



Research Paper

Dalit women in double oppression: A study of Bama's *Sangati*

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ABSTRACT: This work is an attempt to bring light into the world of Dalit women who struggled against discrimination and torture which they had to face from inside and outside their community. Women are considered to be the most marginalized among the Dalit community, they are doubly oppressed. The researcher points out the amount of pain and labour women have to experience right from their childhood and how they find the courage to break those shackles through the very experience of the unnamed protagonist in the novel "Sangati" written by the Dalit Feminist writer Bama.

KEYWORDS: Patriarchy, discrimination, labour, oppression

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I. INTRODUCTION

Literature has always played a significant role in inculcating social awareness against various issues prevalent in society. Bama Faustina Soosairaj's *Sangati* is one such novel in Indian literature. In this paper, an attempt is made to identify the main theme of this novel, that is, subjugation of Dalit women in the Indian Society. Oppressed and trampled by the shackle of patriarchy for years, Dalit women have slowly found the courage to break the norms and structure of the society. The writer Bama feels, it is her duty to voice and bring out the plight of her community to the readers, she wants to bring awareness on such evil practices in India. If Bama's previous novel "Karukku" is said to be her autobiography, then her second novel, "Sangati" can be viewed as the autobiography of parayyas, the Dalit community she belongs to in South India representing the struggle of different women and how each of them faced and tackled it.

India's caste system always revolved around the upper caste trying to overpower and oppress the lower caste. The Dalit literature came into light when the outcast revolt against these discrimination, exploitation and marginalisation and finally found the strength by raising their voice. A woman belonged to Dalit community suffered and suppressed in two ways- first being a woman and secondly being a Dalit. As a result, it could be said as doubly oppressed. Bama as a Dalit Christian writer, examines the class and gender oppression together and expresses emphatically the women's identity.

Bama never failed to choose female protagonists for any of her novel which contributed both to the Dalit movement and to the women movement especially in Tamil Nadu. *Sangati* is a book, full of events and the everyday happenings of the Dalit community. The book does not carry any plot in the normal sense, but it is a series of anecdotes. *Sangati* focus on certain women who dared to make fun of the upper class that oppressed them and through this, the courage to revolt- "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, passion about life with vitality, truth, enjoyment and about their hard labor. I wanted to shout out these stories."

In *Sangati*, many strong women who had been under the shackle of authority are focused. The condition of Dalits was very bad as they were not allowed to enter in to the temple, and schools for education. This form of discrimination based on identity akin to racism. It focused upon attacking male version of the world by exploring the nature of female experiences. In the Indian social ladder, Dalit refers to on the lowest step. Dalit feminism points out repeatedly that Dalit struggle has tended to forget a gender perspective. In Dalit society every woman lives under the double power of caste and patriarchy. We could even observe caste hierarchy within the Dalit community and in *Sangati*, even the priest is gender biased and treats the converted Dalit Christians differently.

II. OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN

Women were treated as an object to satisfy men and as means of pleasure. Dalit community was seen low in the society and were discriminated by the upper class, which included both women and men but at home,
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women were the only victim as men saw it as their only power to rule over someone. They were beaten and abused by men, and women themselves thought it is their duty to submit and put on to all the torture they experienced by men, they believed that this submissiveness made them the ideal women in a patriarchal society. Once a woman was married off, she then became her husband's property and she had to put up with all the tantrums of him without questioning. The irony of the story is that even though women were considered to be the weaker gender, they were the one who provided for the family.

Bama exposes caste and gender issues both inside and Outside the community. Sangati generally speaks about Dalit women who dealt with various issues like gender and sexual discrimination. According to her, all women in the world are second class citizens. For Dalit women, the problem is grave. Their Dalit identity given them a different set of problem. Sangati showcases the several trouble witnessing experiences. It is believed that once you are born as a woman, you can never match a man and you can never raise voice against them just like the protagonist's grandmother(paatti) says "Once you are born a woman, can you go and confront a group of four and five men? Should you ever do it."

III. CHILDHOOD BIASES

The story initially begins with the narration of twelve-year-old girl and by the end of the novel, she has transformed into a woman. The reflective voice is of an adult looking back at her past experiences as a Dalit and how it has evolved over the years. The book deals with gender bias faced by Dalit women right from the childhood. The baby girls have been given lesser care and are always considered inferior. They never left a baby boy to cry, they were given utmost care and fed at the right time, but for girls, it was different. Dalit girls have hardly enjoyed their childhood. They have little time to play as she has to take care of their younger siblings. Sometimes, they even get married off at a very young age soon after they come to age. In Sangati, as a child she is questioning the difference in treatment by her maternal grandmother Vallaiyamma Kizhavi in comparison to her brother. She was taught to eat the meal only after all the men in the family finished eating and the quantity of food served was much lesser than what was served to boys, even at times, girls had to feed their stomachs with the leftovers. While playing, girls were not allowed to join or play boys' game. Cooking or getting married were the games played by them wherein, boys played *kabaddi* or marbles, girls were often abused by boys while playing games. From childhood itself, girls were looked down upon by boys and this mentally grew over the period of time.

IV. WORK DISCRIMINATION

Women were also wage earners, working in the fields and mills just like the men but paid less than them. After the work, men spend their money as they wish but women save every penny to support and provide for their children and husband, they bear the financial burdens to run the family. Soon after their outdoor work, they had to rush back home and do all the household chores in the evening and eat the leftovers of her husband and then, they had to satisfy the man's sexual needs, they could not even get a peaceful sleep at night and this had always been a never-ending process. It is the women who have to undergo sexual harassment and abuse in the field of work and even when men are the culprits, they are the one who are always blamed. Maikkani is one of the many characters portrayed in the book who is said to be of the narrator's age. She started working at a really young age to support her mother while she was pregnant and to feed her other siblings. At the very age of twelve, she has to hold the financial burden of the family. It was Maikkani who looked after the needs of her house. This made her strong and matured beyond her age by facing both mental and physical abuses that came her way in the places she worked. He learned and understood the value of money and labour.

V. VICTIMIZATION OF WOMEN

In the case of another character Mariamma, she is shown as a victim of sexual assault and the inability to raise the voice since it is from an upper-class man. The voice of women was neglected and given no worth as it was under the control of men. Just like Dalit women are double oppressed, upper-class men were double benefited in this context. Bama says that it is normal for a man to treat a woman with no respect or dignity but it was unacceptable when a woman expressed her opinion in this double-minded society. She's voicing for her community in this novel.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the light of the study undertaken through this paper, One can say that this is a protest against the marginalization of Dalit women in India. Bama has invited the reader to see from a Dalit perspective to understand the real cause of these issues that is Caste system and Patriarchy. By the end of her novel, she prays and hopes for a better future who will the treat each other as humans with equal rights without any gender or caste biases- “We should educate boys and girls alike, showing no difference between them as they grow into adults. We should give our girls the freedom we give our boys. If we rear our children like this from the time, they are babies, women will reveal

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their strength. Then there will come a day with equal rights.” From this study, we can conclude that Bama has attempted to be the voice of the voiceless.

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