

# Narrative Weaving: An Analysis of Linguistic Method in Bama's Works

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*Abstract— This paper explores the complex linguistic method in Bama's literary work, highlighting how her narrative style weaves together themes of identity, resilience, and social justice. Bama, a prominent Tamil writer, uses a distinctive linguistic approach that serves to mainstream her cultural heritage and marginalized voices within her community. By analyzing her use of dialect, metaphors, and rhythmic structures, this study demonstrates how Bama creates a unique narrative narrative that departs from conventional storytelling. The research focuses on key linguistic elements such as code-switching between Tamil and English, which serve to bridge the cultural divide and enhance the authenticity of her characters' voices. Additionally, Bama's strategic use of imagery and symbolism enriches her stories, allowing readers to engage deeply with the socio-political context of her stories. An in-depth study of selected texts reveals that Bama's language not only expresses individual and collective experiences but also challenges systemic injustice. Ultimately, this paper argues that Bama's linguistic ideas are not mere stylistic choices but reflect a desire to advocate for social change and preserve cultural memory. By combining personal narratives with broader social critiques, Bama's works resonate with readers, serving as both a mirror and a window into the complexities of contemporary life in India.*

*Indexed Terms- Bama, linguistic Patterns, Narrative style, Identity, Social justice, Tamil literature.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Bama Faustina Soosairaj, better known as Bama, is a prominent Indian Tamil writer and a leading voice in Dalit literature. Born in 1958 in Tamil Nadu to a Paraiyar family of the Dalit community, Bama has described her experiences of caste and gender discrimination in her work. Bama's writing is characterised by its raw and candid portrayal of the realities suffered by Dalit women in India. She challenges the social hierarchical structure by exposing the injustice of the powerful caste system.

Her stories are often autobiographical, based on her own life experiences. Bama's most famous novel is *Karukku* ("darkness" in Tamil), published in 1992. It is a poignant portrayal of a young Dalit Christian woman's journey of self-discovery, resistance against caste and gender oppression. *Karukku* is an important work in Dalit literature, winning the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1993. The novel sparked critical dialogue about the experiences of Dalit women and paved the way for a new generation of writers. Bama published two novels, *Sangathi* (1994) and *Vanmam* (2002), after *Karukku*, as well as several collections of short stories. Her literature has been translated into several languages. Bama is a Tamil Dalit feminist best known for her autobiography. It is also an unusual autobiography in many ways. Personal crises in the author's life lead her to understand her life as a Christian and a Dalit. In other words, *Karukku* can be seen as a critique of society and the state, highlighting its educational system, the church, bureaucracy, and the complexities of caste in independent India. Furthermore, the novel's narrative is not arranged in a simple, linear or chronological order. Holmström claims that Bama's writing style overturns the style and aesthetics of upper caste Tamils. Bama breaks the mainstream with her own style and writing technique. She does not surrender to the conventional way of writing. She takes the reader to a different world of experience. Bama's autobiography is not just her story but a documentary history of the women of her community. When Bama was in school, she learnt the truth about how conversion failed to save people of her community from caste discrimination. She made people of her community aware about untouchability, but they did not understand the real meaning of the word. In school, they were told to keep away from 'upper caste' Christians when they came. Her writings as

germinating seeds are also connected to Karukku in a certain sense where Karu means seed.

#### Historical Context :

Indian writer Bama, famous for her poignant works including “Karukku”, provides an important literary contribution by delving deeply into the historical context of Dalits in South India. “Karukku” is a semi-autobiographical narrative that highlights the socio-political landscape of the mid-20th century, particularly in Tamil Nadu. “There is a Perumal Sami temple on top of another peak. A temple where the Naicker community worships. This mountain is known as Perumara. And the Naicker farms around it are called Perumara farms. There are many more rocks around it like Nari Para, Vannan Para, Vattala Vittam Para. It seems that in the old days Nari Para was full of forests, full of foxes. People say that the foxes living there used to attack the surrounding farms and ruin them completely. But apparently that has happened very little in recent times.”<sup>1</sup> Set against the backdrop of post-independence India, “Karukku” highlights the struggles of the marginalised Dalit community. Bama, herself a Dalit Christian nun, reflects on the intertwining of caste and religion, highlighting the complexities faced by Dalit converts to Christianity. The title “Karukku”, meaning “palm tree”, reflects the harsh reality of the Dalit experience, resilience in the face of adversity deeply rooted in a ruthless social structure. Bama’s story unfolds during a period of social change marked by the Dravidian movement and the emergence of Dalit voices. Caste-based discrimination, prevalent in society, becomes a focal point even within religious institutions. The courage to break the silence about the caste discrimination perpetrated within the church challenges social norms. “The cemetery where Christians buried their dead was right next to the school of the Chaliyar community. However, we Dalits used to bury our dead there. The upper caste Christians had their own cemetery outside a separate bus stand. There were fights between the two castes because the Chaliyars claimed that our cemetery was actually theirs. These Chaliyars planned that if necessary, they could fight with us and take over the cemetery, then it could become part of their school playground or garden. So there were frequent scuffles and clashes between our two communities. “Karukku” is a historical document, which provides insights into the lives of people pushed to the margins of society.

