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A Challenge to Change: Delight in Dalit Redumption from Sin in Bama's Writings

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Abstract

Dalit Literature is an emerging field of literature which portrays the lives of the marginalized or the downtrodden people. Marginalization is the process of pushing a particular group of people to the edge of the society by not giving them any importance. One among these groups is the Dalit community who are commonly known as untouchables. The Dalits are collectively subjected to inequality, social exclusion, caste discrimination, injustice, slavery and violence. The Tamil Dalits or paraiyars are controlled by the upper caste groups such as Naickers and Chaliyars. Dalit women are suppressed both in the house and in the society. There are many writers who raised their voice against injustice being done to the dalit women by the patriarchal system prevailing till date. Bama is one of the most distinguished writers in tamil. She is one of the most acclaimed of all Dalit women writers and through her works she voices forth for the sufferings of Dalits who are suppressed by the society. Bama has taken a bold step in exposing to the world, the sad plight, the silent sufferings and unheard agonies endured by the Dalit women in Tamil Nadu. She places an enormous emphasis on the possibilities of empowerment of Dalit women through education. This paper titled "A challenge to Change: Delight in Dalit Redumption from Sin in Bama's writings" explores the injustice as well as challenges to the Dalit for delight in the society.

KEYWORDS-Marginalization, caste, gender, poverty, slavery, sexual abuse, Physical harassment, agonies, oppression, sufferings, empowerment, education, change, delight, redumption

Emergence of Dalit literature has a great historical significance. It is generic in the sense that all marginalized and oppressed groups of people are under its sway and sweep. It covers multiple levels of personal and social experience. Dalit literature is primarily a literature of protest and a demand of the oppressed for social equality. Dalit literature in India, as a movement, says Dangle, 'Owes its origin to a revolutionary struggle for social and economic changes'. It is closely associated with the hopes for freedom of a group of people, who as untouchables are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality" (237). Dalit writers in Tamil place an enormous emphasis on the possibilities of empowerment of Dalits through education.

Bama, originally called Faustina Mary Fathima Rani is the most distinguished Dalit fiction writers in Tamil and one of the most acclaimed of other women writers. Through her works, she voices the sufferings of women, who are suppressed by the society. The self expressive writings by Bama reveal the silent sufferers. They suffer a lot under the hands of their own men. Bama realistically portrays the physical violence like

lynching, Whipping and canning that the Dalit women face. Dalit women are illiterated cruelly by their fathers, husbands and brothers and given a partial treatment by their own women. As a child Bama is shown Questioning the unequal treatment meted out to her at the hands of her own maternal grandmother, Vellaiyammakizhavi: “ Why can’t we be the same as boys? We aren’t allowed to talk loudly or laugh noisily; even when we sleep, we can’t stretch out on our backs nor lie face down on our bellies..... what, patti, aren’t we also human beings?”(29). Bama feels that girls in the Dalit community are asked to eat after every male member in the family finishes eating. The left- over of others are their only feast. In fact even the quality of food served to the girls is much poorer than the kind of which is served to boys. All the household works are done by the girls whereas the boys enjoy playing games or hanging out with their friends in the village. The girls in the village are deprived of good education unlike the boys. The boys are kept free from all sorts of responsibilities that they should take up whereas the girls are over- burdened with numerous endless toilsome everyday activities.

Women should be the dual responsibility of being a homemaker and also a working woman. They work hard and endure much pain in their working places. Besides preparing food for the large family, they graze in the field with the cattle. Ultimately the tired women often may reject sex to their boozed men. As a result they were severely beaten by their husbands. They are also exposed to sexual harassment by the upper caste men. An incident such as one happened to Mariamma., Bama’s cousin, one day after having collected firewood from the forest. She encounters the landlord Kumarasami Ayya who tried to take advantage of the girl sexually. In a fear that his own image would be tarnished. Kumarasami Ayya went and complained to the headman of the paraiyar community that he had seen Mariamma and Manikkam together in the fields behaving very badly. A meeting was called by the head of the Paraiya community and both were summoned. Everyone in the village knew that the story was false for they had seen the two going back home at different times. But in the meeting the women were not allowed to speak.. Mariamma was fined two hundred rupees and Manikkam was fined a hundred. The father of Mariamma was angry and he started hitting her as hard as he could. The Naattaamai in the trial made a verdict by saying: “it is you female chicks who ought to be humble and modest. A man may do a hundred things still and get away with it. You girls should consider what you are left with it. You girls should consider what you are left with, in your bellies”(26). Mariamma’s humiliation is complete when in front of the whole gathering she is told to kneel and seek forgiveness. No one asked Manikkam to do the same. This incident shows the injustice and partial treatment given to Dalit women

Dalit women who work hard endlessly day and night at home and in the workplace are affected mentally and physically. Bama questions why only Dalit women are attacked by pets. The narrator rightly explains that Dalit women over work from morning to evening and face additional tortures from their husbands are a little mentally weak. Break down and behave as if they have been attacked by pets. The narrator is of the firm belief that Dalit women should strengthen themselves and face all types of adversities with courage and never break down. Bama feels that women should be aware of their situations and find solution to their problems instead of breaking down and behaving as if they have been possessed by pets.

