

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA OF CASTEISM IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF BAMA AND IMAYAM

**Thesis submitted to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH**

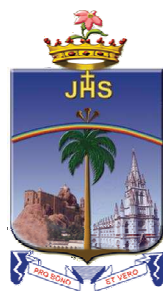
by

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(Ref. No. 27259/Ph.DK5/English/Part -Time/April.2018)

Under the Guidance of

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PG & RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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Certificate

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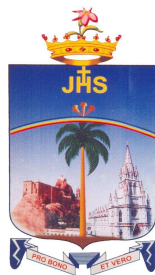
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Declaration

I, **M. Charmaigne Owenita (Ref. No. 27259/Ph.DK5/English/Part-Time/April 2018)** hereby, declare that the thesis entitled **Psychological Trauma of Casteism in the Select Novels of Bama and Imayam**, submitted to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, for the award of the Degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in English** is a record of original research work done by me, under the guidance and supervision of **Dr. V. Francis, M.A., M.B.A., M.Phil, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, during the period of study 2018-2021, and it has been submitted either in whole or in part of any other degree or diploma at any other University or Institute.

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CERTIFICATE OF PLAGIARISM CHECK

1.	Name of the Research Scholar	Ms. M. Charmaigne Owenita
2.	Course of Study	Ph.D. English
3.	Title of the Thesis / Dissertation	Psychological Trauma of Casteism in the Select the Novels of Bama and Imayam
4.	Name of the Research Supervisor	Dr. V. Francis
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W	URL: https://zenodo.org/record/1421115/files/21-23.pdf Fetched: 2020-05-29T02:28:46.0200000	 1
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W	URL: https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-2596-sangati-a-subaltern-study-on-dalit-women.html Fetched: 2021-08-22T23:49:46.7930000	 15
W	URL: https://www.ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2002244.pdf Fetched: 2021-05-25T07:01:26.3530000	 18
W	URL: https://aijsh.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/8.5-Complete-AJRSSH.pdf Fetched: 2022-05-18T12:30:19.7170000	 3
W	URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imayam_(writer) Fetched: 2020-09-08T18:06:20.2970000	 11
W	URL: http://sivanagaiah.blogspot.com/2009/10/discourse-on-caste-and-sub-caste.html Fetched: 2021-07-14T10:21:59.8370000	 14
W	URL: http://www.oijrj.org/oijrj/apr-may2018-special-issue/29.pdf Fetched: 2021-03-24T05:50:38.4100000	 3
W	URL: http://repository.tufs.ac.jp/bitstream/10108/91191/1/ass02_4.pdf Fetched: 2021-09-17T12:35:19.6700000	 1
W	URL: https://www.adlitteramjournal.com/assets/pdf/2020/7.-Y.-Jaya_Article_Ad-Litteram-Journal_December-2020-Edition_Volume-5.pdf Fetched: 2022-05-04T11:08:31.1100000	 1
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Acknowledgements

In the course of writing this thesis, I have been indebted to a number of people and without their help and encouragement this work might not have been as it is today. First and foremost, I thank God, Almighty, with all my heart and soul for His constant support, divine presence and blessing in each and every moment of my life.

In a special way I acknowledge my profound gratitude to my research supervisor and guide **Dr. V. Francis, M.A., M.B.A., M.Phil, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, for his availability, consistent motivation insightful comments, scholarly inputs and utmost support that impelled me to explore new avenues of comparative inquiry in different stages of my research. His immense knowledge, guidance, understanding, patience, and academic training added considerably to my experience. It has been an enriching experience for me to learn from his research expertise and to complete my work.

I owe my sincere thanks to my doctoral committee members, **Dr. K. Suganthi**, Assistant Professor of English, Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli and **Dr. S. John Bosco**, Assistant Professor of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli for their academic encouragement, moral and spiritual support, and valuable guidance as Doctoral Committee Members that helped me throughout the tenure of my research.

I express my sincere gratitude to the **Principals** of St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, for providing me a chance to do my doctoral programme in English at this prestigious institution. I sincerely thank, **Dr. V.L. Jayapaul**, Head of the Department of English and all the faculty members of the Department of English for their co-operation and interest in my thesis. I extend my thanks to the

Management, the Dean of Research, the Librarian, the Teaching and Non-teaching Staff of St. Joseph's College (Autonomous) for their inspiration in the successful completion of my research.

I also thank the Principal, **Rev. Sr. Dr. Christina Bridget**, Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli and The Head of the Department of English, **Dr. Catherin Edward**, Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, for providing me guidance and support towards the completion of my doctoral programme in English. I also take this opportunity to thank my friends, colleagues, and all the well-wishers for their moral and spiritual support.

I remain thankful to the Librarians of the following: SCILET, Madurai; Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli and Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, for being very cooperative to access books, journals, periodicals and magazines for my research work.

I feel a deep sense of gratitude to my parents, my husband and my daughter who formed the part of my vision and for their patience and help throughout my research work. I want to thank my parents and relatives for providing persistent inspiration in the journey of my research.

I sincerely express my gratitude to St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), for just being there for me. I also appreciate the contributions of **Ms. Chithra Devi**, **Ms. Lidiya**, **Mr. Sridhar Jesuraj**, and all my friends, who provided valuable assistance, unfailing support, and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study.

Date:

M. Charmaine Owenita

A Note on Documentation

This thesis entitled, **Psychological Trauma of Casteism in the Select Novels of Bama and Imayam** submitted to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, for the award of the degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH** strictly follows the mechanics of writing and the documentation styles for in-text citations and for the preparation of the List of Works Cited prescribed by The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 8th ed.

Contents

Chapter No.	Title	Page No.
I	Introduction	1
II	From Suffering To Revolt And Rejection In Bama's <i>Karukku</i>	38
III	Caste Puzzle In Bama's <i>Vanmam</i> and <i>Sangati</i>	66
IV	Trauma and Survival in Iyayam's <i>Beasts of Burden</i> and <i>Arumugam</i>	109
V	Bama and Iyayam as Dalit Writers	132
VI	Conclusion	162
	Works Cited	194
	Paper Published	

Abstract

The thesis entitled **Psychological Trauma of Casteism in the Select Novels of Bama and Iyayam** aims at tracing the psychological trauma they undergo in the society as a Dalit that is expressed in the select works. It also investigates the lives of Dalit women, who face double oppression from the upper caste and also from patriarchy. Both the novelists depict the real-life situations and the sufferings faced by the subaltern people. It also shows the extreme consequences of caste and racial discrimination and later the realization of peace and harmony.

The progress or culture of a nation can be measured by the degree of progress women have made. Women are the true ambassadors of a nation's culture. A nation that neglects its culture will lose its soul and perish. Bama and Iyayam highlight the inter-caste rivalry between Dalit communities through their characters. The selected works are Bama's *Karukku* (1992), *Sangati* (1994) and *Vanmam* (2002). Iyayam's *The Beasts of Burden* (2001) and *Arumugam* (2006) embarks upon the journey of self-discovery and showcases the evils of caste system in India.

It also analyses various themes like caste discrimination, slavery, identity crisis and exploitation and suppression related to the present framework. Therefore, this study reveals to resist the dominant societal forces and the denied space to express their agony to exemplify how a caste-ridden society becomes the pivotal force of the trauma of the Dalits and celebrates the Dalit identity.

In order to formalize the research topic, a review of literature has been included in the introductory chapter of the thesis. Chapter – I entitled **Introduction** introduces the development of Dalit literature and explains clearly its characteristics and techniques used by Dalit writers. It also attempts to articulate the writers Bama

and Imayam's record of their experiences of hurt, humiliation and historical neglect by the elite over centuries.

Chapter – II entitled **From Suffering to Revolt and Rejection in Bama's *Karukku*** analyses her life writing to protest against the caste hegemony intertwined into her everyday life and the physical, social, religious, educational and psychological discriminations associated with it. It also invalidated the Dalits by articulating critical questions of subjugation and tyranny of the Dalits by the upper caste. It also brings light on the liberation of Bama from suppression and her new-formed identity is explored. So, the novel accentuates the need for a cultural revival, cultural transformation and liberation.

Chapter – III entitled **Caste Puzzle in Bama's *Vanmam* and *Sangati*** points out the problems of Dalits, especially Dalit women in Christianity. It chronicles about the exploitation and suppression of Dalit women based on caste and gender discrimination. The novels portray caste as a major reason for weakening human relationships and a real hindrance for sustainable growth of the downtrodden. Both the novels are the story of three generations of women – the narrator's grandmother, the narrator herself and the succeeding generation. Both the novels are feministic in the sense that it highlights the plight of the women. The narrator's mythic voice teaches that women must be educated, empowered and respected. They must be treated on par with men and get all kinds of freedom that comes to us as a shared memory of the community.

Chapter – IV entitled **Trauma and Survival in Imayam's *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*** focuses on Dalit communities, their lives, their culture and their politics. The novels are an attempt to flash the disability of marginalized people who

are getting suppressed and subjugated by the casteist or capitalist society. They also deal with the sufferings of low-caste people, considered inferior among Dalits, who are enslaved and exploited by the upper-castes as well as within their own community. So both the novels sharpen the narrator's political edge and spread the revolutionary message of transforming the existing framework of our caste-stratified, gender-based society.

Chapter – V entitled **Bama and Imayam as Dalit Writers** sets out to examine the narrative technique that centres on the struggles of life, everyday caste oppression and survival tactics of Dalit women and Dalit in general. It also tries to encapsulate the symbolic and complex usages of language and idioms in the text and its presumed intent and larger meaning. The ideological underpinning that regulates and controls the matrix of identity, self-exploration, articulation and literary discourse in Tamil Dalit writing. Both the writers put forth the experiences of the oppressed in the language that brings out the reality of society.

Chapter – VI is the **Conclusion**. It sums up the discussions and arguments of the research work. The study of these novels help to elaborate our thoughts related to the problems of caste and discrimination in the Indian society. This would in turn generate more social consciousness among the readers and researchers to bring a wind of change of this unjustly structured society.

Introduction

Literature effectively articulates human thought in regional, national and international languages. Literature, in general, covers different genres like fiction, nonfiction, drama, poetry, and folktale on a global scale. Literature helps both in personal and intellectual growth. It helps in building knowledge and in understanding human interactions. It provides a link to acquaint oneself with the world's cultures, philosophies, and civilizations. It enables the perception of human relations, events and struggles occurring in different places and in different period of time. It also helps in the development of a mature sensibility. Mediated by experience gained by reading, it shapes one's goals, values and clarifies one's identity positively. Further, it enables the assessment of the admirable qualities found in human beings.

In literature, expressions about truth and beauty underlying human life get reflected in a logical sequence. In other words, literature is a form displaying imagination and fantasizing about events in an exaggerated form to kindle the readers' interests. Novels, for instance, projects the ideas of people, their lifestyle, love, faith, friendship and freedom enjoyed as individual and as a member of the society. Generally, books symbolically represent significant insights. They also carry information in a more elevated manner about a nation or a society. The convention of writing is a coordinated method of composition, compilation of information, comprehension and refinement of ideas for advancement in knowledge. Writing is a kind of effective medium for the spread of information to a wider audience globally.

Indian writing in English started with the British rule in India, which supported the improvement of English and upgraded its quality in India. With the advocacy of English schooling, Indian writing in English commenced in the

nineteenth century and turned into a scholarly order in the twentieth century. The focus then was on genuine social issues such as the freedom movement in India. Later on, Indian writing focussed more on the position of women and gender differences in jobs.

Indian writing has a chequered history of advancement around the world. Writers like Salman Rushdie and R. K. Narayan have had a pronounced impact on the Indian Diaspora in the U.K. and U.S.A. and around the world. Early Indian writers used words to convey an experience which was essentially Indian in its dialogue process since India's Independence. English has been adopted as a language of education and an important medium of communication amongst the people of various regions in India.

Indian writing in English is sincerely undertaken to elaborate on the precious gems of India in various fields. It described Indian culture and raised the issues of superiority and inferiority that prevailed in the social context of India as opposed to different languages spoken in India. These aspects formed the core under the postcolonial theory. India and England had mingled in trade, military and political issues. The British rulers swindled the wealth of India and established oligarchy in India. Under this historical background, Indian English literature has come under various forms, such as Indo Anglican, Indo English, Indian writing in English, and it is presently known as Indian English Literature. Basically, the focus was on culture, race, and religion that reflected the multi-cultural society of India. Indian writing in English is criticized for not reflecting the actual socio-cultural situation in the country.

Indian literature also describes interactions of the social milieu in a far-off land, especially with the Europeans and the British. Indian English writing caters to both classic writers of the new generation concerning the past and present trends. Indo

Anglican Literature resulted in a commitment to British rulers in India. The Hindu literary tradition is seen in the great works like Vedas and Epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata and treatises such as Vaastushastra, Arthashastra and Kamsutra. They are considered Indian literary excellence. In the medieval period, Muslim literary works dominated a large part of Indian literature. After the arrival of the British in India, most of the works were to be written in English. Indian English Literature has reached an independent status of extensive themes of culture, tradition, social values and Indian history.

In fact, in the past few decades, Indian writing in English has seen a colossal change in the global scenario. Since pre-independence, an epoch-making trend ushered in Indian culture, where the voice of the poets, essayists, dramatists and novelists made momentous contributions to the world literature. Indian English literature attempts to divulge exceptional trinkets of Indian writing with a massive snoop of native explosion. Furthermore, a new evolution has emerged with the contribution of Dalit writings. In the 1960s and 1970s, Dalit literature has elevated its own standards and remarkably contributed in narrating the life of Dalits in their own regional language. This kind of writing was first initiated and published in Marathi and Gujarati. Dalit literature aims to generate social awakening among the subjugated. Dalit Literature plays the role of alternative literature to bring out the voice of the oppressed. Therefore, a need arises to discuss the primary forms and genres of Dalit literature.

Indian writing in English has consistently been witnessing a significant and instrumental change in thoughts and capturing real factors. The nation was freed politically and excited; however, the pain of the oppressed was loaded with

contrasting social situations, which drove the nation into a profound melancholy. At this point, free India had the option to evolve its model of development and guide public and foreign relations when the writing advanced significantly as it looked for new subjects. Writings that emerged during the 1980s and 1990s presented new topics. Character articulation has changed in its width, and their requirements are credibility to capture broader attention in the world, so they are free. Writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rajalakshmi Devi, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, etc., recorded a new reality in which the quest for a new agreement and new ways and the advancement of new conditions were incorporated in their writings.

The Indian prose composition exposed new ways of thought and interpretation of the Indian scenario. Indian writers before independence were forced to write about the situation obtained in that context. Hence they wrote about the freedom and brutality of the British rule in India. After independence, all writers got the freedom to write about various issues. The writers hence throw light on the main political events, the partition of India and its horrible incidents connected to the status of the Indian union and wars with Pakistan and China. All these events received the attention of fiction writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Khushwant Singh, Salman Rushdie and many others. Subsequently, changes were made in subject matters dealing with joint problems, class conflict and alienation of an individual from caste Hindus received the attention of Indian writers.

Further, development in Indian writing was concerned with women's empowerment, and women were projected as the mirror of civilisation. Marginalised people in India were treated as slaves at the hands of the upper caste Hindus. Robert

Greene, an American statesman and orator, said, 'there is no slavery but ignorance. This shows the downtrodden were unable to act against their masters because of their lack of education.

In India, the patriarchal society enslaved women even though they carried enormous responsibility. Women were always treated inferior to men. She has to sacrifice her aims for the sake of her family, society, state or country. Their symbolic role depicted in Indian English drama in Bengali, as elsewhere in India, gets diminished in real life under dramatic tradition. Indian literature is the oldest globally, with vast cultural diversities, and there are around two dozen officially recognised languages in India. Over ten decades, a considerable volume of literature has been produced in various languages in India.

Indian drama revolves around devotion, drama, poetry and songs. Stylistic influence from the local languages appears to be an exceptional feature of much of the Indian literature in English. The local language constructions and system are reflected in the illustrations, as is mirrored in the literal translation of local idioms. Of the modern English writers, Amitav Gosh is on the lead. He covers both fiction and non-fiction. He used complex narratives to explore the nature of national and personal identity connected to the people of South-East Asia. His famous works are *The Circle of Reason* (1968), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Sea of Poppies* (2008). He is a winner of the Jnanpith award, Padmashri and Arthur and Clarke award.

Vikram Seth is another leading modern English writer of India. His first novel was *The Golden Gate* (1986). This novel is written in verse form. It tells about the journey of a group of friends to California. *A Suitable Boy* (1991) won the

W.H. Smith Literary Award and the Commonwealth Writers Prize. The plot of this novel is about a young girl who longs for a perfect husband. He has also composed some travel books like *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983). This book describes his travel through Sinkiang and Tibet. This book also won the Travel Book Award.

Arundhati Roy is a famous essayist, novelist, and social activist. Her well-known novel is *God of Small Things* which won the Man Booker Prize for fiction in 1997. After her first work, she took nearly twenty years to complete *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). In this novel, Roy narrates the horrible life of Indians in the wake of the partition and also shows the relationship of the families and there is also no life without enemies.

Mulk Raj Anand, a notable writer in modern India, dealt with social issues found in Indian society. He focused on how the caste system was used as a mode to utilise people for employment. His works exposed the lives of the oppressed. His first novel was *Untouchable* (1935) which depicts the suffering of a toilet cleaner who mistakenly runs into a member of a higher caste.

R.K. Narayan (1906-2001) is a famous novelist and a short story writer. His works deal with the social issues of day-to-day life. R.K Narayan's writings are considered to be more descriptive and less analytical. Most of his stories were set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. His first four novels are *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) and *The English Teacher* (1945). His novels are denoted for common and gentle comedy. He was honoured with the Padma Bhushan and the AC Benson Medal by the Royal Society of Literature.

Kamala Das is India's finest poet who wrote extraordinary prose in Malayalam and English. Her writing style showed her strong feminist ideology and female sensibility. Her poems convey that women should break away from their shyness of sexual and domestic oppression in society. Her notable works are *Alphabet of Lust* (1977), *Padamavati* and *The Harlot and Other Stories*. She was awarded the P.E.N's Asian Poetry Prize in 1963 and The Kerala Sahitya Academy Award in 1969. She was also shortlisted for the Noble Prize for Literature in (1984).

The Great civilisations flourished with the idea of a model state and society. Throughout history, the culture of a particular society played a major role in the development of society. The kingdom with great cultural emancipation developed into gigantic empires. Many philosophers emphasised the role of society and its myriad contributions in the growth of the nation. In this process, society played a key role in the establishment of the nation and needed a kind of cohesion for its sustenance and growth. However, society is susceptible to changes depending on cultural contact from within and outside, which impact the thinking of an individual.

The role of the dominant caste in the social system led to the stratification of society based on caste, which pulverised the Indian culture in particular. The evils of the caste system unfortunately entered into the heart of the Indian social fabric, crippling and ruining the basic ideology of humanity. Though India got independence from the British marauders, the evil of the caste system still continues to haunt the soul of the nation. This appears to be another challenge for a developing nation like India, which has to fight another battle with the right spirit. In this context, Dalit literature played a significant role in promoting cultural consciousness amongst the downtrodden class. It evolved into another important area of literature dealing with the issues of casteism, subjugation, suffering, cultural discrimination and cultural deprivation.

Growing Dalit awareness and their consciousness in the existing social system has become a pronounced challenge to the existing Hindu value system and orthodox Brahmanism. As an emerging area of transformation and change, Dalit literature deals with the concurrent themes of right, justice, equality, liberation, emancipation, and hope. Dalit literature is not simply literature; it has transformed into a movement to bring about change. It represents the hopes and ambitions of a new society and new people. Casteism is found to be an inescapable reality which has marred Indian society despite the fact that our constitution has guaranteed equal rights to all its citizens and yet the reality is just the contrary. A few Indian writers emerged to backslash their pain and agony using literature as a weapon to revolt against the evil practices of casteism. The caste system in India has been regulated, organised and put forth in pecking order for centuries.

Communities which fit into one of the four varnas mentioned above are called Savarna or Caste Hindus. Hence Brahmanism is considered to be the brightest and highest in its ranking order, and Sudras to be the servants to serve the rest of the society. Apart from these four major castes, the fifth one is called 'Avarna', who are called Dalits, Scheduled Castes, Outcastes or Untouchables. However, this group has a common identity but is titled in different names. People belonging to these groups are kept out of the Varna System. Right from the evolution of upper caste domination, the Avarnas have been subjugated over the communal cosmos of knowledge. But today, they vow to overcome the subjugation of the upper caste by creating awareness among this lot. The so-called Untouchables or Outcastes have gained a deplorable identity in the Indian Caste System.

Casteism is still prevalent in India, despite many efforts to obliterate it completely. It is a bitter pill to swallow that casteism has gone so deep into a society that even the mighty force of the government, through several legislative measures, could not uproot it. Thoroughly, this gross social acrimony, caste hatred and violence result in the increasing percentage of undeveloped or underdeveloped masses, consequently affecting social solidarity and harmony. As a result, a huge population permanently lives in the lowest echelons of the social order, without any basic amenities, under deplorable conditions, which is detrimental to the development of the country. According to Natarajan in an article published in the Times of India titled “It’s an Exclusive Story” states caste groups, SCs and STs constitute their highest proportion in the lowest monthly per capita expenditure brackets. Its composition consists of Muslims and women, especially the poor among them, who constitute over a third of the country’s population. They continued to be excluded from India’s development path for more than six decades since Independence. (2)

The dynamics of caste and Dalit issues are closely linked with their identity and the self. The caste identity is something that defines notions of self, subject, religion, culture and also everyday life experience. The caste identity is something that has been historically inherited, learned and practised over several ages and lived concretely for centuries. The caste system in vogue and in practice over several centuries formed the basis of our social consciousness, our knowledge systems and discourse in the society. Caste is primordial in nature, our existential being, and hence cannot escape from the existing social order. It is said that “caste as a cultural category becomes central to our understanding of Indian culture. Reinstating Ambedkar in the present theoretical context may help us to trace the anti-caste

framework found in the Dalit intellectual tradition and also what emerges today as Dalit literature” (Azhagarasan xxii). However, the resistance of caste is not something that is outside this dominance.

There is a profound increase in the awareness among Dalits mainly because of the initiatives like introducing Dalit studies in the universities across the nation and across the world. The internationalisation of the Dalit issues through literature quickens the process of social transformation. As stated precisely by Janet Vucinich in her Preface to *Government Brahmana*: The social nature of storytelling bridges distances and enables us to see ourselves in reality and to question that reality. The questioning is critical in both personal and social change (xvi). Taking into consideration these factors, the relevance of Dalit life-writings gain more significance in dissolving the borders and empowering the Dalits in India to enjoy the fundamental rights in their democratic country without any discrimination.

Verifiably, the Indian social framework has been one of the most consistently isolated ones with regard to race, religion, locale, ethnicity, sex and language concerned. While these different types of segregation exist in every human culture, at least one of these components together incorporates orderly arranging the society's admittance.

In different places of India, there are various practices identified based on ranks, gender and religious identity in the nationalistic movements in British India during the decades leading up to the partition. The individuals who disregard normal practices might be rebuffed as ‘untouchables’. The three significant parts of life heavily influenced are marriage, job and strict love. Inter-marriage is not permitted on the ancestral line. While eating, anybody can get food in possession of a Brahmin. However, a Brahmin cannot acquire specific kinds of food from an individual treated

as taboo in society. Likewise, if the so-called untouchable attempts to get water from a public source, the water is considered to be polluted, and nobody can utilise it. In celebrations and occasions, such as weddings and memorial services, Kshatriyas and Vaishnyas have full rights to participate in celebrations. On the contrary, Shudras (slaves) are not permitted to forfeit such divine functions.

The literary representation of the Dalit's lives is mostly seen as a record of the injustices of caste discrimination and a questioning of the evils of the social system. Dalit narratives are generally based on real-life experiences. Dalit literature generally deals with the oppression based on the caste system, focussing more on the plot, which mirrors the society. This plot-oriented interpretation tends to miss out on one of the essential aspects of Dalit narratives and setting. It also reveals the problem of the spatiality of the caste system. It also argues that the caste system was spatially conceived before it was socially executed, and thus, the 'setting' of Dalit narratives are no longer mere descriptions but the reflection of the underlying spatial order of the social structure.

