



The Representation of Societal Ills and Healing Strategies in Bama's *Karukku*

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that Bama's *Karukku* is a remarkable autobiography explicating the humiliation, degradation and oppression of Dalits and women in Indian society. The problems focused on have relevance to the general position of women and Dalits in all marginalized groups. This is an attempt toward purging the society of its ills and healing Dalits and women, who continued to be subjected to myriad forms of abuse. The paper "The Representation of Societal Ills and Healing Strategies in Bama's *Karukku*" is a study that shows the societal structures that oppress the Dalits and women in Indian society. The issue is viewed through 'ills' because the untouchability and oppression of women and Dalits is an ill that can adversely affect the wholeness of a society.

In *Karukku*, I observe that there must be a conscious act of self-determination for Dalits and women can heal their troubles of oppression. Education is a healing medicine for women and Dalits, from that they can cure themselves from the emotional agony and physical pains, which they suffer through the ages. Even education alone cannot liberate women and Dalits in Indian society, because of its complicated internal structures. They need a strong organization with different commitment to annihilate these oppressive ideologies and institutions. The solution for the societal ills is hard to come by, unless there is a change not only in the political and economic strategies of India, but also in the mindset of non-Dalits towards Dalits and men toward women. The healing strategies which Bama shows at the end of every chapter by asking series of serious questions to the reader and to her own self in *Karukku*, is a necessary affirmation against the back drop of, what she has suffered being a Dalit, Christian, woman.

Key words: Dalit Writing, Humiliation, Double rejection, Inequalities

Bama a grand luminary among contemporary Indian women writers as used the literary space of autobiography as agency for her social vision. Her representation of violence against Dalit women and on Dalits illustrates her commitment to eliminate the atrocities not only against Dalit women but also against all the women of the world. She came to literary fame with the publication of autobiographical work *Karukku* in 1992, which chronicles the joys and sorrows experienced by Dalit Christian women in Tamilnadu. It has won the Cross Word book award in 2000. It was lauded for being a candid portrayal of the diversity of female and Dalit experience in Indian society.

An outstanding writer in Dalit literary arena Bama writes with societal intent to effecting social change. She sees writing as a way to express the wrongs that she observes and experiences in the society and as dedicated herself to the task of delineating the unique dual oppression from which women and Dalit's suffer. This is evident in her life also when she got a loan and set up a school for Dalit children in Uttiramerur. She represents humiliation, which she suffered as Christian Dalit women in *Karukku*. She had her early education in her village, after graduation she served as a nun for seven years. She left the convent and began writing with the encouragement of a friend, she writes on her childhood experience. These experiences formed the basis for her first work *Karukku*, her powerful expressive autobiography in which she delineates the Dalit's struggle to achieve social autonomy was imperative at a time when women's are silently suffering within their family and community.

Bama's life was a struggle against violence, poverty, rejection, suffering and humiliation on Dalits and women, against caste discrimination and negotiates with its oppressive facts. She speaks of her education and the troubles which she faced to get education as a Dalit woman, how she was treated in her hostels. After completion of her education she joined as nun to serve the poor and down trodden, but she realizes that even those institutions are money minded. It is one of the honest expressions in women writing in India, largely concentrating on the problems and Dalit women experience.

Dalit men, rendered powerless by the social system to validate their male ego by unleashing their rage on women and children in their community. Besides this the frustrations engendered by the rigors of economic oppression and deprivation often make them abusive in their familial relationship. In *Karukku* Bama shows how this economy is also not going to play a major role for betterment of Dalits life and it fails to bring a societal identity to them. It is evident that money and wealth is not going to change the status of the Dalits and women in Indian society. Bama further moves and asks the basic humanitarian questions regarding Dalits:

“Are Dalits not human beings? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have such attributes as a sense of honor and self respect? Are they without any wisdom, beauty, dignity? What do we lack?... they seem to conspire to keep us in our place to think that we who have worked throughout history like beasts, should live and die like that; we should never move on or go forward.”(Karakku 27)

Primary concern of Bama is to focus on Dalit's and women, who are physically and emotionally victimized by society. Her prime mission in Karukku was to elevate and question the caste system. So she speaks out loudly and in doing so as societal as possible that they could become instrument of social transformation. Bama fearlessly represents inner reality of the Dalit women experience. The major theme of her works focus on caste based and gender discrimination they also portray caste discrimination practiced by the religion. As family is the core of the community where values are nurtured there is the need for a healthy relationship between family members. As a converted Christian family background which she inherits she truly expresses what she suffered from that background. In Christianity they are neither accepted as Christians nor as Dalits among Hindus. This is what double rejection that they face, their situation is caught between the two worlds, 'one is dead another one is yet to be born.

When she was studying in her high school the warden of the hostel even though a woman treats the hostel girls inhuman manner, she always used to blame without any reason. Such inequalities dispirit the lower caste peoples they lack motivation in the hostel environment. This caste discrimination creates destruction in the young minds.

Only inspirational figure which she finds is her brother, that as a family member he encourages Bama to get education. Education for his brother seems to be a weapon which can change this society. Bama suggest that women and Dalits can cure themselves from the emotional agony which they suffer from ages by means of getting education. At the end she realizes that even education is not at all a final solution, Education alone cannot liberate woman and Dalits. As Bama's brother said, “Because we are born in to the parayajati we are never given any honour or dignity. We are stripped off all that. But if we study and make progress we can throw away these indignities. so, study with care, learn all you can. If you are always ahead in your lessons, people will come to you of their own accord and attach themselves to you. Work hard and learn.”(Karakku 17-18)

As Bama proclaimed that upper caste people ought to transfer themselves and stop to oppress women and Dalits in our society, so that Bama asks some basic important questions in to come out of agony. She also gives some healing strategies, ideas to change and modify this discrimination, she has given plenty of inspiring words at the end of every chapter they may awake Dalits and women in deeper levels.

They need a strong organization with different commitment to annihilate this oppressive ideologies and institutions. The solution for the societal ills is hard to come by, unless there is a change not only in the political and economic strategies of India, but also in the mindset of non- Dalits toward Dalits and men toward women. The healing strategies which Bama shows at the end of every chapter by asking series of serious questions to the reader and to her own self in Karukku, is a necessary affirmation against the back drop of, what she has suffered being a dalit, Christian, woman.

Bama's autobiography is uniquely written with a burned purpose in her mind. It is for the fulfillment if that purpose she overthrow the established convention for writing, as dictated by the upper caste.

At the end of the book, is an Afterword written by Bama seven years after she wrote the book. She says “it is a great joy to see Dalits aiming to live with self respect, proclaiming aloud. You are a dalit; lift up your head and stand tall.” (Bama 138) This is an attempt toward purging the society of its ills and healing Dalits and women, who continued to be subjected to myriad forms of abuse. The paper “The Representation of Societal Ills and Healing Strategies in Bama's Karukku” is a study that shows the societal structures that oppress the Dalits and women in Indian society. The issue is viewed through 'ills' because the untouchability and oppression of women and Dalits is an ill that can adversely affect the wholeness of a society.

This is probably what the author aimed for when she wrote her experiences down. Bama's texts were never worked on the victimhood of Dalits. The agency of Dalits has been powerfully presented in all her writings. Her works lay lot of emphasis on empowerment of Dalits through education. Karukku is an activist intervention in literary domain and renders Dalit writing as essentially an act of political exercise.

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