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## “KARUKKU” THROUGH WRITER’S LENS: INCREDIBLE RESILIENCE IN BAMA’S LIFE AS A CHRISTIAN DALIT

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**Abstract:** The genre of life writing was proliferated as a significant module of Dalit literature in India after the publication of few Dalit writers work in Marathi language. As an outset, Dalits chose the genre autobiography as a best literary tool to thunder their unfulfilled hopes. Ever then, the genre of life writing by marginalized writers became popular and witnessed the zenith of literary and linguistic agglomeration in many regional languages. Marginalized writers don't tag on any meticulous literary conventions, they have their unique style of writing in demanding deliverance through Dalit literature. In fact, Bama's *Karukku* has agitated the Tamil literary clique after her book publication. Naturally she has used idiomatic lexicon as a medium of narration by contravening the grammar rules and has set a different pattern of reading in the history of Tamil Dalit literature. *Karukku's* translator Lakshmi Holmstrom found extremely difficult to translate the text into English because of its “agglutinative” structure. This paper repositions Bama's *Karukku* as autoethnography and the narrative techniques which depicts the lifestyle of Christian Tamil Dalit from the southern Tamilnadu.

**Keywords:** Autoethnography, agglutinative, linguistic agglomeration, marginalized.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Faustina Mary Fathima Rani, hailed from Roman Catholic family is better known by her penname Bama, began to be noticed as a eulogized writer after the publication of *Karukku* in the year 1992. As a teacher, Dalit writer and Tamil Dalit feminist, she takes the accountability to pen down the marginalization of Dalit women in the hands of upper caste, patriarchal oppression, poverty, inequality, self-respect, class, and religion. Her brother Raj Gowthaman, who is an instigator to new-fangled approaches to Tamil cultural and literature in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century is her inciter and inspirer of her life.

Bama had a strong propensity towards Jesus Christ. This made her to become a nun. Her seven years as a nun life dejected her from what she believed to be the Christianity by speculating how the Dalit children were treated inhumanity by the nuns; she felt bizarrely and totally perturbed. She decided to leave her religious order inspite of knowing the consequences she would face in future from her family and the society. Her mother was ready to accept her when she failed to follow the solemn vow but her father forbade her due to the societal discredit that she brought to her family.

Bama decided to inscribe her autobiography when she left behind her life of renunciation and stepped into the world of reality. She felt that it is her allegiance to narrate the reminiscence of her own people. At first she started to write *Karukku* to cure her own gashes that she faced right from her childhood and she insisted other than that she had no motive when she unceremoniously drafted her reminiscence. When her autobiography was published, she received remarks and censure from different kinds of people. Some of the mainstream writer did not accept her writing in the beginning. But many of the same kind people elated and eulogized for producing new categorization of writing. Literary critics acknowledged it as a new genre in Tamil Literature.

To Bama's surprise her own community did not understand her writing and they forbidden her away from the village for six months. Her father was irate on what she had done though he strongly believed education is the only source to that helps the oppressed class to situate on their own feet. When her book got published a scene was generated as if she had perpetrated a colossal misdeed. Her own coteries were against her for bringing their issues to the public eye and place them down by expressing their lifestyle in a menial way. Bama felt pathetic for her own people of not knowing that her writing has drawn attention to her community by raising her voice and taking a stand against the status quo. She strongly believed that her writing alone can help to unmask the caste and gender stereotypes in the literature.

The autobiography *Karukku* can be seen as autoethnography genre of writing as it investigates in a wider context the cultural and placing the individual in social context. *Karukku* is a perfect example of autoethnography as it incorporates their personal experience with the Tamil socio cultural environment.

## II. NECESSITATE FOR THE INTENSIVE STUDY OF KARUKKU:

It's been over two decades after publishing *Karukku* but still the researchers try to find the factual elucidation of Bama's *Karukku* through the writer's lens. For generation the stories of the lower caste Hindu groups we have heard are depicted only by the patricians, the upper-class people. It was only after the Ambedkar movement for Dalit we could see the chronicle told by them narrating their physical soreness, toil, endeavor and misery that they face in their day to day life. The text written by Dalit writers prove to be a testimony, the victims are the characters and it becomes an aftermath statement.