Bama’s narrative exposes the hierarchical structures inherent in both social and religious spheres, contributing to a larger discourse on social justice and equality. In short, “Karukku” is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of systemic oppression, leaving an indelible mark on the literary landscape and the ongoing struggle for social justice.

#### Meaning of the “culture :

The term "culture" has a very long and comparatively complex history, signifying different things at different times. It is derived from the Latin word "cultura" meaning "to care for"; an agricultural term that has been used to denote development and sophistication in human attitudes - the cultivation of values. Culture is complex and multi-layered, comprising a combination of practices, beliefs and facts that factually determine a people's life, language, ideas, aesthetic tastes, skills and usages, which can be classified as narrative, psychological, structural and genetic. To put it briefly, culture is the entire set of intra and inter social transactions understood as the value system of a particular society. Culture is racial in the sense that every human race has its own customs and beliefs. Man is a social animal, he comes in contact with other people, during the course of life's transactions with others he adopts many new things besides his original things which form the stock of his culture as a result of which culture is dynamic. The customs adopted by a particular group of people may be rejected by the people of the same group over a period of time, because mankind started its life from the lowest and has travelled from barbarism to civilization.

Geertz said: The concept of culture I advocate is essentially symbolic. Believing with Max Weber that man is a being suspended in webs of significance which he himself has woven, I take culture to be within those webs, and hence its analysis is not an experimental science but a search for meanings. The term ‘Dalit’ in Hindi and Marathi means ‘oppressed’/exploited. It was first used by Ambedkar to describe a life condition characterised by exploitation, suppression and marginalisation of the lower castes by the upper caste Brahmanical order. The term found easy acceptance across all untouchable communities in India, replacing older terms such as ‘Harijan’. ‘Dalit’ means oppressed from above, not

some defect in man due to pollution. It implies the need to rebel against oppression. In addition, the term provides a collective political identity to the various lower castes and sub-castes spread across regional and linguistic diversities within India.

The main problems in the working of Bama are as follows :

#### Caste Oppression:

Bama's stories contain a sharp critique of caste oppression in Indian society. Through her works such as "Karukku" and "Sangati", Bama vividly portrays the lived experiences of Dalit individuals who are oppressed by caste discrimination and violence. She exposes the insidious ways in which caste discrimination pervades every aspect of social life, from education and employment to religion and interpersonal relationships. Bama's stories offer a raw and frank portrayal of the harsh realities experienced by Dalits, challenging readers to confront the inconvenient truths of caste-based discrimination and exploitation. Moreover, Bama's exploration of caste oppression extends beyond mere depiction; it involves a deep interrogation of power dynamics, privilege and resistance. Bama's stories thus attack the entrenched caste system while also celebrating the indomitable spirit of resistance of Dalits.

#### Language and Empowerment:

In Bama's stories, language and empowerment are intricately intertwined, reflecting the complex dynamics of power, identity, and resistance among marginalized communities, especially Dalit women. Through her novels, Bama explores how language functions both as a tool of oppression and a tool of empowerment, and highlights how individuals transcend linguistic hierarchies to assert their identities and challenge dominant narratives. Language and empowerment are depicted in Bama's works as follows:

#### Marginalization within Linguistic Hierarchies:

Bama's stories often depict how Dalit women are marginalized within dominant linguistic frameworks, where their voices are suppressed. Characters grapple with the erasure of their linguistic identity within caste-based hierarchies, facing discrimination and ridicule for their local language. Novels such as "Karukku" and "Sangati" vividly portray the ways in

which language is used to reinforce social inequalities, perpetuating a system where Dalit voices are systematically silenced and delegitimized.

