

Narratives of Trauma and Resistance: A Representative Study of ‘Sengani’ In Jai Bhim

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Abstract

Social film genres tell the tragic stories of society's downtrodden and underprivileged people and encourage viewers to have a sense of empathy and accountability towards them for their adversity. The irony is that although India has the largest tribal population in the world, their economic condition is miserable and pitiable. They are exploited and have impoverished lives. They have difficulties assimilating into mainstream society, which has left them socio-culturally and technologically disadvantaged. With its emphasis on the injustice and exploitation of tribes in the 1990s, the film Jai Bhim accurately captures this predicament. Sengani, the expectant tribal lady, cried aloud, but she only spoke up when she confronted the higher-ranking police officers who were mistreating her. This research paper aims to shed light on the status of tribal women in modern Indian culture by using a feminist lens to analyze Sengani's character in the film. It examines the pain experienced by Indigenous women, their socio-cultural context, the injustice suffered by them, and their fight for justice. It also emphasizes how crucial it is for these sorts of movies to raise awareness of social concerns, women's difficulties, and the social advancement of neglected tribes.

Keywords: Marginalisation, Resistance, Social concerns, Trauma, Tribal women

INTRODUCTION

November 2021, the premiere of the film Jai Bhim explores societal prejudice. The power of law, its importance, and its dominance over all forms of government and non-government officials and groups have been demonstrated in the film. The movie is based on a true incident that happened in Tamil Nadu in 1995 that led to the victim's widow seeking a habeas corpus through a landmark ruling by the Chennai High Court. The Irula tribe, a de-notified tribe from Tamil Nadu whose existence is full of hardship and suffering, is the focus of the Jai Bhim narrative. Rajkannu, gets arrested by the police when he is alleged of stealing ornaments from the village president's home. Sengani, his pregnant wife, attempts to ascertain his whereabouts and unearth the facts surrounding her husband's abduction after he and his family vanished from the jail following severe police abuse.

A couple from the Irular tribe named Rajkannu and Sengani appears at the beginning of the film. They labor in the higher caste men's fields, catching poisonous snakes and rats to manage the infestation. Rajkannu is summoned to the village chief's home to capture a venomous snake hidden in the jewelry cabinet. After removing the snake, Rajkannu abandons it in the forest. Later on, once Sengani, his wife, becomes pregnant, he moves to a different village in search of work in order to support his family. Rajkannu is charged with taking jewels from the village chief's residence when he is not there. When the police arrive at Rajkannu's home to conduct an inquiry, they violently kick his wife in the womb. In order to find out where Rajkannu is, they mercilessly torture his wife, Sengani, and his other family members,

including his brother, sister, and brother-in-law. However, because Sengani is pregnant, they release her. Later, after savagely torturing Rajkannu to get him to confess to the crime, the police capture him. Sengani enlists the assistance of Chandru, a lawyer who strives for justice for the tribal people after she learns that her husband and other relatives are missing from police custody. After reviewing her case, Chandru files a habeas corpus case. According to the police, Rajkannu and the three relatives escaped from their custody, and they produced eyewitnesses in the court. In the course of events, Chandru discovers Rajkannu's dead body close to Pondicherry. The autopsy revealed that Rajkannu passed away while in police custody, a fact that a policeman subsequently admitted to.

A crucial role in the film is played by the native woman Sengani. She refused to submit to the powerful individuals who are in charge of abusing the indigenous lady and her family. Her own struggle for justice and self-respect following her husband's death while under police custody is a major theme of the movie. Following the consideration of all the evidence, the court rules that Rajkannu was slain by the police while he was in prison. Sengani was compensated with three lakhs and half ground land following the final ruling. As a result, the movie shows a tribal lady standing strong against obstacles and members of the higher class and caste in her quest for justice for her husband.

