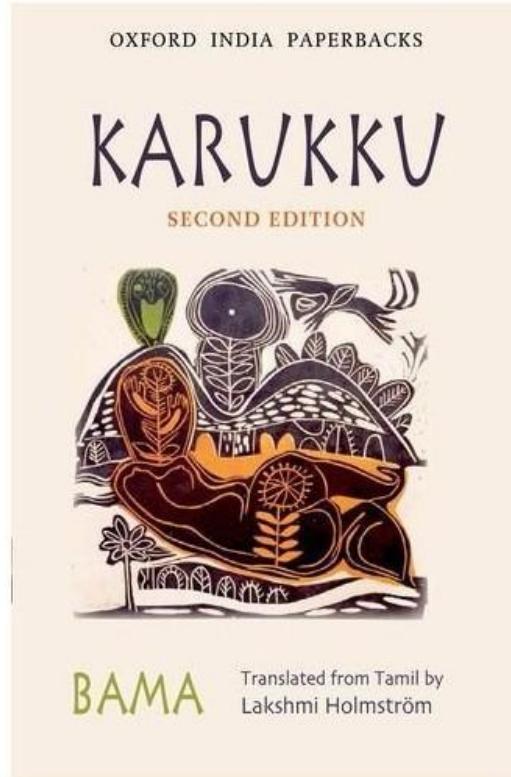


## Sufferings of Dalit in Bama's *Karukku*

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### Abstract

Dalit Literature is literature written by the Dalits and about their lives. Dalit literature forms an important and distinct part of Indian literature. Dalit Literature emerges in the 1960s. Starting with Marathi Language soon appeared: Hindi, Kannada, Telugu, Bengal and Tamil Languages. Through narratives such as Poems, short stories and most Autobiographies. Dalit Literature demanded as petty and false the then privative portrayed of life by the mainstream Marathi literature which lacked mention of the object poetry-stricken life style of the Dalit faced, at that time, from the higher castes. It is often compared with African American literature especially in its depiction of issues of social and racial segregation and injustices as seen slave narrative.

### Introduction

Bama was born in 1958 as Faustina Mary Fatima Rani in a Roman Catholic family from Puthupatti in the then Madras State. Later she accepted 'Bama' as her pen name. Susairaj was her father and Sebasthiamma, her mother. Her father was employed in the Indian Army. Bama's

grandfather had converted from Hinduism to Christianity. Bama's ancestors were from the Dalit community and worked as agricultural labourers. Bama had her early education in her village. On graduation, she served as a nun for seven years.

Bama Faustina Soosairaj is a Tamil, Dalit feminist, committed teacher and novelist. She rose to fame with her autobiographical novel *Karukku* (1992), which chronicles the joys and sorrows experienced by Dalit Christian women in Tamil Nadu. She subsequently wrote two more novels, *Sangati* (1994) and *Vanmam* (2002) along with two collections of short stories: *Kusumbukkaran* (1996) and *Oru Tattvum Erumaiyum* (2003). She is the sister of famous Dalit writer Raj Gauthaman. In addition, she has written twenty short stories.

### ***Karukku***

*Karukku* is the first Tamil Dalit autobiography written by a Dalit Christian woman. Bama gets international recognition when *Karukku* won the Crossword Award in 2001. *Karukku* means Palmyra leaves with their serrated edges on both sides are like double edged swords. The autobiography is a narrative of trauma, pain, resistance and atrocities committed on Dalit Christian women. It is a document of poverty, violence, rejection and suffering and how the writer strives hard to overcome the problems and how she reconstructs her 'self'. She is one of the most challenging figures in Dalit feminist world. She starts her career as a writer in 1992, when she comes out of the convent. She has been awarded a life time achievement award by Canada Tamil Literary Garden Toronto. She is bold enough to focus on caste domination and social discrimination in the present work. The work describes personal crisis of the author's life and anticipates equality, social justice and love towards all. It has been adequately perceived that, Dalit women's writings largely concentrate on the problems and experiences of Dalit women. Bama's life resembles the saw edged *Karukku*.

