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Gender Trauma in Faustina Bama's *Karukku*

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Gender Trauma in Faustina Bama's *Karukku*

This study explores gender trauma in Faustina Bama's Karukku, an autobiographical narrative that details the author's experiences as a Dalit Christian woman navigating caste-based and gender-based oppression. The text reveals how casteism and patriarchy intersect to perpetuate trauma for Dalit women, who face layered forms of discrimination, marginalization, and social invisibility. By examining the dual oppression Bama endures—as both a Dalit and a woman—this analysis delves into how societal structures deny her dignity, autonomy, and equal opportunities, trapping her in a cycle of subjugation and silence. Her experiences within the Church further amplify this trauma, as religious institutions, instead of offering refuge, reinforce caste hierarchies, creating a sense of betrayal and disillusionment. This study situates Karukku within trauma theory and feminist frameworks to highlight the profound psychological impacts of caste-based gender trauma. It argues that Bama's narrative not only documents personal suffering but also exposes the collective trauma of Dalit women, transforming her individual story into a voice for resistance and reclamation of identity within oppressive systems.

Key Words: caste-based discrimination, gender trauma, patriarchal society.

This research explores gender trauma in Faustina Bama's *Karukku*- an autobiography by a Tamil Nadu Roman Catholic woman. Writing under the pen name Bama, she authors works that primarily address caste and gender discrimination, sexual violence and exploitation, educational inequalities, patriarchal oppression, religious discrimination, and issues of psychological trauma. This autobiography emerges from the injustice she endured because of her faith and caste. A personal crisis shapes its nature and conflicts through the writer's experience, who, as a Dalit and Christian, achieves integrity.

Bama's autobiography in *Karukku* defies conventional narrative structure, offering instead a rich tapestry of issues, perspectives, and deep analyses of life's experiences, including caste discrimination, gender oppression, economic exploitation, and social exclusion. The book provides profound insights into her experiences with the Church and the lives of other Dalit Catholics. As she navigates her self-education, Bama uncovers not just a religious existence but also a profound sense of untouchability, which shapes her understanding of faith. She reinterprets Christ's teachings, encouraging other Dalits to find strength and empowerment in the scriptures, challenging the Church's practices that have long perpetuated their marginalization.

Autobiography as a genre provides rich ground for theoretical insights and methodological approaches that can be used to analyze its structure, purpose, and impact. Here are some relevant theoretical insights and methods appropriate for analyzing autobiographies:

Narrative theory explores how stories are structured, how they are told, and what meanings they convey. In autobiography, this involves analyzing how the author constructs their life story, the narrative voice, and the techniques used to create coherence and identity. The use of first-person narration, non-linear timelines, and the blending of memory with interpretation. Close reading to identify narrative structures, themes, and the author's perspective.

Rooted in the work of Sigmund Freud and later theorists, psychoanalytic criticism examines how unconscious motivations, desires, and traumas are reflected in the text. Exploring how the author deals with personal crises, repressed memories, and the impact of childhood experiences on identity. Analyze text for symbols, slips of language, and recurring motifs that may point to deeper psychological themes.

Postcolonial theory is useful when examining autobiographies from marginalized or colonized groups. It looks at issues of identity, cultural hybridity, and resistance against dominant discourses. How the author navigates and asserts their identity in the context of colonial or post-colonial power structures. Analyzing language, themes of displacement, and cultural references to understand the author's negotiation of power and self-representation.

Feminist literary theory focuses on gender and the representation of women's experiences in texts. In autobiographies, it examines how the author addresses issues of gender, patriarchy, and the intersection of gender with other social identities. Analyzing the portrayal of female subjectivity, agency, and the challenges of writing as a woman in a male-dominated society. Identify instances where gender roles are challenged or reinforced, and examine how the author's gender affects their self-representation.

This theory investigates how race and racism intersect with identity and power structures. In analyzing autobiographies by authors from racialized groups, this approach seeks to uncover how race informs their life narrative. The influence of race on identity formation and personal experiences. Examine themes of racial discrimination, cultural identity, and resistance in the text.

This approach looks at autobiographies as cultural artifacts that reflect broader social contexts. It connects the individual life story to collective identities and societal structures. Understanding how the author's life narrative engages with social class, community, and historical events. Contextual analysis to align personal experiences with historical and cultural background.

This approach studies how memory functions in the construction of the self. Autobiography is seen as a space where personal and collective memories intersect.

The accuracy of memory, the role of selective remembering, and the act of constructing memory as a narrative device. Analyze how memories are recalled and depicted, noting discrepancies, embellishments, and the reliability of narrations.

This method involves studying the autobiography as an ethnographic record that provides insight into the social and cultural life of the author. Treats the autobiography as both a personal account and an observational study that reflects a specific culture or community. Analyze the text alongside cultural, historical, and anthropological data to provide a holistic understanding of the context in which the author lived.

The choice of method depends on the specific focus of your analysis. If the aim is to understand how personal identity is constructed, narrative or psychoanalytic theory may be best. If examining power dynamics and identity (especially for marginalized groups), postcolonial, feminist, or critical race theory would be suitable. For exploring the relationship between the individual and society, a sociological or cultural studies approach can provide broader insights. Combining multiple approaches can offer a comprehensive analysis that accounts for both the personal and social dimensions of autobiographical texts.

Autobiography in *Karukku* thus becomes a means of resistance, as Bama challenges dominant narratives and asserts her identity, all while giving voice to the trauma and resilience of Dalit women. This work exemplifies how autobiography can move beyond personal recounting to become a platform for social critique and collective memory.

Faustina Bama's *Karukku* is an example of how autobiography can serve as both personal narrative and collective voice. Through her own life story, Bama highlights the struggles of Dalit women in Tamil Nadu, blending her individual

experiences with the broader context of caste oppression and gender discrimination. In *Karukku*, Bama uses the form of autobiography not only to recount her journey of self-discovery but also to expose the harsh realities faced by marginalized communities. Her narrative is deeply reflective, focusing on themes of religious betrayal, societal marginalization, and personal empowerment. Autobiography in *Karukku* thus becomes a means of resistance, as Bama challenges dominant narratives and asserts her identity, all while giving voice to the trauma and resilience of Dalit women. This work exemplifies how autobiography can move beyond personal recounting to become a platform for social critique and collective memory.

In *Karukku*, Faustina Bama presents her life through a deeply introspective and honest lens, intertwining her personal experiences with the broader socio-political realities of being a Dalit Christian woman in Tamil Nadu. She writes in a fragmented, non-linear style, capturing the intensity of her emotional and spiritual journey. Bama's narrative is characterized by a raw authenticity, as she recounts moments of profound suffering, discrimination, and exclusion due to her caste and gender. Her life story unfolds through the lens of trauma and resistance, where she reflects on her early childhood, her education, and her decision to become a nun, only to leave the convent after confronting the hypocrisy and caste discrimination within the Church.

In Faustina Bama's *Karukku*, various traumatic elements emerge as Bama narrates her experiences of growing up as a Dalit Christian woman in a caste-ridden society. The novel functions as both an autobiography and a critique of systemic oppression.

