



Navigating Oppression: An Intersectional Feminist Perspective in Kavery Nambisan's *The Hills of Angheri*

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Research Article

Abstract

This research paper explores the theme of intersectional feminism in Kavery Nambisan's novel "The Hills of Angheri", focusing on how the narrative highlights the interconnectedness of various social identities and their impact on women's life experiences. The story reveals how the protagonist encounters discrimination in her hometown due to her gender while also facing prejudices abroad because of her nationality. The oppression that Nalli undergoes is multifaceted and so she faces challenges in several dimensions. She is viewed through the lens of different identities as a girl, a daughter, a student, a medical professional, and a foreign national. With special reference to the novel The Hills of Angheri, the study aims to examine how Kavery Nambisan challenges the social power structures that marginalized women in a number of ways using the intersectional feminist method.

Keywords: Discrimination, Intersectional Feminism, Oppression, Marginalization, Social Identity.

Introduction

The practice of people treating other people unequally on the basis of their race, colour, gender, age, economic status, caste, religion, and other characteristics is known as discrimination. They are compelled by this mindset to act immorally against their cohabitants. One group of people wishes to enjoy superpowers over the other group. This kind of behaviour dates back to ancient times and continues till today.. This kind of callous mentality is very common in India. The prevailing segments of society are seriously practising it. The harsh truth is that the current generation is likewise engaging in this behaviour without realising how detrimental it is to humanity as a whole. It is pathetic to note that human faecal materials were found floating in the water tank that supplies drinking water to the residents who belong to the scheduled caste community in Vengaivayal village in Pudukottai district, Tamil Nadu, in December 2022. This kind of oppression or discrimination also exists in other dimensions like gender and religion. Women are significantly impacted by this societal mindset. Society mistreats women because of their gender. In India, conditions for women are gradually improving, but at the same time, the number of crimes against them is rapidly increasing. This circumstance has made being a woman insecure. They frequently experience sexual abuse regardless of their caste, religion, or social standing. It shows that women are women even though they have higher positions in society. Karen Horney in her *Feminine Psychology* points out that men have strong opinions about women that they are weaker innately, emotional, dependent, minimum capacity to work and masochistic (231). Anita Singh adds that women are elevated to a high position in the national imagination but not in actuality. Although Indian women are portrayed as the embodiments of a



nation, their struggles and oppression are unfortunately little noted (119). Nambisan exposes the harsh reality in the lives of women in *The Truth (Almost) About Bharat*. She says that women are called as Laxmi, Saraswathi, Chandini... and with other exotic names of Goddesses and then crush them softly under heels. (TTAB 64). Furthermore, despite having a single identity as a human being, women suffer greatly from having several identities. As a child, teenager, adult, worker, mother, daughter-in-law, and so forth. Regardless of the roles she plays, she is either mistreated or suppressed. The Supreme Court has recently expressed concern about dismissing a woman from an official position based solely on her marital status. The court considers it a "coarse case of gender discrimination and inequality" (The Hindu editorial, 2024). Ms. Selina Johna, former lieutenant in military nursing service, was removed from service in 1988 stating that she is married. The editorial also points out that the labour participation of women of all ages is only 19%, per Labour Force data in October and December 2023. Mangoli and Ganapati state that in the field of education, there is a great deal of discrimination against women, and the belief that women should be kept in only at homes. They also add that women may be the victims of any type of crime, including robbery, murder, and cheating and they are identified as 'crimes against women.' More recently, this year in Chennai, an outsider sexually assaulted a female student on the university campus. The public was shocked throughout the state as a result, and the institution was compelled to revise its policies for the students. After specific hours in the evening, they are not allowed to leave the hostel grounds. Similarly, a number of crimes against women go unreported. B.S. Pooja and her fellow researchers found a "notable difference in the occurrence of crimes between the years 2020 and 2022 both at the national and state levels. Specifically at the national level, in 2020, the total cognizable CAW was 371,503, whereas, in 2022, this number increased to 445,256." An article in The Economic Times details that "In 2024, the National Commission for Women received 25,743 complaints, with 24% related to domestic violence. Complaints about the "right to live with dignity" and dowry harassment were also significant. Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of complaints." It is further shocking to note that women with psychological and physical disabilities are also subject to such crimes. Dipanjali Singh points out that In India, sexual violence against girls and women with physical or psychological disability is more common because of communication challenges and their reliance on careers. In this situation, well-known Indian author Kavery Nambisan tries to convey to the public about women's empowerment and understanding of women for better living. Her writing concentrates on how society treats women in stereotypical ways based on its own interests. Women in Nambisan suffer from sexual abuse, culturally-based restrictions on their basic rights, strong adherence to family responsibilities, and other issues. The female characters in Nambisan come from a variety of social backgrounds. Through the prism of intersectional feminist viewpoints, this study examines the ways in which women face discrimination and oppression in the novel *The Hills of Angheri*.

