



Socio-Economic Status Of Dalits In Bama's Karukku

Blessy. W¹, Dr. J. Jesu Latha²

¹II M.A English Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam.

²Associate Professor and Research Supervisor, Research Department of English, Annai Velankanni College, Tholayavattam.

APA Citation:

W, B., Latha, J.J., (2021). Socio-Economic Status Of Dalits In Bama's Karukku , *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(3), 2186-2188; 2021.

Submission Date: 11/10/2021

Acceptance Date: 16/12/2021

Abstract

Bama's Karukku is an autobiographical account of the reflection of the author and her community's life. The novel depicts the socio-economic status through their travail, sufferings, and lifestyles. In a broader context, her literary work portrays how upper-class society exploits and marginalises her entire neighbourhood. The novel identifies poor socio-economic conditions as one of the main barriers for the upliftment of Dalits in the society. Karukku shows the disappointment of the Dalit Christians inside the church and convent. The standard of Dalit people's life as well as the possibilities and benefits granted to them within the society are examined in this article from a Marxist point of view.

Keywords: Dalit, Christians, Marxism, Socio-economic, Labor, Exploitation.

INTRODUCTION

Karukku is an autobiographical novel that depicts the lifestyle of Dalits and their socio-economic conditions. According to the social ladder, Dalit families make up the lowest stratum of society. Therefore, people of the upper caste anticipated that Dalits would engage in traditional work; it affected the livelihood of Dalits by lacking adequate living conditions and education in almost all spheres of social and personal life compared to the rest of the society. The socio-economic position of Dalits is amply described in Karukku with regard to housing, religion, land ownership, education, and employment. As an outcast, Bama investigates the mystique of moral corruption and exploitation in her work.

In the opening chapter of Karukku, Bama describes the breathtaking splendor of her homeland, which is situated in the Southern State of Tamil Nadu as; "Our Village is very beautiful. The mountains range right around the village. They are lovely to look at. People say they are the Western Ghats" (1). She simultaneously depicts Dalits as being oppressed and confined to the streets, while painting a beautiful picture of her village. Caste divisions exist in Bama's village. Three-fourths of the inhabitants in her village reside in the area which was divided into five streets and had cottages with Palmyra thatched roofs. Others who work for the government live in dwellings made of lime and plaster. The village layout provides a comfortable way of life for its higher-class residents because they are close to all the amenities including the post office, the panchayat office, the milk-depot, the big shops, the

church, and the schools. However, the Dalits are marginalized within the society.

In Indian society, the caste divisions determine who has access to power and advantages. The upper caste holds the majority of social, economic, and political power, while the lower caste has remained in a position of servitude. One of the primary causes of the exploitation of Dalits' socio-economic conditions is that they are excluded from the four-fold division established by Lord Krishna in *The Bhagavad Gita*. Originally, Lord Krishna organised society into four divisions based on quality and action in order to ensure the successful discharge of society's duties. But it caused social class divisions among people because they split vocations based on caste. They create vocations for each caste, such as climbing palm trees for a living for the Nadars, sweeping streets for the Koravars, working with leather for the Chakkiliyar, and making earthenware pots for the Kusavar, who lived on the outskirts of the community. The wealthy class avoided socializing with the lower classes. Bama berates the class structure throughout her work.

In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* Karl Marx contends that the capitalist class and the proletariat are the two fundamental social classes in society. By using a Marxist lens, an individual can observe that the Naickers were capitalists and the Parayas (Dalits) were the proletariats in Karukku. The fact that Dalits toiled in the Naicker's land is because they did not own any land and it is one of the key reasons why the Naicker landowners treated them like slaves. The innocent Dalits worked in the farms of Naickers like machines regardless of the weather conditions because it is the only source of income for the defenseless Dalits.

