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**Breaking the Double Margins: Dalit Female Subjectivity in Bama's *Sangati***

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**Abstract**

Caste and gender together in the Indian subcontinent have created a unique double oppression that works together on two modes of social devaluation—one along the mode of untouchability, which made Dalit men and women subhuman in the logic of the Brahmanical hierarchy, and the other along the mode of patriarchy, which further subjugated Dalit women within their communities and beyond. It is here, in this space shaped by such double constriction, that Bama's auto-biographical writing, *Sangati* (1994; translated into English by Lakshmi Holmström in 2005), comes forward as an extraordinary literary document – one that cannot be contained in the easy narratives of liberal feminism or in what we might call the Dalit assertion narrative. The title, “Sangati”, literally translates to "events" or "happenings" in Tamil and signifies this seemingly humble work's focus on the granular, the everyday and the embodied, not on abstract ideological frameworks. Bama's rendering of Dalit woman subjects is dense and complex, confronting readers, critics, and theorists with a challenge to think differently about the categories of women's marginalized experiences as they are usually thought. This paper contends that *Sangati* engages in a coherent literary critique on the double marginalization of the subjectivity of Dalit women — both to the caste Hindu mainstream and to the Dalit activist narrative — and that Bama's formal and thematic methods coalesce to describe a Dalit feminist subjectivity that is unavailable to the mainstream feminist and Dalit activist discourses.

**Keywords:** Brahmanical Hierarchy, Sangati, Dalit Women, Tamil, Marginalization

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## **I. Introduction**

Bama, whose full name is Faustina Mary Fatima Rani, was born in 1958 into a Paraiyar Dalit community in Tamil Nadu, and her emergence as a writer must be situated within the broader context of the Dalit literary movement in India, which gained momentum from the 1970s onward, particularly in Maharashtra with the influence of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's philosophy of annihilation of caste, and subsequently in Tamil Nadu through the Dalit Panthers of India. Her first book, *Karukku* (1992), an autobiographical narrative recounting her experiences as a Dalit Catholic nun who eventually leaves the convent in protest against caste discrimination within the Church, established her voice as one that refused to separate the religious, the caste, and the gendered dimensions of oppression. *Sangati* followed as a communal autobiography — a text that, while narrated by a first-person female narrator, draws upon the collective experiences of women in a Paraiyar village, weaving together multiple stories into a polyphonic account of Dalit female life. Critics such as Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, in their pioneering anthology *Women Writing in India*, had already begun the project of recovering subaltern women's writing, but *Sangati* pushes further by refusing the position of the exceptional individual subaltern and insisting, instead, on the collective subject. This collective orientation is itself a formal political gesture: where mainstream feminist autobiography tends to celebrate the singular woman who transcends her circumstances, Bama's text embeds its narrator within a community of women whose experiences collectively constitute a social text of caste and gender oppression.

## **II. Double Margin: Caste, Gender, and Intersectionality**

In order to comprehend the conceptual import of Bama's work *Sangati*, one needs to take stock of the theoretical work created to describe the experience of multiply marginalized subjects. While intersectionality is a useful starting point, as it was introduced by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her seminal 1989 article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," it needs to be adapted and complicated in the Indian context of caste. Crenshaw argued that Black women in the United States do not exist in and are not simply "woman" plus "Black" — but that they are produced by an intersection of race and gender that was not accounted for by mainstream feminist and anti-racist discourses. This insight is very compelling for Dalit women in India as well who are trapped between the demands of mainstream politics (gender without caste) and Dalit politics (caste without gender). In her significant study of caste and gender *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* (2003) Uma Chakravarti discusses the historical intertwining of caste and gender in the Hindu social system, pointing to the role of the control of women's sexuality and labour in perpetuating the caste hierarchies from one generation to the next. The interplay between gender and caste

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is what has been brought into sharp focus by Bama's Sangati, and caste is always gendered and gender is always caste-inflected for Chakravarti.

