

Narrative Techniques and Colloquial Style in the Short Stories of Bama

Dr. Y. Jaya

Assistant Professor of English,
Department of H&BS,
University College of Engineering,
Kakinada AP
kkjaya2000@gmail.com

Abstract:

This article examines the distinctive narrative techniques and the strategic use of colloquial language in the short stories of Bama, a prominent Dalit feminist writer in Tamil literature. Being self-experienced Bama's narratives are away from dominant literary conventions by foregrounding Dalit subjectivity, collective memory, and everyday resistance. In order to counter upper-caste literary aesthetics, the study examines the ways in which oral storytelling styles, episodic structures, first-person narration, and community-centered voices serve as narrative techniques.

Special attention is paid to Bama's use of colloquial Tamil, idiomatic expressions, and folk speech, which not only authenticates Dalit life but also serves as an act of cultural and linguistic assertion against hegemonic norms. Focusing on theoretical frameworks from Dalit aesthetics and Ambedkarite thought, the article argues that Bama's narrative style embodies what Sharankumar Limbale terms "writing from lived experience" and that Gopal Guru identifies as the ethical urgency of Dalit discourse. Language in Bama's short stories emerges as a political tool that resists sanitisation, disrupts literary elitism, and reclaims marginalised voices. This study examines Bama's storytelling practices in the broader context of Dalit literature, demonstrating how narrative form and informal language work together to serve as tools for identity building, social critique, and transformational resistance.

Keywords: Colloquial Idiomatic expression literary elitism Resistance Sanitisation.

Introduction:

A condensed form of narrative fiction, the short story seeks to create a single, cohesive impression. The crucial short story writing strategy depends on its central theme. The writer must concentrate on a single main subject and steer clear of pointless subplots because the form's duration is constrained. The plot should be succinct and well-structured, usually along a straight line from exposition to climax and resolution, though modern short stories may differ in this regard.

Another important component is characterisation. Short tale writers typically use a small number of characters, exposing their characteristics through dialogue, action, and internal conflict rather than in-depth description. A short story's setting or backdrop has a big impact on its mood and content.

The social, cultural, and psychological milieu can be revealed through events and character interactions when the background was skilfully incorporated into the story. Every word in a short narrative adds to the overall effect, thus language must be precise and provocative. Dialogue should be realistic and useful to advance the plot or improve characterisation.

Internal or external conflict creates tension and advances the story. The conclusion of a short tale is quite important; it should reinforce the narrative's central premise and leave the reader with a lasting impression.

Human suffering, social injustice, irony of fate, compassion, *etc are highly reflected in the* short stories of *Bama* which is a powerful and well-crafted work of fiction. The author effectively employs the essential elements of the short story—plot, characterisation, setting, language, and narrative technique to create a unified and strong impression on the reader.

The plots of Bama's stories are straightforward but profound, following the economy that defines the short story genre. The plot proceeds rationally from the opening to the climax and, finally, to a gripping ending. The author avoids unnecessary events and focuses on a single battle to maintain structural continuity and intensity. Irony, moral clarity, and emotional impact are all present in the story's strong finale, which gives the reader something to ponder over.

The story's characterisation is realistic and nuanced. The characteristics of the individuals were revealed through their actions, dialogue, and reactions to circumstances rather than being thoroughly detailed. The protagonist becomes a memorable character whose experiences mirror society as a whole. The story's theme was advanced by even the smallest characters.

The story's theme and setting are intimately related. The author presents the social and cultural background sparingly, allowing it to emerge naturally throughout the narrative. This backdrop enriches the reader's comprehension of the characters' motivations and challenges while also enhancing realism.

The language in the story is straightforward, comprehensible, and expressive. The story is made more authentic by the author's use of everyday dialect and avoidance of ornate diction. Dialogue is a powerful tool for character development and plot advancement. The story's theme was reinforced by the narrative approach, whether it is symbolic or linear.