The recent development in literary studies highlights the significance of the setting – the spatial element of literary representation – revealing the interconnection between textual space (s) and actual space (s). These actual spaces (s) refer not only to the physical space but also to the cultural and social orders specific to a particular society. That is, this mode of literary interpretation, which foregrounds space, reflects the interconnections between the physical space and the social and behavioural patterns. This highlights the referentiality of space. So the textual spaces are not mere descriptions but references and reflections of the human relationships with the actual space (s). In this way, reading the space (s) of Dalit representations reveals the spatiality of the caste system and the social structure based on it.

Most of the Dalit narratives capture the living conditions of lower caste people under the caste oppression, which glimpses the Dalit lives. Some of the common aspects of these narrations are their deplorable living conditions, the menial jobs for which they are made to be responsible, restrictions imposed on them in the public places and the inhuman punishments inflicted upon them when they happen to violate these restrictions. A close examination of such narratives reveals that the lifestyle of Dalits and the restrictions are fundamentally spatial. However, they often go unnoticed, submerged under the flow of subjectivity of the narration.

In this connection, the most appropriate to mention are that Dalits are pushed to render menial jobs and restrictions are imposed on visiting places of worship reserved for high caste and commensal feeding. In this context, Dalit narratives explore the significance of the textual space and reveal different levels of their interconnections with social space. This form of spatial organisation in the caste system is prevalent throughout India, irrespective of varying regional, linguistic and religious identities. With reference to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's writings on caste, it reveals that the caste system is fundamentally spatial. It highlights how the rigidity of this spatial and social order of the caste system is maintained. Besides, the low castes are not seen as credible sources of knowledge. Some writers are more powerful in exposing broader issues of caste, class, economic and political power, and ideological and cultural struggle, which renders the relationship between caste groups and the building and maintenance of hegemony.

Power, status, values and attitudes towards writing and the writer himself are closely interconnected. Therefore, it is very important to know who writes what, about whom it is related and in what context it is essential. If we carefully glance

through the Dalit literature, we can see that the disadvantaged write mostly about their own lives without injuring other caste sentiments. But we must know that when the powerless become merely the object of another man's thinking without being a part of the whole thought process, that type of thought could but be a false testimony which is pervasive in nature and would tend to maintain a hegemonic world view.

Professional historians have always consciously or unconsciously attempted to de-historicisation of Dalits. The Dalits were always presented in history as less privileged people. However, this process has now been identified by the Dalits and is being reversed by turning them from passive objects to active subjects engaged consciously in constructing their own histories and asserting their respectable social location in society. Generally, a good writer is judged as one who is adept at using language effectively to express ideas. Class and caste affliction also play a vital role in an author's marketability in a country like India. If one is from the upper social background and is good at romanticising and idealising certain ideas, he or she automatically becomes powerful. The writer is recognised and rewarded and has a greater influence in the society, whereas the dissenting voices, and more particularly if they have arisen from the corners of the lower strata of the society, find themselves marginalised and unheard.

Simon de Beauvoir's famous statement, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (295), indicates that though women were born as the second sex, the patriarchy works in every social milieu. An analysis of the history of the society shows that the second-rate citizenship given to the females in the group is widespread and universal. Thus, the treatment of females, assigning them as the second class, has been even observed among invertebrates.

The recent centuries have qualified Dalit literature as ‘resistance literature’ that breaks all barriers and shatters all shackles. The emerging voice of the subalterns gives direction to the long-suppressed voice of the ‘others’. Dalit writings were born from the deep-rooted dignity of the ‘others’ to assert themselves and are characterised by a new level of pride, militancy, creativity and the eagerness to use writing as a weapon and to strike back.

Indian Dalit literature travels through the suffering of low-caste people. ‘Dalit’ is a Marathi word that comes from the Sanskrit word – ‘dala’, which means soil. Current issues in India are social oppression with an infliction on caste groups. Dalits, in particular, had gone through cruel treatment and being less respected and underprivileged in society. Dalit writers also share their sufferings through their literature. Dalit’s creative self-expression discovers an ideology of rights from suppression, and they are bent upon actual facts borne out of oppression in the hands of the high caste Hindus.

Dalit literature demonstrates their consciousness as a reality. It is significant and owes its origin to a revolutionary struggle for social and economic change. This explains the various aspects of serious thought in Dalit literature. It is closely associated with the hopes for freedom of a group of people who, as untouchables, are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality. This literature is characterised by a feeling of rebellion against the very establishment of negativism and scientificity. It is one of the chief media for Dalits to enhance and uplift the entire lower classes and, above all, aims to create awareness to solve their problem. The characteristics of Dalit literature are in its reaction to exploitation with brutal frankness, thereby exposing the atrocities of higher caste groups in society, and it is coupled with burning anger and

hatred and call for ruthless vengeance against the society and people who have created such baseless inequality and inhuman exploitation. It challenges the historical code of society and organises revenge against established practices for the cause of Dalit upliftment in society.

Dalit literature is not only literature of pain but also the literature of change. One finds not merely resentment but also an inner, articulated or unarticulated urge for change. And a standard tool to bring about this change is education. The same trend is followed in Tamil Dalit literature which was formed with the advent of the Dravidian Movement and with the principles of B.R. Ambedkar. Tamil Dalit literature underscores the need to bury differences among the Dalit groups and differences in lifestyle, beliefs, customs and economic conditions.

Dalit literature reflects all basic principles of Dalit culture. Dalit literature is, in fact, the writings that are about Dalits. Dalit (oppressed or broken) is not a new word. Apparently, it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of 'depressed classes', a term the British used for what is now called the Scheduled Castes. In the 1970s, the 'Dalit Panthers' revived the term and expanded its reference to include scheduled tribes, poor peasants, women and all those being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. So Dalit is not a caste. It is a symbol of change against oppression and a sort of revolution.

In modern times, because of the legacy of Mahatma Phule and Baba Rao Ambedkar, Dalit literature got impetus in Maharashtra. But before the name came into existence, people like Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav and Shankarao Ramchandra Kharat had already created Dalit literature. In its formal form, it sprouted out of a progressive movement called 'Little Magazine', which was a kind of a rebellious

manifestation of the educated youth of those days against the establishment. These Dalit youths found inspiration in the movement of the blacks in the distant land of North America and were christened 'Black Panther', a role model of sorts in India.

The primary motive of Dalit literature is the liberation of Dalits. The dalit struggle against the caste-bound tradition of casteism has a long history. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, there was no formal education available for Dalits. Dalit literature as a genre emerged only in the 1970s through some of the Dalit protest movements in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Dalit literature produced a profound Dalit consciousness based on the ideals of human freedom. It has been written from the Dalit point of view and with a Dalit vision.

Dalit view point calls for a writer to internalise the sorrows and sufferings of the Dalits. Any writer with some Dalit sensibility may have a Dalit view but not necessarily Dalit vision. The difference between the Dalit view point and Dalit vision can be found in the desired objective. A person with the 'Dalit viewpoint' aims for a limited transformation, whereas a person with the 'Dalit vision' demands a total revolution or transformation. When the narrator is from outside the Dalit community, there is a greater possibility of narrating merely as an observer. Contrarily, when the narrator is within the community, his account, apart from observation and his experience, percolates into his thought.

Dalit writers, through their writings, endeavour to narrate that they have a history and that they have a definite past. The untouchables were merely the objects of someone's story. They did not have a different history of their own other than what 'the other' said. They had to accept what the Hindus had to tell about them. Many writers have dealt with the theme of untouchability in the past, but it has always been

from the perspective of an outsider. However sympathetic they might have been. Dalit literature visualises humanism as the focal point and proceeds with a protest against the caste problem, racial discrimination, troubles and suffering meted out to their beliefs with a sense of liberty.

Dalits have an identity crisis; hence they embrace other religions to get a social identity of their own. Sometimes they protest religion for social reasons. Naturally, the concept of Dalit is considered old in literature, and it also expresses the suppression of exploitation, humiliation and oppression. The term “Dalit” is naturally associated with the concept of helpless, poor, needy people, mainly in Indian society. Dalit literature is written by Dalits and for Dalits. Firstly, the Dalits started writing about the caste problem that they faced. Some writers tried to avoid Dalitism as a personal attack on great individuals or great progressive intellectuals.

Basically, Dalit writing goes back to the ages of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata because Vyasa belongs to the lower community, Valmiki is a tribal, Markandya is untouchable, and Agastya is a hunter. So most of the great Hindu literary writers belong to the Dalit community. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s philosophy and thinking influenced Dalit movements significantly. As a strong proponent of Dalit’s theory, his sole aim was the annihilation of caste and abolishing exploitation and establishing equality for Dalits in the society. There were some movements raised for the upliftment of the Dalits, such as the Dalit cultural movement, Vachana movement of the 12th century was also a movement of the lower community. The aim of these movements was to unite people under the lower rung of the ladder in society. Before these movements, the Dalits remained faceless people and had no identity in society. They believed that they were born to remain as bonded labour to the feudal landlord

of the village and hence voiceless. These movements gave a voice to the writers to open up their sufferings through writing.

Dalit writers used idiolect in their writing to express and explore their own self and experience of their community. The language used in Dalit writing is caste and community-based. We find many writers in the Indian language who stressed in their writings the problems faced by the Dalits. The Dalits are still called “account” (untouchable) both in society as well as in literature created by the upper caste Hindus over the ages. Nowadays, many women writers are coming up with the braveness to explain the Dalit sufferings through their writings. Comparatively speaking, female writers are more effective than males because the former write with full spirit to express Dalit problems since they were actual victims of oppression in the society. Dalit literature is written in various languages of India, especially in the 1960s under Marathi literature and later in Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil and English. Poems, short stories, novels as well as autobiographies from the major genres of Dalit expression.

In post colonialism theory, the term subaltern was used to indicate socially politically oppressed people in the social scale of ranking by the colonial rulers. The term Subaltern connotes lower rank. In the twentieth century, Subaltern Studies and postcolonial theory became popular in third world countries. The postcolonial criticism sprouted out of Marxism and Structuralism. The expression was used by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). He was an Italian Marxist, and he wrote on subaltern classes of the farmer, workers and various groups. He asserts that this term has a history connected with the history of dominated classes.

Subaltern studies were the major concern of Tamil Dalit writings as well as in Marathi and Kannada. They opposed the ideologies and practised of Tamil culture

that the upper castes had dominated. The uniqueness of their representative creation is the growing self-confidence and self-consciousness with which they courageously challenged the dominant norms of society and literature. The term Dalit methodically exposes the subaltern themes in South Asian society. It used the terms like class, gender, race and so on. The aim is to rebuild the history of the lower classes. The subaltern also focuses on language and culture. The postcolonial critic Homi K Bhabha points out the importance of social and associated power relations in society. The history of the world asserts the existence of two sections in our society. One is the upper class. It enjoys all benefits economically and socially. The other is the lower class which is poor economically and socially, hence neglected by the society.

Dalits, because of their low status in the caste framework, were considered polluted and dirty, though they participated in purifying the upper castes of their impurities. Since the role of the marginalised is structurally kept low, hence their role in society has never been recognised or acknowledged. The central concern of the Subaltern Studies is its impact on society. The realisation of the upper castes that 'the others' too have an agency of historicising themselves, enthused by their own autonomy to uphold their cultural ideologies as yet another historical narrative.

Ranajit Guha is a popular subaltern historian. His famous work is *Elementary Aspects of Peasants Insurgency in Colonial India* (1990). In this book, he described the farmer's viewpoints on how they have suffered under the dominance of the upper caste led by subordinated in rural India. Guha strongly asserted the importance of women's movements, farmers struggle, caste and class problems and their dissent.

With the emergence of Dalit literature, the marginalised writers brought their issues to the limelight through their writings, and an awakening took place through their works. Numerous Dalit authors express their inner spirit and battles which they

had undergone in their everyday life. A fresh rejuvenation was manifested in the writing of Dalits. Dalit literature not only includes the writings about the suppressed people of India but also focussed on other downtrodden groups who occupied a secondary position due to upper class domination. Dalit writers are not ready to accept the view that the Dalit culture provides extremely low motivation for triumphs and achievement.

Urmila Pawar is a contemporary Dalit writer in Marathi. She is best known for her societal relevant writings. In recognition of her contributions to literature, she was given the Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad award. She wrote her autobiography titled *Aaidan* in Marathi, later translated into English and called *The Weave of my life: A Dalit Women's Memories*. Her writings were based on caste supremacy and its impact on the everyday life of Dalit. She won the Laximibai Tilak Award for her autobiographical novel.

Another important Dalit writer is Anita Bharti. She has been a Dalit writer and well-known activist. She wrote a biography *Samajik Krantikari* which won the B.R. Ambedkar National Award. The other well-known Dalit writer is Mulk Raj Anand, an Indian writer in English. His works aimed at the cause of the poor for their betterment in caste-ridden Indian society. His popular novels are *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *The Village* (1939), *The Big Heart* (1945) and *The Road* (1961). His autobiographies include *Seven Summers* (1951) and *Pilpali Sahab* (1983). He won the Sahitya Academy Award for *Morning Face* (1968).

Next in the series of Dalit writers is Thakazhy Sivasankara Pillai (1912-1999). He is a novelist and short-story writer in the Malayalam language. He is popularly called Thakazhy. He started his writing profession at a very young age. His novels

and short stories deal with several concepts of societies in Kerala in the mid 20th century. His works concentrated on the suppressed classes of society.

Meena Kandasamy (1984) is a prolific Indian writer. Her pen name is Meena. She is a poet, translator and also activist. Most of her works are based on feminism and anti-caste in nature. She published two collections of poetry *Touch* (2000) and *Ms. Militancy* (2010). Her literary works are based on contemporary political issues, denoting caste, corruption, violence, and women's right. She has also published biographies, novels and translations on issues of caste and gender and how society puts people into stereotypical roles.

Palanimuthu Sivakami is an Indian Dalit Tamil writer. She was born in Tamil Nadu. Because of her parents' inter-caste marriage, she grew up in Uttar Pradesh. She is a Post Graduate in History. She belongs to Indian Administrative Service, served as a District collector in Tuticorin and Vellore, and also as Secretary of Adi-Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, Government of Tamil Nadu. She stood as a candidate of the Bahujan Samaj Party in the Lok Sabha Elections. Her political involvement was based on Dalit education. She herself experienced caste-discrimination being a Dalit. Her works are *Kurukku Vettu* (1999), which is well-known fictional work in the Tamil language. This novel examines the problems of female sensitivity, a self-reflexive exercise theorising Dalit issues focusing on female issues and the notoriety of upper caste domination. Her other novels are *Ippadikku Ungal Yadarthamulla* (1986), *Nalum Thodarum* (1989), *Kadaisi Mandar* (1995) and *Kadaigal* (2004). *The Taming of Women* deals with the ceaseless sadism against women in the Dalit community. *Pazhayana Kazhidalum* (1988) was later translated into English as *The Grip of Change*. Her novels portray the issues and the hard lives of women and their suffering under male domination.

Bama is a Tamil Dalit feminist and a teacher by profession, and a novelist. Her works are *Karukku* (1992), an autobiographical novel which chronicles the joys and sorrows experienced by Dalit Christian women in Tamil Nadu. Her other novels are *Sangati* (1994), and *Vanmam* (2002), and she also wrote two collections of short stories, *Kusumbukaran* (2003), and *Oru Tattvum Erumaiyum* (2003). The novel *Karukku* won the Crossword Book award in 2000. Her major themes are based on caste, gender discrimination and Dalit feminism.

Imayam is a well-known Indian novelist in Tamil. He wrote five novels like *Koveru Kazhudhaigal* (1994), *Arumugam* (1999), *Sedal* (2006), *En Kathe* (2015), and five short stories, *Man Baram* (2002), *Kolai Cheval* (2013) and *Save Soru* (2013). He is closely connected with the Dravidian Movement and politics. He has won many awards like Agni Akshara Award, Amudhan Adigal Literature Award, Tamil Peravai Award, Anantha Vikadan Award, etc. His works were basically based on a political concept impacting the Dalit community.

Another influential Dalit writer is Baby Kamble. She started writing during her spare time. In her short history, *Jina Amucha* (Our Life) is presently viewed as an instruction calling for Dalit awakening and a lobbyist and running a live-in school close to the town, Fartan in Maharashtra for the utilisation of returnees until his demise in 2012.

In the 1940s, Shantabai Krishnabai Kamble turned into the main Dalit female educator of the Sholapur region in Maharashtra. Her account of Dalit is based on the Mumbai incident in 1981 coupled with her own set of experiences. *The Story of My Lifes Kaleidoscope* (Mazhya Jalmachi Chittarkatha) was written in a sequential style and published in Purava Magazine in 1983.

Baburao Bagul is one of the pioneers among the Dalit Panthers. His significant short-stories are *Janwa I Jate Jorali* and *Jenvha Me Jat Chorali Hotig*. His other books are *Maran Sastreash* (1969) and *Sud* (1970). In 1970, he was awarded the Harinarayan Apte Award by the Maharashtra Government. His epic narration is about the social and lack of monetary support because of the class framework, which led to the mistreatment of Dalits.

Dalit literature, in general, makes a beginning to point out the core issues underlying social ideology dominated by the upper caste and explores the negative aspects of life. It is based on real-life experiences. In their writings, 'Anubhava' (experience) takes precedence over 'Anumana' (speculation). For Dalit writers, their history is not an illusion or unreal but an authentic account of Dalit life and their experiences. The language of these writers is primarily based on the local dialect of the underprivileged in Indian society. Shame, anger, sorrow and indomitable hope are the core stuff of Dalit Literature. Because of anger due to age-old oppression, the expression of the Dalit writers is very incisive and sharp.

The analysis of Dalit writings shows some of the dominant themes recurring in them. The notable writers under this category are Mahasweta Devi, Namdeo Dhasal, Daya Pawar, Arjun Dangle, Sachi Rautray, Rabi Singh, Perumal Murugan, Palamalai, Sudhakar, D. Gopi and others. Amidst the bulk of Dalit literature, the works of Bama and Iyamam portray the issues of caste-based oppression and gender discrimination in a more typical fashion. Their account adopts the narrative approach that speaks and conveys about ordinary lives and convey the voices of women who are on the margins in society. Under this category, the most illuminating experience comes under Bama.

Bama was a teacher, a short story writer and a novelist. Bama's contribution to Dalit literature is significant in idea and volume among the Dalit women writers. Her

creative potential revealed her potential as a notable Indian Tamil Dalit writer. Her novels and short stories are regularly translated into English, French, and other regional languages like Kannada and Telugu. She has grown to be very popular among readers both in India and abroad. Her narrative art provides an excellent understanding of the Dalit community and also a unique place in the history of modern Indian writing in English. One can observe the glimpse of her artistic expression revealing the harsh realities of poverty and poor financial background, political and social exploitations confronted by Dalits in the hands of present-day society. Dalit women writers share the similar issues faced by Black women writers around the world who had been struggling against human rights violations like racism, humiliation, discrimination, exploitation and gender oppression.

Bama, though a Dalit, belongs to the Christian religion, and she was christened Faustina Mary Fathima Rani. She belongs to one of the southern villages of TamilNadu, namely, Pudhupatti near Madurai. She was born in the year 1958 to a family of Dalits and agricultural labourers by occupation. Bama is a pseudonym adopted by her for pursuing a literary career. Her father, Susai Raj, was an Indian Army man and Sebasthiamma was her mother. Her ancestors were converted to Christianity in the eighteenth century. Her previous generations were servants in the houses of the upper caste Hindus.

Bama completed her schooling in her village and pursued her collegiate education at St. Mary's College, Thoothukudi. After completing B.Ed., she worked as a teacher. She desired to serve the Dalit children and uplift them from the bottom layer of society. She became a Christian nun and dreamt of uplifting the poor, especially the Dalit children. Unfortunately, she was disappointed to observe the

proceedings in a convent in North India. Dissatisfied with her aims, Bama relinquished her nunhood after seven years due to utter disillusionment.

To have full-fledged participation in the upliftment of Dalits, Bama became a social activist and abandoned her religious order. So began to condemn discriminating practices in the convent against Dalit Christians. After several years, Bama came out of the shell of weakening, and she regained her willpower and began to condemn the discriminatory practices of the convent against Dalit Christians. Her strength sprouted positively after meeting Rev. Fr. Mark S and Rev. Fr. Jeyaraj, who motivated her to write and instilled the strength in her and the spirit for writing to highlight the suffering of the underprivileged in society. Her literary narratives register the ordeals of Dalit men and women in society. Her powerful creative work brought her literary fame and recognition in the form of many awards in India and abroad. She says her yielded belief lies clearly in a single word 'battle' against humiliation and discrimination. A humble attempt is made by the researcher to make a cult out of Bama's real-life experiences. Even higher activity creeps around the embryonic theory.

Hence, critical analysis is made to evaluate the approaches focusing on the sociological, feministic, and psychological aspects of the novel. In all her writings, she portrays the socially marginalised Dalits, sexually exploited women, and economically underprivileged. Probably no other social group has been subjected to such humiliation and corruption of identity than Dalit women. Bama believes in empowerment as a resource for the advancement of society in common. So averting gender discrimination is crucial for women's power and emancipation. In her novels, Bama depicts how Dalit women have to face several odds and overcome caste predilections and project themselves as a mature writer for the cause of women's emancipation and to improve the image of women against the background of several constraints.

Bama writes intelligently on the burning issues and provides a penetrating analysis of the collective conscience of her people. Her account of female emancipation is symptomatic of the writer's glorious mind. Her vision of females is very powerful to overcome darkness, hypocrisy, and fraud and penetrate on them. Her writings not only indicate the social issues related to the downtrodden, and she delineates a boundary for Dalit people to voice their songs and provides anecdotes that she has experienced in her life. It is a kind of inscription that speaks for itself, consistently carrying the reader to a blazing core, where an exploited Dalit soul has existed.

Among the notable works of Bama, her first autobiographical novel is *Karukku* (1992), which hailed her as the first Dalit woman writer in India. It is an autobiographical novel of its kind in Tamil Dalit literature. This novel speaks about the caste discrimination and oppression of the lower caste people in society. This novel was originally written in Tamil and translated in English by Lakshmi Holmstrom in (2000). *Karukku*, chronicles the joys and sorrows of Bama's life from childhood to adulthood. It is a narration of trauma of Casteism in the Dalit community. The autobiography received the anticipated criticism leading to her banishment from her village for the next seven months. The work, however, received critical acclaim and was awarded Crossword Book Award for the English translation in 2001.

Bama was recognized widely and published more works. In her works, she calls for the overthrow of caste hierarchies and to establish a separate identity for Dalit feminism. In *Karukku*, the author concentrated on caste discrimination highlighting the suffering of the lower caste people. The upper-class people treated Dalit people like slaves. Because of their poor economic background, they are under the control of the high-caste people. The author's focus was on other major hurdles

based on caste orientation like religion and also based on being untouchables. In *Karukku*, Bama symbolically expressed that Dalits are like Palmyra leaves – either end is sharp. Hence, Dalit is assumed to be like a ‘double-edged sword. The word *karu* denotes an embryo or seed that exhibits freshness. In the novel, Bama brings to focus her sufferings as a village girl. *Karukku* describes the grating lives of Tamil Dalit Christians in the native villages. Her native village has an inbuilt caste hierarchy based on the Naickers, who were the dominant caste in the whole village. The others in the order are Nadars, Koravars, Chakkiliyars, Kusavars, Pallars and Parayars. The streets and the houses of lower-caste people are kept outside the village. The schools, shops, churches and other properties were under the control of upper-caste people, and their living condition were miserable and dirty.

After her graduation, Bama joined a convent to become a nun. After she enrolled as a nun, she found the environment had a tinge of a wealthy lifestyle and was disappointed. She left the order of the nun and became a teacher and taught students who come from wealthy families. She observed the Dalit students who were doing menial jobs like sweeping the premises and washing the classroom, and cleaning the lavatories. In *Karukku*, she portrayed her feelings about the unfulfilled hopes of Dalits who suffer from poverty and caste discrimination. She vents the caste prejudice which predominates in Indian society. Furthermore, the author describes how Dalit women suffer under male domination. It has been an avowed practice to keep Dalit people at some distance from upper caste people. She focuses on the violent, hectic, dirty face committed by the upper caste of the society afflicting Dalits. The prejudice often takes brutal forms, offences committed by the upper caste left unopposed and the orgies of violence, rapes, and burning of their houses and crops.

