



## Bama's Presentation of Her Literary Fictions

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**ABSTRACT**

*The present paper deals with the presentation of Bama's fictions. How does she present her fictions? What are distinct qualities of her fictions that make them unique. Her fictions present Dalit women as focalisers who help in exposing maladies of the society. Dalit women occupy an important place in her fictions breaking stereotypes. The intrusion of her comments help in understanding her fictions well. Her presentation of Dalit rebellious characters like Ponnuthayi in short story, Bama's narrator in 'Karukku' and others is unique. They reject their given identity and try to construct their social and political identity. Her fictions focus on their deprivation and oppression of Dalits by upper-castes. Bama's literary fictions try to subvert the binary opposition of man/woman, elite/subaltern, centre/periphery. By adopting their colloquial style she gives realistic touch to her fictions.*

**KEYWORDS :** Stereotype, binary opposition, discrimination, assertion, colloquial style.

Bama's fictions have been female dominated. Female development has been characterized by the possibility to explore the social environment. Bama brings gender perspective into the discussion. Her women characters violate the norm and refuse to follow the traditional trodden path. So they are perceived as rebellious. The traditional view of woman as passive, less capable and inferior to men has been defied in her fiction times and again. They are strong, courageous, hardworking and resilient. They have got an important place in her fictions. Narrative perspective is a significant subject in this concern. She presents their experience from their own point of view. In her fiction we find a mixture of female voice and the narrator's point of view. Women characters are focalizers and also reflectors since the narrator lets them expose the maladies of the society. Each female character has the right to observe other characters. Bama's fiction guarantees the female consciousness and female identity. Since she has a close relationship with all these female characters, she reveals the story's ideology effectively. She intrudes upon the story with a personal opinion. These opinions are very helpful in seeing things in their right perspective. Bama transforms the role of the female from being the observed to observing others. This way she presents their gradual disillusionment with the patriarchal ideology and shows a steady movement toward a self-conscious female identity.

Ponnuthayi is a character who is an intelligent, pragmatic and brave. She does not get her due only because she is a woman earning her livelihood. If we look from Gayatri C. Spivak's understanding of such women characters, Ponnuthayi can be seen as a lady who has "the potential to challenge if not alter the situation" (Singh, 89). Her act of leaving her husband is another step displaying her defiance and proves her strength. Being orthodox, her parents are not in the favour of her decision of living alone without her husband and say, "At least take the children and bring them up here" (Ponnuthayi, 69). Ponnuthayi condemns the idea rudely, saying, "Stop crying and keep quiet for a while, Amma. Don't fathers know how to bring up their children? Let them try. It's enough that we have lived by marrying stones and grass" (p.69). Thus Bama seems to give a clarion call to the women through her fiction to awaken them to their worth in the society. She does not surrender before negative social forces and tries to fight back. She is no longer a thing acted upon or an object of sexual gratification, but an enlightened individual dictating her own will. She refutes the stereotype of motherhood. Bama's fiction challenges the male discourse in various ways.

Bama represents her female character in *Karukku* as sensitive woman of post-independent India who is introspective, self-aware, content educated. She asserts her identity, struggles for her rights and eventually reaches self-articulation. She presents a realistic picture of an educated Dalit woman's life who, despite being educated and economically independent, remains a victim of injustice within her family, society and convent. The age old belief is that she, as Manu declared, "must be kept in subordination to the man of the family: in childhood to her father, in youth to her husband, in old age to her sons" (qtd in ICCR Report, 13-14). Bama shows her belief against this tradition through her decision to remain unmarried and to serve

people. This decision is an assertion and affirmation of her feminine sensibility. Bama protests against the marginalization of women and social injustice and communicates a powerful female sensibility. Her voice of protest and self-assertion is heard in Ponnuthayi's voice who rebels against the norms of patriarchal dictation of submissive and self-effaced women.

In India, the woman internalizes the ideal of wifehood, motherhood and daughterhood. For them Sita, Savitri and Damyanti are ideal women. But the women characters in Bama's fiction challenge this concept of Pativarta in the face of an oppressive patriarchy. Her fiction acts as a subversive text. It critiques the social and cultural world of her time. It brings into focus religious and patriarchal structures that assign the woman a place of subordination. Praising the black skin of Dalit women is going against the norms again and breaking away from what is traditionally expected from a young girl. Bama's rejection of the ideal marriage is an act of defiance as well.

