

III

Bama's *Karukku*: Marginality of Convert Dalit Women

Dalit studies in Tamil started quite late in comparison to its counterpart in Marathi or Kannada. Dalit studies in Tamil could not find its place in Tamil literary domain until 1980s or early 1990s. A self-respect movement was founded in 1925 by E.V. Ramasami in Tamil Nadu with the aim of building a society where backward castes should be given superior rights. It advocated against the discriminatory practices adopted by Brahmins. The Dalit category was also included in the backward castes but the benefits which backward castes received (like representation in legislature and better opportunity in jobs) were not allowed to reach Dalits among the backward castes. In the Dravidian fold dominated by other backward castes the Dalit voice and their consciousness remained suppressed. In the seventies and the eighties, there emerged a generation of writers whose writings were influenced by Marxism, but Dalit identity still remained suppressed in the hands of these writers. They represented Dalits as working class and their oppression was defined within the paradigm of capitalist oppression of the working class.

The Dalit literature in Tamil came into existence only when the Dalits started to write their experimental reality in autobiographical or fictional mode. The first Dalit novel which was published in 1989 was *Pazhiyana Kazhidalum* written by a Dalit woman, Sivakami. This novel advocates the need for an organised, educated Dalit youth which works towards the empowerment of Dalits. As Dalit patriarchy is an important subject of discussion in Tamil Dalit Literature, this novel contributed significantly in establishing Tamil Dalit literature. It foregrounds Dalit men's violent treatment of Dalit woman at home. Sivakami's novel prepared the ground for the critique of domestic violence and abuse of Dalit women at home by Dalit men—father, brothers, sons, fathers-in-law and brothers-in-law, apart from sexual and occupational harassment faced by Dalit women outside the four walls of the house at the hands of the upper caste men. Sivakami's second novel, *Aanandayee* (1992) focuses on violent exploitation of women in different spheres of life. She further points out that Dalit women's sexuality (whether daughter's, wife's, or beloved's) is violently contained and repressed. Sivakami was one of the earliest Tamil Dalit writers who drew attention to the double oppression of Dalit women—on account of their caste and gender by the upper caste men as well as Dalit men.

The first Dalit autobiography in Tamil was *Karukku* which was published in 1992 by a Dalit woman, Faustina Soosairaj Bama. *Karukku* discusses various types of oppression faced by Dalits at the hands of state (Police), panchayat, and the upper caste people and at the church. Bama further highlights as to how Dalit women are doubly marginalised—one on the name of caste and another on the name of gender. Commenting on her commitment to Dalit consciousness, she remarks that "My ambition is to communicate the dreams and aspirations of my people, who have remained on the fringes for centuries in Indian history" (Dutt). Bama portrays as to how Dalits who converted into Christians with the hope to enjoy equal status in society, are not allowed to participate in the church choir. She highlights the discrimination even in church where the sitting place for the Dalits is kept away from the upper caste Christians, and they are not allowed to bury their dead in the cemetery within the village but they use the different graveyard beyond the outskirts. Bama's second novel *Sangati* shows how Dalit women face daily threats of rape, sexual assaults, physical violence at home and the workplace. *Sangati* brings together Dalit women's experiences in the language of Dalit women. Bama's contribution to Dalit literature is significant in many ways. She uses confessional and conversational mode of narration in both *Karukku* and *Sangati*. Bama's writings focus on Dalit women's lives, their wit, their humour, their resilience and their creativity. Dalit women are shown as hard worker who work hard both at home and outside.

Dual oppression of Dalit women on the basis of caste and gender forms an important issue for discussion in Tamil Dalit Literature. In Tamil Dalit Literature, women's sexuality becomes a critical concern. Dalit writers discuss the containment of Dalit women's sexuality from pre-puberty stage to menopause by caste bound society. The girls belonging to Dalit community are not allowed to attend school after attaining puberty. They are sexually assaulted by much older husbands; they face sexual harassment or are raped by fathers-in-law and brothers-in-law if they are widows; and suffer regular beating by their husbands. It is to portray the realistic picture of Dalit exploitation that Tamil Dalit Literature includes in itself various dimensions of Dalit experience with special focus on exploited Dalit women. Tamil Dalit writers use the language spoken by ordinary people to depict the day to day sufferings of Dalits to bring their narrative closer to reality. Various Dalit writers experiment in terms of genres and expand the limits of literary language to include spoken, conversational, earthly vocabulary of the marginalised. They use folklore, legends, myths and swearing words which bring their narrative closer to everyday

life. In an interview Bama presented her personal view of Dalit aestheticism and grammar. According to her:

The story told in *Karukku* was not my story alone. It was the depiction of a collective trauma – of my community – whose length cannot be measured in time. I just tried to freeze it forever in one book so that there will be something physical to remind people of the atrocities committed on a section of the society for ages.
(Bama Interview)

Bama was born in 1958 in a Roman Catholic family in Madras state. Bama's ancestors belonged to Dalit community and worked as agricultural labourers but later on converted from Hinduism to Christianity. Perhaps they were compelled to embrace Christianity by the inhuman and undemocratic practices adopted by the caste Hindus who leave no stone unturned to see the Dalits as 'wretched of the earth' in the real sense of the word. It was the insensitivity among the upper caste Hindus which might have driven the Tamil Dalits to Christianity. Ambedkar regrets the caste-based social scenario:

Caste is, therefore, the real explanation as to why the Hindu has let the savage remain a savage in the midst of his civilisation without blushing or without feeling any sense of remorse or repentance.... Not only has the Hindu made no effort for the humanitarian cause of civilising the savages but the higher caste Hindus have deliberately prevented the lower caste ... from rising to the cultural level of the higher castes.

(Ambedkar 270-71)

Bama's father was in Indian Army. She got her early education in her village. After doing graduation & B.Ed. she served as a nun for seven years in the convent. After that she left the convent and began writing. She started writing on her childhood experiences which formed the basis for her first autobiographical novel, *Karukku* which was published in 1992. It won her the Crossword Book Award in 2000. Her other writings are *Sangati* (1994) and *Vanman* (2002) along with two collections of short stories: *Kusumbukkaran* (1996) and *Oru Tattvum Frumaiyum* (2003).

