

KARUKKU: AN CONFESSION OF BAMA'S REAL LIFE STORY

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Abstract

Dalit literature is written by dalits. Dalit literature first found its voice in Marathi in 1960s and 1970s and appeared in other languages like Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada. Dalit literature uses autobiography as a literary genre and Dalit writers shares their personal experiences of oppression, injustice and caste discrimination.

Bama is a Tamil Dalit feminist, novelist and dedicated teacher. Bama's novels focus on caste and gender discrimination. She portrays caste discrimination which prevails in between religions. Bama's works are deals with Dalit feminism and it encourages and celebrates the inner strength of subaltern woman. She became prominent with her autobiographical novel Karukku. Bama's narrative is not linear but expresses her woes of oppression and social discrimination in lively manner. Karukku is a poignant novel which speaks about the author, Bama's childhood experiences. Through this book Karukku, Bama confesses the pain of oppression, discrimination and injustice, of being a Dalit, christian woman. The main objective of this paper is to demonstrate that, Karukku: An Confession of Bama's Real Life Story.

Keywords: *Discrimination, Oppression, Determination, Injustice, Marginalization.*

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Tamil Dalit literature in the 1990's as an apparent literary form has drive to the extent works of novels, short stories, poems and autobiographies. Dalit literature is more than a literature of lament and frustration. The important themes in Tamil Dalit literature is pain and sufferings of the Dalits. Dalit writers considered their literary work as a movement of social liberation. Tamil Dalit writer Raj Gautaman points out that the decade old Tamil Dalit literature has two main functions. First one makes the Dalits to realize their subjugation and creates awareness in them and the second one makes the Dalits to fight for the equality and rights.

Tamil Dalit writer, Bama's primary motive of Dalit literature is the liberation of Dalit in particular and the liberation from oppressed in genre. Bama was born in 1958 as Faustina Mary Fatima Rani in Puthupatti village, Viruthunagar District. She is also known as Bama Faustina Soosairaj. She wrote her works by using the pen name Bama. Susairaj is her father and Sebasthiamma is her mother. Her father was employed in Indian Army. She is the sister of famous Dalit writer Raj Gautaman. Her works are *Karukku* (1992), *Sangati* (1994), *Vanmam* (2002) translated into other Indian Languages, English and French. Her collected Short Stories are *Kusumbukkaran* (1996), and *Oru Tattvum Erumaiyum* (2003). In addition she has written twenty one Short Stories.

Bama's novel focuses on caste and gender discrimination. Her works dealt with Dalit feminism and celebrates the will power of subalterns. Bama and her family converted into Christianity in order to rescue from the caste discrimination. The autobiographical novel *Karukku*, made Bama a prominent writer. *Karukku* is the first autobiographical novel in

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Tamil Dalit literature by a woman writer. In this novel, Bama narrates her real life story and her community, the victims of caste discrimination and injustice. The incidents in the novel are not in chronological order. The term *Karukku* means embryo or a seed full of freshness. It also means Palmyra leaves with the serrated edges on both the sides which resembles like double edged swords. Subsequently as Bama refers the double edged swords, she inputs the two powerful objectives on Dalits. She emphasizes the Dalits to realize their state of marginalization, subjugation, and she evokes the Dalits to fight against discrimination and the Dalits should strive for their upliftment in the society.

Bama wrote the novel *Karukku*, after she left the Christian convent. *Karukku* is a compilation of Bama's memoirs of her childhood days, her painful life journey and the grief of Dalit people. Throughout this book she used colloquial language. The Jesuit Charity IDEAS published the novel, *karukku*, in 1992. Bama's *Karukku* is an autobiography as well as semi autobiography. In the book *Karukku*, Bama not only registered her difficulties, trauma in her life, she also exemplifies the vulnerable condition of the Dalit community, which she too belongs to. The protagonist name is not mentioned specifically. Bama opens her preface with "I" and she uses "our" to refer the people of her community. She divides the book into nine chapters. *Karukku* as a confession of Bama's real life story, she confesses about her unforgettable, joyous childhood days which she enjoyed. As a Dalit child, Bama was unable to understand the pathetic condition of her community.

