



### EXPLORING THREE-FOLD SUBJUGATION OF DALIT COMMUNITY IN 'KARUKKU'



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#### ABSTRACT

*A peep in to Indian history can unleash horrible picture of social discrimination on the basis of Class, Cast and Gender. Evidences of cultural instability and underprivileged societies can be sought through various incidents depicted in Indian literature. Since literature is a mirror image of society it reflects what social structure follows. Different literary forms have been toying with an idea of social reformation and equality since independence of India, number of poems, stories, novels and dramas painted grief, hunger, marginalization on part of inferior communities but cannot do more than arousing pity. The same stigma continued its all-pervasive influence in pseudo form till date. Its diabolic nature not only stained egalitarian attitude but also attacked secular structure of political vision cherished by Indian social reformers. Bama Faustina, A mouthpiece of Dalit community suppose to reveal cry of the oppressed community for equal social status and privileged life. She is considered as a reformist and revolutionary writer in the circle of contemporary Dalit writers. She has exposed plastic sensitivity of modern Indian elite classes towards backward casts and their legal rights. Motivated by outlined concern, the paper seeks to analyze causes of discrimination on the basis of gender, class and cast and to explore Bama Faustinas struggle depicted in her recent Novel 'Karukku'. Her indelible efforts to emancipate choked voices of deprived communities need to be reviewed and investigated to impart proactive status to derelicts in modern Indian societies. Thus, the core objective of this study is to find out origin of Dalit literature and its positive effect on the community. Second important point that is thoroughly analyzed is how cast hegemony is used as a tool for unjust suppression of Dalit women. The work also peeps in to unfair working of Church where converted Dalit Christians are treated as inferior subject. In nutshell Karukku has been scrutinized on the basis of gender sensitization, female subjugation and class distinction.*

**KEY WORDS:** Karukku, Oppressed, Dalit, Underprivileged, Marginalization, Cultural instability, Proactive.

#### BRIEF HISTORY OF DALIT COMMUNITY

Verna system is the origin of untouchability in India, according to four verna's various duties and privileges were assigned to them. It was in vogue to consider Bramhin's as most learned Kshatriyas as warriors, the Vaishyas as traders and Shudras as menial workers. Thus the Shudras occupied lowest position in social structure. The pseudo lawgivers like 'Manu Smiriti' in Hindu religion had intensified social imbalance by proposing weird moral laws and social bans on Shudras and feminine gender. Thus corrupt atmosphere of Indian social hierarchy had segregated a group of lower community that further came to be known as Dalits or Untouchables. They were considered as the most neglected and deprived inhabitants of Indian Subcontinent. Such types of

Depressed classes commonly known as broken people mean Dalits. Their quest for identity commenced after infliction of gruesome atrocities by upper classes. Under camouflage of religion number of odd practices became routine part of their life, thus social apathy and exclusion from mainstream lead them to more miserable conditions. They were not allowed to enter temples and use public properties like wells, graveyards and common bathing areas by the river side. The pathetic lot of the community continued till independence of the nations, since subaltern syndrome has deeply rooted in the cast their revolutionary spirit was subdued beyond limits that eventually doused the fire of retaliation. Their exploitation continued up to the regime of Britishers, though it did not end completely reforms gained momentum. The era of social boycott and bonded labour had breath its last till framing of Indian

Constitution. At last inherent spirit of untouchables was highly kindled by constitutional guarantees and protections. Thus positive constitutional provisions developed the path of social revolution and further helped to create conditions necessary for its achievement.

### DALIT LITERATURE

Dalit Literature got momentum only after independence of the subcontinent, its objective was to uncover harsh facts that nobody dare to unleash before independence. In the introduction of the Novel Lakshmi Holmstorm, the translator of *Karruku* points out outburst of Indian Dalit writing she adds :

*Dalit writing - as the writers themselves have chosen to call it - has been seen in*

*Tamil only in the past decade, and later than in Marathi and Kannada . It has gone*

*hand in hand with political activism and with critical and ideological debate ,*

*spurred on by such events as the Ambedkar centenary of 1994 and the furore following*

