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A Broken World of Bama in Karukku: A Subaltern Study

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Abstract

One of the most significant purposes of Indian English writers of fiction has been the artistic interpretation of Indian society, its culture, construction and prediction of the Indian image. Commonly and generally according to the writings, Indian society is broadly classified into three main groups, namely the upper caste, the non-upper caste and the depressed classes. Among them, there existed many castes and subcastes, which followed numerous practices and customs; surprisingly, each of them is a unique way of representing their caste and creed. The impact of the upper castes has been significantly felt in the social, religious and cultural lives of the downgraded sections over the years. The mounting corpus of subaltern writings, poems, novels and autobiographies, however, seeks to rectify the phenomenon of suppression by examining the nuances of subaltern culture.

Keywords: Subaltern Culture, Dalit Literature, Discriminations, Poverty and Hunger.

INTRODUCTION

The aesthetic portrayal of Indian society and culture, as well as the building and forecast of the Indian image, has been one of the most important goals of Indian English fiction writers. According to the texts, Indian society is divided into three primary groups: upper caste, non-upper caste, and depressed sections. There were several castes and subcastes among them, each with its own set of traditions and customs; unexpectedly, each of them has its own style of portraying their caste and creed. Over time,

the upper castes' influence has been felt strongly in the social, religious, and cultural life of the lower castes. The growing body of subaltern literature, poems, novels, and autobiographies, on the other hand, aims to correct the repression problem by delving into the complexities of subaltern culture.

DALIT LITERATURE

With origins in the destitute untouchables, Dalit literature is one of the most prominent literary styles to develop in post-independence India. The transformation of these so-called 'untouchables' from a despised identity to a self-declared identity as Dalit is a story of centuries of communal struggle. The term was first coined by Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, two towering characters in Dalit history. The voice of the marginalised and targeted is a powerful instrument for identifying the hidden conditions that exist in our environment. With the knowledge gathered from marginalised and subaltern literature, the world will be able to combat the ignorance that engulfs these people's lives, as well as the bias that results from that ignorance. Inner self-experiences have long been buried in silence, often with religious and social approval, and relegated to the non-literary realm. Recently, there has been a movement to completely deny their existence.

Activists embraced the term "Dalit," which refers to all downtrodden people. According to the Maharashtra Dalit Panther Movement's ideology, Dalits include members of scheduled castes and tribes, neo-Buddhists, labourers, landless and impoverished peasants, women, and minorities, all those who are exploited politically, economically, and in the name of religion. This movement took a late start in Tamil Nadu, arriving on the beachfront

RESEARCH ARTICLE

only in the 1990s, during the centennial celebrations of Dr. Ambedkar's birth. It would be impossible to cover all Dalit works or the intricacy of topics in such a small introduction; nonetheless, it is crucial to note that some of the concerns and goals of this movement in diverse literatures in our languages are comparable.

KARUKKU A SUBALTERN STUDY

Since 1990, Dalit literature in Tamil has garnered a lot of attention. Around two decades after Marathi Dalit writing appeared, Tamil Dalit writing appeared. When compared to Marathi and Kannada Dalit composing, Tamil Dalit composing began late yet has accomplished a great deal in a short period of time. Dalit-written books, refrains, individual records, short tales, essential papers, and plays in Tamil are consistently distributed by Dalit publishing companies or in small periodicals circulated by Dalits. Bama's own narrative *Karukku*, published in 1992, was also pivotal in the rise of Tamil Dalit writing. Faustina Mary Fathima Rani, a Tamil Dalit lady with a Roman Catholic heritage, goes by the pen name Bama. Her autobiography, *Karukku*, is one of four full-length works of writing she has produced (1992). *Palymra* leaves serrated edges on both sides, making them look like a double-edged sword. The persecution of Dalits by the police, the Panchayat, the higher castes, and the church is highlighted in *Karukku*. Bama also emphasises how Dalit women are subjugated even more at home by Dalit males. According to Bama's writings, sexism combined with caste hegemony is a profoundly unfair oppression of Dalit women. *Karukku* delves at the many types of violent persecution faced by Dalits, with a focus on the paraiyar caste. The church, too, oppresses Dalit Christians, which is a crucial component of this effort.

