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## Bama's 'Sangati': A Study

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### Abstract

In order to highlight the interwoven realities of caste, class, and gender in the lives of Tamil Dalit women, this research study analyzes Bama's *Sangati* as an important Dalit feminist book. *Sangati* highlights the tenacity, unity, and agency of Dalit women while documenting their daily hardships, humiliations, and institutional oppression through its nonlinear, oral-storytelling narrative. The essay examines how Bama subverts prevailing literary traditions by elevating marginal voices and revealing deeply ingrained caste and patriarchal systems. It assesses the book as a cultural archive that represents experienced realities rather than fictitious depictions, as well as a socio-political testimony. The study makes the case that *Sangati* is a celebration of collective strength, resistance, and empowerment rather than just a story of pain using an intersectional and Dalit feminist theoretical framework. The results highlight the significance of recognizing and elevating underrepresented voices in literary scholarship and validate the text's vital role in broadening the discourse of Indian feminist literature and Dalit studies.

**Keywords:** Dalit, feminism, Patriarchy, oppression, discrimination.

### Introduction

Dalit literature is a revolt against the exploitation and dehumanization of people of Dalit descent. Dalit literature is based on the principles of justice, equality, and freedom. Dalits have been refused access to these. The voice, touch, and shadow of the marginalized Dalit people are all considered filthy. Dr. Ambedkar's effort helped Dalits realize their equality and right to self-respect after freedom. The true hero of this literature is the average man. He triumphs in his fight for self-respect by rising up against cruel persecution. The true beauty of this writing lies in this. Dalit literature began to appear at the same time that political leaders from the community came into being, along with their identities. "Dalit" refers to the disadvantaged, disenfranchised, and downtrodden. The word is not brand-new. In Hindi, it was referred to as the "depressed classes" in 1930.

**An Overview of Bama, the Author:** Born in 1958, Bama (sometimes spelled Bama Faustina Soosairaj) is an author, dedicated teacher, and feminist of Tamil Dalit descent. Her autobiographical work *Karukku* (1992), which details the joys and sufferings faced by Dalit Christian women in Tamil Nadu, brought her popularity. In addition, she authored two collections of short tales, *Kusumbukaran* (1996) and *Oru Tattvum Erumaiyum* (2003), and two additional novels, *Sangati* (1994) and *Vanmam* (2002). She has also written twenty short stories in addition to this.

### *Sangati* (1994)

A number of female generations are the subject of the novel *Sangati* (Events). The elderly women are part of the generations that are narrated by the grandmothers, Velliamma Kizhavi, and subsequent generations. A woman from the Dalit caste must endure suffering on two fronts. Being a woman comes first, followed by being a member of the lowest community. A distinctive Dalit feminist story with autobiographical elements pertaining to the entire community is Bama's *Sangati*. It focuses on how women are oppressed twice. The book contains a number of short stories, memories, and anecdotes that illustrate the events that women in the Tamil Nadu community of Paraiyar experienced throughout their lives.

In *Sangati*, women are portrayed as daily wage workers. Women are paid less than males are. Men's earnings, however, are theirs to spend as they wish, while women are responsible for supporting the family financially. In the workplace, women are frequently the targets of sexual harassment and abuse. In this book, Marriamma shares a great deal about the sexual assault she and the women in her village experienced and how helpless they were to stop it. This book vividly depicts acts of physical violence committed by brothers, dads, and wives, such as cannibalism, whipping, and lynching.

### Thirty-five Characters

Laxmi Holmstrom translated *Sangati* from Tamil into English after it was written. With almost thirty-five characters, the story is separated into twelve segments. *Sangati* is the word for happenings. Although there is an autobiographical element to the story, it is the story of a community as a whole rather than a single person. The fact that Dalits were prohibited from attending temples and schools made their situation extremely precarious. Dalits are at the bottom of the Indian social structure. Taking note of everything, Bama discusses issues with gender and caste both within and outside the society. "All women in the world are second class citizens," asserts Bama. Dalit women face a serious issue. Their Dalit identity has caused them to face distinct issues. Not even they are regarded as respectable human beings. These facets of Dalit culture serve as the basis for my stories.