#### Education as a Path to Empowerment:

Despite linguistic marginalization, education emerges as a transformative force in empowering Dalit women to challenge linguistic hierarchies and claim their rights. Through formal education, the characters acquire language proficiency, literacy, and critical thinking skills, enabling them to combat them. Bama's own journey from a marginalized Dalit girl to a renowned writer and teacher exemplifies the empowering potential of education in transcending linguistic barriers and promoting self-determination.

#### Cultural Revival and Linguistic Pride:

Bama's stories celebrate the revival of Dalit culture and linguistic pride as essential components of empowerment and resistance. Characters reclaim and revitalize their linguistic heritage, challenge the hegemony of dominant languages and assert the value of their own linguistic traditions. Through cultural revival movements, Dalit communities reclaim their linguistic identities, building collective bonds of solidarity and resilience against linguistic discrimination and erasure.

#### Resistance through local expression:

Despite linguistic marginalization, the characters in Bama assert their agency and resistance through local expression and storytelling. Local languages, rooted in the everyday experiences of marginalized communities, become sites of resistance and empowerment for Dalit women. Bama celebrates the richness and resilience of Dalit dialects and oral traditions, highlighting their potential to subvert dominant narratives and challenge entrenched power structures. Through storytelling, poetry, and song, the characters reclaim agency over their linguistic identities, claiming their right to be heard and recognized within their own terms.

Challenges of Language Acquisition: Bama's novels often depict the challenges faced by marginalized individuals, particularly Dalit women, in acquiring proficiency in dominant languages. Limited access to quality education, discriminatory language policies, and social stigma contribute to linguistic barriers that

hinder empowerment. Characters may struggle to assert themselves in spaces dominated by upper-caste dialects or English, facing ridicule or exclusion due to their linguistic backgrounds. Bama sensitively portrays the complexities of language acquisition and the perseverance required to overcome linguistic obstacles on the path to empowerment.

#### Linguistic Hegemony and Cultural Erasure:

Bama critiques linguistic hegemony and its role in cultural erasure and marginalization within Dalit communities. Dominant languages often serve as a means of cultural assimilation, imposing standardized norms and erasing the linguistic diversity and richness of marginalized cultures. Bama's characters confront the erasure of their linguistic heritage and resist attempts to homogenize their identity within dominant linguistic frameworks. Through acts of linguistic resistance and cultural revitalization, the characters reclaim agency over their language and culture, challenge hegemonic narratives and assert the value of linguistic diversity.

Transcending linguistic boundaries through literature: Bama's own literary efforts exemplify how language can be used as a tool of empowerment and resistance. Through her novels and essays, Bama amplifies the voices and experiences of marginalized communities, challenges dominant narratives and promotes solidarity across linguistic boundaries. Bama's use of local language and storytelling traditions serves as a powerful medium to communicate the struggles and aspirations of Dalit women, transcend linguistic barriers and advocate for social change. Through her literary activism, Bama empowers readers to confront linguistic injustice and envision a more inclusive and egalitarian society.

#### Hope and Solidarity:

Despite the oppression and marginalization that pervades her stories, Bama infuses her works with a sense of hope, resilience, and solidarity. Through moments of collective action, mutual support, and community resistance, her characters find strength and courage in the face of adversity. Whether it is the solidarity shown during protests against caste atrocities or the bonds forged through shared experiences of oppression, Bama emphasizes the transformative power of collective struggle. Through

acts of resistance, resilience, and solidarity, her characters confront systemic injustice and imagine alternative futures based on justice, equality, and dignity.

#### Social Implications:

Bama's "Karukku" presents a poignant exploration of social implications, particularly in the context of Dalit identity in India. The autobiography highlights the nuances of caste-based discrimination, its far-reaching consequences on individuals and communities. One of the major social implications depicted in "Karukku" is the dehumanizing effect of the caste system. Bama highlights the discrimination faced by the upper castes, showing how they are pushed to the margins of society, denied basic human rights. The book serves as a powerful testament to the urgent need for social reform to eradicate oppressive caste structures.

Furthermore, "Karukku" discusses in depth the interconnections of social identities, emphasizing the multiple layers of discrimination faced by Dalit women. Bama articulates the challenges of being both Dalit and female, highlighting the double burden of oppression borne by individuals in this interconnection. The narrative invites readers to consider the importance of addressing gender-based discrimination within the broader fight against caste-based injustice.

