

CHAPTER - II

Question of Livelihood in Bama's *Karukku*

Bama, like other Dalit writers, deals with the question of livelihood of Dalits. In her writings, she depicts the plight of Dalit men and women who have been subjugated for centuries. It is evident from her writings that Dalits are untouchables in society. Still in the 21st century they are trying to assert themselves in society. In this regard, many Dalit writers have raised their voice to bring forward the cause of Dalits. Bama's *Karukku*, an autobiography, depicts that Dalits are reduced to sub-human beings. Most remarkably, she observes conversion into Christianity which has no caste system, doesn't reduce the intensity of pain caused to Dalits. Her personal experience of hypocrisy of the upper caste society makes her autobiography more real and powerful.

Bama's *Karukku* is a path-breaking intervention in Tamil Dalit fiction. Bama, a Dalit woman, a former Christian nun and now a school teacher tells about her experiences, her struggle for livelihood and her marginalized position in the society influenced by her gender, class and religious location. She describes the oppression that operates in the lives of Dalits, and more specifically in the lives of Dalit women. For Bama and other Dalit writers, Writings from the margins and about the marginalized are an attempt to empower Dalit people.

'Karukku' means 'leaves of Palm tree'. With their serrated edges on both sides the leaves of palm trees are like double-edged swords. Tamil word 'karukku' containing the word 'Karu' embryo or seed also means freshness. Perhaps the second meaning is more suited to Bama's writing this book as a means of healing her wounds. Obviously she derived a sense of freshness by reflecting reality in the book *Karukku*. In the book, she

tells about the struggle for survival that has been faced by her. Referring to the first meaning of the word 'karukku', Bama's self-expression represents one-edge and the other edge inspired many Dalit people to raise their voice against their oppression. So, it became a symbol of two-edged sword. As Bama herself says in the Introduction of *Karukku*, "that book was written as a means of healing my inward wounds; I had no other motive" (*Karukku* IX). The use of the first-person narration is extremely well received by readers and critics alike. The narrator moves from the past to the present in reflecting the varying manifold sets of different events that occurred in Bama's life. It is a powerful portrayal of Dalit oppression. *Karukku* portrays the lives of Dalits and their suppression by people of upper castes.

Karukku presents a real account of Dalits in Tamil Nadu. They are illiterate people. Due to lack of education, they are not aware of their rights. They work as bonded labourers and are very poor. Bama describes her mother and grandmother who work for Naicker families. They are the worst victims in the Hindu caste system. They work for upper castes and provide every comfort for them, but they live in extreme poverty. They work on the fields of the upper caste, but they never receive any part of the harvest. They are forced to survive on gruel and water every day. They have neither property nor land or even a decent house to live in. Question of livelihood is always before them. Some have converted themselves into Christianity with the hope to get rid of caste-based discrimination but they could not get equality and just treatment by the Christians. Bama in this book makes an attempt to make Dalits aware of the fact their emancipation is possible only with their self-realization. She has devoted her life to improve the pathetic

condition of the Dalit community and has focused on the importance of education for the liberation of Dalits.

The central part of the book is the story of Bama's life as a converted Christian. She presents the hypocrisy underlying Christianity that is generally considered a way for one's liberation. It is an offer of freedom specifically to the Dalit. As a child, Bama spent her life into the festivities and rituals of her family and community, but as she comes out of this largely self-consolidating world and enters into the school and then consecutively into the convent, she finds only the caste prejudices in the cruel selfish world. For the Dalits converted into Christians the Church and its rituals played an important role.

