabad. One year after their marriage when her husband is working on a machine as usual, his right hand fingers are chopped off. Immediately the workers union comes to his aid, takes him to the hospital and gives him the moral support he needs, fights with the management to see that he gets a compensation of ten thousand rupees and that he gets an assistant for him without having to lose his job. Even the wife gives him the moral support he needs and takes utmost care of him. Within two or three months of time their life becomes normal and the protagonist becomes pregnant. During her pregnancy one day she gets unbearable pain and gets admitted in the hospital. The fetus which is growing in the tube bursts and as a result she loses her ability to bear children. All her relatives including her mother, husband and mother-in-law speak to her harshly. From thence she is treated like a discarded machine. She is very much hurt due to the indifference and harsh treatment of her husband. Three months after the incident she is sent to her mother’s home. She is forced to give divorce since her husband wants to get married to have children. There is no one to support her. The protagonist immediately recalls the response of the union when Madhusudhan Rao has lost his fingers. She broods how she is treated indifferently under similar circumstances. On retrospection she understands that it is because the women are divided as mothers, sisters, mother-in-laws, and sister-in-laws. She is not getting any support from them. This instigates a fire in her to bring all these under one umbrella. She now decides that it is her life goal to unite all the women suffering like her silently under similar circumstances.

The protagonist of the story is portrayed as a traditional woman who gives much importance to marriage. From her childhood, she has been trained as a girl fit to become a man’s wife. Hence she even feels alien at her mother’s home and looks forward to have a home of her own after getting married. When her marriage gets settled, ‘she felt that the
home in which she was born and brought up was alien. She heaved a sigh of relief that in a month’s time she would be moving to her own home.” (127) Like the protagonist of Shashi Deshpande’s “A Day Like Any Other” she takes up the responsibilities of a wife with eagerness and happiness. When her friend argues that she instead of giving dowry should demand dowry for all the roles she has to play as a wife, she retorts, “Won’t I too be happy and aren’t the things I do for me too? Aren’t the children I bear mine too?” (128) She eagerly gets married and whole heartedly participates in all the marriage rituals.

I performed every ritual of the wedding in all solemnity and with utmost sincerity, as they say, I took the mangalyam ‘golden ornament tied at the time of marriage’ to my eyes with devotion and placed it close to my heart. I considered it the greatest fortune and the rarest gift of my life. (128)

After marriage, she tries hard to change herself according to her husband’s tastes. Whenever she gets irritated at her husband’s behaviour or faces a difficult situation she recalls the vow she had taken on the day of her marriage. In her own words,

I took up my role as his life partner who would equally share the joys and sorrows so sincerely that later on, in my married life, whenever I had the slightest difficulty, I would recall the decision I took on the wedding day, face it happily and co-operate with him.” (128)

I had to battle quite a bit to keep the sacred feelings I entertained on the day of my marriage. His tastes were so different from ‘mine…..  We continued to love each other because I had told myself that I would on the day of my marriage. (129)

Fit to the Telugu saying Karyesu dasi, karanesu mantri, bojyesu maatha, sayaneshu ramba which advises that a wife should be a servant, mother, minister and prostitute to her husband she takes up the role of a mother to give her husband the moral support he needs and instills courage in him when his right hand fingers are chopped off.

By the time I came in he was crying. He looked at his amputated hand and was crying uncontrollably. I summoned up courage, held back my tears and wiped his tears away. Just like a mother cuddles her little baby, I too cuddled him and pacified him. I tried to instill a lot of confidence in him. I told him that it was my responsibility to make sure that there wouldn’t be a change in his life because of the loss of his fingers. (130)

She even assures him that her love for him would not change for the loss of his fingers. “I placed my lips lovingly and tenderly on the bondage soaked with medicine and
blood and kissed it.” (130) She even touches the feet of the union leader “wholeheartedly” for retaining her husband’s job. She changes her fear into excitement when her husband’s amputated hand touches her. When her husband doesn’t reciprocate the same love and affection when she gets aborted, she is very much shocked. She even juxtaposes both the situations and tries to reason out the real problem. On continuous pondering she is able to find the root cause of her sorrows – the politics played by men in dissociating women into wives, mothers, mothers-in-law, daughters-in-law and so on. She doesn’t lose courage when her husband and mother-in-law chase her out of the house. Unlike ordinary women who either end their life or live in the mercy of their parents, she sets up a goal for her future – to unite all women who face similar kind of suffering. Thus she is portrayed as an emerged woman – a woman who has changed from a traditional, loving, docile wife to an ardent feminist fighting for the cause of women.

