

**Comparative Study of African American Women and Dalit Women in  
Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Bama's *Karakku* through a  
Feminist Perspective**

Dissertation

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B.A (Honours) In English

by

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## Declaration

I declare that the work presented in the Dissertation entitled ‘Comparative Study of African American Women and Dalit Women in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Bama’s *Karakku* through Feminist Perspective’ being submitted to the Department of English, School of Languages, Doon University, Dehradun for the award of Bachelor in (English) is my original research work.

The Dissertation embodies the results of qualitative research carried out by me. I have neither plagiarized any part of the dissertation nor have submitted same work for the award of any other degree/diploma anywhere.



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## Certificate

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled 'Comparative Study of African American Women and Dalit Women in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Bama's *Karakku* through Feminist Perspective' submitted by Ms.Unzila Shams has been done under my supervision. It is also certified that the work in this Dissertation embodies original research and hard work of the candidate.

The assistance and support received during the course of investigation and all the sources of literature have been fully acknowledged.

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## Abstract

Dissertation aims to bring out the similarities and differences between the African American women and Dalit women in terms of marginalization. Black women face racial discrimination while Dalit women face communal discrimination in addition to gender discrimination. They face three-fold subjugation on the basis of caste, class and gender. Black women in America and Dalit women in India are the victims of triple or double oppression. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* depicts the women predicament at the hands of patriarchy through various women characters and Bama's *Karakku* gives the autobiographical incites to the readers as she shares her experiences of Dalit women facing discrimination on the basis of caste, class and gender. Both the novels are comparable under the lens of Intersectionality theory.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE – Harlem Renaissance

The literature produced in the United States by authors of African origin is known as African American literature. It begins with the works of 18th century writers as Phillis Wheatley. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s was a great period in literature and arts was flourished. Maria W. Stewart, Nancy Prince, Sojourner Truth emerged as a voice for women in the 19th century, they helped in spreading message about African-American women's agency and challenged the sexist and racist discourse that predominated in early American society.

Harlem Renaissance (1918-1937) was a time when African Americans displayed astounding Creativity in literature, music, dance, painting, and sculpture. The purpose of this movement was to bring richness of their culture and art forms, to redefine Negro and racial pride. It is originally Negro Movement. A new black identity that began in Harlem, New York, following World War I and ended around 1935 during the Great Depression. The organizations and authorities who served as mentors to aspiring writers were motivated by the protests and ideological support for African Americans' civil rights. Black women have made attempts to find their identities—both personal and collective—as well as to reclaim the status they once enjoyed in their native continent of Africa.

The writers like Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Zora Neal Hurston and Alice Walker have awakened the spirit among them through their writings. African American woman writer Alice Walker in particular has successfully and realistically depicted the plight of black women.



The Harlem Renaissance, most importantly, gave African Americans across the nation a renewed sense of self-determination and pride, a new social consciousness, and a renewed commitment to political activism—all of which would serve as the cornerstone for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, it supported the ideas of its founders and leaders, including Langston Hughes and Alain Locke, who believed that art could be a tool for enhancing the lives of African Americans.

About the Authors- Alice Walker and Bama Faustina

Alice Walker is well-known African-American writer born in Georgia, United States in 1944. Walker's debut poetry collection, *Once*, was published in 1968. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is her debut novel, which spans three generations and 60 years, was published two years later. She wrote short stories such as *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women*. *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems*, were published in 1973, the latter shows evidence of sexist assault and violence in the African American community. After relocating to New York, Walker finished writing *Meridian* (1976), a book that chronicles the maturation of several civil rights activists in the 1960s. Later, Walker settled in California, where she produced *The Color Purple*, her most well-known book (1982). An epistolary novel. It describes an African American woman's development and coming of age in a Georgian town between 1909 and 1947. Steven Spielberg turned the Pulitzer Prize-winning book into a movie in 1985. In 2004, the musical adaptation created by Oprah Winfrey and Quincy Jones debuted.

Walker is unique among the feminist writers. She does not only protest against the patriarchy as the white feminist writers do. Over more than four decades of her writing life. She was graduated in 1965 then she engaged herself in Civil Rights Movement, writing, traveling, speaking and film making in order to bring in the issues of black women and

spread awareness. She participated in demonstrations, a voter registration campaign, and a defiance of Mississippi rapist laws during the 1960s Civil rights movement while she was married to Laventhol.

Walker was highly inspired by Zora Neale Hurston. Walker points out that the American black women face more difficulties because they are oppressed not only by the white race but also by the male sex. Walker defines herself a womanist rather than feminist. And the term "Womanism" neatly captures her conceptions of creation, which are reflected in the themes and narrative devices of her works as well. Walker carefully considers how the environment surrounding black women has profoundly impacted both their physical and emotional well-being. Her main writing concern is the oppression of black women by white and black men, as well as their attempts to fight back in a society that is dominated by racism, sexism, and patriarchy. She addresses the extremely sensitive and taboo subjects of black women's power, experiences, and womanhood. She exhorts her ladies to speak up. African American women have been subjected to sexual repression by black men in their own community as well as racial discrimination on the part of white people. Both sexism and racism have preyed on them. Black women in America often go through this. Contrary to white men and white women, Afro-American women do have their own peculiar world and experiences.