Bama's novels mainly focus on the discrimination on the basis of caste and gender. They also portray caste-discrimination practised by the Roman Catholic Church of South India. In *Karukku*, Bama moves from individual to community. Bama herself describes *Karukku* as the depiction of a collective trauma of her community. *Karukku* is generally perceived as an autobiographical statement of what it is to be a Dalit and a woman. For her, a Dalit woman is a Dalit amongst Dalits. She is thus doubly oppressed by her caste and gender. In Bama's case her position is further endangered by her existence as a Dalit Christian. Hence *Karukku* focuses on three essential forces that cut across and sear Bama's life, namely: caste, gender and religion. Parmod K. Nayar finds *Karukku* more closer to a *testimonio* than an autobiography. He asserts:

Generally in autobiographies, narrator has some social status but testimony described the common man/woman who stands in for the community. In testimony in place of "problematic hero" "problematic collective situation" is found. And that problematic collective situation in "*Karukku*" is caste. (Nayar 85)

Karukku flouts the existing conventions of writing an autobiography. It adopts the confessional mode and avoids a linear narrative. A conventional autobiography is a narrative, where the author presents his/her episodes chronologically. Anecdotes and experiences in author's life generally illustrate the narrator's journey to success. Today it is argued that Dalit autobiographies must be read as *testimonio* because like *testimonio*, Dalit writings also reflect trauma, pain, resistance, protest and social change. John Beverley defines *testimonio* as:

A novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist of the events he or she recounts and whose unit of narration is usually a "life" or significant life experience. (Beverley)

Karukku is a painful journey which is open ended where many questions are left unanswered. Like a conventional autobiography it is not a "complete success story"; rather it reveals the reality of the social ills confronted by a Dalit woman. The narrative exhibits the double discrimination which singles Dalit women out for repression, caste untouchability and gender instrumentality. The *testimonio* shows with evidence that neither of them is ordained by nature or inscribed in genes. Untouchability and machismo are shown with a wealth of concrete daily events as two social and cultural systems are bound together to crush a woman's body as a

privileged space for all types of control and oppression to coalesce. As Bama admits in the Preface to the book:

The driving force that shaped this book are many cutting me like *Karukku* and making me bleed. Unjust social structures that plunged me into ignorance and left me trapped and suffocating; my own desperate urge to break, throw away and destroy these bonds; and when the chains were shattered into fragments; the blood that was split then; all those taken together. (xxiii)

Karukku reflect various themes like religion, caste, gender etc. Through all these perspectives, Bama gives us a clear picture of the caste oppression not only by the upper caste society but more so within the Catholic church itself. Bama always wanted to engage herself in alleviating the sufferings of the oppressed. So she decides to become a nun. This book is about Bama's inner quest for self-discovery and the resultant courage which forces her to leave the life of a nun and to live the life of a Dalit woman. It is her failure to alleviate herself in life that makes her react against the authorities of the church who claim to serve the cause of religion. She reacts: "I thought to myself with some disgust, chi, they are all hypocrites and frauds. I felt in my heart that I could go and speak directly to God without their intervention." (102)

The tension throughout *Karukku* is between the self and the community which brings it quite closer to a testimonio wherein individual experience gets imbibed into the larger social experience. In the given text, the narrator leaves one community (the religious order) and affirms her belonging to another (a Dalit community, particularly of women). Bama's personal experiences get merged with the experiences of other Dalit women who have been the victims of the caste-based patriarchal social construct. Bama argues:

I share the same difficulties and struggles that all Dalit poor experience. I share to some extent the poverty of Dalit who toil far more painfully through fierce heat and beating rain, yet leave out their lives in their huts with nothing but gruel and water. Those who labour are the poorest of the poor Dalits. But those who reap the rewards are the wealthy, the upper castes. This continues to happen in my village to this day. (79)

Bama has never heard about untouchability until her third standard in school. One day when she was returning from school she saw an elder man belonging to their community holding out a

small packet of snacks which was tied in a string. He was bringing the packet without touching it. Bama started laughing on this funny incident. When she shared this incident with her brother, he became serious and told her that the fellow was holding the packet with the string because he was bringing snacks for a *Naicker*. She was told that the fellow bringing snacks belonged to low caste and hence untouchable so he was not supposed to touch those snacks. This is the first time when she heard about untouchability. Her elder brother showed her the right path by making her realise that education is the only way to attain equality. Bama's elder brother opines:

Because we are born into the Paraiya Jati, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect, we are stripped of all that. But if we study, make progress, we can make progress, we can throw away these indignities. So study with care, learn all you can. If you are always ahead in your lesson, people will come to you, work hard and learn.(17-18)

As a result of it she worked hard and stood first in class. Bama finds that education enabled her to know and befriend many people in spite of her being a low caste woman. Bama propagates that people belonging to Dalit community are very hard working. They work from morning till evening. In spite of that they do not get proper payment according to their labour. If the same work is done by a man and a woman, woman is always paid less than man.

And I used to think that at the rate they worked, men and women both, every single day, they should readily be able to advance themselves. But of course they never received a payment that was appropriate to their labour. And another thing, even if they did the same work, men received one wage, women another. They always paid men more. I could not understand why? (55)

Dalit women are doubly exploited: the moment they wake up, they set to work both in their homes and on the fields. At homes, their husband and children pester them. In the fields, there is backbreaking work, besides the harassment of the landlord. When they come home in the evening, there is no time even to breathe. They remain so tightly pressed that even after having collected water and firewood, cooked a kanji and fed their hungry husband and children; they cannot go to bed in peace and sleep until dawn. Night after night they must give into their husband's pleasure. Even if a woman's body is wrecked with pain, the husband is bothered only with his satisfaction. Besides, women are overwhelmed and crushed by their own disgust,

boredom and exhaustion, because of the perpetual harassment meted out to them inside and outside the home. Dalit feminists have analysed three ways of oppression of Dalit women—as subject to caste oppression at the hands of the upper castes; as labourers subject to the class based oppression also mainly at the hands of the upper and the middle castes who form the bulk of landowners; and as woman who experienced patriarchal oppression at the hands of all men, including men of their own caste.

Bama recollects her past when she observed her grandmother working as servant for Naicker families. She feels agonised to remember that in spite of doing useful work for them, her grandmother could get only leftover food of the previous day:

As soon as dawn broke, she would go to the Naicker houses, sweep out the cowshed, collect up the dung and dirt and then bring home the left over rice and curry from the previous evening. And for some reason she would behave as if she had been handed the nectar of the gods.(16)

No doubt, Bama shows her disgust towards such kind of behaviour of Naicker family, but she is badly hurt when her grandmother replies: “These people are the maharajas who feed us rice, without them, how will we survive?” (17)

The people belonging to Dalit family suffer from poverty. After doing hard labour from sunrise to sunset, it is very hard for them to manage two meals a day. Immersed in absolute poverty they cannot even think of providing good education to their children. However, if it is a girl child then it is far more difficult to get education. In the face of poverty, the girl children cannot see the sense in schooling and stay at home, collecting firewood, looking after the house, caring for babies and doing household chores.

