



WOMEN IN BAMA'S SANGATI

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ABSTRACT:

KEYWORDS:

In India's caste system, Dalits are conventionally observed as the low. They are considered as untouchable. Dalits face discernment at possible levels. Multiple echelons of discrimination is faced by Dalit **women at greatest that men in that caste**. Dalit women are being beset even as both a woman and a Dalit. Dalit women are often imprisoned in highly patriarchal societies. Dalit women suffer from severe margins in order to access righteousness and there is widespread liberty in cases where the committer is a member of a high class caste. Both men and women group of Dalits have freshly started showing confrontation against oppression through their writings. Dalit literature is a system of post-colonial literature. Different genres are covered in Dalit literature. Many Dalit writers like Bama, Baby Kamble and Arjun Danglay have come up with their own stories of agony and grief. They have started narrating the misery of Dalit life in its true manner. Writer of a particular region write in their own vernacular language.

Weaker are exploited by stronger which is as old as mankind itself. Dalit literature is always marked by rebellion and a great scuffle of lower caste, against sarvarna who are the high class people. Bama is a Tamil Christian Dalit writer who pens about the breath of Dalit Women in Tamil Nadu. Being one of the Tamil, Dalit Christian woman she is able to express ardently about the identity of women in her works. She observes caste and gender oppression together. She changed the perspective of 'woman' in dalit community.

Sangati is an astonishing vision into the lives of Dalit women who face problems of caste and gender discernment. The theme of Sangati is focused on hard labour and economic unevenness that leads to culture of violence against dalit women. Bama's Sangati is one of the exclusive Dalit feminist narratives. Bama's Sangati has many dalit women characters like Maikanni, Muukkama, Irulaayi and Peechiamma whose problem of gender

discrimination and the situation in a subaltern community is narrated.

Sangati, is her memoirs of her community which moves from the story of struggle of individual to the discernment of the Paraiyya women along with community friends and relatives and their combined struggle. Bama's mind is clearly reflected in her words.

My mind is crowded with many anecdotes: stories not only about the sorrows and tears of Dalit women, but also about their lively and rebellious culture; their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them, but rather to swim vigorously against the tide; about the self-confidence and self-respect that enables them to leap over their adversities by laughing at and ridiculing them; about their passion to live life with vitality, truth and enjoyment; about their hard labour. I wanted to shout out these stories (*Sangati* 9).

The Dalit women are considered to be subjugated and oppressed because of the dominance by their own men and by the superior caste men and women. In Bama's Sangati, women are exploited as they are all illiterate. Woman also face problems with social empowerment. Theme of gender discrimination can be viewed in the her initial quote,

If the third is a girl to behold, your courtyard will fill with gold (*Sangati* 1)

Bama is a little girl in the novel. She states that in her family at the beginning when the child is born, her parents find no variance between boys and the girls but as they grow up, family members take more anxiety and concern for boys than girls. Her family members trust that a girl should belong to the odd number in birth order and for a boy to fit in to even number. Her grandmother attends child birth in her village. She is not allowed to attend upper class as she belongs to paraichi community.

Bama as a young girl of twelve finds difference between

boys and girls in form games where each have their own gender discriminated games like kabaddi for boys and marbles for girls. Even as small girls they had to play only cooking or getting married, home keeping, minding babies as in real life. Members in the society gave importance to boys than girls. The irony of these women's condition is emphasized when she parallels the life of the pigs grown by the white nuns. The pigs are not only as white as the nuns but as also strong and well fed too. Lower caste women like Mariamma not only had to face the fury of their fathers at home but also the risk of being molested by men outside the family, generally upper caste men. The paraiyar men could not go beyond the power of mudalali's words and hence they spoil the life of innocent girl. This event literally disturbs the child and raises queries to her Paatti that whatever men say is assured to be right while whatever women say is believed to be always wrong,

Why can't we be the same as boys? We aren't allowed to talk loudly or laugh noisily; even when we sleep we can't stretch out on our backs nor lie face down on our bellies. We always have to walk with our heads bowed down, gazing at our toes . . . even when our stomachs are screaming with hunger, we mustn't eat first. We are allowed to eat only after the men in the family have finished and gone. What, Paatti aren't we also human beings? (Sangati 29)

In Sangati, Bama overthrows typical legends and asks appropriate queries related to her culture. The story of Thiruvallvar, the great Tamil poet's wife Vasuki, perceived as the essence of chastity and dedication to husband is used in the novel by Bama to exemplify the subordinate position of women in marriage. The story she feels is a cue that wives ate after husbands even during Thiruvalluvar's time. Ananatamma of West Street was beaten up for eating crab curry before serving her husband and Bama offers an alternate folk song to highpoint it.