Although the intersectionality approach offers a valuable theoretical framework, there are a number of scholars and thinkers of Dalit feminist thought who have argued that it needs to be drastically altered to capture the nuances of caste order and its relationship to colonial modernity in South Asia. In his essay titled "Dalit Women Talk Differently" (1995), Gopal Guru asserted that Dalit women's experience and mode of articulation is fundamentally different from upper-caste women's feminism and Dalit men's anti-caste politics and that any attempt to build a theory of Dalit women's subjectivity must start from this difference, not assimilate it to existing theory and discourses. Sharmila Rege in her significant book *Writing Caste/Writing Gender* (2006) extended this view, claiming that there is a Dalit feminist standpoint epistemology, which treats the knowledge that emerges from the standpoint of the most oppressed in the caste-gender system seriously. Based on the Phule-Ambedkarite tradition in ideas and the voices of Dalit women in their lived experience, Rege contended that Dalit feminism does not belong to either mainstream feminism or Dalit politics, but is a different politics and intellectuality altogether. It is in this tradition that Sangati should be located, one not as a piece of North American liberalism's intersectionality theory, but as a product of the work of Dalit feminist epistemology, which asks: how do you know, how do you speak, how do you act from your position of double marginality?

The figure of the double margin is not merely a theoretical abstraction but a lived spatial reality in the world of Sangati. The Paraiyar settlement in Bama's text is itself a marginal space — located at the edge of the village, separated from caste Hindu habitations by invisible but rigorously enforced boundaries of untouchability — and within this already marginal space, Dalit women occupy a further margin. They are excluded from the community spaces where Dalit men gather to discuss politics and resistance; they are subject to forms of domestic violence that the community tends to rationalize or ignore; and they are expected to bear the burden of maintaining communal dignity even as that dignity is constructed in ways that further restrict women's agency. Bama's text maps these spatial dimensions of the double margin with great precision, tracking the movements of women through the village — to the well, to the fields, to the upper-caste homes where they work as domestic laborers, back to the settlement — and in so doing, it renders visible the ways in which gendered and caste-based spatial restrictions intersect to constitute Dalit women's lived world. The text thus enacts what geographer Doreen Massey, in her influential work *Space, Place and Gender* (1994), has called "a politics of place," attending to the ways in which social power relations are inscribed in and reproduced through spatial arrangements.

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### **III. Narrative Form and the Politics of Voice**

One of the most significant literary-critical questions raised by Sangati concerns the relationship between narrative form and political content — or, more precisely, the way in which Bama's formal choices themselves constitute political arguments about Dalit female subjectivity. The text's most distinctive formal feature is its refusal of a singular autobiographical subject in favor of what might be called a choral or polyphonic narrative mode. The narrator, who functions as a transparent frame for the community's collective self-expression rather than as an individualized protagonist, moves between her own memories and observations and the stories of many different women in the settlement — her grandmother Vellaiyammal, her neighbor Mariamma, the young woman Seelavathi who is subjected to horrific domestic violence, the old woman Unnarchellamma whose resilience and humor become a source of counter-cultural strength. This polyphonic structure has important implications for our understanding of the text's politics of voice and representation. Where Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) pointed to the ways in which the structural conditions of colonial and postcolonial discourse prevent the subaltern from achieving legible speech — because the very categories of intelligibility are constituted by and for dominant subjects — Bama's narrative formally responds to this impasse by constructing a collective enunciating subject that is irreducible to the individual voice of the liberal autobiographer.

The formal polyphony of Sangati is thus not merely an aesthetic choice but an epistemological and political one: it refuses the logic of representational politics that would reduce the diverse experiences of Dalit women to a single exemplary figure, insisting instead on the irreducible multiplicity of Dalit female subjectivity. This move has significant implications for the tradition of Dalit autobiography, which, as Raj Kumar has argued in *Dalit Personal Narratives* (2010), has tended to reproduce the Ambedkarite model of the exceptional individual who transcends caste oppression through education and intellectual achievement. Bama's text departs from this model in important ways: while education is certainly valued in the text, and while the narrator's own education enables her to occupy the position of writer, the text does not privilege the educated Dalit woman over her uneducated sisters. Instead, it consistently finds wisdom, resilience, and resistance in the speech and practices of the least formally educated women in the community — the grandmothers, the old women, those whose knowledge is entirely oral and experiential rather than textual and institutional. In doing so, Sangati implicitly challenges the hierarchy of knowledge that tends to privilege the literate Dalit subject and opens up space for a more capacious understanding of Dalit female intelligence and agency.

