

Autobiography of Bama Faustina: A Study of Fourth World Literature

Manushree^{1*}, Navratan Singh²

¹Research Scholar, Department of English and Other Foreign Language, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth University, Varanasi, India

²Associate Professor, Department of English and Other Foreign Language, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth University, Varanasi, India

Abstract: Fourth World literature deals with the writings of indigenous peoples living in lands occupied by non-indigenous peoples. Fourth world literature has emerged as a diverse and universal field of study, characterized by a flourishing linguistic consciousness. The term Fourth World comes from a statement made by Tanzanian High Commission First Secretary but Milano in a conversation with George Manuel. Chief of the National Indian Brotherhood of Canada, Milando said, "If indigenous peoples entered their own world based on their own culture and traditions, this would be the Fourth World." It emphasizes the disapproval and exclusion of ethnically and religiously defined people from the political and economic world system. In the Fourth-World Literature, it is imperative to talk about certain burning issues in the lives of those who are always suppressed and kept at margin in social, political and cultural aspect, they are known by the name of Dalit in India. Dalit literature and the world of imagination are far apart, it is all about the miseries, sorrows and insult of underdogs who are not considered as human beings with flesh and blood. Realism is the stuff of Dalit Literature. This paper attempts to deal with the Subjugation and Oppression of Dalit women in Bama Faustina's *Karukku* and how it creates its space in the genre of fourth world literature. It will analyze how Dalit women are exploited both inside the four-walls of their domestic life as well as in the society. They have been subjugated as women, dalit, and poor. In Bama's opinion nothing can remove the tag of untouchability except education. Education is the only key that can lay any door open for dalit. Otherwise, caste becomes prevalent with the birth and lingered on till death. In other words, caste system in India is as old as mankind itself and it is very tough task to abolish it at all levels. Bama, after her conversion to Christianity, found no difference in discrimination inside the Church. But this paper will also throw light on the steps taken by protagonist who retaliated through the power of pen. Through her strong will power she demonstrated great deal of resistance against age-old discrimination and exploitation and created a literature of resistance.

Keywords: Dalits, Discrimination, Education, Literature of resistance, Caste, Poverty, Gender, Fourth World.

1. Introduction and Discussion

The caste system in India has isolated innumerable Dalits, from mainstream of life. The caste system in India is built on the standard of purity and impurity. Purity means rich and white, impurity means poor and dark.

"Dalit" is a Marathi word derived from Sanskrit "dala" meaning of the soil or the earth. Another meaning is "that which

is rooted in the soil". In other terms Dalit means broken, oppressed, untouchable, downtrodden, and exploited. Caste as a structure is an age-old mechanism of hierarchy based on social constructs, economic manipulation, political power and cultural supremacy of a particular class of people, who are believed to be higher in the ladder than others. When we talk about Fourth-World literature it means we are going, one way or the other, to have something about Dalit literature in it. Unlike other genres of literature it encompasses authenticity and realistic touch at large. "Dalit literature is experienced-based. This "anubhava" (experience) takes precedence over "anumana" (speculation). Thus, to Dalit writers, history is not illusionary or unreal as Hindu metaphysical theory may make one believe. That is why authenticity and liveliness have become hallmarks of Dalit Literature. These writers make use of language of the outcasts and under-privileged in Indian society.

Shame, anger, sorrow, and indomitable hope are the stuff of Dalit Literature, Because of the anger against the age-old oppression, the expression of the Dalit writers have become sharp." -Dr. Jugal Kishore Mishra.

Karukku is the first autobiography written by a Dalit Christian woman. Bama wrote this book to serve her sole purpose i.e., to get rid of the psychological trauma and to heal her wounded self, right from the childhood (written with a purpose of purgation).

"...I left behind my life of renunciation and came out into the world. After that, I wrote my book *Karukku*. That book was written as a means of healing my inward wounds; I had no other motive."

Karukku came into the attention of national and international readers as well as writers, when Bama won the Crossword Award for *Karukku* in the year 2001. This autobiography is a narrative of three-fold subjugation of Dalit Christian women. Bama is the spokesperson of all the Dalit women, especially of converted Christian who, inspite of conversion into Christianity, suffered at three levels: as women, as dalit and as poor. By portraying her insults and agony, Bama gives an accurate picture of social as well as historical India. the main concern of Dalit women writers is not only confine to colour, creed or gender discrimination but to liberate themselves from the age-old suppression and slavery. That's what struck to Bama after her experience as a dalit, as a woman and as a nun

during her stay at convent. In *Karukku* she has depicted all such incidents where she has experienced exploitation and suppression of Dalit women. There she realized that dalit women are subjugated or under-yoked almost in every sphere of life.

Dalits, who are placed at the bottom of the caste-order, are pushed into the periphery at social, cultural, political and economic level in Indian, especially, Hindu society. Bama is one of the prominent Dalit writers who highlighted the plight of Dalits of paraiya community in general and the women in particular. *Karukku* focuses on the various aspects of paraiya community such as caste, gender, poverty and religion that caused a great pain in Bama's personal life. The book describes Bama's life from childhood to adulthood. She has witnessed caste discrimination very early at the time when she was in third standard. She saw an elderly man carries a package without touching it.

