

A PSYCHO-SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE THEME OF EVOLUTION AS SEEN IN BAMA'S KARUKKU.

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ABSTRACT--Dalit writer Bama's work *Karukku*, is packed with the pivotal theme of Dalit oppression that was dealt in a psycho-sociological plane. The entire psychological trauma, the author-narrator faced as a first-hand experience by her and which is later served as a collective consciousness of the whole marginalised lot is found remarkable. All the discussion undertaken here is seen with the glass of evolution in this research article that talks about various phases of evolution like that of Psychological, sociological and revolutionary aspect of the entire class-struggle. The very concept oppression itself is seen as a psychological and at last sociological evolution among the oppressed and the oppressor. In the similar manner eradication of such social evil is dealt as something that can be gradually done. Thus the evolution of self-realisation of Untouchability in the part of the narrator and then moving forward to create awareness on a social level is discussed here.

Key-words--Bama, Class-Struggle, Dalit Oppression, Evolution, Karukku, Marginalisation, Psycho-Sociology, Untouchability.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dalit Literature has developed into one of the most prevailing Liberate Literature when it comes in terms with probing the dominating ideologies and empowerment of the exploited lot of the society. It can as well be considered as the microcosmic say of all the taciturn docile ones all over the world. It would be so ground-breaking, if the works are observed as a collective study of all the subjugated ones, instead of restraining it simply to the Dalits.

Bama is one of the most influential Dalit writers who stood for the cause of stirring her downtrodden society by empowering them with her liberating ideologies packed in her works. Though being a Dalit writer, her translated works brought a world-wide resonance of liberating voices. Her works like *Karukku*, *Sangati*, *Vanmam* and other short story collections work in a incredible approach of rendering the repulsive forces of Casteism and Patriarchical habits originated in her society. And the works didn't end with that, but also bring to the limelight the sunny side of the emancipation too, by the way, the author questions the legitimacy of the obdurate dominant ideologies in contrast to Utopian ones.

By doing so, the author aims at visualising her visualization of a caste free society and in so doing creating that vision amongst all her readers. This, in succession, generates oodles of probabilities of a promising society which might develop into caste-free one day. When the topic associated to the concerns like Coercion, Casteism, etc..., it is notable to mull over how they have become so ubiquitous in society. Something should have elicited its wielding of its supremacy on the subjects. It must have slowly started to grow powerful and become so much entrenched

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like a mountain, unshakeable and powerful. This can be attested with the narratives of oppression spoke over ages and ages in the Universe. After considering this detrimental entity's deep-rootedness, it is astute at this occasion to cogitate upon the notion of shifting the scheme created by those entities in the society.

Many revolutionists and saviours have wielded their power of remonstrance in the society to stamp out such evil powerhouses like caste, oppression etc...in the record. Here comes to the vanguard of Ideological dominion, the notion of evolution. Just like the malevolence started to grow progressively, a change can be wielded in a gradual but steady development. This can be phrased as Evolution in this research article. Evolution is defined by Collins as, "a process of gradual change that takes place over many generations, during which species of animals, plants, or insects slowly change some of their physical characteristics" (Collins). This definition is framed under biological terms. Another connotation given to the term given by Collins is that: it is "a gradual development, especially to a more complex form." (Collins)

According to this, any form of society and its custom cannot be considered to be appearing all of a sudden. It undergoes its evolution, be it a good one or a bad one. Issues of oppression and its opponent element, issues of liberation all pursue the same rule. This paper aspires at highlighting the phases of such evolution in different forms or stages of evolution concerning different social issues, especially social oppression. This is intended to be done keeping the works of the Dalit writer Bama, as illustrations for the study.

By far and large, Dalit literature has become so prominent in the literary circle. With its authentic details of Dalit oppression and the boastful Patriotic kind of feeling towards their identity has never stopped creating huge influential ripples in the literary society. Most of the Dalit writers are by themselves Dalits. Thus the first-hand expressions of their feelings and thoughts are so powerful to bring about the implied effect intended by the authors among the readers. One such remarkable writer is Bama, whose real name is Bama Faustina Mary. In the beginning, she took up this mission of writing just to exorcise all the tormenting scars found in her mind after having had a terrible experience of the power of Casteism. But later, she has taken it up as her mission to make it as "the weapon of the weak" to emancipate her society from the agonizing clutches of Casteism and its oppression.