*Karukku* expresses sorrows, joys and humiliations that her mother, grandmother and many other Dalit women face in fields and at home. Therefore, though it is an autobiography, it is linked with communal problems. Bama's inspiring words awake Dalit women from the deep slumber; portraying their experiences, Bama is trying to seek her identity in the mainstream literature.

We who are asleep must open our eyes and look about us. We must not accept the injustice of our enslavement by telling ourselves it is our fate, as if we have no true feelings; we must dare to stand up for change. 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 or low. Those who have found their happiness by exploiting us are not going to 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.

### **Bama Themes**

Bama's novels focus on caste and gender discrimination. They portray caste-discrimination practiced in Christianity and Hinduism. Bama's works are seen as embodying Dalit feminism and are famed for celebrating the inner strength of the subaltern woman.

### **Sufferings**

The author shares her experiences as a Paraya girl as a school teacher and as a nun. She looks back her life from a moment of personal crisis as she leaves the religious order to which she has belonged for seven years. She reminiscences her childhood days in her village and reflects on them in her autobiography poignantly. The grip of caste is so overpowering in India that even the conversion to another religion cannot annihilate it. The Christian converted Parayas are treated as untouchables even by Christian communities. Bama's family had been converted to Christianity in her grandmother's time. The writer focuses mainly on casteism within the Roman Catholic Church.

The writer argues for the wage disparity among men and women. Her feminist voice is obvious in the following words:

I saw our people working so hard night and day, I often used to wonder from where they got their strength, but of course, they never received a payment that was appropriate to their labour, men received one wage, women another. They always paid men more. I could never understand why. (47).

Women retain strength and pleasure even after worst hardships and various crisis in their lives. Even the writer's mother is not an exception in this regard. She brings up all the children in the absence of her husband who is in the army and away from home for months together. She is a combination of strength and vigour and tenacity. The writer articulates Dalit women's oppression by Police, Panchayat, upper castes, at the Church and further by Dalit men at home. The writer throws light on the patriarchal male centric society and the violent oppression of Dalits, particularly the oppression of Dalit Christians.

According to Bama, though Christianity does not recognize caste divisions, Churches in India are not different in respect of casteism. Dalits are not allowed to join in the choir, are forced to sit separately and are not allowed to bury their dead bodies in Churchyard. Converted Dalits are disillusioned by seeing such rampant casteism in Church. Moreover, they are deprived of all the benefits by the Government as they are Christians. She walks out of the convent after seven years when she finds out discriminatory conduct by Christians. She urges Dalits to get education and to understand the spirit of Christianity and the message of Lord Jesus. But when she comes out of the convent, as she suffered discrimination, she feels economic insecurity. Bama writes this autobiography after leaving the convent, and those days are considered a period of crisis by the author herself. She faced many problems when she came out of the convent. Then she wrote *Karukku*. Bama feels very sad when she finds that even Dalit children are constantly oppressed and humiliated by nuns. They are put to degrading jobs like sweeping, cleaning, washing and even cleaning the lavatories. Parayas are humiliated, irrespective of their age. Her brother always told her that education is the only way to attain equality. His words always inspired her and helped her to study hard. Throughout her life she is reminded of her caste and that makes her so sad. When Bama observes the Naikar woman pouring water from a height of four feet which her own grandmother drinks with cupped hands holding close to her mouth, she gets upset and becomes terribly furious. Each day is new to the writer as it brings something new in her life. She has experienced brutality of the high castes. By seeing the ugly face of the society, she gets enraged.

## **Conclusion**

As a true feminist, Bama resists all kinds of oppression on Dalit women. The author wants to break all the barriers of social and cultural system and depicts her problems as a Dalit and as a woman. A Dalit woman is Dalit among Dalits. She is oppressed thrice. The writer is further oppressed by being a Dalit Christian. Hence, she is oppressed by caste, gender and religion. It is a painful journey with open ending story, and many questions are left unanswered. The writer mainly concentrates on religion and education and gives expression to her bitter experiences. It is the depiction of a journey from weakness to strength.

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