Throughout her student life, Bama found that the tag of caste and untouchability does not leave her. The government offered the financial grants and special tuitions to the *harijans*. According to Bama these were more of a humiliation than consolation, mainly because it singled out her caste identity. Once the identity was revealed, she could sense “among the other students, a sudden rustling, a titter of contempt.” (22)

In the beginning Bama was fortunate enough to get education. But after completing her eleventh year public examination, she is not allowed to go for further education because in that case “It

would be difficult for them to find a husband for me in my community if I went in for further education”(74). But when her mother is forced by a nun to send her to college further for study, Bama writes a letter to her father for money in response to which her father replies very rudely: “You listened to the nun’s advice and joined college so now ask them to give you the money; go on to them” (7). After completing her education, Bama tried to get a job in a school but she could not get that job because she belonged to the lower strata of the society. In her own words:

Today I am like a mongrel dog wandering about without a permanent job, nor a regular means to find clothes, food and safe place to live. I share the same difficulties and struggles that all Dalit poor experience. I share to some extent the poverty of the Dalits who toil for more painfully through fierce heat and beating rain... (78-79)

She feels utterly disappointed when she does not get that job in a school governed by Nadar. Consequently Bama decides to become a nun so that she may devote herself for the upliftment of poor children by providing education to them. Here also, she faces many problems. In a particular class, during training, a sister tells her that they would not accept *Harijan* women as prospective nuns and there is even a separate order for them somewhere. This shows that the roots of class discrimination are deeply rooted. After sometime she leaves the job only to realise that she is losing her confidence. In her own words:

I who had been bold had become an extremely timid person fearful of everything, ready to burst into tears, and without any strength. I had no family. I felt too shy even to communicate with people in a normal way. Sometimes I even thought to myself that it would be better to be dead and gone rather than carry on living like this. (78)

After sometime, her parents ask her to get married but she refuses by saying that “If I were to marry, I would have to live the rest of my life and even die in the end for the sake of one man” (131). At the same time she is conscious of the difficulties one has to face to live alone and to find means of living. She reflects:

There is also another great difficulty, the difficulty, the difficulty I find in moving about in the outside world alone. If a woman so much as stands alone and by herself somewhere, all sorts of men gather around her showing their teeth. (119)

Women are considered inferior not only by other caste people but also by their own caste people. When there is a fight between two communities Chaaliyar and Parayar on the ownership of cemetery land, the Parayar community people (Parayar was a separate category among Tamil Dalits who were looked upon as a lower caste) challenge their counterparts by saying: “If they had the least little bit of decency or manhood, they would have come and fought us face to face. But these are like cowardly woman. (31)

There is no doubt that people belonging to Dalit community are oppressed but women belonging to Dalit community are doubly oppressed in many ways. They are Dalits among the Dalit. She sees some Naicker women giving water to her grandmother in a way that disgusts her: “The Naicker women would pour out the water from a height of four feet, while Paati and the other received and drank it with cupped hands hold to their mouth. I always felt terrible when I watched this.” (16)

Caste discrimination in Indian society is deeply rooted. The people belonging to Dalit community are not allowed to live in the village. Their residences are always kept outside the boundary of the village. High caste people even avoid going to their side. The people of Dalit community are separated from the mainstream life of the village. Dalit people are not only devoid of mainstream life of village but also of all facilities like post office, big shops, and the milk depot etc. Bama laments over the inhuman treatment meted out to Dalits in different walks of life by questioning the existing social order. She questions:

How is it that people consider us too gross even to sit next to when travelling?
They look at us with the same look. They would caste on someone sufferings
from a repulsive disease. When we go we suffer blows and pain. (27)

When they are in need of all these, they go to the village but the high caste people avoid visiting the area in which Dalit people live because all such modern and basic facilities are available in their area. Bama, in her autobiography *Karukku*, comments:

We only went to their side if we had work to there. But they never, ever came to our parts. The post office, the *panchayat* board, the milk-depot, the big shops, the church, the schools all these stood in their streets, so why would they need to come to our area? (7)

Caste discrimination is not only prevalent in day to day life of the village but it is also deep rooted in educational system. Bama feels utterly disappointed to observe the scenario where caste determines the destiny of the children aspiring to get education:

Nadar schools only admit Nadars, and Naicker schools only admit Naicker. And then, Aiyar schools will only teach Aiyar children. If it is all like this, then heaven knows where all the Dalit children can go and break their heads. I don't know if there is such a thing as a Dalit school. (119)

High caste people consider education as an exclusive domain of upper caste children. They consider education as the attribute of the upper caste people only and consider Dalits as made only for menial jobs. Our constitution provides every citizen the right to get education but Dalit children face many difficulties while studying in school, colleges etc. Bama herself experienced the discrimination meted out to the Dalit children in educational institutions. When she was staying in a hostel the hostel warden used to scold the Dalit children in many ways. The hostel warden used to taunt Dalit children in one pretext or the other. Bama recollects the warden commenting on Dalit children: "Look at the Cheri children! When they stay here, they eat their fill and look as round as potatoes. But look at the state in which they came back from home just skin and bone!" (20)

Bama reacted to it by saying that the Dalit students too paid fees like others for food and therefore there was no logic in warden scolding only Dalit children for food. It is a wild kind of injustice. Bama was not allowed to go home for customary holidays while other high caste children were allowed to go home. The Principal and the warden sister did not allow her by saying that "What celebration can there be in your caste?"(22). All this fell on Bama like a volcano. She thought by herself that all rules must be equal to all children. In her own words: "I managed to go get my way at least by insisting that there cannot be different rules for different castes, only the same rules for everyone." (22)

Bama further feels concerned over the fact that high caste people do not consider the Dalit people as human beings. They seriously lack the feelings of human fraternity. For them, caste is superior to all remaining things as they recognise the people through their caste to which they belong. On being asked by a Naicker about the street he belongs to, Bama's brother replied "I am a Paraya from the Cheri Street" (17) resulting into repulsion in the eyes of the Naicker man. The

next day he complained to Paati saying “How dare your grandson talk to me so arrogantly?” (p.17). However, Paati consoles him by asking for forgiveness. All this disgusted Bama who is of the view that the upper caste people always try to suppress the lower caste people in one pretext or the other.

