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A Study of Dalit Feminism and Black Feminism in the Works of Bama Faustina and Maya Angelou

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ABSTRACT

Dalit literature signifies an important period in history of India's awakening of a vast number of oppressed people. It is their liberation, as well as their protest, disagreement, and revolt. Dalit literature is a genre that offers voice to those who have experienced humiliation, exploitation, marginalisation, and revolt in India's underprivileged communities. Dalit literature echoes the Dalits anguished voices. This literature portrays the injustices, indignities, and bias imposed by the upper castes, effectively depicting not just the pain and suffering experienced by Dalits but also giving voice to their anguish. The term Dalit is used to designate individuals or communities who have experienced marginalization and oppression throughout India's extensive historical past. It is not a term that denotes caste. Dalits were formerly known outside India as Untouchables. It exclusively refers to persons and communities who have been historically and structurally oppressed and marginalised from society. As old as humanity itself, persecution or exploitation of the weaker is nothing new. It is crucial to first recognize the general word "Dalit" in order to comprehend the suffering of Dalit women and the necessity of acknowledging their voice.

Keywords: bias, communities, liberation, marginalised, psychological, socioeconomic

INTRODUCTION

Literature is the artistic convergence of various external socioeconomic conditions and internal psychological disorder. Literature has the ability to serve both revolutionary and reactionary objectives. This is especially evident in the revolutionary writings of Rousseau, Trotsky, Tolstoy, and Thoreau. In our own country, we have had great revolutionary writers as well. Swami Vivekananda, Gandhi, Tilak, and the extremely influential revolutionary Ambedkar are among them. This study will attempt to summarize women writers from the subaltern population who utilize their pens as formidable weapons to effect change in Indian society. Dalit is not a caste; rather, it represents a socioeconomic classification encompassing marginalized individuals from diverse castes and social backgrounds who also speak various languages.

The term "Dalit" originates from Sanskrit and signifies "oppressed", "subjugated", "crushed" or "shattered". It was initially introduced in the 19th century by Jyotirao Phule to address the historical suppression faced by the formerly labeled "Untouchable" castes within the twice-born Hindu society. Subsequently, the word "Dalit" found usage as a Hindi and Marathi translation for the British government's formal designation of "depressed classes" which now corresponds to what we refer to as the Scheduled Castes today. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar introduced this term with the aim of providing the so-called "untouchable" castes with a fresh, dignified, and empowering identity, in contrast to Gandhi's proposed term "Harijan" (children of God), which was perceived as condescending. Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar is thought to have become aware of the consciousness and assertion of Black people in America while he was a student at Columbia University from 1913 to 1916. It provided him with the foundation for formulating a strategy to counter caste inequality in India (Kapoor 2004).

In India, Dr. B .R. Ambedkar is frequently compared to Gandhi, a difference that is reflected in their sculptural representation. He was contrasted to Gandhi, who wore a loincloth and regularly held a spinning wheel to represent his connection to India's underprivileged. Ambedkar's 'western' image represents a claim to the past by Dalits, as well as a rejection of Brahmanic and other types of cultural nationalism. *Gail Omvedt* writes about the comparison between two in his book "Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India" , as : "If Gandhi was Bapu ,the 'father' of society in which he tried to inject equality while maintaining the 'Hindi' framework Ambedkar was Baba to his people and the great

liberator from the framework" (Omvedt,xv). In continuation he says: "Gandhi fought for freedom from colonial rule, Ambedkar fought for a broader libration from exploitation and oppression" (Omvedt, xv).

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, prominent figures in Dalit history, played significant roles in the inception of "Dalit literature" during the inaugural Dalit conference in Bombay in 1958. However, the term 'Dalit' became popular as an identity marker in 1972, when a group of young Marathi writers-activists created the Dalit Panthers. The name reflected their emotions of connection and sympathy with the Black Panthers, who were fighting for African-American rights in the United States.

The movement revived by the Dalit activist and researcher Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's ideas and appropriated his concerns with the Gandhian model of Indian nationalism, which was based on caste. *Arjun Dangle*, a Dalit panther movement activist and writer, writes: "Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows and struggles of those in the lowest strata of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary" (Dangle).

Dalit writing has developed throughout India as part of a socio-literary movement motivated by Jyotirao Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar's ideas. B.R. Ambedkar is frequently regarded as the idol that paved the path and inspired Dalit writers to write and respond with their writings. He campaigned for human dignity and is hence known as the Human Rights Champion. He asserted that: "I shall be satisfied if I make the Hindus realize that they are the sick men of India and that their sickness is causing danger to the health and happiness of other Indians."(Ambedkar). Self-help, self-elevation, and self-respect were his messages to his people.

For the uplift of the untouchables, his idea of self-reliance and self-development was preached. Thus, Dalit literature is characterized as writings authored by Dalit community members or literature specifically crafted to portray the distinctive social, historical, and cultural facets of Dalit communities. Dalit literature, deals with oppressed people's anguish, reflects the difficulties, conscience, and identity of Dalits who have been trampled for centuries. This body of work actively advocates for concepts such as social equity, fairness, and the resilience against suffering, bias, and economic exploitation through a clear dedication to societal engagement.