*Mandal Commission.*

#### 1.[ XVIII, Intro,Bama, Karukku ]

Thus, a Dalit writer can be termed as an eye opener who incessantly strives to pen down unsocial customs, stigma and discrimination deeply rooted in Indian soil. Thus the bias attitude of upper classes and their brutal treatment towards subaltern casts is a case in a point that particularly forms structure of Indian Dalit Literature. Dalit literature took form of a movement with publication of substantial literature in Marathi language, Marathi writers like Baburao Bagul [1930-2008] and Namdeo Dhasal pioneered Dalit instinct in literature .The essence was further captured in other languages like Hindi,Tamil, Telgu, Kanadda, and Bangla. Educated Dalit intellectuals began to voice out injustice inflicted on the community. They come out openly with their ideas of social change and reformation. They not only advocated legal rights for the community but also provided platform to novice Dalit writers. Such type of awareness helped them to create political identity and thereby to expose issues of cast injustice; in short they formed a segregated group of social thinkers who strive hard to uplift oppressed community. Indian literary maestros namely Mulk Raj Anand , Arundhati Roy, Mahashweta Devi, Eleanor Zelliot popularized the form . their efforts to peel off layers of ugliness and brutality hidden in modern upper class community eventually provides justice to the depressed milieu. Since the objective of Dalit literature is quite clear and it mainly rests on equality, liberation and freedom it candidly followed graphic social Picture . Depiction of ghastly unsocial practices

and sterile life in Indian ghettos have been unique hallmark of Dalit literature , in short it is a literature of the oppressed community pen down by the same community for the masses .While highlighting the damage done to Hindu community due to caste system the majority of Dalit writers focus on own experiences of discrimination that exist till the time and relevant to all time. Since the literature is a depiction of communal holocaust it lacks literary aesthetics and sophisticated language, rather rough tone and rustic mannerism occupy foremost position. Its target is thus quite clear, it points towards social awareness about identity crisis and imbalanced social atmosphere regarding neglected classes.

### KARUKKU - A SYMBOL OF PAIN

Karukku being an attempt of classic subaltern writing naturally narrates a tale of a woman belonging to oppressed community; it ruminates on bizarre nature of caste and class distinction existing in modern Indian scenario. A series of episodes depicting inhuman experiences are being exposed to show negative impact of gender discrimination deeply rooted in holy organizations like Church. Being a Dalit Christian woman Bama has to face communal fury and discrimination even in religious system like Roman Catholic Church. Her voiceless subjugation continued for long period but she overthrows the burden by publishing her autobiographical novel in 1992 . Her encounter with hostile discrimination disillusions her spirit beyond limit and she shares her bitter experiences in *Karukku* [1992]. *Karukku* literary symbolizes thorny leaves of a palmyra plant usually used to cover tops of huts in southern areas of the country, one often gets hurt and bleeds while handling the leaves. Thus the leaves symbolize tortured and neglected class that meets painful experience without any fault of individual.The author explain objective behind using painful image as a title, she clarifies her point in the preface of the novel in following words :

*The driving forces that shaped this book are many; events that occurred during many stages of my life, cutting me like Karruku and making me bleed; unjust social structures that plunged me in to ignorance and left me trapped and suffocating ;my own desperate urge to break, throw away, and destroy these bonds ;and when the chains were shattered in to fragments the blood that was split - all these taken together .*

#### 2 . [xxv,Preface ,Karukku]

Faustina Mary Fatima Rani nick named as Bama was born in Roman Catholic family that has been converted to Christianity from Dalit origin. She witness odd social atmosphere prevalent in original Christian class which strongly neglect converted people and keep them underprivileged. Being a promoter of Dalit feminisms she believes in female sensitivity, her ideas of new India are quite clear according to her perception the community is unable to stand firmly on Indian soil. Partial attitude of every system including education, religion, burocracy, politics play major role in segregation of downtrodden as neglected section. Bama uses symbolism as a technique to show diabolic effect of social aversion largely practiced to keep away Dalit people from mainstream. Her assessment of strengths and drawbacks of her community unveils unmatched spirit and strength of Dalit women to cut the odds of the social system and to stand on their own in the tempest of communalism.

