A Subaltern Study on Dalit Women, Sangati: Culture of Silence

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ABSTRACT

Dalit males are at the bottom of the pyramidal caste system in Indian culture, while Dalit women are allocated a place much below. Because they are at the bottom of the social hierarchy, Dalit women are often mistreated and exploited by Dalit men and higher castes. The women of the lower castes are well aware of the helpless situation in which they find themselves. In Bama's book Sangati: Events, Dalit girls and women are described as constantly remaining mute while being humiliated and reduced to the status of non-human beings. These silences are much more significant to them than words, and they use them as a weapon against all kinds of negativity until they reach adulthood. This essay builds on Bama's Sangati: Events by looking at Dalit women's situation and the manner in which they absorb, maintain, and combat the culture of silence.

Keywords- social hierarchy, Indian culture, Bama's book Sangati: Events, Dalit girls and women.

Culture is the expression of a group's or society's traditions and social behaviour (Wehmeier 373). As a result, individuals play a critical part in the culture-building process. Many invaders from diverse countries, groups, and races have turned India into a composite civilization with many varied beliefs and ideals. As a result of the Aryan invasion, the indigenous, aborigines, and Dravidians were enslaved and subjugated. Because they didn't want to interact with people from other societal strata, the Aryans established four distinct caste systems: the Brahmin (priest), the Kshatriya (political ruler or warrior), the Vaishya (merchants), and the Shudra or Untouchable (laborers, peasants, artisans and servants). As with the first three divisions, the following three divisions were meant to serve the three members of the upper class. These days, people from the Shudra ethnic group, once known as the "Untouchables," are referred to as "Dalits." By inheriting one's ancestors' social class, caste is able to build one's social status.

Indian civilization was matriarchal, egalitarian, and casteless before the arrival of the Aryans. Even while indigenous cultures were more egalitarian than Aryan, they dominated pre-Vedic civilization, establishing the patriarchy of their conquerors.

The matriarchal society system's position Aryans valued women as 'pativrata,' 'saubhagyabati,' 'bhadramahila,' and 'grihalaksmi,' symbolising the virtues required of females - pure, respectable, virtuous, sacrificial, and docile. To restrict and limit women's sexuality, stereotyped images were utilised as weapons against them. Women, who are biologically weak, are forced to accommodate their status as the 'Other' to males in a male-dominated society and are therefore satisfied. A female is assumed to be inferior not just in most physical qualities, but also in terms of her experiences, emotions, and perceptions.

Human nature is characterised by a desire for power and a proclivity to control others in order to achieve dominance over them. One of the main motivations for the construction of the 'Varna' system is to address this issue. The caste system is described by Ambedkar as "graded inequity," and he goes on to say that "there is no such class as a wholly unprivileged class save the one at the bottom of the social pyramid." The rest's privileges are assessed. Even the poor are affluent when contrasted to the poor. (Benazir Bhutto 102)

According to Ambedkar's concept, Dalit males have even more benefits than Dalit women, who are just 'below' in the hierarchy of rights. The Dalits are at the
'bottom' and 'top' of this 'social pyramid.' According to Guru's assessment, Dalit women endure discrimination and subjection on three levels: First and foremost, they were classified as Dalits (castes), then as impoverished class, and last as women. They are often abused and exploited by their male counterparts and those from higher castes. Bama's Sangati: The events of the day brought attention to the plight of Dalit women, as well as the ways in which they absorb, perpetuate, and oppose the culture of silence in which they live.

It is lauded for its glorification of Dalit women's lives, humour, and humour in Bama's book 'Sangati.' The novel's concept sets the tone for a pleasurable reading experience.

Preparation and celebration for the delivery of a female child, based on the widespread idea that a family's third child would bring happiness after birth if she is a girl (3). However, this pleasant element is short-lived since it is smashed right at the start of their raising process. Growing up is a difficult challenge for individuals who belong to India's Dalits, or those from the margins of society. Girhood is determined and defined by caste, class, and gender. These forces manifest themselves in wider societal and familial domains. Tamil poet Imayam describes a Dalit girl's mother's blaming and cursing of her birth in this setting:

"A succession of issues, Endless hardship," my mother wailed when I was born ("Imayam 37, Imayam 38, Imayam 39, Imayam").