Sharankumar Limbale has expressed: "Dalit literature is precisely that literature which artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits. This literatures but a lofty image of grief" (Limbale), *Poisoned Bread*, a compilation of Dalit writing edited by Arjun Dangle, says, "Dalit literature is not simply a literature but it is associated with a movement to bring about change. It represents the hopes and ambitions of a new society and a new people" (Dangle).

Dr C. B. Bharti claims, "The aim of Dalit literature is to protest against the established system which is based on injustice and to expose the evil and hypocrisy of the higher castes. There is an urgent need to create a separate aesthetics for Dalit literature, an aesthetics based on the real experiences of live" (Bharti, *The Aesthetics of Dalit literature*).

The serpent metaphor reflects the harsh caste system, and the poison represents the community enmity it spreads. The central objective of Dalit literature is to dismantle the caste system and reconstruct Indian society with a foundation rooted in equality and justice. Dalits have historically been deprived of their humanity and treated as a subhuman group.

B.V. Bhosale (2014) in his book ―*Sociology of Dalit literature* (2014) traces that the term "Dalit Literature" first appeared in Dalit literary conference in 1958, organized by Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha. It was the resolution No.5, adopted at the conference which mentioned that writing of Dalits and other non-Dalits concerning the Dalits is called Dalit literature.

Dalit writing in India, particularly Dalit literature in Maharashtra, arose in the 1960s and 1970s, according to Bhosale (2014). The origins of Dalit literature can be traced in the writings of Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, and others, who were among the founders of the Dalit Panthers movement in Maharashtra during 1970s. There were two types of writers who wrote on and about Dalits: Dalit writers and non-Dalit, higher caste, writers who wrote on the subject of caste. Later, Dalit authors appeared on the horizons and took up the cause, writing passionately about caste, discrimination, humiliation, exploitation, oppression, and how Dalits have endured the worst of inhumanity. Bhosale (2014) further adds that Dalit literature is the reflection of individual, community, enlightenment and consciousness of self and reality around.

Savarna critics, like Kavi Anil and Vidyadhar Pundalik, argue that anyone with the ability to empathize with the pain experienced by Dalits and express it artistically can create Dalit literature. Critics like Nirmal Kumar Phadkule and Narhar Kurundkar go even further, asserting that even someone from the Savarna caste can produce Dalit literature,

suggesting that the author's personal experience as an untouchable is not a prerequisite for creating this genre. However, Limbale opposes the viewpoint of these Savarna critics. He contends that a middle-class perspective can never truly capture the essence of Dalit literature, which represents the voices and experiences of society's marginalized and persecuted groups.

Limbale argues that it is challenging for someone who is not a Dalit to compose Dalit Literature because Dalit consciousness is shaped by the lived experiences of Dalits, which encompass their profound sorrow, enduring suffering, and their sentiments of defiance and anger. These intricate experiences are not something that a non-Dalit can fully comprehend or accurately depict. Dalit Literature stands out due to its unique emphasis on promoting social advancement and offering an authentic representation of Dalit encounters with pain and hardship, as well as expressing the Dalit community's spirit of resistance. In contrast to a focus on aesthetics and enjoyment, Dalit Literature requires the establishment of distinct artistic criteria for its evaluation.

Dalit literature often faces criticism for evoking emotions of sadness, hardship, and resentment in its readers due to its focus on the experiences of lower-caste individuals. In contrast, non-revolutionary art typically aims to elicit feelings of joy and enjoyment. However, it's crucial to recognize that Dalit Literature differs from other literary forms in that its primary purpose is to evoke emotions of pain and suffering. This is because Dalit Literature serves as a social testament of resistance, with the primary goal of promoting the advancement of Dalits, and therefore, it prioritizes conveying the harsh realities of their experiences rather than emphasizing pleasure and beauty. Dalit literature is about raising a feeling of social consciousness within society, rather than being a piece of art focusing on pleasure producing sensations. Many revolutionary thinkers, including Rousseau, Marx, Phule, and Ambedkar, solidified their impact by dedicating their writings to promoting social awareness and consciousness. The fact is that, Dalit writing asks for emancipation and freedom, as well as peace and equality, makes it revolutionary literature. Limbale asserts that conventional ideals like Satyam, Shivam, and Sundaram hold no significance in the realm of Dalit aesthetics, as he views them as mere constructs designed to exploit the impoverished. According to him, this aesthetic trinity primarily serves the interests of the upper caste and does not contribute to social or material well-being. Instead, Limbale outlines the fundamental aesthetic principles that underpin Dalit literature, which include Equality, Liberty, Justice, and Fraternity.

The sorrow and misery endured by Dalits can only be described by Dalits themselves, it is true. Because those who have not been subjected to such prejudice, humiliation, or repression are unable to express their feelings properly. As a result, only the works written by Dalit writers revealed the truth of Dalit literature. Only Dalit women authors can assess how they communicate anguish, the depths of poverty they have experienced, and the injustice they have encountered among their own people. However, the reality of our society's double standard ideals emerged following the rise of Dalit women authors for their own cause.