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The linguistic texture of the text is equally significant in this regard. Sangati was written in Tamil and specifically in the dialect spoken by Paraiyar communities in Tamil Nadu — a register that departs significantly from the standardized literary Tamil of the educated classes and that carries within it the traces of the community's social history, its oral traditions, its humor, and its subversive potential. Lakshmi Holmström's English translation, while inevitably transforming many of these linguistic specificities, has been widely praised for its effort to preserve the colloquial energy and the comic register of the original. The importance of dialect and vernacular language in Dalit literary production has been theorized by scholars such as Raj Gauthaman, who has argued in the Tamil context that Dalit writers' use of their community's spoken languages constitutes a form of linguistic resistance against the cultural hegemony of Brahmanical Tamil literary tradition. When Bama's characters speak — in the earthy, ironic, often hilariously subversive idiom of their community — they are not merely conveying information but performing a mode of cultural self-assertion that refuses the terms of respectability imposed by dominant culture. The humor in Sangati, in particular, deserves sustained critical attention: the women's comic commentaries on caste Hindu pretension, on male pomposity, on the absurdities of the social order they inhabit, function as a form of vernacular critique that is all the more powerful for being encoded in laughter rather than in the earnest cadences of political discourse.

#### **IV. Violence, the Body, and the Limits of Community**

If the polyphonic narrative and the vernacular linguistic register of Sangati constitute formal strategies for articulating Dalit female subjectivity, the text's unflinching representation of violence — caste violence and gender violence — constitutes its most challenging and politically urgent dimension. Bama does not sentimentalize or aestheticize the violence that Dalit women experience; she presents it with a directness that has sometimes made critics and readers uncomfortable, but that is essential to the text's political project of making visible what is typically rendered invisible or naturalized in public discourse. The violence in Sangati operates at multiple levels: the structural violence of caste-based labor exploitation, through which Dalit women's bodies are extracted for the economic benefit of upper-caste households; the spectacular violence of caste-based sexual assault and humiliation, which functions as a mechanism of social control; and the domestic violence enacted by Dalit men upon Dalit women, which the text refuses to excuse or minimize even while contextualizing it within the broader structures of caste oppression. This last dimension has been the most contentious among critics and readers, since it risks being recuperated by dominant discourse as evidence of Dalit cultural pathology rather than as a systemic consequence of the dehumanizing effects of caste oppression.

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Bama's treatment of domestic violence in *Sangati* is particularly nuanced because she refuses to reduce it to either a simple indictment of Dalit men or a simple excuse for them. The text shows, with considerable psychological and sociological insight, how the violence that upper-caste structures of caste hierarchy enact upon Dalit men — their daily humiliation, their exclusion from economic and political power, their systematic dehumanization — is in turn displaced onto Dalit women's bodies. V. Geetha, writing in the context of Tamil feminist discourse, has described this as the phenomenon of "secondary patriarchy" among oppressed communities, by which the experience of subordination in relation to the dominant society generates compensatory forms of domination within the community. Bama's text dramatizes this dynamic with painful precision through figures such as Seelavathi's husband, whose brutal violence against his wife is shown to be both a personal moral failing and a social phenomenon connected to the specific psychic damage that caste oppression inflicts. But crucially, the text does not allow this sociological contextualization to extenuate or normalize the violence: Seelavathi's pain is real, her suffering is real, and the community's failure to adequately protect her is a genuine moral and political failure, even if it is one that must be understood within a complex causal matrix.

The figure of the body is central to *Sangati*'s representation of Dalit female experience in ways that connect the text to broader debates in feminist theory about embodiment, agency, and subjectivity. Dalit women's bodies are the primary sites upon which caste and gender power relations are inscribed and contested: they are bodies that are required to perform the most polluting forms of labor in the caste division of work, bodies that are subject to sexual violation as a mechanism of caste terror, bodies whose reproductive capacity is controlled through social norms that police Dalit women's sexuality within and across caste boundaries. Feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz's argument in *Volatile Bodies* (1994) that subjectivity is always already embodied — that the mind-body split of Western Cartesian tradition is an ideological fiction that has been particularly damaging for women and other subordinated groups — is directly relevant here: Dalit women's subjectivity in *Sangati* cannot be separated from the material conditions of their embodied existence, from the specific ways in which their bodies are positioned within the social order of caste. Yet Bama's text also insists that these bodies are not merely passive sites of inscription but are also agents of resistance, pleasure, and solidarity. The scenes of women's collective laughter, of their physical care for one another, of their embodied knowledge of herbs and healing — these represent a form of what bell hooks has called "homeplace making," the creation of spaces of dignity and nurture within conditions of systematic oppression.

