

Ignominy and Sarcasm of Human vs Animal: A Study on Bama's *The Ichi Tree Monkey*

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Abstract: This paper examines Bama's short story *The Ichi Tree Monkey* which explores the themes of childhood playfulness, traditional superstitious belief and subtle violence against animal. The story highlights Parvathi, a dedicated teacher and she encourages empathy towards living creatures especially monkey. The story juxtaposes children's kindness over monkey, devotional respect till it behaved as they expected. But, they stoned the big monkey, when it snatched two kilos of sugar from Valliyaka who bought it from fair price shop and came on the way. The children violence and verbal abuse against monkey reflected their deeper ignominy. Parvathi's gentle approach encourages the village boys to recognize creating a sense of responsibility and respect for monkey whom they call once as Rama, Rama the God. Monkey sarcastically replied that humans are always unhappy. They carry loads of books, and wandering around helpless and always in pain despite they look good to the question of pig on who is the best creature in the world? Bama satirically describes crucial life style of human being through the story. The atmosphere of the story portrays for transformation and growth within human behaviour, emphasizing friendly approach towards nature rather than treating them indifferently.

Keywords: superstitious, subtle, juxtaposes, respectful, creature, wandering, atmosphere

1. Introduction

'Subaltern' refers the people who are socially, politically, economically and geographically kept aside from the hierarchical society. Antonio Gramsci coined the term 'Subaltern' to identify the cultural hegemony that excludes specific people and social groups from the social economic institutions of society. Subaltern includes peasants, tribes, women and other groups who are denied to access and to breathe power. Historically speaking, Subaltern studies itself as an attempt to allow people to speak and express feelings and thoughts. It is a new kind of writings has been started by voiceless to share their pains, anger, sufferings, life style, celebrations and social milieu of their society. It tried to make an alternative historical writing in which history would be written from below rather than above.

In the domain of literature, we can trace the root of subalternity. The subject of subaltern studies such as peasants, women and Dalits express their strong emotions and intolerable experiences. But subaltern as an autonomous writings which paved a new path to history and cultural studies. In Post-Colonial India, Subaltern Studies reflected the various forms of writings of history and literature. So, subalternity becomes a dominant framework in literature when marginalized sections has no voice of its own in the society.

Bama was born in W.Pudupatti, Virudhunagar District, 1958. Her full name is Faustina Mary Rani. Her father Susairaj was employed in the Indian Army and mother name is Sebesthiamma. She is the sister of famous Dalit writer Raj Gowthaman. Her grandfather converted from Hinduism to Christianity. Her ancestors worked as agricultural labourers in her locality. She had her early education in Tringal Middle School in her village then she went to higher studies nearby town. Her novels and short stories focus on caste and gender discrimination in the caste society. Her first novel *Karukku* (1992) translated to English in 1994 and won Crossword Prize in 2001. *Sangati* (1994), *Vanmam* (2002) and short stories collections *Kisumbukkaran* (1996), *Oru Tattavum*

Erumaiyum (2003), *Just One Word* (2018) and *The Ichi Tree Monkey* (2021).

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Bama's stories portray the struggles and resistance over upper class society suppression of Dalit people, particularly Dalit women. She expresses ignominy which prevails in Indian society over animal or low class society. In *The Ichi Tree Monkey*, the protagonist Parvathi a teacher, who works in local school shows love for animals especially monkey. Before she moves to school, she used to spend five minutes watching it's playful in the ichi tree which stands hugely on the way to her working school.

Parvathi spent five minutes watching the monkeys on the tree before proceeding to school...it was a lovely sight to watch a baby monkey hang on to its mother's breast and suck on its nipples. In between suckling, it raised its head and looked here and there. It was so cute. (Bama 112)

The school kids were also playing with monkey and called out 'Rama Rama' and gave biscuits, vadais and other eatables the kids had in their hands. The children used to bring something for the monkeys daily without fail. For the kids, the monkey was a god. It was feast for the monkey as they were called 'Rama Rama' especially when they were given eatables items. Parvathi wondered how a monkey knew that his name was being called. As the time passed the fruit of Ichi tree was bore for them. Other birds like sparrow also shared the ichi fruits in the tree.

