



## THE TRUE REFLECTION OF DALIT FEMINISM IN BAMA'S SANGATI

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### **Abstract**

*In Indian society there are many caste, high caste people and lower caste people. The lower caste people are regarded as Dalits. They are suppressed, humiliated, and exploited in every sphere of life. Today Dalit are regarded as untouchables. The present paper is about the women of dalit community whose are marginalized, discriminate and isolate in Indian society. Dalit women are known as "oppressed class". There are many questions are arises as, who is Dalit? What is feminism? What is dalit feminism? And what are the problems of women in Bama's Sangati? These entire questions find their answer in this paper step by step properly.*

**Key Words: Dalit, Feminism, Marginalization, Patriarchy.**

The word "Dalit" comes from the Sanskrit, and means "ground", "suppressed", "crushed", or "broken to piece", "crack open", "split", and "grind". It was first used by Jyotirao Phule in the nineteenth century, in the context of the oppression faced by the erstwhile "untouchable" castes of the twice born Hindus. Arjun Dangle, the leader of the 'Dalit Panther Movement' holds about the Dalit as:

"Dalit is not a caste but a realization and it is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows and struggle of these who are in the lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finding as revolutionary" (234).

In others words we can say that Dalit is not a particular caste. Dalit are regarded as untouchables and they are known as ignored, oppressed and tormented. According to Sanjay Paswan, "Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution"(109). In Dalit community man represents the exploited man in the society. In India over 50 year ago, Dalit was not allow to go religious place or temple, living in some areas , where other communities people lives and marrying into the families of the country's upper castes. J. Jayakiran Sebastian says about Dalits:

For far too long, there seemed to be an almost embarrassed silence when it came to fleshing out the harsh experience of Dalit Communities in independent India. Should one speak of an 'embarrassed silence' or of a 'conspiracy of silence' when it comes such matters? The resurgence of Dalit pride and the increasing recognition of the vital role played by Dalit communities in the political land.(2)

A unique feature of the Indian society is its composition of the basis of caste. According to the ancient Dharamshastra of the Hindus, there were only four Varna's (castes). The Brahmins were priests; the Kshatriyas were warrior, the Vaishay traders and the Shudras, skilled, semi skilled or unskilled laborers doing menial work. The hierarchy is primarily a class system and development of a society based on class is a world-wide Phenomenon. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the father of the Indian constitution, a Dalit himself, led, a fierce struggle for his Caste-fellows' rights. Dr. Ambedkar has traced the development of the caste system in his work "Cast in India their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" (1916), "Annihilation of Caste (1936) and "Who was the Shudras?" (1948)

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar speaks very critically about Manu and Manusmriti He states that caste existed even before Manu who was merely an ardent supporter who canonized the institution, and not the originator of the system. Before Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, there was a man named Mahatma Jyothi Rao Phule (1828-1890) who heartlessly examined Hindu religion, brutally attacked those who supported caste pre-eminence and powerfully maintained that the backward classes, untouchables and women in the country must be at large from slavery and be permitted to live a life of dignity.

The word 'Feminism' seems to pass on to a strong consciousness of individuality as a woman and concentration in feminine problems. The suppression of woman is a fundamental reality of history and it is the most important source of all psychosomatic disorders in society. According to Janet Richards, "The essence of Feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that woman suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex, the proposition is to be regarded as constituting feminism"(3).

Women's movement of the 1960s may be noted as the starting point of Feminism. But, of course, before this movement there previously occurred a variety of struggle against male oppression, the fortunate systems and women's inequality in societies.



In fact the movement in the 1960s was the rebirth of the old custom of thought and action. There emerged a range of books and various feminist writers. Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" written in 1792, discussed male writers like Milton, Pope and Rousseau and their treatment of female characters in their works. Oliver Schreiner's "Women and Labours" (1911) and Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" (1929), which intensely portray the disproportionate action given to women looking for education and alternatives to marriage and motherhood.

