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Condition of Dalit women: An overview in the works of Bama

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Abstract

Bama, a Tamil Dalit writer of India has authored several fine novels based on the theme of ill condition of Dalit women. Her novels include Karukku, Vanmam, Sangati and Kusum Bukkaran are world fame which have brought into light the suppression, depression and marginalization of woman of Dalit class who are thought to be unprivileged class. These women were not only marginalized by the hands of the upper caste but also in their own society. Bama has narrated the tale of exploitation of Dalit women in her works.

Keywords: Plight of Dalit women, exploitation, suppression, depression and unprivileged class

Introduction

Bama has beautifully painted the pitiable condition of Dalit women in her novels. Her novels Karukku, Vanmam, Sangati and Kusum bukkanan are world famous, depict the plight of Dalit women of her own community. The sufferings of Dalit women take place even when they are under infancy period. They are deprived of basic right and they have to live very hard and hot lives.

This is not in the case of boys, "If a boy baby cries, he is instantly picked up and given the milk. It is not so with the girls" (Sangati, P. 17). The difference between a boy and a girl was seen openly by Bama. Bama tells in her novel that these people who differentiate between two sexes can never change their habits even when they are old. In suet a society. "boys are given more respect. They will eat as much as they wish and run off to play. As for the girls, They must stay at home and keep on working all the time....." (ibid, P. 17)

Bama has depicted the condition of Dalit women and their exploitation of the men coming from upper caste. These men, taking advantage of situation, make the women prey to their hands Kumar swami, coming from upper caste, take advantage of a Dalit girl's helplessness and molest her. When this happening comes in the broad day light, he tries to save himself and blames upon the poor Dalit girl Marianma. "When she went innocently to get some water, he seized her hand and pulled her inside and later fearing that his reputation might be in ruins, he hurried to the village and went to complain to the headman of the paraifair community, The Nattamai (ibid, P. 20) This pattern of molesting a Dalit girl by upper cast man has also been depicted by Mulk raj Anand in his novel Untoneheble, in which Kalinath, a priest of the temple does not allow the Dalits to enter inside of the temple but Sohini, the sister of Bakha comes there, Kalinath, with the desire of molesting her allows her come inside the temple thus, The women are sexually exploited in the novel of Bama. But when Kumar swami in summand, without proper trial or investigation the words of the upper cast man were taken blindly" Did the Mudalali lie to us in everything he said? The girl's cry is heard by none and they called her "whore" and "was asked to pay fine Rs. 200" (P. 126)

Bama thinks deeply that only the Dalit women become the subject of prey in the hands of the upper caste. She falls in the surprise why Dalit women alone become the subject of molestation in the cruel clutches of men and society. For this bad deed Bama pains too much in her heart and blames upon the society by saying, Because of our caste and because of our poverty, every fellow treats us with contempt of ever there is a problem or a disturbance, everyone, starting with the police, choose to blame and humiliate the women of our community. (P. 66)

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Bama seems very much worried again for the Dalit women and she thinks that these women easily become the prey in the hands of the evil spirits "Peys" and it does not attack upon men. So it is very humorous that the Dalit women and the women coming from upper caste.

I thought about the fact that only women and Dalit women in particular – become possessed And when I examined the lives of our women, I understood the reason. From the moment they wake up, they set to work both in their homes and in the field. At home they are pestered by their husbands and children; even then they can't go to bed in peace and sleep their husband's pleasure. Even if a women's body is wracked with pain the husband is bothered only with his own satisfaction, women are overwhelmed and crushed by their own disgust, boredom, and exhaustion, because of all this the stronger ones somehow manage to survive all this the one who don't have the mental strength are totally oppressed; they succumb the mental ill health and act as if they are possessed by peys. Our men don't have the same problem. Even if they work really hard, they still have their freedom. They still control their women, rule over them, and find their pleasure within the home, they lay down the law; their word is scripture. (P. 59)

Bama thinks deeply the condition of women that these are women who undergo very hard labour from the beginning. These are the women who take care of the house, please everyone in the family, accept orders given by their husbands yet they don't get a satisfactory standard of living. "They cannot live as per their own wish and desire where as they have to follow the orders of others to please them. She also takes pain that the dowry which is an evil, exits in her own society" But this dowry is given on the side of the groom which is known as "partisan" for the betrothal. She appreciates one practice in her own community that is re-marriage of widow; for this practical no widow is seen in the whole of the society and they live a respectable life.

