

To Study the Value of Literature as a Remedy for Social Injustice

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ABSTRACT

Gender roles in literature have an impact that goes beyond fiction. Readers' perceptions of societal norms, assumptions, and expectations are shaped by how they perceive and interact with gendered narratives. By questioning and altering gender roles, literature frequently acts as a catalyst for social change while also reflecting and reinforcing established standards. To grasp the complex dynamics of gender in society, one must grasp how gender roles are constructed, developed, and impacted in English literature. This research paper seeks to add to the current conversation on gender roles by critically analyzing literary works from many eras and genres. It does this by encouraging a greater understanding of multiple representations, encouraging inclusivity, and motivating progressive societal change. Gender is a complicated cultural and social construct rather than just a biological term. Gender identities influence how people are portrayed in cultural texts by shaping conventions, expectations, and hierarchies throughout communities. Gender stereotypes are reflected and replicated in literature, which serves as both an artistic medium and a storehouse of cultural memory. Additionally, it offers a platform for challenging, negotiating, and redefining gender norms. Male heroism was placed at the heart of classical classics like Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, while female characters like Helen or Penelope were depicted in positions characterized by beauty, loyalty, or treachery. Similarly, women frequently represent ideals of sacrifice and devotion in South Asian epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. For generations, these representations not only upheld patriarchal systems but also shaped societal ideas about gender roles. In contrast, feminist and queer movements have influenced modern and contemporary literature, which has attempted to rework these stories.

Keyword: Inclusivity, Literature, Beauty, Loyalty, Treachery, Conventions, Expectations

1. INTRODUCTION

The journey from complete helplessness to gaining political power is the narrative of the Dalit political movement. In fact, Ambedkar was the first to use the term "Dalit" in his journal Bahishkrut Bharat (Outcaste India) in 1928. In doing so, he politicised the so-called untouchables, which Gandhi depoliticised by referring to them as "Harijans." "Dalit" has the potential to be a revolutionary term, but it also represents the so-called lower-caste people or untouchables, people who have experienced caste atrocities, and people who are broken. In addition to challenging caste differences and the potential for the caste system that dehumanises members of this group to disintegrate, it offers them a completely new counter-discourse to combat caste atrocities. There were no such options for the word "Harijan," and many Dalits clearly detested it. It served as a means of retaining the Dalits in the Hindu community. However, there is a chance to break free from the term "Dalit" and forge a distinct, revolutionary identity. Anupama Rao discusses the politics of naming in this setting and asserts that names give identities significance. As she states:

In this case, the politics of the name also reflects a deeper paradox of Dalit politics that derives from the fact that the term "Dalit" is both analytic and prescriptive: it defines the historical structures and practices of dispossession that experientially mark someone as Dalit and simultaneously identifies the Dalit as someone seeking to escape those same structures. In other words, the name indexes an analysis of caste inequality and the terms of resistance that can augur its annihilation (Ibid. 16).

The term "Dalit" is hence dynamic. It has the capacity to "become," to advance and evolve toward an identity that could eradicate caste and transcend the so-called Hindu fold. Transcending from a bad identity to a positive and revolutionary one is this exact process.

In this framework, it is crucial to briefly discuss colonial history and the role that Hindu nationalists had in shaping the Dalit identity. According to Nicholas Dirks (quoted in Rao, *The Caste Question* 5), "an enhanced politicisation of civil society took shape after the mutiny of 1857, when culture became an explicit category of colonial government." According to Uma Chakravarti, a new "public culture" emerged during the colonial era. Power dynamics and hierarchical relationships were altered with the arrival of the British and their dominance over the Indian subcontinent. All of the castes who wished to renegotiate their positions in the traditional hierarchical order believed that the British government was the new secular power and would be the best one to handle their issues because it proved to be an all-encompassing body that would rule over the entire nation. According to Risley, the Census Commissioner, each caste should be categorised "by social precedence as recognised by native public opinion at the present day" (quoted in Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste* 117). This was followed by the statement that the enlightened public opinion must make the final choice, which obviously implied that the opinions of the upper caste must be taken into consideration. Despite all of this, the leaders of the so-called lower castes saw this as a chance to rise in the caste hierarchy and obtain social respect. For the lower castes, colonial authority created numerous opportunities. One of the numerous options for escaping the caste system was conversion. In addition to exposing students to fresh perspectives, English instruction—particularly that provided by Christian missionary schools—also created opportunities for employment in the public sector. For the Dalits, it created completely new identities. The so-called lower castes experienced social mobility as a result of these economic shifts brought about by new educational and employment opportunities. In addition to all of this, the colonial decision to count Indians according to caste through the decennial Census, which began in 1872, was the primary cause of the rise and frenzy for an identified caste identity. The Sepoy Mutiny caught the colonial rulers off guard, and they wanted to reevaluate the Indian situation. For them, the fundamental component of Indian social, religious, and political life was caste.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

