

POSTHUMAN ENTANGLEMENTS: DALIT WOMEN RECASTING AGENCY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN WRITING

Sushmitha Udhayasankar

Independent Scholar, Chennai -72.
sushmithaudhayasankar@gmail.com

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Abstract

Posthumanism challenges conventional notions of what it means to be human, highlighting connections, embodiment, and interdependence. While most of the conversation centers on technology, ecology, or Western philosophy, the experiences of India's marginalized people, particularly Dalit women, provide new perspectives on voice, agency, and identity. This paper explores how Dalit women's writing adds to post humanist theory by depicting collective, relational, and hybrid forms of being that resist both caste-patriarchal oppression and universal notions of the human. The paper looks at *Karukku* by Bama and *When I Hit You* by Meena Kandasamy to show how memory, community, and experimental storytelling are used by Dalit women writers to break silence. *When I Hit You* exposes systemic violence and fragmented identity through linear narration, while *Karukku* uses embodied memory and group strength as resistance. Based on Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* and Sharmila Rege's *Writing Caste/Writing Gender*, the paper makes the argument that both works extend the boundaries of humanism, gender, and caste. Through reimagining humanity through reliance, fragmentation, and resistance, they highlight the usefulness of posthumanism in overcoming both physical and social inequalities. Additionally, this paper shows that Dalit women's literature not only challenges oppression but also adds to worldwide posthumanist discussions. Through the addition of Dalit feminist perspectives in discussions of posthumanism, this paper shows that modern Indian literature does more than only challenge caste-patriarchal systems; it also makes a significant contribution to wider theoretical discussions about the posthuman. Social justice, material injustice, and the various ways that marginalized communities express their presence, resistance, and identity can all be integrated into posthumanist theories.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Dalit Literature, Dalit Feminism, Caste and Gender, Voice and Agency, Collective Subjectivity

Introduction

In its current form, posthumanism is a philosophical and cultural practice that challenges the long-standing definition of what constitutes it to be human. It emphasises interconnection, life, and perplexity and relational life, as opposed to fixed and universal perspectives of humanity. Although the majority of posthumanist thought has manifested itself in terms of technology, ecology and Western philosophical traditions, the lack in terms of the representation of voices of marginalized groups remains a significant omission. The lived conditions of Dalit women in India can be viewed as a peculiar category that can offer a clear vision of how posthumanism can be rebuilt not only as a theoretical narrative, but also as a way of contesting caste, patriarchy as well as traditional violence.

The writing of the Dalit women has increased as a source of struggle and recovery. It is non-mainstream literary traditions, which either marginalized or discriminated Dalit women, with a specific emphasis on actual memory, community, and separated but strong subjectivities.

In works such as Bamas Karukku and Meenakandasamys *When I Hit You*, it is stressed that narrative means of survival, arguing and transformation can be employed. Memory and social strength become central to the resistance in Karukku and personal narration becomes central to disclosure of institutional violence and fragmented identity structures in *When I Hit You*. These readings demonstrate how Dalit women do not want to be victims and instead invent new voices and agency.

This paper contends that the writing of Dalit women broadens the definition of posthumanism because it puts the writing in dialogue with critical literary works like those by Rosi Braidotti (*The Posthuman*) and Sharmila Rege (*Writing Caste/Writing Gender*). It criticizes posthumanism as it puts emphasis on relational agency, personal memory and resistance. These texts bring the voices of Dalit women to the forefront of global posthumanist discourses of justice, identity and subjectivity both by revealing the caste-patriarchy oppression and transcending humanist universals.

Representation of Dalit Women in Indian Literature

The way Dalit women are represented in Indian literature has been characterized by silences, mistakes and discrimination in the past. In other cases, Dalit women are frequently manifested in the superior literary traditions of domination, as nameless victims of misery, as an icon of poverty, as an inert spectators of injustices in society. These images denied individuality of Dalit women in addition to propagating casteist and patriarchal attitudes by depicting them as helpless and mute. Diplomating their lived experiences out of the mainstream was equivalent to the social seclusion that Dalit women experienced in their everyday lives.

