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Bama's "*SANGATI EVENTS*" as Treaties of Feminist Dalit Literature

Abstract:-

Sangati means news, events, happenings and the novel is one of the interconnected anecdotes. Sangati is a series of event that narrates the lives of Dalit women who face the double disadvantages of caste and gender discrimination. Sangati is a startling insight into the lives of Dalit women that highlights the issues varying from Christian conversation, caste and sexual discrimination and superstitious beliefs and oppression of women.

Keywords: Dalit, Sangati, Dalit Feminism, Dalit women, Sexual discrimination, Dalit Literature.

The novel "Sangati" was originally written in Tamil in 1994 by an exponent Dalit Feminism, Bama Faustina Soosairaj and later was translated into English by Laxmi Halmstorm. Born in Tamil Dalit Christian family Bama hails from Deccan India, as a feminist who holds her grounds deeply rooted into indigenous soil and Indian traditions, which seems to have become more than just contaminated with the ever prevailing and cursed casteism. Through Sangati, Bama holds the mirror up to the heart of Dalit women. She makes an appeal for change and betterment of the life of Dalit women in the variety of fields, including sex and gender discrimination, equal opportunity in work force, education rights and etc. The first novel written by Bama, Kurukku (1992), is Bama's autobiography whereas Sangati (1994), is an autobiography of her community which moves from the story of individual's struggle to the perception of the Peraiyya women, a neighbourhood group of friends and relatives and their joined struggle.

Sangati carries an autobiographical element in its narrative, but it is a story of the whole community, not an individual. It is the voice of many women speaking to and addressing one

another, sharing their everyday experience with each other.

“The theme of “Sangati” is “Subjugation to Celebration”. Bama’s Sangati is a unique Dalit feminist narrative”.

Bama’s novel focuses on caste and gender discrimination. They portray caste discrimination practised in Christianity and Hinduism. Bama make clear her intensions in her acknowledgement, “My mind is crowded with many anecdotes; stories not only about the sorrows and teatrs of Dalit women, but also their lively and rebellious culture...about their passion to live life with vitality, truth and enjoyment about their hard labour. I wanted to shout out these stories.”

The various aspects that Bama shows in Sangati are:

Caste and Gender discrimination: The novel starts with a quote; “if the third girl is a girl to behold, your courtyard will fill with gold”. These words said by narrator’s grandmother shows the theme of gender discrimination. She talks about the superstitious of the people that they believed in the fact that it is lucky thing for a girl to belong to the odd numbers and boys to belong to the even numbers. Going further Bama tells about the gender discrimination that girls were not allowed to play boys game like kabadi or marbles, they will get roundly abused. People will say “what does she think she is? She is just like a donkey. Look at the way she plays boy’s game.” Bama raises the issue of gender discrimination by writing, “if a boy cries, he is instantly picked up and given milk. It is not so with the girls. 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 their breast.” It did not end here but continued on and on. The women were paid their wages lower than men for the same work. Girls were also not allowed to get education like boys. They only had to suffer not only at the work field but also at home physically or mentally.

As Bama discloses in an interview that, “the main purpose of my writing is to bring out the revolutionary nature of Dalit culture.” In the novel she speaks about the brutality of caste system, which has made the human being forget their humanity. In spite of hard labour and education, equality and legal rights are not given to Dalit people. Untouchability has spread its wings all over them and has marked them as outcast. As Bama states, “in my village it was my grandmother who attended every single birth. Only the upper class never sent for her

because she was a paraichi.” It did not end here, but even in religious domain such as church, the arrangement was in such a way that they were not allowed to sit along with other people. Doctors and nurses never entered their residential areas. People used to hesitate to sit near them in buses while travelling. The children of the upper class hardly respected the elders who worked in their fields, house etc. In fact the children were not equally treated.

Voice of Dalit Women: - “Bama being a Tamil Dalit Christian woman is able to express emphatically the women’s identity”. She redefines woman from political perspective of a Dalit. Women are presented as wage earners as much as men. Women bear the financial burden of running the family. They are also vulnerable to sexual harassment and abused in the workplace. The women are mercilessly treated by their brothers. Bama narrates the cultural identity of a Dalit by illustrating the rites of coming-of-age ceremony. They do not exhibit any sentimental attitude to the bonds of marriage, for example “thali”, does not have any binding significance. Similarly, widows are free to remarry of their choice. Firstly, the strength of Dalit women is shown through Pachamuukipillai, who went to cut grass during her full-term pregnancy, where she managed to deliver the child and come home carrying the baby and bundle of grass. This indicates that the pregnant women do not take rest. They are taxed up with responsibilities. Even Bama’s mother spent all day transplanting in western fields and they went into labour.

“They are taxed up with responsibilities. Even Bama’s mother spent all day transplanting in the western fields and then went into labor. The boys are given more respect and they will eat as much as they wish and run to play.

