

DEPICTION OF CASTE DISCRIMINATION: A STUDY OF BAMA'S KARUKKU

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Cite This Article: Dr. G. Krishnakumari, "Depiction of Caste Discrimination: A Study of Bama's Karukku", Indo American Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Review, Volume 5, Issue 1, Page Number 40-44, 2021.

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Abstract:

Dalit literature is renowned for its portrayal of the resistance and socio-political struggle of those belonging to lower castes against those of higher social status. Dalit women are subject to a dual form of exploitation. Undoubtedly, the significance of Bama in Tamil Dalit literature is not arduous to emphasize, since she has carved herself a distinct position within its very brief chronicles. Karukku, authored by Bama, has been widely recognized as a seminal work in the genre of Dalit literature. Bama's literary trajectory has evolved from emphasizing the plight of Dalits to exploring the intricate dynamics between caste and patriarchy in her subsequent writings. In contrast to the subjective expression of victimhood found in the literary work Karukku. This study provides an overview of Tamil Dalit autobiography and its significance, specifically focusing on the many stages of women's fight within society and the issues of caste exploitation, with specific reference to Bama's Karukku.

Key Words: Autobiography, Dalit Women, Dalit Christian, Caste Exploitation, Oppression

Introduction:

The Tamil Dalit authors have undertaken the task of documenting their experimental reality using autobiographical or fictional means, so enabling the Dalit community to establish its own distinct presence within the Tamil literary domain. The literary works of Sivakami, Edayavendan, Unjai Rajan Abimani, Bama, Anbadavan, Gunasekaran, Imaiyan, and other authors provide a genuine representation and positive portrayal of the Dalit community, countering the idealized and sentimentalized depictions seen in the works of Poomani and Daniel.

The inaugural Tamil novel authored by Sivakami, belonging to the Dalit community, was released in the year 1989. The novel Pazhiyana Kazidalum explores the topic of Dalit leadership and highlights the inherent drawbacks of an imitative approach, as Dalit leaders replicate the dishonest and manipulative political practices commonly observed among privileged politicians from higher castes. The novel espouses the necessity of a cohesive and educated Dalit youth, emphasizing the importance of unity in their pursuit of empowerment, devoid of ideological affiliations, and characterized by genuine dedication to action.

Sivakami's novel laid the foundation for a comprehensive examination of the pervasive issue of violent acts and mistreatment inflicted upon Dalit women within their domestic sphere by Dalit men, encompassing paternal figures, siblings, sons, fathers-in-law, and brothers-in-law. Additionally, the novel sheds light on the experiences of Dalit women who encounter sexual and occupational harassment outside their households, perpetrated by individuals belonging to higher castes as well as law enforcement personnel.

In her second novel, titled "Aanadayee" and published in 1992, Sivakami examines the theme of the violent exploitation of women's bodies. She highlights the presence of a patriarchal and repressive structure inside the institution of the family, which perpetuates flagrant injustice towards women. The sexual agency of Dalit women is subjected to forceful containment and suppression. Sivakami, an early Tamil Dalit female author, brought up the issue of the simultaneous subjugation experienced by Dalit women due to their gender and caste, perpetrated by both upper caste men and Dalit males.

Bama's name stands out prominently among the Dalit women writers in India. Bama's Karukku has a tale that exhibits both a simplistic and profound structure, as it explores the experiences of a Dalit lady. The piece of art effectively challenges the established norms and discourse of the male Dalit narrative by employing unconventional plot structures, a dynamic timeline, fragmented storytelling, unidentified characters, and the incorporation of vernacular language. Bama deliberately deviates from the conventional format typically seen in autobiographies in order to effectively convey her unique perspective as a marginalized individual within the context of gender.

Karukku, the inaugural autobiography published in 1992, holds the distinction of being the pioneering work in Dalit literature. Translated into English in 2000 by Lakshmi Holmstrom, it marked a significant milestone in the representation of Dalit experiences. Autobiographical works in Tamil literature have not attained the same level of prominence as observed in the Marathi literary tradition. This autobiography is characterized by its unique nature, as it emerges from several periods of emotional crisis that serve as a catalyst for the author's exploration of the significance of her identity as a Christian Dalit woman. The composition adopts a first-person narrative style, wherein the sequence of events in the narrator's life is not presented in a linear fashion. Karukku explores the experiences of a Dalit lady, shedding light on the pervasive presence of casteism inside an Indian community.