It was the emergence of Dalit literature in the twentieth century, which started to discuss this discrimination with reference to the voices of the marginalized. Nevertheless, in this movement male authors who emphasized the bigger fight against caste injustice often clogged women voices. The experiences of Dalit women were very little known as the result of the interaction between caste, gender, and class. Sharmila Rege (2006) in *Writing Caste/Writing Gender* discusses how Dalit women have been disenfranchised as a group, in the mainstream feminist movements and in Dalit discourses, through their so-called double marginality.

Even now, in the recent years, the Dalit female writers have started to reclaim the narrative authority. An example is Bama Karukku (1992) an autobiographical narrative with a unmatched style and sheds light on gender injustice and class discrimination. By using graphic imagery like when someone is humiliated because he touches a forbidden object at school or when priests are lying because they are taking advantage of Dalit.

Women Bama unveils the nature of oppression that is based on everyday locations. Her narrative denies victimization, it highlights instead strength and neighborhood solidarity and how to transform misery into action. Karukku also reinvents the Dalit woman as a carrier of oppositional information, not a muted woman.

Equally, there occurred a turning point in the Dalit women fiction as in *The Grip of Change* by Sivakami (1986).

The young widow Thangam is represented in the book as having fallen prey to Dalit males who claim to protect her as well as to upper-caste landlords. The patriarchal leanings of Dalit politics are demonstrated by showing.

The issue of women being oppressed twice is indicated in this paper. Besides this, Gowri, the primary character, and an intelligent Dalit woman exhibits the agency and leadership of women by resisting male domination within her own world. This self-representation destroys stereotypes and presents Dalit women as various and autonomous individuals. The personal aspect of marriage can be approached differently by *When I Hit You* (2017) by Meena Kandasamy. Kandasamy also attacks dominance and the ideal notion of the revolutionary male characters by the detailed description of the domestic violence and psychological abuse offered by the narrator. Control scenes, e.g. when her husband had seized her laptop in order to prevent her writing, demonstrate how systemic power influences relationships of one person to another. But the narration itself becomes some kind of opposition; the protagonist uses trauma to act as a evidence to seek her voice.

The examples presented below demonstrate how the emphasis on lived experience, real memory, and recovery of agency in the writing of Dalit women complicates the straightforward representations. Representation in such an environment becomes posthuman oriented: voices develop into community and interconnection and not individuality, identities are fractured and not determined, and struggle is embodied and experienced through the body and lived experience and not idealistic thought. Since the work of Dalit women exposes the forms in which the marginalized life finds strength in connection, confusion and social power, this work does not only uphold Indian literary traditions, but also opens up possibilities of reworking the fundamental category of the human.

The literature of Dalit women therefore shifts the balance between the disappearance and self-representing and the silence and speaking. Their narratives concentrate on singularity, memoir and experience, revolting against feminist alter-egolithic and caste-based oblivion. These works also criticize traditional understanding of identity in that they describe experience as dislocated, bodily and relational. Such transformations are sympathized by posthuman thinking, which values mixture and connection rather than rigid humanist values. Consequently, the image of Dalit women in literature does not only alter the Indian cultural memory, but also preconditions a more in-depth study of the posthuman agency.⁴

⁴Guru, G. (1995). Dalit women talk differently. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30(41/42), 2548–2550. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4403937>

Posthumanism and Dalit Women's Agency

Posthumanism is a critique of the concept of a single, universal human as well as the fact that identities are defined by relationships, representation, and being tied together. Humans as argued by thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti are socially, materially, and politically interconnected and not fixated on people are distinct entities.

It is very strong to Dalit women whose lives have often been taken beyond the borders of humanness by patriarchy and caste. It enables the readers to witness how their writing retakes agency using memory, community, and resistance instead of being individual persons. Karukku by Bama is the significant instance. Karukku Bama is a well known piece of art. Discrimination in forms of small everyday incidences is replete in the story like when the young girl is teased because she touches a forbidden piece at school or when she sees dishonesty in the actions of priests who abuse Dalit women in preaching against dirtiness. Bama connects her story with the grief of her people as a whole and not merely records her own misery. She is not only concerning we but also only I, which is a posthuman act in itself. The manifestation of resistance involves memory and community and means that the strength lies in the common experience and survival is linked.

