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## Caste and the Dalit Women : A Reading of Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*

-Ripunjy Bezbaruah  
-Dr. Manab Medhi

*There is actually nothing personal in these personal narratives; it becomes public and political and it is thereby paving its own space to grow as a different discipline. It is well stated that personal narratives gained its ascendancy when the demand of identity writing comes. What is more significant is that these autobiographies throw light on the disciplines of history, sociology, literature and culture. Moreover, it questions the politics of caste hegemony in our society. Now if we look back into the tradition of writing, we often find men in a privileged position.*

"India happens to be one of the World's largest democracies, but ironically it continues to remain as a caste – structured society. In India, it is found that a large section of people live a life of subjugation and insufferable sadness. The caste or varna system in India has segregated thousands of Dalits, from the mainstream culture to a sub-human and debased existence. After centuries of suppression, the Dalits are in the struggle for emancipation under the liberation movement spearheaded by Babasaheb B.R. Ambedkar." (T. Deivasigamani 1)

During the pre-independence India, the social reform movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Nationalist movement influenced revisiting the position of women in Indian societies. It is seen that the social reformers took the issues of women very seriously. Social reformers like Savitribai Phule, Jyotirao Phule, Dr. Ambedkar were actually concerned with the empowerment of women and the upliftment of the oppressed classes. But unfortunately, the condition of lower class/ caste women was not addressed in those debates. The social reform movement had focused more on the educated and Brahmin women and did not pay any attention to the problem of caste discrimination. The influence of the ideology of caste or *varna* was so intrinsic to the Indian societies that the reformers simply took the existence of the lower caste people for granted. "Varna ideology teaches and propagates that humans are born unequal from different parts of the divine body. This inequality and hierarchy of humans is justified by karma- samsara theory. If I am a Dalit, I have done something wrong in my past life. Your very nature of birth is determined. You have no choice. Your svadharma is intrinsic to

you. Your salvation lies in your faithful observance of your Varna (Dati). There is no mobility in this system. Stay where you are till you die." (Sequeira 125)

The condition of Dalit women has always been overtaken by the so-called women activists. The condition cannot be given proper elucidation by any other human being except the Dalit women themselves as their suffering is different to the universal suffering of the other women. It is said that the Dalit females are doubly suppressed – one, they are suffering because they are from the lower caste - 'the untouchables' and secondly, because they are 'women'. The Dalits are the outcasts, impure and pollutants of the society. Since ancient times, there are evidences of suppression for the sake of dharma or caste even in the Hindu scriptures like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. These lower caste women are not given the opportunity to access education. They are landless labourers. Socially, they are divided and employability is almost zero. They are even denied the use public drinking water facility and sexual exploitation by the upper caste is a common fact. They are the victims of social hegemony not in outside but also in their homes. It is easily found that the women's position in family is secondary. She may be the bread earner but she has to live in utter miserable condition in her own house hold. Mainly all Dalit women have worked for the sustenance of their families. Health services are not provided and there is the practice of superstition in the Dalit society.

With the movement of Dr. Ambedkar, Dalits came forward to express their age-old pangs of life by voicing against the caste hierarchy and social injustice that they experienced. They protested against the atrocities of the upper caste. In his *Annihilation of Caste* (2014), Dr. Ambedkar says that division of labour is another name of caste system in India. If division of labour is strictly important in any civilized society, then there would not have been any problem. "Civilized society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilized society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into watertight compartments. The caste system is not merely a division of labourers – which is quite different from division of labour – it is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other. In no other country is the division of labour accompanied by this gradation of labourers." (Ambedkar 233-34)

