

Victimization of the Marginalized: A study of *The Storeyed House***Aravinth Raja**Assistant Professor of English
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This study attempts to bring out the victims of the marginalized people in a given society in the text *The Storeyed House*. Marginalization is an evil practice that exists in society for over a long period. At one point, the marginalized become the victims under the oppression of the upper-class society. This study brings out such cases in the selected text *The Storeyed House*. The researcher has used the concepts and subaltern theories propounded by Gayatri Spivak, Antonio Gramsci and Arjun Dangle in the research study. A subaltern in any society is put under the cruel oppressive hands of the elitist people or the upper class in the particular society. The selected texts also give a solution in overcoming the shackles of marginalization and suggests 'strategic essentialism' as the key idea to revolt against the upper-class people. The study also tries to analyze the disjointed narrative in the text as a tool to express the social evils.

Keywords: Marginalization, victimization, subaltern, oppression, emancipation.

The Storeyed House portrays the life and death of an old man named Bayaji, who and his newly built house is destroyed by the oppressor in the particular society. Bayaji is an old man who comes to his native village after getting retired from his service. He is above in his sixties and could not able to even lift his belongings. While he enters the village, he sees Bhujaba, a person from the upper class coming on his way and greets him with warmth. However, Bayaji could not bear an untouchable greeting him with a smile and he replies him in anger and frustration. His tone itself establishes his superiority over him considering him to be untouchable. Bayaji does not want to create any problem at the time since it is the first time he enters the village after a very long time. Bhujaba takes this an opportunity to accuse

Bayaji using harsh words against him and his community. Bayaji belongs to the Mahar community who are treated as untouchables as history writings say. The notion of oppression is seen all through the text primarily with the character Bhujaba. When he observes an untouchable greeting him, he replies “Greetings? Can you forget your position simply because you’ve turned Buddhist?” (Hoval 177).

Bhujaba does not stop with this, instead, he goes on telling him that how an untouchable should greet an upper-classman. Whenever he finds a chance, he establishes his superiority over Bayaji and he also spreads false ideologies which he himself constructs. He persuades Bayaji to accept himself as a subaltern in the society and asks him to greet as “My humble salutations to you, sir who is my father and mother” (Hoval 177). Bayaji gets upset in hearing this and thinking how the society has not changed till now. He goes a step further in insulting and humiliating Bayaji by asking “Do you think you can become a Brahmin merely by saying ‘Greetings?’” (Hoval 177). The language used by the people is also classified into categories which the text condemns. From the conversation of Bhujaba, one could easily understand that most of the good words are to be used by the upper class and few derogatory words are to be used by the lower class people. This is evident when he asks if Bayaji can become Brahmin by uttering the word ‘greetings’.

However, when Bhujaba finds that Bayaji has some money with him, which he got as his relieving amount, his tone and attitude changes. His upper-class ideologies suddenly demolish and he treats him good. He says “Bayaji, you have a heavy load on your head. Go to your house first. We’ll talk at leisure later” (Hoval 178). The author tries to condemn the society’s consciousness of considering one as subaltern if he does not have any money. Even a subaltern can become equivalent to an upper-classman when he has a sufficient amount of money with him. The concept of money plays an important role in determining the social status of a man. Both the above statements are expressed in this text. The materialistic social determination is seen through the action of Bayaji when he decides to build a new house for his family. When he comes to the village after very long years, his children had come to welcome and greet him. They also asked their father what he has brought for them. He replies that he has bought nothing for them with the hard earned money, instead, he decides to build a new house, that too a Storeyed house because it only can help the family to accommodate with comfort. “Look, children, ours is such a large family. Even at mealtime, we’ve to eat by

turns or sit crowded, knocking our knees together. I wish to build a house out of my earnings, and it has to be a storeyed house; the usual three-portioned house won't be adequate for us" (Hoval 179).

The news of an untouchable building a storeyed house spreads to the whole village soon. Kondiba, a wealthy landlord and a man belonging to the upper class is the only person in the village to have a storeyed house. The news affects him much than others. Even people in the village starts gossiping and abusing Bayaji for building a storeyed house. One elder man in the village says, "an untouchable creature, should think of a rival Storeyed house was too much for Kondiba to bear" (Hoval 180). The reason which Bayaji gives is since his family members are numerous he could not accommodate all of them in the old portioned house. But, people in the village starts abusing him and even threatens him not to build a house equal to the house of an upper-classman. Some people in the village started abusing and attacking the whole community in the village because of Bayaji building a storeyed house. Few even accused the community people as "untouchables were forgetting their position" (Hoval 180).

