



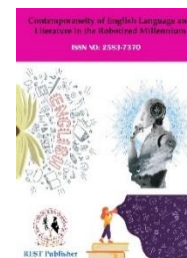
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Intersectionality in Bama's Short Stories: "Chilli Powder" and "Freedom"

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Abstract: This paper examines the themes of intersectionality in Bama's short stories "Chilli Powder" and "Freedom." Through the lens of caste, gender, and class, these stories highlight the compounded oppression faced by Dalit women in patriarchal and caste-based systems. By exploring the intersecting identities of her characters, Bama critiques societal structures and emphasizes the resilience and agency of marginalized individuals. Using Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality framework, this paper analyzes how Bama's narratives illuminate the lived realities of Dalit women and challenge hegemonic narratives that exclude their experiences.

Key words: Intersectionality, Dalit Feminism, Bama, English Literature, Triple Marginalization, Subaltern Agency, Caste and Gender, Systemic Exploitation, Narrative Resistance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Intersectionality provides a critical framework to analyze the overlapping systems of oppression that affect individuals based on their intersecting identities, such as caste, gender, and class. For Dalit women in India, these intersections create unique forms of marginalization, as they endure the dual burden of caste discrimination and patriarchal control. Bama, a trailblazing Dalit feminist writer, addresses these issues in her stories. In "Chilli Powder" and "Freedom," she vividly portrays the lived experiences of Dalit women, illustrating how caste and gender-based oppressions intersect to shape their realities. This paper explores these stories to demonstrate how Bama uses intersectionality to critique societal injustices and highlight the transformative power of resistance and solidarity.

Intersectionality in "Chilli Powder"

In "Chilli Powder," Bama recounts the story of a Dalit woman struggling against the pervasive caste-based oppression that dictates every aspect of her life. The narrative centers on her labor-intensive work, where she is subjected to exploitation and humiliation by upper-caste employers. The story illustrates the intersection of caste and gender, showing how the protagonist's Dalit identity makes her an easy target for systemic abuse, while her gender reinforces expectations of subservience and silence. The metaphor of chilli powder symbolizes the sharp and stinging pain of oppression, which is not only physical but also psychological. What makes "Chilli Powder" particularly compelling is the protagonist's quiet defiance. Despite the constant dehumanization, she resists through her endurance and self-respect. The story critiques the normalization of exploitation while shedding light on the agency of Dalit women, who navigate oppressive structures with remarkable resilience.

Liberation and Intersectionality in "Freedom"

"Freedom" offers a poignant exploration of the yearning for liberation among Dalit women. The story follows a young Dalit girl who dreams of escaping the oppressive confines of caste and gender roles. Her aspirations for education and independence are met with resistance from both upper-caste oppressors and patriarchal norms within her own community. Bama uses the concept of "freedom" as both a literal and metaphorical goal. For the protagonist, freedom represents the ability to live with dignity, pursue education, and make choices unrestrained by societal expectations.

However, the intersections of caste and gender create a web of constraints that make this freedom difficult to attain. The narrative underscores the systemic nature of oppression while also highlighting the transformative potential of education and self-awareness. The protagonist's determination to carve out her own identity reflects Bama's broader message about the importance of resistance and solidarity in challenging intersecting oppressions.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality and Dalit Feminism

Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality framework provides a lens to analyze how Bama's characters experience marginalization at the intersections of caste, gender, and class. In "Chilli Powder" and "Freedom," the protagonists face not only caste-based exploitation but also the additional burden of gendered expectations. These stories resonate with Dalit feminist scholars like Sharmila Rege, who argue that Dalit women's experiences cannot be understood through a singular lens of caste or gender but require an integrated analysis. Bama's work critiques both mainstream feminism, which often ignores caste, and Dalit movements that marginalize women's voices. Her stories amplify the experiences of Dalit women, challenging hegemonic narratives that erase their struggles and contributions.

Resilience and Agency in Bama's Narratives

While Bama's stories expose the systemic nature of oppression, they also celebrate the resilience and agency of Dalit women. In "Chilli Powder," the protagonist's perseverance reflects a form of quiet resistance against caste and gender norms. Similarly, in "Freedom," the young girl's determination to pursue education embodies the transformative potential of agency and self-empowerment. Bama's characters are not passive victims; they are active agents who navigate and resist the structures that seek to constrain them. By centering these narratives, Bama not only critiques systemic inequalities but also provides a vision of hope and change.

Implications for Social Justice

The intersectional analysis of "Chilli Powder" and "Freedom" reveals the need for a more inclusive approach to social justice. Policies and movements must address the unique challenges faced by Dalit women, who are marginalized at the intersections of caste, gender, and class. Education emerges as a critical tool for empowerment in Bama's work, but it must be accompanied by systemic changes that dismantle oppressive structures. Bama's stories also highlight the importance of representation in literature and media. By amplifying the voices of Dalit women, her work challenges dominant narratives and creates spaces for dialogue and understanding.

2. CONCLUSION

Bama's "Chilli Powder" and "Freedom" exemplify the power of literature to illuminate the complexities of intersectionality. Through her vivid storytelling, Bama critiques systemic oppression while celebrating the resilience and agency of Dalit women. Her work provides a crucial lens for understanding the interconnected nature of caste, gender, and class discrimination, offering valuable insights for scholars, activists, and policymakers. Future research can build on Bama's work by exploring its implications for contemporary social justice movements and its resonance with marginalized communities globally. Ultimately, Bama's stories remind us of the importance of centering the voices of the oppressed in the fight for a more equitable and inclusive society.

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