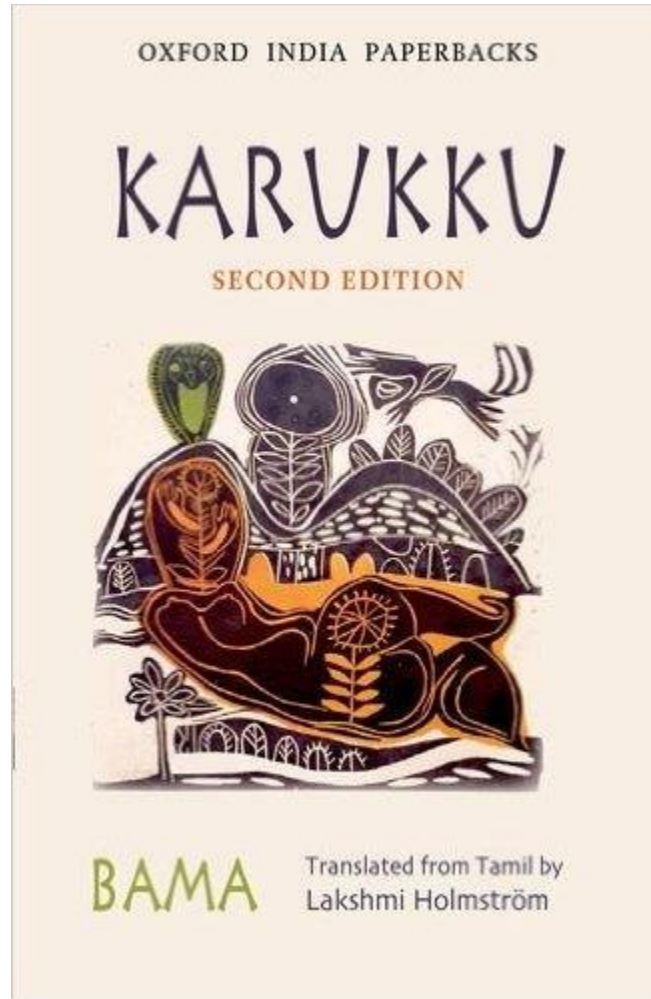


## Double Oppression in Bama's *Karukku* and *Sangati*

K. Latha, M.A., M.Phil.

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### Abstract

Bama, originally called Faustina Mary Fathima Rani is a Paraiyar, Christian Dalit activist. Her novels focus on caste and gender discrimination. They portray caste-discrimination practised in Christianity and Hinduism. Bama's works are seen as embodying Dalit feminism and are famed for celebrating the inner strength of the subaltern woman. Bama rose to fame with her

autobiographical novel *Karukku* (1992), which chronicles the joys and sorrows experienced by Dalit Christian women in Tamilnadu. Bama's *Karukku* (1992) and *Sangati* (1994) narrate the painful and tormented life history of a sensitive, insightful and perceptive Dalit woman. The word 'sangati' means 'events' and thus the novel, through individual stories, anecdotes and memoirs, portrays the events that take place in the life of women in the Paraiyar community. The novel also reveals how the Paraiyar women are doubly oppressed.

Bama's *Karukku* and *Sangati* show various aspects of caste discrimination and gender discrimination. These novels show the sufferings of Dalit community in the hands of "upper-caste" communities in church, places of education and society. These also show the sufferings of the Dalit women in the hands of the upper caste men and also in the hands of their own husbands.

**Key words:** Bama, Dalit literature, *karukku*, *sangathi*

### **Dalit and Dalit Literature**

The terms 'Dalit' and 'Dalit literature' have been a subject of arguments, controversies, etc. The term 'dalit' refers to the vision of caste binaries and caste based oppression, discrimination and celebration of the politics of 'otherness'. Most of the thinkers and creative writers related with dalit literature have expressed their consensus on the inference that dalit literature is a manifestation of cultural conflict of the society, economically and culturally deprived groups of society. It is not a literature of caste but of a specific consciousness that deprives innocent individuals from their basic rights of self-survival, self-preservation and self-expression.

