

## WOMAN POWER AS DEPICTED IN BAMA'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY *KARUKKU*

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### Abstract

Bama's *Karukku*, is an autobiographical writing. By presenting her personal experiences, she openly voices out to talk about the atrocities meted out towards oppressed women in several terms. However, she does not fail to highlight how this inhuman repression has made her mentally strong and haul out the shakti or woman Power from within. This paper ventures to show how Bama collects her inner strength through the experiences she has had in her community, church and the society.

The Postmodern Women Writing has grown up considerably throughout the world and has become increasingly open, straight forward and pro-individual. The themes, the style, syntax and symbolism that permeate their writings have also been affected by the present space and time and also by the cultural modes and traditions practiced in the society. Issues like women subjugation, women's sexuality their desire for freedom, their awareness to 'be' a person and their commitment to womanhood and religion have become subject-matter for debates and deliberations. Though these aspects are common to all women's writing, this is particularly true of subaltern women writers, since they have to struggle not only for individual empowerment but also for the freedom of their community. A subaltern female is doubly burdened, that of being in the oppressed group and of being a woman of the oppressed group. This predicament has been well substantiated in Bama's *Karukku*, an autobiographical writing. By presenting her personal experiences, she openly voices out to talk about the atrocities meted out towards oppressed women in several terms. However, she does not fail to highlight how this inhuman repression has made her mentally strong and haul out the *shakti* or Woman Power from within.

Autobiographies, memoirs, letters and diaries by women though deemed as authentic records in Feminist Studies, the subject has been pathetically neglected, but has been motivated feminist scholarship since 1970. Women have been writing autobiographies for many centuries Women's autobiography writing, seldom taken seriously as a focus of study before the seventies, was not deemed appropriately "complex" for academic dissertations, criticism or the literary canon. Women autobiographers, hence had to face many problems. On the one hand, they had to resist the pressure of masculine autobiography as the only literary genre available for their enterprise and on the other they had to confront sharp criticisms as a woman writer. They had the

difficulty in conforming to a female ideal. An emerging generation of African American women, coming of age during the years of the Civil Rights Movement published autobiographical narratives through which they could establish a place within political or artistic movements; they also explored the complex legacies of racial and sexual exploitation. Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1968) and Maya Angelou's *I Know why the Caged Bird sings* (1969) were among many writings that introduced African American women autobiographies to a broader American audience. Women's autobiographies is now a privileged site for thinking and issues of writing at the intersection of feminist, postcolonial and postmodern critical theories. An autobiography, from the Greek *autos*, 'self', *bios*, 'life' and *graphein*, 'write', is a biography written by the subject or composed conjointly with a collaborative writer. Taken together in this order, the words denote "Self life writing"- a brief definition of "autobiography". The term autobiography was first coined in the preface to collection of poems by the eighteenth century English working class writer Ann Yearsley, but the form is much older. Traditionally, an autobiography focuses on the 'life and times' of the character, while a memoir has a narrower, more intimate focus on his or her own memories, feeling and emotions. An autobiographical novel is a novel based on the life of the author. The literary technique is distinguished from an autobiography or memoir by the stipulation of being fiction. Names and locations are often changed and events are recreated to make them more dramatic but the story still bears a close resemblance to that of the author. Events may be reported the way the author wishes, showing variations in characterization. Since the writers somewhat draw on their own experiences in most of their work, the term autobiographical novel is difficult to define.

Sidonie Smith's scholarship on Women and Autobiography has been important in both defining and advancing the field of feminist autobiography criticism. Almost all autobiographies claim to be honest self-depictions. But autobiographer's self-understanding are shaped by the language that they use to express themselves. In writing their lives, the autobiographers must choose whether to reproduce or to contest dominant views of femininity in her culture, views that historically, have been misleading, unfair, or insufficient. Smith's *A Poetics of Women Autobiography* (1987) argued that in an androcentric tradition autobiographical authorization was unavailable to most women. Smith asserted that any theory of female textuality must recognize how patriarchal culture has fictionalized "woman" and how in response, women autobiographers had challenged the gender ideologies that surround them in order to script their life narratives. Critic Carolyn Helibrun (1926-2003) noted in her best-selling *Writing a Woman's Life*:

Only in the last third of the twentieth century have women broken through to a realization of the narratives that have been controlling their lives. Women poets of one generation- those born between 1923 and 1932- can now be seen to have transformed the autobiographies of women's lives, to have expressed, and suffered for expressing, what woman had not earlier been allowed to say. (60)

Thus, the women autobiographers revise the content and purpose of autobiography. Autobiographies published throughout the twentieth century were widely read, advertised by book clubs, and taught in university courses; the criticism of women's autobiography as a genre is barely two decades old. Within autobiographical writing in general, Dalit autobiographies occupy a significant space. Tejaswini P. Narayankar writes in her article, "Dalit Autobiography: An Evolution of Individual Self", submitted for *Research Front* (Vol.2.2, Apr-Jun, 2014):

The difference between autobiographies written by mainstream writers and dalit autobiographies is significant. Unlike autobiography written by main-stream writer, dalit autobiography is not

confined strictly to the author's life or hardships faced by him and happy moments passed by the author though it is narrated in first person. It is the reflection of traumas and wounded psyche of dalits and dalit community. Moreover dalit autobiographies . . . do adequately represent history of agony. . . . Initially, Dalit literature itself is autobiographical in content. Most of the dalit writings are autobiographical in nature, expressing anger against injustice. What was considered vulgar in Brahmanical code has now found its rightful place in dalit autobiographies. Dalit autobiographies interpret self, society and conflict within these two and give more importance to the society and the community rather than individual emotions. They summon truth from the past about poverty, helplessness along with resistance. (1)

In Maharashtra, women have written more autobiographies than men. *Amchya Ayushatil Kahi Athvani* (1910, The Memories of Our Life Together) by Ramabai Ranade, is the first full length autobiography in Marathi by woman. Tejaswini observes:

There is a rich treasure of dalit women autobiographies in Maharashtra. Efforts of Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar in creating consciousness among dalit women are praiseworthy. Appearance of dalit women in male autobiographies like sacrificing mother, pain enduring and suffering wife motivated dalit women to write about their own life experiences. Dalit women have acquired remarkable confidence to write about their own life narratives, as they have been in public spheres right from the early decades of 20th century. Kumud Pawde, Shantabai Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Shantabai Dani, Mukta Sarvagod and Baby Kamble are some of the notable dalit women writers who have indited their life stories. Conflict between self and community, triple exploitation, humiliation, starvation, Ambedkarite movement and resistance against patriarchy are the recurrent themes of these autobiographies. (4)

Through their autobiographies, the dalit women writers recapitulate their mental and physical trauma, their domestic life, problems as housemaid, brutalization, dehumanization, despair and agony, in an artistic manner and argue that dalit feminist problems are understood only by dalit women, as dalits' problems are understood only by dalits and not by non-dalits. Dalit women narrate bitter experiences with realization that other dalit women also must have had the same suffering. "*Karukku* is the first Tamil dalit autobiography written by Bama, a dalit Christian woman, is a narrative of atrocities committed on dalit Christian women" (5).

Bama born in 1958, known as Bama Faustina Soosiraj, is a Tamil Dalit writer, and belongs to a Roman Catholic family. She has published her autobiography, *Karukku* (1992) in Tamil and is translated into English by Lakshmi Holmstrom, who gives the meaning of the term "*Karukku*" in her translated work:

*Karukku* means palmyra leaves, which, with their serrated edges on both sides, are like double-edged swords. By a felicitous pun, the Tamil word *Karukku*, containing the word *Karu*; embryo or seed, also means freshness, newness. (vii)

*Karukku* is the first autobiography to appear in Tamil, for Dalit writing. Tamil has not produced any autobiographies as seen in Marathi. It is an unusual autobiography that has grown out of specific moments, a personal crisis that drives the author to understand the meaning of being a Christian Dalit woman. The writing is in first person narrative, in which the events of the narrator's life are not arranged in a chronological order. The narration is a reflection upon different aspects repeated in different perspectives. The episodes can be grouped thematically, such as education and work, games and recreation, and religion and belief. In all these patriarchal atrocities and women subjugation are predominately depicted. Within these circumstances, Bama confirms that she ventured to surface the woman power in her.

