

Decolonising Literature: Postcolonial and Dalit Feminist Perspectives in Bama's *Karukku*

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This paper discusses the way that Bama uses the stages of decolonisation intervention in postcolonial Indian literature by foregrounding the Dalit Christian womanhood as an area of epistemic, affective, and political struggle (Nayar, 2006; Singh, 2021). Ensuring that it grounds the work of close reading, the postcolonial, decolonial, and Dalit feminist theories, it posits *Karukku* as a witnessing of the afterlives of caste, church, and nation in the tools of autobiographical practice and one that can speak with the subaltern locations (Priyadharshini & N, 2025). The analysis follows the three lines of decolonising faith, decolonising the nation, and decolonising literary form and draws conclusions that the Bama narrative challenges Brahmanical and Christian hierarchies, the nationalist teleologies, and supports the Dalit speech, orality, and communal memory as providing theory (Singh, 2021). Focusing on a decolonial ethic of resistance, solidarity, and collective self-construction that challenges canonical postcolonial paradigms and requires a renovation of the very body and voice of Dalit women, the article of the book additionally refers to the concept of deconstructing what Dalit women write, what is meant by modernity, and what constitutes a liberation (Singh & Kumar, 2023). Through this, Dalit life writing is repositioned in the text as an important point on which the association between caste, religion, and the nation can be re-explored in the study of postcolonial (Hans et al., 2016).

Keywords: Dalit literature; Bama; *Karukku*; caste; Dalit Christianity; decolonial feminism; postcolonial studies

INTRODUCTION

Bama's *Karukku* now occupies a pivotal place in discussions of Dalit literature and life writing, often identified as a landmark in bringing Dalit Christian experience into literary and theoretical debates (Nayar, 2006; Singh, 2021). Written as an autobiographical narrative that intertwines confession, testimony and political critique, the text records the everyday textures of caste humiliation, religious hypocrisy and gendered violence in post-independence Tamil Nadu (Singh & Kumar, 2023). Postcolonial theory has interrogated empire and its cultural afterlives, yet Dalit critics have shown that much canonical postcolonial discourse tends to universalise "the colonised" and downplay caste

differentiation within South Asia ("Dalit Lifeworlds at Risk: When Postcolonial Critique Fails," 2024) *Karukku* exposes this limitation by revealing how colonial power mutates into localised Brahmanical, ecclesiastical and state forms, indicating that decolonisation without the annihilation of caste remains incomplete (Kumar, 2025)

This article situates *Karukku* at the intersection of Dalit feminism, postcolonial critique and decolonial thought (Ray, 2025; Thenmozhi, 2024) It argues that Bama's narrative decolonises literature along epistemic, affective and formal axes by disrupting dominant ways of knowing, feeling and narrating the nation from the standpoint of a Dalit Christian woman (Kaur, 2021; Singh, 2021; Soukai, 2020; Thenmozhi, 2024). Her work not only provides a

powerful narrative of self-reflection but also serves as a crucial tool for understanding the spatial implications of identity formation within Dalit communities (Kumar, 2022). This is achieved through her exploration of segregated Dalit spaces within villages, which she identifies as crucial sites for the awakening of collective consciousness and subaltern resistance (Sharma, 2021, p. 36). Her unique narrative approach, which includes not explicitly naming herself or her village, along with her innovative use of Tamil, challenges conventional autobiographical forms and amplifies the authenticity of Dalit experience (Emmadi, 2021, p. 1625; Priyadharshini & N, 2025).

Postcolonial, Decolonial and Dalit Feminist Frameworks

Postcolonial theory has often been anchored in readings of metropolitan and elite colonial archives, which foreground the coloniser–colonised dyad while leaving intra-national stratifications, such as caste, under-theorised (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Singh, 2025). In the Indian context, this has meant that the experiences of Dalits, Adivasis and other subaltern groups are folded into a generalised “native” category, obscuring how they are dominated both by colonial rule and by upper-caste formations (Banerjee, 2021; Chauhan, 2025). Dalit criticism emerges partly as a response to this erasure, insisting that any postcolonial project which fails to engage with caste reproduces the silencing it claims to contest (Curiel, 2016; Hans et al., 2016).