In Sangathi (1994), Bama explores the dual oppression faced by Dalit women, notably in terms of gender and caste-based discrimination. The situation of material suffering and oppression experienced by the gendered subaltern can only be understood within a historical context by examining representative individuals. The current work encompasses a depiction of suffering and the historical encounter with caste-based injustice, resulting in the dehumanization of individuals, which is consistently evident throughout the narrative.

The third work, Vanmam (2002), examines the issue of inter-caste conflict within the Dalit community. It explores several solutions to address this issue and sheds light on a significant part of Dalit life that has been extensively explored and acknowledged in Tamil Dalit works and broader Dalit studies.

The Scar or Vadu (2004) by K A Gunasekaran is an autobiographical work authored by the esteemed storyteller and prolific writer. Gunasekaran, who formerly served as the director of the International Institute of Tamil Studies, presents a compelling narrative in his award-winning Tamil novel Vadu. Translated into English by V Kadambari as The Scar (2009), this literary piece provides a comprehensive account of the customs, cultures, and festivals of a particular community, while also shedding light on their experiences of poverty, struggles, deprivation, oppression, and exploitation at the hands of non-tribal or non-Dalit individuals.

Dalit Autobiography: Bama's Karukku:

The representation of Dalit women writers is limited in terms of their numerical presence. Bama's contribution to Dalit Literature holds substantial significance in both its conceptual framework and extensive body of work, particularly within the realm of Dalit women authors. Due to her exceptional literary skills, she has emerged as one of the foremost Indian Tamil writers who is widely recognized for her works translated into several indigenous languages. The literary works authored by her are frequently rendered into English, French, as well as regional languages such as Kannada and Telugu. She has gained significant popularity among readers both domestically in India and internationally. The narrative art displayed by the individual in question establishes a prominent position within the historical context of contemporary Indian literature written in the English language. The individual's artistic expression is driven by her creative energy, allowing her to confront the challenging circumstances of poverty as well as the various forms of exploitation prevalent in contemporary society, including financial, political, and social exploitation. Dalit women authors encounter similar challenges as their counterparts, Black women writers from various global contexts, who have likewise confronted human rights infringements such as racism, degradation, prejudice, exploitation, and gender-based subjugation.

Bama, who was christened as Faustina Mary Fathima Rani, hails from Pudupatti, a hamlet located in the southern region of Tamil Nadu, specifically near Madurai. The individual in question was born in the year 1958 and thereafter used the pseudonym "Bama" for her pursuits in the field of literature. The father of the individual in question, Susai Raj, served as a member of the Indian Army, while Sebasthiamma fulfilled the role of her mother. The individual's forebears underwent a conversion to Christianity throughout the 18th century. The preceding lineages of her family were employed as domestic workers in the residences of individuals belonging to the higher social stratum of Hindu society. The individual successfully concluded her primary education within her local community and thereafter continued her further education at St. Mary's College in Tuthukkudi. Following the completion of her Bachelor of Education degree, she pursued a career as an educator.

Motivated by a strong desire to assist the marginalized Dalit children, she made the decision to uplift and empower those individuals who reside in the lowest stratum of society. She has actively embraced the concept of sisterhood and harbored aspirations of empowering Dalit female children. Regrettably, she was assigned to a convent located in North India. Bama's dissatisfaction and lack of fulfillment caused her to retain her status as a nun for a duration of just seven years. In order to fully immerse herself in her role as a social activist, she made the decision to relinquish her religious affiliation. The individual in question has made the decision to withdraw support from the institution due to its denunciation of the convent for engaging in discriminatory practices against Dalit Christians. Over the course of many years, Bama had a prolonged period of sadness and disillusionment. However, she gradually began to dispel these disheartening ideas and regain her determination to protect herself and her community. The individual in question has successfully restored her vitality in a favorable manner, and she attributes this achievement to the assistance provided by Reverend Father. Mark S. and Fr. M. Jeyaraj served as sources of inspiration for the individual, encouraging her to engage in literary pursuits and fostering her determination to create innovative works. Currently, she is employed as an educator at Uthiramerur, a location in close proximity to Kanchipuram.