The celebration of caste system cannot show the ways to social or economic progress in any society but it can destroy the moralities of the Hindus. So, the relation between the caste and the Dalits is most significant in the sense that Dalits think that the caste system prescribed by the Hindu scriptures is the main reason behind all their sufferings as a social being and yes, it is. The Brahmins must not

be 'a carrier of spiritual treasures. All humankind wants social resoluteness and hence, adjustment is necessary. Fixed social norms are always disastrous in social harmony. Adjustment is always a static idea but it should not be at the cost of sacrifice of social justice. But if we look into the issues of the Dalits, we clearly see that the caste oppression is a constant turmoil to them: they are treated as the untouchables; other upper caste people are debarred to touch even the shadow of a Dalit. The meanness in Hindu caste system forced them to live life like those of animals. Basic and primary amenities are also restricted to them. Sharankumar Limbale and Jaydeep Sarangi in their "Editor's Note" to *Dalit Voice* (2018) write, "Dalit is a typical Indian concept and age-old social practice. Dalit is a self-designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as untouchables (outcaste) or of low caste. Dalits in India sociologically function on the arbitrary plane in which they overthrow the caste system and its clutches. The dominant caste groups place the marginalized groups of Dalits in binary categories with fixed secondary status." (5-6)

Specifically, Dalit women's autobiographies articulate a new direction to the study of life narratives. They even try to take out their personal life into the public and challenges and interrogates the gender related problems in regard to caste and religion. So, their autobiographies are not only the outburst of their prolonged sufferings and oppressions but a kind of documentation of the history of their existence. It is, in other words, the history of a class called 'Dalits'. In his *Introduction* titled, "The Narrating Self and the Narrated Self" to his book *Ahead of their Times* (2020), K. Purushotham writes, "The theory and criticism examine women's life narratives exploring links between the historical devaluation of women, their writing practices, exclusion of their writing from the canon of conventional autobiographies, cultural biases in defining the self-hood, revisiting the prevailing concept of autobiography from different perspectives." (12)

There is actually nothing personal in these personal narratives: it becomes public and political and it is thereby paving its own space to grow as a different discipline. It is well stated that personal narratives gained its ascendancy when the demand of identity writing comes. What is more significant is that these autobiographies throw light on the disciplines of history, sociology, literature and culture. Moreover, it questions the politics of caste hegemony in our society. Now if we look back into the tradition of writing, we often find men in a privileged position. Whenever when question of writing comes into the domain of women's writing, it is seen that most of the women writers are reminded of the patriarchal set up of the society. Women's writings are generally gender centric and hence,

readers demand what they want in them. That is why, women writers are given less space and place in literature. While conventional life narratives show a 'polished life account', the autobiographies by Dalit women is the expression of experience of caste and religious atrocities, memories of childhood and divisions of life before and after marriage. Sometimes, they are not so polished, but we have the experience of real-life situations in them. "Dalits produced literature that discusses the reality of caste based oppression, thereby disallowing comfortable, 'modern' conceptions of the caste-free, class-free, secular nation of universal citizen subjects in modern, independent, democratic India." (Brueck 126-127)

Phule and Dr. Ambedkar engaged modernity as a tool to the empowerment of Dalits. Interestingly after Dr. Ambedkar, Dalit authors and politicians have also conceptualized this post-modernity ideology, stressing on education, secularization and participation in politics as the most significant way to the progress of Dalits. Now, the question is on this ground whether modernity keeps its promise of liberty from the oppressive social class hierarchy and this is the true innovation in Dalit literary discourse in academia. Literally, Dalits are living at the margins of the modern society. The motif of writing these life-narratives is not only to show the oppression and battle against the social injustice of a community by other community; instead, it is a narration to narrate their oppression in their own way. So, here we find their history, culture, memory, experience and identity crisis. Actually, Dalit autobiographies affirm in a collective mode of expression. "This dialectics of self and community assumes further significance in dalit women's testimonies, for, situated as women in the community, they articulate concerns of gender, challenging the singular communitarian notion of the dalit community." (Rege 17)

Understanding of Limbale's Outcaste (2003) shows that for the Dalit community being a beautiful woman is a curse. He says that it was a commonplace for the superior caste people to rape Dalit women and a beautiful woman was more vulnerable in front of their lust. In every village, there are children born out of relations between *Patils*, *zaminars* and Dalit women laborers. His mother had given birth to twelve children from three men. However this inhuman treatment and violence of human rights for the Dalits often remains unnoticed and unexpressed. Dalit female autobiographies show that they are more capable of projecting resistance to the religious rituals and collective practices of superstition and these preoccupations are not fitted in the general course of rationalist vision. Their originality is more subjective than any other writings.