Caste-Based Discrimination

Bama describes the pervasive nature of caste discrimination and the resulting feelings of isolation and exclusion. The trauma of being marginalized by dominant

caste groups is a recurring theme that highlights the deep psychological wounds caused by systemic inequality. Personal anecdotes illustrate the everyday humiliations faced by Dalits, such as being treated as untouchable and being denied basic respect and rights. This form of trauma is compounded by the internalized sense of inferiority that such experiences can create.

Bama recounts how she faced overt and covert discrimination in educational settings, where teachers and fellow students made her feel lesser because of her caste background. The trauma from these early experiences reinforces the challenges of pursuing education in a society that sees Dalits as inferior. The psychological burden of trying to prove her worth in an environment structured against her is a source of continuous trauma, reflecting the intersection of caste and gender.

Religious Hypocrisy and Betrayal

The trauma of realizing that the very religion Bama trusted for spiritual solace also perpetuated caste discrimination is a central element in *Karukku*. The betrayal by religious authorities, who were supposed to uphold values of equality and compassion, adds to the complex nature of her trauma. Bama's struggle with her faith in the face of caste-based injustice within the church highlights an emotional and spiritual trauma that questions the authenticity of religious institutions.

Economic Hardship

Bama's portrayal of her community's economic conditions reveals the trauma of poverty compounded by caste-based exploitation. The grueling physical labor and economic subjugation experienced by her family and community members serve as a source of both physical and emotional trauma. The financial constraints that prevent the community from accessing opportunities contribute to the trauma of feeling trapped in a cycle of poverty and exclusion.

Gendered Violence and Marginalization

Bama experiences trauma not only as a Dalit but also as a woman. She highlights the compounded marginalization faced by Dalit women, who are subject to both casteist and patriarchal oppression. Bama's depiction of the hardships faced by women in her community, including verbal and physical abuse, reinforces the theme of trauma that is gender-specific and shaped by both cultural and structural violence.

Identity Crisis and Search for Belonging

The trauma of navigating her identity as both a Dalit and a Christian creates a constant internal conflict for Bama. This crisis is fueled by the knowledge that both her caste and religion play roles in her marginalization, leading to feelings of alienation and a search for belonging. The narrative reflects Bama's journey from internalized trauma toward self-awareness and resistance, representing the emotional turmoil involved in asserting one's identity against systemic oppression.

Psychological Repercussions

The continuous encounters with injustice contribute to psychological trauma, manifested in anger, frustration, and a profound sense of betrayal by society. Bama's recounting of past experiences shows how trauma is stored and revisited, turning the autobiography into a means of both expressing and confronting the pain of her memories.

The traumatic elements in *Karukku* are deeply interwoven with Bama's critique of social structures and her personal journey. The work captures the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of trauma stemming from caste-based discrimination, religious hypocrisy, gendered oppression, and economic hardship. Through *Karukku*, Bama not only voices her pain but also engages in a process of reclaiming her identity and agency in the face of persistent trauma.

The autobiography centers on the pervasive caste discrimination within the Catholic Church, highlighting her path of solitary self-exploration. Bama's departure from the religious community to embrace her identity as a Dalit woman underscores the central conflict in her narrative. As Holmstrom observes in her introduction, Bama's story is driven by "her quest for integrity as a Dalit and a Christian," a quest that leads her to challenge the very institutions she once sought to be part of (16).

Bama's ancestors converted to Christianity in the 18th century, and her narrative in *Karukku* is profoundly shaped by the interplay of caste and belief, both of which have brought sufferings into her life. For Bama, Christianity initially represented a form of emancipation, but she gradually realized that this liberation was largely framed within the context of Dalit identity. As a child, she was deeply involved in the celebrations and customs of her family and community. However, upon leaving her rural home to join a convent and later attend school, Bama encountered a new way of life marked by simplicity. This shift in her environment and understanding of faith highlights the complexities of her journey, as she navigates the expectations of her religious and cultural heritage while confronting the realities of caste discrimination. As she reflects, "It is her driving quest for integrity as a Dalit and a Christian that shapes the book and gives it its polemic" (Holmstrom 16).

Bama is the most respected Tamil-language Dalit writer. Her initial name is Faustina Mary Fathima Rani. The Latin name is Faustina. She was born as Fathima in 1958 in Puthupatti village in the southern Tamilnadu district of Viruthunagar near Madurai. Tamils pronounce Fathima as Bathima, hence the name Bama. In the eighteenth century, her family converted to Christianity.

Bama, born in the village of Paraiya to Susairaj and Sebasthiamma, grew up in a family with two brothers and three sisters. Her father worked in the Indian Army,

while her mother was a housewife. Currently a teacher in Uthirameroor, a small village near Kancheepuram in Tamilnadu, Bama's upbringing was marked by both joy and hardship. Her eldest brother, Raj Gauthaman, a Dalit intellectual, played a significant role in her life, inspiring her with his ideas and beliefs. Despite the teachings of Christianity, her father, and her brother, which often conveyed that love was sinful, Bama decided to join the convent in 1985, against the wishes of her family. Before entering the monastery, she had lived a clear and uncomplicated life, often longing for that earlier simplicity.

After the release of *Karukku* in 1992, Bama gained significant recognition among Dalit writers. The autobiographical novel, originally written in Tamil and translated into English in 2000, won the Crossword Book Award in 2001. *Karukku* is notable for being the first autobiography written by a Dalit woman, documenting the multifaceted oppression faced by Dalits due to their caste, religion, class, and gender. Bama details numerous instances of caste discrimination, such as the conflict between the Paraiyar and Chaaliyar communities and the police brutality inflicted on Paraiyar citizens, who were targeted by officers bribed by the Chaaliyar. The book also sheds light on the plight of Dalit women, including those who were sexually assaulted in police stations, exposing the severe injustices they endure (Holmstrom, 16).

In *Karukku*, Bama unveils the harsh realities of caste-based discrimination and religious oppression within the church and monastery, where she witnessed upper-caste priests and nuns harassing and mistreating Dalits. Despite her strong educational background, Bama found herself struggling against a caste system that relegated her to a marginalized status. She spent seven years in a convent, where she observed the abuse and suffering inflicted upon Dalit sisters and their children by upper-caste nuns.

The text focuses on the dual burdens of caste and religion, as Bama recounts the discrimination she faced from a warden sister who openly rejected Dalit children.

This research explores the development of gender trauma suppression and subversion in *Karukku*, analyzing the profound mental and physical subjugation Bama endures as a Dalit woman. Using trauma theory, the study examines her autobiographical narrative to reveal the traumatic dimensions of her experience and how they shape her resistance to caste-based oppression. Key research questions investigate the factors that empowered Bama to resist caste-based discrimination, the ways in which she was traumatized, and her perception of herself as a victim of patriarchal society. These inquiries aim to illuminate the core issues that *Karukku* confronts: the intersections of caste, gender, and trauma in Bama's life and work.

