



Caste and Masculinity: The Complexity of Gender Dynamics among Different Communities in Tamil Karisal Literature

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Abstract

The conceptualisation of masculinity in the traditional sense has been viewed as a complex mix of attitudes, behaviours, and abilities (powers) possessed by diverse groups of individuals. It is supposed that neither these sets nor the individuals who compose them have remained consistent across time and among societies. In this paper, I will be exploring the varying degrees of masculinity that is exhibited by men of different communities portrayed in Tamil Karisal literature. Gender relations are also defined along the lines of Caste and status. 'Karisal' meaning 'black soil' encompasses the arid regions of Southern Tamil Nadu and Karisal literature depicts the lives of the people living in such regions. Traditional traits of masculinity such as being valiant, dominant, and knowledgeable is more expected from the upper caste men whereas such traits are not encouraged among men belonging to the marginalised sections of the rural Karisal landscape. This paper will also look at how gender relations exist between the men and women of both dominant and lower castes in the Karisal region. It can also be noted how virtues associated with femineity such as chastity, subordination and obedience are expected from upper caste women who do not cross household boundaries but Dalit women, out of economic necessities, are made to work as agricultural labourers in the fields and are prone to being harassed by men of all castes. For this study, the texts for analysis are short stories from *Along with the Sun* (2020) compiled by Ki. Rajanarayanan and the novel *Koogai* (2015) written by Cho Dharman.

Keywords: Gender dynamics, Caste, Masculinity, Karisal, Dalit.