

Text Context and Contestations : Articulations of Gender Identity



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Mrs. Jayashree M. G.*

At the dawn of 21st century discriminations, scary old practices exist dehumanizes and perpetuates completely different cruel shape of discriminations do rampant inspite of possessing different legislations. Dalit women are subjected to three dimensional oppression – Caste, gender and class. Various women forum and high orderliness started as with dalit women great movement participate actively to fight against social injustice and defend themselves they are empowered". Dalit great movement has completely different fabulously rich the unusual history of rationalism and humanist incredible." Dalit women movement in Tamilnadu has been playing actively a significant role through Women's forum and support dalit political parties.

Dalit literature aroused through the writings' of many writers' about the sufferings and sacrifices made by the community in their life and their search for the identity and social rights in the social milieu. To fight against all odds and injustices like equality, denial of education. The plight of Dalitwomen in Indian society is horrible as they are oppressed on the basis of class, gender and caste. In today's social context women have started protesting against the discrimination, oppression and injustices leveled upon them and are trying to create a female space for themselves in the literary world for the discourses of their life.

In this context the work of women writers who come out to the mainstream to explore the problems faced by the oppressed women become highly important. There are a large number of women writers in Dalit discourses who brought Dalit texts into mainstream visibility. The Dalitwomen have started searching for the root cause of these injustices leveled upon them. Bama a pioneer in Dalit literature belongs to first generation writers like that of Women movement writers speak about the exploitation and identity crisis and she is also the first female writer in the Dalit community has created a space for women in their community in the literary sphere.

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By adopting a bare colloquial language, life instances in their community and at large the feudal lords in their region during their period foregrounds the realistic picture of the life of the marginalized communities and their life during post-colonial period. Casteism and gender have become two sides of a coin of life. While Bama's *Karukku* stands as her autobiographical sketch, the two fold [i.e] Casteism and Gender -sufferings of her life depicted in the novel.

Sangati was originally written in Tamil in 1994. It was translated by Laxmi Halmstrom into English. The novel *sangati* means happenings. The whole narrative is divided into twelve chapters. The novel is a native novel reflecting the stories of pariyah community. It is remarkable one in delineating the anecdotes, memories and happenings in the life of the various characters in the novel. It has interconnected anecdotes in which we find memorable protagonist. According to Lakshmi Holstorm "Sangati moves from the story of individual struggle to the perception of the community of pariyah women, a neighborhood and group of relations and their joint struggle",

"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."

The novel also reveals how Paraiya women double oppressed. *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.)

Interconnected events—the everyday happenings of dalit community has been depicted. To begin with we find the several generation of women narrating the anecdotes, memories, instances in life is linked through the narrator. The grandmother of Bama Velliayamma paati, is the central character, who is social worker does deliveries without any benefits it is because of the social hierarchy-patriarchy. The upper caste people did not merit her expertise. After Govindan, her husband's disappearance, she started working and brings up her two daughters independently. She acquires more knowledge, about her community history-customs and rituals and also the historical situations from her grandmother's age to her age. The old grandmother converted into Christianity as a result her mother studied upto fifth standard.. . Bama gives another picture of the community 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 oppressed.

we also come across the instances of exploitation gender, labour as well as sexual harassment. The episode of Mariamma sets an example of Dalit woman in all stages of life. She has an irresponsible father lives with the concubine treated his wife cruelly and sexual harassment has lead to her death he days when she was alive, Mariamma takes care of hertwosisters. One day, while working she fell into the well and she was hospitalized for months. it has lead to poverty and forced her to work; she went into the hill to gather firewood. She was molested by an upper caste landlord, Kumara Swami Ayyah. We find the panchayat system prevailed those days not favouring mariamma a dalit, the uppercaste defended and was publicly insulted.

Mariamma who gets sick of life says, **"For no fault of mine, I get abused wherever I go. Did I ever look that fellow in the face even? Yet the people of this village call me every kind of name" (40).**

moreover her future life also was hampered as she was forced to marry a wicked man Manikkam. Maikanni the character depicts the child labour and denial of education to the girl child. "From the time she woke up, she sprinkled the front yard with water and swept it, and then carried on with all the housework: swept the rest of the house, scrubbed the cooking pots, collected water, washed clothes, gathered firewood, went to the shops, cooked the kanji. She did it all one after the other". (70 In another incident, Mudaliyar's educated son misbehaves with Paralogam, who hides the event out of fear. These incidents are quoted to illustrate the cruelty of the upper caste people. Thaayi, one of the most beautiful women, is beaten up wickedly by her husband and he goes to the extent of cutting off her hair in order to diminish her beauty. Bama does not forget to mark the oppression imposed on Dalit women by the upper caste men, who take privilege over their caste for protection.

In another instance institution of marriage is brought out in paraiya community parisam system was existed. It means a monetary gift given by the groom's parents to the bride. But now the dowry system is practiced imitating the uppercaste. "Tali" is not important among the paraiya Dalit women and they

have the privilege of widow re-marriage. But it is not possible in the case of upper caste women. The plight of KuppusamiNayakkar's daughter, who is made to suffer as a widow, is one of the examples. In Dalit communities re-marriage tried to bring some solution. People believe that Christianity is a religion of freedom and brotherhood. But in paraiyaChristian community, a girl or a woman is not free to choose the life partner. Once she is married, she has to live with the husband though he is unworthy till her death. PariyaChristian community believes in the chastity and the commitment, whether it is for good or bad the people have accepted it.

The resistance of dalit women is also depicted in the novel the characters like Rakkamma who lifts her saree in public and use vulgar language in order to stop her husband Pakkijaraj from inflicting violence on her. The strength and vigour of Dalit women are expressed through a range of characters in the fiction. 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. this narration accommodates more than 35 characters most of whom are female, but in conventional sense there is no individual who may be tagged as hero or heroine. 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"**.

Instances of the folklore and fun frolic also portrayed through the ceremony of coming of the age and marriages and also the language of dalit women is rich and resourceful giving way to proverbs, folklore and folk songs. Towards the end of the novel She concludes her novel with a message, "we must bring up our girls to think in new ways from an early age. We should educate boys and girls alike, we should give freedom to girls"

CONCLUSION

Bama believes that it is through education girls can empower themselves and claims equality and their basic rights. 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. The caste and gender oppressions come together as a stigma that traumatises the Dalit women even when she is educated and employed. Sangati thus celebrates the fortitude of the Dalit women who can actualize their potential even as they are oppressed by the male dominated and caste ridden society. The feminine ideals of fear, shyness, innocence and modesty are replaced by the womanist ideals of courage, fearlessness, independence and self esteem in the Dalit woman's ultimate quest for identity.

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