She actively addresses and documents the challenges faced by Dalit individuals, both men and women, in her creative works. The author's exceptional artistic contributions garnered her literary acclaim through several accolades both domestically and internationally. In her capacity as a writer, she has explicitly expressed her commitment to chronicling the historical events and ongoing challenges faced by the Dalit community. The individual's conviction is unequivocally centered on the concept of "battle" as a means to combat humiliation and prejudice. The researcher attempts to establish a cult centered around Bama. An underlying theory is present in every activity. The research effort is underscored by critical theories or methodologies that include sociological, feminist, psychological, and realistic perspectives. In all of her literary works, the author depicts individuals belonging to the socially disenfranchised Dalit

community, women who have experienced sexual exploitation, and those who face economic disadvantages. Arguably, few social groups have endured a more disheartening display of human degradation and moral decay than the marginalized women.

Bama asserts that she views female empowerment as a valuable means to achieve a desirable outcome, namely the progress of society as a whole. While gender is not an isolated matter, it represents a significant kind of oppression experienced by women, while also serving as the foundation for their future liberation. Bama's literary works depict women within the context of societal limitations, so imbuing her writings with a feminist perspective.

Bama wields her pen with the intention of engaging in intellectual discourse on pressing matters, aiming to deeply resonate with the shared consciousness of her community. According to this adherent of realism, the use of a pen by a writer has never been seen as a decorative symbol indicative of the writer's exceptional intellect. Throughout history, this particular instrument has consistently served as a potent tool, poised to confront obscurity, deceit, and duplicity, while simultaneously safeguarding the voices of the silenced. The author's works reflect upon the societal concerns pertaining to marginalized individuals, effectively portraying their authentic perspectives via the inclusion of their own narratives, songs, and personal tales that she has personally encountered in her own life. The inscription under consideration demonstrates a self-referential quality, continually guiding the reader towards a fervent essence, wherein resides an oppressed individual belonging to the Dalit community. The readers may have a sense of humiliation in relation to the circumstances faced by those residing within the same global community as themselves. One disconcerting reality is the existence of real-life occurrences within our recent history. The author depicts the harsh realities of southern India as an intolerable existence.

Bama's literary works encompass a diverse array of subjects, including the portrayal of discrimination against Dalit individuals, particularly women, as well as the perpetration of atrocities against impoverished Paraiyars and Pallars. Additionally, her writings shed light on instances of police brutality, sexual harassment, and the Dalit community's endeavors to reclaim their self-respect and dignity. As an author, Bama commits herself to documenting the historical and contemporary challenges faced by Dalit individuals. The individual in question is an author who really portrays her personal encounters.

To underscore Bama's fervent campaign against the societal inequities faced by economically disadvantaged, politically vulnerable, and socially underprivileged individuals, the researcher has chosen the following translated literary works authored by Bama: *Karukku* and *Sangati*, translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom, and *Vanmam*, translated by Malini Seshsatri.

Bama has authored a total of four books, which encompass three short tales titled *Kisumbukkaran* (1996), *Oru Thathavum Erumayam* (2004), and *Kondattam* (2006). The autobiographical work titled "*Karukku*" by the author was released in the year 1992, followed by the publication of her two novels "*Sangati*" in 1994 and "*Vanmam*" in 2002. The texts were originally composed in the Tamil language. All of her literary works have been effectively translated into English as well as many regional languages. The literary works *Karukku* and *Sangati* have undergone translation into other languages, including English, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam. The international readership of *Sangati* has been expanded by its French translations. The terms "*Vanmam*" and "*Kusumbukkaran*" have been translated into the English language. The novel *Manushi*, which serves as the sequel to *Karukku*, was released in the year 2013.

Caste Discrimination is a prevalent social issue that involves the unfair treatment and marginalization of individuals based on their caste affiliation. The situation of caste hierarchy infiltrating the church in India has emerged relatively recently, in comparison to its occurrence in America and other nations. In the context of India, a significant number of individuals belonging to the Dalit community have chosen to embrace Christianity as a means of seeking respite from the entrenched caste-based oppression prevalent in the Varna system. Nevertheless, while engaging in dialogue, Churches continue to uphold the cultural values and caste practices of Hindus. This phenomenon gives rise to instances of prejudice inside the church.

Caste discrimination is notably more prevalent among adherents of the Roman Catholic Church, who frequently voice concerns over the church's identity problem. Dalit Christians experience various types of oppression. In the state of Tamil Nadu, there exists a spatial segregation between the houses of individuals belonging to lower castes and those of upper caste Christians.