Review of Literature

Several research works have been done by analyzing the literary works of Kavery Nambisan in several dimensions. Hemanth Kumar Mekathoti conducted research on the use of the term "feminine sensibility" in order to comprehend the opposing forces of modernity and tradition. Jenniffer L explored the satirical societal image accompanied by psychological imprints and cultural differences in the works of Kavery Nambisan in relation to satirical psychological realism and cultural authenticity. Veena Rani conducted research titled "Novel as Activism" and analysed the works of Kavery Nambisan to find out how Nambisan's novels directly expose societal problems. Itika Dahiya in her article "Slum-Dwellers Struggling to Breathe: an Assessment of Kavery Nambisan's *The Story That Must Not be Told*" exposed the severe



realities and outcomes of modern Indian society. Padmavathy G. made a study on, “Feministic Views-Seeking Self-Identity of the Protagonist with Reference to Kavery Nambisan’s *Mango Coloured Fish*” and gave a clear picture on women’s struggle and recommended for redemption. Rajkumar, J. in his research work entitled “Emerging women in the novels of Kavery Nambisan a study” analysed the female consciousness of Nambisan’s female characters. Rajeswari in her study entitled “Ecofeminism in the Novels of Kavery Nambisan”, detailed the oppression of women by connecting it with the oppression of nature and related them with patriarchal practices. Numerous studies that primarily focus on Nambisan as a feminist author and capture her brand of ecofeminism have been conducted. As of yet, no research has been conducted on the intersectional feminist issue in relation to Kavery Nambisan’s *The Hills of Angheri*.

Objective of the Study

The study aims to bring out:

1. **The circumstances where women face oppression within their own family and the public.**
2. **The reasons that the family and the public give for the suppression of women.**
3. **The identities exhibited by women both in the family and in the public.**
4. **How women are suppressed by intersectionality.**

Methodology

The study seeks to examine intersectional feminist themes found in Kavery Nambisan’s *The Hills of Angheri*. A comprehensive analysis of the selected work is conducted, and relevant secondary sources, such as scholarly works on the author, were gathered to provide context and depth to the investigation. In order to effectively perform a qualitative analysis of the chosen novel, this study employs systematic textual analysis.

Navigating Oppression

Nalinakshi, a girl from a strict rural community who aspires to become a doctor and open a hospital in her hamlet of Angheri, is the protagonist of the story. She is not allowed to continue her medical course due to the widespread belief that only boys are more qualified to become doctors than girls do. However, her schoolmate Jai is free to pursue a career in medicine. In spite of the opposition, Nalli is passionate about realising her dream and succeeds in becoming a surgeon. Nalli observes that in her village people who are fortunate enough to have access to clean water, air, and healthy food but are denied access to medical facilities. Nambisan states, “they live on chapattis, dal, onion and green chilli and chew a raw mooli or carrot afterwards. . . they drink tea, once a day in summer, twice in winter. They eat what they can get and they’re healthy. (THOA 357) Additionally, doctors are reluctant to practice in these remote locations, which makes medical facilities extremely inaccessible to them. She decides to become a doctor and run a hospital for her people with a service mindset. However, her people do not receive this generous attitude of Nalli positively, and they create obstacles to achieving her goal. Even her family members do not trust Nalli since they are also part and parcel of the male-dominated society that always wants women to associate themselves with household work, give birth to children, and take care of the elderly people at home. However, she is determined to achieve her goal despite the obstacles and hardships that she encounters on her journey. Rajkumar mentions in his study that a woman should possess qualities like “Determination, self-confidence, courage and introspection” that will make her more assertive.

This study tries to bring out the areas where Nalli faces oppression at different levels: as a daughter, a girl, a doctor, a student, and a foreign national through the lens of intersectional feminism. Anna Carastathis points out that that oppression is not a single process or a binary



political relation but is rather best understood as being composed of several, overlapping, or interwoven systems. She also notes that one of the pioneers of Critical Race Theory in the American legal school, Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, first proposed and then developed the metaphor of overlapping categories of discrimination.

Oppression as Daughter

The first opposition to Nalli's decision to become a doctor starts with her family. They want Nalli to be a common woman by getting married and giving birth to children. But Nalli disapproves of that by saying, "I'm going to study to be a doctor first" (THOA, 7). However, her family is very much worried about her marriage. They believe that if she is well educated they may not be able to find a bridegroom for her. "Five or six years of college and then it won't be easy to find a husband." (THOA, 23). In this instance, Nalli faces gender-based discrimination from her own family. Women should sacrifice their own goals in order to marry someone, according to the strong belief held by both society and the family. Nalli is suppressed since she is a girl. Her childhood friend Jai, on the other hand, has no obstacles in his quest for education. Nalli questions, "If Jai can, why not me?" (THOA 21). Suzanne LaFollette points out the situation of a girl as "having had less freedom than the male, she has not been able to assert to the same extent her right to live for herself" (553-54).

