

A Critical Reflection of Bama's "Karukku" as a Testimonial Narrative

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of
Bachelor of Arts degree in English

By

LOVELY FAITH G

41010005



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES

SATHYABAMA

INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)

Accredited with Grade "A++" by NAAC

JEPPIAAR NAGAR, RAJIV GANDHI SALAI, CHENNAI - 600 119

APRIL 2024



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This is to certify that this Project Report is the bonafide work of **LOVELY FAITH G (41010005)** who have done the Project work. She has carried out the project entitled "*The Critical Reflection of Bama's Karukku as a Testimonial Narrative*" under my supervision from June 2023 to April 2024.

Dr. N. Safrine

Internal Guide

HOD
Department of English
Sathyabama Institute of Science
& Technology
25/4/24

HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT

(DR. J. AMUTHA MONICA, M.A., M. Phil., Ph. D.,)

Submitted for Viva voce Examination held on 26/04/2024

Internal Examiner

(Name in Capital letters
with signature)

External Examiner

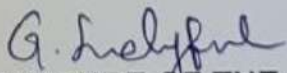
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DECLARATION

I, **LOVELY FAITH G** hereby declare that the Project Report entitled "***The Critical Reflection of Bama's Karukku as a Testimonial Narrative***", done by me under the guidance of **Dr. N. Safrine**, is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Arts degree in **Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology**.

DATE 25.04.2024

PLACE: CHENNAI


SIGNATURE OF THE CANDIDATE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am pleased to acknowledge my sincere thanks to The Board of Management of Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology for their encouragement in doing this project and for completing it successfully. I am grateful to them.

I convey my thanks to Dr. Rekha Chakravarthy, M.E., Ph.D., Dean, School of Science and Humanities, and Dr. J. Amutha Monica, M.A., M. Phil., Ph.D., Head of the Department of English, for providing me necessary support during the progressive reviews.

I would like to express my sincere and deep sense of gratitude to my Project Guide Dr. N. Safrine, M.A., M. Phil., Ph.D., for her valuable guidance, suggestions, and constant encouragement paved way for the successful completion of my project work.

I wish to express my thanks to all the Teaching and Non-teaching staff members of the Department of English who were helpful in many ways for the completion of the project.

Abstract

Bama's "Karukku" stands as a seminal work within the realm of testimonial narratives, offering a poignant reflection on the intersectionality of caste, gender, and religion in contemporary Indian society. This project thesis critically examines "Karukku" through the lens of testimonial literature, delving into its narrative structure, thematic depth, and socio-political implications. By analyzing Bama's portrayal of her personal experiences as a Dalit Christian woman, this study seeks to elucidate how "Karukku" serves as a powerful testimony against systemic oppression and marginalization. Additionally, it explores the ways in which Bama's narrative challenges dominant discourses and fosters dialogue on issues of caste-based discrimination and identity. Through a nuanced exploration of "Karukku," this thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of testimonial literature's role in advocating for social justice and promoting inclusive narratives.

Keywords:

Identity, Marginalization, Caste, Oppression, Resistance, Autobiography, Testimony, Discrimination, Intersectionality, Dalit Literature, Social Justice, Cultural Critique, Memoir, Subaltern Voices.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Karukku” written by Bama [Faustina Mary Fatima Rani], Tamil Dalit Christian women. "Karukku" stands as a seminal work in Indian literature. It is portrayal of the Dalit experience through the lens of testimonial narrative. Published in 1992 and translated in English by Lakshmi Holmstrom in 2001. Karukku have been translated into English, German, French, Telugu and Malayalam. “Karukku” serves as a powerful contribution to Dalit literature offering firsthand account of lived experience of a Dalit woman and she also highlighting the challenges faced by Dalit community. Karukku is not a imagination story it is her personal experience and Bama’s voice not as a singular entity but as one among many Dalit voice.

From the 1980s onwards there was life narratives of Dalit women written in Indian regional languages. Notable among them are Kumud Pawade’s *Antasphot* (1981), Shanta Bai Kamble’s *Majya Jalmachi Chitrakatha* (1983), Baby Kamble’s *Jina Amucha* (1985), P. Sivakami’s *Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum* (1989), Bama’s *Karukku* (1993) and *Sangati* (1994), among others. Writers like Ambedkar and Bama have played crucial roles in shaping and contributing to Dalit literature

Dalit literature is Indian writing that focuses on the lives, experiences and struggles of Dalits who have been facing centuries of caste-based oppression and discrimination. The word "Dalit" comes from Marathi word with Sanskrit root. "Dalit" means "ground", "crushed" or "broken into pieces". For this a term used by British now called Scheduled caste. Dalit literature has always been true portrayal of Dalit life. Bama says:

“Dalit literature is our weapon. It is through our words that we assert our existence and demand justice”.

Dalit literature refers to literature produced by writers from the Dalit community in India. It serves as a powerful tool for social critique and a means of asserting the voices and identities of the Dalit community. Dalit writing including diaries, books, sonnets, and personal stories, reliably portrays the battles of marginalized communities. It may be a of expression for Dalits, made by them and expecting for their community. The

main themes of Dalit writing are social disabilities, caste system, economic inequality, contemporary cruelties, struggle for identity and quest for human dignity.

Bama describes it in her book as 'Karukku' referring to palmyr leaves, which resemble a double-edged sword with pointed tips on both sides. By the language of happiness, the Tamil word Karukku, with the word karu; It also means embryo or seed, renewal, newness. (Left xv). Bama himself acknowledges the meaning and significance of 'Karukku' in his life in the introduction to the book, writing: "The inspirations for this book are many events that happened in many periods of my life, life unjust plans that cut me and made me bleed like a Karukku: My passionate desire to break, throw, and destroy these fetters and when the fetters were broken to pieces, The splitting of blood; Put all these things together" (Bama xxiii).

Bama, born as Faustina Mary Fatima Rani, stands as a significant figure in contemporary Indian literature, renowned for her poignant portrayal of the Dalit experience and her unwavering commitment to social justice. Born into a Dalit Christian family in Tamil Nadu, South India, Bama's upbringing was marked by poverty, discrimination, and the oppressive caste system that relegated Dalits to the margins of society. Despite facing numerous challenges and obstacles, Bama demonstrated exceptional resilience and determination, fueled by her fervent belief in the power of education and literature to bring about societal change.

Bama's literary journey began with her groundbreaking memoir "Karukku," published in 1992, which offered a searing critique of caste oppression within the Catholic Church and society at large. Drawing from her own experiences as a Dalit woman, Bama laid bare the systemic injustices and indignities faced by Dalits in India, challenging dominant narratives and amplifying marginalized voices. Through her candid and evocative prose, Bama shed light on the lived realities of Dalit women, exposing the intersecting oppressions of caste, class, and gender that shape their lives.

In addition to "Karukku," Bama's literary oeuvre includes novels such as "Sangati" and "Vanmam," which further explore themes of caste, identity, and resistance. Through her vivid storytelling and nuanced characterizations, Bama invites readers to empathize with the struggles and triumphs of Dalit communities, fostering greater awareness and empathy for their plight. Moreover, Bama's activism extends beyond the realm of literature, as she remains actively engaged in grassroots movements for

Dalit rights and social justice, advocating for equality, dignity, and empowerment for marginalized communities.

Against the backdrop of Tamil Nadu's complex social and political landscape, Bama's life and work are deeply intertwined with the broader struggle for Dalit liberation and emancipation. Inspired by the teachings of leaders such as B.R. Ambedkar and Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, Bama's writings serve as a powerful tool for consciousness-raising and social transformation, challenging caste-based hierarchies and envisioning a more just and inclusive society. Despite facing backlash and criticism from dominant caste groups and conservative forces, Bama remains steadfast in her commitment to amplifying Dalit voices and dismantling caste-based discrimination in all its forms.

As a young woman, Bama encountered numerous challenges and obstacles on her path, including societal prejudices and institutional barriers. However, her resolve remained unwavering, and she emerged as a trailblazer in the realm of Dalit literature, using her own experiences as fuel for her literary activism. Bama's decision to write in Tamil, her native language, was a deliberate choice to reach a wider audience and amplify the voices of the marginalized.

Bama's narrative unfolds against the backdrop of her own lived experiences, weaving together threads of personal anecdotes, cultural observations, and political reflections. Through her unfiltered prose and unapologetic voice, she confronts the harsh realities faced by Dalits, challenging readers to confront the uncomfortable truths that lie at the heart of India's social fabric. In exploration of "Karukku," we delve deep into its thematic richness, dissecting the layers of oppression and resilience that characterize Bama's narrative. At its core, "Karukku" is a story of survival—a testament to the indomitable spirit of a community subjected to centuries of marginalization and oppression. Through Bama's lens, we witness the struggles of Dalit women as they navigate the intersecting axes of caste, gender, and class, forging a path towards self-empowerment and collective liberation.

In addition to her literary contributions, Bama's activism has been instrumental in advocating for Dalit rights and social justice. She has been actively involved in grassroots movements and advocacy initiatives aimed at dismantling caste-based discrimination and promoting equality and dignity for marginalized communities. Bama's commitment to social change extends beyond the written word, as she

continues to engage with Dalit communities and support efforts to address systemic injustices.