"The Self is narrative reconstructed in a performance of identification. Each narrative is a remake of life through a travelling back which originates in a decision

to break away with the prescribed socio-cultural models of interpretation. This decision originates in a will to henceforth exist for oneself. The alienated self is done away with. The narrative reconstruction is nothing less than a creative assertion of one's identity. Memory inaugurates a radically different temporality."

Dalit women's autobiography does not follow the rules of other life-narratives of the same category. This is not the narrative of their sufferings. Dalit narratives can be studied as a functioning of caste narrative of upper caste people of our society. Hence these types of life-narratives seek a desire to be liberated from the caste related controls by the upper caste. They are unknowingly victimized for their caste only. The Constitution of India has granted many avenues to liberate them, and now they want them all – this is the purpose of the struggle of the Dalits. Literally, Dalit life-narratives stand as a unique treatise to the other forms of Dalit literature. This may be because of the demand of a proper agency for the representation of Dalits in media and literature. The discourse of Dalit women autobiographies is direct to address the caste culture of the Indian society. In fact, Dalit literature revolutionized the society for their basic human rights. Dayal Pawar's *Baluta*, Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*, Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* – all address the experienced issues of the narrators and the community people.

Urmila Power's *The Weave of My Life* (2019) takes us to her sojourn from her childhood life in a rural village, her mother's battle for defeating thorns of life, her school days, to her marriage and finally settles down to the life of city dweller. In Mumbai, her association with the women activists makes her a strong woman to organize Dalit women. Her style of writing is different in the sense that it does not follow any chronological sequences of events. It prompts us to witness the events and characters that gradually unfold the intricacies of caste hegemony in her society and its terrible sufferers – the Dalit women. It sometimes appeals to the upper caste Hindus to ascertain that their victimhood is due to the representatives of the upper castes. She, like the tradition of Dalit autobiography, employs two distinct features – 'witnessing an event' and 'experiencing it' to add political participation for a secular democracy. Her tone of expression is almost like that of an activist with a mission in mind to consider. The Dalit women began to interrogate the religious customs, superstitions and caste segregation as the caste panchayats were given power to examine the female sexuality; the caste panchayats dictate the norms for womanhood: what is acceptable and what is not. The autobiographer gives us a clear picture of the disrespect shown to females by saying that a woman was pregnant because of extramarital affairs, was publicly

humiliated and tortured to death by the women of her own community as prescribed by the caste panchayats. So, there is 'protest' in this autobiography against the mainstream feminist norms in one hand and on the other hand, against the patriarchal norms of the Indian social system where the basic human rights for women are restricted. In the "Introduction" to Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* (2019), Maya Pandit writes, "The Weave of My Life represents a terrain where the dalit woman stands today, questioning the established ideologies of caste, modernity and patriarchy. It goes on to expose the contradictions, fissures and fractures within the dalit and feminist movements and also within the kind of modernity that we have inherited and, in turn eventually constructed. It questions the nature of modernity itself in its portrayal of the transformation of the Mahar community in rural and urban Maharashtra. Similarly, it challenges from a feminist consciousness the patriarchal domination and gender biases deeply rooted in both the public and private domains, in the dalit movement as well as in familial, an legal, social and religious practices. In the process, it challenges the received notions about progress, change, development and modernity entrenched not only in the traditional ideologies of family and religion but also in radical dalit and feminist politics."

In the same introduction of the text, Pandit further writes that a far more pointed criticism leveled against *The Weave of My Life* was caused by its 'feminist' perception and stance against patriarchal domination in dalit families. Urmila's relationship with her husband changed drastically with her increasing fame as a writer and activist. The earlier joint family, joint in form and feudal in its ideology, was giving way to a modern family, nuclear in form and bourgeois in its ideology of individualism. In the nuclear family in the urban metropolitan setting, a woman's independence and individualism were perceived as threats to male control over the household. She is a radical feminist who can even think of donating her husband's kidneys to a dying girl when her husband was in death bed. The remark of Maya Pandit is significant in this regard: "Urmila Pawar's memoir represents the struggle of a dalit woman who has travelled on a long journey from a small town to a huge metropolis, and became one of its leading intellectuals and writers. She has tried to make values like justice, equality, freedom, rationality, citizenship, progress and democracy an integral part of her dalit feminist utopia. This is what sets *The Weave of My Life* apart from all the other books written in the tradition of the feminist, radical and dalit struggle."

