
Demystification of Theological Elements in BAMA'S KARUKKU

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Abstract: *Dalit Literature is a part of Indian literature which reflects the life of downtrodden, crushed and out cast. It is the voice of all the voiceless and broken men of our society. Bama is born as Bama Faustina Soosairaj in 1958. She is a contemporary dalit feminist, who is the first women to write her autobiography, Karukku. Even in the days of Jesus Christ the caste system prevailed. Bama being a low caste nun suffered a lot within herself. She suffocated internally thinking about the reaction of nunnery after knowing the real fact that she was a Dalit. She was totally disgusted to see the nuns of the convent matching their attitudes and behavior according to the reputation and status of those wealthy families which made her to live nunnery.*

Keywords: *Dalit, Nunnery, Oppression, Messiah, God, Christians*

Lord Krishna as saying, in response to the question— "How is Varna (social order) determined?"

"Birth is not the cause, my friend: it is virtues which are the cause of auspiciousness. Even a chandala (lower caste) observing the vow is considered a Brahman by the Gods". (Bhagavad Gita, Ch.4, Verse 13)

Indian Independence is gained from the clutches of hard hearted British since August 15, 1947. Even after decades and decades; a group of people tend to face atrocities in the name of caste, creed and religion. They are called Dalits. Dalit Literature is a part of Indian literature which reflects the life of downtrodden, crushed and out cast. It is the voice of all the voiceless and broken men of our society.

Indian Constitution firmly speaks about equality and has formulated an article (Article 17 in the Constitution of India 1949) which talks about abolition of untouchability. This article also states that untouchability is an offence in front of law. But the worst part is that even after formulating great law and order. Dalit Literature being a part of Indian literature reflects the life of downtrodden, crushed and out cast. It is the voice of all the voiceless and broken men of our society.

Bama is born as Bama Faustina Soosairaj in 1958. She is a contemporary dalit feminist who is the first women to write her autobiography, *Karukku*. She wrote *Karukku* in 1992 and was translated into English by Lakshmi Holmstrom in the year 2000 who has won Crossword Award for translation twice (2001 and 2007). Other works of Bama include *Sangati* (1994), *Vanmam* (2002), *Kusumbukkaran* (1996) and *Oru Tattvum Erumaiyum* (2003). Her grandparents were born as Hindu dalits and got converted to Christianity. Her father saved Indian Army. She completed her primary education in her village. After her graduation, she served as a nun for seven long years in Christian convent.

In the days of Jesus Christ the caste system prevailed. A Jew was regarded as a person who belonged to higher caste and speaking with a Samaritan or mingling with them was considered a taboo. The Jews were very much cautious about not defiling themselves by mixing with the Samaritans. But Jesus went out of the way and spoke with a Samaritan woman. In the passage of John, the verses four to twenty six, fourth chapter tells about Jesus who spoke with a Samaritan woman revealing that he is the Messiah. The Messiah is the savior that the Jews had been waiting for many thousand years.

The disciples of Jesus were shocked when they saw him speaking with the Samaritan woman. But Jesus continued speaking with her and broke the taboo. Jesus was against discrimination and caste throughout his life. Bama has rightly brought out the existing casteism which prevails in the Churches where the words of Jesus Christ are preached. There are numerous incidences in the Bible through which Jesus fights against the tradition and culture that were caste biased. New Testament tells us the importance of equality. In the Old Testament Levites were the only tribes who were chosen by God to serve him. The New Testament tells that anyone can serve God. Those who trust God's only son will live long and will always be cared by the Almighty. "For God so loved the world that he

gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life". John 3:16 (New International Version).