"Karukku," Bama's seminal work, emerged within a specific socio-political and cultural context that deeply influenced its themes and narrative. "Karukku" broke new ground in Indian literature by offering a candid and unflinching portrayal of the Dalit experience, particularly that of Dalit Christian women in Tamil Nadu. The book's title, "Karukku," meaning "palmyra leaf" in Tamil, alludes to the palm-leaf manuscript tradition of ancient Tamil literature while also symbolizing resilience and endurance.

The context of "Karukku" is deeply rooted in the complex dynamics of caste and religion prevalent in Tamil Nadu society. Bama herself was born into a Dalit Christian family, and her experiences growing up within this marginalized community provided the impetus for her writing. Through "Karukku," Bama provides a critical examination of the intersections between caste, religion, and gender, shedding light on the unique struggles faced by Dalit Christians who are often marginalized within both the Dalit and Christian communities.

At the time of its publication, "Karukku" sparked significant controversy and debate within Indian literary and intellectual circles. The book's candid portrayal of caste-based discrimination within the Catholic Church challenged entrenched power structures and exposed uncomfortable truths about caste privilege and oppression. Bama's willingness to confront these issues head-on, coupled with her evocative prose and nuanced storytelling, earned "Karukku" both acclaim and criticism, cementing its status as a seminal work in Dalit literature.

"Karukku" also emerged against the backdrop of broader social and political movements aimed at addressing caste-based discrimination and promoting social justice in India. The 1990s witnessed a resurgence of Dalit activism and consciousness, fueled by events such as the Mandal Commission protests and the rise of Dalit political parties. Bama's book became a rallying cry for Dalit empowerment and a powerful tool for raising awareness about the pervasive nature of caste-based oppression in Indian society.

the context of "Karukku" is intricately intertwined with the socio-political realities of Tamil Nadu and the broader struggles for Dalit rights and social justice in India. Bama's courageous decision to speak out about her experiences as a Dalit Christian woman

paved the way for a new wave of Dalit literature and activism, leaving an indelible mark on Indian literature and society. Some of her other works are:

“Sangati” (1994):

“Sangati” is a collection of short stories that provide a vivid portrayal of the lives of Dalit women in rural Tamil Nadu. Through a series of interconnected narratives, Bama illuminates the daily struggles, resilience, and agency of Dalit women within the oppressive structures of caste and patriarchy. The stories depict themes such as caste-based discrimination, gender inequality, domestic violence, and the quest for dignity and self-assertion. Bama’s storytelling is marked by empathy, authenticity, and a deep understanding of the social realities faced by Dalit women, making “Sangati” a poignant and powerful literary work.

“Vanmam” (2002):

“Vanmam” which translates to “Vengeance,” is a novel that delves into the theme of caste violence and oppression in rural Tamil Nadu. The story revolves around the lives of Dalit villagers who are subjected to exploitation and brutality by the dominant upper-caste landlords. Bama exposes the systemic injustices perpetuated by caste hierarchy, depicting the struggles of Dalit communities to resist oppression and seek justice. Through vivid characterizations and evocative storytelling, “Vanmam” highlights the resilience and collective resistance of marginalized communities against caste-based oppression. The novel serves as a powerful indictment of caste-based violence and a call for solidarity and social change.

“Kuzhandaigal, Pengal, Aangal” (2004):

Translated as “Children, Women, Men,” this work is a collection of essays that examines the intersecting dynamics of caste, gender, and power within Tamil society. Bama explores the experiences of Dalit children, women, and men, shedding light on the unique challenges they face in different stages of life. The essays delve into various issues such as education, employment, family dynamics, and political empowerment from a Dalit feminist perspective. Through incisive analysis and personal anecdotes, Bama advocates for social justice, equality, and the empowerment of marginalized communities. “Kuzhandaigal, Pengal, Aangal” is

regarded as a seminal work in Dalit feminist literature, offering profound insights into the complexities of caste and gender dynamics in India.

“Katturai Thiruvizha”:

“Katturai Thiruvizha” translates to “Essay Festival. This book is a collection of essays written by Bama. In these essays, Bama likely addresses a variety of social, political, and cultural issues relevant to Tamil society, including caste discrimination, gender inequality, education, and activism. Bama’s essays are known for their thought-provoking analysis and impassioned advocacy for social justice.

“Sadamaruthal”:

“Sadamaruthal” translates to “Harvest.” This work may be a collection of short stories or essays. In “Sadamaruthal,” Bama likely explores themes related to Dalit experiences, rural life, and the struggles of marginalized communities in Tamil Nadu. The stories or essays in “Sadamaruthal” likely offer poignant insights into the social realities faced by Dalits and other oppressed groups, highlighting issues of caste discrimination, poverty, and resilience.

“Nil Iravu”:

“Nil Iravu” translates to “Blue Night.” This book could be a novel or a collection of short stories. In “Nil Iravu,” Bama may delve into themes such as love, loss, identity, and societal norms. The title “Blue Night” suggests a mood of introspection or melancholy, indicating that the stories or novel within may explore emotional depth and existential themes.

“Kulaththil Kalvaram”:

“Kulaththil Kalvaram” translates to “Trouble at the Threshold”. This work may be a novel or a collection of stories. Bama likely examines the challenges and conflicts faced by individuals or communities at the threshold of societal change or personal transformation. Themes in “Kulaththil Kalvaram” may include resistance to oppression, breaking free from social constraints, and the pursuit of justice and equality.

“Unami”:

“Unami” is a term that refers to the lowest caste group among Muslims in Tamil Nadu. In this book, Bama likely explores the experiences, struggles, and identity of the Unami community within the broader context of caste dynamics in Tamil society. Through personal narratives, Bama may shed light on the discrimination and marginalization faced by the Unami community, as well as their resilience and efforts to assert their rights and dignity.

Her works are also mouth pieces of Dalit feminism that embodies the strengths and determinations of the subaltern women. All her works educated the marginalization, discrimination, abuse and humiliation of Dalit women in daily life only as she depict to break the bonds of establishment out to the Dalits. Bama says “Our stories are not just tales of suffering; they are also stories of resilience and resistance” she also says about three burdens “Dalit women carry three burdens. One, being a Women; two, being a Dalit; and three, being poor. But our strength lies in being able to carry these burdens and still fight for our rights”

Bama's "Karukku" explores discrimination on multiple fronts, emphasizing the intersectionality of caste, religion, and gender, sexual abuse from upper class men, disparities in employment wages, humiliation and oppression. She also highlighting caste-based discrimination within religious institutions. The discrimination depicted in "Karukku" extends to social and economic realms, where Dalits face systemic bias and limited access to opportunities.

Caste oppression in India is a deeply rooted social issue characterized by the hierarchical caste system. Stemming from the ancient caste system, which categorizes individuals into hierarchical social groups based on birth, caste discrimination perpetuates systemic inequality and social exclusion. According to Jyotirao Phule, "Caste is a disease, and we must collectively work towards its eradication." Caste-based discrimination manifests in various forms, affecting education, employment, and daily social interactions. Dalits face social ostracism and exclusion from mainstream society, with restrictions on their access to public spaces, temples, and educational institutions. They are often subjected to derogatory treatment, verbal abuse, and physical violence, including caste-based atrocities such as lynching, rape, and forced displacement.

Gender discrimination is a pervasive social issue that persists globally, manifesting in various forms and impacting individuals based on their gender identity. In many societies, including India, gender discrimination predominantly affects women and girls, perpetuating systemic inequalities and hindering their access to rights, opportunities, and resources.

“Gender discrimination is the most pernicious form of inequality because it denies half the population full participation in society.” - Nicholas Kristof

In India, gender discrimination is deeply entrenched in cultural norms, traditions, and patriarchal structures. Women face various forms of discrimination across different spheres of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and within the family and community. Despite legislative reforms and social advancements, gender disparities persist, undermining women's empowerment and equality. In education, girls often face barriers to accessing quality schooling, including limited resources, safety concerns, and cultural biases favoring boys' education. Gender gaps in literacy rates and educational attainment persist, perpetuating cycles of inequality and limiting women's opportunities for social and economic advancement.

In the workforce, women encounter gender-based discrimination in hiring, promotion, and pay. They are often relegated to low-paying and precarious jobs, with limited opportunities for career advancement and leadership positions. Gender stereotypes and biases contribute to occupational segregation, with women disproportionately represented in informal and unpaid work sectors. Healthcare disparities also persist, with women facing barriers to accessing essential healthcare services, including reproductive and maternal health services. Cultural taboos and patriarchal attitudes often impede women's autonomy over their bodies and reproductive choices, exacerbating health risks and disparities.

Economic exploitation occurs when individuals or groups are unjustly treated and taken advantage of within economic systems, often resulting in their labor or resources being exploited for the benefit of others. This exploitation can manifest in various forms, including low wages, hazardous working conditions, lack of job security, and limited access to resources and opportunities.

