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## **Self-Actualization of Dalit woman and narration as a strategy for transition: An analysis of Bama's works**

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**Abstract**---The practice of untouchability was formally outlawed and considered as illegal by the constitution of India in 1950 but in practice, Dalits are still subjected to extreme forms of social and economic exclusion and discrimination. Dalit Literature reflects real designs of feeling, thought, and action, including outlines of expressions and Society's unconscious and conscious assumptions. In post-Independence India, Dalit literature is one of the most important literary movements. It innovates, giving expression to emerging identity crisis that many not yet be definable in literal terms. Here the author tries to explore the transitional ideas and perspectives propagated by Bama to establish Dalit identity as human identity, highlighting the problems and solutions as texted in her works. The author explains the needs for creative interference to enlarge the power and capacity for change, because it helps for a paradigm shift from silent passivity to productive resistance of the Dalits, which will in due course, transform them to adore in better social status, privilege and consideration.

**Keywords**---unconscious assumptions, conscious assumptions, transitional ideas, resistance, liberation, Dalits.

## Introduction

Dalit literature is a social campaign advanced for the encounter against injustice and is driven for the hope of freedom; it is not simply a literary trend. Dalit literature is considered to be commenced from 11th century when Madara Chennaiah wrote about the unfair and oppressive condition of Dalits. The motion and the movements in the field deconstructed and criticized master and director narratives and analysis. Dalit movement as such started in the year 1958 by the thinkers' like Bhimrao Ambedkar and Jyothiba Phule.

Dalit Writings comprises not only the words about Indian suppressed folks but also about other groups like minorities and backward classes throughout the world that have been downgraded by the privileged classes. Dalit Literature includes writings about the exploitation of nature and environment, the racial discrimination, the women relegation, the rights of Transgenders and the negligence of age old people. "Dalit, rather than being a caste, can be regarded as a symbol of Change or Revolution!" (Thomas 18).

## Materials and Methods

Dr. Ambedkar's struggles for liberation of Dalits in the early twentieth century, is noteworthy in the genre. Dalit Panthers the leading activists, who espoused and championed the cause of dalits, were all writers. They narrated the exact state of Dalits with an intuition and insight that came from those who belonged to the community and some of them from the first-hand experience. Bama's narration belongs to this category. These portrayals of slavery and oppression, as well as the open and hidden forms of caste discrimination in the contemporary world, were distinct from anything that had been written before. Their statements to freedom, dignity, self-respect and equality gave new meaning to primary perceptions of democratic life.

The collective struggle by the untouchables from stigmatized identity to self-chosen identity as Dalit resulted in the renovation of a sect of people to stand self with greatness. The word Dalit Literature was first used in 1958 at a Dalit conference held in Bombay. However, for a unique identity, the term Dalit came into prominence in 1972 through an organization called Dalit Panthers which was founded by a group of young Marathi writers and activists. They formulated a literary theory, a formula within which Dalit writing should be discussed and assessed. Experience is verbalized in a collective form and Bama's work is not an exception to it. It is full of anger and a voice of resistance because the torment of Dalit life cannot be expressed in syrupy poetic stanzas.

An article posted in [navsarjan.org](http://navsarjan.org) describes the term properly, associating untouchables with the term, Dalit:

"Dalits have been oppressed, culturally subjugated, and politically marginalized. The principals of untouchability and purity and pollution dictate what Dalits are and are not allowed to do; where they are and are not allowed to live, go, or sit; who they can and cannot give water to, eat with, or marry; extending into the minutia of all aspects of daily life" (Who are Dalits?)

Bama accustoms people with the caste classification and untouchability that have prevailed in her society, abysmal nature of the downtrodden people and its method of exploitation. She establishes Dalit is not a caste but recognition and an understanding and is related to the practices, ecstasy and burdens and struggles of those in the lowest division of society. It becomes fully grown with a sociological point of view and is related to the ideologies of negativity, upheaval and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary.

### **Discussion : Quandary of Dalits amidst Masculine and Caste Hierarchies**

Use of Dalit vocabulary is one of the significant contributions of Bama to Dalit literature. Her practice of Dalit vocalized dialect as her voice gives an individual and dissimilar echo to her writing. The writer, narrator and the characters use the same local and verbal vocabulary of Dalit people. Her sentence structure reflects the speech forms of dalit women. She practices the confessional, conversational style of narration in the novels like *Karukku*, *Sangathi* and *Vanmam*.

Bama's texts portray Dalit women's breathes, their wit, their hilarity, their flexibility and their creativity. They are exposed as hardworking, courageous women who work continuously at home and outside and manage the household alone when their husbands, brothers and sons are in the custody of the police as charged for erroneous actions. The public relationship, the harmony among neighbors in a Dalit colony is valorized. Despite dual stresses of work at home and in the fields and in the workplace, Dalit are forced to put up with the enormous violence at masculine hands.