Harum Scarum Saar is a superb example of creating a short narrative. The story achieves artistic coherence and emotional depth through its concise form, compelling theme, and skilful characterisation. It effectively accomplishes the goal of a short narrative by leaving the reader with a powerful and enduring impression. The primary idea or underlying message that the author wishes to convey is the theme of a short tale. It goes beyond the subject matter of the story; It encompasses not just the subject matter of the story but also the comprehension or interpretation that arises from the characters' experiences and the progression of events.

The concept of a short narrative needs to be clear and unique because the duration of the form hinders the development of multiple ideas. Instead of making explicit claims, a writer typically uses story development, characterisation, setting, and conflict to expose the theme. The protagonist's decisions and actions often reflected the story's theme, and the setting or societal backdrop further supports the subject's applicability.

For example, themes like poverty, alienation, injustice, love, or human perseverance were frequently explored through relatable people and everyday situations. In critical appreciation, mentioning the theme means identifying the central idea and explaining how the author develops it throughout the story. The degree to which the theme was skilfully incorporated into the narrative framework and creative techniques determines how effective a short tale is. A strong theme gives the narrative coherence and makes an impact on the reader.

Themes in Bama's Short Stories

Bama is a prominent Dalit writer whose short stories powerfully articulate the lived experiences of marginalised communities, particularly Dalit Christians in Tamil society. Her writings are deeply rooted in social reality and function as acts of resistance against caste oppression, gender discrimination, and social exclusion. The themes and narrative strategies in her short stories reflect a strong commitment to social justice and collective identity.

The most dominant theme in Bama's short stories is caste oppression. She exposes the everyday humiliation, exploitation, and violence faced by Dalits in both public and private spaces. Caste is shown not as an abstract system but as a lived reality that shapes relationships, labour, education, and dignity. The issue of social injustice, in which establishments like the workplace, school, and church fail to protect the weak, is closely related to this.

Another significant theme is gender discrimination. Dalit women in Bama's stories suffer double marginalisation both as Dalits and as women. Their lives were marked by hard labour, domestic responsibility, and sexual exploitation. However, Bama does not portray them merely as victims; instead, she highlights their strength, resilience, and spirit of resistance.

The theme of community and collective identity is central to her narratives. Unlike individual-centred stories, Bama foregrounds the shared experiences of the Dalit community. She emphasises unity, mutual support, and cultural memory as tools of survival. Themes of education, awareness, and self-respect also recur, suggesting pathways to liberation and empowerment.

Narrative Techniques in Bama's Short Stories

Bama's narrative approach is realistic and immersive. Her narratives are authentic and emotionally impactful since they frequently draw on personal experiences. Her frequent use of a community or first-person voice allows marginalised individuals to speak for themselves rather than be addressed.

Her utilisation of oral storytelling traditions is one of the most notable aspects of her narrative style. The language is conversational, straightforward, and frequently reflects spoken Tamil. Her writing is approachable and opposes literary snobbery while maintaining cultural distinctiveness.

Besides, Bama employs episodic and non-linear narration, emphasising occurrences over rigidly planned stories. Character, power dynamics, and societal hierarchy are all revealed through dialogue. The hypocrisy of prevailing caste, customs and religious establishments is gently exposed through irony and sarcasm.

Dalit Consciousness, Lived Experience, and Resistance in Bama's Short Stories

Dalit consciousness, a perspective that arises from a deep awareness of historical marginalization and caste-based oppression, has a significant influence on Bama's short stories. Bama draws attention to the basic realities of Dalit life humiliation, hard labour, exclusion, and survival by grounding her narratives in actual experience rather than portraying caste as a remote social issue. Dalit speakers are free to convey their own suffering and agency without the influence of dominant caste perspectives because these experiences have been shared from inside the community.

