

Doubly Marginalized: Representations of Malaiyaha Tamil Women in Sri Lankan Writings

Abhilashini, B., Thiruvarangan, M.

Department of Linguistics and English, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna

babhilashini@gmail.com

When you sip a delicious cup of Ceylon tea, you tend to forget the silenced histories behind its journey. The tea industry, one of Sri Lanka's biggest industries, thrives on the labour of Malaiyaha Tamil women workers, the backbone of the tea industry in Sri Lanka. While Tea is a profitable commodity to the country's economy, the hands that pluck its leaves undergo hardships and struggles. Women on plantations experience gender discrimination, marginalization and oppression. They are doubly marginalized by the exploitative structures both within their homes and society. Even in the 21st century, the Malaiyaha community is amongst the most deprived and oppressed community in Sri Lanka, often living in dismal conditions, poverty, limited access to education and healthcare. This study explores the representation of Malaiyaha Tamil women in Sri Lankan poetry and short stories, focusing on women's struggles, hardships, labour exploitation, dual burden, marginalization, domestic violence and resistance. With the diverse perspectives of male writers and female writers, this study probes into narratives revolving around women's lived experiences in the estates. These narratives and poems voice opposition to the oppression, discrimination and marginalization that the community faces. The long-rooted histories of the community that are erased and silenced are uprooting as powerful literature to critique romanticized narratives about the "Tea Gardens". My work intends to uncover the lived realities of Malaiyaha Tamil women through literary texts. These works do not present women as only victims of suffering, oppression and violence but also as agents of resisting silence.

Keywords: *tea, Malaiyaha Tamil women, marginalization, labour, resistance*