The purpose of the research paper is to critically examine Sengani's portrayal in the film *Jai Bhim*, which showcases her addressing larger social concerns, including gender inequality, caste/class discrimination, and structural oppression in India. The paper aims to explore the psychological and emotional effects of gendered violence and caste/class-based prejudice on Sengani, delving into her traumatic experiences.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The field of trauma is fascinating and intriguing. These days, one might hear individuals talking endlessly about how an encounter, an event, an act of violence or harassment, or even just a sudden, unexpected incident, sometimes even one that wasn't especially malicious, can leave one traumatised. Although Sigmund Freud began speculating on traumatic events with the publication of *Studies on Hysteria* in 1895, trauma theory became more popular in the second half of the 20th century. Michelle Balaev examines the development of trauma studies as well as their historical context and addresses the nature of trauma in *The Nature of Trauma in America*. Speaking is acknowledged in trauma as both the solution to the issue of traumatic pathology and a basic characteristic that, in its absence, characterises trauma, according to Balaev. Additionally, she is the author of *Contemporary Approach in Literary Trauma Theory* (2014), which expands on the topic of trauma in literary criticism by offering fresh viewpoints on the theoretical underpinnings and potential directions of the discipline. Changes in psychiatric definitions of trauma as well as semiotic, rhetorical, and social issues that are part of the study of trauma in literature and culture may be the best ways to understand the evolution of trauma theory in literary criticism.

The Greek word for 'wound' is 'trauma', and it refers to a psychological condition. In his genealogical study on the subject of trauma, M. S. Ocaik noted that the term 'trauma' was initially used to describe physical injuries and some of its immediate repercussions. The Oxford English Dictionary, published in 1656, has the earliest known use of the word 'traumatic', which is described as '...pertaining to wounds or the cure of wounds'. A range of psychological impacts of the experience or threat of violence, injury, and loss has been referred to as trauma since the late 1800s (Ocaik 9). Similarly to this, Kali Tal in *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literature of Trauma* describes trauma as "a life-threatening event that displaces [one's] preconceived notions about the world" (Tal 15). Trauma is defined by The Webster's New College Dictionary as:

“An emotional shock that creates substantial and lasting damage to the psychological development of the individual, generally leading to neurosis; something that severely jars the mind or emotions.” (Webster 1173)

Such trauma may have significant and long-lasting effects on people’s mental health, relationships with others, and general quality of life. It can also be experienced by oppressed groups like tribal women, which frequently feed the cycle of injustice and suffering.

Women today face threats from a variety of violent situations, such as sexual assault by intimate partners, family members, and strangers; domestic abuse includes beatings, burnings, acid disfigurements, threats, and retaliation, as well as honour killings and other ritualistic killings.

Gender is an important dimension of structural inequality. Therefore, traumatic events and their impacts upon people have to be understood from a gender sensitive and gender-informed perspective. A gender-sensitive approach to any problem will try to foster gender awareness and to improve gender equity in research, planning, and implementation. (Ocak 111)

It is important to investigate the topic of gendered violence and gendered trauma since the influence of gender on those who experience trauma is not as well understood.

Women are more vulnerable to trauma because to their gendered roles and rigid gender segregation in these societies. Women are more likely than males to become victims of organized crime. Everyone agrees that a person’s culture shapes their way of thinking and living; a person's attitude or conduct itself is a reflection of their upbringing. Every individual’s perspective and reflection of the universe are ultimately determined by the cultural or socio-political context in which they are born and raised. Because a person’s socio-cultural background shapes how they should respond to events in a given community, trauma has varying effects on different people. Trauma can have distinct origins and consequences on an individual than it does on a community. It is true that it is person or culture specific, and that the influence or effect differs depending on the individual and the society, “The fact that silence is not a neutral act; rather, it is a politically regressive one that passively permits the continuation of violence against women and children” (Horvitz 4).

According to Ocak, sexual assault, physical violence, and gender discrimination are all part of the issue of ‘gendered trauma’:

The gender dimension should be taken into consideration when trying to understand trauma. To begin with, different types of trauma may happen to both sexes at varying frequencies, and there may be gender-specific sensitivities towards trauma. Gender-sensitive research can better inform primary and secondary prevention measures as well as therapeutic and rehabilitative models implemented for trauma victims. (114)

Thus, the idea of gendered trauma helps to explain the women’s horrific experiences.

It is possible to say that tribal women experience distinct and severe types of suffering as a result of the compounded layers of oppression and violence that interact with their gender, socio-economic level, and cultural identity. Tribal women’s sufferings and struggles have their roots in political, social, cultural, and historical contexts. Indigenous communities were frequently marginalised by colonial practices, which resulted in their dispossession of resources and land, loss of customary means of subsistence, and dissolution of their cultures. Development policies have marginalised indigenous populations even in the post-colonial era, leading to relocation and further socio-economic disadvantages. Poverty is widespread and is made worse by restricted access to jobs, resources, and basic services like healthcare and education.

