



REPRESENTATIVE OF DALIT WOMEN'S SELF-IDENTITY IN
BAMA'S SANGATI



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ABSTRACT:

The study analysis how the self-identity of Dalit woman is subjugated in her respective land. A Dalit woman has to face insults/degradation in the society and at their home. The present study focuses on Dalit woman identity, self-confidence, struggle for freedom, resistance and emancipation. For the purpose, the present study of Dalit woman's 'Self - identity' in Bama's Sangati. Bama is prolific present Dalit woman Tamil Writer. The focus of this paper is to elaborate the brightness of Women character portrayal in Sangati. Bama's Sangati deals with the

community of Dalit women, who are marginalized on the bases of caste as well as gender. Bama's Sangati novel explores the idea of transformation of rejection into resistance, identity, self and freedom. Self is the central theme of the novel. By writing this, the writer has exposed the lives of the exploited character, which are full of suffering and humiliation.

Key Words: *Self-identity, self-confident, freedom, resistance, awareness and emancipation.*

RESEARCH PAPER

“Oppression, ruled and still being ruled by patriarchy, government, caste and religion, Dalit women are forced to break all the strictures of the society in order to live” (Preface, Sangati) Present study takes up one Dalit writer, Bama of India, to examine the woman of the marginalized is no more ghettoized now. Moreover, she has learnt to raise her voice which was muted since ages by the dominant group, The Higher Caste people and the Upper Class People in India. As Sharmila Rege argues, “The Dalit Feminist standpoint is about historically locating how all our self-identities are not equally powerful, and about reviewing how in different historical practices similarities between women have been ignored in an effort to underline caste-class identities, or at other times differences ignored for the feminist cause” (Writing Caste, 135).

The focus of this paper is to elaborate how some of the major women characters represented by the writer, survive despite immeasurable physical, mental and emotional trauma they undergo. Amidst of unspeakable torment and isolation, their survival strategy rests only on an indomitable courage to fight all odds.

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” (sexual/textual Politics, 121). (Women’s condition was not good in 1960’s and 1970’s but in 1980’s the mood changed. Being a Tamil, Dalit Christian woman she is able to express emphatically the women’s identity Bama examines caste and gender oppression and suppression together. She redefined ‘woman’ from the political perspective of a Dalit.

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.

Bama's 'Sangati' is a saga of courage and dignity wherein the superstitions and blind beliefs that existed in Paraiyar community are widely discussed. Bama comments that it is universal that women are the slaves of men but Dalit and African American women bear the violence of upper-caste men at the working place and of their men at home. Bama foregrounds the difference of Dalit women from the privileged upper caste women. This can be analyzed in the stories of Mariamma and Thaayi whose marriages have ended up in their being beaten up every day and being humiliated at the hands of their husbands who consider it their right to beat or kill their wives. These actions and ill treatment stirs up emotions of anger, fury resentment and hatred in Bama. Bama decides that it is up to women to be aware of their situation, "We must be strong. We must show by our own resolute lives that we believe ardently in our independence. I told myself that we must never allow our minds to be worn out, damaged, and broken in the belief that this is our fate. Just as we work hard so long as there is strength in our bodies, so too, must we strengthen our hearts and minds in order to survive" (59).

In the case of Paakkiraj and his wife Raakkamma the resistance is seen, even in a very obscene language. Bama's language itself shows the resistance as well as the struggle which happens in Dalit marital life. Here Bama gives a clear picture of that society. Paakkiraj says; "Don't try all that here or I will crush you to pieces with a single stamp. Remember that! Then he dragged her by her hair, pushed her down, and kicked he lower belly" (123) Then Bama describes: "Raakkamma got up after kick and wailed out aloud. She shouted obscenities; she scooped out the earth and flung it about. How dare you kick me, you low life? Your hand will get leprosy! How dare you pull my hair? Disgusting man, only fit to drink a woman's farts! Instead of drinking toddy every day, why don't you drink your son's urine? Why don't you drink my monthly blood? And

she lifted up her sari in front of the entire crowd gathered there. That was when Paakkiraj walked off, still shouting” (120).

