

Representation Of Marginalisation In Bama's *Karukku*

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ABSTRACT

Literature gives a concrete shape to each and every aspect of society, be it positive or negative and its relation with human beings. With the change of time and rapid advancement of education, science and technology, the progress of society can be easily perceived but still there are some disadvantages present in society that hold it back from the path of progress. Having a responsibility to educate the masses, literature brings light to such social disadvantages and their impact on human life and creates a ground for fair judgement. Marginality is one such predominant issue in society that becomes a major hindrance in the path of progress and development of community, society and the whole nation. Marginal literature has gained much prominence worldwide. In Indian literature of marginality, Dalit literature comes to the forefront. Dalit literature emerges as a new genre to portray how Dalits have always been subjected to suppression, oppression, discrimination and marginalization at the hands of the so-called upper caste since ages. The Dalit writers through their narratives and life stories always try to portray how it feels to be a Dalit in a social set-up where they constantly struggle to live a free and dignified life in society. Bama's *Karukku* is the first Dalit autobiography by a woman. The paper attempts to study the kind of atrocities and prejudice Bama and her community face due to their Dalit identity and how Bama struggles to become free from the clutches of such caste oppression. Bama's voice is the collective voice of the whole Dalit community against the subjugation and marginalisation they face in society.

KEYWORDS: marginality, oppression, caste, Dalit, identity.

1. Introduction:

Literature is not simply the artistic record of life. In the words of J.M. Long, it is the expression of life in the form of truth (Long, 2). It is known to be the humanization of the real word. Throughout the ages literature has been able to show the authentic picture of society by specifying both the negative and positive aspects of it. As a vehicle of social transformation,

literature studies the social blemishes, more effectively. Marginality in various form, be it caste or gender, is one of those social blemishes literature, mainly post-colonial literature is concerned with. In India literature of marginality or subaltern literature gives emphasis on the study of marginal voices in the society. Dalit writings constitute one such literature that gives a platform to the Dalit voice against marginality, suppression and oppression. Since the time unknown, it has been observed that there has always been a wide gap between the upper class and the lower class, the powerful and the powerless, the dominant and the oppressed which is the base of conflict between the two. The people living in the lower strata of society fall prey of discrimination and subjugation at the hands of the dominant class which is a ban of social construction and need attention. The Dalit autobiographies, poems, novels, drama are all testimonials of Dalit struggle. Apart from that, even some non-Dalit Indian writers also write about the plight of the untouchables in Indian society to centralise them in order prevent their sense of alienation and bring into focus the dangerous social issues that marginality can bring. Such writers are Mulkraj Anand, Vijay Tendulkar etc. The present paper deals the sufferings and struggle of Dalit community taking Bama's autobiographical novel 'Karukku' as a case study. The paper again studies the basic ideas given by Bama in her autobiographical novel, to come out of the grip of their downtrodden subaltern identity and acquire a better one. The whole book appears to be a self-discovery of marginalization of low castes not only in the social but also in the religious ground i.e. the Christian Catholic church from a woman's prospective.

2. Marginalisation as a Concept:

Throughout the years, marginality becomes a global phenomenon. The word marginality is generally used to explain the social, cultural, structural, political, economic domains where the downtrodden section of the society struggle for identity, recognition and equal participation in society. Marginality is the dangerous form of oppression practiced in society. The term 'marginality' was first used by the US sociologist Robert Park during the early 20th century to refer to the psychological phenomenon that results from cross-culture and cultural conflict. Though Robert Park's concept of marginality comes through his interest in human migrations and cultural conflicts but in the field of literature, the meaning of marginality is beyond that. In contemporary literature, the marginal are those socially, culturally, economically, politically excluded groups who lack active participation in society.

According to Young, there are five faces of historical oppression- exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. Young again argues that of these kinds of oppression, marginalisation is the most dangerous because 'a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination.'(Young, 53). Marginalization is always related to economy and material deprivation that is one of the root cause of growing poverty among the deprived masses.

