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Damodar Mauzo's *Karmelin*: Trials, Tribulations and Struggle for Better Future

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Abstract :

Damodar Mauzo is an eminent Konkani writer. For him, language and literature are means for the achievement of quality human life; they are not an end in themselves. He has not written literary works for name and fame but for the improvement of the readers and their ways of living life. Most of his writings describe the lifestyle of the Goan Catholic community in a realistic manner. His first novel, Karmelin, which won him, Sahitya Akademi Award, portrayed the trials and tribulations, of the Goan women working as babysitters in the Gulf countries. Mauzo said that the subject had not appeared in any language, not even in Kerala literature.

Key words: Konkani, lifestyle, Goan Catholic, trials and tribulations, babysitters

Introduction

Damodar Mauzo is a Goan short story writer, novelist, critic, and script writer in Konkani language. He was awarded the Jnanpith Award, India's highest literary award in 2021, Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 for his novel, *Karmelin*. He has been awarded Vimala V. Pai Vishwa Konkani Sahitya Puraskar award for his novel *Tsunami Simon* in 2011. His collection of short stories *Teresa's Man and Other Stories from Goa* was nominated for the Fran O'Connor International Award in 2015. He was born in the coastal village of Majorda in South Goa on 1st August 1944. He has written short stories in Konkani language. Some of these are translated

into English and published. He runs his family shop in Goa. His business has kept him close to the people of his village. His experiences of village life influenced him a lot. People of his village are predominantly Catholic. He has depicted the lives of Catholic people in Goa with authenticity. The novel *Karmelin* deals with the suffering and the sexual exploitation of the ayahs (house maids) working in Persian Gulf countries. The novel, *Karmelin* has been translated into twelve languages, Assamese, Bengali, Maithili, Nepali, Gujarati, Marathi, Sindhi, Punjabi, Tamil, Kannada, Hindi and English.

Methodology :

Interpretative and analytical methods have been used in the process of research for the exploration of themes of trials, tribulations and struggle to escape from the poverty of the protagonist, *Karmelin*.

Eminent Konkani writer Damodar Mauzo has been conferred with the 57th Jnanpith Award 2022. Mauzo is the second Konkani writer to receive the highest literary award, presented annually by Bhartiya Jnanpith. Litterateur Ravindra Kelekar had won the 42nd Jnanpith Award 2006, the first ever awarded to an author writing in Konkani, presented in July, 2010. Mauzo won the Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel, *Karmelin* in 1983. A number of his short stories have been translated into many languages, including Portuguese and French, besides English. It has been translated into English by Vidya Pai.



Karmelin is the moving saga of a young orphaned girl's trials and tribulations and her attempts to break free from the fetters of poverty. She grows older, to bring up her daughter in a small gossip-ridden village in south Goa with dignity and self respect. It is about the fortune of the protagonist, Karmelin, let down by a drunken wastrel of a husband. She bravely creates her own destiny. She is compelled to work as a maid in Kuwait to ensure a better future for her family and to pay the old debts. It is a tale about sexual exploitation, machinations within the family, caste conflicts within the Christian community, sexist Arab bosses, and above all the bitter-sweet triumphs of Karmelin. It has been set in the metropolitan location of modern day Kuwait and the flourishing, lush landscape of Goa. The novel is aptly named after its protagonist.

Karmelin is the story of a young, orphan girl. It describes her trials and tribulations and her struggle to break free from the shackles of poverty. Karmelin was a very intelligent child like her brother Francisco from early childhood. Mauzo has graphically described the poor health condition in the village and the struggle to survive in the circumstances of fever. The villagers suffered from fever. The whole village depends just on one person for comfort, Padre Manuel, the priest at the local church. He comes forward to comfort the people not only through his sermons, but also through actual deeds. He goes to Margao to meet the doctor and he brings the medicine to save the lives of people who were suffering from fever. By some miracle four to five people survive the ordeal. One day priest also falls ill. Not a single man goes to enquire about his health. People are terrified of fever. Like an army on the battlefield, frightened at the sight of their fallen general. The villagers realize that the fever is too strong. They believe that no one can escape from its grasp. The novelist has described the need of health facilities in the village.

I mustn't even think of Nissar today, Karmelin said to herself, he is the one responsible for my

sins..... for my shame But will he come today? Doesn't miss a chance usually..... Hope he doesn't spoil this special day, thoughinsists on going to bed and doesn't even finish quickly. She's totally worn out and tired but not he.....!