Bama studied up to eighth standard in her village and she went to neighboring town for her higher studies. The warden-sister insulted lower caste children for no reason. Bama joined college after her schooling to do B.Ed. She did not care a toss about caste. She held her head high in all situations. After completing her education, she started to work. She found joy in teaching children. There were many Dalit children whom she taught. She was happy really to teach them and students liked her as a teacher. However, she came to know that these nuns collectively oppressed Dalit children and teachers for no reason. She was weighed down by hearing the humiliations of the nuns. This made her think of becoming a nun and save the children of her community. She thought, "*Why should I not become a nun too and truly help these people who are humiliated so much and kept under such strict control.*"(K 23)

During her training she found sisters discussing about different orders where low-caste people were not accepted as nuns and they had separate order. Bama lamented inwardly hearing the conversations within the convent. She grieved over the fact that there was no place that was free of caste. She then became a nun and was sent to some other convent.

Bama being a low caste nun suffered a lot within herself. She suffocated internally thinking about the reaction of nunnery after knowing the real fact that she was a Dalit. They perceived that low-caste people have no moral discipline and they neither have cleanliness nor do they have culture. The nunnery had a strong belief that these people can never be changed. Low-caste people were degraded in every way. They believed that aiding them is like aiding cobras. The belief system is such that they use and speak words without judgment. Bama thought that she survived somehow in the mess only by being a coward.

Bama's mind was filled with all these thoughts and desires. She used to think that if she becomes a nun and enters a convent, she can serve the poor children of her community. And it was this train of thoughts which led her to take a 'wrong decision' of becoming a nun. She tells her desire as,

There was a desire in my heart to help other children to better themselves, as I, born into the same community, had been able to do, because of my education. I really wanted to teach such children. (K 77)

She was totally disgusted to see the nuns of the convent matching their attitudes and behavior according to the reputation and status of those wealthy families whose children came to their convent. She expresses her regret by telling,

The more I watched this, the more I frustrated I felt. My mind was disturbed. My conscience was battered and bruised. At last I asked myself, is this life for me? I left the convent. The convent was well endowed with gifts. When every nun went home on leave, the nunnery expected gifts from them when they returned. It was not possible for Bama to bring appropriate gifts that matched their status and life-style. She neither had wealth nor any property. If someone were to bring fancy gifts and articles which is apt for the convent life style, nunnery placed them high. They added value to those from the upper-caste or with great influence. On the other hand they never gave the slightest care for others in the convent and went home, utterly weary and dispirited. (K 78)

Daily routine of the nunnery was highly disciplined with prayer and Pusa. Bama tells that as they woke up in the morning, there were prayers and offerings. They had prayers in the midday, in the evening and at night. They had prayer throughout the day but she found all these prayers had no connection between the life which they led and the work which they did. These prayers were said only for the sake of saying. On one hand they said the prayers as a duty and on the other hand, they possessed such power and status which is very contrary to a true Christian. Before becoming a fully fledged nun they are requested to make three vows, of poverty, chastity and obedience. These vows teach them and help them out to lead a life centered around ordinary people. But the vows are always disproved.

She wanted to become an ideal nun, not just to be a nun but to treat all children the way they should be treated. She wanted to take great care of them instead of exploiting them. Her mind and intellect made a conflict of becoming a

nun. She always cherished certain love in her heart towards Jesus and the lady (Mary). She always read the Bible in the morning and evening.

She learned that God always showed great compassion and love for the suppressed and oppressed. Even in New Testament one can see that Jesus associating with the poor and needy. She points out that the priest taught them that God is loving, kind, gentle, one who forgives sinners, patient, tender, humble, obedient. Nobody insisted that God is righteous and never countenances inequality. She found the great difference between this Jesus and the Jesus projected to daily pieties. The downtrodden are taught only in an empty way about humility and patience but not about the 'real' Jesus (God).

Now she left the order. She never knew the procedures until she entered the convent. Only after her sojourn, she understood the empty speech made by them of devotion, Holy spirit, renunciation, poverty and chastity. She felt that if Jesus appeared before them he will surely question them severely for what they do and behave. She was angered with the Priests and Nuns. When she saw them, she was always reminded of Pharisees, Saducees, and high priests who appear in the Bible.

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When Bama was a nun she came to know about the reality which prevailed in the nunnery. She demystified all confusions related to theology and made herself clear about the actual practice and came out of the nunnery.

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