The element of resistance, which functions both conceptually and narratively, is a distinguishing characteristic of Bama's storytelling. In addition to overt protest, her characters use perseverance, group cohesion, and the declaration of self-respect to oppose oppression. Particularly, Dalit women show themselves as resilient, silent, strong individuals who oppose patriarchal and caste systems. An act of resistance against elite literary traditions that have historically silenced oppressed voices is the use of vernacular language, oral narrative styles, and community voices.

As a result, Bama's short stories turn individual and societal sorrow into a cultural and political message. Her stories serve as potent interventions in Dalit literature, reframing the short story as a forum for social change, protest, and assertion by fusing Dalit consciousness with personal experience and resistance.

Ambedkarite Thought and Dalit Aesthetics in Bama's Short Stories

The Ambedkarite philosophy, which emphasizes education, equality, self-respect, and opposition to the caste system, may be reinforced in Bama's short stories. Similar to Dr B. R. Ambedkar, Bama highlights the caste system's devastating effects on Dalit lives and denies its

moral justification. Her stories emphasise social fairness and human dignity, reflecting Ambedkar's demand that caste must be abolished. In Bama's stories, institutions like religion, education, and social authority which Ambedkar criticised for upholding caste oppression are also questioned and deconstructed.

A fundamental tenet of Ambedkarite epistemology, the idea of Dalit awareness in Bama's literature arises directly from lived experience. In her stories, knowledge is visual rather than abstract or literary, resulting from everyday experiences with exclusion, labour, and humiliation. Bama disrupts prevailing literary traditions that have always portrayed Dalits from an external and frequently stereotyped perspective by letting Dalit individuals tell their own stories.

Bama adheres to Dalit aesthetics, which departs from the conventional notions of beauty, refinement, and form supported by upper-caste literary standards, through the use of informal speech, oral narrative styles, and episodic structure. Truth, suffering, rage, and defiance are valued more highly in Dalit aesthetics than flowery rhetoric. The direct and unvarnished language of her stories becomes a political tool that challenges literary elitism and asserts cultural autonomy.

Ambedkarite philosophy, which advocates for the abolition of caste, the affirmation of human dignity, and the pursuit of social equality, is the foundation of Bama's short stories. Like Dr B. R. Ambedkar, Bama challenges the institutions of social authority, education, and religion that uphold discrimination and reveals the immorality of caste systems.

In Bama's narratives, resistance functions on several levels. Thematically, her characters use moral fortitude, self-assertion, and group cooperation to fight against caste and gender discrimination. In literature, the narrative voice itself becomes an act of resistance as

marginalized subjects are given more formal space. Dalit aesthetics, which portrays writing as both a creative outlet and a social intervention, is in line with this.

Ambedkarite theory and Dalit aesthetics are fundamental ideas to Bama's short stories. Bama turns the short tale into a venue of cultural assertion and political struggle by fusing resistance, living experience, and Dalit consciousness. By reinventing the function and style of storytelling in the Indian literary tradition, her works make a substantial contribution to Dalit literature.

Dalit Aesthetics, and Critical Theory in Bama's Short Stories

A key perspective for comprehending Bama's narrative has provided by Sharankumar Limbale's theoretical framework of Dalit aesthetics. According to Limbale "Dalit literature is a literature of lived experience, and its goal is social awakening rather than amusement.

Bama's short stories, which are grounded in the common realities of labor, humiliation, gendered pain, and survival, have provided the best illustrations of this concept. Bama's use of oral narrative forms, colloquial language, and episodic structure supports Limbale's claim that social truth and authenticity are more important than traditional literary sophistication.

Bama's narrative approach has been further clarified by Gopal Guru's theoretical influence. Guru emphasises that Dalits must speak for themselves rather than be represented by dominant groups, making a distinction between "the experience of humiliation" and "the language of humiliation." Bama's tales exemplify the same concept by giving Dalit voices particularly those of women a platform to express their own suffering, rage, and defiance. As a result, the narrative voice in her works transforms individual pain into a social consciousness and becomes an act of political assertion.