Now, let us move to the final verdict as far as this autobiography is concerned. The first point to remember here is that, though this is a product of 'life-narrative'

as said by many critics, Pawar's book is a piece of radical feminist writing that purely discusses the dalit women's issues: may it be their subjugation as 'women' universally or may it be 'women' of Dalit community. She describes even the subjugation by the patriarchy at the household of the Dalit women; means Dalit women have been made victimized for several times and in several ways. There is no end to their sufferings. She has refrained the line for many times in her autobiography – "I died a million deaths at this humiliation", makes her stronger. The dark reality of caste is invisible for those who are aristocratic; but to those whose feet are on the ground can see that with bare eyes. She says that women are everywhere but where is the Dalit women? We can conclude with the words of Urmila Pawar: "May be it will remind some of their own lives, help them cast a glance down memory lane. Again, some of them might simply want to throw it away. I expect nothing from the readers. I want them to see that each and every person's life is a social document. If they look at as what I have written as a part of what life is like that would be more than enough for me." (Pawar *The Weave* 320)

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- 1 See Rani Somnath, Sarode. *A study of Selected Autobiographies in Dalit Literature* 2015. Triak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Ph.D. thesis. Inflihnct.
- 2 See Maya Pandit's "Introduction" to Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*. Kolkata: Sree, 2019, xxxix.

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# Certificate

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Presented paper as Plenary speaker/Resource person on: Violation of Human Rights: A Thematic Study of Some Dalit Autobiographies by Women in English Translation

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for presenting a paper titled Injustice against Women: A Brief Discussion on Urmila Pawar's 'The Weave of My Life' during the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) sponsored **Three-Day Online National Seminar on Fourth World Literature: Voices of the Marginalised with Special Reference to Northeast India**, organised by the Department of English, Tetso College, Dimapur from 22nd - 24th November, 2021.



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## Marginalization Of Dalits And Bama's Karukku

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### ABSTRACT

Society may become marginalized for a variety of reasons. The main causes are caste, gender, and income. In terms of caste, a group of individuals may be stigmatized as untouchables. One such group is the Dalit community, whose members are marginalized by upper caste members and viewed as untouchables. Dalit literature is explicitly committed to social justice, social equality, and resistance to oppression, discrimination, and economic exploitation. It is either written by members of the Dalit communities or is specifically written to be the social, historical, and cultural aspects of the Dalit communities. As a teacher and, more importantly, as a writer, Bama has set up herself in academic circles, despite being a member of the first-generation student body in her community. She places a strong focus on education as a tool for empowering society. Many forms of brutal oppression meted out to Dalits, particularly to the Paraiyar caste, are discussed in Bama's Karukku.

Keywords: - Dalit, marginalized, oppressed, identity, Paraiyars, injustice, and prejudice.

**Introduction:** - Marginalisation is a worldwide issue that negatively affects societies all around the world. It is a sociological process that pushes an individual or an assortment of individuals to the periphery of society. The notion of marginalisation includes multiple dynamic elements and is not a monolithic entity in and of itself. The ideas of social exclusion and inclusion in society coincide with the term of marginalisation. A sizable



segment of the Dalits and lower castes still rely on outside help to make ends meet. Global marginalisation prevents a great number of the population from taking part in the process of growth. There are numerous variables that contribute to marginalisation, making it a complicated issue.