“The economic exploitation of Dalits is not just a byproduct of caste discrimination; it's a deliberate tool to maintain their subjugation.” - B.R. Ambedkar

In many societies, economic exploitation disproportionately affects marginalized and vulnerable populations, including low-income workers, immigrants, and minority groups. These individuals often lack bargaining power and are forced to accept exploitative conditions due to systemic inequalities, power imbalances, and limited alternatives. One prominent example of economic exploitation is the phenomenon of sweatshops, where workers, often in developing countries, are subjected to long hours, low wages, and unsafe working conditions to produce goods for global markets. Similarly, agricultural laborers, domestic workers, and informal sector workers often face exploitative conditions, including substandard wages, lack of benefits, and exposure to health risks.

In addition to labor exploitation, economic exploitation can also take the form of resource extraction and land grabs, where natural resources and land are appropriated from local communities without their consent or fair compensation. This exploitation deprives communities of their livelihoods, land rights, and access to essential resources, perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependency.

Education and healthcare denial to Dalits in India stems from deep-rooted societal prejudices, systemic discrimination, and historical inequalities. Dalit children often encounter discrimination and hostility in schools, including caste-based bullying, verbal abuse, and social exclusion. Teachers and administrators may hold prejudiced attitudes towards Dalit students, impacting their academic performance and emotional well-being. As a result, many Dalit children face lower enrollment rates, higher dropout rates, and limited access to quality education.

Schools in Dalit communities are often underfunded, understaffed, and lack basic infrastructure and amenities such as classrooms, libraries, and sanitation facilities. Poor quality of education in these schools further hinders Dalit students' academic progress and reduces their chances of pursuing higher education or vocational training.

Dalit families often struggle with poverty and lack the financial resources to support their children's education. Additional expenses such as school fees, uniforms, and textbooks pose significant challenges for Dalit families, leading to high rates of absenteeism and dropout among Dalit students. Dalit communities, particularly those in rural and remote areas, often lack access to healthcare facilities and services.

Limited transportation options, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and geographical isolation further restrict Dalits' ability to access timely and appropriate medical care.

Dalits often face barriers in accessing justice due to entrenched caste-based discrimination within the legal system. Discrimination by law enforcement officials, lack of awareness about legal rights, and fear of reprisals from dominant caste groups deter Dalits from reporting crimes or seeking legal redress for injustices. Additionally, Dalits may encounter challenges in accessing legal aid services and navigating complex legal procedures, further impeding their access to justice.

Cases of caste-based violence and atrocities against Dalits are frequently underreported, inadequately investigated, and rarely result in convictions. Perpetrators of caste-based violence often enjoy impunity due to their social and political influence, leading to a climate of fear and insecurity among Dalit communities. The lack of accountability for perpetrators further perpetuates cycles of violence and discrimination against Dalits.

Dalits are underrepresented in political leadership positions at both the local and national levels. Despite reservation quotas and affirmative action policies, Dalits often face barriers in contesting elections, securing party nominations, and winning political office. Dominant caste groups exert considerable influence on political processes, marginalizing the voices and interest of Dalits in decision-making bodies. Dalits often face discrimination and marginalization in decision making processes at the grassroots level, including local governance structures such as village councils and panchayats. Discrimination, intimidation, and lack of support networks deter Dalits from actively participating in community affairs and advocating for their rights and interests.

The marginalized, particularly Dalit people, have endured suppression and domination for years, mainly by the upper class. Despite enduring such hardships, they have begun to speak up for their rights. Consequently, Dalit literature has emerged as a powerful expression of their voice, serving as a rebellion against social injustice and advocating for a society free from discrimination. Bama, having personally faced marginalization from the upper caste, passionately addresses this issue in her novel "Karukku," breaking her silence and bravely highlighting the mistreatment inflicted by the upper caste upon the outcastes.

A testimonial narrative is a personal account or story provided by an individual to share their experiences, opinions, or perspectives regarding a particular subject, product, service, or event. It often serves as a form of endorsement, expressing the individual's thoughts or feelings in a way that can influence others. Testimonial narratives are commonly used in various contexts, such as product reviews, book endorsements, or personal stories of overcoming challenges. "Bama's Karukku" can be considered a testimonial narrative because it is essentially her personal testimony and firsthand account of the challenges, discrimination, and struggles she faced as a Dalit Christian woman in India.

Bama's narrative is deeply introspective, offering intimate glimpses into her own thoughts, emotions, and experiences. She reflects on her journey with a sense of vulnerability, allowing readers to connect with her on a personal level and empathize with the challenges she faces. Through vivid description and sensory imagery, Bama brings the landscape of her childhood village to life, immersing readers in its sights, sounds, and smells. Her writing is rich in detail, painting a vivid picture of the rural Tamil Nadu setting and the people who inhabit it. Bama's use of language is a central aspect of her narrative style. She incorporates Tamil words and phrases into her writing, adding authenticity and depth to her portrayal of Dalit culture and identity. This use of dialect serves to emphasize the distinctiveness of Dalit voices and experiences within the larger social context. Bama skillfully navigates the intersectional dynamics of caste, gender, and class in her narrative, highlighting the ways in which these intersecting axes of identity shape Dalit women's experiences. She explores the complexities of identity formation and the multiple layers of marginalization faced by Dalit women, offering a nuanced understanding of their lived realities. "Karukku" serves as a powerful platform for Bama to critique social norms and challenge dominant narratives surrounding caste and gender. Her narrative is imbued with a sense of social consciousness, as she exposes the injustices and inequalities inherent in the caste system while advocating for the rights and dignity of Dalit communities.

Through the narrative, Bama shares her experiences within the Catholic Church, addressing issues of caste oppression and the complexities of identity. In a broader sense, readers often see "Karukku" as a testimonial to the larger societal issues of caste discrimination and the quest for dignity and equality. Bama's storytelling serves

as a testimony to the resilience and strength required to navigate a society marked by deep-rooted prejudices and injustices.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to S.K. Paul, being a Dalit means realizing one's full potential. Individual, cultural, social aspects and Dalit identity are intertwined. The new Dalit individual achieves social and cultural emancipation through self-improvement and self-definition.

A.R. Venkatachalapathy asserts that Bama's *Karukku* is a literary masterpiece that challenges readers to confront their own complicity in perpetuating caste and gender inequalities.

According to Kasuma Satyanarayana and Susi Tharu, although there were a few Dalit writers in the past, the real strength of Dalit writing emerged mainly in the late 1960s. During this period, a new social movement, influenced by the ideology of Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Dalit Panthers, emerged. In the following decades, Dalit calligraphy became popular all over India. This book re-examines issues of caste, challenges the importance of colonial and missionary efforts, resists the simplification of caste as a class or non-Brahmin issue and clearly and analyzes the contemporary impact of caste.

According to Arundhati Roy, *Karukku* is not merely a book; it stands as a powerful testimony of Dalit women's struggles for dignity and liberation.

Sharan Kumar Limble, 2010 said that Dalit writers continued to write, and every effort was made to make their voices heard

Randhawa reveals that, although they are part of Hindu society, they were marginalized and enslaved, arguing that religion, the source of all art, played a role against Dalits who had a unique sense of caste in the midst of doubts and reproaches, Hindu and Indian aesthetics.

Kancha Ilaiah regards Bama's *Karukku* as a groundbreaking work that uncovers the hidden realities of caste and gender oppression in Tamil society.

According to Limble, Dalit literature is a unique and innovative addition to Indian literature. It brings a new experience to Indian literature, a different emotion and vocabulary, a different main character, a new perspective, and a new blend of melancholy and rebellion.

Rekha Ojha explains that Dalit women associate freedom with removal of caste oppression. This approach is based on community rather than individual preferences, as Dalit women feel a strong sense of belonging to their community.

Meena Kandasamy sees *Karukku* as a courageous act of resistance against caste and patriarchy, challenging dominant narratives and reclaiming Dalit voices.

In his essay, "Race, Colonialism, and Consciousness," Partha Chatterjee argues that common sense is not fixed and unchanging. Rather, it includes scientific theories and philosophical ideas that are part of everyday life.

Anand Teltumbde asserts that in *Karukku*, Bama amplifies the silenced experiences of Dalit women, offering a potent critique of caste-based oppression.

Mini Krishnan describes *Karukku* as Bama's adventure story combining autobiography, research and manifesto. It gives a vivid account of life outside mainstream Indian thought and practice.

According to Mini Krishnan, Dalit art forms come from a mindset that seeks freedom from oppression and deserve to be widely recognized and understood. He stresses that critics of Dalit literature should take note. Dalit literature is described as socially affirming, and the authors make it clear that their literature reflects their life experiences and is written for the benefit of humanity

Lakshmi Holmstrom argues that it is Bama's strong desire to maintain integrity as a Dalit Christian that shapes her book, making it its compelling character in which Bama critiques institutional racism and patriarchy in the Roman Catholic Church the inside and outside. Significantly, she reconsiders her childhood faith as a Roman Catholic through her experiences as a Dalit woman.