The trauma that Dalits suffered is wholesome, impeding mental faculties emotionally, politically, and economically because of caste discrimination. The main contempt of Dalits was against untouchability. *Karukku* describes the brutal oppression of Dalits, especially of the Periyar caste. The novel is a profound exposition of subaltern writing. It is a brave novel, evoking a deep sense that describes the attitude of the mainstream society's inclination against Dalits. She shares a lot of harsh incidents that she went through in her childhood days because of caste discrimination. The lower caste people are grounded and segregated, suppressed by high caste people and how they are isolated from the mainstream society.

Following this, Bama published *Sangati* (1994), which witnesses a shift from the personal account to the general one. While *Karukku* is an autobiography of an individual, *Sangati* is the autobiography of the community. In her second novel *Sangati* (1994), she deals with several inter-connected anecdotes, experiences and events which record the pain of being born and growing up into a particular caste. The novel *Sangati* is divided into twelve chapters, dealing with events in the life of Dalit women. It also traces the oppression by the upper caste meted out to the Dalits in terms of labour, gender dominance, exploitation and sexual abuse. *Sangati*, as the title itself suggests, is composed of events. It offers a series of stories of real life, narrated by different women characters. These stories are accompanied by general comments and the author's opinions. It records the lives of Dalit women who encounter double oppression – from the upper caste and from patriarchy and male authority. It does not follow the parameters of a traditional novel. It has no plot in the normal sense; it has many stories told by different protagonists. It projects the endless variety and monotonous way of life of Dalit women under oppression. The whole account is

reminiscent of the evils of racial supremacy, patriarchy, casteism and class conflict. They are all practised with unquestionable authority perpetuated causing inequality without any institutional sanctions.

Vanmam is the third novel that envisages the subaltern dream of equity and justice in society. *Vanmam*, published in 2008, highlights the happenings between two Dalit castes in a village called Kandampatti in Tamil Nadu. Bama raises her voice to assert the need for unity, liberty and equality of the suppressed class for a better future. *Vanmam* exposes the internal fissures in the sub-communities of Parayars and Pallars and their harrowing experiences. It depicts how village streets are marked to segregate castes and sub-castes of Dalits, and the landlord exercise supremacy in general. The personal vendetta coupled with starvation, atrocities and unreasonable quarrels within communities in such a locale led Dalit youth to choose the path of education and solidarity. They realize that it helps to retain the cherished Dalit dream of independence.

Educate! Organize! Agitate! is a slogan that the Dalits raise to establish their identity and individuality. Bama is not pessimistic about the future of Dalit women. She asserts that women can tide over oppression and neglect if they are willing to learn and acquire education about the world around them. This enables a woman to make a choice between right and wrong. This could be achieved through awareness and education. Aurobindo said that the progress or culture of a nation could be measured by the degree of progress women have made. Women are the true ambassadors of a nation's culture. A nation that neglects its culture will lose its soul and perish. Bama proved that despite the high caste ideology exercised through class, caste, sex and religion, the subaltern can and should speak.

Imayam (V. Annamalai) is a prominent and well-known Dalit writer and Indian novelist in Tamil. His family lived in Meladanur but later shifted to Cuddalore, where his father worked in the Adi Dravida Welfare Department. He finished his higher studies at Periyar E.V.R. College, Tiruchirappalli. During his college days, he got books from some Sri Lankan Tamils on the ethnic crisis in their country and also attended the exhibitions and photo displays that they put up. In addition, he bought and read Russian literature in translation.

Imayam's first piece was written for a competition in St Joseph's College in Trichy around 1984-1985. He went on to attend a thirty-day workshop organized by the All India Catholic Universities Federation (AICUF). In the workshop, discussions were held on books by Tamil writers and sessions on films. However, for Imayam, S. Albert, a professor of English from Trichy, opened the door to the world. Imam recalls the professor narrating an incident about Hemingway, whom someone in Paris advised to go back to his homeland and write about it. The writings of Jayakanthan and Poomani and the pamphlets and discussions on the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka were major influences on Imam. He started thinking seriously about his venture and writings about such themes.

Imayam wrote five novels, five short story collections and a novella. He is closely connected with the Dravidian Movement and politics. His novels *Koveru Kazhudhaigal* (*The Mules or Beasts of Burden*) and *Arumugam* have won acclaim within Tamil literature and have been translated into English and French respectively. He also received many awards like Agni Aksara Tamil Nadu Progressive Writer's Award (1994), Amudhan Adigal Iliakkiya Award (1998), Junior Fellowship from the Department of Culture, Government of India (2000) and Thamizh Thendral Thiru. V. Ka. Award from the Government of Tamil Nadu in 2009.

Some of his other works are *Sedal*, another novel published in 2006, which deals with a Dalit community whose women are designated as oracles. These women, appointed during droughts, fix the date for village festivals, perform koothu, participate in death rituals, and are not allowed a marital relationship. The novel traces the life of *Sedal* given over to the temple during the 1945-1946 droughts in Tamil Nadu, whose family leaves her behind and migrates to Sri Lanka. His novella *Pethavan* was first published in September 2012 in *Uyirmai* (Tamil Literary Magazine). This novella is set against the background of rural Tamil Nadu and is about the story of a father who is faced with the brutal realities of caste and communal prejudice as the panchayat orders him to murder his daughter for being firm in her resolve to marry a Dalit boy. The narrative is a comprehensive account of the stress and warning that await those who dare to transcend caste barriers.

Beasts of Burden is a translation of *Koveru Kazhuthaigal*, the original Tamil version of the novel. Lakshmi Holmstrom has translated it. The Tamil word 'Koveru Kazhuthaigal' means mules or donkeys. It narrates the lives of the Washer men community, who traditionally carry dirty cloth bundles of upper caste people on donkeys for washing. They also wallowed under poverty, discrimination, hard work, and ignorance which cannot be washed away from their life.

In the introduction section of the novel, Imayam himself says that it is constructed between two journeys, a pilgrimage of hope at the beginning and a subsequent trip to the washing ghat in drudgery and despair at the end. The climate of time and change is important to the novel, whose primary theme is Arokkyam's dilemma amidst changing system of belief about the self and society.

The life of a washerwoman named Arrokyam, her husband Savuri and their three children, Joseph, Mary and Peter. It is a painful journey with lots of questions left unanswered. It is a revelation of the bitter reality of the social ills confronted by a washerman family, the lowest in the order of the Dalit communities. The ethnographic details that Iyam provides in the novel show how Arrokyam and her family, like other washerwoman groups, literally live on the margins of society.

The novel *Beasts of Burden* represents the struggle of a community under a poor condition in the village and the dreadful division and oppression. Since Dalit people constitute a large segment of the population, they have been forced to mobilise themselves in order to fight for their rights and justice. So this novel can be read both as an individual story and the story of Dalit life struggle as a whole. It captures the self-perseverance of people for sustenance and shows how such downtrodden struggle to find a living space and in fulfilling social obligations like marriage, education and employment opportunities.

The novel *Arumugam*, a Dalit novel, was originally written in Tamil, and it has been translated into English by D. Krishna Ayyar. It is a tale of an emotional bond woven between a Dalit woman and her son. Arumugam, the little boy who grows up, has his innocence snatched away through real-life experiences. Raman, Arumugam's father and Dhanbackiyam, Arumugam's mother, get a job in Pondicherry. They take their son Arumugam along with them. Their life goes well until Arumugam sees his mother lying with a British man, Jerry Albert. After such an encounter, Arumugam runs away from his mother, and his adult life starts. Wherever he goes, he begins to observe similar events that he witnessed as a little boy. However, he encounters various Dalit women characters like Vasantha, Chinnapponu, Abitha and Lakshmi,

who shaped him like a real mother. The novel narrates the ups and downs of the life of Arumugam clearly and beautifully.

Subaltern studies have impacted social change, causing the progress of Dalits. However, the sad fact is that people living in rural communities still undergo oppression, waiting for a voice to represent them. Imayam uses the technique of the characters themselves speaking and brings out the humiliation and oppression that the Dalits face in the society based on caste distinction.

Dalit literature proliferated in all genres of literature; autobiography has provided a great stimulus to Dalit manifestation across the country. Autobiography as a genre gives space to a person to share his/her lived experience. The experience becomes the text for the writer. The past has been one of violence, dispossession, and death for Dalits. Their writings reflect trials of invasion with passion and persuasiveness and provide a historical account of their experiences.

The subaltern theory has been peculiarly prophetic about the sufferings of the Dalit people. Bama and Imayam discuss the conflict of oppression about the caste system and the struggles and rights of Dalit people. It also comprehends the caste discrimination and the trauma they undergo in society. Both Bama and Imayam describe the personality crisis and anticipate equality, social justice and love for the subaltern group.

Bama and Imayam brought light to the theme of inter-caste rivalry by chunking together all the experiences that a subaltern has undergone. It also depicts the importance of self-assertion of separate identities within caste leads to in-fights. Both Bama and Imayam explore how upper caste people use caste as a strategy to stifle the growth and development of Dalit communities. It also gives a clear picture of how caste plays

an important role in creating violence and in weakening the human relationships among marginalised people due to low social, political and economic conditions.

This research aims to transform the established discrimination and examine how Dalit women respond and articulate to free themselves from caste ideologies that occupy a dominant position. The present thesis seeks to provide a revelation by studying the trauma in the novels of Bama and Iyayam, the most popular Tamil Dalit writers in English. It attempts to make comprehensive critical comments on their novels with reference to the image of the Dalit caste and their agonies portrayed in their novels. The study also aims at exploring the personality of Bama and Iyayam through their works.

As the present study is restricted only to the select novels of Bama and Iyayam, more emphasis is given to Dalit women's tribulations and trials, aspirations and triumphs. It documents the Dalit struggle for economic, social, and political empowerment. It is also closely related to the theory of Subaltern, which deals with the concept of identifying the groups that are excluded from society; the perspective of the subaltern people, the most powerless, voiceless people who lived within colonial confines. This thesis aims to involve the oppressed community in entering into politics through education, raise their voice towards problems and find a solution for their struggles in the caste-ridden society. The research study also focuses on overcoming the caste issues in society and revolt against the upper caste.

The dissertation comprises six chapters. In the Introductory Chapter, a modest attempt has been made to trace the development of Dalit literature and its themes, considering the substantial contribution made by the male and female writers to the development of Dalit literature in English, especially by Bama and Iyayam.

Chapter – II entitled **From Suffering to Revolt and Rejection** in Bama's *Karukku*, analyses her identity as a Dalit. Her marginalised position in society is further accentuated by gender, class and religious location. It is a study or the analysis of Dalit discrimination, marginalisation, humiliation and isolation from the common tradition of life, especially the heartrending condition of Dalit women in Indian society. It also brings light to the liberation of Bama from suppression, and her new-formed identity is explored.

In her autobiography, Bama presents her experience as a Dalit Christian and how Dalits are segregated in the institution of Church and thus Christianity. She also points out the problems of Dalits, especially Dalit women, in Christianity. Thus, Bama becomes the voice of all the Dalit Christians across India. It offers a detailed account of Bama's religious wakening in the convent. It breaks down the silence to bring many shameful secrets into the public domain, not only the social inequality but the biases of the legal system. With a sense of self as a Dalit, Bama leaves the convent and returns to her village, where insecurity is still at large, and she does not feel compromised. The narrator thus leaves a community of religious women to join another community of Dalit women. Bama takes up the story of this community in her next novel *Sangati*.

Chapter – III entitled **Caste Puzzle in Bama's *Vanmam* and *Sangati*** points out the problems of Dalits, especially Dalit women in Christianity. It describes the events and experiences in the lives of Dalit women. The first person subjective reflects on the intimations of caste and gender that make Dalit women doubly slaved. Bama is unrelenting and, with equipoise, strives for a sense of solidarity with others who, like herself, have been victimised by caste and gender discrimination. It is the

story of three generations of women – the narrator’s grandmother, the narrator herself and the succeeding generation. The narrator’s mythic voice comes to us as a community’s shared memory.

Vanmam portrays caste as a major reason for weakening human relationships and a real hindrance to the sustainable growth of the downtrodden. Bama recounts the time when both Parayars and Pallars maintained a peaceful and harmonious relationship, and, in contrast, she also portrays how the caste causes indifference and lack of concern among them. The upper caste society uses the enmity between Pallars and Parayars to their advantage. There are many instances in this novel that depict how Naickers, the upper caste people, encourage Pallars to fight against Parayars. The upper caste society instigates the enmity between these two communities to preserve their status and power. Bama gives a clear picture of how caste plays an important role in creating violence, weakening human relationships, depriving marginalised people of social, political and economic development and at the same time benefitting the people who have wealth, power and upper-caste status.

Chapter – IV entitled **Trauma and Survival in Imayam’s *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*** focuses on Dalit communities, their lives, their culture and their politics. Imayam enunciates the plight of lower caste people who are submerged and experience double subjugation in society. He criticises the lower caste people who become pseudo-Brahmins and act against people who are considered subordinate among Dalits. This chapter explores the marginalised situation of the gender and the story of the Dalit women and their position in the society and the pains and trauma faced by the women and their emergence as a self.

Beasts of Burden (Koveru Kazhuthaigal), one of the classics of modern Dalit Literature, elaborates on the caste structure and daily life of Dalits. It also features the threat of sexual harassment to women by the upper caste and the psychological struggles they undergo. The next novel, *Arumugam*, is a tale of an emotional bond between a mother and a son woven together with strings of love thrown from a secure, loving home into the cruel world. Arumugam learns that his perceptions of life are as unreal as wisps of smoke, and, finally, he understands the reality of life. Both the novels feature the sexual harassment women face by the upper castes.

Chapter – V entitled **Bama and Imayam as Dalit Writers** sets out to examine the narrative technique that centres on the individual's experience, and the caste identity never leaves both the writers nor they discard it. It also brings out the Dalit in the Dalit's own vocabulary, refusing to follow traditional notions of form, style, aesthetic paradigms or acceptable forms of diction and grammar. The technique of using suitable words which give much meaning is described, and the usage of apt characters, which helped in the success of the literary work, is also brought out. The language used brings out the reality of society.

Chapter – VI titled **Conclusion** sums up the discussions and arguments of the research work based on the varied world of marginalised, subjugated, oppressed, rebellious, and emancipated women. The study of these novels helps to direct and widen our thoughts pertaining to the problems of caste and discrimination distressing the Indian society. This study would further enhance the researcher's probe into the same themes of different writers in English, and thus it would become a beacon of light in the field of Dalit literature.

Chapter - II

From Suffering to Revolt and Rejection in Bama's *Karukku*

Dalit literature could be seen as an emerging field in Indian English writing. Over the past decades, Dalit communities assumed a revolutionary status and emerged into a radical protest seeking a new voice and identity against high caste domination. India became independent in 1947 and is the biggest democracy globally, yet the society remains a caste-oriented community with major divisions. The ancient scripts segregated a section of society as a taboo, and they badly treated the 'untouchables.' This provided a prelude to the misery of the marginalised people. Many philosophers and scholars started voicing their concern against the treatment of the oppressed as low-class people and for their emancipation in the hands of upper castes in the Indian Diaspora.

To give vent to Dalit feelings, autobiography is considered a mode of expressing an individual's experiences. It presents the sufferings and obstacles of the Dalit individuals in the society due to low caste identity borne out of the cultural composition. However, it is also influenced by historical, philosophical and psychological dimensions. Dalit literature could be considered parallel to African and Jewish American literature, where colonial oppression took the form of race, ethnicity and colour, which played an essential role in discrimination and perpetuating supremacy of the colonials over the local community.

William Andrew states that the writing of autobiography is in some way uniquely portraying self-liberation and represents the final culminating act in the drama of the quest for freedom. Autobiography is an individual privilege that chronicles the development of the 'I' and the 'I' grows as it progresses through a

traditional quest pattern and searches for an individual experience that allows him or her to express the self. Dalit autobiography holds a unique position in several ways. It differs vastly from other autobiographies. We find the composition of self-expressive cultural definition in it. Such autobiographies represent an individual or are reflective of a group. At the same time, the narrator projects his or her pride in an inimitable form educative of strong feelings in a clear form. The voice of the individual becomes the voice of the community. This thread of communal orientation runs through all Dalit autobiographies.

In contemporary Dalit literature, writers expanded their horizons through their constant struggle for equal rights. In such works, the doubly marginalised are women in particular, who have decided to rescue themselves from historical and cultural indivisibility and desired to create a literature of their own. As a result, autobiography holds up a deep fascination for Dalit people of all ages. The success of this genre is mostly seen as an act of empowerment, providing a clear picture of their struggle to be treated equally with their oppression suffered through ages. In fact, an autobiographer seeks liberation through the creative act of writing.

Dalit women's writing, by and large, prefers autobiography as a mode of expression of their sufferings. The slogan of Dalit women's literature is 'Personal is communal and communal is personal.' Dalit women writers focused on caste discrimination and sexual torture experienced since their childhood and tried to search for a new identity of life in the society. Dalit women writers are mostly concerned with their identity in the community because of individual consciousness. Their goal hovers around their growth as an individual and from childhood to adulthood. They chart their progress apart from gaining knowledge while at the same time giving importance to the sense of dignity and striving for self-realisation.

Dalit writings draw their ideological strength from the writings of Ambedkar and the struggles that they underwent against the oppressive and inhumane caste system in India. His basic philosophy was that the true picture of the pain and anguish of the Dalits could be captured by Dalits only. The critics and autobiographers call Dalit autobiographies the 'narratives of pain.' If Dalit autobiographies, in general, narrate the lives of marginalised people, autobiographies of Dalit women focus on the lives of Dalit women having been suppressed as doubly marginalised people. Their life is a pothole of troubles, mingled with illiteracy, aggravated by early marriages and worsened by victimisation and molestation by the upper castes. Bama's autobiography depicts the people who suffer from gender and caste discrimination, and through her work, she motivates every person to raise their voice against the caste issues.

The cusp of Dalit literature is full of protest, pain and agony. Bama, a Tamil Dalit writer's most acclaimed work *Karukku* is one such autobiography that deals with the suffering and pain of the Dalits due to the inexorable social structure. It gives an account of self-discovery, change, and changing notions of identity and belonging. Bama also makes her autobiography an exercise of trauma to prevent future repetition. She feels that the problem in her life presents an indomitable spirit that makes her work emphatically articulate. It is a narrative of a Tamil Dalit Christian woman who was enslaved by the clutches of casteism and discrimination against lower caste women by the upper caste. The novel documents the trauma, pain, protest and social changes that the women underwent as members of the Dalit community. The focus of this chapter is to overview Bama's *Karukku* as an account of the conflict between being a Christian and a Dalit. The autobiography received the anticipated criticism leading to her banishment from her village for the next seven months. The book was first written by her in Tamil in 1992 and translated into English by

Lakshmi Holmstrom in 2000. Bama became a recognised name and published more works after that to fundamentally change and overthrow caste hierarchies and create the Dalit female's identity. The work, though, received critical acclaim, and yet it was awarded the Crossword Book Award in 2000. The English translation has enabled *Karukku* to cross-linguistic and regional boundaries and reaches global readers. The book is about Bama's inner quest for self-discovery and the resultant courage, which has fuelled her to move away from an ordinary life expected of a woman and that of Dalit identity. *Karukku* is a spiritual-literary and socio-cultural endeavour on the part of an oppressed creative artist whose soul surges towards self-discovery and, as a result, realising and reinterpreting the meaning of her existence both as an oppressed under an oppressive community and as an emancipator in the larger fellowship of free human souls who aspires to great things in life. It depicted a collective trauma of Bama's community whose depth could not be measured as a time-bound event, hence a succession of events till today.

Bama's *Karukku* is a novel and a testimony of the expression of a subaltern woman who was born as a Dalit Christian. It is a surge against the ongoing caste resistance and gender oppression. The subaltern people were not given enough space to represent their ideas and literary creativity. In such a context, the genre of testimonial literature becomes the refuge of subalterns. The testimonies were recorded as an instrument of retrieving and registering the protest of subalterns. The novel *Karukku* exposes a Dalit Christian woman's bitter experience. It traces the cultural, social and familial life of Dalits. It stands as a stamp of every Dalit woman's history. Through this novel, Bama registers a place in the history of her community under the mainstream Tamil literature.

Bama's *Karukku* handles the issues of oppression of women, especially in Tamil Nadu. Bama speaks as a representative of the subaltern community, and the novel *Karukku* is not only a testimony which accounts for her life but also the life of the Dalit community, which attracts immediate attention from readers. Unlike a stereotype novel, Bama deliberately attempted to deviate from the usual style of autobiographies in which the oppression faced by a subaltern Dalit woman in its pristine forms is projected by her personal experiences as a Dalit has in a caste-based society, is a heart-rendering account by the author.

Bama's *Karukku* deals with caste domination and social discrimination within Catholic Church and its institutions. It also presents Bama's journey towards self-discovery and spiritual identity. It is her driving quest for integrity as a Dalit and gives a polemic account within Catholic Church. It is a collective trauma of the Dalit community and as a Dalit Christian woman. The oppression and the consequent sufferings of the community are communicated to the world at large. The trauma mentioned in the novel reflects the novelist's powerful suppressed emotions intensely. Lakshmi Holmstrom, in her introduction to the English translation of the novel, precisely comments on the situation: "I grow out of a particular moment: a personal crisis and watershed in the author's life which drives her to make sense of her life as a woman, Christian, Dalit" (7). Thus, *Karukku* was born.

Karukku is significant not only for being an authentic recording of the marginalised existence of the Dalits but also for throwing light upon the darker side of caste-ridden Indian institutions. Bama's life as "a village girl, Parayar, rural poor, downtrodden woman and Dalit" (131) unfolds the role of various social set-ups working in favour of casteism. The survey of a life span of over three decades

provides ample scope to unveil the function of the caste system at various social strata. In the words of Promod K. Nair, “*Karukku* is a powerful critique of Indian civil society itself; the educational system, the church and bureaucracy” (84). It is an accurate account of the scratches and tearing of wounds inflicted on the body and mind that formed the book’s embryo. The experience of her past life is central to this autobiography. Memory often serves to create a rich tradition for oneself. But in *Karukku*, it becomes an attempt to break away from the existing tradition, which is filled with horror and humiliation to identify her identity. In the process of going deep into the past, Bama identifies herself with the Dalit community and becomes an expansion of her own self. The political vision that the autobiography envisions for the Dalit community seeks primarily through the agency of the narrator that provides the context for calling the social dogma based on the caste system.

The caste system is a national tragedy that continues to haunt Indian minds throughout centuries till the present day. This tragedy has coloured and saturated Indian thinking and infiltrated every sphere of the socio-economic, religious and political fabric of the country. It continues to be perpetuated in covert and overt ways even after the institution of numerous legislative and preventive mechanisms over the last sixty years since the independence of India. Caste violence continues unabated, both in subtle ways and as blatant violence and oppression.

Dalit experience is unique. Though the oppression of the minorities and the colonised indigenous population has existed for over six hundred years, it seems to be less intense when compared to Dalits. First, because Dalit oppression has existed for thousands of years and, secondly, unlike with any oppressed groups, it is legitimised by religious doctrines and social norms and customs. Hardly any other society has suffered oppression for centuries and continues to face the same situation as Dalits.

This chapter also problematises the question of Dalit identity - from suffering to revolt and rejection in the context of two alternative views on cultural identity such as essentialism and postmodernism that provides conflicting views on identity. It also explores the possibility of a theoretical understanding of social and cultural identity in terms of social and cultural location. *Karukku* negotiates the notion of the continuity between experience and identity and claims to establish kinship with Dalits “who have been deprived of their basic rights” and reveals a “passionate desire to create a new society made up of justice equality and love” (13).

The current debates on identity, especially the arguments raised by Satya P. Mohanty, deserve specific mention here. Mohanty argues, “Whether we inherit an identity – masculinity, being black or actively choose one based on our political predilections – radical lesbianism, Black Nationalism, socialism – our identities are ways of making sense of our experiences. Essentialism is the view that specific categories (e.g., women, racial groups, dinosaurs, original Picasso artwork) have an underlying reality or true nature that one cannot observe directly. On the other hand, postmodernists insist on internal differences within the group and claim that identities are fabricated and constructed rather than deducted from experience. They even warn about personal experiences that are unstable and slippery and cannot be considered a source of objective knowledge. Bama’s identification with the village is evident throughout *Karukku*. The narrator places the village above the castes and the communities residing in it. The following statement shows: ‘Before I come to castes and communities, I have a lot to tell about the village itself’ (1). It is her ardent love for the village.