A dynamic process, marginalisation has been intellectually and socially reinvented and expanded because of business capitalism, imperialism, modernization, industrialization, globalisation, and related social transformation movements. Every aspect of their lives is impacted by the marginalisation of Dalits, which violates fundamental rights that include such as political, economic, social, civic, and cultural freedoms. Dalits are inherently viewed as marginalized group in Indian society. Thus, when individuals began speaking out about themselves after centuries of silence, a body of writing appeared that portrayed the assertion of human rights, pride in oneself, rebellion against social injustice, accounts of individual and group pain, and dreams and aspirations for a new, discrimination-free society. They began speaking up for their rights after putting up with all this pain. They need a discrimination-free society, and this is a struggle against social injustice. The pains endured by Dalits, the marginalized, and the oppressed at the hands of higher castes, educators, the government, and the church are covered in this article. "The statement harassment and discrimination have proven apparent throughout the framework of the Catholic Church in different proportions seems to be particularly pertinent considering the caste prejudice that is implemented inside the chapel." (Chatterjee 98)

Beena Pallical understands the significance of prejudice caused by lineage, having been a citizen of the Dalit minority in India. The Dalit community, also referred to as the untouchables in India and other South Asian nations, experiences lifelong marginalisation, breaches of their fundamental freedoms from birth. Since people are rigorously ranked according to their lineage, they are positioned at the bottom of humanity's social strata.

Bama goes on to show how Dalit women face discrimination on two fronts: one based on their sexual orientation and another on their caste. Regarding her

dedication to Dalit awareness, she states, "My goal is to share the hopes and dreams of my fellow citizens, who have been marginalised for many years in Indian history" (Dutt 13). In *Karukku*, Bama who had been marginalized by the upper caste, breaks her quiet and expresses her fury. She courageously confronts the upper caste's mistreatment of lower castes. According to Pramod Kumar Nayar, "*Karukku* exposes racial and economic collaboration in India after independence and is a potent indictment of Indian community, including the government, the religious community, and the system of education" (Nayar 84). According to Dangle, "the movement of Dalit literature in India owes its origin to a revolutionary struggle for social and economic changes. The aspirations for liberation of a group of people who, as untouchables, suffer from social, economic, and cultural injustice are strongly linked to this literature" (Bama 237). It applies to Tamil-language Dalit literature as well as any other regional Dalit literature in India. As a writer and a schoolteacher, Bama has set up herself in intellectual circles, making her a member of the first-generation learners in her community. She places a strong focus on education as a tool for empowering society. She develops a strong ideological bond with feminist theory as an activist. Bama authored *Karukku* in Tamil in 1992, but it wasn't until Lakshmi Holmstrom translated it into English in 2000 that it garnered international recognition. In 2000, it was awarded the Crossword Book Award.

The book's structure and its polemic come from the driving yearning for integrity as a Dalit and Christian. It talks about the various kinds of violent oppression Dalits must face, especially the Paraiyar caste. It might be viewed as Bama's childhood memoir, sharing the happiness and sadness of her downtrodden people in India who are the lower castes. The different events in her life are reflected in the book.

In the village of Bama, there exist inherited divisions between the lower and upper caste communities. *Karukku* village, which is separated into caste, class, and communal divisions, is an example of a typical South Indian village. Indeed, caste boundaries are most often used to divide classes in Indian communities. This rule does not apply to Bama's village. Bama notes a

distinct pattern in the distribution of the caste groups in the village, referring to the various caste and religious groups that call the village home, such as the Nadars, Koravar, Chakkiliyar, Kusavar, Pallar, Paraya, Thevar, Chettiyar, Asari, Udaiyar, and Naickars: I don't know how it came about the upper-caste communities and the lower caste communities were separated like this into different parts of the village. However, we stayed in our section of the hamlet while others kept to themselves.

“However, they never once visited our area. In these streets stood the post office, the panchayat board, the milk depot, large stores, the church, and educational institutions. Why then would they have to visit our region? In addition, a large school on Naicker Street was exclusively for pupils from higher castes” (Bama 7). The village's internal conflicts and biases, which are mostly connected to caste and class divisions, are made clear by the demographic peculiarities and the dispersion of its diverse populations. One way to interpret the geographic separation of caste-related communities is as a metaphor for the deep division that exists inside the village community. The relationships among members of the village community reflect the split. Bama's description of her early understanding of this intensely felt sensation, “I hadn't yet heard people speak openly of untouchability when I was studying in the third class, is heartwarming. However, I had already seen, sensed, experienced, and felt ashamed of what it was” (Bama 13).

