

CHAPTER 1

**INTRODUCTION:
INCHOATIVE WRITERS OF OPTIMISM**

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1.1 Introduction: Global Minority Discourse

Women have come a long way from their subjugated and oppressive condition lately and women writers reveal that the literary tradition involves the relationship between them and the society in which they live. Women's literary world includes and reflects their life and experiences from their perspective which is totally different from that of the male. A central tenet of modern feminist thought has been the assertion that all women are oppressed. This assertion implies that women share a common lot, and that factors like class, race, caste, religion and even sexual preferences do not create a diversity of experience that determines the extent to which sexism will be an oppressive force in the lives of individual women. Other than this important aspect of gender issue, each woman is different with diverse experiences which create a unique space for each one of them.

The minority discourses of women are surfacing with unprecedented urgency in the post-colonial and post-modern context. Writers from the marginalized section of society have put forward a subversive ethnic which knocks the conscience of the hegemonic cultures concomitantly, thereby generating confidence and pride in them. This enables them to deconstruct a traditional mindset which made them oppressed and view them as equals rather than pitiful victims. The universal aspect to gender oppression is not only the historical development of the society that share common elements, but also global structures and processes that affect the societies which in turn affect the

lives of women. This forms the basis for a global sisterhood. This sharing and bonding among the marginalized and subaltern groups strike solidarity and their writings become an aggressive force that contain not humiliations but celebrations.

The texture of global society blocks the avenues of expression for women and in its essence a denial of self. So it has become imperative for women writers to defend women in order to counteract patriarchal oppression. The oppressed and the silenced cannot by definition speak or achieve self-legitimation. Ilaiah argues:

Unless the oppressed learns to hegemonize their own self, unless the culture and consciousness of the oppressed is put forward visibly in public debate, unless their culture is prepared to clash with the culture and consciousness of the enemy in public, a society of equals will remain an illusion (168).

Women writers from the minority group celebrate womanhood exposing female culture, and writing for them becomes an act of self definition and self expression where they break the conventions to fill the lacunae with their scripts.

The polarization of the black and the white in the United States, and of the dalit and the upper castes in India shows how the lives of differences are drawn through multiple sites of power. But these marginalized writers could write back and recreate the stories and histories differently from a personal

perspective. The bold and assertive articulations of the marginalized women writers enable them to create a different discursive space, in which they could understand the domestic and social memories, expose lived realities, reclaim their culture and also form subjectivity through gendered and radicalized racial or casteist differences.

The statement that African American women confront both ‘a woman question and a race problem’ (Cooper 134) captures the essence of black feminist thought for generations. The African American literary and intellectual traditions have focused primarily on the racial overtones only and ignored the political struggle aimed at eradicating the multiple oppressions that black women experienced. The black women’s experience becomes a special kind of oppression and their suffering in their country becomes racist, sexist and classiest because of their dual racial and gender identity and their limited access to economic resources. The black women struggled for black liberation and gender equality simultaneously. Their commitment to the struggle is profoundly rooted in their lived experiences and hence the aggressiveness is sharp and lasting. They understood the necessity of internalizing positive definitions and rejecting the denigrating stereotypical and controlling images related to them. They realized the need for active struggle to resist oppression and attain individual and group empowerment. A great deal has been said and written about the black man and his resistance but very little about the unique relationship black women bore to the resistance struggle during slavery and after. The consciousness of their oppression and trust towards its abolition had

been sustained for generations in the community and this offered the impetus to black women in the later generations to pull their strength and fight in order to survive. The women lived with stability even during slavery and provided stability for others too.

