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## **SOCIAL OSTRACISM AND GENDER SUBORDINATION IN THE WRITINGS OF THE MARGINALISED**

**Jain Varsia Rani.R**

Research Scholar

V.V.Vanniaperumal College for Women

Virudhunagar

E-mail: varsiarj@gmail.com



### **ABSTRACT**

This paper addresses the matters of caste system and racial prejudice prevailing between Dalit literature and Afro-American literature. It chiefly focuses on the persecution of blacks and the whites. Constant social clash between the capitalists and the working class is the major issue discussed throughout.

**Keywords:** Social stratification, gender oppression, inequality, persistence and transformation.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The term 'Social Ostracism' is defined as social exclusion and social rejection. A particular community is being expelled from a group considered that they are untouchables or disgrace to the society. Gender Subordination is nothing but subjection and servitude. The present paper explores how men and women are treated in the hands of contemporary writers.

All societies are stratified into two major social groups such as a ruling class and a subject class. The power goes to the ruling class; through that power they assist workers from the subject class with low wages. But they extract more labour from them. They just do not bother about the workers and their families. There is an unending war between the submissive and the aggressive. An always aggressive person wins. Nothing matters, but money.

The powerless never get satisfied with the work they do because they do not get adequate wages to run their families. Throughout their life they are exploited by the power mongers. They are made to suffer in the stratified society. They are not able to get rid of their poverty.

Hierarchical distinctions of colour, caste, sex and religion are dominant tropes of oppression operative in a society and are responsible in perpetuating systems of inequality. The black women in the west and dalits in the east as minorities have been categorically denied not only literacy but the most minimal possibilities of decent human life. They encounter deprivation which determines their limiting and limited circumstances. Their entry into the mainstream is made difficult not merely by prejudices and restrictions but also by psychological boundaries they internalize as they develop in a social structure that historically has excluded them.

The research paper entitled “Social Ostracism and Gender Subordination” is the never ending clash and conflict between the upper class and the lower class, the blacks and the whites, the capitalists and the workers, dalits and the non-dalits and how they are reflected in Dalit literature in India and Afro-American literature. Problems arise when the high

class wants to rule over or dominate the working class. The main focus is on Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* where in the Hindus and whites suppress and crush the Dalits and the blacks down respectively. In this way, Dalit literature and Afro-American literature are similar to each other. They came into existence after much struggle.

Brahminical literature refused to include the life of the oppressed that are renamed as Dalits/untouchables. They hate to get blended, the life and history of the kings and queens with the life of the untouchables. Naturally, Dalits had no place in the literature. After many efforts taken by Dr.Ambedkar, Dalits have received their recognition in the literary field. Followed by Dr.Ambedkar, innumerable dedicated contemporary writers have bloomed to raise the position of the untouchables from the dust. The agony and traumatic condition of Dalits are brought out to the light only through the Dalit writings. Dalit writers started their literary career with autobiographies daringly. Until then no one knew that Dalits were the sufferers. The writers who belong to the Dalit community struggle to rescue the remaining people under the clutches of upper caste monsters.

## THE WORKS OF SIVAKAMI

Among them, P.Sivakami occupies a special place in the field of Dalit literature. She is a prolific writer and activist. She has published four novels and four short-story collections and is a regular contributor to the literary magazine *PudiyaKodangi*. Her self-translated work *The Grip of Change* is considered as the most prominent among the rest of the novels. She is regarded as India's leading feminist and Dalit novelist. She is a former IAS officer. She served in the government of Tamil Nadu and central government from 1980 to 2008. Afterwards she voluntarily retired to serve the poor and the disadvantaged. In most of her novels, she grapples with the life of dalits mainly on the afflictions of Dalit women. She feels that most gender atrocities are committed against Dalit women.

In Afro-American literature, Toni Morrison attained the unfathomable and unsurpassable height by receiving the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993. She is a creative writer of grand and glorious possibility who hails from a family of industrious and hard-working black people struggling against racial oppression. Morrison started her literary career in journalism and very soon she has been acclaimed as a senior editor at Random

House, a major publishing company. This was the time when she decided to devote herself to writing and resultantly her debut novel *The Bluest Eye* appeared in 1970.

The subject of slavery has a particular fascination for Toni Morrison as it enables her to explore the implications of representing slavery on the "real slaves" and their descendants who are no longer slaves. All her novels especially *Beloved* offers a painfully compelling, detailed account of slave humiliation and oppression so that the black life on American soil is recorded, examined and understood for its complexity and significance and not excluded in a new version of American history.