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**V. Resistance, Agency, and the Question of Dalit Feminist Politics**

One of the central critical debates surrounding *Sangati* concerns the nature and extent of the resistance that Bama's text makes visible. Some critics, influenced by liberal feminist frameworks that emphasize individual agency and empowerment, have found the text's picture of Dalit women's lives too bleak, too focused on victimization at the expense of celebrating female strength and resistance. Others, influenced by a more structuralist approach, have argued that the text's representation of women's laughter, solidarity, and vernacular subversion constitutes a form of everyday resistance that, while not transforming the structural conditions of Dalit women's oppression, nonetheless constitutes a meaningful form of cultural and psychological resilience. Still others, drawing on the framework of Dalit feminist politics as articulated by theorists such as Sharmila Rege and V. Geetha, have argued that the most important form of resistance in the text is not the individual acts of defiance by particular women but rather the collective act of narration itself — the bringing into speech of what has been silenced, the creation of a literary form adequate to the complexity of Dalit female experience. This last position seems most adequate to the text's own logic, since *Sangati* consistently frames the act of storytelling and communal memory-making as itself a form of political practice.

The character of Vellaiyammal, the narrator's grandmother, occupies a particularly important place in the text's construction of Dalit female agency and resistance. Vellaiyammal is an old woman who has survived decades of caste oppression, sexual vulnerability, hard labor, and the violence of poverty, and she carries this history in her body and in her stories. Her function in the narrative is to embody a form of communal memory that preserves the history of Dalit women's suffering and survival across generations. But Vellaiyammal is not simply a tragic figure: her speech is characterized by a fierce, ironic humor that refuses to grant dignity to the social order that has oppressed her, that sees through the pretensions of upper-caste respectability and names them with comic precision. In this sense, she represents what James C. Scott, in his influential study "Domination and the Arts of Resistance" (1990), has called the "hidden transcript" of subordinated groups — the counter-cultural discourse that is produced in the spaces sheltered from the direct exercise of dominant power. Scott argues that such hidden transcripts, while not constituting open political resistance, are nonetheless politically significant because they preserve a cultural space of dignity and critique that can, under changed conditions, become the basis for more overt forms of resistance. Vellaiyammal's stories and her mode of speech function in precisely this way in *Sangati*: they preserve a tradition of vernacular critique that the younger narrator can build upon and amplify through the act of writing.

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The relationship between Vellaiyammal's oral tradition and the narrator's act of writing is one of the most productive tensions in the text, and it illuminates the complex politics of Dalit feminist literary production. The narrator's literacy and her capacity to write in a language that can be published and circulated is itself a product of the kind of educational access that Ambedkarite politics fought for and that represents a real historical achievement of the Dalit movement. But this literacy also creates a certain distance from the community — the very distance that enables the narrator to represent the community's experience in writing also marks her out as different from the women whose stories she tells. Bama navigates this tension with considerable sophistication, neither celebrating her own position as the educated Dalit writer who transcends her community nor pretending that this position does not exist. Instead, she foregrounds the act of transmission itself — the passing of stories from Vellaiyammal to the narrator, from oral tradition to written text — as the site of a complex negotiation between different modes of knowledge and different social positions within the community. In this sense, *Sangati* can be read as a meditation on the conditions and responsibilities of Dalit feminist literary production, as well as an instance of it.

The question of Dalit women's political agency in *Sangati* is further complicated by the text's treatment of religion, particularly the complex role of Christianity in the Paraiyar community. Bama's community converted to Christianity as a way of escaping the stigma of untouchability, and many scholars — including Rowena Robinson in *Christians of India* (2003) — have documented the ways in which such conversions often provided Dalit communities with access to education, new forms of social organization, and a degree of protection from upper-caste violence. Yet Bama's earlier text *Karukku* had already demonstrated that the Church was not immune to the reproduction of caste hierarchy within its own structures, and *Sangati* continues to explore the ambivalent relationship between Dalit women's faith and their social position. Christianity in the text functions neither as a simple emancipatory force nor as a simple reinforcement of patriarchal control; rather, it is a contested terrain upon which Dalit women negotiate their identities and their relationships to authority in complex ways. The women's prayers and rituals provide genuine sources of consolation and community solidarity, even as the institutional Church often reproduces the patriarchal and caste-inflected hierarchies of the surrounding society. This ambivalence toward religion is characteristic of Bama's sophisticated refusal of simple narrative frameworks, her insistence on the complexity and contradiction of Dalit female experience.

