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Dalit Women Identity in Bama's *Sangati*

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This paper is a study or the analysis of dalit marginalization, discrimination, isolation and humiliation from common tradition of life especially the tragic condition of dalit women in Indian society. Dalit literature is about the sufferings of 'oppressed class'. Dalit fiction and its literary movement are based on the common ground of social oppression. It is a study of marginal and colonized. Dalit literature is a form of post-colonial literature. The form of dalit literature covers a wide range of literary genres. It is a literature of whole community but of an individual. Many writers, thinkers, social reformers and political figures gave their contribution in the dalit literary movement like B.R. Ambedkar, M.K. Gandhi, Rettaimalai Srinivasan etc.

Exploitation or oppression of weaker by stronger is as old as mankind itself. The Indian history has been a vibrant record of conflict and dialectic between two opposite forces like exploiters and exploited colonizer and colonized, powerful and powerless. Dalit literature is always marked by revolt and a great struggle of lower caste, against the high class people commonly known as savarna.

In India there is a huge campus of religion situated in the society. There are four major caste divisions in India, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. The lowest caste people came under Shudra's. They are regarded as dalits. These people are suppressed, humiliated, exploited, discriminated and marginalized in every sphere of life. These people are also regarded as untouchables/ Achoot/ Harijan. In Indian society some communities are at the lowest step like: dalits, females, poor, eunuchs, etc. If the woman belongs to dalit community they suffered of two types: first being a woman, second belongs to the lowest community. Therefore it could be said they are "doubly oppressed."

Women's movement was started in 1960's. There are a number of writers contributed in the movement like: Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of Rights of Women* (1792), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Virginia Woolf's *A Room of one's own*, Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, Fredrich Engels's *The Origin of The Family* (1884), John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of women* (1869) etc. These writers speak out the real woman who struggle with social norms, condition, which are extremely propagated by a patriarchal society. Toril Moi explains, "The first is a political position the second a matter of biology and the third, a set of culturally defined characteristics." Women's condition was not good in 1960's and 1970's but in 1980's the mood changed. Being a Tamil, dalit Christian women she is able to express emphatically the women's identity. Bama examines caste and gender oppression together. She redefined 'woman' from the political perspective of a dalit.

According to Frantz Fanon, "The class of oppressed is invariably inimical to the autonomy of the oppressed and their culture". In *Sangati* Bama focuses on the double oppression of females. While going through all this caste system some important questions arises in the mind: Who are Dalits? What is feminism? What is women's identity Focused in Bama's *Sangati*? What are the solutions suggested in Bama's *Sangati*? These are some important questions which pressurize us to go through the text.

Sangati exposes that how a man spend money to earn as they please but on the other hand a woman has to fulfill their family responsibilities. The theme of *Sangati* is "Subjugation to Celebration." Bama's '*Sangati*' is a unique Dalit feminist narrative. It is mainly concern with women's movement in India. Literature also contributes in the Dalit

movement and to the women's movement in India especially in Tamilnadu movement of 1960s may be noted as the starting point of feminism. But of course before this there already occurred various struggle against male oppression, the privilege systems and inequality.

As an exponent of Dalit feminism, Bama has found in *Karukku* the right way to explore the sufferings of Dalit women. *Sangati* carries an autobiographical element in their narrative, but it is a story of a whole community, not an individual. In *Sangati*, many strong Dalit women who had the shackles of authority are also focused. The condition of dalits were 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.

To the great extents, writers like Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir speak out about the representation of women in literature. In 1980's first feminist criticism became much more electric. It focused upon attacking male version of the world to 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 women live under the double power of caste and patriarchy. They are doubly oppressed.

Women's are considered as the symbol of sex and object of pleasure. A study of dalit feminist writing reveals a tale of endless miseries, inhuman victimization and shocking gender discrimination. Bama, was already, formulating a dalit feminist. She was a Tamil Dalit Christian.

Sangati was originally written in Tamil in 1994. It was translated by Laxmi Halmstrom into English. The whole narrative is divided into twelve chapters. The word *Sangati* means events, and thus the novel through individual stories, anecdotes and memories portrays the event, that takes place in the life of a woman in paraiya community. The novel also reveals how Paraiya women double oppressed. *Sangati* deals with several generation of women: the older women belongs to narrators grandmothers generation Velliamma Kizhavi's generation, and downward generation belongs to narrator, and the generation coming after as she grows up.

Sangati is an autobiography of her community, which highlights the struggle of Paraiya women. Bama chooses only a woman protagonist for every story in her novel *Sangati* contributes both to the dalit movement and to the women's movement in India specially Tamilnadu. "*Sangati* is a look at a part of those Dalit women who dared to make fun of the class in power that oppressed them and through this, they the courage to revolt." (2005.8.)

Sangati also refers news and the book is full of interconnected events—the everyday happenings of dalit community. It goes against the notions of traditional novel. The book does not carry any plot in the normal sense, but it is a series of anecdotes. The author herself says the purpose of writing the book in her acknowledgement.

"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 labour. I wanted to shout out these stories." (9.)

Women are presented in *sangati* as wage earners as much as men as working as agricultural and building side labours, But earning less than men do. Yet the money that earn in their own to spend as they please, whereas women bear the financial burden of running the family. Women are also constantly victim to sexual harassment and abuse in the world of work.

