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**Retracing the Narrative of
Subalternity: Historical
Evolutions and New
Applications.
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E-Seminar

Retracing the Narrative of Subalternity: Historical Evolutions and New Applications

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THE VOICE OF DALIT WOMEN IN BAMA'S KARUKKU

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Abstract

The voice of the Dalits has risen to make a positive impact on the lives of many Dalits. Feminism is not only a label which is used with the subordination of women but also the poetics of liberation. Feminism is not only a western movement, but it also a western epistemology. In recent years, Dalit Feminism has played a vital role in the liberation process. This paper attempts to identify some key issues with regard to Bama's Karukku. The novels without doubt, have contributed to Dalit Feminism in a major way. The oppressions of the Dalit women are captured vividly in the novels, and it also gives a glimpse of all the various facets of a typical Dalit women's birth and her other life pattern.

The Voice of Dalit Women in Bama's Karukku

Post-colonial literature is a form of literary writing that responds to the intellectual discourse of European colonization in the Asia, Africa, Middle East, the Pacific, and other post-colonial areas throughout the globe. Post-colonial literature addresses the problems and consequences of the de-colonization of a country and of a nation, especially the political and cultural independence of formerly subjugated colonial peoples; it also covers literary critiques of and about post-colonial fiction, the undertones of which carry, communicate, and justify racialism and colonialism. But most contemporary forms of postcolonial literature present

literary and intellectual criticisms of the postcolonial discourse by endeavouring to assimilate post-colonialism and its literary expressions.

Post-colonialism is the critical destabilization of the theories (intellectual and linguistic, social and economic) that support the ways of Western thought – Deductive reasoning, the Rule of Law, and Monothesis – by means of which colonialists, “understand” , “perceive” and “know” the world. Post-colonial concept thus establishes intellectual spaces for the subaltern peoples to speak for themselves, in their own voices, and so produce the cultural discourses, of philosophy and language, of society and economy, which equilibrium the imbalanced Us-and-Them twofold power-relationship between the colonist and the colonial subject.

Common perceptions on colonialism show colonialism usually works through the use of brutal force employed by one country to exploit another Community and obtain economic wealth through abuse of native people.

The post-colonial perspective emerged as a challenge to this tradition and legacy; it attempts to illegitimate the idea of establishing power through conquest. A relatively new evolving academic concept in relation to postcolonial studies is the Stranger King concept. Dalit Literature, literature about the Dalits, the oppressed class under Indian caste system forms an important and distinct part of Indian literature.

Dalit literature established into prominence and as a collective voice after 1960, starting with Marathi, and soon appeared in Hindi, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil Language, through self-narratives, like poems, short stories and most significantly autobiographies known for their realism, and for its contribution to Dalit politics. It denounced as petty and false the then prevailing romanticism with the bourgeois Sadshiv petti literature treated the whole Dalit issue,

ignoring the social reality of appalling poverty and oppression of caste Hindus which was the result of the bourgeois character of this values. It is often compared with the African-American literature especially in its illustration of issues of racial segregation and injustice, as seen in Slave narratives.

In 1992 when a Dalit woman left the convent and wrote her autobiography, the Tamil milestone work “karukku” privately in 1992- a passionate and important mix of history, sociology, and the strength to remember. Karukku insolvent obstacles of tradition in more ways than one. The first autobiography by a Dalit woman writer and a classic of subaltern inscription, it is a bold and poignant tale of life outside mainstream Indian thought and function. Revolving around the main theme of caste oppression within the Catholic Church, it portrays the tension between the self and the community, and presents Bama life as a process of self-reflective and recovery from social and institutional betrayal.

Bama wrote her autobiography quite differently from the usual style. What makes an autobiography different from a testimony is that the former is merely talking about the events in life while the latter is written with a purpose. Bama interlaces the two together and it resulted in a testimonial autobiography. It is relevant to study a text which records the oppression faced by a subaltern Dalit woman and how “Karukku” can be treated as a subaltern testimonial autobiography.

Bama’s “karukku” is a revolutionary novel literature. It has created a great impact in the society. The title itself denotes the poignancy of the novel. It is the threshold for the upcoming of Dalit people. The novel was originally written in Tamil and later translated into English by Lakshmi Holmstrom. Bama’s novels focus on ‘Racism’ and caste-based and gender

discrimination. They also portray cast-discrimination practiced by the religion. The major theme of this novel. Man is said to be the name of pride, honor, caste, superstition, wealth and power. This novel with its theme whips the people who discriminate human beings in the name of caste and religion.

The whole novel is an autobiography of Bama. The sufferings and difficulties are virtually portrayed in this novel. The caste system emerged so long ago in order to distinguish people who indulge in various occupations. Today, the total outlook of caste system has been changed. People fight among themselves and become violent. There is no spirituality but religion and caste exist.

Bama suffered and become a victim to the caste and caste breeders before she knows the meaning of caste. She does not know she is ill-treated and to which community she belongs. Bama, while she was studying in school, she suffered for the first time and she was ill treated for being a Dalit girl. She and her friends were once playing together. The play was that each and every one should climb the coconut tree and touch the coconut. All did it and finally when Bama was about to touch it, due to the force and pulling of all the children it fell down. Bama was blamed and she had been declared as a thief. The teachers and others in school said that she was trying to steal the coconut. Bama was asked to get a letter from the school correspondent in order to re-admit her in school. This was the first incident which depressed Bama a lot.

Bama once underwent an embarrassing situation. A function was held in her college and all came to in neat and elegant dress. Bama did not have good dress to wear. She felt ashamed and her friends criticized and bullied her. Bama did not want to attend the function, so she locked herself in the toilet and remained there until the function got over.

The streets in the village were also marginalized for the Dalit people. People who belong to Dalit community lived in a street which was outer from the other parts of the village. There was no shop, hospital, school and other basic facilities in their streets. Once the Dalit people fought for their right and a huge war took place between the Dalit and others. There was loss of lives on both the sides. This incident created frustration and increased suffering in the heart of Bama.

Bama from her childhood witnessed the suffering of her people and her own. She is bold and educated but poor and suppressed. She got education in college and joined as a teacher which was run by a Christian missionary. She was suppressed and ill-treated there too. As it was a Christian institution, people from abroad also worked there. They did not like Bama and she felt as fish out of water. Arrangements were made to transfer her but due to certain reasons it was not done. Later she was transferred to Kashmir. Bama could not bear the sufferings and she was advised by a person to return to her native. Bama somehow reached her native. She felt frustrated and asked herself what she had done to face all miseries. She recalled her past life and found nothing pleasant in it. She realized that she had become a victim to the brutal society. She gained confidence and positive attitude from her failures and miseries. She became ready to face everything. She had a thought that she had faced many difficulties and overcome many troubles, so what does she have to meet worse than this. This attitude changed her life and she became victorious. One can see a victim victor in the name of Bama. Bama is the representative of all suppressed and Dalit people. Each and every one has to fight for their right and learn the art of turning all negatives into positives.

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