This research attempts to explore the development of suppression and subversion of the gender trauma in *Karukku*. The present research takes into consideration the appalling mental and physical subjugation faced by the main protagonist during her life. For the same, the researcher applies Trauma theory to analyze the Diary. The research is the finding of the dimensions of trauma in *Karukku*. What are the motivating factors that helped a Dalit protagonist to resist against the caste-based discrimination? How the characters are traumatized in the novel? How the protagonist is a victim of patriarchal society? These are some of the questions that the research attempts to explore.

This research aims to reveal the harsh realities of how deeply women are traumatized by the deceit and betrayal of a patriarchal system. The protagonist of Bama's *Karukku*, the autobiographical narrator of Bama, narrates her story via her real-life experiences and her personal experiences of resistance that become a resistance of consciousness of her oppressed Dalit community. Bama is adversely

affected by the threat of the disintegration of society, increasing humiliation and the defeatist mentality. Her self-satisfaction and simplicity is shattered to pieces. Hysteria and laughter, painful agony and inordinate intoxication cause problems in their lives. The use of the perspective of psychological trauma produces the finding that she is a pathetic and touching victim of disloyal patriarchal games and the uncontrolled vulgarity of demoralized person.

The story of *Karukku* is a seminal work in Dalit literature, offering a poignant account of the author's life and the systemic oppression faced by Dalit women in India. The novel, which is a mix of autobiography and social critique, delves deeply into issues of gender trauma. In this way, Pramod K. Nayar writes:

Karukku is the story of a Christian Dalit woman who realizes that her identity as a Christian is heavily mediated by her identity as a Dalit, and that she must fight the discriminatory practices both inside and outside the Church, and that this is all the more tough as a woman. It analyzes the strategy of witnessing in Bama's narrative, arguing that she functions as a witness to a community's suffering and calls upon readers to undertake "rhetorical listening" as secondary witnesses. This act of recording trauma and witnessing, the essay proposes, is one of subaltern agency. (84)

Bama Faustina Soosairaj is a proponent of Indian Dalit feminism. This book defies genre classification, as it appears to be both an autobiography and fiction. Bama discovered that truthful recording could be a useful tool for protesting an unfair, exploitative, and traditional societal structure. She documents not only her personal dissatisfaction and circumstances as a Dalit Christian woman destined to face humiliation and exclusion at every turn in her life, but she also authentically speaks to the collective experiences of an entire subaltern community in India, the Dalits.

Bama is renowned for her celebration of the inner strength of the subaltern woman and for embracing Dalit feminism in her works. *Karukku*, Bama's autobiographical novel that portrays the pleasures and sorrows of Dalit Christian women in Tamilnadu, became an international bestseller. In Bama's *Karukku*, a sensitive, intelligent, and discerning Dalit woman recounts her traumatic and torturous life tale. In this regard Yash Deep Singh presents:

Through this book, Bama mobilizes her fellow citizens, the Dalits, and especially the Dalit women, to resist being victimized by hegemonic powers by using education and entrepreneurship as a means of redefining, reaffirming, and reestablishing their identities and legitimate positions within the Indian social hierarchy. (61)

Karukku depicts the hardships faced by Dalit women in a caste-oriented and patriarchal society. The protagonist experiences some form of traditional or patriarchal misery at all times. Women who experience these kinds of hardships are frequently pushed into the subaltern class. Dalit women are surrounded by a variety of situations that have arisen outside the established caste backdrops wherever they go. However, they are constrained by patriarchal traditions at home. Numerous patriarchal and cultural norms have imprisoned them. In the excerpt, Bama illustrates the depressing situation faced by Dalit women. She examines her personal pain narrative, which is centered on Dalit culture and patriarchy.

Karukku was written by a wounded self with specific experience, the experience of Dalit women. It criticized patriarchy and caste discrimination. Bama's emotional battle leads her to discover her own identity, *Karukku*, which means Palmyra leaves. Bama makes an effort to overcome her existential problem, which stems from her separation from the monastery and her neighborhood. In the annals of

Tamil literature, *Karukku* was a novel type that was both highly praised and derided. Dalit literature sprang from the suffering caused by unfair societal structures that are founded on caste and class distinctions, and it has long served as a voice for the plight of these marginalized communities. Another critic Jalendra Phukan mentions that:

As portrayed in *Karukku*, the situation of Dalit women in Indian society is depressing and marked by a great deal of doom. They experience oppression based on class, gender, and caste. *Karukku* poses important questions about caste and religious matters that are detrimental to our society. In her fictional works, Bama addresses a number of topics including domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and abandonment by husbands, loneliness, and brutality against Dalit women in their own homes. Her literary works depict the marginalisation and exploitation of Dalit women and the community as a whole by upper class society, with a broader perspective. (1519)

Bama's autobiographical narrative challenges the traditional conventions of Dalit literature, which often depict Dalits as victims or passive recipients of violence. Instead, Bama's work presents a more nuanced portrayal of Dalit agency and resistance, as she recounts her struggles against discrimination and oppression.

Bama strives to reflect on the daily social reality of her village, the sorrows of Dalit women, and her own hardships both inside and outside of her community through this autobiographical book. She makes an effort to portray the social reality of Dalit women, who battle daily for their lives. The critics Komalpreet Kaur mentions:

Whenever Dalit women travel, they find themselves in a multitude of caste-shaped situations. In terms of family life, the women follow patriarchal guidelines. The numerous social and patriarchal restrictions prevent them from expressing themselves freely. This ultimately leads to their being labeled as

“other”. Bama’s essay illustrates the dire circumstances faced by Dalit women. She explores her own experience of oppression in relation to Dalit culture and patriarchy. (4932)

Dalit literature in India has been widely celebrated for its powerful portrayal of the experiences of Dalit women in Tamil Nadu. It has been the subject of numerous analyses and literary reviews, which have highlighted its themes of caste-based discrimination and oppression.

The novel *Karukku*, a text which though structured like a novel but it is not a fiction, a life-story about a Dalit poor woman has been explored by critics and reviewers from various perspectives. She is the first Dalit Catholic women to write and published an autobiography novel. The root of the word ‘Dalit’ which translates to oppression in Sanskrit, Nepali and Hindi language. Bama has done a remarkable job of depicting the struggles faced by Dalit women, who are discriminated on two fronts: as women and as Dalits. Bama’s varied representations of Dalit women in *Karukku* with a view to underline the interface between gender and caste significations in Dalit fiction.

Bama’s involvement in Dalit literary discussion in the early 1990s made a significant contribution to the study of gender-caste intersections in Dalit existence. Her works underscore Dalit women’s double cursed existence, in which they are oppressed by upper caste and Dalit males, the family, the state apparatus, and other forces based on their gender and caste, both at home and beyond.

Although all these critics and reviewers examined this novel from different points of view and then arrived at several findings and conclusions, none of them notice the issue of trauma in *Karukku*. Since, the topic of trauma is untouched and unexplored; the researcher claims that it is the fresh, new and original topic. By using

the theory of trauma, related to the ideas of Sigmund Freud, the researcher probes into this topic. The inner traumatic conflict of sepoys and the underlying parameters are the chief domain of this research.

