



Crisis for livelihood in dalit literature: A study of Bama's selected works

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Abstract

Suffering, violence, anguish, anger, protest, and suppression both physical and psychological, are the common elements in Dalit Literature as in *Karukku* and *Sangati*, Bama tries to show that the pitiable condition, anger and protest of Dalit can be understood by a Dalit only who faces it and lives with it every moment of his/her life. Both the works *Karukku* and *Sangati* reflect upon the wounded self and dark territory of Dalit consciousness which accept their depressed state in society and tries to convert that subjugated consciousness into a strong, self-dependent and respected one by getting education.

Keywords: identity, dalit, society, casteism etc

Introduction

Man, being a social and an amiable animal feels a sense of security, of stability, of belongingness and fraternity necessary for his happiness. He finds his moorings and happiness in some home, in love and affection of parents, in friends and community. When this sense of harmony is lost for any reason, he feels a sense of alienation and a loss of his being. He feels this world meaningless and this life disorientated and purposeless. This loss of self creates an identity crisis and this loss of identity is the root cause of all his problems. This identity crisis in literature is termed 'Quest for identity'.

Quest for identity means a journey and an initiation into experience and a discovery of one's real being in human life. With increasing economic development and urbanization, the ordinary people are exploited at every level, and this exploitation make them feel alienated and without existence. They are tortured on economical and political bases. Dr. R.S. Pathak in his introduction to *Quest for Identity in Indian English Writing* defines this term: "... identity and its quest refer to the spiritual odyssey of the modern man, who has lost his social and spiritual moorings and who is anxious to seek his work" (11).

This identity crisis or the quest for identity is not confined only to the individual: it may characterize a group, a class, a community or a whole nation and this individual quest becomes a microcosm of the quest for national identity.

The present paper is about quest for identity in Bama's works, *Karukku* and *Sangati*. My topic is related to Dalit Literature. The writer Bama also belongs to Dalit Community who have faced exploitation herself which a Dalit faces in upper caste dominated society. Dalits are deprived of their rights and run their voice down by upper caste society. Inspired by Jyotiba Phule and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, dalits gave vent to their plight in the writings which in the 1958 conference of Maharashtra Sahitya Sangh held in Mumbai, was called 'Dalit Literature'. The lower caste people, victims of the hegemonic practices motivated by caste and gender based social system, searched for their existence in Dalit literature.

Madara Chennaiah, an 11th century cobbler saint who lived during the reign of western Chalukyas in Karnataka, was one of the first dalit writers who wrote in Kannada language about the pitiable condition of lower caste. This miserable and pitiable condition of lower caste is due to the Hindu concept of 'Chaturvarna' in *Manusmriti*, in which there are four Vernas Brahmins, Kashatriyas, Vaisya and Shudra. In this hierarchy of caste system Shudras were treated like the animals and given the jobs that are still despised and abhorable. These oppressed people after tolerating humiliation, injustices and inequalities, and encouraged by the philosophy of Ambedkar, got courage to revolt against this system. As Indu B.C. in an article "Silence Speaks: A Study of Bama's *Karukku*" defines Dalit literature:

Dalit literature is a writing that parallels the revolutionary movement spear headed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar with a view to bring about psycho-social transformations in the minds of the oppressed. Dalit literature, a strong oppositional voice not only raises important question but also narrate the ability of the people in the margins to fight against all odds and injustices. (*The Criterion* 1)

Bama's *Karukku* is the first dalit woman autobiography which describes the oppression of dalits on the basis of class, gender and caste, and many events of caste-discrimination such as the fight between the Paraiyar and the Chaaliyar, and the beatings of Paraiyar people by the police bribed by the Chaaliyar community. The Paraiya women are molested by the police at night. Bama is also tormented mentally often and again by the upper caste priests and nuns in church and in convent. She is well educated but could not get any dignity in society. She remained as a nun for seven years in a convent and realized how the Dalits nun and children are suffered and tortured a lot of pain in the hands of upper caste nuns.

Karukku emphasizes on two main aspects namely caste and religion which caused great pain and sufferings in Bama's life. She tells about the discrimination based on caste leveled upon dalit children by the warden sister in *Karukku*, who could not bear low caste children, "these people get nothing to eat at home, they come here and they grow fat" (17).

Sangati presents a series of events occurred in the lives of dalits and a joint struggle of Paraiya community in search of their existence, and is a critique of patriarchy as well as of casteism within church. This book dwells on the impoverished and miserable condition of dalit women suffered from double discrimination; they are molested by the so-called high caste people and also by dalit males. They do the same job as their male counterparts but are paid much less than their male labourers. The inequality against women is a main issue in *Sangati*. As Bama describes herself:

We have to labour in the fields hard as men do, and then on top of that, struggle to bear and raise our children. As for the men, their work ends when they have finished in the fields. If you are born into this world, it is best you were a man. Born as women, what good do we get? We only toil in the fields and in the home until our vaginas shrivel (6).

The plight and miseries of dalit women and the discrimination between dalit male and female can be seen in this work, and accepts Bama that dalit males cannot revolt against their landlords, they show their anger and strengths at home on their wives.

Suffering, violence, anguish, anger, protest, and suppression both physical and psychological are the common elements in Dalit literature. The pitiable condition, and anger and protest of dalits can be understood by a dalit only who faces it and lives with it every moment of his life. Writing such confessional work is the only approach to them to reflect their condition and to recognize their identity. They searched for their existence through writings and that is why quest for identity is a dominant theme in Bama's works. I am very impressed by this topic and I want to do something new in this field that in why I chose this topic. Indeed, Bama tries her best to make Dalit community aware. She is a role model of such a woman who inspite of all her miseries, and caste and gender oppression, proved herself and became able to strengthen her identity as a woman. Her life is a true representation of every Dalits' lives. She wants to make them realize that they must crush all the institutions that put Dalits down. All human beings are equal. None is high or low. Those who have found their happiness by oppressing Dalits are not going to let them go easily. It is Dalits who have to place them where they belong and bring about a changed and fair society where all are equal.

At the end of the paper, it is right to say that Bama after being tormented, used writings to console her marginalized self, and it is writings alone which helped her to quest her existence. It is also true that the writings gave her strength enough to live a life full of confidence.

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