Much of Dalit Literature is found in the regional languages and it has to be translated into English to receive due attention everywhere. Several Tamil Dalit Literary works have been translated into English and in other languages and have received appreciation.

### **Bama, a Leading Dalit Novelist**

Amidst a number of writers, who actively participate in propagating Dalit Literature, Bama has written books providing a firsthand account of discrimination by upper-caste nuns,

priests, defining ‘woman ‘from the socio-political perspective of a Dalit, focusing ‘Dalit Victimhood’ in a detailed manner in all her writings.

Faustina Mary Fathima Rani is from the Paraiyar community, and is a Christian Dalit activist. She took the first and last syllables of Fathima and made up her name “Bama”. She was born in Wathirayiruppu, Puthupatti in Virudhunagar District in southern Tamilnadu in 1958. Her family was converted to Christianity, way back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Her father was Susairaj and her mother was Sebasthiamma. Bama was the third of the six children in the family. Her elder brother Raj Gauthaman is a Dalit ideologist. Her father Susairaj was employed in the Indian Army and spent all his money for the education of his children. Bama completed her education from St. Mary’s College Tuticorin and after taking her B.Ed., degree, she worked as a teacher in a school. Later she joined the convent to become a nun. After seven years, she gave up convent life as she found that the Dalit are discriminated even in Christianity which proclaims the equality of all human beings before God. She had little idea of what she would do with the rest of her life out of job. She was condemned by the society and the church alike. She began writing her autobiography *Karukku* to stop herself from dying.

When published in 1992, *Karukku* with the unique manner in which it used the Tamil language. The writing took liberties with the grammar went on to change not just the way Dalit Literature was perceived in the literary circles of Tamil Nadu but also in the society at large. Bama wrote her second novel *Sangati* in 1994 and brought out a collection of short stories *Kisumbuukaran* in 1996 reaffirming her status as writer with a great insight and an inimitable style. She writes in a simple, lucid language that breaks all barriers of approved norms of decency and dismantles the mask of middle-class morality. She has been at the forefront of Dalit literary activism, and has given Dalit aesthetics a visibility it had previously lacked in the literary camps of India.

On the whole, Bama has published four main works an autobiography, *Karukku* 1992, a novel, *Sangati*, 1994; collection of short stories, *Kisumbukkaaran*, 1996 and again another novel *Vanmam*, 2002. The first two full-length novels are translated in English, German, French,

Telugu, and Malayalam. Besides writing, Bama teaches at a school in the village of Uthirameror near Kancheepuram.

The Institute of Development Education, Action and Studies (IDEAS) published both *Karukku* and *Sangati* in Tamil. Mini Krishnan has edited and published the translation of *Karukku* into English in 1999, and *Sangati* in 2002. It was Mini Krishnan who introduced Bama's work to French publishers. It was through her that L'Aube translated *Sangati* into French in 2002. Lakshmi Holmstrom spent years in translating, revising and redrafting the English version of *Karukku* and *Sangati* without disturbing the essence and flow of the original. Bama's recent work *Vanmam* is translated into English by Malini Seshadri in 2008. She won the 'Crossword Award' for the English translation of *Karukku* in 2001.

### ***Karukku***

*Karukku* is an autobiographical novel. It is an unusual autobiography. It makes a sense of Bama's life as woman, Christian and Dalit. It is the driving quest for integrity as a Dalit and Christian that shapes the book and gives its polemic. *Karukku* is concerned with the single issue of caste oppression within the Catholic Church and its institutions and presents Bama's life as a process of lonely self-discovery. Bama leaves her religious order to return to her village, where life may be insecure, but she does not feel alienated or compromised. The tension throughout *Karukku* is between the self and the community. The narrator leaves one community in order to join another one. In other words, she leaves the community of 'religious women' in order to join another one as 'a Dalit Woman'. *Karukku* eschews the confessional mode, leaving out many personal details.

