



## Caste and the Continuing Battle: A Critical Study of Aravind Malagatti's "Karya" in Contemporary India

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### Abstract

This article offers Aravind Malagatti's perspective on the dominant importance of caste oppression in India. It also aims to highlight the impact of oppressive rules that control Dalit communities, an area still underexplored. The discriminatory practices and resistance they provoke are central to this study. Using citations from academic critiques, reviews, and journalistic commentary, this article calls for the rejection of Brahminical rules and their illogical religious ideologies that uphold caste-based suppression and oppression. Inspired by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Michel Foucault, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's research, the article features Aravind Malagatti's "Karya" as a voice that challenges the ritualistic foundations of Hinduism that legitimise caste hierarchies. Malagatti's narrative is thus presented as both a literary intervention and a political act of resistance in the ongoing fight for Dalit liberation. The study also emphasises the importance of Dalit narratives in reshaping discussions on caste, identity, and resistance in modern India. This article seeks to deconstruct caste hierarchies and promote inclusive literary and cultural narratives within the scope of contemporary Indian literature.

**Keywords:** Caste, Karya, Hinduism, Counter-hegemonic discourse, Liberation, Inclusivity

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author/s declared no conflicts of interest.

**Funding:** No funding was received for this research.

**Article History:** Received: 10 April 2025. Revised: 05 September 2025. Accepted: 10 September 2025. First published: 15 September 2025.

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**Published by:** [Aesthetix Media Services, India](#) ↗

**Citation:** Naik, S. & Satpathy, S. P. (2025). Caste and the Continuing Battle: A Critical Study of Aravind Malagatti's "Karya" in Contemporary India. *Rupkatha Journal*, 17(3). <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v17n3.03g>



## 1. Introduction: Aravind Malagatti and Kannada Dalit Literature

Aravind Malagatti is a distinguished Kannada poet and writer. He has published over fifty books, including poetry, fiction, and literary criticism. He received the prestigious Ambedkar Fellowship Award from the government of Karnataka. "Government Brahmana", the first Dalit autobiography in Kannada written by Malagatti, won the Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Award. Dalit literature tells the stories of marginalised 'untouchable' communities in India. It portrays people from these communities as oppressed, resilient, and revolutionary in their pursuit of self-realisation and rights. Many Dalit writers have significantly contributed to shaping Dalit identity and image. The debate on India's caste system remains highly relevant. Our country's principle "Unity in diversity" is often just a line on paper; in reality, we have diversity but lack unity. We are divided by various factors, and these divisions continue to govern us. Society needs harmony, but living in a delusional world means we are ruled by ignorance. Without knowledge, we remain unaware citizens, and democracy suffers. Religion and rituals are two main aspects of modern Indian society. These should serve as mediums for a meaningful life, but excessive reliance and blind faith can harm society. Over more than seventy-five years of India's independence, the debate continues on whether to abolish or reform the system. A key debate today is between Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi. Although caste appears increasingly outdated, it still significantly shapes India's social landscape. "Karya", a realistic novel by Aravind Malagatti, originally published in Kannada in 1988 and translated into English by Susheela Punitha in 2021, acts as a powerful mirror to these realities, offering a poignant portrayal of Dalit life both in everyday existence and beyond. Its compelling narrative not only reveals the social reality of Dalits but also highlights the ongoing struggle against systemic injustice. Caste is not merely a social issue; it is a lived reality that influences the spiritual, cultural, and institutional fabric of Indian life. Malagatti's works are deeply political, rooted in the Ambedkarite tradition of critique, and scrutinise Hindu rituals that uphold caste-based oppression, which in turn leads to other forms of oppression. Through techniques such as irony, satire, and counter-narrative, Malagatti dismantles hegemonic structures that seek to normalise caste. His narrative exposes how profoundly caste is embedded in Hindu practices and beliefs, showing that even in death, Dalits are denied dignity and equality. By highlighting a religious ritual, Malagatti presents a stark, unflinching picture of how the Hindu religious order legitimises and sustains social hierarchy, exclusion, and oppression. "Karya" also reflects the multitude of hierarchies among lower castes, portraying a reality where these hierarchies act as obstacles to creating a casteless society. Such divisions serve as barriers to the unity of Dalit communities. This "divide and rule" policy enables upper castes to maintain control and dominance over lower castes.