K. Satchidanandan describes Bama's *Karukku* as a literary masterpiece that exposes the intersections of caste, gender, and religion in Tamil Nadu.

Satyanarayana and Susi Tharu argue that Dalit literature brings new ideas and perspectives. It raises important questions about the portrayal of Dalit and lower caste lives, making this an important societal concern.

Alok Mukherjee argues that Dalit literature rejects the Brahmin literary tradition in various ways. Unlike classical Indian aesthetics, which aims to evoke emotions such as pity, love, fear and anger, Dalit literature does not follow this path. It also differs from devotional bourgeois literature, in that it does not focus on otherworldly anxieties or individual desires, insecurities and alienation, and besides, Dalit literature is neither to appeal to exotic feelings nor it indulges in self-pity.

Arjun Dangle argues that autobiographies provide a detailed and long-term picture of life events and experiences.

Chandra Bhan Prasad views *Karukku* not solely as a book but as a call to action for social justice and equality.

According to Linda R. Anderson, an autobiography is a book that reflects real life experiences and stories of writers.

Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, as discussed in *Colonial Studies*, argues that the historical memory available to historians was actually created by oppressive power structures this condition placed ethnic, tribal, village or ethnic supremacists organized sovereignty emerges, a phenomenon also experienced by Bama

In his essay, " subaltern: Deconstructing Historiography," Spivak argues that the concept of subalterneity should be understood in the context of the history of oppression and exploitation rather than the narrative of only in the production of goods along special roads

Ranjit Guha argues that colonial status was validated through inheritance systems, strengthened by legal institutions, supported by religion, normalized – sometimes even glorified – by tradition.

Through *Karukku*, Bama redefines the boundaries of literature, centering the experiences of Dalit women and challenging literary norms, according to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

According to Andre Betteille, a tribe can be described as a distinct and named social group with in-group marriage, membership passed down through generations, and basic social practices, often articulated by traditional work around.

Dr. Ambedkar describes the concept of caste as the categorization of the untouchables in a hierarchical system in which they are placed in the lowest positions, enjoying respect and contempt in life of the contradictory elements.

In his article "Dalit sentiment and aesthetic aversion", R. G. Jadhav argues that it is impossible to adequately analyze Dalit literature on the assumption that social consciousness and aesthetic sensibilities are innate.

Ruth Manorama views Bama's *Karukku* not merely as a book but as a testament to the resilience and resistance of Dalit women in the face of systemic oppression.

Porter argues that race stands as one of the most brilliant, just, and effective attempts by a social class to subjugate humanity for its own benefit. Its laws irrevocably divided society, created insurmountable divisions between elites and other communities, strictly assigned jobs, associations and aspirations, and determined the fate of reproduction, and are unlikely to change. The ways of life, such as the status of the afterlife, were predetermined as well.

K.R. Meera regards Bama's *Karukku* as a literary gem that sheds light on the intersecting oppressions faced by Dalit women, offering hope and inspiration for change.

M.V. Srinivas observes that the conversion of people from decrease castes to Islam, Christianity, and different sects like Sikhism and Arya Samaj, become frequently pushed with the aid of a desire to get away the stigma associated with their low caste fame. However, they discovered that shedding their caste identification was now not truthful, because it continued even inside their new non secular or sectarian affiliations. While Indian Islam and Christianity mirror factors of the caste gadget, it's essential to observe that the caste dynamics amongst Indian Christians and Muslims vary from those within Hinduism.

Gayatri Sinha sees *Karukku* as a courageous exploration of identity, belonging, and empowerment, resonating with readers across borders and boundaries.

Arjun Dangle argues that Dalit identity transcends mere caste status; Instead, this identity, which encapsulates a deeper understanding rooted in the lived experiences, hardships and triumphs of those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, develops through the lens of sociology, takes principles embracing defiance, resistance, and loyalty to reason, and ultimately to an end revolutionary spirit.

Vasanth Kannabiran believes that Bama's *Karukku* is a testament to the transformative power of literature, providing solace and strength to those who have been marginalized and oppressed.

Ambedkar insists that individuals must take responsibility for ending their oppression. Relying on divine intervention or fantastic images for freedom is not the solution.

Urvashi Butalia considers *Karukku* a raw, honest, and poignant account of one woman's journey towards self-discovery and liberation.

Gail Omvedt regards *Karukku* as a powerful narrative that illuminates the lived experiences of Dalit women, giving voice to their struggles, joys, and aspirations.

Arjun Dangle in his acclaimed book "Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature" argues that Ambedkar had a deep love for literature and compared it to his love for his children and expressed how Ambedkar spent while writing, lost when he neglected basic needs was eaten like food. Writing gave her strength and she found satisfaction in the process. When he finished the book, he felt the same mixture of satisfaction and satisfaction as his four sons.

Rajesh Rajamani regards *Karukku* as a narrative of resistance, reclaiming agency and dignity in the face of systemic oppression and violence.

Marathi Dalit writer Arjun Dangle talks about Dalit literature in his translated book "Poisoned Bread" as a way to teach readers about the caste system and untouchability in India. He emphasizes that Dalit literature is produced from a sociological perspective and inculcates the principles of dissent, resistance and commitment to understanding, which ultimately leads to radical change

In his famous book 'Towards the Aesthetics of Dalit Literature', Sharan Kumar Limble argues that Dalit literature is a powerful representation of the suffering, oppression, exhaustion and poverty faced by Dalits. It paints a profound picture of suffering. Limble

emphasizes the universal human demand for freedom, dignity, security and freedom from social oppression, values reflected in a unique genre known as Dalit literature.

According to Kalpana Kannabiran, Bama's *Karukku* is a radical act of storytelling, challenging dominant narratives and centering the voices of the marginalized.

In her insightful study titled 'Articulating Silence: A Study of Bama's *Karukku*', Sheena accurately interprets Sara Winnie Bama's autobiography "*Karukku*" as a representative metaphor for Dalit experiences "*Karukku*" refers to the hot pointed palmyra leaves used to strike the roof of the hut of a guest. Burnt spots for those editors are sad, symptomatic of minor problems compared to deep societal wounds.

In "The Hard Business of Life: Bama as a Writer, Teacher, Woman, Christian, Tamil and Dalit," Gita Hariharan delves into Bama's important contributions Hariharan si Bama's departure from Sanskrit and the struggles that followed there came to find her path in life, which inspired her to write emphatically about her Dalit upbringing

Dalit writer and critic Sharan Kumar Limbale defines Dalit literature as a literary expression of Dalit experiences, written by Dalit writers with a deep knowledge of Dalit identity He asserts that Dalit literature comes directly from untouchable experiences to distinguish the essential. Limble argues that Dalit writers see their writing as a vehicle for human emancipation.

Toral Jatin Gajarawala emphasizes that Dalit literature is another innovative change and represents a departure from anything that has been written before.

R. Cheran sees *Karukku* not solely as a book but as a testament to the resilience and strength of Dalit women, who have long been marginalized and silenced.

Limbale argues that Dalit writers prefer to analyze their works sociologically, emphasizing social values rather than aesthetic interests. He argues that analyzing only the aesthetics of Dalit literature ignores the perspectives of Dalit writers.

Laura R. Brueck argues that Dalit literary theory often oversimplifies and ignores the complexities of literary strategies employed by Dalit writers This simplification may be intended to maintain Dalit in the combination of unique literature and political influence.

Instead of explaining in detail what the names mean, the reader is simply given a clue as to what they mean. The reader, like the translator, must find out for himself the caste

system of Achalpur, a village in Tatyakambale. Initially unfamiliar with caste terminology, a careful re-reading of the novel enlightened the reader on the caste divisions in Achalpur.

Rajmohan Gandhi describes Karukku as a poignant memoir that confronts the reader with the harsh realities of caste-based discrimination and the power of resistance.

Githa Hariharan believes that Bama's Karukku is a must-read for anyone seeking to comprehend the complexities of caste and gender oppression in India.

By Dalit literature, I mean writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness. The form of Dalit literature is inherent in its Dalit, and its purpose is obvious: to inform Dalit society of its slavery, and narrate its pain and suffering to upper caste Hindus (Limbale 19).

Jyoti Lanjewar observes in "Dalit Literature and Dalit Women" (2013) that, "Dalit women are also Dalits in relation to Dalit men within the Dalit community. They are thus Dalits twice over insofar as they bear the burden of both gender and caste oppression"

Surekha Nelavala in her article "Inclusivity and Distinctions: The Future of Dalit Biblical Studies" (2010) states that "Dalit women's autobiographies provide dissident spaces within the literary public in which they can speak out against untouchability and patriarchy. Personal narratives of the marginalized also serve as sociocultural records of their community as well as the literary forms of social protest...Exposing continuous untouchability unites everyone who has similar experiences and those who identify with such experiences of exclusion, insult, or discrimination"

CHAPTER 3

CASTE AND DISCRIMINATION

UNTOUCHABILITY

When she went home for holidays, the upper-caste woman avoided sitting next to her on the bus. “she'd immediately ask me which place I was going to, what street. As soon as I said, the Cheri, she'd get up and move off to another seat”. [20] They'd prefer them to get up and stand all the way rather than sit next to me or to any other woman from the Cheri. This happened to her several times, as they believed sitting next to her or any other woman from Cheri would “pollute” them. This highlighting the deep-rooted discrimination in society. Dehumanizing treatment faced by Dalits.