In the early days, he would rush back home giving his wife the slip. The first time..... Oh mother! How scared Karmelin had been? She'd heard so much about these Arab men..... and sure enough her body had been sore for the next three days! But as time passed she'd become used to it, in fact she'd began to look forward to Nissar's visits. Everyone said these Arab men were like an addiction, which you couldn't shake off, but that wasn't true! Karmelin's enthusiasm had begun wane of late. These days it didn't seem to matter whether he came or not. He was her master so she had to put up with him without making a show of protest. If only he wouldn't come today.

Damodar Mauzo a Konkani writer has set tender stories in Goa. He has created a world far removed from the sun and sand and the holiday resorts. We meet in his stories villagers facing moral choices, children waking up to the realities of adult lives, men who dwell on remorse, women who live a life of regret, and communities whose bonds are growing weak in an age of religious polarization. He is one of the doyens of Konkani literature. He has presented vivid glimpses of the richly diverse, cosmopolitan reality of contemporary Goa.

They named the child after Paai – Camilo Xavier. There is no rice in the house. They have been living on gruel for the last six months. When they got back from the baptism, they saw two men were waiting for them. Karmelin didn't know them. But later she comes to know that one of them was the landlord, Pedro Miranda. Karmelin knew that Jose's father had borrowed a large sum of money from him. He had mortgaged the house to them. Pedro Miranda tells Jose that he has not paid any interest for the



last two years. He told that he could not wait any longer. Miranda asks him to either pay the interest or give him the house. Listening this, Jose loses his temper. Jose requested Pedro to give him the time of one month for repayment. Pedro Miranda is a kind hearted man; he gives Jose three months time to return the amount. Jose has to pay fifty rupees as a rent.

In the foreign country, Karmelin suffered because the rules favored the Arabs. Karmelin felt as if she suffocated. She dreamt of working there for a few more years. All those dreams had turned to dust. She spends an uneasy night in the jail. Thieves and murders had been lodged there before her. There was no hope of getting justice. What was she charged with? She had unlocked the room and answered the phone. Karmelin had hoped Nissar would come to her help. But he had not come, and now it was too late. She appeals to Lord Jesus that only he can now save her. Because of a small offence, she was kept in jail. Her journey of life is thorny. His stories are based on real life experiences.

According to Damodar Mauzo every writer is an activist. He has described the issues of environmental damage, and social problems such as loneliness, old age, gender exploitation. We see activism in his stories. He has championed the cause of freedom of expression which is a fundamental right which enhances our humanness. He has described the life of the protagonist, a lower middle class Goan from childhood to adulthood. We come to know her relationships with the various people in her life. Joao Philip is the loving uncle who brings her up after the death of her family. Agnel, the cousin she loves who leaves her to marry the rich girl of his mother's selection. Jose is her drunkard and abusive husband. Nissar is her Arab boss who sexually exploits her when she is forced to work as an aayah in Kuwait to support her family.

Karmelin rises from the ashes. She hopes that she will provide her daughter with a secure

future and higher education. Karmelin's experiences represent the suffering of women in the society which is far away from economic inequality. She has faced the trauma of displacement. The book presents a beautiful canvas of the culture and life style of Goan Catholics, the festivals they celebrate. The protagonist rises above the misfortune with her will power and struggle.

Damodar Mauzo has presented a moving story of a young orphan girl, in *Karmelin*.

The protagonist, Karmelin faces trials and tribulations in her life. She rises above the problems and suffering through her inner spirit and fortitude. She brings up her daughter with dignity and self respect. She creates her own destiny. She is obligated to work as a maid in Kuwait to ensure a better future for her family and to pay the old debts. She provides her daughter security and higher education which are important for the quality human life. With her courage and determination she not only survives in this world but also provides her daughter a secure future and a perspective to live a life of dignity and respect. The novel gives us the important message that economic empowerment and quality higher education are essential to fight against any type of problems. The novel has expressed the discourse of liberation. The protagonist represents the experiences of women across the country and the world. It is an valuable character study of the life experiences of a lower middle class Goan woman who is the protagonist of the novel. The themes are universal. The novelist has presented the themes of exploitation, vulnerability, a mother's fierce love, survival and grit, we can relate with all.

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