Woman did not write down in the creation as it now, the understandable cause as Virginia Woolf puts it, "A woman must have money and room of her own if she is to write fiction" (129). Money symbolizes authority and liberty and a room of her own is to have meditative thinking every woman had enjoyed these things in the past so to increase their creative capabilities and special liberty. In the book 'A Room of One's Own' of Virginia Woolf, the narrator was asked to give lecture on 'Women and fiction', the narrator is human being intermittent by the advance of Beadle, a university security guard. He enforces the rule, by which women are not allowed to walk on the grass, "Only fellows and scholars are allowed here, the gravel is the place for me" (139). Eisenstein interprets the term feminist or feminism as,

In my understanding of the term 'feminist' then I see an element of visionary futurist thoughts. This encompasses a concept of social transformation that as part of the eventual liberation of women with change all human relationships for the better. Although, centrally about women, their experience and condition. Feminism is also fundamentally about men and about social change. (5)

To a great extent, writers like Mary Wollstonecraft, Simon de Beauvoir's spoke about the representation of women in literature. But here Virginia Woolf speaks about the real women who struggle with social norms, conditions, which are extremely propagated by a patriarchal society. The concern with conditioning and socialization underpins a crucial set of distinctions, between the terms "feminist", "feminine". As Toril Moi explains, the first is a political position, the second a matter of biology and the third, a set of culturally defined characteristics. In the 1970s the major effort went into exposing the device of patriarchy, the cultural mind-set in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequalities. Then in the 1980s the mood changed: first, feminist criticism became, much more assorted, second, it switched its focus from attacking male version of the world to exploring the nature of female world and outlook and reconstructing the lost or suppressed account of female experience; third attention was switched to the need of create new canon of women's writing the history of the novel and of poetry in such a way that deserted women writers were given new reputation. Dalit feminist critic, Sharmila Rege writes:

The Dalit feminist Standpoint is about historically locating how all own identities are not equally powerful, and about reviewing how in different historical practices similarities between women have been ignored in an effort to underline caste-class, identities, or at other times differences ignored for 'the feminist cause' (5-11).

In the discourse of dalit conscious the concern for the position of dalit women for their double marginalization is significant. They are "dalit of dalits" because their humanity is crushed under the burden of patriarchy or well as under the burden of caste prejudice. In the double marginalization, their identity remains shrouded and it is reduced to cipher. However the intersexual analysis of caste centered texts makes it evident that even within their double marginalization, these dalit women retain the glory of womanhood and preserve the sublimity of the spirit to redefine their inner reservoir of spirit to assert their identity beyond the "discontent of civilization". Besides the tributes of feminist, they are endowed with the power to assert her right to self preservation, self development, self dignity and self survival. The analysis of the position of dalit women affirms that the emphasis remains on "the direct experience of women" to get the true spirit of womanhood with a focus to record "how lower class women in India feel about being a woman".

In dalit feminism the emphasis is on the issues of self consciousness, reactions, rebellion, self realization and self assertion. In the periphery of double marginalization, the issue of equality of sexes, fulfillment of sensual drives, emotional contentment and economic liberty become weak. These dalit women in their reaffirmation of identity get rid of double marginalization and candidly confess their voice and identity in social structure. This quest for freedom is the essential quest for humanity.

The analysis of all Dalit women character signify that each women sustains her own autonomy of self and she can survive in those spaces that are beyond the domain of gender specific and caste specific morality. Their innate quest for self fulfillment, protest against oppression sublimity of spirit, distinctive identity, realization of moral commitment's unexpressed quest for sensual drives, irresistible vehemence, and innate courage for the affirmation of self and identity constitutes the canvass of distinctive feminist ideology that can be denied as a mockery of gender specific roles. The caste determinants can be partial paradigms of human existence but its absolute control on human predicament involves the seeds of the annihilation of the edifice of social structure.



Women were confined to the four walls of domestic's spheres, their whole and sole responsibility being looking after the domestic matters failing which they were for turned and suffering was ultimate. Women's were made to beautify the things around, succumb to the desires of the male members in any form druthers or wife. The refusal of their duties or even reluctance resulted in their condemnation by both family and society.

Woman is only a symbol of sex and is considered an object of pleasure and means of the perpetuation of men's race. This system confines women to domesticity and consequently they have no role to play in the public sphere. So, women are restricted to private sphere and my attempt to come out is a beach of the patriarchal law. Patriarchy considers men as superior beings possessing every power to subdue the weaker sex (women). Men are free and equal whereas women are deprived of their privileges as they are not equals two laws prevail-one for men and the other for women.