One of the most notable advancements in 20th-century Indian literature is the emergence of literary contributions from Dalit women. Dalit women authors have used literature to combat the exclusions of mainstream feminist texts. Only a few Indian women authors have attempted to include Dalit feminist perspectives into their works. For a long time, Dalit women have been ignored. Dalit women authors have produced a significant amount of fiction, poetry, and critical works. In their literature, they have begun to express their subjectivity and individuality, which had been suppressed for generations. From vast story to minor narrative, from individual identification to collective identity, and from self-justification to self-affirmation, Dalit literature represents a shift from mainstream literature to literature that highlights marginalized voices. Though Dalit literature focuses on caste consciousness, new paradigms for thinking about gender and socioeconomic disparities are developing as a result of societal change.

There is a significant production of Dalit literature, owing mostly to the education and Dalit consciousness established by Dalit activities. Many Dalit writers, including Bama Faustina, Baby Kamble, Arjun Dangle, Laxman Gaikwad, Waman Libalkar, and Omprakash Valmiki, have penned personal narratives that depict the pain and hardships endured in Dalit existence, documenting the struggles of the Dalit community. The trauma of Dalits is represented so sensitively and plainly in a very straightforward way through struggle and Dalit writing that these writings become a tool of resistance.

Dalit literature emerges from centuries of suffering, subjugation, and exploitation experienced by a collective of individuals. It is not the product of one person's anguish, nor is it confined to the experiences of a single day. Instead, it embodies the agonizing collective expression of numerous individuals over millennia. The suffering depicted in Dalit literature is not the isolated distress of a single person but rather the shared pain of an entire marginalized community. A non-Dalit writer will never be able to adequately convey this sorrow and suffering. Non-Dalit authors would never be able to feel or convey the Dalit situation authentically. As a result, they have dismissed non-Dalit writers' portrayals of Dalits as unauthentic and unbelievable.

In the writings of Dalit men, they portray the wrongdoings of upper caste men, whereas in the writings of Dalit women,

they illuminate the dual oppression faced by both upper caste men and males within their own caste. Various feminist Dalit movements have spoken out against cruel patriarchy, sexual abuse, and gender inequities in order to empower Dalit women to live true lives. On the one hand, male Dalit authors rail against the upper caste's compassion while discriminating against, tormenting, and sexually abusing their own female relatives.

DALIT FEMINISM

Feminism has a significant role in highlighting the varied conditioning that women experience in society. One-half of the population is marginalized by several public structures that undermine women's inclusion and involvement in society. The feminist movement has experienced various significant transformations since its beginning, and the last three decades have expanded awareness of third world female battles. In the Indian setting, caste and gender are attacked from two angles by Dalit feminism. Because no kind of oppression ever happens in isolation, it is important to include both caste and gender when discussing the treatment of Dalit women. Indian civilization has a long history of oppressing women and members of low castes. The history of the Indian people is full of campaigns started by social reformers who opposed the abolishment of caste. However, at the same time as feminism emerged in the west, a number of revolutionaries in India began to struggle for the advancement of women.

Many Dalit magazines and news-letters publish pieces written by Dalit women writers and activists. The study investigates the plight of Dalit women by emphasizing topics of caste, class, and gender in sample novels by chosen Tamil Dalit women writers. These works are powerful expressions of Dalit protest against the caste and gender abuses that have afflicted Dalits for decades. These novels are examples of activist works about the experiences of Dalit women. Sivakami, Bama, and Meena Kandasamy are three of the most well-known contemporary Tamil Dalit women writers who have played a leading role in Dalit literary activism. Their fictional works articulate the intricate intersection of caste and gender, shedding light on the double oppression faced by Dalit women due to their gender and caste, inflicted by both upper caste individuals and Dalit men.

Early protest groups in the 20th century aimed to improve the social, economic, and political circumstances of Dalit women. These groups emphasized the connection between colonialism, industrialization, and the commodity of women's bodies as the primary cause of their oppression. One cannot avoid Babasaheb insightful views on contemporary societal concerns when reading BR Ambedkar. Ambedkar wrote extensively about women's concerns and the subjugation of women in his journals Mook Nayak and Bahiskrit Bharat. In order to ensure that women in India have financial stability through inheritance after marriage, he argued in favour of a Hindu Code Bill. Ambedkar recognized the need of giving women a place where they can reach their full potential. He fought for women's equality and respect in society. Women have been repressed by Brahmanical rites and moral requirements, especially Dalit women.

The fundamental tenet of Ambedkarite ideology is to provide women's education, economic stability, and political voice so they may speak their own issues. Dr. Ambedkar believed that education was a crucial weapon for women's emancipation. They were not permitted to attend school alongside members of the lower castes. His speeches make it clear that he cared deeply about women's empowerment. On July 20, 1942, he delivered a speech during the Second All-India Conference for Women from the Depressed Classes in Nagpur, where he stated, measure the progress of the community by the degree of progress which women have achieved. I shall tell you a few things which I think you should bear in mind. Learn to be clean; keep free from all vices. Give education to your children. Instill ambition in them. Inculcate on their minds that they are destined to be great. Remove from them all inferiority complexes.- Dr.B.R.Ambedkar