Bama, in her novel 'Sangate', wants to set up equality between the status of a boy and a girl. She stresses much upon the equal opportunities and sharing of things in equal order. No difference should be there between a male and a female. She wants to root out the differences she, therefore, asks them to treat both "boys and girls a like showing no difference between them as they grow in adults. Girls too must be given full freedom and make them realize their strength. Then she is sure, that" there will come a day when men and women will live as one, with no difference between them; with equal rights. "The injustice, violence and inequalities will come to an end, and women can soundly break" (Ibid, P. 123)

Bama, through her writings, brings into light how the Dalit women are tortured by their husbands. They are being beaten by their husbands even after they work whole day in the fields, razing the cattle and doing all the domestic activities, cooking for a big family. When the tired women deny to their husbands for sex when they are under drunken state, they would beat them mercilessly sexual exploitation of Dalit women at their work place by their owner and at home the same condition by their husbands make the position of women very critical. Gender pressure is the subject of sex-exploitation of women.

We find that Tamil Dalit literature is full of women sufferings. Dalit women were not allowed to entry in the schools or colleges, they were married at the very early age to the husbands much more senior to them in age and in this

way they were sexually assaulted by much older husbands. Their sexually assault does not confined to their husbands only, whenever their father-in-law's, and brother-in-law's get opportunity, they also sexually assault to them and if they are widowed, they are being beaten mercilessly sexually assaulted by drunkard, labors and others and more it they were set to do heavy work in factories and brought heavy loads upon their heads.

Several Dalit writers have depicted this victimized condition of women in their writings. These writers have never missed in highlighting the life and career of Dalit women and suffering they face day-to-day life. The Dalit women have faced sexual-assault at home and rape at their work places is the supreme experience of them. The social condition of Dalit women differs from those of women coming from upper caste. The patriarchy is also different as per the caste determined by the caste. The patriarchal norms are not same in every religion; politics based difference is something very sensitive which brings other kinds of differences. The exploitation of Dalit women by the upper caste men in very common theme in Dalit literature. These men set the women to do their work and when the work allotted to them is over they demand from them undue advantage.

Bama's fiction writing is filled with the theme of Dalit women's exploitation. They are subjected to sexual harassment, verbal or physical behaviour specially at the workplace or in academic or other institute where males are supposed to be superior to those of women, and the women are supposed to follow the orders given by them. Poor Dalit women like sweepers, washerwomen are subjected to rape and after that, they are threatened not open their mouths, otherwise ready to face the consequences. These women's are those who go for work to earn their livelihood where they are forced set up cohabitation with them. Thus the women are too much exploited. Men think women only the thing of commodity and after the cohabitation is over, they don't give them value and leave them in lurch. Bama, other knowing the reality of women in the society, perplexes mentally and suffers too much from her heart. Bama through her novel Sangati focuses on the education of women that they are not imported education like boys. The girls, from the very beginning are set to work whereas the boys send to school; Girls education was not there; Bama herself recalls, "...I have a little education; I earn a living, and stand on my own two feet. But when I think of the women from my community who can't tell a" [the first letter of Tamil script] from aa "[the second letter of Tamil script] and bend low to receive endless blows at home and at work, I am filled with frustration" (Sangati, P. 122)

The upper caste people have much pained to the women of Dalit society. They forcefully cast upon Dalit women their own evils and mistakes. These women are suffered in many ways by the hands of upper caste people. These women become habitual of bearing all the misbehavior of these people. Bama through the Character Arokkyam in the novel Sangati depicts the reality how the Dalit women are ostracized. She focuses the events as:

Look how unfair these fines are. Even last week, when my granddaughter paralokam went to pull up grass for the cow the owner of the fields said he would help her lift the bundle on her head. That was his excuse for squeezing her breasts, the barbarian. He has supposed to be the mudrillali's son. He is supposed to be an uneducated fellow. The poor child came and told me and wept. But say we dared to tell anyone

else about it. It's my granddaughter who will be called a whore and punished.

Whatever a man does, in the end, the blame falls upon the women. (Ibid, P. 26)

Bama's fiction is a tale of suppressed and oppressed women who never raises her head high even after being beaten by fathers husbands and brothers. She does not fight back even when the domestic quarrels are being carried publically. The women character in the novels of Bana is very sensitive and kind who shares the experience of her life to one-another and she sometimes raises her head high in anger or in pain against the oppressors.

Bama's novel *Karukku* after *Sangati* is also full of woman's suffering and pain. The novel depicts the strife and struggle faced by women. Bama in the very beginning of the novel focuses the condition of woman. She describes in the preface of the novel as.

The driving forces that shaped this book are many cutting me like *Karukku* and making me bleed; unguist social structures that plunged me into ignorance and left me trapped and suffocating; my own desperate urge to break, throw away and destroy these bonds; and when the chains were shattered into fragments, the blood that was split then, all these taken together.

In her autobiographical novel *Karukku*, Bama has depicted three main forces which have changed the life of Bama; they are caste, gender and religion. She depicts the condition of Dalit and Dalit. She tells that the Dalit women is not only humiliated by the upper caste people but also by her own community where she is born, brought up and married. She does not expect such a Mis-behaviour by her own people how she is behaved. Bama heard the world untouchability when she was in third less in the school.

