

## SELF-REFLEXIVE MODE OF NARRATIVE: AN ANALYSIS OF BAMA'S KARUKKU

**Dr.Komalpreet Kaur**

Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Sabo

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### **Abstract:**

*For the Dalit women in our patriarchal and caste-based society, Karukku is a vital novel. The protagonist goes through a series of patriarchal or conventional tribulations the entire time. This type of hardship frequently causes women to fall into the lower echelons of society. Whenever Dalit women travel, they are surrounded by a variety of conditions that have been shaped by their caste. With regard to family life, the women adhere to patriarchal rules. With so many social and patriarchal constraints, they are unable to express themselves freely. They end up being labelled as "other" as a result of this. This essay by Bama depicts the tragic situation of Dalit women. She delves into her own personal history of oppression as it pertains to patriarchy and Dalit culture.*

**Keywords:** *Self reflexive, narrative, Dalit, society, caste.*

### **1. INTRODCUTION**

For Dalit, the underlying term is "dal," which means "to splinter, split, or fracture." The term "dalit" has evolved to imply anything or everyone that has been shattered, split, broken, or ripped, and so represents a group of people who have been oppressed, dispersed, crushed, or annihilated. The Hebrew word for "low" is "dal," which is considered to indicate "weak, impoverished, or helpless." Dalit is a term that has entered the English language via Sanskrit and has since spread throughout the world's languages. A few of the authors believe that Dalit isn't a caste at all. He is a victim of this country's social and economic norms. As a result of their teachings, he does not believe in the existence of God, reincarnation, souls, sacred texts, or the concept of fate and heaven. He does hold humanism in high regard. Change and revolution are symbolised by the Dalit. Writings by Bama are mostly focused on the church's politics of gender. They are given menial tasks by the Church and its caretakers. As a result, women in the upper castes are not expected to perform menial tasks. "Our ladies sweep the church and maintain it tidy," says Bama. Others wait patiently until we are finished before they enter and take their places at our table. (Significant number 119) Bama brings the reader's attention to the disparity in earnings. In spite of the fact that Dalit women earn money, they are nonetheless subordinated to males both at home and in the community. The Dalit males, according to Bama, oppose Manu's beliefs. In the same way, though, they adhere to the ideals of Manu in terms of women's rights. Dalit women, as members of the lowest caste, are subjected to inhumane humiliation and hardship as a result of the caste system. Rural areas have a considerably worse caste structure than metropolitan places. For many rural Dalit women, safety, security, and sufficient protection are nonexistent, according to Bama. As a result, Bama gave birth to a generation of Dalit women who are unafraid to challenge the status quo. Sangati delves into the lives of women who had the temerity to

ridicule the oppressive elite that held control over them, and in doing so, discovered the strength to rise up and fight back.

In Bama's *Karakku*, the author chronicles her childhood as a Dalit Christian woman, a female, and a Dalit. On caste, gender, and religion, it demonstrates the author's marginalisation. Caste and gender prejudice are depicted realistically, which is appropriate for the genre. According to Arjun Dangle, "autobiography is a growth and extension of a sociocultural description" (Gunasekaran 2009: xv). Author Linda R. Anderson believes that the genre of autobiography is one in which the lives of its writers are depicted via the written word. The storey of one's life might be organised in this fashion to better comprehend the present by looking back at the past. An accurate depiction of the author's life and experiences is provided in this book. As a product of India's Varna and caste systems, these points of view fit well with the contemporary autobiography. An oppressive "contract" generates the remnants of the past left for the historian, according to GayatriChakravortySpivok of *Subaltern Studies*. For Bama, this culminated in the establishment of an institutional domination over the tribe, caste, or community by a high caste. Bama's autobiography and Dalit literature are both realistic since they are based on the "life experiences" of the untouchables. Her own personal experiences as a woman, a Dalit, and a Christian are used to depict the realities of Dalit women's lives in this book. As a result, *Karukku* depicts the author's and her community's lives in equal measure. According to Gail Omvedt (1994), all hill peoples, neo-Buddhists, labourers, poor farmers and women who have been exploited in the name of religion are considered Dalits (*Karukku*:x). *Subaltern studies* can also be used as an umbrella word for Dalit Literature. For years, Dalits suffered in silence from a slew of injustices, leading to the rise of the Dalit movement (Randhawa 2013:39). An autobiography written by Dalit-Christianwoman Bama is only possible because of her own personal experiences as a Dalit woman. According to Spivok's article, "*Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography*," the term "subaltern" should be taken "...in connection to histories of dominance and exploitation rather than inside the main modes of production narrative..." "Vol. VI" (Guha 2010:330 Vol. VI). In Indian civilization, caste hierarchy and exploitation have been wreaking havoc. It is through dalit literature that we learn about the everyday lives of the dalits. Thus, the primary goal of Dalit literature is the emancipation of the caste system's victims, the dalits, who have been oppressed in India for centuries. There was no stopping the efforts of Dalit writers to get their voices heard, according to SharankumarLimbale (2010:25). According to GangdharPantawane, one of India's most prominent writers and critics of Dalit literature, while Dalit Literature and Black Literature may have certain similarities, they cannot be compared.