### ***Sangati***

*Sangati*, published in Tamil in 1994, is the second work of Bama. *Sangati* moves from the story of individual's struggle to the perception of a community of Paraiyar women, a neighborhood group of friends and relations and their joint struggle. In this sense, *Sangati* is perhaps the autobiography of a community. *Sangati* is uniquely placed in contributing both to the Dalit movement and to the women's movement. It disobeys received notions of what a novel should be, just as *Karukku* flouts the conventions of autobiography. It has no plot in the normal

sense. It has only the powerful stories of series of memorable protagonists. In a way, *Sangati* is an episodic novel. “Sangati” means news, event and happenings.

It is through one of interconnected anecdotes in *Sangati*, Bama formulates a ‘Dalit feminism’ which redefined women’ from the socio-political perspective of a Dalit, and examines caste and gender oppressions. In a way, *Sangati* teases out the way patriarchy works in the caste of Dalit women starting from economic inequality. Bama pinpoints the sexual harassment, male led caste courts and churches and the biased rules for sexual behavior and the psychological stresses of Dalit women.

### **Caste Discrimination**

Casteism is considered as a social problem as it disturbs the sound governmental politics and democracy and paves the way for mutual group conflicts. Casteism is manifested in the form of clashes between various castes for higher share in the socio-economic rights and power. Bama’s *Karruku* and *Sangati* portray as on caste and gender discrimination.

The title of the book, *Karukku*, is used by the author as a symbol. The term ‘*Karukku*’ generally refers to the serrated or toothed edge of the stalk of a palmyra leaf. The sharp edges found on both sides of the stalk symbolically refer to a double-edged sword. The word is also used as a pun and in Tamil language the word ‘karu’ means seed or embryo which also implies the meaning of newness or freshness. While discussing the symbolical significance of the term ‘*Karukku*’ Bama makes an orientation to the words found in the epistle to Hebrews in the New Testament is for the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

### **Trials and Tribulations of Bama as an Individual, as a Woman and as a Writer**

Bama’s *Karukku* records the trials and tribulations of Bama as an individual, as a woman and as a writer. When she arrived at the college, with just the clothes that she was wearing, they admitted her into the hostel. She felt deeply humiliated by her classmates where she went around in the same skirt, jacket and daavani for a whole week. She endured all the shame and

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humiliation and stayed on. Then she decided to become a nun and enter a convent and in that she worked hard for other children who struggled as she had done. The nuns from the convent matched their approach and behavior to the power and prestige of those families. The convent does not know the meaning of poverty. The more she watched, the more frustrated she felt. Her mind was disturbed and her conscience was bothered and bruised. And it was this conviction that made her leave the convent. For a writer, this was a double cross, where she left the convent she was on cross roads. The future was uncertain and she did not know where her next job would be, and then came the writing.

### **Christian Message of Hope - *Karukku***

Bama's re-reading of the Christian scriptures as an adult enabled her to carve out both a social vision and a message of hope for Dalits by emphasizing the revolutionary aspects of Christianity, the values of equality, social justice and love towards all. Her own life experience urged her towards activity engaging in alleviating the sufferings of the oppressed. When she became a nun, it was with the stubborn hope that she would have a chance to put these aspirations into effect. She discovers, however, that the perspectives of the convent and church are different from hers. The story of that conflict and its resolution forms the core of *Karukku*.

*Karukku* depicts how Dalit Christians are not allowed to sing in the church choir, are forced to sit separately, away from the upper caste Christians, are not allowed to bury their dead in the cemetery within the village, behind the church, but are made to use a different graveyard beyond the outskirts. The Paraiyars who are converted to Christianity in order to escape casteist oppression at the hands of orthodox Hinduism are shown to be greatly disillusioned as they are not able to escape caste oppression within the church fold. Further, reservation benefits are not granted to Dalit Christians according to the Constitutional provisions of India.

