



REJECTION TO RESISTANCE: A STUDY OF DALIT FEMINISM IN BAMA'S *KARUKKU*

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ABSTRACT

The Indian history has been a vivacious record of conflict and dialectic between exploiters and exploited, colonizer and colonized, powerful and powerless. Dalit literature is known for its revolt and struggle of lower caste against the high class people. Dalit women are especially doubly exploited. Feminism or feminist aspect deals with society in general and women in particular. This research paper highlights the need of Dalit feminist writing and the the problems of dalit women and self realization of marginalized women with the reference of Bama's Karukku.

Key words: Dalit feminism, resistance, marginalization, patriarchy.

INTRODUCTION

Dalits are considered as people of discrete set of low castes. They are members of the lowest order of Indian society, they face discrimination at almost every level whether that be education or social or political life. Untouchability is the biggest scar on Dalit history. The new Tamil Dalit writing aims to awaken in every readers a consciousness of the oppressed Dalit and to share the Dalit experience. It narrates the anti-caste and anti-religious struggle of the Dalit. Writers like Daniel, Poomani, Sivagami, Imayam, Markku form the array of Tamil Dalit writers. BAMA occupies a place among them. In her works, she seeks not only an identity but also the changing notions of identity existing in Dalit people.

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Bama also known as Bama Faustiana Soosairaj is a Tamil, Dalit feminist and novelist. Bama's ancestors were from the Dalit community and her novels focus on women oppressions and gender discrimination. Bama's *Karukku*, *Vanmam* and *Sangati* are seen as embodying Dalit feminism and are famed for celebrating the inner strength of the subaltern woman. Bama's *Karukku* is the first Dalit autobiography written in Tamil. It focuses on two aspects namely caste and religion that caused great pain in Bama's life. Bama through her autobiography "Karukku" reflects how she suffered and being challenged throughout her stages of life as a Dalit. She portrayed the brutal, frenzied and ugly face of the society and been enraged by it.

Karukku talks about the personal crisis of the author as she leaves the religious order to which she belonged to for seven years. *Karukku* means Palmyra leaves which, with, their serrated edges on bothsides, are like the double edged swords. In her childhood, Palmyra *Karukku* injures her as she goes to gather firewood. Like Palmyra leaves, life with its unjust social structures and inhuman activities wounds her so much. In the preface to the novel *Karukku* the author says,

"There are many congruities between the saw-edged Palmyra Karukku and my own life ... they also became the embryo and symbol that grew into this book."(xiii)

The description of a small village is never complete without an explanation of the communities and caste. "Karukku" starts with the line 'our village is beautiful'; Bama narrates the beauty of mountains from the peak and slowly descends to the low castes sufferings add ugly discrimination of castes in the society. This could be evidently seen in "Karukku" Bama says,

I don't know how the upper caste communities and the lower caste communities were separated like this in to different parts of the village. The other castes such as Thevar, Chettiyyar, Nadar, Naicker, Udaiyaar had their own settlement for themselves were Dalits are not.(6)

This clearly suggests that they are discriminated from the society. It is so painful to see them to live without a home. It reflects that they have no identity in the society.

Bama presents the dual aspects of female characters. She describes how the entire village is saved by women against the infuriated police. All the male characters survive just because of their wives. "The women managed to hide their men and save them"(33). At the same time, Bama also describes how the low caste women are under a double patriarchy and bear the double women. Bama pointed out,



My grand mother worked as servants for Naicker families. In the case of one of them, when she was working in the fields, even tiny children, amid the other day, would call her by her name and others her about, just... drank it with cupped hand held to their mouths(16).

Dalit women and children are suffered more by the atrocities of the upper caste. They are suppressed within and outside of their community. Bama says,

"Women suffer more than men, even if they did the same work, men received one wage, women another.... men are always paid more."(47)

Education is provided by the government for the improvement of Dalits. When they struggle for survival even children happen to go to work to support the family economically. Though they get educated, their identity as an Dalit persists till their death. Bama and her brother realize their importance of education.

"Because we are born into Paraya jati, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities".(15)

Bama's faith goes wrong and she feels that there is no connection between God and the suffering poor in the content. Nuns and the priest rose themselves to be true devotees of God but they are malicious inside and like to punish Dalit students. Nuns who belong to the upper caste enjoy their power and position. With the power they had, they dominate and exploit the poor in the name of God.

"What kind of piety can this be? They fake themselves into God's so that they can exploit others. So where has God gone?"(94)

Bama gives a terrible picture of the female subaltern and the marginalized. They work hard both outside and inside. They become real animals and work restlessly. No one cards for them and they become mechanical in every corner of life. Individuality, freedom, and even the self and self consciousness are lost under the male patriarchal domination both inside and outside at home. Paraiya women are ready to go to any extent make their life peaceful. Bama shows a rebellious character against male oppression on women and the patriarchal domination culture, social, economic, religious, and familial life of Paraiya womanhood.

Bama explains:



The position of women is both pitiful and humiliating, really. In the fields they have to escape from upper caste men's molestations. At church they must lick the priests shoes and be his slaves while he threatens them with the tales of God, Heaven, and Hell. Even when they to go their own homes, before they have had a chance to cook some kanji or lie down and rest a little, they have to submit themselves to their husband's torment. (122)

The novel also probes deep in to the anguish of the soul of a Dalit. It tries to explain that there is no mercenary motive behind the writing of the author. It makes an effort to relate author's passionate recordings of the suffering folk. In her work , she reveals her love and concern for her people and voices for their liberation in its true senses. As a result of her embarrassing experience as a Dalit, Bama realises that through the whole community of Dalit can be empowered and can gain human dignity through the sound education. Bama passes through many emotional encounters and experiences. The whole process is a trail of discovery, which makes her a self-made woman. Though through her education, Bama made a difference in her life.

Dalit literature is an arduous endeavour from the canonical to the marginal, from mega-narratives to micro-narratives, from the virtual to the real, and from self-emulation to self-affirmation.

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