

BAMA'S KARUKKU IS THE SOCIAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

***Ms. A. PRINCY, **Dr.S.LATHARANI**

*Ph.D. Research Scholar Department of English St. Antony's College of Arts and Science for Women
Dindigul, Tamil Nadu*

Research Supervisor Department of English NMSSVN College Madurai, Tamil Nadu

Abstract

Bama Faustina Susairaj: Karukku (1922), the most famous autobiographical book written in Tamil it explains the childhood experiences of being a Dalit. Bama tries to bring about an arousing in Dalit women to empower them in education through her experience. Her style of writing was noticed as being unique and another feature is she does not once name the protagonist. She was born to a Roman Catholic family in Puthupatti which is Tamilnadu. Bama's descendants were Dalit Hindus converted to Christianity. After her education, she served as a nun for seven years then she started writing. Dalit women used literature as a weapon in feminist writing that includes genres like poetry, short story, essay, novel, and autobiographies. In the space of writing women like Bama, Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar and several others created an important tradition of the "Social Autobiography" by penning their memoirs with a close commentary on their social condition.

Key words: Dalit writing, sufferings, trauma, witnessing.

Bama is considered one of the most distinguished Dalit fiction writers in Tamil. The theme of Dalit consciousness is carried out massively in all her works. Bama's text has seemed to work on the victimhood of Dalits. She hardly criticizes the practice of untouchability in the caste-ridden Indian society. Karukku was not only the first Dalit autobiography but achieved a specific identity, having been written by Dalit Christian women. Karukku is evidence of different themes like religion, recreation, and education, etc. Bama gives a clear picture of catholic Dalit life and their oppression not only by the upper caste community but also within the Catholic Church. The book describes the life of Bama. Karukku translated into English by Lakshmi Holmstrom. The central theme in her works explains the condition of Dalit women and it is also portrayed through the protagonist's struggle against patriarchy. The first person narrator articulates the traumatic experience of caste discrimination from the standpoint of Dalit women. The narration moves from past to present in exploring the various events that happened in her life and that of Dalit in the caste-based society.

Karukku means Palmyra tree leaves that with their ragged edges on both sides are like double-edged swords. By a felicitous pun, the Tamil word Karu, embryo or seed also means freshness, newness. In her preface, Bama draws attention to the symbol and refers to the words in Hebrews (New Testament).

"For the word of god is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit of joints and marrow and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12)

Bama's Karukku has nine chapters with her postscript; each chapter has discussed the caste discrimination in Bama's life. She started with her village and finish with a convent life. Karukku focuses on caste and religion which caused great sting in the heart of Bama. Bama experiences the pain of untouchable and she says. "I had already seen, felt experienced, and been humiliated by what it is". When she is in the third standard, she has seen discrimination in her locality. She is mystified to see a Paraya old man carrying an envelope in his hand and handing it over to a Naicker with an attempt of not touching it. It seems amusing to her. When she comes home and tells this story while laughing her brother's reply breaks the ground under her feet. He said that everybody believed that Naikers were upper caste and they must not touch Parayas. If they touch, they would be polluted. When I heard this, I didn't want to laugh anymore, and Bama gets angry against this act her elder brother shown her the right path and tells her that education is the only way to achieve equality by which she can attest herself. Wherever she goes, she was treated as an untouchable there is a painful

experience faced by her in the form of untouchability. Literature became their voice of resistance against injustice and oppression.

Dalit literature and its language are characterized by pain, agony, revolt, oppression, and humiliation as experienced by the Dalits. Bama's genre where the narrator stands in for the social group. Bama's constant movement from the individual to the collection suggests that karukku is considered as a collective biography than an autobiography. Bama explores in particular the language of women; Karukku echoed Bama's voice. Bama enough and more valid reasons for the violence of their language as a shield to protect them, sometimes a sharp tongue and obscene words used by women, only help them to escape from extreme physical violence caused by men and to shame them. All other times Bama implies that such language may grow out of a frustrating lack of peace and pleasure in their lives.

The book describes Bama's life from the early days to later life. Bama as an innocent child is not able to understand the double standards of society. She does not know how her village come to be divided based on communities in the lower caste and upper. There are hereditary divisions of the settlement of upper caste and lower communities in the village of Bama. The people of upper caste such as *Naicker, Chettiyar, Thevar, Nadarand Udiyaar*, never came out to the parts where the low caste people such as *the Koravar, Chakkiliyar, the Kusavar, Pallar, Parayar* living places. The upper caste was having some rules of untouchable, it gave pain and ashamed to Bama. Through this part of life Bama, faced cast discrimination that occupies a major role even in the religious places and who Dalits believe as highly spiritual are disappointing and humiliating them without reasons.