The protagonist’s mother is portrayed as a conventional, tradition bound woman who feels that a girl’s place is with her husband. She always tried to induce the feelings of marriage into the protagonist. “From about three years prior to this, whenever I had made small changes in mother’s house which were not to her liking, she would say, “you can do it in your house, let things continue here like this.” (127).

For her the sole purpose of a woman is to bear children and rear. She thinks that a woman who can’t become a mother is not fit to be a good wife. Without caring for the protagonists feelings after abortion, she chides the protagonist, “You have somehow survived the operation. I don’t know what’s going to happen in future.” (132) According to her a woman who can not become a mother has to bear the tortures of her husband. She says, “What can you do? Your life is in shambles. No chance of playing with a child. You will have to put up with whatever they say,” (133)

Her mother-in-law is portrayed as a typical mother-in-law who has neither kindness nor humanity towards her daughter-in-law. When she learns that her daughter-in-law can no longer bear children, she becomes very harsh towards her daughter-in-law and plans to turn her out of the family to get her son married again.

Women are considered as mere breeding machines. Men have employed a variety of techniques to keep women under control. One of these is the glorification of motherhood. Since childhood they have been brought up cherishing the values of
motherhood. If they can’t become a mother on medical grounds or on their own accord, they are ill-treated and tortured. At the same time the society also demands that it is only married woman who can become a mother. If an unmarried woman tries to become a mother she is considered an unchaste, impure woman. The capacity of a woman to become a mother is directly or indirectly linked with her relationship to a man. Her motherhood is applauded only under the sanctification of a man. If the protagonist of “A Political Story” is deserted for losing her ability to become a mother, Subadra of “Bhinna Sandarbalu” is tortured for her unwillingness to become a mother. Similarly Shanti of the same “Bhinna Sandarbalu” is looked down by her own parents for becoming an unwed mother. On the whole all the three women are exploited only for the sake of motherhood. The theme of “Bhinna Sandarbaalu” is the myth woven around women’s capacity to breed. If a married woman is compelled to become a mother against her wishes, an unmarried woman is prevented from becoming a mother even if she wants to.

Shanti is the daughter of Ranganatham and Janakamma staying in Guntur. She has been brought up cherishing the values of individuality and self-respect. She has a brother who has been recently married. She is courageous and is not obliged to do anything against her wishes. When she is in her third year of degree she makes the college girls enact a play much against the wishes of the college management and gets applauded by everyone. Subadra is her friend Leela’s elder sister who has lost her mother in her sixth year. Subadra’s mother dies while giving birth to a third child. She and her sister Leela are brought up by her father, Jagannatham who remains a widower. This incident leaves a deep mark in Subadra’s mind, who decides that she under any circumstances she will not give birth to a child. She refuses even to play the role of a pregnant woman. Santhi plays this role with eagerness. After seeing her performance and her courage, her friend’s brother’s friend Kishore starts admiring her and it develops into a friendship. Kishore is a member of the naxalite movement and during the period of emergency, he goes into exile for a period of six months. During this period Santhi understands that she is in love with him. When he comes after six months, she informs the same to him. But he informs her that he is going into exile for a long period of uncertainty and may not return later. They both go to a nearby temple on a hillock. She willingly gives herself to him and doesn’t feel guilty of her act. In the meantime in Hyderabad, Subadra who is married to Vasu a
bank officer is nagged by her husband to go for a check-up since they don’t have children even after two years of marriage. Subadra initially was against marriage. After seeing Vasu, she likes him and agrees for the marriage. But she is adamant in her decision of not begetting children. Hence she takes contraceptive pills without her husband’s knowledge. Vasu unaware of all these things takes her to a lady doctor and gets her tested. One day he discovers Subadra’s act of taking contraceptive pills. They both quarrel on the issue for sometime. But Vasu adamant in his desire of having children makes Subadra pregnant against her wishes. Unable to tolerate the atrocities of Vasu, Subadra leaves home, gets aborted and stays in a working women’s hostel. In Guntur Shanti becomes pregnant due to Kishore and eagerly expects her child. When she informs the same to her parents, her father has no objection to her love with Kishore and her waiting for his return from exile. Both he and Janakamma advice Shanti to get the child aborted. They plead her to allow them to live in peace during their old age. Hence Shanti writes a letter to her parents informing them her decision of going to Hyderabad in search of a job and leaves the house. It is only when she comes to Leela’s house she learns about the incidents in Subadra’s life and decides to join hands with her. Leela too decides to join them. Both Leela and Shanti start for Hyderabad.