In this manner, Dr.Ambedkar emphasized the importance of education in advancing the status of women and the development of our nation. With unwavering belief in their liberation, Ambedkar offered this counsel: ‘Give education to your children’. When an independent Dalit group emerges in the early 1990s, a new branch of feminism called “Dalit Feminism” emerged. Feminist ideas, in their broadest sense, advocate for gender equality in all areas; they value ‘difference,’ since it is the diversity of women's experiences within a patriarchal society's systematic dominance that contributes to the feminist body of knowledge. Feminism is divided into several branches, including Black Feminism, Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism, and Post-structuralist Feminism. Similarly, Dalit Feminism is a subgenre of feminism that emerged in response to Third World feminist movements. It is challenging to pinpoint the exact beginnings of Dalit Feminism, but, in the early 1990s, Sharmila Rage notes that “Dalit Feminism articulation, especially on the issues of quotas within quotas, challenged the conceptions of “genderless caste” and “casteless gender”” (Rage 3). Dalit feminists say that women, especially Dalit women, are the worst victims of men's systemic dominance over women, and that they are twin victims of patriarchy and caste. Dalit feminism mostly reflects disadvantaged women's particular experiences within wider societal frameworks. Differing from conventional Indian feminism, which has often faced criticism for sidelining Dalit women, Dalit feminism is seen as a “discourse of dissatisfaction” and “a politics of difference”. Feminist ideas discuss gender equality in a broad sense. The term “Dalit Feminism” was coined when it was recognized that Dalit women suffer the most from the systemic oppression stemming from both gender-related issues and caste-related problems perpetuated by men.



The roots of Dalit feminism can be traced back to Jyotiba Phule's writings, where he discussed the oppression of women by the Brahmanical patriarchy. However, it wasn't until the 1990s that Dalit women began to assert the distinctiveness of their issues and perspectives compared to those of 'upper caste women'. While women from all castes face the burden of a patriarchal society, the nature of this structural violence is particularly severe for women from lower castes. They endure oppression not only from males within their own caste but also from men belonging to the upper caste. The formation of the National Federation of Dalit Women in New Delhi in 1995 marked the first independent expression of this movement. Dalit women themselves established the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) with the aim of enhancing their own livelihoods by pursuing legal action against crimes based on caste, as well as to encourage leadership and self-assurance. Anandi, a feminist NGO located in Gujarat, focuses on enhancing the political, social, and economic empowerment of women. In the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, the Dalit Mahila Samiti is a group dedicated to promoting a movement for Dalit women. Over time, several Dalit women's organizations have arisen, championing the recognition of the unique experiences of Dalit women and advocating for a definition of equality that encompasses not only gender but also the caste-based experiences of women. It highlights the underappreciated and neglected areas of life. When a Dalit is a woman, their condition is made even more terrible. Along with gender and economic inequality, she also has to deal with caste prejudice. A Dalit woman experiences simultaneous marginalization from three fronts: Caste Hindus, Caste Hindu women, and Dalit men. The Dalit movement began in the middle of the nineteenth century to improve the lot of these underprivileged groups, but patriarchal Dalit movements as well as mainstream feminist literature still fail to address the needs of Dalit women.

After the 1990s, feminist politics took a radical turn, signifying the emergence of an ideology distinct from that of 'upper-caste' feminists. Other acts of dehumanization of women were tied to orthodox rituals like Sati, such as widowhood, denial of clothes to women from underprivileged groups, and so on. Ambedkar identified an unnoticed influence within the women's movement, which rejected the inclusion of 'caste' as an integral component of the broader movement, as well as its absence in the literature emphasized by Dalit women's efforts that emphasized the gender-based division. Dalit women utilized literature as a weapon in the post-Ambedkar era to challenge the main stream feminist literature, including works in categories like autobiography, short stories, essays, and poetry. That is the works of female authors who are prominent in the setting to investigate the issues faced by oppressed women become quite significant. There are many of authors who incorporated Dalit literature into their writings mainstream exposure. Women contribute their own identities to these discourses as well as Dalits and women. The barriers to Dalit women's expression in contemporary democratic India demonstrate a history of silence and discrimination.

In both Indian and Indian English literature, Dalit women have been inaccurately portrayed. The majority of males from upper castes who write favour Dalit women. They are never shown as rebels seeking to end the injustices done to them, just as the objects of the upper caste men's lust. In the literary works of progressive authors such as Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand, as well as others, Dalit women are depicted as experiencing sexual harassment or assault at the hands of upper-caste individuals. These authors included such depictions with the intention of humanizing the victims. However, these portrayals often failed to acknowledge the possibility of Dalit women resisting and asserting themselves to protect their dignity, just like any other victim of societal injustice. Consequently, Dalit women were consistently portrayed as victims rather than as individuals capable of fighting back against their oppressors.