Bama's so-called powerful Trilogy, namely, Karukku, Sangati and Vanmam, seems to be packed up with ideas related to the most serious issue of Casteism and its monstrous effect on the society. Many have spoken much about such marginalisation issues beyond measure. But what is spectacular about Bama here is the way she had put forth her view on the whole idea of Casteism, Marginalisation, and finally emancipation of the downtrodden Dalits. Such a narration is so special because a reader can find the dancing of Evolution skirting the entire narration of the works by the author. The author-narrator herself makes her narration gets evolved, that is, gradually gets formed to the ultimate expected one. She subtly starts the narration by articulating the most scenic beauty of her village concerning her villagers and then slowly infiltrating her narration with the main idea of Casteism. She thus starts her Karukku as, "Our village is very beautiful..." (Karukku 1) What seemed to be a poetic way of appreciating her village in the beginning slowly evolves itself into a harsh critique on Casteism which was harboured by the people of the society in which she lived or rather survived.

The subterfuge employed by the author can be justified by defending it by stating that any particular social behaviour is not a one night stand. It gets evolved either into a positive one or a negative one. Thus, eradicating the negative one also needs an evolutionary process. The issues should be dealt by striking hard at its root rather at its stem. Thus, the author effectively had used her weapon of writing to find a diagnostic attitude towards the fatal issue of Casteism.

Moving on with the theme about the work taken for the study it is also worth emphasizing that, even the novels of Bama has undergone evolutionary enforcement. The first novel towards the final one in the trilogy takes up a transition from a personal encounter of the very enemy, Casteism and the evolution of the understanding of it towards the generalisation of its impact on other individuals too. This finally has led the author-narrator to contribute to the evolutionary perspective towards Casteism in the third novel *Vanmam*, which hones on the revolutionary vigour in the emancipation of the downtrodden.

As said earlier, the author-narrator harnessed the evolution-tinged narration of the work by slowly developing on narrating the issue of Casteism that has wielded its power on her society. After starting to describe the beauty of her village she moves on to describe with pained words born out of her bitter experience gained as a Dalit woman. In the beginning, she starts to bring out the differences found in the lives lived by the so-called Upper caste people or rather non-Dalits and the so-called Lower Caste people or rather the Dalits in her society. Even though Mother Nature has no prejudice in dealing with the inhabitants based on the man-made social hierarchy, people have a lot of partiality among themselves. Bama makes it clear in the very beginning itself, how there is a clear demarcation between the lives lived by the upper caste and the one lived by the lower caste people. It is illustrated very clearly on the way the former said people enjoy most of the benefits at ease, whereas, the later ones worn themselves out by severe labours even to gain the bare minimum to meet the ends. It goes as follows in the first chapter of *Karukku* itself,

II. DISCUSSION

“Most of our people are agricultural labourers. When there is no call for work in the fields, they go up to the woods on the mountains and make a living by gathering firewood and selling it. People from the better-off castes never have such problems, though. They own fields with boundaries; they have dug wells and established pump-sets; they can work their land all year; they eat well and live in comfort in their homes.” (*Karukku* 1-2)

Moreover, it is also noted that social privileges also cater to the needs of the upper-class people in a way that butters-up them rather than the marginalized ones. Social institutions and community halls are also built in the places of the upper caste people so that they are easily accessible by them, whereas the lower caste people have to go all the way from their places to their place to come within the reach of the institutions. Bama, while giving her readers an imaginative tour around her place, she says so,

“I don’t know how it came about the upper-caste communities and the lower caste-communities were separated like this into different parts of the village, and we stayed in ours. We only went to their side of we had work to do there. But they never, ever, came to our parts. The post-office, the panchayat board, the milk-depot, the big shops, the church, the schools – all these stood in their streets. So why would they need to come to our area?” (*Karukku* 6)