Memoirs of Bama's Childhood Days

Bama depicted her beautiful village and its inhabitants. She expresses her joy in celebrating Chinnamalai festival, Christmas, New Year festival and so on. She likes Kabbadi and the games like rolling a dice, board games, palanguzhi, spinnin tops, which she enjoyed playing. Sometimes they performed kummi dance and kuthu dance. She usually had rice with Kuzhambu, sometimes kuzhu with side dishes like onions, groundnuts, green chilies and pickle from Nadar shop.

Bama witnesses herself on the attacks over Dalits. In her village, Bama happens to see an old man of her community handed over the envelope to the Naicker's house without touching. Bama describes about the harmful condition of Paraiyas. In an account of this, her brother explained that Naickers belong to upper caste and we the dalits are called as low caste, an untouchable. The upper caste people feel superior to Dalits. So they treated the Dalits as untouchables. If Paraiyas happens to touch them it would be considered as polluted. These incidents disturbed Bama vehemently and realize the helpless state of Dalits.

The so called untouchables, paraiyas are living a hard life and they are toiling in the fields of Naicker's, and they work as daily wages in building constructions, digging wells, load men, sometimes went to hill top to collect the sticks. They are doing the menial works, to survive at the same time they are subjugated and exploited in the name of social discrimination. Here Bama testifies the tragic story of the lower caste. When Bama returns from school, she watches an old man is carrying snacks with a help of a string.

"He came along holding out the packet by its string, without touching it. I stood there thinking to myself, if he holds it like that, won't the package undone, and vadai fall out? The elder went straight up to the Naicker, bowed low and extended the packet towards him, cupping the hand. Naciker opened the parcel and began to eat the vadai" (K-14).

As a small child she, astonishes on Naicker's indifferences and she succumbed on this shameful incidents. Bama knows that both her grandmother and mother also is working for Naickers. When these paraiya people asked for water the Naicker woman used to pour water at such a distance. Naicker ladies give the remaining food to Bama's grandmother and others also without touching, including their vessels. Her grandmother refers Naickers are like Maharajas, who feeds the food to us. Bama gets furious at this ashamed accord. Her brother convinces her and explains that education is the only way to eradicate the discrimination. Even though Bama's family was in financial crisis, her father enforces the importance of education. His main motive is to educate their children. He feels education is like a weapon to fight against social and caste discrimination. Bama gets inspiration from the words of her brother and takes education as her obsession. She incarnated the brutal nature of Naicker. The upper caste treated the Paraiyas as down trodden. They never respected the Dalits, even they fail to pay back gratitude for Dalit's sincerity and dedication on their masters.

Injustice and Hardships of Dalits

Bama remains about the injustice over Paraiya community. In the bartering session also, Naicker's takes the upper hand. Parayas exchange the harvest grains, cotton pads, to Naickers but they received only less worthy and working hard to make all good things. The injustice on Dalits is the cause of their poor financial status. Discrimination makes the Dalits speechless and denied the rights to attain equality. Bama implies the negligence of the Paraiyas take place even in the education institution. In schools Dalit children were not allowed to sit equally to the upper caste children. She opens the worse part of Paraiya community students and how the upper caste utilizes the Paraiyas for their works. These students are doing all the works in the schools.

“Everyone seemed to think Harijan children were contemptible. But they didn't hesitate to use for cheap labor. So we carried water to the teacher's house. We watered the plants. We did all the chores that were needed about the school” (K-18).

Dalit students are treated very low, disrespect and inhumane. In return dalits are receiving humiliation and marginalization. Bama feels so dejected and regretting of being a Dalit, because she was accused in school by the name of her community. When she was playing in the school someone has stolen the coconut. They charged Bama for this. Headmaster blames Bama by the name of her caste. He suspended her from the school. When Bama was crying, a teacher advised her to get the permission letter from the priest in the church. Bama enters the church and request for the letter. The priest in the church also blames her for not doing any wrong deeds. He accuses her in the words: “After all you are from the Cheri. You might have done it. You must have done it” (K-19). When she enters into the classroom everyone was starring at her. The injustice against Bama proves the trauma of indifferences. She contradicts the situation and feels that her caste puts her down. She made it clear that casteism plays a vital role in our society which objects the growth of Dalits.

For her high school studies, Bama joined in hostel. Here Bama narrates her worse experience of her hostel life. Both the upper and lower caste students are staying in the same hostel. When Bama joined there, she was in a economic crisis. So she wears the simple dresses and sometimes she repeats the same dresses. The hostel wardens are humiliated Bama continuously with name of her caste. The wardens were very harsh towards Dalit students. Wardens complain that:

“The warden sister of our hostel could not abide low caste or poor children. She’d get hold of us and scared us for no rhyme or reason. These people get nothing to eat at home, they come here and they grow fat: she would say publicly” (K-20).