In Bama's short stories, resistance functions both structurally and conceptually. Her characters use common acts of disobedience, solidarity, and self-assertion to oppose caste and patriarchy.

However, writing in a non-elite, community-based voice itself is a form of opposition to dominant literary traditions. This is consistent with Dalit aesthetics, which sees literature not as independent artistic expression but as a means of social involvement.

Bama's short stories demonstrate the potent fusion of critical theory, Dalit aesthetics, and Ambedkarite ideology. Bama turns the short story into a venue of resistance, dignity, and social critique by emulating Gopal Guru's attention on self-representation and Sharankumar Limbale's emphasis on lived experience. Her writing has made a substantial contribution to both modern Indian literary discourse and Dalit literature.

Bama says Swear words are the weapons for Dalit women. Writers employ a wide variety of literary forms, devices, and styles as weapons of resistance. The language of resistance is a powerful weapon of the oppressed. This language contains contemptible swear words, hurled at the oppressor. They sound unpleasant and unrefined because they entail backbiting, gossip, character assassination, rude nicknames, obscene and abusive words and also vulgar gestures. Laughter, ridicule, sarcasm, lampoon, humour, jokes and indignant gestures are powerful weapons which have their own aesthetic values. Bama has handled this weapon of resistance very skilfully to resist the oppression faced by the community of her own.

Bama's writing is raw, earthy and natural. Additionally, it has the strong, zesty flavor of the onion, pickle, or chilli that one chomps on in between mouthfuls. The critic Subhasree Krishnaswamy rightly says, 'Much like the ragi kuuzh that her community subsists on morning, noon and night. Abusive words which are everyday forms of resistance have no headlines. By throwing powerful words and deeds the characters in Bama's stories reflected how they were exploited, humiliated, suppressed, ill-treated, marginalised and dehumanize which is quite humanising.

Short stories

Bama's writing resembles the work of the reputed writer R.K Narayan. The common features are affectionate treatment of the communities and the hurried pace of personal lives. The comparison is rather instructive, though some critics called Narayan status-quoist. It is true that when some forces of modernity appeared and laid to narrative friction, a semblance of resolution was latent by the time story was completed. There is a legal premise that makes her stories end up in setting a whole panoramic perception for pro-active approach. Most of her stories have the smell of zig-zag puzzles People must endure the dangers of subservience that are passed down through the generations in many of her stories. A few minor steps must be taken to make sure the riddle has reached a logical conclusion,

Bama's stories the end marks the point, where things have changed for the effected ones. There is no way to return to the inherited ways of interrelations. The preposterous self- abnegating factors of caste, which have weighed on the ancestors for whom they have subjugated, become unbearable. It is imperative to note that Bama's storytelling is on simpler fashion in which the reader learns a new aspect of Dalit character. There is a 360-degree perspective of the situation in each phase.

Like a village story teller sitting under a shady tree, talking in slow pace on the thoughts and action of her characters: "Agreed you are a good character. "The narrator tells the man reminiscing an episode in Annachi." In the sluggish pace Bama's skill reflects upon many lives in hundred pages.

"Pongal after pongal Madaswamy would pay his respects to his landlords and do whatever he had to, as tradition demanded. It was thus that during Pongal, too he collected whatever was required and got ready to go."Madaswamy is fifty years old, and raising his seven or eight children has been an upheave-led chore. It is pertinent to note that Bama never fixed the number

of children. People in the street used to stay there was no job he had not done. He opened a tea shop at the far end of the street.

But he had to close the petty businesses as they didn't work out well. Madaswamy then tried selling beans and other eatables hawking them street after street. That also, did not work. Then he tried growing mango and jackfruit plantation on lease. As the season demanded, and that felt, too. He had so been farming on Ramaswamy Ayya's leased farmlands for the last four or five years.