Aravind Malagatti's "Government Brahmana: A Discourse on Suppression and Survival" by S. Johny, published in *Language in India*, Vol. 16:8, August 2016, establishes that legal reforms are failing to eradicate caste abuse, instead taking new forms of caste humiliation. This reveals the complexities and contradictions inherent in their socio-legal transformation. Furthermore, this article demonstrates the strategies employed by Dalit communities to survive while exposing the systemic shortcomings that sustain their marginalisation. "Rebellious Writing in Kannada

Literature: Malagatti's *Government Brahmana*", another article by Mr. Anand Kattimani, published in *Research Journal of English (RJOE)*, Vol 9, Issue 1, 2024, explores the transformative role of Aravind Malagatti's autobiography, "Government Brahmana", within Kannada and Dalit Literature. This work is pivotal in portraying Dalit lived experiences and challenging entrenched caste hierarchies through literary expression. It provides a critical framework to understand Dalit life during the period depicted, while also reflecting on changes shaping Dalit experiences today. Religion plays a significant role in shaping and sustaining India's caste system, serving as both a cultural framework and a source of legitimacy for social hierarchies. Dr Prabuddh Ananda's article titled, "Interrogating Rigidity of Caste and Religion: A Study of Aravind Malagatti's 'Government Brahmana'", published in *Literary Herald*, Vol 10, Issue 1 (June 2024), examines this rigidity within caste and religion. Malagatti, in an interview conducted in 2019 and published in 2021 in *Sage Journals* by Surya Simon, titled, "A call for mutual change and progress: An interview with Aravind Malagatti and Dharani Devi Malagatti", Vol 88, Issue 3, offers a profound exploration of caste, Dalit identity, and the transformative power of literature and translation in contemporary India. It provides scholars with a foundation for further research by highlighting gaps in this area, thereby contributing to the ongoing debate on caste as an outdated social category. To understand the current conditions and lived realities of Dalit communities, a report titled "U.P., Rajasthan, M.P. top in cases of atrocities on Dalits" (Fig. 1), published by *The Hindu* on 23 September 2024, reveals how, despite constitutional safeguards, meaningful reform remains largely unfulfilled. The report details the alarming number of cases registered under atrocity laws against Dalits, while also pointing to low conviction rates and delayed justice. This data underscores the persistent caste-based violence and the urgent need for reform.

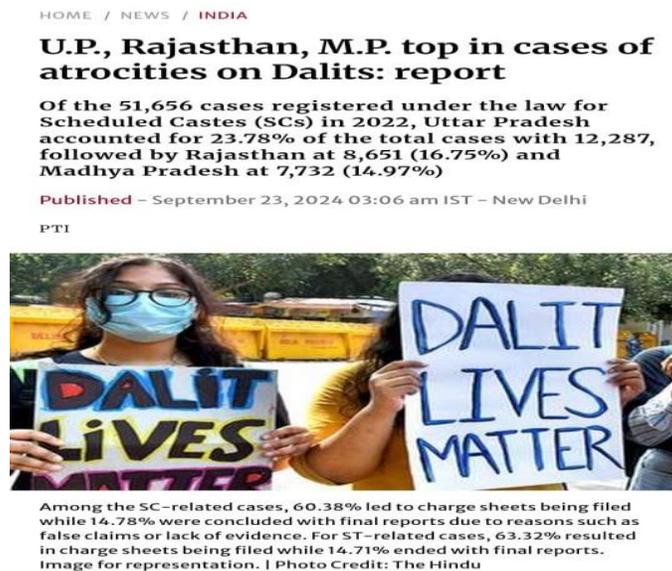


Figure 1: "Photo Credit: The Hindu"