The protagonist of Bama's *Karukku*, the autobiographical narrator, her struggle, her story based on her real life experience and her personal experience of resistance that comes to be a resistance consciousness of her oppressed Bama addresses gender trauma by stating, "The upper-caste men abuse us in so many ways, even sexually, knowing full well that we have no one to defend us" (23). Dalit community in Hindu societies can be some motivating factors to the new generation to speak against caste-based discrimination and act against such evil practices. Being a Dalit woman, this research can internalize this issue more significantly and act academically better for autonomy and freedom of the oppressed communities in practical life.

The researcher makes use of the tool of trauma. Sigmund Freud's ideas on gender and trauma, though largely developed through the lens of early psychoanalytic theory, provide foundational insights into how gendered experiences can shape psychological trauma. Freud saw trauma as linked to repressed memories and unresolved conflicts, often rooted in childhood experiences. In his early work, particularly the theory of 'hysteria,' Freud suggested that certain traumatic experiences were socially gendered, observing that his female patients often exhibited symptoms tied to repression and the suppression of desires within a patriarchal society. He famously stated, "Hysteria is the result of a specific trauma, a repressed memory of an event that was so upsetting that the mind cannot process it fully" (*Studies on Hysteria*, 1895).

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud introduced the concept of the “repetition compulsion,” the tendency of individuals to re-live traumatic experiences. Though he did not explicitly frame this in gendered terms, this concept has influenced later psychoanalytic interpretations of how societal expectations and gender roles can force individuals, particularly women, to continually re-experience certain traumas, as they are constrained by societal structures. Freud's theories laid groundwork for understanding how gendered expectations contribute to the unique traumas faced by women, as these roles often impose limits on autonomy and self-expression, contributing to recurring psychological distress.

Karukku by Bama Faustina is a poignant autobiographical novel that explores themes of caste, gender, and religion in Indian society, particularly in the context of Tamil Nadu. While the primary focus of the book is on caste oppression experienced by the author as a Dalit woman, it also sheds light on the trauma inflicted upon women due to gender discrimination and patriarchy. Bama exposes gender trauma by describing the exploitation of Dalit women, stating, “We are violated and our cries are ignored, as if we do not exist” (45). In the novel, Bama discusses the intersecting oppression of caste and gender, highlighting how Dalit women face double marginalization in society. They not only endure the discrimination and violence inflicted upon them because of their caste but also grapple with the constraints imposed by patriarchal norms.

Like other Dalit writers, Bama addresses the issue of Dalits’ means of subsistence. She portrays in her poems the centuries-long subjugation of Dalit men and women. Her words make it clear that Dalits are social outcasts in their native country. They are still attempting to make an impression on society in the twenty-first century. Numerous Dalit writers have taken up this topic and spoken out in support of

Dalits. In his autobiography *Karukku*, Bama portrays Dalits as less than human. In *Karukku*, Bama highlights gender trauma by noting, “Dalit women are subjected to sexual violence and exploitation, a silent suffering that echoes the broader injustice of our oppression” (89). Notably, Bama observes that conversion to Christianity, despite its claim of being casteless, does little to alleviate the suffering of Dalits. Her personal experiences with the hypocrisy of upper-caste society lend authenticity and power to her autobiography.

Karukku by Bama is a groundbreaking work of Tamil Dalit literature. As a Dalit woman, former Christian nun, and current school teacher, Bama recounts her lived experiences, her struggles for survival, and her marginalized position shaped by her gender, class, and religious identity. She vividly portrays the oppression endured by Dalits, with a particular focus on the unique challenges faced by Dalit women. Bama underscores gender trauma by writing, “The pain of being violated is compounded by the indifference and scorn we face from those in power” (12). For Bama and other Dalit writers, writing from the periphery and about marginalized groups is a significant instrument for empowering Dalits.

The term ‘karukku’ refers to palm tree leaves with serrated edges that resemble double-edged swords. The Tamil term ‘karukku’, which contains the word ‘Karu’ for embryo or seed, also indicates freshness. Bama addresses gender trauma with the line, “The abuses we endure in silence are a testament to the deep-seated discrimination we face daily” (102). The second reading is more appropriate, given that Bama composed this book to assist her recover from her injuries. She clearly found a sense of renewal in the book *Karukku*, which reflected reality. She writes about her experiences fighting for her life in the book. Referring to the primary meaning of the word *karukku*, Bama’s self-expression symbolizes one edge, while the

other edge represents the inspiration it provides to many Dalit individuals to voice their resistance against oppression.

As a result, it became a powerful metaphor for the two-edged sword. As Bama explains in the introduction to *Karukku*, “that book was written as a means of healing my inward wounds; I had no other motive” (9). The use of first-person narration in *Karukku* has been highly praised by both readers and critics. The narrative seamlessly shifts between past and present, capturing the diverse and complex events of Bama’s life. It serves as a compelling depiction of Dalit oppression, vividly portraying the struggles of Dalits and their subjugation by upper-caste communities.

In Bama’s story, the promise of independence and Indian dignity is betrayed, and she suffers the consequences. The story of her betrayal in the church and convent is the more widely accepted one. *Karukku* is the story of a young Catholic girl who finds her identity as a Dalit. Even in her spiritual life, religious festivals that were a part of the annual cycle of crops and seasons shaped her existence. Later, she described the religious and social practices that kept Dalits as untouchables.

Marginalization occurs in society for different reasons, including caste, gender, color, income, and complexion. People were labeled as ‘Untouchables’ because of their social class. They are marginalized by upper-class individuals. For many years, Dalits in our society have been sidelined, suppressed, and dominated. After accepting all of this pain, they began to advocate for their rights. Bama, after being neglected by the higher caste, explodes in rage and breaks her silence, raising her voice in her novel *Karukku*. She actively speaks out against high caste mistreatment of lower castes.

Dalit children were treated differently than other children at school. Bama experienced caste discrimination at school multiple times. She eventually learned,

acknowledged, and felt humiliated about being born into an untouchable caste when she was in third grade. The dominant class's practice of untouchability has left a lasting impression on the Dalit people. Dalits were starving for their basic requirements. They began working for the upper caste, but were allocated lower-level occupations such as driving livestock, protecting wheat from stray animals, and gathering firewood, among other things. Dalit children suffered greatly; they were not provided with clothing, and they roamed the streets barefoot. All of these events highlight the plight of Dalit children who must struggle to meet their basic requirements. She writes, "They could live what the cheapest they would get" (2). Bama recalls another confrontation from her upbringing. Bama once spent the evening in school playing with other classmates.

Jacques Lacan's ideas on gender trauma focus on the formation of identity and desire through language and the symbolic order, which imposes societal norms and structures on individuals. Lacan argued that the process of entering the symbolic order—the realm of language, law, and societal rules—forces individuals to repress certain desires and identities, leading to inner conflict and trauma. For Lacan, gender identity and the trauma associated with it are shaped by the symbolic, as society dictates roles, norms, and expectations for men and women that often clash with the individual's unconscious desires. He famously said, "Man's desire is the desire of the Other," which signifies how deeply our desires and identities are influenced by the expectations and demands imposed by others (1966).