She is asking, “Are Dalits no human beings? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have such attributes as a sense of honour and self-respect? Are they without wisdom, beauty, dignity? What do we lack? They treat us in whatever way they choose, as if we are slaves who don't even possess human dignity” (27) This reflects the frustration and indignation of someone from the Dalit community who feels marginalized, oppressed, and dehumanized by society. She is questioning why they are treated as lesser beings, devoid of common human attributes such as honor, self-respect, wisdom, beauty, and dignity. Ultimately, they desire equality, respect, and recognition of their humanity. When the upper-caste woman refuses to sit next to her, it's not just about physical space; it's a blatant display of prejudice and discrimination. By moving away, the woman implies that sitting next to a Dalit would “pollute” her, reinforcing the notion of untouchability. This rejection based on caste identity denies the Dalit woman her basic humanity, dignity, and right to occupy public spaces without discrimination. It's a clear example of how deeply ingrained caste discrimination is in society, leading the Dalit woman to question whether her oppressors even see her as fully human.

Whenever she went to work for the Naickers she should not touch their goods. She should always stand away. These were their rules. Because Naickers belonged to a

higher caste and had money. Naickers women would pour water from a height of four feet, which her grandmother and others would receive and drink with their hands. Both of her grandmothers worked hard at Naickers house, from morning till evening. They brought home leftover food from Naickers house. The Naickers behave "if she had been handed the nectar of the gods". [16]

The Naicker woman came out with left-overs, stretched from a distance and poured them into her grandmother's vessel. Because the Naicker woman should not touch her grandmother's vessel. When she asked about this to her grandmother. Her response was "These people are the maharajas who feed us our rice. Without them, how will we survive?". [17]

She saw a similar incident when she was unaware of what untouchability meant. While walking home from school, she noticed old man from her community came from the direction of the bazaar. He was carrying small packet of vadai or something holding out the packet by its string, without touching it. He went to Naicker, bowed low and gave the packet to Naicker. When she saw this, she doesn't know why the old man hold without touching. she inquired about this to her elder brother "He said everybody believed that Naickers were upper caste and there must not touch parayas. If they did, they would be polluted". [15]

This incident illustrates the role of caste in shaping social interaction and oppression experienced by those belonging to lower caste. Caste is a system of social stratification in India, where individuals are born into specific social groups known as caste, which are traditionally hierarchical and hereditary. In this, the old man's actions reflect deeply ingrained beliefs surrounding caste, purity, and pollution. The Naicker being considered an upper caste member is believed to be high pure. Those from lower caste as seen as impure of polluting.

This incident serves as example of caste-based discrimination and untouchability prevalent in Indian society, especially affecting those from lower castes. Untouchability, rooted in the caste system, perpetuates social segregation and denies basic human dignity to certain groups based solely on their caste status. It's a deeply ingrained issue that continues to affect millions of people in India.

IDENTITY

Even in the school, they frequently spoke bad about their community. Whenever something went wrong, “they would say immediately, without hesitation, ‘It must be one of the Cheri children who did it’ [18]

One day after school, she was playing with her friends. She touched the coconut, and the coconut dropped. The next day, the headmaster called her name in the assembly and he said “You have shown us your true nature as a paraya”. [19] When she approached to priest for permission to enter the school. His response was “After all, you are from Cheri. You might have done it. You must have done it”. [19] Because of her identity, she accused falsely. She also said the headmaster abused her and he used every bad word. “When I entered the classroom, the entire class turned round to look at me, and I wanted to shrink into myself as I went and sat on my bench, still weeping”. [19]

They are blamed for any wrongdoing, and even minor incidents are blown out of proportion, leading to unjust punishment. The headmaster, belonging to a higher caste, perpetuates these biases, leading to further marginalization of Dalit students.

This incident demonstrates how unfair treatment based on caste identity. The headmaster accused her of stealing the coconut without any proof, just because she is from a low caste. Even the priest did not believe her innocence at first because of her caste. She was unfairly accused and mistreated solely because she is from Cheri. This is identity-based discrimination in society.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LOW CASTE INDIVIDUALS

Both her grandmothers worked as servant for the Naicker families. Even infants born just the other day would address her grandmother by name solely because they belonged to the upper caste. In return, her grandmother respectfully referred to the little boy as "ayya" or "Master."

People from low caste are expected to show respect to those from higher caste. That's why even young children address their grandmother by her name. This shows how deeply rooted caste based in norms are in society even from a young age.

In her village, there are many different communities live there. The name of street cannot escape references to caste and communities. From the name of the community, can find which community lives there. some of the street names are Thevar, chettiyaar, Aasaari, Nadar, Naicker and Udaiyaar street. The upper - caste communities and the lower caste communities were separated like this into different part of the village. The upper-caste people in Bama's village never visit Cheri, where Bama lives, because all the essential facilities like the post office, the panchayat, the board, the milk depot, the temple, the big shop, the church, and the school are located in their own street. There was a big school in the Naickers street which only for the upper - caste children.

In her high school hostel, she says "The warden sister of our hostel could not abide low-caste or poor children. She'd get hold of us and scold us for no rhyme or reason. If a girl tended to be on the plump side, she'd get it even more. These people get nothing to eat at home; they come here and they grow fat, she would say publicly. When we returned to the school after the holidays, she would say, look at the children, when they stay here, they eat their fill and look as round as a potato. But look at the state they come from home, just skin and bone." [17,18] Despite paying full fees like everyone else, the warden sister scolds them because they are from a low caste and lack money. Bama says" she'd get hold of us and scolds us for no rhyme or reason". Dalit students are treated as inferior.

Students from low-caste are marginalized and treated unfairly in convent despite paying the same fees as students from higher caste. Low-caste students face discrimination and verbal abuse from the hostel wardens. These students come from low-caste and face numerous challenges in accessing basic necessities. Instead of showing compassion and support, the warden unfairly targets them based on their caste identity. They are paying fees like everyone else but they face verbal abuse and unfair treatment simply because of the community background.

she found even the governmental policy of identifying and helping Harijan children as humiliating. The only time she found some pride in it was when she was marked out as the best Harijan student in the district.

When she requested permission to go home for her sibling's first communion, both the principal and the warden denied her request, yet they permitted wealthy children to

leave. When she questioned this unequal treatment, they replied, "What celebration can there be in your caste for first communion?". [22]

This shows they are discriminated based on caste. The students are treated differently because of their social status. There is inequality within the school. There is inequality within school. The principal and the warden denied her request because they believed that her caste did not have any meaningful celebration for such occasions.

"There are two or three schools available for the children nowadays. But these little ones' fate is the smell of matchbox solution, not the smell of knowledge or learning." [55]

Only boys were allowed go to the cinema and girls from her community not allow to go to cinema. "They said that this was because the boys of all the other communities would pull their women about if they were seen in the cinema hall." [58]

As the girls grew older, they were no longer allowed to play outside. Faced with such poverty, the girl children couldn't see the point in schooling and instead stayed home to collect firewood, care for the house, look after babies, and do household chores. Meanwhile, the wealthy children ate well, wore fine clothes, attended good schools, held high positions, and earned more money. They treated them like machines, yet unjustly abused them.

Girls from her community were denied access to cinema due to fear of harassment, perpetuating unequal treatment based on caste. Economic disparities forcing them into household duties instead of schooling. This shows caste discrimination and economic inequality.

"Even for a daily meal we have to depend on someone else. We dance to someone else's tune, even for a serving of rice. And, of course, knowing this fully well the wealthy control and crush Dalits." [80]

She expressed her humiliation and pain. "In this society, if you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live your life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste difference does not disappear. Wherever you look, however much you study, whatever you take up, caste discrimination stalks us in every nook and corner and drives us into a frenzy. It is because of this that we are unable to find

a way to study well and progresses like everyone else. And this is why a wretched lifestyle is all that is left to us." [26]

Her expression of humiliation and pain is the pervasive and entrenched caste discrimination present in society. She highlights how being born into a low caste condemns individuals to a lifetime of humiliation and degradation, with no respite even after death. Caste discrimination permeates every aspect of life, from education to employment, and even in death rituals. This systemic discrimination hinders their ability to study, progress, and live fulfilling lives like others. As a result, they are left with limited opportunities, pushing them into a wretched lifestyle characterized by poverty and social marginalization. Her words reflect the deep injustice and suffering faced by Dalits due to the caste-based hierarchy ingrained in society.

She not only shares her struggles but also sheds light on the difficulties faced by all Dalit people. She highlights how they are marginalized and denied basic necessities due to their community background. She says, "I share the same difficulties and struggles that all Dalit poor experience." [78]

"I am like a mongrel-dog, wandering about without a permanent job, nor a regular means to find clothes, food and a safe place to live." [78] The Dalit woman likens herself to a mongrel dog to express her sense of marginalization and lack of belonging in society. The comparison reflects her feeling of being treated as an outcast, denied opportunities for stable employment, adequate clothing, food, and a safe living environment solely because of her caste identity.