We Do Not Part by Han Kang (2024) uses a fractured story to examine gender, silence, and historical tragedy. In the book, a writer revisits the violent past of Jeju Island and gathers testimonials from women who endured crimes committed by the state. In the context of gendered oppression and historical memory in particular, Kang's narrative style emphasizes how language can both disclose and conceal power relations.

Gossip is reframed as a feminist method of resistance in Kelsey McKinney's 2023 book *You Didn't Hear This From Me: (Mostly) True Notes on Gossip*. According to McKinney, gossip—which is sometimes written off as unimportant—has historically served as a way for women to exchange information, get over social constraints, and question authority. This work offers a new viewpoint on the social and political implications of informal communication by placing gossip within gendered discourse and power dynamics.

With an emphasis on colonial legacies, Ali A. Mazrui's 2023 book *The Power of Babel: Language and Governance in the African Experience* explores language as a weapon of governance. The book offers insights on how language shapes power relations worldwide, including gendered implications in literature and policy, despite its focus on African countries. This book is pertinent to conversations on linguistic power in English literature because Mazrui emphasizes how colonial languages still influence identity and authority.

Language and Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives by Sara Mills (2021) examines how gendered language functions in various circumstances by combining ideas from literary studies, feminism, and linguistics. Mills addresses issues including workplace discourse, literary depictions of authority, and gendered politeness standards. Because of its multidisciplinary perspective, the book is a useful tool for comprehending how language shapes gender and authority in literature.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To gauge how much contemporary female authors have contributed to feminist writing.
2. To demonstrate the value of literature as a remedy for social injustice

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: This study adopts a qualitative research design rooted in critical textual analysis. Unlike quantitative approaches that rely on numerical data, textual analysis allows for a nuanced examination of language, themes and representations within literary works. The method is particularly suited to gender studies, where power relations, cultural ideologies and symbolic meanings must be interpreted in context. The study draws on the principles of feminist literary criticism, queer theory and intersectionality to analyze how texts both reflect and reshape social conceptions of gender. These theoretical lenses enable a layered understanding of literature as both a site of patriarchal reproduction and a medium of resistance.

To conduct a comprehensive analysis of gender roles in English literature, this research paper will employ a multi-faceted methodology, incorporating various approaches to gather and analyze data. The methodology will involve the following key elements:

Literature Review: A thorough review of existing scholarly works, critical essays and literary analyses pertaining to gender roles in English literature will be conducted. This will provide a foundation for understanding the existing research landscape, identifying key themes and exploring gaps in knowledge.

Textual Analysis: A selection of representative literary works from different periods and genres will be chosen for in-depth textual analysis. This analysis will involve close reading and interpretation of the texts, paying particular attention to the construction of gender roles, character development, narrative techniques and the portrayal of gender dynamics.

Historical and Contextual Analysis: The research will consider the historical, social and cultural contexts in which the selected literary works were produced. By examining the societal norms, beliefs and events of each period the study will uncover the influences on the construction and representation of gender roles in literature.

Comparative Study: A comparative analysis will be conducted to explore the similarities and differences in the construction and evolution of gender roles across different literary works, authors and periods. This comparative approach will highlight the diversity of representations and shed light on the changing perceptions of gender.

Intersectional Perspective: An intersectional lens will be applied to the analysis, considering the interplay between gender roles and other dimensions of identity, such as race, class and sexuality. This approach will enable a nuanced understanding of the complexities and intersections of identity within the portrayal of gender in literature.

Reader Response Analysis: The study will also incorporate insights from reader response theory, examining how readers interpret and engage with gendered narratives. This analysis will explore the ways in which literature influences reader's understanding of gender roles, stereotypes and societal norms.

Theoretical Frameworks: The research will draw on relevant theoretical frameworks, such as feminist theory, queer theory and poststructuralist approaches, to provide critical perspectives on gender roles in literature. These frameworks will aid in the interpretation and analysis of the selected texts, as well as in understanding the broader socio-cultural implications.

