

**THE SUBALTERN CAN SPEAK IN THE FICTION OF BAMA FAUSTINA
AND MAHASWETA DEVI**

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to focus on the writings of Bama Faustina the Tamil Dalit Writer and Mahasweta Devi the Bengali writer. Bama is the pioneer in highlighting the toils and pains of Dalit people. Bama explores one of the social evil caste, oppression faced by a Paraya Dalit woman and her community as a whole in the state of Tamilnadu. Literature has often been used as a powerful medium to protest against social evils. The world has witnessed many such social critics whose main aim has been to expose social evils with a view to reform society. Bama discovered herself with self identity. With the help of individual identity she raised the voice of her marginal community and fought seriously to liberate them from the clutches of casteism. This article deals how strong the Dalit women are, though they got oppressed in the hands of their husbands, landlords, upper caste men and women, and even the church authorities. Bama's female characters reflect their psychological strength and voice their protest against the oppression of caste and gender.

Keywords: Vocal voices , oppression, subjugation, patriarchy, caste, gender, marginalization,liberalization

Introduction

When we look into the historyof social evils ,British writers Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy raised their voice against social inequalities. Dickens has expressed in his novels the oppression ,the exploitation, feelings, sentiments of his own people and generation. Thomas Hardy exposed the oppression , the exploitation of poor and the weakness and the follies that were rampant in the Victorian society.

American fiction is also replete with novels like Stoves Uncle Tom's Cabin, Upton Sinclair. He exposed the filthy conditions in Chicago stockyards. The power of Sympathy which stresses the need for female education and the necessity for moral economy in the affairs of life.Indian writing in English has also contributed the share in the fight against social evils. Though many novels were written during Pre-independence period, social criticism took its form, shape only after the attainment of independence.The Indian fiction is most vitally concerned

with social conditions and values and Indian society galvanized into a new social and political awareness, was bound to seek creative expression for its new consciousness and the novel has in all ages been a handy instrument for this purpose. Novelists have seen caste a degree of degradation and a brutal division of labor. They all have condemned inequalities and hypocrisies of the caste system. Man has created artificial barrier in the name of the caste that has threatened the very structure of our democracy.

In the words of Srinivas Iyengar- Today casteism has permitted political life to such an extent that the very structure of our democracy is threatened. Nobody appears to take, notice of this cancer. Tension is mounting and yet the atmosphere of drift continues . The levels of caste are manipulated by all striving part political power, not in the furtherance of an integrated nationalism but for sectarian ends which weaken the composite fabric.

Literature review

Dalit literature as a genre was established in the 1960S and 1970's in Gujarat and Maharastra. Nearly two decades later Dalit writers such as Idayavendan, Abhimani, Unjairajan, Vedivel li, and Marku came into limelight as self-styled Dalit writers in TAMILNADU. At first in Tamilnadu, the person who tried to open the eyes of society to the heinous practice of keeping men enslaved and consigning women to a greater degree of bondage is EVR Periyar. He was

responsible for the first wave of churning in society which galvanized the movement against caste prejudices as well as the emancipation of women.

As a social reformer had been voicing his concern for the liberation of the women and has spoken on every subject concerning women like- love, chastity, prostitution, marriages, widow marriages, women's education ,birth control ,property rights, suppressed womenkind, freedom from bondage, poor status of women in Hinduism. He urged that All women should be educated and they should make use of their learning to eradicate the superstitious beliefs and practices found in our society. Social criticism which is found in Indo-Anglian novels further flourished under the influence of great leaders like Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhiji criticized the exploitation of the ignorance of women and their obedience to their disloyal husbands. He also pleaded equal opportunities for women. While explaining Tolstoy's philosophy, Gandhi writes: An effort will be in vain if we refuse to submit to his tyranny.

Slavery consists in submitting to an unjust social order, not in suffering ourselves to be kicked. Jawaharlal Nehru, a great humanist, and optimist considered that freedom from social evils is as essential as that of the freedom from foreign oppression. Social criticism has become an effective instrument in the hands of many Indo-Anglian Novelists. R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya , Kamala Markendeya

,Khwaja Ahmad Abbas and Mulk Raj Anand are a few of them.