Bama is a Dalit writer, born at Puthupatti village in Virudunagar District in South Tamil Nadu. She popularized Dalit writings and debates throughout India. Her leading two novels are *Karukku* and *Sangati*, both are autobiographical in nature. The mistreatment of dalit community and the double standards espoused by upper castes towards them permeate the autobiography *Karukku*. The work *Sangati* indicates the pervasiveness and prevalence of caste system even in the church. The discriminated Dalits converted to Christianity expecting mainly to get formal education. The third novel *Vanmam*, go into detail the theme and idea of internal conflict among Dalit communities.

In Bama's *Karukku* they are oppressed and the oppressors are Naickers, the land lords. The upper caste students were appreciated a better status and were treated with respect by the nuns; meanwhile Dalit children were treated disrespectfully and asked to carry out menial works. Bama herself had a bitter experience at school; the innocent was victimized to have stolen mango just because she hailed from the marginalized and was treated badly. Bama narrates different real events through her works; how the upper cast people consider the lower cast people. A woman in her village called Gnanappu was incensed and laughed at by the upper cast people as 'you are only fit to collect sniggers and slippers like Chakkili Boys' (*Karukku* 8), while she was in a queue to get water.

Bama portrays the system of her family and people live in her village.

“Both my Grandmothers worked as servants for Naicker families. In the case of one of them, when she was working in the fields, even tiny children, born the other day, would call her by her name and order her about, just because they belonged to the Naicker caste. And this grandmother like all the other laborers, would call the little boy Ayya, Master and run about to do his bid. .. Even the way they were given their drinking water was disquieting to watch. The Naicker women would pour out the water from a height of four feet, while Patti and other received and drank it with cupped hands held to their mouths... As soon as dawn broke, she would go to the Naickar houses, sweep out the cowshed, and collect up the dung and dirt, and then bring home the left over rice and curry from the previous evening. As for some reason she would behave as if she had been handed the nectar of the gods”. (Karukku 16)

The conditions of low caste people are explained here very clearly and their sufferings are beyond the imagination. The way they are treated by the upper cast people has to be studied and analyzed well. It is the reason, why Bama speaks like this. She and her family members are the pries of the same brutal system. It is very strange how they were collecting food from Naicker house. They have to keep their vessel by the side of the drain. The Naicker Lady will tip the leftover food from a distance without touching the vessel, if she should be polluted.

Bama shouted severely against such slaveries done by the down-trodden people but the replay she received was from her family was:

“These people (Naicker) are Maharajas who feed us our rice. Without them how will we survive? Haven’t they been upper caste from generation to generation and haven’t been lower caste? Can we change this?” (Karukku 17)

As Bama says, Dalits are victims of physical and mental torture. If they try to focus to proclaim their rights, they are often met with strong resistance from the upper castes, result in the inhuman tortures, rapes, massacres, and other atrocities and many times their complaints ate not registered by the police. Sometimes police try not to register FIR and sometimes the Dalits are made victims by the police under the false accusation diverting the issue of atrocities against the upper castes thus helping them save from atrocities either because of political pressure or some malpractices.

In Karukku, Bama explains an event happened to Mariamma a low cast woman. Once she went to gather her firewood and logs as usual and came back home in the burning heat carrying her bundle. She was so tired, there she saw pump-set nearby and went to drink a couple of mouthfuls of water. She happened in front of Kumarasami Ayya who seized her hand and tried to harass her pulling her inside. Somehow she escaped from him. She shared all about the events with her friends, they warned her:

“Mariamma it is best you shut up about this. If you even try to tell people what actually happended, you will find that it is you who will get the blame; it is you

who will be called a whore. .. That land owner is an evil man fat with money. He is upper cast as well.” (Sangati 22)

She became silent as the leaf only will be torn, but this time Kumarasami Ayya hurried to village and gave a complaint to Nattaamai, that he has seen with his own eyes Mariamma and Manikkam walking along and behaving in a very dirty way. In the evening, everyone in the village were summoned to discuss the matter. Silence flanged everywhere. In the assembly, the women were shut up and weren't allowed to speak. Mariamma and Manikkam came to the Centre of the circle, greeted the elders by falling down and prostrating themselves. The upper cast people shouted against them and refused even to ask them the explanations as believing the words of Mudalali.

Finally they got permission to talk what happened actually. Both explained clearly. But the senior Nattaamai's voice rose again:

“In that case did the mudalali lie to us in everything he said? You two had better be respectful, admit the truth and beg pardon. Otherwise we have no other way to punish you severely”. (Sangati 23)

She began to weep loudly and said: ‘Ayya, I never did any of that. It was the mudalali who tried to misbehave with me. But I escaped from him and ran away (Sangati 24). But the people hardly believed their words and they were forced to say forgiveness and were asked as punishment to pay of R.s. 200 for Mariamma and R.s. 100 for Manikkam.