Even as a small child, Bama was aware of her status as a Paraiya because of the humiliating events she had both seen and experienced in her village. Karukku recounts countless incidents that prove caste prejudice. She focuses on the two key issues that cause Bama a lot of suffering: caste and religion. Bama had negative school experiences. Regretfully, a green coconut dropped when Bama reached the top and touched it.

The kids raced away, leaving it there out of fear. Although Bama is innocent, “the principal mistreats her. In the name of caste, she chastises her, saying, you have shown us your true nature as a Paraiya. Yesterday, after everyone else had left, you climbed the coconut tree and snatched a coconut. You are not allowed to enter this school. Step outdoors” (Bama 19). This has left Bama in

excruciating pain. In front of all the kids, she has been made fun of and humiliated. She then receives a school suspension. A teacher sees her crying and suggests that she meet with the church priest to discuss an apology. The priest's first reaction to her request for a letter from him to be admitted to the class was, "After all, you are from the Cheri. It might have been you. It had to be you that did it." Bama's articles particularly address the topic of gender politics in the church. The converted Dalit women are given menial employment by the Church and its guardians. Conversely, women from higher castes are never given menial jobs of any type. According to Bama, "our women mop the floors and maintain the chapel tidy. Once we're done, women from different castes stay to one side, make a spectacular entrance, and take a seat before anybody else" (Bama 119). The entire class gives her an odd look when she enters the room on the priest's recommendation. She says, "I wanted to shrink into myself as I went and sat on my bench, still crying, because the entire class turned to look at me when I entered the classroom" (Bama 19).

Untouchability was a concept unknown to Bama until her third year of education. For the first time, she learns about the pitiful plight of her neighbourhood, which is funny in an ironic way. Bama comes into an elderly resident of her area offering a packet of goodies as she is making her way home from school. However, Annan, Bama's assistant, informed her that Naickers were upper caste, so they must not touch Parayas. They would get filthy if they did. He was forced to carry the package by its string as a result. In Alabama, the introspection has started with amazement. Bama asks: "What did they mean when they referred to us as Paraya? Was the name that offensive now? However, we are all human. Never should our people perform these menial tasks for these men. We ought to labor in their fields, collect our pay, and stop there" (Bama 16).

Bama remembers a particular instance from her life where the Dalits had to remove the food scraps from the higher caste members. This leftover food alludes to the Dalits' remnant identity in India: It took me a while to realize that Paatti was returning home with the food that the Naickers had decided to discard. Patti visited the Naicker residence one day. Following the completion of

her soiled tasks, Paatti set her brought-with vessel at the side of the drain. With her leftovers in hand, the Naicker woman leaned down and placed them into Paatti's container before leaving. She should avoid touching Paatti's vessel since it could contaminate it. Bama begins to search for ways to escape this pitiful life and to better herself and her community. Her older brother recommends that she follow the correct road and that the only way to achieve equality is via education. According to Bama's older brother, "we are never treated with honor, decency, or respect because we were born into the Paraya Jati. But these humiliations can be eliminated if we continue to learn and advance. Study carefully and absorb as much as you can. People will come to you voluntarily and become attached to you if you consistently excel in your lessons. Learn and work hard" (Bama17–18). The advice from Bama's older brother has a lasting influence on him. She wants self-improvement. She has been studying diligently with all her breath since her brother started speaking to her. Bama is an extremely conscientious student. She makes sure she finishes the class first every time. And, because of that, many people became her friends, even though she was an untouchable.

Bama discovers during her schooling that untouchability harsh remnant of her caste everywhere she goes. The government provides Harijans with cash grants and discounted tuition. Because they specifically target her caste identity, these grants and tuitions are more of a source of embarrassment than solace. Following the identity's disclosure, Bama believes, "there is a sudden rustling among the other students, a titter of contempt. A sudden wrath overcame me" (Bama 22). Against all obstacles, Bama finishes her B.Ed. and undergraduate, and she then chooses to become a teacher. She's employed by a convent. Bama discovers "the Dalit children are often mistreated by the nuns who work there. The warden-sister of our hostel could not abide low-caste or poor children, she says, expressing her anguish. Without any clear cause, she would yell at us" (Bama 20).