Bama born in 1958 is a Tamil writer, Dalit feminist, and a committed teacher. She is also known as BAMA Faustina SOOSAIRAJ. Bama is the pen name of the writer. She was born in Putthupatti village in VirudNagar district in southern Tamilnadu. She is an exponent of Dalit feminism. The novel *Karukku* got published in the year 1992 and has won world recognition. Lakshmi Holmstrom translated the novel into English in the year 2000. The word *Karukku* means Palmyrleaves, with their serrated edges on both sides which are like double-edged swords is the first autobiography in Tamil Dalit literature. The incidents and the story depicted in the novel reflect the inner trauma of Bama as well as her community. In this she describes the daily life, tastes, religion, festivals, entertainment, living style, games, culture, and beliefs. Bama's *Karukku* is a frequently-studied and researched text in the academic circles and colleges, not just for its style but for its content the events which it narrates the atrocities against the Dalit community.

Simon de Beauvoir the writer of *The Second Sex* mentions in her book that western societies are patriarchal. Being subordinated to the male, the female discovers that she is a secondary or nonexistent player in the major social institutions of her culture. So women must ask themselves "what is a woman" (23) Beauvoir insists that a woman answer must not be mankind because such a term

once again allows men to define women. Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the rights of women* believed that women should enjoy social, legal and intellectual equality with men. Women ought to enjoy equality in the social sphere, especially in marriage, and condemned forced repression and unnatural stimulation. According to Janet Richards "The essence of feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex, the proposition is to be regarded as constituting feminism.

Subaltern women are the victims of the postcolonism. They are suppressed not only by a continent but also by their men. They also are colonized by the tri social evils class, race and gender. They are known as a triple colonized section. Gender inequality has become the worst device in the lives of women. Democracy has made them understand their rights and laws and their freedom of expression and education give voice to the voiceless. But in the changing modern world, they are prioritized and to privileged exhibit their views and exercise their freedom.

Bell hooks says they exist a counter language "- language of the sub-altern which has undergone a transformation and has been irrevocably changed to speak against all forms of oppression. Women characters in Bama's fiction search of their identity because identity is the root cause of all their problems. The subjugation of their roles in society has made them take a dire attempt to reveal their identity. Bama's

fiction offers an array of females figurative situation/ position in society, voice of the subaltern women and their materialistic use of the body for the social and economic purpose as well. A woman is the epitome of light. As the saying tells If a man is educated an individual is educated but if a woman is educated, the whole family is educated. One can find the similarities between Bama and the Pakistani Writer Kiswan Naheed in condemning the marginalization and oppression of the downtrodden women. Kiswan Naheed is a woman of Indo-Pakistan. Her poem I am not that woman is a beautiful poem.

I am the one you crushed
 With the weight of custom and tradition
 Not knowing
 That light cannot be hidden in darkness

Here the poet raises her voice against the oppression of women in the society. She urges the society to respect women and provide equal status on par with men. Women play different roles in family and society as a daughter, sister, wife, mother, and grandmother. Women are better than men if they are given freedom. Empowerment of women is insisted as she is the creator of society and ignites light in the lives of the people. I am not that Woman is a liberating poem which strongly urges women from all cultures to respect themselves and not allow themselves to be oppressed in any form. Naheed exposes the disturbing mentality of many eastern cultures that women are simply burdens and objects. Naheed instills

the ideology that women are mothers, they are a light in the darkness and that they are so much more than the bodies that they are in. Naheed reminds us to focus on what is inside of us and even in our superficial society, remind ourselves to respect our bodies and who we are as people. Bama, Sivakami, Baby Kamble, and Urmila Pawar are an attempt to create a space for Dalit women within the male-dominated domain of Dalit literature. Bama's other novel Sangathi rejects Dalit women's passive self-image in Dalit literary discourses and celebrate their self-pride and dauntless spirit. In Sangathi Dalit women are transformed from being the mute objects to strong articulate women.