The Indian scenario is different when compared to other countries. Though the constitution of India grants equality to women in various fields of life, a large no of women are either ill equipped or, not in a position to propel themselves out of their traditionally unsatisfactory socio-economic conditions. Oppression and atrocities are still rampant. Patriarchy continues to be embedded in the social system in many parts of India denying a majority of women the choice to decide on even how to live. There are infinite variations of the status of women differing according to the culture, family structure, caste, class etc. There are specificities such as rural women and urban women, middle class and lower class women, Brahmin and Dalit women, and as women in Hindu society or in Muslim society. All these distinctions are significant determinants of variations in their position in different groups. Status of women is affected by certain macro forces as economic development, political participation, ideological overtones and literacy. Though the lower caste women are discriminated and ostracized, they step squarely into the centre of public debates in contemporary India, particularly since 1990 when the Mandal Commission extended facilities of positive discrimination to a greater portion of low-caste groups. Women from the discriminated sections of

society have acknowledged the essentials of education and the need of employment so that they could sustain independently and create a social life.

Discriminated black women in America and Dalit women in India exhibit a marked similarity in their history, struggle and resistance, though the social structure of the two peoples differ. Determined women from these marginalized sections carve their own niche and they evolve slowly from victimization to liberation. Maya Angelou and Bama represent these marginalized communities in their gradual progression from oppression to optimism through a unique self-spun philosophy¹. The insistent voice of Maya Angelou, the black woman writer, cannot but be heard and the authenticity in her text which exposes the experiences of the black community cannot be unseen. Similarly the assertiveness of Bama, the dalit woman writer, erases the boundaries of caste, class and gender and she has created a gyno space in the literary block to attract other dalit writers.

1.2 Objectives

There is plenty of research on black and dalit writers exposing their oppression at the social, political and gender levels. There are investigations on the oppressed people of African descent that have conceptualized and begun to add the issues of racism/white supremacy. Many texts have provided a critique of American society, recommendations for black empowerment and steps for psychological and physical revolution. Black leaders like DuBois, Malcolm and Luther King began to highlight the challenges in bringing about changes in

the interests of black collective research findings in Black Studies. It provided ammunition to the blacks and their organizations to mobilize black masses and force the United States government progressively to take steps in improving the overall conditions of the blacks.

Dalit studies have emerged as a major area of research, creating space for critical or difficult conversations between feminist theory and dalit politics. The publication of *Nallapoddu* (Black Dawn) in 2003, edited by Gogu Shamala, is a landmark endeavour. The work has enabled a rich political understanding of the situation of dalit women and men, the politics of their invisibility and the critical importance of paying attention to the specific experiences in every aspect of national life. Dalit as a concept and category has its value, idea, meaning, culture and identifications with human dignity opening up new possibilities besides rendering critical understanding. But the reason for the lack of response to issues of history is that education came later to the dalits and they lacked strong leadership. Unlike the blacks, the Indian dalits belonged to different states variegated in language and they lacked communication and organization which left them disunited and dislocated. Moreover, the dalits have not organized strategies such as afro-centricity to counter their exploitation by others. In 2002, the Durban Conference on Racial Discrimination of the United Nations turned out to be an initiative in linking the problem within a larger framework in which activists and academics made a transitory attempt to understand the dialectical relation between caste and race. The issue of caste and race continues and it poses challenges to the

existing order; it propels the initiatives for the creation of an alternative paradigm as well as reconfigures the contours of every day materiality.

In this age of globalism when spatio-temporal boundaries are being erased, affinities between silenced communities beyond margins should be stronger. It is in this context that a comparative reading of the works of Maya Angelou and Bama who create a gynospace of their own becomes relevant.

1.2.1. Statement of Objectives

Post-colonial women's writing generally discusses the social, political and cultural issues which marginalise women based on andro-eurocentric paradigms. Literary studies related to the women belonging to the marginalised ethnic communities like the Blacks and the Red Indians in America, and the Dalits and the Tribals in India are also equally fascinating areas of investigation.

