

An Analytic Study on the Untold miseries of Dalits and their precarious social conditions in Bama's Autobiographical Novel "Karukku".

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Abstract

In India, for several decades, Dalit people are being deliberately side-lined by non-Dalits. In addition, particularly, the Dalit women are marginalized by men, and their children are strongly concealed because of the fear of atrocities. Though several Dalit writers are writing down about the subjugated life style of Dalits community, the Dalit woman writer, Bama through her autobiography *Karukku* represents herself to articulate the hurting narrative of Dalits and the torture of adulthood in their life. Further, communal disharmony and Casteism emerge as a major issue which plays a keen role in Indian society and it is considered as a part of the people's lives; it gives identity to all people in Indian society. This paper highlights the communal discrimination invariably allocates the status of hierarchy at their birth itself. This discrimination brands many people as "untouchables" who, in turn, are subjected to innumerable atrocities by the members of elite or upper castes. Though many social reformers, thinkers and nationalists oppose and tried to abolish the caste system, it unfortunately emerges to prevail in the society in disguised forms.

Key words: *Marginalisation, Disharmony, Casteism, Discrimination, Untouchables, Atrocities*

In the vast country like India where religion and caste domination is predominant. Among the existence of multiple castes, the Dalits people are the most affected and they face humiliation and oppression wherever they go or whatever they do. The only reason for these unpleasant incidents is the Dalit caste. That is why Shah says that "Dalits in India have been socio-economically oppressed, culturally subjugated and politically marginalized for centuries" (Shah 14). Further they are denied access to many places like common well, schools, hospitals hotels, temples, etc., because of caste discrimination that perennially exist in Indian society, despite the constitution of India prohibits the practice of untouchability by any form anywhere. Having undergone some miseries, the writer, Bama, here narrates her bitter experience during her childhood days. For instance, she picturises about the games which she used to play along with her friends during their childhood. As they don't know or release the gender differences in the days of their childhood, the boys and girls play together without any discrimination. During such time, some of their games have represent real life and society. That is why, some boys would assume the role of being Naicker. The rest of us would call them as 'Ayya, Ayyaa' and pretend to be their pannaiyaal (servant). Even these boys would act as if they had a lot of power over us. They would call out to us 'Yeppa, Yeppa', humiliate us, and make us do a lot of work" (Bama: *Karukku* 56). Bama here illustrate her plight and mental agony of being a Dalit.

In India, to escape from the caste injustice, some people usually convert themselves to Christianity to get rid of themselves from the tortures of caste tyranny. And then, some of the colonial writers through their novel writings started celebrating the act of conversion into Christianity, as the conversion into Christianity provides them with good food, shelter and education which automatically create the sense of equality to all. Compare to other nations, this happens vastly in Indian because the so-called Dalits voluntarily come forward to convert themselves into Christianity believing that Christians are not obsessed with caste as the Hindus were. Ideologically the theory of creation seems to be different from the Hindu philosophy of creation, whereas in practice people are segregated and separated on the basis of caste even in some churches.

According to Jesme, who observes on the class disparity found in the convents: The less-educated and the less privileged among the professed nuns belonged to a lower class, undergoing a different manner of training under a separate Mistress. These sisters, though they are also from the lower strata, were differentiated from the cheduthies as they, too, took the three vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, and follow the sister's habit. These nuns could not be allowed to sit on chairs alongside other more privileged sisters but only on their 'trunks'. At the same time, they were often given jobs in the kitchen, parlour, fields or compounds. There is also a division like 'Fair Ethelamma' and a 'Dark Ethelamma' in the province. The fair one belongs to the higher strata and the dark one to the lower. This happens not only because of the difference in complexion, but mainly because of the disparity in education and wealth. Despite our proclaiming the ideas of justice and equality before God, such class distinctions exist in the convents and seminaries even today. (47-48)

Hence, the writer Bama is of no exception, she is also a Dalit, converted into Christianity, and decides to take up the position of a nun to help the poor and the destitute. But all her dreams of rendering good service to the needy and the society remain dreams and was not able to bring into reality or action. Because like myth and reality, in convents the Tamil nuns, from lower caste, are treated differently. Therefore, in this condition she undergoes double injustice or ostracism: first as a Tamil and second as a Dalit. Bama vehemently utters "Tamil people were looked upon as a lower Caste. And then among Tamils, Parayar were a separate Category" (Karukku, 24). Like adding oil to fire, further Bama is informed by a sister there that by certain order the Harijans are not allowed or can not become as prospective nuns. This pathetic condition affected her mood a lot and she feels alienated. She also enunciates, "I lamented inwardly that there was no place that was free of caste" (Bama: Karukku 25).

In addition to that, the schools run by the missionaries also unleash the caste disparity. It is common to note such disparity. The Dalits are humiliated and the welfare schemes offered to them by government or any NGOs are misappropriated by the authorities deliberately. Jesme notes: According to government rules, the scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe students are given a quota of a certain number of seats. To keep these seats for the management, sometimes false numbering is resorted to. Fictitious application numbers are allocated where by those seats can be grabbed (57). The convent where Bama undergoes training is attached with a school. In that school the Dalits are allotted menial jobs like "Sweeping the premises, swabbing and washing the classrooms, and cleaning out the lavatories" (Bama: Karukku 25).