Decolonial thought sharpens this critique by theorising “coloniality of power” as a long *durée* structure that outlives formal decolonisation, embedding hierarchies in religion, knowledge, labour and affect (Banerjee, 2020; Davies, 2021). For Dalit communities, this coloniality is experienced not only as residual imperial presence but also as Brahmanical hegemony and the theological authority of institutions such as the church (Singh, 2021). Reading Karukku through a decolonial lens makes it possible to see how the text not only denounces specific episodes of injustice but also exposes the deeper grammar through which caste and Christianity organise whose lives are sacralised and whose suffering is normalised (Singh & Kumar, 2023).

Dalit lifewriting has been read as a distinctive contribution to this landscape because it records atrocity and resistance from within communities that have historically been denied the right to narrate (Mattos & Festino, 2021; Sriraman, 2023). Works on Dalit autobiography emphasise how these texts refuse the inward, psychologised model of the bourgeois self, opting instead for narrative

forms that keep the collective constantly in view through shared memories, village spaces and communal labour (Beltrán, 2021; Thiara, 2016). In Karukku, the “I” is frequently sutured to “we,” signalling that Bama’s autobiographical project is less about singular introspection and more about creating an archive in which Dalit Christian experiences can appear as historical and political (Kaur, 2021; Thenmozhi, 2024).

Dalit feminist scholarship underscores that Dalit women are positioned at the intersection of caste, class, gender and religion, and that any analysis that collapses their experience into a generic “woman” or “Dalit” is inadequate (Pan, 2021; Sharma & Geetha, 2021). Studies of Dalit women’s autobiographies and life-narratives show how they contest both male-centred Dalit discourse and savarna feminism that often treats caste as secondary (Pan, 2019; Singh, 2024). Approaching Karukku within this framework foregrounds how Bama tracks the specificities of Dalit Christian womanhood—its labour, its surveillance, its aspirations—and makes these the basis for rethinking what counts as political subjectivity in postcolonial India (Axeena, 2025; Kaur, 2021).

Methodology

This study employed a close textual analysis of Bama’s Karukku, supplemented by comparative engagements with Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke* and Urmila Pawar’s *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman’s Memoirs* (originally Aaidan in Marathi), to examine how Dalit women’s life-writings functioned as sites of collective resistance and decolonial critique (Amonika, 2024; Pawar, 2009; Ray, 2025; Sen, 2017; Sharma, 2021; Thenmozhi, 2024). Pawar’s memoir enriched this framework by illuminating parallel experiences of caste-gender-class oppression across regional contexts, underscoring shared strategies of resistance while highlighting distinct narrative forms of identity formation and activism in the Dalit literary canon (Sen, 2017; Thenmozhi, 2024). Based on representative intersectionality the dissertation tests how textual reference to the texts discussed practices the various systemic subjections at the intersection of the classes, caste, gender, and the religion considering Dalit contexts (Pan, 2021; Ray, 2025; Sharma and Geetha, 2021). The comparative approach also helped to understand how these testimonial genres, albeit differing in geographical and historical terms, serve as testimonies of mass destruction of human beings, build collective archives, and express liberation politics based on Dalit women particularities (Emmadi, 2021; “Problematising Testimony in Autobiographical Narratives by Dalit Women in the English Translation, 2021; Ray, 2025; Sharma, 2021). This strategy demonstrates how entrenched

village spaces of isolation reacted to be the space of revelation of consciousness to the dominance of Brahmanical and ecclesiastical authority through the use of personal accounts to give collective voices of memory and labour (Beltran, 2021; Sharma, 2021; Thiara, 2016). Bama also has long-term implications in bringing the church into this systematic drive out, and she records instances of

Dalit dispossession to contaminated areas in worship places, thus creating an exposure of theological inconsistency that sustaining caste division and egalitarianism through conversion (Jeremiah, 2024; Kaur, 2021; Rajendran, 2020; Sharma, 2021; Thenmozhi, 2024).

"Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality and the Dalit Standpoint"

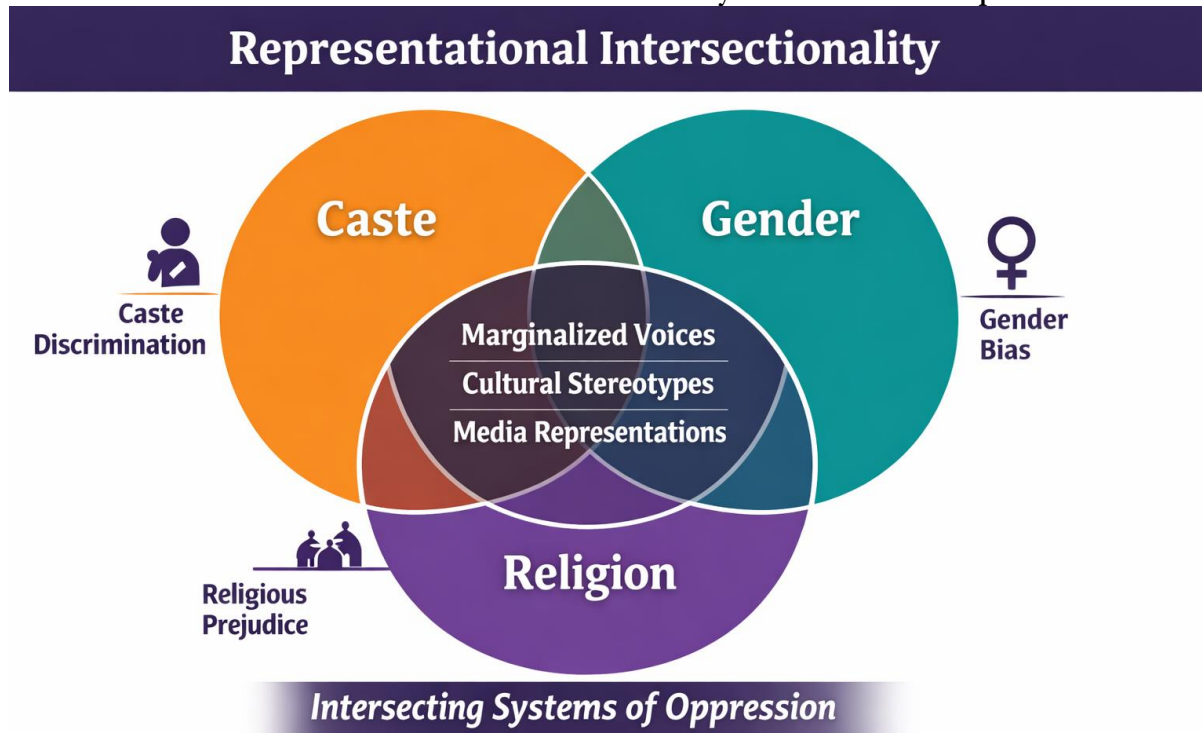


Figure 1 Representational Intersectionality: Interlocking Structures of Caste, Gender, and Religion

Figure 1. Conceptual framework illustrating *Representational Intersectionality*. The diagram demonstrates how caste, gender, and religion function as intersecting systems of oppression rather than isolated categories. At their convergence emerge marginalized voices shaped by cultural stereotypes and media representations. This framework foregrounds how testimonial narratives and digital expressions reveal layered structures of exclusion while also enabling resistant counter-representations.

Bama's Karukku as Decolonial Testimonio Comparative Testimonios: Regional Context, Resistance Themes, and Narrative Style

"The following table situates Bama's Karukku within the broader landscape of Dalit feminist life-writings, contrasting its regional and narrative specifics with those of contemporaries like Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar (Amonika, 2024; Sharma, 2021)."