Bama's own experience is part of a larger movement among Dalits. Several movements by Dalit leaders both in India and abroad were carried out by great leaders like Martin Luther King in America and Nelson Mandela in South Africa whose sacrifices and contributions have become a major source of inspiration for the peoples of globe. Lord Gowthama Buddha who preached the abolition of Untouchability, is considered as one of the earliest Dalit reformers. In 1950, Ambedkar embraced Buddhism and converted thousands of Dalits to Buddhism. Chaitanya Prabhu in West Bengal started a Movement called "Namashudras" Movement. It changed the attitude of the people towards Dalits. Thus Dalit reform movements were started in India right from the days of Buddha. The Scheduled Castes are known as harijans, that is, children of God, a term coined by Mahatma Gandhi in 1933. There are many studies on Dalit Movements. The Mahar movement of Maharashtra has been seen as All India movement.

There is no full-fledged study or even an anthology giving information about various SC movements in different parts of the country in colonial and postcolonial period. Two papers, one by Gail Omvedt and Bharat Patankar and the other by Ghanshyam Shah give an overview of the dalit liberation in India. They were the Human Rights Activists who fought for the liberation of Dalits.. The former deals with the colonial period whereas the latter looks at both the colonial and the postcolonial periods. The main issues discussed, are confined to the problem of Untouchability and with a political credo. The alternative movement attempts to create a socio-cultural structure by conversion to some other religion or by acquiring education, economic status and political power. The reformative movements are further divided into Bhakti movements, neo-Vedantik movements and Sanskritisation movements, and further into the conversion movement and the religious or secular movement. The latter includes the movement related to economic issues. Dalit Movements have cultural consensus, Buddhist dalits and counter ideology and dalit identity. Patankar and Omvedt classify the dalit movement into caste based and class based movements. Dayanand Sarawati the founder of Arya Samaj believed that the caste system was a political institution created by the rulers for the common good of society and not a natural or religious distinction. Satish Kumar Sharma's book *Social Movements and Social Change* (1985) is the only full-fledged study which examines the relationship between the Arya Samaj and the untouchables. Arya Samaj was against the political movements of the untouchables. It went against any move initiated by the untouchables that disturb their solidarity and integration. A major anti-touchability movement was launched by Dr Ambedkar in the 1920's in Maharashtra. He saw the opportunity and possibility of an advancement for the untouchables through the use of political means to achieve social and economic equality with the highest classes in modern society. He organized the independent labour party on secular lines for protecting the interests of the laboring classes. In the early 1930's Ambedkar concluded that the only way of improving the status of the untouchables was to renounce the Hindu religion. He found that Buddhism was appropriate as an alternative religion for the untouchables. He preferred Buddhism because it was an indigenous Indian religion of equality; a religion which was anti-caste and Anti Brahmin. Dr. Ambedkar and his followers were converted to Buddhism in 1956. The movement for conversion to Buddhism has spread dalit consciousness irrespective of whether dalits became Buddhist or not. The Dalits of Maharashtra launched the Dalit Panther Movement in the early 1970s. Assertion for dalit identity has almost become a central issue of dalit movement. This involves local level collective action against discrimination and atrocities. This has been well-dispersed by Dalit writing.