*Beloved* is set during the end of Civil War when violence against black reached its climax. Through flash backs Morrison takes us to a more distant period when slavery was practised in the south. The narration revolves around a group of slaves who once lived on a plantation in Kentucky "Sweet Home". Each slave has a drastic story to tell and each share a common burden of exploitation, ostracization and oppression and their stories gradually merge into a single story.

## PLIGHT OF THE DALIT COMMUNITY

The real plight of the Dalit community is brilliantly exhibited through

the novel *The Grip of Change*. The novel comprises how Dalits are treated in the hands of upper caste Hindus, how they are addressed, how much they earn, where they live, how Dalit women are violated etc. Dalits are completely ignored by the high class people. They think even the single touch of Dalits would pollute them. Dalits hold the lowest place in the hierarchical set up. They are considered worse than animals. In the novel *The Grip of Change*, Sivakami has criticized the self-destructive tendencies of Dalit community by exposing caste hierarchical order existing in Tamil Nadu, by giving an elaborated narrative in the text, she says:

Even amongst the lower castes, hierarchy existed-pallars were agriculturallabourers, Parayars were drummers and menials, and the hakkiliyars were cobblers. The first grade-the pallars were absent in Puliur. The pallars considered themselves superior to the rest. The Parayars considered themselves higher than the chakkiliyars, who in turn considered themselves superior to the Para-vannars, the washer community. The para-vannar men washed clothes for the lower castes and the women worked as midwives for them. Similar to all other human communities, the women were

considered to be lower than the men. Everyone established their worth by pointing to those beneath them (63).

There is a long gap between the upper caste street and the low caste street. Economic inequality separates them accordingly. The people who live in the low caste street should not walk on the upper caste roads. They are not known to the upper caste locality. They do not know anyone from them. But the upper caste men and women have illegitimate relationship with the Dalit men and women. If they do not yield to their desires, they will be tortured, raped and violated. Thangam, the protagonists, body is repeatedly damaged and violated. When the affair between Thangam and Udayar is brought to light, he simply leaves her to be punished and to be beaten up black and blue by his relatives. In this case, the exploiter is Udayar and the exploited is Thangam. As per the law he should be punished and sentenced to death. Contrarily, Thangam is accused and blamed for having relationship with Udayar.

### **SEX ABUSES ON DALIT WOMEN**

Dalit women are not only sexually abused by the upper caste men but also by the Dalit men. Being a childless widow, she cannot fight for her share of land on

her own. So she seeks the help of Kathamuthu who is the leader of the Parayar community. He takes in charge of Thangam in order to find justice for her. He inserts her in his house as the third one; already he has two wives. He struggles to save her from being caught up in the hands of upper caste beasts. Finally he wins the justice. But as an exchange offer, he just uses her body to quench his thirst for lust. Throughout this novel, her body is considered as 'seducer'. If they really hate Dalits they would not have touched them. On the basis of caste division, the upper caste Hindus set the Dalit community apart. But whenever they want sex they can use women from Dalit community. This is the tentative law made by them.

There is another female character Gowri who undergoes humiliation and hurt. When she is a girl, she is continuously suppressed and blamed by her father, Kathamuthu. With this subordination she can be called as a victim as her mother is under the control of her father. Naturally she cannot raise her voice against patriarchy. But she is not ready to be considered as a victim throughout her life. Fortunately and successfully she completes her schooling, and she dares to pursue her higher studies in the distant place. Even in the college, she is insulted by her classmate because

she is of low caste. In *The Grip of Change*, Sivakami just documents how Gowri was disturbed by an event in which she gets wounded on the remarks of a student belonging to a backward caste. Gowri asked the student who was returning after getting her scholarship money,

How much did you get?' For you, it is different', the girl replied. 'Aren't you from a scheduled caste?' Gowri enquired doubtfully. 'Nonsense! I am Vanniyakula Kshatriya'. If you are not from a scheduled caste, just say so!

Why do you have to prefix a nonsense'?' (95).

Without bothering about being subordinated, she just does her work with her heart and soul. Simply she breaks the obstacles using education as a weapon. She has found the imperishable treasure that no one can steal from her. A huge transformation takes place through the character Gowri. Thus Sivakami conveys the message to the Dalits that they can overcome anything when they have education.

Sethe the central character of the novel *Beloved* is a runaway slave woman and slave mother who feels alienated and repressed under the burden of her past.

Her past comes to us in bits and pieces in form of stories and flashbacks. Paul D, one of her companion at 'Sweet Home', comes after eighteen years and his presence makes Sethe speak. She recalls the incidents of her racist and sexist oppression. The worst she suffers is when the boys at the farm steal her breast milk while her own children separated from her are deprived of their mother's milk. The tree like scar mark tells the horrible story of physical torture. The cruel school teacher encodes scars on her back when she complains about the boys who took away her milk. Sethe decides to leave 'Sweet Home' to escape torture. Her children leave before her but her husband Halle does not come at the appointed hour and is lost to her forever. Finally Sethe commits her desperate and violent act of infanticide so that no white man will ever "dirty" her, so that no young with "moosy teeth" will ever hold the child down and suck her breasts" (*Beloved* 251, 70).

