

# Racialism in Bama's *Karukku*

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## Abstract

Bama is a marginalized Dalit woman. She stands firmly for the betterment of the downtrodden communities. Bama has published three novels and collection of short stories. Her three novels are *Karukku*, *Sangati* and *Vanmam*. Bama's *Karukku* is regarded as her successful an autobiographical novel. In this novel Bama reveals women's frustration. Subaltern literature focuses on the marginalized people and their sufferings. Subaltern literature is a recent development in critical analysis. Their voices have always been marked with true and bitter experiences of exploitation, humiliation, subjugation, oppression, and resilience. The subaltern people narrate their stories of humiliation to the public. Subaltern literature represents the downtrodden voice with an authentic tone.

Bama was born at Puthupatty near Madurai in 1958. After the birth of Bama her family was converted to christianity. Her ancestors were from Dalit community and worked as agriculture labourer. She is a B.A graduate and gets bachelors degree in education. *Karukku* means Palmyra laves. In her life Bama has suffered much difficulties. She faced many problems even in her childhood because she born in the Dalit family. She struggled much against the castes based system in the Indian society. During her childhood she learns moral things much from her lovable brother. Through this novel *Karukku* we come to know that subaltern people's ill-treatment and their suffering. Bama is one among the subaltern. The novel describes the narrator's humiliations but also the crude realities of the subaltern people. The subaltern theory has been discussed by many in the scholarly circle. Tirthankar Roy after analyzing Subaltern studies says, "Market participation is one major way of enabling the poor make their own history" (222).

Bama is the first person narrator of the novel *Karukku*. The narrator tells about her past life to the readers and the present life condition as well. It is a wonderful narration of Dalit woman Bama's suppression. In her childhood Bama did not hear even the word untouchable. One day Bama returned home from school after seeing a horrible incident. An elderly old man who belonged to her own community kept a parcel in his hand. It was a packet of snacks. The old man is very cautious not to touch it. The old man bowed his head and handed over the parcel to the Naicker. This incident seems to be very funny and ridiculous to her. When her brother came there, she narrated the whole incident to him. Her

brother explained that they were born Dalits and they were never shown equanimity, respect or honour. Her brother advised her to study well and make good progress.

One day Bama was playing with their school friends inside the school. One of her classmates asked Bama to climb up the coconut tree. After a long persuasion, she climbed up the coconut tree and touches it. At that time the school head master entered suddenly into the garden. All her friends run away except Bama. After that Bama also ran towards her home. In the next morning the Headmaster called out her name. As the Headmaster scolded her enormously saying that she revealed her true nature of a Parachi and also accused her of stealing the coconut. She was asked by her headmaster to stand outside. She felt very ashamed and insulted in front of all the students.

Later on Bama finished her under graduation and B.Ed., successfully. She intended to become a teacher soon. First she worked in convent. In the Convent, Dalit children were treated like untouchables. She saw this cruelty against them and she was reminded of her school days. In her eighth standard she stays in the school hostel. The warden-sister always was scolding the low-caste and poor caste children. The warden branded Dalit as Cheri children. The school warden boastfully stated that they do not get delicious food at home. For that reason, they came here to develop their physical body not for their education and skills. They said they ate full and looked as round as potatoes. She claimed that they went home for holidays and came back to the hostel like a skeleton.

Bama's every situation portrays her bitter experiences. Apart from that, It deals with the journey of her life. She portrays her own community people's horrid situation in the society. In those days, more than major parts of the land are in the hands of Naicker Community. People of Paraya community must work for them. In an ancient time, each Paraya family is attached to the Naicker family, as a bonded laborer. These kinds of work were supposed to be done only by the Parayar and Pallar people. Both men and women in the community could survive only through hard work and incessant labour. As Bama says :

The upper caste people are generation to generation live as wealthy, they ordered the Dalit people and they lived through the Dalit people's hard work.

She raised the question Dalit people lived as lower caste generation to generation why we change this? Bama feels terrible for their services to the upper caste as slaves and the way there are oppressed, in the name of untouchability, casteism, suppression domination and whatever it may be.(25)

The Naickers are called as Ayya by Dalit people in a honourable way. When Dalit

people request for getting water from the Naicker women, they do not give the water directly but pour out the water from a height of four feet for the Dalit people to drink with their cupped hands. One day, Bama goes with her grandma to the Naicker's home. Bama places her vessel that she had brought with her by the side of a drain. The Naicker women come out with their left over food and fill the vessel left beside the drain. The Naicker women quickly move into their homes. When ever Naicker women come out of their homes, Dalit people keep away from the roads or street. Dalit either enter inside their homes or lean out from some distant place.

Bama comes across so many hurdles in her early life. Day by day she faced much difficulties throughout her life. Remembering her brother's advice, she determined to work hard and study. She takes first rank among the students. She realizes that in every place, Dalit people are ignored easily by the upper caste people. She wants to develop her community people. Even though three quarters of the school are Dalit students, the teachers do not hesitate to use the Dalit children as their personal laboureres to carry water to the teacher's house and for the plants. In all the possible ways Dalits are insulted and abused. As far as the teacher are concerned, Dalits are not human but they are senseless creatures.

Bama presents her autobiographical sketches skillfully. She has portrayed the subaltern people life most poignantly. She shows their extreme suppression and the caste bias in the society. Bama has unique responsibility regarding the subaltern people's situation among the upper caste society. As a women writer Bama faces many difficulties in her past life. The upper caste people have a bad impression about the Dalit people. They consider them only as servants. The Dalit people do not get any respect and dignity anywhere. Hence they seem to appear as untouchables. They think the Dalits are subhuman. Even if the Dalit are educated, qualified and employed in government jobs, they are not treated as equals. Neither are they respected nor honoured. Bama comes across these kinds of problems. She concentrates only on her studies, and she got high marks in her exams. Most of the Dalits remain illiterate as they are not fully aware of their critical situation. The present paper conveys a strong message that educated Dalit should create awareness among the Dalit people as Bama has done through her writings.

Through the novel Bama expresses that the Caste system has no other norms than birth while it is illogical, and unethical. Her rationality is that every one can do equally well in education. She hints that it would be better to keep education as the norm for deciding the class, lower or higher in the caste system. Any one who excells in education, science, technology, and advancement must be considered as high and respectable.

### Works Cited

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