The loss of livelihood and heightened vulnerability arising from mining, deforestation, and other developmental activities pose a danger to the significance of land to tribal identity and existence. Due to a lack of employment options, many Indigenous women are forced to work in unofficial, sometimes exploitative labour marketplaces.

The patriarchal structure that predominates in tribal communities also causes women to be marginalised and subjected to gender discrimination. Due to gender bias and oppression, women in the tribal community are disproportionately affected. They also face difficulties obtaining a decent life and a sustainable means of subsistence because of social barriers, poverty, unemployment, and poor health. Additionally, women's engagement in economic activities was notably low. In weak states, girls are more susceptible to abuse and uneven access to education. Cultural taboos, reluctance to coeducational classrooms, attitudes toward early marriage for girls, and distances to schools outside the local security all contributed to the double marginalisation of women and children. These are a few of the main obstacles that Indigenous women face (Shivakumar 29). Tribal women are already burdened by traditional gender roles; they are frequently in charge of children, home chores, and subsistence farming, which restrict their access to education and personal growth. Geographical remoteness, economic obstacles, and cultural beliefs that value male education over female education all limit access to education.

There are several obstacles facing the healthcare industry, including limited access to care, a dearth of health education, and customs that may be at odds with current medical wisdom. Tribal women are frequently underrepresented in political decision-making, which results in policies that do not specifically meet their needs. There is a dearth of knowledge about legal rights, and it is challenging to obtain justice because of prejudice, red tape, and a lack of legal assistance. Tribal women suffer psychological and emotional trauma due to a number of factors, such as the increased risk of gender-based violence, the loss of communal bonds resulting from displacement, and systematic discrimination that exacerbates feelings of powerlessness and inferiority. Dixit K. Nishi (2006) has highlighted the difficulties and struggles that the tribal people, particularly the women, face. She notes that one major issue that these women face is being sexually exploited by contractors, landlords, bureaucrats, and other powerful individuals in the general public.

Strong ties to the community, conventional methods of recovery, and the work of grassroots groups offer vital assistance in spite of these obstacles. To improve their circumstances, advocacy and empowerment through economic and educational activities are essential. To address these concerns comprehensively, inclusive policies, improved access to education, improved healthcare, sustainable economic possibilities, and strong legal assistance are required. Therefore, in order to enhance the lives of indigenous women while honoring their distinct cultural, social, and economic settings, systemic reform and long-term empowerment are needed. In addition to providing for urgent necessities, addressing these complex issues entails creating an atmosphere of support that empowers indigenous women to flourish and stand out for their rights both inside and outside of their communities.

According to Shivkumar's discussion, gender discrimination is therefore accepted as the norm in patriarchal society:

“In male-dominated societies, factors such as domination and subordination prevent girls and women from leading their lives fully. Patriarchal attitudes operate in almost all areas such as socio-political, economic, education, health etc.” (Shivkumar 33)

The pain and struggle of tribal women—with particular reference to Sengani in the film *Jai Bhim* have been examined within the framework of this analytical theory.

ANALYSIS OF TRAUMA AND STRUGGLES OF SENGANI

Sengani is shown as the lowest socio-economic class indigenous lady. She is most devoted to her family. She also valued life's virtues more than anything else. In the first scene, the rats are shown being caught by Sengani and her husband, Rajkannu. His spouse queries Sengani after she lets go of a single little rat:

Rajkannu: Are you mad? Why did you release the rat?

Sengani: The mouse is a child. You will rot in hell if you fill your stomach by taking a child's life.

Sengani's empathy for innocent life, even that of a mouse is evident in this scenario.

Sengani's persona serves as a moving illustration of integrity and resiliency in the face of both personal sorrow and institutional injustice. Her empathy, demonstrated when she lets go of a mouse in the first scene, demonstrates her deep regard for all living things, regardless of where they fall in the social system. This first representation foreshadows Sengani's unwavering stance against injustice and sets the tone for understanding her core convictions.

