

Identity and Self-Representation in Taslima Nasrin's My Girlhood and Bama's Karukku

¹L. S. Shanthi, ²Mary Thomas

¹²*Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Dr MGR Educational and Research Institute University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.*

Abstract

Taslima Nasrin and Bama are fascinated by the dilemmas women face in various facets of their existence. Even though each writer has their unique strategies for tapping the possibilities of the issue, they all share deep concerns and a desire to see women empowered and outspoken. Bama and Nasrin came from extremely different backgrounds and had quite different formative influences in their lives. *My Girlhood*, by Taslima Nasrin, is about the increasing awareness of gender subordination and female abuse in Bangladesh. *My Girlhood* is about a young girl's search for her personal space. Taslima Nasrin's search for love and independence leads her to a new understanding of being a woman. Dalits may gain economic power, yet their Dalitness follows them till death. They are not socially regarded as equal human beings by the upper castes. In her autobiography, Bama addresses the issue of Dalit identity at various points in her life. The article's main purpose is to study the diagram of Identity and Self-Representation in Taslima Nasrin's *My Girlhood* and Bama's *Karukku*.

Keywords: Self- Representation, Identity, Autobiography, Subaltern issues, Gender, and resistance.

INTRODUCTION

Modern-day women, in their writings, writes from the subcontinent, have endeavored to delve deep into the psyche of women, tracing the patterns of their thinking, feelings, and behavior. They have also attempted to portray the problem of women stuck in a fight between tradition and modernity, the different factors that operate against them, and the unchangeable life conditions that trap their identity.

Dalit writing is a literary phenomenon that emerged after independence. The appearance of Dalit writing is historically significant. The causes and consequences of oppression and depression in the life of the nation's enormous population's marginalized class are also prevalent in many other places of the world.

Most marginalized groups worldwide have a similar system of oppression. However, the

labels vary depending on class and class division. In India, it was done under the guise of caste, while in the West, it was done under race. Inequality was a primary source of marginalization, which led to instability, unfairness, and prejudice.

Women who choose the path of struggle and resistance face a profoundly ingrained and widespread patriarchal order that coerces them and fills their hearts and minds with many anxieties, disillusionment, and impending defeatism. Only women with strong character, tenacity, and perseverance can stand firm and demand the freedom to express themselves, make decisions, and act.

Marginalized groups were always on the periphery, far from power centers. The main goal of this study is to depict the silence of Dalits who are oppressed and marginalized. Dalits have long been considered the "other"

side of Indian society. So, after centuries of quiet, they began to speak out about themselves, resulting in new literature showing declarations of human rights, self-pride, revolution against social prejudice, personal and collective suffering, and dreams and aspirations for a future society free of discrimination.

Bama emphasizes the differences between Dalit and upper-caste women and praises their uniqueness in terms of strength, labor, and persistence. Despite being oppressed, subjugated, and looked down upon as insignificant animals by upper-class people and their males, Dalit women have incredible resistance and survival capacity. Bama's books, written in Tamil and Dalit, question the importance of oppression narratives as the default frame of reference in Dalit-feminist discourses. They expressed the lived experience of caste and looked into the new dimensions of Dalit women's battles.

Taslina Nasrin, a contemporary woman author, born and raised in Bangladesh and trained as a medical, portrays the suffering of Bangladeshi women. The central theme of her novel " is their search for self-identity. This paper highlights the sufferings of women in South Asian society, as represented by Taslima Nasrin, under the guise of religion and culture. It also tackles the common people's anguish and quests for identity. Taslima Nasrin persuades her audience that women's oppression and fundamentalist forces may be defeated if all of us who are humanistic and secular band together to combat their harmful effects. Taslima Nasrin, a contemporary woman author, born and raised in Bangladesh and trained as a medical, portrays the suffering of Bangladeshi women. Her novels revolve around their search for self-identity.

Identity is significant because it influences people's behavior. Individual and group identities exist. Individuals, on the other hand, alter their identities in groups. As social identity theory has demonstrated, people's quest for identification might lead them to seek identity in an arbitrary and random group. An individual can belong to multiple groups and

hence change identities. Inscriptive, territorial, economic, cultural, political, social, and national identities are possible. The majority of identities are manufactured. People create their own identities under various pressures, inducements and freedoms.

