

Image of Triple Oppressed Women in Bama's Sangati

Sana Kausar¹, Dr Varsha Vaidya²

¹Research Scholar, R.T.M Nagpur University

²Professor & HoD of English, Taywade College, Koradi, Nagpur

Abstract

Bama's *Sangati* is a unique work that delves into the consequences of multiple discriminations suffered by Dalit Christian women, without having clear narrative or protagonist. The present research paper does a thorough analysis of the novel in order to identify instances of prejudice that result in women being marginalized and subjugated. It is believed that women are the most marginalized group and Dalit women face triple oppression. These women face traumatizing treatment at every turn in their difficult lives. Initially, they face discrimination due to their caste and lower position than men. Afterward, they face exploitation by male family members inside their own society. They are reduced to the position of domestic helpers during the harsh daylight hours and transformed into objects of sex during the night. Women are routinely treated as lesser animals- meant only objects of male gratification and subjugation and are branded as illegitimate. Men have the natural right to take advantage of, mistreat and even kill women. This includes setting them on fire. With the novel, the paper explores these deep topics, illuminating the widespread discrimination that results in Dalit Christian women's misery and disempowerment.

Keywords: Casteism, Discrimination, Patriarchy, Subjugation, Marginalization

Bama Faustina Soosairaj wrote the novel *Sangati* in Tamil in 1994. Laxmi Holstrom translated it into English in 2005. Bama, a well-known feminist, novelist and teacher from Tamil Nadu, illuminates the severe discrimination that women in the Dalit community endure. The term 'Sangati' refers to the collective identity of a community as a whole as well as the identity of an individual. The story highlights the particular difficulties faced by subaltern women who face discrimination within the Dalit social structure in addition to triple types of oppression stemming from their gender and caste. Through a sensitive examination of the intersections of caste and gender in these women's lives, Bama's work eloquently shows the injustices and obstacles encountered by these ladies. Bama highlights in her writing that *Sangati* is wider representation of the communal experiences and identity of the Dalit community, especially its underprivileged women, rather than just a personal story.

Bama's own experiences and observations enhance the way Dalit women's problems are portrayed, creating a gripping story that transcends traditional storytelling conventions. The book's authenticity stems from its emphasis on interconnected occurrences and lack of a typical storyline, which mimic the fragmented yet cohesive structure of Dalit women's lived experiences that face discrimination from the moment of their birth. The girls continue to face difficulties as they mature into Tamil Dalit ladies. They endure many sorts of discrimination despite their industrious attempts to work in the fields until late at

night, receive income and carefully save every penny for the welfare of their families. The pay gap, when women get paid less than men for doing similar work, is one obvious feature. The difficulties Dalit women encounter in meeting the demands of their husbands and children are made worse by this economic inequity.

Dalit women actively engage in constructive endeavors, but their achievements are frequently disregarded and underappreciated. These challenges are made even more vulnerable by the unpleasant realities of sexual harassment in the workplace. The difficulties faced by Dalit women are exacerbated by the combination of gender and caste, which weaves a complicated web of discrimination throughout many facets of their existence. In addition, the majority of Dalit community leaders are men, as are the family, church, and caste tribunals. Dalit women are marginalized in part because of the established power dynamics that are reinforced by this male-centric leadership. The agency and autonomy of women inside their own communities is further limited by their lack of representation and participation in the decision-making process.

The story of *Sangati* is told from the perspective of a twelve-year-old girl, and as it goes on, it documents her transition into adulthood. Bama draws attention to the glaring disparity in how newborn boys and girls are treated in the Dalit community right away. Discrimination against girls starts early; compared to their male counterparts, baby girls receive less care and attention. Because infant boys are treated differently and with greater importance than baby girls, it is clear that society prefers to have male offspring. The novel depicts a disturbing reality in which baby boys are not allowed to cry, demonstrating a cultural prejudice in favor of giving male infants' needs and comfort a higher priority than those of female infants. Play activities that enforce traditional gender roles are marbles and kabaddi, which are considered suitable for boys. Girls, on the other hand, are restricted to role-playing at home, where they cook and act out marriages. These early experiences help to shape cultural norms and expectations, perpetuating the notion that girls belong in more domestic roles and that boys should pursue particular interests. Girls are given roles in "mothers and fathers" games that mimic traditional household duties, such as feeding the boys who portray the father's mud rice. The boys' physical hostility, which included grabbing girls by the hair and using violence, is a powerful statement against the normalization of gender-based abuse that starts early in life.