There are generally two conceptual frameworks of marginality- societal and spatial. The concept of societal marginality deals with all human dimensions such as religion, culture, social structure including caste, class, ethnicity, gender etc., economy and politics. This framework emphasises on the study of the underlying reasons of social inequality injustice and oppression of the downtrodden masses. Spatial marginality is concerned with geography and locational marginality where a particular group is forced to live in peripheral areas.

All over the world, a vast group of people fall under the vicious circle of marginality which has become a complex problem in present day society. Among different forms of marginality, caste-discrimination is one such that affects the lives of approximately 260 million people globally (Lal, 15).

In southern Asia, a large group of people are suffering from caste- discrimination. These groups are generally known as Dalits, outcastes and untouchables. In the words of Haq, “the centrality of the structure of caste is purity-pollution, which is the basis of caste-based normative order. It promotes segmental division of labour (who will do what type of work), unequal distribution of socio-economic and political opportunities, social segregation, and alienated pattern of social life.”(304).In Indian class hierarchy, there are mainly two major caste groups- the upper and the lower caste. The lower castes are considered of poor quality and inferior while the upper caste is associated with all sorts of superiority. The lower castes are considered as polluted and hence they are untouchables, it is even related to low- birth while the upper caste are held in great regard as they are considered as non-polluted, pure and touchable. The low-castes are called untouchables or polluted because their day to day occupational works are associated with pollution and filth. This group of people live at the bottom of the caste normative order and live a life of degradation and discrimination that nearly affect each and every sphere of their lives denying the basic human rights. The Dalits are subjected to the social and economic exclusion, forced to do some particular jobs denying access to public and private services. They are basically the ruled class in society where dependency turned them up being slaves of modern age to the ruling class. They are denied to all sorts of indispensable advantage like access to draw water from communal well, the access to school, health services and employment. All these restrictions and denials make the low caste people to live below poverty line. They are even restricted from participating in decision making process and civil life. Thus the caste based discrimination and marginalization becomes a serious issue that restrict a large number of people to progress in all spheres of life and create obstacle to attain their desirous aims and goals.

Throughout the centuries, the Dalits have remained the silent sufferers considering their underprivileged condition as their destiny or fate. With the social development and enlightenment in thinking and reasoning, the seed of class consciousness begins to sprout and they take the stand to stand up against caste-discrimination. The sense of class consciousness lead them to start rebellion against all sorts of injustices that caste discrimination bring to them.

With the emergence of different Dalit movements to gain access to the human rights denied to them, the Dalits try every possible means to make their voice heard against marginalization. They start to record in pages the Dalit pain, struggle and humiliations that result from caste based discrimination. With the intended purpose to expose their miserable and deplorable condition to the masses, the Dalit writer through their writings, also aimed the growth of consciousness and activism among themselves. Thus, Dalit literature emerges as the Dalit voice and begins to flourish.

3. Representation of Marginalisation in Dalit Literature:

Dalithood is a kind of life condition that characterises the exploitation, suppression and marginalisation of Dalit people by the social, economic cultural and political domination of the upper castes' Brahmanical ideology (Basu, 217). Dalit community is the subaltern community in India. The use of the concept of subaltern has become very much prominent in post-colonial literature. The Italian Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci first used the term 'subaltern' to refer to the powerless marginalized section of the society who are in hegemonic control by the ruling class. They are marginalized on every possible ground notably cultural, political, social as well as religious. This group of people lacks the agency in society and social power. Belonging to the subaltern group, it is the aim of the Dalit writers 'to decode[ing] biases and value judgements in records, testimonials, narratives of the ruling classes and restore[tion] to subaltern groups of their agency'(Perusek). Roy Pascal in his 'Design and Truth in Autobiography' states that

“Autobiography depends on the seriousness of the author, the seriousness of his personality and his intention in writings. The self of the author has been deteriorated by the caste system, so that it became an agent for the welfare of the exploited.”(Pascal, 60)

