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Socio-Cultural Realities in the Selected Short Stories of Bama

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Abstract

This research paper on the title “Socio-Cultural Realities in the Selected Short stories of Bama” explores socio-cultural realities presented through the short stories written by Bama namely “Just One Word”, “Man and Beast”, “The Verdict”, “Corpse”, “Is It Fair” and “Wherever You Look”. Being a significant author of Tamil Dalit literature, Bama writes about the lives of the marginalized people who have been subjected to oppression due to their lower caste status, gender discrimination, poverty, and marginalization. Through her literary creation, she brings into focus oppressive mechanisms existing in society. This research focuses on the way in which Bama rejects the established social paradigms and constructs the Dalit identity. With the help of socio-cultural criticism, Dalit feminism, and Subaltern Studies, the research paper seeks to demonstrate that Bama’s short stories are not only works of literature but also socio-political interventions.

Keywords: Dalit Literature, Socio-Cultural Analysis, Caste Oppression, Dalit Feminism, Marginalization

Introduction

Dalit literature became an important literary movement that aimed to express the lives of those people who were historically marginalized under the caste system. Different from other Indian literatures, Dalit literature is all about marginalized voices and their portrayal of social oppression, poverty, and exclusion. Among the current Dalit authors of Tamil Nadu, Bama is one such author who made her mark through her depiction of the reality of the caste system as well as women's experience in Tamil society.

Being born and brought up in the socio-cultural setting of rural Tamil Nadu, Bama’s works reflect the life experiences and incidents of common people with regard to caste discrimination in language, labour, religion, and social relations. The selected works of Bama including "Just One Word," "Man and Beast," "The Verdict," "Corpse," "Is It Fair," and "Wherever You Look" illustrate the lives of Dalit characters with various forms of social discrimination. The study is

based on a socio-cultural and Dalit feminist perspective in order to understand the issues of caste, gender, labour, and power as depicted in the short stories of Bama.

Critical Perspective and Methodology

In this paper, socio-cultural method is used to analyze the selected short stories of Bama. The analysis mainly utilizes the theoretical framework of Dalit literature, Dalit feminism, and Subaltern Studies to examine the portrayal of caste discrimination, gender inequality, labor exploitation, and social exclusion in the selected stories. The theory of the caste structure and social stratification propounded by forms an important basis for this study. The idea of social inequality and exploitation as articulated by Ambedkar provides a crucial theoretical framework to understand the structural oppression against the Dalit community in Bama's stories. Moreover, this study also takes into consideration the theories of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, especially the concept of "subaltern" proposed by her, to comprehend the suppression of the marginalized in dominant socio-cultural structures. Furthermore, this paper also utilizes the perspective of Dalit feminism to comprehend the experience of dual marginalization faced by Dalit women. The oppression of women as workers, victims of degradation, and social rebels is analysed through the lens of intersectionality.

Methodologically, the paper employs qualitative textual analysis. The selected short stories are analyzed qualitatively to find themes such as caste discrimination, labor exploitation, cultural identity, gender discrimination, and social resistance. Short textual quotations are interpreted within their socio-cultural context to examine how Bama critiques dominant ideologies and reconstructs marginalized experiences.

Oppression of Caste and Social Strata

One of the key themes running through Bama's short stories is that of the continued oppression of caste. In her short story "Just One

Word," Bama shows how language itself can serve as a tool of humiliation and domination. A simple act of uttering an insult on the basis of caste has the ability to inflict emotional pain upon one's psyche and maintain a system of social stratification. It seems that oppression does not always happen in the form of physical violence, but more often through language and behaviour. As Bama puts it, "One word was enough to wound for a lifetime" (Bama 24). This shows the psychological impact of being discriminated verbally and how the caste system mentality takes shape in interactions among individuals. The story talks about a condition where even marginalized people who attain higher position are facing the discrimination.

In "The Verdict," the inherent injustice in the village power structures is exposed. It criticizes how social organizations are corrupted by allowing justice to be dictated by caste identity instead of the facts of the case. The dominant caste group exploits the power structure to subdue the marginalized sections of society. Bama writes, "Justice bows down before caste" (Bama 57). This quote highlights the failure of institutional systems which aim at justice yet reinforce social disparity. This narrative shows how caste politics operates in local governance and judicial systems. The story ultimately exposes how education, professional status and institutional authority fail to eradicate caste bias. Instead, it demonstrates how irrational beliefs and inherited prejudices continue to perpetuate discrimination, even within spaces meant for learning and equality. In "Wherever You Look," discrimination becomes a fact of life that dictates everything for the Dalits. The title suggests how discrimination is everywhere in society. The Dalits are discriminated against in schools, jobs, and even at social events. Bama says, "Wherever we went, there was humiliation waiting for us" (Bama 103). The story shows how difficult it is psychologically for individuals to survive in a hierarchical social setup based on caste identities. The caste sys-

tem is not just a social issue but a cultural phenomenon that impacts all human interactions. These stories collectively expose the systemic nature of caste oppression and demonstrate how social hierarchy continues to dominate everyday experiences in contemporary society.

