

Unveiling the Struggles in Bama's Karukku and Sangati

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Abstract

The feminism is the belief that women deserve socially, economically, politically and culturally equality but patriarchal social setup which is being followed in India always suppresses the role of women in all walks of life and caste system of India has made the plight of women even worst. This article discusses the projection of murky life of Dalit women in Bama alias Faustina Mary Fathima Rani's novels Karukku and Sangati, These novels clearly depicts the lifestyle and social injustices faced by Dalit community people chiefly focus on subjugation and marginalization of women. The women of Indian society face discrimination from birth to death. Even at present the birth of a male child is being considered as an honour in Indian families. Though girl children are reared with love and care, they face the gender discrimination in each stage of their life. They face sexual exploitation, oppression and trauma but caste discrimination wound them to the core. Both the novels are autobiographical through which she has explicitly depicted the struggle of Dalit women and their emergence from the distressing plight.

Keywords: Murky, Subjugation, Marginalization, Oppression, Trauma.

Literature has been a vibrant record of life via characters and occurrences that serves as a historical document of time. It has become an effective tool in expressing how human started to live a civilized life and established social status. The term Dalit is not about only untouchability but also painful life of a marginalized particular caste. In Tamil Nadu, the term was used intermittently along with those who have been put down and the oppressed during the 1980s, but it is only since the 1990s that it has been used widely not only by Dalit writers and ideologues in order to identify themselves, but also by mainstream critics. Dalit literature is a genre of Indian writing that focuses on the lives, experiences, and struggles of the Dalit community, who have faced caste based oppression, violation and discrimination for centuries. The Dalit women have encountered more and face more injustices due to caste and gender discrimination in India. Their socio-economic status leads them towards sexual exploitation by the employers who are from the upper class. The autobiographies and testimonies of Dalit women, which highlight the convergence of caste, class, and gender in the context of social exclusion, have played a significant role in the formation of Dalit feminism.

Bama also known as Bama Faustina Soosairaj is a Tamil Dalit feminist, committed teacher and novelist. She rose to fame with her

autobiographical novel *Karukku*, which chronicles the delights and griefs experienced by Dalit Christian women in Tamil Nadu. Bama has written two more novels, *Sangati*, *Vanmam* and two short story collections *Kusumbukkaran* and *Oru Tattvum Erumaiyum*. *Karukku* which means the searing edges of a Palmyra leaves, is indeed a double edged sword directed towards the reader which highlights the atrocities caused by the gender discrimination, caste and class division. Bama's *Karukku* (1992) is her autobiographical work which is translated from Tamil to English with the same title by Lakshmi Holmstrom. Bama is from the village of Puthupatti in Tamilnadu. Bama is a pseudonym used by the Tamil Dalit feminist writer and former nun, Dr. Bama Faustina Soosai. She is known for her works that highlight the experiences and struggles of Dalit women in India. One of her notable works is *Karukku*, which is an autobiographical narrative that discusses the challenges faced by Dalits within the Christian community in Tamil Nadu. She has narrated the community based streets of her village such as Naickers street, Chaaliyar street etc. From her early life childhood she has faced the social discrimination.

The Christian religion which teaches about love and compassion attracted her very much that she has started developing intimate relationship with God. The impression she has begun to diminish when she comes to know the way how Dalits are treated based on their caste. During the schooling Bama has experienced the ill-treatment and discrimination both from teachers and students. The event makes us realize the actuality that caste discrimination occupies a major role even in the educational and religious places. These bitter experiences and caste discrimination in her village make Bama to prefer a new environment where she can find equality and a possibility to prove her identity. She has been motivated by her brother to pursue her dream and attain it through education.