She says, "Life is difficult if you happen to be poor, even though you are born into the upper-castes. When this is the case, the condition of those who are born into the Paraya community, as the poorest of the poor, struggling for daily survival, doesn't need spelling out." [79] She is explaining that life can be difficult for those who are poor, even if they are born into upper-caste families. She highlights that the situation of those born into the Paraya community, considered the poorest of the poor, who struggle daily for survival, is self-evident and requires no further elaboration.

Bama says that if she good as them or even better because of caste alone, they are forced to suffer pain and humiliation.

CHAPTER 4

ECONOMIC PROBLEM AND INJUSTICES

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

People of her community work for Naickers. “More than three - quarters of the land in these parts are in the hands of the Naickers”. [48] If they didn’t find any work, they will go into the jungle to collect firewood but it wasn’t easy because the guarded will allow them only if they give money to him. The twigs and thorns would scratch and tear their face, their hair, their arms and legs. It wasn't a short distance, after all, between the mountain jungle and their village. If they want to gather firewood this much struggle and hardships, they have to face but the Naicker buy them for seven or eight rupees each.

This shows economic struggles. They had to pay the guard for permission and the journey was long and tough. Despite their hard work, they earned very little when selling the firewood. This unfair treatment is due to both economic problems and discrimination based on caste.

Apart from Sunday her grandmother works every single day. Sometimes if the Naicker called, she would go on Sunday.

They work hard from morning to evening but Naicker only pays them five or ten paise for each marakkal.

In her village, both men and women have to work hard just to survive. She says, “they never received a payment that was appropriate to their labor”. There will be discrimination among gender also. the men and women did the same work but they won’t paid same as men. “Men received one wage, women another.” [54,55] But women working equally hard and they suffered bodily pain.

This situation describes how women consistently receive low wages compared to men for the same work. This is because of gender inequality in the workforce where women face discrimination and are undervalued for their work.

When her father was at home, as he worked in the army, there was always plenty of good food. Rest of time there would be kuuzh. During war (the Pakistan war, the China war, the Bangladesh war) times her father was unable to send money to home those times her mother managed by some work. At her home, they bought new clothes twice a year. One for Christmas another for Chinnamalai festival. Besides, she collects her elder sisters cast-offs clothes.

When the father is unable to send money home during these (wars) period, it creates a significant economic burden on the family. The practice of buying new cloths only twice a year for Christmas and the Chinnamalai festival reflect the financial burden.

Her dad, who was still in the army, sent money every month. It was more than enough for rent and hostel fees, so she had money to buy food and things they liked, making them happy. On Sundays when visitors were allowed, the character's mom came, bringing cooked meat or chicken curry and snacks. She stayed in school until the eleventh grade, where everyone expected them to do well in exams, which made them happy too.

Her parents wanted them to stay home, thinking there was no need for further education and worrying about finding a spouse. But during the holidays, she visited a nun who had taught them before. The nun felt sad about she giving up on studying and convinced her mom to let her continue. Even though money was tight, the nun sold her earrings to help pay for her college. she determined to keep studying, went to college with just the clothes they had and managed to get into the hostel. This shows how her determination, along with the nun's help, allowed them to pursue their education despite challenges.

“For a whole week I went around in the same skirt, jacket, and daavani. All my classmates looked at me as if I was some outlandish creature. Some of them asked me, Did I only possess one set of clothing? Didn't I have any others? I felt deeply humiliated. I told them my mother was bringing my belongings, and I went to the hostel and wept”. [74,75] The reason for her wearing the same outfit for a week despite feeling humiliated and experiencing pain is likely due to economic constraints. She might not have had enough resources to afford multiple sets of clothing, leading to embarrassment and discomfort when questioned by her classmates. This situation highlights the emotional and social burden of financial struggles

Upon seeing her excellent marks, the teachers and nuns praised them. A week later, her mother brought them their clothes, box, and bedding. Following this, she noticed a change in their classmates' attitudes, "After this, my classmates began to be friendlier towards me". "The teachers also said, 'Look at this one who joined late, how well she is doing!'". [75]

"Because we are born into the Paraya jati, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities. So, study with care, learn all you can. If you are always ahead in your lessons, people will come to you of their own accord and attach themselves to you. Work hard and learn". [17,18] Her elder brother says this. As a result, her excellent mark changed the attitudes of her classmates.

When she was in school, her elder brother wrote that, "And whenever my elder brother wrote to me, he would say, 'You have lots of brains; it's as if a palmyra fruit has been thrust into a sparrow's head. Study well and gain lots of marks.'" "I went about my own business, telling myself this was the destiny that was given to me." [73]

After this, she became less concerned about material possessions like clothes and jewelry, focusing instead on her studies and tasks in her own unique way.

Some of the students approached her, questioning why she were not wearing any earrings or necklaces and why she did not have sandals on their feet. She noted that most of them arrived at college adorned with various accessories and wearing fine clothes. She questioning, "But where would I go for such things? I even pawned my small earrings in order to pay my examination fees. And my clothes certainly weren't anything much". [75] The reason for her not wearing earrings, necklaces, or sandals, despite being questioned by her classmates, is due to economic difficulties. Unlike her classmates who can afford accessories and fine clothes, she doesn't have the financial means to buy such items. She explains that she had to pawn her small earrings just to pay her examination fees, highlighting her financial struggles. Her limited resources force her to prioritize basic necessities over luxuries like jewelry and fashionable clothing. This illustrates the economic disparity.

In her fourth year, College Day was always celebrated grandly, all the final year students attending dressed in silk. She didn't have a single decent sari. she didn't want to borrow a sari from someone. And on that particular day. Knowing that silk sarees

were mandatory for the occasion, she made up her mind and retreated to the bathroom, locking herself in. "So at last, I made up my mind and went and locked myself up in the bathroom. I wanted to weep and weep when I considered my plight. And I realized how deeply shamed one can be for the lack of a few rupees in one's hand". [76] And she didn't show up until it ends.

The reason for her decision to lock herself in during the college day is because she does not have a single decent saree. She may not have been able to afford a silk saree which is more expensive. This shows she faces economic problems.

Once the protagonist completed their B.Ed. and began working, life took a turn for the better. Earning a steady income brought comfort and independence, allowing them to make their own choices and pursue their desires freely. She says "I could buy the sari or jacket that took my fancy, and wear it. I could go wherever I wanted to go. I could buy and eat what I liked. I could even have a few pieces of jewellery made for myself. I became aware that if you have a little money in your hands you can gain some authority, and status, and prestige". [76]

SYSTEMATIC DISCRIMINATION

From her community, some individuals attacked a member of Chaaliyar caste. Soon after, member of the Chaaliyar caste filed a complaint against the entire paraya community. they didn't report who actually hit but accused the entire community of vandalizing their school, house, and temples. They alleged that members of her community threw stones, broke roof tiles, and dishonored women by dragging them out. The police did not have proper inquiry.

"All of a sudden a huge gang of policemen came out from the Chaaliyar settlement, batons in hand, drove our men back ruthlessly, mercilessly beating those they caught before arresting them". [34]

Instead, they came to their part of the village, beating all the men severely and arresting them indiscriminately. "then the police came to our part of the village, rounded up all the men whom they found there and beat them black and blue." [34] Day after day they came on rounds in the Dalit streets. The place was so still that their boots stamping sent shivers in the heart of women and children. When she asked when they would be released, her grandmother replied that the police would treat them like

animals, “whip them like they whip animals” [28] and only heaven knows when they would return home. The police brutality was extreme; they beat a man named Alphonse so severely in the middle of the street that he began vomiting blood. When a woman tried to pick her son’s money, “a police man put his boot against her stomach, kicked her aside, and took the money himself.”. The Alphonse, who were beaten by the police, died. Some men were rounded up and sent to Madurai jail. Those who escaped were hiding in the forest and mountains. The headman dashed into the high earthenware enclosure in Bama’s home, only to be caught, kicked and rained with blows. A ten-year-old boy died in this strangling atmosphere. The women went with a sari to the hiding father and disguised him in a sari. The police interrogated the group while returning. Immediately the women raised a funeral dirge and escaped. Some women dug the grave at night and buried the boy. The father was not even able to weep for fear of the police identifying him. The men who were hiding in the belfry of the church were caught and taken away. The priest was “sitting at ease in the bungalow, his legs crossed, smoking his cigarette happily and watching it all” (39). He could not even lend a paltry loan of five rupees to the Dalits at this critical condition. This incident shows how the police treated low caste people even though they didn’t make any mistakes. They didn’t have proper investigation and they favor for upper caste people. But there was great happiness that the case turned out in their favor.