The Dalit women are doubly marginalized in Indian society because of the overlapping structures of caste and gender. Sangathi rejects Dalits women passive self-image in Dalit literary discourses and celebrates their self-pride and dauntless spirit. In Sangati Dalit women are transformed from being the mute objects to strong articulate women. Bama's work challenges the paradigm of Dalits and feminist discourse by analyzing the overlapping structures of caste patriarchy and gender regulation in an attempt to subvert them both. In the Dalit community, women enjoy freedom and individuality which are denied to their upper-caste counterparts especially in their ability to work independently and vocally assert their sexual and reproductive rights.

Kanchailaiah says that Dalit patriarchy is more democratic. Dalit women do not have to perform

padapuja(worshipping the husband's feet) to her husband either in the morning or evening. She does not have to address her husband in a way she would address a superior. In a situation of dispute, word in response to word, abuse for abuse is the socially visible norm. Patriarchy as a system does exist among Dalit , yet in this sense it is considerably more democratic. Bama says that even if all women are slaves to men Dalit women really are the worst sufferers. It is not the same for women of other caste and communities. Dalit women cannot bear the torment of upper caste masters in the fields and at home they cannot bear the violence of husbands. In her opinion the upper caste women show no pity or kindness either if only as a woman to woman but treat them with dislikedness as if they are creatures of different species who have no sense of honor or self- respect.

The upper-caste women lived inside their houses eating, gossiping and spending their leisure time with their husbands bidding. Bama expresses that her women work hard and earn their own money, and have a few coins in their hands .They don't even stretch their palms to their husbands for every little expense. This shows how self-reliant Dalit women are. She highlights that because of their caste and poverty people deal them with dislikedness. If there is a problem or a disturbance in their area all people choose to blame and humiliate the women of her community. The Dalit women they themselves used to take challenges themselves. Besides all the pains and

problems the Dalit women raise a question of why they should hide their skills and capabilities? They pose a challenge to the society.

Nobody is equal to them in the work what they do in a day like care for the children, look after the house and doing all the household course. Dalit women come forward to uphold their rights. Bama picturized her women who must uphold their rights. She gives a voice to stand on their own and declare that they too are human beings like everyone else. She says that if we believe someone else to come and uplift the situation then the weaker section doomed to remain where they are.

In Sangati Bama highlights that upper caste women give the superficial impression that they never quarrel among themselves nor with their husbands. They literally commence on the street fights and the vulgar quarrels that take place in the Dalit areas. The upper-caste women situation is like beautifully decorated stylish hair knot which has lice and nits inside. The upper-caste women even sit and stand according to their husband's order. Bama praises her women who are mentally strong and who take care of the family in the house. If men show strength of muscle, women reveal the sharpness of her tongue as the women are physically weak and she can't retard the men, in turn, she curses him from top to bottom. Though the Dalit women suffer a life of hellish torment and violence still she is like a rock to control all her emotions and waiting for the day of liberation. The Dalit

women never got peace of mind and quite after working all day. Neither their bodies nor minds felt rested when they woke up. This made them get irritated and used to quarrel with everyone they met. Dalit women's life is unceasingly tedious.

Because they have neither pleasure or fulfillment in their own sexual life they derive a sort of bitter comfort by abusing their husband's ill-treatment. Dalit women body, mind, feelings, words, and deeds are all under their men control and domination. But sometimes they feel their happiness lies in being enslaved to men but they are ready to manage their life with self-worthiness, honor, and self-respect. Upper caste men keep them suppressed. They have an abundant will to survive however hard they might have to struggle for their last breath. JM.Waghmare in his *Literature of Marginality* says American black, as well as Indian Dalits, were the sons and daughters of darkness journeying through untold sorrows and sufferings.(20)

Subaltern people were the salt and savor of this ancient land's voice, were inactive in the past. The Indian Dalit women are still under the clutches of inequality. After fifty years of Independence the women writers redefined their identities. Women in India do not enjoy equal status and individual dignity in the male-dominated world, that makes them marginal socially, politically, sexually and culturally. Their sexual exploitation leads to social, political and economic exploitation. Women who belong to the

weaker sections of society such as Dalits, Adivasis etc who face double jeopardy. Gender is at the base of their marginality. They face domestic violence too. This is clearly picturized in the novels of Bama. She says that Gender inequality has become the worst device in the lives of Dalit women and inequality is the main cause of marginality. And democracy has made them comprehend their rights and laws.