In the Dalit community women is given second place in society. She is incomplete without men. Women are emphasizes as "treated like a beast of burden and an object of pleasure". In *Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing- A Feminist Study in Comparison*, Neena Arora said about the women: "... the place of women in society has differed from age to age, yet one fact common to almost all societies is that woman has never been considered the equal of man" (8) In male dominated society women as treated as subordinates to men and they treat women as "property, servile" them. In the patriarchal society, it is a universal truth, that women are ill- treated in everywhere. In her book Neena Arora, show many faces of women for their status:

Men all over the world have been speaking about women in a derogatory manner. An old Italian saying is: 'a horse, whether good or bad, requires spurs, so a woman whether good or bad, requires thrashing.' The wise men of China also advise husbands in these words: 'Listen to the counsel of your wife, but act against it.' The old men of Russia say: 'There is only one soul among ten women.' The Spaniards say: "We shall save ourselves from wicked women and should never be captivated by any that have good looks. (14)

She argues about the position of women in male dominated society and say, "There is a great discrepancy between the idealized concept of woman in India myths and scriptures and her actual situation in life. On the surface she enjoys a very status and is known as Devi (Godess), Lakshmi... or Shakthi..., but, in real life, She is harassed, oppressed and tortured in various ways"(16).

Bama's "*Sangati*" was originally written in Tamil in the year 1994 and it was translated into English by Lakshmi Halmstron. "*Sangati*" voices the community's identity. The word *Sangati* means events, and thus the novel through individual stories, anecdotes, and memories portrays the events that take place in the life of the women in Paraiya community. The novel also reveals how the Paraiya women are doubly oppressed. Women are presented as wage earners and it is up on them that the burden of running the family falls. The men on the other hand spend the money they earn as they please. In addition the women are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and harassment. Bama gives her statement for dalit women in the preface of the *Sangati*:

In *Sangati*, many strong Dalit women who had the courage to Break the shackles of authority, to propel themselves upwards, to roar (their defiance) changed their difficult, problem- filled lives and quickly stanchd their tears. *Sangati* is a look at a part of the lives of those women who dared to make fun of the class in power that oppressed them. And through this, they found the courage to revolt. (vi)

Bama's intention of Dalit women is very carefully depict the acknowledgement of the *Sangati*:

My mind is crowded with many anecdote, stories not about sorrow and tears, but also about their lively and religious culture, their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them, but rather to swim vigorously against the tide, about the self- confidence and self respect that enables them to leap over their adversities by laughing at and ridiculing them, about their passion to live life with vitality, truth and enjoyment, about their hard labour. I wanted to shout out these stories. (xvii)

Hard labor and economic precariousness of Dalit women leads to a culture of violence, and this runs through the book: the terrible violence and abuse of women by their fathers and husbands, and sometimes even brothers, women fight back. Set against these tales of hardship are other stories, of every day happenings: of women working together, preparing and eating food, celebrating and singing bathing and swimming. A positive image in created as well, of certain freedoms enjoyed by Dalit women; no dowry is require of the, for example widows remarry as a matter of course. There is also a very strong sense of a Dalit women's relationship to her body in terms of diet, health and safety, sexuality and notions of modesty. "*Sangati*" deals with several generations of women: the older women belonging to the narrator's grandmother Vellaiyamma Kizhavi's generations downward to the narrator's own, and the generation coming after her as she grows up.



Women are presented in *Sangati* as wage earners as much as men are working as agricultural and building site laborers, but earning less than men do. Yet the money that men earn is their own to spend as they please, whereas women bear the financial burden of running the family, often singly. They are also constantly vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse in the world of work. Within the community, the power rests with men caste courts and churches are male-led, and rules for sexual behavior are very different for men and women.