After completing Graduation, Bama joins in a catholic Christian school as a teacher. She wants to be a devoted teacher by offering her service with love and care to the Dalit children who are studying there. But the ill-treatment of other teachers and nuns towards the poor children triggers her anger on them. She wants to show them how a true Christian or nun has to be so she decides to become a nun. The members of her family and friends strongly opposed the resolution but she prepares herself to go to convent. She revokes her conviction when she knows that there is a separate training centre for Dalit women who want to become nuns. She remembers the compassion, truth, love and simplicity of Priests and nuns who inspired her to become teacher in the early childhood but at present she finds Priests and nuns who serve with bias and enjoy luxurious life. In convent Bama observes the difference in the treatment of rich pupils and poor Dalit students. She could not bear injustices and unkindness towards them so she starts arguing in favour of Dalit students and their rights. As a result she is transferred to various branches of the missionary school every year. She continues to motivate the students in all schools. In India many low class people converted to Christianity with the expectation of attaining social recognition and honour but in reality they come across Caste discrimination even in church.

Thus, *Karukku* proves that even religious places they are not respected by the upper class. The actual change must happen in the mindset of people who are following the past designed caste structure blindly. Even today despite the law that forbids caste-discrimination, many cruel practices including public rape and other violent activities are experienced by the Dalit community. In rural part of India still we witness the violent and barbaric attitude of the upper class men towards the Dalit women. No one questions on the injustices, even the local authorities support only the exploiters not the victim. In *Karukk*, Bama shows bitter experiences intensely and serves as a proof of caste discrimination that is prevailing in the Indian society. Bama observes the Caste Discrimination Identity, Self-discovery, Intersectionality Resistance and Empowerment, Religious Oppression and Social Justice and Activism in her novels.

The novel Sangati (1994) is also Bama's autobiography of her community. It speaks about the issues of Paraiyar women. Through multiple characters she conveys the impact of Caste discrimination as well as Gender discrimination. Pathima is the narrator of the novel. She narrates the events (sangati) of her life in twelve chapters. She is used to hear many stories from Vellaiyamma Kizhavi, her grandmother who has very intimate relationship with her. Vellaiyamma looks after the labor for pregnant women in the village. She got married Goyindan at the age of 14. He went to Srilanka in search of fortune. Most of the Paraiyar community people in the village are converted Christians but they have to live in the society with some restrictions, lower class men must obey the higher class men, they have to be servants to them without raising questions, lower class women are not allowed to wear blouse like upper class women as per the community rule. If someone tries to disobey, they will be punished by their community men. Most of the women in Paraiya community financially struggle throughout their life. They have to work for their expenses, if not so they have to tolerate the tortures of husbands which includes verbal abuse and physical violence. In some cases even it lead to murders. The men of the Paraiya community bear the insults of the upper class but show all their frustrations and anger only on their families who are depending on them. Domestic violence is the common feature we find in Patriarchal society. Men show their authority on women by using their physical strength in the name of right and women silently suffer as per the definition of Good Woman.

Bama feministically voices out the grievances of Paraiya women. Veliamma attends childbirth and proves as expert in this service but the caste identity marginalizes her to do the same work in the residence of the land lords. Even she works hard in the houses of the upper caste people, they avoid her entrance inside the residence and give the left over and poor quality of food. Economic conditions of women are explained in the various events through grandmother. Bama painfully said that man can humiliate woman many times and he can disrespect a woman but it is very normal in this present scenario. In this partial male chauvinism minded society woman has no right to spoken out anything her pain and aim:

We have to labour in the fields as hard as men do and then on top of that, struggle to bear and raise our children. As for the men their work ends when they've finished in the fields. If you are born into this world, it is best you were born a man. (7)

Mariamamma, one of the daughters of the Pathima's aunt is a victim of sexual exploitation and social injustice. The Paraiya community is considered as untouchables by the other communities but the Paraiya women are sexually exploited and abused. In the event of Mariamma we witness the same. Kumarasami Ayya, the upper class man tries to seduce her but luckily she has escaped from his clutches. To hide his crime he crafts a story of an illegal affair between Mariamma and Manickam. No Paraiya men question him, without proper enquiry the village Panchayat members announce two hundred rupees as a fine for her guilt and she has to apologize to village people for her shameless behavior. For Paraiya men the words of the upper class men are equal to bible verses. No one believes Mariamma except Pathima and Vellaiyamma. In the Indian families male children have more privileges than female children. They enjoy much freedom but girl children are always subjugated and treated as slaves. When Vellaiyamma worries about Mariamma's marriage, her father suggests Maanikkam as a groom. Just because of caste, chastity is questioned and without doing any mistake Mariamma is suppressed and forced to accept Maanikkam. From the event we learn that justice is also denied based on the caste.

