

The Body as a Space of Responsibility, Harrassment and Stimulating Power Performance in Bama's Sangati

Pooja. A

II- M.A. English literature

Bharathiar University

Coimbatore

poojasmhs@gmail.com

Abstract

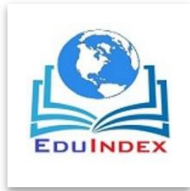
Acceptance may be good sometimes, but it doesn't work every time. The real pain is when you feel rejected and this was the situation of women in the paraiyar community who suffer isolation. The critical situation in this novel is that women do not have a voice. They are so habituated to suffering that getting out of it becomes a challenge which they do not wish to undertake. This paper aims to read the power of woman's body which acts as a resistance and the life of women in Paraiyar community. In addition, it focuses on the picture of hardship, culture, identity and growth as portrayed in Bama's Sangati. Though there might be anecdotes of hardships of women in the novel, this paper has taken a positive as well as an optimistic outlook of how a woman can go beyond gendered borders by resisting patriarchal ideologies. This paper brings out how Bama's characters set a role model in the present world. Qualitative methods are adopted in this research paper for a better understanding of the ideology.

Keywords: *Resistance, body, hardship, suppression.*

1. Introduction

Sangati was originally written in Tamil in 1994. It was translated by Laxmi Holmstrom into English. The whole narrative is divided into twelve chapters. Bama's Sangati is a realistic portrayal of the hardships of women in her own Paraiyar community. The word 'Sangati' means news, events, happenings, and the book is full of interconnected anecdotes. In the Acknowledgement in Sangati Bama writes: "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 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 "(xvi).

2. Paraiyar community



Think India (Quarterly Journal)

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-06

International Conference on Indigenous Languages and Translation Studies

held on Saturday, 3rd August 2019

Venue- Seminar Hall, **School of Humanities and Social Sciences**, Jain Deemed-to-be-University, Palace Road, Bengaluru, India



Sangam literature contains references to the caste system of Tamil culture, which contained certain "low-born" groups referred to as Pulaiyar. They were believed to be associated with magical powers and kept segregated from the higher –caste people: they had to live in separate hamlets outside the villages. However, their magical powers were believed to sustain the king, who had the ability to transform it into auspicious power. They were suppressed by the higher class communities like, Aryans, even though the paraiyars seemed superior to them in terms of culture and knowledge. Thus the pulaiyar performed a ritual function by composing and singing songs in the king's favor and beating drums. They were divided into subgroups based on the instruments they played. George L. Hart believes that one of the drums called *kinai* later came to be called *parai* and the people that played the drum were called as paraiyar. They were also farmers and rulers.

They had their own priests, carpenters, shoe-makers, weavers, washer men and hair dressers. Inscriptions, especially those from the **Thanjavur district**, mention *paraicceris*, which were separate hamlets of the Paraiyars. Also living in separate hamlets were the artisans such as goldsmiths and cobblers, who were also accorded low status in the Sangam literature. In a few inscriptions, Paraiyars are described as temple patrons. There are also references to "Paraiya chieftainships" in the 8th and 10th centuries, but it is not known what these were and how they were integrated into the Chola political system.

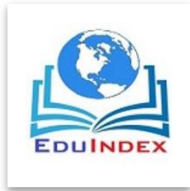
The Indian history has been a vibrant record of conflict and dialectic between two opposite forces like exploiters and exploited colonizer and colonized, powerful and powerless. Dalit literature is always marked by revolt and a great struggle of lower caste, against the high class people.

3. The portrayal of women:

The beginning lines of the novel itself tell how the superstitions prevail in the paraiyar community." If the third is a girl to behold; your courtyard will fill with gold" (1). It might feel praising the women but actually women were not considered as humans.

"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 says, 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 lines are hell"(7).The partiality or gender discrimination starts from the small play are itself. The treatment for women was extremely worse in paraiyar community. Already the community which they live in is suppressed community and the women in them are doubly suppressed.

Dalit girls had never known their childhood happiness as they had little time to play as they had to take care of their younger siblings. "Maikkanni is one such girl who has started to work from the day she learns to walk" (70). She has to go to work when her mother delivers a baby. When her mother becomes fit Maikkani turn to take care of the new born baby. She describes the life of paraiyar community women in the following quotations,



Think India (Quarterly Journal)

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-06

International Conference on Indigenous Languages and Translation Studies

held on Saturday, 3rd August 2019

Venue- Seminar Hall, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Jain Deemed-to-be-University, Palace Road, Bengaluru, India



“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 even when our stomachs are screaming with hunger, we mustn’t eat first. We are allowed to eat only after the men in the family have finished and gone what Patti aren’t we also human beings?” (29). They also had marital troubles which are mentioned in the following quotation,

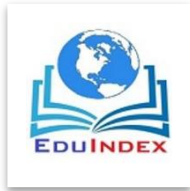
“ Even they lay down their bodies wracked with pain, they are not allowed to sleep, whether she dies or survived, she had to give pleasure and enjoyment to her husband” (59). This shows how violently those men in the paraiyar community seek sexual pleasure from the women. Even good sleep is not guaranteed for them. Sleep is the only time to relieve your pains. It was not given to them.

