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Voices of Dalit Women for Equality in Bama Faustina's *Sangati*

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Abstract:

Dalit literature voices against the exploitation, humiliation, and oppression of Dalits. Equality, freedom, and justice are the pillars of Dalit Literature. These three social rights had been forbidden to Dalits. Being a "Dalit" is a curse in itself and born as sufferers. The touch of Dalit, the Shadow of Dalit, and the voice of Dalit are impure. The term Dalit stands for the oppressed, broken, and downtrodden. It is a synonym of "depressed class". Dalit literature has its origin in Maratha literature and later on moved into Hindu, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and Tamil Literature. Dalit Literature appeared as a threat to the ruling upper-class hegemony in society as well as art. Dalit Literature has its foundation in the realism and harsh experiences of being ruled. Dalit Literature exposes the exploitation or oppression of the weaker by the stronger. Indian history has a vibrant record of conflict between exploiters and exploited colonizers and colonized, powerful and powerless. Dalit Literature brings a clear picture of the great struggle between "Sudras" and "aristocratic class". A Dalit woman is a dual victim, firstly she is an object to work tirelessly; secondly, she is a victim of sexual assault. Many female Dalit writers took serious note of the plight

to bring the pain of Dalit women through literary works.

Keywords: Caste, Gender, Humiliation, Equality etc

Bama is the supreme representative from Southern India to write down the sufferings of the most deprived section of society. The woman protagonists of Dalit writings are found to be analogs with the Black American women. Bama a terrific writer talks about the different aspects of Dalit feminism that redefine a woman from the socio-political and economical context keeping given gender oppression and caste. Dalit suffers twice first being a woman second being a Dalit-The twice oppression. Dalit Literature had been always neglected genre but the publication of "Poisoned Bread" forced the writers to shift their focus on the atrocities of Dalits. Then Arun Prabha Mukherjee's translated version of "Jonathan" gained wider acclaim as the established Dalit Literary piece. The Indian caste system is the epitome of paradigmatic ethnography caste has its origin in ancient

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India. The caste system emerged as the bone for Indian strata among different sects based on Karma, dharma, color, and position in a hierarchy. Brahmins procure the uppermost pedestal in Indian society whereas "Sudras" attain the lowermost pedestal as Sudras are born to serve the people Brahmin, Khastriyas, and Vaisyas. They remain "untouchable" and "unheard". The term "schedule cast" has been introduced by the British for those untouchables who had got two different names by the supreme exponents of freedom.

Bama's "*Sangati*" is a Dalit Narrative plotted upon the strings of anecdotes where women protagonists are centrally focused. "*Sangati*" has the autobiographical element not of one woman but women of different generations. In *Sangati* characters are chained in the name of orthodox traditions. They belong to different generations. The older women are narrators narrating about grandmother's generation, Velliammakizhavi's generation, and downward generation.

"All our menfolk gathered in the front of the community hall, and sat down. The women stood about, behind them, here and there, watching...Even the little boys were all seated there."(*Sangati* 21) This text from Bama's *Sangati* shows the code of behavior that is being conducted in the unethically ethical male-dominated Indian setup where Man is born to rule and what is his expectation from a woman is evident.

Sangati is part of Dalit feminist literature based on the autobiographical streaks of Tamil Nadu-based Sudra community women belonging to the Paraiyar community. Being a Dalit woman is the curse in herself and she has to suffer multiple folds first being ruled second being woman last but not the least being Dalit.

Sangati brings out the trauma of being dual oppressed. The novel *Sangati* is found to be beaded with several individual stories, anecdotes, and memories that portray the pain and sufferings of being a woman. *Sangati* has the voices of different generations but their agony, suffering is the same. Women protagonists of *Sangati* are hand to mouth, daily wagers who are not even allowed to spend money according to their pleasure they have to give an equal share in financial expenditure. In India, women are taught to take back when it comes to their life. They have to sacrifice to make others happy; this is the ideal definition of being a dignified Indian woman-spell bounded. Women of the Dalit community are the regular victim of sexual assault both at home and workplace. In this novel, Marriamma reveals the thought of the aristocratic class which is considered Dalits as the battery-run human beings who have no will, no opinion, and zero self-respect. She brings out the horror of sexual assault which she undergoes ironically. She can't stand up against it. Bama takes no bar in exposing the physical violence met by women. Novelists even move one step