According to *Sangati*, Dalit girls' childhood freedom and enjoyment are restricted by the social norms that define distinct roles for boys and girls. Due to financial constraints, Maikkanni's mother must return to work shortly after giving birth to a new child. Consequently, after her mother is well enough to return to work, Maikkanni takes on the role of looking after her newborn sibling. Maikkanni's upbringing is shaped by her early exposure to caregiving, which highlights the early shift that many Dalit girls face from infancy to adult responsibilities. Girls' freedom and leisure time are further curtailed by the duty to care for their siblings, even when they go out to play. In addition to upholding gender norms, this gender-based division of labor keeps the cycle of gender inequality in the community intact. Boys have more flexibility and possibilities for play and personal growth, while girls are burdened with household and caring duties.

The story makes a big point about how different people are treated at meals. Bama is instilled with the belief that males have a superior status in the home by being trained to eat only after the other men have completed their meals. In addition, girls receive less food than boys do, which is an example of the unequal allocation of resources based on gender. The custom of the girls eating the leftovers that the

male family members have prepared is another practice that subjects them to subordination and perpetuates the idea that girls are second-class members of the family.

Bama gives a detailed account of the constrictive behavioral norms that the community places on girls. They are supposed to walk with their heads bowed and are discouraged from laughing or conversing loudly. These behavioral limitations highlight conventional gender norms and expectations and are part of a larger pattern of control and limitation placed on girls.

Discrimination penetrates the internal workings of the Dalit community as well as society at large. The marginalization of Dalit women from religious and educational settings sheds light on the injustice they endure. They are further marginalized and have fewer prospects when they are denied access to temples and schools, which feeds the cycle of social deprivation. This exclusion reflects patriarchal norms that restrict Dalit women's autonomy and agency in addition to being an example of caste prejudice. When *Sangati* examines how converted Dalit Christians are treated, it becomes clear that prejudice exists even among religious groups. The unequal treatment that priests inflict indicates that caste prejudices can endure in settings that are meant to foster openness and equality.

When analyzing cultural norms, Bama highlights historical figures that represent the subservient role that women are assigned within the institution of marriage, such as Vasuki, Thruvallvar's wife, who dedicated her life to her husband. Wives are expected by society to eat after their husbands, which represent a larger trend of inequality in marriages. This demeaning viewpoint reinforces the notion that a woman's identity has an unbreakable connection to her husband's by denying women their autonomy and uniqueness. The way that women are portrayed emphasizes how devalued they are in this social structure because they are not seen as human beings in and of themselves, but rather as their husbands' property.

An account of the ongoing sexual abuse threats and labour exploitation that Dalit women faced as a result of upper caste oppression is given in *Sangati*. Being a Dalit lady is akin to walk along a path full of thorns. The persistent threat of sexual abuse by upper caste males makes these women's honour unstable, so they must always be on guard to safeguard it. The tragic testament to the terrible haplessness these women experience when attempting to exercise their rights in the face of justice is provided by the narrative of Mariamma, Bama's cousin. Kumaraswamy, the landlord, makes inappropriate sexual approaches towards Mariamma. Her fear of societal rejection, though, is the reason behind her quiet in the face of this justice. It is imperative to acknowledge that the transgressions of upper caste members are unjustly pinned on Dalit women who endure unjustifiable brutality at the hands of men even when they have done nothing wrong. These women are unfairly branded as promiscuous when they do find the bravery to voice their disapproval. An example of a criminal who tried to molest a Dalit girl is the upper caste man Kumaraswamy. To maintain his social standing, he made up an accusation against Mariamma, an innocent girl.

“When she went innocently to get women water, he seized her hand and pulled her inside... afraid that his reputation might be in ruins, hurried to the village, and went and complained to the headman of the Paraiyar community, the naattaamai.” (*Sangati* 20)

The unpleasant fact those women's lives are frequently boiled down to providing for men's gratification. The upper caste society as a whole and the Dalit community both share this demeaning viewpoint, which leads to discrimination against Dalit women and men. It depicts a worrisome power dynamic in which women, who are viewed as the men's only source of authority in the home, suffer physical and emotional abuse. The traumatic event of being forced into an unwelcome marriage is experienced by

Thaayi's character. The graphic depiction of Thaayi's husband abusing her physically with a belt is a horrifying example of domestic abuse. The horrifying display of power occurs when her spouse asserts his right to beat her or even murder her at his leisure. In an attempt to lower her pride, Thaayi's husband chopped off her hair and put it on the doorpost. This act highlights the coercive character of their relationship and reveals the underlying goal of controlling and subjugating her. The husbands, fathers and brothers of Dalit women brutally abuse them at home.