The prominent position given to the village at the beginning of this autobiography indicates the central position that the village has in framing her identity as a villager. She begins *Karukku* with a statement, “Our village is charming” (1) and describes the Marakkaapuuchi Malai, Perumal Saami temple, Nariparara, Vanna Paara, Vattala Vitthaam Paara, Muniappasaami temple and a large number of lakes that are part of the village. The mountain ranges around this lovely village. Bama, the narrator, as she sets the locale, reveals her love for the village. The sun spilling light and sparkling, peered between the trees. As the sun was dropping through the mountains in the evening, the fields would be luminous with yellow light. “The cool southern breeze blowing, the crops swaying filled the hearts with delight. To look at the light in the western sky was like looking at a revelation of God” (3-4). But it is to be noted that her identity as a villager does not prevent her from unearthing the inner divisions within the village community along with caste, class and communal lines of the village.

It is true that the class divisions in Indian villages are most often along caste lines. Bama’s village is not an exception to this rule. Referring to the divergent caste and religious groups residing in the village like Nadars, Koravars, Chakkiliyars, Kusavar, Pallars, Parayar, Thevar, Chettiyar, Asari, Udaiyar and Naickers, the narrator identifies a clean pattern in the distribution of the caste groups in the village. Against this panoramic beauty, the village presents a neat division of the Hindus and the untouchables. The Parayar settlement in five streets was next to the Pallars settlement and next to the cemetery. The church and the school were in the Nadar area. There were the Chaaliyars and the others. The caste settlement in the village literally descended to the Parayar community. Prema Nandakumar observes that: ‘Nature has been generous, but it is the man who has become an expert in touch-me-notism’ (35).

Bama's autobiography is characterized by her memory of the past and vision of the future observed from the socio-cultural location of the present. The novel, *Karukku*, constitutes the arc of the narrator's spiritual development both through the nurturing of her belief as a Catholic and her gradual realisation of herself as a Dalit. Bama says that there are many similarities between the sharp edge of palmyra leaves and her own life. "Events that occurred during many stages of my life cut me like *Karukku* (palmyra leaves expressed symbolically) and made me bleed... Later they also became the embryo (*karu*) and symbol that grew into this book" (13).

Bama also speaks of her commitment to the Dalit cause. She believes in the growing self-respect among the Dalits and envisions them gaining political, economic, and cultural strength. *Karukku* is more interested in sharing her Dalit experience than a military hit back. Bama reflects on the low status of Dalit Christians and the breaking silence of the subaltern through the process of rediscovery. She has not just portrayed occasions regarding the effect it had on her later life, yet a sovereign record of her day-to-day encounters as snapshots in a comprehensive fashion of her persecution in its identity. Through this novel, individuals perceive how Bama needs to be understood of her Dalit identity.

The novel mainly discusses the development of the protagonist's mind and character, from childhood through varied experiences and recognition of her identity and role in the world. It highlights Bama, a dalit who moves towards self-discovery, self-defence, and self-affirmation. Her only mission was to uplift the Dalits by writing the autobiographical novel *Karukku*. It is the first Tamil Dalit text which deals with the experience of a Dalit woman, and such an account functions as a voice of the entire community of people who have undergone similar experiences of discrimination in the caste-ridden hierarchy in the society.

Bama was born in 1958 in Puthupatti, Virudhunagar district, Tamil Nadu.

Bama's father who was in the army was determined to educate his children well. Her mother, an illiterate coolie, supported her with perceptive anecdotes to overcome obstacles in life. Her brother Gautaman, who is now a writer and critic, encouraged Bama to reach for everything that was possible for a young dalit woman. During her childhood days, her brother used to bring home books from the library. Thus, she was exposed to Tamil writers like Parthasarthy, Jayakanthan and Akhilan.

In *Karukku* the focus was on two essential aspects, namely: caste and religion that cause great pain in Bama's life. *Karukku* tells the story of a Tamil Dalit Catholic from her childhood and home coming after leaving the religious order in which she served for seven years. Bama could not understand what untouchability was until she experienced the humiliation of being an untouchable as a child. When she was walking from school one day watching all the fun that was going on in the streets, she saw a big man carrying a small package, it was something like vadai or green banana bhajji. "He came along holding out the packet by its string, without touching it" (13). When Bama discussed this incident with her brother, he told her that, "Because we are born into the Parayarjati, we are not entitled to any honour or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities" (15). These words left a very deep impression on her and from that day onwards, she decided to study well. It provided an authentic experience and a sense that descends out of harsh experience.

Repeated experiences of this sort created in her deep awareness about caste prejudices. Bama expresses her anguish over the caste discrimination. Discrimination against Dalits in the field of education is a widespread phenomenon, and it has been

practised systematically denying opportunities. The authorities in position figures thwart the desire of Dalit Christian by their sneering attitude. They are bent upon hacking the psyche of Dalits and Bama had a bitter experience at the school. She recounts the incident in the book when she was in seventh standard. She was publicly humiliated and put to shame. As usual, the children were playing in the campus after school, and they were running up to a particular coconut palm to touch its tip. When Bama's turn came, a coconut, not fully ripened, fell with a thud. The next morning, in the assembly, the headmaster called out her name and scolded her saying that she had shown her true colour as a Parayar. She was accused of having stolen the coconut and was asked to meet the parish priest who was the correspondent of the school. The moment she finished narrating what had happened, the priest's response was, "After all you're from Cheri: you must have done it" (16). When she protests, the headmaster tells her: "You people of low caste like the manner you have... we cannot allow you inside the school. Stand outside" (19). This incident, in fact, damaged her mentally and Bama felt shame since she was humiliated and insulted in front of the other children. After that, she got suspended from the school. When she started crying, a teacher advised her to meet the Church priest for an apology letter. When she entered the classroom with the recommendation of the priest, the entire class looked at her in a strange way. She expressed: "When I entered the classroom, the entire class turned around to look at me, and I wanted to shrink myself as I went and sat on my bench, still weeping" (19).

Bama narrates that the incident shrank her dignity when the Priest humiliated her. The situation is clearly symptomatic of withdrawal syndrome in her. Any young mind tends to withdraw itself from such a tyrannical approach of the society. Fortunately,

Bama empowered herself through education. “I studied hard with all my breath and was almost in frenzy almost. As Annan urged, “I stood first in my class. And because of that many people became my friends even though I am a parachi” (15). Bama has understood the importance of education and the reader gets a glimpse of her strong attitude in the pages of *Karukku*. With determination and hard work, Bama successfully completed her higher education and later became a nun, so that she could serve the poor and needy Dalit children. Encouraging the true Dalit spirit among the depressed groups, she urges them to come out of their hackneyed shell of imposed, polluted and contemptible image. She gives a radical call to crush all the oppressive centres and dismantle the centre-oriented set up”, “We crush all the institutions that use caste to bully and use into submission and demonstrate that none among human beings are high or low” (28).

During the holidays, when she went home, if there were a Naicker woman sitting next to Bama in the bus, she would ask Bama about her background. The moment Bama’s identity was revealed, she would move off to another seat, or she would ask her to go to some other seat. This happened several times. It is a very shocking incident, and she is confused by listening to the caste name, particularly when she is not mature enough to understand it at all. She does not keep talking about the humiliation. In the very act of remembering the scene, she has encoded the mode of resistance that constructs her in opposition to the hegemonic structure of the caste system. Bama had never heard of untouchability until her third standard in school. For the first time she comes to know about her community’s pathetic state, which is ironically tinged with humour.

Bama herself worked along with her grandmother in a Naicker family during her holidays. Her own cruel experience of the hard work in the field and the forest

enabled her to portray the plight of the oppressed in a realistic way. She helped her grandmother to collect firewood and also went to collect cow dung from the streets and the fields to be used as fuel at home. At other times, she along with other children went to the field to pull up the groundnut pods.

As Bama was returning from school, she found an elder from her street. He was holding out a small packet of snacks. This packet of snacks is tied in a string. The elder was bringing the snacks by holding the string without touching the packet and giving it to a Naicker in the village. Bama was unable to control her laughing, looking at the funny sight. This represents how poor, socially oppressed people have been laden with the self-derogatory and untouchable image for centuries. They have grown up as a negative image of impurity that has been imposed upon them by the caste traitors. The self-questioning has begun in Bama with wonder.

Bama additionally discussed the embarrassment she experienced when she graduated from secondary school since she was a Dalit, which was the representative estimation of attire as an image of prosperity in her composition. She depicted a school party for which she did not go to because she did not have the cash to purchase another new saree and continued staying away in the restroom until it was over. Bama faces a similar weightage in the rest of her life, and she likewise faces a similar weightage in school and college, which makes it hard for her to acknowledge the training that she can bear and needs to battle as a woman. Her story digresses from an itemized conversation of her way of life as a Dalit and that of a woman. As Bama brought up in a meeting with Githa Hariharan, Dalit women are ‘misused multiple times’ on account of their status, class and sex, which is considered the ‘triple monster’.

In high school, the warden sister quite unwarrantedly piqued, “Look at the Cheri children. When they stay here, they eat their fill and look as round as potatoes” (17).

Bama retreated inwardly and questioned that Dalits too paid fees like other students, but they alone are condemned unreasonably. In another situation, she asked for permission to go home for her brother and sister's First Holy Communion. The nun spoke in a domineering way, "What celebration can be there in your caste, for the first communion!" (19). The fellow students also delighted in a titter of contempt on such occasions. Later, she was denied a job with a query, 'Are you a Nadar'? As a teacher, she realized that even older people bury their pride and self-respect doing menial jobs for the nuns before whose power and wealth they were frightened. She understood that the nuns collectively oppressed the Dalit children. And going through different junctures, she surmised that the Dalits are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until their death. Even after death, caste differences don't disappear.

Bama's brother who was an educated young Dalit reflects the subversive Dalit consciousness. It is this positive and progressive attitude that is required to eliminate inferiority complex amongst the Dalits. It would help in destroying the false pride of caste perpetrators. The government offers financial grants and special tuitions to the Harijans. But such grants and tuitions signify more humiliation than consolation, mainly because it singles out her caste identity.

The overwhelming nature of caste, and inhuman proportions to which it develops and pervades in the society, are portrayed in the novel. Though caste enjoys a preeminent position defining and determining the identity of the narrator, the prevalence of the other shades of identity cannot be ruled out. The novel points at the multiple nature of the narrator's identity at several instances.

After her college studies, Bama completes her B.Ed. Degree successfully. So, she was able to get a job in a school run by the nuns. Even there, a nun asked her

about her caste. When she knew that Bama belonged to the Parayar community, an expression of contempt came over the nun's face. The nun looked down upon Dalit teachers and Dalit children in the school. She worked in that school for five years, and it was a continuous battle for her. In that school, most of the children are from poor families and three-fourth of them were Dalits. Bama was very eager to teach these children because she had taken up her teaching profession with this aim. She wanted to liberate Dalit children through education.

Indeed, Bama is very happy teaching the children because most of the children in the convent are Dalits. She enjoyed teaching with some skill and success. Nuns used to suppress Dalit children and Dalit teachers very much. On seeing the oppression at the convent, it struck Bama with the idea of becoming a nun. She decides to sacrifice her life to help the poor and Dalit children. After becoming a teacher, Bama could witness the Dalit children subjected to verbal harassment for no reasons at all. Children were treated with contempt and employed to do menial works like sweeping the campus and cleaning the toilets. The widespread belief that "low-caste people were degraded in some way" (22).

The most significant phase of Bama's life dawned then. Bama wanted to join a religious congregation and become a nun to serve her community, promoting self-esteem and social consciousness. The life of a nun taught her the valuable lessons of life. She entered the convent with a dedicated motif of serving Dalit children. She carefully chose a particular religious order after reading the life history of the foundress. The way the foundress had sacrificed her life for being poor inspired her very much. She wanted to be like her and decided to dedicate her life to the upliftment of Dalits. Bama joined this religious order taking the vows of obedience, poverty, and

chastity. Unfortunately, the convent was also possessed by caste prejudices: “the convent I entered didn’t even care to glance at the poor children” (66).

The nuns in the convent constantly threw insults and abuse against Dalit students. Christianity stands for love, service and helping others. Convents are service-oriented, but their approach is different towards upper castes and Dalits. They could not admit Dalit students in their convent school because they feared whether the school standard would fall. Thus, they marginalize all Dalits as poor quality. The nuns in the convent speak very insultingly about low-caste people, and they do not even consider low-caste people human beings.

This novel *Karukku* is a narrative in which Bama looks for providing a separate identity for Dalits. She recalled how unique she was about others as a Dalit lady, and each time she attempted to be autonomous, conceited or to represent those in the court who expected to serve them, she was seriously denounced. In any event, leaving the religious circle demonstrates Herculeans work since she is frequently halted by senior nuns. Bama stressed that instead of being more and more beaten down and blunted, they must unite, think about their rights and battle for them. In the very first year of her career as a teacher, she thought that she was going to achieve her mission. But soon she realized how she was duped in her vocation. The school in which she worked had a lot of children from wealthy families. The people of her community did odd jobs like sweeping, washing the classrooms and cleaning the lavatories. The nuns catered only to the interests of the wealthy children.

In *Karukku*, Bama exposes the irony of religious life and Christianity. In the convent where she saw the nuns spoke very insultingly of the low caste, Bama neither told them that she was from the low caste, nor did she have the courage to retort.

Earlier, as a lay woman, she could fight and argue with them freely, but the etiquette within the convent demanded her to be quiet. “The convent too was well-equipped richly, and it seems the Jesus they worshipped was a wealthy Jesus. The environment sums up the fact there is no connection between God which Jesus taught and the way the poor are treated (91). She wanted to question the attitude of the nuns, but in the name of her vow of obedience, she was silenced. She was disturbed and shocked to find that the convent and the church had completely deviated from the doctrines they preached.

The flames of fury once again started to burn. But this time, she must abide by the vows as a nun and could do no anything but remain quiet. Being a Dalit, Bama could protest and thereby demand her rights as a woman. On the other extreme, being a true Christian, she was expected to be passive and silent, bound by the oath she took as a nun. It was a social call at one end, and a religious call at the other. Bama was in a dilemma and helplessly caught between the two extremes. Revelations that she learnt during seven years as a nun in the convent enabled Bama to assert herself as a responsible member of the society in the future. She found that, while her own people were toiling hard to manage a day’s life, the Nuns in the convent in the name of serving the people enjoyed all comforts. It seems a sort of betrayal both for the religion of which they are a part and against the oppressed community for which Jesus stood for.

After three years, she was transferred to a different place and within a month, she was moved five times. She had to accept this in the name of the vow of obedience. Besides, her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, her humility enabled her life to serve ordinary people. “In reality, these vows are the means of control and

enslavement, she believed” (97). The church, the school and the house of the priest are in the vicinity of the streets occupied by the upper castes. Dalit students rather must trek a long distance to reach their school. They also had to bear the stigma of poverty. They were mere shadows in contrast to the children of the same age from other communities. In hostels, their dress and eating habits were subject to adverse criticism and comment. The Parayar caste nuns are not given any kind of respect and positions in the convent. Bama notices the casteism in the convent. She starts realizing that one can tolerate outside discrimination from society, but it is very hard to face politics and casteism inside the convent. Because of the purpose of her survival, she has to pretend to remain there because of her strong determination and perseverance towards the poor and the Dalit children. Whoever asks Bama about her caste, she answers honestly without any hesitation. The nuns made uncharitable, unchristian remarks about the way Dalit children conducted themselves.

Even Dalits, such as priests or nuns, are the victims of discrimination. In addition, all menial jobs in and around the church were allotted to the Dalit converts and their children. They were asked to clean the toilets and the classrooms and do all sorts of menial jobs. All these scenarios of discrimination and uncharitable criticism of Dalits in demeaning words seems a humbug in the eyes of Bama. She used to wonder how those nuns claim that they work for God’s Kingdom where all are equal. Some of the utterances they made against the Dalits are: ‘How can we allow these people to come into our houses? In any case, even if we were to allow them, they would not enter our homes. They themselves must know their place. There is nothing we can do for these creatures. And we shouldn’t do anything for them, they will never make progress. Their natures are like that (99).

Despite all these humiliations meted out to Dalit – the nun’s claim that they work for God’s Kingdom. Bama was amazed and ashamed to hear these words but could not question the attitude of the nuns. When Bama entered the convent, she learnt more of God and the teaching of Jesus. She learnt from her experience in the convent that all these seemed to be hypocritical. This made her get angry at the priests and nuns. Furthermore, she observes, ‘They (the Dalits) have become aware that they were created in the likeness of God. There is a new strength within them, urging them to reclaim that likeness which has been so far repressed, ruined, obliterated: and to begin to live again with honour, self-respect and with a love towards all human mankind. It is a sin to treat someone according to their outward appearance’ (94). The proceedings in the convent are “always the discussion was at the level of what to prepare, what to eat, what to celebrate and how to enjoy, what to build and what to break, what to buy, where and how to sell it” (96). When she saw these things, she thought of her own people living in misery, taking in only gruel all the time.

Bama’s observation of the convent gives an indelible impression that the vow of obedience and the virtue of humility are subtle tools of intimidation. So, she decided to leave the convent after seven years with a view to liberate Dalits from the clutches of poverty and serfdom. So, one fine day in the year 1992 she left the religious order. She packed her box and walked out of the convent. She was left alone in the outside world, and the task of finding a job seemed difficult. It was very hard to return to an ordinary life after seven years of life in a nunnery, away from reality. But the desire to work for Dalits was still alive in her heart. She had courage, determination, and dedication to work for the well-being of her community and encourage them to build something new.

In her struggle to discover herself, Bama was helped by her friend Father Mark. He asked her to pour out her heart in a diary and so began to write about her experiences as a Dalit. She called this story of a Dalit, *Karukku*, a reference to the double-edged stem of the palm leaf. The double edges of the leaf recalled for Bama not only the social cuts which people like her got every day, but also the more important fact that they must cut through this stifling system. Bama is clear about her mission to fight the worst injustice done against Dalits.

Karukku is addressed especially to women folk in Bama's community with a view to transform and enable them to shed the shackles of slavery. She succeeds in her mission transcending the then traditional and stereotyped roles thrust upon the women folk in her community. Bama's clarion call to her fellow Dalits is positive and is inspired by hope. In her preface, she says that the oppressed should be like the doubled-edged *Karukku*, challenging the oppressors. She refers to the 'New Testament' of the *Holy Bible* where the word of 'God' is described as a 'two-edged sword'. Her challenges peep through the narrative as well: "We must dare to stand up for change. We must crush all those institutions that use caste to bully us into submission" (25).

The novel *Karukku* traces the development of the protagonist from passive endurance to affirmative awareness and, finally, to a definite and positive determination towards life through a series of events in which she was oppressed and exploited. She also touches upon the development of Dalit children and overall, the liberation of the Dalits. Bama realizes that through the right type of education the whole community of Dalits can be empowered and gain human dignity. *Karukku* centres around one constant issue of abuse in the Catholic Church and its foundations and depicts Bama's life as a forlorn experience.

Dalit theology has brought into focus to the world community in the mid-1980s the imperfection underlying in Indian Christian philosophy. It neglected to communicate the experience of persecuted Dalits, who are mostly Christians. Dalit philosophy has the goal to translate truth, the idea of God, and human salvation. It esteems the value of devotees and their faith in God to challenge persecution, utilizing sacred writings and culture as sole commitment to the change of the world. Christian Dalit theology mirrors the uniqueness of the Brahman system and experience of Dalits as its source, text, and culture. It envisages two challenges - to change the harsh framework and the other is to evolve an ideal for the liberation of Dalits.

For Dalits, salvation is primarily independence from the abuse of the individuals such as class framework. It is through writings that women endeavour to overcome their opposition and establish identity in the society. Gayatri Spivak in '*Can the Subaltern Speak?*' expands the original definition of the subaltern and the sub-proletariat to include the struggles and experiences of women. *Karukku* is a path-breaking novel that addresses various issues of suppression and exploitation, religion nor legal constitutional interventions seem to provide any answers to the Dalits. The part of Bama's story is that of her betrayal by the promise of freedom and dignity as an Indian.

In order to analyse text as part autobiography, part analysis, part manifesto, Bama is a bold account of what life is outside the mainstream of Indian thought and fiction. *Karukku* unfolds the physical violence, the mental agony, and the psychic mutilation of the untouchables. It lays bare to the world the heinous crimes of the upper castes and suggests repenting for wreaking injustice on the powerless. The powerful with seared consciousness have trampled upon the fundamental rights of

Dalits. Thirumavalavan said, “Casteism atrocities are ostracized” (4). Bama’s *Karukku* exposes the pervasive and predominant evil force in her small village.

In Bama’s village, chiefly the Naickers were the landowners. Their lands sprawled across and bore peculiar names. The low-caste people worked endlessly, but the wages they get are far below subsistence for the entire household. However, they remain silent because of caste supremacy. Instead, Naickers added to their wealth. Having observed this situation, Bama writes plaintively “wealthy live off the labour of the poor, like leeches. It seems that our society is divided into those who toil and those who sit down and feast” (68). Bama’s grandmother was liked by Naickers just for the reason she collected her people and drove them to work in their fields for the minimum wage. Lancy Lobo points out in *Visions, Illusions and Dilemmas of Dalit Christians in India* that ‘the Hindus kept the Dalits under their grip to improve impurities so that they could keep their sanctity, to supply cheap and sometimes unpaid labour and, thirdly, to wield them to boost the vote bank for them to ascend to power. But they would continue to look upon them as untouchables reinforcing their caste identity’. (45)

Legal systems also set boundaries against poor Dalits. A dispute rose between the Chaaliyars and the Parayar Community over the cemetery based on caste hierarchy. The Parayar community is dispossessed of even the cemetery. Because of the supremacy of the Chaaliyars in caste hierarchy even though later they stabbed the Dalit boy. Then it was silent for some time. The case was against Dalits. The police could not give a fair hearing of the case. Bama says that even though the Dalits were beaten up ‘black and blue’ and whipped like animals (28). No Chaaliyars were questioned. They walked around with an air of victory. Day after day, they came on

rounds in the Dalit streets. The place was so still that their boots stamping sent shivers in the heart of women and children. Alphonse was beaten so much that he could not stop vomiting blood. He died on the second day. Some men were rounded up and sent to Madurai jail. Those who escaped hid in the forest and mountains. The headman dashed into the high earthenware enclosure in Bama's home, only to be caught kicked and rained with blows. A ten-year-old boy died in this strangling atmosphere. The women went to the hiding. The police interrogated the group while returning. Immediately the women raised a funeral dirge and escaped. Some women dug the grave in the night and buried the boy. The father was not even able to weep for fear of the police identifying him.

Regarding the black oppression, Frantz Fanon relates that 'the agents of the government speak the language of pure force. The intermediary is the harbinger of violence. The same condition is experienced by the Dalits too. Thirumavalavan quotes Justice Mullah of Allahabad High Court, "the police are only a legally approved and uniformed rowdy gang" (47). The police force does not safeguard peace in the place but causes a murderous rampage and sleeps peacefully in the Chaaliyars' house. It is not surprising that the Dalit leader condemns that the police force is an instrument of extremely horrid terrorism structured by the state. And Bama in her social milieu becomes aware that our mental firmness doesn't match the influence and authority that money-power wields.

Religion seems to revert to its revered role when it contacts the untouchables. Ambedkar's one-line directive 'educate, untie, agitate' was not feasible in Bama's life. Bama, a Roman Catholic, imagines that she would be able to reform the existing caste system. Uprooting the evil of casteism and uplifting Dalits have swayed Bama's

heart to enter a religious order despite her people's dissuasion. A brief stay showed the dark reality behind the facade. The school admitted the affluent children and the nuns matched their attitude and behaviour to the power and prestige of those families and only as a token of gesture, they took four or five poor children. Bama's conscience was battered and bruised. Her life in the convent shattered her views and vision.

The convent life as she perceives is like going round and round in "luxurious cages, trapped in comfort" (97). As a sacrificial life, they vow to set their hearts on God first and then on service to the needy. On the contrary, the upper castes assume power; control the dispossessed and the poor by thrusting blind belief and devotion by turning them into slaves in the name of God while they themselves live in comfort. If this is their kind of service to the people, internal politics tear them apart. Dalit priests and nuns are pushed aside and marginalised.

