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SANGATI: VOICE OF DALIT WOMEN

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Abstract

The aim of my paper is to study or the analysis of Dalit marginalization, Dalit women's condition and humiliation which they face from the Indian society. Through this paper I have presented a summary of gender equality and gender oppression faced by Dalits, especially by 'Dalit women'. I have tried to describe the situation with especial reference to Bama's 'Sangati'. As we know that Dalit Literature is about the suffering of Dalits. Dalit women's condition is worst than the Dalit men because she has to face double marginalization and oppression. Dalit literature comes under the term of post-colonial literature. Dalit literature represents the whole community but it is the story of an individual. It is the voice of every individual who belongs to Dalit community. Dalit literature is about the search for identity, struggle of lower caste against the high caste, revolt against the exploiters. India is a place of huge religion and caste. Where dalits considered with many names like- Shudra, Untouchable, Ahoot, Harijan etc. But in India, if

the women belong to Dalit community then she has to face 'double oppression', first being a woman and second being a Dalit woman. Many writers came and wrote upon Dalit's condition but the real condition of Dalit women is beautifully shown by Bama.

Keywords: Sense of belonging, Dalit culture, search for identity and rights

Indian and international scholarship has for a long time shown special interest in the caste that is at the bottom of Indian society. A large number of books and articles have been published on castes which were formerly called "Untouchable", but later on "Harijans", and nowadays mostly "Dalits". A lothas been written on Indian women. As we know that women studies have appeared in many languages, Indian and foreign, but there is little interest in Dalit women. In the general literature of Dalits, usually no special attention is paid to women and their

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specific problem. Women and especially Dalit women are often blamed for being “Traditionalist”. People thought that they have no interest in improving their situation. A Dalit patriarchy has developed in which Dalit men use the same mechanism to subjugate their women as high caste men had done for ages against their own women.

The norm of our society is that a woman should not live alone, but stay at first with her father, then with her husband and last with her son. If we talked about freedom, Dalit women are always controlled and have a subjugated position. She cannot keep her earnings for herself. She has to ask money from her husband.

For Dalit Women the husband is like a god. In Dalit society, Dalit has a low position and he is treated badly by the high castes. Then he comes home, and at least here he wants to be treated with respect and for women, that means the men take absolute precedence over their wives. They take the decisions, they take the money and they eat first and if something remains, the women may eat it. Men can eat as long as they are hungry, and if nothing left then women goes to bed hungry.

Bama, one of the first Dalit women writers to be widely recognized and translated. She committed to importing values of self-esteem and social consciousness among the Dalit, she has tried to articulate the aspiration and anxieties, the fear and the hopes, the past and the present of her society.

Bama’s *Sangati*, the story of the three generations of women, the older woman belongs to the narrator’s Grandmother Vellaiyamma Kizhavi’s generation, the narrator’s own and the generations coming after her as she grows up. Bama through this novel becomes the voice of Dalit women. The novel *Sangati* which is divided into twelve chapters talking about one particular woman, and their condition. In chapter one, the line starts with the proverb –“ It the third is a girl to behold, your courtyard will with gold’, but the reality is different to the proverb, it was a good thing for the first third, and ninth baby, the odd- numbered one, to be a girl, so if the second or eighth baby was a boy, it was a lucky thing.

That is the condition of girls and the worst thing is to being a Dalit girl. Bama also talked about the village girls who married at the age of fourteen year old or earlier. And

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lower caste women were not allowed to wear a Sari-blouse even the writer's mother did not wear a Sari-Blouse. Bama's Grandmother went away when her mother was a three month old baby and never returned. Her mother does not lose her courage gives. Bama gives so many examples that shows the real condition of girls in the village. Her patti, who always tell her the stories of the past time. And each and every story belongs to the girls which make you to think pathetic about the condition of the girl. She gives the example of fellow 'Kaathuraasa'. There is the story behind his name. When his mother went into the labour for gutting the grass and there she delivered the child straight away. So the child got the name 'Kaathuraasa', which means 'the king of the field'. If she stayed at home then how she will get the food for her cows and calves. It was not just with her but more or less all the women in our street have the same problem. Women had to work hard as men do and she also had to struggle to bear and raise our children.