By employing this multi-methodological approach, this research aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced examination of gender roles in English literature. The combination of textual analysis, historical context, comparative study, intersectionality and reader response analysis will contribute to a holistic understanding of the construction, evolution and impact of gender roles in literature, fostering new insights and perspectives on this significant aspect of English literary studies.

5. RESULT AND DATA INTERPRETATION

The Dalits had long been denied the right to express themselves. They have lived in excruciating anguish with no way to escape it. Education is a necessary component of cultural expression, yet Dalits were denied the opportunity to receive an education. As a result, autobiographies—which, according to Sarah Beth, are a major form of political assertion—gave vent to the oppression they have endured throughout history. When a group of people who have been oppressed and subjugated for a long time because of caste or racial differences begin to participate in the cultural and political arenas of social life through writing, their first instinct may be to describe their agonising experiences as members of a lower caste and the marginalised Other. Whether the work is an autobiography or a fiction, it is always about the community's struggle against caste injustice and their "unique" experience as Dalits. As a result, Dalit literature has the inherent quality of always telling the tale of the greater community. Since the protagonist or individual is merely a part of the suffering total, they become less significant. As a result, the community usually takes precedence. In order for the community to emerge as the topic rather than the individual, the individual is submerged under the ordinariness of ordinary Dalit existence. In this regard, it should be noted that Dalit women seem to have their own radicalism when it comes to autobiographies and novels. The involvement from the perspective of the woman is what sets apart Dalit women's writings, particularly those of Bama. This gives them several opportunities. Not only do they struggle against caste and social discrimination in the group as a whole, but they also struggle against gender discrimination as women both inside and beyond the society. Bama's work Sangati, which I will be discussing now, is especially characterised by this twofold resistance.

Novel writing originated in the West, and the protagonist, whose development the book discusses, is at its core. The West's tendency toward individualism is undoubtedly the source of the tradition. In this context, Ian Watt correctly states:

...from the Renaissance onwards, there was a growing tendency for individual experience to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbiter of reality; and this tradition would seem to constitute an important part of the general cultural background of the rise of the novel. (Watt, 14)

The bildungsroman, which shows the protagonist's development from boyhood to maturity, became a significant form in the hands of the author. Autobiographies also use the same style, focusing on the individual, but they are grounded in reality rather than fiction. In these ways, colonial modernity has shaped Indian tradition. However, given the necessity of their own chronology and social and psychological backdrop, Dalit literature clearly deviate from this. Dalit women's life narratives depict "a social and community-based chorus of voices" (Waghmare 13), in contrast to the autobiographies of upper-class or middle-class Hindu women, which emphasise the personal and confessional. Alok Mukherjee refers to it as the "genre of life writing" as a result (12). Here, it was impossible to distinguish the personal struggles from the societal ones, the truth from fiction, or even the autobiography from the book. Bama has already left her mark on the subversion of this genre's conventional shape through her autobiography, *Karukku*. In the instance of the classic novel form, how does she accomplish it? She accomplishes this by, on the one hand, giving her book a highly unique form and, on the other, by constructing a distinct world of women. Instead of focusing on a single protagonist whose personal development is often the theme of the mainstream novel genre, her book is made up of vignettes about numerous women. In fact, it was believed that the growth of the middle-class individual and his unique experience was a prerequisite for the novel's development as an artistic genre in Europe. The name "the novel," which meaning new, comes from the belief that every individual experience is distinct and constantly fresh. In contrast, Bama builds a very different social environment in her book. Her book lacks the evolving plot framework that typically demonstrates the protagonist's development in a traditional Bildungsroman, as previously mentioned. According to Debjani Ganguly's essay "Dalit life stories," Sangati has elements from a variety of genres. As she states:

It functions as prosopography (collective biography) by narrating stories of suffering and survival in the everyday life of a community of *paraiya* women in rural South India. It has picaresque elements in its episodic structure as it jumps from event to event that are not, in the final analysis, tied together in an organic plot. Finally, if one focuses on its skeletal framing by the story of a Dalit girl child growing into adulthood, it manifests some features of the *Bildungsroman*. *Sangati* signals the multiple and conflicting legacies of the history of Dalit community formation, in terms of both regional difference and gender. (Ganguly: 2012, 157)