The point of view is different in *When I Hit You* by Meena Kandasamy. In this specific case, marriage is a personal domain of the personal authority that the narrator is exposed to. Her partner is trying to deprive her of the world by erasing her by sponning her laptop and switching off her writing. Such scenarios demonstrate ways in which power is divided and segregated in identity. Nevertheless, the narrator will not shut down. She takes the fragmentation and makes memory out of it through her story. This posthuman agency is also evident in her writing, voice is not absolute or uninterrupted but, instead, grows in scars, injuries and the writing itself. Also, the content of the two books questions traditional humanist ideas of freedom and dignity, which tend to presuppose equality and disregard the facts of caste and gender. The writing of Dalit women reveals the fact that the human nature cannot be described as perfect because it is filled with difficulties, memory, and assistance of other people. Their narratives make a virtue out of suffering and gender and caste out of posthumanity and mark agency as courage and solidarity.⁵

Contemporary Indian Writing by Dalit Women

Women writing today has grown into a potent means of identity recovery and that opposes silence. Besides presenting personal experiences, Bama and Meena Kandasamy are other authors who discuss social problems. Their works reveal that literature may be both a weapon of resistance and a medicine. Bama demonstrates how caste discrimination is reflected on day-to-day.

Life in Karukku by putting emphasis on her individual life as a Dalit Christian woman. She talks of the humiliation of her community, being taken out of school and how the memory of it can act as a source of strength. In other instances in the book personal suffering transforms into group resistance like when Bama recalls how her people support each other despite constant humiliation. This demonstrates that identity is not only created by an individual but also by their community, religion and shared struggles.

On the other hand, Meena Kandasamy in her book *When I Hit You* focuses on violence that is experienced in violent marriages. The novel brings out the means of oppression of women in their homes by caste and patriarchy. Kandasamy narrates the pain as well as the desire to get out in a simple, linear fashion. Even writing itself becomes resistance, that which politicizes personal pain.

Resistance, empowerment, and voice recovery are common themes of both works of the authors. They demonstrate that Dalit women are not passive meaning-makers who are the victims of gender and caste, but they are active participants in challenging them. Further, their works exhibit several identities, layered and interwoven and could not be limited to one category, as a woman, Dalit, Christian, writer, and activist. These texts demonstrate how narratives can combat, cure and redefine identity in India and elsewhere. They belong to the strong vision of the modern Dalit women literature.

However, there are still challenges confronting these authors including fewer publishing opportunities, caste biases and non recognition. The problems of these challenges bring about the following question: what are the remaining challenges and what can be done to empower voices of Dalit women in literature and in the society.⁶

Challenges and Opportunities

Dalit women writers are experiencing numerous challenges in literary and social spheres, which tend to reduce the audience and impact of their work. The legacy of discrimination and caste, in terms of academic status, literary awards and publication opportunities, remains. Dalit women have always been sidelined due to the bias that mainstream publishing houses have had towards the upper caste opinions. The presence of social biases may restrict the readability and the understanding that the readers have of their novels when they are published, and in other cases, the critics may fail to read the realities that are lived as reflected in their novels. These structural barriers also make Dalit women struggle to gain the attention that they deserve. Emotional and psychological aspects also make it difficult to write about personal and collective trauma. It is emotionally and psychologically stressful to write about trauma, personal and social. In writing their stories, most of the Dalit women writers have a traumatic experience of being marginalized, abused and oppressed. Whereas this process may be a challenge, which is stressful, it can also be a strength source. Dalit women transform their personal suffering into writing and group consciousness. It notes how the personal suffering is turned to political action in books like Meena Kandasamy in *When I Hit You* and in *Karukku* by Bama. Their voices are empowered because by stating that the lives of oppressed women are vital, in order to understand the society.