Lacan also explored the concept of 'lack' as central to human experience, especially regarding gender. In his theory, all individuals experience a sense of incompleteness or lack, which is intensified by societal gender expectations that force people into predefined roles. This notion of 'lack' can be especially traumatic for

women, who are often subjected to patriarchal ideals and objectified within the symbolic order. Lacan described this as “the alienating imposition of the Other’s desire,” suggesting that individuals are traumatized by society’s constraints on their identities and desires. Lacan’s insights on gender and trauma underscore how societal structures create an enduring tension between individual identity and collective expectations, often leading to psychological distress.

Bama stepped up to touch the coconut palm tip as part of the game; however, the coconut fell, and the children who were playing fled in terror. The next morning, the headmaster taunts and mistreats Bama in front of the entire assembly. She felt ashamed and ridiculed in front of all the students, and she was suspended from school. She cried all day, and the teachers ultimately insisted that she meet with the church priest and request an apology. She ultimately visits with the priest to obtain the letter that will allow her to re-enroll in class. Instead of issuing an apologetic letter, the priest began criticizing her, saying that “After all you are from Cheri. You might have done it. You must have done it” (19). Naickers in her village do not recognize or respect any Dalit, no matter how educated they are.

The researcher makes use of the notion of trauma and essential theoretical insight. Julia Kristeva’s ideas on trauma are deeply rooted in her concepts of abjection, language, and the fragmented self, exploring how trauma disrupts identity and blurs the boundaries between self and other. In her influential work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980), Kristeva describes abjection as the process of confronting something that is profoundly disturbing or unsettling to the self, such as the body, death, or societal taboos. She writes, “The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I.” This experience of abjection is traumatic, as it forces individuals to confront aspects of themselves or reality that they would rather

reject or disavow. Trauma, in this sense, is bound up with the collapse of stable identity, where the individual faces a profound loss of coherence or meaning.

Kristeva also connects trauma to the limitations of language in expressing pain and suffering, particularly trauma that cannot be easily verbalized or integrated into one's narrative. She emphasizes how language fails to encapsulate certain traumatic experiences, leaving the individual in what she calls a "semiotic" state—a pre-linguistic space where feelings are raw, fragmented, and uncontainable. According to Kristeva, this inability to articulate trauma leaves individuals in a state of psychological fragmentation, where they oscillate between wanting to express their suffering and confronting the limits of language. She notes, "The abject confronts us ... with our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity, even before existing outside of her" (*Powers of Horror*, 1980), highlighting how trauma also brings us back to primal fears and dependencies. Kristeva's theory thus links trauma to a crisis of language, identity, and the boundaries of selfhood, with abjection serving as a profound metaphor for the disintegration and alienation trauma can bring.

Despite their education, Bama and her brother suffered greatly. During the vacations, her brother, a university student, visited the library in quest of books. One day, Naicker men inquired about him, and he responded to enrage the upper caste man simply because he happened to speak with a Dalit. Bama, too, experienced one such occurrence while traveling by bus. A Naicker woman was sitting beside her on the bus. When the women learned about Bama's apartment on Cheri Street, they abruptly relocated to another seat. Cheri Street is where the Dalits live. The women feared being contaminated by an untouchable. During that moment she felt that, "If u are born into a low caste, every moment of your life is a moment of struggle" (27). Bama

was ashamed at several points in her life because she was born into a low-income family.

Julia Kristeva, a philosopher, psychoanalyst, and literary critic, has explored gender trauma primarily through her concepts of abjection and the semiotic, examining how social and linguistic structures affect women's psychological experiences. Kristeva's work reveals how trauma in women is tied to experiences of marginalization and the ways that society often defines femininity in relation to purity, submission, and other limiting ideals. Her seminal work, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, discusses how the boundaries society sets around the “acceptable” and “pure” aspects of identity often lead women to internalize trauma. The line “The abject confronts us with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal” (12), explaining that women are frequently positioned within this space of the “abject,” marginalized by societal norms that alienate their bodily and psychological experiences.

For Kristeva, gender trauma is closely connected to this experience of abjection, where societal structures push women to confront aspects of themselves and their bodies that are deemed impure or unworthy, creating a profound sense of alienation and psychological distress. In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, she connects this experience of abjection to feelings of depression and loss, especially in relation to motherhood and female identity. Here, she writes that “Women carry a trauma linked to a hidden suffering in a world that does not acknowledge their loss or pain” (28), highlighting how women’s emotional suffering is often invalidated within patriarchal structures.

Kristeva’s theories suggest that gender trauma is perpetuated not only by overt discrimination but also by subtler, insidious forces that define and confine female

identity within rigid, patriarchal norms. Her concept of the semiotic, the pre-linguistic realm of emotions and bodily drives, offers a pathway for understanding and possibly healing from trauma, as it allows women to reconnect with a part of themselves that resists social constraints and can offer transformative potential. Kristeva's work continues to provide a profound theoretical framework for understanding the internalized and often hidden dimensions of gender trauma.

Bama wants all of her community members to get together, think about their rights, and fight for themselves. Dalit people first did not grasp the power of education, but Bama helped them discover the genuine value of education and began to appreciate the true worth of education, which could provide them dignity and self-esteem. Bama represents her entire community. Bama recounts her agony and sorrow as "I don't know when my wings will heal and gain enough strength so that I too will be able to fly again. Just as people throw sticks and stones to wound a wingless bird, many people have wounded me with their words and deeds. Yet I know I am moving forward slowly step by step" (104). Bama was marginalized not only as a Dalit, but also as a woman and Christian. After being ridiculed and subjugated by the higher class, she makes it known that no one is willing to fight for her neighborhood. With his brother's optimistic advice, she used the most powerful instrument 'education' to conquer all of her anguish and suffering.

Bama endured immense sorrow in her life due to caste and religion. Before she began to internalize the miserable status of her community in her third year of village school, she had never heard of untouchability. She describes her interaction with an elderly man in Karukku, where he is clutching a food packet with a thread without touching it. He presented it to one of the village's Naickers. She was a young

student at the time and thought this episode was quite amusing and delightful. But now she feels very grieved and broken hearted, and writes:

What did it mean when they called us ‘Paraya’? Had the name become that obscene? But we too are human beings. Our people should never run these petty errands for these fellows. We should work in their fields, take home our wages, and leave it at that. (16)

As Bama becomes acutely aware of the tragic plight of her community in society, she critically reflects on her childhood experiences of discrimination. One striking incident involves an elder man holding out a snack packet by its string, careful not to touch it, as if to avoid ‘polluting’ the snacks.

Horrorific experiences are often profoundly unsettling and overwhelming, compelling victims of trauma to suppress painful memories rather than face them. However, many trauma researchers argue that it is this very repression of memories and emotions that lies at the core of trauma's enduring impact. Trauma does not fade with time; unprocessed pain lingers, continuing to affect individuals both in the short and long term. According to Eyerman, “A victim of war trauma must be helped to express suffering and to confront bad memories, with the support and guidance of an empathic and informed adult” (67). Talking, writing, or even acting out traumatic events serves as a crucial step for trauma victims to begin healing and embark on the path to recovery. Each culture has its unique methods of addressing and processing traumatic experiences.

