

# **“A Purity in Sacrifice, a blessedness in Shame”: Feminist Praxis in Dove’s “On the Bus with Rosa Parks”**

**Dr. (Mrs.) G. Beulah, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.**  
**Sri Meenakshi Govt Arts College For Women (A)**  
**Madurai 02**  
**Tamilnadu**  
[beulahbeatrice11@gmail.com](mailto:beulahbeatrice11@gmail.com)

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## **Abstract**

Women are prevented their first-hand experience or they are considered as the secondary resources when compared with men who are the primary sources. Rita Dove with her feminist Praxis has tried her hand with many poetry collections. One such book *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* is filled with such realistic experiences. Dove's Civil Rights Movement is extended in *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* along with the personal life of Rosa Parks, the unknown domestic worker in the segregated South, which was made a public issue. Dove becomes a feminist Praxis to find out a way to empower, involving ideas of mutual nurturance, through a smooth was, constructing for a thorough change with literal elevation to emotional imbalance, concentrating on communal life, reciprocating to the societal upliftment and the overall development of the personal progression over the time. Dove has shown the progression of physical action for a forward thinking with Rosa Park’s refusal leaving a greater impact on the political system with a complete renovation. A judicious reflection over the women’s actions led a way for the freedom of a race, the African American race which may results with revision of conceptions and reflection. Feminism must further extents such renovation in its long spread over the ideology considering the impacts of the action.

**Keywords:** Feminist, Praxis, upliftment, refusal, freedom, renovation.

## **Introduction**

Feminism is not a woman thing, but it is a world issue. It's written as a theory to analyse, argue and for study purpose. It's a great theme for updating practical wisdom or to have perceptual and concrete experience to become the best speaker in Feminism and Feminist theory. What is the actual result? It's nullified when it is translated into action. What is the societal response for such debates on women and related issues? Papers have been published and many conferences have been organized to give public awareness that women's' issues are taken care of.

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Paulo Freire defines “Praxis” as Pedagogy of the oppressed as "reflection and action decided at the structures to be transformed” (28). The motif behind the explanation is that the victims or the women who are oppressed should know the critical position of their own status or condition. How do Women exist in the society, their utility to the society, and the societal reverberations upon them? How women have their perception, knowledge to understand their complexities, comprehending the ambience in which they react, their discretion and ultimately the judgment over their actions and reactions. Women are prevented their first-hand experience, or they are considered as the secondary resources when compared with men who are the primary sources.

The emphasis through feminist Praxis here is to gain the first-hand experience of everything by women with their infinite knowledge to exercise, realize, engage or apply over the practical world. Rita Dove with her feminist Praxis has tried her hand with many poetry collections. One such book *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* is filled with such realistic experiences. Her pricking worlds, practical knowledge, illustration from the tradition, her resolutions and solutions are impeachable.

### **Discussion**

*On the Bus with Rosa Parks* has poems relating to African American liberation and freedom. Dove's Civil Rights Movement is extended in *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* along with the personal life of Rosa Parks, the unknown domestic worker in the segregated South, which was made a public issue. “She was the courageous activist of the Civil Rights Movement. It is a revolutionary poem and depicts the reason for the civil rights movement and the resilient nature of black women” (Beulah 81). The very opening Part "Cameos" is loaded with ten poems. She presents a painful experience with the first poem "July, 1925".

... is pained  
Because she cannot stoop to pluck  
The plumpest green tomato  
Deep on the crusted wine.  
... She thinks,  
and it will be a son (13-14)

The thought of giving birth to a daughter is a painful experience. Her race problem is clearly shown when she mentions "Mama, stout as a yellow turnip" (14). She is conscious of her colour, as it is the foremost issue. The next poem "Depression Years" brings out the drastic

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conditions of the black people. It is difficult to live for the African American people during those depression years.