### **IDEAL MOTHERHOOD**

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison discusses about the African American motherhood. Although giving birth is a noble act, for Blacks it is just to bring another innocent human being into an oppressive world. Morrison has given Sethe as an ideal mother who is able to escape from slavery, bear rape, sustain

with the hardships but could not neglect the responsibility of her motherhood. Sethe is a desperate victim of violence of both slavery and female oppression. The spooky memories hinder Sethe to lead a healthy and peaceful life. Sethe has conserved some of the traits of her original traditional African culture, which highly values motherhood. She is deprived of a normal family life in her youth which she wants to give her children as a mother, at any cost. She will not let the white men blemish her children like they have already done with her. Sethe's elevated motherly love alone leads her to kill her daughter, as a mother she takes the womanhood to a new level. Sethe is Morrison's paradoxical character who has a lot of motherly love towards her children, loyalty to her White masters and at the same time ferocity towards her oppressors.

Economic reasons more than any others had led to the killing of infants in the slavery era. The African-American set up is the example where economic factors led to the sorrowful phase of the Black community. Infanticide has always been the background of the slave age. It sometimes showed resistance and sometimes mercy killing. But child abuse and especially girl child faced the most terrible consequences of slavery. Denver is also a victim of child abuse. The initial

years of her childhood are spent in prison along with her mother. She is mocked by the society for the crime committed by her mother. Her mother never reveals her past to Denver which makes Denver lose faith on Sethe. The rest of her childhood is spent in fear of being killed by her mother. She is a psychologically scared child. Slavery has done a psychological damage to a mother-child relationship.

The power of the women in acting as a community to meet their feministic ideals is seen in *Beloved*. Sethe who is isolated from the community is drowned into the depth of insanity due to the guilt of the murder. In the end Paul D and Denver join with the community to exorcise the ghost, *Beloved*. The community of women also organises themselves in the case of an adversity. The feministic ideal of the strength of women in a group, to fight such adversities and oppression is seen in this incident. Denver, despite turning physically into a full grown woman still acts girlish because of her confinement inside the house for many years. Sethe's psychological oppression forced Denver to set out and seek help from the society and from the womanhood.

Most women in the world, in one way or another, are subject to patriarchal and racial oppression. Each woman's

specific needs, desires, and problems are greatly shaped by her race, socioeconomic status, class, sexual orientation, educational experience, religion and nationality. Hence the experiences shared by the Dalit women and the Black women. As a result, various other factors need to be taken into account when dealing with the problems of African American females.

## **STRUGGLE OF BLACK WOMEN**

The roles of slave women varied as domestic and farm help, procreating slave children, and even used up for the recreational purposes of their master. The helplessness and the unsupportive nature of the Black women may be the reason for the increasing crime on the Black women. However, all the Black women of the early nineteenth century could not have met a fairy tale ending but they have been strongly enduring the ill treatment for years. Even if forced into hopeless marriages or kept working until death they endured them silently. Black women did not run away from their responsibility in society. The history of the Black Women is regularly one of the quarrel and of extreme torments. Through the centuries there has been a struggle for women to find their self-identity and to remove themselves from the forced identity by both the Black men and the White people.

## CONCLUSION

Capitalists are born with the sadistic nature. They get some kind of satisfaction when they see them suffering. They do not have the word 'compassion' in their dictionary. There is no boundary drawn to the domination of whites and the Hindu community. Dalits, without the botheration of caste and class, gradually they start lifting their heads to fit in the society from the clutches of poverty. Education helps them do so. Contrarily, in the case of blacks, they are being subordinated by the whites throughout the novel. They push the blacks constantly and make them down to earth. They are unable to break the bondage of slavery. In the novel *Beloved*, slaves are not regarded as human beings but as animals. Sethe remembers how "Schoolteacher'd wrap that string all over my head, cross my nose, around my behind. Number my teeth" (*Beloved* 226). By using a string, the schoolteacher measures the body parts of the blacks and studies them. This action of physical measurement becomes a form of oppression, as it subjugates the slaves into biological specimens. If they make an attempt to get rid of their hands they will be whipped and tortured. Even though Paul D, Sethe and their family feel free from the enslavement after the ghost has been exorcised still they are afraid by

thinking that slave owners may come at any time. But whatever happens they won't give up their struggle. Because they have a strong hope for the future that one day the situation will change.

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