This incident shows how unfair caste discrimination is, especially in how the police treat people. They hurt and arrested men just because of their caste, which isn’t right. This is just one example of how those in power treat marginalized communities unfairly. The sad death of Alphonse, who was badly beaten, shows how badly low-caste people can be treated. Even when a woman tried to take money, she was hurt too, which shows how little the justice system cares about basic rights. These actions make life even harder for vulnerable communities. The justice system failed to investigate properly and treat victims fairly, showing how unfair our legal system can be. Low-caste people often can’t get fair treatment because of their social status, and they can’t afford good lawyers either. Meanwhile, people from higher castes are often treated better and protected from punishment, even if they don’t deserve it.

India has a long history of treating people differently based on their caste, with some groups getting more respect and others facing discrimination. Police didn’t arrest who actually hit. Instead, police blamed the whole Paraya community. police didn’t

investigate properly and ended up hurting innocent people from the Paraya community. This happens because some police officers may treat people from lower castes unfairly. Police were very violent, hurting people badly and even causing someone's death. This shows that some police can act without being punished, especially when dealing with lower caste people. People from higher castes might get treated better by the police and authorities, while those from lower castes may not get the same fairness. This makes it harder for lower caste people to get justice.

CHAPTER 5

RELIGION AND LIBERATION

CONVENT LIFE

She says “this attitude not only among the common people in the society about us. Far worse is the attitude within our own Church.” [80] At the first place of work, a nun asked “Are you Nadar”. She said “I am Paraya. [23]

She entered the convent to teach poor children but the convent was filled with wealthy children. That convent, they truly treat people suffering from poverty differently from those who have money in their pockets. “the convent I entered didn’t even care to glance at poor children”. [77] “Before they became nuns, these women take a vow that they will live in poverty.” [77] But inside the convent, “the convent does not know the meaning of poverty”. [77] “When the bell rang, there was a meal...There was always food of all kinds... in abundance. There was a comfortable room to live in, each had a bedstead, a fan, table and chair, and drinking water... At ten in morning there was coffee and snacks. At twelve, a hot meal. Once again tea and snacks at four in the afternoon, and a hot meal at seven”. [67] “there as every comfort and convenience there”. [78] One could have stayed there comfortably with enough to eat, clothes to wear, and a chance to travel to different places.

She says, “I wanted to become a nun, but to be different.” [103] This describes she doesn’t want luxuries. She wants to treat all with same respect which is only given to wealthy people.

In the convent they spoke very bad about low caste people. They didn’t even consider them as human beings. They think that low caste have no moral, discipline nor cleanliness nor culture.

“The school was full of children from wealthy families. The nuns from the convent matched their attitude and behavior to the power and prestige of those families” [78]. The more she watched this, the more frustrated she felt.

“I dreamt that I would share my life with the poor and the suffering, live and die for them” [106] Instead, she was sent to prestigious schools and asked to teach them. It

was only after she arrived there that it all became clear to her. All the children there came from wealthy families. The one who came too was a well-endowed one. And the Jesus they worshipped there was a wealthy Jesus. There seemed to be no connection between God the suffering poor. "There was no love for the poor and the humble". [106] They claimed that God's love is limitless and unconditional. They claim in church that God was born into a poor family, lived among the poor, and died poor. Inside the convent, they preached about God's limitless love, but in reality, love seemed conditional based on wealth and status. Despite singing about God's justice and forgiveness, they often acted unjustly and punished those who inconvenienced them. Their actions didn't match their words.

They sent her to teach in another big school for wealthy children. She would have to act according to the rich children's demands. "In fact the entire school was ruled by their demands". [116]

The rich children would say, "We don't want to sit next to these ones, they are dark-skinned, they are poor, they are ugly, they don't wear nice clothes". [112] Even during the plays or dance performances, the wealthy children were unwilling to dress up as the poor. It seemed to her that teaching such children was a waste of her time.

She was unable to stand the torture any more, she packed her belongings and walked out of the convent.

"In the convent, even amongst themselves there were caste divisions, divisions between the rich and the poor, and even divisions over the languages that they spoke". [103]

She learnt "The God has always shown the greatest compassion for the oppressed, and Jesus too associated himself mainly with the poor". Yet nobody had pointed it out. Those people who had taught them, had taught them only that "God is loving, kind, gentle one who forgives sinners, patient, tender, humble, obedient. Nobody had ever insisted that God is just, righteous, is angered by injustices". They don't teach the oppressed about God; instead, they instruct them in an empty and meaningless manner about humility, obedience, patience, and gentleness. "There was no love to be found in that convent . . . there was no love for the poor and the humble . . . In the name of God they actually rob from the poor who struggle for their livelihood". [106]

“If by accident a poor and lowly person appears, “they will fall upon that person like rabid dogs”. In the name of God, they exploit the poor who struggle for their very livelihood. They teach them to close their eyes when they pray, with the deliberate intention that they should not open their eyes and see. They instruct them to bind their arms together and to prostrate themselves fully on the ground in prayer, so that they never stand tall.

Before one becomes a nun and chooses to reside in the convent, there is lengthy training and preparation. What they taught them during that time was truly admirable. They were told that each of them is different and unique, with no one else like them in the whole world. It was comforting to hear that God created each of them in a special way. However, when it came to actual practice, it was quite different. They were expected to behave as if they had all been made from the same mold. Nobody was allowed to think or speak differently.

In the wealthy life of the convent, “there were prayers at midday, in the evening, and at night; prayers throughout the day.” [113] However, there was no connection between these prayers, the life they led, and the work they did. “On the one hand, all these prayers were said only as a duty. On the other, such power and status that can't ever be described as truly Christian.” [113] The nuns are told that their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience set them free and help them relate to regular people. But in reality, these vows end up controlling and enslaving them, rather than giving them true freedom.

Outside the convent, she had experienced poverty and had lived among those who suffered from it. But inside the convent, she could not see even the traces and tracks of poverty. They could only go round and round, always within their luxurious cages, trapped in comfort.

After she saw this, she felt frustrated. “Even amongst the priests and nuns, it is the upper castes who hold all the high positions, show off their authority, and throw their weight about. And if Dalits become priests or nuns, they are pushed aside and marginalized first of all, before the rest go about their business. It is because of this that even though Dalits like me might wish to take up the path of renunciation, we find there is no place for us there”. [80]

In a particular class, a sister said that they would not accept Harijan women as prospective nuns and there was even separate order for them.

From the moment of entry into the convent, caste discrimination was evident, as seen when a nun questioned the caste identity of a new member. This violated the caste discrimination within the religious institution. She wanted to help people, but she witnessed how low-caste individuals were dehumanized and marginalized, being considered inferior in morality, discipline, cleanliness, and culture. This discrimination extends to the children who are from low-caste backgrounds in the convent. The convent was filled with wealthy students, and she observed how the attitude and behavior of the nuns in the convent. There is a lack of empathy towards those from poor backgrounds. In the convent, individuals from upper caste hold a position of power and authority, while Dalits are marginalized and pushed aside. In church, they talk about God's love being limitless and unconditional, but she found that love within the convent seemed conditional based on wealth and status. The disconnect between preaching about serving the poor and reality of catering to the wealthy highlight the hypocrisy within the religious institutions. She wanted to teach the poor children, but she was repeatedly placed in a prestige school. Finally, she was unable to tolerate the discrimination and hypocrisy, and any longer, she made the courageous decision to leave the convent.

After she left the convent, the caste discrimination she faced within the convent had deeply wounded her, transforming her from a bold person to someone timid and fearful. Even within the convent, there was a caste division as well as division based on wealth and language. In the convent, they didn't teach about God's compassion for the oppressed and Jesus associated with the poor. Instead, their teaching focused on humility and obedience. She witnessed exploitation of the poor in the name of God within the convent. Before one becomes a nun, they taught about uniqueness, but in reality, nobody allows to speak differently. There is a frequency of prayer within the convent. There was a disconnect between these rituals and the actual lives led by the nuns. She observed how upper caste held all the higher positions of authority within the church and convent.

OUTSIDE THE CONVENT

The school run by Nadar, they only appoint Nadar women, and the Naicker schools only admit Naickers. Aiyar school only teach Aiyar children. Even schools run by Catholic nuns and priests refusing them. "they are told that if they take Dalit children, their standards will fall. They marginalize all of us Dalits as being of poor quality." After all this, she asks, "how I can find a job and survive." [119]

she finds trapped in the society where caste-based discrimination pervades every aspect of life, including education and employment. Schools operated by specific caste groups only admitting and hiring individuals from their own community. Even schools run by Catholic nuns and priests refusing admission to Dalit children to maintaining standards. She faces challenge of finding a job and surviving in a society that systematically denies them equal opportunities based solely on their caste identity.

Having lost her job, she found herself without any money. She didn't even have enough clothes to wear. She says "Convent life had changed me fundamentally. I who had once been bold had become an extremely timid person, fearful of everything. ready to burst into tears, and without any strength". [78] This shows how individuals from low-caste backgrounds are treated by those from high-caste backgrounds. The caste discrimination inflicted significant harm on the individual's confidence and emotional well-being. She experienced discrimination and marginalization solely because of her caste.