### Bama's Writing

She refers to the rural ladies as Amma, such as Vellaiamma, Maarriamma, and Pecchiamma, and she employs additional Tamil Dalit slogans. She names the locations, months, holidays, rituals, customs, attire, and jobs using a variety of Tamil phrases. Women talk to each other and discuss their daily lives in this book, often with hurt or rage. This book has a ton of sexual allusions in it. By disobeying spelling and grammar conventions, she creates a bridge between the spoken and written forms of Tamil. She adds, "It is very typical for a male to mistreat a woman and to humiliate her repeatedly. But a woman has no right to speak up in this partially hypocritical culture. Everyone may accept this. She feministically expresses the complaints of the women of Paraiya. Vellaiyamma Paati, a young child, and the narrator herself are among the characters who hear the narrative from their grandmother.

Women's Ways and Treatment: Throughout the first part of *Sangati*, Bama concentrates his criticisms against the various forms of oppression and hardships that Dalit women endure. However, *Sangati*'s latter stages depart from the depressive and frustrated states. Rather, it gives Dalit women a positive identity by emphasizing their inner vitality and strength. The author draws readers' attention to the Dalit community's educational system. She uses Pecchiamma, a member of the Chakkili village, as an example, who completed her fifth-grade education. That community's girls don't attend school too often.

**Sexual Exploitation:** Kumarasami Ayya, the higher caste landowner, exploits Maarriamma sexually. Maarriamma went out one day as usual to fetch firewood and carried her burden home in the sweltering heat. She heads to the nearby irrigation pump set after spotting water in it. Kumarasami Ayya grabs her hand and drags her into the pump set as she tries to drink water. But she makes it out and tells her friends about it; they respond, saying, "That landowner is a greedy, evil man." He is also of a higher caste. How can one even attempt to confront such individuals? Will people take what they say or what we say seriously?

But fearing for his reputation, Kumarasami Ayya rushes to the village and complains, stating, "Just today that girl Maarriamma, daughter of Samudrakani, and that Mnukkayi's grandson Manikkam were behaving in a very dirty way," to the headman of the Paraiya community, known as the Naattaamai. Maarriamma and Manikkam approach the center of the circle during the village investigation, fall to the ground, and fully prostrate themselves in greeting to the elders. They are therefore instructed to stand with their arms

folded to one side. When Mariamma finally gives up and begs for forgiveness, the Naattaamai demands that she pay Manikkam Rs. 100 and a fine of Rs. 200. The Naattaamai declares, "It is you female who ought to be humble and modest," as she concludes the ceremony. A man can get away with doing a hundred things.

### Bama's Feminism

Bama is a feminist writer whose work mostly targets the Dalit population. Women accept the patriarchal role that males play in their lives because they lack authority. Her female characters are never endowed with knowledge or authority. As a result, they are viewed as social victims and are open to attack from anyone. Hindu women have historically been portrayed as quiet victims who have been relegated to a secondary position in the home and in society. In their familial lives, Maarriamma and Thaayi have experienced mysterious humiliation. In addition to frequently abusing them, their husbands believe it is their natural right to degrade and murder their spouses. Maarriamma has never been lucky in her life.

She didn't receive the love and affection she anticipated from her parents when she was living with them. When her marriage to the drunkard Maanikkam—who frequently ends up in jail and does not look for work—was planned, she started crying. Maarriamma repeatedly declined to marry him after learning about his character. She had no choice but to accept him at last. She experienced daily beatings ever since she married Maanikkam. She was used entirely as a scapegoat, and everyone looked on helplessly. When Kumarasami Ayya molested her, the Paraya men were rendered speechless.