Table 1

Author	Regional Context	Major Work (Testimonio)	Key Themes of Resistance	Narrative Style	Nature of Voice
Bama	Tamil Nadu (South India); Dalit Christian community	<i>Karukku</i> (1992)	Caste oppression within Christianity; gender discrimination; spiritual rebellion;	Fragmented, autobiographical, reflective	Confessional yet communally rooted; personal pain expands into collective Dalit-Christian experience

			education as liberation		
Baby Kamble	Maharashtra (Western India); Mahar community	<i>The Prisons We Broke</i> (Jina Amucha)	Brahminical patriarchy; caste humiliation; Ambedkarite awakening; women's suffering	Collective memoir; social documentation	Strongly communal; "we" narrative foregrounding shared Dalit women's oppression
Urmila Pawar	Maharashtra (Western India); Ambedkarite Buddhist background	<i>The Weave of My Life</i> (Aaidan)	Intersection of caste and gender; mobility through education; urban-rural transition; memory and craft	Linear autobiographical narrative blended with metaphor	Personal and analytical; blends confessional mode with socio-political commentary

Narrating Casteed Christianity

In academia, there is an often-reiterated belief that the most interesting intervention of the book is that Karukku interrogates the perpetuation of caste even in Christian traditions that claim to have transcended the concept of caste (Rajendran, 2020). One example, illustrated in the novel, is the separation of Dalit children in school and marginalization of Dalit parishioners in the ecclesiastical space which represented a spatial order of the village and redefined notions of purity and pollution into the liturgical space (Singh, & Kumar, 2023). These examples clarify how conversion does not eliminate caste, but rather subsumes it and reinvests it in the rhetoric of Christian institutions to produce a result of a casteed Christianity with both postcolonial and also highly colonial features of hierarchy (Jeremiah, 2024). Bama's narrative voice refuses the deferential tone expected of a believer and instead moves between bewilderment, anger and sharp irony when describing priests, nuns and teachers who participate in casteist practices (Nayar, 2006). The "wounds" named in the title are not simply psychological but are mapped onto the body through beatings, insults and exclusions, making the church one of the sites where the colonality of power is felt most acutely in Dalit Christian life (Singh, 2021). In exposing these dynamics, Karukku unsettles celebratory accounts of missionary work and invites the reader to re-evaluate the role of Christian institutions in sustaining or challenging caste, a move that resonates with broader decolonial critiques of religious complicity in racial and caste hierarchies (Kannalil & Shanthi, 2025; Longkumer, 2020).

This critical examination aligns with the objectives of understanding layered oppression and interpreting narrative structures through decolonial

lenses, as proposed for analyzing Dalit Christian women's experiences (Kannalil & Shanthi, 2025). This nuanced portrayal positions *Karukku* not merely as an autobiography but as a critical decolonial testimonio, exposing the intricate ways in which caste continues to operate within ostensibly egalitarian religious frameworks (Axeena, 2025). Bama vividly illustrates how Dalit individuals, even after converting to Christianity, continue to experience profound social ostracization and discrimination within the Church, exposing the enduring nature of caste prejudices despite religious affiliation (Kaur, 2021, p. 4938; Thenmozhi, 2024, p. 1798). This demonstrates how the promise of Christianity as an escape from the caste system is often unfulfilled, highlighting a "double marginalization" where Dalit Christians face discrimination both from broader society and within their adopted religious community (Kaur, 2021, p. 4935; Thenmozhi, 2024, p. 1797). This persistent

discrimination underscores the notion that conversion does not automatically lead to liberation from caste-based oppression, instead revealing how entrenched social hierarchies can adapt and persist even within new religious contexts (Thenmozhi, 2024, p. 1798).

Self-Identity and Collective Agency

Yash Deep Singh reads Karukku as a text that reconstructs Dalit Christian selfhood against the grain of nationalist and ecclesiastical narratives that would prefer Dalit subjects to remain grateful, silent and invisible (Singh, 2021). At the beginning of the narrative, Bama presents herself as someone deeply invested in the church and in notions of religious vocation, yet continually confronted with humiliations that expose the gap between doctrine and practice (Selvamuthu 2021). Her eventual decision to leave religious life is not framed as a private spiritual crisis alone but as a political break

with an institution that refuses to see Dalits as fully human (Singh & Kumar, 2023).