Since the 1970s, political and scholarly debates have used " identity politics ". When people cannot achieve an identity because they are not welcomed by those who already have it, it becomes a problem. After the Cold War, the question for East Europeans was whether the West would accept their self-identification as a part of the West. Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians have all been accepted by Westerners. They are less inclined to do so with certain other Eastern Europeans seeking a Western identity. They have been hesitant to do so with Turks, whose bureaucratic elites are yearning for Turkey to become more westernized.

In "Karukku," Caste, Gender, Ego, Rage, And Resistance Are Explored

Karukku, Bama's debut novel, is a notable autobiographical tale. It's about her Dalit people's sad ruminations (recollections) and the dreadful situations in their lives and cultures. Against this backdrop, the plight of Dalit women in Indian society is appalling, as they are oppressed based on gender, class, and caste. She explores themes of revolt and resistance against social segregation, caste dominance, and prejudice in her short tales and novels, and various articles. Her works have been published in English, Kannada, French, Telugu, and Malayalam, among other languages.

Identity refers to the characteristics, appearances, beliefs, or expressions that differentiate a person from others based on his or her individuality or distinguish a person's family, community, ethnicity, or religion from others. On the other hand, Bama believes that two factors determine a person's identity. Caste is one influence, and religion is another. These two characteristics are what determine Bama's sense of self-identity.

Karukku has become a symbol of the Dalit struggle to claim their own identity, breaking all past conventions. Bama has documented some traumatic events that shaped her personality and shaped who she is now. Since ancient times, Dalits have been exposed to atrocities by the upper castes, causing them agony and sorrow. They believed it was their fate to serve the upper classes and work as enslaved people.

Bama has formed a Dalit Penniyam, a Dalit feminist stance in Tamil, through Karukku. All of the works directly criticize the patriarchal power structure and caste-dominated society. They are also more indicative of Dalit women's changing nature. In Karukku and the first half of Sangati, Bama highlights the pains and oppression experienced by Dalit women narrators. Sangati, on the other hand, walks away from the frustration and misery of the first half. Instead, it gives Dalit women a positive identity by emphasizing their inner strength and energy. It honors the tenacity and perseverance of Dalit women to make their mark in a caste-based, male-dominated culture.

In Karukku, Bama has depicted how upper castes exploited Dalits because of their caste. It is believed that caste is as pure as religion. P. Mohan Larbeer has rightly pointed out:

“Caste is the only criteria for identifying anyone in today's caste-ridden society.” (322).

Because of their caste, Dalits were not treated as human beings by the upper castes. Bama's grandmother worked in the houses of upper caste Naikers. Even the small children didn't give any respect to elder Dalits. They called her Patti by her name. But Bama's grandmother addressed the small one as 'Ayya' like the other laborers. Bama says:

“And this grandmother, like all the other laborers, would call the little boy Ayya.” (16)

Dalit Literature Critical Essays (2013) D. Murali Manohar's edited book examines various Dalit problems and issues related to caste, including how their assigned lands have been taken away in the name of development and expansion through Special Economic

Zones and other means; how Jaganth, Sonu, Krishnam and Bama have paved the way for Dalit women's development; and how the Dalits are divided into different religions, primarily Buddhism and Hinduism.

On the one hand, exploring Dalit women's invisible experiences in terms of representations, new images, styles, and forms and developing a critical vocabulary that systematically communicates these is difficult. There is also an attempt to construct an innovative trend of Dalit literature, which dates back to the twentieth century, in order to create new historiography. There is also a greater theoretical push to focus on the double patriarchy parameter. And it is in these areas that Indian Dalit feminist criticism shows significant parallels with their critical analysis of self, truth, knowledge, beliefs, language, and power. Liberal and radical feminist perspectives inspired some of the previous work that set the path for this form of Dalit criticism.

