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## **Amplifying the Silenced Voices: Exploring Marginalized Women's Narratives in the Fiction of Bama through a Comparative Analysis of 'Karukku' and 'Sangati'**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the deep impact of India's famous Dalit writer Bama on Dalit literature, culture and consciousness. Bama's literary works, including "Karuku" and "Sangathi", reflect her personal experiences as a Dalit Christian woman facing discrimination from upper-caste Hindus and dominant-caste Christians in Tamil Nadu. Her writing is a mix of autobiography and political expression, serving as a powerful voice against the injustice meted out to Dalit women. Through a close examination of Bama's major works, this article explores the complex themes of race, gender, religion and backwardness in the context of Dalit identity. In addition, it explores Bama's innovative narrative techniques, linguistic inventions, non-linear structures and humour that challenge established norms and amplify the voices of the marginalized. This scholarly journey through Bama's literary contributions sheds light on the complex layers of caste, gender and empowerment in Indian society.

**Keywords**– Karuku, Sangathi, Discrimination, Upper-caste Hindus, Dominant-caste Christians,

### **Introduction**

Bhama, a renowned Dalit writer from India, has made an indelible mark on the literary landscape by telling candidly the stories of oppression, marginalization and backwardness in her community. Her writing comes from a very personal and poignant place, covering her life as a Dalit Christian woman subjected to the twin prejudices of upper-caste Hindus and dominant-caste Christians. With an unwavering commitment to portraying the socio-political milieu of Tamil Nadu, an area steeped in the rich history of the Dalit movement, Bama's literary work exemplifies a compelling blend of autobiography and political expression. This essay embarks on an analytical journey through the thematic complexities of Bama's work, highlighting Bama's profound impact on Dalit literature, culture and consciousness. Combining her experiences as a former teacher and nun who bravely faced casteism and sexism within her religious community, she became a rallying cry against the injustices meted out to Dalit women. Bama's literary endeavours, guided by his tenets of faith and deep-rooted convictions, are a ray of hope and empowerment for marginalized people. In the following pages, we navigate the thematic tapestry of Bama's literary collection, highlighting the subtle connections

between race, gender, religion, and resilience. By closely examining his major works like "Karuku" and "Sangati", we will uncover the multifaceted dimensions of Dalit identity based on the cultural influences embedded in his stories. In addition, this essay will explore the narrative techniques used by Bama, where linguistic inventions, non-linear structures, and touches of humour combine to create a narrative voice that challenges established norms and voices the marginalized. As we embark on this scholarly journey through Bama's literary horizons, we can travel the corridors of the Dalit experience, explore the impact of his narrative choices on cultural consciousness, and engage in a revealing comparative study. Woven threads and distinctive features in his works. In doing so, we attempt to uncover the depth and resonance of Bama's stories, which resonate beyond the boundaries of literature, leaving a lasting impression on the collective consciousness of a society grappling with complex layers of caste, gender and empowerment.

**Contextualizing Bama's writings:-** Bama is a prominent Dalit writer in India who writes about the oppression and marginalization of her community. She draws inspiration from her life as a Dalit Christian woman who faced dual discrimination from upper-caste Hindus and dominant-caste Christians. It also reflects the socio-political context of Tamil Nadu, where the Dalit movement has a long history. Bama's writings are not only autobiographical but also political, as they express the collective resistance and aspirations of Dalits (Wikipedia, n.d.). Bama (2014) is a Dalit writer from India who describes her experiences of caste and gender oppression. She is a member of the Paraiyar community, which is marginalized by the Hindu caste system. They faced discrimination in various aspects of their lives, such as education, career and religion. She was a teacher and a nun for Dalit girls, but she left the convent after seeing casteism and sexism. She writes to highlight the injustice meted out to Dalits, especially Dalit women. According to Bama, a Dalit writer from Tamil Nadu, her writing reflects the oppression and resistance of her community in the socio-political context of Tamil Nadu, where the Dalit movement has a long history of fighting against Brahminical supremacy and demanding equal rights and respect., She also cites other Dalit writers as influences on her writing, such as Ambedkar, Periyar, Phule, Ayothi Thass and her brother Raj Gautaman. She also sees her Christian faith as a liberating and empowering force for Dalits (Bama, 2005). Bama is a Dalit writer who writes in the Tamil dialect which reflects the culture, identity and resistance of her community. She uses various literary devices to criticize the dominant castes and their oppression of the Dalits. She writes about her life and the lives of other Dalit women who face discrimination based on their caste and gender. She also shows how Dalit women face their challenges and support each other. Her writings are personal and political as they express her feminist and Dalit consciousness. (Bama, 2000) Bama is a prominent figure in the field of Dalit literature. She draws on her personal and social