In the state of Kerala, there exists a population of landless laborers who are engaged in employment under the patronage of the Syrian Christian community. Inter-caste marriages are not prevalent within the Christian community, sometimes referred to as "rice Christians." The higher caste individuals have the belief that the Dalit community members are more inclined towards converting to Christianity. In order to address the challenges posed by economic deprivation and untouchability. There is an undeniable assertion that Dalits embraced Christianity as a means to attain improved societal respect. The current scenario reveals that inside several villages, Dalit Christians tend to reside in segregated communities, attend distinct church establishments, and utilize separate burial grounds.

The Dalit Christian community has been deprived of the constitutional guarantees that were originally intended for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. According to S M Michacle, it can be observed that a Dalit Christian currently faces triple discrimination, originating from the state, the

church, and non-Dalit Christians. Michael further contends that, for a Dalit Christian, the Dalit identity has greater prominence than the Christian identity.

In the event that there is any employment opportunity within the households of individuals belonging to the higher caste, those from the lower caste are required to seek out such opportunities. The upper caste individuals refrained from entering the dwellings of lower caste individuals due to their perception of the latter as being untouchable. The Dalit community has been subjected to marginalization by those belonging to higher castes. The provision of amenities is exclusively limited to the residential areas predominantly inhabited by individuals belonging to the higher caste, while those residing in lower caste neighborhoods face a lack of such services. In this particular context, it is observed that both male and female children are consistently exposed to the practice of being unclothed from the waist down. In the context of water scarcity, individuals engage in persistent competition for access to water resources, hence highlighting the unfortunate circumstances faced by economically disadvantaged populations. During Bama's enrollment in the third grade of elementary school. Upon her enrollment at the school, she had no prior exposure to the concept of "Untouchability." Bama perceived and encountered the presence of Naicker in her residence on a particular day, coinciding with the diligent efforts of her neighbors. Naicker, an elderly individual residing on Bama's street, was seated on his chair, a figure esteemed for their respectability. While transporting tea and Vadai or bhajji from the tea stand to the Naicker residence, The individual exhibited a gesture of humility by stooping down and offering Naicker a serving of tea and vadai. In response, Bama found amusement in the situation, resulting in her own laughter.

Bama recounted the incident to her older brother, providing humorous details. Her brother, who holds a Master's degree, responded by highlighting their affiliation with the lower caste paraya community and their perceived inferiority in relation to the upper caste. He expressed concern that any physical contact between them and the esteemed elders residing on Bama's street would result in their pollution. The inhabitants of the upper caste would occasionally offer leftover food and other consumable items to individuals from the lower caste, who would gratefully accept and bring them home. On one occasion, Bama accompanied her grandmother to Naicker's house.

The manner in which Bama's grandma engages in strenuous labor subsequent to the provision of water by the Nicker women might be characterized as atypical. Bam experienced a profound sense of distress while observing the event. The individual had the belief that her grandmother had procured the food items from Nicker's residence, which were not deemed undesirable. However, she afterwards came to the realization that all of these things are superfluous. However, she subsequently came to the realization that all of the undesired aspects were there. The Nicker lady has bestowed several items upon Bama's granny. When Bama inquired about the social hierarchy between her grandmother's community and the upper caste individuals, her grandmother responded by advising her not to make such statements, emphasizing the perceived superiority of the upper caste and the lower caste status of their own community.

In the event of any untoward incidence occurring inside the school or classroom setting. The focus of this study pertains on the majority of students attending Cheri School, specifically those residing on Nadar Street. A variety of mundane tasks were assigned to individuals. We assisted in the transportation of water to the teacher's residence and school while the individual in question was pursuing their studies in the seventh grade. Following the conclusion of classes, it was customary for them to engage in recreational activities with their fellow students. On one occasion, they were engaged in a game near a large Neem tree. After the conclusion of this game, the students participated in another activity where they raced towards a coconut, with each student attempting to touch it. When Bama's time arrived, she too made contact with the coconut, causing it to fall.

During the subsequent assembly, the school principal summoned Bama and reprimanded her for exhibiting her inherent identity as an outcast. He accused her of trespassing by climbing a tree and harvesting a coconut, so forbidding her from entering the classroom. During that period, a conflict arose between the Chaaliyar caste and the paraya community. The headmaster is a member of the Chaaliyar caste. One of the school teachers in Bama resided on Bama Street. She recommended that Bama obtain a letter from the church priest in order to secure permission from the headmaster to gain access to the classroom. However, the priest's response varies as a result of your affiliation with Cherri Street. The priest composed a letter sent to the headmaster, expressing a firm determination to get approval for Bama's enrollment in the class. After careful consideration, the headmaster granted Bama access to the class, recognizing her diligent efforts to uplift her community via her dedicated work.