The life in post independent India in *Karukku* represents the corporeal and unwritten viciousness portraying the disquieting of the maltreated community. Though it's been decades after independence still we can witness the stratification in the Indian society. To say in a positive note to some extent the Dalits have attained their "status" in the society due to various manoeuvres carried out by Dalit and the changes brought in India constitution. If it has to answer the question whether they have attained the "equality", the answer may be "no" it is an accepted fact. Suraj Yengde a young Dalit activist and contemporary renowned scholar of caste say the Dalits have attained the status but not the equality in the society. It may take even centuries to reform the present social stratification. How does this reform happen? It happens only by doing out research, debate, speaking up in public conferences, seminars and investigating the atrocities on Dalits. As a result, the marginal writers try to steadfastness the occurrence of repression by investigating the nuances of subaltern culture in the form of poetry, novel, and autobiographies.

## III. MARGINALIZED NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Dalit literature made a daunting entry in the mainstream literature in 1970's by constituting the primordial lingo by exhorting new actuality and new forms of writing. Slowly then on it spread to other amalgamation in Tamil, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Kanadam, Telugu, Malyalam which have witnessed the peak of Dalit literary productions. The research scholars indicate that these kinds of writings existed in earlier centuries, but it marked its uniqueness on the mythical map only since late 1970's.

The history of literature is the historical growth of writing in the genre of prose, poetry, novel and drama that attempt to provide entertainment, enlightenment, or instruction to the readers. From then it slowly developed the genre of autobiography. Autobiography as a part of the literary genre has helped many writers to express their personal life in the public domain. One of the best ways to understand the context of any text is literary techniques implied by the writer. Every writer chooses their own perspective to narrate the story. The writers reflect the customary communal happening and principles through literature that is found in the concerned society they belong to.

As educators it is certainly to believe the verity that writing is a necessary job skill. To accustom this skill is not that effortless. A good reader becomes a good writer. A person who reads a lot enriches his or her vocabularies, writing style, set goals, feels stress-free, improves memory and have strong analytical thinking skill. For many reasons people write. They write for a job, fun, to share messages, opinions, ideas, suggestions, feedbacks, for relaxation, to inspire, motivate, and guide others. Bama as a writer

#### IV. KARUKKU THROUGH BAMA'S LENS

**Settings:** The narrative setting of Karukku is Tamilnadu. Here, Bama representing of her village is relatively dissimilar from other Dalit writers. It looks like to have poetical fictional languages. Her village surrounding is portrayed as "At dawn and at dusk, the eastern and western skies are splendid to see. When we used to go out in the early morning to relieve ourselves, a bright red sun, huge and round, would wake up in the east and climb into the sky" (5). Her narrative is not a self subject 'I' here but amalgamated 'we'. The spatial division of domicile points out how expediently the upper caste has set their contiguous. The first few pages describe the topography of her village. We get a screening of the whole society before we are introduced to the protagonist. The first four pages completely brings out the setting and descriptions of the village.

**Plot:** Being born and brought up from a Dalit Roman Catholic family Bama countenanced assortment of caste unfairness from her childhood. She was constantly presaged by her brother to grasp firm on education which would uplift her in the society. She struggled a lot to attain education. She became a nun and a teacher in a convent. Her dream was toppled when she joined as a teacher in a convent. She lingered to be as a hushed bystander watching the bigotry that was prearranged to her own community kids in the convent. She was frightened to voice for those voiceless kids as her caste would come to limelight. As a result, she left her religious order and stood in the same point where she started her life.