The people from the upper strata of society always think that all un-social activities are done only by lower caste people. Bama narrates one incident of her suffering in school. When she was in the seventh class, after school hours she used to play with other children in the school campus. While they were playing, a coconut fell from the coconut tree, but the blame of stealing the coconut fell on Bama. Next day the teacher orders Bama to go out of the school campus. When she goes to the priest to plead her innocence the priest’s first response is that “After all, you are from the cheri. You must have done it. You must have done it” (19). Bama is convinced that she is blamed only because she belongs to a Parayar community and in case a high caste student is at fault, then the situation would have been surely different. Besides, she has to bear the stigma of caste-based society guided by the age old patriarchal social setup. She remarks:

When we girls grew up, there was no more play. We went to work during the day, came home and saw to the household chores; that was it. There was nothing else. Now even the little ones do not play anymore. Even the tiny ones wake up at cock crow, go to the matchbox factory and work there till sunset. (58)

In convent itself, caste discrimination is very much prevalent. In it Tamil people are considered as a lower caste and among them Parayar are considered as a separate category which is considered as lowest of the lower in the eyes of the convent. The administration of the convent humiliates the low caste people in every way. They consider that these people have no moral discipline, no cleanliness and no culture. Though the priests and nuns at convent claim that they are engaged in the service to God, but they certainly discriminate people according to caste. While in the eyes of God every human being is equal, Bama wonders as to what kind of service of God they are offering. For Bama, the question of discrimination through religious institutions remains unanswered throughout her life.

Women belonging to Dalit community are doubly marginalized –first for their being a Dalit and then for their being women which implies that their status is relegated to secondary position in society. Discrimination against women starts with her suppression and exploitation in her home

by the men belonging to their community. She gives the example of Udan, a fellow who belongs to Bama's community. He used to beat his wife openly in the community hall almost every day. Bama propagates that though in our constitution both men and women are given equal rights but the male always tries to suppress woman by curtailing her freedom and the essential dignity in different spheres of life. Udan is such kind of fellow who beats his wife without any reason.

Bama focuses on the corruption prevailing in the church. She says that Dalit people who have turned Christians feel utterly disappointed and disillusioned as they do not get rid of discrimination even after their conversion into Christianity. In church itself they are considered as subordinate to other Christians. Their churches are being built separately and all high posts of the church are occupied by the upper caste Christians. If a Dalit happens to become a priest or nun, they are ridiculed first of all by high caste priests or nuns. Bama finds that it is only the upper-caste Christians who enjoy the benefits and comforts of the church and in case Dalits become priests or nuns; they are pushed aside and marginalised first of all (69). In this way Dalits remain exploited and suppressed everywhere. Bama rightly observes:

If you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death caste difference does not disappear... Even the nuns and priests, who claim that their hearts are set upon service to God, certainly discriminate according to caste. (26-27)

When Bama works as a teacher in a boarding school run by a nun, she is surprised to see that though three-fourth of the children attending that school belong to Dalit community and that school is run for destitute children but in fact every menial task needed by nuns at school are done by Dalit children. Bama feels concerned about the sorry state of affairs in such schools where the Dalit children are made to internalise that "This was the way meant to be for Dalits; that there was no possibility of change. And mainly because of this these children accept all this as their fate (13). Everyone who is engaged in the school try to teach that God is loving, kind, gentle, one who forgives sinners, patient, tender, humble, and obedient but nobody tries to insist on the fact that God is just, righteous, is angered by injustices, opposes falsehood and never believes in inequality. They try to teach God's teaching in a way which benefits them and not the real teachings of God. Though in the church they claim that God was born in a poor family and He loves the poor people. But if any poor person enters the convent they all treat him deplorably.

In church, all high posts are occupied by high caste people or their kith and kin. They exploit the Dalit people and enslave them on the name of God. They derive sadistic pleasure out of the discrimination against Dalits.

On becoming a nun, Bama suffers a lot for her being a Dalit. She sees that in the convent Dalit children are marginalized while the upper caste children from the wealthy families enjoy all the comforts. The nuns in the convent live like queens and all kind of menial works are done by lower caste children. Though there are daily prayers in praise of God but there is no connection between these prayers— the life that nuns live and the work they do. The nuns who are employed in the convent are required to make three vows— of poverty, chastity and obedience.

The administration of convent thinks that these vows will literate nuns and enable them to live a life which is centred on ordinary people. Bama thinks that in fact these vows are made to impose enslavement. In her own words: “In fact all three vows of theirs serve only to separate them from ordinary people and the reality of ordinary lives, to put them at a great remove as if they belonged to a different world” (114). Bama says that most of the people in the convent do not know the meaning of ‘Dalit’ and those who know have very poor opinion about Dalits. They discuss that if they allow Dalit people to enter their houses they (Dalits) themselves do not come in because they know their place in society. Bama asserts that:

Because Dalit have been enslaved for generation upon generation and been told that they are degraded, lacking honour and self-worth, untouchable; they have reached a stage where they themselves, voluntarily hold themselves apart. This is the worst injustice. The consequence of all this is that there is no way for Dalits to find freedom or redemption. (28)

In their opinion, helping the Dalit people is like helping cobras. Bama thinks that the convent is itself not devoid of caste discrimination. So she decides to leave the convent. Though in the convent she had status, money and an opportunity to lead a comfortable life but she feels herself alienated from ordinary people. Her predicament gets highlighted in the words: “I am like a bird whose wings were broken. After its wings have been broken, it is protected only if it stays within its cage. But if it comes out, it can only flap its wings uselessly, unable to fly. And that is the state in which I am now” (121). It is only after leaving the convent that she becomes an ordinary person to understand that now she can treat people in a normal manner and can do something

worthwhile task for the upliftment of the people of her community. She is torn within herself for joining the institution which serves the interest of the upper strata of Christians while humiliating the Dalit converts. She regrets her decision to join the system as a nun only to be the party to discrimination against her own people. She observes: “My conscience kept hurting me that although I heard, observed and experienced all this (Humiliation), I too lived a privileged life like an upper-caste person.” (116)

