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PORTRAYL OF SELF – REFLECTION IN THE WORK “*KARUKKU*” BY BAMA

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Abstract: More than thousand years now, Dalits continue to live as submissive creatures, leaving their degrading and disgracing conditions to fate. Dalit literature is known for its documentation of struggles and persecution of lower castes by the upper caste people. Bama a Dalit writer plays an important role in Tamil Dalit literature and the impact that her works create evokes many suppressed Dalits. *Karukku*, an autobiographical work of Bama depicts the Self – reflection and the persecution that she experiences. Portrayal of Self – reflection by Bama and the way she expresses it creates a revolution among Dalits. Expression of one’s self is not an easy task. Bama just gathers up her courage and she narrates all her sufferings and pains through her work *Karukku*.

Index Terms - Autobiography, Self – Reflection, Persecution, Sufferings, Dalit, Upper caste, *Karukku*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dalit literature originally starts in Marathi language as a response to the Persecution that happened even after the independence. It come into existence in late 20th century in Maharashtra. and soon it started to appear in Hindi, Kannada, Punjabi, Sindhi, and Tamil languages, through the form narratives like poems, short stories, and autobiographies, which stands out due to their everlasting portrayal of reality and the Dalit political scene. Dalit literature is a post - colonial literature. Slowly, after decades Dalit literature blooms in Tamil literature because no one has the freedom to express their thoughts. Dalits are alienated from the society and faces discrimination. Because their lives are not typical like ours, it requires a different kind of courage for them to write down their daily events. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a Dalit himself, fervently supports Dalit movements and calls for the abolition of the caste system. He established a base for Dalits whose voices are not heard. Today, Dalits continue to honour him as a hero, and he is also referred to as the Father of the Constitution.

In an oratory of Swami Vivekananda, he criticizes men for writing about women, their problems and their sufferings. He strongly believes that only women can express their own feelings, suffocations, persecution state and humiliations in a reliable manner. In recent years, Dalit women writers have attempted to make their unheard voices heard in the wake of the success of women writers in India. We could witness some Dalit women writers in Telugu literature, such as Challapalli Swaroopa Rani a Dalit feminist, Vijaya Bharathi a Dalit revolutionist and Jyothimayi have written criticism on the Dalit question. Further the mute voices of the subalterns have come to the public. Some such voices that has shown their powers by becoming the voice of their respective communities through their work and specifically there are two Tamil writers Sivagami and Bama whose works have been translated into English.

Bama is the pen name of a famous Tamil Dalit writer Faustina Mary Fatima Rani who born into a Roman Catholic family. She has born in the year 1958 in Chennai. She begins to write after facing so much depression in nunnery. She published her first book *Karukku* in 1992 is an autobiographical work which creates a great impact in the society. In addition, she wrote three collections of short stories: *Kusumbukaran* (1996), *Oru Thathavum Erumayum* (2003), and *Kondattam* (2009), as well as two novels: *Sangati* (1994) and *Vanmam* (2002). All her work mostly reflects the subjugated state of her community, they never been treated like normal humans.

Bama’s writing is an activist intercession. An important issue in Tamil Dalit literature is that Dalit women faces oppression dually on the basis of caste and gender. Self – reflection of Dalit discourse stands out as a magnificent mark of Tamil Dalit literature and *Karukku* – an autobiography of Bama’s is no exception to it. Self – reflection of a person portrays the pain of Bama and it also portrays the personal crisis and watershed of her life and her community which drives her to make sense of her life as a woman who belongs to the Dalit community.

This research paper brings out the factors that Bama reflects in her work *Karukku*. More than caste discrimination Bama faces and witnesses gender discrimination. Apart from other Dalit writers Bama stands as an exception she writes all incident that she experiences.

II. EXPRESSION OF SELF - REFLECTION

India, is well known for its rich and varied culture, is the epitome of "Unity in Diversity" where people have their own language, culture, religion, and caste live together in 'so-called' harmony. The exquisite portrayal of Indian society, culture, and heritage as well as the architecture of Indian image had been one of the most important goals of Indian fictional writers. The natural law of universe promotes harmony, equality, and equity among human beings. The later civilization and invasions that happened throughout the world was the reason for the invention of discriminatory systems.

Though we consider Indian society as a whole we are divided or separated into three primary groups; upper class, middle class, and deprived class. There are several castes and subcastes among them and each has its own tradition and customs. Throughout time upper caste's influence had been felt strongly in society. It leads to the overpowering of the upper class on lower-class people as they are isolated from religious and political life.

As Mahatma Gandhi said, "If untouchability lives, humanity must die" - best words to describe the brutality of humans. In *Karukku* as a whole, when looking closely at the first two chapters that are set in order, one could see the theme as well as the techniques that have been employed by the writer. Bama's use of language is not only an idea of what she done in Tamil but also a great insight for those who use Tamil as their language which is a medium of communication. A fascinating aspect of Bama's *Karukku* is the language, which has a strong Catholic influence. Lakshmi Holmstrom stated that Bama used the language of popular Catholicism, not the language that was used by theologian. Autobiography is not the only form of writing used by the oppressed to express their desire for "equality, freedom, and equity," but it is true that they do so. Across all languages, Dalit writers employ a unique technique that involves working on the language itself in order to defy both accepted form and accepted literary language. Well, Bama is an expert person and she perfectly fits into the category of Dalit literature. This is to sensitize what it means to be a woman and that too a Dalit woman in India today.