He is conscious about the caste factor that affected his business. He did not feel like rebelling. He is out of rebellion mood. When his son went to school, the reaction with the absurd decision was furious. Madaswamy and his family went to the land master after he became tired of the son's inquiries. After the landlord humiliated him, he urged his son to feed the cattle the food that the landlord had provided. He was clearly insulted by the leftover food that was provided to him. There comes the end as the futuristic possibilities had become matter without any interruption.

In Haarum Saarum Saar the village joker Pothiya Muthu makes a vulgar proposal to the employer. The end of this is told clearly to the employer. It is observable that Bama appears to soften the blow. Actually, the contrary is true. In these stories, there is a powerful articulation. In practice, to be able to state in the course of life what is unacceptable is not that simple. Bama has the trick of making her readers come to the brink through clear methods of prodding. Her method eliminates the necessity for a confrontation to identify the issue. It is the speed of daily life- lined by the fashion of ancestors who have tolerated her long. The clues can come from these without complaint or protest. The moments of empowerment come when people recognize their unalienable right to equality.

Kondattam in Tamil means celebration. The story portrays not only the lower caste of Hindu society got marginalised, but also spread over evil tentacles into the Christian religion. Being a nun Bama also faced herself the ill treatment in the church. This humiliation changed her mind to leave the convent and return to the social life as a lay woman. The ruling class in the Kondattam narrative forbids the lower caste from entering the church grounds or even participating actively in the Christmas festivities.

The Dalits have been treated as fugitives and untouchables in the hands of Hindu land lords. They are bashed and threatened in every occasion. Even the parish priest is helpless in supporting and protecting them. The Dalits pinpointed the priest about his preaching on the equality of all men in the eyes of God, but of no advantage. The priest is warned on the practice of centuries old justice and suppression. Despite of all these problems, the story ends in an optimistic note.

According to Bama the retribution faced by Dalits referred as tazhapattor- the lowered/oppresed and odukkapattor -marginalised is same to other downtrodden and underprivileged sections of society like the poor, women and children. Bama criticizes the soulless society with anguish and pain for ill-treating the Dalits in her stories. The combination of factors exacerbated their poverty. As a result, Dalit women suffer and are marginalised thrice.

Azhippu (destruction), where there is no hope for the unfortunate women, effectively captures the suffering of the oppressed women.

Azhippu portrays the torture faced by downtrodden women left with no hope for survival. Overriding the caste structure, this story reflects the trauma of women in a way where gender decides on every occasion. The story which ends on a pathetic conclusion is unusual for Bama.

For Kaniyamma, the only option is to accept life's misfortunes very stoically. An older man rejects the daughter, who is already impoverished, as a member of his family.

Hoping again hope is the only way for her during pregnancy. She never apprehended that visiting a doctor would mean abortion. In essence, the story depicts the mother's and daughter's desperation in the face of casteism, gender inequality, and poverty.

For the old lady Thavasi there is no companion other than her goat which follows her in all places. The relatives are kind enough to invite her to their place. Because of self-respect Thavasi does not complain. Having simple needs, she can sustain herself on minimum wages. At the end, on a tragic evening she accidentally falls into a pit and cries for help. Nobody comes to rescue her, nobody listens to her and bleating of her goat. Finally, there is no one to listen to her. The end comes the next morning her stiff body is discovered by the villagers. (translation mine)

In the story Thavittu kuruvi (husk sparrow) the birds have been treated metaphorically to explain how female body is exploited. Looking her two birds thrown out of the nest it seems the animal nest by bigger birds disturb Kaleswari. Screaming at her the mother explains "It has been true in human society, now it seems the animal kingdom too is imitating us". This simile gives the picture of how the upper caste landowners have no compunction regarding the usage of female body for their physical pleasures. In real life, the daughter born out of an illegal relationship was raised by her grandmother and mother Thayamma until she reached the school age.

Obviously, the child is not aware of her own plight and is confused at the mother's sad words regarding the sorrow of the sparrows. Finally, it is a never who comes to Thayamma and her mother and advises them to bury the past and move on with the changing times. Notably, the

majority of the stories in this collection of stories end with the hope that the victims' situation will improve better in future days.