The village in *Karukku* divided along caste, class and communal lines are the representative of a typical South Indian village. It is true that the class divisions in Indian villages are most often along caste lines. The people of upper castes such as Brahmins, Naicker, Chettiyaar, Aasaari, Thevar, Nadar and Udaiyaar never came to the parts where the low caste people such as the Koravar, Chakkiliyar, Pallar and Parayar lived. The Panchayat Board, the Post Office, the milk-depot, the schools, the big shops and the church were situated in the streets of

upper caste people. Bama's village is not an exception to this rule. Referring to the divergent caste and religious groups residing the village like Nadars, Koravar, Chakkiliyar, Kusavar, Palla, Paraya, Thevar, Chettiyyar, Asari, Udaiyar and Naickars, the narrator identifies a clear pattern in the distribution of the caste groups in the village.

The geographical division of the settlements of people belonging to different castes can be seen as a symbolic representation of the wide gulf within the village community. The division is reflected in the interactions within the village community. Early realization of this deeply felt experience is touchingly presented in these words, "When I was studying in the third class, I hadn't yet heard people speak openly of untouchability. But I had already seen, felt, experienced and been humiliated by what it is" (K 11). This can be seen as the first step in Bama's efforts for political re-description of her situation. What made her aware of her identity as a Parayar, even as a young girl, is the humiliating experiences that she had seen as well as felt in her own village. Innumerable instances that illustrate caste discrimination are narrated in *Karukku*.

*Karukku* focuses on two essential aspects namely: caste and religion that cause great pain in Bama's life. Bama has bitter experiences at the school: One day Bama and other children were playing the game of running up the coconut palm and touching its tip. Unfortunately when Bama climbed up and touched the tip a green coconut fell down. The children out of fear left it there and ran away. Next morning at the school assembly the head master who belonged to the Chaaliyar caste called out Bama's name and chided her, "You have shown us your true nature as a Paraya." He further added, "You climbed the coconut tree yesterday after everybody else had gone home, and you stole a coconut. We cannot allow you inside the school. Stand outside" (K 16). Bama was in terrible agony because she had been shamed, insulted and humiliated in front of all the children. When she went to the priest to get a letter from him to get admitted into the class, the priests' immediate response was, "After all you are from the Cheri. Your might have done it. You must have done it" (K 17). She returned to the class with terrible shock and pain in her heart. Caste difference were not absent even in Bama's college studies. She found that the college authorities followed different rules for different caste.

It is a shocking incident and she is confused by listening to the caste name particularly when she is not mature enough to understand it at all. She does not keep on talking about the humiliation. In the very act of remembering the scene, she has encoded the mode of resistance that constructs her in opposition to the hegemonic structure of the caste system. Bama has never heard of untouchability until her third standard in school. The first time she comes to know her community's pathetic state, which is ironically tinged with humour. As Bama is returning from school, she finds an elder from her street. He is holding out a small packet of snacks. This packet of snacks is tied in a string. The elder is bringing the snacks by holding the strings without touching the packet and is giving it to a Naicker in the village. Bama is unable to control her looking at the funny sight. Bama says: "Just then, an elder of our street comes along from the direction of the bazaar. The manner in which he was walking along made me want to double up" (K 15). The self-questioning has begun in Bama with wonder.

Bama starts to look out for means to uplift herself and her community from this pathetic existence. Her elder brother shows her the right path and tells her that education is the only way to attain equality.

Bama's elder brother's counsel makes a very deep impression on Bama. She wants to prove herself. Ever since her brother speaks to her, she studies hard with all her breath and being. Bama takes her studies very seriously. She sees to it that she always stands first in the class. Bama writes: "In fact, because of that, many people become my friends, even though I am Paraichi" (K 15).