O Crab, Crab, my pretty little crab, who wandered through all the fields I planted I pulled off your claws and put you on a pot, I gave the pot a boil and set it down. I waited and waited for him to come home, And began eating as came through the door. He came to hit me the, the hungry brute, He pounced at me to kill me..." (Sanagti 30)

The characters like Mariamma and Thaayi presents the leitmotif of gender issues, unhappy married life, shame and domination. These ladies suffer a lot and their husbands also demean them by thrashing them cruelly and cutting their hair. But they women never revolt against it. When the girl asks about it to her mother, why she does not leave their men and tolerate the sufferings, her mother replies,

It's not so easy to get away, once you are married. Once you've put your head in the mortar, can you escape from the pestle? No, she must continue to suffer until her head rests on the earth at last (Sangati 44).

Maikkanni is a girl in the novel who works when she learned to walk from birth. She looks after her mother and

goes to work when her mother gives birth. When her mother's health becomes fit Maikkanni had to take care of the new born baby. The life of a Dalit girl was perturbing but the life of a grown up Dalit woman was shoddier. Marriamma tells a lot about the sexual attack and the abuse faced by Dalit women and their powerlessness to stand up against it.

Men hitting their wives are tagged as the action of low caste household but such happenings also take place in upper caste families too. The difference between the two lies in the fact that the dalit women does not care about the status. Dalit women's first priority was to serve the belly. They have to do the physical toil to run the whole household without the upkeep from their husbands and as a result their hindrance bestows in the form of quarrels and abuses in the streets. Bama makes it apparent that only few women fight with their men like this.

Most of them put up with all that violence and suffer a life of hellish torment (sangati 67).

Bama convincingly depicts the physical violence, like assassinating, lashing and dismissing of Dalit woman by fathers, husbands, and brothers. Bama discovers the psychological stress. Like other Indian women writers she is more generous with the use of Tamil Dalit jargons.

In reality marginalization of dalit women is multi-layered. Relegation for the Dalit woman begins at home. The Dalit community, like most Indian communities, always favors the male child. The girl child is not welcome and becomes an object of discernment. In the Dalit home, the male child is renowned while the girl child is seen as a curse.

Pathetic picture of dalit women's lives are clearly pictured in this novel through different descriptions. Even voting is not women's freedom. They vote to the person who was advised to them by their husband. Bama lobs light on the different aspects of Dalit women's life grace like various issues regarding departure in marriage, child labour, and status of women across the society. These issues are portrayed through the characters of such as Irulaayi and Pecchiamma. Every feature of society related to women is revealed here by Bama because here she describes the theme of gender discernment, caste based domination, sexual violence, the condition in which dalit women grow up and men and upper castes' treatment with dalit women. Women are restricted from seeing cinema; they cannot do inter-caste marriage even though they are literate.

A girl who has a little education and has progressed somewhat, is not allowed to seek a like-minded man, and certainly not marry anyone of her choice (Sangati 109).

In the novel Bama concentrates in her language of dalit women with resource by giving way to maxims, folklore and folk songs. In first half of the novel, Bama shows her protest in her words against the oppression faced by women in dalit community. But the later part of Sangati moves away from the state of despair and frustration. Instead it presents a positive uniqueness to Dalit women concentrating their inner strength and stamina. She also

appeals our mind to the education of Dalit community. She gives the example of Pecchiamma, who belongs to Chakkili community, who studied only up to fifth class.

To conclude, it can be said that Bama has made us conscious about the life of Dalits very closely which forces us to change our approach towards the subjugated, the marginalized and suppressed class of society. Bama in her *Sangati* describes factual elements in a very brave and truthful way, which she experienced in her life by using informal language, exploitations used by women in their daily life. She ends her novel with an positive point of view. She has become fruitful in raising her voice against caste, class, patriarchy in general and 'male' sex in particular; focuses on the prominence of education, strong self-will, impartial defiance of female to female and to show the courage against inequality and bias. At the end of the novel Bama says that she has a hope.

1. I am hopeful that such a time will come soon (Sangati 123).

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