In **Adaiyalam**(Identity), Bama writes of the deep-seated patriarchal notions in all sections of society.

In **Chidarakal**, (Shattered pieces) the protagonist Chandran heart is shattered by the constant second-hand treatment meted out to him.

In **Vali**(pain), Bama takes us into the heart of an innocent kid, Palpandi who is unable to accept the custom of burying a living chick in the coffin of the young woman. While others mourn the death of the woman, the kid weeps for the chick.

In **Vayirum Vazhkaiyum**(Hunger and life), Even among schoolchildren, caste divisions that are strongly ingrained manifest themselves.

The most poignant story is **Edakoodam** (Something Amiss) where Marimuthu, the class topper and brightest kid, deliberately performs poorly on his exam in order to discipline his instructor

Ravikumar a, former MLA and one of the editors of the Oxford India Anthology of Tamil Dalit Writing, “Dalit is a consciously chosen ideological position against the caste system. An untouchable alone can be a Dalit because caste defines a person by birth. It is like a feminist position. Every woman is not a feminist, but only a woman can be a feminist”.

Mr. Ravikumar further says, (The Hindu) when a Dalit woman writes, it is obvious that her voice is that of one marginalised three times economically, socially and also gender wise.

In **Chilli powder** the arrogant landlady Gangamma is described as ‘Thennanpalaila Kedakkara therakennakka’ (29), implying that she has “an ugly figure with a huge paunch like a swollen toad stuck to a palm leaf” (29) Dalit women are gifted with a spontaneous

outflow of language which reveals their indomitable spirit, courage, sarcasm and a sparkling sense of humour.

The reversal of fortune is well exemplified in the story **Those Days** in which the landlord Maruthappan is tied to a fig tree in the slum for molesting a Dalit girl. The entire crowd abuses him. Masanam Thatha raises his voice, ‘‘ It was only in those days that we remained quiet! (55).

In the story **Ponnuthai** her comments effectively draw attention to the protagonist's resistance to repression and others' criticism. She remained resolute in her profession, oblivious to the disparaging remarks made by others.

Subramani in **Freedom** shows his resistance towards oppression by urinating on the curry leaf plant which belongs to the mistress of the house saying, she makes me suffer so much, let her cook with my pee now and eat.

In the story, **An Old Man and a Buffalo** Malandi Thatha who is well known for his use of words as weapons of resistance.

Most of the stories in her collection end on a note of hope that things will change for the oppressed and the victimised. As **Ambedkar** said ‘‘If you believe in living a respectable life, you believe in self- help which is the best help.’’

Conclusion

Bama's short stories have a distinct political and social aim and has been characterised by significant subject themes and creative narrative techniques. Bama turns the short tale into a potent vehicle for protest and self-assertion by fusing the themes of caste, gender, and resistance with a genuine narrative voice. The readers find the factors of change working

constantly. The narrator projects the omnipresent, amorphous emotions in her stories especially that of anger and a sense of desperate exasperation of the characters to the rest of the world. Her writings question established literary conventions and make a substantial contribution to the Dalit literature.

Works Cited:

Bama. Haram- Scarum Saar and Other Stories. Trans. N. Ravi Shankar. New Delhi: Women, 2006.

Kale, S. Kishore, Against all Odds, Penguin Books India, 2000

Krishnasamy, Subhasree. A Call for Action. The Hindu Literary Review 6 Feb. 2005

Scott, C. James. Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance. Delhi: Oxford UP.1990.

Suriyachandran, Swear Words and the Weapons for Dalit Women. Tamil (New Book Speaks). March 2004:2-8

Bama, Kondattam (Tamil) Chennai: Aazhi Publishers, 2009.

<http://jaiarjun.blogspot.in/2006/09/small-rebellions-stories-by-bama.html>

<http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/56448/9/09/-chapter>

<http://www.Thehindu.com/todays-paper/to-miscellaneous/tp>