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Caste Discrimination in Bama's "Karukku"

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ABSTRACT

This paper focused on a content analysis of the translated tamil fiction, "KARUKKU" by Bama, "Karukku" structured like a novel besides being an "autobiographical intervention as a speech act". Most of her novels are autobiographical works. "Karukku" besides being a projection of the intersection of gender, caste and class. Bama has suffered multiple hegemonies as a dalit woman, and therefore poor and as a Christian Indian. The autobiography has several stories embedded in the narrative as a pointer to the patriarchal oppression of women.

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Introduction

Untouchability, the worst form of social oppression existed in India unsolved since time immemorial. Historians and anthropologists trace the genealogy of caste and untouchability to the Rig Veda of the Hindu religion. According to Rig Veda the Brahmin (Priestly class) was born from mouth of Brahma, (a Hindu God), and therefore they are expected to be respected by the rest of the people. Kshatriya (warrior class) is believed to have born from the shoulders, Vishay (agricultural and mercantile class) from the thighs, and Shudra (menial class) from the feet of Brahma. The division of labour in India, which is based on caste hierarchy, is believed to have taken its roots in the Hindu Mythology. Some of the anthropologists claim that it is the beef eating culture of the serving class that alienated them from the mainstream society. The other argument that has been put forward is the western version which says that the people who created this Vedic literature belonged to the Aryan race. The Aryan race came from outside India and they invaded India. The Aryans are white in complexion and the original inhabitants are dark in complexion. Aryans conquered the original inhabitants (Dasas and Dasyus) and enslaved them in the name of caste and degraded them as shudras.

Untouchables, usually known by degrading names such as Koravar, Kusavar, Chakkiliyar, Pallar, Parayar and so on (Specifically in Tamil Nadu), were dehumanized by the caste Hindus. Caste Subalterns' efforts to overturn prevailing relations of caste and community through the creative transformation of existing social categories and practices challenged caste Hinduism and the privileged. Dalit emancipation was predicated on the existential, political, literary, and ethical reordering of Indian Society, but it also presupposed the imagination of the Dalit as a specific kind of caste identity and a political category. Dalit is a name for a community and an identity of a new subject in the making. To call oneself Dalit, literally meaning 'ground down', or 'broken to pieces' or 'crushed', is to convert a negative description into a confrontational identity. Dalit history traces the paradoxical manner in which an identity predicated on a future outside or beyond caste was conceived with historical

humiliation and suffering as its enabling ground. "Karukku", Bama's first autobiographical novel, means double edged sword, in one side she talks about her belief of Catholic Church, in another side she gradually realizes herself as a Dalit.

"Most of the land belonged to the Naicker community. Each Naicker's fields were spread over many miles". (P.6)

The farmlands belonged to the upper caste people. The lower caste people don't have the farmlands; the village has number of community streets. If any work is available in upper caste people's house, the lower caste people have to go there and find out. Those upper caste people never entered to the lower caste people place because they thought, they are untouchables. These upper caste people have marginalized the dalit people. All the facilities available only in the upper caste people street, not in the lower caste. The children are always used the bare bottomed, both boys and girls. In the water tap people are always fighting for the water, which shows the pity of the poor people.

"The elder went straight up to the Naicker, bowed low and extended the packet towards him, cupping the hand that held the string with is other hand". (P.15)

When Bama was studying third standard in elementary school, she never heard of "untouchability". When she entered the school, she felt and experienced. One day Bama had seen Naicker at his house. When all Bama's neighbour's were doing all hard works. Naicker was sitting in his chair, an elder person, who belongs to Bama's street, is considered as respected one. When he had been carrying tea and vadai or bhajji from the tea stall to the Naicker's house. The person has bent himself and gave tea, vadai to naicker. Bama laughed herself.

"The Naicker women would pour out the water from a height of four feet, while paatti and the others received and drank it with cupped hands help to their Mouths". (P.16)

Bama said this incident to her elder brother with comic detail; her brother is an M.A. Graduate. Her brother replied that they belong to low caste Paraya community, and they belong in upper caste, if they touch us they would be polluted. Some

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important elders of Bama's street goes for work at Naicker's house, the upper caste people used to give some old foods and other eatable items to them; they get it and bring it to their children. One day Bama went with her grandmother to the Naicker's house.

