



THE STUDY OF EXPECTATION AND DESPERATION ON RELIGIOSITY IN BAMA'S KARUKKU

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Bama is a tamil dalit woman writer who has contributed many literary works to dalit literature such as novels, short stories, poems etc., In her autobiography Karukku, she has written about the gender and caste discrimination faced by them even if they attain good education. In this paper I would like to express about Bama's expectation and desperation regarding religiosity and the persistence of caste discrimination in her life.

Caste discrimination is one of the most pernicious forms of discrimination as it condemns individuals from birth to a life of marginalization.

- Gulnara Shahinian

Bama belongs to Christian religion and goes to catholic church from her childhood. She has got impressed by the Christian scripture which is teaching about love and about the intimate relationship with God. She decides to become a nun and to serve God. After she joins in the nunnery she comes to know that there is a separate training center for dalit catholics and she has to go there. The way how dalits are treated based on their caste makes to feel that she

has taken a wrong decision. She gives up her wish to become a nun.

Through this part of life of Bama, we can clearly understand that the caste discrimination occupies a major role even in the religious places and whom dalits believe as highly spiritual are disappointing and humiliating them without reasons.

Bama has bitter experiences on caste discrimination in her village. She wants to go to a new environment which gives her peace and to prove her identity. She has studied Holy Bible which says about the love and scarification. After the completion of her studies, Bama joins in a catholic Christian school as a teacher. She finds many dalit children studies there and she likes to serve them with devotion in duty. When she observes the behavior of other teachers and nuns towards the children, she gets angry and keeps on arguing with them for the sake of poor children. This experience pushes her to think about becoming nun.

It struck me overwhelmingly that these nuns collectively oppressed dalit children and teachers so very much; why should I not become a nun too and truly help these people



who are humiliated so much and kept under such strict control? (Bama, 23)

Amidst the strong opposition from the family members and friends, she prepares herself to go to convent. All her relatives and friends advise her that she could not find the peace in nunnery and nuns will never follow the truth of gospel in real life but Bama could not accept it. Moreover, before joining the convent, she has learned about a nun who lived and sacrificed her life for the sake of downtrodden and poor. Bama wants to live like her and believes wholeheartedly that her wish will never put her in shame.

They said I could do far more useful work as a layperson than I would do as nun. They said that caste-difference counted for a great deal within convents. (Bama, 23)

After she enters into the convent, very soon, she finds that the atmosphere is not up to her expectation. She feels that the environment and life style of nuns are against the God's call. She has seen how she is discriminated in front of other trainees without consideration. The Sister who supervises the training has asked Bama about the change of birth date from christening certificate and school certificate. Whatever the explanation she gives, the Sister could not agree it and she tells that the tamil people will cheat the school

administration to get admission with wrong birth date.

What a nuisance this is turning out to be; thus far they made us hang our heads in humiliation because of our caste; in this order being a tamil seems to be equivalent to being a Paraya. (Bama, 25)

At the time British colonization, many Christian missionaries have come to India and have helped poor people through some charities and by prayers. By seeing the dalit community and their sufferings, they have introduced Jesus (who gives eternal peace) and christianity to them. Due to their preachings of God many dalits have converted to Christianity. Those people are called dalit Christians. Bama has strong belief on Jesus and on the teachings of Holy Bible. So she has expected the same good qualities from the nuns who claim that they are the followers of Bible.

The other experience what she shares about caste-discrimination removes the curtain of the order(convent). In a particular class at the time of completion of her training, a Sister tells that there are certain orders which do not agree Harijan(dalit) women as prospective nuns and they have got separate nunnery somewhere. Bama could not digest it and tries to find out about her position. When she has enquired, she is completely disturbed with the reply of the Sister.



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Asia Pacific Journals

ELK Asia Pacific Journals – Special Issue

ISBN: 978-81-930411-2-3

At once she asked me whether any other order had invited me to join them. I said yes, while I was working in a convent school earlier, the Sisters had invited me to enter their order. Our sister said, ‘Well, they asked you too, did they? Don’t worry about it. You may join us.’ I wished I could have disappeared from the spot and vanished then and there. (Bama, 25)

In the convent, she watches many rich children happily comes, studies and goes but the dalit pupils are used to look after the jobs like sweeping the premises, swabbing and washing the classrooms and cleaning the lavatories eventhough they are not given respect. They are all insulted by other children and by the nuns too as low-caste people who do not have moral discipline, neither cleanliness nor culture. Bama could not show her angry because she is afraid that if they come to know her caste, they may not give same respect or they may stop talking with her.

In Karukku, the main philosophy of human life is clearly revealed. It does not mean in which religion the person is born, it mean that in which way he is grown. The society is having a blind eye on dalits. Bama has got double depressed after she has joined in convent. Being a poor dalit Christian woman, she has learnt the Gospel and possesses the wish of helping and serving poor as they have learnt that Jesus himself born in cattle-shed and died for the

poor, ugly, disgusting sinners. We are surprised to hear about nuns through Bama who could not possess such love in them. Howcome the truth of Bible is hidden to their eyes?