experiences as a Dalit Christian woman in Tamil Nadu, India. Her works include novels, short stories and essays that address issues of caste, gender, religion and violence in a Dalit context. Her first novel, *Karukku* (1992), which describes her journey of self-discovery and empowerment, won the Crossword Book Award in 2000. Her other novels, *Sangati* (1994) and *Vanamam* (2002) depict the lives and struggles of multiple generations of Dalit women. Her short stories, such as *Kusumbukkaran* (1996), *Oru Tattvum Erumaiyum* (2003), and *Kandattam* (2009), provide realistic and humorous insights into Dalit society and culture. Bama has also contributed to the academic discussion on Dalit literature, feminism, education and human rights with her essays on various topics (Bama, 2011). Bama is a Dalit writer who uses her personal experiences to reflect the voice of her community. She writes to highlight the oppression and injustice faced by Dalits and inspire them to fight for their rights and dignity. She also writes to challenge and change the systems that discriminate and exploit Dalits. Bama's writings reflect her strength, passion and creativity as a Dalit feminist writer. (Bama, 2000; Natarajan, 2007; Pandian, 2013)

**Themes Explored:-** *Karukku* is a memoir that describes Bama's journey from childhood to adulthood and how she faced discrimination and oppression from the dominant castes and patriarchal society. She also reflects on her faith and her identity as a Dalit Christian woman, and how she found the strength and courage to resist the injustices imposed on her (Bama, 2000). *Sangati* is a novel that portrays the collective experiences of Dalit women in Bama's village, and how they face various forms of violence and exploitation in their everyday lives. She also celebrates their resilience, solidarity, and agency, and how they challenge the norms and structures that oppress them (Bama, 2005). Both novels highlight the theme of caste and gender as interconnected systems of oppression that shape the lives of Dalit women. They also highlight the theme of resistance and empowerment as ways to challenge and transform oppressive situations. However, the novels differ in their narrative style and perspective. *Karukku* is a personal and introspective account that focuses on Bama's personal experiences and feelings, while *Sangati* is a communal and conversational account that focuses on the collective voices and stories of Dalit women. *Karukku* is more linear and chronological in its structure, while *Sangati* is more episodic and fragmented in its structure.

**Narrative techniques-** Firstly, the Bamas use a mixed language that blends literary Tamil with the dialect of their Paraiyar community. This language choice reflects her identity as a Dalit writer who challenges the hegemony of the dominant Brahminical culture and emphasizes her voice and point of view. She also uses various literary devices, such as metaphors, similes, proverbs, and anecdotes, to enrich her narrative and illustrate her points. For example, in '*Karukku*', she compares her life to that of a palm tree that survives harsh conditions and bears sweet fruits (Bama, 2000, p. 13). In '*Sangati*',

she uses the metaphor of a drum to represent the collective voice of Dalit women who resist oppression and celebrate their culture (Bama, 2005, p. 5). Second, Bama constructs his novels in a non-linear and episodic manner that subverts traditional norms of autobiography. She does not follow any chronological order, but jumps from one event to another, creating a mosaic of memories and experiences. She does not focus on herself as the sole protagonist but instead includes the stories of many other Dalit women who have influenced her life. By doing so, she creates a collective autobiography that represents the shared history and struggles of her community (Rajeshwar & Rao, 2013). Third, Bama uses humour as a narrative technique to deal with the pain and trauma of caste discrimination and gender violence. She portrays the everyday lives of Dalit women with humour and satire, highlighting their resilience and agency. She also mocks the hypocrisy and absurdity of the upper caste norms and practices that oppress and exploit Dalit people. For example, in 'Sangati', she ridicules a Brahmin priest who demands money and food from Dalit families to perform rituals to purify them (Bama, 2005, p. 19). She also highlights the double standards of a patriarchal society that imposes strict rules on women's behaviour and appearance, while allowing men to engage in evil and violence (Bama, 2005, p. 25). Bama's narrative techniques in 'Karukku' and 'Sangati' are effective in conveying her story of Dalit womanhood in a casteist and sexist society. She uses language, structure and humour to challenge dominant discourse and create alternative spaces for underdog expression and empowerment.

**Cultural Implications:-** Cultural implications are the effects that a literary work has on its readers or the culture of the society in which it is produced or consumed. Bama, a Dalit feminist writer from Tamil Nadu, has written two novels, Karukku and Sangati, which have had a significant cultural impact on the Dalit community, especially Dalit women. In this response, I will attempt to compare the cultural implications of these two novels.

Karukku, published in 1992, is an autobiographical novel that describes Bama's experiences growing up as a Dalit Christian woman in a rural village. The novel exposes Bama to the many forms of oppression and discrimination faced by the dominant castes, the church and the patriarchal society. The novel also celebrates the resilience and resistance of Dalit women, who use their folk culture, oral traditions and everyday practices to challenge dominant structures and assert their identity and dignity. Karukku is a pioneering work that gave voice to Dalit women's perspectives and initiated a new genre of Dalit literature in Tamil (Bama and Holmstrom, 2000). Published in 1994, Sangati is a sequel to Karukku which focuses on the collective experiences of Dalit women of the Bama community. The novel depicts the different phases of Dalit women's life from childhood to old age and how they face the hardships and struggles of being Dalit, woman and poor. The novel also throws light on the internal

contradictions and conflicts within the Dalit community such as gender inequality, caste hierarchy and religious conversion. Consistency is a powerful work that challenges mainstream literary conventions and norms by using a non-linear narrative, a colloquial language, and a dialogue style of expression (Bama et al., 2005).