Post colonial women's writing in India generally discusses the issues which marginalize women based on caste-centric paradigms, thereby decentering them socially, politically, sexually and culturally. Studies related to the women belonging to the marginalized communities in India offer areas for investigation. It is in this context that Dalit literature becomes significant. The world is viewed from a dalit perspective and it might outrage and even repel the guardians of class and caste. The comparative reading of the works of the two authors proposes

- a. to locate commonalities in women discourses of two specific communities, the Black American and the Dalit Indian, by choosing a representative from each, namely Maya Angelou and Bama.
- b. to locate the fictionalized instances of oppression encountered by the black and dalit women in the novels of Maya Angelou and Bama and to analyse the feminine predicament in the marginalized communities in India and abroad.
- c. to bring out the cultural reclamation of the subaltern communities in general and also the self-identity and self-esteem asserted by both writers who have been widely known to be asserting their history, myths, rituals, folklore and community through their fictional works.
- d. to investigate the significance of Maya Angelou and Bama as post colonial women writers in their perceived role as inspirational forces to their respective women communities by instilling optimism and self confidence into their oppressed mindset, and to study their use of language in general and the use of narrative techniques and the registral and dialectal variations in particular.

1.2.2 Positive Paradigm

The philosophy 'from oppression to optimism' becomes the key slogan of Angelou and Bama. The subjugation and discrimination undergone by the marginalized sections of people anywhere in the world would lead them to intense disillusionment and disappointment. Angelou and Bama prove that

there is joy in the struggle and if it is supported by mental strength and courage they could anchor themselves firmly in the space created by them. The resistance to oppression and patriarchy has given them the impetus to survive the exploitation and suppression and lead them go beyond the state of despair. Usually the black and dalit literatures are categorized as novels of oppression because oppression is being subjectivised. But without writing their past history, their oppression and atrocities encountered, they could neither proceed to the present situation nor could they visualize the future.

The backdrop of oppression gave these writers the opportunity to think positively and to question their place in society. Writing against oppression is to show to the public the inhuman behaviour of the Whites or the 'Savarnas' towards the blacks or the dalits. The perception of the women writers differs from that of men because women are triply jeopardized - gender, class and race/caste. Transcending the level of tolerance or endurance, the oppressed woman has learnt to turn back to face the oppressor squarely. Thus writing of oppression is a weapon to reveal what has been done to a minority section of people. It becomes a protest, a revelation and propaganda. Generations of sufferings, endurance and survival have imbibed them with new vigour and stamina that there is a parallel presence of a forward looking optimism in their writings. Through the incidences and instances in their lives, both the writers convey the message of positiveness and there is an incessant transformability of existing conditions through revolutionary imperatives. A philosophy of life,

of optimistic realism, surges out to the readers throughout their works that certainly would register their vision of the futuristic marginalized women.

Since Angelou and Bama may be categorized as literary resistantes, their works could be analyzed using the tool of resistance theory. The post colonial critic, Spivak's controversial 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' has been countered by Parry, the Black critic, who argues that Spivak deliberately does not give speaking part to the colonized.

1.3 Angelou and her life

Maya Angelou is one of the most renowned and influential voices of our time. She is hailed as a renaissance woman for her achievements in the black literary field. Angelou is a celebrated poet, memoirist, novelist, educator, dramatist, producer, actress, singer, historian, film maker and civil rights activist. Born on April 4th 1928 in St. Louis (Missouri), Marguerite Ann Johnson is the daughter of Bailey Johnson, a naval dietician, and Vivian Baxter. She was raised in St. Louis and Stamps, Arkansas. In Stamps she experienced the brutality of racial discrimination but she also absorbed the unshakable faith and values of the traditional African-American family, community and culture. As a teenager, Angelou's love for arts won her a scholarship to study dance and drama at San Francisco's Labor School. At fourteen, she dropped out to become San Francisco's first black American female cable car conductor. She later finished high school, giving birth to her son Guy, a few weeks after graduation. As a young unmarried mother she supported her son by working as a waitress and

cook; however her passion for music, dance performance and poetry soon took center stage.