Bama's story is that of her betrayal by the promise of freedom and dignity as an Indian. The more dominant account is the story of her betrayal in the convent and the church. *Karukku* is the tale of a child's spiritual journey as a catholic and realization of her position as a Dalit. Even in that spiritual life, religious festivals that became part of yearly cycle of crops and seasons formed her life. Later, she described the religious and social life which detained Dalits as untouchables. In her life Bama had bitter experiences and her feelings and expressions are well-placed in the "Preface" of the book:

The driving forces that shaped this book are many: events that occurred during many stages of my life, 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 all these taken together. (*Karukku* XXIII)

Caste and religion caused great sufferings in Bama's life. She has never heard of untouchability until her third standard in village school when she started internalising her community's pathetic state. In *Karukku* she narrates the incident of her encounter with an elder man who is holding a packet of snacks with a string without touching the packet. He gave it to a Naicker in the village. At that moment she was a small school going child and found this incident to be quite funny and delighting. 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. (*Karukku* 16)

With the actual realisation of the tragic position of her community in the society, Bama reacts critically to her childhood experiences of discrimination. The elder man was holding out the packet with its string without touching the snacks so that the snacks would not be polluted. Bama thinks that Dalits are behaved as if they are not human beings. They are treated like animals. With this realisation, Bama begins to look out for means to uplift herself and her community from this trampled position. Her elder brother shows her the right path that education is the only way to gain equality and to run their life smooth. Bama's elder brother says:

Because we are born into the Paraya jati, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities. So study with care, learn all you can. If you are always ahead in your lessons, people will come to you of

their own accord and attach themselves to you. Work hard and learn.
(*Karukku* 17-18)

Her brother's counsel made very deep impression on Bama. Ever since her brother motivated her, she studied hard and did her best and always stood first in the class. But in spite of her education, Bama finds that wherever she goes, there is a painful reminder of her caste in the form of untouchability. The governments offered the financial grants and special tuition classes to the Harijans but Bama thought it more of humiliation than consolation because it disclosed her caste identity. Once the identity is revealed, Bama opines, "Among the other students, a sudden rustling; a titter of contempt. I was filled with a sudden rage." (*Karukku* 22)

Bama completed her under graduation and B.Ed., and worked in a convent. She felt very depressed when she finds that the nuns working there exploit the Dalit children in one pretext or the other. When she was living in the hostel after completion of her eighth standard, Bama painfully remembered the nuns commenting on Dalit children. The warden sister of the hostel could not fathom the lower-caste children. She'd get hold of them and scold them for no rhyme or reason. If any girl seemed to be on the plump side, she'd even get angry. So, wherever she went, to a school or a convent, she was exploited by nuns and upper caste people.

Bama feels very happy teaching the Dalit children in the convent with some skill and success. Nuns used to suppress Dalit teachers and children. On seeing the suppression of Dalits at convent, Bama suddenly struck with the idea of becoming a nun and decides to sacrifice her life to help the poor and lower caste children. She wanted to help the down trodden, and entered the order. She worked in a Christian religious order

where the Tamil nuns especially the Tamil Paraya nuns are considered inferior and lowest of the low. They are not given any kind of respect and positions in the convent. Bama notices the casteism there. She realizes that one can tolerate discrimination outside from society but it is very hard to tolerate politics and casteism inside the convent. She has to pretend for the sake of her survival. She lives an artificial life. They behave with Dalit nuns in a different way. They don't consider them as human beings. The upper caste nuns converse with each other about Dalits in the abusive and obscene way. Eighty percent of the Roman Catholics in Tamil Nadu are Dalits yet they are not given any respect. Despite the series of humiliating instances, Bama continues to live in the convent because of her strong determination to help and uplift the poor and the Dalit children by remaining in the system. Those Dalits who are getting training with her to become nuns are excited to know about Bama's caste. She tells her caste honestly without any hesitation. The religious order has its own reservation for Harijan women becoming nuns but Bama feels perplexed when Sister says, "they would not accept Harijan women as prospective nuns and that there was even a separate order for them somewhere." (*Karukku 25*)

She is accepted in the religious order only after she gets confirmation from the convent. The convent is known to be a place for love, equality and services but its services are different towards upper castes and Dalits. They could not admit Dalit students in their convent school, due to the poor quality and say that the standard of their convent will fall. They considered all Dalits as degraded, immoral, uncultured and indiscipline and rowdy. Bama ponders over the question how can the Dalits progress?

How can they be civilized when no one wants to educate them? They are treated as if they are not human beings.