Shanti is portrayed as an unconventional woman who has imbibed feminine values in her. She feels that both men and women are equal and have to be equally treated. She can’t tolerate the atrocities meted out to women. In her college, when the girls are prohibited from enacting drama on the stage, she adamantly slogs to change the situation and finally plays the drama on the stage. She vehemently questions her lecturer against the rule of prohibiting the girls from enacting the play, “Just because the boys are barbarous, you give all the opportunities to boys and see to it that everything is in favour of them. Since we are the weaker sex you dispel us. Don’t you?” (3) She likes and cherishes the feelings of motherhood but hates to get married. “She doesn’t like to slog for the husband and be under his control.” (10) “She can’t and doesn’t want to wait for anyone.” (11) Though she hates politics she enjoys reading the works of Srisri, Kodavanganti Kutumba Rao and Chalam. Fairly knowing that Kishore is going to go into exile during the emergency and there are rare chances of his coming back and leading a normal married life with her, she sleeps with him and carries his child. She doesn’t attach
any importance for chastity and feels that her body is her own. She even tells Shanti that in future if she wants to get married to anyone else, she will marry. She may or may not inform her future husband of what has happened to her. According to her when widow remarriage is acceptable, a woman marrying after getting deflowered by someone is also acceptable. She doesn’t feel guilty of her act and even justifies it to her friend, “You know that I love him deeply. Just because he’ll be gone in a month, should I end my life without kissing him at least once? Just because our marriage is impossible should I sit away from him as if I have no love towards him? How detestable is it? What a shame it is to our love?” (29) She even tries to convince her parents the fairness of her love. But when she finds that she is hurting her parents because of her decision, she decides to leave home for ever and live independently. Thus she is portrayed as an unconventional woman who has her conceptions of marriage and motherhood.

Subadra is delineated as an unconventional woman who has the impact of her mother’s death on her. On seeing her mother’s death during delivery, she hates and fears motherhood. She doesn’t want to change her mind and is bent on it. At the same time she can’t suppress her desires for a normal married life. She likes the man who is fixed by her father and hence willingly marries him. But she doesn’t have foresightedness to inform her fiance her ideas of motherhood. She thinks that marriage has nothing to do with motherhood. She even considers that it is not mandatory for all married woman to beget children. When her husband forces himself on her to make her mother, she hates the very same relationship which she has cherished earlier. She calls those moments as the “moments when she was considered an animal” She even claims that during those moments “She touched the ends of her life.” (41) According to her “Marriage is the instrument invented by man to take control of women’s breeding capacity.” (41) Unable to tolerate the atrocities she leaves her home and lives in a working women’s hostel. She is adamant in not begetting children and hence gets aborted. Thus in not letting herself taken control of by the feelings of motherhood she too is unconventional like Shanti.