Hindu tradition is often viewed as reinforcing caste hierarchies through its rituals, customs, and social practices. The prevalence of Dalit atrocity cases can also be exemplified by a recent incident in one of India's eastern states, where several Dalit women sat on a dharna outside a temple in Odisha's Kendrapara district after they were allegedly denied permission to perform the ritual of offering milk to the deity during the holy month of Kartik. An article published in *The Times of*

India by Ashis Senapati, titled, "Temple bars SC women's ritual offerings, sparks protest," on Nov 9, 2024, at 20:48 IST, highlights how scheduled caste (SC) women in Garajanga village, Kendrapara district, staged a protest on Saturday outside the Siddheswari Ramachandi temple, alleging caste-based discrimination. They had been prevented from offering milk to the deity during the holy month of Kartik. The controversy arose when temple priests and upper caste locals allegedly barred SC women from participating in the ritual, claiming that only upper caste devotees have the traditional right to make such offerings. The situation escalated as the protesting women reported facing caste-based slurs when they challenged the restriction. As I quote here, 'We were previously allowed to offer milk to deity, but during this Kartik month, we were suddenly barred. This discrimination deeply hurts us, especially since we have been living harmoniously in this village.' Niranjan Padhiari, a temple priest, defended the exclusion, saying that milk offered by SC women would be considered 'impure' for temple rituals and the deity's bathing purposes. This sudden reversal — from initially permitting to later denying during the so-called sacred month of Kartik — reveals that caste Hindus are unwilling to grant Dalits full and equal rights. By invoking notions of purity and impurity, they use Hindu rituals and customs as tools to maintain social control and preserve their dominance. This clearly demonstrates how religious traditions are manipulated to uphold caste hierarchies and restrict the autonomy of marginalised communities. Furthermore, another recent report published by The Times of India on Nov 15, 2024, at 23:25 IST, titled, "Dalit Man's Last Rites Disrupted; Case Filed Against Village Head, 8 Others" by Mohd. Dilshad, is pertinent to Aravind Malagatti's novel "Karya," as it documents the disruption of a Dalit man's last rites, closely mirroring events in the novel. The report details how tension flared in Bhainsi village, under Khatauli police station in Muzaffarnagar, after the last rites of a Dalit man were disrupted by the village head and his associates, who allegedly made casteist remarks and threatened the family against holding a cremation at the village crematorium platform. The complainant's statement states, 'On Nov 9, during the funeral procession of Babu Valmiki, the village head, Amit Ahlawat, along with his associates, stopped us, wielding sticks. They declared, 'Your last rites will not be performed here; only we have right to use this land, as your rites will defile it.' This incident closely echoes the desecration of a Dalit woman's dignity, symbolised by her body being shockingly and unjustly removed from the grave, illustrating how oppressive Hindu rituals and customs continue to tarnish the dignity of Dalits even in death. Similarly, the report describes how a Dalit man's cremation was obstructed by dominant caste members, reinforcing the systemic denial of dignity in death. Both the real-life incident and the fictional narrative reveal how caste-based discrimination persists in governing Hindu death rituals, denying Dalits the right to live, die, and mourn with respect. This underscores the ongoing reality of caste-based discrimination in contemporary society, where Hindu religious beliefs and practices often serve as mechanisms to sustain and legitimise such social hierarchies. Another recent report, titled "Denied entry to Bengal village temple, 130 Dalit families wage battle for rights," published by The Indian Express on March 8, 2025, sheds light on an incident where Dalit families were refused entry into the Gidheawar Shiva Mandir in Gidhagram. Despite legal reforms, true equality remains elusive due to the ongoing imposition and application of Hindu religious practices. The report highlights the gap between legal provisions and social practices. The persistence of such exclusionary customs suggests a deeply rooted structural violence, where religious spaces become contested zones of caste assertion and denial.

**Denied entry to Bengal village temple, 130 Dalit families wage battle for rights**

Officials say they are trying to navigate the fragile situation while keeping in mind the law and order situation, but for the families, the administration is dragging its feet.