Bama Faustina Soosairaj or Bama is considered as one of the most distinguished Dalit fiction writers in Tamil. She was born in Tamil Nadu, India. She did her schooling in village and then spent seven years as nun after graduation. All of her works do an outstanding job of addressing the theme of Dalit consciousness. It appears that Bama worked on the Dalit victimhood in his texts. She strongly condemns the caste-based practice of untouchability in

Indian society. All of her writings have effectively portrayed the agency of Dalits. She develops a strong ideological kinship with feminist theory as an activist writer. Dalits and women are both oppressed groups who suffer injustice because of their ethnicity. In her account of the Dalit experience, Bama emphasizes the similarities between the two groups and employs feminist representational techniques, rereading and historicizing the oppression of Dalits.

*Karakku* is considered first Dalit autobiography written by Dalit Christian women. Bama won Crossword award in 200. Bama's other works are *Sangati* (1994), *Vanmam* (2002) and three collections of short stories: *Kusumbukkaran* (1996) and *OruTattvumErumaiyum* (2003), *Kandattam* (2009). Additionally, she has written twenty short stories.

Gita Hariharan discussed with Bama in an interview, the challenges she faced after the publication of her groundbreaking autobiographical work *Karakku* and she renowned as Dalit feminist writer. She further discussed how Dalit women on three levels if caste, class and gender are marginalized. She stated that in order to fend off exploitation, they must build on the group power of "community living. In the light of the suicide of Rohith Vemula at Hyderabad Central University, she says, "Cut through the system instead of cutting ourselves." (Bama) with respect to caste discrimination in India. She personally feels that if teachers commit to forming the next generation, they can achieve great things. Unfortunately, the majority of them uphold the caste system, and through their words, attitudes, approaches, and inhuman behavior, they kill Dalit students rather than eradicating caste. Even Dalit teachers avoid getting involved and take on a neutral role out of concern for disclosing their identity. Our educational system does not enable us to develop into complete human beings who are simultaneously compassionate and logical, intelligent and good. Money and caste determine everything. It is a competitive educational system that only creates people who can make money, not people who are sensitive and compassionate. The system has no regard for

other people and is self-centered. The degree of rigidity and lack of empathy increases with education level. And this is what Bama's views on caste system and how it is fostered among people through educational institutions. In this interview with the Indian Cultural Forum, she discusses the ways in which there are disparities in the educational system.

#### Glimpse of the novels

Bama highlights the multi-layered oppression of Dalit women in *Karukku*. She focuses on the routine "work" Dalit women perform both at home and outside the home. She investigates how the state, families, churches, and upper caste communities legitimize and institutionalize violence against Dalit women. In her fiction, Dalit women are depicted as being exploited at work and at home, as well as being violently treated by upper caste landlords, the panchayat, the police, and Dalit men inside their own homes. She looks into the ways that violence against Dalit women is institutionalized and given legal cover by the government, families, churches, and upper caste communities. In her fiction, Dalit women are portrayed as being violently treated by upper caste landlords, the panchayat, the police, and Dalit men inside their own homes, in addition to being exploited at work and at home. Bama primarily depicts Dalit women as workers who begin their careers as young girls and continue to toil through adolescence, womanhood, middle age, and old age—almost to the end of their days. Their neighborhood and society at large disregard their efforts, and they are abused in every way possible. It is evident that the Dalit community has fought for equality and the realization of a dignified life. Her fiction thus captures the Dalit struggle for social, economic, and political empowerment through a thorough account of Dalit women's struggles, victories, and aspirations.

Bama has been cutting the weeds of patriarchy and untouchability that have emerged over the centuries with her pen like a *Karakku*—a sharp-edged weapon. Caste and gender discrimination are major themes in Bama's writing. They depict caste discrimination as it is practiced in Hinduism and Christianity. However, Dalit feminism and the inner power of the underprivileged woman are embodied in Bama's works. *Karakku* followed the conversion of a Dalit woman to Roman Catholicism and her eventual separation from a convent. It details Bama's struggles as a woman, as an individual and as a writer. A few incidents in *Karakku* show how Dalit women's conditions are. Because of her attire, the protagonist experienced social isolation when she first enrolled in college. She felt extremely humiliated by her classmates because she spent an entire week wearing the same skirt, jacket, and Dasani. She persisted despite the embarrassment and humiliation. She then made the decision to become a nun, entered a convent, and worked arduously there for other children who experienced similar hardships to her own. The nuns from the convent mirrored the influence and status of those families in their attitude and behavior. The convent is ignorant of what poverty is. She became angrier as she continued to observe this. Her thoughts were jumbled, and her conscience bothered and hurt her. She left the convent as a result of this conviction. Bama also portrays the oppression of women by their own men and by upper class men and women in her second work, *Sangati*.

Similarly, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* depicts the oppression of women. In Africa or America, colored women face racism and violence at the hands of men and women and at the hands of black men. *The Color Purple* tells the story of Celie, a poor, illiterate black woman from the South who fights to be free from the cruelty and degrading treatment she receives from men. The protagonist succeeds in escaping the patriarchal society, despite the difficulty of doing so. There are many barriers within the black community that prevent black women from realizing who they are. Rape, incest, and color are some of these

handicaps. The fact that there is no race issue makes the rape of Celie significant. Both Celie and her stepfather are of African descent. This incident proves that it can be dangerous for a woman to come from a black family. These facts serve as exemplars of life for black women. Even in the black community, Celie faces oppression because people's behavior is influenced by the degree of blackness.