Bama narrates an incident that happened in her life while confirmation. Bama brings out her experience of listening to a devil story by her sister. The sister has said in the scripture lesson that if one commits many sins, that will be noted in the notebook which God possesses. Stupefied by fear, Bama obeys the sisters unconditionally and does whatever work that is ordained by the sisters. She regularly prays to God to lessen her sins. Bama sometimes tests the words of the priests and nuns because of curiosity; they say that the host delivered at the church should not be touched or bitten, as the host contains Jesus himself in it, failing on which the person will have bleeding and narrates an incident happened in the nearby village whereby a person who has bitten the host continues to be bleeding. Bama wants to test this event, and so she hides behind the veil and bites the host and concludes, "No blood at all. Then I knew that this had been an empty threat" (86).

Inscribing principles of poverty, chastity, and obedience, they live like Pharisees and Saduces. The vows are tools to control and enslave the poor. They could impose a prototype of their self on God and justify that “God is just, righteous, is angered by injustices, opposes falsehood but never tolerates inequality” (90). Bama’s first-hand experience emboldened her to leave the order, forsake comfort and set on the path of liberation. She speaks “with all their words and rules in the convent; they cut me down, sculpted me and damaged me” (104). She constantly speaks about “dying several times within” (28). The feeling of indifference that she received at school, college, workplace, convent and in society as a whole set fire in the heart of Bama and filled it with a conscious desire to fight against the system. *Karukku* became her testimony; and thereby, a subaltern’s testimony of being a Dalit.

The life portrayed in *Karukku* throws light on the most agonizing and hapless lives of the Dalits. Bama’s portrayal needs to be understood as a representative of her experience. The unpleasant experience and an oppressed soul must compulsorily undergo a traumatic change. That change had occurred through Bama’s narrative of resistance, *Karukku*. She introduced a new genre, testimonial literature, through which she makes others aware of the situation that is faced by Dalits, especially in Tamil Nadu and makes her people ready for the struggle. She presents her autobiography in a unique way that it might change the condition of her fellow-beings and create a revolution of change. Bama herself talks about the change that happened to her: “I described myself in *Karukku* as bird whose wings had been clipped. I now feel like a falcon that treads the air, high in the skies” (11).

In exploring the autobiography of Bama, *Karukku* expounds how Dalit literature is not merely literature but a movement of emancipation of the

downtrodden. It is a form of protest the evils of the caste system and Brahmanism in India. Bama's *Karukku* also brings out the subjugation of Dalit Christians in Indian society. The novel conveys that oppression based on caste and class can be challenged through education. It also unleashes how Dalits turned to Christianity in hope of equality and justice and how it turned out to be the contrary in practise.

Dalit literary writing is a mode of activism that seeks to free Dalits from the clutches of dominant ideology and caste oppression. The consciousness of a community can be seen in the self-reflective work of Bama. By producing Dalit consciousness, she aims at the liberation of Dalits. Bama emphasizes that Dalit should break the norms of the society and fight against the oppression. The caste-consciousness in Bama is so strong and so through her writings, she stands against the traditional caste system. In *Karukku*, Bama presents the plight of Dalits, how their identity is constructed by the upper caste people of the society and how their psyche is structured. So *Karukku* is concerned with the single issue of caste oppression within the Catholic Church and its institutions. It enumerates a personal crisis in the author's life, which drives her to make a sense of her life as a woman, Christian and a Dalit, which speaks for itself and heralds a new world for Dalits with respect and pride. This realization enables Bama towards the journey of self-discovery from struggle to revolt and rejection against the caste hierarchy in India.

The journey becomes even more demanding when a Dalit woman decides to raise her voice, her task is to overthrow dominant ideologies and societal structures and embolden the oppressed sex. Bama, thus, chooses a non-conformist style in her autobiography as well as novels to protest the codified stereotypes of class, caste, and gender. Her works provide a nuanced and panoramic view of Dalit life. *Karukku* is

neither a pleasure giving work of fine sentiments and refined gestures, nor a narcissistic wallowing in self-pity. Being purposive, *Karukku* is a specimen of, to use an old phrase, the literature of commitment. Bama lays stress on the zeal for the single objective of Dalit liberation. She is all praise for the Dalit people whose identity and struggle show a path to leave all anxieties and identify her own strength for the upliftment of the Dalits. To conclude, Bama proves that despite the ideological positions endorsed by the dominant sex, class, caste and religion, the subaltern can and should speak.

This is probably what the author aimed for when she wrote her experiences down. Bama's text foregrounds the heterogeneity and complexities of Dalit identity. The life portrayed in *Karukku* throws light on the most agonizing and hapless lives of the Dalits. Through *Karukku*, Bama is not just revolting against caste oppression, but asserting and celebrating her human identity as a Dalit woman who wants equality and justice in the existing social order. So, this chapter concludes that caste discrimination is not only experienced by Dalits in Hindu society but also prevalent in egalitarian Christian faith.

The lower-class people think and pray to God for time to live happily in this society. She wants them to erase the stigma of their birth and show the world that they can live with dignity. She wants the same spirit for the entire Dalit woman. Then only they boldly face the struggles and solve their problems in front of the upper caste society. She wants to indicate her people to rewrite the Indian history and hopes that it will insist the new meaning into the veins of history and civilization.

This quest for excellence should be the goal and mission. Bama is denoting that the dalits are goal-oriented and keep moving forward for an independent society.

Dalit people cannot be kept under oppression for a long time. They fight for themselves, and their challenges are deeper, larger, and bigger. Then only they can get freedom of their Dalit community people.

What is thought-provoking is Bama's sketching of a positive identity for Dalit woman. A change in attitude is the need of the hour, and she is optimistic of the inequalities coming to an end. In the age of accelerating cultural collisions and global consciousness, she commented boldly of compelling social injustices perpetuated on the subaltern community. Bama's art is special and specific; grand and meticulous; emphasizing and evocative; imaginative and interpretive; not the ideal of what to be but the practical of what ought to be. So, Bama's autobiography *Karukku* is the community autobiography which demands further exploration of reading and understanding the deeper socio-economic issues of the society.

Chapter - III

Caste Puzzle in Bama's *Vanmam* and *Sangati*

Dalit literature is mainly concerned with the expression of Dalit voices. It attempts to construct Dalit identities differently from the way elite discourses have instructed them. Women have historically been reduced into silence. It is curious to note that the voices of Dalit women have remained silent even when the silence of upper-caste women finds vent and voice in the so-called feminist literary representations. Dalit women's writing characterises the emergence of Dalit women's voices in literary discourses. Tamil Nadu is a state known for Dravidian movement which played a vital role in subduing the power of upper caste people that stood a barricade for the realization of democratization in its true sense. If not for its active participation in the socio-political scenario, there would not have been any reservation quota for the under privileged and thereby wide opportunities for them to grow academically and economically high. Ironically, all the efforts of the veterans and warriors of Dravidian movements to institutionalize their caste-based policies have aggravated the consciousness of subordination among lower caste people and established an exclusive identity as Dalit and paved the way for the dawn of Dalit movement in Tamil Nadu.

The primary aim of Dalit movement is to fight against the caste conflict that lies in the forms of exclusion from common civic responsibilities, discrimination between upper and lower caste people, inequalities based on economic status, oppression of selfhood and, essentially, to facilitate the development of a confident self among Dalits through literature. Women too hold strong positions and play an

active role in the movement through direct participation and as independent thinkers and writers in the literary world questioning the existing dogmas and theories on life advocated by the upper caste people. The feminist movements from their very inception in the West were concerned only with issues pertaining to the high class and middle-class women. Their experiences were deemed as the woman's experience, and this resulted in subsuming the experiences of the gendered caste subalterns in India under the same.

The pattern and working of the caste system in India, and the way it is seen by the artistic eyes of the author, defines the term Dalit as people who are wounded, ruptured, shattered, crushed, and destroyed. A Dalit is frequently called an untouchable—a person who comes under a category that defies any kind of definition. Varna is a categorization in the Indian traditional context that dealt with the belief that most of the humans are presumably designed from the various parts of the divine form of the Universal Being (Creator) called The Purusha. But today, Varna has been replaced by the various 'castes' in the social hierarchy, which roughly define the social status of a person and often decide whom they can marry and what profession they can pursue. Dalits fall outside the Varna system, anyway. The term 'Dalit' is a constant reminder of their age-old oppression, denoting both their state of deprivation and the people who are oppressed. This term for them is not a mere name or title: for them it has become an expression of hope, the hope of recovering their past self-identity. The term has gained a new connotation with a more positive meaning. It must be remembered that Dalit does not mean caste or low-caste or poor; it refers to the deplorable state or condition to which a large group of people has been reduced by social convention and in which they are now living.

Class, caste, and gender are inextricably linked; they interact with and shape each other. The structure of marriage, sexuality and reproduction is the fundamental basis of the caste system. Casteism is still prevalent in India, despite the many-sided efforts to obliterate it completely. It is a bitter pill to swallow that casteism has gone so deep into the society that even the mighty forces of the government cannot uproot it. This gross social acrimony, caste hatred and violence result in the increasing percentage of underdeveloped mass, consequently affecting social solidarity and harmony. Such a huge population permanently living in the lowest level of the social order, without any basic facility in deserving conditions will be harmful to the development of the country. There is a proportionate increase in the awareness mainly because of the initiatives like introducing Dalit studies across the nation and the world. This internalisation of Dalit issues through literature quickens the process of social transformation.

The innate desire of human psyche to rule over others is a tribute to the prevalence of internal hierarchy among Dalits. According to Sinha, though economic functions and rewards are dispersed according to caste criteria, they are made to look secondary to the ideational trappings of the system in which people are made to feel inferior or superior without any reference to the level of their material possessions or earnings. This makes the problem of eliminating castes extremely difficult and complex.” (215-216). He further adds: “Here, it is the psychology of superiority or inferiority, which makes the real distinction” (216).

Indeed, Ambedkar anticipated the perpetuation of this kind of internal hierarchy among Dalits. Dr. Ambedkar, who dedicated his entire life to annihilating caste, had made an extensive study on the causative factors, which originated,

nurtured, and perpetuated caste system. He was the first to comprehend the internal divisions and disparities among the Dalits. According to him, they are a disunited body infested with the caste system in which they believe as much as does the high caste Hindu. This caste system among the Untouchables has given rise to mutual rivalry and jealousy, and it has made common action impossible.

In the Indian literary milieu, the last decades of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of highly talented Dalit authors who explore the miseries and misfortune of their communities with utmost commitment. What is most appalling in the work is her startling revelation of discrimination in the Church and the institutions, a subject hitherto unexplored. Bama is the most celebrated Dalit women writer who has been at the forefront of Dalit activism, and she is actively involved in social issues, especially Dalit issues. Bama's novels represent Dalit women primarily as workers-honest, hardworking, poorly paid, and exploited workers. Her novels record economic and sexual exploitation of Dalit women and argue that their Dalit identity renders them more vulnerable to injustice than other women workers. At the same time, they also point out that Dalit women are subjected to violence, brutal oppression, not only by upper caste male landlords or state administration, but also by Dalit men. There is thus, a see-saw movement between their characters, Dalit identity and their position as women in a stratified society. Bama analyse patriarchal structure as much as they protest cast division in society.

In Bama's fiction, Dalit women are beaten-up by their husbands or brothers at home and ill-treated at work by upper-caste landlords. She presents a spirited fight put up by Dalit women against male-high handedness. While she locates violence against women as an essentially patriarchal mindset, she also shows how Dalit women can

subvert it through their humour, hard work or, more importantly, through access to education. She celebrates shrews who use their tongues to overcome male brutality or single women who rely upon education to carve out a life free from male authority. She also posits education and collective organized efforts to counter a violent and caste structure.

Divisions among human beings are so innate and inherent that they could not get rid of that divisive fact even at this age of knowledge revolution. Human psyche craves to master, rule, oppress and assert its authority over others, and this is the major reason for oppression in all levels, in the name of caste, creed, race, gender, etc. This innate desire to overpower is discernible through the intra-caste conflicts among the marginalized communities too. This chapter focuses on the caste rivalry among the oppressed communities as revealed in Bama's *Vanmam: Vendetta*. It also attempts to study how the upper caste people exploit this animosity between the two castes - Parayar and Pallar and perpetuate this rivalry by exercising divide and rule policy. In the aftermath of violence and loss of many lives, self-realization happens among the marginalised people paving the way for peace.

The Parayar community, for whom education is accessible through missionary-run schools is considered advanced socially and economically. There is greater political awareness among them, and they are highly resented by upper castes for emulating Ambedkarite ideology. The novel depicts how Parayar youth, most of them college-educated, pursuing a post-graduate degree, organize cultural activities, sports competitions, and awareness campaigns to spread Ambedkar's thought in their community when they return home from their hostels during vacations. Hope for political unity among Dalits rests on this segment. Pallars are mostly school dropouts,

and their youth are shown to be either working for Naickers or unemployed but always envious of their Parayar counterparts. But despite the best efforts of Parayar youth, caste strife between the two communities does not get stalled, resulting in rampant police brutality, forcing young men and adult males to either flee or live in jails.

Parayar youth, although fashioning themselves as radical, are yet orthodox in their attitude towards their women. After the cultural programme, the young men want to hold a meeting at the chavady to discuss future action plan. But they do not invite or want women to be present. Jayaraju announces, "We shall continue with our cultural programme. As a meeting is scheduled to be held at chavady, women are asked to return to their homes quietly." (80). The educated girls protest but to no avail. Selvarani observes, "These boys call themselves great reformists. But if there is a 'village meeting', they ask us, women, to go home. What kind of justice is this?" (80). Older women explain to the girls, "Oh, come on. Men shall be men and women shall remain women." (80) However, when the police swoop on the men, killing them or arresting them indiscriminately, Parayar women both young and old standby them, protect them, nurture them, takeover their chores, run the household single-handedly and also arrange for their bailor to do professional help.

Vanmam is a sad saga of victimization. Bama's main concern in *Vanmam* is to admonish the subaltern, the need for education and unity. It is a portrayal of the life of downtrodden people, their struggle for existence and ambition for empowerment. It encompasses the breach of trust and human rights. It ends with a ray of hope that there will be a day in the future that Dalits living on this soil can lead a happy and respected life. This hope can only be realized through education. This realization that education alone can change the lifestyle of down-trodden people by breaking the

shackles of abuse and in human treatment changed the entire perception of the people. So, to meet the dawn, i.e., a life full of hope, self-esteem, Dalits need to coalesce, revitalize them with education and only then, this battle for existence and empowerment can be won in the true sense of the term.

Vanmam is a unique novel. The central focus is on caste issues and not simply on the outrage against the Dalits. The background of *Vanmam* is a village in Tamil Nadu, and it deals with the hostility between two castes within the Dalit community – Pallar and Parayar and the dominant Naicker caste – the men who fire in between the Pallar and Parayar castes to maintain their status. The novel strikes a calm note. The young men from the Parayar caste, Saminathan and Jayaraju, who are empowered through college education, are sensible to the rights and opportunities they have been nullified for generations and they are irritated about their backward status, in this multi-caste village in which the chavady (the meeting place), fields, orchards, the streets of the Pallars, Parayars and Naickers show the cultural diversity of various castes and their functions. The essence of the story deals with revenge and counter-revenge, which ends in a caste clash. From this gory clash, many young men escape, children cannot attend school, women are widowed, and children are orphaned – a picture of utter chaos and complete loss of dignity to all who were involved. These incidents drive home the point that they are the people from the dominant caste who are behind instigating violence among the Pallars and the Parayars. The more enlightened you are, the more you think to help, make way for a sinking of their differences, and unite the two sets of people.

In *Vanmam*, Bama tells the inter-caste rivalry between Dalit communities. It highlights the vengeance between Pallars and Parayars and shows how dominant

Naickers use that to their advantage and stroke the fire between the other two castes in favour of themselves. Their ignorance is paid with a price of misery, pain, sufferings, and death. It traces the segregation faced by Dalit people based on race and caste. It portrays the violence, hardships and the loss of numerous lives undergone by the Pallars and Parayars due to their meaningless grudges and jealousy. This paper brings out the way people are segregated among themselves based on caste, thus leading to a huge rivalry and loss of identity. Thus, racial segregation becomes the main theme that revolves in the novel along with other themes such as the quest for identity and freedom, brutality, and patriarchal dominance.

The characters in the novel *Vanmam* face a huge racial segregation that has mainly contributed to the plot. It could be viewed as a discourse of the caste and inter-caste struggles faced by the people of Dalit community. The upper-class lords like Naickers manipulate the emotions of Dalit people in a way of seeking revenge for the prejudices. B. Azgarasan in his Introduction, *Vanmam: Vendetta* states the same saying: *Vanmam* occupies a unique place as it brings to the fore the centrality of the issue of caste and not simply the atrocities against Dalits (28). As a whole, *Vanmam* explores the pain and animosity of various castes and sub-castes with a century-old Dalit politics in Tamil Nadu.

Bama's *Vanmam* begins with the description of the cultural geography in the Kandampatti village. The readers can understand that the streets, chavady and fields are divided based on the caste divisions, which are shown in the novel as three factors of dispute. The Naickers are characterized to be the dominant upper class under which the Pallars and Parayars work, earning their daily wages. The Pallars who identify themselves as Hindus and the Parayars who are mostly Christian converts work in the fields and orchards of the upper caste landlords.

Dalits usually lack economic, political, social, and cultural rights. For many years, Dalits have been struggling with the problem of the caste system, which existed in the society. *Vanmam* outlines the story of Dalits and their struggle for existence. The novel also deals with the internal enmity between two castes within Dalits. Pallars and Parayars are the two Dalit castes discussed in the novel. The Parayars are Roman Catholics and the Pallars are Hindus, identifying themselves as DKVs or Devendra Kula Vanniyars. The Parayars are more assertive than the Pallars to talk about humanity, forgiveness, and compromise. The Pallars are portrayed as the victims of Hindu discrimination and caste feeling, which make them susceptible to being used by Naickers, the dominant caste. The other Dalit community, the Chakkiliyars, appear only by name; they are not portrayed in all the events that are depicted.

The Naickers appear occasionally, but they almost never directly confront the often-assertive Parayars. The Naickers stoke the fires of conflict and try to provoke the Pallars into action. In a way, they are the promoters of quarrels. Bama makes it clear that it is the structure of caste, which involves hierarchy and enmity, that lays the ground for the vendetta depicted in the novel. In the novel, Parayars and Pallars aggressively attack each other.

There are important differences between these two groups. The Pallars are less educated and, consequently, more bitter, and susceptible to being manipulated. They are depicted as the main aggressors. In a sense, this is a common phenomenon in almost all regions of India. The Parayars like Malas in Andhra Pradesh, Mahars in Maharashtra and the Chamars across North India who have got better education and employment and have also taken an active role in liberation movements and Dalit politics. They have been perhaps more likely to reject Hinduism. Today, we see the

other large castes - Pallars, Madigas, Matangas, and Valmikis — asserting them as an opposed group, very often accepting a strong Hindu identity. It is a clear indication for the Naickers community that the Dalits are reunited. Having gone through the novel, it shows that both the Dalit groups realized that they should end their suffering and reap the fruits of unity. Moreover, both the Parayars and Pallars decided to elect a candidate from their community unanimously, and they won.

Bama's *Vanmam* begins with the description of the cultural geography in the Kandampatti village in Tamil Nadu, which could be viewed as the microcosm of the Indian subcontinent. This is a town encircled by wonderful mountains where individuals from various networks have passed down from one age to another. The Naickers' farmland is toward the west of the town, so both Parayars and Pallars need to go across interstates to arrive at the fields. In the town of Kandampatti, both the Parayars and the Pallars work in the Naickers fields from morning till night. Notwithstanding their persistent effort, they need to spill out the porridge. Remarking on the difficult work of the Parayar, Bama notes "The Parayars toiled hard day and night to turn even barren land into fertile fields" (6).

Unfortunately, their hard labour does not assure them of ample food. The poor students of the village, during vacation, would play in the ponds and come back in the afternoon: "Sometimes they would come home hungry after their bath and look eagerly into the kanji pot. But it would be empty because their younger brothers and sisters would have finished off the food" (45). Worst is that they would go for menial jobs with an empty stomach. Besides starvation, they must live in constant fear of the atrocities of the landlords and the communal clashes which may erupt any time. While delineating the precarious existence of Dalits, Bama writes, "What a life . . . even a dog's life would be better . . . can't live and can't die either . . ." (113).

The vendetta between the Parayars and Pallars does not have a legitimate reason and its source is not clearly known. The earliest instance of violence in the village is the killing of a Pallar by a Parayar named Mannangati. Mannangati enjoyed certain privileges in the village, which irked the Pallars, who out of envy, dragged him to a brawl and tried to stab him, but Mannagatti took a knife and ripped out the guts of a Pallar. Yet, the Parayars and the Pallars got along well.

On another occasion, Marrasu, a Parayar and Karuppuswamy, a Pallar, got into a quarrel when both were involved in watering the farms of Naicker. Following the instigation of the landlord, who encouraged him “to be aggressive and promised to take care of everything” (8). Karuppuswamy killed Marrasu. These are isolated incidents, which do not affect the cordial relationship between the Parayars and the Pallars for some period, and they celebrated festivals together and took part in common festivities, functions, and programmes.

Vanmam shows how Dalits have internalised the given social system of segregation based on caste. If Parayars and Pallars are outcastes in the eyes of Naickers, Udaiyar, Chettiars, Naidus and Nadars; Pallars and Parayars treat each other as outcastes within their own social habitat. While Parayars have embraced Christianity, Pallars remain within the Hindu fold. This fact is played up by Naickers and other upper castes to keep the two Dalit communities divided. This results in Parayars and Pallars getting into arguments and strife over whose lands should be watered first. While Parayars and Pallars remain landless, they go to the extent of killing each other over an argument over whose landlord’s lands are irrigated better. The novel, in fact, opens with an account of the murder of a Parayar farmhand, Mariyasu, at the hands of Karuppusami, a Pallar farmhand, over the distribution of

water to their respective master's lands. As Karuppusami master protects him, he gets away with Marraasu's murder and surreptitious disposal of his body.

In this way, the enmity between the two communities is nurtured and kept alive by Naickers. "God knows when we, Parayars and Pallars, would stand united" exclaims a Parayar woman, Mekelamma." (27). Mekelamma's lament becomes the central refrain of the novel. One incident led to the other. If a member from the Pallar community becomes the aggressor in one incident, a Parayar becomes the aggressor in another. The upper caste landlords stoke the fire of hatred and prejudice, call in the police and settle scores with the Parayars. The novel is written from the Parayar's point of view although an objective analysis is undertaken to demonstrate that Pallars are used by Naickers for their own political gain.

In the meantime, some of the educated youths of Parayar streets formed the "Khazani Arts Troup" and conducted various cultural events. These developments on the Parayar street make the Naickers grow jealous. They accused the church of encouraging the Parayars. "They belong to the Church; they get lots of support. Also, many of them are now educated." (2) Strengthened by the successful conduct of cultural programmes, the Dalit youngsters wanted to install a statue of Ambedkar, the Messiah of the Dalits. Furthermore, they desired the involvement of all Dalit groups in the venture. The Pallars donated Rupees one thousand for the statue, which was unveiled in a colourful function.

The solidarity in organizing the programme and the speeches made on the occasion infuriated the landlords who conspired to annihilate the unity of the downtrodden. Incited and instigated by the Naickers, some of the Pallars who have not realized the evil intentions of the Naickers demanded to return the money donated

for the statue of Ambedkar. The comfortable life of the Parayars and the Pallars faced serious setbacks over the issue of putting up a flagpole near the statue of Ambedkar. Violence erupted when a wire tied to the pole was cut by a Parayar young man. Instead of pacifying, the landlords instigated the Pallars by saying, “How arrogant they are to lay a hand on the wire you people have put there. Don’t let them get away with this. It’s either you or them now” (80).