In 1954 and 1955, she toured Europe with a production of the opera *Porgy and Bess*. She studied modern dance with Martha Graham, danced with Alvin Alley on television variety shows, and in 1957 recorded her first album *Calypso Lady*. In 1958, she moved to New York where she joined the Harlem Writer's Guild, acted in the historic off-Broadway production of Jean Genet's *The Blacks* and wrote and performed *Cabaret for Freedom*. It was during this period that she met a number of major African-American authors like McPherson, Baldwin and Marshall. After hearing civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speak for the first time in 1960, she joined the Civil Rights Movement and became the Northern Co-coordinator of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. During the early 1960s, Angelou lived briefly with South African activist Vusumzi Make. She moved with her son Guy to Cairo, Egypt, where she served as editor of the English Language weekly *The Arab Observer*. In 1962, her relationship with Make ended and she moved to Ghana where she taught at the University of Ghana's School of Music and Drama and worked as feature editor for *The African Review* and wrote for *Ghanian Times*.

During her tours abroad she read and studied voraciously, mastering French, Spanish, Italian, Arabic and the West African language Fanti. When she was in Ghana she befriended Malcolm X and returned to United States in 1964 to help him build his new organization of African American Unity.

Shortly after her arrival at the United States, Malcolm X was assassinated and the organization got dissolved. Soon after Malcolm X's assassination, Dr. Martin King asked shocked Angelou to serve as coordinator and organize a march. King was assassinated in 1968. King's assassination falling on her birth day, April 4, left her devastated but with the guidance of her friend and novelist Baldwin, she began to work on the book on her first autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in 1969, which brought her first international recognition and acclaim. The list of her published verse, non-fiction and fiction, now includes more than 30 bestselling titles.

1.3.1 Achievements of Angelou

Angelou, being black and a woman, wants to engage herself to the task of refuting all the stereotypes, myths and images including the accepted and internalized images drawn by even the assimilationist group of black women. She proved to the andro-euro centric literary world that if a black female possessed self-discipline, concentration and perseverance, it is possible to achieve her aspirations and dreams. A trailblazer in films and television, Angelou wrote the screenplay and composed the score for the 1972 film *Georgia, Georgia*. Her script, the first by an African American woman ever to be filmed, was nominated for Pulitzer Prize. The years to follow were some of Angelou's most productive years as a writer and a poet. She worked as a composer, wrote for singer Roberta Flack and composed movie scores. She wrote articles, short stories, television scripts, autobiographies and poetry, produced plays and

spoke on the university lecture circuit. In 1977, she appeared in a supporting role in the landmark television adaptation of Alex Hailey's *Roots* and John Singleton's *Poetic Justice* in 1993. In 1993, she recited her poem 'On the Pulse of Morning' at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton, becoming the first poet to make an inaugural recitation since Robert Frost at John E Kennedy's inauguration in 1961. In 1996, she directed her first feature film *Down in the Delta*. In 2008, she composed poetry for and narrated the award-winning documentary *The Black Candle*, directed by M.K Asante, Jr.

Angelou campaigned for the Democratic Party in the 2008 presidential primaries giving her public support to Senator Hillary Clinton. When Clinton's campaign ended, Angelou put her support behind Senator Barack Obama. When Obama won the election and became the first African-American president of United States, she stated, "we are growing up beyond the idiocies of racism and sexism" (Angelou). In 2009, Angelou campaigned for the same-sex marriage bill in New York State.

Widely celebrated by popular audience and critics, Angelou has a long roster of recognitions. Angelou served on two presidential committees, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Arts in 2000, the Lincoln Medal in 2008 and received three Grammy Awards for the years 1993, 1995 and 2002 respectively for her spoken word albums. In 1995, Angelou's publishing company Bantam Books recognized her for having the longest-running record on New York Times paperback Nonfiction Best Seller list. She has been Reynolds Professor

of American studies at Wake Forest University since 1981. Her *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* was nominated for National Book Award and made her a symbol of pluck and pride for African American women. She was nominated for Pulitzer Prize for her collection of poetry 'Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diiie'. Her latest book is *Letter to My Daughter* dedicated to Winfrey.