In the Indian context, a significant portion of feminists believed that caste should continue to occupy a central position in the comprehension of women's oppression. This struggle is quite challenging because women face exclusion and dual oppression, given the severe constraints on their access to education and literacy. As reported, dowry-related murders and threats within families are prevalent among the dominant upper castes, whereas Dalit women are more prone to encountering public threats, sexual and physical assaults, and frequent instances of rape. Dalit women have kept putting up with sexism and casteism. Even if we have made progress, Dalits continue to face violence and discrimination since they are already regarded as being untouchable. Being a Dalit woman comes with significantly more difficulties. They experience violence on a regular basis, including sexual harassment and physical assault. Class

exploitation, gender discrimination, and caste oppression are all intertwined. Caste persecutes lower caste women by manipulating gender to generate caste rank, power dynamics, and cultural distinctions. The Dalit women's voice cannot be included in the conversation on the three forms of discrimination that Dalit women experience: caste, class, and patriarchy. In an effort to emphasize the distinct perspectives of Dalit women within the realm of social justice, numerous Dalit women writers have made endeavors to reevaluate and reinterpret past movements like the Telangana Movement, the Ambedkarite Movement, and the Self-Respect Movement. Dalit women's experiences, which provide first-person tales of exploitation and prejudice, are used to highlight their voices. Examining the participation of Dalit women in various advocacy movements also brings to the forefront their voices. Consequently, three interconnected systems—caste, class, and patriarchy—generate a multifaceted, concurrent, and severe form of oppression that significantly impacts the lives of Dalit women. Dalit feminism cannot be fully understood or explored without first learning about these well-known figures that helped to popularize the notion of Dalit feminism throughout the world.

BAMA FAUSTINA

Bama Faustina Soosairaj, widely known as Bama, is a Dalit feminist, dedicated educator, and novelist born in 1958. Her father, Susairaj, served in the Indian Army, while her mother was Sebasthiamma. She is the sister of the renowned Dalit author Raj Gauthaman. Bama's grandfather had converted from Hinduism to Christianity. Her ancestors worked as Dalit farm laborers. Bama completed her primary and secondary education in her hometown. After graduating, she worked as a school teacher, primarily for disadvantaged girls, before spending seven years as a nun. During her teaching experience, she became aware of the oppression of Dalit students and teachers by Catholic nuns, which deepened her aversion to the convent. It was during this period that she began her writing journey. She wrote about her childhood experiences after being encouraged by a friend. These experiences inspired her forfirst novel, *Karukku*. Her work *Karukku* published in Tamil in 1992 and later translated into English by Lakshmi Holmstrom in 2000, *Karukku* earned recognition by receiving the Crossword Book Award for exceptional fiction in Indian languages and garnered attention not only from readers but also from writers both nationally and internationally. With the publishing of her autobiographical work *Karukku*, Bama, a Dalit Christian woman writer, has gained enormous acclaim. It was the first autobiography published in Tamil by a Dalit lady. It covers her experiences as a Dalit girl and a Dalit nun. This autobiography narrates the triple oppression faced by Dalit Christian women. Bama serves as the voice for all Dalit women, particularly those who converted to Christianity and still experienced suffering on three fronts: as women, as Dalits, and as impoverished individuals. Through her portrayal of the insults and hardships she endured, Bama provides an accurate reflection of both social and historical conditions in India. In *Karukku*, she vividly depicts incidents in which she personally encountered the exploitation and suppression of Dalit women. This made her realize that Dalit women are marginalized and subjected to various forms of oppression in nearly every aspect of life. Consequently, she emerged as a prominent Dalit novelist, becoming one of the most widely read authors in the Tamil language.

Bama's writings hold a distinctive place in their exploration of Dalit consciousness, shedding light on caste-based oppression within both Christianity and Hinduism. In an interview, Bama expressed that she writes because she views it as her duty and obligation to articulate the experiences of her community. Additionally, she finds writing to be a cathartic and empowering process. She believes that "Writing itself is a political act" and considers it a "weapon" she wields to confront and challenge the inhumane caste practices. Her autobiography *Karukku* has seen a rise in the literary world, and her works extensively represent the Tamilnadu's literary landscape. She also discusses the Dalits and the injustices they face in her works *Sangati* and *Vanmam*. The marginalisation of Dalits appears to be a theme in Bama's writings. Her works largely concentrated on the Paraiyar Dalit caste, one of Tamil Nadu's major "Untouchable" castes. Her books have complex, inventive, and fragmented narrative frameworks that explore the communal Dalit Cultural past. She is a prominent author who supports Dalit feminism. Through her memoirs, she is the first Dalit woman writer to focus on the subject of caste encountered by converted Dalit Christians in the nunnery. Sangati and Vanmam are her two novels, and Kisumbukkaaran, Oru Thathavum Oru Erumayum, and Kondattam are her three collections of short tales.

Karukku stands as the inaugural autobiography penned by a Dalit Christian woman. Bama undertook the writing of this book with a singular objective: to address the psychological trauma and tend to the wounds that had afflicted her since childhood. As she clearly writes in her book *Karukku*: "…I left behind my life of renunciation and came out into the world. After that, I wrote my book Karukku. That book was written as a means of healing my inward wounds; I had no other motive." (Faustina, *Karukku* ix)

Bama's novel *Sangati* received the Crossword Award in 2001 and was translated into English as "Events" by Lakshmi Holmstrom. The novel comprises 12 chapters, with Bama serving as the primary narrator. In *Sangati* Bama recounts the ordeals, injustices, and mistreatment endured by Dalit women, often under the pretext of caste, social class, and gender. *Sangati* is the outcome of the author's experience living in the most downtrodden and marginalized society. She tells the autobiography of her town through anecdotes, experiences, news, and events, among other things: "My mind is crowded with many anecdotes . . . about the sorrows and tears of Dalit women. I wanted to shout out these stories" (*Sangati* ix).