Dalit literature, especially the Dalit autobiographies are generally known as the record testimonials of trials and tribulations faced by the Dalit due to caste ideology. These are the documents of the Dalit struggle for basic human rights, identity and recognition. Dalit autobiographies draw attention to the inhuman subjectivity of the Dalits. There are a number of Dalit writers in several Indian languages who have penned down their first hand marginalized experience for being a Dalit such as Omprakash Valmiki, Arjun Dangale, Vasant Moon, Bama, Urmila Pawar etc. Bama is one the first Dalit women writers whose Dalit autobiography is considered as the first Tamil Dalit autobiography by a woman writer. Bama has talked about the response that Karukku has created throughout the years throughout the years since it is published in Tamil, “Karukku has been a comfort to many who have been brought low and who suffer the pain of caste discrimination, untouchability, poverty and destitution; it has given them courage and helped them to love life once more. Karukku stands as a means of strength to the multitudes whose identities have been destroyed and denied.”(Bama, x)

4. Representation of Marginalisation in Bama's Karukku

Bama's 'Karukku' translated into English by Laxmi Holmstorm is the first Dalit autobiography by a woman and a very significant work in Dalit literature that has won the crossword award in 2001. Bama is the pen name of Faustina Mary who used the pseudonym for convention of writing. The pseudonym that Bama chooses is a blend of different sounds from her Christian name. The autobiography does not give us a linear description but presents her thoughts in fragments. The first person narrative of Bama gives less emphasis on her individual life and more emphasis on the whole Dalit community. The trials and tribulations she face in the society goes beyond her personal domain. More than 'I' Bama emphasises on 'We' making her voice a collective one in the Dalit liberation process. While talking about the African American autobiographies, Selwyn Cudjoe remarks, "a public rather a private gesture 'me-ism' gives way to 'our-ism' and superficial concerns about 'individual subject' usually give way to the collective subjection of the group"(Cudjoe, 10). Throughout the autobiography, it is found that Bama constantly repeats her statements about caste oppression and recalls a series of her childhood memories just to emphasise more on her premise.

Beginning with the first line 'our village is very beautiful' Bama gives a realistic description of the natural surroundings of the village and its people of all sorts. In the very opening lines of the autobiography, Bama makes it clear that their village is beautiful and much close to nature but it is not in a way progress. Still Bama is fascinated by the beauty of the village. Her deep feelings and fascination for the environment of her village and its natural surroundings show her sense of gratification she carries for her origin. Next she gives a locational description of her village where different Dalit communities live. She writes,

"Just at the entrance to the village there is a small bus stand. This is the terminus. The bus will take you no further. It is as if our entire world ended there. Beyond that there is a stream. If rains, it runs full of water. If not, it is nothing but a stinking shit-field" (Bama, 6-7). Here, she tries to highlight on the concept of spatial segregation by mentioning that they live at the edge of the village. Next Bama gives the locational view of different communities. She adds, "To the left there is a small settlement of ten to twenty houses, known as odapatti. It is full of nadars who climb Palmyra palms for a living. To the right there are the koravar who sweep streets, and then the leather-working chakkiliyar. Some distance away there are the kusavar who make earthenware pots. Next to that comes the palla settlement. Then, immediately adjacent to that is where we live, the paraya settlement" (Bama, 7).

Here, Bama emphasises on the concept of segregation giving a geographic view i.e. separate settlements for different communities on the basis of their gradation on caste hierarchy. As the pallar and the paraya communities form the major Dalit castes in Tamilnadu, they are allowed to live only at peripheral areas with their different locality and different graveyard. For Dalit communities, there are different settlements lacking in all kinds of advantage, progress and advancement. The progressive areas with hospital, post office,

church, mil-depot, market are occupied by the upper caste communities such as Naicker and Thevar etc., even the big school at the centre is only meant for the upper caste children. It is only the upper caste who belong to the central area and push the Dalits to the margin. Thus the Dalits become the victim of spatial marginalization. It is always the Dalits who deprive of all good things. Bama shows her utter disregard and uncertainty about such unreasonable conflict between the upper castes and lower castes that prompted the need of spatial segregation:

“I don't know how it came about that the upper caste communities and lower class communities were separated like this into different parts of the village. But they kept themselves to their part of the village and we stayed in ours” (Bama, 7).