In the violence that followed, innocent people from both sides were mercilessly butchered. Their houses and belongings were destroyed. The worst affected by the violence were the Parayars who could not get support either from the Government or from the Church, whereas the Pallars enjoyed the favours of the landlords and the police. The Parayar men dispersed to different places out of fear. Under the guise of searching for men, police “enter the house of Parayars and talk vulgarly to the women and even misbehaved with them.” (88). The women were dragged to the street and were beaten up brutally, “with no regard even for the infant and the aged, they kept on swirling their lathes down hard again and again” (89). They got blown everywhere in their bodies. “All the women had swellings and black bruises all over their bodies as the blood clotted and congealed under the blows” (89). The Parayar women were more scared of the police than of the riots. The women who were taken to the police station were subjected to severe torture and abuses. Chellakili, a pregnant Parayar woman was kicked in the lower belly by a policeman with his boot. “Chellakili curled up and collapsed on the floor of the cell. As she lay there on the floor of that police lock-up, she felt a sharp pain in her belly . . . and had an abortion right there” (86).

Kandampatti was caught in the grip of fear. The following year, the Parayars had to skip the Christmas celebration. However, during the Easter festivities, violence broke out in the village. The loss of lives, oblique poverty and tormenting experiences of violence make the villagers brood over the destructive nature of vendetta, which makes them realize that nothing can be achieved through violence. They could not harvest anything but the loss of a few innocent lives, untold miseries, and misfortunes. For the upper class Naickers, “The news that the Parayar Street had become a wasteland was as sweet as of nectar” (122).

When the murder of a Parayar came to trial in the Court of Law, there evolved a common notion of peace between the two communities. Jayaraju, an educated Parayar young man, declared in public, “We were just beginning to progress slowly and now these murders and court cases and police raids . . . all over people scattered about, studies ruined, not even able to attend Church . . . how long can we go on like this”? (126).

The two groups resumed discussion which led them to compromise. They unanimously declared, “After all, life is short. We work, we eat . . . we die. Why take on unnecessary problems?” (129). When the upper-class people heard of the peace agreement, they mocked and ridiculed both Pallars and Parayars. In fact, the upper-class people are upset over the unity of the subaltern as they are quite sure that their domination will be questioned. Bama has quite an optimistic vision of a very bright future for the Dalits. She finds a zest for life, courage of the Dalits, and she is astonished at the resilience of the Dalit women. There is a burning desire to develop and a thirst for knowledge prevails among Dalit youths. When the men were hiding to avoid arrest, the Parayar women stayed indoors. They carried on the routine work and

withstood police brutality and threats. There is yet another incident in the novel where Dalit women themselves received the corpse of three people killed in the violence and buried them.

Vanmam highlights the fact that Dalit youngsters are determined to have education as they believe that only through education, they can liberate themselves from the bondage of ignorance and poverty and improve their social status. There had been an age-old practice in Kandampatti that the Dalits had to offer homage to the Naickers: “On every Pongal festival, with great festivity, they would set out for the landlord’s house with their families taking with them offerings of a rooster one or two large pumpkins, four or five stalks of sugar cane, and a measure of rice”. (7)

About ten years ago, the educated youths of the Parayar community forced the elders to stop the practice, which was eventually followed by Pallars too. In that way, the education of the younger generation brought changes in the mindsets and attitudes which forced them to break the prevailing practices that damage the dignity and decorum of the lives of Dalits.

Bama’s ultimate concern and conception in *Vanmam* is to enlighten and edify the subaltern, the need of solidarity and unity and make them enjoy the fruits of the solidarity and unity soon. In *Vanmam*, the author speaks through the character Anthony while unveiling the statue of Ambedkar, which is fit to quote: ‘Educate! Organize! Agitate’ . . . we must all get education. We should be aware of social realities. We must realize how society has marginalized us and discriminated against us. And having realized that, we must unite and fight the injustice. We must not be afraid to fight . . . we will make a new world. We will create an equitable society free of caste. (61)

Similarly, in the author's note of the novel, Bama confesses her aim in the novel. To strengthen her voice for the unity of the Dalits, Bama portrays the election held in Kandampatti after the union of Parayars and Pallars. In the history of Kandampatti, only Naickers contested for the post of President and won. The enlightened Parayars and Pallars fielded Kaallaiyan of the Pallar caste as the joint candidate. The Parayars and Pallars campaigned together for Kaallaiyan, which enabled him to win the election. Bama asserts that the victory in Kandampatti is symbolic of the victories of the Dalits at the national level if they stand united.

In the novel *Vanmam*, on the day of unveiling Ambedkar's statue, Anthony with an authoritative voice declares the need for the solidarity of the marginalized in the immediate future. Only through unity and collective efforts of the downtrodden, the much-cherished dream of liberty, equality and fraternity can be a reality. Like the great Dalit leader Dr. Ambedkar, Bama believes that education alone can uplift her people.

In analysing the portrayal of Dalit women in the novel *Vanmam*, Bama's novels mainly focus on the caste and gender discrimination, and she portrays the caste-discrimination in Hinduism and Christianity. Bama's works are based on Dalit feminism and show the innate strength of the marginalized Dalit women. Here is a writer who considers herself a warrior and attempts to utilize her pen as a weapon to fight against the social hierarchy and the dehumanizing caste consciousness. According to Bama, Dalit women are the victims of a double marginalization: caste and gender. Their urgent need is strong support to overcome their sufferings, so that they can be strong pillars of their families and strive to uplift their society. The novel brings out how these Dalit women themselves work hard to educate their male child—

but not the female child. The female children manage to complete the education available to the nearby schools but pursuing higher studies is far beyond their scope. Dalit women are portrayed as being well-aware of the importance of education.

One of the female characters in the novel is Mekelamma. She is very eager to read her son's letter though she is illiterate. She seeks the help of a literate neighbour to read her son's letter. Though illiterate, she eagerly works to educate her children. There are several others in the community like her. All the women in the novel *Vanmam* are enthusiastic and never indolent. Like Mekelamma's son, Saminathan is sent to college. Nanamma's son Jayaraju does his graduation. While Therasamma argues with her son to complete the graduation, she does not bother to do the same for her daughter Fathima. This highlight to show the already marginalized Dalit women also suffer discrimination by gender.

Bama underlines how far Dalit women go. There is further suffering in addition to these discriminations. They are also made to remain non-descriptive of matters of self-identity. They cannot enter the chavady (the meeting place of men). Though the men allow them to watch the cultural programmes, they are not supposed to participate in them. Many are interested and even talented in dance and other art but are discouraged by their promenading men.

Despite all these setbacks, we see that Dalit women are both strong and bold. Whenever this caste-based violence erupts, the men suddenly and invariably disappear seeking safety zones. It is women who face the fury of the police. It is the old women, girls and children who get tortured by the police. These women are also deprived of the essentials like enough food and proper sleep. They cannot get medical treatment either. Not do their men help to guard at times of need. Despite all these

adverse circumstances, they are seen as mentally strong enough—they are the ones who go out to collect the injured and the dead after an incident of violence. “Though misfortunes and problems continued to pile up, the women faced them all resourcefully” (123). The exploitation of this internecine rivalry reaches its heights when a trivial mango theft by a Parayar boy is blown out of proportion by the rival group resulting in the loss of many lives on both sides and gruesome atrocities on women and children. Bama brings before us the horrendous scenes of a riot-hit village and the mortification endured by the oppressed in the hands of the rich and powerful. After a tormenting period of bloodshed, angst, and trauma, the “spirit of vendetta” (131) among the Parayars and the Pallars gets subdued. They could no longer bear a harrowing life caused by fear, anxiety, and irreparable loss. They yearn for a peaceful life which would be possible, they realize, only if they live together in harmony. They understand that what’s past is past, so it is important to trust each other and try to get along together.

In fact, the section like ‘Cemetery Feud’ in *Vanmam* on Parayar women’s management of the crisis following Parayar-Pallar riot is almost a narration of Bama’s representation of women’s response to cemetery feud between the two communities in her earlier works. Young women accost the police, drive carts to carry their dead and dig up a mass grave and bury the men. The atrocities of police on women during the raid in the village are largely sexual intimidation, molestation, and physical violence. When women are not allowed to leave the village for work, they survive and nurture their children by selling milk of their cattle. They also stay together at one house by turns and subvert police repression through their gendered bonding. But when the situation normalises, Dalit boys return to their college by borrowing money,

whereas girls are forced to give up their studies and stay at home. Thus, the impact of caste-strife on women is more acute.

Even pregnant women, lactating mothers, old women, and school-going girls are rounded up, jailed and severely beaten up by the police. When Parayar boys plan a counter strategy to avenge the Pallars' murder of innocent Parayars, Rosamma points out, "You men will kill and run away and dodge the police. Here, we women are beaten up by the police and intimidated by the Pallars as well. We can neither go to work nor cook and eat in peace... lord... what a life... worse than a dog's... we can neither live... nor die..." (134-35)

Vanmam depicts how women get punished and suffer on account of caste-strife engendered by men. They do not want it. They do not precipitate it. Yet they become its worst victims. *Vanmam* posits an important caveat to the issue of the identity of Dalits. Non-Dalits tend to homogenise Dalits, erasing out differences, contradictions and anomalies that prevail among various Dalit communities. To the outside world, they are dumped as a common heap - a homogenised, monolithic category of untouchables.

Vanmam alerts us to this disturbing facet of Dalit life where they accept a unified, singular political identity as Dalit; however, culturally they are unable to overlook or overcome differences that exist amongst them. While the upper castes mock them and use this dimension of their social identity to exploit them politically, it is worth remembering that the heterogeneous character of the Dalit community is a reflection and extension of our pluralistic society where homogenisation is unwelcomed as well as unfair. However, for purposes of political empowerment, Dalits would have to sink cultural, regional differences and work together under a

common banner. Unity among Dalits is a pre-condition to a successful overthrow of upper caste hegemony in society.

Vanmam reiterates this in each of its twelve chapters. Parayars initiate negotiations to arrive at peace between the two communities. Parayars have lost more in terms of human loss, economic set-back and pending court cases. While Naickers fume, Pallars and Parayars agree to withdraw cases against each other and put up a common candidate for the panchayat board election. The newly elected Dalit president Kaallaiyan (belonging to the Pallar community but voted to the post by both Parayars and Pallars) foregrounds the need for unity among Dalits if they wish to defeat upper castes' domination over them. He also promises to work for victory for Dalits at the State assembly and Parliamentary elections.

A democratic resolving of intra-caste differences becomes the accepted mantra at the end of the novel. A democratic resolving of intra-caste differences becomes the accepted mantra at the end of the novel, much to the discomfort of Naickers.

Kaallaiyan comments, "As Ambedkar pointed out, we need to capture political power first. Let the Panchayat election be the first step towards that goal" (158). The novel concludes with typically Bama's optimism, hoping for a result-oriented future for "though there are fears lurking in our minds, there exists clarity of thought and a strong will as well" (157).

We must be on our guard in case anyone tries to provoke us and create enmity between our castes. With this determination and united strength, they are able to win the Panchayat election much to the disappointment of the upper caste people. This newly gained success strengthens their conviction to live together forever and not to yield to the instigation of the upper caste people. Malini Seshadri rightly says "though

Vanmam talks about the event sharpening among the people of a small village in a state in India; it is a microcosm of a bigger world, a sort of set-up to the big picture. Intra-Dalit rivalry leads to animosity, the deft manipulation of emotions and prejudices by upper caste landlord. This is a cautionary tale. The events narrated in *Vanmam* remain as a standing testimony to the finely grained caste consciousness among people and the innate craving of the human psyche to master and oppress the weak, thus trying to perpetuate the divisions (11).

The main theme of racial segregation is at last resolved in the novel *Vanmam* as the people of both the castes, the Pallars and the Parayars, understand their mistake and decide to strive together and make sure that justice prevails to make a new world for their future generations. The climax of the novel ends in a smooth way. It strikes an optimistic note in the lives of people. The novel concludes with an ending that the people could never forget the vicious and aggressive events and create a peaceful environment for the next generation. Overall, the novel *Vanmam* is a heart-touching novel with startling language that shows the extreme consequences of caste and racial segregation and the later realization of peace and harmony.

Dalit fiction and its literary movements are based on the common ground of social oppression. It is a study of marginalised and colonised. Dalit literature is a form of post-colonial literature and covers a wide range of literary genres. It is a literature of a community and not an individual. The novel *Sangati*, the second novel of renowned Dalit writer Bama, is an analysis about Dalit marginalisation, discrimination, isolation and humiliation from the common tradition of life, especially the tragic condition of Dalit women in Indian society. It is about the sufferings of the oppressed class. If one happens to belong to a disadvantaged community of a society,

then one is privileged a lot more than just a writer. Bama as a feminist holds her grounds deeply rooted into the indigenous soil and Indian traditions, which seem to have become more than just contaminated with the ever-prevailing, vitiated, and cursed casteism.

As the word ‘Sangati’ means events, the novel contains individual stories, anecdotes and memories that take place in the lives of women in the Parayar Christian community. Though *Sangati* carries an autobiographical element in its narrative, it is a story of a whole community, not an individual. It deals with the polyphonic cries of several generations of women: the older women belong to the narrator’s grandmother Velliamma Kizhavi’s generation and downward generation belongs to the narrator, and the generation coming after as she grows up. Injuries on the single body are symbolic of a larger wound of the community. *Sangati* moves from the story of the individual struggle to the perception of a community of Parayar women, neighbourhood groups of friends and relations and their joint struggle.

Sangati is a record of Dalit women experiences of the joint oppression of caste and gender faced by them. It analyses Dalits women’s oppression as a triple jeopardy of oppression by double patriarchies – discreet patriarchy of their own caste and an overlapping patriarchy of the upper caste as well as poverty. Discreet patriarchy dictates that power rests with men in the community and in the institutions led by them – the caste courts, the Church, and the panchayat. The novel traces an account of the aggressive exploitation of Dalit women in terms of double-day labour, domestic violence, priests in the Church, upper caste landlords and their own ignorance and suggests remedies. Bama locates male violence unleashed by their caste men in their own sense of powerlessness of upper castes. Exploitation, threat of rape by the upper

castes are analysed in terms of values of overlapping patriarchy, which maintains a strong sense of gendered spaces and sees the habitual visibility of Dalit women, which they inhabit as sites of work, as a sign of their availability and inscribes them as lustful women whose sexuality cannot be controlled by the Dalit men. Bama foregrounds the difference of Dalit women from privileged upper caste women and celebrates their identity in their strength, labour and resilience.

In the initial chapters, it is narrated in the first person, and then counterpointed by the generalizing comments of the grandmother and the other mother figures and later by the author-narrator's reflections. The earlier chapters show the narrator as a young girl of about twelve years of age but in the last quarter, as a young woman. The reflective voice is that of an adult looking back and mediating deeply upon her experience in the past, which calls for practical actions. It has no plot in the normal sense but just some powerful stories of memorable protagonists.

Bama chooses only a woman protagonist for every story in her novel and yet comes up so clearly justified about her choices while doing so. In *Sangati*, as a child, she is shown questioning the unequal treatment meted out to her at the hands of her own maternal grandmother – Vellaiamma Kizhavi (old lady) in comparison to her brother. She is asked to eat after every male member in the family finishes eating. The left-over of others are her only feast. In fact, even the quality of food served to the girls is much poorer than the kind of which is served to boys. All the household works such as cleaning, cooking, laundry, and baby-sitting etc are done by the girls, whereas the boys enjoy playing games or hanging out with their friends in the village. Despite this, the girls in the village are deprived of good education unlike the boys. The boys are kept free from all sorts of responsibilities that they should carry out, whereas the

girls are over-burdened with numerous endless toilsome everyday activities. She laments: “It’s one justice for men and quite another for women.” (24). All morality is brought down to the sexual morality of women. The freedom to stray is the pre-requisite of men alone, as though to be born a man, endows him with certain special privileges.

Bama contests this construction of the male as superior and advises women to break the rules of patriarchy as a framework to oppress women and maintain their hegemony. The dominant paradigm of considering women as subordinate to male desires and as mere objects of desire, something to be possessed and cherished for male enjoyment has contributed to the wreck of the women of her society. She sees caste not as a benign form of division of labour but as a hegemonic system of oppression and ideology of dominant perception. She also raises the issue related to patriarchy in a very heroic manner. The novel eases out the way patriarchy works with Dalit women. As Bama nego-feministically voices out the grievances of the Parayar women, there is, in the first place, the question of economic inequality. Women are presented as wage earners as much as men are, working equally as men, as agricultural and building site labourers, but still earning less than men do, thereby highlighting social feminism.

The money that men earn is their own to spend as they please, whereas women bear the financial burden of running the whole family, often even singly. They are constantly vulnerable to a lot of sexual harassments in the world of work. Within their community, the power rests with men as the caste-courts and churches are male-led. The rules for sexual behaviour are different for men and women. Hard labour and economic precariousness lead to a culture of violence, and Bama explores this theme too.

Dalit people are afraid to keep their teenage girls at home, and hence, they stop education. As soon as girls attain puberty, they are married off. Similarly, Bama's aunt Samundrakani was beaten and killed by her husband. Her three daughters, Mariamma, Annamma and Seyakkodi, were left uneducated. Here, Mariamma's life takes half of the novel. Gathering firewood is one of the ways to earn livelihood of Dalit women. Dalit women are at risk when they go to gather firewood. They were subjected to sexual assault by the upper caste men. Vellaiamma took Mariamma to the nearest hospital to get diagnosed with the delay in puberty. Since Bama is at puberty stage, she never leaves home. Similarly, her father never took them to any places.

Even nearing the due time of pregnancy, Dalit women work in farmlands. Sebasthiamma also did the same. Breast feeding to baby is very short. At least after five days, the mother must work in the harm of the childbirth. Bama says, "We must labour in the fields as hard as men do, and then on top of that, struggle to bear and raise our children. As for the men, their work ends when they have finished in the fields. If you are born into this world, it is best you were a man. Born as women, what good do we get? We only toil in the fields and in the home..." (6-7).

Mariamma, as usual, returned after collecting firewood. After a tiresome walk, she loaded the firewood and went to Kumarasami Ayya's (an upper caste man) pump-set to drink water. Mercilessly, Kumarasami dragged her inside and molested her. Mariamma fortunately escaped from him. Her village mates who came on the way found the assault and took Mariamma home. Cunningly, Kumarasami Ayya spread the shame that Mariamma was in an illegitimate relation with Manikam (her cousin) in the upper caste men pump-set. In the panchayat, the Dalit headman ordered

Mariamamma to prostrate before the village gathering. As a symbol of resistance, she never agreed. Suasaiamma questioned the headman for sentencing only a woman and not bringing the eyewitness to the enquiry. The headman said, “If we bring the upper caste people to the Panchayat, who will give us job in the farm” (23). Finally, Mariamma prostrated. She was fined with rupees two hundred and Manikam was fined with rupees one hundred.

Arokkyam narrated that: “Look how unfair these are. Last week, when my granddaughter Paralokam went to pull up grass for the cow, the owner of the fields said he would help her lift the bundle on her head. That was the excuse for squeezing her breasts” (26). Bama observed these events as a child and burst into anger, “the position of women is both pitiful and humiliation, really. In the fields, they have to escape from upper-caste men’s molestations. At church, they must lick the priest’s shoes and be his slaves, while he threatens them with tales of God, Heaven, and Hell” (35).

Thaayi is a fair-skinned Dalit woman. She was unwillingly married off to a man. But she was beaten by her husband every day. He believes that Thaayi is a prostitute. Because she is more beautiful in the Dalit locality. Bama’s mother says that “It’s as if you become a slave from the very day you are married. That’s why all the men scold their wives and keep them under control” (43). Rakkamma is a vibrant woman. When her husband Paakkiraraj beats her, Rakkamma lifts her sari up in front of the crowd. She gave word for word. He called her a whore. She did all sort of activities to escape from her husband.

Bama’s neighbour Kaaliamma fought and won her husband Chinnapan. She is also a voice of the voiceless. Her husband took the saving amount of Kaaliamma for

drinking alcohol. Yet, she never leaves him freely. When these men go to the upper caste streets, they become like dogs, totally voiceless, Kaaliamma says. The behaviour of upper caste men in raping Dalit women is accepted by upper caste women also. The Dalit women are being raped. Social freedom is restricted, yet sexual freedom is enjoyed by upper caste men. Apart from caste discriminations, Dalit women struggle to survive. They shout, but they hide their domestic struggles.

In Dalit community, women face discrimination on the grounds of their caste and gender identity. This dual pressure put them in an extreme traumatic situation when compared to their male counterparts. While exploited by upper castes, women in the Dalit community are equally vulnerable to face violence and demeaning from their own men. Maikkanni in *Sangati* is such a representational character. She is a malnutrition-prone girl of eleven years old and a fair girl: “a bright-eyed child... she is eleven years old but is so undernourished that she looks like a seven-year-old” (69). Her father deserted the family and joined another woman. Maikkanni, as a driving force, worked in factories and farmlands to manage the family. In the factory, she was beaten up for throwing away two labels. As a child labourer, she also suffered and was assaulted – as a Parayar – by co-child-workers. As an elder one to the seven siblings, Maikkanni is forced to do all the domestic chores. It is described so: “The day Maikkanni learnt to walk; she started to work as well. Her mother had to go out to work in the fields. It was Maikkanni who looked after all the tasks at home. From the time she woke up, she sprinkled the front yard with water and swept it, and then carried on with all the housework; swept the rest of the house, scrubbed the cooking pots, collected water, washed clothes, gathered firewood, went to the shops, cooked the kanji. She did it all, one after the other”. (70).

The tale of her seven siblings is rooted in her father's callous violence towards his wife and children. When her mother resumed her work at the fields, Maikkanni would stay at home; nurse the baby and manage the home. Her father deserted them for a concubine. It affected Maikkanni the most. She is deprived of schooling, games, and care-free childhood. As she must leave for the match-factory before sunrise, she suffers from constipation and stomach disorders. Every Saturday, her father visits to collect her wages, around rupees forty to fifty per week. On one Saturday, she is tempted to buy an ice candy for one rupee and gets severely beaten up by her father. She thus has no rights over her earnings. She also gets bullied at the factory. The boys do not allow her to sit near the window on the bus. The supervisor at the factory also beats her for any minor flaws. She explains it to the narrator, "He beat me twice Perimma. The first time was when I was sticking the matchbox labels, and he saw me throwing away two labels I had used too much paste... She was severely beaten up by him for the second time when she relieves herself in the open space instead of using the factory toilet". (72-73).

Maikkanni becomes a symbolic victim of atrocities against the lower caste women - denial of education, sexual exploitation and race or class bias. Wife battering is considered as a birthright by men in Dalit community. Mariamma's mother falls victim to this and her grandmother testifies, "She was killed by the ceaseless beatings she received from her husband. He would demand his quota of sex from her every night. She worked day and night, at home and in the fields. How could she put up with his demand's night after night? He was a beast. If she dared to refuse, he would break her bones. Any object would serve him as a weapon, even an iron pestle. When she died her last-born was barely four months old". (9-10).

Most women like her endure all the violence against them without any resistance. In his study on the effects of gender-based violence on the lives of the victim, Norwood comments, “Battered women are not ... rendered phenomenological helpless by the relentless behaviours of their abuser. Rather they are relationship addicts perpetually ill and forever in need of treatment, who see out such relationships because of their illness” (106).

Gender discrimination operates insidiously in the lives of Dalit girls both within and outside the family. In *Sangati*, the narrator observes, “The fact that I was dark-skinned unlike my elder siblings was a source of disappointment to everyone at home” (1). She further recalls that it is a norm in the neighbourhood that a male infant is never allowed to even whimper while a female baby is left unattended for long hours. Even in the matters of weaning, the male child enjoys breast feeding for a longer period compared to the female counterpart. The difference between male and female psyche depends mainly on social expectation and upbringing. The way the feminine role is emphasized in the society has an everlasting impact on their personality and identity formation. Quite early in their lives women are taught the need for flexibility, adjustment, and submissiveness. They are mentally conditioned to obey their husbands. Perhaps this is the reason why women hesitate in forming strong opinions or taking initiatives.

Within the community, power rests for sexual behaviour are very different for men and women. They would never let a woman talk loudly or laugh audibly; they are allowed to eat only after the men in the family have finished and gone. They would never let the girl marry a man after her own heart and would deem that the honour and pride of the whole community is lost in her marriage with a man outside his own

caste; while the same issue has no repercussions as far as the men folk are concerned. Hard labour and the terrible violence and abuse by their fathers, husbands and brothers and the violent domestic quarrels, which are carried on publicly where sometimes women fight back are pointers to the fact. Patti voices the fate of her folk, “If you are born into this world, it is best you were born a man” (6).

