

Rediscovery through Self-Reflection: AN ANALYSIS OF BAMA'S KARUKKU

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Abstract: Karukku is a vital novel to express the experiences of cultural discrimination, caste, gender and religion, where the life of a Dalit woman is an endless struggle. It explains how she passes through a process of lonely self-discovery. The nightmare experiences of Dalit women are well expressed in this novel. The deep agony of oppression becomes a potent weapon to fight against their plight, prejudice, and trauma. **Karukku**, as a compelling case study, highlights Bama's perspective on the community's suffering by a Dalit woman. Whenever Dalit women travel, they face many problems that emerge from their caste orientation. In the family also, a woman has to conform to patriarchal set patterns. In the lack of social freedom, women cannot express their grievances fully. The patriarchal out-dated social norms subdue them. This novel is an expression of agony, oppression and subjugation. It is a war against caste oppression, gender bias and neglected women who are always at the receiving end in society..

Keywords: Dalits, society, caste, marginal identities, rediscovery, Bama's Karukku

This paper discusses the experiences of caste discrimination, violence against women, gender bias, acute poverty, and violence against Dalits. Bama's writings are primarily focused on the Church's gender politics. They are given jobs that entail hard work. "Our ladies sweep the church and maintain it tidy," says Bama. Bama successfully focuses the reader's attention on the inequality in income. Though Dalit women earn some money, they are still subjugated to men. Dalit women have to suffer humiliation and hardships resulting from the caste system. Dalits are the most marginalized group in Indian society. However, we can see an increase in Dalit literature in recent times. This literature portrays Dalit feelings and aspirations in a true sense. In this novel, Christianity has also been discussed in great detail.

Bama's Karukku is a testimony to a community that suffers from being Dalit and backward. It deals with the caste discrimination that Catholic Church perpetrates and makes life miserable. It is a journey of lonely self-discovery. The unjust society commits injustice and cruelty to the protagonist, and she seeks healing of her body, mind and soul. Her own experiences as a Dalit, a woman, and a Christian are used to portray the harsh realities of Dalit women's lives in this novel. This way, **Karukku** equally describes the author's and her community's lives. According to Gail Omvedt (1994), all hill peoples, neo-Buddhists, labourers, poor farmers and women who have been exploited in the name of religion are considered Dalits. Bama writes, "The story told

in **Karukku** was not my story alone; it was a depiction of collective trauma of my community whose length cannot be measured in time.”

According to Spivok's article, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," the term "subaltern" should be taken "...in connection to histories of dominance and exploitation rather than inside the main modes of production narrative....." Vol. VI (GUHA 2010:330 Vol. VI)

Everyone has the right to live a life of fulfilment.

Bama remembers her childhood days and knows the reality of social evil, i.e. untouchability. Bama is a charming little girl who watches things around her earnestly. After watching activities like a snake charmer doing some act, a monkey performing, and a cyclist cycling for the past three days, she moves further; she sees the landlord sitting and watching his workers working the field. She then saw an older man from her community handling a snack pack (vadai) in a very unusual manner, at some distance from his body, and then offered it to the landlord. She found it very pleasing and burst into the peel of laughter. On reaching home, she tells her elder brother and comes to know that the older man was carrying the vadai in that way because he belonged to a low caste, and it would make the vadai impure if he had touched it. She also finds it very disgusting that the upper caste people question her brother about his whereabouts to know his caste.

For the Dalits, going to school had always been a difficult dream. She also discusses her convent education, where she didn't have any obligation other than to eat and study: "I ate my meals, and I studied; that was all." During her free time, she says she "performed all the tasks that fell to me normally," so it's not as if she developed a hatred for hard work. Later on, she expresses her delight and discusses how she loved the task most. As a result of this continuous labour, she describes, the Dalits are compelled to depend on it for the survival. Moreover, she points out that men and women are highly discriminated against. However, they are happy and seem to accept this harsh reality without any condition. She further says that the upper-caste society cannot thrive without this hard toil of the lower castes.

Finally, Bama concludes her speech with a serious tone, saying that even youngsters are made to toil in fields and factories rather than going to school. The Dalits can find no way to escape the loop of exploitation but to go to school. Bama meticulously brings forth her point about the importance of hard physical work in their life since childhood. It also emphasizes how they miss elementary education. Thus this novel is a mixture of Bama's views about the life of Dalits.

The Church and her community are at war, making up most of the gatherings. She felt isolated and deprived, and she was utterly devastated. Hierarchical gatherings were also prevalent in the Church. She learned that the serving nuns had their eyes firmly fixed on things in the Church and had no interest in helping the country or the deprived people. The Church was more focused on

the money, pelf and power of the upper classes. According to Bama, education in schools was worthless commodity.

These poor Dalits cannot raise their voice against the upper castes because they were deprived. Bama's contemplation aims "to share with people my experiences and use writing as one of the powerful weapons to fight for the rights of the underprivileged." Her whole life as a Catholic Christian girl and woman was shaped by the fact that she was a Dalit. At a very tender age, she comes to know the meaning of being a Dalit.

She joined the Church as a nun because she wanted to work for the oppressed ones. She embraces Christianity because she likes the ideology of the Church- the idea of universal love. She believes that God is with the poor and helpless. She wants to bring positive change to her community. However, she feels disappointed and shattered when she knows her community is not ready enough to respond to this change.

Bama's **Karukku** vehemently presents the inner realizations of Dalit Christian women and the cruelty perpetrated on them. Society has no solution to all these problems. No region is bothered about the poor conditions of the marginalized people. She suffers and endures, and her sense of deprivation and neglect inspires her to work for the oppressed and depressed.

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