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"KARUKKU": A WOUNDED SELF

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ABSTRACT

Dalit literature is the literature which is concerned with socially underprivileged, and which asserts the socio-political stature of the downtrodden and the oppressed. Bama's writing celebrates Dalit women's lives, their wit, their humor, their resilience and their creativity. They are shown as hardworking, courageous women who work ceaselessly at home and outside. Bama's novels are an activist intervention in literary domain and renders Dalit writing as essentially an act of political exercise. Her work points out that the church distorts the real image and teachings of Christ and preaches docility, meekness and subservience to the faithful while suppressing the radical, liberative teachings of Jesus.

Keywords: oppression, Consciousnesses, Dalit aesthetic, submissiveness

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Karukku (1992) was written by a wounded self with specific experience, the experience of Dalit women. It argued against patriarchy and caste oppression. Bama's personal struggle finds her own identity, *Karukku* which means Palmyra leaves. Bama attempts to overcome her existential despite stemming from her alienation from the convent and her community. *Karukku* was a new genre in the history of Tamil Literature; it has gained many praises and many scorned it. Dalit literature was born out of anguish of unjust social systems based on caste and class inequities and has become an expression of the agonies suffered by these deprived groups for ages. To become a nun is Bama's stubborn hope, to put an end to the caste oppression; she thought that she would get a chance to put aspirations into effect. But the perspectives of the convent and the church are different from her. 1992 was an important year in Bama's life. She left behind the renunciation and

came out of the world. After that she wrote *Karukku*, and was translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom. The focus of a *Karukku* exclusive of Dalit aesthetic.

Dalit literature is the literature which is concerned with socially underprivileged, and which asserts the socio-political stature of the downtrodden and the oppressed. The Dalit literature imbibes 'Dali consciousnesses, a consciousness of their expression of exclusion, subjugation, disposition and oppression down the ages. Anger, shame, sorrow and indomitable hope are the stuff of Dalit literature, because of the anger against the age old oppression, so the expressions of Dalit writers have become sharp. Dalit women largely remain unheard of until the arrival of women autobiographies. Dalit women are often victimized by upper caste men to appease their sexual appetite. The elements of anguish anger and protest discernible in literatures of Dalit's. The writers of Dalit writing in India throughout their writings evoke

a vital and recurring thematic concern: a conscious protest against and rejection of the political and cultural hegemony of the caste Hindus. The novel *Karukku* deals with the narrator's spiritual development both through the nurturing of Bama's belief as a Catholic, and her gradual realization of herself as a Dalit.

Dalit women face a triple burden of caste, class and gender" in which she sums up the plight of Dalit women, highlighting the fact that Dalit women are a distinct social group and cannot be masked under the general categories of "Women" or "Dalit's" (*News Archives*).

It is this acceptance of fault without being faulty, submissiveness, lack of courage to speak truth, servile attitude, and subservient mentality of the Dalit's are responsible for their sufferings as they cannot get rid of these attitude easily after being oppressed for centuries. It is for this attitude of the Dalit's, Bama in her canonical autobiography *Karukku* writes angrily:

Because Dalits have been enslaved for generation upon generation, and been told again and again of their degradation, they have come to believe that they are degraded, lacking honour and self-worth, untouchable; they have reached a stage where they themselves, voluntarily, hold themselves apart. This is the worst injustice. This is what even little babies are told, how they are instructed. The consequences of all this is that there is no way for Dalit's to find freedom or redemption. (28)

The Dalit voice of protest and resistance against the supremacy and caste based hierarchical position of the Brahmins is not a new phenomenon rather for more than seventy years the Dalit community has been trying to resist their oppression and suppression in the hands of the upper castes and striving hard to gain equality and justice in social sphere through their writings. On the contrary, the voice of protest and resistance in literature is comparatively newer and especially in Drama the Dalit voice remains silent till 1980s. The initial phase of visceral portrayal of oppressed, suppressed,

wronged and subjugated Dalit class has given away the place to more rational picture of Dalit consciousness and their struggle for equality and justice through the writings of prominent Dalit novelists and poets and later on by the playwrights. The Dalit literature imbibes the Dalit consciousness of their own slavery, an understanding of their experience of exposition, subjugation, suppression, dispassion and oppression down the ages British had made compulsory education to all oppressed classes, so they were given an opportunity to educate. Before they were denied educational opportunities so they could not raise their voice until 1960's. Educated by the western education system and enlightened by the rational thoughts of Western culture, these writers reflect on the condition of the Dalit community and raise their voice on several issues of the Dalit's by the upper caste Hindus.

According to Katker:As long as Caste in India does exist, the Hindus will hardly behave to treat and approach another human from outside India or within India who is not a upper caste as human, they will not inter- marry or have any social intercourse with outsiders; and if Hindus migrate to other regions on the Earth, they will carry this filth and pathology, because their mind-set is so hardly wired. Indian Caste would become a world problem.(C,4)

The problem of untouchability is not only against the fundamentals of humanity but also it has become a stigma in the Indian society where the Shudras and the Dalits are considered untouchable and impure by the upper class Hindus. S. M. Michael in his essay *Dalit Vision of Just Society in India* says:

The word 'Dalit' particularly emphasizes the dehumanizing 'caste oppression' that makes them outcastes and Untouchables (a degradation not shared by the tribal's or sophist), within the context of the Hindu caste system with its religious social organizing principle of 'purity and pollution'. (108-109)

India's Untouchables are relegated to the lowest jobs, and live in constant fear of being publicly humiliated, paraded naked, beaten, and raped with

impunity by upper-caste Hindus seeking to keep them in their place. Merely walking through an upper-caste neighborhood is a life-threatening offense.

Dalit women also face violence when they try to access rights and entitlements provided by the constitution and the government. In addition to facing discrimination and untouchability in accessing welfare schemes, women from Dalit community also faces sexual and other kinds of physical violence. In spite of the space (reservation) given to them at panchayat (village) level their participation is dismal in the local governance. Dalit women face direct impediments right from the time of filing nominations right up to announcement of the election results, including: caste and sexually-based verbal abuse; harassment, threats or physical assaults; property destruction; restrictions on freedom of movement; and illegal and fraudulent voting practices.

Bama's contribution to Dalit literature is noteworthy in terms of use of Dalit vocabulary. Her use of Dalit spoken idiom as her narrative voice gives a distinct resonance to her writing. Her syntax reflects the speech patterns of Dalit women. She uses the confessional, conversational mode of narration in both *Karukku* and *Sangati*. Bama's writing celebrates Dalit women's lives, their wit, their humor, their resilience and their creativity. They are shown as hardworking, courageous women who work ceaselessly at home and outside. She argues that their works require merit as an alternative aesthetic paradigm that is aware of Dalit lifestyle and experiential realities. The violence that pervades Dalit lives invades her literary expression and they beat hegemonic, traditional, mainstream literary or aesthetic parameters and surge ahead to formulate a fresh, alternative, innovative, radical literary idiom. Such an exercise leaves its impact on generic as well as linguistic norms. Bama's novels are an activist intervention in literary domain and renders Dalit writing as essentially an act of political exercise. Her work points out that the church distorts the real image and teachings of Christ and preaches docility, meekness and subservience to the faithful while suppressing the radical, liberative teachings of Jesus. She hence urges upon

Dalit's to educate themselves, read the Bible themselves and recognize Jesus as a defender of the oppressed.

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