Throughout her education, Bama finds that wherever she goes, there is a painful reminder of her caste in the form of untouchability. The government offers the financial grants and special tuitions to the *Harijans*. These grants and tuitions are more of humiliation than consolation, mainly because they single out her caste identity. Once the identity is revealed, Bama opines: "Among the other students, a sudden rustling; a titter of contempt. I was filled with a sudden rage" (K 19). It was against the odds that Bama completes her under graduation and B.Ed. subsequently; she decides to become a teacher. She works in a convent. Bama finds that the nuns working there constantly oppress the Dalit children. When she is in the hostel after completion of

her eighth class, Bama painfully recalls the nuns commenting on the Dalit children. Bama expresses her grief:

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 Cheri children! When they stay here, they eat the fill and look as round as potatoes. But look at the state in which they come back from home just skin and bone. (K 17-18)

In fact, Bama is very happy teaching the children because most of the children in the convent are Dalits. She enjoys teaching with some skill and success. Nuns used to suppress Dalit children and Dalit teachers very much. On seeing the oppression at convent, it is Bama who is suddenly struck with the idea of becoming a nun. She decides to sacrifice her life, help the poor and Dalit children.

The Paraiya caste nuns are not given any kind of respect and positions in the convent. Bama notices this in the convent. She starts realizing that one can tolerate this in the convent. She starts realizing that one can tolerate outside discrimination from society. But it is very hard to face politics and casteism inside the convent. Because of the purpose of her survival, she has to pretend there. Through the crucial circumstances are like this in the convent, Bama continues to stay in the convent because of her strong determination and perseverance towards the poor and the Dalit children. Those who are taking training with Bama to become nuns are anxious to find out to which caste Bama belongs. Whoever asks Bama about her caste, she answers honestly without any hesitation. The religious order itself has its own reservation about the Harijan woman to become nuns. In a particular class, a sister tells Bama that there is a separate religious order for Harijan woman to become nuns.

The exploitation of Harijan people and the double standard in the attitude of the upper castes towards them pervade the autobiography of *Karukku*. All the progressive agencies of

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independent government never ensure an equal treatment for Dalits and Tribes. Though the Indian Constitution's goal is to ensure free education for all its citizens, lack of adequate means always keeps the Harijan as well as other so-called low caste poor children from going to school. Even if they go to school, the treatment they get from the school is never a pleasant one.

Whole society is overwhelmed by caste prejudice. They are always eager to retain and sustain the caste system and its vocabulary. Even the headmaster is not free from caste prejudice. One day he accused Bama of stealing coconut from the school campus and told her in the assembly:

“You have shown us your true nature as a Paraia” he said “you climbed the coconut tree yesterday after everybody else had gone home and you stole a coconut. We cannot allow you inside this school. Stand outside. I was in agony because I had been shamed and insulted in front of all the children.”(K 19)

Thus, the process of Dalit subjugation starts from school which is supposed to be the place for the Dalit upliftment. Dalit autobiographies recognize the power of ideology that imprisons them and provides a critique of the paradigms that validate the social oppression. Bama sarcastically remembers another incident from her childhood:

When I went home for holidays, if there was a Naicker woman sitting next to me in 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 to and move off to another seat. Or she'd tell me to move elsewhere. As If I would go! I'd settle into my seat even more firmly. They'd prefer then to get up and stand all the way rather than sit next to me or to any other woman from the cheri. They'd be polluted, apparently. (K18)

Casteism in India is analogous to racism in its European counterparts. In India perception of race can structure the nation's norms and limits. The humiliation suffered by the Harijans indicates the violation of the essential principles of the idea of a nation. Dalit people had to take the leftover food from the upper caste people in the past. This leftover food suggested the leftover identity of the Dalits and Tribals in India.