The predicament of Dalit women in Indian society, as represented in *Karukku*, is depressing and depressing. They are oppressed because of their caste, gender, and social status. *Karukku* raises important concerns about caste and religion issues that wreak havoc on our society. Bama's fictional

writings depict a variety of challenges affecting Dalit women, including wife-beating, sexual harassment, loneliness, women abandoned by their husbands, ignorance, and violence in their own families. In a broader sense, her literary works depict the exploitation and marginalisation of Dalit women and the whole community at the hands of upper-class society. The upper classes exploit them socially and economically. Bama strives to reflect on her personal sorrows both within and beyond her community, the sufferings of Dalit women, and the everyday social realities of her society via her autobiographical book. She seeks to portray the socioeconomic realities of Dalit women who fight for survival every day.

"*Karukku*" begins with the phrase "Our village is magnificent," and Bama describes the beauty of the mountains from the pinnacle, gradually descending to the low classes' sorrows and the society's harsh caste prejudice. Dalits, unlike other castes, were unable to meet their fundamental necessities. The caste system continues to discriminate against Dalits. In rural places, caste prejudice is very acute. Even if the names of the places have changed in everyday life, the Dalit residential quarters remain isolated enclaves on the outside of the villages. Dalits face discrimination and are pushed out of their villages. Bama explains in "*Karukku*." Other castes like Thevar, Chettiyar, Nadar, Naicker, and Udaiyaar have their own settlements where Dalits do not. This plainly indicates that they are marginalised in society. It's heartbreaking to watch kids without a home. It demonstrates their lack of societal identity.

Discrimination frequently takes the form of violence. Caste crimes against Dalits include rampant deaths, mutilations, physical assaults, rapes, public humiliation, attacks on their homes and communities, burning down of houses and crops, social boycotts, poor income in rural regions, acute poverty, and a high proportion of secondary school dropouts. All of these political and economic discriminations have a psychological impact on them. "In our culture, if you are born into a low caste, you are compelled to

RESEARCH ARTICLE

endure a life of humiliation and degradation until your death," Bama said, describing her unspeakable afflictions. Caste prejudice follows us around in every nook and cranny, driving us insane. Dalits, unlike upper castes, were unable to meet their fundamental necessities. They should only work as slave labour for the upper caste, such as driving cattle in pairs, treading out stray grain, and cutting firewood, among other things. They could survive on whatever was the cheapest. Clothing is not supplied for Dalit children. We could see the youngsters used to go barefooted in the fields. Even if a couple lads wore trousers, they would have slid down, barely concealing what they should have covered. This incident exemplifies the pitiful situations of Dalit children who are unable to meet even basic demands. In the guise of 'Untouchability,' Dalits suffered; they should not touch upper caste people; if they did, they felt the upper caste people had been defiled. The guy handed his Mudalaiyar the package of vada he was carrying by its cord without touching it. In a disturbing event, Naicker women were instructed to pour water from a height of four feet while paati and others received and drank it with their hand cupped to their lips. These kinds of circumstances would make them feel much worse than an animal. The misery and pain endured in the name of untouchability were beyond words to explain. The Dalits were mercilessly mistreated by the upper castes. Scrubbing out the Cowshed, collecting the excrement and muck, and then bringing home leftover rice and curry are horrifying images. The food they are given is undesired and ready to be thrown away. The Naicker woman emerged with her leftovers, reached out from afar, and tipped them into Paatti's vessel before departing. If Patti's hand or vessel came into contact with her vessel, it would be contaminated.

Dalits have been forced to endure humiliation and torture. Upper castes are constantly promoted, while lower castes are denigrated. Even though they are as good as upper caste (or) even better in their souls, they are compelled to suffer anguish and humiliation due to a single problem of

caste. In Tamil Nadu, Dalits struggle for their human rights with more vigour than in any other state in India. The atrocities committed by the upper caste have a greater impact on Dalit women and children. Within and outside of their community, they are oppressed. Violence has been perpetrated against women. Men treated women in a deplorable manner. They swore at them and said that because their husbands were gone, they should be prepared to entertain the cops at night.