Bama's *Sangati* drastically gives an account of Dalit women's dual oppression an accent of gender and caste as well as other discriminated situations of womanhood in Tamil Dalit culture; "*Sangati*" explores the female subjugation and subordination in a great way. This pure narrative work becomes more feminist concerned when it is handled by Bama. Bama regards herself as a Dalit feminist and has emphasized the important of Dalit feminist standpoint. Through this Dalit black literature Bama, like other writers of rape, sexual assaults, physical violence at work place, in public arena as well as evidence at home. Bama exposes caste and gender problems both outside and inside the community; *Sangati* focuses generally on Dalit women on various issues such as gender, sexual discrimination and Dalit women and Dalit culture. In the *Sangati* younger girls are not allow to play boy's games, like 'kabadi' and 'marbles'. These games are known as boy's game. And girl's games are play cooking, getting married and other domestic and field works.

Even when we played 'mothers' and 'fathers', we always had to serve the mud 'rice' to the boy first. They used to pull us by the hair and hit us saying, 'What sort of food is this, 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. (31)

In "*Sangati*" encapsulates the author's experience of working within her erogenous and appraised society and the series of several interconnected anecdotes, experiences, news and events as narrated in the book, from an autobiography of a community. This short narration accommodates more than 35 characters most of whom are female. But the conventional sense there is no individual who may be tagged a hero or heroine.

Bama gives another picture of the community. Although both men and women came home after a hard day's work in the field, the men went off straight to the Bazaar or the Chavadi to while away their time, coming home only for their meal. But as for the own from the mine they return home they wash vessels clean the house, collect water, gather fire wood, go to the shops to buy rice and other provision boil some rice, make a Kuzhambu or a Kanji, feed husband and children before they eat what is left over and go to bed (59).

The unequal rights freedom and everything connected with family become very poor and unadjustable in the case of women. Male characters in the Pariya community become pleasure seekers and hold unequal rights. Bama herself says that "when I thought about all this, I was often. Bama very carefully portrayed a picture of Dalit women's life and their toil all through their lives. Men are very free. But the women have to tail hard bath in the field as well as at home. The double toils forces them to cruse their birth as women. In *Sangati* Bams says in the field of education dalit women's hand is always empty. They have no authority to get education. About the Dalit women's education Bama say in the novel, "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" (118).

Bama shows the gender discrimination meted out to them throughout the lives of Dalit women. "If a boy baby cries, he is instantly picked up and give milk. It is not so with the girl. Even with breast feeding, it is the same story; a boy is breastfed longer. With girls, they wean them quietly, making them forget the breast (7)". Everywhere women have a second rate position and men a higher position viewed thus, we find a multiple oppression as well as marginalization. In case of a boy, they give wholehearted support while a girl child will have only half hearted support. Everywhere boys are given more respect than girls. Boys can play any time they like and any game. But the girl must stay at home and keep working all the time. According to Bama dalit girls have no authority to enjoy their childhood. They have no right to play anywhere. In *The Sangati*, she very clearly portrayal the starting life of dalit girl in Pariya community:

In our streets the girls hardly ever enjoy a period of childhood. Before they can sprout three tender leave, so to speak, they are required to behave like young women, looking after the house work, taking care of babies, going out to work for daily wages. Yet, in spite of all their suffering and pain one cannot but be delighted by their sparkling words, their firm tread, and their bubbling laughter. (75)



In the comparison of other community's women, dalit women's life is very poor. They have no authority to express their feeling. Bama want to say all Dalit women to "be strong", and "we must never allow our minds to be worn out, damaged, and broken in the belief that this is our fate. Just as we work hard so long as there is strength in our bodies, so too, must we strengthen our hearts and minds in order to survive" (59). Bama says her communities' peoples stop this oppression, and girl should gives authority alike boy. We should stop the difference between boys and girls.

Thus, after reading all these things we can say that *Sangati* gives the narrator a key function and controls all the incidents and events in a proper way. The narrator becomes both an omniscient narrator and a controlling agent of their story, who speaks out the historical aspects of Dalit community through the characters like Vellaiyamma or Patti and a small girl, the narrator she, who learns the stories from her grandmother and it becomes the development of the novel. In *Sangati* many strong Dalit women who had the courage to break the shackles of authority, to roar changed their difficulty, problem filled lives and quickly stop their tears. In *Sangati* try to said they are live under any pressure and get joy their fully life.

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