Bama highlights the particular predicament faced by Dalit women who work in mills and agriculture. Men frequently use their money for pleasures. Women are left to take care of the home. Dalit women labour in the fields or mills for a day, and when they get home, they have long list of chores to complete, including cleaning dishes, gathering firewood and water, going to the market, cooking and feeding their families. In addition, the story reveals the personal and frequently harsh sides of married life. Dalit women are deprived of a restful nights' sleep because they must satiate their husbands' erotic whims. This facet highlights the deep seated disparities ingrained in the gender dynamics among Dalit communities.

One of the events depicts a distressing incident involving a pregnant woman, her violent husband and the apathetic response of the community and the woman's parents. A major theme is the woman's choice to marry her husband regardless of the conditions of their relationship. It sheds light on a situation in which a person chose to be married on her own, may be defying her family's expectations or wishes. Her freedom in selecting her partner is evident, as her parents emphasize that she chose her partner herself. This calls into question women's autonomy and empowerment when making marriage-related decisions as well as the possible repercussions of those decisions. The husband's violent treatment of his expectant wife is extremely upsetting and serves as a stark reminder of the pervasiveness of gender based violence. The physical and psychological trauma inflicted upon the woman is graphically shown by the act of dragging her by the hair while she is heavily pregnant. His behavior reveals an unsettling power dynamics where violence and control are prioritized in their relationship. The husband's physical abuse and disparaging remarks serve as a clear reminder of the difficulties some women encounter when attempting to exercise their right to autonomy and choice in marriages. It emphasizes how difficult decisions can be in societies where arranged marriages are common.

The topic of prejudice against inter-caste marriages is highlighted in Essaki's story. During the course of her narrative, Essaki develops feelings for a man who belongs to the 'vanaan' caste, a distinct caste. The storyline takes a terrible turn when she decides to elope with her partner in order to avoid her family's displeasure. The story's most upsetting scene, though, is when Essaki's brothers reveal their evil intentions after first promising her protection and reconciliation. In a horrifying turn of events, they grab Essaki and carry out a horrible act of cruelty against her and her unborn child by using severe brutality. This horrific deed serves as a stark example of the terrible outcomes that prejudice and discrimination in society may have, especially when it comes to inter-caste marriages.

.....There they dragged her out of the cart and without even caring that she was a full-term pregnant woman; with one sweep on sword they separated her head from her body. They sliced open her stomach, took out the baby, twisted its neck, and killed it. (*Sangati* 53)

Thus, this Dalit fiction, *Sangati* serves as a compelling social record, depicting the numerous layers of oppression and marginalization experienced by Dalit women in their daily existence. Bama primarily delves into the pervasive dominance and violence inflicted by men upon women within her community.

She reflects on whether this oppression serves as a means for men to attain a sense of self-gratification through the exertion of power and authority over women, compensating for the absence of such control in other aspects of their lives. In the fields, Dalit men endure servitude to their masters and upon returning home, they release their pent-up frustrations by mistreating their wives. Bama also questions the community's double standards regarding inter-caste marriages, stressing the mercy afforded to boys while strongly opposing such unions for girls. The bias extends to the church and its clergy, who display discrimination when dealing with inter-caste marriages. Even educated girls who assert themselves in public spaces often face dismissive attitudes. Bama critically examines these prevalent tendencies within her community, revealing three layers of discrimination faced by Dalit individuals, particularly women, in their daily lives. The prospect of liberation seems remote for women as they deal with persistent trauma arising from caste, gender and biases within community.

REFERENCE

1. Bama. *Sangati (Events)*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 2009. Print
2. <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-2596-sangati-a-subaltern-study-on-dalit-women.html>
3. <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/7038/703873561009/html/#:~:text=After%20a%20minute%20reading%20and,novelist%20herself%20experienced%20in%20reality.>
4. <https://www.questjournals.org/jrhss/papers/vol9-issue8/Ser-3/L09088183.pdf>