The book also underlines the importance of education as a means of social change. Bama's personal journey from being a marginalised Dalit community to becoming an educated voice challenging social norms exemplifies the potential of education in breaking the shackles of discrimination. "Karukku" advocates inclusive educational opportunities as a means of empowering marginalised communities and promoting social equality. In conclusion, Bama's "Karukku" resonates with deep social implications, highlighting the complexities of caste-based discrimination and advocating for a just and inclusive society. It urges readers to confront and dismantle oppressive social structures, while highlighting the transformative power of education in promoting social change.

#### Narrative Voice and Authenticity

Bama's narrative voice in *Karukku* is highly personal, allowing readers to connect intimately with her experiences. By sharing her own story, Bama creates a relatable and empathetic space where readers can understand the emotional depth of her journey. The use of a personal narrative voice transforms broader issues of caste discrimination and gender inequality into tangible, lived experiences. The authenticity of Bama's narrative voice humanises those who have been marginalised. By sharing her vulnerabilities, Bama challenges the dehumanisation often perpetuated by caste-based hierarchies. Bama's voice is a form of resistance against stereotypes. It breaks the narrow bonds imposed on them by society. Bama's voice empowers her readers.

This act of self-expression becomes a means of resistance against the silencing effects of caste-based oppression, inspiring readers to assert their own voices and truths. The authenticity of Bama's narrative voice allows her to connect her personal history to the collective history of her community. Through her personal experiences, she reflects broader patterns of discrimination, resilience, and transformation within the Dalit community. This connection between the individual and the collective reflects the shared struggles and aspirations that bind marginalized individuals together. Bama's narrative voice enhances readers' engagement by inviting them to become active participants in her story. As readers become immersed in Bama's story, they gain a deeper understanding of the human cost of caste-based discrimination. Bama's unique storytelling style bridges the gap between personal and social narratives, allowing readers to see the world through her eyes. Her voice not only highlights her own story but also serves as a medium to amplify the voice of the Dalit community and advocate for social change.

The main suggestion of the linguistic patterns in Bama's works:

#### Linguistic Style and Choice of Dialect:

Bama's use of Tamil and its dialects plays a significant role in shaping his narrative. His choice of a regional language instead of standard literary Tamil helps represent the authentic voices of the Dalit community. A deeper analysis can explore how the regional language plays a role in socio-political commentary in his works.

#### Written and Oral Tradition:

Bama's works are rich with oral traditions, reflecting the storytelling techniques of historically marginalized Dalit communities. Her use of oral narration brings a sense of immediacy and personal connection to her stories. Focusing on the interplay between oral and written traditions in her work can provide insight into how Bama bridges the gap between traditional narrative forms and modern literary practices.

#### Reversing hierarchical language norms:

The language used in Bama's works challenges the hierarchical nature of caste-based language and social structures. She uses the language to confront the rigid caste system and highlight the injustice faced by Dalits, whereas in traditional literary works it has been used by upper caste writers. Analyzing this contradiction can help understand how Bama's linguistic choices challenge caste-based norms.

#### Gender and Language:

Apart from caste, Bama's language also reflects a critique of gender discrimination. Her protagonists often reflect both the oppressive caste system and the patriarchy of their society. A study of the language she uses to portray the struggle of women in a Dalit context reveals that linguistic choices also reflect gender-based oppression.

#### Empowerment through language:

Bama's linguistic method empowers her characters, giving them a voice in a society that seeks to silence them. Her use of language as a means of resistance challenges traditional power dynamics and amplifies the voices of the oppressed. How her use of language serves as an act of empowerment for her characters can be explored in relation to postcolonial theory and the concept of "language as power."

#### Literary tradition and innovation:

Bama draws inspiration from the Tamil literary tradition, with his works innovating by breaking away from elitist norms and adopting a more inclusive and accessible style. This may provide insight into his role in redefining modern Tamil literature.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Bama's works demonstrate a distinctive use of language that serves as a powerful tool to express the socio-political realities of Dalit life in India. Through a blend of oral traditions, regional dialects, and vivid narrative techniques, Bama's linguistic methods weave a narrative that is both intimate and socially transformative. Her narrative weaving uses a language that is accessible yet profound, reflecting the lived experiences of marginalized communities while challenging dominant cultural norms. Bama's choice of language not only reflects her identity and cultural heritage but also subverts traditional methods of storytelling. This method fosters a sense of inclusivity, allowing oppressed voices to find expression in the literary sphere. In addition, the narrative structure in Bama's works often reflects the non-linear nature of memory, trauma, and resistance. The ease with which she weaves together individual and collective experiences highlights the cyclical and interconnected struggles of caste, class and gender, ultimately exposing the deep-rooted inequalities in Indian society.

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