Girls must stay at home and keep working. Bama’s grandmother was no exception, in the words of Bama, She cared for her grandsons much more than she cared for us. If she brought anything home when she returned from work, it was always the grandsons she called first. ..if she brought mangoes, we only got the skin, she gave the best pieces of fruit to the boys. Because we had no other way out, we picked up and ate the leftover skins (7).

Maturity is another major ritual celebrated by them. When Bama’s cousin Mariamma attained puberty she was kept in a Kuchulu, a small hut where she was made to sit for 16 days. All brought her many sweets. They believed on evil possessing therefore she is supposed to hold a small iron rod or something made of iron in her hands. On the sixteenth day a small pandal decorated with banana trees in front of the house would be

erected to celebrate the occasion in a grand style”.

Here Bama gives an example of Mariamma whom an upper cast fellow tries to molest her and when she escapes from his hand she shares everything to her friends and they said, “It is best if you shut up about this. It’s you who will get the blame; it is you who will be called a whore.” Bama describes the women do not have a single moment of rest for themselves. Bama writes about them”, because all day they remain busy with other domestics works like to feed hungry children, collect water etc, after doing all these they do not sleep soundly as at night they have to satisfy their husband. As she writes; “night after night they must give in to their husband’s pleasure. Even if a women’s body wracked with pain, the husband is bothered only with his own satisfaction.”

Ill-Treatment of Women: - The novel ‘Sangati’ is an analysis of Dalit marginalization, discrimination, isolation and humiliation from common tradition of life specially the tragic condition of the Dalit women in Indian society. The single issue “caste system” gives rise to several problems in an Indian society. Here Bama portrays the story of a girl, Essaki, a girl who had seven brothers and her herself as a single youngest sister. The story of Essaki becomes heart rending story. She feels in love with a fellow of Vanan caste and ran away and lived happily with him. Her brother found her whereabouts and reached to Isaaki and won her trust. Poor Isaaki believed them and set off happily. But those villains had no intensions of taking Isaaki home instead they straight went deep into the forest and

“they dragged her out of the cart and without even caring that she was a full-term pregnant woman, with a sweep of a sword they separated her head from the body. They sliced upon her stomach, took out the baby, twisted her neck and killed it. When Vanan, her husband came to know, he came on lamenting Isaaki, Isaaki! Nobody knows what happened to him in the end. A tiger or something must have killed him.”

Again Bama reflects on the ill treatment of women by describing the story of Raakkamma whose husband beats her badly and she replies her in the same manner. As her husband treats her mercilessly and says;

“shut your mouth, you whore! Otherwise I’ll stamp on your stomach your guts will

scatter everywhere!” On this, Raakkamma says; “go on Da! Let’s see if you are a real man..... she spat at him.” Her husband kicked on her lower belly, dragged her by her hair and at this the courageous Raakkamma shouts, “You low life ma! How dare you kick me? Instead of drinking today every day, why don’t you drink your son’s urine? Why don’t you drink my monthly blood/. And she lifted up her sari in front of the entire crowd gathered there”.

Child Labour: - Bama narrates the story of childhood in their community. She narrates the child labour through the character Maikkami, also called as Siyarani. As Maikkami was the eldest child among the five children. Right from the beginning she was learnt to walk, she started to walk. She was compelled to work in fields, factories and do household chores at home. Bama mentions her pathetic situation as; “from the time she woke up, she sprinkled the front yard with water and swept it,... she did it all one after the other.” As Maikkami’s farther had left his wife and was staying with another woman and never paid attention to Maikkami and her siblings. She compels the readers to think deeply where she says, “who does my mother has except me? My father had left us. I must see to everything.” So responsible she was.

The biggest problem she faced is being alone as an unmarried woman. She had to face question as, “what caste are you? What is your religion/. Where do you work/? How much do you earn? Are you marrying? Are you going to marry? Why not? Next, she states that it was hard to get a rented room. Moreover, she lives alone because she is unmarried. People gossip about her, as she questions; “They seem to think that once a woman is married and has Thali round her neck, she is signed, sealed... Why shouldn’t a woman belong to no one at all but herself?

Bama concludes the novel ‘Sangati ’saying,

“Then there will come a day when men and women will live as one, with no differences between them. Women can make, and women can break.” Bama aches for a society, where there is equality, humanity of love but sadly it remains a dream.”

Conclusion:

Apart from the above discussion there are several other problems that the Bama has dealt with. Such as marriage system, inter-caste marriage, conversion of religion, poverty and so on. Towards the end of the novel, Bama narrates her own bitter experience as Dalit women. Despite being educated and working she seems to face many difficulties. Bama advised natives of her society to educate boys and girls equally, without showing any disparity. She hopes that girls child should be brought up in a way that in coming days both genders men and women will be treated with uniform moralities. Bama concludes the novel in an optimistic note.

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