Figure 2: "Photo Credit: The Indian Express"

Written by [Ravik Bhattacharya](#) +1 More  
 Updated: March 8, 2025 09:33 IST NewsGuard  
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The temple in Gidhagram village in Purba Bardhaman district of West Bengal. (Photo: Partha Paul)

"We don't even have the right to climb the steps, let alone enter the temple and pray. Even a meeting with the administration couldn't change that," said 50-year-old Ekkori Das, standing in Daspara area of Gidhagram village in West Bengal's Purba Bardhaman district.

Figure 3: "Photo Credit: The Indian Express"



A resolution passed afterwards stated: "Racial discrimination has been banned through our Constitution. Everyone has the right to worship. Therefore, Das families will be allowed to enter Gidheawar Shiv Mandir in Gidhagram." (Express photo by Partha Paul)

Figure 4: "Photo Credit: The Indian Express"

Aravind Malagatti's "Karya" poignantly highlights the role of religion and religious practices in sustaining and legitimising the caste system. In a conversation published in Indian Cultural Forum on 12 April, 2021, when questioned about Hindu customs, Malagatti emphasised their enduring importance- not as spiritual necessities, but as instruments that continue to reinforce caste identities and social stratification. His response also underscores the fluidity of this custom in reaching the reader's consciousness by making them feel disturbed and dissatisfied. Another online platform, ArtReview, authored by Deepa Bhasthi, reviews the book on 22 July 2021, titled "The Usefulness of Death: Aravind Malagatti's 'Karya'," which presents death as a multifaceted phenomenon deeply entangled with caste dynamics and ritual practices. The title "Usefulness of Death" is ironic. Death is an inevitable part of life and is considered the great leveller. However, the text "Karya" portrays the misery of Dalit lives even after death. Even death cannot have any substantial utility in a Dalit's life. It is said that when a person dies, the body, left without social conditioning, becomes free from societal confinements. But "Karya" poignantly shows the futility of death in a Dalit's life. Even after death, a Dalit remains a Dalit: An untouchable whose kullaggi(ritual fire) is not allowed to touch the ground. This review demonstrates that this text is

an indictment of death. Malagatti, the author, uses death as a potential spectacle and tool to question the reality of a casteist society.

## 2. Discussion

Caste represents the spectrum of inequalities in India. Through 'Karya', Malagatti reminds us that caste is deeply embedded in our rituals, and confronting it requires challenging the Hindu ritual orders that legitimise and uphold it. The story begins with a solemn procession led by Ghatagara Mallappa, carrying the Kullaggi, the ritual fire, as it makes its way towards the graveyard on the third day after the death of Bangaravva, a Dalit muthaide. Right behind Mallappa was Fakirappa. He held the kavala mora—a winnowing tray filled with bits of boiled meat, bones, brain, tongue, and eyes of goat, along with some roti, savoury snacks like chakkuli and chivuda, a chipped cup of tea, some broken rice, and two bottles of medicine. According to Hindu tradition, when someone dies, certain rituals, known as 'karya' (meaning 'last rites' or 'ceremonial duty'), must be performed to ensure the soul's peace. Part of the ritual requires that the Kullaggi (ritual fire) not touch the ground, but as the story unfolds, the sacred fire falls to the ground when a sudden blast of wind rises. This fire symbolises spiritual purity and continuity, and its fall to the ground signifies impurity—a disruption of the sacred order, as Malagatti poignantly reflects in his text.

'Ei, don't let the kullaggi fall.'

'It shouldn't touch the ground.'

'It's bad luck if it does.'

'Don't let it fall. Come what may.' (Malagatti,2021).

"He dropped the sacred fire — it was wrong — but was he to blame?" (Malagatti, 2021, back cover). Through these lines, Malagatti suggests that the sanctity of the ceremony has been tarnished. Amidst the chaos, no one listens to Mallappa — neither to his words nor to the visible blisters on his palms, caused by his desperate attempt to hold the kullaggi for as long as possible. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states in her renowned work "Can the Subaltern Speak," "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernisation (Spivak, 1988, p. 102). Mallappa's effort, pain, and human vulnerability are entirely overlooked under the weight of Hindu ritual, custom, and tradition — just as the woman in the 'Sati' Hindu practice is completely erased within patriarchal religious tradition. Instead, all attention is fixated on a single act: the fall of the kullaggi. Mallappa's voice is silenced by the weight of ritual, and the community's response is wholly consumed by discussions of purity and impurity as dictated by Hindu customs and rituals. Therefore, the assertion — "The subaltern cannot speak" (Spivak, 1988, p. 104) — becomes crucial here. Malagatti sharply critiques this selective moral gaze, exposing how ritualistic obsessions can blind society to the suffering of real people.