## Literature Review

Many researches has been done with the intention of comparing women conditions in America and India. Before delving into my research let us look some of the researches carried out on the Comparative study of black women and Dalit women in the novels *The color Purple* and *Karakku* through feministic outlook.

An important research article by PhD scholars, J. Kavi Kalapana and K. Saranya, comparison between African American literature and Dalit literature was published in the year 2016, they compare the politics of race and caste in Black American writing and Dalit Indian literature using examples from Bama's *Karakku* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

Another article by Shailija Paik entitled 'Building Bridges: articulating Dalit and African American Solidarity' deal with the interconnections between Dalits and African Americans, it was published in 2014.

Another important article by Patricia Hill Collins published in 1996, entitled "WHAT'S IN A NAME? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond" gives us incites to the concept of "Womanism" introduced by Alice Walker. So, the idea of Womanism is being incorporated while doing the research under the lens of feminist perspective.

## Gap Area

Racial inequality in America has its parallel in Caste inequality in India. Even though caste and race is different. Many researches has already been done on the novels *The Color Purple* and *Karakku* separately. But I tried to draw parallel between both the novels and compared the women conditions with respect to social, historical, and cultural contexts by giving incites to the racial, class, and caste inequality that women face in America and India.

## Objective of the research and the research questions

To study the two works *The color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Karakku* by Bama separately under the lens of intersectionality theory and compare and analyse the conditions of black women in America and Dalit women in India through the characters in the novels.

The research deal with the questions about womanism and how the idea of womanism is implemented in the novel *The Color purple*. How women have to face triple or double oppression due to their caste, class, gender and race. They are always on the verge of victimization. In both the novels, women break the shackles of patriarchy and find their way to liberation. The research deal with the question, how Dalit feminism and Womanism is different from feminism and further describes the prejudices faced by dalit and black women.

## Research Methodology

The study uses a qualitative approach.

The study is comparative in nature.

The content is based on primary resource, the novels *The Color Purple* and *Karakku* and secondary sources, the intersectionality theory and various research papers, academic articles based on triple Oppression, African-American Literature, Dalit Literature.

Chapter One deals with the introduction of the whole dissertation, it gives the valuable information about the authors Alice Walker as African-American writer and Bama as Dalit feminist writer. This part also gives the glimpse of both the novels. *The Color Purple* and *Karakku*.

Chapter Two deals with the theoretical framework used in the comparative analysis of both the texts and mainly describe the theory and its application

Chapter Three deals with the movements associated with the respective writers of the books *The color Purple* and *Karakku*. Walker termed Feminism as Womanism with respect to black women and how Dalit movement changed into literary movement through the works of Dalit writers, one of them is Bama, who turned out to be revolutionary Dalit feminist writer who shared her experiences of triple marginalization through literary pieces.

In Chapter Four, a comparative study is carried out on the basis of various parameters such as it deals with oppression of caste, class and gender that a woman faces in both the novels, Idea of God, Narrative techniques and quest for identity.

Chapter Five, is conclusion of all the chapters and summing up of all the comparisons and similarities aforementioned in the other chapters.

The method used is of text analysis and interpretation.



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## Chapter-Two

### Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality is a conceptualization framework for how various forms of prejudice and discrimination affect one individual, a group of individuals, or a social issue. It considers how people's multiple identities and life experiences intersect in order to comprehend the complexity of prejudices they encounter.

“The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise.”(Oxford Dictionary)

The term ‘Intersectionality’ was first coined by social theorist and law professor, Kimberlee Crenshaw in her paper “De-marginalizing The Intersection of Race And Sex: A Black Feminist Critique Of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory And Antiracist Politics.” in 1989. The theory first came two decades before when the black feminists begin to criticize the whites and the mainstream feminist movement. The pressure to be a homemaker and other issues that were prevalent in the mainstream (white) feminism movement were often difficult for many black women to relate to. Black women did not relate to these issues related to these experiences because they had to at work in order to support their families and were unable to take benefits of being homemakers.

Women who participated in the Civil Rights Movement were faced sexism and were excluded from leadership. Black women were inspired to demand a feminist practice that prioritized their lived experiences as a result of their intersectional experience with racism in the feminist movement and sexism in the civil rights movement.

The Combahee River Collective, a group of black feminist lesbians, released the Combahee River Collective Statement in 1978 to define and advance black feminism. These women state in the introduction that “The conditions of our lives are produced by the combination of these oppressions. As Black women, we see Black feminism as the pragmatic political movement to combat the simultaneous multiple forms of oppression that all women of color face. They fought to be recognised as black women, not just as black people or as women, and to be a part of the feminist and civil rights movements.”

Crenshaw explained on the Collective’s theory, asserting that it is important to consider the intersection of blackness and womanhood in order to comprehend the marginalisation of black women. Although many of the early advocates of intersectionality were African American women, the theory has emerged as essential to comprehending a variety of differences, such as sexual orientation, age, class, disability, and more.

Gloria Jean Watkins or bell hooks, a famous social activist. She was born September 25, 1952 is best known for her feminist theory, which asserts that ignoring the intersection of social categories such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and class leads to oppression of women and alters what it means to be a woman in society. The most well-known book by bell hooks, ‘Isn’t I a woman? Black women and feminism’, discusses how racism and sexism intersect to affect black women and how this has led to black women having the lowest status in American society. In addition, Children's books, chapters in other people's books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and many other feminism-related books are among the many others that hook has written.

