

Aspirations For Identity In Bama "Sangati" And Toni Morrison "Beloved"

Sonia Priyadarshini R^{1*} and Dr.Vineeta Diwan²

^{1*}Research Scholar, Department of English, Kalinga University, Raipur, Chattisgarh, U.P.

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Kalinga University, Chattisgarh, U.P.

Abstract:

The term "identity" encompasses a wide array of elements integral to one's sense of self, including rights, equality, dignity, access to equal opportunities in both work and education, and the fundamental right to receive fair pay for one's contributions. Postcolonial literature extensively delves into the multifaceted concept of identity, shedding light on how historical narratives, cultural contexts, and entrenched ideological frameworks intersect within both alien and native societies, intricately weaving themselves into the lives of the central characters. The pervasive sense of disorientation and isolation experienced by these protagonists emanates from the incessant questioning they face from those around them, probing into their origins and demanding answers to questions like 'who are you? Where are you from?' The inherent complexities arising from the juxtaposition of conflicting binaries create a profound identity crisis, where individuals find themselves grappling with the intricate puzzle of defining who they truly are amidst the competing societal expectations and self-perceptions. It becomes evident that identity is not a fixed, inherent trait but rather a nuanced and dynamic process that is shaped by a combination of external influences and personal agency. One's sense of self is a composite tapestry of both bestowed attributes and consciously constructed facets, continually evolving and adapting in response to the complex interplay of personal experiences and societal constructions.

Key Words: alien, circumstances, despair, identity, perplexity, rights, society, women

This paper delves into the profound crisis faced by the protagonists in Bama's "Karukku" and Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" as they grapple to establish their identities amidst the myriad challenges prevalent in their respective societies. Despite the geographical and cultural disparities between these two writers, their protagonists encounter similar struggles in gaining recognition within their communities. Bama, as an Indian dalit women writer, sheds light on the persistent issues entrenched in Indian society, where caste divisions perpetuate the marginalization of its own people. On the other hand, Toni Morrison, an African American woman writer, vividly portrays the injustices inflicted upon black individuals in a society that systematically discriminates based on race and skin color. Through their poignant narratives, both writers confront and expose the deep-rooted social ills that plague their societies.

The parallels between the experiences of Dalit and African American communities underscore their shared history of marginalization and exploitation. Constantly oppressed, these communities have channeled their discontent into organized efforts and intellectual pursuits as a means of resistance against their oppressors. By acknowledging their circumstances and voicing out against all forms of exploitation, they strive to assert their rightful place in society and celebrate their individual and collective identities. Dalit literature, particularly, serves as a platform for the underprivileged, amplifying the socio-political struggles of the downtrodden and oppressed. Through their writings, Dalit women authors have begun to share their stories, shedding light on the narratives that remained unheard for so long. In his seminal essay, 'Dalit Vision of Just Society in India,' S.M. Michael advocates for the recognition of Dalit writers and their unique perspectives, emphasizing the importance of embracing the sensitivities and experiences of this marginalized community in shaping a more inclusive society in his groundbreaking article "Dalit Vision of Just Society in India,":

The word 'Dalit' particularly emphasizes the dehumanizing 'caste oppression' that makes them outcastes and untouchables (a degradation not shared by the tribal's or sophists) within the context of the Hindu caste system with its religious, social and organizing principle of 'purity and pollution' (108-109)

Hailing from the southern region of Tamil Nadu, Bama's upbringing was marked by the harrowing specter of dalit exploitation at the hands of the dominant higher caste members. Through her seminal work 'Karukku,' a poignant autobiographical novel, she delves into the deep-seated traumas confronted by the dalit community, shedding light on the pervasive societal injustices rooted in caste discrimination. Her narrative vividly exposes the entrenched ills that plagued the society she inhabited, elucidating the layers of oppression and discrimination faced by the marginalized dalit population. Bama's personal experiences reflect a stark reality of facing dual marginalization within her social milieu. Moreover, her resilience is exemplified by her refusal to acquiesce to the unequal treatment meted out by the nuns in the convent where she pursued her education and rendered her services, thereby challenging the systemic biases

and disparities ingrained in the fabric of society. She discloses her internal trauma in the following ways in her book *Karuku*:

Because Dalits have been enslaved for generation upon generation, and been told again and again for their degradation, they have come to believe that they are degraded, lacking honor and self-worth, untouchable; they have reached a stage where they themselves voluntarily, hold themselves apart. This is the worst injustice. This is what little babies are told, how they are instructed. The consequences of all this is that there is no way for Dalit's to find freedom or redemption. (Karukku28)

In her poignant autobiography, titled *Karukku*, Bama fearlessly delves into the dichotomous realities of joy and humiliation that not only her mother and grandmother endure but that numerous Dalit women confront daily in the arduous realm of the fields and within the confines of their homes. Through a deeply introspective lens, Bama invites readers on a profound journey as she shares the pivotal moment of personal crisis that marks her decision to depart from the religious order she faithfully served for seven transformative years. This momentous departure becomes a catalyst for Bama to reflect on her formative years in the rustic embrace of her village, weaving a tapestry of memories that vividly capture the essence of her childhood. Her reminiscences serve as a poignant mirror through which she inspects the past, offering insights that resonate powerfully in her narrative. Embracing the past with a blend of nostalgia and critical introspection, Bama's work emerges not only as a testament to her personal odyssey but also as a profound commentary on the complex tapestry of social and cultural dynamics that shape the lives of Dalit women in India. The seed for protest against discrimination began to germinate deep within her when she discovered a glaring disparity in the wages she was receiving compared to her male colleagues. This realization sparked fervor deep within her, fueling her determination to take a stand against the injustice she witnessed. As she pondered over the unequal treatment she was subjected to, a sense of indignation and resolve grew stronger within her with each passing day. This growing awareness of the systemic bias instilled in her a sense of purpose and a desire to advocate for equal rights and fair treatment for all. The seeds of dissent that were sown in her heart soon blossomed into a profound commitment to fight against the pervasive discrimination that she and many others faced in the workplace.

I saw our people working so hard night and day, I often used to wonder from where they to their strength, but of course, they never received a payment that was appropriate to their labor, men received one wage, women another. They always paid men more. I could never understand why. (Karukku 47)

Bama skillfully portrays the intricate ways in which the church exercised authority over the lives of Dalit Catholics, delving into areas such as education, the development of Dalit children, and the empowerment of Dalit women, all contributing to the overall liberation of the Dalit community. Through education, the Dalit community as a whole can obtain empowerment and secure a sense of human dignity, thereby fostering a pathway towards equality. Bama's narrative is colored with poignant emotional encounters and experiences that embody a journey of self-discovery, establishing her as a resilient and determined individual.

In her novels, Bama fervently advocates for Dalit equality within the stratified Indian society, challenging the prevalent notions of superiority upheld by the upper class. Likewise, Morrison's works not only explore the theme of white supremacy but also delve into the complexities of radicalization and class disparities within the black community. Morrison adeptly addresses the issue of internal racism prevalent among individuals of the same race, presenting a multifaceted view of societal dynamics. Her narrative styles bear the unique imprint of Afro-American storytelling traditions, weaving a tapestry that reflects her personal and cultural heritage.

Morrison consistently gravitates towards the central themes of marginalization and alienation experienced by black individuals in a predominantly white society. Her penetrating analyses shed light on the dehumanizing treatment endured by the black race, akin to being treated as mere animals during the periods portrayed in her novels. Through her poignant storytelling, Morrison effectively captures the essence of the struggles faced by the black community, emphasizing the urgent need for societal change and greater inclusivity.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison delves deeply into the intricate boundaries of black society, meticulously examining how these boundaries are rigidly set and defined by the dominant white community. Within this societal structure, black individuals often find themselves in awe of the white geographical boundaries, yet are held at a distance, only permitted entry if they serve the interests or whims of white individuals. For instance, when Claudia and Frieda venture to Lake Shore Park in search of Pecola, they encounter the stark reality of segregation as they witness Pecola's mother, Pauline, faced with the indignity and humiliation of working for a white family. The stark contrast between the callous treatment of the black characters by the white figures is vividly portrayed in Morrison's evocative prose, as exemplified by Pauline's sharp rebuke after the accidental spillage: "You crazy fools... my floor, mess... look what you....work.... get

on out... Her words were hotter and darker than the smoking berries, and we backed away in dread" (The Bluest Eye 109).