This is where Sangati's uniqueness and radicalism originate. In addition to being distinct from what mainstream novels are all about, the form itself is flexible enough to allow and depict Dalit life in all of its complicated and vivid details. Sangati departs from the standard novel style, which tells the tale of a single person seeking self-realization, to tell the story of numerous women whose daily lives are a true struggle. According to Lakshmi Holmstrom's introduction, the book is "one of interconnected anecdotes" (xvi). The stories highlight the bravery, wit, humour, and independent spirit of Dalit women. Through the use of oral storytelling, Bama creates a completely separate universe by discussing the past, present, stories about various members of the society, the numerous social ceremonies that were held in the past, and even the bad spirits that possessed women at different points in time. As stated by Bama in the book's acknowledgements,

My mind is crowded with many anecdotes: stories not only about the sorrows and tears of Dalit women, but also about their lively and rebellious culture; their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them, but rather to swim vigorously against the tide; about the self-confidence and self-respect that enables them to leap over their adversities by laughing at and ridiculing them; about their passion to live life with vitality, truth and enjoyment; about their hard labour. I wanted to shout out these stories. I was eager that through them, everyone should know about our lives and us. (*Sangati*, ix)

Her book expresses the collective awareness of suffering experienced by a diverse range of women. This fluidity of form, which Debjani Ganguly mentions in her essay, may have been necessary for the portrayal of this violent, violated, humorous, and occasionally even liberating environment. There would be too much for one structure to support. The tales are not epic tales. These are little tales, and what makes them special is that they depict commonplace events in women's lives. In a similar vein, Gyanendra Pandey discusses Dalit autobiographies and the kind of narratives they tell:

In their description of the Dalit struggle to overcome the history of this oppression and to inhabit a different kind of body, they also tell us a good deal about the play of a less visible, universal prejudice- the commonsense of the age, or of the community that says, casually, *that's how it is*, and, implicitly, *how it is meant to be*.

The narrator starts off by telling the tale of her own grandmother, who also serves as the inspiration for many of her tales. After that, she tells us stories about a number of different women before dedicating just a few pages to herself at the end. Stories about personal lives, everyday struggles, creative and humorous survival strategies employed by the ladies, and tales of peys or bad spirits and their possession of women can all be found in the hamlet. The majority of the articles focus on the challenges that women face on a daily basis. Some women deal with it by using their intelligence, wit, and humour, while others suffer silently and helplessly. There are several sources of the crimes. Although upper-caste landowners are infamous for exploiting and sexually abusing Dalit women, their own males are no better. They occasionally subject their women to even more severe forms of torture and brutality. Then there is the church, which more closely adhered to gender and caste distinction rather than promoting independence from it. In actuality, the church made the already downtrodden people's condition even more harsh by imposing its own rigid biblical laws on them. Not only do these find a place in this brief novel, but there are also well-known tales of local festivals, spirits or peys that frequently haunt the area and possess individuals, and their distinctive everyday language, way of life, and eating customs. Bama's frequent comparisons between the lifestyles of the so-called upper-caste and lower-caste women are another noteworthy feature of the book. It only serves to further persuade us that it may not be possible for women to form an all-encompassing sisterhood and that, given the Indian context, it is essential to comprehend women via their unique characteristics. This indicates that, in the case of Dalit women, knowledge of the caste-gender nexus is just as crucial as knowledge of Dalit patriarchy, which contributes to their demise.

CONCLUSION

This raises concerns about the entrenchment of Dalitism, which is another example of "self-identical hegemonic structure." What the Dalit Panthers believed to be their agenda in their 1973 manifesto contains a hint of yet another viewpoint. It resulted from their definition of the term "Dalit," which they defined as "all the Scheduled castes and tribes, landless labourers, small farmers, and nomadic tribes, who are committed to fighting injustice stemming from political power, property, religion, and social status" (qtd. Shah, Dalit Identity and Politics 209). It suggests that the emancipation of the Dalits is contingent upon the emancipation of the subalterns as a whole, including women. The triumph of feminism is currently being discussed from the same perspective, which considers not only the subalterns individually but also the entire threatened planet. In this regard, the Dalit women writers do, in fact, exhibit the requisite consciousness or, for that matter, the doubleness mentioned above. On the one hand, they discuss the entire subalternity, and on the other, they demonstrate an active awareness of gender exploitation and discrimination both inside and beyond the community. The observations made by authors like Bama, Kamble, and Sivakami are outstanding examples, while those given by Mahasweta and Arundhati further support the idea.

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