Bama then stresses upon the Dalit culture by bringing into focus the Dalit folk tales like Muniappasami shrine and Nallathanga temple story. The myths and folk tales Bama has used depicts the emotion, humanity and love they have for their family and near and dear ones even if they are poor. Bama also remembers in her childhood, how they have celebrated Chinnamalai festival, Easter and Christmas with great enthusiasm. They would decorate chariot and go along the streets singing hymns and prayers. Thus Bama describes the way of life of the Dalit community, their culture and takes pride in it. Bama asserts her cultural traditions and practices very prominently as she is aware of the richness of their culture. The recognition of Dalit culture is also a part of Dalit struggle. In the words of K.A. Geetha, “as a counter force against the cultural hegemony of Brahminical tradition, Dalit culture is inseparable from the struggles of Dalits. Dalit writers and intellectuals are actively engaged in reconstructing and asserting their cultural traditions and practices.” (Geetha, 86). Dalit culture highlights the unity and integrity among the Dalits.

Regarding the justification of the title of her autobiography Bama writes, “there are many congruities between the saw edged Palmyra karukku and my own life” (Bama, xxiii). The word ‘Karukku’ means Palmyra leaves with serrated edges on both sides which are sharp like double-edged sword. ‘Karukku’ symbolises the pain that makes Bama’s heart bleed, tearing her apart from inside. Metaphorically, by ‘Karukku’ Bama signifies the oppressors who make the Dalits suffer with all sorts of ache and pain that caste oppression brings to them. Simultaneously, ‘Karukku’ also symbolises God’s double edged sword i.e. God’s word. Bama writes, “in order to change the state of affairs, all Dalits who have been deprived of their basic rights must function as God’s word.” (Bama, xxiv)

The book describes Bama’s life full of insults, discrimination and rejection from her very childhood. She plays the role of both a witness and a sufferer of caste oppression as a school girl, as a teacher and as a nun. Bama first comes to know about untouchability when she was studying in third standard. One day when she is returning from school, on the way she sees an elder man from her community bringing a packet of vadai, holding it by its string without touching it. He goes straight up to a Naicker, an upper caste man, bows low to him and gives him the packet of vadai. At that moment, as a child she finds the act of the man very funny

and could not understand why the man was holding the packet with a string without touching it. But it is her brother Annan who tells her about the practice of untouchability. After learning this, unable to laugh she feels terribly sad, anger, and pain. She questions,

“What did it mean when they called us paraya?... But we too are human beings.”(Bama, 16).

As a first-hand witness as well as victim of untouchability, Bama raises this serious issue through her childhood memories. She remembers how her grandmother, while working as a labourer in a Naicker's house, is offered water from a distance and the way of giving water is disquieting to watch:

“The Naicker women would pour out the water from a height of four feet, while paati and others received and drank it with cupped hands to their mouths.”(Bama, 16)

It gives a constant pain to Bama when she witnesses their plight and the inhuman behaviour towards them. The untouchables have to live on the unwanted food and leftovers by the upper castes. Bama remembers how her grandmother used to bring leftovers from the Naicker family. One day Bama observes how the Naicker woman leaned from a distance and poured the leftover food to her grandma's vessel. Such a behaviour of the upper caste woman toward her paati made Bama to feel offended. When Bama questioned on such behaviour her grandmother replied:

“These people are the maharajas who feed us our rice. Without them, how will we survive? Haven't they been upper caste from generation to generation and haven't we been lower caste? Can we change this?”(Bama, 17)

Here, Bama's grandmother is the representative of powerless depended section of Dalit community who under years of subjugation accepts their subordinate condition as their destiny. Such a subordinate condition for years crush the minds of the Dalits to think beyond their slave-like position and low status. Lack of consciousness and the sense of helplessness make the Dalit to accept their condition. But to the new generation like Bama, such humiliations are unbearable. They refuse to merge themselves in silent servitude and subjugation. To break the shackle of their subordinate position, Bama conveys the message that marginalised voice must be replaced with a voice.