The Dalit people's quality of life and health are harmed by the bad economic situation. The arduous labor of Bama's mother is described in *Karukku*, where she writes, "But it was only by toiling like this, without taking an account of their bodies as human flesh and blood, that people of my community could even survive" (52). Furthermore, the Naicker women envisage Dalits as slaves so they oppress and dehumanize them by pouring drinking water from the height of four feet. The poor Parayas receive it in their cupped hands. In a similar vein, Baby Kamble claims in *The Prisons We Broke* that "Dalits were just like animals but without tails". She compares Dalits with bullocks because even the bullocks are given some dry grass to eat, but outcast people are merely given leftovers to eat. She indicates that the Dalits live in the Village's outside rubbish pits, where everyone else disposes of their waste. The Dalit people's existence makes it seem as though they are born to labour. Despite working nonstop like machines, their standard of living has not improved.

The people's cultural identity can be shown by their food. In *Karukku*, Bama provides graphic descriptions about the meals of Dalit people. The outcast people only make delicious cuisine at home for special events like Christmas, New Year, Easter and the Annual Feast. On the other days, they used to eat rice and curries. The Dalits commonly eat gruel with some raw onions and green peppers.

Literacy level is one of the essential indicators of socio-economic infrastructure development. The human society is significantly impacted by education. In *Karukku*, Bama recounts that the Dalit children become victims of the evil of child labour by working in matchbox factories as a result of the low socio-economic situations. Moreover, Bama is humiliated in her college because of her lower status as a result of not having a decent saree to wear. Additionally, in conventschools, the nuns believe that educating Dalit pupils was equivalent to feeding cobras. People's life is defined by their socioeconomic level since Dalits with inferior rank are

mocked. Bama was inspired to work hard by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's motto of educate, agitate, organize, and she is convinced that education is the only means of bringing societal change.

People's economic attitudes and behavior are also influenced by the topic of religion. The Dalit Hindus converted to Christianity in order to flee from the difficulties of being untouchable and to obtain protection and material assistance. But the conversion did not improve the life of Dalits. Due to the Indian government's assertion that Christians from lower castes live in a caste-free society, the Christian Dalits missed out reservations in the spheres of education and government employment. "They had jumped from the frying pan to the fire" (36), writes Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*. It effectively captures the Dalit's sad condition. According to Bama, Dalits are forced into servitude by priests in the pretext of religion, and they observe celebrations without understanding their importance. During festivals, the poor Parayas give apples, oranges, grapes, and biscuits to the priests, but they did not receive anything in return; instead, the priests forced the Parayas to leave their location.

Karukku elaborates on the festivities of Christmas, Easter, New Year, and Chinnamalai festival. Music, dance, and songs are inextricably linked to Dalit people's life. The Dalit people's lives are intricately entwined with music, dancing, and singing. Orally, the outcast people express their creative impulses mostly through music and song. Without any formal training, singing is instilled into the people's life. Bama claims that Dalit women sing on all occasions. Similar to this, a mahar saint-poet named Chokhamela generates his heart palpitations in his poetry titled *On the Threshold Songs of Chokhamela* by asking God as "Why have you thrown/ this challenge god? / Solve the riddle of mine;" (14). As a result, Dalit people express their feelings through song since they cannot express in society because they are trained to be voiceless.

Through Karukku, Bama portrays how the poor socio-economic conditions affect the lives of misfits. In Bama's village, the animals are nourished better than the Dalits, but the lives of the oppressed people are too harsh. In Karukku, Bama reveals that because of their exclusion from society, the outcasts are unable to pursue an education. Hoping to improve better life, they turned to Christianity but as Bama's story shows, it is a complete failure in the life of Dalit people. Hence, even today the poor socio-economic conditions remain a hindrance for the upliftment of Dalits in the society.

Works Cited

- Ambedkar, B.R. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, vol.17, 1979. Bama. Karukku. Trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom, Oxford UP, 2012.
- Kamble, Baby. *The Prisons We Broke*. Orient Blackswan, 2017.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Edited by Friedrich Engels, International Publishers, 1967
- Mokashi- Punekar, Rohini. *On the Threshold Songs of Chokhamela*. The Book Review Literary Trust, 2002.
- Radhakrishnan, S. *The Bhagavad Gita*. Harper Collins Publications, 1949. Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. Fourth Estate, 1997.