Dalit woman has suffered substantial, mental, emotional, disgraceful and radical discrimination at every step of her life. Even though all these experiences of cruelty that leave critical marks on Dalit women’s lives and dominant caste perpetrators constantly reiterating gender-based caste norms and Dalit gender subordination, the narratives of the Dalit women also facts their audacity, power and flexibility to state their right to live a life with dignity. The persistence they have shown in their various attempts to continue their lives against all odds. Refusing to let their lives fragment further because of the violence they have experienced. Is a mark of their audacity?

In Sangati, Bama discloses the story of two women, Mariamma and Thayi whose marital disharmonies are revealed in an effort to make the Dalit dilemma. They are ill-treated and beaten up daily by their husbands. Mariamma is hated by her father, assaulted by the landlord and later tormented by her husband. She is a true representative of the entire community of the obedient Dalit women. She never resents her tormentors. She is partially blamed of being close with a village boy and summoned to the village meeting. Even though the whole village knows that she is not responsible, nobody has the audacity to protect her. Mariamma, returning from the fields, is approached by the upper-caste landlord, Kumara Sami Ayya. He tries to pull her in a shed, but she escapes. Mariamma is warned by her friends to shut this incident and not tell about this incidence to anyone as Mariamma, herself would be blamed instead of the upper caste Kumara Sami though he is the actual culprit. There would be nobody to listen to her. This denial of speech constitutes Bama’s political critique of the social and historical marginalization of Dalit women’s narratives. The story allows a further examination of a parallel conversation, which raises passivity as a preferred alternative to opposition.

This structured notion of muted approval contextualizes all trivial women’s narratives such as Mariamma’s. Further, Kumara Sami spreads rumours about Mariamma and Manikkam, for he is afraid that Mariamma would complain about him. When the track begins, the voice of upper caste ayya is upheld. When the women try to criticize, their voices are suppressed by questions by the headman who shouts at the women asking them, if the ayya was untruthful to them about everything? Bama illustrates our attention to the fact that the women who begin to protest are

‘silenced’. Bama paints several other instances and incidents, through the voice of different women, the complete dilemma of Dalit women who have to experience annoyance at the hands of the upper caste men in the fields during the day and at night suffer the fury of their husbands. The male members of the Dalit community have their own resistance systems. Since they cannot protest against their landlords they show their strengths at home on their wives and children. Women, as a result, suffer, caste oppression in mornings and gender oppression at night.

To raise and maintain a true self in a society by breaking the age old silence is the need of the hour. However, such an endeavour becomes a tribulation for those who are doubly oppressed, for those who are muted and mutilated physically and psychically through the difference of caste/race, sex and power. They are the silenced women of the marginalized community. Powerlessness and the incapacity to emphasize their self, alters the behavioral pattern of these women. These marginalized women who are placed in a state of obedience and consistency are alienated from their true self, because they try to describe themselves in relation to the oppressors. The lack of roots and the indifference from the community and the past cause individuals to become alienated and they often resist unsuccessfully to identify, an essential self.

The mixture of patriarchy with caste domination is a cruel and unfair repression of Dalit women as depicted in Bama’s *Sangati*. She was not sure about presenting every injustice that she had faced in her works. Bama has been open about how the plight of the Dalit is one of the “worst injustices.” She actively seeks to use her literature as a way to transform what is, into what can be. The language used is realistic, syntax that is reflective of how she and others spoke in her village. By show casing incidents where Dalit women are suppressed at different layers of caste gender and also because of economic and social deprivation that these women endure, Bama brings forth the plight of Dalit women.

There is no doubt that Bama becomes the voice of these subjugated women, without trying to control these voices. This becomes all the more existent and genuine as Bama is one of these subaltern who has finally found a voice. From not being able to speak of all the injustices she endured, to writing several stories displaying the repression of Dalit women and becoming the true representative of these subaltern women of her community.

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