In her school and college days, Bama faces lots of difficulties humiliations and insults for being a low caste. If anything bad happens in the school, immediately without hesitation it is assumed that one of the low caste children might have done that. In the bus even, the upper caste people do not sit with the untouchables for the fear of being get polluted. Bama asserts that because the harijan children are always held contemptible, they are used for the cheap labour in the school. Even there are different rules for different castes in the educational institutions. Once she is not given permission to go home to attend an occasion while in front of her eyes the wealthy children of the college are given permission to go home. When she asks the authority about their refusal, she is reminded of her low caste and poverty. But Bama

fighters until she manages to get her way at last by “insisting that there cannot be different rules for different castes, only the same rules for everyone”(Bama, 22).

Bama and her community face such a caste based marginalisation that even religion is not free from it. Bama's family is converted to Christianity during her grandmother's time. The reason behind the conversion of Dalits to Christianity is to attain freedom from humiliation and caste based discrimination. But Christianity which promises equality among all also treats the converted Dalits unequally. Here, in this autobiography, Bama brought forward the social reality of the Christian Church and its injustices towards the poor converted Catholics. They are marked as Dalit Christians. They are not allowed to sing in the church choir. In the church, they practice segregation, different schools for the rich Christians and Dalit Christians. The Dalits are never allowed to bury dead bodies in the churchyard.

Observing the oppression of the Dalit Children, Bama decides to be a nun. She writes, “at that time, all my prayers, all my meditation and my thoughts were directed towards oppressed and exploited people, and towards the Jesus who fought for justice and fairness”(Bama,105). But in the convent even which she used to think would be free of caste, caste discrimination is not invisible. Here she gets to know that Harijan women are not accepted as full-fledged and prospective nuns: “I lamented inwardly that there was no place that was free of caste” (Bama, 25). When Bama has been sent to another convent, she is shocked to see the oppressive attitude of the sisters who even do not consider the low caste people as human beings. In the convent, Bama finds no love and affection ‘for the poor and the humble’. There she observes the vast difference between appearance and reality. They talk of serving the poor but in reality they behave with the poor Dalits as they are no human beings. The nuns exert their power upon the Dalit workers by abusing them all the time and treating them in a very shameful manner. It constantly angers Bama to see the poor older Dalits who are forced to do the menial tasks in the Convent bearing the abuse of the nuns. Mulkraj Anand in his ‘Untouchable’ also showed how the Dalits are forced to do menial works and suffer the abuse and humiliations by the upper castes like the black money-lander who, in the novel, forces Bakha to do his daily job,

“There is not a latrine clean, you must work for the pay you receive.”(Anand, 11).

After seven years Bama leaves the convent when she finds that the convent is not even free from discrimination. Bama reveals the mind-set of the Convent nuns, “according to their notions, low caste people are all degraded in every way. They think we have no moral discipline nor cleanliness nor culture” (Bama, 26).

Bama fearlessly reveals that even the religious institutions like church and the convent are not free from caste animosity. The priests and the nuns prompt them to blind beliefs. In the name of God, they are very likely to turn the Dalit Christians into their slaves. In the convent, Bama witnesses the mechanisms of the nuns very closely and the discriminations they do between the rich and the poor children. They take the vow that their life would be dedicated for the cause of the poor but they hardly do anything for the poor. These things traumatize

Bama and she finally leaves the comfortable life of convent happily and dedicates her whole life for the benefit and welfare of her own community.

Bama narrates how her belief towards the church have changed throughout the years. She recalls her childhood experiences with the church and the notion about the God she used to hold when she was a child. She remembers how the sisters in the scripture lessons used to frighten them by talking about the devil who is busy in recording their sins constantly if they do not do their duty. They would hardly speak of the God's glory. Afraid of the devil, Bama remains always ready to do the church works whatever she is told by the sisters though she feels fear to work in the church alone. During Christmas, the Dalit Christians have to take fruits and gifts to the priests they do not get enough food for themselves. The priests promise the upliftment of the poor and the downtrodden but in reality they serve the rich. All the priests and nuns are upper castes. The Dalits are not accepted even in the life of renunciation.

