



CASTEISM IN CHRISTIANITY AND KARUKKU OF BAMA

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ABSTRACT

The name "Dalit Christian" is more recent; However, the identity of Dalits as Christians is as old as Christianity in India. Although Christianity originated abroad, it has its roots in India. It is believed that St. Thomas came to Kerala in the 6th century and some Brahmin families in South India converted to Christianity. These converts were known as Syrian Christians. In 400 AD, Christian missionaries succeeded in converting many Hindus to Christianity. For the untouchables, deprived of every social right and human dignity in Hindu society, Christianity allowed them to emerge from the mire of untouchability and achieve a caste-free society. In the following years, many Dalit communities like Chahura of Punjab, Chamar of Uttar Pradesh, Wankar of Gujarat, Mahar of Maharashtra, Parairs of Tamil Nadu and Pulye of Kerala became Christians. Sobin George says in his article that the Christian population in Punjab increased after conversion 3912 in 1881 up to 3,95,629 in 1931. (George,7)

Key Words: - untouchables, social right and human dignity, Hindu society, Christianity

The Dalit-Christian Context

The primary belief of the Dalit community in converting themselves to Christianity is that Christians appear to be freeing themselves from social and spiritual neglect. The missionaries preached and practiced egalitarianism in the gospel and appealed to the Dalits because they promised to be free from the structure of oppression and inequality. The humanitarian doctrine of Christianity inspired Dalit communities to embrace Christianity in the hope of a better life. The missionaries were also aware of this caste aspect of conversion. Robert

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Caldwell, a missionary at the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, says that "the lower castes initially embraced Christianity for protection and material help." Renowned Marathi Dalit writer Baburao Bagul observes that Dalits have no place in Hindu sacred literature like Christianity:

“Despite the division between rich and poor, shelter and shelter, there is a place for the most unfortunate and most miserable class in Christianity and its literature. In contrast, Shudras and Ati Shudras - the lowest castes and those who were completely excluded from the caste framework - failed to find a place in Hindu religious and secular literature”. (Bagul, 276).

Bagul's observation on the neglect of Dalits in Sanskrit literature has been echoed by many Dalit writers and thinkers who see Christianity as a fundamental egalitarian religion that recognizes the humanity of Dalits. But all these ideas and sentiments became dubious when over time Christianity became hostile towards Dalit Christians. Christians of Dalit descent are referred to as “converted Christians” in official discourses, often turning to the role of passive agency without any kind of agency. Although Christianity has improved the physical condition of Dalits by providing them with education and employment opportunities, there has been no significant change in the social status of the Dalit community as conversion is being recognized by their religion instead of religion.

In some parts of India, Christianity becomes an ethnic identity: it is seen as the religion of the untouchables. In time, Christianity came to be known as 'foreign religion', meaning untouchable in Tamil. At the same time, the state began to understand the Dalit-Christian problem only from the point of view of conversion. Although the so-called upper-class leadership in the church tried to raise the issue of Dalit Christians from their point of view, the State SC failed to differentiate Christians of Dalit descent into Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Castes and later only converted to Christianity. Moreover, the church, the state and the society did not recognize discrimination against Dalit Christians because the Christian community was to come together. As a result, the entire system continued to treat Dalit Christians as 'untouchables'. “In fact, today a Dalit Christian discriminates three times between the state, the church and non-Dalit Christians,” says SM Michael. He argues that the Dalit identity for the Dalit Christian overlaps the Christian identity.

The Role of Christianity in Bama’s Karukku

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Bama mentions in her autobiography that the type of settlement in her village was such that upper caste Christians were living in a separate section of the village away from the Dalit conversion company. Bama confirms that "post offices, panchayat boards, milk depots, big shops, churches, schools they are all standing on our streets." (Bama 6).

This distinction between upper and lower caste Christians confirms that the earlier people occupied a place of superiority in Christian society. Seeing that nuns and priests treat Dalit Christians with contempt, Bama decided to join the church herself so that she could help sad Dalit children learn something and live a better life. Out of sheer desperation, she realized that there was racism in the church as well. Before she joined the Order, that is, when she was a trainee, a sister told her that certain orders did not allow Dalit Christians to join them. She also told them that there is a separate order for Dalit Christian nuns. Although she accepted the order, she saw the inferiority of the Dalit Christians. She remarked,

"People from my community were taking care of all the chores like cleaning the yard, digging and washing the classrooms, and cleaning the toilets." (Bama 22).

The Catholic Church, which is supposed to be egalitarian and humanitarian, observes a similar hierarchical social structure as found in the Hindu society. Bama notes that instead of catering for the poverty-stricken and underprivileged Dalit Christians, the Church authorities in India have changed into a profit-making institution, prioritizing the best interests of the upper castes only. For Bama, the social and poor Dalits must act as 'Word of God', fight for their rights in an unjust world and expose how they were oppressed. At the same time, the autobiography is also dual as it explores the types of physical and mental violence experienced by the upper castes and the Bama and Paraya communities at the hands of the church, as well as their ability to challenge these repressive structures.

CONCLUSION

The caste system, which is unique to the Hindu community in India, is a form of disgusting social stratification. It is a two-way system that privileges the upper castes and separates the lower castes, thus creating a large gap between the two. There are Dalits in that latter part of the Christian system. Christianity was the path to freedom for the Dalits, but the situation was completely different between the convent and the church. Dalit nuns have never been given equal importance in the church and have always been given regular jobs as opposed to high

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quality nuns. Christianity is love, support, and service to others. Convents are usually service oriented, but this service varies according to the social status of the people. Bama's work focuses on the plight of the Dalit Christian community in Indian society. It clearly explains the living experience and lifestyle of this community. Her work also shows how Dalit Christians are a double victim of their religion and caste. However, Bama is not interested in painting sculptural images of Dalit Christian morality; Instead, she explores the complex identity of a community mediated by caste, religion, and gender.

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