Bama recalls the words of her grandmother who works for *Naicker* families. When she works in the fields, even small children would order her, command her and call her by name. The tiny children do all these things just because they belong to the upper caste. Bama's grandmother, like all the other labourers, calls the little boys as Ayya, Master. When the Paraya or Dalit women feel thirst for water, the Naicker women pour out the water from a height of four or five feet in their cupped hands. Dalits can't touch their utensils and they have to drink water with their cupped hands so that they do not pollute them by touching the utensils. Bama wants to ask the reason behind bestial treatment meted to them despite the fact that Dalits are also human beings. Undoubtedly advised by the Constitution provides all the citizens equal rights. The autobiographical account of pain of being Dalits in Tamil context demonstrates that upper caste people don't cherish sincere respect for constitutional values.

Bama is reminded of the day she went with her grandmother to the Naicker house for work. After her grandmother had finished all her filthy chores, she placed her vessel by the side of the drain. The Naicker woman came out with her stale food and leftovers, leaned out from some distance and tipped the food into the vessel. Bama wants to protest this behaviour but her grandmother tells her that these people are the Maharajas and without them they can't survive. The acceptance of stale food by Bama's grandmother echoes back to Omparkash Valmiki's *Joothan* and Arjun Dangle's story 'The Poisoned Bread'. However there exist commonalities in the form of attitudinal differences between old and new generation of Dalits. If the old generation compromises 'self-esteem' in the

pretext of survival, the new generation is inclined to resist any sort of humiliation. Listening to this, Bama feels upset and thinks about the plight of Dalits in the name of caste and untouchability since generations. With the series of hostile experiences, Bama feels very alienated in this higher caste dominated society. She wants to break all the barriers and traditions in the name of which Dalits are oppressed; and *Karukku* revolutionizes the Dalits situation on a wider scale by reflecting over the hypocrisy behind the caste system as well as religious conversion. This protest of Bama is justified by Santosh Kumari:

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. Revolving around the main theme of caste oppression within the catholic church, it portrays the tension between self and community and presents Bama's life as a process of self reflection and recovery from social and institutional betrayal. (74)

In *Karukku*, Bama vehemently criticizes the practice of untouchability in the Roman Catholic churches in particular and the casteism in Indian society in general. The language she uses is itself a manifestation of her Dalit consciousness. Use of colloquial, Tamil Dalit language instead of standard/mainstream Tamil language shows her faith in the strength of Dalit culture and language. With the increasing pain and suffering that she has passed through, she emerges as the powerful voice to encourage Dalits to protest and to revenge. Sufferings or pain is a double-edged weapon for Dalits. The sharp leaves of Palmyra trees can harm the hands that touch them but it can also defend them. The

awareness to this very status of Dalits can also instigate them to raise their weapon against their oppression. *Karukku*, thus, symbolizes Dalit awareness and Dalit consciousness that instigate them to fight for their survival. Bama realizes this subverted consciousness which inspires other Dalits to articulate their pain. 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)

The close study of Bama suggests that pain is a pre-requisite for Dalits to write or fight back. The story of Bama’s pain and her search for survival doesn’t end here and she has bitter experiences even at the school, one day after school time Bama was playing at the school with her friends. At that moment, somebody has plucked the coconut. Everyone accuses Bama of plucking the coconut but she is not guilty of stealing the coconut. The headmaster abuses her and doesn’t allow her to enter the school. When she approaches the priest of the church he says, “After all you are from the Cheri. You might have done it. You must have done it.” (*Karukku* 19)

It is very shocking incident that the headmaster as well as the priest abuses her in the name of caste while Bama is least informed about the nuances of caste-system. In the very act of remembering the incident she has encoded the mode of resistance that prepared her to oppose the hegemonic structure of the caste system. As a child, she faced many hurdles in her early life, which caused her to think of the casteism, later she is relieved by the words of her brother who tells her the value of education and the dignity given to an educated man. Impressed by the words of her brother she does her best and stands first in the class but in spite of it, she attains no dignity. Teachers use Harijan

children as labourers to carry water to the teacher's house and for the plants. Teachers don't teach the Dalit children, rather they get them work in the schools.