Through her life experience, Bama determines the difference between the appearance and reality of the church persons. They throw dust in the eyes of the Dalits by speaking of their devotion and renunciation, poverty, chastity. But in actual they rob the Dalits and lead a wealthy and comfortable life. When Bama understands all these things, her faith on Christianity deteriorates. Though she loses her faith in Christianity, she never loses her faith and belief on God. The Dalits merely get respect as human beings from them. Bama asserts that the seed of consciousness among the Dalits has been sown. She asserts,

“But Dalits have also understood that god is not like this, has not spoken like this. They have become aware that they too were created in the likeness of god. There is a new strength within them, urging them to reclaim that likeness which has been so far repressed, ruined, obliterated; and to begin to live again with honour, self-respect and with a love towards all humankind. To my mind, this alone is true devotion.”(Bama, 109)

What Bama faces in the society is that Dalits are denied self-respect and identity. They are refused to be recognised as a part of the mainstream society and are thrown out of the space. They are treated as untouchables and are considered impure because of their occupation associated filth are dirt. Moreover, they are considered ‘outcaste’ because they fall outside the four fold caste system i.e. Brahman, Kshatriya Vaishya shudra and are excluded from the Vedas. In the name of caste and social hierarchical system, the Dalits are exploited. They are not given their appropriate wages and women labourers are always paid less. Even the small children go to work at matchbox factories denying their education. Bama asks,

“There are two or three schools available for the children nowadays. But these little ones’ fate is the smell of matchbox solution, not the smell of knowledge of learning. How can they afford to study, when it is such a struggle even to fill their bellies?”(Bama, 55).

Through her autobiography, Bama not only raises her voice against marginality but also tries to bring awareness among the Dalits. She wants the Dalits to understand that their unending suffering is not because it is there in their face but because of the deprivation of their rights as

human beings. It is to open the eyes of her community that Bama writes the book depicting what it meant to be born in a low caste family, to be a Dalit: “ If you are born into a low caste, every moment of your life is a moment of struggle.”(Bama, 27). She advocates that the Dalits should no longer be the victim at the hands of the upper caste but they should stand up for their own rights:

“We who are asleep must open our eyes and look about us. We must not accept the injustice of our enslavement by telling ourselves it is our fate; as if we have no true feelings; we must dare to stand up for change. We must crush all these institutions that use caste to bully into submission, and demonstrate that among human beings there are none who are high or low. Those who have found their happiness by exploiting us are not going to let us go easily. It is we who have to place them where they belong and bring about a changes and just society where all are equal” (Bama, 28).

The caste ideology of the society also stopped the Dalits to find good means of living. After Bama leaves convent, without job and money life becomes difficult for her. When she applied for a job interview in a Nadar school, she was rejected because she was a Dalit. Bama states that such discriminations in the every field of society where caste matters more than education or qualification leave her broken and helpless. She feels ‘as feeble as a murunga tree that blows over in the wind’ (Bama, 121). She herself asserts:

“Today I do know what it is to be hungry, to suffer illness in solitude, to stand and stare without a paisa in one’s hand, to walk along the street without protection, to be embarrassed by a lack of appropriate clothes, to be orphaned and entirely alone, to swim against the tide in this life without position or status or money or authority” (Bama, 120).

Bama, in her autobiography, never yearns for a transformation of her identity, but longs for the recognition of Dalit identity. She never challenges the system but focuses on the individual status of Dalit people. She is fully aware of the fact that only by understanding and appreciating their identity of ‘difference’, the Dalits can leave marginality behind. One of the reasons Bama leaves convent is the fear of change in her identity while living in the convent which is never desirable to Bama. She asserts,

“I don’t know what kind of magic it is that they work upon us in the convent, but during these seven or eight years, my brain has become confused and dulled. In some ways, they actually change you into a different person...the strategy of the convent had been to transform my identity completely.”(Bama, 120)

Throughout the book Bama anticipates quality and the abolition of untouchability to recognise Dalit identity. The study of self-assertion in Bama’s ‘Karukku’ focuses on the consequences caste-hatred can bring. And it is the poor low-caste community who lead a stigmatised life due to the bereavement of their basic human rights. ‘Karukku’ expresses the traumatic journey of not only a single Dalit woman but the life struggle of Dalit community as a whole. Thus, in the autobiography the self represents the community. As she is the one

who has experienced first-hand the atrocities of Dalit life, she is able to centralize the Dalit predicament and created a voice to be heard.

