



# Bama from *karukku* and Sethe from *beloved* comparative analysis with the lens of intersectionality

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**Abstract**— This paper compares two strong women Bama from *Karukku* and Sethe from *Beloved* and shows how they deal with different forms of oppression. Bama is a Dalit woman from India who faces caste and gender discrimination. Sethe is a Black woman in America who suffers from slavery and racism. Bama and Sethe are treated badly because of they are, and their struggles are shaped by more than one problem like race, caste, gender, and class. This idea is called intersectionality, which means looking at how different types of discrimination come together and affect a person's life. The paper shows how Bama and Sethe fight back in their own ways. Sethe uses her strength as a mother to survive slavery, while Bama uses education and writing to fight caste discrimination. Even though they live in very different places and times, their stories show that marginalised women face complex challenges, but also have the power to resist and bring change.



**Keywords**— *Discrimination, Intersectionality, Oppression, Slavery, Race*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The rhetoric on women in postcolonial literature constantly presents them victims of violence, oppression and race. however, characters like Bama from *karukku* and Sethe from *beloved* challenge this stereotype by showing their agency patriarchal oppression and psychological scar of slavery.

The intersectionality theory regularly uses in feminist, ethnic, postcolonial and subaltern studies, provides a useful framework to research these characters. Intersectionality highlights the how inhabitants interact and create unique experience. Kimberlie Crenshaw "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989) argues that *intersectionality*, showing how Black women face both racial and gender discrimination in ways that are different from Black men or white women. After applying these theories, this paper examines the intersectional strategies of Bama and Sethe highlighting how resistance and survival through the education and love and depression. Although lots of research on these texts, but this paper reflects in contrast between these texts. After applying these theories,

this paper examines the intersectionality strategies of Bama and Sethe, highlighting how they navigate patriarchal control, social rejection, and the trauma of Postcolonial.

Sethe, as an enslaved Black woman, exists within a brutal system of racial oppression. She is denied autonomy over her own body, family, and labor. Her suffering is not just about being enslaved but about being a Black woman in a system that specifically targets her reproductive rights. The taking of her milk represents white control over Black motherhood. Even after slavery, racism continues to haunt her. She struggles to find economic security and is stigmatised by the community for her past actions. On the other hand, Bama (Dalit Oppression in India's Caste System) Bama, born into an oppressed Dalit caste, experiences discrimination that is systemic and deeply entrenched in Indian society. Like Sethe's dehumanisation under racism, Bama faces social exclusion and untouchability. The caste system dictates that Dalits cannot access certain spaces, education, or resources. The story in *Karukku* where she sees an elder Dalit man carrying food

for an upper-caste person with “untouchable” caution mirrors the forced servitude of Sethe under slavery.

**Sethe (Black Womanhood and Motherhood)** Sethe’s experience as a mother is central to *Beloved*. The institution of slavery not only commodifies her body but also severs her maternal bonds. She is seen as a “breeder” rather than a nurturing mother. Her decision to kill Beloved rather than let her return to slavery is an act of both trauma and agency. It highlights how Black women were forced into impossible choices under white supremacy. The expectation that Sethe must be endlessly resilient and self-sacrificing reflects a patriarchal and racialized burden placed on Black mothers. Alternatively, **Bama (Dalit Womanhood and Social Expectations)** Bama faces both caste and gender discrimination. As a Dalit woman, she is oppressed by both upper-caste communities and patriarchal structures within her own caste. Dalit women, like Black enslaved women, were historically exploited for labor and denied agency over their own bodies. In *Karukku*, Bama’s decision to become educated and independent is a radical act against both casteism and patriarchy.

**Sethe (Poverty and Post-Slavery Exploitation)** Even after escaping slavery, Sethe struggles economically. She works tirelessly but remains in a vulnerable position because of racial discrimination. The post-slavery reality in *Beloved* reflects how Black people were systematically denied economic independence, leading to generational poverty. In contrast, **Bama (Dalit Economic Exploitation)** Dalits were historically assigned menial, low-paying jobs. In *Karukku*, Bama highlights how economic opportunities for Dalits remain restricted. Education becomes Bama’s tool to fight against this oppression, but she faces barriers due to both caste discrimination and gender norms.

**Sethe (Haunting of the Past in *Beloved*)** Sethe is haunted both literally by Beloved and metaphorically by the trauma of slavery. Her past shapes her present, making it impossible for her to fully heal. Morrison portrays trauma as cyclical, affecting not just Sethe but also Denver and the Black community at large. Conversely, **Bama (Caste Trauma and Resistance in *Karukku*)** Bama’s work is centered around the trauma of caste oppression but also on the resilience of Dalit communities. While Sethe struggles to move beyond her past, Bama actively resists her oppression by choosing education and activism.

## II. CONCLUSION

The experiences of Sethe in *Beloved* and Bama in *Karukku* illustrate the profound impact of intersectional oppression, where race, caste, gender, and class intersect to create unique and layered forms of marginalization. Through an intersectional lens, it becomes clear that neither woman’s

oppression can be understood in isolation. Sethe’s struggles cannot be reduced to race alone, just as Bama’s cannot be solely attributed to caste. Instead, their identities as Black and Dalit women respectively shape their lived realities in deeply complex ways. Despite facing overlapping systems of violence, both women engage in acts of resistance, though their approaches differ based on their historical and social contexts. Sethe’s resistance is deeply personal and physical, rooted in survival and motherhood; her escape from slavery, her fight to reclaim autonomy over her children, and her endurance in the face of trauma reflect the ways Black women have historically resisted oppression within systems designed to erase them. On the other hand, Bama’s resistance is intellectual and collective, as she challenges caste-based discrimination through education, storytelling, and activism. While Sethe’s resistance is tied to reclaiming her bodily and emotional agency, Bama’s is a fight for knowledge, representation, and structural change. This comparison highlights how intersectionality shapes both oppression and resistance. The layered discrimination faced by Sethe and Bama underscores the need to move beyond single-axis analyses of oppression, recognising instead how multiple systems of power operate simultaneously. Their stories reflect the broader struggles of marginalised women across different geographies and histories, emphasising the necessity of contextualized resistance strategies whether through personal acts of survival or systemic interventions like education and literature.

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