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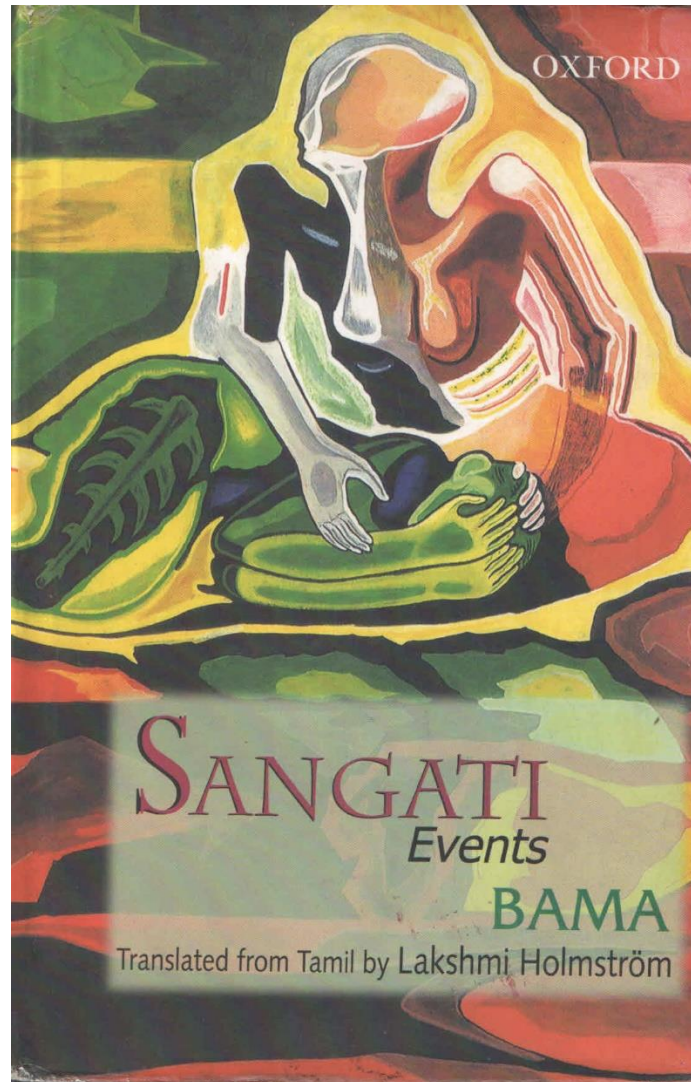
A dispute arose between the Chaaliyars and the Parayar community over the cemetery. The higher caste claimed ownership. The Parayar community was dispossessed of even the cemetery. Some effeminate Chaaliyar boys beat up the Dalits and in turn the Dalits marched to deal with them. The Chaaliyar women threw stones at the Dalits while the men hit them. Then it was silent for some time. But, Izhava's husband had been caught unaware and was stabbed. The spear pierced through the body splashing blood everywhere. Yet the Chaaliyars fabricated an elaborate case, packed with strange lies. As a result, the Reserve Police from Sivakasi camped there feasting on the sheep Dalits butchered for them. They never gave a fair hearing but acted upon the false report and beat up the Dalits 'black and blue' and "whip them like they whip animals" (28). No Chaaliyar was questioned. They walked around with an air of victory.

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. Alphonse was beaten so much that he could not stop vomiting blood. He died the second day. 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. The village remained desolate as a 'cremation ground' (28). They had none to help and no money to fight against. They remained hapless and helpless. Bama, the military man's daughter, felt choked at night as the police force encircled the area.

### **Casteism in *Sangati***

The above said aspect of Casteism in *Karukku* is seen in *Sangati* too. Bama's *Karukku* and *Sangati* point out that in the present social context, conversion does not ensure or encourage social transformation. Dalit experience suggests that, in practice, a Dalit is not allowed to rid of

his/her caste identity that stigmatizes him/ her socially, even in the new theological set-up adopted by him/her. The hope for social transformation through religious conversion thus remains elusive.