'Ain't I a woman' came out in 1981, it completely altered how people thought about black women, and it continues to have a significant impact today. Black women would be much more oppressed without her work. One intersectional feminist, bell hook, introduced race (and other marginalized identities) to feminism, making it more open-minded and applicable. Bell Hook had such a significant influence on modern feminism, and we will always be appreciative of what she did.

Applicability of intersectional theory in *The Color Purple* and *Karakku*

Shug Avery in *The Color Purple* is a perfect example of intersecting roles. The two most significant "functions" of Shug's character in Walker's book *The Color Purple* are Celie's intersecting (Crenshaw, 1991) roles of gender, race, and sexuality. To give her the knowledge and skills she needs to challenge and rebel against the oppressive social constructs that are imposed on her identity. Several characters in the book push against the boundaries of traditional and patriarchal gender roles. This is particularly reflected in the identities and traits of the female characters, such as Shug's sexual liberation and assertiveness and Sofia's strength, which is compared with masculinity.

In *Karakku*, the narrator faces intersecting oppression of caste, gender and class. She has always questioned the patriarchy for developing such societal norms for women, where women is seen as inferior to upper caste and then to the men of their caste. Bama belonged to 'Paraya' caste due to which she has to face discrimination in educational institutions, Church and in everyday life. A theory of intersectionality could be applied in a manner.

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## Chapter- Three

### Womanism and Dalit Feminism

#### Womanism

From the very beginning of feminism as a movement, there has been a gap between white and colored women. Although securing equality and the right to vote for women was feminism's initial focus, by the nineteenth century, it was clear that there were two separate women's movements because white women refused to back the cause of black women's rights. Black women, who were at the bottom in hierarchy, and white women in the United States, for instance, black women were mistreated by white people, especially those in the South, in order to boost their egos. Numerous slave women's testimonies, including those of Harriet Wilson and Jacobs, demonstrate how white women have refused to acknowledge the fundamental rights of black women. Sojourner Truth, an American Women's Rights Activist in her famous speech "Ain't I a Woman" demanded for the equal rights of women and raised voices against the policies of white women.

Frances Harper, an American suffragist, poet, emphasized the difficult decision that black women had to make during their 19th-century suffrage campaign because they had to look for the support of either the white women or the black men who also demanded the right to vote. Due to the rejection of black women's claim to the same civil and political rights, white women made the decision to aid black men in their struggle despite delaying the realization of their rights.

In New York Times Magazines in 1984, Walker said, she chooses 'Womanism' because it's better than feminism, she chooses it because she cherishes the spirit of women,

she further says, she chooses a new word because she has ethnics American habit of providing a new word to the society. Only a new word can help to be fully seen.

Walker emphasized that the black feminist and womanist movements have emerged from feminism and they have new demands and need viewpoints on the movement. They are also more accurate in both theory and practice. Finding new terminologies that could adequately represent black women's experiences would be necessary if feminism failed to fully capture their experiences. Alice Walker's "Womanism" steps in to make a significant contribution in this regard. This fundamental difficulty of embracing diversity among black women is reflected in current discussions about whether black women's viewpoint should be described as "Womanism" or "black feminism."

### Dalit Feminism

The Dalit community's female members are subjected to numerous forms of caste, class, and gender oppression. However, caste continues to be the main cause of their problems. The caste system is a bad practice that is against Indian law, but it still exists in Indian society because it is so deeply ingrained in peoples' minds and is supported by social mores and ideologies.

According to the holy texts, the Hindu social structure consists of a fourfold Varna-based system. The Brahmins (priests and teachers) are at highest rank, below them are the Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors) then come the Vaishyas (traders and merchants), and finally comes the Shudras (servants). Shudras did menial jobs for the other three Varnas. The inherent caste and class structures in the Varna system made it distinct. A person's occupation was directly linked with the caste identity.

Louis Dumont, a French anthropologist gives her statement upon the status of the people who are left outcastes, the untouchables. They are called “Avarnas” or “outcastes”. This could be considered as fifth category. Historically, they were called ‘Untouchables,’ and called the ‘Depressed classes. They are relegated to a marginal existence in the society because they engage in menial and impure work, which leads to the conclusion that they are polluted,’ ‘Harijan,’ and ‘Dalit’ which is their political and cultural identity.

Ambedkar led a revolutionary movement that opposed the caste Hindus' established standards and ideology in the 1930s. The movement questioned the legitimacy of the caste system that classified Hindus in India according to their social standing. Dalits used literary forms as well as social and political platforms to express their opposition to the dominant ideology. Literature evolved into a powerful medium for expressing their outrage and protest at the Hindu caste system's dominance. The Dalit literature not only highlights the risk of being sidelined based on caste structure. The Dalit movement thus becomes a war cry for the much needed change in our existence itself. It is a revolutionary movement that aims for a discourse to dismantle caste based hierarchy stabilized by the dominant class. Thus, Dalit literature acts as a liberating genre which strives to rewrite the fundamental rules of the land. (Geetha 2011)