Bama highlights the labor done by Dalit women at home and outside the home, for her own family and the upper classes, in her fictitious autobiography. She says that the family, the church, and the government all regard violence against women as a regular part of life. She tells how Dalit women work hard in the fields of upper-caste landlords and are still brutalized by upper-castes and family members in Karukku. A Dalit lady must work hard from being a youngster to the end of her life. She chronicles the battle of Dalit women for education, empowerment, and dignified existence in her book. Dalit girls were viewed as second-class citizens and were relegated to second-class status even at play. In her autobiography, Bama describes the games played by children in a Dalit hamlet in great detail. The boys pretended to be Naikers (upper-class landowners), while the Dalit girls pretended to be farmhands. In another scenario, the boys pretended to be shopkeepers, while the girls pretended to be Dalit customers looking for groceries. The lads would play priests, and the Dalit girls would portray Dalit nuns in a play about the church. Dalit lads would sometimes dress up as drunken husbands, and

Dalit girls would dress up as battered wives. While they were playing, the boys behaved like their fathers and beat their girls for not cooking the food tasty and varied, and they also utter words of their fathers. Boys grow up looking at the men in all ways.

Karukku is a fine example of patriarchal society, caste discrimination, and untouchability at church. Laxmi Holstrom, in the Introduction to *Karukku*, writes:

“Church rules, such as the one against the divorce, militate against women and keep them under control; parish priests are not sympathetic towards women’s individual choice of life-partner; they are given the meanest job in the church with the promise of a reward in heaven.” (xviii)

Laxmi Holstrom, in the Introduction to *Karukku*, remarks:

Bama has described her experiences at the hostel. The warden’s sister was as cruel as upper castes at the hostel. She rebuked the Dalit children for no rhyme or reason. If any Dalit girls grew plump, it was intolerable for the warden’s sister: “These people get nothing to eat at home; they come here, and they grow fast.”(20). When the Dalit children returned to school after vacations, they received the same remarks from the warden’s sister: “Look at Cheri’s children! When they stay here, they eat their fill and look as round as potatoes. But look at the state in which they come back from home—just skin and bone!”(20)

Bama was very angry at whatever she experienced at school, at church, and community. She retorts:

“In this society, if you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste difference does not disappear. Wherever you take up, caste discrimination stalks us in every nook and corner and drives us into a frenzy.”(26) “If you are born into a low-caste, every moment of your life is a moment of struggle. People screw up their faces and look at us with contempt.”(27)

Bama believes that education can play a significant role for Dalits in claiming treatment as human beings. Bama has emphasized education. Education, to some extent, has given Dalits a kind of power to fight against such atrocities. In one of her interviews, Bama states: “Education is supposed to change the society, but it is an institution which caters to the caste system.”(6). Again she remarks in one of her interviews about *Karukku*: “When *Karukku* came out, at that time, it fed that fire of social awareness.”(4) Again, Bama, in one of her interviews, remarks about the assertion of Dalits:

“It is a struggle. It hasn’t started now. We have been resisting from the beginning. Now that Dalits are politically more aware and educationally better off, these become threatening to the oppressors. Dalits want to change, whether it is in religion, politics, or literature, but their oppressors don’t want it. When they want to celebrate their freedom and assert themselves, upper castes want to oppress them again. That is what Bhima Kaoregaon is about. Una showed that a cow is more important than a Dalit life. It shows that they are treated less than animals.”(6)

Dalit women’s oppression and subjection, which looked at writing by Dalit women writers to develop a comprehensive statement of the imagery, experiences, themes, race and caste Dalit personal narratives, and narrative strategies used in these works.

In recent decades, Dalit women have attempted to build a female space for themselves by writing about their terrible experiences. Many Dalit women writers have helped to bring Dalit writings into the mainstream. They’ve started looking for the source of the injustices they’ve been subjected to. Women in these discourses bring their own identities as Dalits and women. In recent years, Dalit women have attempted to create a female cosmos (space) for themselves through writing about their terrible experiences.

A delightful and engaging exploration of Bama, the Dalit Woman author. Even though a considerable number of critical pieces and some full-length works about Bama have been

published individually, few studies have attempted an analysis of the oppressed and subordinated Dalit women in the Bama novels. The proposed research focuses on the silence of marginalized and oppressed Dalit women in Indian English fiction, focusing on Bama's select books. In her writings, Bama depicts several pictures of Dalit women. It is necessary to consider the feministic approach portrayed in Dalit literature in order to comprehend these images.