*Karukku* is a tale of a woman who is set to develop her inner strength despite abnormal social apathy that haunts her from childhood to womanhood. Her open expression of gender and class discrimination turn her to face criticism on all levels, thus she proves to be a rebellion that fights against prevalent social system that dominates lower strata. 'Palmyra palm' leave stands as image of pain and cuts, one has to bear while handling it, the author being born and brought up in 'Paraya' community, her life is nothing more than a painful experience. The community is largely acknowledged as secondary and wears a label called lower class. Since repression runs parallel to **Paraya** community Bama meets number of humiliating episodes throughout her educational and professional career. The revolutionary attitude turns her restless and never stops to kindle her interest in issues of welfare of oppressed casts. Since childhood she witnessed cast rivalry, bizarre cast classification and class subjugation. Different appearances and separate places of upper caste and lower caste communities mark class distinction deeply ingrained in her Village. It provides true essence of Tamil village that follow cast system, religious taboos and 'verna' system in twentieth century. Bama never fail to show pain of every lower cast that keenly associates their daily vocation with their creed and strata. Naicker community is a landowner community and most powerful, the remaining are inferior namely Udaiyaar, Nadars, Koravars, Chakkiliyars, Kusavars and Parayas. Except Naickers and Udaiyarr remaining struggles for their identity, human rights, privileges and social rights, they fall under menial

working class that serves elite society as potter, sweepers, cobblers and palmyra cutters. Thus systematic representation of social images, odd experiences, and racial discrimination marks subaltern substance in the novel. The undercurrent of subaltern tone enhances literary value of *Karukku* as a milestone in Indian Dalit writing, though it simply narrates story of upper cast domination still existing in southern rural populace it highly focuses on need to amend Verna system that rests on the pedestal of cast discrimination. The novelist ironically shows how powerful upper classes cut roots of lower strata and throw them in abysmal psyche of rootlessness. Bama use her village as a representative of age old Indian legacy of class and gender hegemony that continuously pins sensitive individuals belonging to oppressed communities. Her initial life in village introduces Bama with stark realities of communal oppression, class division and cast ridden scenario. She candidly shares strange experience when she was in third standard, while returning back to home she notices :

*an elder of our street came along from the direction of the bazaar. The manner in which he was walking along made me want to double up. I wanted to shriek with laughter at the sight of such big man carrying a small packet in that fashion. He came along, holding out the packet, without touching it. The elder went straight up to the Naicker, bowed low and extended the Packet towards him.*

### 3. [P.15, Karruku]

But Bama becomes numb when her elder brother tells her reason of older man's bizzare behaviour as :

*He said everybody believed that Naickers were upper cast, and therefore Must not touch Parayas, If they did they would be polluted. That's why He had to carry the package by string.*

### 4. [P.15.Karruku]

The span of her development from adolescence to youth is full of challenges and struggle hence the novel comes under genre of Dalit literature that opens a vast panorama of pain and suffering regarding neglected classes. The analytical study shows Indian Dalit literature can be compared with Afro-American literature that largely deals with issues of racism and subjugation of black Negros. In most of European and American subcontinents black Africans were treated as slaves and segregated as inferior class, thus they had to lead their lives with

pain of mistaken identity and rootlessness . Same trauma of class hatred is pinning Indian Dalits since ages and continued till modern times , Writers like Bama gets inspired by revolutionary steps initiated by social reformers like Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar , Mahatma Joytiba Fule and Campions of Indian Dalit Literature like Dr. Narendra Jadhav, Om Prakash Valmiki , Datta Pawar, Baburao Bagul, Namdeo Dhasal and last but not the least Mulk Raj Anand .