The prejudices on Paraiya students provoke Bama to react. Bama feels very bad and says that we too are paying all the fees like upper caste. Paraiya community people are ill treated subjugated in all the places. Bama’s strength and will power makes to continue her education in the midst of all her miseries. Parents of Dalits students proclaims that their children are tortured in the name of their community. They considered this indifference is a kind of obstacles for their progress. Bama received the award for best student in SSLC exams. Her family members feel very excited and Bama feels very proud and accepts that education makes her stand equally to upper caste people. She proves herself as a Dalit child and proclaims that Dalits also will get felicitation by everyone through the means of education. The narrator insights that flaw of discrimination is the barrier for her progress. But, she overcomes and joined in the college.

Bama hopes that at colleges their will not be a contemplation on her community. She feels education enlightens the oppressors about the importance of equality, indiscrimination. She realizes that casteism overwhelming everywhere. Dalit people are always treated as Dalits and there is no exemption for this: “It struck me that I would not be rid of this caste business easily, whatever I studies wherever I went ”(K-22). Bama’s agony against upper caste makes her to fight for the liberation from untouchability and oppression. Poverty and discrimination oppresses the lower caste. But Bama reinforces that education will upgrade the Dalit.

After the completion of her under graduation she joined in a convent as a teacher for seven years. But she resigns her job and joined in convent as a nun. She sacrifices her life for the upliftment of her community. She enjoys teaching, especially for Dalits. As a nun, Bama hears and experiences the indignation. As in Bama’s words: “I wanted to be like her, living only for the poor and down trodden; so I entered that particular order” (K-21). In the convent Bama had an odd experience which she never thinks. Her colleagues are not treating her equally because she is a converted Christian. They accuses Dalit students are not clean and not having morals. The worse treatment on Dalit children and Dalit nun, make Bama to rebel against this subjugation. The converted Dalit nuns are not getting any chances to get position in churches. Dalits are deprived of all the benefits from the government. They are not allowed to sing in choir and treated separately. They disregard the Dalits and also converted Christian nuns. Bama never imagines that religious indifferences exist even in churches too. Bama retains herself in the church for the sake of Dalit children. The narrator and her community never enjoy respect, honour in their life. In spite of all the toments, Bama presumes the bright future for her community by the acquisition of invincible education.

Bama gives training to the people who are willing to become nuns. The curiosity of the people to know her community, immediately without any hesitation, Bama replied that “I” belongs to Paraiya community. She understands that we too are beloved of God’s. God is not partial but the upper caste priest and nuns, who is preaching about God is very partial. Bama gains a new strength and confident and feels very strong to fight against the caste discrimination, inequality. She likes to live with honour, true to others and treats everyone is equal. The narrator wants to break the barriers of her community and strives for the

empowerment of Dalits. The Dalits are considered as less privileged and so Bama's ideas and endeavors are neglected.

CONCLUSION

After she leaves the convent, Bama underwent severe financial problem. Her family also was not supporting her, because they were against Bama's ideas to become a nun. She was like a refugee, without place, food. Finally she landed in Madurai. She met a Priest from her village. He encourages her to write her miseries, grievances, hardships in the form of a book and it was published after many hurdles because of its language. Bama says that once born as a Dalit till the end of our life we are struggling, tormenting, and always marginalized because of our community. She empathize the trauma of discrimination so she devoted her life for the upliftment of Dalits. She founded a school in Kanchipuram especially for Dalits. She continues her writing, as a teacher and writer. Bama also wants her community to realize about their subjugation and she encourages fighting for their rights. Therefore Bama's *Karukku*, created an awareness among the Dalits, especially about the importance of education. She is oppressed in her school days, college, hostel, as a nun.

Karukku is a painful story of Dalit community people as well as Dalit woman, Bama. After, she retires from the school she involves in writing books. Like Bama, Pawar also confesses her life story in her book, *The Weave of My Life*. Both the Dalit writers concentrates on oppression and the hardships of Dalits. She feels very confident about the progressive future of Dalits when she is welcoming the writers on Dalits like Sivagami, Gogu Shymala and Vijila Chitrapad and others.

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