



Why Are Women Enslaved?

Dr N. Ganga Vidya, Mr. J. Stalin Selvaraj,

Director, Lecturer,

Daebak Entrepreneurs LLP, India

Bharathidasan University Constituent Arts & Science College Navalurkuttapattu Tamil Nadu – 620 009, India

Abstract: “Karukku” is the first work of Bama and it is an autobiographical work wherein she details how a Dalit Christian Woman faces oppression. This book began a new genre in Tamil literature known as Tamil Dalit Literature. Whereas “Sangati” the other book titled “Events” in English details the birth of dalit girl child, upbringing, customary practices, change of religion, way of living, livelihood, education, entertainment, superstition, women in and out of marriage, and objectification of women. This paper studies the writer Bama’s explanation of dalit life and lifestyles, which prove that what Periyar wrote in his book “Why were women enslaved? In year 1928 has been valid in year 1992/1994 when the author published and what is even worse is that it is valid even today in year 2020!!

Index Terms - Dalit literature, Women slavery, Bama, Karukku, Sangati, Periyaar.

INTRODUCTION

In India till date in 2020 “Masculinity” implies bravery, strength, anger, leadership and “Femininity” implies love sublimity, calmness and caring” as stated by Periyar in the year 1928 in his book “Why women were enslaved?” Marginalization, in society happens due to poverty, caste, gender, and religious differences in India and in Tamil Nadu. Classisms, casteism, patriarchy, feminism, societal issues due to religion are the reasons for discrimination. The persons who have been a victim of this oppression including Bama, herself are called as Dalit. In Karukku Bama has written it revolving around her own self whereas she has made Sangati into a semi fiction and used Vellaiamma to portray dalit women. Dalit women can only be empowered with education to overcome all of this, as only education can make every one equal, eradicate caste and gender discriminations and instill strong self-awareness amongst the dalit community.

Bama Faustina Soosairaj

Faustina Mary Fatima Rani Soosairaj was born at *Pudhupatti* near *Madurai, Tamil Nadu* in the year 1958. Her first work is “Karukku” in 1992, an autobiography. Lakshmi Holstrom translated the same in the year 2000. It won the Crossword award in that year 2000. This made her a noted writer. Her other works are *Sangati* (1994), *Kusumbukkaran* (1996), *Vanmam* (2002), *Oru Tatta vum Erumaiyum* (2003).

Thanthai Periyaar

E. V. Ramaswamy, was born in erode as a second son of Chinnathayammal and Venkata Naicker. He belongs to the Karnataka Balija Naidu caste, which are ultra orthodox and strict vaishnavites. Annai Meenambal Shivaraj the first Scheduled Caste women president of the South India Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) presided over the SCF Women's Conference held at Madras, in 1938, which was attended by B. R. Ambedkar and E.V.R Ramasamy. She gave him the title – “Periyar” (The Great One) in this conference. Periyar on hearing this title is said to have laughed and accepted it as a sister’s gift. His works are humungous and all his body of works is mostly detailed in “Kudi Arasu” since 1925 and “Revolt” since 1928.

Periyaar’s explanation of “Why women were enslaved?”

Slavery is neither a process of becoming nor a question of choice for women. It was and is the norm. Periyar in his thought, word and action was not simply complaining or explaining why women were enslaved but he made the complete society understand and face it. As an example he created Maniammai to lead this mass movement after him and in order to provide her the status he married her. The discrimination in the society on the basis of birth (caste) and between men and women by gender and enslavement of women has always been his very strong opposing points. At that point of time women were being treated as good for nothing slaves, ornamental dolls, child producing machines, and workers confined to the kitchen and cooking ovens. He even felt the institution of marriage as a criminal act. The enslavement in conclusion led to a woman losing her identity. He strongly felt that women were and are slaves only

because they expect men to proclaim them equals. His revolutionary thought was to let women become independent on their own and break free from those bonding chains, which are in their mindset and not physical.

Bama's Explanation of Why women are slaves even in 1992 and 1994

Sangati or Events is presented in first person narrative of Vellaiyamma with the technique of story within the story. Karukku is also in the same style of first person narrative of the author herself in autobiographical tone. There are plenty of differences in the way the dalits lived in 20th century and the way they live now in 21st century. There are many visible changes in the economy, education and living conditions. Yet there is not much self-awareness. People previously went through lot of physical and emotional sufferings due to lack of guidance. The author strongly feels that her work and experience should be guiding star to all the dalit community. Hence both her works are stories of real incidents.

In Karukku the protagonist is detailed from birth till date as a first person experience of Bama herself. In Sangati/Events Vellaiyamma who is almost an octogenarian details all that she has witnessed around her in her lifetime.

The economic background of the dalit community, the life in abject poverty leads to women having to earn to run the family whilst the men earn to please themselves. Karukku explains the poor economic condition of the author and her family and friends. Sangati details, the complete, dalit community being economically and socially backward. There are several generations of women in Sangati. So Sangati is more an autobiography of a community and Karukku, that of an individual.

Bama has detailed in both her books how she as a dalit women and all the other dalit women showed the courage to break the shackles of authority, to propel themselves upward, to roar their defiance and changed their difficult, problem filled lives. She says it helps dalit women to bounce like a ball that has been hit and not to curl up and collapse under that blow.

Discussion in 2020

Today information about dalit women is being widely discussed in many places and by many people and in many universities they are a separate paper for study. Today Dalit literature shares the same space worldwide as the other marginalised and subaltern groups in other continents. It is a Tamil, Indian and feminine reflection of the global literature of oppressed fighting human rights, social justice and equality. Every one, worldwide wish girls to have a right to education, make informed decisions about their lives, self-rule their bodies, be protected from all forms of discrimination, be encouraged to pursue non-stereotypical gender roles within their communities, and have the freedom to live exactly as they please.

But the shocking statistics as per The International Labour Organization (ILO) 2018 estimates show over 40 million people are in some form of slavery today of this 4.8 million persons in forced sexual exploitation and 15.4 million people in forced marriage. This leads to a debate on the exact definition of "slavery"; those in slavery are often difficult to identify. Kevin Bales put it in his TED Talk, "In 21st Century it has become an economic crime, People do not enslave people to be mean to them; they do it to make a profit". Modern slavery is a consequence of poverty. Countries that lack education, economic freedom, the rule of law, and have poor societal structure foster environment for acceptance and propagation of slavery. Slavery is prevalent in countries with vulnerables but then world over 50% of the population are women and they are the vulnerables even in developed countries. As per The Global Slavery Index report in 2018, India ranks first with 8 million.

Conclusion

Bama comments that her works are an awakening clarion. "Each one of us has to wake up from slumber. Instead of accepting our lot as our fate, we should reject this bondage, this unjust system. We must be brave and stand up for ourselves. Break up caste barriers and biases and prove to the world that no man is inferior to another. Those who have prospered by suppressing us would not give their hold so easily. But we need to show them their place, show them all are equal and change this society."

The influence of the society, culture, economy and both religion on dalit women, as portrayed by these women writers explain that the cause of degradation of dalit women is more due to inherent poverty. Poverty compels women to depend on men in their family. All the men in the family assume that what the men earn is for their own-selves and what the women earn is for running the family, so dalit women have to invariably work and earn. To escape this slavery and domination women ought to get education, whether by attending school/college (regular or distance). The ways adopted in tackling discrimination, malnutrition, unemployment, poverty and other issues, are by going to schools with free food, going to common gatherings exclusive for women. Being sponsored by temple/church/religious entity or Non Governmental Organization.

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