When there is a fight between Chaaliyar and Parayar community people over the land of cemetery, women do not hide themselves in houses but they fight with other community people by demonstrating their solidarity with the people of their community. When Izhava’s husband is stabbed with a knife by Chaaliyar community people, Maama Paralokan invokes Parayar community people to fight face to face with other community people. Even old woman named Thavais joins him and invokes her community people for the fight. This incident shows that in Bama’s *Karukku*, women play crucial role in collective decision making. On the occasions when the two communities collide ruthlessly, the police behave discriminately against Parayar community people. They arrest a lot of Parayar community people and to avoid arrest, some of them hide themselves in woods and fields. It seems as if the entire institutional structure stands against Dalit community. Bama explores as to how the Dalits are denied justice by police administration:

The police behaved deplorably towards the women as they went from house to house. They used obscene language and swore at them, told them that since their husbands were away they should be ready to entertain the police at night, winked at them, and shoved their guns against their bodies. (40)

In the times of crises, women and children are left alone in the houses of Parayar community. Bama portrays Dalit women as brave and confident enough to attend to their usual work, child care and the responsibilities of the house in absence of their husbands. These Dalit women go to the fields to work as labourers; carry with them food for the people who are hiding themselves in the fields; and give them the latest news of the village and at evening they return back home.

Dalit women seem to have developed the feeling that their cowardice and diffidence can hardly serve any purpose. In the night of fight the women of Paraya community decide to sleep in the churchyard for the safety of their children. Chaaliyar community people and police are surprised

to see these women of Paraya community carrying out all the responsibilities even in the absence of their husbands. The associated living of the suffering Dalit women in the autobiography is perhaps guided by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's concept of democracy which "is a mode of associated living. The roots of democracy are to be searched in social relationship, in terms of associated life between the people who form the society." (Ambedkar 519)

These women are posed with a serious challenge when a child of ten years old dies at the moment when his father is not at home. The women folk of Chaaliyar community are trapped in a catch-22 situation when they realise the problem as to how and where to bury him because there is a fight going on the cemetery land and there is a custom that the child can be buried only after its father sees its face. The women demonstrate exceptional courage and guts to make right decisions when they decide to bury the child at night. They also chalk out a strategy to go in a group of two in the Mandavam fields at night where the child's father is hiding. They go there and carry a sari with them for the person and bring him back wearing a sari with them. In the mean time, other women dig a grave for the child. All this happened after deliberating upon the apprehensions of Dalit women regarding some unforeseen situation which may arise while they dig the grave. They have discussed the possible reaction of Chaaliyar people on their knowing the fact. Bama's Paati is quite confident and asserts that the Chaaliyaar people do not have the courage to face the women of the Pariyar community if they remain united. She highlights the importance of unity and solidarity of suffering women to face such challenges. In her own words: "If we go together at evening time and stand together, they would not come out, even to shit" (42). This shows that women belonging to Dalit community are brave enough and they have the capacity to handle all kinds of adverse situation. Unlike *The Outcaste*, Dalit women in *Karukku* are portrayed as assertive, awakened, and progressive in spite of all the odds they have to face in a caste-ridden society.

On the arrival of the child's father, the Dalit women make it convenient for him to see his child's dead face so that the child is buried. The team-spirit and the spirit to brave the odds make them venture into difficult circumstances. Their adventure is very much in tune with what Bama asserts in the Preface of her autobiography:

In order to change this state of affairs, all Dalits who have been deprived of their basic rights must function as God's word, piercing to the very heart. Instead of

being more and more beaten down and blunted, they unite, think about their rights, and battle for them. (xxiv)

These women act smartly to leave the child's father away from the village after the burial. Their awakened consciousness enables them to go to the court to defend the cases filed against their people. They collectively divide the expenditure for the trial and at last they win the trial and their people are released. Everyone praises the women of Parayar community for the collective wisdom, readiness and smartness they show while managing everything by themselves in absence of their husbands. Bama's Dalit women display the collective sensibility of those who have been subjected to perpetual suffering and who have ultimately gathered the courage to reject the given social construct by revolting against the dictates of the merciless society. However, their rejection and revolt comes gradually to first stir the dormant consciousness of Dalit women. It is the awakening from within that gives these women strength to face the odds of life by themselves without any significant support of their male counterparts. In this regard Sharankumar Limbale's observation in his *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* sounds quite pertinent:

'Rejection' and 'revolt' in Dalit literature have been birthed from the womb of Dalits' pain. They are directed against an inhuman system that was imposed on them. Just as the anguish expressed in Dalit literature is in the nature of a collective social voice, similarly, the rejection and revolt are social and collective. (Limbale 31)

Limbale considers this explosive rejection and piercing revolt as compelling as the flood with its aggressive character and an insolent, rebellious attitude. Bama's narration of the exceptional sense of responsibility among Dalit women is in sharp contrast to Limbale's representation of Dalit women as perpetually enslaved, subjugated and mentally captured.

After working as a teacher in a convent school in Madras for three years, Bama gets the news that she is to be transferred to another school. Initially this information pleases her as she thinks that it will be a great opportunity for her to serve in a convent school situated in rural area. The Provincial tells her that she is selected as a Head Teacher in a village school near Madurai but this happiness remains for only a few days as she receives another correspondence from the Provincial overruling the previous order informing her about her transfer to another school in

Madras as a Maths teacher. She feels utterly disgusted on this decision and shares her feelings with another sister who advises her not to expect a better posting because the Church authorities do not like Tamil nuns and consider them inferior to other nuns. The sister remarks:

You have nearly ten years' experience, have not you? That is why they all wanted you to be the head teacher there. But it was this one (Sister Marian) who didn't want it. Do you know why? She doesn't like Tamizh nuns. If they had chosen someone from her community, she wouldn't have minded. (124)

This episode exposes the prevailing hypocrisy and double standards in Church and convent education. It shows that though the lesson of equality is preached all the time in the convent, all the claims of democratic and inclusive vision are belied when it comes the turn of working under a low caste person. Bama is quite conscious to bring to the fore discriminatory practices adopted in the Christianity—the religion which generally boasts of being the only religion to accommodate the differences. Bama fails to achieve the desired heights in the institutional hierarchy of convents because these institutions are largely dominated by upper class Christians who feel disgusted when it comes to work under a low caste person. Though Bama fulfils all the eligibility conditions for becoming a Head Teacher, she is not appointed at that post because she belongs to the lowest strata of the society. She receives one message after another either to join as a Maths teacher in another school in Madras or to perform as a teacher in a training school but her prospects of becoming a Head Teacher are always overlooked by the authorities.