JM.Waghmare opines in *Literature of Marginality* that Marginalized and indigenous people are left with fear, insecurity, exploitation, and injustice.

One can observe a lot of resemblance in the writings of Bama, Mahasweta Devi, Black writers like Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. Mahasweta Devi points out the need for change in Indian System against the marginalized people in her *Introduction to the Collection as Life* is not mathematics and the human being is not made for the sake of politics. She wants a change in the present social system and does not believe in mere party politics.

In Mahasweta Devi's stories, readers can notice a wide range of women from tribal women to upper-caste women, from rich to poor who are dealing with the hypocritical behavior of the family and society. The dualism or multi-behavior of society not only ruined their lives but also set an example of deposition where women and their physical attributes are only considered as a product to consume and mutilation.

Mahasweta Devi's stories are not only about her surroundings rather it reciprocates marginalized women's voices. It tells the grand narrative of the unspoken story of peripheral women in existing society. Vandhanasays; Devi writes reports on exploration and expropriation, deprivation and degradation carrying subaltern voices and translates the issues and the people. she is concerned about into the narratives and characters of her fiction.

Gender Consciousness and Female body are more focused on the works of Devi. She is a trendsetter in postcolonial and subaltern depiction of the tribal women. She has depicted in her works how the subjective possession of female body gazed by the male dominant society as an objective one. Devi in her fiction *Breast Stories* clearly has portrayed that the subaltern can also speak. The second sex of Simon de Beauvoir helps the readers to understand the condition of women. Beauvoir mentions that , Men particularly society believe that" It is best to keep women in the state of dependence ,their codes of law have been set up against her;and thus she has been definitely established as other(171) The process of othering women is a part of a discourse to discuss where women should not have any voice to raise rather they will be subjected to become the object of naivety and exploitation. Bama concentrated on how subaltern women can live afresh by transforming themselves from a voiceless state to the voiced Not only the portrayal of identity and empowerment but also

the gesture of defiance ,subversion, resistance, and transgression help to identify the voices of subaltern women in the Dalit community. Same as Bama, Mahasweta Devi, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker represent the subaltern voices and intersect in their perspective on equality, social justice, and human rights.

Sunitha Williams the eminent astronaut from space says, which is quoted by Bijoy in his article *The Aboriginal Butterfly* could see no borders no political, social racial, cultural or economic boundaries- only serene blue waters laced by pearly surf interspersed with brown and green land(16)

At this juncture, one can refer the pre-independence movement in connection to Jotirao Phule, (1826-90) who started the real movement to lift up the status of untouchables to equal human level. He had faced himself the cruelty of the Hindus in the name of religion and caste. So, he made it his sole aim to change Indian society's caste-based inequality. According to Ashok Jha, "It was his aim to reconstruct the social order on the basis of social equality, justice and reason." (Dalitisation 18) .According to him ignorance and economic exploitations were the responsible factors for the deteriorating conditions of the untouchables. So, he 'attacked the Brahminical scriptures and Puranas, revolted against priestcraft and the caste system and set on foot a social movement for the liberation of the Shudras, Atishudras (Untouchables) and women.'

(Jha A. 19) Phule wanted to establish society, equal for all.

Therefore, he gave priority to the rational attitudes. He was of the firm faith that education was the most powerful means for the liberation of untouchables. His first step towards women education started with his wife Savitri Phule. Sameway Bama desires to uplift the condition of her women with education. Only with help of education women can face the challenges in their path and handle them courageously and solve to an extent.

Conclusion

Bama realized very young in life through her own experiences and from her brother words that education was the only redeeming factor which would help them escape the indignities and humiliations that haunted their circumscribed lives. Bama says because I had the education, I had the ability, I dared to speak up for myself. I dint care a toss about caste. Because of my education, I managed to survive among those who spoke the language of caste difference and discrimination.

As Holmstrom puts it Bama decides on joining the religious order inspite of her doubts and misgivings, in the stubborn hope that she will have a chance to change things to redress the balance from humble acceptance of oppression to staking a claim for justice. Writers like Bama and

Mahasweta Devi acted as powerful medium or agents to address the problems of Dalit women.

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