In Rege's opinion, this 'unwelcome' deed is a consequence of the woman's constant dread of losing her virginity, together with her need to pay dowry and presents to the groom's family, as well as to make ritual sacrifices for the delivery of a female child. The Shudras' older matriarchal culture was devoid of all of these negative aspects, which were eventually mimicked in their lives, making Dalit women's lives more vulnerable.

Both men and women have unique roles in the family's power structure. Sex and gender are two distinct concepts, with the former being biological and the latter being socially produced. Because of their gender-specific responsibilities, men and women are expected to be 'masculine' and 'feminine,' respectively, in society. It is during infancy that children begin to learn about gender roles. In a male-dominated culture, the birth of a female kid is supposed to accommodate and reconcile with the circumstances. This tale depicts how female children and women have been harmed by a lack of sufficient nourishment and diet. The reason for this is because they must eat after the family's male members. Due to the lack of food, they spend the most of their life being hungry. "Here, dalits exhibit features generally associated with higher castes." Males are favoured and pampered in this sphere" (Sing 134).

In this storey, the narrator's grandmother, Vellaiyamma, recounts that even when both children are sick or have a fever, the baby boy gets more time for nursing than the female child. The latter is cured after "half-heartedly," even if both are sick or have a fever. As they get older, girls are expected to take on more responsibilities around the house, washing dishes, getting water, sweeping, gathering wood, and even accompanying their younger siblings to play. All tasks that must be completed. She also tries to support her family financially by working at a nearby town's match factory since her mother "could not go to work in the fields then" after the birth of a child (70).

This storey examines how Dalit females face more challenges in obtaining an education than Dalit boys. They have limited time to educate themselves since they are responsible for all household activities as well as the care of infants. The result is a lack of chance to learn and a perception of being ignorant fools who are often abused for their lack of comprehension. A group or group that lacks information may easily be repressed because of this relationship between power and knowledge, which Foucault argues must be preserved in order to monopolise it (119). This is the primary reason why the dominant group - Dalit males – frequently deny Dalit females access to school, which leads to employment and empowerment.

In this storey, the females are only allowed to play particular kind of activities, Cleaning the cooking pots, collecting water, getting firewood, travelling to the store, and preparing kanji are all tasks that must be completed.

When girls participate in sports like as kabaddi, marbles, or chelanguchi, which are historically considered to be for males, they are chastised for attempting to appear macho (7). Children's games are divided into male and female roles in order to instill "feminine values" in females as early as possible. When boys are young. They often pose as police officers, store owners, bus drivers, or conductors, all of which are traditionally associated with male authority; but, because of their perceived inferiority, females are susceptible to the same type of male control, as the narrator explains. An examination of the children's activities reveals how power structures imprint on the teenage mind and how they are inculcated in youngsters via observation of the social environment.

Another issue addressed in this book is child marriage. In addition to Periamma (her older aunt), the narrator's mother and Patti are among the numerous female characters in the novel (grandmother). She persuades her mother to discontinue her study after puberty and arranges her marriage so that they may spend the rest of their life together in peace once they have children. Although she opposes the notion, her
father insists that she complete the tenth grade since he and her mother see that their illiteracy is at the foundation of all their troubles. It makes the grandmother of the narrator feel sick to her stomach, and she worries how long she will be protected by the young girls who have come to live with her (9-10). A premature marriage is harmful to the development of a child, and Babasahab Ambedkar advises Dalit mothers to keep their daughters from marrying young. Instead, he says, they should be their husband's “partner” or “friend,” not his slave (qtd. in Paik 42).

The uneven allocation of labour between Dalit men and women reveals an essential feature of patriarchy. Dalit women are required to put forth more work than their male counterparts at home and in the fields of the upper castes, according to the data collected. To understand why Dalit women opt to work as wage earners, Sharmila Rege investigates why their husbands' wages are spent on booze or on keeping the "preferred wife" in the home, among other things. The storey also shows how women in lower castes are subjected to economic discrimination.