Intra-caste strife among Dalits is mentioned in *Vanmam*, and ideas for resolving it are debated. In many ways, *Vanmam* is considered as less emotionally charged or compelling as compared to *Karukku* or *Sangati*. It revisits certain themes and situations fromher previous works but doesn't necessarily add a new or distinct dimension to the ongoing discourse. *Vanmam* demonstrates how Dalits have internalized the existing social framework of caste segregation. If Naickers, Odaiyars, Chettiars, Naidus, and Nadars see Paraiyars and Pallars as outcasts, Pallars and Paraiyars may also treat each other as outcasts within their own social context. Bama recently contributed an essay to the anthology "Single by Choice: Happily Unmarried Women!" In her essay, she discusses her decision to lead the life of a single, professional Dalit woman in India. She describes how her choice has subjected her to criticism and skepticism; highlighting the challenges she has faced due to her decision to remain unmarried.

MAYAANGELOU

Maya Angelou was a well-known and admired personality in American literature; she was a writer, renowned poet, memoirist, novelist, educator, dramatist, producer, actress, dancer, historian, and civil rights activist. Maya Angelou was born in St. Louis, Missouri, as Marguerite Annie Johnson. Angelou was brought up by her grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas, as a consequence of traumatic marriage of her parents. Bailey, Angelou's elder brother, has given her the nickname "Maya". When Angelou was seven years old and had returned to her mother's care, her mother's boyfriend raped her. Later, after being released from prison, he was murdered. Angelou remained silent for six years, believing that the man's death was an outcome of her revelation of the tragedy. During her mutism and early adolescence, she traveled back to Arkansas with her grandmother. After moving back to Arkansas, she learned poetry and read Poe and Shakespeare. This sparked her passion for poetry.

Maya Angelou wrote seven autobiographies, three essay collections, numerous poetry books, and was credited with over 50 plays, movies, and television productions. Despite lacking a college education, she received dozens of awards and over 50 honorary degrees. Angelou is best known for her seven autobiographies, focusing on her childhood and adolescence. Her debut work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), gained international acclaim, chronicling her life up to age 17. Maya Angelou transitioned into a career in poetry and writing after engaging in various unconventional occupations during her youth. These included working as a fry cook, being involved in sex work, performing in nightclubs, participating in the cast of "Porgy and Bess," serving as a coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and working as a correspondent in Egypt and Ghana during the period of Africa's decolonization. Angelou's career was remarkably diverse, spanning poetry, playwriting, screenwriting for television and film, directing, acting, and public speaking. She was an exceptionally prolific poet, and her collection *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diiiie* (1971) even garnered a nomination for the Pulitzer Prize.

Maya Angelou achieved a historic milestone when she recited her poem *On the Pulse of Morning* at Bill Clinton's first presidential inauguration in 1993. This marked her as the first poet to do so at an inauguration since Robert Frost at John F. Kennedy's in 1961. She was an active member of two presidential committees and received several notable honors, including the Presidential Medal of Arts in 2000, the Lincoln Medal in 2008, and three Grammy Awards. In 1972, her screenplay "Georgia, Georgia" was produced into a film, making her the first African American woman to have her screenplay brought to the screen. Numerous national and international organizations recognized her remarkable contributions to the literary world. In1981, Wake Forest University appointed her to the Reynolds Professorship in American Studies. In the year 2000, President Clinton bestowed upon her the National Medal of Arts. Furthermore, in 2012, she received the distinction of being inducted into the Wake Forest University Writers Hall of Fame as a member of its inaugural class. The National Book Foundation also acknowledged her remarkable contributions by awarding her the Literarian Award in 2013 for her outstanding service to the American literary community. Maya Angelou sadly passed away in 2014, leaving behind a lasting legacy of creativity. Memorial services were held at Wake Forest University and Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco. In 2015, the U.S. Postal Service issued a postage stamp featuring her likeness as a tribute to her enduring impact and influence.

Maya Angelou is an ordinary woman with simple goals in life; she encountered many disappointments, struggled through difficult situations, and came to several dead ends in life; yet she transformed into an extraordinary woman. Her life story becomes significant for all men and women and black community because of its motivating and instructive values. Angelou seemed to be good at everything. At the age of sixteen, Maya Angelou was employed as the first African American fare collector on San Francisco's streetcars, marking the beginning of a series of groundbreaking achievements in her life. These milestones included becoming the first African American woman to have a screenplay produced and publishing her renowned work Caged Bird, it became evident that she succeeded at creating art from her remarkable life experiences. Maya Angelou courageously divulged intimate details of her personal life in her book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.* This publication propelled her into a prominent role as a voice for both the Black community and women, and her writings were regarded as a resolute affirmation of Black culture. Despite attempts to ban her books from certain U.S. libraries, her works enjoy extensive use in educational institutions worldwide. Many reviewers predominantly categorize Angelou's most renowned works as autobiographies rather than autobiographical fiction. She activelyaimed to confront and push the conventional boundaries of the autobiography genre by critically examining, modifying, and stretching its conventional structure. Her literary works explore a wide range of themes,

including racism, identity, family relationships, and her extensive experiences with travel.