Where Bama's grandmother does all the hardworks, after Naicker women has given water to her grandmother in abnormal way, Bama felt terrible to watch it. She thought that her grandmother bought the foods from the Naicker house, which are not unwanted. But later she has realized that all the things are unwanted. So the Naicker woman has given all these things to Bama's grandmother. When Bama asked her grandmother, why are you collecting these unwanted things, her grandmother replies to Bama don't say like that, they are superior to us, they are upper caste people, and we are lower caste.

"These people are Maharajas who feed us our rice. Without them, how will we survive?" (P.17)

Bama's elder brother has completed his degree M.A. Once he went to the public library, where, Naicker was there for reading Newspaper. By the appearance of Bama's elder brother, he can't identify him. Naicker ask's his name. Bama's brother replied, Naicker can't be identified. Again another man asked him, in which street are you coming from? Bama's elder brother replied sharply "I am coming from Paraya Stret". Naicker gets furious. Who is this guy not answering properly, who don't know to respect the people. Another man mentioning to Naicker about Bama's grandmother. Oh that is our Rakkamma's grandson, on next day Bama's grandmother went to Naicker's house for work. When Naicker says everything to Rakkamma, your grandson is an arrogant person. Who doesn't know the respect. Bama's Paatti handled this situation, ayya just you excuse it, he got little bit education. When Bama's elder brother heard it, he laughed. Even Bama's elder brother told the importance of education. Once he visited to the public library. In the register column, he wrote his name with Qualification M.A., suddenly the librarian stood and offered him the chair. When her elder brother says, that he is from cheri street, these kind of respect, honour is prohibited. So, Bama's elder brother says to her, you were born in Paraya Jati, so you should studywell and get good marks in your subjects gradually everyone will honour you. So, Bama got inspiring words from her elder brother. She studied well and got first rank in her class.

If any wrong incident happen in school or class. The scope always goes to cheri children, about the three-quarters of the children in the school were pallar and parayar. The church school was built on Nadar Street. They give all kind of menial work; we are carrying the water for teacher's house and school. When, Bama was studying seventh standard, after the end of class, every day evening she used to play with her relative students. One day they are playing on the big neem tree, after they play another game, student run fast towards the coconut tree, with that speed they touch growing coconut, everyone has touch coconut. When Bama's turn she also touched the coconut, which felt down.

"All the children were frightened everyone said that Bama had plucked the coconut". (P.19)

In the next day at the assembly time the school headmaster has called Bama and scolded her, that she shown her true nature

of Parraya. You only climbed the tree and plucked the coconut. So he doesn't allow Bama to enter the classroom. At the time there was a fight between chaaliyar caste and paraya. The Headmaster belongs to chaaliyar caste. When one of Bama's school teachers lived at Bama's street, she advised Bama to get letter from the church priest, the headmaster will allow you to enter the class. But the priest's reaction also different, after all you are from the cheri street, resolutely you have done it, finally priest wrote a letter to the headmaster for permission. Then the headmaster allowed Bama to enter the class, when he used bad words on her community.

After completion of her secondary education she, joined Nineth standard at neighbouring town, where she was staying in hostel. There was holiday time, Bama used to travel in the town bus, when the Naicker woman, was sitting beside Bama. When she asked Bama's name and her native place. Bama said her name and native place. Again the Naicker women asked in that village which street Bama belongs. Bama says that she is living in cheri street. Suddenly Naicker women moved to another place.

Bama joined as a Mathematics teacher in one of the schools. In that school a nun has asked if Bama was a Nadar? After the completion of B.ed. When Bama replied herself as a Parayar. The Nun has showed different expression at her face, even now if Bama remembers she laughs. Majority of students are Dalits. They showed great affection on Bama. She takes classes in good way. Most of the nuns are Telugu people. They won't take care of Dalit students, they oppressed the Dalit students. So Bama decided herself to become nun, then only can serve for the Dalit students, finally Bama has resigned the teaching post and entered to a religious order.

In "Karukku" Bama portrayed the oppression of Dalit's life. How they are discriminated by the upper caste people, even Bama also discriminated in many places. Finally she didn't give solution for these problems in her first autobiography work "Karukku". As an educated women, who failed in the society (she loses her teaching profession). Bama showed her anger through her work, she doesn't protest against in the public place. By caste discrimination Bama failed in society.

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