They lack the authority to confront the upper class individual because they are terrified of losing their favors, particularly their jobs. Bama concentrates on the lives and labors of Dalit women in this book. Men have no sense of duty and are free. However, in addition to working hard at home, the women in this village had toiled hard in the fields. This community's women are independent. Women work in the fields and in the match factory because they are paid equally to males despite not receiving the same pay as men. For doing the same task, they receive less money than men do. According to Bama, the coming-of-age ceremony signifies a girl's readiness for marriage.

A girl must get married after reaching adulthood since, according to popular belief, marriage is the best defense against evil individuals. Women in this neighborhood occasionally live extremely difficult lives in appalling conditions. The vocabulary used in this story to describe women is fairly informal. There is a sixteen-day celebration when a female reaches adulthood. In order to ward off evil spirits, the girl must bind herself with an iron rod. Unlike boys, girls do not have the same rights to an education. They must endure mental and bodily suffering at home in addition to on the job. Additionally, their uprising results in either violence or their demise.

Men from the Paraiyar community frequently lack the bravery to rebel against those from higher castes. According to her, ladies never have a moment to themselves to relax. They are always required to live such a life, working nonstop. She explores themes of oppression, humiliation, and universal gender difficulties through the characters of Mariamma and Thaayi. In addition, their husbands degrade them by chopping off their hair and abusing them physically. They never rebel against it, though. Bama captures the true image of Dalit

paraiyar women in *Sangati*. She gives a detailed account of the life of a Paraiyar woman from conception to death. Despite their numerous problems, they have happy lives. According to Bama, upper castes also oppress Dalit women in addition to their men. Here, Bama draws a comparison between the ladies in her society and those from higher castes. The Alabama solution proposed was: In her book *Sangati*, Bama states, "We need to be strong." We have to demonstrate our strong belief in our independence by leading uncompromising lifestyles. I convinced myself that, just as we work hard as long as our bodies are strong, we must also work hard to develop our hearts and brains in order to live. We must never allow our minds to become weary, wounded, or shattered in the notion that this is our fate.

### Conclusion

Bama's *Sangati* stands as a powerful socio-literary document that lays bare the intersecting realities of caste, class, and gender in Tamil Dalit women's lives. Through its episodic structure and oral-narrative style, the text refuses the conventions of mainstream literature and instead foregrounds the voices of marginalized women whose experiences have historically remained unacknowledged. The conclusion that emerges from this study is that *Sangati* is not merely a personal or community narrative; it is a collective assertion of identity, agency, and resistance.

The everyday struggles depicted in the text—discrimination based on caste, the oppressive structures of patriarchy, the exploitation of labour, and the denial of dignity—highlight the compounded marginalization endured by Dalit women. Yet, Bama refrains from presenting her characters solely as victims. Rather, she celebrates their resilience, wit, solidarity, and refusal to succumb to injustice. The women in *Sangati* continuously negotiate with systems of power, resist violence, support one another, and carve out spaces of strength within a hostile socio-cultural environment. Their laughter, storytelling, and collective labour become tools of survival and defiance.

This study reaffirms that Bama's narrative acts as a vital intervention in Dalit feminist discourse. By situating women's experiences at the center, *Sangati* challenges the patriarchal and casteist assumptions embedded both in society and in mainstream feminist literature. The work underscores the need to view Dalit women's issues through an intersectional lens, recognizing the multiple structures that shape their lived realities. In doing so, Bama not only documents oppression but also calls for social awareness, empathy, and transformation.

Ultimately, this research highlights *Sangati* as a text of empowerment—one that dismantles silence, amplifies subaltern voices, and insists on justice. It urges scholars, readers, and society to rethink the rigid boundaries of literature and to acknowledge the importance of Dalit women's narratives in the broader landscape of Indian writing. Through its raw authenticity and unwavering honesty, *Sangati* continues to inspire new conversations on equality, human dignity, and the possibilities of resistance.

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