Bracha L. Ettinger, an artist, psychoanalyst, and theorist, has made significant contributions to understanding gender trauma through her concept of the “matrixial gaze” and “matrixial borderspace.” Ettinger’s theories emphasize how trauma is relational, affecting not only individuals but also the spaces between people. She

focuses on what she calls the “matrixial” space, a shared, feminine-identified dimension of subjectivity that enables empathy and connection. Through this lens, Ettinger explores how gender trauma is not isolated within individuals but is an intersubjective experience that deeply influences connections with others. In *The Matrixial Borderspace*, she writes:

Trauma, especially for women, occurs in the matrixial sphere, a space where subjectivity is co-emerged and co-affecting, blurring the boundaries between self and other, and inviting an encounter with the unknown other within the self. (65)

Ettinger’s work redefines trauma as something that can be “trans-subjective,” extending beyond individual experiences to involve collective, shared dimensions, especially between mothers and children and within feminine-identifying groups. This “matrixial” perspective provides a new understanding of trauma as inherently relational and embedded in a web of mutual affect. In her article “Matrixial Gaze and Screen,” Ettinger explains, “The matrixial gaze opens up a transgressive space for recognizing trauma not as isolated events but as shared, interwoven experiences of presence and absence, intimacy and vulnerability ”(132).

Ettinger’s ideas challenge traditional views of trauma by proposing that gendered trauma can be processed and partially healed through relational, empathetic engagement within the matrixial sphere. This framework also emphasizes the importance of aesthetics, art, and creativity as tools for exploring and transforming trauma, allowing for the re-imagination of identity and relational bonds. Her contributions offer a groundbreaking approach to gender trauma, situating it within a shared, transformative space of collective resonance.

Bama believes that Dalits are treated as though they are not human beings. They are treated as animals. With this realization, Bama begins to explore for ways to help herself and her tribe rise above their predicament. Her elder brother shows her the proper road, demonstrating that education is the only way to achieve equality and run their lives smoothly. Bama's elder brother says that "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. Put up a lot of effort and study" (18). Her brother's advice left a profound impact on Bama. Inspired by his encouragement, she dedicated herself to her studies, worked diligently, and consistently ranked first in her class. However, despite her academic achievements, Bama was continually confronted with the painful reality of her caste, manifesting in the form of untouchability. Although the government provided financial assistance and special tuition classes for Harijans, Bama perceived these measures as a source of humiliation rather than support, as they starkly exposed her caste identity.

Laura Brown, a pioneering feminist psychologist, has contributed influential ideas on gender trauma, particularly through her focus on how trauma manifests within patriarchal structures. Brown emphasizes that trauma experienced by women and gender minorities cannot be separated from the cultural and social systems that oppress them. She introduces the concept of "feminist trauma theory," which asserts that gender trauma is often a product of pervasive societal injustices such as sexism, misogyny, and heteronormativity. In her work *Subversive Dialogues: Theory in Feminist Therapy*, she writes:

For women, trauma is often embedded in the fabric of everyday life, created and reinforced by cultural beliefs and systems that see them as lesser, as

objects, as unworthy of respect. This trauma cannot be healed without addressing the very structures that create it. (53)

Brown also explores the concept of “insidious trauma,” a type of trauma that doesn’t arise from a single traumatic event but rather from chronic exposure to gender-based oppression. She argues that many women experience this form of trauma, as it is “woven into the cultural fabric” through subtle but harmful experiences like discrimination, harassment, and objectification.

This form of trauma is often overlooked or dismissed because it is gradual, pervasive, and not necessarily connected to overt acts of violence. In her article “Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma” (1995), she explains:

Insidious trauma is the accumulation of negative experiences in the lives of women that arise from sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression. This trauma, though less visible, is real and impacts women’s mental health, self-perception, and sense of safety in the world. (108)

Brown’s work has been groundbreaking in highlighting how gendered trauma exists both in overtly violent acts and in the everyday lives of women, shaped by a society that often invalidates their experiences. Her feminist perspective on trauma has broadened the understanding of how trauma is not only a personal struggle but a political issue tied to gender-based oppression, making her contributions foundational to feminist psychology and trauma studies.

Bama recalls visiting the Naicker home with her grandma for work. After finishing her exhausting chores, Bama's grandmother placed her vessel by the drain. A Naicker woman appeared, holding her stale food and leftovers, and from a distance, poured the contents into the vessel. Bama wanted to protest this treatment, but her

grandmother explained that these people were the Maharajas, and they could not survive without them. The acceptance of stale food by Bama's grandmother mirrors the experiences in Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* and Arjun Dangle's story "The Poisoned Bread." However, there is a clear generational divide in the attitudes of Dalits, with significant differences between the older and newer generations.

If the older generation sacrifices 'self-esteem' in order to survive, the younger generation is more likely to resist humiliation. Bama becomes outraged when he hears this and considers the situation of Dalits who have been subjected to caste and untouchability for decades. Bama feels quite alienated in this higher caste-dominated society as a result of his recent harsh encounters. Bama seeks to dismantle all the barriers and traditions that have been used to oppress Dalits. *Karukku* brings about a revolutionary shift in the Dalit struggle by critically examining the hypocrisy behind both the caste system and religious conversion, challenging the structures that perpetuate their suffering.

This protest of Bama is justified by Santosh Kumari as "Karukku broke barriers of tradition in more than one. The first autobiography by a Dalit woman writer and a classic of subaltern writing, it is a bold and poignant-tale of life outside mainstream Indian thought and function" (74). Bama harshly attacks casteism in Indian culture generally and the practice of untouchability in Roman Catholic churches in specifically in *Karukku*. Her language is an expression of her Dalit consciousness in and of itself.

Bama's use of colloquial Tamil Dalit language, rather than standard or mainstream Tamil, reflects her deep belief in the strength and resilience of Dalit culture and language. Through her profound agony and lived experiences of suffering, she rises as a powerful voice, inspiring Dalits to resist oppression and seek justice. For

Dalits, suffering serves as a two-edged sword—both a source of pain and a catalyst for empowerment.

Palmyra trees' pointed leaves can harm those who touch them, but they can also defend themselves. Awareness of Dalits' status might also motivate them to raise their weapons against injustice. Thus, *Karukku* represents Dalit consciousness and awareness, which motivate them to struggle for their survival. When Bama discovers this twisted awareness, it encourages other Dalits to express their suffering. Paula Richman observes, "Bama uses *Karukku* to articulate the notion that pain need not be an ending point; it can spur realization and new growth, as it did for her" (74).