This poignant scene serves as a stark reminder of the discriminatory treatment faced by black individuals at the hands of the white power structure. Through her narrative, Morrison masterfully encapsulates the yearning of the black society for their rightful identity amidst a landscape dominated by a hybridized culture. The novel intricately weaves a tapestry of emotions, showcasing the complex interplay of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the intricate relationship between the white and black communities. As Morrison deftly illustrates, this relationship is fraught with ambivalence, with the black subject never existing in a simple binary opposition to the white counterpart.

Moreover, the narrative sheds light on the struggles of a black woman who grapples with the pervasive mistreatment stemming from her skin color, inciting a fervent desire for change. The conjoining of marginalized dalit literature, exemplified by "Karukku," and African American literature, epitomized by "The Bluest Eye," underscores a shared narrative of resistance against hegemonic powers. In both realms, there exists a profound correlation between the perpetuation of hegemonic structures and the ensuing acts of defiance and retaliation by those deemed marginalized or fallen.

Furthermore, the prevalence of diverse ethnic groups in pluralistic societies like India and the US has upended traditional notions of marginality, as these groups now assert their presence and challenge the mainstream narrative. Figures like Bama and Morrison exemplify a defiance of imposed absence, crafting robust identities that transcend imposed limitations or constraints. Their fluid and multilayered identities resist fixed categorizations, embracing a pluralistic narrative that underscores the dynamism of identity formation.

Overall, the pioneering work of women writers like Bama and Morrison opens up a myriad of interpretations and readings regarding identity formation, particularly emphasizing the complexities faced by female voices emanating from marginalized spaces. Their narratives offer a rich tapestry of insights, enriching the discourse on identity politics and underscoring the transformative power of storytelling from the margins.

In delving deep into the intricacies of Bama's works through our comprehensive analysis, we transcend the boundaries of mere literary exploration. We find ourselves seamlessly intersecting with the broader landscape of feminist discourse and social justice activism, where our examination serves as a profound testament to the wealth of insights we have diligently amassed. These insights shed light on the multifaceted experiences and ongoing struggles diligently navigated by Dalit women in the face of the complex web of caste, class, and gender-based oppressions deeply rooted within our societal fabric.

By consciously directing our focus towards the narratives woven by Dalit women, we not only pay homage to their pivotal roles but also acknowledge the intricate interconnectedness and dynamic interplay of the intersecting systems of discrimination that intricately shape their lived realities. Our approach is underscored by an unyielding commitment to embracing and magnifying Dalit feminist perspectives, reflecting our steadfast dedication to nurturing solidarity and catalyzing collective action in our joint endeavor to combat systemic injustices persisting in our societies.

It is imperative, therefore, for feminist movements and scholarly pursuits alike to steadfastly advocate for the amplification of voices and narratives belonging to Dalit women. Through this advocacy, we illuminate their agency, resilience, and invaluable contributions in the ongoing quest for empowerment and emancipation within the societal framework. Aligned with this unwavering dedication, our active pursuit propels us towards a future where individuals from all walks of life, irrespective of their backgrounds, can revel in the true essence of liberation and parity harmoniously within the intricate tapestry of our communal coexistence.

A poignant juxtaposition between the narratives encapsulated in both Bama's and Toni Morrison's works evokes a stark reminder of the indomitable spirit and unwavering resistance typified by Dalit women when faced with adversity. These profound stories serve as powerful conduits that navigate the labyrinthine intricacies of their daily lives, compelling us not only to ponder but also to catalyze action in fostering transformative societal changes. Within the resounding voices of Dalit women echoed through these narratives lies a clarion call urging us to unify our collective efforts in shaping a future where every individual is afforded the opportunity to luxuriate in genuine freedom and egalitarianism, embraced within the collective fold of our shared communities.

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