Maya Angelou fearlessly revealed facets of her personal life in her memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. This made her a prominent advocate for both the Black community and women, and her writings were regarded as a robust championing of Black culture. Despite attempts to restrict her books in certain U.S. libraries, her works are extensively employed in educational institutions worldwide. Most reviewers predominantly categorize Angelou's most acclaimed works as autobiographies rather than works of autobiographical fiction.

Maya Angelou stands as one of the most impactful African-American women, and her autobiography contains insightful reflections on the condition of Black society in America, witha particular focus on its impact on Black women. African-American women, often regarded as a minority within a minority, have actively strived to reshape their societal standing and have achieved a more favorable position in contemporary society. Maya Angelou's novels are structured in such a way that they give a sequence of lessons on how to oppose racism and oppression. She articulated the varied forms of black resistance to racism. Despite acknowledging the individually empowering quality of these moments of resistance, Maya's comments show that such resistance contributes to keep the African-American community from drowning in the desperation and despair that surrounds them.

African American women readers were immediately won over by Angelou's writings because they identified themselves on the pages. Angelou offered the missing mirror, letting them to see them for the first time. Maya Angelou was a prolific poet, and several volumes of her work have been published. Many of her poems are about the African American community, particularly the African American woman. The common themes in the poetry of Maya is Love, the beauty of the black woman, the strength of women, political declarations, social justice, and the endurance of the human spirit.

BLACK FEMINISM

Black Feminism, sometimes referred to as Color Feminism, is a highly intricate concept characterized by a multitude of varying interpretations. One of the primary challenges lies in defining who can be identified as a Black Feminist. As indicated in Patricia Bell Scott's selected Bibliography on Black Feminism, the designation of Black Feminist can extend to any African American women, irrespective of the specific beliefs or concepts they endorse. This is because the lived experiences of black women serve as the underpinning for the development of black feminist consciousness.

African American and other non-Western researchers, as well as others concerned with women's economic and social oppression, have criticized mainstream feminism discourse in the West for ignoring the racial dimension of the gender question. Black feminist writers have focused on the difficulties experienced by women from marginalized groups, which are similarto those faced by other women but also distinct due to elements such as race, color, socioeconomic background, nationality, and country.

Black feminism directs its attention to the lived experiences of African American women, acknowledging the intricate interplay of racism, sexism, classism, and various other social identities. It places a significant emphasis on recognizing and bridging the gaps between racial injustice and gender disparity. It is a centuries old culture that challenges simple categorization and known for its unique multidisciplinary strategy for freedom. Truth's words and activities are early manifestations of the black feminist tradition. Black feminism encompasses intellectual, creative, philosophical, and activist dimensions, all rooted in the lived experiences of black women. Its scope is far-reaching, which makes offering a concise definition challenging. In fact, the diversity of view among black feminists makes thinking of black feminisms in the plural more accurate. Although different points of view, black feminisms share a few fundamental principles: The experiences of black women, encompassing racism, sexism, and classism, are intricately interconnected. Their advocacy and perspectives distinguish them from both black men and white women. Furthermore, there is no inherent conflict between combating racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. It is imperative to address all of these issues simultaneously.

Alice Walker coined the term “Womanist” in 1983 to represent “a Black feminist or feminist of color”. Her concept established a more social and humanitarian form of feminism that recognized queer black women while also connecting with centuries-old traditions of black women's behavior and thought process. Black women are frequently perceived to be at a disadvantage due to racism and sexism, yet some black feminists see their situation as one of opportunities. They say that in the struggle for liberation, those who have experienced various forms of tyranny know the best way to destroy them. In the late nineteenth century, black feminisms centered primarily on the experiences of heterosexual black women. However, radical black feminisms at the close of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century shifted their focus to center on queer and transgender black women, girls, and gender nonconforming individuals.

According to Alice Walker a leading proponent of black feminist criticism, “Womanist is to Feminist, as purple to lavender”, by bringing that up, she emphasizes the significance of women of color, their opinions and experiences, their right to self-determination, and their contribution to feminist movements that encompass not just women but also the

environment. She further defines Black feminism as, "A black feminist or feminist of color usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more or in greater depth than is considered "good" for one…." Black women intellectuals provide a distinct voice for black women's empowerment and resistance. She adds "Self-determination, appreciation for all elements of womanhood, and the dedication to the survival of both men and women; it remarks on a woman's extending of her personal limits while keeping their relationships with others in the community, i.e. what is valued in Womanism".