Hence, Dalits are forced to do those jobs in schools. An article entitled “Dalit Children in India – Victims of Caste Discrimination” enumerates: A survey by Indian human rights organization Navsarjan Trust reveals that teachers, local governments, and community members routinely subject the children of manual scavengers to discrimination and forced labour as part of daily experience of attending school and living in their communities reports reveal rampant discrimination against Dalit children and students in direct contravention of numerous international and domestic laws banning caste discrimination and ‘untouchability’ practices. In schools, one can find such kind of disparity even today. The teachers speak abusive language and sometimes illtreat the low caste people; they are not considered as human beings.

According to their notion, low-caste people are all degraded in every way. They think that they don’t have any moral discipline or cleanliness nor culture. And all the menial jobs there done by Dalits who were abused all the time and treated in a shameful and degrading way. (Bama: Karukku 26). Fortunately, or unfortunately the novelist Bama, on completion of her studies, gets a job of a teacher in a school run by nuns. By that time, she has realized that the nuns are nothing but “whited sepulchres” (Bama: Karukku 102). However, she has worked in that school for a period of five years. There have been many poor children and also three fourth of them belong to Dalit community. She witnessed that there have been many atrocities wreaked against the poor people, instead of serving them and that has irritated Bama. “They ran a boarding school which was nominally for the sake of destitute children, but in fact they made those children do every menial task that was needed. They behaved as if they were queens there, and everybody else was there only to run errands for them” (Bama: Karukku 103).

Even there are a few nuns with slightly humane attitude; they are not able to do well as they are ostracized from the entire community of nuns. Amongst them, one can witness the caste divisions, class divisions and racial divisions. Bama avers, “I learnt that God has always shown the greatest compassion for the oppressed. And Jesus too, associated himself mainly with the poor” (Bama: Karukku 104); she feels that nobody teaches the real God. They are eager to show God as “loving, Kind, gentle, one who forgives sinners, patient, tender, humble, obedient” (Bama: Karukku 104), but not as “just, righteous, angered by injustices, opposes falsehood, never countenances inequality” (Bama: Karukku 104); in such a way she has begun to understand God and His ways and decides to become a nun to serve for the entire humanity.

After completing her training as a nun, Bama has been posted at a convent, where she found that there is no connection between God and suffering poor. The school is fed up with children from wealthy families; there is no love among the people who used to preach God as loving and merciful. They claimed that God’s love is limitless, subject to no conditions. Yet inside the convent there were innumerable conditions about how you should be and who you were in order to deserve love. When outsiders arrived, flaunting their wealth and education, they were treated with one sort of love; if they did not have these things, they were treated in a different way . . .” (Bama: Karukku 106). At this juncture, Bama realizes that the churches teach one thing but practice another thing, here love is subject to what one has in their pocket, and “it is injustice that dances like a demon in the convents.” (Bama: Karukku 106).

Being a teacher, the writer also assesses the proceedings of the contemporary church; they are not backing up the cause of the oppressed and socially disadvantaged but rather they turn them into slaves in the name of God, while they enjoy comfortable life. Actually, the upper caste Christians only enjoy the fruits of the religion; the upper caste people are able to come out of the caste-based oppression, wreaked on them by the Hindu hegemony, whereas Dalit Christians are humiliated and deceived in the name of God.

Though the Dalits have understood that God is common for all and treats everyone equally, their survival made them to accept such unacceptable treatments rendered by the authorities. They have become aware that they too were created in the likeness of God. However, their new strength within them, urging them to reclaim that likeness which has been so far repressed ruined, obliterated and to begin to live again with honour, self-respect, and with a love towards all humankind". (Bama: Karukku109).

Therefore, Christianity as a whole as it is practiced today has no love for humanity; Love is restricted based on caste, class and level of wealth. Actually, church and the missionary come to India with an objective of serving the humanity; they have given education to the suppressed and the exploited free of cost. Unfortunately, the aim of church activities have now changed a lot and that they exorbitantly charge for providing quality education. And as a result, only rich people are accommodated. But they could justify their stand by saying that the money collected is used for service for other people in other places. To hide this, they give admission to a few poor students.

There is a disparity based on their economic stratification—rich and poor. "The rich children would say, we don't want to sit next to those ones, they are dark-skinned, they are poor, they are ugly, they don't wear nice clothes" (Bama: Karukku 112). Due to poverty, Dalits have only a few clothes; they are not affordable to purchase dress as they want to. However, they have to manage with the dresses available with them. Throughout her writings she explains how she has suffered psychologically during her studies at college for want of adequate dress and ornaments. Bama undergoes the course of poverty throughout her studies. She has no ornaments and even no footwear to wear. She says some of the students asked me, 'Why aren't you wearing anything in your ears and about your neck? You don't even have chappals on your feet',. It was true that almost all of them came to college wearing all kinds of trinkets and with fine clothes. But where would I go for such things? I have even pawned my small earrings in order to pay my examination fees. And my clothes certainly weren't anything much. (Bama: Karukku 75).

To sum up, Bama highlights different kinds of untold exploitation and voiceless condition of the Dalits. The upper caste people bribe the policemen to demolish Dalit superiority; they feel that the Parayars are disobedient; consequently, they want to wipe them off. Through this autobiographical novel, Bama has brought the untold miseries of Dalits to light.

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