Chakravarti says, there are multiple graded patriarchies structured within the Hindu society similar to the graded inequalities. Brahmins is at the top of this hierarchy, each caste community has its own unique set of gender and social norms that contribute to various kinds of female oppression. Women in Indian society are therefore subject to the gender norms of their respective castes and experience a variety of forms of oppression. Women from upper



castes experience different hardships than women from lower castes. Typically, only gender-based oppression affects the former. They experience domestic violence and gender discrimination, which may be related to female infanticide, dowry, gendered domestic work, and "honor killings." On the contrary, Dalit women experience the rigidities of double patriarchal oppression because of their lower social, political, and economic status. The oppression of Dalit women by the men in their community is one example of inherent patriarchy. The men in the family's tax, mistreat, and beat them. The second one is extrinsic patriarchy, in which the Dalit women is treated as a property by men of upper castes. They are subjected to caste-based violence as well as economic and labor exploitation. They are frequently threatened with rape and sexual assault.

Uma Chakravarti proclaims, "because of their material advantage over lower castes, upper-caste men have had access to lower caste women for sexual purposes." (Chakravarti) "They are thus victims of intersectional oppression of caste, class, and gender, which are interlocking in nature." (Sharma and Kumar 2020).

Bama argues that Dalit feminism differs from Indian feminism because the issues faced by Dalit women are entirely distinct from those faced by non-Dalit women. Therefore, it is correct to say that Dalit women's problems are social rather than personal. The mainstream Indian feminist movement, which was largely started by women from the dominant castes, does not address their problems. They only objected to patriarchal structures because of personal instances of gender oppression. The specific issues of caste discrimination, poverty, hunger, sexual exploitation and public violence faced by Dalit women were not addressed. Dalit women were marginalized within the patriarchal Dalit political and literary movement as a result of their intersectional oppression, struggles, tenacity, and contributions; as a result, they continue to be "outsiders within." Dalit women were excluded from this movement due to the masculinization of the Dalit movement and the Savaranization of womanhood, which

subjected them to intertwined caste, class, and gender oppressions. In the 1990s, a Dalit feminist movement was born as a result of Dalit women's exclusion from both the mainstream feminist and Dalit movements. Dalit women have a unique perspective due to their status as "outsiders within," as they are aware of social construction patterns that sociological insiders may not be able to understand.

Bell hook said that, "she would like to see things differently, where she is different and look from the perspective of people who are in the margins and speak differently." (Hooks) The marginal status of Dalit women is suggestive of the fact that how these women are treated and privileged class and always has to be excluded from being at the centre, they are always sidelined due to this reason they started participating in such movements and raise their voice through activism and Dalit women organizations.

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## Chapter- Four

### Comparative study of African-American Women and Dalit women in Alice

#### Walker's *The Color Purple* and Bama's *Karakku*

Double or Triple Oppression faced by black women and Dalit women in the novels

In *Karakku* Bama faces the triple marginalization, because she belonged to the lower caste, lower class and being a woman. Walker in *The Color Purple* writes about the complex themes of racial injustice and the oppression over women. In both the novels women are double or triple marginalized due to their caste, race, gender, class. The following subdivisions further explain on what basis the conditions of black and Dalit women are parallel.

#### Gender Oppression in *The Color Purple* and *Karakku*

Women have to face double triple oppression because of their caste, race and gender as compared to men who face discrimination on the basis of caste. Both at home and at work, women must endure hardships. They also resort to violence or even commit suicide when they try to revolt.

Bama tells the past incident about Uudan, she doesn't know his real name. She says there wasn't single person who doesn't know him because he uses to drag his wife to the community and beat her up as if she were an animal, with his belt. Every day for some reason or the other. (Bama 61)

After working all day, women must satisfy their husbands' lust, "when they come home in the evening, there is no time even to draw a breath" (Bama 59) because in the night, "they must give in to their husband's pleasure...women's body wracked with pain, the

husband is bothered only with his own satisfaction” (Bama 59). When Bama asks her Patti about the violence she replies angrily; “you ask me why? Because the man was crazy with lust. Because he wanted her every single day, He is an animal, that fellow. When she refused, he practically broke her in half.” (Bama 10). Even after she has worshipped her husband as a god, a woman is not permitted to eat in front of him. Giving the reference of such an event Bama writes.

“The husband beat her up so much even though she was carrying a child- and all this torture just because she caught some crabs from the wet field and made a curry and ate it before he came for his meal” (Bama 30).

It demonstrates how necessary it is for women to conform to the idea of the perfect woman, according to which a woman is the perfect wife if she listens to her husband, and the perfect daughter if she listens to her father or brother. Women are only to serve and obey men because they are the center of the universe. The social mindset of the society, where man exercises control over all facets of life, is what Bama wants to change.

Bama provides another illustration of how lower caste women are treated insensitively in the church,

“at church they must lick the priest’s shoes and we his slave while he threatens them with tales of God, Heaven, and Hell” (Bama 35)

Similar instances of violence and sexual exploitation are evident in *The Color Purple*. *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker opens with a rape scene. Walker depicts a horrifying scene of male lust in which she describes how a man rapes a fourteen-year-old girl and behaves like a beast in order to satiate his lust. The main character, Celie, describes her father's heinous act in a letter to God in the following words, “I am fourteen years old. I have

always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me” (Walker 3).