Women consistently bear the brunt of an unequal system, irrespective of the underlying societal divisions. This thesis aims to draw parallels and distinctions between the exploitation and oppression faced by Black Women in the United States and the experiences and social status of Dalit Women in India's caste-based society. There are many parallels between the racism experienced by African-Americans in the United States and the caste discrimination experienced by Dalits in India. When we investigate women's "positions" from several perspectives, drawing a comparison and distinctions between Dalit and Black women, the discrimination imposed by the Caste system remains unaffected by the gender of the oppressor. Similarly, resistance to racial reform is encountered from individuals who uphold the institution of racial segregation, regardless of their gender, be it men, women, or others. The concept of "double exploitation" impacts both Black and Dalit women, and it can be interpreted in two ways. One interpretation relates to the dual sexual exploitation they endure, perpetrated by both members of their own communities (Dalits and Black men) and individuals from upper castes (and white men). Their sexuality is influenced by both affluent and disadvantaged individuals. Second, this double exploitation might also relate to their distinct situation of gender discrimination. The higher caste and white ladies are pioneers of the injustice laid out to the women in dispute. Black and Dalit feminists believe that upper castes and white intellectuals have predominantly controlled the tales of Negro and Dalit women. In *Dalit Women Speak Differently*, Sharmila Rage contends that feminist movements build certain universal identities of women that must be challenged. On the other hand, these basic substance differences that enforce social behavior are critical in Hindu society but simply marginal in American society.

Due to the complexities of the Varna system, Dalit women had to fight with a little more men and women from different subgroups. These men and women were usually unkind and unhelpful, making life more difficult for Dalit and Low caste women. There is also more division within the Dalit minority group. Under the requirements of the Indian Constitution, more than forty categories of Dalit caste surnames have been scheduled, and each group claims to be of higher descent than the other.

Through six novels, this thesis investigates and analyzes the literatures of two disadvantaged groups: African Americans in the United States and Dalits in India. It shows how two very different societies—those in India and the United States—are influenced by comparable hegemonic forces. The racial superstructures in the United States and caste superstructures in India exert influence, distort, and add complexity to the identities of the oppressed, intersecting with factors such as gender, class, and family structure. While the writings produced by historically oppressed communities often reflect effective resistance against oppression, giving voice to those who have been silenced, it underscores the importance of recognizing the persistent act of silencing that continues to occur.

The area of study is a comparative analysis of Maya Angelou and Bama's writings, which deal with oppression, exploitation, subjugation, pain, humiliation, and tolerance on the part of the Dalit populations, regardless of the countries in which they live. Maya Angelou and Bama exemplify the underprivileged sections of every community, and their situations are unique. These two writers' adventures through the Dalit world are unique, and their contributions to Dalit writing are immeasurable. They have enhanced the marginalized groups' voices and given them more confidence. Characters in general and protagonists in particular, symbolize the objectives of the writers. They have successfully and effectively raised their voices in opposition to every social atrocity. By protesting and fighting for their social, religious, and political rights, the oppressed have been able to modify, refine, reconstruct, alter, and improve their lives.

Their vocabulary includes oppression, resistance, self-assertion, and identity. Dalits and Blacks in America feel, and it is a fact that they have been psychologically subdued and wounded, making them distant on the basis of caste, race, sex, and colonialism. The Dalit and the Black have been undermined by powerlessness and inability. They have spoken out against the deplorable status of their community. Considering many similarities, there are some differences between the two literatures. African Americans were slaves in a foreign land, whereas Dalits were slaves in their own country. The troubles of African Americans began in the early seventeenth century, while the subjugation of Dalits began at least a thousand years earlier. In comparison, the Dalits' critical sufferings lasted longer than that of African Americans.

In both communities, the concept of enslavement was used to rule, dominate, and oppress the weak. The two communities enslavement systems did not originate as the result of racism or casteism, instead due to slavery. Loss of identity and inferiority complexes are side effects of racism and casteism. Racism and casteism, for example, both divide individuals. Understanding the difficulties of the two communities requires knowledge of their histories. Social ills such as 'racism and casteism' or 'slavery and injustice' have led to similar horrible situations for African Americans and Dalits.

CONCLUSION

A comparison of Bama's and Angelou's works reveals differences and similarities not just in the writers approaches to life, but also in the sociopolitical, cultural, and religious atmosphere of their respective countries. Exploitation, oppression, gender discrimination, race and caste conflicts are all similar, but the techniques employed to fight, battle, and resist differ due to differences in their way of life and social conditioning. Both subalterns and Afro- Americans fight to survive, and it is difficult to live in such a racist/casteist and andocentric world. In such a sexual, textual power politics dominated by andocentric casteist world, a significant group of subaltern and Black literary women constantly reinvent their identity, place, and tradition. On the one hand, the globe celebrates International Women's Day to thank and honor women for carving out space in our patriarchalistic society, while on the other, crimes and subjugation against women are on the rise. In such cases, if one want to raise awareness of equality in female-male partnerships It is vital to view women's oppression in the context of stated class knowledge of such victimization and to work for their freedom.

Bama and Angelou upend literary traditions with their life experiences, recollections, and values that connect the past to the present. In these reminiscences, these writers challenge the world with their assertiveness, boldness, and combativeness, staking their rightful place in the literary and human worlds. Throughout my theorizing and textual analyses, I drew on insights from gender studies, feminist history, and feminist theory. The thesis has a comparative edge, as evidenced by the selection of autobiographers from various socio-cultural settings around the world. In the research process, a variety of methodologies such as feminist, socio-cultural, comparative, psychological, and historical were applied.

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