In such a manner, Bama started to build upon the way how the awareness of the unjust social practices got evolved in her and then others eventually. Self-realization of all these ugly faces of her society evolved finally into anger, thirst for freedom and transformation in the author, which made her to take huge steps in her life which was beautifully but painfully portrayed in the remaining of the work. Bama brings in the shocking leap of such awareness of the Untouchability which she encountered at her early years to her readers. “When I was studying in

the third class, I hadn't yet heard people speak openly of untouchability. But I had already seen, felt, experienced and humiliated by what it is." (Karukku 11)

The very statement above summarizes how the child Bama, was scarred for the rest of her life due to the unjust social practices which she witnessed and suffered even at her very young age. Childhood is meant to be cherished and something that has to bring nostalgic memories in the later years of a person. But here a Dalit's childhood was only filled with painful events that can only leave scars in their reminiscences which when recalled at their later years only creates quiver in their emotional framework. Life gets super hard for them right from the very beginning of their birth itself. This face to face encounter to the cruel face of the society paved way to the gradual evolution of the author's self-realization. She from being a mere child cherishes enjoying all the minor entertainments provided to her by her surroundings until the day when she encountered the untouchability issue

"I was walking home from school one day, an old bag hanging from my shoulder. It was possible to walk the distance in ten minutes. But usually, it would take me thirty minutes at the very least to reach home. It would take me from half an hour to an hour to dawdle along, watching all the fun games that were going on, all the entertaining novelties and oddities in the streets, the shops and the bazaar." (Karukku 11)

All these novelties as such became far from reaching from the artistic eye until when she caught a glimpse of an old man who was holding a packet of snack by the strings that are used to tie the packet thereby avoiding touching the snack with his fingers. Then, "The elder went straight up to the Naicker, bowed low and extended the packet towards him, cupping the hand that held the string with his other hand. Naicker opened the parcel and began to eat the vadais." (P 13) This sight in a small girl's eyes was only an element of hilarity in the beginning until she got a distressing rationalization of that elder's manners from her elder brother. This triggered the evolution of her realization of the Untouchability issue existing in her society. Thus it led her to speculate with angry questions in opposition to such injustice.

He said everybody believed that Naickers Were upper caste, and therefore must not touch Parayas. If they did, they would be polluted...

When I heard this, I didn't want to laugh anymore, and I felt terribly sad. How could they believe that it was disgusting if a Paraya held that package in his hands, even though the vadai had been wrapped first in a banana leaf, and then parcelled in paper? I felt so provoked and angry... (Karukku 13)

Another apprehension was awaiting her after this eye-opening confrontation. Her grandmother used to work in an upper-class woman's house and while she returns home she has the custom of bringing food from there. Later when Bama came to discover that the food was the leftover ones from the upper caste. Furthermore the way it was offered was also so horrendous and disrespectful.

It was a long time before I realized that Paatti was bringing home the unwanted food that Naickers were ready to throw away. ... After she had finished all her filthy chores, Paatti placed the vessel that she had brought with her, by the side of the drain. The Naicker lady came out with her leftovers, leaned out from some distance and tipped them into Paatti's vessel, and went away, Her vessel, it seemed, must not touch Paatti's; it would be polluted. (Karukku 14)

Thus, all these occurrences witnessed by Bama, made her engage herself into action in eradicating Untouchability. She was incensed to the core and her soul started to long deeply in some way or the other to put an end to such unjust social practices. All-inquisitive-Bama started to become reckless until her elder brother came

to her rescue with his well-experienced advice. To her, he is a role model who has raised above such caste issues by trying to gain some dignity and to be bold amidst those who are abusive in the caste infested society. He has told her that, "Because we are born into the Paraya jati, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities. So study with care, learn all you can." (Karukku 15)

Bama evolved from being an angered person to a revolutionary Dalit. She studied hard as per her brother's advice and started to excel in almost everything she does. But she also felt embarrassed in many a situation wherein, she felt all the more ashamed when poverty issues cropped up in the schools and colleges. There she faced partiality and humiliation just because she is a Dalit. This again pushed her to go beyond her from just excelling in her studies. She got the deep desire to get rid of this caste issues which kept encountering her everywhere she goes. Thus she took a giant leap of entering a convent and to dedicate herself in the betterment of the Dalits. But all went in vain when she came into the realization that even the convents are infested with the caste divisions. After trying all that she could only went in vain. So Bama left the convent out of disappointment.