'Sangati' explores the changing perspective from generation to generation. It deals with three generations of women- the narrator's grand mother, the narrator herself and the generation coming after her. She brings into limelight Dalit women. She carves out the stories and incidents in the lives of these people whose voice remains unheard. Her fictions trace the role of caste, class and patriarchy in the lives of Dalit men. Though they are patriarch of women, but they have no identity outside their caste. They have to keep their mouth shut in front of upper caste people. In Mariamma's case, in spite of being guilty of molesting Maraimma, Kumarsami puts all blame on Mannikam, a Dalit village boy and escapes himself. Nobody asks any clarification from Manikkam and Mariamma. They are punished without fault. Sexual harassment with Mariamma shows how caste and class become more intense when it comes to Dalit women.

Bama has raised the issue of economic inequality. She shows how Dalits are deprived of basic rights. They are considered suitable only for manual task since ages and not for intellectual task. Bama shades light on economic exploitation perpetrated by upper caste people on Dalit men and women. Women as wage earner don't get their due share. They are paid less than their counterpart. They suffer both inside and outside the house. As for men, they work hard in field throughout the year yet don't get enough to survive. They don't have their own land. So they are dependent on upper caste people's land for their work and survival. In spite of doing so much work these Dalits find their place in society at the lowest rung. Bama's autobiography and other fictions represent the lived experience of their community's past as well as present. The experiences depicted are both individual and collective. Bama is witness to the events she recounts.

She shows how Dalits are considered socially inferior and face economic and social discrimination. They have been neglected and ostracized in Indian society for ages. Dalit still suffer stigma of untouchability. Bama discusses their oppression at the hands of state police, panchayat, upper-caste and at the church. She also shows how Dalit women are oppressed further by Dalit men at home. Her fictions pres

ent the plight of Dalit Christian. They are not allowed to sing in the Church, are forced to sit away from the upper caste men. And they are not allowed to bury their dead in the cemetery within the village. In order to escape the oppression, they converted to Christianity, but even in Christianity they are shown to be greatly disillusioned. Even within the church fold they are not able to escape the oppression. This economic and social disparity has exploited these people a lot.

Bama has taken the same cause of Dalit in her collection of short story themes but in a different way. She has adopted short story as a weapon in the hand of these Dalits to articulate their problems and resistance. She has used the realist technique. Her characters adopt satirical talk, abusive language and humour as form of protest. Bama clarifies in her acknowledgement of the work:

My mind is crowded with many anecdotes, stories not only about the sorrow and tears of Dalit women, but also about lively, rebellious culture, their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them but rather to swim vigorously against the tide...about their hard labour. I wanted to shout out these stories (Introduction, xvi).

The problems faced by the common Dalit folk in their daily life are the staple of her stories. Her stories focus on poverty, economic disparity, self-centredness, and oppression of Dalits. Bama's story presentation is different. She has portrayed sensitively the problems encountered by Dalit people. But we also find a touch of humour in her stories. In her short story the portrayal of the village folk from the lowest strata has become an important model. Her short stories deal with their aspiration, likes, dislikes, humour, resistance and oppression. Ambedkar's thought on the liberation of socially downtrodden reflects in her portrayal of characters of short stories.

Bama, through the depiction of men and women's characters, rejects a given identity. Through her counter Dalit discourse she tries to construct their own social and political identity in the public domain. Jasbir Jain appraises Bama's fiction *Dalit Women's Autobiographies*, "Dalit literature has deconstructed stereotypes, exploded a number of myths about morality and family structures and at times transcends the notion of self to acquire a representative voice in the historical context rejecting any romantic notion of self pity" (Aggarwal, 106). Dalit literature has a different aesthetic, so the criterion of assessing it is also different. The Indian aesthetics of satyam, shivam, sundaram and the western aesthetic can't be taken into consideration. Bama is one of the most challenging Dalit feminist voices among them. As a Dalit woman she has herself been a part of this tradition of suffering.

The subaltern and patriarchal discourses that are based on a series of binary opposition such as man/woman, elite/subaltern, centre/periphery produce a violent hierarchy. In this hierarchy women, marginalized women and marginalized culture are branded as deviant/disruptive both socially and culturally. In this binarism one term governs the other. Bama's fictions aim at inverting such over the privileged hegemonic system and attempt to bring low what was high through the strategy of resistance and subversion. Her fictions serve to topsy-turvy such hierarchical structure and generate aesthetic of opposition in the process. In her narrative we find an unconventional presentation of Dalit character specially women characters where they flout the notion of decency. Her presentation of women like Pachamma and Ponnuthayi is unique. Ponnuthayi is seen doing business of selling fruits like men and Pachamma shows her courage to face policemen in her own humorous way and escapes going prison after stealing cotton from Gangamma's field. In short story each character has his or her own way of resistance which is seen by humour, abusive language and sharp retort.