Bama raises many questions to society, she asks,

Are Dalits not human beings? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have such attributes as a sense of honour and self-respect? Are they without any wisdom, beauty, dignity? What do we lack?

(Bama, 27)

As a part of this society, we have to answer this question by understanding and uplifting dalits. According to some critics, it is stated that the dalit Christians are completely forbidden by the government and by the upper class. Due to the class discrimination, upper class could not accept them. Due to the conversion from Hinduism to Christianity, the government could not recognize them as low-castes. The dalit Christians are much depressed when compared with other dalits. Karukku proves that even in religious places, they are not treated with respect.

Those who commit atrocities against Dalits do not differentiate between Christian Dalits and non-Christian Dalits. For an Indian, a Dalit is a Dalit, whether Christian or not.

(Arulraja, 9)



Bama decides to come out of the convent. She has refused to listen anybody's words and has joined in nunnery with full-fledge. With the same speed, she wants to come out of it. She is giving many reasons for her emotional action and reaction. Not only the caste-discrimination matters her, she points out the way how the order runs too. She complains that there is no presence of God. When Bama stays in convent, she has got a good and nutritious food, nice bed to sleep and a comfortable life with all facilities inside the compound. She tells that the convent schools are admitting wealthy children compared to poor. When she asks about that she has got a reply that their parents are the sponsors for their sophisticated life, for their building constructions and there is no use of serving only the poor who could not give or do anything to the order. So it is important to help, obey and honour the rich pupils.

The other thing which disturbs her is, in the convent is the rich children who are acted as the owners of the order. Whatever they do, nuns keep quiet, accept all their mistakes and admit them as innocent in the class, acted only on their demands but dalit children are punished severely even for small mistakes. They have to suffer for the mistakes of wealthy children also. Bama could not bear such an injustice and unkindness. She says,

All those people who had taught us, had taught us only that God is loving, kind, gentle, one who forgives sinners, patient, tender,

humble, obedient. Nobody had ever insisted that God is just, righteous, is angered by injustices, opposes falsehood, never countenances inequality. There is a great deal of difference between this Jesus and the Jesus who is made known through daily pieties. (Bama, 104)

Before joins in the order, Bama has got freedom to say what she likes and dislikes and atleast to raise her voice but it has become so pathetic to her and feels as if she has become a slave to the order by losing all her birth rights and human rights. She is insisted only to shut her mouth, eat, pray, work and sleep. Nothing more than these things she can do from there. She can do these things from outside also. It is not needed to wear a mask as nun. Her aim to serve and help poor dalit children in school has become a dream. At last she finds clearly without any doubt that there is no godliness but worldliness, respects only wealthy. She feels shame to be a nun thereafter and tries to run away from the place.

But there is something ugly in saying one thing and doing another. How long can one play-act in this way?.....And I don't know if they have become so habituated to their play-acting that they can no longer distinguish between the role and the reality. (Bama, 107)



When she has decided to leave the convent, she faces many obstacles and restrictions from the Sisters. Bama's religiosity has taught a bitter and an unforgettable experience. According to Bama, religiosity is gentle love, equality, honour, politeness, kindness and true devotion but she has seen the negative form of religiosity which says about inequality, selfishness, greediness, partiality, enslavement and control. Each coin has two sides, she has found the other side of it but she could not digest it and do not want to live with unrighteous and injustice nature in the sight of the true God, Jesus Christ. Finally, she concludes her journey as nun and says,

Today I realize what an extremely foolish thing I did. But at that time I didn't understand in the least what I was doing. I was like one who was falling into a well, blindfolded.

(Bama, 105)

With fear and humiliation, Bama travels to her native place. She could not control her tears when she rewinds the past incidents in mind especially when she travels to Jammu to take up the job in convent, how the nuns send her in an unreserved compartment and deceives her as if some of their person will climb the train with ticket and how she has thrown by TC to sit near toilet for not having the ticket.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the person who has gone to nunnery

very actively and happily, the same person comes back to her native place sadly and shamefully by showing the traces of failure in all over her face. Bama is an educated and a bold woman. So she has faced struggles and comes out of them very bravely without losing her confidence. The expectation what Bama has on religiosity has given the scars of everlasting and ever forgotten desperation in her heart.

Everywhere people believe that if a person appears to be religious, surely they will be having all religious oriented qualities and a good attitude. When it comes to reality, everyone will have their own reasons. When a group of members take up a congregation or an organization, they should have rules and regulations. It is mandatory for them to follow those rules by themselves and to live according to the doctrine what they preach truthfully otherwise they will lead the innocent people to unnecessary sufferings. Bama proves through her activity of coming out from convent the Christianity is not to survive, it is to serve the poor and it is not the way to gain but to give.

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ISBN: 978-81-930411-2-3

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