The film's narrative centres on the police department's violent treatment of Native Americans. The local police hunt for the true perpetrator when a thief takes money from the Sarpanch, the village president's residence. However, after identifying the true offender, they pay him a bribe to end the investigation. Rajkannu and his family members from the Irula tribe are violently humiliated by the police department after they are arrested. Sengani, his pregnant wife, was not even abandoned. She was beaten by the cops with little regard for her health or pregnancy. The situation deteriorates further when one of the police officers publicly removes his sister's sari shamelessly. Because of police brutality, Rajkannu passes away while under police custody. The police department doesn't seem to care that he crossed the line and disposes of his body by throwing it along the edge of the woodland. As a result, the movie depicts a number of situations that highlight the brutality with which police treat people from lower socio-economic classes, particularly tribal women. Sengani hurled her worries with anguish and grief as she was asked to explain her situation in court.

Sengani: Police dragged my husband in front of my eyes. Now they say that they have fled; they have not been found. I am pregnant; where do I wander?

As a result, the story of the movie presents a sharp contrast between Sengani's humanitarian traits and the police department's violent actions.

The police, who are a symbol of state power, abuse their position of authority to mistreat and degrade the tribal people, especially weaker women like Sengani. Rajkannu's death and the subsequent abuse of his family's rights following his erroneous arrest highlight the systemic prejudice and widespread misuse of power that the tribal people experience. Sengani's situation represents the pain of underprivileged populations that are victims of systemic violence as a whole, not simply his own particular sorrow.

Sengani's declarations in court and her unwillingness to take bribes from the DGP further highlight her courage and commitment. In court, she expressed a deep sense of unfairness and loss, but she also expressed her will to pursue justice in her remarks. The movie also showcases women's strength. Rajkannu's pregnant wife battles the system to the very end. Despite having two children to take care of, she declines DGP's financial offer to take back the case. This is a portrayal of her self-respect. This sequence highlights the interplay of gender and social rank in her battle, emphasising her role as a voice for the voiceless. Sengani defies hopelessness in the face of extreme bodily and psychological suffering, including the humiliation she endures as a pregnant woman who is physically assaulted by the police. Her

decision to decline the DGP's offer is a strong declaration of her moral strength and self-respect, presenting her as a symbol of resistance and optimism.

Sengani's persona is further enhanced by her strong cultural beliefs and profound regard for her spouse. In Indian culture, a spouse is treated with the same regard as God. Sengani's persona embodies these cultural values as well. Sengani insists on accompanying her husband when he takes a leave of absence to fulfil his duties in a scene. The chat shows that her spouse helps her realise the challenges of living in the outside world:

Sengani: Wherever you go, take me with you.

Rajkannu: You want to smoulder in the kiln fire.

Sengani: I will bear the kiln fire, not the pain of your separation.

Her refusal to leave Rajkannu's side, even after realising the difficulties they would encounter, demonstrates her steadfast devotion and their close relationship.

Sengani's character's cultural ethics are influenced by Indian culture. Sengani chooses to stay at home with her kid instead of accompanying her husband to the brick factory, even though she is aware that there would be numerous challenges there. For Sengani, this occurrence represents the anguish of being separated. The demeaning treatment they endure at the hands of the government stands in striking contrast to this bond, which is based in ancient Indian cultural standards. Sengani's conversation with Rajkannu emphasizes not only her endurance of physical challenges but also the psychological damage caused by their forced separation. Her character is given depth by this personal aspect, which heightens the interest in her struggle for justice.

Sengani takes a stance and battles against all socio-political devils for justice and equality, while being from the lowest social classes and having to deal with issues like untouchability, false accusations, and social torture. Sengani's declarations in court and her unwillingness to take bribes from the DGP further highlight her courage and commitment. In court, she expressed a deep sense of unfairness and loss, but she also expressed her will to pursue justice in her remarks. This sequence highlights the interplay of gender and social rank in her battle, emphasizing her role as a voice for the voiceless. She refuses the DGP's request to drop the lawsuit in exchange for a sizable sum of money.

DGP: You cannot win this case. There is evidence that Rajkannu was killed in a road accident. I will talk to the policemen and get you a hefty amount if you want. It will help you in the upbringing of children.