#### **VI. Sangati and the Dalit Feminist Literary Tradition**

The importance of *Sangati* needs to be considered in relation to the wider Dalit feminist literary production in India, and in Tamil Nadu. It has been pointed out by critics like Veena Deo and Urmila Pawar that though Dalit literature in Marathi context presented

by Maharashtra Dalit Panthers and writers like Namdeo Dhasal and Daya Pawar has been a significant precursor for Dalit literature produced from within the experience of untouchability, the voices and perspectives of Dalit women were not sufficiently represented. In the Marathi context, it was with the collaborative memoir *Aaydaan (We Made History, 1988)* and the autobiography *Aaydan (The Weave of My Life, 2008)* that it began to change, and Urmila Pawar introduced the gender aspects into the narration of Dalit women's involvement with the Ambedkarite movement. The Tamil Dalit literary movement and the particular tradition of Tamil women's writing as studied by scholars like A. R. Venkatachalapathy need to be kept in mind in the context of Bama's emergence as a writer. There has been a complicated and sometimes paradoxical relationship between the Dravidian movement, which has been the most predominant form of political organisation in Tamil Nadu since mid-twentieth century, and Dalit assertion, and the latter has had to work out the potential and constraints of the Dravidian political model.

Bama's *Sangati* is a particularly special movement in this context because it claims to be singular, to be unique to the Paraiyar Dalit woman, and one that cannot be accommodated in any of the existing political movements – the Dravidian movement, the mainstream women's movement, or the Dalit literary movement in its male-centric form. There is a tension between the insistence of the text on the centrality of the community (the Paraiyar settlement as a social world with its own norms, its own hierarchies, its own ways of solidarity and conflict) and any politics that would appeal to abstract categories like Dalit or woman or Tamilian as if these were unmediated collective identities. Rather, Bama demonstrates how subjectivity and community are created by the tangible particularities of caste status, relations between the sexes, work relations, space, and language. This focus on the concrete and the particular is typical of the very best Dalit feminist writing and thought and is one of the traits that has made *Sangati* so influential, not just as a literary text but as a contribution to the evolution of Dalit feminist theory in India. S. Anandhi, a scholar on gender and caste issues in Tamil Nadu, has pointed to Bama's writing as a foundation for theoretical arguments that can only be derived from lived experience, rather than from sociological analysis.

The impact of *Sangati* is not limited to the Indian context and the text has been studied and taught in postcolonial literary studies programmes in other parts of the world, where it has been situated in relation to the subaltern studies, postcolonial feminism and world literature debates. Those who work in the tradition of subaltern studies, such as the Subaltern Studies Collective (founded by Ranajit Guha and developed by other scholars like Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), have faced the task of resurfacing subaltern voices and perspectives from the archive of colonial and postcolonial

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modernity. Bama's text is particularly challenging and opportune in this regard: it is a text that obviously has an agenda to recover subaltern voices, but it does so not in the scholarly format of archival research, but through the communal ritual of storytelling and vernacular writing. In this regard, it is a rather alternative way to encounter the subaltern—one that does not necessarily involve the scholar-critic who seeks in the archive for some signs of subaltern experience, but the community member who has access to forms of oral tradition and lived experience that the archive may not hold. One of the most politically charged aspects of Sangati's work in postcolonial literary and cultural theory is to have had the Dalit woman writer not as an object of academic knowledge, but as a producer of knowledge about her own community and her community's experience.

### **VII. Beyond Victimhood: Laughter, Solidarity, and Communal Wisdom**

The multi-layered tonal quality of Sangati's writing — the ability to sustain with the same sort of humour, warmth and vitality the harshest truths of caste oppression and gender oppression that refuse to be distanced from a Dalit woman's life — may be its greatest virtue but also its greatest flaw. This tonal complexity is a political one, too: it does not allow the two major ways in which the subaltern's suffering tends to be represented in literary and cultural production, the sentimental mode, which asks for identification and pity, while preserving the social distance between the represented and the representing subject, and the heroic mode, which transforms suffering into a means of celebrating exceptional individual resistance. Neither does Bama's text: his characters are fully human, capable of pettiness, generosity, fear, courage, resignation, defiance; and he wrests his characters in a tone that oscillates/combines the comic and the tragic, the lyrical and the prosaic, the intimate and the political. It is precisely this ambiguity of tone, this "oral quality," which is a hallmark of oral storytelling culture, that is found in the written text, and that indicates Bama's desire to "capture" the aesthetic values of oral culture while simultaneously reshaping them with the act of writing.