The cultural implications of these two novels are diverse. They not only highlight the realities and problems of Dalit women's lives but also present alternative approaches and solutions for their empowerment and emancipation. They also contribute to the development and promotion of Tamil literature and culture by introducing new forms, styles and themes that reflect the worldview and sensibility of Dalit women. He also inspires and influences other Dalit writers and activists to express their stories and struggles through various mediums and genres.

### **Comparative Analysis:**

A comparative analysis of Karukku and Sangati reveals some similarities and differences between the two novels. Both the novels use simple and colloquial language which reflects the oral tradition of the Dalit community. Both novels also challenge the stereotypes and prejudices that are imposed on Dalit women by the dominant culture. They expose the various forms of oppression Dalit women face based on their caste, gender, class and religion. They also celebrate the resilience, courage and agency of Dalit women who resist and destroy oppressive structures and norms.

However, there are also some differences between Karukku and Sangati in terms of their narrative style, structure and focus. Karukku is a more personal and introspective novel that describes Bama's journey from childhood to adulthood, as she struggles to find her identity and voice in a hostile world. Karukku is divided into four sections that correspond to the four directions of the cross, symbolizing Bama's Christian faith and his quest for salvation. Sangati is a more communal and conversational novel that presents the voices of many Dalit women who share their stories, opinions and experiences with the reader. Sangati is structured as a series of episodes that depict various aspects of Dalit women's lives, such as their work, education, marriage, motherhood, health, religion and culture.

**Reception and Impact:** - Bama is a noted Dalit feminist writer who has written novels, short stories and essays that reflect her experiences as a Dalit Christian woman in Tamil Nadu. Her novels Karukku and Sangati are based on her own experiences and the experiences of other Dalit women. His novels have received critical acclaim and recognition from various fields. Her first novel, Karukku, which describes her life as a Dalit Christian woman, won the Crossword Book Award in 2000 (Wikipedia, n.d.). Her second novel, Sangati, which depicts the lives of several generations of Dalit women, has been translated into several languages and adapted into a play (Goodreads, n.d.). He also received the Tamil Literary Garden Award for Continuity in 2008

(Wikipedia, n.d.). Bama's writings have inspired many other Dalit writers, especially women, to share their stories and express their concerns. Bama's writings have also contributed to the awareness and empowerment of Dalit communities, especially women, who face many forms of oppression and discrimination in India.

**Conclusion-** Through her literary works such as "Karuku" and "Sangati", Bama portrayed her own experience as a Dalit Christian woman facing discrimination from upper-class Hindus and caste Christian powerful among Tamil Nadu. Her writings are a mixture of autobiographical and political commentary, serving as a powerful voice against the injustices meted out to Dalit women. This study takes a closer look at Bama's key works to explore complex themes of caste, gender, religion and backwardness in Dalit identity. Bama's innovative narrative strategies, creative language, non-linear structures and humorous touches challenge established norms and amplify the voices of those on the margins. These approaches offer a unique opportunity to understand the Dalit experience and articulate their struggles and aspirations. By closely examining Bama's literary contribution, we embark on an illuminating intellectual journey across India's multifaceted strands of caste, gender and empowerment. Her influence transcends graffiti, as her works have sparked discussions and debates on Dalit rights and gender. Everyone and social justice. Bama's writings are a mirror that reflects the challenges of the society she represents and calls for action for positive change. Bama gave a voice to those on the margins and redefined their identity, leaving an indelible mark on both literature and social philosophy. In Bama's stories, we see that the power of storytelling is transformative and empowering. Her ability to weave her personal experiences into larger social narratives helped create an inclusive and empathetic understanding of the challenges faced by Dalit communities, especially Dalit women. His works continue to inspire readers in India and beyond, inspiring hope for a more just and equitable future.

**Future Directions:-** Bama's novels explore how they challenge and subvert dominant literary genres and conventions such as autobiography, realism and feminism, creating a new form of Dalit literary expression that is rooted in their own culture, language and aesthetics. Is.

To explore how Bama's novels represent the interrelatedness of caste, gender, class, religion and region in the lives of Dalit women, and how they deal with their multiple identities and oppression in a complex and dynamic social context.

To analyse how Bama's novels engage with historical and contemporary Dalit movements in Tamil Nadu and India and how they contribute to the political and social activism and empowerment of Dalit communities, especially women.

Compare Bama's novels with Dalit women writers like Shanta Bhai Kamble, Sharmila Reke, Sivakami, Kalyani Tagore Charal, and Meena Kandasamy from different regions and languages of India and find similarities and differences in their themes, and styles. Perspectives and Implications. Study the backgrounds of readers and critics from diverse backgrounds and disciplines such as journalism, sociology, anthropology, history, gender studies and human rights studies and analyse their influence and identity. -They find what matters to them in books and newspapers. Social sector.

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