The trajectory of the text moves from this internalised shame—about caste, about poverty, about “inadequate” faith—towards an explicitly politicised understanding of injustice, in which Bama links her own experiences to those of Dalit women around her (Talat & Singh, 2023; Thenmozhi, 2024). This shift is marked stylistically by an increasing use of direct address (“you”) to Dalit readers and by exhortations that they must speak, organise and refuse to remain passive in the face of everyday violence (Emmadi, 2021; Talat & Singh, 2023). Rather than offering closure, the text ends on an open, exhortatory note, suggesting that the work of self-making and collective mobilisation is ongoing; in this sense, *Karukku* functions as a decolonial testimonio that calls its audience into political relation rather than simply documenting suffering (Priyadharshini & N, 2025; Ray, 2025).

While *Karukku* effectively functions as a decolonial testimonio that retools autobiographical form and calls its audience into political relation (Priyadharshini & N, 2025; Ray, 2025), it is crucial to acknowledge academic critiques surrounding the uncritical application of the testimonio genre to Dalit literary texts. As noted by scholars, in the use of testimonio, the focus on the aspect of authenticity and the manifestation of collective suffering, excessive dependence on this paradigm can lead unconsciously to the obsession of available forms of truth production (Problematising Testimony in Autobiographical Narratives by Dalit Women in the English Translation, 2021). In addition, the unique course of the Dalit life, not coincidental with Western autobiographical practices, suggests that the narratives of Dalit women, despite being highly personal, are commonly more sensitive to the group than to subjectivity, thus complicating the traditional notions of the self (Emmadi, 2021; Hans et al., 2016). This has been done by ensuring that, although the individual voice continues to be central, it is still caught in the power-narratives of the men of the upper and lower communities or the tales of women, who are members of their own communities (Sharma, 2021). This critical operation will do away with narrowing down these intricate life stories to the unfortunate findings of wretchedness, separation and exclusion, but proposes their rich ethical and political interventions (Thapan, 2022). Decolonising Nation and Narrative

Contesting Nationalist Teleologies

Work on Dalit autobiographical narratives shows that these texts repeatedly trouble the seamless

story of Indian nationalism as a completed emancipatory project (Hans et al., 2016; Thapan, 2022). In *Karukku*, the rhetoric of the nation as an inclusive postcolonial democracy is constantly undercut by episodes of exclusion from land, schooling and basic dignity, which reveal how Dalits inhabit the nation as internal colonies rather than equal citizens (Singh & Kumar, 2023). Bama's account of walking past upper-caste houses, enduring taunts in the village and being relegated to menial tasks in institutions that praise equality lays bare the distance between constitutional ideals and caste-saturated everyday life (Singh, 2021).

Postcolonial theorists have pointed out that nationalism functioned as both a defensive response to colonial rule and a new mode of homogenising difference within the postcolony (Raghavan, 2023; Silva, 2020). *Karukku* gives that abstraction concrete form by showing how Dalit communities are summoned into national discourse primarily as cheap labour, loyal believers or disciplined students, while their claims to land, justice and dignity are deferred or denied (“Dalit Lifeworlds at Risk: When Postcolonial Critique Fails,” 2024; Priyadharshini & N, 2025). The narrative's focus on the village, the school and the church—as overlapping institutions that all mediate the nation—invites readers to see nationalism not as a singular liberatory force but as a contested field in which caste power is continually reasserted (Hans et al., 2016; Lee, 2019).

By narrating the nation from the perspective of a Dalit Christian woman, Bama complicates the dominant figure of the postcolonial citizen as implicitly upper-caste and Hindu, and instead foregrounds a subject whose very existence troubles the majoritarian story of India (Soukai, 2020; Thenmozhi, 2024). Her account resonates with arguments in Dalit and decolonial scholarship that demand the integration of caste into discussions of coloniality, insisting that decolonising the nation requires more than celebrating independence or multiculturalism; it requires dismantling the layered hierarchies that shape whose lives matter within the national imaginary (Natarajan, 2022; Raghavan, 2023).