Bama has the most terrible experiences with caste discrimination in her village. She wants to go to a new environment that gives her peace and to prove her identity. She thus studied the Holy Bible which says about love and scarification. After the completion of her studies, Bama decided to become a teacher so joined a catholic Christian school as a teacher. She likes to serve Dalit children who are studied there. When she observes the behavior of other teachers and nuns towards the children, she gets angry and keeps on arguing with them for the sake of poor children. This incident pushes her to think about becoming a nun.

Admits the strong opposition from the family members and friends, she prepares herself to go to the convent. All her relatives and friends advise her that she could not find peace in the nunnery and nuns will never follow the truth of the gospel in real life but Bama could not accept it. Bama wants to live like her and believes wholeheartedly that her wish will never put her in shame. After she enters the convent, very soon she finds that the atmosphere is different from her expectations. She feels that the environment and lifestyle of nuns are against God Bama has a strong belief in Jesus and the teaching of the Holy Bible.

In Karukku, the main philosophy of human life is revealed. It does not mean in which religion the person is born, it means that in which way he or is grown. Society is having a blind eye on Dalits. Bama has got a double eye on Dalits. She is a converted Dalit Christian woman; there are many bad incidents she faced in the church by the nuns and priests. Bama has double depressed after she has joined the convent. Being a poor Dalit Christian woman, she has learned the Gospel and possesses the wish of helping and serving the poor as they have learned Jesus serving poor as they have learned that Jesus himself was born in cattle-shed for the poor, ugly, disgusting sinners.

The Dalit Christians in the extract are shown as ignorant people. Bama was not against the convent and rich people. She admired the preparation of the convent, but her beliefs on the Nuns are different, and the rules and principles of the Nuns have changed her beliefs towards the Nuns. She did not know to laugh or cry. In the convent, many people did not know the meaning of the Dalit. Some of having a poor opinion of Dalits. The first time Bama was afraid that she is a Dalit because the people in the convent were speaking badly about the Dalit people. When she has heard their words she was wonderful about God's sake. In the sixth month Bama decided to come out of the convent, she came home at last. She left the comfort life of the convent, a regular meal. The convent life makes Bama very weak mentally and physically.

Finally, Bama rejected her nunnery life. And she rejected the marriage life and even she was alone from her family. Bama is an example of caste discrimination. Caste discrimination made Bama a strong woman; she did not forget all those memories.

The novel *Karukku* traces the cultural, social, and familiar life of Dalits. It stands for every Dalit woman's history. Through this novel, Bama makes a place for the history of her community in mainstream Tamil literature. Bama mentioned that the story of *Karukku* is not individual, but it is a collective trauma of Bama's community. The language that she uses in the text is gained the unexpected attention of the readers. She found herself in a voiceless community. In *Karukku* the voice of the individual becomes the collective voice of the community. Bama fight against the suppression and oppression of Dalits she also talks about the women in her society.

Bama gives the voice for the voiceless by adopting certain literary techniques use of the first-person narrative and the autobiographical genre. The personal voice of Bama becomes the "Collective Voice". Even though the number of writers is there, Bama is quite different from others. After centuries of silence, they have chosen autobiography thus an appropriate vehicle for this expression, and the portrayal of the life of a Dalit individual was representative of an entire community. Bama's language makes her novel more unique and effective. Bama's narrative inspires a spirit of rebellion which is necessary to organize a full-fledged battle against oppression. Her narration focus on the miseries of the entire Dalit community. Bama talks of rituals that the Dalit's practice to mark the observance of the social customs of her community. Bama is her pen name. This perhaps shows the eagerness of erasing one's self from a narrative that foregrounds a community's collective experience of suffering and resistance. Bama's narrative spirit of rebellion is necessary to organize a full-fledged battle against oppression. The pain she faced in her life mold Bama. She started her life being a Dalit writer and Dalit feminist. The book *Karukku* is a lesson for every woman for being strong. Bama's characters are symbols of Dalit women's identity. She proves that a woman can live alone in society. She has clarity of thoughts and expression. She is dedicated to the uplift the downtrodden, is passionate about teaching. Bama's mission is to build a casteless society.

Reference

- Bama. *Karukku*, New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press 2012.print.
- Kumari Hema. Y.V. "The Study of Expectation and Desperation of Religiosity in Bama's *Karukku*". 2.3. 2014: 1-6. Print.
- Sailpar Anshu. "Matrix of Dalit feminism in Bama Faustina's *Karukku* and Sangathi events". (9). 2015: 476-481. Print.
- Shushupana. S.S. "Expressing the Self: A Study of Bama's *Karukku*". 2. S.1 2015: 20-23. Print.