The literary expression of marginality, self-assertion of the Dalits is a part of the politics of difference. Bama as a representative of 'difference' intends to eradicate the power politics associated with caste-ideology by practicing such politics of difference. With the assertion of the problems of the Dalits, it is equally important to find out the solution. And for Bama, the solution for the problems of the Dalit lies in the systematic assertion for equal right, justice, dignity, self-respect, recognition of identity etc. Bama writes 'Karukku' as an evidence of different forms of marginality like social, religious even spatial. In such a time of crisis when women are twice oppressed, first by caste and second by patriarchy, Bama could break the social barrier to make an articulation of 'difference' and raises a voice for her community.

Bama complains that because they are never given the opportunity to progress in life and society, they remain poor and hence backward. Because the poor lack power and authority, they are controlled by those who possess power in the society. This creates the power structure in the society where the powerful with the expectation to hold their status and power intact in its position, close the door for the powerless that leads to attain power. Because of the superior prospect that is associated with the upper caste, they want to maintain their existing social order by exerting power upon the lower caste people. As the caste system of the society serves their interests and in favour of them, they are quite agreeable with it. This power structure in the society leads the upper section, the elitists to deny the dissolution of the social construction, the given identity to the Dalits that is actually forced to them by the elite section of the society. But the Dalits revolt against such identity construction and caste based discrimination because it does not serve their interests and they are the only ones who end up being marginalised. So in her autobiography Bama questions the place of Dalit in Indian society and searches for a space of self-respect. But it remains a mystery whether the bridge between the upper caste and the lower caste is possible or not. Even Bama also shows her feelings of uncertainty and doubt in this regard. She writes,

"It seems that our society is divided into those who toil and those who sit down and feast. They have separated those whom they consider unfit to touch, pushed them to one side and marginalised them; they make them work like machines yet abuse them unjustly, never allowing them to make any progress. I don't know when such atrocities will ever end. Is it likely that he who finds his comfort by exploiting us will ever change, or ever allow the system to change?"(Bama, 79-80).

To emancipate her community from the clutches of caste discrimination and poverty, she urges the need of proper education for her people. From her brother Bama learns that it is only education which can uplift them their present condition. It is her brother Annan who once told Bama about the importance of education. Bama recalls the words of her brother,

“Because we are born into the paraya jati, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities. So study with care and 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” (Bama, 18).

Annan’s words make a deep impression on Bama. She asserts the importance of education for the Dalit community again and again to bring awareness in her community, among the subalterns and marginalised so that they can become aware of the reasons of their marginalised position and stand up against it. She feels that it is only education that would lead them to the path of a dignified identity. According to Bama, only education and pride in their identity can bring upliftment to the Dalits.

5. Conclusion

Like the African American slave narratives, ‘Karukku’ is also a narrative of Dalit struggle. Throughout the book Bama urges for liberation of the Dalits. Her autobiography is a propaganda of identity crisis which shows the journey of an untouchable to attain liberation. Bama seeks to bring a change in the set of beliefs associated with caste ideology that deny the recognition of the low caste in society. She aspires for integrity between the different communities in both social and religious ground. Being a Dalit herself, she creates a marginalised voice of her own as well as her community by giving a self- explanation of marginalised experience. Bama as a subaltern writer, attempts to theorize the difference by giving stress on the concept of marginalisation and oppression. By creating a picture of her wounded self and the degraded life of her community under years of caste based subjugation, she plays the politics of ‘difference’ by revealing the trauma, pain, anguish of the Dalits that ideological belief system of the nation brings to them. She hopes her voice to be heard and anticipates the end of such caste-based injustices, discrimination and hatefulness towards the Dalit community. Through her narrative, she demands basic rights and opportunities to the poor Dalits so that they can attain mobility which will lead them to assimilate with the mainstream society.

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