Since Dalits make up the majority of the convent's students, Bama is delighted to be their teacher. She enjoys instructing with considerable

success and skill. Dalit teachers and children used to be severely suppressed by nuns. Bama is the one who is instantly inspired by the thought of becoming a nun after seeing the persecution at the convent. She chooses to give her life to aid the underprivileged and Dalit kids.

The nuns of the Paraya caste are not given any standing or dignity within the convent. This is noticed by Bama in the convent. Facing the politics and casteism within the convent is quite difficult. She must function as though she is there because she must survive. Despite the challenging conditions within the convent, Bama stays due to her unwavering resolve and perseverance towards the underprivileged and the Dalit children. The people training under Bama to become nuns are curious about what caste she is a member of. Bama addresses questions about her caste honestly and without reservation. A sister in one class informs Bama that Harijan women can become nuns through a different religious order. It is only after receiving confirmation from the convent that Bama is allowed to join the monastic community. Her services have been requested by the convent. Convents focus on supplying services.

However, they have a distinct viewpoint on Dalits and higher castes. Due to the possibility of a decline in standards, they were unable to admit Dalit students. They denigrate all Dalits and regard them as inferior. The convent's nuns make derogatory remarks about lower-class individuals. People from lower castes are not seen as human. "The nuns believe that low caste people are all degraded in every way about them. They believe that we lack morality, hygiene, and culture. They believe that there is no way to change this" (Bama 26).

Bama claims that the church's leaders lack tolerance, generosity, compassion, sense of fairness, fraternal traits, and a global perspective. They are forced to use a different cemetery outside of the hamlet's boundaries instead of being allowed to bury their deceased in the local cemetery, which is found behind the church. It is proven that the Paraiyars, who become Christians to flee the harshest persecution at the hands of orthodox Hinduism, are deeply disappointed with themselves since they are unable to break free from caste discrimination within the church. Furthermore, Dalit Christians are not eligible for reservation privileges

because, in theory, Christianity does not acknowledge caste.

Bama describes how she became disillusioned with the church herself and left a nunnery after seven years because she believed that church officials were treating Dalit Christians unfairly and unchristian. By repressing the teachings of Jesus, the church teaches docility, meekness, and subservience to the devout while distorting the true image and teachings of Christ, as Bama's work makes clear. She therefore exhorts Dalits to buy knowledge, read the Bible for themselves, and acknowledge Jesus as a champion of the underprivileged. The poor Dalits are separated by the legal system.

The cemetery was a point of contention between the Chaaliyar and Parayar communities since the upper caste claimed ownership of it. Even the cemetery is owned by the Parayar community. The Dalits marched to confront some effeminate Chaaliyar guys who had beaten them up. While the men struck the Dalits, the Chaaliyar ladies flung stones at them. After that, there was some silence. However, Izhava's husband was apprehended, and stabbed, and his blood was all over the place. However, the Chaaliyars concocted a complex case that was entirely made up of bizarre lies. Consequently, "the Sivakasi Reserve Police set up camp there and feasted on the sheep that the Dalit had killed. They never held a fair hearing; instead, they beat the Dalits black and blue and whip them like they whip animals" (Bama 35). They exude success as they move about. They made their rounds around the Dalit streets every day. The sound of their boots stamping caused mothers and children to shudder.

The scene was so still. Alphonse was thrashed so severely that he started regurgitating blood. On day two, he passed away. A few men were apprehended and taken to the jail in Madurai. The people who managed to flee were holed up in the mountains and forests. When the village head charged into the tall earthenware enclosure at Bama's house, he was apprehended, kicked, and struck repeatedly. A ten-year-old youngster passed away in this suffocating environment. The woman went to the father who was hiding with a sari and covered him up with it. As they were walking back, the police officers

questioned the group. The women at once began a funeral dirge and ran away. A few women buried the boy in a cemetery they had excavated at night. The father was afraid the police would recognize him, so he was unable to cry. The men who had been hiding in the church's belfry were apprehended and removed. The priest seemed quite at ease. At this critical juncture, he was unable to even give the Dalits a meagre five-rupee loan. The village was still empty, like a cemetery. They had no money to battle with and no one to aid.