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further to explain it by whipping, lynching, and canning done by their own men husband, father, brother, and son. The novel “*Sangati*” revolves around the thirty-five characters covered up in twelve chapters and the word *Sangati* means events. Dalit is the lowest rank in the Indian hierarchical caste system. The novel “*Sangati*” concerns caste and gender issues. According to Bama “All women are second class citizens. For Dalit women, the problem is grave because their Dalit identity gave them a different set of problems. The experience is a total leak of social status. Even they are not considered dignified human beings. My stories are based on these aspects of Dalit culture.”

The novel “*Sangati*” is devoid of any specific plot but it is a series of anecdotes Bama says the purpose of writing it in the form of anecdotes “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 labor. I wanted to shout out these stories.” (*Sangati*, 9)

Sangati has the reflective tone to depict the anecdotes reflective tone belongs to the voice of an adult who looks back on past experiences meditating deeply to implement practical actions. Initial chapters are narrated in the first person moving towards generalized comments by grandmother and other figures followed by

author’s-narrator’s reflections. *Sangati* raises the question of women’s economic inequality thus highlighting the socio-economist aspect.

Sexual behavior rules are found to be brow-raising different for men and women. Bama Faustina explores the bold and courageous Dalit woman who breaches her border to gain equality. The narrator of *Sangati* is a twelve-year young girl who finds herself trapped in the shackles of gender stereotypes. How gender games are played in childhood to bring transformation in the mindset of children? “Even we played ‘mothers and fathers’, we always had to serve the mud “rice” to the boys first. They used to pull us by the hair and hit us says, ‘what sort of food is this without salt or anything!’...” (*Sangati* 31)

The plight of a Dalit girl child is lamentable, born as labor, she hardly enjoys childhood. “Maikkanni is one such girl who has started to work from the day she learns to walk” (*Sangati* 70). She has to work with her mother who has delivered a baby. When her mother becomes fit Maikkanni has to take care of her siblings as the motherly sister. Bama explains: “Why can’t we be the same as boys? We aren’t allowed to talk loudly or laugh noisily: even when we sleep we can’t stretch out on our backs or lie face down on our bellies. We always have to walk with our heads bow down, gazing at our toes...” (*Sangati* 29).

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Bama reveals the subordinate condition of women –The Second Sex. Two anecdotes of Mariamma and Thayi talks about breached wed-locks with zero love. Women are ill-treated and beaten up badly by their husbands. A husband has to work outside only but a woman is lesser paid labor and an unpaid tirelessly serving mother. She has to come back after lots of physical work but the day doesn't stop here she has to wash utensils, clean house, collect water, gather firewood, and cook food for everyone where is "she" nowhere a woman has no identity, "Even they lay down their bodies wracked with pain, they are not allowed to sleep, whether she dies or survived, she had to give pleasure and enjoyment to her husband" (Sangati 59). Bama brings out the dismantled psyche of a man through her folk song which was composed to explore the torment of Ananamma of West Street as she ate crab curry before serving it to her husband, "O crab, crab my pretty little crab, who wandered through all the fields I planted I pulled off your claws and put you on a pot, I gave the pot a hot and set it down. I waited and waited for him to come home, and began eating as came through the door." (Sangati 30)

Bama suggests women be strong and courageous, "we must be strong. We must show by our own resolute lives that we believe ardently in our independence... just as we work hard so long as there is strength in our bodies, so too, must we strengthen our hearts and minds to survive". (Sangati 59). Bama is fond of using

Tamil in writing to give a realistic touch. She used Tamil words to make anecdotes more relatable. Bama focuses on the psychological stress under which a woman lives. She frequently uses Tamil slogans to boost up the morale of Dalits. She addresses the village women directly as Amma such as Vellaiamma, Maarriamma, and Pecchiamma. She knows how and where to put Tamil words in novels like a month, place custom, rituals, festivals, and occupations. The novel has a great touch of sexual references. Bama Fustian knows that fact Education is the only element with which the lives of these neglected Dalit women can be enlightened through the example of Pecchiamma belonging to the chakkali community studied up to fifth class. The first half part of *Sangati* focuses on the protest against all forms of oppression and suppression faced by Dalit women, but the second half of the novel focuses on the emergence of a new Dalit woman full of courage and vigor. *Sangati* tries to establish the optimistic identity of Dalit women away from depression and dejection.