Subadra’s sister is a traditional girl, who unlike Shanti and Subadra doesn’t have any kind of reservations regarding marriage or motherhood. She feels that it is normal and nothing wrong in getting married and begetting children. At the same time she can not approve Shanti’s act of sleeping with a man before marriage and becoming pregnant.
She calls it an act of foolishness. She even feels sorry for Shanti’s parents. She vehemently argues that Shanti has committed a mistake. But on reading her sister’s letter, she understands the reality and feels that what Shanti and her sister Subadra are doing is correct and supports them. Thus she is a woman in transformation. Through the story Volga tries to demystify the myths woven around women’s bodies. She detests the tradition of trying to trap women in the name of motherhood. Talking about this Volga says,

Motherhood should be demystified. As a biological phenomenon women give birth to children. But when her life is conditioned that a good mother should be like this and like that, she loses a lot. By the time a woman tries to fulfill the conditions laid down for a good wife and a good mother, she would have forgotten her personality. (“Volga’s Interview: Streela Rachanalu Vaari Jeevithalonunchi Choostaru” 76)

Women are generally considered the weaker sex. Hence they are always kept under the protection of man. It is also believed that a man can live alone without the support of a woman whereas women cannot. Hence the society always tries to keep women under the care of a man. But in reality, it is the opposite. Volga observes, it is always men who need companionship. Women can lead a happy life independently without any male support. Their will-power seem to be greater than that of a man. Subadra and Shanti try to prove this aspect and decide to live separately without any man’s support and care. Similarly Vijayalakshmi of “Companionship” also proves that a woman can live happily even without a male support. Subadra sheds the company of her husband, Shanti of her parents and Vijayalakshmi of her children to go with their own principles in life. But unlike in “Bhinna Sandarbalu” in “Companionship” man-woman relationship above the physical plane is beautifully brought out. The theme of the story “Companionship” is the real need of companionship and the friendship between a man and a woman. The story depicts the true meaning of companionship – the strength of women and the weakness of men and how men without their knowledge are equipped to cover their weakness under the guise of manhood. Here Volga projects the idea that women have the capacity to lead the life all alone whereas men cannot. Volga subverts the general belief that a woman needs help when she is a child (protection of father), young lady (protection of husband) and old (protection of son) and shows that it is the
man who always needs the help of a woman in all stages of life. The man in the story is a practical man who longs for a companion and understands the real meaning of companionship after having discussion with Vijayalakshmi. Gangadharam and Vijalakshmi are a widower and a widow respectively living next doors in an apartment. Their spouses die in a gap of two months. Gangadharam is very much upset by his wife’s death and carries on his life as a burden. But Vijayalakshmi leads a happy life taking music lessons and keeping the house spot clean. Gradually friendship develops between them and Gangadharam starts taking dinner in Vijayalakshmi’s house once or twice in a week. Both of them are working, Gangadharam as an officer in L.I.C. and Vijayalakshmi as a teacher in a private school. During the first year ceremonies of their spouses both Gangadharam’s children and Vijayalaks’m’s children persuade them to go and stay with them, but both refuse to go. In the mean time, persuaded by his friend, Gangadharam proposes to marry Vijayalakshmi to which she responds that she is not ready to adjust her life for the sake of anybody else. She makes Gangadharam realize that it he who needs the companionship of Vijayalakshmi to keep his house clean and to serve him delicious food. Realizing the truth of the statement Gangadharam changes his way of life, tides up his house and cooks his own food. Their friendship continues and “if Gangadharam ate for two days in Vijayalakshmi’s house she ate for two days at his.” (82) In the mean time his daughter delivers a baby boy. Gangadharam’s happiness knows no bounds. With the help of Vijayalakshmi, he purchases all that is required for the baby and goes on fifteen days leave to stay with his daughter. On his return he finds Vijayalakshmi thin. In his absence Vijayalakshmi misses him a lot and so she expresses her love for him. They both seek the company of each other and are happy.

Vijayalakshmi seems to be the personification of Volga’s ideas about man-woman relationship. Volga in an interview says,

The problem of man-woman relationship is very complicated. Many sorrows in life happen because women consider their lives as something dependent on men. Marriage is just a part of our life. Basically woman is a human being. (Streela Rachanalu Vaari Jeevithalonunchi Choostaru 76)

She does not allow herself to be taken away by sorrow and makes her life meaningful even after the death of her husband. She doesn’t allow either sorrow or
helplessness to overshadow her life. Her happiness makes her neighbour Gangadharam realize his mistake of allowing himself to be carried away by loneliness. On seeing the way Vijayalakshmi is successfully leading her life, he understands his inability of doing his own work. Her way of life makes Gangadharam wonder, “Are women happy in heaven when they themselves die and happy on earth when their husbands die?” (75)