Karukku gives an account of the anguish and opprobrium of a Christian Dalit woman Bama. She also reflects on the society that she lives in. The main aim of Bama's writing, is to share her experience with the people and she used writing as weapon to fight for the rights and justice of the underprivileged people. Through her writing, Bama gratifies self-reflection and inner strength. In the author's preface, Bama states as the saw-edged palmyra karukku and my own life have numerous parallels. My skin was scratched and torn when I played with the scattered Palmyra karukku back in the days when I was sent out to get firewood, but later they also developed into the embryo and symbol that became this book. She added that there were numerous events from various stages of her life that cut her like a karukku and made her bleed from an unfair social structure that trapped her in ignorance and caused her to become suffocated, shattering her into pieces.

The author portrays the poverty of her family, as they can't afford money for other varieties of fish all they consume is the cheapest fish among many varieties. She also said how rich gets and enjoys the costliest fish. That the upper castes eat ayirai, keluti, and viraal and she also depicts her anguish that how poor they are. "But in our own street, we mostly bought and cooked curries out of silebi kendai and paambu kendai. Because that was the cheapest we could get". (3)

The words of her Patti hit her hard that made her to realize that the situation is not going to change. With the power of education, they could change anything but because of the caste system they denie to get education. Now that education is available to them, they are using literacy to their advantage to protest all forms of oppression. Bama never thought that her Patti would utter these words,

"What Patti said to me in return was this: These people are the maharajas who feed us our rice. Without them, how will we survive? Haven't they been upper caste from generation to generation, and haven't we been lower caste? Can we change this?". (17)

After working as a teacher for years, she decides to become a Nun. So, she goes to a convent where she learns that to become a Nun they require three vows, Poverty, chastity, and obedience. They teach that these vows liberate them and enable them to lead their lives that are centered around ordinary people but, in truth, the vows become a means of control and enslavement.

"When I was outside, I had experienced poverty and had lived among those who suffered from poverty. But inside the convent, I could not see even the traces and tracks of poverty. We could only go round and round, always within our luxurious cages, trapped in comfort". (113)

The support that she gets from her brother pushes her to pursue education further. He advises her to study with care and learn all she can despite of being born into Paaraya jathi. If she is ahead in her lessons, people would approach her of their own and attach themselves to her. "As Annan had urged, I stood first in my class. And because of that, many people became my friends, even though I am a Paraichi". (18)

This is not just words, this reflects how the woman of the lower caste community are treated. Further, it is depicted that she and Pecchiamma are classmates and she drops her schooling during her sixth class because she is a girl who belongs to the oppressed community. The girls of the oppressed class are not involved in schooling that much. They stop their studies and marry them off when they reach puberty. "I was walking home from the bus stand one day, when Pecchiamma stopped me. 'Ei, tha, you haven't got married yet, I hear. You're old enough, aren't you?'. (Sangati- 91)

She experiences untouchability in her small age itself. People hesitates to sit near her in bus. They never show respect towards her and her community. Untouchability is a sin and we people should treat all equally. Though we people talk about modernization and globalization still they tend to treat people indifferently. "When I was studying in the third class, I hadn't yet heard people speak openly of untouchability. But I had already seen, felt, experienced, and been humiliated by what it is". (13)

From their childhood they are discriminated and humiliated. Even at her small age she has experienced untouchability which is a sin. Why people discriminate them it's because they are Dalit no humans have the rights to discriminate other. Caste can be defined only through the words but none know the origin and proper reason for this so-called casteism. "In any case, I didn't get the job. Why? Because I am a Dalit. It was a school that is governed and run by the Nadar. It seems they only appoint Nadar women." (118)

Even as a college student, she undergoes many humiliating experiences. She is treated low by her fellow students for getting scholarships and for wearing the same set of clothes for a week due to her poor social status. She mortifies for being born in the lowest of lowest caste.

“I did not have the courage to tell them. I was afraid of how they might talk to me or behave towards me if I told them. When I heard them speak in such a way about the oppressed Dalit people, I used to wonder how those people could bring into being god’s kingdom where there are neither the high nor the low”. (115)

Bama is unsure of her next move and where to look for her identity. Truly and rightly, she finds her ‘self’ in expressing her opinions, she raises her voice, questions the society for their discrimination in the name of caste, creed and gender. She takes up writing as her vocation and stands as a spokesperson for the people of her own community. Like Bama, we could see many Dalit autobiographies in which the respective authors reflect themselves and the society they live and still the discrimination is prevailing. It’s a democratic country and every human have the right to be respected.

III. SUMMATION

The goal of subaltern studies is to challenge both the historical narratives in use today and the way the history is. The fact that she is a member of the underclass gives readers a reason to examine their writings from the viewpoint of those who are marginalised from history's mainstream.

The only person who has the rights to claim a Dalit self – narrative is a Dalit writer. The stories typically describes severe discrimination and the battles people faces to uphold their rights and dignity in daily life. The works of Bama serve as a starting point for elucidating the politics of the community they belong to. The story clarifies how she has always makes effort to claim her Dalit identity. The accounts also convey the feeling of being unable to express such strong emotions for fear of being oppressed and further humiliation. However, the desire to identify with the community forces them to deal with numerous enquiries about their origin and places of belonging, which forces her to consider how societies are built. The writers' self-narratives serve as the vehicle through which they have choose to challenge the social order.

Bama’s description of her pain and struggle to understand her identity as a Dalit while challenging the community. They believe to be their own serves as the background for identity reassertion. Bama asserts their Dalit identity to their own community through her narratives. Dalits feels alienation because of the social order. As a result, Bama makes effort to express the true feelings of herself in the society. Self – reflection plays an important role in every autobiography and she perfectly portrays it. Self – reflection of Bama serves as a strong foundation for other Dalits to overcome the discriminations.

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