On receiving different directions from the authorities, she remains in a state of utter confusion to prepare herself for new tasks. To her surprise, she gets one more telephone call asking her to join in a Convent in Jammu & Kashmir. Bama is made to experience indecisiveness and uncertainty on the part of the authorities for the reasons best known to them. She is bound to remain in flux regarding her right place in the scheme of things in Convent schools. At last she leaves for Jammu only to face indifference and apathy of other nuns working there towards her. These high caste nuns don't offer her any welcome there and don't accept the fact that a low caste person acquires equal position as of theirs. Even the Mother Superior's behaviour towards her is deplorable. Perpetual humiliation, indifference and discrimination ultimately make her decide to leave the convent forever in spite of all the apprehensions she has for the future. Bama thinks that the stigma of caste does not leave her in spite of the education she has got. So she decides to

resign from the post but the administration of the convent does not accept her resignation and she is further harassed and made to go through torturous procedure to get her resignation accepted. All her efforts for the approval of her resignation remain futile and therefore at last she decides to leave the convent without approval.

While returning from Jammu after leaving the job the idea of going back home terrifies her badly. She thinks that no one in her family will approve of her leaving the job and no one will ever be considerate of the circumstances compelling her to take the bold decision. She is sure that her father will certainly rebuke her because he has never been in favour of her joining the convent. She contemplates the possible reaction of her father: “How many times I told you not to enter the convent. Did you listen? Now you have not only lost a secure job. You have grown older as well.” (133)

Here Bama wants to highlight the mindset of the society in which she lives. Parents want marrying their girl children as earlier as possible so that they can get rid of their responsibilities. On the other hand male children like Bama’s brother get much time to make their career and are allowed to live life as they want to live while on the other hand girl children are hardly ever allowed to take decision by themselves. Bama again presents woman as doubly marginalised because she remains confined to limited choices and is guided by the dictates of society all the time. Her sufferings start from the cradle and continue till grave. Her education, marriage, professional career and growth as an individual largely depend upon the mercy of the patriarchal setup. Moreover, women belonging to Dalit community are marginalised not only in the outer world on the name of caste and gender but also marginalised in their own community and within home.

Bama comes to the realisation that her dream to become a nun in the convent during her early education completely misled her because the convent which she used to consider as the ideal platform to serve her community and humanity at large disappoints her badly. The ideal image of convent which she carried in her mind shattered into pieces because instead of serving the cause of creating democratic and educated society, Bama found that convents are more oriented towards creating chasm in society by way of adopting undemocratic practices. Bama is exploited, alienated and victimised by the convent authorities and therefore decides to sever her ties with a hypocritical system belying the ordinary people all the time.

She undergoes adverse circumstances and suffers perpetually only because of her caste. The harrowing experiences of her life get reflected in *Karukku* in a way that Bama's sensibility gets portrayed as the collective sensibility of all Tamil Dalit women of her time. It is in this context that she admits that "My book talks about the condition of Dalit women and Dalit culture. The need for unity among Dalit sub groups, the need to get political power, the need to get self-confidence, to own up to their identity and be proud of their own culture" (Bama). She criticises the existing social order for the prevailing discrimination against Dalits. She is of the opinion that Dalits are in no way inferior to the upper caste Hindus or mainstream Christians and if there exists any difference among the human beings, it is manipulated by those who are in power in society. She asserts:

They possess money; we do not. If we were wealthy too, wouldn't we learn more, and make 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 study of Bama's *Karukku* convinces the researcher that conversion or no-conversion, Dalit women remain perpetual sufferers in a society stratified on the basis of flimsy principles. For Dalit women, the vision of inclusive development, justice and inclusive democracy still remains a dream. If there is any change that change has occurred in the perception of Dalit women who have somehow started to garner the courage to assert their identity. *Karukku* seems to take the story of *The Outcaste* forward as the humiliation and harassment which Dalit women suffer in *The Outcaste* is less severe in *Karukku*. It suggests that the Dalit consciousness has started yielding positive results and Dalit women have opened a war against the prevailing caste-based society.

Works Cited

- Ambedkar, B.R. "Annihilation of Caste," *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*. Ed. Valerian Rodrigues. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. 270-71. Print.
- . "Prospects of Democracy in India." *BAWS*. Ed. Hari Narke. Vol. 17 (Part III). Mumbai: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra. Print.
- Bama. Interview. *Recognition for the Language of My People is The Biggest Award I Can Win*. 26 April, 2001. Web. 22 May 2012. <<http://www.ambedkar.org/entertainment/RecognitionFor.htm>. Accessed 20 April 2005>.
- . Interview by Suchitra Bahal. *Labouring for the Cause of Dalits*. The Hindu 6 March 2003. Print.
- Beverley, John. "The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio (Testimonial Narrative)". *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992. 91-114. Print.
- Dutt, Nirupama. *Spirit of enterprise: Caste in her own image*. The Tribune 17 August 2003. Web. 13 July 2012.
- Limbale, Sharan Kumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*. Trans. Alok Mukherjee. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2010. Print.
- Nayar, Pramod K. "Bama's *Karukku*: Dalit Autobiography as Testimonio," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2006. 83-100. Web. 17 July 2012. <<http://jcl.sagepub.com>>.

IV

CONCLUSION

The two Dalit autobiographies studied in the present research present a convincing argument against the caste-based Indian society. However, the situation becomes worse when the Dalits or untouchables are subjected to discrimination even after their conversion as is portrayed in Bama's *Karukku*. The research consolidates the Dalit experiences within and outside the rigid dictates of Hindu religion. The present research has perhaps added to the understanding of predicaments of Dalits in India, with special focus on Dalit women. To highlight the issue of marginalization of Dalit women, the researcher has referred to various resources across the discipline. It is through the multidisciplinary perspective of research adopted by the researcher that the research could incorporate in itself different dimensions of discrimination against Dalit women—social, political, cultural, economic, legal and even religious.