She is similar to Annapurna of Chudamani Raghavan’s “A Bunch of Keys” in feeling weighed down by the domestic chores. But unlike Annapurna, she considers her husband and children as the reason for her fatigue and not the domestic chores. Nor does she feel despondent after her husband’s death like the old woman of Shashi Deshpande’s “And Then”. Vijayalakshmi feels, “I used to feel as if the three men were literally hanging down my neck and shoulders. I had some relief after the children got married and left. After he died, I am left with my own life.” (75-76)

From her own experience, she has a clear understanding of women’s lives. She can explain her thoughts very clearly to Gangadharam and make him understand the trauma in women’s life. She considers women as people with strong nerves and men as weak and dependents. She objects calling widows as orphans and says, “All that I want to say is that the word ‘orphan’ is not apt for women who have lost their husbands. Men who have lost their wives are the real orphans.” (76) She is a woman of self respect. She gets annoyed on hearing her sons comment her job. According to her though her job doesn’t pay her much, it gives her self-confidence. “True, but it’s my job that gives me confidence, not theirs.” (79) She has continuously tried to protect her job from her husband’s criticism in the past. “Nobody knows how much energy I spent trying not to give up my job but to protect it from criticism.” (79) She has changed herself according to her husband’s tastes not out of love, but because of her nature. “She didn’t like if the other person faced some difficulties or made faces, especially her husband.” (75) She doesn’t deny Gangadharam’s proposal in the beginning for the sake of traditions but for her own self. Finally when she finds that she can’t bear Gangadharam’s separation, she accepts his love. She has not only denied going to her sons, but also has decided to accept the companionship of Gangadharam without caring for the norms of the society. In this aspect she can be compared to Shankari of Chudamani Raghavan’s “Nangam Ashram.”
who acts according to her wish without bothering for the society. On the whole she is one of Volga’s modern women who cannot be bound by the society.

On the other hand Gangadharam’s dead wife Susheela is a traditional wife who has lived in accordance with the traditional norms laid for a wife. Her husband misses her a lot after her death. Her submissiveness and docility makes her husband take her for granted so that “he could easily get over his anger on anyone in the office by taking it out on Susheela.… He would yell at her and bring down his B.P.” (74) She used to do all menials jobs for him like pressing his legs at night which made her husband feel, “She had done him injustice by her death.” (74) In her lifetime she was such a backbone to her husband which makes her husband cry every time he is reminded of her. But the real feelings of Susheela and her reactions to her husband’s actions are not clear since she is introduced only after her death. But both Susheela and Vijayalakshmi are educated, women who did not have the “temperament to say nasty things about others to their husbands, but had instead the culture to say good things” and would “smile at each other without malice.” (70) But the friendship between the two women did not grow to its full due to their busy schedule. In fact friendship between two women is not always the same as the friendship between men. Society and male chauvinism has its say over it. Especially the friendship between the in-laws may it be a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law or two sisters-in-law is affected by the society. The impact of society on the thoughts of girls and turning sour a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship long before it is formed is the theme of the story “Walls”. Though the story the author tries to portray how the society with all its evil powers has made friendship impossible between two women and how prejudices against mother-in-laws are developed in the minds of young girls. She also depicts the problem faced by women in the society and shows how women are looked down in spite of their hard work. Through the story Volga brings to light the plight of working women and separated women. It exposes the prejudices the society (men) has towards women especially working women.

Revathi is the mother-in-law of Chandrika. Chandrika sets up a separate family in the second month after their marriage. Chandrika has a mischievous son, Sharat who is expelled from school. Sharat’s school is near Revathi’s office. On her way home Revathi meets Chandrika standing disgusted in the bus-stop and takes her home. Looking at the
serenity of Revathi’s house, Chandrika remembers her own faults and asks Revathi how it is possible for her to keep the house so clean. She even pours out her problem of her son being expelled from school and cries for her inefficiency in bringing up the child. Revathi consoles her and informs her of another school which will be suitable for Sharat. Impressed by Revathi’s concern for her, Chandrika explains the real reason for her maintaining distance with Revathi. Since childhood she has been under the misconception that mothers-in-law are cruel and that daughters-in-law suffer under them. Revathi through her compassionate words touches the chord of Chandrika’s heart. Now Chandrika feels guilty of her act of living separately and invites Revathi to stay with them. Revathi replies that she likes her present way of life and promises to invite herself over when she can’t live by herself. As the title suggests the story talks about the walls built by the society between two women.