From Aesthetics to Activism

Critical work on Dalit women's writing emphasises that these texts rarely treat literature as an autonomous aesthetic domain; instead, they explicitly link narrative form to activism and community transformation (Nayar, 2011; Patil, 2023; Soukai, 2020). *Karukku* exemplifies this orientation in its refusal of linear, polished storytelling, opting instead for an episodic, fragmentary structure that mimics the way memory returns to moments of injury and resistance (Israel, 2022; Lehen, 2019). The narrative

frequently breaks off to address readers directly, to name injustices and to urge action, creating a text that does not simply represent Dalit life but intervenes in it (Singh & Kumar, 2023).

Bama's code-switching between colloquial Tamil-inflected language and more standard registers functions as a stylistic assertion that Dalit speech belongs in print and can carry theoretical weight (Israel, 2022; Nayar, 2011). This decision challenges the expectation—shaped by both colonial education and upper-caste literary standards—that only certain languages and styles are fit for “serious” writing (Nayar, 2006). Critics of Dalit autobiography note that such stylistic choices are inseparable from the political project of reclaiming narrative space; by bringing local idioms, work songs and street talk into a published text, *Karukku* asserts that Dalit modes of speaking are not to be corrected or erased but to be heard and taken as knowledge (Kaur, 2021; Priyadharshini & N, 2025). In this sense, *Karukku* participates in what has been described as a shift “from aesthetics to activism,” but it would be more accurate to say that it redefines aesthetics itself as a terrain of struggle (“Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies,” 2021; Sharma, 2021). The beauty of the text lies not in formal perfection but in its insistence on naming violence, honoring memory and imagining different futures for Dalit communities; the narrative's affective intensity—its anger, sorrow and defiant hope—becomes part of its political force (Israel, 2022; Soukai, 2020). For postcolonial literary studies, this

demands a rethinking of evaluative criteria so that texts like *Karukku* are not marginalised as “raw” or merely “testimonial,” but recognised as sophisticated interventions in debates about form, ethics and power (Nayar, 2013; Priyadharshini & N, 2025).

The testimonio tradition pioneered by Bama in *Karukku* has evolved into digital testimonios on contemporary platforms like Facebook and X, where Dalit women share personal narratives of marginalization, caste violence, and resistance, extending the activist impulse of print literature into viral online spaces (Jalwal, 2025; Kannalil & Shanthi, 2025; Oza, 2024). These digital forms—hashtag campaigns such as #DalitLivesMatter, live videos, and community threads—echo *Karukku*'s fragmentary style and direct address, building counter-publics, amplifying voices, and mobilizing solidarity, much as detailed in the comparison of platforms in Table 2 (Jalwal, 2025; Oza, 2024).

This reevaluation necessitates an understanding of Dalit women's personal narratives not merely as reflections of past experiences but as ongoing, sociologically grounded engagements with contemporary issues (Simon, 2021)

Digital Platform Comparison: Modes of Subaltern Political Mobilization

This table outlines shows different digital platforms enable distinct forms of subaltern political mobilization, ranging from identity to consolidation and counter-public formation to direct institutional pressure, thereby illustrating the digital transformation of testimonial resistance.

Table 2:

Digital Platform	Primary User Mode	Type of Subaltern Mobilization Enabled	Nature of Political Impact
Facebook	Community pages, live videos, long-form posts	Identity consolidation; community storytelling; memorialization of caste violence	Builds collective consciousness and solidarity networks
X	Hashtags, threads, rapid commentary	Hashtag activism; pressure-building; agenda-setting	Immediate visibility; amplifies cases to media and policymakers
YouTube	Video testimonios, interviews, documentary-style content	Counter-public sphere creation; narrative reclamation	Challenges mainstream media framing; preserves digital archives
WhatsApp	Encrypted group communication	Grassroots coordination; rapid mobilization for protests or legal aid	Localized but high-impact offline action
Instagram	Visual storytelling, reels, infographics	Symbolic politics; youth-driven identity assertion	Aestheticized activism; cross-regional solidarity
Change.org	Online petitions	Institutional pressure through signature aggregation	Formal appeal mechanism influencing administrative review