After she leave the convent, today she experiences, "what it is to be hungry, to suffer illness in solitude, to stand and stare without a paisa in one's hand, to walk along the street without protection, to be embarrassed by a lack of appropriate clothes, to be orphaned and entirely alone, to swim against the tide in this life without position or status or money or authority". [120] But she doesn't regret for left the convent. "But I have never once regretted that I left the convent with all its comforts and conveniences". [120]

"With all their words and rules in the convent, they cut me down, sculpted me, damaged me." [121] This shows how she faces pain and humiliation in the convent.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

"Karukku" serves as a testimonial narrative that bears witness to the struggles, triumphs, and resilience of marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, in the face of systematic oppression and discrimination. Bama's Karukku offers exploration of the intersecting theme of caste, oppression, discrimination, religion, and economic challenge that pervade in Indian society. Karukku exposes harsh reality faced by marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, who endure systematic discrimination and exploitation. Throughout the Book, Bama exposes the insidious ways in which caste hierarchy dictates every aspect of life, from education and employment opportunities to social interaction and religious practice. Her personal experiences illustrate how individuals face pain and humiliation because of a community background. Karukku shows social inequality in India. Karukku sheds light on the economic struggles faced by the marginalized community, highlighting the interconnectedness of caste discrimination and economic problems. Karukku" by Bama is an important book that talks about the struggles faced by Dalit Christian women in Tamil Nadu, India. It's a story about discrimination and injustice, especially within the Catholic Church. Bama's writing is powerful and honest, making readers think about the unfair treatment faced by Dalits in Indian society.

Through her book, Bama encourages people to fight against caste-based discrimination and work towards a fairer society for everyone. In this, she describes how people from higher castes treat those from lower castes with disrespect and avoid them because they think they are impure. For example, an upper-caste woman refuses to sit next to the narrator on the bus, and the Naicker family doesn't let the narrator's grandmother touch their things. These actions reflect the unfair treatment and discrimination faced by lower-caste individuals because of their caste. It highlights the need to change these beliefs and treat everyone with respect and equality, regardless of their caste.

This shows how the Bama and others from her community face discrimination and prejudice based on their caste identity. Even in school, they are unfairly blamed for

any wrongdoing, with accusations made solely because they belong to the lower caste. For instance, when a coconut falls while the narrator is playing, she is falsely accused of causing it, and the headmaster and priest immediately believe the accusations because of her caste. This incident highlights the unjust treatment and bias faced by Dalit students, perpetuating marginalization and reinforcing caste-based stereotypes.

The pervasive caste-based discrimination experienced by the Bama and her community. Even young children are taught to show deference to those of higher caste, while the infrastructure of the village reflects the segregation between upper and lower caste communities. In the convent school, Dalit students face verbal abuse and unfair treatment from hostel wardens despite paying full fees. Government policies intended to help marginalized students are viewed as humiliating, and special occasions are denied to them based on their caste identity. Economic disparities further compound the injustice, with girls from the community denied access to cinema and forced into household chores instead of schooling. The wealthy exploit and oppress Dalits, leaving them dependent and powerless. These experiences underscore the deep-rooted caste discrimination and economic inequality prevalent in society.

The economic struggles faced by the protagonist and their family, who often rely on collecting firewood for meager earnings. Despite hard work, they receive low wages, and gender discrimination results in women earning less than men for the same labor. During times of financial strain, such as during wartime when her father couldn't send money, the family faces hardships and must limit expenses. Despite these challenges, the protagonist's determination and the support of a nun enable them to pursue education. However, financial constraints lead to embarrassment among peers due to lack of adequate clothing and accessories. The protagonist's decision to lock herself in during College Day highlights their inability to afford a silk saree, symbolizing economic struggles. Nevertheless, upon securing a job after completing their education, they gain financial independence and the ability to make their own choices, providing a sense of authority and prestige. These experiences underscore the impact of economic hardships and the empowerment that comes with financial stability.

This highlights the unfair treatment and brutality faced by the Paraya community at the hands of the police, who indiscriminately arrested and beat men from the community following a complaint filed by a member of the Chaaliyar caste. Despite lacking proper evidence or investigation, the police targeted and assaulted innocent individuals, resulting in severe injuries and even the death of one man named Alphonse. The incident exemplifies the systemic caste discrimination within the justice system, where marginalized communities are unfairly targeted and denied basic rights. The failure of the police to conduct a thorough investigation and their biased treatment towards the Paraya community underscore the challenges faced by lower-caste individuals in seeking justice and protection under the law. This incident reflects the broader issue of caste-based discrimination in India, where people from higher castes often receive preferential treatment, exacerbating the injustice experienced by marginalized communities.

Bama expresses the deep-rooted pain and humiliation experienced by those born into lower castes, highlighting how caste discrimination permeates every aspect of their lives. She emphasizes that regardless of her abilities or achievements, caste alone dictates the suffering and degradation they endure from birth until death. Bama identifies with the struggles faced by all Dalit individuals, acknowledging the shared difficulties and challenges endured by the impoverished Dalit community. She underscores the dire circumstances faced by those belonging to the Paraya community, emphasizing their status as the poorest of the poor, constantly battling for mere survival in a society plagued by caste discrimination. This serves as a poignant commentary on the pervasive and systemic nature of caste-based oppression, which continues to afflict marginalized communities in India.

Bama shares her experience of facing caste discrimination within the church and convent, highlighting the hypocrisy and injustice prevalent in religious institutions. From the moment of entry, caste discrimination was evident, with individuals from lower castes being questioned about their identity. Despite her desire to help the poor, she witnessed how low-caste individuals were dehumanized and marginalized, even within the church. The convent she entered was filled with wealthy students, and she observed how the nuns catered to the affluent while showing a lack of empathy towards those from poor backgrounds. Upper-caste individuals held positions of power and authority, while Dalits were marginalized and pushed aside. Despite preaching

about God's unconditional love, the reality within the convent was different, with love seeming conditional based on wealth and status. The disconnect between preaching about serving the poor and the reality of catering to the wealthy highlighted the hypocrisy within religious institutions. After enduring discrimination and hypocrisy, she made the courageous decision to leave the convent. The experience deeply wounded her, transforming her from a bold person to someone timid and fearful. Even within the convent, there were divisions based on caste, wealth, and language. The teachings focused more on obedience than on God's compassion for the oppressed. The exploitation of the poor in the name of God and the lack of true freedom despite taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience further underscored the injustices within the convent. Despite her initial aspirations, she realized that there was no place for her within the religious institution, ultimately choosing to forge her own path outside its confines.

After leaving the convent, Bama faces the harsh realities of life, experiencing hunger, illness, loneliness, financial struggles, and social embarrassment. She finds herself trapped in a society where caste-based discrimination permeates every aspect of life, including education and employment. Schools and workplaces operated by specific caste groups only admit and hire individuals from their own community, leaving Dalits marginalized and deprived of opportunities. Despite the challenges she faces, Bama does not regret leaving the convent, as she realizes that the comfort and convenience it offered came at the cost of her dignity and self-respect. She acknowledges the emotional and psychological damage inflicted upon her by the discriminatory attitudes and practices within the convent.

In "Karukku," Bama articulates her aspirations for society through her poignant testimonial narrative, which serves as both a personal reflection and a call to action. Throughout her narrative, she expresses a deep yearning for social transformation, advocating for a society that is free from the shackles of caste oppression, economic disparity, and religious intolerance.

In society, Bama seeks recognition and dignity for marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, who have long been relegated to the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy. Through her personal experiences and observations, she sheds light on the pervasive discrimination and dehumanization faced by Dalits in various spheres of life,

from education and employment to social interactions and religious practices. Bama passionately asserts the inherent worth and humanity of Dalits, challenging societal norms that perpetuate their marginalization and exclusion. She calls for a society that values every individual regardless of caste, acknowledging their contributions and potential.

Furthermore, Bama advocates for equality and justice in all aspects of life, including access to economic opportunities and resources. She highlights the economic struggles faced by marginalized communities, illustrating how caste-based discrimination exacerbates economic disparity and perpetuates cycles of poverty and exploitation. Bama emphasizes the importance of addressing structural inequalities and implementing policies that promote equitable distribution of wealth and resources. She envisions a society where every individual has the opportunity to thrive and succeed, regardless of their social background or economic status.

Additionally, Bama challenges conventional interpretations of religion and spirituality, advocating for a more inclusive and compassionate understanding of religious teachings. She critiques the ways in which religion has been used to justify and perpetuate caste discrimination and oppression, calling for a return to the core values of love, empathy, and justice. Bama emphasizes the transformative power of spirituality in inspiring resistance against oppression and fostering solidarity among marginalized communities. She envisions a society where religious institutions prioritize social justice and collective liberation, actively working towards the empowerment of all individuals.

In conclusion, Bama's testimonial narrative in "Karukku" reflects her profound aspirations for a more just, equitable, and compassionate society. Through her courageous voice and unwavering commitment to truth-telling, she challenges us to confront the uncomfortable realities of caste oppression, economic disparity, and religious intolerance, and to actively work towards building a world where every individual is valued, respected, and afforded the opportunity to live a life of dignity and freedom.

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