



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2014; 1(1): 458-459
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 24-10-2014
Accepted: 29-11-2014

Rashmi Agrawal
Assistant Professor,
Department of English, Govt.
V.S.P.A. Sanskrit College,
Kota, Rajasthan, India

Dalit representation in Bama's *Karukku*

Rashmi Agrawal

Abstract

Dalit issue and Dalit feminism has received an authentic recognition in Bama's book *Karukku* and the presentation of Dalit consciousness by Bama has made a momentous impact in Indian English literature. Bama was highly influenced by the stalwart leader of Dalits, Dr B.R. Ambedkar and this subjectivity is well perceptible in her thought provoking writings. Bama invokes Dalit victimhood through her characters and vibrantly records the curse of the caste system that has crippled the Indian society. This paper analyses the perspective of Bama while she projects the ill-treated and oppressed section of the society and the resulting trauma with which they suffer. The evils of untouchability and caste discrimination have been dealt with an autobiographical note. In an informal speech style the non-fictional book addresses the readers closely and shares the predicament of Dalits without highlighting her personal details. The book is written in a unique narrative style and a colloquial language which makes it more appealing and touching. It presents how the author herself gradually realises her being different from the upper class, upper caste Tamil and this being the reason of her constant humiliation and oppression. Even the state machinery is instrumental in perpetuating the victimhood of Dalits and the animosity between communities.

Keywords: Autobiographical, oppression, discrimination

Introduction

Karukku is a realistic story as the characters have risen from author's personal anguish and desire to express her own feelings and experiences. It presents the injustices and the atrocities done by the upper class towards the dalits. They are humiliated and treated as untouchables at the hands of the higher castes. The inhumanity and ugliness of the caste system is well reflected in the oppression and exploitation of the Dalits through the diverse characters of *Karukku*. Bama is a distinguished Dalit writer who believes Dalits to be that section of the society who are crushed and ill-treated and to take the liberty to do so, they are brought under one name, Dalits. They are discriminated and denied the freedom to live life as per their own choice. The stereotypical notions of purity and pollution which are deep rooted in the Indian society fire the caste-ridden mentality and bedecks the nomenclature of untouchable. All this leads to disconcerted existence of the Dalits pining for an unmitigated presence in the society.

Karukku, originally written in Tamil, is a study of poverty stricken, wretched life of Dalits. It acquaints the readers with the position of Dalits who are deprived of their rights and their identity by the upper caste people. The novelist is fully conscious that they suffer for their being Dalits and nobody cares for their lives. They are kept physically away from the mainstream and are pushed to the lowest rung of society. They are treated marginally, unequally and are deprived of even basic human rights and facilities. The author experiences humiliation since childhood and relates her heart throbbing tale and graphically presents the helplessness of individuals to resolve the conflict that exist at individual as well as societal levels. The in-depth realities of Paraya men and women have been presented who are unable to overcome the pains of poverty and untouchability despite working hard. The protagonist suffers from some or the other sort of traditional or patriarchal sufferings at every stage of life. Bama imagines herself to be a bird whose wings have been cut still she aspires to fly freely. As a dalit and that also a woman specifically her suffering is enhanced. Bama says in the novel: "In this society if you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste difference does not disappear.....If you are born into a low caste, every moment of your life is a moment of struggle".(26,27)

Correspondence Author:
Rashmi Agrawal
Assistant Professor,
Department of English, Govt.
V.S.P.A. Sanskrit College,
Kota, Rajasthan, India

Bama, who belongs to the Paraya caste faced social discrimination since a very young age when she did not even understand the meaning of the word caste or untouchable. She relates an incident when she was in the third standard, an elderly person in their village was asked to bring some Vadai's on the condition that he should not touch them. Thus he had to fetch those vadai's on strings and everyone laughed at him hysterically. When Bama was told by her brother the reason for this humiliation she was deeply touched and hurt. She was then motivated by her brother to perform so well in class that she earns the respect of everyone, even the high caste girls and Bama did so. In her village the caste elements were very dominant and the upper caste people openly displayed their disregard and servitude towards the lower caste groups. The dalit women suffered from cultural harassment in the society as well as the existing patriarchy at their homes making them the biggest victims of the system. The higher caste groups in Bama's were Naicker, Nadar, Thevar, Aasaari etc. When Bama saw the Pariya elders bowing before and showing respect to even Naicker children she identified with the collective fate of her community. She states how the idea of caste, race and gender is perpetuated in the society. Parayas were not allowed even to touch the Naickers. The Naickers were the landowners and therefore enjoyed all the rights to employ the Pariyas as labourers. The Pariyas therefore were in no situation to argue or go against the wishes of the Naickers. Dalits had to spend their lives in poverty and hunger accepting the meagre wages given by the upper caste. They had to clean wastage at their homes as well as suffer from physical as well as mental torture of the upper caste without any resistance. The dalits had to stay in particular areas and were forbidden to move freely in the areas where upper caste people dwelt. They had minimum sources of survival, be it food or land. The Dalits were kept economically dependent on the upper caste so that they would continue to serve them throughout their life and for generations. The struggle for survival leave them no scope to make efforts for social justice and equality.

An ultimate power is assumed by the upper caste over the dalits. They lack concern towards their age or physical ability. Bama's both grandmothers worked as labourers for Naicker families. They did cleaning for them, collected dung and dirt and brought the leftover food home when they returned late in the evening. This hectic routine again started the next day early in the morning. In exchange for the service provided by them they had to accept whatever their employers gave them with gratitude and satisfaction as it was the only way to fill their empty stomachs. It was the question of hunger and survival. They were even verbally abused and had to suffer from all kind of atrocities done to them. Pushed to marginalised positions by various caste based forces they did not dare even dream about their separate identity. They knew the result of any revolt would be joblessness. This fear forces them to remain silent. Bama narrates how the children's games were also conditioned by their surroundings and treatment. They played the role of oppressor belonging to upper caste and the oppressed labourer of low caste in games which reflects the insecurity of the dalits since childhood. When Bama embraced sisterhood and she became a nun she was pained to see that the underlying discrimination took place even in the convents. She later left the job as she could not accept the behaviour that she was subjected to by the elite who dominated the convent. She was repetitively reminded of being a low caste female and felt offended.

Bama believes that the empowerment of dalits is possible only through their proper education, economic development and reservations for them. The caste barriers should be taken down by reducing the economic gap between groups. The Dalit subgroups need to be united and get political support to establish an identity for themselves of which they may be proud. They need to be in a position where higher caste people would not think of ill-treating them. They need to be strict rules which restrict the ill-treatment of any human based on the caste system. Caste is a monster that can be killed with the weapons of education and consciousness.

References

1. Bama, Karukku, trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom. Macmillan India Limited; c2000.
2. Jogchand PG. Dalit Women. Gyan Publishing House; c2013.
3. Kothari, Rajni. Caste in Indian Politics. Orient Blackswan; c2010.
4. Kumar, Raj. Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity. Orient Blackswan; c2010.
5. Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. Feminism without Borders. Duke University Press; c2003.