The laughter of women in a group, as in Sangati, is especially sensational in this respect, and has been given an ever-growing critical scrutiny by scholars concerned with the relationship between humor, power and resistance. The laughter of the women of the Paraiyar settlement is not just a release of tension, it is a mode of critique, a way of expressing criticism that is indirect, ironic, that exaggerates the comic elements of the story. The women's humorous remarks about the upper-caste's pretension, the women's critical commentary on the hierarchy of respectability that excludes them, the women's ironic self-awareness about the conditions of their own oppression— all of these are part of a kind of "conocimiento" or counter-knowledge, a way of knowing the social world from the position of those who are excluded from it, that is unavailable to those who have positions of

privilege. The humour in *Sangati* is not one that allows the women to simply accept their oppression, but is a practice of cognition and culture, by which they continue to have a critical relationship to an oppressive social order. It is a humor which has been stripped of its bourgeois context and subverted for the service of the doubly marginalized, this is Henri Bergson's classic Laughter (1900) called humor.

Another source of counter-knowledge is the communal wisdom that flows among the women of *Sangati*: their knowledge of medicinal herbs, labor practices, and social strategies for traversing the labyrinth of caste and gender. This is experiential knowledge, not the knowledge of formal education or of intellectual transmission, but of what is gained through lived experience and shared practice and oral tradition, as the philosopher Miranda Fricker (2007) has put it. Fricker's ideas of "testimonial injustice" – the injustice that happens to the speaker whose testimony is seriously disbelieved and devalued due to their social standing – are directly applicable to Dalit women in *Sangati* whose knowledge and experience is constantly devalued by the caste and gender hierarchies that surround them. In response to this epistemic injustice, Bama's text insists on the validity and value of the communal women's knowledge, by regarding stories and wisdom of the old women like Vellaiyammal as valid and valuable contribution to the understanding of the community's situation. The text thus performs a kind of "epistemic justice," as Fricker describes it, "the fair treatment and recognition of the systematic devaluation of marginalized knowers.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

Bama's *Sangati*, then, is a text that may be hard to categorise and impossible to be given any single political or theoretical interpretation. It's an auto-biography, a communal history, a feminist text, a caste narrative, a literary achievement, a political intervention, it's an account of suffering, it's a celebration of vitality and resistance. It is precisely this refusal of reduction that renders it so important in the context of current South Asian literature and Dalit feminist thought: an insistence on Dalit women's experience as a whole and as particular because it contains no one of the prevailing theoretical discourses. The "double margin" of the title is neither just a double victimization, as Bama writes, but also a double position from which a critical look at the social order is possible. It is precisely because they are in the lowest tier of the intersecting hierarchy of caste and gender, that Dalit women have a kind of access to the mechanisms of social power which those who are above them may not have, and it is this epistemic and political power that *Sangati* is trying to mobilize through the act of literary narration.

The formal innovations used by *Sangati* - its polyphonic narrative structure, the use of vernacular humor and oral tradition, and its focus on the collective and not the individual subject- are not simply aesthetic choices, but are integral to the political nature of the text.

They are Bama's formalizing of the question which must be answered by any writer who is willing to represent the multiply marginalized experience: how to represent without reducing, to speak without speaking for, to translate between the oral traditions of a community and the written traditions of the literary culture without losing what is most valuable in either. What Bama has done well in *Sangati* is to create a text that is truly suitable to this challenge, one that leaves open the subjectivity of the Dalit woman in all its complexity and does not close it off with the mainstream literary and political discourse. In this regard *Sangati* not only marks an important intervention in the Dalit literature and in Indian feminism but also has a significant contribution to the global quest of literary forms and critical frameworks appropriate to the experience of people at the margins of several layers of overlapping social hierarchies. In the ongoing effort to build a truly "intersectional" and "international" vision of literature and society, Bama's work is a vital reference point – a text that has already taught us a lot, and continues to engage us in deeper and more generous thinking about acting, knowing, speaking, from the double margin.

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