

## Bama's Exploration of Dalit Narratives in *Sangati*

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### Abstract

*Narratives are the stories with events, characters, actions, settings, tenses and methods of storytelling. The art of narratives documents various cultures, social realities, issues, identity, myths, expectations and perceptions. Dalit literature articulates the narratives of oppressed class, their thoughts, feelings, pains, challenges and expectation for the future. It hardly follows particular literary and linguistic form of the mainstream culture. It tries to detach from the traditional literary language and attempts to reflect the injustice and oppressed position of the marginalized.*

*Bama is identified as the prominent Dalit feminist writer. Her narrating stories of Dalit women uncover struggles, encountering risks in life and rebellious characters. Bama's Sangati narrates the real stories of Dalit women in the rural region of Tamil Nadu. The art form of narration comprises of the author's memories, conversation between women folk, gestures, culture and colloquial language. Bama depicts the folklore, proverbs, songs and dances to globalize the culture of Dalits. The present paper focuses on the journey of Bama as a writer to share the voices of Dalit women. Through her writings, she engages to document the abilities of these Dalit women to stand against all dominating authorities and lead their life with awareness.*

**Keywords:** Dalit, Oppressed, Women, Writing, Nattation

### Introduction

Narratives in literature include various topics, priorities, issues and region and reflect different contexts of life. They are relatively based on social and cultural systems. Women's writing is also a significant genre in Indian patriarchal society. It has emerged in contrast to the oppressions of men and enlightened the community of women community. In this connection, Dalit women's narratives come to light and record their repressions of everyday life. Double oppressions and struggles are evaluated in these writings in the Indian patriarchal set up. The issues which are different from the upper caste women get a platform for discussion.

### Narrator's View

Bama's narratives represent the identity of her community and especially women's stigmatized positions and woes. She feels a sense of pride in her articulation of Dalit's women's courage, joys, taste, self and culture in the rural region of Tamil Nadu. Accepting the writing as a powerful weapon, she displays the authentic experiences of untouchability and creates assertiveness in the minds of Dalits. She collects every minute experience of Dalit community which subsides them as marginalized.

*Karakku*, an autobiographical narrative recollects the experiences of untouchability from their upper caste neighbors. This hard life makes the lower caste people to accept conversion. It provides the privilege of education and job to Bama. But, her narratives share her negligible position inside the religious institutions. Though, it is an individual experience, the collection of practical events of community is included in the narration.

Bama's *Sangati* projects the lives of Dalit women in the caste ridden society of rural Tamil Nadu. Dalit women's identity is established in the patriarchal structure and in the oppressive rules of class, caste and religion. In *Karukku*, she gets relief to her pain stricken heart with expressing her alienation through writing. Narration in *Sangati* considers the women of three generation and discusses the attitude of Dalit women to protect themselves against all shackles. Of course she weaves minor incidents of troubles, but highlights the perspectives and acts of these rural Dalit women in the celebratory tone. She romanticizes the liveliness of them in their attempt to survive and lead life happily. Individual woman characters are represented in a collective form with psychological insights. She is nowhere reluctant to express the reality of her women folk.

She expresses,

"My mind is crowded with many anecdotes: stories not only about their lively and rebellious culture, their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them, but to swim vigorously against the tide; about the self-confidence and self-respect that enables them to leap over threatening adversities by laughing at and ridiculing them; about their passion to life with vitality, truth and enjoyment; about their hard labour." 1

Narration of the author is the recollection of the anecdotes of women's day to day life.

This autobiography of women registers the challenging life of Paraiya women, their relationship with their community people and others.

### Exploring Memoirs in *Sangati*

The novel, *Sangati* is the representation of the historical practices of Dalit Christian women in gender biased society. The author narrates the archive of a particular Dalit Women as a child a young woman and an adult with her impressive explanation. Her narrative strategy allows the readers to contemplate over the realism. In her narration, her grandmother, mother and other community women become the mouth piece. In the midst of negligence and hardships, she narrates the phase of conversions of paraiyar. This inferior class has accepted Christianity to come out of the shackles. It is true that they get free education from the white priests. But the debatable aspect is that Dalits are still looked down and deprived of Government concession.

Bama's story telling style adopts a strategy of including routine activities and offers the family history. The conversational reports between herself and grandmother deliver the various Dalit women's issues. All gossips of the village are collected like social and historical events from the grandmother while grooming hair. The difficult lives of pregnant women, widows, single women are registered. They work hard in the fields and get meagre money to bare the responsibility of the family. But men spend their earning in order to fulfill their needs.