1.3.2 Autobiographical Volumes

With the publication of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970) - (*Cage*) -, Angelou was heralded as a new kind of memoirist, one of the first African-American women who was able to publicly discuss her personal life. The book can be known as an autobiographical fiction which challenged the conventional structures of autobiography by critiquing, changing and expanding the genre. The book reflects the essence of her struggle to overcome the restrictions that were placed upon her in a hostile environment. She evokes her childhood in the American South with her brother in their grandmother's in Arkansas. It was here she learnt the power of the 'white folks' at the other end of the town. This volume becomes an extraordinary autobiography with a touch of realism and a twist of lyrical imagery. Her second work *Gather Together in My Name* (1974) - (*Gather*) - centers on her and her brother's move away from their grandmother. This transition takes place from her later teen years through her mid twenties focusing on her experiences as a mother, a Creole cook, a madam, a tap dancer, a prostitute and a chauffeurette. She concludes the book with an

apology for the accounts of her wretched past. It becomes a remarkable work because of its rare gift of hope in adversity. *Singin' and Swingin' and Getting' Merry like Christmas* (1976) - (*Singing*) - covers about five years of her life from twenty two to twenty seven. During this period, she was married to Tosh Angelos, a Greek whom she divorced after five years. She always carried with her a struggle to discover her true self and identity. *The Heart of a Woman* (1981) - (*Heart*) - manifests her quest for identity and place in the androcentric society. She made a commitment to promote Black Civil Rights and examined the nature of racial oppression, racial progress and racial integration. She felt pain and joy as she watched her son growing up to find his own identity. Angelou loves the world in spite of the cruelty it offers to the blacks. The fifth volume *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (1986) - (*All God*) - shows her to have developed an even greater sense of connection with her African past. She experienced the presence of tribal atavism within her but painfully realized that Africa was not her much dreamt 'Promised Land'. Initially she experienced the joy of being Black in a Black country but soon realized that life in Africa appeared paradoxical. She found sexism without loving female friendship, and Black solidarity with distrust of Black Americans. *A Song Flung up to Heaven* (2002) - (*A Song*) - opens as Angelou returns from Africa to the United States to work with Malcolm X. She is devastated by the assassination of Malcolm followed by the assassination of Martin Luther King and this resulted in her complete withdrawal from the

world unable to deal with such brutality. The volume ends at the point where Angelou begins to write the first line of *The Caged Bird*.

These narratives explore the trauma and personal triumphs of a remarkable woman with a keen understanding of the power of language to affect change and of the role of image making in the self representation of groups who have been historically oppressed. She acknowledged her debt to the black women writers who were her predecessors, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Zora Neale Hurston in particular and to her friend James Baldwin who encouraged her to write after hearing her childhood experiences. Her personal experiences typify the changes that have occurred in America in the course of her lifetime. She consciously strives to be the kind of writer who brings people and traditions together while at the same time appealing to the nobler sentiments of her readers. She is a humanist and a protean personality who has against all odds made her own life into the great American success story. Her works have a profound resonance with a long tradition that begins with the eighteenth and nineteenth century slave narrative.

The great grand daughter of a slave-born Arkansas woman, Angelou, has a rich and varied life and her serial autobiographical works intertwine in a harmonious way to her individual experiences with the collective social history of African Americans. Angelou confesses:

All my works, my life, everything I do is about survival, not just bare, awful, plodding survival, but survival with grace and faith,

while one may encounter many defeats, one must not be defeated (Lupton 45).

Her autobiographical projects are a response to external pressures and in many ways directed to a white audience but at the same time they succeed in gesturing towards the black community which shares a long tradition among oppressed people. She has used her works to reimagine ways of writing about women's lives and identities in a male dominated society. Her autobiographical volumes are often compared to *The Women's Room* by Marilyn French and *The Golden Notebook* by Lessing which were written during the same period. She has formed a female cultural identity and a positive black woman's image throughout her writings. Revealing oppression and slavery, they offered a historical overview of her life in America and Africa and how she coped within the context of a larger white society. She presents herself as the protagonist progressing gradually from helpless victim to a person of resistance and finally growing to outright and active resistance. Her works can be identified as cultural autobiography because the story of a black woman's selfhood is inseparable from her sense of community. She becomes the carrier of cultural traditions and key to the formation of continuance of black culture in America.

