Double Discrimination in the Writings of J M Coetzee and Bama: A Comparative Study

Shalini Infanta. L

Research Scholar

SRMIST

Kattankulathur, Chennai, India

Dr. Shanthichitra

Head (English)

SRM IST

Kattankulathur, Chennai, India

shalini12sls@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper deals with the sufferings of the women characters and the existential mask which they put on in order to survive in the society in the midst of all the chaos. J.M Coetzee's characters play a pivotal role in reflecting the trauma in the society. Bama in her novels had dealt with the dalit community in the society and the obstacles faced by them in the name of the distinction are described. This paper mainly deals with the injustice which happened to the women characters also it shows of how the orient women were treated by the name of

<https://doi.org/10.24113/ijellh.v7i11.10101>

constraints is discussed. This paper portrays the physical and mental trauma underwent by the depressed and discriminated class women.

Keyword: Colonialism, Occident, Orient, Consciousness

Introduction:

J M Coetzee, one of the most talented writers of the 21st century, had received many notable prizes for literature. In his writings, he was able to incorporate the issues of the present generations with the history of the past and it is considered as one of the reasons for his success as a great writer. As he was born in South Africa so it is easy for him to reciprocate to the feelings and the culture of the people. Personally, in his life, he had witnessed the differentiation in society through colonization. He didn't take any stand while reflecting the ideas of the orient and the occident. As an author, he was able to describe the mood of the settings and describe the location to the readers by using narrative techniques. In his novels, the idea of 'subaltern' is seen in different perspectives, as it is not constant. It keeps changing based on the hierarchy of power which is embraced in society.

Bama is a pseudonym of a powerful women writer who expresses the perspective of the Dalit community. Born in a converted Christian Dalit family and she was able to reciprocate to the feelings of the suppressed community. In her writings, she was able to stress the idea of self and the notion of Varna which created the distinction in the society. Also in her novels, she did not give much importance to the language or the sentence structure and she used a simple and colloquial language to reciprocate to the feelings of the people. Her writings were translated into many other Indian languages apart from that it was translated into English and French. She had written nearly twenty short stories, in which she had dealt with the perspective of caste, religion, and women. Both, J.M. Coetzee as well as

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Bama had experienced the subjugation differently and tried their best to depict the situation positively without affecting anyone's emotions.

In the Heart of the Country, the central character Magda, a spinster who stays with her father on an isolated farm and she hates her father as he was strict to her. Her hatred turned into jealous, as he brought a woman as his wife that makes her hallucinate as she was not able to control her emotions. There are many restrictions laid down by her father, which did not let to have freedom and independence. She is not allowed to be friendly with the servants also she is not allowed to meet anyone in the neighborhood. Hendrik, a servant, was working on the farm, got married and brought his wife to work with him on the farm. Magda recognizes that her father is having an affair with Hendrik's wife Anna. After knowing the truth she was not able to control herself so she starts dreaming about their relationship especially she imagines about their intimacy.

Bama's *Sangati* is about the survival of women from different generations and it is not about individual suffering instead it is about the suffering of a whole community. The narrator of this novel is an old woman, who narrates everything from her childhood days till her present age. Here the narrator looks back at a young age and reminiscing the good old days, where she was discriminated based on the community. In this novel, Bama was discussing the social evils in the society, which includes, they were not allowed to enter the temple, as well as they, are denied to enter the education institution. Throughout this novel, the hardship of Dalit women is discussed as they have to work at home as well as they have to work in the workplace. *Sangati* contains the autobiographical elements and it was written in Tamil in 1994. Later it was translated into English by Laxmi Halmstrom. *Sangati* was divided into twelve chapters and it contains incidence, memories, and anecdotes which happened to the several individuals of the oppressed community.