Upon the conclusion of her secondary school, she enrolled in the ninth grade in a nearby town where she resided in a hostel. During a period of leisure, Bama would frequently utilize the local public transportation system, specifically the town bus. On one such occasion, Bama found herself seated next to a woman named Naicker. When inquiring about Bama's name and place of origin. Once more, the Naicker woman inquired about the specific street in the hamlet where Bama resides. Bama asserts that her current place of residence is situated on Cheri Street. The Naicker ladies abruptly relocated to a different location.

Bama was employed as a mathematics instructor at a school. At the aforementioned educational institution, one individual inquired whether Bama belonged to the Nadar community. Upon the successful completion of a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program, When Bama identified herself as a member of the

Parayar community. The Nun exhibits many facial emotions, including laughter when recalled by Bama. It is noteworthy that a significant proportion of the student population consists of individuals from the Dalit community. The individuals had a significant level of fondness towards Bama. She engages in her coursework in an effective manner. A significant proportion of the nuns within the context under discussion are individuals of Telugu descent. It has been observed that these nuns have a tendency to neglect the welfare of Dalit students, hence subjecting them to oppressive treatment. Bama made the personal decision to pursue a religious vocation as a nun, with the intention of dedicating herself to the service of Dalit pupils. Consequently, she resigned from her teaching position and joined a religious order.

Upon Bama's admission to the convent, she became acutely aware of the presence of caste-based prejudice within the Catholic Church. Motivated by a desire to aid the marginalized, she resolved to pursue a life as a nun. She found the opulent lifestyle of the nuns to be unsettling. The fundamental nature of her calling was in the act of relinquishing material gratification and choosing a modest lifestyle. Upon resigning from her position as a teacher, Bama proceeded to join an order where she undertook three vows (P122). She had already come to the realization at a young age that being born into a lower caste entails a constant battle throughout one's existence (P 27). This notion is further substantiated during her term of training. During the last phase of their training to become nuns, a sister conveyed to the group that in certain religious orders, Harijan women were not considered eligible candidates for nunhood. Furthermore, it was mentioned that there was a distinct order specifically designated for Harijan women (P 25).

The contrast between the lifestyle at the convent and her town prompted Bama to ponder the reasons for the potential discrimination exhibited by the nuns and priests, who were specifically selected to assist the marginalized and underprivileged. Upon resuming her role as a teacher subsequent to her transition into a fully ordained Nun, she encountered a situation where she was required to instruct students hailing from affluent backgrounds. It was during this period that she observed the Dalit community members, who were responsible for menial tasks such as sweeping the premises, mopping and sanitizing classrooms, as well as maintaining the lavatories, being subjected to degrading treatment. This sight ignited a sense of defiance within her. Individuals of various age groups adhered to the directives of the sisters, therefore maintaining their secrecy. However, the continuous submission to authority resulted in the erosion of self-esteem and dignity.

The individual had a heightened level of concern over her social security benefits, given her current state of unemployment and the need to get a suitable employment opportunity. The convent serves as a representation of the church's empty assurances. The provision of services to society lacks a personal touch. The individual's cognitive state was adversely affected by the regulations enforced within the convent, leading to a strong desire for a future period in which they would have the opportunity to experience unrestricted liberty and personal growth. The injuries sustained by Bama will require a significant amount of time for the healing process to occur. The individual expresses a notable sense of irony on the perception of the Dalit by the nuns, highlighting their deep religious commitment and enthusiastic participation in many festivals and rituals. Bama reminisces about several occurrences of religious festivities throughout her formative years, whereby the local community publicly demonstrates their religious devotion. The tumultuous period of her existence concluded upon the sister's liberation of her from the three vows.

In her work *Karukku*, Bama effectively depicts the systemic oppression experienced by Dalits, highlighting the discrimination they face at the hands of those belonging to higher castes. Bama herself also recounts instances where she personally encountered discrimination. In her autobiography "*Karukku*," Bama does not provide a resolution to the aforementioned issues. Through her literary work, Bama expresses her discontent, refraining from public protest. However, due to the prevalent caste prejudice, Bama's societal endeavors have been met with failure.

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