The reading of the text suggests that the children of lower caste community go to school only to work as labourers; and therefore the idea of self-realization and self-esteem is a far cry for them. How can they progress when they are not considered equal to other castes and they are not treated as human beings? Whatever they do, wherever they go, the devil of casteism follows them. They have no source of income – men work in the fields of upper caste and the children collect the firewood in the forests. Bama also did it. Keeping in mind all these circumstances, there emerges unanimity of opinion that Dalits no way of progress and they are destined to remain marginalized. The class teacher would ask all the Harijan students to stand up during the assembly which hurts Bama. Despite all, she was pleased with her caste name when she was awarded as the best Harijan student for S.S.L.C. examinations. This occasion in her life gave more inspiration to Bama. In her village, life of a Paraya is full of hardships since early childhood. Everyone has to work for their by labouring either for the *Naickers* families or in their fields. In addition to this, they are assigned the job of digging wells, carrying loads of earth and stone, going to the hill top to gather firewood and working as labour on construction sites. Practically, each Paraya family is bonded labourer to the *Naicker* family.

Her grandmother is a real and regular servant. She has to wake up before the cockcrows, fetch water and complete all domestic chores. Like all other Dalit women, she has to face exploitation and inhuman treatment. In the market also, *Nadars* take advantage of their helplessness during their bartering session. Dalits are the ones who

work hard to make good. They are everywhere demeaned by Upper Caste. At the high school hostel, the warden sister makes humiliating remarks against Dalit children and the upper caste women refuse to sit by the Paraiya women in the bus. These instances constantly remind Bama of her caste at the school, at the church and at various other places and makes her conscious of her identity as a Dalit only. 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. Bama's anger and frustration finds genuine expression in *Karukku*. She laments that the upper caste people can't even tolerate their rise and growth achieved through hard work, education and constant struggle. They become outrageous and conspired against Dalit community. Bama's anger against the Swarna castes is obvious 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. (*Karukku* 27)

The overwhelming nature of caste is portrayed here. When Bama lives in the convent, she feels angry at the upper caste authorities, because all the inferior jobs are assigned to Dalits only. Dalits are treated in a shameful and degrading way. She feels pained to see even older Dalit men trembling like small children when they talk to the upper caste priests and nuns. Dalits are frightened by the power and wealth of the nuns. Bama feels uneasy among the unfair and cruel upper caste nuns. She realizes that religion is forcefully imposed on the Dalit communities. In her childhood, she worshipped God, and prayed in the church because she had faith in God and believed that all men are equal in the eyes of God but now she has realised that the upper caste communities oppress them in the name of religion and caste. Now Bama has lost her faith in God and religion; and she does not feel any fear of God. She wants to spread the principles of Ambedkarite thought. Her experiences in the convent further shatter her faith in God and religion. She observes that the nuns and the priests of the church pose themselves as God and maker of religion. Surprisingly caste division is noticed among the nuns on the basis of their richness or poverty or the language they speak.

Bama reflects over the difference between Jesus in *the Bible*, and Jesus who is known through daily prayers in the church. God shows the greatest sympathy and compassion for the oppressed, but neither the priests nor the nuns really insist that God would get angry with those who do injustices and falsehood with the oppressed people. So, Bama criticizes both *the Bible* and the Jesus. Bama experiences and realizes all these through her spiritual journey from childhood to an adult woman. 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”. (XVI)

After renunciation from the religious order, Bama feels a sense of fulfilment because she feels that she would no longer be discriminated by the upper caste nuns and priest in the convent or the church. Lakshmi Holmstorm, in her introduction to the book, says, “the narrator leaves one community (the religious order) and affirms her belonging to another (a Dalit community, particularly of women).” (*Karukku* XVIII)

In the church, Dalits are everywhere on the jobs but nowhere in the society. It is only the higher caste Christians who enjoy the comforts of the church. The Priests and nuns of the upper caste Christians hold all the high positions, show off their authority and throw their weight about. Neither the priests nor the nuns of Dalit origin can get respect, and the upper caste nuns make abusive remarks about them. Bama says that even if Dalits are as good as they are, or even better, they are generally forced to suffer degradation. As Stella writes, “She was disturbed and shocked to find that the convent and the church are completely deviated from the doctrines they preached.” (249)