A similar fate befalls Fakirappa when the procession comes to a halt following the fall of the kullaggi. He is burdened with carrying the kavala mora — according to Hindu custom, this must never be set down until it reaches the grave. Therefore, Fakirappa is not even allowed to sit or put

down the kavala mora. As Malagatti writes: "Don't sit. You'll have to pay a fine if you do" (Malagatti, 2021, p. 25). What Malagatti is trying to make understand is that the accidental fall of the kullaggi can be treated as merely a mishap, but it is considered a ritual transgression so severe that it is taken to Panchas — the council of elders — to deliver justice. The situation becomes so intense that it transforms into a site of acute pain and suffering for Fakirappa. Fakirappa is not only physically burdened but also emotionally consumed by the deep-rooted fear of violating sacred customs. He is so deeply convinced by the beliefs and rituals surrounding death that he thinks he can't cheat Bangaravva since she is known to be a goddess-like person. Malagatti, through the portrayal of Fakirappa's silent endurance, exposes the rigidity of Hindu religious customs, rooted in caste hierarchies. Fakirappa says:

'Kaaka, I'm dying! I'm dying!'

'No. kaaka, no! The Panchas have threaten to fine me even if I move my foot' (Malagatti, 2021, p. 51).

'No, she was a like goddess. I can't cheat her' (Malagatti, 2021, p. 55).

The lines above reflect what Michel Foucault, a French historian and philosopher, describes as the concept of 'docile bodies' in his book "Discipline and Punish". Foucault states, 'A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved. The celebrated automata, on the other hand, were not only a way of illustrating an organism, they were also political puppets, small-scale models of power: Frederick II, the meticulous king of small machines, well-trained regiments and long exercises, was obsessed with them' (Foucault, 1995, p. 136). In "Karya", Fakirappa is not seen as a human being but as an object; a body, a docile body that is shaped and disciplined by religious customs that disregard his suffering. He is a mere instrument in the preservation of ritual purity. Here, Malagatti highlights how the trivialities of Hindu customs and rituals are unquestioningly followed, leading to profound emotional and physical pain. He challenges the oppressive trivialities embedded in ritualistic tradition. Furthermore, to offer a clearer understanding of the Hindu religion, its traditions, customs, and rituals, Malagatti dedicates a significant section of the text titled "Pointless Fuss over a Corpse" to vividly depict the ascetics, using them as symbolic representatives of Hindu tradition. With sharp sarcasm, he exposes the complex and hypocritical relationship between ascetics and the Dalits. Malagatti's satirical tone and his critique of caste-entrenched religious authority are as follows:

For the Veerashaiva ascetics known as Jangamas, some sects of Dalits are the main clientele. In a business without capital, the panchanga is their only investment. And the future they forecast from this almanac is their merchandise; never mind that it is repeated, parrot-fashion. People listen to his predictions standing outside the door as if it were the truth from the Vedas; they believe they have no salvation without the Jangamas. The Jangamas also have the practice of dividing up the Dalit settlements among themselves once every two years so that they do not trespass on each other's territory. How did this bond grow between the untouchables and the ascetics? No one knows! (Malagatti, 2021, p. 31).