It seems to interrogate the logic given by Dr. Ambedkar in favour of conversion when he exhorts the Dalits to opt for conversion from a caste-based Hindu religion which fails to guarantee equality, democracy, secularity and dignity of the individuals. For him, there is nothing as inhuman as is to consider someone as untouchable. Utterly disappointed with Hindu way of life, Dr. Ambedkar questioned the essential postulates of Hinduism in terms of the space it provides to the untouchables:

Does Hinduism recognize their worth as human beings? Does it stand for their equality? Does it extend to them the benefit of liberty? Does it at least help to forge the bond of fraternity between them and the Hindus? Does it teach the Hindus that the untouchables are their kindred? Does it say to the Hindus it is a sin to treat the untouchables as being neither man nor beast? Does it tell the Hindus to be righteous to the untouchables? (Ambedkar 228)

The realization among the Dalits regarding caste-based discrimination in Hindu religion might have led them to conversion into Buddhism or Christianity but the account of the sufferings of converted Dalits as portrayed in Bama's *Karukku* is quite dismal and therefore the entire understanding among the Dalits regarding Hinduism being the most undemocratic religion gets challenged. Perhaps, the change of religion could hardly serve any purpose in establishing a casteless society because the converted Dalits remain discriminated even after embracing the religion that boasts of being the most democratic religion of the world—Christianity. The present research attempts to address the issue of discrimination against Dalit women in particular and Dalits in general but it is more focused towards establishing the fact that Hindu or Christian, every religion is essentially based upon stratification. If Hinduism relies upon Varna system, Christianity dwells upon the idea of native Christians and converted Christians. This way or that way, religion becomes a potent tool of discrimination and those who are born in Dalit families remain destined to suffer in one pretext or the other.

The research is very close to establish the fact that Dalits are marginalized but women belonging to Dalit community are doubly marginalized on the name of caste and for being a woman. The discrimination against Dalit women started quite early from their birth. From cradle to grave, they are made to remain peripheral as the centre is occupied by the dominant upper caste Hindus in case of Hindu religion and by the native Christians in case of Christianity. The research is based upon the most general truth defining Dalit lives i.e. most of the people belonging to Dalit community are daily wage workers. They work hard from morning till evening only to get very little. They are considered as 'Untouchable' by the upper caste people. No doubt, the discrimination against Dalits is not a recent phenomenon as it has its roots in the *Manusmriti*—the religious book of Hindus, but what concerns the researcher the most is the prevalence of untouchability even in the post-Independence India. Dalits are considered as *varnabahyasins* in caste hierarchy in Indian society. In ancient times the caste was defined on the nature of work done by the people but with the passage of time the caste is recognized on the basis of birth. It is from this particular point that the diverse condition of suffering of Dalit people started. At present the discrimination against Dalits on the name of caste is the most undemocratic stigma prevailing in a country claiming to be the largest and vibrant democracy in the world. It is a wild kind of injustice to discriminate on the name of caste because taking birth in a family (low or high) is not in one's hand. What kind of justice it is that if a person takes birth in a high caste, he/she is

provided all kind of freedom and rights but if he/she takes birth in a low caste family, he/she is deprived of all rights and is subjected to all kinds of humiliation, suffering and exploitation in every sphere of life.

Most of the people belonging to Dalit community are suffering from poverty; and therefore if a boy takes birth in their family he gets warm welcome because male child is considered as a bread-earner for the family. On the other hand female child is considered as a burden for the family. The discrimination against Dalit women starts from this particular point. In the two autobiographies discussed above we see that women earn as much as men but in spite of that women are not given equal status in her own family. Women are always considered as inferior to men. If a Dalit man and a Dalit woman do the same work they get different wages. A man is always paid more than a woman. A woman belonging to Dalit community suffers from double burden because she has to work outside the home as a labourer and after returning from work she is supposed to do all household chores. After returning from work male members take rest but women are not allowed to take a single breath in peace. From the moment she wakes up she has to work like a machine without taking rest till she goes to bed at midnight after doing all household works. After doing hard work throughout the whole day, Dalit woman is not even sure to have sufficient food to eat. Some times after feeding the whole family nothing is left and in such situation she sleeps with empty stomach.

The saddest part of Dalit narratives is that a girl belonging to Dalit community is rarely allowed to go to school. When parents go to work outside, the girls are asked to stay at home and to look after her younger siblings and to do all household chores. Due to poverty and lack of education, Dalit girls are married at an early age which causes a number of problems in their future. The denial of education to Dalit female children is considered the most important factor coming in the way of the advancement of Dalit families in future. If education is defined as the tool to enlighten the individual, society, nation and the globe at large, then obviously denial of education to Dalit girls as is portrayed in *The Outcaste* seems to be the part of a design not to let the Dalit families come out of the perpetual darkness.

The autobiographies under study present the exploitation of Dalit women at different levels. Dalit women face a number of problems on work sites. No moment of their life is free from humiliation. They are physically, mentally and sociologically exploited by the upper caste

Hindus. Women belonging to Dalit community are taken as a means to fulfil lust of upper caste male. The concept of untouchability is interpreted to suit the wish and desire of the upper caste people. On the one hand even Dalit woman's touch pollutes them while on the other hand the upper caste Hindus don't mind exploiting Dalit women sexually to gratify their lust. Ironically, the upper caste people do not accept water from the hands of Dalit women but can have sexual relationship with them. As a result of these relationships, children are born without the name of the father. Such children are brought up by Dalit women after doing hard labour but such kind of children are treated as half-caste. The upper caste biological father does not acknowledge them as his offspring and the community of the mother does not consider them as the children of their community. The upper caste people bother only about their lust; they do not think that they are spoiling someone's life and family. They use Dalit female as long as they wish and then desert her to suffer throughout her whole life. The research highlights the dual standards adopted by the upper caste Hindus in society. They live in the houses constructed by Dalits; drink water from the wells dug by the Dalits; wear the clothes washed by Dalits; eat the grains of the crops sown by the Dalits; and depend on Dalits for every necessity of life, but their deep-rooted malice against these underprivileged citizens is an ordinary phenomenon.

The people belonging to Dalit community are backward in every sphere of life and are denied the privilege to participate in the mainstream of the society. They are landless, uneducated, poor and dependent on other community people for their bread. All the menial works are done by these people to keep the country and its people neat and clean but they are still treated as untouchables. The stigma of untouchability does not leave them. After independence, many plans were made for the upliftment of these 'wretched of the earth' but even today the condition seems to be deplorable as Dalits are still employed as manual scavengers and are subjected to discrimination in different walks of life. *The Outcaste*, as the title of the autobiography suggests, presents a bleak picture of Dalits in India where the Dalit children are not allowed to sit with other high caste children in schools. They are asked to sit at the backseats in the class. In many ways they are tortured and humiliated. Perhaps the most important factor behind discrimination against Dalit children in schools is the perception that education is exclusive right of the upper caste children. *The Outcaste* also highlights the fact that if a Dalit after doing hard labour and after struggling with many unfavourable situations becomes able to get equal position in office, he/she is still treated as inferior to others and not given the work of more importance. The stigma of

untouchability does not leave them— no matter where they go and what religion they adopt. No doubt, the people of Dalit community are now getting education and have made their life pleasurable but the stigma of untouchability is still on their heads. The concept of *sanskritisation* has undoubtedly started yielding results in politics, corporate world and education but the beneficiaries are still very small in number. At the moment when India is taking pride on its demographic dividend, the government has come to realize that it is essential to educate its citizens irrespective of caste or gender to capitalize on the benefits of its demography. Right to Education Act 2009 may certainly prove to be a major milestone towards achieving the vision of inclusive democracy.