Angelou feels:

I wasn't thinking so much about my own life or identity. I was thinking about a particular time in which I lived and the influences of that time on a no of people. I used myself as a focus to show how one person can make it through those times (Tate 6).

The sharp decisive voice of Angelou, the black woman, is audible enough to inspire other oncoming black writers. Her works reveal the angst and apprehensions of domination which suppressed her to be mute. She vehemently declares through her discourses the need for the black woman to emerge from her lowly status in order to forge a space in the social order and show how the dissenting voices could be heard.

1.4 Bama and her life

Interestingly, the black populace of America inspired the marginalized group of people in India who have been subjugated for centuries for the only reason that they were lowly born. The caste system created for the economic balancing of the society was misused by power mongers to shift some people to the periphery as their servants. 'The untouchables' as they were branded were impeded from all freedom. The hegemony and poverty suffered by these people were seldom known. Despite being citizens of this country, the untouchables were deprived of their legacy rights. Unlike the Blacks, the question of leaving the country never confronted them. Though the dalits have fallen into the pit of depression and have been living as prisoners for centuries, they have gathered to accentuate their tribulations lately. They have imbibed new concepts of living and are trying to discover their identity and recuperate their culture. They have become aggressive in their struggle to attain freedom and equality through different modes. They recognized the importance of education in achieving their goal and find the possibility of action through literary domain.

Bama is a celebrated dalit woman writer in Tamil whose works have been translated into English, French and several other regional languages. Born as Faustina Mary Fathima Rani in the village Puthupatty, near Madurai in Tamil Nadu in 1958, she accepted the pen name 'Bama'². Susairaj, her father, was employed in the Indian army and Sebasthiamma was her mother. They were converted to Christianity way back in the eighteenth century. Her grandmother and mother were labourers who toiled for the landlords to bring up their five children. She did her schooling in her village and completed her degree at St. Mary's College, Tuthukkudi. After taking B.Ed, Bama started working as a teacher. Her life took a turn when she took the vows to become a nun. This was an attempt to break away from caste bonds and further pursue her goals to help poor dalit girls. She expected that she could work with the poor dalits and create awareness among them but unfortunately she was shocked to find that her desire could not be fulfilled as she was posted in a convent in North India. After seven years, Bama left the seminary in protest against the discrimination the church metes out to dalit Christians. After a period of disappointment and disillusionment, Bama slowly dispensed such thoughts and began to gain strength to defend herself and her community in positive terms. She is indebted to Rev. Fr. Mark S.J and Fr. M. Jeyaraj who encouraged her to write and gave moral support so that she could build self confidence and self respect. Presently she is working as a school teacher at Uthiramerur, near Kancheepuram.

1.4.1 Achievements of Bama

Bama has published an autobiographical work *Karukku* (1992) - (*K*) - and two novels *Sangati* (1994) - (*S*) - and *Vanmam* (2002) - (*V*) - originally written in Tamil and three volumes of short stories, *Kisumbukkaran* (1996), *Oru Thathavum Erumayum* (2004) and *Kondattam* (2006) respectively. Her works have been translated into English and other regional languages. *Karukku* and *Sangati* have been translated into English, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. The French translation of *Sangati* has won her international readership. *Vanmam* and *Kisumbukkaran* are translated into English. Her latest novel *Manushi*, the second part of *Karukku*, is soon to be published. *Karukku* has become the first dalit autobiography in Tamil written by a dalit woman in the rustic language of the paraya community. In it she discusses various forms of violent oppression like social, gender and religious unleashed on dalits especially on the paraya community to which she belongs. She highlights the discriminatory conduct of the church authorities towards dalit Christians. *Sangati* articulates the dual oppression of dalit women on account of gender and caste. It becomes a feminist narrative wherein she endeavours to expand a feminist agenda in taking up the theme of caste oppression against dalits, especially the women while also incorporating the inherent strength in the oppressed group which offers possibility of empowerment. *Vanmam* shows a marked departure from *Karukku* and *Sangati* as she adopts a linear and descriptive tone to reveal a pronounced empathy for paraya victimhood in the unceasing strife between the Pallars and the Parayas. Bama offers a corrective