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Maria Root, a clinical psychologist and scholar, has made substantial contributions to the understanding of gender trauma, particularly through her work on intersectionality, identity, and the unique experiences of trauma among women and racial minorities. Root's perspective emphasizes how gender trauma is often compounded by intersecting identities, such as race, culture, and socioeconomic status. She argues that trauma cannot be fully understood without recognizing these overlapping aspects of identity and how they shape individuals' experiences of power and marginalization. In her influential article, "Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Lives" (1992), Root discusses how societal power dynamics play a critical role in the trauma experienced by women, especially women of color. She writes:

Gender trauma is often inseparable from the social context that creates and maintains it. For many women, trauma is not a single event but an ongoing process shaped by cultural, racial, and economic factors that exacerbate the effects of oppression and violence. (241)

This idea sheds light on the ways that chronic, low-level stressors related to gender and racial bias can profoundly impact mental health over time, creating a form of trauma that is often invisible but deeply felt. Root's work on gender trauma provides a nuanced view that acknowledges the role of intersecting identities, advocating for a trauma-informed approach that considers the cultural and structural influences on individuals' lives. Her contributions have been instrumental in broadening the understanding of gendered trauma, highlighting how trauma is embedded within larger social and cultural contexts.

A close examination of Bama's life reveals that pain often becomes the driving force for Dalits to write or resist oppression. Bama's journey of pain and struggle for survival is far from over, as she faces further bitter experiences even at school. One day, after school, while playing with her friends, someone plucked a coconut from the premises. Without evidence, everyone accused Bama of the theft, despite her innocence. The headmaster humiliated her and barred her from entering the school. Seeking justice, she turned to the priest at the church, but he responded dismissively, saying, "After all you are from the Cheri. You might have done it. You must have done it" (19). She says, "To identify and explicate literature by a member of the survivor group and to deconstruct the process by which the dominant culture codifies their traumatic experiences" (18). When we go back to the autobiography, Nasrin belongs to Muslim society. Her own uncles raped her who also represents the masculinistic Islamic society.

One can relate to Kali Tal's idea here. Kali Tal's views are focused on an individual's life that he/she is affected by life threatening events. Through this writing, the author challenges society and gives a place to the audience to understand the girl's problems. To illustrate her nightmarish past days she goes back to the past and jots down all her anxieties and pains into her paper. She adds that:

Psychological trauma is a direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate. The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness or horror. (87)

Here, we can apply Kali Tal's concept. The book depicts the harsh reality for students from lower-caste groups who attend school only to be condemned to laborer positions. Self-realization and self-esteem are still faraway ideals for them. How can they progress if they are denied equality and human dignity? Wherever they go, the specter of caste follows them. With no regular source of income, Dalit men work in upper caste farms, while children are sent to the forests to collect firewood.

Bama herself endured these hardships. These oppressive circumstances foster a shared belief that Dalits have no pathway to progress and are destined to remain marginalized. During school assemblies, the class teacher would single out Harijan pupils, asking them to stand, which deeply upset Bama. However, despite such humiliation, she experienced a sense of pride when she was recognized as the best Harijan student in the S.L.C. examinations. This achievement became a source of inspiration for her. In her village, the life of a Paraya is fraught with struggle from

early childhood. Everyone is required to work for the dominant castes, either in their fields or households. Parayas are burdened with arduous tasks like digging wells, carrying heavy loads of dirt and stone, collecting firewood from hillsides, and performing manual labor on construction sites. Essentially, every Paraya family lives as bonded laborers to the Naicker families, trapped in a cycle of servitude and exploitation.

Jennifer Joy Freyd, a prominent psychologist and trauma researcher, has contributed significantly to the understanding of gender trauma, especially through her concept of "betrayal trauma." Freyd argues that betrayal by trusted individuals or institutions, such as family members or societal structures, can be deeply traumatic, especially in cases involving gendered violence and discrimination. Her theory emphasizes how trauma can be intensified when it involves someone on whom the victim depends for basic needs, safety, or love. In this context, trauma is not just a result of violent acts themselves but is also tied to the betrayal of trust, which can cause the survivor to repress or dissociate the traumatic memories to maintain a functional relationship with the betrayer. Freyd explains this in her work *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse*, where she writes:

When children or adults are betrayed by people or institutions they rely on, they may need to remain unaware of the betrayal in order to preserve necessary relationships or attachments. Betrayal trauma theory explains how this process works and why trauma from betrayal may have unique and profound psychological effects. (14)

Freyd's work also addresses how gendered dynamics are central to betrayal trauma, as women and other gender minorities are often socialized to trust and rely on certain protective systems—such as family, partners, or religious institutions—that can become sources of betrayal. Freyd's insights into gender trauma provide a lens for understanding the compounding effects of betrayal within systems of power and trust, shedding light on why survivors of gendered trauma may struggle to process or confront their traumatic experiences. Her work has become foundational in trauma studies, offering a valuable framework for understanding the impact of both interpersonal and systemic betrayals on survivors' psychological health.

Bama vividly depicts her grandmother as a tireless and dedicated servant, waking before dawn to fetch water and complete endless domestic tasks. Like many Dalit women, she endures relentless exploitation and dehumanizing treatment. Even in the market, the Nadars exploit their vulnerability during barter exchanges. Despite being the backbone of labor and hard work, Dalits are perpetually demeaned by the upper castes. At her high school hostel, the warden sister makes derogatory comments about Dalit children, and upper-caste women refuse to sit beside Paraiya women on buses. These incidents serve as constant reminders of Bama's caste identity, following her everywhere—from school to church and beyond—cementing her awareness of being seen solely as a Dalit. Reflecting on these experiences, Bama writes in

Karukku:

Wherever you look, however much you study, whatever you take up, caste discrimination stalks us in every hook and corner and drives us into a frenzy.

It is because of this that we are unable to find a way to study well and progress like everyone else. And this is why a wretched lifestyle is all that is left to us.

(26)

Bama writes the above lines very painfully. She is right in her place because it is beyond our reach to be born into a rich upper caste family, and if you are born into a lower caste family, every moment of your life is a moment of struggle.

Here these lines highlight the author's time event. People are mostly being traumatized by stressful and painful experiences. In this regard, Jenny Edkins in her book *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* says "The reinstallation of time as linear and the narrating of events as history is central to the process of reinscription" (15). As we already discussed working through is seen as the process of repeating, elaborating and amplifying interpretations. The author revisits her early years and creates a scene of violence. Bringing a reality which is based on truth in front of the world is not easy. We must have strong guts to do that.

Bama's anger and frustration are powerfully expressed in *Karukku*. She mourns the fact that upper-caste people cannot tolerate the progress and achievements of Dalits, gained through hard work, education, and persistent struggle. Their response is one of outrage, leading them to conspire against the Dalit community. Bama's deep resentment toward the upper castes is clear when she writes:

How did the upper castes become so elevated? How is it that we have been denigrated? They possess money; we do not. If we were wealthy too, wouldn't we learn more and make more progress than they do? But when it comes to it, even if we are as good as they are, or even better, because of this one issue of caste alone, we are forced to suffer pain and humiliation. (27)

The repressive character of caste is abundantly demonstrated here. During her time at the convent, Bama develops a strong resentment for upper-caste authority since Dalits are constantly assigned only menial and demeaning chores. They are treated with shame and disgrace. It hurts her to see older Dalit males act submissively like infants

while meeting with priests and nuns from higher castes. The wealth and authority of the nuns terrifies the Dalits. Bama is uncomfortable with the harsh and unjust upper caste nuns. She understands that the Dalit communities are subjected to an oppressive religious regime.