### OBJECTIVE OF THE NOVEL

In her interview with **Geeta Hariharan** ,Bama Faustina Soosairaj express her grief and unbearable humiliation she faces during her career as a teacher and nun at convent. Her vulnerable experiences regarding Dalit woman's miserable lot continued even after publication of her autobiography .She has been criticized by her own people for exposing ugly and filthy lifestyle of the community. Bama nurtures a motive to educate especially Dalit girls, but her hopes retire in sullen spirit. Finally she suggests all youngsters belonging to lower communities to build collective strength to resist biased discrimination based on cast, class and gender. She has been finally honored by Indian literary establishments for voicing feminist issues related with lower communities'. The outstanding translator **Lakshmi Holmstrom** provides unimaginable assistance to Bama to come out of struggle and she enthusiastically exposes wrong perspectives of convent and church still in vogue. She forms parallel attitude cherished by original writer to project thematic coherence to alleviate sufferings of oppressed. Her use of lucid style, narrative technique and native references heightens literary value of Bamas original script. She deftly communicates cast oppression within the Catholic Church and she also aptly discovers Bama's internal conflict for self - reflection. Her bitter memories of institutional betrayal are depicted in appealing manner to provoke thought process of scholars as well as ordinary readers .**Gayatri Spivak** and **Lakshmi Holmstrom** never fail to praise Bama for her innovative experiment ,they conclude :

*Bama's work is not only breaking a mainstream aesthetics , but also*

*proposing a new one which is integral to her politics. What is demanded*

*Of the translator and reader is in Gayatri Spivak's terms , 'a surrender to*

*special call of the text'. This is certainly not comfortable reading for anyone*

*Bama is writing in order to change hearts and minds. And as readers of her*

*work, we are asked for nothing less than an imaginative entry in to that*

*different world of experience and its political struggle.*

### 5.[ xx Intro. Karruku, Spivak]

Author's village , local Church and The convent play vital role in her introduction with serrated edges of social set up that imbibes communal spirit in children too. Being born in Dalit community slave syndrome runs through her nerves , she believes that she is degraded human being that lacks honour and self -worth . Her docile attitude, submissive mind and readiness to suffer sharply indicate the tortured soul that doesn't know how to protest. When she sullenly follow orders of her father to stop further studies , she appears victim of patriarchy but close analysis of the novel shows she is more tortured by Church authorities and the nuns in the convent. Her withdrawal from active participation from social activities in the Church and resignation from the convent proves her indomitable desire to break series of atrocities inflicted by upper cast Christians on converted Dalits . With the zeal for Dalit liberation Bama finally takes bold steps, she publish *Karruku* with a dream to see her community gaining political, economic and cultural strength . She points at need of fighting spirit to see them resisting those who have attacked them in an unjust and inhuman way.

### KARUKKU : A TALE OF SELF-REFLECTION OF OPPRESSED CLASS

**Mini Krishnan** Editor of the novel , describes ideology of freedom from oppression in quite bold manner, she puts forth that Dalits are those who have been ground down or rooted in the soil. According to her ,for centuries powerful authorities exploited suppressed cast groups in the name of religion and society. Thus they continue passive role in class structure and bound to tolerate social injustice. For generations the state of affair continued in static mode, finally social discontent strokes and stirs sensitivity of the neglected classes to become double -edged *Karruku* to wage a war against oppressors. Palmyra though very useful turns painful if handled wrongly, it can make one bleed and shed tears. In the same manner low casts have been severally used and misused by upper communities for personal, political and social gains. Their dumb souls carry quietly bitter memories of brutal, frenzied and ugly society till emancipating force come to rescue them. Story of *Karruku* revolves round Paraya [ low cast ] community that struggles hard for social privileges and honorable social status , they are labeled as poverty stricken , starved , ignorant people leaving in

hope of new perspective . Thus the novel comes under the genre of marginal literature which exposes dual suppression of Dalit woman; on hand she suffers as a low cast human and on other as a inferior gender. In short, *Karruku* , fulfills double purpose , it opens a social debate on issue of cast system sustained for generations and scope of gender equality in secular country like India . Finally the author's use of didactic tone helps reader to understand a Dalit woman's journey from sate of subjugation to social emancipation.

#### CONCLUSION

Personal trauma of the author works as a lesson for number of Dalit and non- Dalit readers, her autobiography thus does not come under conventional autobiography. Its larger than life canvas turns it as a mouthpiece of collective trauma of the community and hence personal experience of one finally proceeds from individual to social body. The novel voice out ills of cast hatred that spreads disgust among human beings of blood and flesh, all are same in biological attributes but quite different on

the basis of cast , class and gender. Thus the webs of artificial boundaries create cracks in human bondage that forms the pedestal of universal humanity.

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