



The Double Marginalization of Subaltern in Bama's *Karukku*

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ABSTRACT: Dalit literature is the literature of Dalits, by Dalits, and for Dalits. Bama is the first Dalit women writer in India. With the encouragement of her friend, she wrote her first novel *Karukku* (1992). It is an elegy to the community in which Bama grew up. *Karukku* is an autobiographical picture of the author's childhood experiences as a female who belongs to the Dalit community. *Karukku* is the powerful voice of Dalit consciousness and the bitter life of the social life led by Dalit women. Bama's creativity and imagination weave an image of oppressed and suppressed Dalit women and her quest for identity. She gives an image of marginalized Dalit women who move towards self-discovery and by this Bama's *Karukku* offers a new perspective on Dalit women. Through this novel, Bama tried to convey the fact that Dalit women are not only the victims of caste but also of patriarchy. In her autobiography, Bama has shown the plight of Dalit women, the way they are treated, their sufferings, and discrimination at the hands of their patriarchs. Bama is giving expression to her experiences from her childhood to adulthood. The humiliation she faced throughout her period of education and the discrimination in the convent. *Karukku* becomes her testimony, where she aims at the liberation of Dalits through her writing. In this novel, Bama tries to overcome her multiple identities as a Dalit, as a Christian, as a woman. In this sense, *Karukku* is the vulnerable and honest version of Bama. Hence, Bama emerges as a role model for her community.

KEYWORDS: Marginalization, identity, discrimination, oppression.

Dalit Literature talks about the utter oppression faced by Dalits from the so-called higher castes. It talks about the problems they faced and the required change in society. The Tamil Dalit novelist, Bama writes about the caste discrimination and all the injustice she faced in school and college. At the age of 26, she became a nun. But due to the discrimination in the convent, she left it after several years. In this novel, Bama presents the inescapability of caste oppression. *Karukku* focuses on how caste causes pain in her life. Even as a young girl, she had faced innumerable things. She had many bitter experiences in her life. One day she was blamed when someone stole a coconut from school. The headmaster scolded and insulted Bama in front of all the children. He said that “you have shown your true nature as a Paraya.”

Bama notes:

What did it mean when they call us ‘Paraya’? Had the name become that obscene? But we too are human beings. Our people should never run these petty errands for these fellows. We should work in their fields, take home our wages, and leave it at that.

Bama had heard this word untouchability when she joined a school. Throughout her education, she was never treated like all other children. She was always reminded that she is poor and never deserves any kind of dignity and respect. Bama had written this novel to heal her wounds. Unlike other autobiographies, *Karukku* is an unusual autobiography. Through this work, Bama tries to uplift her community and she wants her community to be equally treated like other communities. She aims at the liberation of Dalits through this writing.

Bama narrates the story of pain and suffering. It talks about the story of a survivor who filled her heart with a desire to fight against the system that degrades her identity. She doesn't want to be suppressed but she wanted to be considered equal. She stood against those norms and was not frightened of the caste system. The traumas she experienced won't be healed. Bama completed her education and decided to work in a convent. When she started working in the convent, she found that many of the children are ill-treated by the nuns. The main reason behind this traumatic experience is because they belong to Dalit community. After seeing all these ill-treatments of nuns in the convent made her become a nun. Apart from them, Bama wants to be a different nun. She wants to save those children from the hands of caste system and violence. Men always consider women as inferior to them. Women are considered as slaves. They were not paid for their works. Bama invokes a sense of fire in them. She made them realize the importance of education. She convinced them that they too have rights. Unlike others they are also supposed to be respected. Moreover, they are also

humans. Bama stands up for those people who are still under the dark exploitation of the caste system. In each stage of her life, she felt bad for her birth in a low-class community. She was treated very badly from her childhood itself and she never enjoyed her life to the fullest. The kind of disrespect and criticism she received was too much for her. Dalit people starved for their rights. They were afraid of the upper-class people due to the evil actions from them. There basic right was denied. Women are not paid less for their work compared to men. Women are also sexually harassed in their workplace by the landlords. Bama had talk about a series of events where the protagonist had undergoes poverty and hunger. Bama is a Christian Dalit woman who chooses writing as a medium to share all these experiences. She considers writing as a powerful weapon against the so-called class system. Moreover, the class discrimination, she faced untouchability from early childhood itself.

Bama writes:

'All the time I went to work for the Naickers, I knew I should not touch their goods or chattels; I should never come close to where they were, I should always stand away to one side'.

Dalits have turned to literature as a space to articulate their resistance and struggles. *Karukku* denotes Palmyra clearing out, which are like double-edged swords with serrated edges on both sides. The Tamil word *Karukku* includes the word 'karu,' which means 'embryo' or 'seed,' as well as freshness and novelty. *Karukku* Bama symbolizes the notion that when confronted with abuse, Dalits should be like the saw-edged Palmyra leaf *Karukku*. Dalits should also be seen as aspirants. By referencing from the Bible, *Karukku* Bama justifies the use of the symbol *Karukku*,

Although the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (New Testament) described the word of God as a two-edged sword, it no longer stirs the hardened hearts of the many who have sought their happiness by enslaving and disempowering others. The novel *Karukku* reveals Casteism. It gives the voiceless a voice, as well as an identity to those whose existence in society has been denied. Bama describes the difficulties she has as a minority. She utilizes art as a means of expressing their pain. She observes how the ruling class mistreats Dalits. Dalit women are most often victims of a range of exploitations. Their patriarchal dominance has been more qualitative and severe. The options and channels open to them for airing their criticisms and concerns. Bama encourages her community's members to fight for their rights. Rather than being passive, she encourages them to work hard in order to reclaim the respect they deserve as human beings. Bama, after enduring a great deal of hardship, bravely fights for her rights and equality among people of all

castes and creeds. She compares herself to a bird with very strong wings that never stop its journey and keep flying.

Bama is a fighter; she is a survivor. She overcomes all those social malaise in our society. Bama's work is breaking a mainstream aesthetic. She succeeded in changing the hearts and minds of people. She tried to change all those conventional thoughts. And this is the lonely self-discovery of a woman, who won the race of caste discrimination.

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