The plight of Dalit women is always poor. Different women in the Paraiya street has different reasons to suffer. All their sufferings are narrated by Bama in these aspects on her way back home from school, Bama found a Dalit woman called Thaayi weeping. Her husband to keep her under control almost beats her to death. Bama writes, “Thaayi’s husband was beating her up again and again with the belt from his waist. She didn’t even have a chattai on. Everywhere the strap fell on her light skin, there were bright red weals”(42).

Then there is Rakkamma from Kuppachipatti whose regular plights with her husband is different from Thaayi. If Thaayi has resigned to her fate, Raakkamma is not ready to do so. She does not left of her husband easily when beaten up. She uses abusive and obscene language with equal vindictiveness. Lifting her saree when everyone starts calling her shameless, she shouts at all of them and says ”Why don’t you lot just go off and mind your business? It is I who am beaten to death everyday. If I hadn’t shamed him like this, he would surely have split my skull in two the horrible man”. Usage of bad language was Raakkamma’s only means of escape.

Bama also narrates the story of Maikkanni (Seyarani) who is a mal- nutrition girl of eleven years old. Her father deserted the family and joined with another women. Maikkanni, as a driving force, worked in match factories and farm lands to manage the family. In the factory, She was beaten for throwing away two labels. As a child labourer, she was also insulted as ‘Paraya’ by co- child workers.

The story of Maikkanni is a revelation of the hidden strength and resilience of a Dalit girl who has to face the most awful circumstances in life right from childhood. Bama portrays Maikkanni as possessing a sense of maturity and poise for above her under age. With a deviant father and a mother who put the burden of a new baby each year on her shoulders, She is robbed off her childhood. She takes care of all the affairs at home and works in a match factory. She is also a victim to the bullying and exploitation by the men from within and outside her community at home and in the work place. Bama also exposes the ignorance and innocence of her women when it comes to voting and electing the government.

Bama says that being a woman and that too a Dalit woman who is unmarried has posed great difficulty for her in everyday life. She asks the basic question as to why a woman can’t belong to no one but herself. She not only speaks for herself but for her community at large when she says:“I have to struggle so hard because I am a woman, and exactly like that, my people are constantly for the simple fact of having been born as Dalits. Is it our fault that we are Dalit”.

The Dalit women were tormented both within and out of their homes. Playing the spokesperson for the women of her community, Bama states that it is on her part to speak out the truth that though all women are slaves to men, her women are the worst sufferers. Bama wants to bring a change in the lives of the women of her community and women as a whole. She also speaks for women on the whole when she says that women too as individuals have their own desires, and wishes, that if women do not speak for themselves, come forward to change their condition then who else is going to do it for them.. Bama ends her novel in an optimistic tone:

We must bring up our girls to think in these new ways from an early age. We should educate boys and girls alike, showing no difference between them as they grow into adults. We should give our girls the freedom we give our boys. If we rear our children like this from the time they are babies, women will reveal their strength. Then there will come a day when men and women will live as one, with no difference between them; with equal rights.(123)

One can find that the writer herself has suffered a lot of injustice and abuse at the hands of patriarchal society. *Sangathi* (1994) is her second novel where the writer gives reference to many incidents. Bama has personally confronted with these events and she has exposed it to the world with utmost details. The most prominent factors that hinder the growth of the subalterns are caste and gender. In *Karuku* the writer provides all the details about the different caste and their hierarchy. The upper and lower caste people lived in different parts of the village. The Dalits especially the women are not allowed to participate in any social affairs. The upper class people neither visit the settlements of the lower caste nor do they touch them in any caste. They consider Dalits to be impure and hence they are called as untouchables.

As it was mentioned earlier, the Dalits were not only suppressed by caste and gender but also by the language they speak. As Bama says, "Being a Tamil seems to be equivalent to being a Parayar" *karukku* (24). And among them, Parayar were the separate category. As a Tamil nun a writer was rejected and humiliated by other nuns in the convent. Tamil people are not appreciated and accepted by the other language speakers according to the novel. The lower caste women are subjected to violence by the upper caste. Moving to gender inequality, the writer gives importance to female marginalization. If the lower caste is inferior to upper caste then the women are considered inferior to men.

Women are subjected to inequality, social exclusion, caste discrimination, injustice, slavery and violence in all the possible ways. Tamil Dalits, paraiyars to be specific are suppressed by the upper caste groups such as Nadar, Naicker and Chaliyars. They are considered as untouchables and forced to do hard labour with less wages by the upper class people. They are not allowed to participate in any social events. Dalit women are always exposed to violence and injustice. Female marginalization leads to the suppression of women in the society by their caste system. There are many writers and activists who raised their voice against the injustice being done to the Dalit women by the patriarchal system

A change in attitude is the need of the hour, and with this Bama is optimistic of inequalities coming to an end. Bama makes an appeal for change and betterment of the life of Dalit women in the variety of fields, including gender discrimination, equal opportunity in work force, education rights. The readers hear the voice of many women in pain, anger frustration and some out of courage. The sharp tongue of the Dalit women protects her against oppressed.

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