Pearl laughs  
A wet red laugh  
Pearl oozes  
Everywhere. When she was  
Young, she licked the walls free of child; she  
Ate dust for the minerals (19)

Here the cross patterns are used to highlight the difficult paths. She tries to get solace through music, their innate talents. The Poem "Homework" starts with the lines "The Negro and his song are inseparable" (20). Though the music "is primitive" it is "sensuous", "a part of giving pleasure and above all "a quality/appealing strongly/ to the Negro's/entire being" (20-21) and 'melody" are their "childish faith in dreams" (21)

Drumming is another way of escaping their painful experience:  
"The Negro claps his hands,  
Spontaneously; his feet  
Move constantly in joyful  
anticipation of the drum" (21)

The poems "Easter Sunday, 1940" tells her feminist Praxis. "A purity in sacrifice, a blessedness in shame". (23) Women are witnessing double-cross fire as they manage white dominant world and black men too. So she feels that marriage is unwanted.

"She'll never marry –  
Though she'd  
Like to have  
A child" (20)

The poem "Nightwatch, the Son" summarises her thought figuratively. How life was a miserable thing for the African American people as "aggressively adult."

Aggressively adult,  
They keep their  
Lives, to which  
I am a witness.

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At the other end.  
I orbit, pinpricked  
Light. I watch,  
I float and grieve. (24)

"Freedom: Bird's Eye view" brings out the theme: "And the World was already old/ And I was older than I am today" (27). Dove takes up the challenge of reading as her empowerment. In the poem "Maple Valley Branch Library, 1967" She writes:

Greedily: Six books, six volumes of bliss  
The stuff we humans are made of:  
Words and sighs and silence,  
Ink and whips, Brahma and cosine,  
Corsets and poetry and blood sugar levels (33)

She has opened a new vista for her to squeeze in, as a mark of self revelation. "I can eat an elephant / If I Take Small Bites"(33). Dove becomes a feminist Praxis to find out a way to empower, involving ideas of mutual nurturance, through a smooth was, constructing for a thorough change with literal elevation to emotional imbalance, concentrating on communal life, reciprocating to the societal upliftment and the overall development of the personal progression over the time.

### Critical View

Here what Marx meant by Praxis is evidently clear that there is a transformation of the individual through the process of human actions or through labour. Dove feels the kind of freedom in her inner self. She writes in the poem "Freedom: Bird's – Eye view":

Now, that's  
What I'd call  
Freedom,  
And justice,  
And ice cream for all (34)

The poem "Testimonial" highlights her positive though. She sees the New World as "the poplar, quivered/sweetly in rank and file"(35). Her experience is "Swooned between Spoonfab of lemon sorbet" (35). She over joys with her statement that "how could I count my blessings" and finally announces that: "luck leaked out everywhere/ I gave my promise to the World/And

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the World followed me here” (35). She openly proclaims her happiness in "Dawn Revisited." Her words are very poignant as she writes "the whole sky is yours" and continue to say that,

To write on, blown open  
To a blank page. Come on,  
Shake a leg! You'll never know  
Who's down there, frying those eggs,  
If you don't get up and see (36)

Mary Lousie Smith did not vacate her seat with courage as it is mentioned in "Lady Freedom Among Us." "No choice but to grant her space / Crown her with sky / For she is one of the many /And she is each of us"(70). "On the Bus with Rosa Parks" mentions few names of women who were arrested and thrown as they refused to get up out of their seat on the bus. Claudette Colvin Goes to Work" describes how Claudette Colvin is one such strong woman who refused her seat to a white person on March 2, 1955. "Colvin and Smith did not have connections and influence, but what they did mattered" (Righelato 204).

"Rosa" highlights the real hero of the Civil Rights Movements. Rosa Parks "sat there, the time right inside a place" to rest. Her sitting was captured by a camera and the police came to arrest her. "To climb into a bus in a segregated state was always a fearful experience for black people. The experience of joining the ride o freedom risked the danger of being eaten by the wolf" (Righelato 203). "How she stood up / When they bent down to retrieve /Her purse. That courtesy" (83). Here Dove Photographed Rosa Park's historical refusal act of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955.

### Summation

Dove has shown the progression of physical action for a forward thinking with Rosa Park's refusal leaving a greater impact on the political system with a complete renovation. A judicious reflection over the women's actions led a way for the freedom of a race, the African American race which may results with revision of conceptions and reflection. Feminism must further extents such renovation in its long spread over the ideology considering the impacts of the action.

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