She claims in her letter that her mother took refuge with Alfonso during the spring because she was ill at the time “finally he leaves her alone. A week go by, he pulling on her arm again” (Walker 3). After that when Celie’s mother was out than Alfonso asks Celie, “You going to do what your mammy wouldn’t” (Walker 8). She further writes, “First he put his thing up against my hip and sort of wiggles it around. Then he grabs hold my titties. Then he pushes his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He starts to choke me, saying You better shut up and get used to it.” (Walker 3).

Here, Walker demonstrates, how some men act inhumanely as a slave to their carnal desires. We can see the rape is characterized by silencing. “You'd better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy” (Walker 3). As Celie describes it, "Then he pushes his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He starts to choke me, saying You better shut up and get used to it” (Walker 3)

Some instances that depicts the vivid theme of gender roles in both the works, portrays how men define roles of gender. For example, in ‘The Color Purple’, when two sisters of Harpo came to meet him, one of them asks him to bring water bucket, instead of Celie, he replied women are supposed to work not men. “women work, he says. What? She says. Women work, I’m a man” (Walker 22)

In *The Color Purple* Celie, the protagonist is the perfect example of women conditioned as patriarchy. Sofia gets married to Celie’s brother, Harpo. As the novel goes, we can see the stark difference in the personalities of Celie and Sofia. Celie is submissive, timid and moulded by patriarch of the family while Sofia is rebellious women who fight against unjust done to women which are not at all justifiable. There is an instance which gives a clear

picture of how Celie is moulded by his step mother that she even doesn't realize how wrong she is when she suggests Harpo to beat Sofia. Sofia wanted to go to her sister's house and Harpo is not happy with that. For this reason, his father Mr. suggest him to beat her. As he never did before. "You ever hit her? Mr. \_\_\_ast." (Walker 35). Celie is seen as a women conditioned by males and she act like them. "I like Sofia, but she don't act like me at all. Celie also suggest Harpo to beat her. Beat her, I say." (Walker 36)

In *Karakku*, Bama highlights how women are able to survive on their own when men must go into hiding due to the events involving the Pallar men. This distinction highlights the idea that women needed the men's income in order to survive. This was projected in their wages, as "Even if they did the same work, men received one wage, women another. They always paid men more" (Bama 54-55). Bama's inventiveness as a young child causes her to question this disparity in earnings based on gender.

Nettie describes the unfavorable conditions in which Olinka were living in. Women were denied to education. Nettie says in her letter to Celie, "The boys now accept and Tashi in class and more mothers are sending their daughters to school. The Men do not like it: who wants a wife who knows everything her husband knows? They fume. But the women have their ways and they love their children, even their girls."(Walker 154)

Sofia and Shug Avery are the great examples of women fighting for their rights, they are the epitome of women empowerment. Sofia doesn't submit to the white, men andto patriarchal norms of society. She rebels against his father, brothers, cousins, husband (Harpo). She says,

"All my life, I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy, I had to fight my brother.

I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child isn't safe in a family of men. But

I never breath. I love Harpo, she says. God knows I do. But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me.” (Walker 39)

In *Karakku* the narrator talks about the importance of education and using education as a weapon to overcome the communal discrimination to some extent. As Bama is a teacher. She taught school children from 1979-2015. She says, “she is fortunate enough to get education she is fortunate to have become a teacher despite being a Dalit because that is a privilege reserved for upper caste men.”

Caste oppression in *Karakku* and race oppression in *The Color Purple*

Bama shares the incident of her school time, she was in class seventh and playing in front of the school, she was blamed for the coconut that was stolen from the tree in the school because she belonged to Paraya caste it was easy to blame her for wrong doings.

“The next morning at assembly, the headmaster called out my name. ‘You have shown us your true nature as a Paraya’, he said. ‘You climbed the coconut tree yesterday after everybody else had gone home, and you stole the coconut. We cannot allow you inside this school. Stand outside.’ I was in agony because I had been shamed and insulted in front of all the children. The headmaster was of the chaliyaar caste.” (Bama 19)

“She was advised by the teacher to go to the priest and bring a letter from him to the headmaster and resolve the issue. She went to the priest and told him the whole story in detail and begged him to give her permission to go back to school. The priest’s first response was “after all you are from the Cheri. ‘You must have done it’.” (Bama 19)



“In this society, if you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste-difference does not disappear. Wherever you look, however much you study, whatever you take up, caste discrimination stalks us in every nook and corner and drives us into frenzy. It is because of this we are unable to find a way to study well and progress like everyone else.” (Bama 26)

“If we are born into a low caste, every moment of your life is a moment of struggle. People screw up their faces and look with disgust the moment they know our caste.” (Bama 27)

Bama posits question on the upper caste people for treating as outcastes in the novel.

“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 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.” (Bama 27)

“Are Dalit not human being? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have such attributes as a common sense of honor 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. What do we lack? They treat us in whatever way they choose, as if we are slaves who don't even possess human dignity.” (Bama 27)

“And if Dalits become a priest or nun they are pushed aside and marginalized first of all.” (Bama 80).

Therefore, Dalit women are doubly marginalized because of their caste and gender.

