



An Insight into the Mental Affliction of a Woman from a Downtrodden Society with reference to Bama's *Karukku*

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Abstract— *Dalit Literature is one of the specific literatures where works are written to bring out the world of the downtrodden. It has become authentic when the writers belong to the same sector record the reality. Bama is one among the writer in Tamil Literature who has written her autobiographical novel Karukku meaning palmyra leaves with serrated edges. The title symbolically represents the condition of the people of her society. The work is the indication of the injustice done to the many downtrodden communities of the south India. This work is a mirror of the society from Bama's view and experience. She picturizes the inhuman treatment of the upper caste and dedicated her life to bring in justice to her community. This article highlights the mental affliction of Bama in Karukku that discloses the state of the victimized people.*



Keywords— *Dalit literature, downtrodden, anguish, affliction, inhuman treatment*

Expression of thought, feeling, emotion and opinion is a very huge blessing of human beings. Literature is the area where the thoughts and emotions are expressed in different genres. There are many forms of expression and the writers deliberately exhibits the human psyche and mind. The writers are influenced or affected with both internal and external factors. It is very much pertinent that the writers must focus on writing anything that is acceptable, admirable, attractive as well as the writings should reflect a thought of an emotion.

Among Many literatures 'Dalit Literature' is one of the significant platforms that explores the voice of the voiceless. This literature focuses on the depression, oppression, suppression of the downtrodden community for many centuries. Here the factors that are unnoticed and ignored are asseverated in an authentic manner. The writers who tend to write under the nomenclature 'Dalit Literature' brings out the societal patterns, cultural distinctions, Caste and community degradation and treatment of women etc. These works reveal some of the hard-core realities where the people face a lot of discriminations in the name of caste, creed and culture.

Society is a setup which is built for the human beings to live a happy and comfortable life but in the early days it

is being designed in a way that some of the people who are poor are suppressed under the hands of the rich. They have been used to do all the servant duties for low wages. Apart from this discrimination the people were not treated as human beings they call them by different names and these people were not even allowed to touch other community people. The inhuman treatment is being realized by many from the suppressed community and they disclose the radical ministration of the so-called upper community through writing.

Bama is a prolific Tamil writer of the 21st century who attempts to write her works about the suppressed community where she belongs to. Her writings envisage the life of the people whose sufferings are endless. *Karukku* is her autobiographical novel which enlightens our knowledge on the life of the parayar (sub-caste of Tamil community) community. The way of her narration encompasses the entire community issues and the exact situations where she experienced the suppression. The work is a perfect manifestation of the society through which one can understand the language, rituals, working patterns, communal issues, acceptance of suppression, clutches of upper community etc.. Her writings are a pure form of

expression through which we can empathize the agony of life.

In *Karruku*, Bama's life has been revealed life from childhood to the matured age in which she realized that nothing can change this suppression but only as a person belong to the community should take initiatives to combat against the practice of the society. She understands in her younger age that it is a custom for the upper caste people to make use the lower caste for their wellbeing and sophisticated life.

Women are always very sensitive and most of the times deals with things emotionally. Attached to the familial activities' women deal with matters sentimentally, everything that happen around affects them a lot. Bama in *Karukku* narrates the events that give a very clear picture of the society. The days she remembers from her childhood imbibe a very clear picture with reference to language, life style, culture, treatment, women's role and the structure of the society.

She faces the discrimination from the school and realizes the suppression from her brother's indication of it. One thing he insisted on her is education is the weapon to handle or get rid of such treatment. But pathetically the oppression is never been abolished completely even through education. She explicitly draws out the structure of her society where the Naicker community is the dominant force to whom the parayar, pallar, chakkiliyar communities work. They are rich the menial duties like sweeping, washing clothes and drainage cleaning are done by the lower caste for even very low wages. Even they always treat them as untouchables.

Bama often thinks that why do these people think themselves as superior as everyone is born the same. There are many questions whirls around her head as a child and cannot understand some of the rituals followed in the society. It is surprising for her that her grandmother (Paati) accepts the treatment and says that we belong to low caste and we have to do all these works nothing is there to condemn about.

The bad treatment of Harijans is felt everywhere like school, college, convent, nunnery, working place and most especially in the society as well, She deliberately asks, *Are Dalit not human beings? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have such attributes as a sense of honour and self-respect? Are they without any wisdom, beauty, dignity? What do we lack? They treat us in whatever way they choose, as if we are slaves who don't even possess human dignity. And if ever a Dalit gets wise to this and wants to live with some honour and self-respect, they jump up and down as if something really outrageous is happening. They seem to conspire to keep us in our place: to think that we*

who have worked through out history like beasts, should live and die like that; we should never move on and go forward. (24)

When she explained a scene to her Annan (elder brother) that an old man from her community carry a vada in a package that is attached with the string without touching it and hands over the package to the Naicker, bowed low, this incident provoked a laughter in her. But her Annan was not amused of this, he said that touching parayas was a sin to Naicker community. Hearing this she got infuriated, *How was it that these fellows thought so much of themselves? Because they had scrapped four coins together, did they mean they must lose all human feelings?* (13)

Every day of life has been a torture and torment to her after realizing that the whole community has been ill treated by the upper caste. Another incident where she felt shameful about the upper caste was that, *The Naicker Women would pour out the water from a height of four feet, while paati and the others received and drank it with cupped hands held to their mouths. I always felt terrible when I watched this.* (14)

Her Annan's words were instilled firmly into her mind that is, *'Because We are born into the Paraya Jati, We are never given any honor or respect. We are stripped But if we study and make progress, We can throw away these indignities'*. (15). She studied with utmost care and stood first in all her endeavors. She made a vow in her heart that her education will turn everything topsy-turvy. She wanted to bring a very big change in the societal pattern and living of her community.

Her next movement to convent to take up her training to become a nun taught her that the treatment of women belongs to parayar community is the same everywhere. There she is labelled as a harijan and ill-treated where ever possible. The warden-sister furiares her saying, *"These people get nothing to eat at home: They come here and they grow fat"*. (17). She often felt like alien and wanted to get away from that place but her ambition to get a degree made her stay there with a lot control over her anguish. She even felt that *'Sometimes I even thought to myself that it would be better to be dead and gone rather than carry on living like this.* (67)

These words clearly reveal her mental agony at the young age. Being a woman belonging to lower caste and poor, it was very difficult for her to survive even among the educated people. At church she sensed a kind of sophisticated life lead by the nuns, she felt that it was totally against the principles of the church. She says, *We dance to someone else's tune, even for a serving of rice. And, of course knowing this fully well, the wealthy control and crush Dalits.*(69)

The autobiography reveals the anxiety of the narrator who pulls out the realistic portrayal of her life which is full of struggles, fighting for identity, proving to be intelligent, searching for the peace of mind, perseverance to the abuse.etc. Sunil Kumar in his article '*Identity Crisis and Dalit Literature: A Study of Bama's Karukku*' opines that,

Bama's Karukku, an autobiography, depicts that Dalits are reduced to sub-human beings. Even though, they convert themselves into Christianity which has no caste system, do not get any relief. She herself faced the hypocrisy of the Upper caste society which makes her autobiography more real and powerful.

At one point of her life she learnt that education cannot do anything with the upliftment of her identity. She tends to understand that she must have a different approach to bring a change to her community. She decides to come out of her job and takes a clear decision that she has contribute to the upliftment of the paraya community. Her writings are the reflections of her mental agony and through her experiences and learning she feels contented to write an autobiography which is the extract of her anxiety , agony and anguish.

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