She was born in such a society that was not weleamed in any way. She was full of sorrow and pain when she noticed that the upper caste people look down upon her and her society. It was her first experience which made her start to look out for means to uplift herself and her community from this downtrodden existence. When her Annan told her to attain education which was only the source of attaining equality.

Because we are born in the *Paraya Jati*. We are never given any honour or dignity with respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities. So study with care, learn all you can. If you are always ahead in your lessons, people will come to you of their own accord and attach themselves to you. Work hard and learn. (KU, 15)

Bama herself tells about he own life and study that she proved her mettle by getting education hardly living in the society where the people have mentality not to educate the girls under the very apposite circumstances, she could hardly complete her graduation and then after B.Ed. and decided to become a teacher. After completing her education, she thought she would have respect and honour in the society but she felt discrimination and dishonour when she became a teacher in the convert school, where she saw how Dalit students and teachers are not thought equal to others. She found in the convert how nuns who were working there behaved indifferent to the children coming from Dalit community. She felt a jolt and decided to leave the job of a teacher from the convert and made up her mind to find out another source by which she might able to provide respect and honour to her own community.

Bama, while working in a Christian, she saw how the Tamils were thought inferior and among them Tamil Prayer was thought the most inferior means the lowest and no esteem at all. There was no room for Harijan women in convent school to become nuns and "would not accept Harijan women as perspective nuns" and felt "that there was a separate order for them somewhere" (KU, 17). An idea came in the mind of Bama to become a nun in the convent to help the children of her own community; as she knows very well; education is the source which can root out the inequality from the society. If the children of her own community should be educated, they would not have treat the women inferior to them and would not have suppress the women of her own community.

Working in the convent as a nun, Bama felt that religion forces the children of her community to speak out psalms of Christian religion in the morning assembly and they were not allowed to praise of their own community. They were to praise the Christian and its religion in the psalms. What Bama recalls as:

I praise the lord omnipotent bless me Sami, for I have sinned. It is a week I made my last confession lied four times; I stole five times I have not obeyed my elders; I was daydreaming in the church, I repent these and those sins that I have forgotten Sami. This was always the formula. (KU, 73)

After leaving the church, Bama felt herself without a permanent job, no means she has to earn her livelihood, to buy clothes for her, food and a safe place; now she realizes that he has to live under poverty in the same way her other community member would live. Now she can have Dalit poor experience and face the painful life. The upper castes have the reward of wealth; so they would live in comfort rest and on the contrary the life of the Dalit is full of pains and sorrows. Thinking about all the poor condition of her people and of her own she does not have the intention to return to her home with the fear she might be married. She does not want to marry at all as she has closely experience the miserable condition of married women, how they are humiliated, tortured and suppressed. Her fear was right in this context. She thinks, "If I were too marry, I would have to live the rest of my life and even die in the end for the sake of one man. What use would I be then, to society? I leave the convent now and go into the outside world; I want to show that it is possible to live a life that is at least a little useful to society". (KU, 131)

She finds sorrows and sufferings all around her. There is no limit of her sufferings and suppression. Her world in which she resides is painful. Slavery is terrible for men; but it is more terrible for women. It is in the reason that men are set to work from morn to night and after the work in over, they are left free on the contrary the women never feel freedom; they are like men set to work but after the work is over they are engaged in sexual activities when they deny; they are given physical harassment. The Dalit women are much oppressed:

From the moment they wake up, they set to work both in their homes and on the fields. At homes their husbands and children pester them; in the fields there is backbreaking work besides the harassment of the land lord. When they come home in the evening, there is no time even to draw breath. And once they have collected water and firewood, cooked a kanji and fed their hungry husband and children. Even then they can't go to bed in peace and sleep until

down. Night after night they must give in to their husband's pleasure. Even if a woman's body is wrecked with pain, the husband is bothered only with his satisfaction. Women are overwhelmed and crushed by their own disgust, boredom, and exhaustion because of all this. (KU, 59)

Bama recalls that in her own society the discrimination between a boy and a girl was at a climax; what she saw with her naked eyes. She tells that the discrimination has spread widely at every stage. Boys were allowed to have more play while the girls were restricted from; they were made very busy in the household activities; they were not allowed to have play and fun.

Regarding it she asserts as

When we girls grew up, there was no more play. We went to work during the day, came home and saw to the household chores; that was it. There was nothing else. Now even the little ones don't play anymore. Even the tiny ones wake up at cock-crow, go to the matchbox factory, and work their till sunset. (KU, 58)

Bama adds that a woman coming from Dalit community has no authority to raise her voice against the injustice done upon her. Thus the condition of women is fully pitiable.

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