Bama also explores the psychological stresses and strains, which account for Dalit women’s belief in their being possessed by “spirits or peys” (54-57). They are constantly aware of being raped at any time. The society’s attitude towards women in this regard is evident in Naatamai’s words, “It is you female chicks who ought to be humble and modest. A man may do hundred things and still get away with it. You girls should consider what you are left with, in your bellies” (26).

In every chore, the male dominates the female. But women and even young girls face the threat of all physical and mental violence from the upper caste landlords and their acquaintances. Their lives are constantly under threat both at homes and outside. To support the family, girls, even at the tender age, have even been denied elementary education and have to work. They often die at the workplace. They are often exposed to dangerous spots as part of their jobs. Still, they are paid less when compared to their counterparts. The narrator’s cousin Mariamma gets multiple fractures when she slips up while carrying head loads of stones inside a well and is laid in bed for eight months (20). Being a member of Dalit community, certain kinds of violence are thus traditionally reserved for women only.

Bama exposes caste and gender hierarchies outside and inside the domestic space that render the woman outcast in her community. Dalit women suffer from both racial and gendered forms of oppression simultaneously. Her fate is still hopeless

outside her small community, which constantly asks questions about caste identity. Yet, it ends on a personal note by pointing out how women are always the most vulnerable, even when educated, economically independent and choosing to live alone like Bama herself. Race and gender categories are not analogous but remain mutually intensifying. For example, after the death of her grandmother Vellaiyama, other women took the response of a midwife in her community. Mother's care was very poor. Many Dalit women died of childbirth without proper care. There were no nurses and doctors in Dalit community. At the same time, upper caste doctors never come to the Dalit settlement in case of an emergency. Race, gender, and sexuality are not just additives to one another; they do not provide metaphors and images for one another but work together and develop in the others crucible.

In India, widows are traditionally supposed to wear white sari as a symbol of ill-omen. Apart from poverty, Dalit widows are not allowed to fair dressing and entertainment. They were treated differently. However, the second marriage is accepted by Dalits. Pecchiamma is from Chakkili (sub-caste). She is a classmate of Bama. But she drops out of her study in fifth standard. She got married to a fellow-citizen man. Due to domestic violence with her husband, she left her husband and married another man. She got two children from both husbands. Most of the women in Dalit community marry a second time after a certain dispute with the first husband. Bama says men are "devil" (96) in this regard.

Dalit men in Bama's novels are subjected to humiliation in a society that shuns lower-caste people. They are treated like "dogs with their tail rolled up when they are in fields with their landlords. There is no way they can show their strength in those circumstances. And so, they show at home and towards children" (65). Their ill

treatment in the hands of their masters happens to be a prick to their self-esteem. Shamed of their own self, they reach home drunk. Their spouses are a handy target for them to vent out their feelings. They thrash them black and blue. Wretched creature is the wife in Dalit community. No support from husband to run the family; what he earns he spends on liquor; being intoxicated, he whacks her almost to death and sometimes even to death; handles her as an object of sexual pleasure; ill-treats her as he is treated by the upper caste people.

In India, the world's largest democracy, women were asked to vote as men do. Men are asked to vote as upper caste people do. Every caste started its own political party to show its pride and power. Indians are not towards national development, but caste. If Dalit people talk about Dr. Ambedkar, upper caste people never give daily work at their farmlands. As Bama reflects the words of Bhakkiyam, "Now, in recent years, there is the whiff of Ambedkar – talk blowing right through our street... Our boys are going around everywhere talking about Ambedkar. But it only causes troubles for us..." (103). It is the fact that even Bama herself did not mention any word about Dr. Ambedkar in her groundbreaking autobiography *Karukku*.

A woman in Dalit community, as depicted in Bama's novels, is not to be encouraged by these happenings however cruel they are. She has learnt the art of surviving at any cost. She becomes resilient to such incidents and makes it clearly visible of her firm characteristics, either sublime or subversive, and uses them as strategies to rebel and fight against cruelties to make a living. Though the biased social system demands her to be silent, she is not always. She is courageous and hardworking, ceaselessly at home and also outside to take care of the household single-handedly, enduring the enormous violence and physical assaults of her

husband, and she equips herself with cleverness to tackle the situations using a dissenting strategy.

Sangati, the story of three generations of women, the older woman belonging to the narrator's grandmother Vellaiyamma Kizhavi's generation, the narrator's own and the generation coming after her as she grows up points to changing perspectives and aspirations as well as to the gains and losses over years. Bama's admiration for the women of her community, a Dalit woman's affinity with nature and her pride in the skill involved in exacting labour shines through the book. It is with both pain and wonder that Bama can narrate the life of Maikkanni, "She was required to work far harder than her years demanded, she also behaved with a commonsense far beyond her years" (75). She recounts with gusto the stories of women's indomitable courage and prowess during those hard days of police raids (134) and admires the women of her community for the ideals of courage, fearlessness, independence, and self-esteem. They have ceased to be mere guinea pigs for exploitative and dangerous experiments in health and fertility.

The canvass of *Sangati* is larger in the context of casteism and church. Bama's counterparts are subjected to humiliation, caste and gender discrimination and remain marginalised in the new social or spiritual space that they bargained for by their conversion to Christianity. Often the church disappoints them and fails them in their struggle for freedom and prosperity. The rules of the church against divorce militate against women and render them helpless in their fight against the atrocities committed on the individuality of womanhood by their husbands. The parish priest conspires with the menfolk against the women's individual choice of life-partners. Strangely, the church provides the meanest job and little pay with the promise of a reward in

heaven. The women become sites on which various versions of scripture or law are elaborated and contested. The narrator even grows suspicious about her tribe's conversion to Christianity.

Most Dalit feminists, including Bama, talk about Dalit women facing violence in some form or the other at the workplace, in the public arena and at home. Being raped or sexually assaulted by men of the upper caste or by the starved fatty men of their clan is a routine thing happening in Dalit community. Hence, in all Tamil Dalit literature, sexuality of Dalit women is a common theme coarsely handled by them to accentuate women's subjugation to sexual assault even at a tender age. But the Dalit writers make one difference from others. Unlike other women writers, they never project their characters as women, always whining and wailing with tears filled in their eyes. Instead, they compile them into a mouth-full; a seaming art though it is a talent they are gifted with to use as armour expiating the lost egalitarian privileges in the caste-prone patriarchal society. The Dalit woman wags the nerveless bastion to put her husband to shame with added accentuation through vulgar gestures – unimaginable by a timid woman of the upper caste. What seems to be obscene and ill-mannered are the means to escape from being bashed by or even killed by her husband. Rakkamma is not a “quite creature” (61) as assumed to be at the beginning of the novel. She uses abusive terms to curse and makes obscene and ill-mannered gesticulations to stop her husband from tormenting her physically.

Bama is not always angry while expatiating the experiences of Dalit women. She brings out “all that is bold and beautiful” (51) in Dalit women's life in a jesting mood and enumerates the imperceptible but potent and influential weapons used by them to confront the harsh domestic situations at home. A few women physically fight

with their husbands, reciprocating to every harsh punch of theirs, even if they must lose the battle at the end. While readers are horror-stuck to witness Rakkama's hideous behaviour, Kaaliamma lightens the heart of the readers. She is a character who can never be bullied. She retaliates vehemently with some kind of hits and blows that her husband intends to give her. She is not one among the few who endures humiliation with a sense of fortitude to prolong and sustain their marriage.

It is significant to note that Bama highlights the inherent human nature to combat life's challenges, the ethno factors, with the weapon of the auto factor – the power of the self. The auto factor within the narrator transcends the limitations caused by the ethno factors, namely caste or race and patriarchy. The self-introspection and self-analysis of the narrator result in self-awareness which is indispensable for the emancipation from the tentacles of the ethno factors. In her journey towards self-realisation, the narrator, Pathima, not only gets deliverance for herself, but also paves the way for the deliverance of her community from the marginalised predicament. The evolution of the right attitude and the radical transformation in her outlook are manifested in her auto ethnography. There is a transformation from her befouled state of mind entrapped by the clutches of casteism to the state of tranquillity, and she becomes an enlightened individual with fervour to empower her community.

Azhagarasan says that being a self-realised soul, Bama has “resolved to write about Dalit women, especially about those who stood up to protest against the atrocities... not simply about the victims” (151). She asks, “You know who the narrators in my stories were? And emphatically replies my amma and my Paatti” (151). She does not merely analyse the root cause of the multi-domain marginalisation of the women of her community, its gravity and its impacts, she also comes out with

an effective solution to the pursuing problem. According to Bama, it is meaningless to expect the government or others to redress this as shown in the lines of the novel:

We must take up the challenge ourselves... We must stand up for ourselves and declare that we too are human beings like everyone else. If we believe that someone else is going to come and uplift us, then we are doomed to remain where we are, forever” (66). She wants the Dalit women to realize themselves particularly their self-esteem and the potential of their self: “But if only we were to realize that we too have self-worth, honour and self-respect; we could manage our own lives on our own way” (68).

Her vision of creating an egalitarian society reinforces in *Sangati* through Pathima: “And I don’t like to hide my identity and pretend I belong to a different caste. The question beats away in my word; Why should I tell a lie and live a false life”? (120-121). The suggestion of caste identity is a clarion call to all lower castes to be conscious of their own caste which is in no way inferior to any higher castes. (18) The benefit of this caste identity is that it asserts dignity. With sense of dignity, the low castes together can valiantly fight with enthusiasm. This identity can be used as a strategic weapon to emphasise castes at the initial stages to achieve casteless society in the ultimate stage. Pathima declares her caste loudly. She has no inhibition to assert her identity: “I often get angry enough to shout it out aloud: I am Parachi; yes, I am a parachi” (120-121).

Compared to the upper caste women, Dalit women, according to Bama, face more problems in the social domain like taking a house for rent: “I have to struggle so hard because I’m a woman. And exactly like that, my people are punished constantly for the simple fact of having been born as Dalits. Is it our fault that we are Dalits? On

top of that, just because I am a woman, I have to battle especially hard” (122). At least she could live a less-problematic life with her little education and earning. But the women of her community are illiterate. She says: “... when I think of the women from my community who bend low to receive endless blows at home and at work, I am filled with frustration” (122).

Though Bama feels sorry for their plight, she is of the conviction that they have a strong will to survive. Though buffeted by heavy odds in life, these women manage to pull along with their indomitable spirit. She reiterates that she is not an isolated individual but the representation of the women of her community. She says: “Today when I say ‘I’, it includes people like me. All these things together form our collective identity and help us all to act together. I cannot claim for myself the identity of an individual, a Dalit woman, I am a part of a collective awareness. I carry their voices” (151). Over the years, the Dalit women themselves have constructed an identity about their lives and struggles. This identity deals with their multiples of roles and problems faced as an individual, in the family, at workplaces, in the religious sphere and in the Dalit and wider society.

Vellaiamma, Sebasthiamma, Mariamma, Suasaamma, Arokkyam, Rakkamma, Kaaliamma, Maikkanni, Bhakkiyam and Rendupalli are revolutionary women. Their consciousness of ignorance and marginalization burns in the heart of Bama. Samundrakani (Perimma), Thaayi and Pecchiamma are victims of various means of marginalisation. By observing these facts in her community, Bama is still hopeful and thinks that both boys and girls should be given freedom equally in order to establish equality and justice. And the saying will come true that “... Women can make, and women can break” (123).

The works of Bama represent her consciousness of a Dalit. She expresses her views with the readers about the human and mutual perceptions of her citizens in this caste-dominated society in their daily life. The agony of casteism explored from a Dalitian view in all her novels reveals how the caste structure in India neglects a portion of its own population and ill-treats them. Bama has contrasted the current with the strategy of recapitulation in order to highlight the pathetic challenge of the Dalits in the endurance movement. In her sedative disposition, Bama challenges structures such as the family, the community, schools, and government that have driven many of her citizens to empirical and figurative or psychic death. She deeply claims that only cooperation is going to allow them to emancipate themselves into citizens.

In the overall space of Dalit literature, Dalit women clearly demand and deserve special respect and pride of place. They indeed form a separate class and stream as women. One can assert boldly that any discussion of Dalits or Dalit literature itself is bound to be incomplete without special reference to Dalit women. Anupama Rao in her *Introduction: Caste, Gender and Indian Feminism*, observes that Dalit women are “thrice-subjugated as women, as Dalit women, and as Dalit women who perform stigmatized labour” (11). The assessment by Dr. Ambedkar is that Dalit women occupy a despicably deplorable bottom most space in the social pyramids.

Bama has a very simple writing style. She does not use complicated terminologies and theories to explain her point. Her writing style has a simple language and the accent she uses gives the readers exact depiction of the scene she wants to convey. In the novel *Vanmam*, the novelist depicts the real-life incidents and sufferings faced by the subaltern people. Through her beautiful choice and arrangements of words, she creates an accessible and friendly writing style. The main

themes in her works are caste and gender discrimination, which is practiced in the marginalized regions. She also focuses on the inner strength of the subaltern women, and it also turns out to be one of the main themes like inequality and the quest for self-identity, which could be derived from her own life experiences.

It is significant to note that Bama valorises educated women who opt out of marriage to escape violence and subjugation. The writer subscribes to feminist thought and Marxist analysis but significantly argues for enlarging received theoretical orientation to include specifically, caste-related ground realities in contemporary Indian society. In *Vanmam*, intra-caste strife among Dalits is discussed and strategies are debated to resolve the same. In many aspects, *Vanmam* is a less intense or moving tale in comparison to *Karukku* or *Sangati*. Certain issues, even incidents narrated or discussed in her earlier two works are taken up again in *Vanmam*, without, however, adding a new word or a different dimension to the quality of discussion. The narrative is less gripping in places, rather tepid.

Even though Bama had employed repetition as a deliberate narrative strategy in *Karukku* and *Sangati*, she had used it to add a fresh interpretation or reveal another critical reading of the narrative material than given in her earlier treatment. This engaging trope is missing in *Vanmam*. Disappointing as this may be, a critical study of *Vanmam* is warranted as she subjects Dalits - both Parayars and Pallarsto an objective scrutiny and calls for forging of unity among Dalits on social and, more significantly, political grounds. This aspect is explored further in an objective, social milieu in her *Vanmam* where she analyses the intra-community conflicts, caste hatred and resulting violence among Dalit communities.

Bama's fiction has won critical acclaim steadily over the years. If initially, her use of Dalit vocabulary and unconventional use of language was criticised by

mainstream writers and critics. Bama's reformulations of genres, narratorial innovations are attacked by critics. In *Storylines: Conversations with Women Writers*, Bama recounts.

In literary circles, there were some who discounted it as not being literary enough... not keeping to the generic definitions of novel or autobiography. Some of them were upset by the obscenities used and found them un-parliamentary. But there were also those who welcomed it as new and experimental... once they commented on the language and called it vulgar and obscene, I was all the more convinced that it was my language, our language. (15)

Bama's writing indicates a conscious choice in terms of form, language, mode of narration, tone, characterisation, and content. The primary motive of Dalit literature is the liberation of Dalits, in particular, and the liberation of the oppressed, in general. It is fundamentally a cultural activity coming under the broad movements of Dalit political liberation. It is cultural politics. It takes the form of a protest. It is the language that enables Dalit women to give vent to all their anger and frustration. All the same, it is that Dalit for these very language women is set apart from the mainstream. A Dalit woman, who has undergone formal education, is to lose her natural language. Her natural state is forever distanced, and her self-hood is severed from its roots by her entry into a formal language. It becomes impossible for her to experience the real as far as she cannot express it in her language. Once she enters the formal language and accepts its rules and dictates, the real will always remain a mirage, an absence, or a silence. A subaltern can speak, but only through her silences. The Dalit activists and feminist movements in India have failed to address the concerns of the gendered Dalits precisely because of their linguistic otherness.

The narrative thus works at multiple levels. At the personal level, the meditating female voice narrates the memories of her personal life. The first-person pronoun is used here. At this level, the narrator is a young girl, and her retelling of life is based on her childhood memories and in the concluding chapters, she has grown into a young woman. In the second level, the narrative is presented from the eyewitness, the account of the grandmother. Through the de-sentimentalised and detached narration of Valiyamma Kizhavi, Bama presents the multiple struggles of several Dalit women of her community: their economic exploitation, their vulnerability to the sexual assaults by upper-caste men and the violent ill-treatment meted out to them by their men. She also presents their culture of living: the coming-of-age ceremony, betrothal and wedding ceremony and the celebration of festivals. At the third level of narration, a number of individual Dalit women express their perspectives and experiences, which are framed within the reflective comments of the mediating female voice. In Bama's self-narrative, Dalit autobiography loses its communal dimension and gets deepened in its gender specificity. Bama's narrative is not strictly confined to her life although it deals with the experiences of her early life, her childhood days with her grandmother and so on. On the other hand, the narrative focuses on the life struggles of the women of her community, and as the narrating and experiencing self, Bama's identity eventually gets merged with their identity.

Bama's text subverts the narrative structures of Dalit writings in an attempt to create a distinct Dalit feminist aesthetics. Bama makes effective use of heteroglossia in *Sangati*. Instead of privileging a single narrative voice as in Dalit autobiography, Bama's use of several narratives in *Sangati* makes it a polyphonic text. Bama's work can be seen as the narrative of the history of the Dalit woman - Valiyamma Kizhavi,

Bama's grandmother – but the text also incorporates the experiences of the meditating female voice and those of countless other Dalit women. The narrative tension between the subdued voice of the mediating narrator and the reported vocal voice is maintained throughout. While the reported female voices seethe with crude energy, the mediating and reflecting voice is gentle and restrained by virtue of her civilizing education. Her education and empowerment excuse Bama to a certain extent from the language and experience of her people. She overcomes this limitation by letting the voices of her female characters emerge in the text as they are. Bama instead of speaking for the gendered subaltern speaks to them and allows their voices to prevail. The multiple voices animate points to the plurality of Dalit women's experiences and negate any attempt to essentialize them. Thus, Bama universalizes the Dalit experience.

Bama's writing embodies an activist agenda. As a Dalit, writing has empowered Bama. Her entry into the academy, her presence at literary meets, conferences in Indian metros and abroad, her continued contribution in the sphere of education as a schoolteacher are various facets of her social empowerment. In turn, she employs her writing to implore Dalits to adopt education as a sure strategy for self-empowerment and acceptability in society. Her writing while using spoken Dalit women's vocabulary is addressed to non-Dalits who need to be educated and sensitised about Dalits' struggle for a dignified existence. At the same time, it also shows possibilities of success to her Dalit reader.

In all her works, a feminist narrative on Dalit women's lives, *Vanmam* is a novel in which Bama reiterates and calls upon Dalits to organise and help themselves to regain peace and harmony. In *Vanmam*, the loss of unity among Dalits is stressed upon most forcefully. Education for Bama is not limited to formal education. She lays

equal emphasis on spiritual education but wants this to be free from interference from ecclesia and officialdom. Dalits have to gain enlightenment in a political sense rather than merely accumulate university degrees. Her self-discovery not only redeems her but also serves to enlighten the other marginalised and thus enable the readers to deeply grasp the experience and interpretation of this interesting case, and so Bama's novels *Sangati* and *Vanmam* are an outstanding testimony to express the real identity of Dalit women and thereby reformulate Dalit aesthetics.

Chapter - IV

Trauma and Survival in Iyayam's *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*

Literature is a camera that captures not just moments but also emotions. It reveals the reality in its true colours, immersing people in nostalgic occurrences and mocks at the repercussive episodes. Literature reverberates the melancholy of the marginalized, echoes the cries of oppressed women, demonstrates the plight of the destitute, marks the identity crisis of the anonymous people and records the revolution of the rebels. Dalit literature uses the written word as a weapon against the inhuman oppression of Dalits by the Brahminical social order that denies them basic human rights and dignity. It also showcases the solitude of the marginalized, portrays the poverty of the downtrodden and illustrates the ill-treatment of women.

Dalit literature is regarded as a body of writing that expands the field of literature by bringing a new social reality into literary discussion. It also identifies the best works, creates a canon of Dalit literature, and promotes the critical appreciation of new poetry, autobiography, short stories and other literary forms. Such an approach, however, does not grow only out of literary discussion or the practise of writers. It is a social movement invested in the battle against injustice and driven by the hope of freedom, not simply a literary trend or a formal development. This literature encompasses diverse forms of intellectual and creative work by those who, as untouchables, are victims of economic, social, and cultural inequality. Using the term 'Dalit writing', it helps us to emphasize the relation with the social and political concerns of Dalit movements.

Dalit literature is a literature about the existence of Dalits made of information on Dalits. Significantly, the inceptions of Dalit's works should be pulled in the battle for social and financial change. This clarifies all parts of profound thought in Dalit books. Dalit writing is firmly identified with the expectation of the freedom for a bunch of individuals since they are not the casualties of social and financial disparities. The books are one of the primary wellsprings of data utilized by the Dalits to advance and build up the whole lower class, with the point of advancing attention to critical thinking. Dalit writing is portrayed by its reaction to the fierce and straightforward use, along these lines uncovering the brutality of the greater class of outrage and disdain and calling for shameful retribution on society and individuals answerable for such imbalance and viciousness. Testing social practices and getting ready for the counter are the main considerations. Om Prakash Valmiki portrayed the Dalit books as torment messages that people experience outrage, yet track down an internal, direct longing for change (20).

A whole new set of writings by Dalits began to appear in the 1970s. These writings criticized and rejected the ideas of reform and upliftment. They showed that although caste and class are related, caste cannot be reduced to class. They demonstrated that the non Brahmin consolidation of the Dravidian Movement continues to exclude Dalits. They began to describe the reality of Dalit life with insights that came from those who belonged to the community and first-hand experience of Dalit life. Their descriptions of slavery, oppression, the struggle for survival, love, hate, humiliation, and the wretchedness of Dalit life were unlike anything that had been written before. It becomes clear that caste is not simply a prejudice but a form of power and of economic, social, and cultural capital in the

contemporary world. In this context, Dalit aspirations for freedom, dignity, self-respect, and equality infuse these primary concepts of democratic life with fresh concrete and grounded meanings. The arrival of 'Dalit' is exuberantly announced in several writings. With this shift, new settings, new themes, new arguments, and new attitudes began to appear in the literature.

Dalits in India face numerous social and political deterrents. Their basic freedoms have been disregarded. They are frequently exposed to separation, mistreatment, neediness, and savagery. They are excluded from the standard Hindu group. Unfortunately, the segregation and responsibility for Dalits against the Indian subcontinent did not depend on religion, language, sexual orientation, or shading, which is the most well-known reason for separation in numerous places of the world. It is supplanted by 'standing' or 'birth'. There are numerous conditions to bar Dalits from spots of love.

All endeavours carried by the Dalits have been emphatically gone against by the decision of the world class for social and political purposes. The privileged societies stress that if the lower classes are permitted to get training, they will request to share power. So, training is restricted, and Dalits could not enter or even show fundamental abilities to the poor in their own native. The primary inspiration of Dalit writing is that it gives a voice to the persecution of Dalits in the Indian subcontinent and gives freedom to their financial and social turn of events. Dalit books depend on the existence of individuals who are mistreated, abused, persecuted, or broken. The characters of its content are utilized as cleaners of latrines for streets and sewers. Hence, the fundamental inspiration of Dalit composing is to dissent and free Dalits.

Dalit literature discusses the measurements of autonomy and fights of the individuals who are denied of their self-respect and whose awareness is compelled to fall into social decay and social innate. Another significant component of the narrating Dalit's story is that it does not recognize an individual from their family, local area, and society. Dalits were not treated as creatures and had to live on the edges of the town under disgusting conditions. They are even denied from sharing characteristic assets like water. Nagaraj claims that "Dalit is the proprietor who has a place with a political local area comprised of untouchables. Following a technique of self-conviction and covering, Ambedkar united the Dalit personality." (115). This acknowledgment depends on chosen social encounters (self-indulgence and outrage) including an enormous number of unaffected stations. Dalit writers depict Dalit as a youngster who thinks about his/her group and circumstances which they face. Dalits lose their character and confirm their certainty and pride. Dalit writings started to show the certainty and autonomy of Dalit figures.

From the mid-1990s, scholars gave an impression on Dalit literary works, which started to examine the oppression of Dalits and their struggle for survival. This was also the period when Tamil literature was increasingly invading the middle-class culture with its anxieties centred on honour, social prestige, women's chastity, and erosion of moral fabric in the face of women entering the workplace. Discrimination of Dalits and social injustice were discussed by a few novelists but not with the radical force that characterize Dalit writings. During this time, discrimination of Dalits and social injustice were discussed by the writers, which characterized Dalit writings.