. Dalit writing is a post-Independence literary phenomenon. The emergence of Dalit literature has a great historical significance. The causes and effects leading to the age old

existence of oppression and despair of lives of marginalized class of nation's vast population are also observed in many other parts of the world. Arjun Dangle in his translation from modern Marathi Literature entitled *Poisoned Bread* (1992) has defined Dalit literature as "Dalit Literature is one which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India... It makes with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary". Most of the marginalized groups all over the world have a similar system of oppression but the titles are different as per the class and class divide. In India it was under the pretext of the caste and in the Western world it was under the name of the Race. Inequality was the main source of this marginality which led to insecurity, injustice and exploitation. Dalits were always marginalized as the 'other' side of the Indian society. So when they started voicing out after centuries of silence about themselves, we have the literature depicting assertion of human rights, self-pride, revolt against social injustice, chronicles of personal and collective suffering, and hopes and aspirations for a new society devoid of discrimination. Dalit Literature is literature about Dalits. Dalit (oppressed or broken) is not a new word. It was used in the 1930's as a Hindi and Marathi translation of 'depressed classes', a term the British used for what are now called the Scheduled Castes. In 1970's the Dalit panthers exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. Dalit is not a caste, but a symbol of change and revolution. The primary motive of Dalit literature is the liberation of dalits. Some of the important writers whose writings will find a place are: Mahasweta Devi, Namdeo Dhasal, Daya Pawar, Arjun Dangle, Sachi Rautary, Rabi Singh, Basudev Sunani, Bama, Abhirami, Poomani, Imayam and others.

Sharan Kumar Limbale in his work *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* (2004) has stated that Dalit literature is precisely that literature which artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits. The Tamil equivalent of the Marathi "Dalit" is *taazhtapattor*, used in this specific sense by the Tamil poet, Bharatidasan in the 1930's, when he was working for the self- Respect Movement. Dalit writing constantly refers to the anti-caste, anti-religious speeches of E.V.Ramasamy Naicker (Periyar) founder of the Self-Respect Movement. The Tamil words *taazhtapattor* or *odukkappattor* are used as a universal-identity for a particular group of people. Dalit writing is to awaken the consciousness of the oppressed. Bama's work *Karukku*, tries to explore a change in Dalit identity. The text also points to a powerful sense of engagement with history, of change, of changing notions of identity and belonging. Bama identifies certain experiences she has had and captures those moments that are paradoxical. She seeks an identity but seeks a change which means an end to the earlier imposed identity. Bama's style of language overturns the decorum and aesthetics of the received upper-class, upper-caste Tamil. She breaks the rules of written grammar and spelling throughout, elides words and joins them differently, demanding a new and different pattern of reading. *Karukku* also, by using an informal speech style which addresses the reader intimately, shares with the reader the author's predicament as Dalit and Christian directly, demystifying the theological argument, and making her choice rather a matter of conscience.

*Karukku*, very interestingly, also tells a story of Tamil Dalit Catholicism in the vocabulary that it uses, particularly in the central chapter which describes her spiritual journey from childhood faith to her original fold after departing from the convent. Bama's work not only breaks the mainstream aesthetic, but also proposes a new one which is integral to her politics. What is demanded of the translator and reader is, in Gayathri Spivak's terms in *Outside in the teaching machine* (1993), a "surrender to the special call of the text" (qtd Holmstrom, *Karukku*, xi). Bama is writing in order to change the hearts and minds. And as readers of her work, we are

asked for nothing less than an imaginative entry into that different world of experience and its political struggle. Her simple geographical description at once takes the readers to their ghetto. But, she is quite proud of her village: "I love this place for its beauty" (1)

There were five streets that made up the part where our community lived: South street, Middle street, North street, East street and Olatharapatti street. Row upon row of houses. Three-quarters of them were cottages with palmyra-thatched roofs. Inbetween, a few with tiled roofs. Here and there, a few houses of lime and plaster.(6)

*Karukku* is a powerful critique of the Indian civil society, the educational system, the church and the bureaucracy, highlights the complicity between class and caste in post-independence India. Bama refers to the toils of the Dalits in the fields, the spatial organization of the village and the community's rituals and superstitions. As Lakshmi Holmstrom in her introduction to the novel states that Bama does not make a connection between caste and gender oppressions. *Karukku* is concerned with the single issue of caste oppression within Catholic church and its institutions and presents Bama's life as a process of lonely self-discovery. Readers are given a full picture of the way in which the church ordered and influenced the lives of the Dalit Catholics.