Revathi is a conventional, self-respecting woman who has struggled hard to keep her soul and house clean and tried “even hundred times harder to prove that her mind and body were pure and clean.” Though “she felt like questioning the society, ‘I won’t be pure. What can you do? Why do you care for me? Will you feed my son or me a morsel of food once a day?’” she didn’t do so but kept “calm, pure and spotless.” (21) She has tried hard to avoid criticism of any kind. She is sincere in her job and hates to hear any criticism on her work. Hence instead of taking permission for two hours, she applies for leave. Due to her own experiences she has a soft corner for women. She can understand the sufferings of women. With the same compassion she tried to understand her daughter-in-law who never allows her to come closer or interfere in her household affairs. Not annoyed of her daughter-in-law trying to maintain certain distance from her, she understands her agony, her hard-working nature and pities her.

She felt concerned for Chandrika. Most often she used to sympathize with her daughter-in-law. Whenever she went to visit her son, she felt sorry for her daughter-in-law. (19)

She has a lot of appreciation for Chandrika’s sincerity, but never shows it off as Chandrika does not like it.

When Revathi understood how hard Chandrika was trying not to take any such blame, she felt like hugging her to her heart. But Chandrika wouldn’t let it happen. (20)
When she sees Chandrika at the bus-stop she can not leave her there and go her way and so compels her and takes her home. She is concerned but not curious enough to learn what has happened and so patiently waits till Chandrika reports on her own, the reason for her disgust. She with her patience and concern successfully breaks the wall that separated Chandrika from Revathi.

Chandrika is a modern, hard-working woman of self-respect who has many prejudices about mother-in-laws. But she is good. She is hard-working and tries to prove that women work excellently. As a result she gets crushed between her motherhood and her career, with more work put on her shoulders. At the same time due to her prejudice against her mother-in-law, she never allows her mother-in-law to come close to her. “A small look or a word of affection from her mother-in-law would throw Chandrika into fidgety. Some panic would be seen in her eyes.” (20) She is not happy in the company of her mother-in-law as she thinks that her mother-in-law would find fault with her.

In fact Chandrika felt uneasy whenever Revathi arrived. She had thought that her mother-in-law didn’t like her house, her manners, her cooking, her method of serving and eating. She felt like standing on thorns till her mother-in-law took leave of her. (19)

But she is flexible and can easily wash off her prejudices. Once done away with her prejudice, she does not have any hesitations to invite Revathi to stay with them and frankly pours out her hesitations and emotions to her mother-in-law. Like in the other stories even in “Walls” the two women Revathi and Chandrika are good and understanding. But Chandrika is a changed woman who comes out of her inhibitions and changes her perspective with the help of the other woman. If the society is the reason for marring the friendship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, sometimes it is the man who due to his selfish motive damages the friendship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. This is what has happened in the case of Anuradha and Veeramma in “Who are the Real Enemies?” Through this story Volga subverts the famous belief that women are the enemies to women and shows that the men are the real enemies. It is the man who engenders strife among women and women become scapegoats. In this story Volga shows how the good natured intelligent women too turn into enemies to each other becoming pawns in the hands of men. The story also presents intelligent and sensible
women like Punyavathi who come to the rescue of such women by throwing light on the problem.