Her belief in human equality and dignity of men is articulated from the mouth of Ammasi in her short story 'Annachi'. He was called in village court gathering to answer why he had called an upper caste Naiker as 'annachi' which means brother. He responded gravely, "There is nothing wrong with what I said. Did I call him mama or machan, try to create a relationship and asking for the hand of a girl? What did you people do when I addressed Irulappan, the drain-cleaner as annachi las week? Didn't you reproach me for addressing a korava as annachi? Now you ask me why I called a Naiker, annachi! It's just what the old woman Poovathi saying, When a donkey shits, is there a differ-

ence between what it shits first and what it shits last? Shit is shit. All men are just men.(Annachi, 14)." Here by adopting this humorous way he brings forward his viewpoint of having equality and shows resistance against discrimination.

Bama believes in equal human rights and asks the same respect for Dalit like other upper caste men. In her story 'Those Days', she compares the situation of old days and now a days. In this story Masanam Thatha works in Ashokar Ayya's (an upper caste man) field. After finishing his task, he comes to collect his wages. Ayya gestures him to wait and he sits in a corner on the bench. Seeing him on his bench Ashokar Ayyar anger knows no bound and he shouts, "Enda Paraiya dog, how dare to sit on the same bench as us. You are an old man, otherwise I would have kicked you to death!" Then Masanam Thatha shouted back, "you called me a Paraiya dog. You pig like fellow born to a sow? I waited for half an hour- You should have paid me and sent me off. I sat down because of pain in my legs. What's wrong with that? We are all human beings! (Harum Scarum Saar and Other stories, 58)" Such statement from a Paraiya community man shows his self respect and awareness of his right and position. His sharp retort seems a warning to all exploiters. Same kind of retort, we find through the character Ponuthayi who starts her business of selling fruits and vegetables, leaving her husband after being harassed by him. "I may go to work or I may not. That's my business, why should these people born of whores talk about me? Looks like they get heart burn if I do business! If anyone speaks about me with their tongues between their teeth, I will slice them off!" (Harum Scarum Saar & Other Stories, 62). She shows her courage of living on her own terms and by leaving her children with her husband which again goes against tradition. In this way she breaks stereotypes and faces the world bravely. In patriarchal ideology woman's place is shown at home in an image of docile wife that is must for domestic harmony. They are convinced that their place is in the home, not in the workplace. Such images do not reflect reality, but the interest of patriarchal male centered society. But Bama's fictions question at this and take nothing for granted when analyzing any image or activity. Unlike speechless dominated, submissive women's presentation, we find Dalit women's dynamic role against patriarchy. Her presentation by giving these Dalit women's voices has become unique.

By focusing on their carefree and cheerful lives, she presents the contrast with the lives of elites which are full of jealousy, hatred and ill strategy. It shows uncorrupted value of society, hardlabour and simply won pleasure. Thus again, she raises their life above the elite standard of living. Sometimes she focuses on the personal element while at other times she narrates the day to day events of her village. She incorporates the cultural aspects of her community and writes about their life struggle both at home as well as in fields. The written anecdotes unfold and trace out the Dalit cultural pattern and communicate the problems. Her aim is the need to get political power, the need to get self-confidence, to win their identity and be proud of their own culture.

The colloquial way of narrator and character is another feature of her fictions. It imparts the touch of reality and familiarity between the characters. By adopting the language of right, she defies the notion of propriety and through narrative subversion, she constructs a meaning that goes on at odd with democratic society. In this way by creating her own language she establishes her and her people's distinct identity. An instance we see where an old man Abraham is talking to Saaminathan in 'Venmam' "My lad are you talking about that chap Mannangatti, son of that Maadan? If there'd only been a few more like him, we would have turned out to be a race of warriors. Oh yes, my lad, he was a proud one, he was!" (Venmam, 13) This colloquial style of Bama's fiction gives it a realistic touch. It seems as if everything is going on before our eyes. Bama develops a specific style of writing where Tamil dialect is an adequate tool for a conversation. Literary Tamil carries the notion of poetry and daydreaming. In her fictions a contrasting position is occupied by the down to earth colloquial language, the voice of the real world.

Thus her folkloric language as medium of protest and unique characterization going against tradition by showing awareness and resistance bring their perspective to the forefront in their voice and makes the presentation of her fiction unique. Thus we can say that the voice of the common men, his struggle and sacrifices which went

unnoticed in the annals of history has found a prominent place on the page of her fictions.

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