Bama opens her "Preface" with the personal "I": "There are many congruities between the saw-edged palmyra karukku and my own life" (p xiii). It is significant that the first *noun* in Bama's narrative is not a unified subject "I" but a collective "our". This is the opening line of *Karukku*: "Our village is very beautiful" (1). When she describes her community she never uses "my people". Instead she writes: "Most of our people are agricultural labourers" (1). Bama has clearly stated the genre here – it is not a personal autobiography alone, but a collective archive of suffering, imposed because of social stigma. In other words, Bama does not at all want to dissociate herself from her community. She seems to prefer stay firm within it, so that she can come out open and smash the solidified atrocities practiced within it. Bama is the narrative voice through which the torments and violence of two communities, Dalit and Christian, are addressed to us. Numerous descriptions of the corporeal brutality occur in Bama's text and each bodily image is located within the social structure of caste. The caste it seems is inscribed on the Dalit body. Bama's elder brother shows her the right path and tells her that education is the only way to attain equality. She is encouraged by her brother to change her destiny by educating herself: "Because we are born into the paraiya 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. Workhard and learn.(15)

Throughout her education, Bama finds that wherever she goes, there is a painful reminder of her caste in the name of untouchability. The government offers financial grants and special tuitions to the Harijans. These grants and tuitions are more of humiliation mainly because it singles out her caste identity. Bama narrates her bitter experiences at the school: one day Bama and her friends were playing at the school in the evening. At that moment somebody had stolen the coconut. The guilt was thrown on her. Everyone said that it was Bama who had plucked the coconut. Actually she was not guilty but the headmaster treated her badly. He scolded her in the name of caste, that was quite agonizing to young Bama. She felt ashamed and insulted in front of all the children. She got suspended from the school. A teacher advised her to meet the Headmaster with a letter of apology. It was not the harsh words that make young Bama feel sad, but the loaded abuse in the words made her sick. After that incident, she became an outsider, when she entered the class room everyone looked at her in a strange way. She

painfully expresses: "When I entered the class room, the entire class turned around to look at me, and I wanted to shrink into myself as I went and sat on my bench, still weeping" (17).

Bama does not keep on talking about the humiliation, but has encoded the structure of the caste system. She has never heard about untouchability until her third standard in school. Then, she comes to know about her community's pathetic state, which she understands through her personal experiences. The narration has a humorous touch. One day when Bama was returning from school she saw an elderly person holding a small packet of snacks in a string and giving it to an upper caste person, named of his caste 'Naicker' in the village. The scene provoked laughter in her; but at the same time it also induced her to think that her people should never succumb to run for such petty errands to these fellows. After her completion of eighth class, Bama painfully recalls the nuns' comment on the Dalit children. She seriously thought of taking teaching-career so that she could put an end to the ill-treatment meted out to the children: ". . . Why should I not become a nun too and truly help the people who are humiliated so much and kept under such strict control?" (20). Bama became a teacher in a Christian convent after graduation with an objective to liberate the Dalit children from the oppression of the nuns.

Bama realized the topsy-turvy condition of church after becoming a nun. Socially the nuns posed themselves as if they were leading a life of physical and mental chastity, and dedicated to a deliberate life of poverty by eating only simple food. But inside the Church, the ground reality was altogether different. The nuns were fond of eating delicious food, showed much interest in money and clothes. They nurtured jealousy with each other and talked sometimes in abusive language. They are taught to keep distance with lower caste. Even inside the Church there are divisions among nun on the basis of caste. She thought she can teach the Dalit student for which she has entered in the order but she couldn't tolerate the atrocities inside the church. She finally resigns her post and leaves the order as it weakens her inner strength day by day. After leaving the Church order Bama accepts:

Today I am like a mongrel, wandering about without a job, nor a regular mean to find clothes, food and a safe place to live. I share the same difficulties and struggles that all Dalit poor experience. I share to some extent the poverty of the Dalits who toil for more painfully through fierce heat and beating rain, yet live out their lives in their hut with nothing but gruel and water. Those who labor are the poorest of the poor Dalits. But those who reap the reward are the wealthy, the upper castes. This continues to happen in my village to this day (67-8).