They stayed poor and defenceless. The daughter of the military veteran, Bama, felt constricted at night when the police were surrounding the area. As a result, Bama illustrates how police officers had a biased opinion of the Dalits. Because Karukku accurately depicted the lives of Dalit Christians, it was translated into other languages and enjoyed a large readership. Many Dalits converted to Christianity during and after the British colonization of India in the hopes of leading a dignified and honorable life. Christianity shares the belief of most other religions in their equality before God. Karukku expresses the bravery and fight of Dalits in addition to describing their horrific life. Bama thinks that by doing this, she will encourage Dalits to stand up and fight for their rights.

Bama expressed her satisfaction with the book's success and thought it had served her purpose. She included an author's note titled Ten Years Later in the second edition, saying that the book, written by her wounded self, has not faded with time. Conversely, it has served as a tool for easing the suffering of those who have been injured. Many people who have been brought low and who endure the agony of poverty, destitution, untouchability, and caste prejudice have found solace in Karukku; it has given them courage and enabled them to embrace life once again. For the countless people, whose identities have been destroyed and rejected, Karukku serves as a source of strength.

Bama uses language to communicate her terrible experience and theorize her anguish and rage. She expresses the Dalits' experiences of grief and sadness, but she also highlights their tenacity and fortitude. Considering this, Karukku is not only an



autobiography but also among the best accounts of suffering and confrontation from Dalits.

It is an expression of several Dalit topics, such as those about their economy, family, education, and religion. Bama approaches all these issues with integrity, highlighting the prejudice meted out to Dalits by the Catholic Church as well as the upper caste community. Bama gives many instances of this discrimination in Karukku. For example, she tells of how upper caste Naicker gave leftover food to her grandmother; they nearly tossed the food from a great height so as not to meet Bama's grandmother's hand or utensil. Dalits were similarly regarded in churches with abject contempt. Caste distinctions persist even after death. No matter where you turn, how much you learn, or what you do, caste discrimination is there to lurk around every corner and enrage us. We are unable to learn effectively and advance in line with everyone else because of this. And for that reason, all that's left to us is a miserable lifestyle.

Bama claims to have harboured resentment against her Dalit birthplace, saying, And in my heart, "I have even grieved over the fact that I was born as I am" (Bama 27). This animosity stems from the hardships of living a life of struggle as a child of a lower caste. They are despised by the upper classes as though they have some disgusting illness. The upper castes feel that even the touch of a lower caste has tainted them. They meet discrimination of several types everywhere they go. Dalits are often treated inhumanely by upper castes, which force them to labour like animals and do not give them the credit they merit for their diligence. Karukku is a mirror of the agonizing situation facing the Dalits. Undoubtedly, many Dalits have endured their hardships and come to terms with the fact that they are inferior creatures sent on earth to perform menial labor and serve the upper caste. However, some people refuse to conform to the established social standards of discrimination and repression, and Karukku is the narrative of one such Dalit lady who fought and encouraged others to do the same.

**Conclusion:** -Bama's Karukku, with its distinctly Dalit theme and language, caused a tornado to sweep the literary world. It turns into an effort to defy accepted

wisdom and find new means of defining oneself. It reflects various issues, including education, leisure, and religion. Bama paints a vivid image of the caste discrimination that the Dalit Christians endure, both from the upper caste society and, to a greater extent, from within the Catholic church. Bama's humble experiences as a Dalit have made her recognize that, with the correct education, the entire Dalit community may become powerful and regain their human dignity. Bama highlights that to combat the forces of tyranny and division, Dalits must escape the prison that society has built for them. In *Karukku*, Bama expresses her rage at the unmet expectations of the Dalit community, who continue to live in abject poverty due to prejudice and exploitation. Dalits endured marginalization and were forced into slavery. Despite their suffering, discrimination, and hardships, they ought to face more in the future. Dalits have tried to alter the nature of Indian society and reinterpret their place in it. Bama challenges the established caste system that permeates India. Bama put a lot of effort into her writing to get the identity. Thus, Bama's *Karukku* depicts the social, political, economic, and cultural marginalization and subjugation of Dalits in India.

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