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Sangati is about the audacity and weakness of the paraiyar community especially woman is described. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator's grandmother said that "If the third is a girl to behold, your courtyard will fill with gold" (Bama 1) and the little girl is the writer herself. In the writer's family, there is no gender discrimination between girls and boys until they grew up. Her grandmother used to say that it is lucky for a girl to be born in the odd number and she attends all the delivery leaving the upper caste, "in my village, it was my grandmother who attended every childbirth. Only the upper caste never sent for her because she was a paraichi" (Bama 1). Gender discrimination is prevalent in both the upper and lower caste. Girls are not allowed to play with the boys; neither can they play boys games, "who does she think she is? She's just like a donkey, look. Look at the way she plays boys' games." (Bama 7)

Bama narrates about the coming of age ceremony, where it is celebrated for sixteen days and the girl is eligible to get married after the ceremony. People get worried if the marriage is delayed because they are worried about the society and the men in the society, "Paatti and Amma chatted with each other. Paatti said, just see whether she doesn't come of age in two, three months. Have you noticed the bloom on her face? As soon as she gets her periods, you stop her from studying, hand her over to some fellow or the other, and be at peace." (Bama 9) Girls are not allowed to get an education as well as they will not allow getting equal pay in the job field. Here writer narrates about Mariamma, who was molested by the upper caste fellow but the family members ask her to hide it as there won't be justice instead only humiliation will be left, "it is best if you shut up about this. If you will get the blame; it is you who will be called a whore." (Bama 24)

Men in the paraiyar community don't have enough courage to fight for their rights and they lead the life of a slave. It is miserable for a woman in the paraiyar community as they need to do household chores as well as daily labor for money. "When they come home

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in the evening, there is no time even to draw breath” (Bama 59) so women in the paraiyar community were undergoing double discrimination, both at home as well as in the society. “Night after night they must give in to their husbands’ pleasure. Even if a women’s body wracked with pain, the husband is bothered only with his satisfaction” (Bama 59)

In the heart of the country, Magda as an owner of the farm needs to fulfill the responsibilities of the society as well as the family, but after all the sacrifices which she made for the benefits of the family was turned into nothing when she was not given importance in her family. “To my father, I have been an absence all my life. Therefore instead of being the womanly warmth at the heart of this house, I have been zero, null, a vacuum towards which all collapses inward, turbulence, muffled, grey, like a chill draft eddying through the corridors, neglected, vengeful.” (Coetzee 2) This clearly shows the relationship between father and daughter. As a father, he didn’t pay attention to his daughter’s needs as well as he did not try to fulfill the expectations of his daughter. In this novel, Magda underwent many worst situations where she battled for her existence right from her childhood days she was denied to be friendly with the servant children. Her life is molded in such a way that she is restricted to mingle with the neighbors and she took solace by drafting her experience in the diary as there is no one to listen to her. “I am a spinster with a locked diary but I am more than that. I am an uneasy consciousness but I am more than that too. When all the lights are out I smile in the dark.” (Coetzee 4) Magda didn’t get a chance to share her sorrows with anyone and she doesn’t have any friend to share her sorrows. Here, Magda, the existential mask which she wears is the art of writing a diary and hallucinating. She doesn’t have anyone to share her grief so she started living her life according to her wish. In this novel, J M Coetzee had beautifully portrayed the importance of relationship also the desire of being loved by someone.

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At the end of the novel, Magda is torn between the idea of reality and hallucination. She tries to take solace by taking the company of her servant Hendrik, she starts spending personal time with him. “He sits down heavily beside me on the bed. My nostrils fill with his smell. He lays a hand on my hip and I scream at the blank wall.”(Coetzee 114) Even after knowing that he is married but she later discovers that Anna, Hendrik’s wife is having an affair with her father so she compares both the state of Anna and herself and feels that nothing is wrong when she continues her relationship with Hendrik. At a point in time, she finds that she was ill-treated by Hendrik, for the sake of money. She was abused violently and physically tortured by Hendrik cruelly on taking advantage of the situations. “Hendrik, alas, is gone and I must face my demons alone, a grown woman, a woman of the world, though one would not think so, crouched behind the last bag of mealies. Hendrik, I cannot speak to you, but I wish you well, you and Anna both, I wish you the cunning of the jackal, I wish you better luck than your hunters. And if one night you can come tapping at the window I will not be surprised.” (Coetzee 152) when Magda gets upset about seeing the mess in her life and she doesn’t have the option to clear it and she finds that her father is sick.

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