In general, upper-caste women are treated harshly by upper-caste males. However, many times, atrocities against Dalit males have a greater impact on Dalit women's life. Bama remembers a similar occurrence from her youth. It was such a dreadful tragedy that all of the males in her tribe were forced to flee into the woods for many days. Caste distinctions are so pervasive that they have engulfed the village's oldest males. The upper castes are ruthless in their treatment of the Dalits. They sought to murder the Dalits over a little plot of graveyard property. These upper-caste clans own vast swaths of land, yet they, too, tried to wrest a little graveyard from the Dalits. The Dalits have been relegated to a second-class status by societal restrictions. Governments and organisations also place an unfavourable emphasis on lower castes. The poem depicts police officers, who are referred to as the "preservers of laws," as mindlessly following and siding with the upper classes. The whole police force is being fed in order to apprehend the Dalit guys. What could these ladies do in such a hopeless circumstance, where could they turn for support when everything has turned against them? They become deafeningly quiet in the face of the circumstance, praying for a nice day every other day. From a young girl to an elderly lady, the book *Karukku* depicts the miseries of Dalit women in a variety of ways. This essay challenges various patriarchal laws that oppress women in our culture. Bama tackles the struggles and everyday realities of Dalit women in this work. She imagines herself questioning the oppression of Dalits by different post-colonial and traditional organisations. Women,

RESEARCH ARTICLE

as described in the book, are wage workers who play an important part in sustaining their families via their daily earnings. They have not, however, been accorded adequate position and respect inside the family. Women are not paid a fair wage for their efforts in the workplace, whereas males are paid far more. Furthermore, the money produced by women is spent properly on home matters in order to govern the family. Men, on the other hand, are free to spend their money as they like, regardless of the family's best interests. Such constraints compelled women to shoulder household obligations while males remained careless in domestic concerns. Another important topic raised in the texts is sexual harassment. Women are regarded as little more than sexual objects. Bama highlights the sexual exploitation of Dalit women in the workplace and at home. They face sexual harassment from upper-caste guys at work. Kumarasami Ayya misbehaves Mariamma at the pump that she constructed in her seminal work Sangati, but when he realises his error, he immediately informs the local headman and manipulates everyone for his own good. Everyone in the conference sought to blame her for her behavior. Women, on the other hand, are sexually harassed at home by their own spouses. When women arrive home from work, exhausted, and soon after doing all of the household chores, they must offer their tired bodies to their husbands.

Poverty and hunger are the two most heinous sins that may befall any civilization. For centuries, the Dalits have struggled with these difficulties. Dalits are forced to bend in front of upper caste people due to poverty. Furthermore, it is hunger that drives Dalits to perform the filthiest tasks in the higher castes' houses. In his poem Starvation, Namdeo Dhasal describes the hardships of Dalits owing to hunger. It also represents Dalit pleadings and resistance to starvation. The matter of survival takes precedence above anything else. Accepting the upper caste's physical torment or cleaning their houses' squanders are two options. Bama depicts a sequence of occurrences in the work Karukku that show Dalit poverty and hunger.

The Dalits are definitely deprived of land and property, as the preceding paragraphs demonstrate.

The upper classes deny them land on which to cultivate their own crops. Furthermore, the Dalits are required to use certain roadways designated for them. The lords of the higher castes are fully aware that giving land and possessions to Dalits would be a mistake. They would no longer serve them if they were offered money. Wealth may empower them in ways that the upper castes would find dishonourable. The Dalits are not provided with adequate food or property. Only a little quantity of resources is being supplied in order for them to merely exist in order to serve them. Their communities are densely packed in small rows, as described in the text. As a result, they have little choice but to work in the fields of the upper classes. Because of their reliance on the upper castes, they are viewed as 'different' by society. The Dalits would stay jobless and unpaid if they do not follow the higher castes' orders. It is common for no one to want to respond to the expense of survival. As a result, the Dalits must obey the instructions of the upper castes. The matter of life takes precedence over pain. If there is a way to save them, every form of oppression becomes justifiable. As a result of this cycle, Dalits have been subjugated by higher castes from generation to generation. In the passage, Bama discusses the difficulties and pains of women.

The Dalits must accept with contentment whatever the upper caste offers in exchange for services rendered. The phrase 'And for some reason' in the cited passage above expresses all that is the sole solution to the subject of hunger. Acceptance of the tasting food will eventually lead to an identity crisis. However, these items would satisfy their appetite and act like nectars in their empty bellies. These elderly women are forced to work at such an early hour. If they arrived late to their masters' residences for whatever reason, even the leftover meal would not be served. These unfortunate women have no choice but to shatter their bones at all hours of the day and night. After a long day of hard work in

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Conclusion

All the experience related to caste hegemony, gender discriminations, exploitations, humiliations and starvation of Dalit-Christians in her community is expressed in her work Karukku and it becomes her testimony.

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