Sengani: I will not be able to introduce this coming child to his father either. However, I will have much wealth. With that wealth, I will feed these children. When they ask me where I got so much money, I will say that your father's killers gave it to me. So, will I tell my children this, sir? Even if we kill ourselves, who is to ask? But it does not mean that we should sell our self-respect. I do not care if this case is lost. I will tell the children that the battle is lost. If possible, get those bloody policemen punished.

Sengani defies hopelessness in the face of extreme bodily and psychological suffering, including the humiliation she endures as a pregnant woman who is physically assaulted by the police.

Her decision to decline the DGP's offer is a strong declaration of her moral strength and self-respect, presenting her as a symbol of resistance and optimism. Sengani's conviction is evidence of her bravery as a woman. She has the ability to speak up for justice with conviction. She is fairly clear about wanting the offender to pay for their actions, and she does not allow anything to stand in the way of justice.

Sengani stands for the mistreatment of Indian tribal women, who experience many sorts of prejudice due to factors such as caste, gender, and socioeconomic standing. Her persona functions as a microcosm of the greater obstacles that indigenous groups have in obtaining fundamental human rights and justice. Sengani experiences widespread caste prejudice throughout the movie, which hinders her ability to get an education, find work, and maintain her fundamental dignity. She also experiences gendered violence, which is a typical occurrence for Indian tribal women who undergo several types of oppression. Subtle indications in the movie illustrate these facets of her trauma, which mirror larger systemic patterns of violence and exploitation. The movie examines Sengani's internalisation of the violence and discrimination she encounters, which results in psychological trauma and low self-esteem. Sengani is a living example of courage and resiliency despite her struggles. Her trauma is shown throughout the movie, maybe via her community's support systems or her own actions of disobedience against injustice. Sengani's challenges are placed in the larger context of India's interlocking caste/class and gender inequality by *Jai Bhim*. It highlights the vulnerability of tribal women like Sengani by criticising the deeply ingrained social hierarchies and economic inequalities in Indian culture. The story could also touch on social justice and legal movements within the tribal group, showing Sengani's possible participation in grassroots campaigns to fight caste and class prejudice and pursue justice.

As a result, movies like *Jai Bhim* are essential for promoting social change and bringing attention to the neglected realities of tribal women. Viewers are prompted to consider structural inequalities and their role in advancing equality and human rights by Sengani's character. As a result, Sengani's portrayal in *Jai Bhim* provides an insightful look at pain and resiliency in the face of widespread prejudice based on gender and caste. Her persona is a potent narrative device that sheds light on the continuous challenges encountered by Indian tribal women and motivates group action in the direction of a society that is more just and equal.

CONCLUSION

The film *Jai Bhim*'s Sengani serves as an excellent example of how indigenous women's pain and difficulties are analysed, highlighting the complexity of their suffering and resiliency. Sengani's journey offers a moving account of the structural inequities that tribal societies experience, especially for women who are disproportionately marginalized in terms of their socioeconomic status and political standing. Her kindness, fortitude, and unwavering resolution in the face of heinous persecution are shown in the movie, making her a potent symbol of resistance against the widespread misuse of authority. Sengani's representation subverts the prevalent victimization tropes that are frequently connected to underprivileged populations by emphasizing the strength and agency of tribal women. Her struggle for justice, despite the high personal cost, is a moving example of the unwavering spirit of people who, in spite of their social status, refuse to submit to and oppose unjust regimes.

Sengani's persona is essentially a potent story of defiance, tenacity, and unshakable devotion to justice. Her transformation from a brave warrior battling institutional oppression to a sympathetic tribal woman captures the larger difficulties of oppressed populations. Sengani's tale serves as a powerful reminder of the resilience of the human spirit and the pursuit of justice in the face of insurmountable obstacles. In summary, Sengani's portrayal of a tribal woman in *Jai Bhim* provides a representative analysis of the larger issues facing these people. Her experience serves as a powerful reminder that structural change is required to address the pervasive injustices and inequalities that these communities must contend with. It demands that their rights be acknowledged, that discriminatory acts be stopped, and that an inclusive

society based on justice and equality be established. Sengani's story inspires a wider conversation about the empowerment and advancement of Indigenous women since it is not just one of pain but also one of bravery, dignity, and the unwavering quest for justice.

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