The text traces an account of the oppression unleashed by the upper castes towards the Dalit women in terms of labor, exploitation and threat of rape. Being a Dalit woman was constantly to be on a bed of thorns. A Dalit woman had to safeguard her honor which was always insecure due to the sexual abuse fears from the upper caste men.

In *Sangati*, upper caste women have greater access to economic resources, education and information. They exercise their authority over social, economic and religious institutions.

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whereas, the Dalit women did not have these privileges. Both the patriarchy and the caste system result in the oppression of the lower caste women.

### **Gender Discrimination:**

The text, *Karukku* points to the multiple nature of the narrator's identity at several instances. Though the boys and girls played together without showing any obvious awareness about gender difference, what they played obviously refer to the caste, class, gender discriminations that prevail in the society. For instance, the children played as if they "were all; the same," but it was the boys who always played the roles of the dominant sections like Naickar and Nadar *mudalaali* while the girls were assigned subordinate roles. This is an instance of how the ideology of the social system that is founded on caste, class and gender discrimination filters into the minds of the small children. In another sense, the play by the children reveals the intermingling of caste, class and gender identities within Indian society.

The Dalit women suffer from both racial and gendered forms of oppression simultaneously. *Karukku* is a text written by a third world woman who struggles in a doubly colonized world. Bama becomes a mirror for the other unsilenced women. She manages to speak the unspeakable instead of them. Bama finds that a Dalit woman is forced to live life according to the terms and conditions laid down by the domineering patriarchy. The wages of men and women are not similar. The men are paid more while the women are paid less. The life portrayed in *Karukku* throws light on the most agonizing and hapless lives of the Dalits.

In both the novels *Karukku* and *Sangati*, there is an important role of the church. Even in church Dalit women were not given any preference, they were just treated as slaves; they were consciously excluded from all the activities of the church. Dalit Christian women suffer from an identity crisis apart from being discriminated for their low social order. The discrimination is from within and outside churches. Being Dalit, they suffer due to caste discrimination and being women, they become the victims of the patriarchal social order in their families and outside. Dalit women are easy targets of the non-Dalit men for sexual harassment, mental torture and education. According to Bama's narratives, conversion to Christianity has not reduced the pathetic state of Dalit women.

The novel *Sangati* also reveals how Paraiya women are doubly oppressed. *Sangati* deals with several generations of women, the older women belong to the narrator's grandmother's generation Velliamma Kizhavi's generation, and the downward generation belongs to the narrator, and the generation coming after as she grows up. According to Bama, the Dalit women over the years have been living in sub-human conditions both within and outside. Bama believes that rape, sexual atrocities, molestation, harassment and disrobing are the different forms of oppression of the Dalit women.

*Sangati* also deals with the history of the Dalit women. The novel is an account of the experiences of Bama's maternal grandmother and her contemporaries.

Another most important aspect of *Sangati* is the plight of the Dalit women workers who look and after graze the cattle besides preparing food for the large family. Ultimately, the tired women often may reject sex to their boozed men who beat them up severely. Domestic sexual violence at the hands of their husbands at home and sexual exploitation of Dalit women workers at work place form a subject of concern in *Sangati*. According to Bama, Dalit women were not permitted to go to schools and colleges after reaching puberty. They had no access to university education. Bama discusses the subject of Dalit women's sexuality from adolescent stage to menopause.

Bama probes the very position of a dalit woman who is forced to live life according to the terms and conditions laid down by the domineering patriarchy. Even the wages of men and women differ and men are paid more. She challenges this tendency of the patriarchal set up to dominate women in all phases of their lives. Bama's *Karruku* and *Sangati* show various aspects of Gender Discrimination. It shows the sufferings of the Dalit women in the hands of the upper caste men and also in the hands of their own husbands.