## 2. DALIT LITERATURE

Dalit literature is one of the most significant literary trends that emerged from the destitute untouchables of post-independence India. Dalit identity is the culmination of a centuries-long battle of the so-called 'untouchables' to be accepted by society as a whole. The term was initially used by Mahatma JyotiraoPhule and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, two towering figures in

Dalit history. We may learn a lot about our surroundings by listening to the voices of those who have been marginalised or attacked. Knowledge gathered through marginalised literature and subaltern will help the world combat the ignorance that engulfs the lives of these people and the bias that is a result of that ignorance. Inner self-experiences have been buried in quiet for a long time, frequently with religious and societal consent, and condemned to the limitations of non-literary expression. The most current trend is to completely reject their reality.

Activists began using the name "Dalit," which encompasses all oppressed people. This widening extends the term's meaning beyond Hinduism to include Dalits who have converted to Buddhism, and in the future, Muslims and Christians as well. There are many different ways to categorise Dalits, including "members of scheduled caste and tribe, neo-Buddhists, the working people, landless and impoverished peasants and women," according to a manifesto released in 1973 by the Maharashtra Dalit Panther Movement. Until the 1990s, when Dr. Ambedkar's birth centennial was marked, the Tamil Nadu movement had a slow start. As a quick introduction, it is impossible to cover all Dalit texts or to examine all the topics involved; it is vital to recognise that some of the concerns and aspirations of this movement are comparable to one another.

### 3. SOCIAL INTRICACIES THAT EMPHASIZED DISCRIMINATIONS

As a result of our society's rules, disadvantaged people are increasingly being ostracised. In sovereign India, the disparity between men and women is being maintained and even increased because of a poor approach to enacting laws and regulations. A sex-based imbalance and prejudice that has existed in Indian culture for decades has always been the case. This is because our traditional, social system centred on caste, community, religion, and class is becoming increasingly inequitable, and this has a tremendous impact on the position of women. Since the country's numerous and diversified socioeconomic condition necessitates quick action and reformation, this aspect of reformation has been ignored and ignored for decades.

Current events have freed women from some restrictions, but they've also sparked conflict over whether or not the position of women may be improved as a result of these changes. There is now a foundation in place for the present-day society to take a bold and aggressive stance in exposing in literature society's darker features, particularly the Dalit community. It is the current plight of Dalits and their vulnerability that will shape Dalit writing for years to come. A new wave of radical transformation and growth in the Dalit literature as literature of protest is undoubtedly coming. Thus, Dalit literature adds a new depth to everyday life.. People are intrigued by this new charismatic dimension of literature, much to their surprise. As a result, women from all walks of life in India have been influenced by modernization and globalisation, which has led to an uneven distribution of opportunities and a non-uniform pattern of social development. Under the alias Faustina Mary Fatima Rani, Tamil Dalit writer Bam pondered hard about the nature of Dalit existence, varied viewpoints from different

sections of society, and the connection between action and writing in Dalit literature. In light of Bama's dual roles as both a Christian Dalit and a woman writer, the testimonial form of writing (about her own life and that of her community in this case) presents a generic challenge and its value is truly dependent on its perceived truthfulness, its complete fidelity to lived experience.

#### 4. *KARUKKU*—SELF-REFLECTION OF THE INNER SELF

In order to be understood as a work of fiction, this autobiographical tale must be viewed as a new literary form in order to be seen as an attestation of truth, a societal critique, and also a meticulously constructed and well-written storey. It is a storey of a Christian Dalit lady who recognises that her Christian identity is greatly influenced by her Dalit identity, and that she must battle both inside the Church and outside of it, especially as a woman, to overcome discriminatory customs. *Karukku*, on the other hand, is a novel that appears to be chomping at the bit to find a new shape. The narrator reexamines her life's events from numerous angles, each time gaining a new viewpoint. She argues that Bama organises her life's experiences "into numerous categories, such as Work, Games and Recreation, Education," "Belief," "etc." in her introduction. (See page vii for further information.) It's like witnessing the ripples that form in a pond when a handful of stones are thrown into it. As soon as Bama thinks on her life, fresh ripples arise and race over the surface, causing her to reflect on a huge portion of her life rather than the significance of a single event in itself.