Bama is only left here perplexed and shattered in her evolution phase. But still, she is having within herself a burning urge to uproot the social evil all at once. Even the society within her cast members kept on fighting among themselves which added to her burden. Even her belief in God also has undergone a drastic evolutionary stride. From her childhood she was loaded with all beliefs imposed on her by the nuns in the church. She was only threatened and forced to obey their rules in the name of the devil who might torture the sinners according to their stories. She grew with all those beliefs. In karukku, Bama gives a picturesque detail of all the beliefs and religious customs she followed. But later when she was in isolation after coming out from the convent she started to search God on her own. She started to read the Holy Bible and slowly her realization of the concept of God got evolved into a mature one. She started to stop trusting in rituals and to believe in true worship that involves one's heart.

All her deep lamentations turned out to become her compelling urge to make her into what she is. She finally chose a goal to press on, that is,

We who are asleep must open our eyes and look about us. We must crush all these institutions that use caste to bully us into submission, and demonstrate that among human beings there are none who are high and low. Those who have found their happiness by exploiting us are not going to let us go easily. It is we who have to place them where they belong and bring about a changed and just society where all are equal. (Karukku 25)

Thus, Karukku served well in the evolution of an individual from the struggled Dalit to a revolutionary activist writer. All the questions and trauma Bama encountered in this journey paved way to such a transformation preparing her for a better cause. Moreover, the next two works Sangatti and Vanmam take this evolutionary process on to a completely different aspect. The narration of Sangati, transformed from narrating the pathetic condition of the Dalit woman from the double-oppression to heroic and bold individuals. All the events described bring the realization of the collective women community. Whereas, the third work in the Trilogy, Vanmam, deals with a better conclusion to the Trilogy. It shows the new generation that evolved from all the caste divisions discussed in the previous works. From the immature aggression shown by the people towards their oppressors to a mature way in dealing with the social issue is shown in Vanmam. The younger people started to know the value of education and upliftment. They started to fight in a more respective way. Finally, the work ends with a ray of hope for a better and promising society for all the downtrodden ones.

As with the theme of evolution discussed in this article so far, it is very evident that the very concept of evolution itself gets unravelled in different phases as discussed above. To conclude this article it is found noteworthy to highlight those phases quintessentially as follows:

III. CONCLUSION

Right from the beginning of the novel *Karukku*, Bama clearly discusses the fact that her community faced multifarious ways of hurdles and oppression on the basis of economical status itself. Poverty made their lives a living hell. Even ill-fame gets attached to them along with the Caste-oppression. Those who dominate them also make it sure that, the downtrodden ones never make any progress by showing unjust dominance towards them in all their walks of life. But slowly as the novel progresses it is noted that the ideology of this evolution in the economical phase is portrayed well by Bama. After the harsh encounter of the reality of the oppression, the ideological aspect of the economy gets evolved from encounter to enlightenment and then ultimately to revolutionary ideas to emancipate herself and gradually all the other fellow Dalits. Thus, raising the economic status of the downtrodden might prove promising in eradicating poverty and finally untouchability too.

Evolution in the way the author-narrator felt about her self-image too is very obvious. The one who felt utterly ashamed to make her caste identity known to others in the fear of being ill-treated evolves into a boastful declaration of her being a Dalit. The works of Bama, especially the Trilogy *Karukku*, *Sangati* and *Vanmam* also subtly undergo an evolutionary phase. Starting from a pathetic description of the downtrodden life lived by the Dalits, slowly the narration transcends towards enlightenment of the real reason of the situation and finally to the revolutionary measures taken by the Dalits to bring a changing society. *Vanmam* proves to be a witness to such evolution. Dalits started to rise from being oppressed to holding the reigns of the power in society by bringing lots of economical betterment through education and employment. Thus, just as the evil practices slowly evolves to a monstrous defect in the society even eradication of it can get evolved from a revolutionary spark to a social awakening that ultimately leads to a changed and better society.

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