Through the above passage, Malagatti not only mocks the hollow spectacle of ritualistic religion but also highlights how such practices are used to reinforce caste hierarchies rather than dismantle

them. This Brahminical Culture or Hindu Orthodoxy is very much like a prison-echoing Michel Foucault's concept of the Panopticon (modern-day prison) in his book "Discipline and Punish". As the line goes, 'You may consider that no part of the Empire is without surveillance, no crime, no offence, no contravention that remains unpunished, and that the eye of the genius who can enlighten all embraces the whole of this vast machine, without, however, the slightest detail escaping his attention' (Treilhard, 14) (Foucault, 1995, p. 217). In this modern metaphor of surveillance, individuals internalise the gaze of authority, regulating their behaviour as if they were constantly being watched. Hence, discipline endures even without tangible outcomes or results. As Foucault writes, 'As a monarch who is at the same time a usurper of the ancient throne and the organiser of the new state, he combined into a single symbolic, ultimate figure the whole of the long process by which the pomp of sovereignty, the necessarily spectacular manifestation of power, were extinguished one by one in the daily exercise of surveillance, in the panopticism in which the vigilance of intersecting gazes was soon to render useless both the eagle and sun' (Foucault, 1995, p. 217). Malagatti's treatment of the ascetics in the novel is not merely satirical – it is a powerful indictment of the religious structures that sustain systematic inequality.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, known as the 'father of the Indian Constitution', emphasises unity among the oppressed castes as a prerequisite for social revolution. However, in "Karya", Aravind Malagatti powerfully reveals the deeply rooted caste discrimination that exists not only between castes but also within individual caste groups. The text highlights caste tensions within castes. It is a revelation that Hindu Orthodoxy maintains internal stratification in the name of ritual purity, hierarchical values, and scriptural authority. This generates and sustains social division. Malagatti has portrayed this multi-layered, suppressive, and oppressive social division in a very subtle manner. This division leads to marginalisation and further subjugation. In "Karya", this intra-caste discrimination is explored through the incident where Akkavva's engagement was broken off. This incident prompts Ambedkar's words: "Educate, Agitate, Organise." Though belonging to the same Dalit community, they fail to organise. They have their intra-caste prejudices and agitation but lack education, which causes their community to falter in fostering healthy relationships. They remain so trapped in internal strife and preconceived rituals that it exposes the fragmented nature of caste society. Malagatti says,

How can there be an alliance between the Samagaras and the Machegaras? was Channappa's stand. 'What's the difference between you and them? Both are cobbler communities working with hide,' said Ammanna. 'You could've gone on with the betrothal.' Channappa pounced on Ammanna, spoiling for a fight. 'You give *your* daughter in marriage if you want. Why should we?' (Malagatti, 2021, p. 20).

The narrative deepens its portrayal of Dalit suffering as Malagatti introduces another character-Shantagowda, the dominant-caste landowner. Shantagowda nurses a general grouse against Mallappa, stemming from his deep-seated caste prejudice and personal insecurity. His resentment intensifies when Mallappa, a Dalit, earns public recognition as a wrestling champion-an achievement that threatens the traditional social hierarchy and Shantagowda's sense of superiority. Malagatti says,

But what began as a fight ended as a bout. A revenue collector and a police inspector who had come from elsewhere to watch the wrestling matches interfered and arranged for a

contest between the two. And the winner was Mallappa. Not just that, he also received a cash prize from them and was carried on the shoulders of his fans in a procession. Since then, Shanthagowda had been grinding his teeth against Mallappa trying to keep him from the ring (Malagatti, 2021, p. 72).

He is so deeply entrenched in his sense of caste superiority that he becomes visibly disturbed by Varaga Dasaratha, a Dalit man (Mallappa's father), simply because he wears a moustache as impressive as his own. Despite Dasaratha's just and reasonable explanation for keeping it, Shanthagowda cannot tolerate what he sees as a challenge to caste norms and orders Mallappa of the Nayadara barber caste to shave it off. However, in a powerful moment, Malagatti subtly reveals the intra-caste dynamics and contradictions within the caste system itself. The barber belonging to another lower caste – refuses to cut Dasaratha's moustache. As the text says: "Gowdre, he's below my waist; of a lower caste. How can I touch him?" (Malagatti, 2021, p. 71).