Punyavathi and Anuradha are parentless sisters who have been brought up in their maternal uncle’s house. Anuradha being elder takes every care to see that Punyavathi does not suffer and gets good education. Hence she stops her own education and delays her marriage. Punyavathi gets highly educated and becomes an officer much to the pride of Anuradha. Anuradha gets married to Rajanikantha Rao in her thirtieth year. Rajanikantha Rao’s parents used to take the temple land on lease every year for their livelihood. If one year the crops had failed due to heavy rains, the next year they had failed due to drought which resulted in their poverty. Rajanikantha Rao is younger to his elder sister by 15 years and has taken up the responsibility of clearing the debts his father had raised for his sister’s marriage. He marries Anuradha in his thirty-sixth year only after clearing the debts raised by his father. For the first 10 years everything goes on well and the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are like friends with a lot of regard and concern for each other. In her eighty-eighth year Anuradha’s mother-in-law Veeramma sees the financial problems of her son and gets a new idea to fight for the title deed of the land which they had been taking on lease for forty years. She wants to sell it and give the two lakhs amount which she would get on the sale to her son to help him financially. Rajanikanth Rao too initially spends two to three thousands on it. But when he learns that it wouldn’t materialize, he decides to give up the matter. But Veeramma is bent on going to the village to fight for the land and demands Rajanikanth Rao to give her ten thousand rupees towards the expenses. In the beginning Anuradha supports Veeramma and takes up the role of messenger between the mother and the son. Rajanikanth Rao never says himself the hurting things he wants to tell his mother, but makes Anuradha tell them on his behalf. In the process Anuradha begins hating Veeramma who goes to the village, spends the ten thousands and returns empty handed. It is also because of the villagers who blame Anuradha for the troubles of Veeramma. On her return Rajanikanth Rao showers affection on his mother and orders his wife to take utmost care of his mother. But now Anuradha finds it hard to serve the same woman on whom she has developed hatred for the past eight months as if nothing had happened. As a result the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship gets damaged. When Anuradha’s sister Punyavathi
visits her sister, she learns the happenings and enlightens Anuradha. She tells Anuradha that the actual mistake lies with Anuradha in having taken the emotional burden of Rajanikantha Rao, when he himself has taken up none. Only then it dawns upon Anuradha how her husband has cleverly dehumanized her and has spoilt her relations with her mother – in – law. She cries bitterly “to wash away the anger and the bad feelings in her heart.” (67)

Anuradha is a good natured woman who has played the role of a mother to her sister. She has sacrificed a lot for the well being of her sister. She has also played the role of a daughter to her mother – in – law.

The elder of the two, Anuradha had always been careful in ensuring that her sister would not be hurt by anything in a place other than their own. She gave up her studies and delayed her marriage to make sure that her younger sister’s education would not be disrupted. (59-60)

She had a lot of reverence for her mother – in – law. “Anuradha used to praise her mother – in – law’s memory, intelligence and her knowledge of spiritual matters to everyone.” (61) She whole-heartedly takes up the role of messenger between the mother and the son so that the old woman would be benefited. Later she repeats her husband’s words as her own to reduce her husband’s pain. The one who has initially asked her husband on behalf of her mother-in-law later turns against the later on the former’s behalf.

“Why don’t you send the poor thing?” she told Rajani, feeling sorry for her mother-in-law. (62)

“Rather than stay there and get the land, why did you come away empty handed after your son got a job?” (63)

She cannot change her feelings all of a sudden. Hence her anger on her mother-in-law only increases on seeing her husband and her mother-in-law coming to good terms with each other.

Anuradha is not an automation to show only the expected emotion, is she? She is a person with her own mind. ‘The anger that had piled on in her heart against her mother-in-law increased all the more when she had to take care of her.’ (65)

She is not rigid and hence tries to understand what her sister is trying to say.
As her sister talked Anuradha began to realize all that had happened and all that she had lost. “Why did she have to utter those harsh words to her mother-in-law? Why didn’t she make her husband say those things?” (67)

She is a woman in transition and has changed her way of looking at things.

Veeramma is an affectionate mother who yearns to help her son come out of his financial problems. But she is adamant and doesn’t understand the realities of life. When she sees her son struggling hard to get her grandson into expensive schools, she gets an idea to fight for the title of the piece of temple land which they had leased for more than forty years. She thinks that if she could sell it and could get two lakhs for her son, her life would be meaningful. So she nags her son to send her to the village with ten thousand rupees. Though her son explains the impossibilities of such things she doesn’t understand the practical problems involved in it and is bent on going. Finally she returns empty handed. As a result she has gained the hatred of her daughter-in-law and has spoilt her health. But her relation with her son remains unchanged.