Although doing the same labour, females receive far less than men (18). "The process of capital accumulation employs all types of cultural and material hierarchies to attract cheap labour and enrol the underprivileged people as a member of a reserve army of labour to drive wages down," Chhaya Datar explains (2964).

While labouring in the fields or gathering firewood from woods, Dalit girls and women are constantly threatened with rape and sexual harassment. Raped behaviour is defined as "violent sexual behaviour that is nothing more than a crime of power that solely demonstrates the concepts of "conquest" and "contempt," according to Kimmel (330). In the workplace, sexual harassment of women is seen as a kind of humiliation and exploitation. The presence of female labourers who are obligated to fulfil the sexual wants of land-owning upper castes creates an uncomfortable working environment for everyone. After being sexually abused by Kumarsamasi Ayya while working in his fields, I decided to seek help. Mariamma manages to escape. Her mate urges her not to tell anyone else about the event since the higher caste landowner is a wealthy, evil guy who no one wants to criticise or think is responsible for the immorality (20). The women of the lower castes are well aware of the helpless situation in which they find themselves. Mariamma decides to keep quiet because she understands that disclosing the incidence of molestation will expose her to much greater social shame. Ironically, it is the Ayya who brings a bogus allegation before the headman, alleging that Mariamma was observed in an improper posture with Manikkam. Because the charge is made by a higher caste guy, the local court deems her guilty. She is unable to defend herself and is compelled to remain mute. Due of her inaction, "she was fined Rs. 200 and exposed to jeers and beatings for a crime for which she had no part to play". Although men teased him for being "humble," the nattaamai, leader of the paraiya tribe, decided that a lady should always be "modest" and "humble" (26). As a result of 'double standards,' Dalit women who are accused of being 'impure,' or 'lacking purity,' have concisely been described by Sharmila Rege. Because they are subjugated, they lack the 'honour' to seek punishment for the crime committed against them (29-30).

Another aspect of patriarchy is domestic violence. Dalit women are subjected to harsh Beatings by their husbands, despite the fact that they have not done any wrongdoing. It demonstrates men's pride in their masculinity while also attempting to minimise women's identities. A husband's sole control over his wife's treatment justifies domestic abuse, according to the institution of marriage. As the narrator describes, his wife 'Periamma' succumbs to her husband's abuse, and another female character, "Thaayi, is beaten mercilessly by her husband with a stick or belt, and if onlookers object, the husband arrogantly declares that he is his wife and that he can do anything to her, even kill her (42-43)". Dalit males are subservient to the higher castes, In the complex web of hierarchical society, men subject their women, and women submit their men. As a consequence, Dalit women are seen as animals or inanimate objects by the general public.

When it comes to inter-caste marriage, women are the major target of society's disapproval. An wicked ghost named Esakki is the subject of the novel as well as the storey of a girl who was cruelly hacked to death for marrying a guy from the Vannan (washerman) caste, despite her brothers' vehement objections. Her brothers, enraged, feigned to reconcile with her and then killed her in the forest in a most heinous way while driving her back home. They didn't even spare her unborn child, wrenching its neck to death (50-54). Another storey is a girl who had the audacity to have an affair with a Palla guy. Her brother and father abused and ridiculed the girl. Throughout the storey, the narrator explores the subject of how inter-caste marriage may bring a family's dignity into disrepute. If a girl marries someone from a different caste, her family's respect and pride are questioned, while the situation is quite different for males (109). Uma Chakravarti aptly describes how a family in India gains or loses 'respect' by their actions.

Women’s 'appropriate' and 'improper' behaviour, the latter of which brings their caste and clans 'purity' and reputation into disrepute (151).

Sangati: Events, a book by Bama, the film investigates how Dalit girls and women get used to quiet as a routine part of their daily life. To a woman, these silences are much more powerful than words. As she matures into a lady, she withdraws into her quiet recesses to express her displeasure with the injustices. Brutality and inequality were committed on her by males from both high and lower castes.
REFERENCE