Identity and Self-Representation In "My Girlhood"

Taslima Nasrin is one of the most divisive South Asian novelists. She is a Bangladeshi feminist writer who is a staunch opponent of Islam as a religion that oppresses women. The body of Taslima Nasrin was mangled, and her identity was shattered. She was unhappy and pessimistic. Taslima Nasrin has been honored internationally for her contributions to the cause of freedom of expression.

My Childhood - This book recounts Taslima Nasrin's early years against the backdrop of the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. **My Girlhood** is a tour de force from birth on a holy day to the dawn of womanhood at fourteen, alternating between scenes of violence, memories of her pious mother, the growth of religious fundamentalism, the horror of molestation, and the beginning of a journey that changed her universe. Her father and mother are discussed in detail in the book. Nasrin describes her father as nasty and authoritarian. Two of Nasrin's family elders also sexually exploited her (uncles). She further stated that she treated so many seven- or eight-year-old girls whose male relatives raped, some 50 or 60 years old, when I worked in the hospital (in Dhaka) that cared for them and remembered being raped. Nasrin has written about women's rights in Bangladesh in this and other novels, saying, "Girls suffer, especially in Muslim countries," and that she couldn't go out and run in the fields. She was expected to learn to cook and clean at home. Women are not treated with

respect. For ages, they have been brainwashed that they are men's slaves.

Nasrin's early works were mostly poetry, and she produced a half-dozen collections of poetry between 1982 and 1993, many of which dealt with female oppression and contained graphic language. She began producing prose in the late 1980s. Before the publication of her documentary novel *Lajja*, in which a Hindu family was attacked by Muslim fundamentalists and decided to flee the country, she published three collections of essays and four novels. Nasrin was attacked physically and verbally for her critical examination of Islam and demand for women's equality. Many of her opponents flocked to the streets to demand that she be hanged. The Council of Islamic Soldiers, a violent fundamentalist group, offered a bounty for her death in October 1993.

Nasrin's story is told in his self-portrayal from birth to youth. *Meyebela* is a Bengali word that connotes "girlhood." In Bangladesh, the book has been precluded in light of the fact that its items might hurt individuals' current social framework and strict sensibilities. In calling this collection of memoirs, Taslima Nasrin might have been somewhat tricky. It peruses more like a personal novel, but not one written in English by Indians, in which the tedious occasions of their youthfulness are presented in a thick soup of descriptive words.

Nasrin, currently far away, banished in shame, isn't monotonous, and *My Girlhood* conveys sufficient explosive to hurt her family until the end of her life. To put it gruffly, this is a fabulous novel, and Gopa Majumdar merits a ton of recognition for the amazing interpretation. Nasrin's experience growing up is portrayed up to the age of thirteen. It isn't just her story yet additionally the accounts of her folks, grandparents, and the numerous companions and family members that made up her more distant family.

Nasrin's family resided in East Pakistan, and in the primary part, where you could envision she would portray her entrance into the world, she stays away from the anticipated. All things considered, she begins with the introduction of

her country Bangladesh when, as a little kid, she and her family needed to escape the town of Mymensingh to get away from Pakistani powers. Nasrin is an expert of tension, and the exciting bends in the road in her family show - from the British Raj to Sheik Mujibur Rehman's death - keep her crowd speculating. She never runs out of the story and can keep her accounts moving rapidly. She doesn't have to take cover behind revolting sex subtleties or the stratagem of enchanted authenticity. All things considered, her perceptions of Mymensingh's family life, the fruitful ground of a youngster's creative mind, and the brilliant idea of individuals around her stockpile her with all the motivation she requires.

Regardless of the number of beatings they that give, who they lay down with, or how much indiscretion they do, she shows her characters in the entirety of their subtleties and inspires compassion. Nasrin easily attracts her perusers and causes them to feel like they're a piece of her loved ones. From the age of seven, we follow her mom as she appreciates school, is compelled to leave her examinations to wed, and feels restless on the grounds that she is dull and uneducated. Simultaneously, her significant other is fair and a specialist and sticks to an offbeat type of religion. Nasrin's dad, a rancher's child committed to his town, becomes progressively far off from his kids and, unfit to make sense of his affection for them, falls flat to push them to satisfy his desires. Nani needs to manage and train a meandering, horrendously unworldly spouse who might offer each and every thing of property on the off chance that he would be able.