Hence, we can regard Dr. B.R.. Ambedkar as a pioneer of social justice and equality in India, especially considering his argument in his book "Annihilation of Caste" that "Caste is not a division of labour; it is a division of labourers... It is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other" (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 263). Ambedkar famously argued that caste is upheld and perpetuated through religious and ritualistic practices. In the text, the very ritual of conducting a death ceremony becomes a site where caste-based inequalities are revealed. Although the deceased belongs to a Dalit community, the ritual demands adherence to Hindu customs-customs that inherently reinforce Brahminical superiority. Ambedkar's critique in "Annihilation of Caste" that Hinduism sustains graded inequality is vividly dramatized in "Karya", where even in death, the individual remains subject to caste discrimination. He further writes, "Turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform, you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill this monster" (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 263). In "Karya", the refusal to shave the moustache stems from the barber's reluctance to physically touch him, which not only resists the command of the dominant caste but also exposes the complex layers of discrimination and hierarchy that persist even among the marginalised. Caste constitutes a deeply rooted system of inequality, with notions of purity and pollution upheld by Hindu religious customs. This moment skillfully critiques both caste obsession and the internalised structures of oppression that sustain it. The text concludes with an open and unexpected ending. Malagatti has deliberately adopted this approach as if relying on the readers to find a solution to the situation. The ending may also suggest the futility of Hindu rituals. The irony is that intricate rituals surrounding the burial of the dead often result in pointless deaths of many others. The ending raises and provokes numerous questions, urging readers to stop, reflect, and revisit the lives of Dalits.

### **3. Conclusion**

This article examines caste not only as a sociological theme but also as a lived, embodied experience that influences every aspect of Dalit life. Through "Karya", Malagatti confronts the brutality of caste-based discrimination, utilising the power of literary narrative to reveal and challenge entrenched social hierarchies. To reform the caste system, it is necessary to reform the Hindu religious framework that sustains and perpetuates it. This work offers a compelling critique

of the religious foundations underpinning caste discrimination. The author does not directly declare protest but seeks to disturb and disconcert the reader, reaching into their consciousness. Using 'death' as a tool, he aims to reflect both physical exploitation and mental exploitation by landowners and ascetics, respectively, which lower-caste people have long endured. It is not merely a story about a funeral; it is a strong indictment of the caste system and its ongoing grip on Indian society. Its critical engagement with themes of death, space, voice, and resistance makes this text essential in the study of caste and Dalit literature. It demonstrates that the fight against caste remains ongoing. Caste-based stratification persists in society, and the voice of resistance against this heinous system remains active across eras. Writers from different generations strive to end this immoral system through their writings. Their works combine personal, often miserable experiences with traditional social norms created by orthodox communities. 'Karya' by Aravind Malagatti is an intellectual reflection on such unethical practices, even within village cremation grounds. Malagatti speaks of the Ambedkarite declaration, Foucauldian analysis of power through corrupt practices that shape human behaviour under societal norms, and Spivak's concerns about the subaltern and the oppressed.

The story of "Karya" revolves around the death of Bangaravva, a virtuous woman in the community, and the subsequent 'third-day rituals' or 'karya'. A sudden gust of wind causes the ritual fire to fall to the ground, which is regarded as inauspicious according to the superstitions prevailing in the community. Consequently, the ritual is deemed spoiled. There is immediate unrest among the people as they seek to rectify this mishap, but their efforts are in vain. As a result, Bangaravva's body is placed at the crematorium without a funeral. Through this disrespectful action towards the body of a virtuous woman, Malagatti examines the manipulation of power by the village elders and the absurdity of folk belief. He highlights the lack of basic humanity among high-caste individuals towards the marginalised, not only during their lifetime but also after death. The author deliberately leaves many questions unresolved regarding Rudragowda's death, the fate of Varaga Dasaratha, and Bangaravva's body outside her grave. This serves to emphasise the Brahminical dominance that is forcibly imposed on the Dalit community, even in the most sacred rites of burial. Both the life and death of the subaltern are trampled underfoot by the high castes.

The novel reveals that instead of honouring the Dalit with dignity, the Hindu community demands loyalty. It highlights how Dalits suffer under conflicting social norms and how the system of dehumanising caste oppression undermines the moral and spiritual validity of Hindu rituals.

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