In *The Color Purple*, Sophia became the victim of white supremacy. There is an incidence that Celie describes in her letter to God. Millie, the wife of mayor is racist but she admires the cleanliness and good manners of Sophia's children, so she asks Sophia to be her maid. She says to Sophia,

“Al! your children so clean, she says, would you like to for me, be my maid? Sofia say, Hell no. She says, what you say? Sofia say, Hell no.” (Walker 81)

Sofia is sent to jail for this reply. Just because Sofia refuses to submit to whites, men whosoever dominates her, she had to suffer hardship because such rebellious and brave nature. She is sentenced to twelve years in jail, but the sentence later changed to twelve years of labor as the mayor's maid. Sofia endures such hardship. As Celie being submissive, now Sofia compares herself with Celie in terms of her helplessness.

Sofia says, “Every time they ask me to do something, Miss Celie, I act like I'm you. I jump right up and do what they say.” (Walker 83) This shows the repercussions of racial discrimination on helpless black women who is losing her consciousness and bravery under the shackles of white supremacy and becoming weak.

#### Idea of God

Idea of God in running in the novel 'The Color Purple', Celie the protagonist, since the beginning of the novel writes letter to God. She thinks God is just another white men up in the sky who does not listen to her prayers, this situation could be compared with Bama's when she was pissed of due to ordeals of upper caste people and began to lose her faith but

fortunately she regained her faith and believe in god. Shug helped Celie to make her realize that God is within us. God is not man, nor white. God is God.

Shug's idea about God was different from Celie. Shug sees world and life as beautiful. Shug says, "To please God, I lay back and just admire stuff, be happy. Have a good time. Shug is bold women who believes in seizing the day, she believes the God is within one selves. We need to look for beauty around ourselves. She believes, it pisses off God if you walk by the color purple in a field and don't notice it." (Walker 246)Therefore, in both the novels the idea of god is similar.

"I learnt that God had always shown the greatest compassion for the oppressed. And Jesus too associated himself mainly with the poor. There is great deal of difference between this Jesus and the Jesus who is made known through daily pieties."(Bama 104)

Bama initially thought God can only be found in Churches as she began to realize the hypocrisy of upper caste people who doesn't allow her to enter because she belonged to lower caste she came to the conclusion that God could be find anywhere, he is omnipotent. She goes through major disgust for God but eventually realized it is not God who created hierarchy but the people living in society.

Narrative Techniques used in *The Color Purple* and *Karakku*

The narrative technique and tone used in both the novels are different but the purpose is same. *The Color Purple* is written in epistolary style. According to Donovan,

"The epistolary form is effective because it has been a convention used mostly by women. Josephine Donovan describes it as a "semi-private" genre, used primarily

by women because of their inferior education and because of the fact that such writings were not expected to be published. Less used by males, who were exposed to a classical education and whose writing style was patterned after classical models, letter writing was a means of describing domestic life, and was more informal, artless.” (Donovan, pp 212-13)

Other than the use of the epistolary form, there is another narrative technique that appears to have an indirect impact on this book, that is the slave narrative, it is the crucial part of black literary tradition and in this narrative the first person become the central as mode of discourse, it aids in the reassertion of subjectivity through the "I" as Susan Willis expresses it, “to wrest the individual black subject out of anonymity, inferiority and brutal disdain” (Willis)

In an interview with Mary Helen Washington, Walker describes three different types of black women: the suspended woman, who is mostly immobile; the assimilated woman, who is ready to move but lacks a real space to do so; and the emergent woman, who is ‘making the first tentative steps into an uncharted region’. Walker appears to represent this idea in ‘The Color Purple’ in a passage that actually progresses from suspension and assimilation to emergence: The letters that Celie writes to God, Nettie writes to Celie (withheld by Albert), and those Celie writes to Nettie (returned from Africa unopened) that the two sisters, who have been separated for years, write in a vacuum, all survive despite their inability to communicate, eventually consist of a text written by an emerging black woman with multiple voices. *The Color Purple* is written in Black English Vernacular.

Bama’s *Karakku* is written in autobiographical style. Bama sees writing as a means of liberating Dalits, the women and children. Her autobiographical style of writing in the novel become significant as it portrays vividly what Bama has faced as a Dalit woman in the

casteism society. She was oppressed because of being born as 'paraya' caste and secondly as a woman. She became voice for the subaltern people and raised issues bring into the light such issue of communal discrimination. Novel (and its translation into English) is written in colloquial language, words used are relatable to readers easily. She goes on talking about 'personal experiences' throughout the novel, as a reader I would really appreciate her way of expression and writing style.

There is similarity between the novels as *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker could be considered to be based on the incidence happened to Walker's great grandmother. She was raped when she was 11 years old, this could be assumed that Walker might have taken this real life incidence to highlight through the character of Celie in her spectacular novel and bring light to the condition of black women. And this could be related to the autobiographical narrative of Bama.

Quest for Identity: A similar note in both the novels

The personal search of a character for a meaningful isolation, meaning, and moral decay has been a prominent quest theme in the works of both Dalit women writers and Black women writers. The journey into freedom taken by Dalit women writers and many modern Black women writers has given people a way to define who they are.