Towards the end of her autobiography, Bama repeats the same sentiments:

After I dared at last to leave the convent, it was as if I had arrived at a place where I had no connections. Having sheltered within the safety of the convent, eating at regular meal times and living a life with every comfort, I am now in the position of having to endure the hardships of being alone in the outside world, and of having to seek work, and even food and drink for myself. (101)

In this situation also, Bama did not bury her intention to do service for the welfare of her society. She did not return to take of a family life by getting married. She knew very well about the married woman of her society and what her life was made up of.

Bama's wrath is on the Church and the representatives of Christianity for duping the lower caste in order to get personal benefits. The Dalits are taught by priests that they should follow the rules of religion otherwise God will punish them. The priests thus could frighten them

psychologically and pressurize them to act to their tune. The priests did not teach the oppressed about what is God but rather they continued to teach in an empty and meaningless language about humility, obedience, patience, gentleness, which they never practiced.

I learnt that God has always shown the greatest compassion for the oppressed. And Jesus too, associated himself mainly with the poor. Yet nobody had stressed this nor pointed it out. All those people who had taught us, only that God is loving, kind, gentle, one who forgives sinners, patient, tender, humble, obedient. Nobody injustices, opposes falsehood, never countenances inequality. There is a great deal of difference between this Jesus and the Jesus who is made known through daily pieties. The oppressed are not taught about him, but rather, are taught in an empty and meaningless way about humility, obedience, patience, gentleness.(90)

Bama believed that such a situation would not prevail anymore and the priests would not continue their deception any longer, if the community got a fair and good training from an educated person.

Bama's education had obviously given this understanding and hereafter she could not be the passive recipient of Church's description of God and religion. But this was not the end of her mission. Mere questioning of the set norm and wrong interpretations would not work. Moreover such adventures by Bama or any other individual could not affect sea-change. If the entire dalit community must attain the equal status in the society, they must unite and educate themselves in order to stand firmly against their exploiters. Bama's inspirational words explain this mission of hers categorically: " Yet, because I had the education, because I had the ability, I dared to speak up for myself; I didn't care a toss about caste. Whatever I took up, successfully" (20).

Bama's autobiography *Karukku* has been written to attract the attention of Dalits towards their awareness regarding education. In order to bring an end the caste oppression, Bama's autobiography acts as a "Sociography", since it gives a detailed description to the savior exploitation spread in the whole dalit community in all parts of the country. "Sociography" is writing on society, societal sub-divisions and societal patterns, done without first conducting the in-depth study typically required in the academic field of sociology. By writing her self-history, Bama becomes a Socio-grapher. Education is necessary to all the members of dalit community, and recognition to one's unique identity with its potentialities of survival in any kind of circumstances are some suggestions, which according to Bama can help the dalits to come out of their exploitations. She hence urges dalits to get educated and empower themselves.

Through the memories of her childhood Bama brings to light the dalit children's lifestyle, their growing up and their enjoyment . Her recalling reveals, that Dalit children have a carefree and playful life and also of their innocent pursuit of simple interest.

We played late into night before going home to sleep..... We'd make toy chariots out of dried maize sticks and carry them around in procession; a few of us walking ahead, the others following on with the petromax lamps. We used to make drums out of cattle membrane and skin, and bang them as we went along. It used to be such fun. We marched along, street by street. At last we'd come back to the shrine of St. Sebastian and put down the chariot there. You should have watched the fun as we went past our faces then. Some of the older people would laugh at us and tease us. Others would follow us, ranting and raving away children from other communities would walk along the lake shore, all dolls up, on their way to the cinema (49).