Influenced by the teachings of Christianity and exhortations of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, some of the Dalits converted to Christianity to get rid of all this humiliation which they received on the name of caste. But their conversion could not bring desired results. No doubt they enjoyed some freedom and their condition was little bit improved in comparison to an ordinary Dalit but to their dismay, untouchability was prevalent even among Christians. Bama's autobiography *Karukku* is rooted in that context where Tamil converted Dalits are subjected to discrimination in schools, churches and other walks of life. They are not allowed to enter the churches which are made exclusively for ordinary Christians. The Churches for Dalit Christians are made separately and in Christian religion also there are two separate categories of upper and lower Christians. The converted Dalit Christians are placed in the category of lower Christians. All the high posts of the Church are kept secured for high caste Christians and Dalits are discriminated here also on the name of caste. The story of Bama as a nun in the convent schools run by the Christian missionaries narrates the deep-rooted stratification even among Christians. Her joining as a nun and ultimate harassment in the institutional structure makes one understand that the conversion is not the viable solution to the problem of considering Dalits as untouchables or lesser human beings. The condition of Dalit women is far worse. After doing work the whole day when they get no time for taking rest, they may develop the chances to become mentally ill and start behaving abnormally. The people of her community think that she is attacked by prey and so are beaten severely so that the prey leaves her. There is no doubt that in Dalit Christian community both male and female earn but women are kept away from all crucial decisions of the family and it is the man who has the decision making power in the family.

The researcher has chosen this particular topic so that the condition of Dalit women in today's context can be highlighted. Though the context of both the autobiographies under study is quite different, they seem to agree on the issue of women as doubly marginalized. *The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)* mainly deals with the sufferings of a child who is born as a result of illicit relationships between a Dalit woman and a Patil. He suffers throughout his life for his being considered a half caste. His biological father does not recognize him as his son and the Mahar community (to which his mother belongs) does not allow him to call himself a Mahar because his blood is taken as impure. Unlike Rohit Shekhar who files a paternity suit claiming that "I am not the illegitimate son of N.D. Tiwari but he (Tiwari) is my illegitimate father," (The Telegraph) Limbale does not have the guts to expose his biological father. No doubt, boundless are the sufferings of the half-caste protagonist but the women characters in the novel are far more oppressed than even the illegitimate child. The sufferings of major Dalit women characters including Santamai, Masamai, Nagi and Nirmi are immeasurable as they are bound to accept the patriarchal social construct on the one hand and the caste-based discrimination as a natural social phenomenon on the other. These women are denied of their essential human identity, rights and a dignified individual space in the society. *Karukku* mainly deals with the sufferings of Dalits who have joined Christianity as their religion aspiring equality, fraternity and rightful claim of every individual on human rights. The common thread which keeps these two autobiographies connected is that in both the autobiographies Dalit are shown as marginalized and Dalit women are portrayed as Doubly marginalized— on the name of caste and for their being women.

The bitter truth of today is that no matter how much a Dalit is educated and how much high position one acquires, he/she is still considered as inferior from upper caste people. The people belonging to higher strata of society do not like to work under a Dalit officer. It is perhaps this mindset of the upper caste Hindus that doesn't favour the issue of reservation in promotion providing more opportunities to the Dalits to be promoted as officers commanding authority over the erstwhile dominant groups. The consensus emerged out of the all part meeting on the issue has further postponed the issue to be taken up by the parliament. Similarly, the bill on the provision of thirty three percent reservation for women in parliamentary elections is yet to be enacted. Moreover, one of the most glaring issues of manual scavenging remains unaddressed so far. Considering the seriousness of the issue, "On August 24, 2012, the court pulled up the government for its callousness in not enacting a law to ban manual scavenging despite repeated

assurances that it would come out with law to eliminate this heinous practice” (Venketasan). The caste and gender issues have become so complex today that it is generally unexpected in the patriarchal caste-ridden society to find some viable provisions for the upliftment of Dalits, women or Dalit women. It is in this context that Centre for Social Research apprehends the role of parliamentarians in supporting the issues addressing women issues. It observes that several bills have been introduced in the Lok Sabha this year, including the Women and Girl Child, (Prevention of Atrocities) Bill, The Women Farmers Entitlement Bill, The Incest Offences Bill, and The Pre-Conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Bill related to women rights issues and increasing the fundamental rights that women should have in India today. There are strong apprehensions regarding the reactions of the parliamentarians towards these bills. There are apprehensions that “These women specific bills may not garner the strong sense of support due to the lack of gender equality in our political system” (Khanna). The condition of Dalit women is worst no matter how many plans, providing equal rights and reservation policies are made for her. The women belonging to Dalit community are doubly marginalized firstly on the name of caste, and then on the name of gender. She suffers humiliation in every walk of life, be it home or work place. In spite of certain limitations, the research has put together certain nuances of Dalit discrimination in the light of the discourse emerging from the study of Sharankumar Limbale’s *The Outcaste* and Bama’s *Karukku*. The comparison between the two texts may seem misplaced for their being located in different socio-cultural settings, but the validity of research lies in finding some order in disorder.

Works Cited

Ambedkar, B.R. “Conversion.” *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*. Ed. Valerian Rodrigues. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. 219-240.

Khanna, Leela. “Women Related Bills Introduced to a Men-Dominated Parliament.” Gender Matters.Centre for Social Research. Web. 24 August 2012. <http://csrindia.org/blog/tag/violence-against-women/>.

Kidwai, Rasheed. “Paternity Suit on N.D. Tiwari.”*The Telegraph* 28 July 2012. Web. 26 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.telegraphindia.com>>.

Venkatesan, J. “Cabinet has cleared Bill on manual scavenging, court told.” *The Hindu* 27 August 2012. Web. 31 August 2012. <<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article3828629.ece>>.