The novel has introduced the inner residing strength of Patti in attending childbirth; she is a skilled person at this point. She can handle complicated cases of pregnancy. Her recognition comes from her profession only. Analysis reveals that people of the upper class do not approach her even the condition is worse as "she is Paraichi". It is worth pinpointing the dual psyche of the ruling class who quench their

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sexual desires by assaulting Dalit women but a Dalit woman cannot touch the newborn one.

Sexual Exploitation in *Sangati* is well knitted and how upper-class people use it as their birthright to exploit Dalit women. Marriamma faces sexual exploitation at the hands of upper-class landowner Kumaras. One day, Marriamma as usual gathering firewoods to cook food returned home very anxious in the intense sun rays. She feels thirsty to drink water she goes to a nearby irrigation pump but a mishap was waiting over there in the form of Kumarasami Ayya who clutches her hand to sexually exploit her. Fortunately, Marriamma runs away she reports this matter to her friends but what a Dalit can do for another Dalit-nothing. They said "that landowner is an evil man, fat with money. He is upper caste as well. How can even try to stand up to such people?" But on the contrary, Kumarrasami is afraid about the exposure of his sex scandal so he plays a double game victim becomes accuse like every typical Indian man he puts the question on the character of Marriamma. Culprit Kumarrasami absconds from the crime being an upper, he saves himself as the dignified man. Again Marriamma becomes a victim twice once being a woman another time being a Dalit, she apologies in front of the whole community. Marriamma is again taught how a woman behaves in stern words by Naattaamai who ends the proceedings by saying this, "it is you female chicks who ought to be humble

and modest. A man may do a hundred things and still get away with it. You girls should consider what you are left with, in your bellies." (*Sangati*26)

Bama's another anecdote from *Sangati* reveals how uneducated women fall prey to superstitions. Dalit women have faith in these stories as their dismantled psyche keeps them away from normal life. Yelimma's anecdotes about spirits that haunted other Dalit women concoct a woman to subservient beings. In most Indian families, women are confined up to kitchen boundaries out of which their opinions are not required. But due to great pains by women, this place has sparkled as a workplace. In *Sangati*, Sammuga kizhavi's description about mouth-watering, delicious ragikhuuzh is worked to think about to eat. She calls it "nectar from heaven" (*Sangati* 37).

The story of a Dalit man is no different. He is the puppet in the hands of the aristocratic class who undergoes the treatment of a stray animal. In such circumstances, these men get vent upon their wives to expel out their anger, pain, male pride, suppression sometimes their oppression comes out on women in the form of sexual assault upon dual victimized Dalit women. How unfortunate it is! Unfortunately, women are victims are the born suffers is the most dominant theme of *Sangati*- a saga of unheard voices. In *Sangati* Dalit women are the marginalized

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sect of a structured society undergoing oppression just because of orthodox society but in turn, Dalit becomes dominant in his home due to his confirmed notions of gender stereotype. Bama expresses her unacceptance, “it is not the same for women of other castes and communities. Our women cannot bear the torment of upper-caste masters (mudalais) in the fields, and home they cannot bear the violence of their husbands”. (*Sangati* 65)

Conclusion

This paper portrayed the sufferings and voices of Dalit women for equality. Bama being the supreme exponent in implementing Tamil slang in *Sangati*. Being a feminist writer she is not deterred by the fact either people will accept his literary piece or not. She writes with enthusiasm trying to provide a particular place to Dalits so that society must accept them as true human beings. To make her literary piece more approachable, she introduces the oral folk language, which is familiar to her society. *Sangati* mirrors up the journey of being a submissive Dalit to courageous and re-silent. By creating a string of anecdotes of several Dalit women she tries to question the authorities about their place in mainstream society. Bama doesn't hesitate to depict the regular domestic violence met an Indian woman. Bama affirms that it is the inner strength of Dalit women which can shake the

consciousness of the ruling class Bama sketched Dalit women with a positive identity they are the breadwinners.

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