Bama as a young girl of twelve learns that boys have different roles to play than girls, which get perpetuated in the form of gender games. While kabadi and marbles are meant for boys to play girls even when small had to play only games like cooking or getting married, home keeping, minding babies as in real life. The system cared more for the boy baby than for a girl



child. But instead of going to cinema and reading books, the Dalit children spend their time in their own kind of creative activities. These practices might give some indication to educationalists when they design instructional materials to children of this community. Bama in *Karukku* states how parents from the Dalit community support their families by doing manual work:

Such people have just enough time, if they wake up well before cock crow, to sweep their front yard, collect water, swallow some gruel if possible, and rush off to work as best as they can. In the midst of all this, how can they be expected to look after their children and make sure they go to school? (68)

The author picturises the condition of parents whose children are the first generation learners in school. They do not recognize the importance of formal education because of their poverty and manual preoccupation, which do not allow the children, especially girls, to go to school to receive formal education:

In the face of such poverty, the girl children cannot see the sense in schooling, and stay at home, collecting firewood, looking after the house, caring for the babies, and doing house hold chores. And there are many who patiently accept and endure their hard lives, consoling themselves that this was the destiny given to them, that they cannot see a way to change the caste they were born into, nor the poverty that is part of that caste, nor indeed the humiliation of it all(68).

Dalit women's gender oppression and the need for Dalits to organize themselves to empower themselves politically as well as avail of their constitutional rights are well exposed by the author. Her novel underscores that Dalits cannot always avoid taking recourse to counter orthodox biases and traditional forms of discrimination heaped on them continually over the years. Dalit women's sexuality is an important domain of creative and critical concern in Tamil Dalit literature, which discusses the subjugated status of the dalit women at their own homes and society. Bama experiences that dalit women are strong, but they become weak and helpless when they were repeatedly strangled by the society. Though dalit women encounter many kinds of atrocities, they come out of them with incredible moral strength and get empowered through their ordeals. Bama herself had an experience when she entered the convent as a nun. Then she was as strong as a teak wood but when she left, she felt dried up and incipient as though she had lost all her strength. The nightmarish experiences in the convent made her think about herself and her own community, and the Woman Power in her got rejuvenated, making her establish an identity in the larger society. In the convent, Bama felt low and diminished, however she was very happy to hold on herself with a true and honest mind.

Bama is very careful in portraying the picture of a dalit woman.. The voices of many women speaking and addressing one another, sharing their everyday experiences with each other, sometimes reveal their uncontainable anger or irrepresible pain. Nevertheless, they are true portrayals that certainly must be expressed only in the language of these women that Bama pens in her autobiography. Sadly, this virulent and vibrant language cannot get a sincere exposure in the translation.

Bama is doing something completely new in using the demotic and the colloquial regularly, as her medium for narration and even argument, not simply for reported speech. She uses a Dalit style of language which overturns the decorum and aesthetics of received upper-

class, upper-caste Tamil. She breaks the rules of written grammar and spelling throughout, elides words and joins them different pattern of reading(xi)

Bama says that man can humiliate woman many times, he can disrespect a woman, it is very normal in the society. Even dalit women can establish their identities as persons if they get good education and training. By speaking about the dalit women including the author Bama herself, she affirms that these women can regain their identities and establish their sense of individual selves. She deftly traces her reactions to her growing knowledge about her caste, community hierarchy of patriarchal power structure. As said earlier, such a constant thinking hauls out the hidden power or the *nari shakti* in her. She seems to say that women in general and dalit women in particular should not feel sagged out because of their bitter experiences, but try to learn from the violence to work out in a hostile world and raise themselves with supreme power like Draupati of *Mahabharatha*, who rose herself from the shameful act committed on her in the open court.

*Karukku* is a revelation of the inner strength and vigour of Dalit women as represented by Bama. Her experiences open up new perspectives for Dalit women. We find that centuries of oppression have not succeeded in completely sapping the vitality and the inner strength of the Dalits. Dalit women, in particular, have enormous strength and vigour to bounce back against all odds. *Karukku* represents the realistic description of the subjugated and gives a detailed depiction of the way in which the Church orders and influences the lives of the Dalit Christians. She deals with the larger areas such as education, development of Dalit children, Dalit women and on the whole the liberation of the Dalits. As a result of her humbling experiences as a Dalit woman, Bama realises that through the right type of education the whole community of Dalit can be empowered and can gain human dignity. Bama has passed through many emotional encounters and experiences. The whole process is a trail of discovery, which makes her a self-made woman, and make her come out as a strong personality and show to the world that women gather their "Power Within" through their trials and tribulations.

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