It is quite true that the women in this world led hard lives. Married women treat like animals. Man can beat her or even kill her if he wants. When men and women go outside for

work there they were not treated equally. Usually, Dalit women work hard more than their men folk. Very few women have a regular job with a fixed salary. As a rule, men get better payment than women for the same type and amount of work. She has to fulfil field work as well as household chores.

Women pushed aside always and everywhere because she was born as a woman and they had to look inside their homes only. For her, she has to go on bed at half of the night and have to get up again at four or five in the morning, light the fire and cook the morning meal for the family. At the end they had to go for eight or nine hours in the field. And if they do not find work as field labourers, they walk long distance to collect the woods and grass. This is the life style of Dalit women. The position of Dalit women in the society is both pitiful and humiliating.

In the novel Mariamma who belongs to Dalit community, her life was destroyed because of some upper cast men's foolishness. She was made the scapegoat. If a woman is slandered, that's always her fate. People won't consider whether the accusation is true or not nor they are allowed to speak out. Every woman

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in the village who is Dalit as well as poor in a similar position. In the novel the condition of Thanyi teaches us that one should never be born a woman. And if someone possessed in the village that means there is only the women behind it. Why do the people think that there are only women behind it and not the men. And why are only Dalit and poor women, and not the upper caste women becoming possessed. The pays always set for the women from pallar, paraiyar, chakkiliyar, and koravar communities. If a girl born in a Dalit community, she had no more freedom she become frightened, afraid of every little things, she shivers and die.

The novel, *Sangati*, encapsulates the experience of author's heterogenous and oppressed society. The novel resists the temptation of ghettoise women's memory. Bama through the novel suggests that women should aware of their situation and stay strong. We must not allow our minds to be worn out and broken in the belief that this is our fate.

It may be possible that they are male, and Dalit so being a Dalit they have to behave like a dog in front of high class people or landlord when they are in the fields. There is no way they

can show their strength in those circumstances. So they show it at home on their wives, and children. Now it becomes our women's fate that our women to be tormented both outside their houses and within. If all women are slaves to men, our women really are the worst sufferers. Our women cannot bear the torment of upper caste masters in the fields and at home, they cannot bear the violence of their husband.

On the other hand the same condition had with upper- caste, they show us no pity or kindness either if only as women to women, but treat us with contempt. They themselves lead lives shut up inside their houses, eating and doing their husband bidding. They stay shut within four walls, all twenty four hours of the day. Dalit women at least work hard and earn their own money, and have a few coins in their hands. They don't hold out their palms to their husbands for every little expense. Upper caste women give the superficial impression that they never quarrel amongst themselves or with their husbands.

Girls hardly enjoy a period of childhood. In the novel, the character Maikkanni who was eleven year old, she brought up all the five children who were born after her. Her

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mother leave the world after delivered them into the world. So at the early age girls are looking after the house work. Like taking care of babies, cook means and went outside for daily wages.in the upper castes, to a woman cannot lead a life for herself. If she left her husband, society will call her as an abandoned wife and her life will be finished.

We are the same position and our situation is always the same. Being a Dalit creates a problem on top of that being a Dalit women makes in more difficult. People made the society for convenience of themselves. Same thing happens with women also, women only for the convenience of men. If we talked about the condition of them, its the same upper caste women suffer in one way and lower caste women suffers in another way.

If we compare high caste women and Dalit women both are molested by means but in different manner. A Dalit woman not supposed to leave her husband but to stay with him, even if she suffer. She cannot leave his house and her children. For the sake of society she is expected to put with everything. And they still find no way to leave the men. Low caste women cannot marry once their husband die. Dalit women live in permanent tension. Dalit women have

not slippers and their clothes are often worn out. All the time they thought that what they shall eat tomorrow and what will happened tomorrow. To take decision without feeling convinced that they have the support of their men is probably the main difficulty for many Dalit women in the village. Most women lack self confidence and faith in their own abilities.

The novel, *Sangati* is the voice of many women, who speaks to and addressing one another as they share the incident of their daily lives sometimes raised in anger or in pain. The canvas of *Sangati* is larger in the context of castes. Bama is one among the few have the verse to create chronicles of artistically conceived texts and poetic experimentation of lived experiences in the language of her own.

Sangati talks about many women, it is not about particular woman. Bama who is Dalit writer and being a Dalit writer she speaks not as an individual but as a manner of a community. Bama, through her voice wanted to tell that we must bring up ourselves to think in new ways from an early age. We should educate ourselves, women should reveal their strength.

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