Because she is a Dalit, her existence as a Catholic Christian girl and lady is governed by this. As she begins to explore church life, she becomes increasingly conscious of her Dalit identity, which forces her to reconsider her definition of devotion to God and the significance of religion and belief in her life. A work like this, in which the narrator grows from a kid to an adult with a knowledge of the Church and the world in her own manner, serves as a roadmap for her development. After leaving the convent, the narrator takes stock of her life and reflects on the different circumstances that have sculpted the contours of her existence and imposed on her self-understanding and social-political sensibilities.

When Bama was a youngster, she was raised in a Christian household. When it came to religion for her, it was all about duty and obedience, as well as a feeling of class and caste identification. A Dalit in Indian society and a Dalit in Christian society are concepts she comes to comprehend early on in her life. The Dalit culture, particularly the women and children, is one of the most marginalised groups in India, but Bama, a devout Christian, refuses to abandon the Christian message and instead challenges the Catholic institutions that teach one thing but do another. Christian values, according to her interpretation of scripture, include a commitment to social justice and the well-being of all people. She believes that God chose to stand with the impoverished since he himself incarnated as a man. She entered the convent with the belief that she could better serve the Dalit community by utilising the resources and teachings of the Catholic Church to help the weaker members of society, particularly those from the lower castes. Due to mismanagement and neglect, the convent

fails her and she must leave. But as she reflects on her past life, she realises that in spite of the Church's insistence on this method, social and political inequality has always marked the internal boundaries in her beloved village life, demarcating castes and creating rules of untouchability for those with high visibility. Our land's pervasive sense of injustice does not lead Bama to despair, since she understands that her personal experiences and the resulting knowledge are part of a wider Dalit consciousness that is stirring up a greater movement. This essay is primarily a critique of the Catholic Church and the caste system that exists inside it, but it is also an exploration of life as a Christian Dalit. At the same time as she attacks the Church, she laments the development of materialism and a general loss of faith that characterises modern life in general.

"I don't know why people were so astonished," she says, revealing how much she liked the hard labour. When I was a kid, I was a big fan of hard physical labour (p. 47). A subtly skewed view of those who work in the physical world is a result of the educational system's implicit bias against them. Hence, Bama's reaction is intriguing. She doesn't despise the labour her community performs; rather, she is appalled by the reality that society fails to value or reward it. Even so, she acknowledges her own 'labouring from dawn to dusk, without any rest' mothers and grandmothers. The women and men in her area, she says, "can only live through hard and relentless labour" even now. In spite of the fact that work might be a lot of fun, it doesn't pay; rather, it's exploited by those who control the levers of power in Indian society. The job that is available in rural Tamil Nadu, which is so taxing on the workers, is described as well, to round out her argument. For her part, she talks about how she and her folks have to 'collect firewood or do other work so that we may survive' if there's no other job available. She then explains the labour done by other 'backward' castes, and adds that it is only those from her community who have to 'work so hard'.. This is the place where the truth may be heard. Her belief that hard work and other menial labour are exclusively for those who desire to work hard is presented as oppression of the people. Hard labour is the norm in her family, with her grandmother getting up at 2 a.m. every day to complete household tasks before going to work at the Naicker household where she was a servant and returning home at night. Rather of describing her grandmother's work, the author instead focuses on the way she carried out her obligations to her masters and the family she was a part of. It is interesting to note that Bama's writing relies on simplicity and, curiously for someone typically seen as non-literary or even unpleasant, she more frequently expresses her points with an almost ambiguous indirectness, confirming her abilities as a brilliant writer. Bama also mentions her grandmother in Chapter Two, where she recalls how the family for which she worked behaved and looked down on their servant. Bama's grandma. That her grandmother's event and actions had a rippling effect on her own inner-self is the reason why she feels more connected to her own identity. While describing her early years of working hard to support the family's little income, Bama's storytelling approach can be seen in the manner she continues the storey. This is the point at which she begins to express her feelings of being exploited by the Naicker business owners and the Nadar traders. "All the time I went to work for the Naickers, I understood I should never touch their things or chattels; I should

never get close to where they were, and always stand away to one side," she says again of the untouchable norms she had learned to maintain throughout her life.

For the Dalits, going to school was always a pipe dream. A few paragraphs later, she discusses her convent education, where she had no obligation other than to eat and study: "I ate my meals and I studied; that was all." During her time off, she claims she "performed all the tasks that fell to me normally," so it's not as if she developed a disdain for hard labour. Afterwards, she expresses her happiness and discusses how much she loved the effort. As a result of this constant labour, she explains, the Dalits are forced to rely on it in order to survive. In addition, she points out that men and women are discriminated against when it comes to even these low-paying jobs. They are nonetheless cheery and appear to accept this hard existence unconditionally, she points out, after pointing out that the upper-caste society could not survive without this labour from the lower castes. Finally, Bama ends his speech with a sombre tone, pointing out that even youngsters are forced to labour in industries rather than attend school.

