

Sangati – Bama

Dalit Literature : Dalit literature is a revolution against exploitation and humiliation of Dalits. Equality, justice and freedom are the basis of Dalit literature. These have been denied to Dalits. The touch of Dalit, the shadow of Dalit and the voice of Dalit treated as impure. After the independence, Dalits became aware of their self-respect and equality it is because of the movement of Dr. Ambedkar. A common man is the real hero of this literature. He revolts against inhumane oppression and wins in his struggle of self-respect. This is the real beauty of this literature. The emergence of political leaders from Dalit community and their identities coincided with the emergence of Dalit literature. The term ‘Dalit’ means the oppressed, broken and downtrodden. It is not a new word. It was used in Hindi in 1930 as “depressed classes.”

An Introduction about the writer Bama: Bama (born 1958), also known as Bama Faustina Soosairaj, is a Tamil Dalit feminist, committed teacher and novelist. She rose to fame with her autobiographical novel *Karukku* (1992), which chronicles the joys and sorrows experienced by Dalit Christian women in Tamil Nadu. She subsequently wrote two more novels, *Sangati* (1994) and *Vanmam* (2002) along with two collections of short stories: *Kusumbukkaran* (1996) and *Oru Tattvum Erumaiyum* (2003). In addition to this she has written twenty short stories.

***Sangati* (1994) :** The novel *Sangati* (Events) deals with several generations of women. The older women belong to narrators narrating the grandmothers’ generation, VelliammaKizhavi’s generation and downward generation. If a woman belongs to Dalit community, she has to suffer in two ways. The first being a woman and second is belonging to the lowest community. Bama’s *Sangati* is a unique Dalit feminist narrative carrying autobiographical elements of the whole community. It focuses the double oppression of females. The novel has several individual stories, anecdotes and memories that portray the events taking place in the life of women in Paraiyar community in Tamilnadu. Women are presented in *Sangati* as daily wage earners. They earn less than men do. However, the money earned by men, can spend as they please whereas women have to bear the financial burden of running the family. Women are also regular victim to sexual harassment and abused in the place of work. In this novel Marriamma tells a lot about the sexual assault faced by her and her community women and their inability to stand up against it. The physical violence is realistically portrayed in this novel like lynching, whipping and canning by fathers, husbands and brothers.

Thirty-Five Characters : *Sangati* was written in Tamil then translated into English by Laxmi Holmstrom. The whole narrative is divided into twelve chapters having more than thirty-five characters. The word *Sangati* means events. It carries an autobiographical element in its narrative, but it is the story of a whole community and not an individual. The condition of Dalits was very vulnerable as they were not allowed to enter into temple and schools for education. In Indian social hierarchy, Dalits get the lowest status. Observing all, Bama expresses caste and gender problems both outside and inside the community. 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. Even they are not considered dignified human beings. My stories are based on these aspects of Dalit culture....”

Bama’s Writing: She uses more Tamil Dalit slogans and addresses the village women as Amma such as Vellaiamma, Maarriamma and Pecchiamma. She uses various Tamil words to name the places, months, festivals, rituals, customs, clothes and occupations. In this novel, women address one another and share their everyday experiences sometimes with anger or pain. The language of this novel is full of sexual references. She bridges the spoken and written styles of Tamil by breaking the rules of grammar and spellings. She also 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". She feministically voices out the grievances of Paraiya women. Characters like Vellaiyamma Paati and a small girl and the narrator herself, who learn the story from her grandmother.

Ways of Women and How They are Treated : Bama focuses the 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. The writer attracts the readers towards the education system about Dalit community. She gives the example of Pecchiamma belonging to Chakkili community studied up to fifth class. The girls of that community don't go to school that much.

Sexual Exploitation : Maarriamma faces sexual exploitation in the hands of the upper caste land owner Kumarasami Ayya. One day, Maarriamma gathered firewood as usual and returned home in the burning heat carrying her bundle. Seeing water in the nearby irrigation pump-set, she goes to drink water. When she goes to drink water, KumarasamiAyya seizes her hand and pulls her inside the pump set. However, she escapes and says it to her friends; they said "That landowner is an evil man, fat with money. He's upper caste as well. How can even try to stand up to such people? Are people going to believe their words or ours?" However, KumarasamiAyya gets afraid of his reputation and so he hurries to the village and complains to the headman of the Paraiya community named the Naattaamai by saying "Just today that girl Maarriamma, daughter of Samudrakani, and that Mnukkayi's grandson Manikkam were behaving in a very dirty way". During the inquiry in the village, Maarriamma and Manikkam come to the centre of the circle and then greet the elders by falling down and prostrate themselves at full length. Hence then, they are asked to stand each to one side with folded arms. At last, Maarriamma falls down and asks for forgiveness and so the Naattaamai asks her to pay Rs 200 as fine and Manikkam Rs. 100. The Naattaamai ends the proceedings by saying "It is you female who ought to be humble and modest. A man may do a hundred things and still get away with it."

Bama's Feminism : As a feminist writer Bama's feminism is focused in the Dalit community. As women are powerless, they accept the patriarchal role of men in their life. All her women characters are never empowered with education. Therefore, they are treated as social victims and easy to attack by whoever wishes. Through the centuries, women in Hindu tradition are depicted as silent sufferers; they have been given a secondary status both in the family and society. Maarriamma and Thaayi have faced inexplicable shame in their family life. Their husbands regularly beat them up and also feel that it is their birthright to humiliate and kill their life partners. Maarriamma is unlucky in her whole life. When she was with her parents, she didn't get the love and affection that she expected for. She began to cry when her marriage was arranged with Maanikkam who is a drunkard and does not go for a job and often goes to jail.

When Maarriamma knew his character, she refused a lot to marry him. Finally, she was compelled to accept him. Since she got married with Maanikkam, she suffered with beatings. every day. She was completely made as a scapegoat that people watched helplessly. The Paraya men were speechless when she was victimized for molestation by KumarasamiAyya. They get afraid of losing their favours especially jobs and don't have the power to question the upper class person.

In this novel, Bama focuses on Dalit women's lives and their hard work. Men are free they have no sense of any responsibility. But the women of this community have to do great labour or toil in the field as well as at home. The women of this community are self-dependent.

Because all women earn their wages, they work in the field, in the match factory though they did not get equal wages like men. They are paid lower wages than men for the same work. Bama describes the ceremony of coming age it means that a girl is able to do marriage. After coming age for a girl it is necessary to marry because people believe that it is the best way to protect a girl from bad persons. Sometimes women of this community lead a very hard life in a very pitiable condition. Everything about women is expressed in this novel in a colloquial language. When a girl comes of age there is a celebration for sixteen days. And the girl has to put an iron rod with herself to escape evil spirits.

Girls do not have the right of education like boys. They have to suffer not only at the work field but also at home mentally and physically. And when they revolt it causes violence or their death. It is common in men of paraiyar community that they do not have the courage to revolt against upper caste people. She describes that women do not have a single moment of rest for themselves. Always they have to lead such a life in which they work without taking rest. Through the characters of Mariamma and Thaayi she presents the theme of universal gender issues, unhappy married life, humiliation and oppression. Their husbands also humiliate them by beating them mercilessly and cutting their hair. But they never revolt against it.

In *Sangati*, Bama portrays the real picture of Dalit paraiyar women. She describes all aspects of paraiyar women from their birth to their death. Having so many troubles they lead their life happily. Bama says that Dalit women are not only oppressed by their men but by upper castes also. Bama here makes a comparison between upper caste women and the women of her community.

The Solution offered by Bama: Bama Says in her book *Sangati* “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, we must strengthen our hearts and minds in order to survive.”