The words uttered by the Naattamai after the declaration of the punishment are really provoking. He said:

“It is you female chicks who ought to be humble and modest. A man may do a hundred things and still get away with it. You the girls should consider what you are left with, in your bellies”. (Sangati 24)

The above event explains how the system was followed by the upper cast people and how they were treating the low cast people. The downtrodden sects do not have any voice; they are only workers in the field of upper cast people. Actually it was the landowners are doing all sorts of evilness in the field. Nobody can say a word against them and to bring them to the justice, because in the very next day they have to go crawling to them, to beg for work and food. She does not understand how her village come to be divided on the basis of communities the lower caste and upper. But she says:

“We only went to their side if 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 there stood in their streets. So, why would they need to come to our area besides, there was a big school in the Naicker street which was meant only for the upper caste children” (Karukku 7).

The influence of caste system was so strong that the untouchables themselves could not dare to violate the practice of untouchability nor did they demand for

their human rights for they might have fear that if they insisted on their demands that could be anti-religious or against gods or religion or they might have accepted the caste hegemony.

The idea 'unity in diversity' is an absurd and a farce concept. It has seen the hierarchical stratification of people in the Indian field. Hence there is hardly unification till the stratification of Indian society continues. It is a shameful system of social segregation, that the people are divided on the basis of purity and impurity. The system is a socio-cultural poison of Hinduism but it has affected the other religion also. Many low caste people did conversion to Christianity, Buddhism and Islam to get the freedom and liberation from the hands of high caste people and from their social segregation.

The caste system affected even the independence of our country, as the Indians were following the Chaturvarnyam, that only the Kshatriya (Fighters) who were few in number and were allowed to take the weapons. There were many people here, capable to fight against the imperialists but unfortunately, the enemies easily could overcome the resistance. Many Dalits converted to other religions; they started to fight against the imperialism and finally got freedom to our country. But those who are in power here are trying again to restart the discrimination on the basis of caste and religion.

Now Muslims become the main hindrance in front of the rulers who are mostly represented by the high caste people in the Hindu religion. Their aim is to erase the opponents one by one, but many of the opponents are in support of them, without understanding the final or the next preys are they. It has seen many atrocities are going on all over India. The Muslims are the main enemies and the others in the protection of police and judiciary do continue the religious discrimination and it spreads hatred and poison in the Indian minds.

It was a danger picture and scene of a photographer from Assam Bijoy Bonia, who jumps on the body of the protester and assaults him, even as he lays unconscious, presumably dead, bleeding from a wound in the chest. It is clear in the video how the police are protecting that photographer. It is not a single event but such cases are everywhere in India, its number increases recently. It denotes India started its journey to backwards but religion too stands in the place of caste.

The Dalits belong to Hindu religion but they were once pitilessly suppressed. Many brutal murders have seen even now on the basis of caste. But before decades they were converting to other religion to receive equal status in the society, but now that too terrible and both religion and caste are the main problems of discrimination. There is no any forceful conversion to any religion as propagated here by many modern so called thinkers and historians.

Bama's family converted to Christianity. Bama a voracious child from the very beginning is not able to understand the double standards of the society. She joined in a convent as nun, she travelled all over India with Christian missions but she felt humiliated as a Dalit and finally she avoided the nun dress without having any job and with a great question of life, but hard to answer. She showed

to the world especially to her community that is the suppressed one here, how to live with courage and power.

## Conclusion

As it is well known the discrimination on the basis of Caste, Color and religion is strictly prohibited in India as its people believe in the great Indian constitution. But the current politics create the peaceful conditions restless. The scholars are looking the current politics in a very keen attitude and they are vigilant too to know the steps taken by the political leaders. The new agenda is to suppress the minorities, especially Muslim backward people from the main stream. They are getting the support from the so- called great respected missionaries who are not aware of the fact that they are the next prey to the fascism.

Abedkar opines that "The Hindu will not believe in the quarters of the untouchables and will not allow the untouchables to live inside Hindu quarters. This is the fundamental practice and features of untouchability as it is practiced by the Hindus. It is not a case of social separation .... Putting the impure people inside a barbed wire into assort of a cage. Every Hindu village has a ghetto. The caste Hindus live in the village and the untouchables in the ghetto". (Busi, 1997:17)

It is the duty of every Indian to keep aside the agenda of some people, as it is our country may go again into the caste system. Today the rope of caste is being tightened severely and those who do not care for caste are being tactically isolated. Caste is becoming again the source of power politics in India. It is the time the need of the ideas and establishments of Bama in the Indian politics to give awareness to the ordinary people.

As a researcher I could find that the lack of education is the main reason for the segregation of the some people in the society even though there are some exceptions. So for the Dalits, caste could not allow them any rights as human beings religious, social, political, educational and economic. The voice raised and explained through writings and speeches are what called Dalit Literature, which stands for human rights, identity as human being, and the protests against all sorts of oppressions.

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