Nasrin wouldn't be Nasrin on the off chance that she weren't a quarrelsome figure. The little kid in this story develops a bit and starts to ponder. Her mom's steady lectures about Allah and the Prophet, about djinns and sins, are what she challenges the most, not her dad's Islam, which is viable with current science. Seldom has a representation of a fake master been more deplorable than that of the inferno breathing friend who turns into her mom's adherent. Without teaching excessively, the creator makes sense of how females and young men

are dealt with in an unexpected way, and Nasrin brings up issues. The minuscule young lady has created bosoms and has turned into the Nasrin who will be tossed out of her country since she takes on the individuals who can't endure contradict toward the finish of what should probably be just the principal volume of "self-portrayal."

Conclusion

Both the writers draw a pathetic picture of women's lives through different anecdotes. Both their writings bring out the real status of women by describing all the incidents from their birth to death. They both do not believe in the saying that art is for art's sake; instead, they believe that art is for life's sake. They strongly believe that it is in the hands of women to be conscious and educated to work for their betterment on various issues like sexual harassment, gender and caste discrimination, unequal treatment in the workplace, right to education, etc. The stories of Bama and Taslima Nazrin show evidence of the struggle for self-identity and self-representation that have been interpreted as an influence of sensitive intellect trying to change on the social and global level at large. *My Girlhood* is also a story about religious hypocrisy and women's oppression in the name of faith. Nasrin has a greater understanding of human biological systems and describes the phenomenon of the sexual instinct and its various manifestations as something separate from marriage and family. Her fiction depicts a multi-faceted view of sexual reality. She underlines elemental gravitation, a compelling force that entices the opposite sex to bodily fulfillment. It is enthralling and spontaneous, and it is unconcerned with human scruples. All other human faculties become numb under its tremendous sway. Caste and religion are the most powerful influences determining a person's identity. Bama has revealed the hypocrisy of the higher castes in the church and religion in her memoirs. Her battle for dignity, social identity, and equality has been highlighted. She battles not only for herself but for the entire Dalit community. Karukku is not

a single woman's autobiography but a depiction of the entire Dalit society. On the whole, both the authors try to assert their identity and struggle for themselves and the entire Dalit and Muslim women society.

References

- [1] Bama, Karukku. Trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom, Chennai: Macmillan, 2000. Print.
- [2] Valmiki, Omprakash. Joothan: A Dalit's Life. Trans. Arun Prabha Mukherjee. Kolkata: Samya, 2008. 134. Print.
- [3] Dalit identity: a theological reflection - Global Vision Publishing House globalvisionpub.com/globaljournalmanager/pdf/1393662083.pdf
- [4] My Girlhood: An Autobiography. Trans. Gopa Majumdar. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2001
- [5] Nasreen. Taslima. I Am But A Disembodied Voice, The Living Dead. Outlook. December 18, 2007.
- [6] Banished Within and Without. The Times of India November 18, 2007.
- [7] It Feels, Speaks, and Smells Like Home. Outlook, May 14, 2007.
- [8] No Woman, No Cry. Mint, May 4, 2007.
- [9] I have no connection with any god, any religion, Any Sect. The Times of India, February 20, 2005.
- [10] Jerusha Angelene Christabel G, S S Rajest, "A Short Review on Fragmented Narration in Select Works of Sarnath Banerjee", American Journal of Social and Humanitarian Research, Vol. 3 No. 4, pp. 12-31, (2022).
- [11] Rajest, D. S. S., & G, J. A. C. (2022). A Brief on Past and Present a Tug of War in the Select Works of Kurt Vonnegut. Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy And Culture, 3(4), 59-79.
- [12] G, J. A. C., & Rajest, D. S. (2022). Fragmented Narration in Corridor's Thematic, Language and Imagery. Central Asian Journal Of Arts And Design, 3(4), 15-37.
- [13] Manji, Irshad. Interview with Taslima Nasreen, October 18, 2002. <http://taslimanasrin.com/index2.html>