Epistemic Disobedience and Dalit Feminist Epistemology

This perspective underscores how Bama's use of colloquial language constitutes an act of epistemic disobedience—a refusal to adopt the "standard" language of the colonizer/upper-caste that has historically erased Dalit knowledge—thereby, through self-reflexive storytelling and diverse spatial experiences, actively reconstructing identity in Dalit women's autobiographical narratives beyond static interpretations](Beltrán, 2021, p. 151; Israel, 2022, p. 152; Nayar, 2011)\$. This linguistic rebellion allows *Karukku* to not only portray the multifaceted marginalization faced by Dalit women but also to establish a distinct Dalit feminist epistemology, which challenges dominant literary and cultural norms by making Tamil a tool of resistance and authenticity (Priyadharshini & N, 2025). Such narratives, therefore, move beyond mere aesthetic representation to become powerful platforms for social and political activism, directly confronting hegemonic discourses that have historically excluded Dalit experiences (Simon, 2021). This approach aligns with the understanding that literature, particularly in the context of Dalit writing, is intrinsically involved in shaping perceptions of what is visible and sayable within a society, thereby acting as a critical tool in political discourse ("Problematising Testimony in Autobiographical Narratives by Dalit Women in the English Translation," 2021, p. 10). This resistance is particularly evident in the autobiographical narratives of Dalit women, which through their self-reflexive engagement with spatial experiences, present a dynamic understanding of identity formation, moving beyond fixed and static interpretations (Kumar, 2022). By actively challenging the singular communitarian notion of the Dalit community, these testimonios—

like Bama's—emphasize the dialectic between the self and the collective, thereby creating new generic possibilities and inviting alternative interpretations ("Problematising Testimony in Autobiographical Narratives by Dalit Women in the English Translation," 2021, p. 2). This redefinition of aesthetic value through direct engagement with social realities also necessitates a re-evaluation of literary criticism itself, moving it from a detached assessment of form to an engaged dialogue with the ethical and political implications of textual production ("Problematising Testimony in Autobiographical Narratives by Dalit Women in the English Translation," 2021, p. 1). Indeed, Bama's

work transforms the "marginal" into a space of subaltern resistance, highlighting how Dalit segregated spaces play a crucial role in awakening collective consciousness (Sharma, 2021, p. 36).

Gender, Embodiment and Decolonial Ethics

Dalit feminist readings emphasise that Bama refuses to treat the body as a neutral vessel; instead, *Karukku* continually shows how Dalit women's bodies are produced as sites of labour, suspicion and control (Emmadi, 2021). The text describes women working in the fields, cleaning hostels and serving in convents under conditions that normalise exhaustion and abuse, while their sexuality is policed through gossip, surveillance and moralising discourse (Massari et al., 2025). Such scenes echo broader discussions in Dalit women's autobiographies where labour and sexuality cannot be separated, because both are shaped by caste-based expectations about purity, availability and servility (Ghosh, 2021).

At the same time, *Karukku* carefully records moments when Dalit women assert agency through bodily acts that might seem ordinary: walking out of the convent, refusing degrading chores, choosing to educate children or gathering in conversation (Singh & Kumar, 2023). These actions may not always appear as spectacular resistance, yet they cumulatively reconfigure how the self is lived and understood, shifting from a posture of submission to one of alert refusal (Scott, 1989). Critics of Dalit and Black women's writing underline how such everyday acts of dissent are central to decolonial ethics, which values survival, care and solidarity alongside overt protest (Spathopoulou & Meier, 2023).

Bama's insistence on naming pain and anger also aligns her work with global feminist discussions of "negative" affects as politically generative (Smriti, 2014). Rather than presenting joy or resilience alone as indicators of progress, *Karukku* allows sorrow, rage and exhaustion to remain visible, suggesting that any ethical response must begin by acknowledging the full weight of what caste and religious institutions have inflicted (Singh, 2021). This refusal of a quick, optimistic narrative resonates with arguments that call for a decolonial ethics of witnessing, in which the reader is asked not to consume suffering as spectacle but to recognise complicity and responsibility (Raghavan, 2023).