There are no other ways for Dalits to escape the cycle of exploitation but to go to school, and Bama's method emphasises her point about the importance of hard physical labour in their life from infancy until death, as well as their sole chance to escape the cycle through education. This first chapter confirms that the book is a collection of Bama's own views on her life, spanning from her youth until her eventual departure from the convent. That order was formed by a woman who had a heart for the poor and the downtrodden, and Bama's experiences in it are the subject of this chapter. The nuns, on the other hand, ran as usual with little notice or concern. 'I was born a Dalit girl in a tiny town in rural India' shows Bama's fundamental identification as a Dalit and a lady from rural India. From her vantage point, she sees the convent as inadequate and inattentive. Rather than the church's portrayal of poverty and the hardship she had experienced in her childhood, she discovers a lavish lifestyle in the church. She mentions the unusual, expensive, and opulent meals, as well as the enormous scale of the structures. There is a disconnect between the church and her community, which made up the majority of the congregation. She felt as out of place as if she were in an upper-caste family there, and she was devastated. Congregational hierarchies were also prevalent in the convent. She came to terms with the fact that the serving nuns had their eyes firmly fixed on things inside the church and had little interest in assisting the country or the destitute outside of it. The church placed a high priority on the money and power of the upper classes. At least according to Bama's account, the convent's education was no better.

For the most part, Bama focuses on how the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience that nuns were had to take really distanced them from everyday life and "placed them at a tremendous distance, as if they belonged to a foreign universe". The monastery was isolated from the outside world and had little empathy or compassion for the disadvantaged. The nuns were 'ensconced in a cocoon of safety'. 'Obedience' is especially offensive to Bama since it is used to control nuns and keep them docile, even in the face of injustice or insensitivity, as well as their own personal vows to the order. Because she was taught to develop obedience

and faith, Bama was compelled to serve the wealthy rather than the needy. Bama saw a discrepancy between what was spoken and what was done in the church. As she puts it, the instruction that the nuns received had no bearing on the life they were forced to lead thereafter. Nuns who struggled to fit in were informed that they lacked the requisite calling. It is Bama's strong belief that the church had no relation to the actual reality in India; the authorities had been "indoctrinated throughout their studies in Europe and America." The convent not only didn't know anything about Dalits, but they also made insulting remarks about them in their sermons. Bama was transferred five times in a month after working at the same school for three years. She returned to the world of socioeconomic injustice and struggle after another five months at a wealthy children's school, which was the exact opposite of what Bama had thought the church would do for her. Focused reflections refer to the church's dominance over its nuns and how the very Christian values that are intended to drive its good work among the people are utilised to force and dominate individuals who have received holy vows to serve the church and the people. She expresses some of the other nuns' views on Dalits and is enraged by the church's commodification of ethics and the difficulties of serving the community from within.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In Bama's *Karukku*, the author's thoughts on the Church and her people's suffering are just as important as the storey of her Dalit village. As a Dalit, she feels much more marginalised because of her gender and faith. As a Dalit woman, she writes about what it's like to be a Dalit woman in her community and encourages other women to do the same. In the same way that her being a woman and a feminist obscures her position as a Dalit, her gender confuses her Dalit identity. *Karukku* is a groundbreaking study that examines the many elements of Dalit exploitation, namely that of the Paraiyars in Tamil Nadu, both inside and by the Church. It is important to note that Dalit conversions to other religions are often done as a group, rooted in a specific area. As a result, their caste identity is sadly carried over into the new religion. Converts from upper-caste families, on the other hand, appear to carry caste prejudices into their new religious identities. Throughout India, caste practises and biases are evident in all of the country's major religious traditions. The Dalits appear to have no answers to their problems, whether they be religious or constitutional. After the book's release, many in Bama's own community expressed their displeasure. After its release, *Karukku* caused quite a commotion in Tamil literary circles, but it also signalled a new era in Tamil Dalit culture by allowing the voiceless to make their voices known in the public arena. Because Bama spoke in the Tamil vernacular rather than a standardised language, the text was easier to understand. Rather than merely reporting speech, Bama has used demotic and colloquial language as a means of narrative and even argument. She breaks the laws of written language and spelling throughout, eliding words and combining them in a different way, requiring a new and unusual reading pattern. She establishes a boundary." Due of its stylistic corpus approaches, the style she selected is particularly difficult to translate into English.

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