Economic Exploitation and Labour

In the stories by Bama, one can see that the issue of exploitation is closely associated with the caste system. The state of poverty and oppression of labourers are not seen as personal problems but as social issues created by societal injustice. In her story *Man and Beast*, she uses the image of an animal to draw attention to the problem of dehumanization of Dalits as labourers. They have no value apart from their physical labour, while their humanity is forgotten. As the narrator states, "At least the beast was fed after work" (Bama 41). It also becomes evident how caste-based economic relations lead to oppression and keep labourers impoverished and oppressed. This story illustrates how economic systems based on caste exploit people through denying their dignity and monetary compensation. The Dalits become economically dependent on the upper-caste employers who have power over them socially and economically. While the labour of the oppressed castes is important for society, their status remains low and degrading. Eventually in the end, even the cows embraced each other with affection, but men were with the raw vengeance.

In her story "Is It Fair," Bama discusses the problem of unequal chances and rights in society. She presents an apparently ordinary incident of bus travel, which gradually unfolds into a commentary on everyday conflict, frustration and the lived experiences of marginalized people. The title becomes a reflection of social systems organized according to caste and class. As Bama says, "Fairness existed only for the powerful" (Bama 76). This quote emphasizes the unfair distribution of powers that affects justice, education, and career op-

portunities. The entire plot ultimately captures how routine travel becomes a site of resistance, revealing the frustrations of ordinary people confronting institutional inefficiency and perceived injustice. In this way, the author shows that social structures continue to oppress poor people. These stories indicate that caste discrimination and economic exploitation cannot be separated from each other.

Gender and Double Marginalisation

Another important feature of the writings of Bama is that of double marginalisation of Dalit women. While upper caste feminists have been talking about how women have been oppressed by patriarchy and sexism, Bama talks about how Dalit women are marginalised on both caste and gender fronts. The way death is treated shows a hierarchy based on caste even at the time of grieving and mourning. According to Bama, "Even the dead were not equal." This statement indicates the cruelty of the system that discriminates even after death. The lack of respect in death demonstrates how far the caste system manipulates human conduct.

In Bama's narratives, women face hardships because of hard work, poverty, domestic chores, and humiliation. But what makes Bama different from other writers is that she doesn't make her women mere victims of fate. Her women are resilient and emotionally strong; they resist and fight against their oppression. Their mere existence becomes their way of protesting against those systems that have been built to suppress them. By presenting such characters, Bama questions both patriarchy and the caste system, highlighting especially the position of Dalit women that mainstream feminism often neglects. These narratives thus emerge as important tales of Dalit feminism and socio-cultural resistance.

Religion, Morality, and Social Hypocrisy

Besides these issues, Bama's stories address the question of the function of religion and morality in perpetuating social inequality.

Though religious bodies advocate equality and mercy, caste discrimination persists in the name of religion and society. Bama exposes the paradox of people who assume their moral superiority when they are engaged in oppressive actions. Some stories by Bama show that members of the dominant castes practice selective morality based on their class standing. Caste takes precedence over ethics in these tales. In an ironic style of writing, Bama questions the disparity between morality preached in religion and the way things actually work in life. The author shows how values and customs serve to perpetuate injustice in society. At the same time, Bama presents the collective consciousness of oppressed groups through joint labour, culture, and tradition. Dalit identity becomes a means of opposition to unjust structures of society. The stories imply that oppressed people retain their humanity and dignity in spite of constant marginalization.

Language and Representation of Culture

One of the most prominent aspects of Bama's works is her representation of the Tamil language in its colloquial form and her usage of realistic narrative. Instead of using high literary language to represent characters' actions and experiences, she opts for everyday language. Such a choice already becomes an act of resistance as it represents the culture and life of Dalits. Over usage of idioms, jokes, and other linguistic peculiarities specific to her native culture create the cultural context in which Bama represents the lives of marginalized groups. Her narratives oppose dominant literary discourses by including the voices of the marginalized into literary language. In addition, her narrative style makes these simple acts significant by making them tools of social commentary. Bama represents the process of transforming personal suffering into social resistance. The language of the subjugated is transformed into a literary device for challenging hierarchies and reclaiming marginal identities.

Conclusion

The short stories of Bama reflect socio-cultural criticism of the caste-ridden society of India. Using the short stories "Just One Word," "Man and Beast," "The Verdict," "Corpse," "Is It Fair," and "Wherever You Look," Bama brings to light the plight of the marginalized communities as they live under the burden of caste oppression, exploitation, gender discrimination, and social exclusion. At the same time, Bama's narratives move beyond the representation of suffering and become expressions of resistance, dignity, and identity assertion. By foregrounding marginalized voices, she challenges dominant social ideologies and reconstructs suppressed histories. Her short stories remain significant socio-cultural documents that question injustice and advocate equality, humanity, and social transformation. Through a socio-cultural and Dalit feminist framework, the paper demonstrates that Bama's short fiction is not merely literary representation but a powerful intervention against caste hierarchy and social marginalization. Her works continue to remain relevant in contemporary discussions on caste, gender, identity, and human dignity.

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