Kondiba visits Bayaji's house in order to inquire about his building works. Bayaji even wishes him well for his visit and even says "It's with your blessings that I have ventured on this storeyed house" (Hoval 180). Yet, Kondiba establishes his superiority over the untouchables by advising not to build a rival house against his one. He even goes a step further and threatens him by saying "You may go in for a storeyed house only if you don't wish to stay in this village. I hope you know what I mean" (Hoval 180). On hearing this, Bayaji gets afraid and abandons his plan of building a storeyed house. Instead, he goes for the old portioned house and builds one story for which the way is from the kitchen. The dreams of Bayaji on building a storeyed house is shattered all of a sudden and he is put into the situation where he cannot fight against the upper class instead can only surrender to the oppression of the upper-class people.

The advice which he gets are also a kind of inculcating ideologies in him about the position of an untouchable in a society and he cannot revolt against them nor consider them as rivals. For instance, once Kondiba himself says, "Baiju, you shouldn't lose your head simply because you've set aside some money. Do you aspire to an equal status with us by

building this house? The poor should remain content with their cottage, understand?” (Hoval 180). He is not poor since he has more money than other upper-class people in the village. The reason for planning to build a storeyed house is because his family consists of numerous members. Yet, he is brainwashed not to revolt against the upper class and he abandons the plan of building a storeyed house. The hegemony of the people in power always interpellates into the subaltern’s mind is not to revolt against them. Hegemony need not be the same form instead it takes several forms in oppressing the subaltern.

After many days, the building construction has come to an end and Bayaji plans to arrange a housewarming ceremony. He invites several people for the housewarming ceremony. The convention of the particular society people is the elders should not be called for meal or refreshments and it has been practised in the housewarming ceremony. The ceremony is much like a traditional housewarming ceremony where many activities arranged for the visitors. Kondiba is also a visitor there and he is accompanied by friends who almost look like goondas. They do not show any gratitude towards anyone in the ceremony instead they go to the upstairs and sit for the sake of attending the function. Their eyes showed the hatred and jealousy which they had within them. Since he has visited the house, Bayaji offers him betel leaves. He accepted the betel leaves and refused it. He goes a step further in insulting Bayaji by saying, “It’s enough that your offering is honoured; is it also necessary to eat it? We’ll make a move now” (Hoval 181).

After finding so many ways to insult Bayaji, they plan to leave the house. They do not seem happy or cannot bear the family in a smile, guests in a smile, and house with lighting lamps. All of a sudden the house flared up. Bayaji could not able to see the fire in his house and he runs here and there shouting “My house, my storeyed house! It’s on fire. My enemy has taken revenge on me” (Hoval 182). All of a sudden, all his dreams shattered and he goes on crying into the house to save a few products. People around the house runs here and there shouting and asking Bayaji to jump. “Bayaji was burnt all over. He was still wailing, ‘My house, my house!’ Bayaji’s children encircled him and cried their hearts out. The guests were busy putting out the fire. All Bayaji’s hopes had been reduced to ashes. What was the use of putting out the fire now?” (Hoval 183).

Bayaji is in his last breathe and his elder sons ask him the last wish that he wants their sons to do. Bayaji replies, “Sons, I want you to build a storeyed house. I’ve no other wish” (Hoval 183). The emancipation of the marginalized is seen at the end of the text. The victim in the text is Bayaji, who and his dreams are burnt all of a sudden without having done anything wrong to anyone. The study explores the marginalized people in the text and finds how they are victimized in the society just because of the act of marginalization. Victims of any kind are not naturally put under the circumstances but they are put under the state of victimization through the socially constructed ideas, ideologies and concepts. This is stated by Pauline and others as “The social construction of terms like crime and victimization, abuse of power, terrorism, and radicalization, in particular when captured in law and public policy means that many victims are not viewed as such by other societal actors. Yet, victimization can apply to many other situations than those involving officially certified victims” (Pauline 2018).

The text does not restrict itself in portraying the class conflicts, class differentiation, social eviction, marginalization, etc. but also it gives a solution to overcome the social exclusion because of oppressing power. The last wish as the old man says is to build another house though the recently built was destroyed by his enemies. Emancipation out of marginalization is seen at the end of the text, where the sons of Bayaji starts the work for building a new storeyed house to fulfil their father’s last wish. They do not fear again for the oppressive class of the society instead they want to establish themselves in the society, and to upheave their position in society. Whatever the obstacles may come, they are keen in fulfilling the last wish of their father and also to shine in front of the people who are the reason for the death of their father and demolition of their new house.

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