When her son ordered his wife to look after her, she expressed her love for him, “Good of you, my son.” Veeramma feeling thrilled about her son’s concern, expressed her love for him. (65)

She has not showed the least harassment as a mother-in-law. On the other hand she bears her daughter-in-law’s nagging with composure.

Shyamalamma, Rajanikantha Rao’s elder sister is a loving daughter who does not want her mother to suffer. She too like her mother does not have practical knowledge. When Veeramma fasts to make Rajanikantha Rao send her to the village, Shymalamma instead of bringing her mother to senses supports her mother and advises her brother to act as per Veeramma’s wishes. She even offers to get a loan of ten thousand rupees for the sake of her brother.

Hearing about this latest protest, Shyamalamma, Rajanikantha Rao’s sister, came to look up her mother. She wept on seeing her mother. She was worried about her mother’s health. After her brother came she said, “Send mother home, or else she won’t survive.” “Where do I have the money?” Rajani groaned. “There is no escape, but to take a loan.” His sister gave him free advice. (64)
Punyavathi is a matured woman who enlightens her sister. She washes away the unwanted hatred in her sister’s mind and has a clear picture of men’s way of dealing with women. She clearly interprets how Rajanikantha Rao has used Anuradha as a pawn. She says, “Men are very adept at dehumanizing and desensitizing women and turning them into stones.” (67) When her husband tries to make her say something against his mother, she refuses to do that. She knows how to protect herself from being turned into stones and has rightly interpreted the life of women,

We take care of the physical needs of everyone in the family. Added to that if we take everyone’s mental turmoil and anger onto ourselves we are bound to become heartless. We’ll be reduced to stores. (67)

Thus all the four women present in the story Anuradha, Punyavathi, Veeramma, Shyamalamma represent the microcosm of the Indian women with their own strengths and weaknesses.

A careful reading of her stories shows that Volga has more understanding about the realities of life and that she uses a surgical knife to analyse the problems. In “Companionship”, she pictures the domination of a son on a mother and through her stories “Who are the real enemies” and “Walls” she brings to light the fact that the relationship between two women is built on the foundation of friendship trust, unity and men alone are responsible for the enmity between two women. “Who are the real enemies?” brings to light the conspiracy of the son in disintegrating the friendship between his wife and mother and this story analyzes how the son spares his relationship with his mother by making his wife tell all the things he wants to tell his mother and thus spoils the relationship between the two women. At the same time she also portrays men like Anil Kumar (“Into Light”) and Ram Mohan (“Experiment”) who are supportive to women and bring about awareness. She portrays both good and bad men in the society. Most of the men she portrays are average Indian men with traditional mindset. They don’t like women to be independent, intelligent, and self – respecting, free and happy women. Her writings exhibit the unity among women, desire to end the conspiracy of men’s divide and rule policy, the psychology of women in having compassion for the other and desire to set right each other’s live. Whatever be the themes of her stories her women are characterized as loving women, helping each other and worrying for each
other. She gives traditional women in dilemma between modernity and traditionalism, in the period of transition and who have gone beyond the limits laid down for them and liberated themselves. But the problem is with the men and the society around them.

Her stories disturb people, make them think, show them a new perspective not known earlier, persuade them to reanalyze the already known facts, show them a new path to see the male dominated society from women’s point of view and give them new rules. But they don’t contain the poetic beauty, satire, twist and euphemism which are considered as the common characteristics of stories. She has used narrative method or debatable form to give her readers the summary and inspiration of feminist movement. However her stories have not lacked humanity, sensitivity and feedback which are the common features of stories. As Kalpana Rentala puts it,

Volga has explained in detail the male dominance which has indirectly exploited the women in families….. Through her stories Volga has pin pointed the multi faceted family tortures in the three faces of torture, body politics and their social outlook. Her stories bring the gender politics to discussion from the family background built on reality instead of putting them in theoretical form.

Her success lies in showing the injustice behind the routine activities from a new perspective which makes the readers think. Her specialty lies is establishing her principles through the strength of a story through her pen which has the sharpness to intensify the thoughts of the readers.