Periyayi, one of the residents of the village is treated for evil spirit. She behaves abnormal in public. Pathima observes her and raise a question "Why evil spirits aboard only women of low caste? The original reason behind this is prolonging mental suppression and suppressed anguish of women are expressed through their activities because no one doubts or questions them. Basically,

Paraiya women are violent and use abusive language to meet the extreme treatment they receive from men. Rakkamma, a low caste woman is brutally ill treated by her husband just for requesting money for household expenses.

The condition of women in the rural part of India is pathetic; they have to manage household chores, rear children, do hectic work in the field but not allowed to be free. There is no voice for them. Only a few low caste women are educated but they are not allowed to choose their life partner. If a man marries another caste woman it is accepted but if a woman wants to do inter caste marriage, she is subjugated and insulted. The status of women is the same though they differ in classes, in the upper class women have to pay huge amount of dowry for getting married, they need to spend for a pompous marriage ceremony that reflects their family honour and social status whereas in Paraiya community in the name of Parisam the groom pays fifty to hundred rupees to the bride.

Marriage ceremony is very simply conducted in churches with flower garland exchange but the upper class people ridicule it as beggar's ceremony. The Paraiya women find solace in comparing their life with the upper class women forgetting the injustices they undergo. Bama concludes the novel with a view that in future all the injustices, violence and inequalities will come to an end, and she is sure that the saying 'Women can make and women can break' will come true and such a day will dawn soon.

In the first part of Sangati, Bama concentrates the demonstrations against all sorts of injustice and the hardships that Dalit women endure. However, Sangati's latter stages depart from the depressive and frustrated states. Rather, it gives Dalit women a positive identity by emphasizing their inner vitality and power. The author draws readers' attention to the Dalit community's educational system. She uses Pecchiamma, a member of the Chakkili village, as an example, who completed her fifth-grade education. That community's females don't attend school too often.

Bama focuses her feminism as a writer on the Dalit minority. Women accept the patriarchal role that males play in their lives because they lack authority. Her female characters are never endowed with knowledge or authority. As a result, individuals receive victimization in society and simple to attack at will by anybody. Hindu women have historically been portrayed as quiet victims who have been relegated to a subordinate position in the home and in society.

Unlike boys, girls have not the same rights to an education. They must endure emotional and bodily suffering at home in addition to on the job. Additionally, their uprising results in either bloodshed or their demise. It is typical for men in the Paraiyar culture to lack the bravery to rebellion against the members of the upper caste. Bama's writing in Sangati, depicts the real picture of Dalit women as:

Many of the girls wake up at cock-crow and work in the match factory all days, so they go to sleep immediately after their evening kanji, or even without drinking it. (78)

She describes all aspects of paraiyar women from their birth to their death. Having so many troubles they lead their life happily. Bama says that Dalit women are not only oppressed by their men but by upper castes also like Black women in Afro American literature. Bama here makes a comparison between upper caste women and the women of her community. Bama Says in Sangati as marginalized women can emerge from hardest social and economical problems and restrictions by her strong, brave and fearless mind, it was learnt from Bama's strongest judgment through her novel:

We must be strong. We must show by our own resolute lives that we believe ardently in our independence. I told myself that we must never allow our minds to be worn out, damaged, and broken in the belief that this is our fate, just as we work hard so long as there is strength in our bodies, so too, we must strengthen our hearts and minds in order to survive. (59)

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