**Style:** A vast difference is found between the narrative style of a mainstream writer and marginalized writer. The mainstream writers use opulent languages whereas the marginalized writers use the language of everyday life without any gratuitous facelift. Bama being a marginalized writer and reside participant in karukku records her characters who speaks indecent language in in the public domain with ease. Her style strongly reveals her usage of regional dialects, colloquial language and slangs of her folk. She has used the Dalit style of language which reverses the etiquette and aesthetics of the upper caste. The story is non-linear and express the real trauma in a righteous context. It's not the story of one protagonist but the story of community. She uses 'We' instead of 'I', 'Our' instead of 'My' in the necessary places where she has to highlight the suffering of her community. She stands as a witnessing figure of her community suffering and calls upon readers to embark on "oratorical listening" as secondary witnesses.

**Point of view:** Karukku was not the story of Bama's alone. A sense of collective life aroused through the individual story. She wanted to up bring the entire atrocities of upper caste towards Dalit predominately on the Paraiyar caste from Tamilnadu in a single book. She took a dare step to highlight the religious preeminence of the Roman Catholic in abbey and the convent school where she worked as a teacher when she came out from her vows. Her writings consented to find herself as a Christian Dalit Woman.

**Perspective:** There are much more humiliating experiences faced by Bama. She shares her pain and anguish through these incidents She evidently point out how the society treats Dalit in public. Once an upper caste woman moved away from her in the bus after hearing that she is from "Cheri". She happened to face such sort of affront now and then in public. When she recorded these things, she was not valued for her work instead she was questioned and scolded by her own community. Her perspective was not to grumble or grouse about the upper caste people instead she wrote it for her satisfaction, as healing for her suffering as Dalit Christian women.

**Theme:** Education, and the difference it makes to the marginalised sections of society, is a theme that is explored through different perspectives in *Karukku* as well. The central theme of her text brings out that education is the only factor that empowers and strengthens her community. Bama being born in Paraya community she and her family never received any respect amongst the uppercaste people. Her brother insisted her to hold tight on education as it is the only source to uplift her and her community. Her entire life writing revolves around her attainment of education in school and college. As researcher, I felt Bama failed to be an eyeopener of her people though she received education and good job. She hesitates to reveal her caste in the midst of uppercaste. But she must be appreciated for the daring step that took in the later stage of her life in recording her humiliations and mortifications as autobiography.

**Humour:** She highlights some of the games that played during her childhood with in later seems to be funny that relates the imitation of uppercaste people and their community people. She also lists some of the nicknames that is specially given to her community people. As a young Bama once she saw an old man who carrying the vada and a bhajji that he bought from a tea shop in a string. She felt ridiculous by seeing the old man. It was narrated to her elder brother in a comic tone which in turn he didn't express any happy sign. He explained to young Bama that the old man belongs to Paraya caste and therefore he should not touch the upper caste. In order he carried the snacks package to Naicker in a string. After she heard from his brother the scene, she found to be hilarious has toppled.

**Literary Device:** The title *Karukku* is a titular 'metaphor'. Here *Karukku* symbolizes the palmyra leaves. This leaves have sharp edges on both the sides like a double-edged sword. Similarly, she compares the image "Karukku" as a sharp edge weapon that cut through the ascendant system. It reveals the wounds of her and her Paraya Community wreaked through caste discrimination for centuries. The title "Karukku" also carries a propitious 'pun' which refers to the embryo or the seed which means new or fresh. For the first time in tamil *Karukku* opens up new opportunities to avoid supremacy power structures through self-preferment and liberation.

## V. CONCLUSION:

A big salute to the translation studies for bringing out the visibility of some Dalit writers (marginalized as well as regional writers) from different region. Bama is one amongst them. One can see triple marginalization in the text. First as a woman, second as a Dalit and third as a Christian. It describes the life experience of Christian dalit within the cathoic church and the society. She uses mythology, illusion, auto ethnography, foretelling style, and nostalgia to narrate the marginalized community that has been denied the right to narrate. Bama is not interested in portraying charming illustrations of the Dalit Christian culture; instead she investigates the convoluted uniqueness of the community which is facilitated by caste, religion and gender, from a critical perspective.

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