### **Narrative Technique**

Bama has used a local Tamil dialect in her work which is oral in nature. This Tamil, as Lakshmi Holmstrom (translator of *Karukku*) says, is a "Dalit style of language" which aims at subverting the given "decorum and aesthetics of received upper-class, upper-caste Tamil" which

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Bama also approves. Since caste has its material and geographical existence in India, especially in Tamil societies, use of this dialect has become a tool of strengthening the content of *Karukku*. It also helps the readers to situate the issues in the culture proper and get the region specificity. Inability to capture the dialectical variation may not be as serious an issue compared to the failure to catch such cultural codes, especially in the context of Dalit Literature. One who reads Bama's *Karukku* in Tamil can obviously feel the rhythm, the orality and the implied caste-cultural markers of the narrative. But by completing the broken sentences of the dialect, wherein lies the orality of the text, Holmstrom seems to have missed something in the English translation.

Dalit writings are narratives of trauma, pain, resistance, protest and social change. Dalit texts document the sufferings and atrocities committed upon a large section of the population. The writing proceeds from a lived experience of poverty, violence, rejection and suffering. Trauma, traditionally refers to the destruction of subjects and the self. But Catty Caruthu argues, "trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also fundamentally, an enigma of survival" (qtd in Nayar 86). Dalit writing achieves this. It reveals the structure of the traumatic experience, that is, the caste in India. Also, it gestures at the ways in which the victims have fought to overcome and survived the event.

### ***Testimonio* (Testimonial narrative)**

*Testimonio* (Testimonial narrative) is a narrative that exists at the margins of literature, representing those subjects excluded from authorized representation. Testimonio narratives are documents of atrocities and suffering, bringing one into contact with the victimized. Collective documents, retrieval of traumas, corporeal aspects, as a discourse in public opinions, rhetorical listening, self-affirmations and authenticity of personal feelings are the characteristic features of testimonial. Bama's *Karruku* is a *testimonio* which portrays all the features in various aspects. *Karruku* as a collective document, moves from individual to community through a narration of trauma.

*Karruku* is a mere autobiographical convention where the narrator holds up her own life as an example for others to follow. Rhetorical listening in *Karukku* entails locating Bama as one

voice that stands alongside several thousand Dalit voices that do not speak Bama's function is not, in such a rhetorical listening to stand for herself, but to witness a trauma.

### **Folk Songs**

In Bama's *Karukku* and *Sangati*, women engaged in folk songs and folk dances with the folk music. In *Karukku*, after the Easter Pussai in the Church, the woman stood in a circle and sang. Bama is exclusive in her narrative technique with a mere illustration of children playing games. She is able to communicate the impact of caste-class, gender oppression, family, culture and socio-economic status of the community. The caste-consciousness is deep-rooted that it is indeed even reflexive in the games of the children as they replicate the role of the ruling 'Naickar', 'Nadar Mudalaali' who suppress the outcaste. The miniature life and culture of the Dalit community is visualized through these children's games.

### **Language of Women**

The language of women *Sangati* is vigour, and it is close to proverbs, folk songs and folk lore. A typical example for proverb in *Sangati* is told by Vellalyamma Kizhavi: "If the third is a girl to behold, your courtyard will fill with gold (S 3). Vellaiyamma Kizhavi's retelling of the stories of Esakki who becomes a 'pey' a spirit who possesses young women, and of the Ayyankaachi troupe are wonderful set-pieces in the book for superstitious beliefs. Bama also gives several examples of witty rhymes and verses made up on the spur of the moment to fit an occasion. In *Sangati*, a woman makes up a song for her husband who is angry with her over some trifling matter. The puberty celebration and the possession of 'peys' are examples for superstitious beliefs in folk lore. Throughout her works *Karukku* and *Sangati*, Bama uses the Dalit Tamil dialect more consistently and easily than many of her contemporaries. Bama's *Karukku* and *Sangati* employ the narrative techniques in a skilful manner with a vivid, lively and inventing style.

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