As a child, Bama worshipped God and prayed in the church, believing deeply in the equality of all people before God. However, she later came to realize how upper-caste communities used religion and caste as tools of oppression. This revelation led her to lose faith in God and religion, leaving her unafraid of divine authority. Her time in the convent further eroded her belief, as she observed how nuns and priests arrogantly positioned themselves as divine figures and creators of religion. Astonishingly, even among the nuns, caste-based divisions were evident, influenced by wealth, poverty, and language.

In *Karukku*, Bama reflects on the stark contrast between the compassionate, egalitarian Jesus depicted in the Bible and the distorted version of Jesus embodied in the daily practices of the church. While the Biblical Jesus embodies deep sympathy and compassion for the oppressed, Bama notes that this message is diluted in the church, where priests and nuns fail to emphasize God's anger toward those who perpetrate injustice and falsehood against the oppressed. This critique extends not only to the institutional practices of Christianity but also to the Bible itself. Bama's spiritual journey, as chronicled in the book, reveals her growing awareness of these contradictions and shapes her consciousness as both a Dalit and a Christian. This book also presents a living picture of her spiritual journey and Dalit consciousness as Lakshmi Holmstrom writes in her introduction to *Karukku*, "It is her driving quest for integrity as a Dalit and a Christian that shapes the book and gives it its polemic"(16). It highlights this dual quest for integrity as the driving force behind the book,

underscoring its polemic nature as Bama navigates her identity and faith in the face of systemic oppression.

Moreover, Kali Tal's insight into the traumatization of women in the patriarchal society serves as the main methodological basis. Women are to various harsh forces like sexual molestation, harassment, exposure to these hazards and pitfalls traumatize them. In *World of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, Tal extensively concentrates on this aspect of women's traumatization. The motives of "wives or girlfriends who accuse their partners of sexually abusing their children are often questioned by civil courts, and their charges are looked upon with suspicion" (87). Incest is so rarely reported, and prosecution is so rarely effective. Pornography obsessively focuses on "rape as a pleasurable experience for the male rapist, and often casts female children in the role of the seducers" (76). These views of Kali Tal are keeps to the constitution of the methodological basis of this thesis.

In the convent, Bama gains deeper insights into God and the teachings of Jesus, but the hypocrisy of the church deeply angers her, especially the behavior of the priests and nuns. A notable feature of *Karukku* is Bama's unwavering hope for a better future, which she expresses at the end of each chapter. She writes:

They have become aware that they too were created in the likeness of God. There is a new strength within them, urging them to reclaim that likeness which has been so far repressed, ruined, obliterated, and to begin to live again with honour, self-respect, and with a love forwards all human kind. To my mind, this alone is true devotion. (109)

Bama points out that while priests in the church preach that Jesus was born into a poor family, lived among the poor, and died for the poor, the nuns focus solely on worldly

matters rather than spiritual ones. Their discussions revolve around what to prepare, what to eat, what to celebrate, how to enjoy, what to build, and what to destroy.

In conclusion, this research paper examines traumatic experiences of the characters in the context of culture, religion, patriarchal norms in contemporary Dalit society. Patriarchal society is always intolerant of every woman who does not conform to the patriarchal status quo fed up with the restrictive measures, the leading female characters of the text choose to live in that bring profound level of domestic as well as marital satisfaction. The society laughs at the chronic deadlocks of their marriage and interpersonal relation. Dissatisfied with the traditional gender role, they choose to live this sort of life. They feel that marriage, where husbands are preoccupied with their bushiness, restricted her inner longings and unidentifiable urges.

Casteism is a system of social stratification that enforces rigid hierarchies based on caste, deeply rooted in certain cultures, notably in South Asia. This system divides individuals and communities into fixed social groups, often based on birth, determining their roles, rights, and opportunities within society. Casteism perpetuates discrimination, exclusion, and inequality, as lower castes, such as Dalits, are systematically marginalized, denied access to resources, and subjected to social stigma. This hierarchy not only limits personal freedom but also perpetuates poverty, illiteracy, and a lack of social mobility, trapping generations in cycles of oppression. Although legal measures have been enacted to address caste-based discrimination, its social and psychological impacts remain pervasive, creating deep-rooted trauma and a lasting sense of injustice for affected communities.

In *Karukku*, casteism deeply impacts women, exacerbating their suffering and compounding their trauma through intersecting forms of discrimination. As Dalit

women, they endure a dual oppression—one rooted in caste and another in gender. Bama illustrates how Dalit women face systematic marginalization, relegated to physically demanding, low-paying, and degrading work, often without respect or recognition. Furthermore, societal expectations confine Dalit women to submissive roles, silencing their voices and limiting their autonomy. The trauma intensifies as they are often denied education and opportunities for self-improvement, making them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. This layered oppression shapes their identity and mental well-being, leading to an internalized sense of inferiority and helplessness. Bama's narrative reflects this compounded trauma, showing how casteism, when intertwined with patriarchy, denies Dalit women dignity and the possibility of a self-determined life, leaving lasting scars on their psyche and limiting their future prospects.

In *Karukku*, Bama recounts a powerful journey of self-discovery, resilience, and eventual transformation as she confronts the harsh realities of caste-based discrimination and religious hypocrisy. Her narrative begins with a portrayal of her early struggles and feelings of alienation as a Dalit woman within her community and religious institutions. She describes the painful experiences of exclusion and humiliation, not only due to her caste but also as a woman, which left deep scars on her psyche. Through vivid anecdotes, Bama reveals the extent of her suffering and the challenges she faced in spaces meant to uphold spiritual and moral values but that instead perpetuated oppression and prejudice.

As Bama's journey unfolds, her growing awareness of systemic injustice catalyzes her transformation. Her years in the convent expose her to the harsh treatment Dalits and other marginalized individuals endure within religious institutions, which she had previously held in high regard. This disillusionment

pushes her to question her faith and societal values, and she begins to see her role not as a submissive follower but as a voice for resistance and change. Her courage to break free from the constraints of both caste and religious institutions marks a significant shift in her identity and purpose.

Ultimately, Bama's transformation reaches its peak as she embraces her identity as a Dalit and a woman, claiming her narrative with a new, empowered voice. She leaves the convent, symbolizing her rejection of the oppressive structures that once constrained her. Instead, she devotes herself to writing, using her experiences to shed light on the injustices faced by Dalits and to inspire others in similar struggles. This final state represents a profound personal and spiritual liberation for Bama, as she moves from being a victim of social and religious prejudice to an advocate for social justice and self-empowerment.

In *Karukku*, Bama's journey from subjugation to self-empowerment is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative power of reclaiming one's narrative. Her final state is not merely one of personal victory but a call for social change, as she uses her voice to challenge oppressive systems and inspire marginalized communities. Through her writing, Bama transcends the limitations imposed on her, transforming her life experiences into a source of strength and an enduring message of hope and resistance.

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