

Theme of Marginalization in Bama's *Sangati*

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Abstract

Bama's *Sangati* boldly explores the marginalization and gender discrimination of women. This paper studies the various degrees of marginalization of women belongs to a lower caste community in Bama's *Sangati*. Through her works she has voiced for the voiceless. Each and every characters of this novel are silent sufferers for many decades. Women from author's society are doubly marginalized and oppressed inside and outside the society. From birth to death, they have to struggle for food, shelter, education and rights. Bama skillfully portrays the sufferings of women both physically and psychologically. Ignorance is the root of all problems in their community in general and women in particular. At the family construction, women are inferior to men; they have to feed their children with fewer wage. The superiority of men always ends up in domestic violence, sexual harassment and hostile sexism.

Key words: Marginalization, Gender Inequality, Women, Oppression, Caste, Violence

This paper throws light on marginalization and the gender inequality of women, and focuses the backdrop of casteism in Indian society in Bama's *Sangati*. Through the process of marginalization, lower caste people in general, women in particular are pushed to the edge of society to make them as insignificant. Marginalized people are enslaved by the oppressors as a secondary position; this causes them to feel as inferior to the elite sector. This upper caste people considered as powerful and privileged in society. The impact of marginalization is evident in the characterization of women in *Sangati*.

Marginality deals with the socio cultural and human problems of people belonging to various sections of society such as Black slaves, African, Americans, Native Americans and other minorities. The people who are marginalized are outside the existing system of protection and integration. This limits their opportunities and means for survival. During the

colonization, Aboriginal community in Australia were marginalized from main stream of society and forced to live in destitute areas. As a result, they lost their land, it is a source of live hood and excluded from the labor market. Aboriginal community lost cultural identity and values through forced assimilation and lost their rights in society. The nature of marginalization varies in different settings. For example the marginalization of women in Arab is not the same as in India. In Arab countries women are subjugated to sexual harassment and victims of genital mutations. The laws of Arab countries is highly discriminated in the case of women and banned from driving, need a guardian's permission to travel, enroll in education and health care procedures. Women are governed by a strict dress code with a long cloak and a head scarf. The law never allowed women to participate in sports activities for the sake of religious beliefs. In India, women are discriminated on the basis of pregnancy and marriage, for a child, the father considered as natural guardian and the mother as a guardian only and the marriageable age for women is lesser than men, and marital rape not considered as a crime, which shows the narrow mind set of the society. Marginalization of women around the world is different in degrees, but the discrimination reminds same and they are considered as second - class citizens and sometimes no avail. Though the writers raise the voice in the different form of these marginalized groups. Karan Horney, a German psychoanalyst explains, "Men have certain fixed ideologies concerning the nature of woman that woman is innately weak, emotional, enjoys dependence, is limited in capacities for work even that woman is masochistic by nature. " (231). This opinion depicts the position of women in society as a secondary and object status. Women considered as a production machine at the centre, but treated as an inhuman way in every sphere of life.

The Indian society known for its rigid customs and traditions. This cultural legacy portrays women as powerless, inferior and in significant. Indian women were silent sufferers for many decades about walled in domestic violence by their fathers, husbands and brothers. Women marginalization in India is due to the ideology of the patriarchal society in the name of culture, traditions, religious beliefs and superstitions. It prioritizing son more than the girl child. Some prominent facts of marginalization, due to the gender discrimination, subvert treatment, women's traditional images, and the form of isolation, the loss of self-identity and institution of marriage. The marginalized literature is based on exploitation, agonies, pains and suffering, at the secondary level. The social, political, economical, geographical, special aspects of life which are deeply rooted in their consciousness with their past, present and future.

As an exponent of feminism, Bama has found *Sangati*, to explore the sufferings of women in her community. She primarily focused on caste and gender discrimination. In an interview, Bama has said that she writes because she considers it her duty and responsibility to share the experiences of her people. In addition, she also finds the act of writing cathartic and liberating. For her, "writing itself is a political act", and a "weapon" that she uses to continuously fight against the dehumanizing caste practice.

Sangati was originally written in Tamil in 1994. It was translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom into English. The whole narrative is divided into twelve chapters and more than thirty five characters. The word '*Sangati*' means events, and thus the novel through individual stories, anecdotes and memories portrays the event that takes place in the life of dalit women. *Sangati* deals with several generations of women in her community. The book is full of interconnected events at everyday happenings of her community. It goes against the notions of traditional novel and written in vernacular language of southern Indian. The book

does not carry any plot in the normal sense, but it is a series of anecdotes. The author herself says the purpose of writing the book in her acknowledgement as:

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; their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them, but rather to swim vigorously against the tide...about their passion to live life with vitality, truth, enjoyment; about their hard labour. I wanted to shout out these stories (*Sangati*, 9).