4. Self realization

The life of a dalit girl was worse but the life of a grown up dalit woman was even more worser. Bama describes the life style of dalit girls as follows: "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 even when our stomachs are screaming with hunger, we mustn’t eat first. We are allowed to eat only after the men in the family have finished and gone. What Patti aren’t we also human beings "(29). The narratives of hardship go into our heart when the above question is raised. They are harassed physically and also mentally but then they remain responsible. "From your ancestors’ times it has been agreed that what the men say is right"(118). Though many have changed in this world there are no any positive changes in that society. Bama witnesses every brutality and stands as the pillar of support to her community. They do not even verify whether he husband is correct or not in his decisions. Woman must agree whatever her husband instructs."It is best if you shut up about this. If you who will get the blame; it is you who will be called a whore” (24). This is the suffering of Marriama. Even when she tries to tell the betrayal to everyone, her surrounding restricts her from saying that there will not be anyone to believe her words.

In Sangati when the child narrator grows up, she voices the need for change: she becomes the representative of her community. She feels that it was time for a resistance against the injustices around her. Bama draws attention to their immense capacity for hard labour, their culture of an absence of dowry and their rich cultural heritage. She talks about the narrator’s courageous grandmother who pawned her thali to feed her children; katturaasa’s mother who bore her son by herself while cutting grass, and Marriamma who came back to work even after she met with an accident. But they have been silenced in the crucial moments of their lives.

“ 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 he came through the door. He came to hit me, the hungry brute, he pounced at me to kill me "(30).



Think India (Quarterly Journal)

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-06

International Conference on Indigenous Languages and Translation Studies

held on Saturday, 3rd August 2019

Venue- Seminar Hall, **School of Humanities and Social Sciences**, Jain Deemed-to-be-University, Palace Road, Bengaluru, India



Women in that community have to work in the fields meanwhile they have to work in their homes. It doesn't stop only with that; they have to also wait for their husband's return. They literally do not know why they live but then, still they live for their husbands. "If a boy baby cries, he is instantly picked up and given milk. It is not so with the girl. Even with breast-feeding, it is the same story; a boy is breast fed longer, with the girl, they bear them quietly, making them forget the breast" (7). The importance of the male gender begins from birth.

The Dalit men because often undergo dog's treatment from the upper caste men who are the landlords. As they cannot resist or raise voice against their oppressors, these men show off their male pride and authority, as well as frustration upon their wives. So it is the women who are tormented both inside and outside of their homes.

By narrating the various events of hardships for women from the Dalit community Bama places before us the rural Dalit woman's identity. Though the novel reveals only the troubles they remain as stimulating power performance by showing their resistance through self-realization by which their strength is also revealed. In Sangati we hear the voices of many women, some in pain, some in anger, some in frustration and some out of courage. Sometimes the language is full of expletive with sexual undertones. Bama suggests that it is the sharp tongue of a woman that can protect her against her oppressors. The characters often break into a song or a chant when the situation demands and there is a song for every occasion.

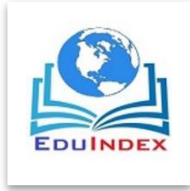
Meanwhile, Bama brings out a positive identity for the Dalit woman. The happiness in that community is marriage ceremony, attaining of puberty ceremony, joy of togetherness, singing songs, cooking and sharing food. In most rural homes the Dalit woman is an earning member, widow re-marriages are possible and 'tali' or the sacred thread worn as a chain during the marriage is not this binding symbol as in other communities

4. Conclusion

In the end of this novel, the Dalit women celebrate their newly found identity and inner strength. The narrator of this novel comes out of her limitations. She works and lives by herself. Bama realizes that it is up to the Dalit women to take their lives into their own hands. This novel will be certainly be an encouragement to Dalit women who are struggling through life, burdened by various aspects which include sex and gender discrimination, inequality at the workplace, right to education etc. all the various stages of their life: as a girl, as an adult woman and an old woman. Here the Dalit women are portrayed in a positive manner where their body acts as a space of responsibility, harassment and stimulating power performance in Bama's *Sangati*.

Acknowledgements

With immense pleasure I, Ms. Pooja...A. presenting the paper "The Body as a space of Responsibility, Harassment and Stimulating Power Performance in Bama's Sangati" thank Jain Deemed – to -be- University for organizing the International



Think India (Quarterly Journal)

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-06

International Conference on Indigenous Languages and Translation Studies

held on Saturday, 3rd August 2019

Venue- Seminar Hall, **School of Humanities and Social Sciences**, Jain Deemed-to-be-University, Palace Road, Bengaluru, India



Conference on 'Indigenous Languages and Translation Studies'. I thank my guides from Bharathiar University who provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted my research paper. I wish to thank all the people who gave me unending support.

References

- 7.1** **Book**
[1] Bama. Sangati. Trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005. Print.
- 7.2** **Journal** **Article**
[2] Dr.Vignesh Kumar. A. & Sabeetha .R.S. "Bama's *Sangati* as a unique Dalit Feminist Narration from Subjugation to Celebration." *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities*, 2(1), 92–96. Retrieved from: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.345673>.(2017).Web
- 7.3** **Web**
[3] Paraiyar. Retrieved from: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/paraiyar.2006>.Web