More so, these are more abstract choices that exist in Dalit female literature. Social critique and personal experience make their writing contribute to the discourse on posthumanism, identity, and agency. Their narratives describe the interconnectedness of the human experience as well as the way in which it is influenced by social, historical, and material influences. The Dalit women writers transfigure concepts of the meaning of being human, of how authority can be comprehended outside of individualism by emphasizing the memory, community, and collective sustenance. With a lot of struggles, the courage, imagination, and resoluteness of Dalit women writers offer new avenues in the name of acceptance, discourse, and change. When people speak their voices, it is not only socially just, but also relevant to literature and education to teach people how to resist and be together and work together, and why it is important to include marginalized ideas in theoretical and cultural debates.

Intersectionality and Global Relevance

One cannot comprehend the writing of the Dalit women only in the boundaries of the Indian society or caste. Their work is significant both in local and global contexts since their issues are closely related to more general question of gender, class and identity. In this case, the perception of oppression as never a singular but a composite effect of multiple influences comes into play. Gender and caste interact to affect opportunity, daily life and presence of hearing the views of Dalit women.

This relationship is manifested in Bamas Karukku when she discusses how she is a Dalit and a Christian lady, to be sidelined not just in the entire society but also within her own religion. Her recollections give an account of how faith, gender, and caste, give rise to peculiar kind of inequality. Likewise, in *When I Hit You* by Meena Kandasamy, patriarchy and caste intermingle in the intimate space of matrimony making domestic life a place of authority and violence. These tales reveal that oppression cannot be condensed into one and instead, it evolves as a result of a combination of multiple forces within the society. This multi dimensional approach also provides impact on Dalit women literature across the world. All over the world, women and men belonging to the oppressed groups be it African American women who are fighting racism and sexism or women of the Indigenous community that reject the colonial elimination have authored literature to fight the silence and achieve action. When the stories of Dalit women are juxtaposed into the context of these global problems, it is possible to emphasize various and common survival, memory, and opposition. Their work demonstrates that posthumanism as something significant has to touch the day-to-day realities of the oppressed women all over.

In such an approach, Dalit feminism is not only a voice of Indian women, but also at work in a general discourse concerning justice, identity and human dignity. In such a way, intersectionality and international connections put Dalit women literature to another level, where only regional issues are discussed. They belong to a broader trend of marginalized voices that require to be heard, recognized, and involved in changing the essence of humanity and the posthuman.⁸

Conclusion

This paper claims that through emphasis on caste, gender and lived realities, the writing of Dalit women has become a perspective of posthuman relations. In simple retelling of the tales of suffering, writers like Bama and Meena Kandasamy transform both individual and societal tragedy into the arenas of agency, resistance, and new theoretical comprehension. According to Bama, in *Karukku*, caste discrimination and hatred are remembered and perceived as community power and not merely as pain. Her memories of being humiliated at school or of the suffering of her community shows that it is solidarity and shared strength that make identity, and not individualism. The literature of Dalit women claims that human being is complex process that is influenced by memory, oppression, community and resistance activities. Bama and Kandasamy put these experiences at the centre of their work, which magnifies the scope of posthumanism.

Unlike traditional humanism, which represent the human being as an entire, self-reliant, and all-embracing entity, the literature of Dalit women proposes that human being is a fragmented but resolute subjectivity, which is characterized by interdependence not independence.

This discussion is significant because of feminism. Devoid of feministic ideas, posthumanism is at risk of disregarding the real plight of women and continuing the old forms of silence. Dalit feminism voices alert us that caste and gender have to be understood in relation to each other as we redefine the concept of humanity in a posthuman world. To sum it up, it has been demonstrated that the writing of Dalit women according to this style is at the cross road between literature and theory, and action. They challenge caste-patriarchal systems, extend the posthuman philosophy, and highlight the importance of feminist concepts in achieving identity and control relations. Their works are a reminder that literature is not just about a retelling of stories but also about affecting society and theory. Hearing the words of Dalit women enables us to learn about the historical pain and challenge as well as envision the new possibilities of the future of justice, solidarity, and dignity.⁹

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