In the convent, she learns more of God and the teaching of Jesus but the church seems to be hypocritical which makes her angry with the priests and the nuns. The very important feature of the book *Karukku* is that Bama shows her hope for the better future at the end of each chapter of the book. 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. (*Karukku* 109)

Bama says that priests in the church preach that Jesus is born in a poor family, live among the poor and die for the poor, but the nuns always concentrate on worldly things not on spiritual things. They always discuss about what to prepare, what to eat, what to celebrate and how to enjoy, what to build and what to break. When Bama sees these things in the convent, she thinks about the misery of her own people, who live on gruel all the time. Then she decides to leave the convent to liberate Dalits from the clutches of poverty and serfdom. She observes that in the name of principles of religion, they are asked to bow the head before the priest so that they never stand with self-pride. Stella justifies this and writes in *Shodh, Samikshaau Mulyankan*, “The vow of obedience and the virtue of humility become subtle tools of intimidation and she found herself caged in that special world of bondage.” (250)

Fed up with the caste based atrocities and discrimination she leaves the convent in 1992. Through her experiences as a Dalit, Bama realizes that through education Dalit community can be empowered to earn a dignified livelihood for themselves. The whole process of Bama’s emotional encounters and experiences is a trail of discovery, which makes her a self-made woman. The life, as depicted in *Karukku*, throws light on the most agonizing and unfortunate lives of the Dalits. The portrayal of her experiences is indicative of the unfortunate situation bequeathed in a greater degree of self-awareness and quest for achieving loftier and nobler things in the lives of Dalit women. Her journey is tedious; encounters are painful; and the experiences reveal agony. But the process of self-discovery, identity and empowerment is an ordeal.

Bama feels utterly depressed when she finds that the oppression of Dalit woman is more than that of Dalit man. Bama gives an important example of feminist point of view by narrating the instances of a game played by children in a Paraya village, In the game, the boys play as *Naickers* (upper caste landlords); the girls play as farm labourers; the boys would pretend to keep shop and the girls would buy grocery; the boys would pretend to be priests, the girls to be sisters; and above all the boys would act as drunken husbands returning home and the girls as wailing wives getting the blows. Thus, even in the child play, the girls of lower caste are in a subordinate position. In relation to the Dalit boys, the girls are located as victims who could be counted upon to legitimize the male authority.

Schooling for lower caste children is placed within the context of their survival tactics. It is very shameful thing that poverty deprives them of their right to education yet it is also poverty that drives them towards the church (the church bell), and school to get the free meal there. Dalit children who are lucky to go to school regularly are subjected to caste discrimination and numerous forms of harassment. Their poverty is mocked at everywhere. Apart from that, the lower caste students are the target for ridicule, condemnation and public humiliation due to their caste. Bama in *Karukku* shows her hope for a bright future for Dalits through education.

The narrator is a witness to a caste-riot between *Paraya* and *Chaaliyar* where the *Paraya* boys and men are brutally beaten by the Police because the *Chaaliyar* community has bribed them. They butchered a sheep for them, and arranged a feast. The police beat every man and arrest whoever they see. The police are on the *Chaaliyar* side. They unleash a reign of terror on Dalits. *Chaaliyars* frighten *Parayas*, harass young *Paraya*

girls on their way to school, and bribe the police by serving lavish hospitality. The police beat up Dalit men, frighten young girls, and molest Dalit women. This embarrassing experience is an eye-opener for the girl narrator who analyse, critique and judge the issues relating to Dalits existence and position in a casteist society. Bama shows her anger against the oppressor and writes:

Are Dalits not human being? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have such attributes as a sense of honour and self respect? Are they without any wisdom, beauty, dignity? What do we lack? They treat us in whatever way they choose, as if we are slaves who don't even possess human dignity.
(27)