Her narratives provide ideas of positive attitudes of Dalit women. Interrogations throughout the novel mirror the challenging ideas among the new generation of women. Many incidents of discrimination between boys and girls in Dalit Community are articulated. Vallaiyamma shares her

experience as a midwife. Though she is an expert, the upper caste women deny her assistance. Accepted norms and structures connecting to marriage age, sexual relations, coming of age, health problems have encircled. Such narrative events are not glorifying the darkside of Dalit women; they give glimpses of opinions between senior women and youngsters.

Bama's narratives emphasize the subversive nature in Dalit women in the entire novel. In the form of articulating instances, the author shows the women's realization of individual, economic, social, historical and political marginalization. They begin to show the gesture of self assertions. When, Mariyamma is accused of her disgraceful behavior in the village panchayath. Narratives in this instance mark the argument of Mariyamma in defiance of her character. Patriarchal shadow of the upper caste and Dalit men restricts the emancipation of women. Grandmother opines that they are controlled from the past days and the literate women are not able to refuse such practices. But, the portrayed characters try to seek justice with their resistance. Dalit women's protests are remembered in Bama's writings in the form of verbal aggressions mockery and obscene words.

Bama's story narration provide psychological insights of Dalit women. Events of spirit possessing women point out the stress and oppressions in their minds. The author discusses,

"Women are overwhelmed, because of all this. The stranger ones somehow manage to survive all this. The ones who don't have the mental strength are totally oppressed; they succumb to mental ill-health and act as if they are possessed by peys." 2

Bama's narrative mode includes Dalit possessed women's psychological issues.

Within the dialogues of her mother, she links the beliefs regarding peyi possession and fear in women. Handling the traumatic situation with strength in heart and mind is essential for them.

The novelist articulates the more physical strength of dalit women who work from dawn to sunset in their homes and in their fields. They fulfill all responsibilities without caring for their health and happiness. For instance, they even prepare the body and lift it on the bier without any assistance from menfolk at the time of burial. It is on the

part of the women folk to work hard from the tender age to the oldage. The little girl like Maikkanni in Dalit street is projected as a hard worker with cheerfulness and laugh. Talents and wisdom in them are registered in communicating various anecdotes of Dalit women.

The analysis of cultural identity is interpreted in a positive way. A group wedding a coming of age ceremony, songs at their work, a chorus of ululation, various games, witty rhymes and verses of different situations are highlighted with documentation. The author notices the significance of women in all these rituals. Bama states,

“From birth to death, there are special songs and dances. And it is only the women who perform them.”

3

The language in the novel has not included formal Tamil language. It includes proverbs and myths to depict the technique in the author's writings to interlink circumstances, accepted practices and beliefs of Dalit Community. The writer quotes in the beginning of the novel, “If the third is a girl to behold, your courtyard will fill will gold.” 4

The Odd-numbered girls are preferred in this village as fortune. It is proved in the case of Bama. She is appreciated as a Dalit feminist writer to voice their identity. Customs of Dalits appear as privileges to some extent. Instead of a dowry at the time of marriage, they have the practice of accepting a bride price. The significance for Tali and widowhood is disregarded and widow remarriages are present in the community.

The activities of religious institution, the attitudes of nuns and priests and practices are dictated in the text and they allow the readers to realize the realities. Women's participation at church is created out of fear and devotion. Though, the language of patriarchy has subsided Dalit women at all levels of life. But, Bama enlightens them of their rights, ability and courage.

Dalit women are away from the modernity in the explained events of Bama. Even though their health is critical, they hardly visit hospitals for the treatment. At the time of elections, they are unaware to stamp rightly on the electoral sheet. They are only concerned about their livelihood. And they keep themselves at a distance from politics, which is male dominated.

Establishing subversive claim of Dalit women, Bama celebrates the lives of women folk. Because upper caste women are not allowed to work outside and they are like snakes inside boxes. Knowing the oppressions of women in the upper community regarding marriage, widowhood, dowry system and lifestyle, Dalit women find themselves in a good condition.

Bama criticizes the acts of Dalits who follow the upper caste people. This imitation results in the acceptance of new practices and leads them to leave the better customs of their own. Documented history, experiences and events communicate the existence of the communities such as the pallar, paraiyar, chakkiliyar, koravar and hindu. So, this village reflects multiculturalism and social relation within these groups.

Bama at the end realizes of her alienation in the urban region. Considering deplorable state of her Dalit women folk at the village, the comfortable lifestyle with education agonizes her. She suggests them to change their views and realize their rights and liberation.

Bama's writings are simple and hardly concentrate on grammatical aspects. Her narrative style has not reinforced any ideologies but allows the readers to realize her interpretation. She doesn't use a definite structure of writing and adopts colloquial language with short anecdotes which deserves appreciation. A distinctive feminist voice is visible against the patriarchal system and the caste-ridden society. The author's quest for a new individual identity is visible.

## References

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