Bama exposes caste and gender problems both outside and inside the community. *Sangati* focuses generally on dalit women on various issues such as gender, sexual discrimination. According to Bama "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 problems.

The Experience a total leak of social status. Even they are not considered dignified human beings. My stories are based on these aspects of dalit culture”.....Google search

Sangati encapsulates the author's experience of working within an erogenous and appraised society and the series of several interconnected anecdotes, experiences, news and events as narrated in the book, from an autobiography of a community. Sangati is a portrayal of many trouble witnessing stories as ones writers Paatti said “Once you are born a woman can you go and confront a group of four or five men?” Should you ever do it? (28.)

This narration accommodates more than 35 characters most of whom.....female, but in conventional sense there is no individual who may be tagged as hero or heroine. Bama gives another picture of the community. Although both men and women came after a hard day's work in the field. The men went straight to the bazaar or chavadi to while away their time, coming home only for their meal. But as for the women they return home wash vessels, clean the house, collect water, gather firewood, go to the shops to buy rice and other provision boil some rice, make a kazhambu or a kanji feed husband and children before they eat what is left over and go to bed.(59)

Even they lay down their bodies wracked with pain; they were not allowed to sleep. Whether she dies or survived, she had to finish his business. Women were not allowed to take part on any occasion, the man themselves would dress up and act as women rather than allow us to join in. (32)

The book deals with gender bias faced by dalit women right from the childhood. Girl babies are always considered inferior and taken less care. Dalit girls are hardly enjoying her childhood. They have little time to play as she has to take care of their younger siblings.

Maikkanni is one such girl who has started to work from the day she learns to walk. (70).She has to go to work when her mother delivers a baby. When her mother becomes fit Maikkanni turn to take care of the new born baby. The life of a dalit girl was tormenting but the life of a grown up dalit woman was worse. The story of narrators cousin Marriamma tells a lot about the sexual assault the abuse faced by dalit women and their inability to stand up against it. Bama is very careful in portraying the picture of a dalit woman. Bama shows gender discrimination meted out to them throughout the lives of dalit women.

Bama realistically portrays the physical violence, like lynching, whipping and canning that dalit woman by fathers, husbands, and brothers. Bama explores the psychological stress and stairs. Her language is also very different from other Indian women writers as she is more generous with the use of Tamil dalit slogans. She addresses the women of village by using suffix ‘Amma’ (mother) with their names. The names of places, months, festivals, rituals, customs, utensils, ornaments, clothes, edibles, games etc. to the names of occupations, the way of addressing relatives, ghosts, sprits etc., she unceasingly uses various Tamil words.

The voices of many women speaking and addressing one another, sharing their everyday experience with each other, sometimes expressed in anger or pain. The language is full of explicit sexual references too. Bama bridges the spoken and written styles of Tamil by breaking the rules of written grammar and spellings. Bama says that man can humiliate woman many times, he can disrespect a woman, it is very normal. But in this partial double minded society woman has no right to spoken out anything. This is acceptable to all.

The postcolonial thrust of her book is in its huge criticism of Indian church. Bama feministically voices out the grievances of Paraiya women. Characters like vellaiamma patti and a small girl and the narrator herself, who learns the story from her grandmother which becomes development of the novel. In novel many strong dalit women had courage to break the shackles of authority. Bama said they live under pressure and get enjoy their fully life.

In India there is prevalence of caste –hierarchy within sub castes of dalit community. In *sangati*, the Catholic priests were also gender biased and treated the converted dalit

women as inferior. Bama used two modes of narration in his book *Sangati*: One is confessional and the other, is conventional. And thus she goes deep up to the historical perspective of dalit community. Bama has personally experienced the marginalized. She sums up their situations in following lines:

“Everywhere you look, you see blows and beatings, shame and humiliation.....Became we have not been to school or learnt anything, we go about like slaves all our lives, from the day we are born till the day we die, As if we are blind, even though we have eyes”.

Sangati examines “the difference between women and their different ways in which they are subject to apporition and their coping strategies”. In the novel the language of dalit women is rich and resourceful giving way to proverbs, folklore and folk songs. Bama as a feminist writer, protests against all forms of oppression and sufferings faced by dalit women in the first half of *Sangati*. But later part of *Sangati* moves away from the state of depression and frustration. Instead it presents a positive identity to dalit women focusing their inner strength and vigor. She also attracts our mind towards the education system about dalit community. She gave the example of Pecchiamma, who belongs to Chakkili community, studied only up to fifth class. The girls of that community do not go to school all that much.

Through *Sangati* Bama holds the mirror up to the heart of dalit women. She makes an appeal for change and betterment of the life of a dalit women in the variety of fields, including sex and gender discrimination, equal opportunity in work force, education rights etc. Actually gives the narrator a key function and controls all the incidents and events in a proper way. The narrator becomes both omniscient narrator and a controlling agent of their story, who speaks out historical aspects of dalit community through variety of characters, and it becomes development of novel. Bama is clear that no one is going to help the hopeless women in her community, it is up to the woman themselves to take their lives into their own hands. Hard labor and precariousness of dalit women leads to a culture of violence, and this runs through the novel.

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