After few days, when Parvathi was returning from school, she saw a gang of kids stood under the tree and stoned the monkeys. She asked them why did they stoned at mouthless

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creatures. The kids condemned angrily the mouthless creature as thieving monkeys. And they accused the monkey for snatching the bag of sugar from Villiyakka who bought two kilos of sugar from the fair price shop and who crossed the way. Helpless monkey could not react against them instead it acted it's nature of jumping from one branch to other branch in the ichi tree.

'Teacher, Valliyakka bought two kilos of sugar from the fair price shop and came this way. That bog monkey snatched the bag of sugar from her like that! It scooped up all the sugar and ate it!' (Bama 12)

Human being who called once the monkey as 'Rama Rama', their god, immediately express ignominy to these mouthless creature. Animals behave according to their nature of existence where as human change their nature and behave indifferently towards them. No animals ask any food or eatable item from human being, it is human who trained them to get it. This could be seen in many tourist spots and worshiping places. If animals behaved as them immediately human tempted to show them ignominy over them. What could mouthless creature do?

Days passed by, Parvathi could not see the monkey on the ichi tree. She thought that the kids driven them away. But soon after she spied a monkey on the back of a fat pig a little far from the tree riding majestically and ceremoniously, turning its head here and thither as if leading some procession. But the kids went after them, throwing stones to drive them away saying: Dei, That thieving monkey is riding the pig. Don't let it get away! 'The pig is your friend? Wait and see what we are going to do to you and the Pig.' (Bama 113) The kids started to mock and chased them from the place.

The monkey sarcastically says to the pig about human beings approach towards animals that they called it 'Rama Rama' with respect and gave things to eat but now 'monkey, monkey'. It also sadly addressed that one cannot trust human being because we could not know when they would turn into enemies even though we behave good to them. 'One can't trust these human kids at all. Didn't I snatch a bag of sugar from a woman the other day? Since then, they have turned into enemies.' (Bama 114) More sarcastically the monkey highlighted discrimination shown among the human being in terms of colour, gender, social status and life style they live in the society.

But, if we look at the way people treat you, you don't get the esteem and respect that I get. They will never respect you.

'Why not?'

'Because you roam around the garbage mounds, eating foul stuff. You are don't look presentable or dignified. They simply can't bear the sight of you, especially your snouty face! (Bama 116)

Even more monkey says that human are bother more about skin, beauty and gender emphasizing humans' birth and existence is far better than other creature in the world having all an ugly thought in their mind.

They are the ones bothered about dark skin, fair skin, beauty, ugliness, purity and impurity. Shame! They even make distinctions among themselves as male and female and fight with each other. By speaking like them you have exposed your vile nature. They say that humans descend from you. (Bama 16)

At one point of moment Monkey asked sarcastically the pig not to connect it with the humans because human beings don't live their life as it is. They always be unhappy, their faces are tensed, they don't smile or express joy and happiness or not even try for it. They carry the loads on their back calling them as educated but do not know how to treat the fellow creature exist with them. They are proud about their birth in this world but having all sorts of vice qualities in their heart.

'Look, you can abuse me all you want, but don't connect me to those humans. That makes me furious. We are not like them. Just look at their faces, always tense. They don't smile or express joy- not even a wee bit. These school kids keep going this way and that. Look at their faces. Like a monkey who chewed some ginger....Oops! Ignore that-I've mentioned my own self! ... I mean, look at their faces, always unhappy... at least when they see us, they laugh, they play. Otherwise they just carry loads of books... Poor things!' (Bama 116)

Thus, Bama vividly portrays the ignominy of human being towards the animal in the story. The monkey and the pig teach a good lesson for all human kind saying that all creature are equal and it is the human who seek discrimination among them. Parvathi whom the writer portrays as a lover of flora and fauna gives as an exemplary human being to show love and kind towards mouthless creature.

2. Conclusion

Bama has portrayed both human and animal characters with humorous sense even they talk ill of each other. The story kindles the readers with strong emotions of showing sympathy towards animal folk. The theme of the story is relatable to readers and eccentric. The characters and the atmosphere of the story encounters everyday by people and caught in the larger schemes of life. The Story *Ichi Tree Monkey* frames the question of ignominy towards voiceless and the writer usages of sarcasm to teach human kind to love animals through their actions. Parvathi protagonist of the story stands as an emblem of loving nature and promotes kids to show love and kindness to animals.

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