"...He came along holding out the packet by its string, without touching it. I stood there thinking to myself, if he holds it like that, won't the package undone, and vadai fall out? The elder went straight up to the Naicker, bowed low and extended the packet towards him, cupping the hand. Naicker opened the parcel and began to eat the "vadai."

Later, the protagonist understood that she and her community were prohibited by Hinduism and were cursed to remain as poor. Being a poor, Bama used to work in the farm during her school days. She revealed about her experience as a farm worker. Even though she went to school, she worked hard as a labourer for daily wages to meet her expenses. But women were not paid the amount as men were paid. They were denied the wages equal to their male partners. "But of course, they never received a payment that was appropriate to their labour. And another thing. Even if they did the same work, men received one wage, women another. They always paid men more. Bama was baptized when she was in the second class level (at the age of six). However, the legacy of Christianity was brought to light. The nuns used Bama to wash and clean the church and its surroundings. They threatened her with the story of Devil. It made Bama familiar with confession. Therefore, even after conversion to Christianity Dalits were excluded or kept away from the philosophy of egalitarianism which is said to be the basis of Christianity. Throughout her education the narrator finds that wherever she goes, there is a painful reminder of her caste, gender and poverty in the form of untouchability and discrimination. People always remain conscious about the identity especially upper-caste people. Once the identity of a dalit is revealed it creates sudden storm among the upper-caste people. When Bama finished her schooling and went for college education at some distance from her village she thought that at such a big college she would be far from such things, as caste and religion. But after few days, when a Lecturer announced,

"Will Harijan students please stand; the government has arranged that Scheduled Caste students get special tuition in the evening.

At the very moments when the protagonist and other Scheduled Caste students stood up:

"Among the other students, a sudden rustling; a titter of

contempt. I was filled with a sudden rage..."

Not only caste but poverty also played an important role in the ill-fate of Dalit women. When the narrator completed her nun training admitted about various caste discriminations in the Christian institutions. "In that school, attended by pupils from very wealthy households, people of my community were looking after all the jobs like sweeping the premises...cleaning out the lavatories. And in the convent, as well, they spoke very insulting about low-caste people. They spoke as if they didn't consider low-caste people as human beings. They didn't know that I was a low-caste nun..."

Therefore, dalit women, even after conversion into Christianity, are abused, insulted and exploited almost in every walk of life. Bama gives importance to women identity. Women are more vulnerable to the assault by upper-caste people and were restricted from certain freedom. They were not allowed to see movies or walk in the streets with an open face. If any woman moves freely, she will be humiliated, assaulted and sometimes raped by upper-caste men. Teresamma, a dalit poet and a teacher by profession from Guntur, writes: We go to work for we are poor But the same silken beds mock us While we are ravished in broad daylight. Ill-starred our horoscopes are. Even our tottering husbands Lying on the cots in corner Hiss and shouts for revenge If we cannot stand their touch. As she wanted to serve her community especially poor, Bama embraced Christianity. The reason behind mass conversion was to safeguard Dalits from the cruel injustice, discrimination, humiliation and caste bias of the Hindu religion. Dalits think that Christianity would treat them gently. But, quite surprisingly, they found discrimination in the church also. The church labeled Bama as Dalit Christian. When Bama completed her training of a nun with a strong will, at the end of training, a nun sister said, "...in certain order they would not accept Harijan women as perspective nuns and that there was even a separate order for them.

2. Conclusion

Now talking of liberation, Bama thought that education is the only weapon which can be used by Dalit women against all types of exploitations which they experience in village, buses, churches, nun's convent, hostels, recruitments and at so many other institutions as well as other work places. Bama's suffering is the suffering of Dalits throughout India. she comprehends that Dalit women have been forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation both as women, inside the four-walls of their domestic circle and as Dalits, outside in the society. On the one hand, *Karukku* portrays the plight of Dalit women in general and Bama in Particular, as Bama herself told the tale. On the other hand, there are so many other people from her community who wanted to rise up the social ladder and are passionate to create a new society made up of justice, equality, fraternity and love. "They who have been the oppressed, are now themselves like the double-edged *karukku*, Thus, Bama's writing portrays the marginalization and subjugation of Dalit women at social, political, economical and cultural level in India. At the same time her writing celebrates Dalit women's life, resilience and creativity. Bama raises her voice, representing her community,

against the subjugation of women in every sphere of life, their resistance and call for action. It has conveyed a message to the society that not only Truth is victorious but that only the Truth is the Truth, and this is how Bama and her work stand tall in the field of fourth world literature and literature of resistance.

References

- [1] V. Kumar, "Three-fold subjugation and oppression: A study of Bama Faustina's Karukku," in *SSRG International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 4, no. 6, pp. 1-4, 2017.
- [2] Bama Karukku. Trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.
- [3] Limbale, Sharankumar, "Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, controversies, and Consideration," Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2004. Print.
- [4] Navya, V.N A Caste Gender and Resistance: A critical study of Bama's Sangati, SOCRATES 2.1, 2004.