perspective and a critical introspection on the subject of victimhood in *Vanmam* because whenever intra-dalit strife took place, it usually led to vilification of dalits whose voices remain submerged. The public refuse to recognize the internalization undergone by the dalits. Bama's short stories are usually comic satires that portray the discrimination prevalent in society and delineate the characters in a funny way that lightens the situations and at the same time leaves the reader to think. She has used the rustic language of the paraya community in her stories also. Bama has an expertise to capture the cadence of their speech naturally.

Bama is deterministic. Though she refuses the space where she could problematize her given identity, unlike James Baldwin who constantly interrogated the givenness of his racial self, she repeatedly appeals to shared standard of justice and fairness in her description of dalit life. Her writings displays an alternate 'Classism', a poetics of her own based on oral tradition. This concept is what makes up Dalit culture.

1.4.2 Recognitions and Awards

Bama has been recognized in both national and international levels through her writings. She has received the Kural Amaippu Award (1992), Cross Word Book Award (2000), Dalit Murasu Kalai Illakkiya Award (2001), Amuthan Adigal Illakkiya Parisu (2003) and many more awards. She is invited by the Universities in India and abroad and has delivered several lectures at various

conferences. She has dedicated her life for the upliftment of the downtrodden in general and dalits in particular. Her mission is to build a casteless society.

Bama's contribution to Dalit literature is significant. She has created a dalit spoken idiom which renders a distinct resonance to her writing. Her autobiographical writings break all conventions of life writings, that there is a specific rhetorical strategy to create a space of intersubjectivity, of being the victim and the witness simultaneously. Bama has created a dalit feminism that celebrates dalit women's lives and work-culture thereby engendering a communal and gender bonding.

Angelou and Bama, writers from the marginalized sections of society, could deconstruct the institutionalized literary and linguistic power as a mode of re-appropriation and their texts are remarkably resistant to the recuperative powers of public discourse on a number of levels simultaneously. It is through the careful interweaving of conflicting narratives that they are able to 'voice' and 'make heard' what the white/ upper caste narratives cannot hear, cannot read and cannot speak.

1.5 Conclusion: Erasing Margins

A comparative reading of the works of Angelou and Bama displays the differences and similarities not only between the writers' approach to life but also between the socio-political, cultural and religious contours of their countries. Oppression, exploitation, and gender discrimination have similarities but the strategies undertaken to resist, to fight and to struggle differ as their

mode of living and living conditions differ. They resist only to survive and it becomes a challenge to live in the much hegemonic situation against the raciest/casteist, androgenic world. Over the years, a substantial group of women writers in the Black and Dalit literary domain constantly redefined their position, identity and tradition. It is a struggle to end male chauvinism and ensure gender equality.

The world celebrating the centenary of International Women's day appreciates and honours women who have the ability to nudge forward and establish a space for them in this andro-centric society. With equal importance it is necessary to view the condition of the women of the oppressed class. Socio-psychological inferiority, desire for liberation and equality and anger against marginalization forms the recurring themes in the women writers from this section. Angelou and Bama subvert the literary traditions through their writings of life experiences, memories, music and rituals that connect the past with the present. There is an authentic call for action by bringing a catalytic recollection of the past history, exploitation and oppression. Through these 're-visions' the provoked writers challenge the world with their aggression, audacity and combativeness and put in resistance and claim their deserving positions in society.

Notes

¹Self-spun philosophy refers to spinning one's own philosophy of optimism and self confidence even in oppressive conditions.

²Bama is a blend of different sounds from her Christian name.

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