Lakshmi Holmstrom shows her gratitude towards Bama's *Sangati* as a positive cultural identity as dalit and women, which can resist upper caste norms. *Sangati* teases out the way patriarchy works against women. Women were presented as a daily wagers like men, working in the fields, building-sites, but earning less than men do. Men can spend their earnings lavishly, but women bear the financial burden of the family. Hard labor and economic precariousness to a culture of violence and this is a theme that Bama explores boldly throughout the novel. They are constantly vulnerable to sexual harassment in the working places. *Sangati* is the voices of women of their community; the voice exhibits their inabilities which come as an anger and pain.

Sangati considered as finely crafted work of Bama, which has power of words to enlighten the oppressed people state of life. Nahla Nainar interviewed Bama's vision that "stereotypes exists, in gender and caste. By writing you can unmask stereotypes. That's the power of words" (The Hindu). Education liberates dalits even as institutions follow a policy of humiliating the society disadvantaged. Subashree Krishnaswamy remarks that "Bama, in these new creative literary forms has found a voice, genuine and unaffected, uniquely her own." *Sangati* profiles the entire community, which flouts the standard dictates of grammar and spelling, and unabashedly uses the dalit dialect even for narration.

Sangati deals with several generations of women, which travels from narrator's grandmother till present generation. The novel records the journey of dalit women, which documents the women tribulations for decades. The stories are presented in conversational mode of different ages of women to show their aspirations and different perspectives of life. The marginalization spots in the places like caste-courts and churches, which are male dominated and here women cannot raise their voice and also unheard by society.

Bama gives the picturesque description of gender discrimination from her childhood. People in her community always prioritize boy child more than the girl child. In Dalit community elders consider boys as permanent members in a family because they believed that they supposed to take care of their parents. On the other hand, female children are transient members who are to be transplanted to another family and so have no role to play in their families. This causes gender prejudices even in the minds of parents. This gender inequality begins from the womb for a girl child. Boys can enjoy by playing outside, fully nourished with food. In the case of girls it is quietly opposite; they are hardly working in the house and take care of their siblings. Sometimes the girl child acts as a second mother for her siblings and burdened with responsibilities. Even in games gender inequality exists. The boys never allow the girls to play with them.

Even when 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 saying, 'what sort of food is this, di, without salt or anything!' In those days we used to accept those pretence

blows, and think it was all good fun. Nowadays, for many of the girls those have become real blows and their entire lives are hell (*sangati*, 31).

During the Shakespearean age, women are not permitted to act in the stages, similarly men disguised as women on the festival celebrations in the churches. Poverty stricken in every house of their community, which led the younger generation to work in the fields and factories as a child labour without proper education. The narrator admired the character of Maikkani, a responsible child who works for her family to feed her siblings, because her father left them alone without any financial support. Most of the girls went to the match factories and fields for their family circumstances.

There are many children like Maikkani in our streets who work so hard both inside and outside, when they are still so young. I have seen boys eating their fill and playing about. But a girl... carry a water pot...pluck grass for cows and gathered firewood for the hearth. (*Sangati*, 76).

Bama realistically portrays the domestic violence and sexual harassment meted out to her community women. Mariamma and Thaayi are extremely subjugated and oppressed by their men. She explodes the psychological stress and physical pain of women. The scenario of her street in the evening is men and women are return to their home after their filed work. Women start their daily routine, but men entertain themselves. After all hard works, women must satisfy her men's sexual desires without hesitations. Women must submit themselves to their husband's pleasure. "Even if they lay down with bodies wracked with pain, they weren't allowed to sleep. Whether she died or survived, he had to finish his business." (*Sangati*, 59).

In the fields, lower caste men are treated like dogs by the landowners, but there they never show any sign of disagreement. These men showed their male pride and authority on their women, to overcome this inferiority complex. The major reason for familial dispute is poverty, Bama states the Government never takes any kind of step, but humiliates these people in order to save the dominant section of society. These people are easy target for blaming by the authorities in dominant society.

All the same, because of our caste and because of our poverty, every fellow treats us with contempt. If ever there is a problem or a disturbance, everyone, starting with the police, choose to blame and humiliate the women of our community. The government does not seem prepared to do anything to redress this. So we must take up the challenge ourselves (*Sangati*,66).

In her community mostly women are bread winners, working hardly inside and outside of the house. Bama states that it is her responsibility to speak out the truth that though all women;

Everywhere you look, you see blows and beatings; shame and humiliation. If we had a little schooling at least, we could live with rather more awareness...Because we haven't 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 (*Sangati*, 118).

Bama's *Sangati* presents the hard core reality of life being marginalized at various situations. This paper discussed the oppressed class also has its own gender discrimination, cultural violence within their community, the men who lived in the margins of society in turn

marginalize their own women on the basis of biased ideology. Bama as a feminist writer voiced for the rights of oppressed state of women. At the end of the novel she gives positive note of hopefulness of being marginalized women, they are librated from financial dependence and inner strength resist against all sorts of patriarchal ideology.

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