Oppression as a Student

Nalli also faces challenges as a medical student in Madras. She is not able to go with the customs and behaviors of city boys and girls as she hails from a village background. Previously, she has experienced disturbances for being a girl and now as a rural girl. Nalli is anxious after joining medical college, as she is much worried about ragging. She is made to sit on a throne with her feet submerged in a bucket of disgusting liquids, including a mix of dead man's mouthwash and enema fluid. Nambisan exposes how a woman is treated by society in different segments of her life. Mary Wollstonecraft rightly says in her introduction of *A Vindication Of The Rights of Women* that men consider females rather as women than human creatures. (11)

Oppression as a Girl

Women are typically the targets of a lot of sexual attention from men. They constantly aim to attract women's attention in order to satisfy their erotic desires. Previously, family members had to formally engage men and women before allowing them to have sexual intercourse. In the current situation, premarital sex is rather prevalent and such formal engagements are kept at bay. Such premarital partnerships are mostly caused by medical improvements that lead to relationships that are more physical. Nalli also faces physical abuse from her cousin Vishnu, who tries to molest her once. She feels guilty and prays to god "Never again, God, never will I give in to such cheap thrills...." (THOA, 66). However, Nalli does not yield herself to the urges of Vishnu. She is highly determined and confident in her studies. Nalli is not prepared to take her focus away from her academic objectives, much like the current generation of college girls who are overly preoccupied with material pleasures, and engaging in unethical relationships. She has a strong commitment to her work. Bogle K points out this kind of sexual motivation as "Hooking up". It is sexual behaviour between two people who are not in a relationship. It includes actions like kissing to having sex. Nambisan points out the challenges that women need to face in the current scenario through Nalli.

Oppression as a Doctor

Amidst many struggles, she completes her course and returns to her village after passing her examinations. She treats a few people in the village, such as the diabetic wife of Basawappa, Nanja's chest pain, Anni's sore armpit lump, and Maregowda's wheezing attack. When she intends to treat Satyavati, the wife of Vaidyar. Satyavati has a fracture on her right femur.



Satyavati does not allow Nalli to treat her. She asks her Vaidyar husband to take care of her. It is believed by the people that a woman cannot become a doctor and she cannot treat patients. The fact that Nalli is a female and the Vaidyar is a male is the only factor influencing the acceptance of this kind of contrast.

Oppression as a Foreign National

She has already faced many troubles in her mother country, so the awaiting troubles in a foreign country may not be very challenging for her. However, the challenges that she has faced in London are quite different from the problems that she faced in India. In London, she faces the issues of the Diaspora. She is isolated because of her nationality and her gender. Her conversation with Dr. Bansali reveals her resistance to the coloniser's mindset. "Sir, England is a different country. They ruled us for so long, now they resent us going there as equals" (THOA 184). She begins training in the casualty department and shifts to the surgery department. Paul Smutch, Mike Mace, and Vivian Mathews are Nalli's coworkers. When Paul states that the people from the third world need our assistance, Nalli is immediately enraged and raises her voice, asking "Third world? Which is chosen as the first by whom? whose second?" (THOA 201). She asks herself, "Did my credentials begin with being Indian, Hindu, a woman, a doctor, or a rustic?" (THOA 201). Moreover, a patient refuses to be treated by her saying he likes to be treated by a British doctor and not by an immigrant. The word "immigrant" hurts Nalli to the core.

Conclusion

The research has tried to navigate the oppressions that the female protagonist faced in the novel *The Hills of Angheri* through in-depth textual analysis. The study also includes pertinent references from secondary sources. According to the study, Nalli is a sample of women who experience widespread oppression on several levels in both the family and society at large. Because she is a girl, a daughter, a student, a medical practitioner, and a foreign national, she frequently receives unequal treatment. Because of her several identities, she experiences discrimination. This is the main stream of intersectional feminism. For a more thorough examination, the study could have concentrated on additional minor female characters in the novel. The phenomenon of oppression is pervasive. Race, gender, caste, religion, economic standing, and other factors are taken into consideration. It could be observed even among the members of a family. It is strange to see that in a family, one person receives good treatment while the other does not. While someone with a dark complexion receives distinct treatment, someone with beautiful complexion receives favourable treatment. Individuals who are wealthy will be treated better. Similar to what occurs within a family, it is also evident in society. People will be viewed from a greater variety of perspectives by society. In this odd behaviour of the society, women are subject to a lot of difficult situations. Despite being a necessary resource for the family and society, women are mistreated at different levels. She experiences a great deal of persecution in all of her positions as a girl, daughter, student, and professional. She is perceived as having several identities. Regardless of what position she attains, she faces hurdles because she is a woman. Nambisan through the character of Nalli, She claims that a woman is a human being first and foremost and she needs to be handled with dignity and respect. Kavery Nambisan promotes the notion that women should be treated as human beings.

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Abbreviations

- [1] THOA- The Hills of Angheri
[2] TTAB-The Truth (Almost) About Bharat

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