By centring Dalit Christian women's embodied experience, *Karukku* also opens up possibilities for cross-border alliances with other women-of-colour and Indigenous feminisms that link land, labour, faith and the body (Kaur, 2021). The text suggests that decolonizing projects cannot restrict themselves to abstract critique of empire; they must also attend to

the intimate, often painful work of reinhabiting the body, community and faith in ways that refuse both colonial and Brahmanical scripts (Spatz, 2019) In this way, Bama's narrative models a decolonial ethics that emerges from lived practice rather than from detached theory, insisting that the weight of history is carried, and contested, in and through Dalit women's bodies.

Policy Gaps vs. Transformative Fixes

(Framed through Representational Intersectionality & Dalit Womanist Praxis)

This table outlines shows androcentric policy frameworks marginalize Dalit women and proposes intersectional, Dalit Womanist interventions aimed at achieving substantive socio-economic and political transformation.

Table 3

Policy Domain	Existing State Approach (Androcentric Bias)	Structural Gap Identified	Proposed Intervention	Expected Transformative Outcome
Caste-based Welfare Schemes	Gender-neutral but male-headed household model; benefits routed through patriarchal family structures	Dalit women's unpaid labour and intra-caste gender inequality remain invisible	Direct benefit transfers to Dalit women; community accountability forums	Recognition of Dalit women as autonomous socio-economic agents
Labor & Informal Sector Policies	Focus on male industrial labor; informal and sanitation workers treated as peripheral	Dalit women concentrated in precarious, stigmatized labor (manual scavenging, domestic work)	Worker-owned cooperatives; collectivized bargaining structures; skill-transition programs	Economic self-determination and dignity of labor
Religious Minority Protections	Minority rights framed around community identity, not gendered caste hierarchies within religions	Dalit Christian/Muslim women excluded from SC benefits; internal patriarchy unaddressed	Intersectional minority policy review; recognition of caste within non-Hindu contexts	Policy inclusion across caste-religion intersections
Education Policies	Access-focused but not curriculum-sensitive; meritocratic framing	Cultural humiliation, symbolic violence, and dropout of Dalit girls	Curriculum reform incorporating Dalit feminist narratives; mentorship networks	Epistemic justice and retention of Dalit girl students
Political Representation	Reserved seats without gender-sensitive implementation	Dalit women representatives lack financial and decision-making autonomy	Capacity-building programs; independent funding channels; leadership training	Substantive rather than symbolic representation
Gender Justice Laws	Gender laws assume caste-neutral patriarchy	Sexual violence against Dalit women treated as isolated crimes	Dalit Womanist legal lens; mandatory caste-sensitive judicial training	Structural recognition of caste-gender violence

Conclusion

Karukku shows that decolonising literature in the Indian context requires confronting the coloniality of caste, church and nation rather than treating colonialism as a closed historical episode (Nayar,

2006; Singh, 2021). Through a hybrid form that fuses testimonio, autobiography and resistance writing, Bama constructs a Dalit feminist counter-archive that unsettles dominant postcolonial paradigms and recentres subaltern agency (Talat & Singh, 2023)

By decentring Eurocentric and upper-caste epistemologies, the text reimagines who can theorise, which experiences count as knowledge and how literary form can function as political praxis (Shankar 2013; Silva 2015). For postcolonial studies, *Karukku* indicates that decolonising projects which sideline Dalit perspectives remain partial and that the field's renewal depends on sustained, theoretically informed engagement with Dalit, feminist and decolonial life writing (Priyadharshini & N, 2025).

This sustained engagement necessitates a re-evaluation of established canons and methodologies, pushing for an inclusion of

marginalized voices that offer alternative frameworks for understanding power, identity, and resistance (Axeena, 2025; Kannalil & Shanthi, 2025). Such an approach acknowledges that narratives from Dalit women, like those found in Bama's work, are critical for a comprehensive understanding of intersectional oppressions and pathways toward social justice (Ray, 2025; Singh, 2024). These narratives reveal the complex interplay of class, caste, and gender, demonstrating how Dalit women navigate unique social locations distinct from those of Brahmin women or Dalit men, thereby exposing the multifaceted nature of their domination (Ray, 2025).

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