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The Silenced Voices In Bama's *Sangati* And *Karukku*

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Abstract:

Caste discrimination is the pivotal topic to be discussed in the academic forum in order to create awareness among public regarding the equality of the race across the globe. Bama's *Karukku* and *Sangati* hinge on the specific theme of the social stratification in India and especially in Tamilnadu. From time immemorial, the ancient civilisations have divided people into distinct classes based on the factors like wealth, occupation and birth. The title 'The Silenced Voices' promulgates on the socially oppressed people who are suppressed by the societal dictum over the particular sect of people.

Every prominent novels indited in the light of domination of people offer a thorough depiction of underrepresented groups and the frequently ignored voices in Indian society. The struggles of Dalit women are highlighted in Bama's *Sangati*, which focuses on their experiences of oppression, silence, and resistance within a strict caste system. *Karukku* delves into the inner battle of a Dalit Christian woman contending with religious and caste-based prejudice. The title, The Silenced Voices, emphasizes how these voices are often muted as a result of gender stereotypes, societal hierarchy, and religious restrictions. In the end, both the stories provide a forum for the empowerment and expression of these marginalized voices in literature by acting as a platform to magnify these marginalized viewpoints and challenge the intersectionality of caste, gender, and religion. These works challenge the dominant social institutions that have traditionally marginalized Dalit women by bringing their repressed and silenced voices to the fore with agency and narrative presence. This novels shows how Dalit communities are forced to live outskirts of their villages, denies access to public spaces, and subjected to social exclusion (Anandhi,2005).

Keywords : Bama, Caste Taboo, Gender discrimination, Hierarchy of society, Social status, Social Stratification, The book *Karukku* recounts on the incidents that made her to first became aware of caste inequality in school when she witnessed a Dalit laborer being fed by an upper-caste landlord who was shielding him from direct contact with the food with a leaf. She was profoundly affected and became conscious of systemic caste oppression as a result of this experience.

The book describes about upper-caste landlords who made Dalit women to work in the fields under terrible conditions. They received little pay and treated without respect which was indeed a reflection of both gender and caste oppression. Bama also talks of the humiliation of Dalit children in her village, where they were frequently viewed as less than human in public places like schools. They were forced to sit apart and endured continual humiliation from classmates and teachers. In *Karukku*, Bama affirms her own experience with education, highlighting the way in which the Dalit students are discriminated against by teachers and classmates (Bama,2000).

The novel *Sangati* describes the Dalit women who are frequently physically abused by their husbands, and who are consistently vent their resentment of caste injustice on their spouses. It also talks about Sexual Harassment at Work and Upper-caste men and landowners frequently harassing Dalit women who worked as farm laborers in the fields. Since they lacked support and are afraid of reprisals, the voiceless people are unable to report these instances to the outside world.

Furthermore, Bama also furnishes about women whom are not permitted to voice their thoughts or participate in decision-making. They are encumbered to have limited mobility and they suffer from the dual oppression of gender and caste. Mariamma, a young Dalit girl, is tragically assaulted and harassed by her stepmother. Owing to systematic oppression and poverty, violence has become commonplace in Dalit households. Bama delineates that Dalit women are frequently denied access to education or personal agency, married off young, and treated like property. Hence, it strengthened their oppression under patriarchal and caste structures.

According to Bama, Dalit students are moreover treated with disdain within school premises also. Teachers have favorable kids belonging to upper castes and use derogatory words against the students belonging to the lowest rung of the society. Since Dalit children were viewed as not deserving of an education, they are frequently compelled to drop out. Even within the church, Dalit Christians are always kept aloof from the normal crowd of devoted people. During mass, they are forced to sit in the extreme last or outside, and Dalit women in particular were forced to perform menial jobs like cleaning. Even Nuns' were mistreated everyone. As an adult, having a belief that religion could help others, Bama joined a convent. However, she observed the bigotry and hypocrisy of nuns who viewed Dalit women and children as socially inferior. She eventually left the convent as a result of this disillusionment. Bama reveals the Church's caste system, which excluded Dalits even during religious rituals. Further, Dalit women were excluded from positions of influence in the church and assigned lowly duties.

According to Bama, her older brother was disciplined for merely attempting to maintain his honor in front of the members of the upper caste. She learned early from the particular situation that Dalits are supposed to maintain their subservience and put up with humiliation.

The narrative details on how upper-caste employers continuously denigrated Dalit women while they performed backbreaking tasks like planting and harvesting. One of the most horrific stories in *Sangati* is of upper-caste men gang-raping Dalit women who peacefully worked in the fields for their living. These women endured the horror in silence, while the offenders spared punishment due to their social standing. Dalit women received much lower compensation for doing the same work as men and strenuously toiled with great effort than women from upper castes. Despite their diligent efforts, these people continued to live in extreme poverty due to their caste.

The book recounts the tale of young Dalit girls who are made fun of and dissuaded from going to school by their relatives and society. All that they are destined to do was to get married to work for their husbands and children. Bama recounts on how young Dalit girls are denied a carefree upbringing by being forced to perform tasks like collecting water, looking after their siblings, and working alongside their parents.

A diligent Dalit woman named Thayi passes away as a result of weariness and a lack of medical care. Her passing is a prime example of how Dalit women's lives were viewed as disposable and without even providing the most basic healthcare. In *Sangati*, Bama highlights the practice of untouchability, which denies Dalit individuals to have access to basic amenities, such as education, healthcare, and employment (Bama, 2005).

In the novel, a Dalit woman who becomes pregnant without the marriage is shunned by her community, despite the fact that the upper-caste man who took advantage of her is the real person to be blamed for. This illustrates on how Dalit women are subjected to the most severe moral policing in the patriarchal society. Bama emphasizes about aged Dalit women, who in spite of their own suffering, frequently accepted oppression and even continued it against younger women because they thought it to be endless and endured the oppression as they found no way out of their difficult circumstances entwined in the life. Owing to patriarchal standards, Dalit women experience oppression from both their families and from upper-caste communities. Bama presents Dalit women as resilient people who struggle to survive and provide moral strength for their families in spite of constant exposure to oppression.

Bama's life story highlights about education which may challenge gender and caste stereotypes.

Despite these challenges, the novel emphasizes on the importance of education for Dalit women, highlighting the potential to empower them and to challenge patriarchal and caste-based oppression (Rege, 2006). In an effort to advocate oppression, she urges young Dalit women to seek education. In *Sangati*, Bama highlights the values of the community of Dalit women which helps them support one another during difficult times and share happy thoughts. These events show the resilience and determination of Dalit women in overpowering structural oppression, in addition to highlighting their intersectional struggles. Bama's writings are still potent critiques of gender, caste, and social injustices by highlighting their battles against caste, gender, and structural injustices. The chosen novels, *Karukku* and *Sangati* illuminate the intersectional oppression of Dalit women and especially on these occurrences, Bama's writings hold a prominent place in feminist and Dalit literature.

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