"I associate closely with Alice Walker's novels - you can't divorce yourself from hope, otherwise there's nothing left." (Rae)

Both Bama's autobiography *Karakku* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* depict this kind of self-definition journey. Bama addresses the issue of identity crisis and the denial of history and identity. Women are viewed as unworthy in patriarchal societies, which have always worked to create and destroy identities. Understanding Dalit women's context requires

considering both their caste and gender. Bama states “When I saw our people working so hard night and day, I often used to wonder from where they get their strength...”(Bama 47) for her this is a community that was born to work. Despite having to endure many hardships, they continued to laugh and be happy. Their children, particularly the girls, are unable to attend school and receive an education due to their poverty and manual labor jobs. Bama educates herself, trains to become a teacher, and educates her people—the so-called underprivileged—to break free from the chains of unemployment and poverty. She pleaded with her people to stop performing menial tasks like cleaning the restrooms, sweeping, and swabbing as slave labor for the upper class Naickers and Nadars. The police's intimidation, assaults, and incarceration demonstrate how modern Dalit has been controlled and held captive. She faced discrimination every time she went for work, “I knew I should not touch their goods or clothes. I should never come close to where they were...these were heir rules.” (Bama 46).Bama fights against the superstitions and myths that surround her. Through her adult rereading and interpretation of the Christian scriptures, Bama is able to convey a message of hope for Dalits by reflecting the revolutionary elements of Christianity and the principles of justice, equality and love for all.

Her personal experiences have compelled her to actively participate in easing the suffering of the oppressed. She decides to become a nun in the obstinate hope that she will get the chance to fulfil these ambitions. But she finds that the convent's and the Church's viewpoints are different from her own. The core of *Karakku* is the tale of that conflict and how it was resolved. Bama spread awareness regarding the hypocrisy of the church and people associated with it. She brought significant change by making people aware about their own oppression under which led people to understand that God is not like that and has not spoken in ways like this. They understand their worth and new strength urged to live with honor and being able to reclaim the likeness that was suppressed.

A similar note of identity quest is found in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Celie, the protagonist found her way to liberation at the end with the assistance of other female characters such as Shug Avery and Sofia and she turns out to be an independent woman at the end of the novel breaking the shackles of patriarchy. She has suffered psychological damage through verbal, physical and sexual violence all her life. Shug is seen as a very strong character in the novel, it is Shug who forces Albert to stop brutalizing Celie. Shug becomes Celie's role model and they both help each other in bringing out the best in each other. Shug inspires her to open a new business, helped her to find a new way of living life by attaining personal and financial freedom, "you making your living, Celie ... Girl, you on your own way" (Walker 19).

*The Color Purple* illustrates women's tolerance for discrimination against racial, sexual, and gender minorities. Women are not less than men, but patriarchal society portrays them as such.

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## Chapter- Five

### Conclusion

It can be concluded that the novel *The Color Purple* and autobiography *Karakku* truly reflect the oppression of women on the basis of caste, gender, race and class. Black American women experienced racial discrimination because of their skin color, while Dalit women endure oppression in the name of communal prejudice. Even their most basic rights were denied to them solely because they were black. The black women finally began speaking out against the dominance of the white people and the men in their own community after a protracted period of silence. The Black women raised their voices in some of the most ferocious writing of the time, refusing to be silenced. Their struggle was made easier by the writings and artwork of progressive black artists who worked to dispel the myths and images that had held black people back and to elevate and empower them with new ones.

Men's oppression of women is symbolized by the subjugation of women. Men exert control over women and compel them to comply with their wishes. They experience double or even triple oppression because they must submit to both their husband and the other males.

African Americans and Indian Dalits are two distinct groups that share a low status in their respective societies. Black Americans and Indian Dalits had to endure untold sorrows and sufferings. Both works of literature aimed to advance concepts of social equality, justice, and defiance of injustice, suffering, and economic exploitation. To draw the conclusion that Dalit and African American societies and literature have many similarities. The emotional commitment of women in the two societies is comparable, which accounts for the similarity. Their suffering, outrage, hopes, and desires have things in common. Even though their

languages are different, these literary works share a similar mental state and emotional expression.

Women's status has changed significantly in recent years, and this can be attributed to the wave of feminism consciousness. Bama and Walker, who both write novels, support and/or advocate for women's rights and gender equality. They discussed how men and women should have equal rights and status in society. The research aimed at analyzing both the novels through feminist perspective and bring out similarities and differences that black women and Dalit women. The Chapter 4 of the research dealt with the similarities and differences that women characters in both the novels face under the social norms of patriarchy. Therefore, my research has compared and bring out certain nuances on the basis of which we can conclude that women face triple oppression on the basis of caste, gender and class in America and India.

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## Further scope and limitations

A comparative study can be done through various theoretical frameworks in both novels since my outlook within the research is limited to feminist perspective. There are lot of differences and similarities which can also be looked upon. Works can be look through different theoretical framework like Walker's *The Color Purple* could be seen through post-colonial perspective.

As *Karakku* is originally written in Tamil, I have read the translated version of the novel. In future someone could analyze the original Tamil version and look upon the loopholes that arise due to translation because of the change in language there might be subtle changes that may occur in the research. Subjugation and marginalization isn't only gender specific, children and men also face discrimination because of their caste which can further be studied, it takes place at other several communities such as Brahmins, Muslims also face different biases and discrimination is paddled through cultural practices and more it's not only bounded to women, these aspects are not discussed in the research therefore, there is a scope to take this research further and analyze it. The research could also be extended taking the other novel of Bama that is *Sangati* which gives a deeper incites to the women conditions and subjugation of women through various events. The shortage of time has led me to limit my research up to feminist perspective only. The findings solely depend on the researcher's own perspective, pre-understanding and analysis of the text.

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