The narrator has received good education and now she has recognised the importance of education in granting a possibility of social dignity to Dalits. It is a significant phase that helps her to take up the responsibilities of an activist working for the upliftment of Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular. Dalit men and women do the work in the fields but women are paid less than the men. It shows the general perception about woman as weak, frail and secondary. Responding to the question of Dalit women representation Capsi Paltati says:

Dalit women have been the silent, suffering minority in the works of both upper caste and Dalit male writer. Denied a voice, the Dalit women withers away at the margins of such literature. Dalit women are oppressed both by men from the upper caste and men from their own community. (184)

It is also of significance to realize how caste overrides gender in this book. Dalit women work at *Naicker's* fields or cowsheds. We note here that unmindful of human dignity

Naicker women ill-treat Dalit women, abuse them, call them by obscene terms and throw stale food and water at them. The *Naicker* women assert their caste superiority over Dalit women and are completely unaware of women's misery and indignity. Perhaps, *Naicker* women's insensitivity towards Dalit women is a response to the violence inflicted on them by their husbands in their family. With their rude and violent behaviour they practice the power which is denied to them in their domestic space. This, it would be right to say that gender overrides caste in this context.

Bama describes that all the people belonging to lower castes are ill-treated and discriminated against, but Christian Dalits face more specific forms of discrimination. Dalits who have converted themselves to Christianity or are born in Christian families face caste discrimination within church and its various official institutions. Theoretically, Christianity doesn't prescribe any caste-system or untouchability but in Indian context Dalit Christians have occupied a place equivalent to untouchables or '*shudras*' in traditional *varna* system. It shows that structure of caste permeates every layer of our society. No place of social experience is untouched by caste politics. When the narrator in *Karukku* enters the church as a nun, she is filled with horror to discover that this sacred profession too is not immune to caste-hatred. She is shocked to observe that even teachers, who disseminate knowledge and moral ethics, practice untouchability. They force Dalit students to sweep and clean the classrooms. Observing all these things, Bama uses her pen in *Karukku* like, "a sharp edged weapon to cut the weeds of untouchability and patriarchy which have thickly grown over the centuries in this ancient land. (184)

The unpleasant experience and the suppression have to compulsorily undergo a traumatic change. Bama's act of commission or omission is not individual but that of the

society. Bama suffered the pain of caste-discrimination, untouchability, poverty and destitution but the book *Karukku* has given her courage and has helped her to love life once more. It has been written as a means of strength to the multitudes whose liberty, equality and dignity have been lost and destroyed. Thus, *Karukku* examines the wounded dark territory of Dalit consciousness which accepts their downtrodden state and tries to subvert that subjugated consciousness into a strong, self-sufficient and respected existence. It subverts the Swarna caste authority that accepts the lower caste people as untouchables, polluted, contemptible and inferior. *Karukku* instils self-respect among Dalits and has enabled many oppressed people to raise their voice against injustice.

It is the need of the hour that the suppressed or the downtrodden must stand against their depressed existence. Indeed, *Karukku* spreads the defiant message that encourages Dalits, despite of all the oppression, to stand firm and revolt against all the indignities and the destructive factors that hinder the creation of an equal and just society. *Karukku* describes how the female narrator comes to know the various dimensions of her Dalit community that is always obsessed with the question of livelihood. Bama breaks the shackles of poverty by educating herself and by becoming a teacher. Now she wants to make Dalit people aware for a bright future. The critical analysis of *Karukku* suggests that this is an autobiography of painful memories, disillusionment, despair and the pathetic conditions of the life and culture of people.

Bama gets education and empowers herself as a novelist. After reading *Karukku*, it can be said that there is a close link between education, writing and empowerment that Bama uses as tools that could liberate Dalits from degradation and oppression. *Karukku* is a mode of revolution that tries to free Dalits from the clutches of casteist oppression. The

narrator herself suffers the pain of caste-discrimination, untouchability, poverty and destitution but *Karukku* has given her courage to articulate her past to gain strength for future. Bama is considered the first Tamil Dalit woman writer and whose writings are replete with the series of instances that manifest the wretchedness of Dalits who are always posed with the question of survival and livelihood.

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