

Resisting Patriarchy: A Feminist Reading of Shivaram Karanth's *Sarasamma Samadhi*

Shrungashree T

Research Scholar

Department of PG Studies and Research in English
Kuvempu University

Abstract

This article explores the themes of gender inequality and patriarchal oppression as depicted in Dr. Shivaram Karanth's novel *Sarasamma Samadhi*. Published in 1937, the novel delves into women's emotional depths, struggles, and suppressed desires, portraying their plight within a male-dominated or patriarchal society. The protagonists, Sarasamma and Bhagirathi, highlight the oppression women endure, ranging from societal expectations to the barbaric practice of Sati.

Sarasamma's forced transformation into a "Maha Sati" is critiqued as a political tool of patriarchy to control women's agency. In contrast, Bhagirathi and Sunalini represent resistance, challenging unjust traditions and asserting women's rights to autonomy and dignity. The novel foregrounds the necessity of rebellion against injustice, advocating for gender equality and questioning the exploitation inherent in patriarchal systems. Through its timeless relevance, *Sarasamma Samadhi* remains a compelling reflection on women's struggles and their fight for existence, identity, and freedom.

Keywords: Shivaram Karanth, *Sarasamma Samadhi*, Gender inequality, Patriarchy, Women's rights, Sati practice, Feminist resistance, Social critique,

Introduction:

Over time, Kannada literature has beautifully portrayed women's emotions, inner struggles, and suppressed rebellion. These elements can be seen in the work of the Jnanpith Award-winning author Dr. Shivaram Karanth's novel *Sarasamma Samadhi*. Which stands for its impactful depiction of women's true identity and their struggle for existence. *Sarasamma Samadhi* was published in 1937, this novel explicitly illustrates a woman's

sensitivities, hardships, desires, societal status, and struggles with patriarchal norms all without glorification, embellishment, or melodrama.

The lives of the protagonists, Sarasamma and Bhagirathi, challenge the very essence of human existence. They questioned the patriarchal system. This significant novel remains relevant across eras, holding a mirror to the emotional turmoil and struggles faced by women of all castes and religions. Through this work, Shivaram Karanth critiques the patriarchal system in India, shedding light on how society perceives women and how it continues to exploit them. The narrative exposes societal tendencies to view women as objects of pleasure, subordinate them under customs and traditions, and rob them of their vitality, turning them into living corpses.

In *Sarasamma Samadhi*, the protagonist fights against these injustices. She resists a system that defines a woman's life as confined to the kitchen and four walls, reducing her identity to her husband's shadow. It critiques a society that dictates a woman should sacrifice her body, unwillingly submit to male dominance, and worship her husband as a deity. Sarasamma's rebellion resonates deeply, even today. However, as the novel unfolds, it becomes apparent that within every man lies a spark of resistance against the same oppressive society. Karanth's writing subtly reveals this duality, where femininity also exists within masculinity.

The novel emphasizes that what a woman truly seeks is love not the arrogance, authority, or material riches of a man. With genuine affection, she is willing to dedicate herself entirely, like sandalwood offering its fragrance. This simple yet profound message forms the essence of the novel.

Interestingly, the portrayal of spirits in this story extends beyond the realm of the supernatural, representing the grim reality of how women live like ghosts even in life, enslaved by societal constraints.

In the novel, Sarasamma is venerated as "Maha Sati Sarasamma" after her death, symbolizing how patriarchal society politicizes the concept of deifying women. Sarasamma, regarded as an incarnation of Sita, marries Neelachayya, loses him early in her youth, and is forced into Sati. Sarasamma's lamentation is not just her agony but the collective cry of countless women whose aspirations and dreams were crushed under the patriarchal system.

Turning her into a deity and confining her actions symbolizes a political ploy by a male-dominated society to control women.

The novel doesn't just portray the tragic life of Sarasamma but critiques the barbaric practice of Sati that victimized numerous women. When society declares a woman's life meaningless after her husband's death, barring her from remarrying, living independently, or adorning herself, it manifests the cruelty of patriarchal norms. Sarasamma, who is forced to ascend her husband's funeral pyre, represents one side of this tragedy, while characters like Bhagirathi and Sunalini, who resist these oppressive norms, represent the other.

The defiance of Bhagirathi and Sunalini, challenging long-standing societal customs, serves as a powerful critique of patriarchal oppression. Bhagirathi's protest against her husband Venkatramanayya who treats women as inferior beings, equating them to dogs and slippers emphasizes the need for resistance. Her decision to leave her marital home symbolizes a significant act of rebellion, paving the way for change. Karanth brilliantly showcases how these women's protests create new paths of resistance.

The novel strongly asserts that enduring injustice silently is far less important than resisting it. For women, especially, it emphasizes the necessity of standing against oppression. Through its powerful narrative, *Sarasamma Samadhi* sends a compelling message that rebellion is vital for justice and equality.

Conclusion:

Shivaram Karanth's *Sarasamma Samadhi* stands as a timeless critique of patriarchal oppression and societal injustice. Through the lives of its protagonists, Sarasamma and Bhagirathi, the novel not only exposes the cruelty of outdated customs like Sati but also highlights the resilience and courage of women who dare to resist. It emphasizes the necessity of rebellion against societal norms that dehumanize and subjugate women, asserting that silence in the face of injustice continue the cycle of oppression.

Karanth's nuanced portrayal of gender dynamics reveals that the struggle for equality is not merely a fight against external structures but also an introspective journey for both women and men to recognize and dismantle internalized patriarchy. The novel's core message that love, respect, and equality are the foundation of a meaningful life resonates deeply even today.

By presenting a scathing critique of the societal structures that exploit women while celebrating the strength and defiance of its female characters, *Sarasammanna Samadhi* transcends its time, offering lessons and inspiration for generations to come. It is not merely a narrative of oppression but a powerful call for transformation, making it an enduring masterpiece in Kannada literature.

Work Cited

Karanth, Shivaram. *Sarasammanna Samadhi*. Manohara Grantha Mala, 1937.