Imayam, a major Tamil Dalit writer, suggests how Dalit women are forced to be used as commodities in order to hold off poverty and help themselves and their

dependents survive in most of his novels. Ignorance, sexual harassments, poverty, anger towards rites and rituals, injustice and slavery are the main themes of Dalit literature. The explanations behind utilizing realities are evidenced that Dalit writers can uncover human suffering on the planet through their writings. The works crafted by Imayam shows this point well.

Imayam said that he writes his stories, be it a novel or short story, at least twelve to fourteen times to get the exact structure. He has attended a thirty-day writers' workshop organized by the All Indian Catholic Universities Federation (AICUF). He has read all writings of Jayakanthan and Poomani and pamphlets and discussions on the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka. They have had a major influence on him. He lets his ideology emerge from life, and he portrays real-life situations in his works. He has a concern that Dalit writers are not addressing the greatness in Dalit life - a life where language is alive, where there is no widowhood, and where there is happiness. Imayam's work is considered one of the classics of modern Tamil literature, especially in Dalit writing.

The idea that caste discrimination and violence are found only in traditional societies, that it is a residue of tradition, or that the practice was to be found only among Hindus were shown mistakenly. Dalit writers demonstrated that humiliation, rejection, and exclusion based on caste were common practices in contemporary India. In fact, caste discrimination takes in new forms in modern life. Its workings are comparable to the workings of race and gender discrimination. Imayam's two novels' *Beasts of Burden* (*Koveru Kazhudhaigal*) and *Arumugam* had made a significant contribution to debates and discussions on Dalit discourse in Tamil Nadu. Imayam's *Beasts of Burden* (1994) portrays Dalit communities, their lives, their culture, and

their legislative issues. In this novel, Imayam depicts the predicament of lower-caste people who fall into double subjugation in the society. Imayam criticizes the lower caste people who become counterfeit Brahmins and battle against the individuals who are viewed as subordinates among Dalits.

The title Koveru Kazhudhaigal means ‘mules’, which have been utilized by the washer men to wash garments. It ironically refers to the washer men community and their predicament. This story is about the Poothurai Vannaar Catholic family, who works among farming labourers in the Dalit province. The mules have the responsibility of carrying, which is a beast of burden. The story also depicts the economic changes occurring in the progress of the novel and developments taking place in the village, which are seen throughout the perspectives of the protagonist, Arokkyam, this story accentuates the monetary change achieved by the continuation of the novel and the advancement of the seventeenth town, just as a significant indication of the sufferings of washer men’s community and the exploitation they meet within their own community.

Representation of Dalit women is an integral aspect of Tamil Dalit literature in terms of space and voice granted to Dalit women characters. Dalit women characters are portrayed as lively, vibrant, earthy, witty, and hard-working women who have inner strength to face crisis and work tirelessly at home and outside. Their songs, dances, community cooking at weddings bring out their innate talent. Imayam’s *Beasts of Burden* carries within itself the grief and pain of the Dalits. Imayam has beautifully captured the ringing poignancy, the trials, and tribulations of a washer woman, Arokkyam, who is trapped between the dilemmas of changing times. The vannaathi woman, Arokkyam, washes the clothes and serves the colony where Dalits

live. The novel discloses the intra-Dalit strife and the sorrows of the lowest of the low-born. Arokkyam's dilemma within changing systems of belief about the self and society captures the reader's interest.

The story revolves around the life of Arokkyam, depicting her sufferings and pains that are caused when her son Joseph moves away with his wife Sahayam. Her grief intensifies when her daughter, Mary, is seduced by Chadayan, the Kothukkaaran. As her first son Joseph is away from her, she doesn't want her second son to depart from her. Hence, she denies her second son Peter from becoming a priest. But then Peter elopes, bringing her more pain. The grief thickens by the death of Mary's husband, Diraviyaraj. When everyone is fortunate to frame his or her life to live independently, the Dalit's alone are so unfortunate that they gift their life with great devotion and diligence, unaware of the fact that surrendering oneself is slavery. This dependence on other people has paved the way for the Dalits to survive in a home without happiness and in a society without safety and security.

Imayam's second novel *Arumugam* portrays the predicament and situation of thousands of poor and vulnerable individuals living in the Auroville locale. His works take the outflow of the customary way of life as specific illustrations, and all his works depend on the existences of Dalits and their encounters. He has communicated the feeling of fear and anxiety through the character. Arumugam is clearly a storyteller, better than a character. Through the words of Arumugam, we could see that the characters are dependent on the language utilized by the privileged upper caste people to treat poor lower caste people. The language utilized by Dalit writers is unique in relation to the language used by individuals that mirrors the unfortunate circumstances which exist in the public arena. Despite the changes in individual's

mentalities and measures taken by the public authority framework, racial segregation has not totally vanished. The present circumstance is still very normal, and day by day papers and magazines report comparative episodes because of this segregation based on caste oppression.

As Imayam himself says in his introduction to the novel, the novel is constructed between two journeys, a pilgrimage of hope at the beginning and a subsequent trip to the washing ghat in drudgery and despair at the end. The life of the washer woman Arokkyam, her husband Savuri and their three children – Joseph, Mary, and Peter, is a painful journey open ended with lots of questions left unanswered. It is a revelation of the bitter reality of the social ills confronted by a washer man family, the lowest in the order of the Dalit communities. In Tamil Dalit literature, the untouchables were represented as broken men, degraded, homeless and inhabiting the margins. Dalits were a territorially dispersed community of suffering. The ethnographic details that Imayam provides in this novel show Arokkyam and her family and other washermen families literally living on the margins of society. Their living place is situated in a segregated colony, outside the caste village. Dalit women are subjected to sexual exploitation by upper caste men.

Dalit women's sexuality is an important domain of creative or critical concern in Tamil Dalit literature. Dalit writers discuss the containment of Dalit women's sexuality from pre-puberty stage to menopause by family and caste-bound society. Dalit women are not allowed to attend school after attaining puberty, subjected to sexual assaults by much older husbands, sexually harassed or raped by fathers-in-law, brothers-in-law if they are widowed, victims of regular beatings by alcoholic husbands or abusive sons and are loaded with heavy labour at home and in the fields

or factories besides taking over the nurturing of numerous children and the aged.

Almost all Dalit writers, in whichever genre they write in, depict a similar graph of a Dalit woman's life or career. Sexual assaults at home or rape at workplace or custodial rape are the most encountered experiences of Dalit women. Dalit writers foreground sexually repressive and oppressive social structure that invades the domestic as well as social space. Their writing calls attention to the occlusion of caste hegemony and patriarchal structure, which seek to control a Dalit woman's sexual life and conduct.

The gendering of Dalit discourse in Tamil acquires a problematic nuance in Imayam's fiction. In Imayam's novels, Dalit women are shown to be subjected to sexual harassment by their male superiors at the workplace. Poor Dalit women workers like washer women are raped by upper caste patrons, and they are forced to keep silent so as not to lose their livelihood. The character Mary is a good example in the novel *Beasts of Burden*. Imayam also depicts how Dalit women are forced to commodify themselves and their dependents survive.

In the novel *Beasts of Burden*, the plight of Arokkyam affects the reader's mind naturally. Pre-societal norms are forcing Arokkyam to be a slave, and she is just submitting to those norms. Capitalism (Gounder family's behaviour against Arokkyam) enters the village and makes Arokkyam's life much more complicated. She is not described objectively but from within, from the perspective of her own dilemma and within the terms of her own anguish. Her dilemma about how to survive in the society and being economically depressed made them think about one's own identity and freedom.

Arokkyam shows a kind of belief towards God throughout the novel. Arokkyam, a woman of indomitable courage, the pillar of the family, with courage and determination

fights for her rights but remarkably displays an unshakeable, unquestioning belief in the oppressive caste system. This is clearly revealed in her statement: “We are a humble community. What’s the use of getting angry?” (9). This kind of desperate and dejected feeling of Arokkyam is seen throughout the novel without acting against the social norms. She accepted all the rules which were created by the colony people and the heads of the villages against her family. Her house is located outside the colony, which itself reveals the society’s reaction to the marginalized.

As Mary grows up into a young girl, Arokkyam reduces her duties at the Thorappadu (washing ghat) and makes her stay more at home to do the household chores. One morning when Mary goes to collect the washing, Chadayan, belonging to the town, provokes and teases Mary, and she reports it to her mother. Arokkyam consoles her daughter and instructs her to be more careful and stronger in the future. Arokkyam consoles her saying: “Our people and our community always managed even before our time, you have to have a strong mind and heart. Don’t ever let that go. It is like your life—breath. If the breath goes, then the life goes. If we lose heart, then that’s it, we are finished. So, make your heart as hard as a stone”? (7).

In the progress of the novel, Arokkyam’s daughter Mary was raped by Chadayan. It was an unwritten fate that women are often raped by the upper caste patrons, and they are forced to keep silent so as not to lose their livelihood. This situation forced her to get married to her aunt’s son Diraviyaraj, but her happy married life also ended in a short period after the death of her husband, who died of a snake’s sting. Mary’s fear towards the society leads to the big question mark of her future. She becomes silenced when she was raped by upper caste men. Arokkyam is the only person who knows about this, and she warns Mary not to tell anybody about

this matter because Chadayan will conspire against them to throw them from the village. This made Mary be silenced. Her individuality, her emotions, her thought to act against the cruel society became suppressed by her mother, who led her life according to the pre-societal norms.

Arokkyam lets all her happiness, pains, suffering to the feet of God and simply accepts the ordeals meted out to her by both the upper caste and the colony people. She does not want to escape from her primordial life and from her slavishness, doesn't want to go to any other place to survive happily and is not ready to throw away her position being a mule. It is not amazing that she is very pessimistic about this. The mother picture in Dalit man's verse is a ceaseless image of persecution, battle, selflessness, and intimidation. Arokkyam is a genuine model, and her portrayal regarding how to live in the public arena and bear monetary pressing factor to consider her character and opportunity seems to be great. All through the novel, Arokkyam shows confidence in God, the courageous lady who is the foundation of the family and unfalteringly protects her privileges, yet she surprisingly showed a compelling and irrefutable confidence in the harsh framework. Arokkyam's feeling of misery and hopelessness goes through the whole novel without clashing and with accepted practices. She acknowledged every one of the laws made by the pioneer individuals and the neighbourhood heads who went against her family. Her living place also mirrors the social reaction of impeded gatherings.

The children of Dalit communities are hailed by the other children of the village by abusive names though it is strange that their economic condition is the same as that of Dalit children. In a piece of conversation between Arokkyam's son Peter and Arokkyam is a highly defining piece of conversation where Peter asks

Arokkyam why they call home for their evening meals. Rather, rather, they can cook by themselves because all the boys torment him by calling out 'raachoru, raachoru'. Arokkyam herself is referred to by the small children of the village as Vanaathi Woman. She tells her son that it is important for her to put it out of her mind. Otherwise, she would go mad. It was only because of forgetting that she survived. Dalits have always had to formulate such strategies to cope with their ill-treatment. The critique of caste ideology, as well as efforts to narrate the Dalit self, the repeated experience of exclusion from public space is an important element of Dalit literature. Dalit men and women are expected to be very humble in front of the other community people for no reason except that they are Dalits.

Arokkyam always fights for her rights whether they are given or not, even with upper caste men. Arokkyam and Savuri are paid just two rupees for the funeral rites, which they carry out for the whole day. The next day, she and her husband are called from winnowing in Azhagan's land. She is paid one single muram of grain. Arokkyam breaks down and pleads saying: "We are people who depend upon you sami, in order to work and make a living" (8).

It is a plea, but it shows that she is very strong and unshakeable in asserting her rights. But being a Dalit woman, her words are not listened to. Dalit women experience a high level of exclusion, invisibility, domestic violence, violence at the workplace, and they are three times removed from the society.

Even among women, they are perceived as 'the other'. But in the novel *Beasts of Burden*, Arokkyam, Mary and Sahayam, the daughter-in-law of Arokkyam and the wife of the eldest son Joseph are portrayed as lively, vibrant, hardworking women who have inner strength to face crisis and work tirelessly at home and outside. On the

contrary, Dalit men are shown as rather irresponsible but very dominant at home. Diraviaraj's father, father-in-law of Mary, ran away from the family leaving his child. Savuri is not very careful at household chores but always demands rich food. Arokkyam's eldest son, Joseph, leaves his family and sets up a shop in Chinnasalem, his wife's native place to fulfil his wife's desire and lives with his wife leaving their parents alone. Peter runs away from the family with his friends without even informing his parents. But Arokkyam was the sole breadwinner of her family who devoted her entire life to her family. She illustrates a life of hard work with few rewards. She laments: "I have passed every hour of every day as if I were walking through fire. I was secure in the belief that where there is a sharp, there must be a shepherd. Who is there today to belch after feasting? We all belch with fasting as if we are yawning. How can one who I fast shut her eyes at night". (283).

Discrimination is a toxin that has contaminated the minds of people, leading to the pollution of the society. Dalits are widely affected by this toxin, and it has tainted their life. How much they attempt to socialize with the multitude, they fail miserably in every attempt and remain marooned. Even in *Beasts of Burden*, Arokkyam is treated like a scum of the earth. When the pigs are slaughtered for the Mariamman temple, Arokkyam asked for the customary habit of giving her the head and entrails. She was answered by Ramasaami, the Kothukkaaran of the village as, "You need to be whipped with my slippers. Bitch of a Vanaathi, how much insolence must you carry in your heart that you dare to oppose me in public! Have you gone that far? You monster! You whore!' (181).

A decent living and a fully clad look have always been denied to Dalits. The society prefers a shabby look as their life is already tattered. When Dalits try to

change their lifestyle, they are criticized and commented on by people. Similarly, when Joseph returns to Chinnasalem, the people of the village comment, “Do you think he looks like Vannaan’s son anymore? He looks a lot better than a child from a well-off family” (166). Caste has a great influence on the life of poor people. The poverty of the poor is like an epidemic that has paralyzed the host. Caste has denied self-assertion and human dignity.

Oppression and injustice are the gifts given by caste–discrimination to the untouchable’s life. The touch of poverty and misery is so strong that the miserable are not able to make a living without them. When Arokkyam has become old like a skeleton, with loose and wrinkled skin like an empty bag, she has a bad dream about the death of a young person; she recalls her past life and is scared about the dream. Arokkyam wonders, that all her life’s struggle is to fill the belly. Like a donkey carrying bundle after bundle, night, and day she carried the vessel and stood in front of every house. It’s all in aid of the stomach. All the abuse and bad words were thrown at her. She says: “It’s like an ocean that can never be filled even if I struggle all my life, I’ll never fill it. All that I have suffered was for its sake, but my belly is never full. For fifty years, I’ve walked between Thorappadu and Colony to earn my food. What am I but my stomach? The world is its stomach”? (295, 296).

The condition of Arokkyam is exactly the condition of most of the Dalits. Dalits live mainly for their belly. In their quest for food, they lose their identity. Having concentrated more on the belly, they have forgotten the idea of betterment. Filling their belly doesn’t fulfil their life. The women of the Dalit community have always been a victim of sexual abuse and harassment. They are viewed as decorative toys to be played with, rather than a human with flesh and blood. Though Dalit

women are the victims of sexual abuse, they are the ones who are cursed and criticized. Men who abuse women are not questioned or censured because they belong to the upper caste. They think that Dalit women have succumbed to the desires of upper caste men. This is obvious when Mary was exploited and harassed by Chadayan, the Kothukkaaran weep ceaselessly out of helplessness, humiliation, and extreme loss.

Imayam focussed on the humiliating experiences faced by Dalit women and as a community. Dalit women are considered weak and powerless. They are considered worthless, and they are always dominated by men whom they serve. For instance, Arokkyam's life is purely dedicated to her husband and children; and she leads her life only for the sake of others and most often 'her life' is not lived at all. She has no room for her own wishes, desires, ambition, and passion in her life. The colony people and the upper-caste people are served by different Vannaan's, which is elucidated by Imayam in *Beasts of Burden*. He pictures how the Hindu Vannaan serves the upper caste and the Christian Vannaan serves the colony. But in all the other towns, only one group of Chakkiliyars serve both groups. Even the marginalized are conscious about religion.

There is a wide range of demarcation and diversification even within the Dalits. They in fact ill-treat those who are subordinate to them. For instance, when the village is devoid of sufficient water, the people of the village have decided to sacrifice a pig and go on a procession. On the day of sacrifice, Arokkyam has requested for the entrails, but the request is rejected by the others, mainly Chadayan, Mottayyan and Ramasaami. Mottayyan has managed to get the entrails for twenty rupees finally. Since Arokkyam had been demanding for the entrails, she was regarded as an

unwanted person and has been avoided purposely by all as she has raised her voice at the village leaders. She is insulted by Ramasaami in public, “Flog her! Scavenging bitch, I’ll pull your teeth out!’ ‘Has it come to this?’ They leapt about. Mottayyan shouted continually, without even seeming to draw breath” (182). This episode portrays the inhuman nature of the people who are reluctant to lend hands for their own people. Feeding their own people, seems to be a burden to them.

Imayam’s critique of Dalit women’s sexuality or moral censure of sexual attacks on Dalit women wherein he upholds them instead of perceiving them as victims of collusion and patriarchy and casteist social structure is a dissonant voice in Tamil Dalit discourse. Further, Imayam complicates his critique of Dalit women’s sexuality by implicating a particular Dalit caste – Parayars as the oppressive offender. This has given rise to a debate in critical circles regarding Dalit discourse, its self-contradictions as well as its ability to interrogate and introspect anomalies and dissent located within Dalit communities. Imayam also holds urbanization, migration of Dalits to urban pockets as responsible for loss of honour among Dalit women.

In order to analyse the concept of survival instinct, Imayam illustrates in his novel *Beasts of Burden* the inevitability of faith and hope to walk into the deserts of darkness, where the path is unknown and unseen. Though Chadayan’s exploitation of Mary resulted in pain and agony, the death of her husband Diraviyaraj causes despair and desperation to her; she turns a new leaf when the ray of hope touches her. This is obvious when Arokkyam states, “Say it’s all destiny, fate, and let it go. Even when our parents die, after we have had a bath, we eat, we have to go on living our lives” (313).

Even when the novel opens with the note of faith, it is clearly shown that wherever Dalits go, they are still beneath someone else. So, they are always treated like that because they do the lowest duties to the lowest communities. Dalits must sow the seed of hope and faith to fetch the fruit of freedom. Perseverance and faith are the two wheels that can ride them to a land of equality.

In *Beasts of Burden*, Arokkyam has ardent faith in God; it is only that faith which drives her all through the way of thorns and stones. Though she loses her faith when Mary's life has been shattered by Chadayan, she regains it back with the same spirit. Once again, her faith is dropped when Diraviyaraj expires, but then she again regains her strength and marches forward along with Mary. The despair and sorrow of Mary is healed only through the medicine of support and care that have been showered by Arokkyam. Time changes and only change has lessened the torments of Mary. Towards the end of the novel, when both marches, the author, Imayam states, "Like the bare sky, the horizon stretched, endless. Then just space. Empty space" (314).

Dalits have to refurbish themselves in order to emancipate and elevate them. They should attempt to breathe the fresh air of liberty and freedom by freeing themselves from the fetters of slavery and discrimination. Shankar Painter, a Gujarat poet, roars with a heart-piercing cry, "Hey Brother Break the Begging bowl. Do not extend hands for begging. By begging the Rights, you cannot achieve the Change in the history. Brother Break the Begging bowl" (147). Thus, the indomitable spirit of inculcating hope, faith, and aspiration in the minds of Dalits has provoked Imayam to pen the novel as a torch bearer to the torpid people.

Imayam's second novel *Arumugam* was translated by Krishna Ayyar and was published in 1999. *Arumugam* explores the difficult emotions that weave stories of a mother-son relationship into a single fabric of love. It is a timeless tale of a child who was denied of his childhood. It is a tale of an emotional bond between a child and his mother woven together with strings of love. It is the story of Arumugam, the little boy who grows up before his time, whose innocence is snatched away from him with his experiences. Thrown from a secure, loving home into the cruel world of the Chekkumedu prostitutes, Arumugam learns that his perceptions of life are as unreal as wisps of smoke and understands in the end that the only truth is the voice of a loving heart. Life's ups and downs along with the concept of death were portrayed beautifully. The detailed description of the day-to-day life of these people brings the reader closer to them. Imayam did not follow any protocol or principles in writing this story. He made the day-to-day life lead the story, and it worked well. The author effortlessly enters the character's mind and brings their thoughts beautifully.

Imayam's novels *Beasts of Burden* (1994) and *Arumugam* (1999) foreground the dominance of a particular Dalit community over the other Dalit communities often resulting in a duplication of the hegemonic caste structure of Hindu society among Dalits and how this has percolated even amongst Dalits who have converted to Christianity. Imayam's novels received hostile criticism on account of their critique of Parayar's dominance over Dalit communities who stand further below in the caste ladder.

Dalit people constitute a large segment of the population, and they have been forced to mobilize themselves in order to fight for their rights and justice in postcolonial India. Dalit human rights emerge in a national context, they write about their own life explicitly referring to the atrocities that were committed on them in

India. It also develops a notion of the human subject that can be serviceable within multiple contexts of suffering. In its representation of suffering humans, Dalit writing generates the possible appropriation by a global literary field for human rights. They involve objectification – deliberately echoing the social process of economic and political oppression – modes of atrocity and injustice but also the representational process.

Imayam, in his novel *Arumugam*, presents the people who live around Pondicherry Auroville and their sufferings. It is in the recognition of the Dalit and the other that bears witness to another Dalit that the protagonists of the Dalit narrative discover their own humanity. The primary witness proposes a programme for the community, nation or even humanity. The writer brings out different aspects through the conversion character. He explains that life is not for all individuals in a society, especially for Dalit, the relationship between them and the upper-class people, their way of life with the rules and regulations of Auroville, the ethics, the morals, the conventions, the beliefs, and traditions of life in the society. The characters that are confined to a limited way of leading their life are not great thinkers or rebels but people who belong to the lower class.

Imayam criticizes the Indian dominant narrative forms and their language by exposing the duplicity of dominant discourses within the society generating a different history. Through their writings, the Dalit writers reflect the narrative recovery of emotional life, pointing out the fault lines, conflicts, and repression within dominant discourses, within the society generating a different history. Through their writings, the Dalit writers reflect the narrative recovery of emotional life, pointing out the fault lines, conflicts, and repression within dominant historical narratives. Imayam's narratives in the same way reveal that even decades after political

independence, social justice is still a dream for Dalit. In the novel *Arumugam*, the woman character Chinnapponu talks about her life: “How can I live without you, my thangam? I’ve become an orphan. Ah, she’s left me, and her story has ended, Asking was he crowned; a mansion he lorded over, ruled the land did he; with health and wealth showered’ for years he held sway; of long life, no dearth, but disappear he did, under six feet of earth”. (166)

Dalit writing invites readers to map a comparative history of the trauma as it embodies the effect that will affect the geographical and political barriers. There is a considerable risk in its calling for such a history because it is not the same in either form or impact across the world. Dalit writing is an attempt to comprehend all the greatness, as well as the shame associated with human life in the society by the upper-class people. They try to express their concern over the human beings losing against nature and all the emptiness surrounding life. Ashis Nandy proposes a system in which territories and expressions of the suffering of Dalits can be linked productively and applied to demonstrate how a comparative history of trauma can be developed.

Rather than producing texts that can be readily classified as social novels or women’s fiction, Iyayam’s works have destabilised the genre. Iyayam’s novels aim at the empowerment of the subaltern, as they offer criticism of the society. In his novel *Beasts of Burden*, the villagers’ beliefs and customs are brought out vividly by him. He offers multiple voices within the ravings of the abused woman in order to foreground the condition of Dalits in *Arumugam*. Arumugam’s anguished voice narrating his trouble is the personal one. The reference to their local god, who will, he believes, avenge his humiliation, is a mythic voice. The historical voice is included into these two when Arumugam expresses the poor Dalit’s inability to be recognized

as humans with dignity in the society. Their voices and the three contexts thus set out are: the personal, the historical-social and mythical. The voice of scriptural and patriarchal authority speaks through the mother character in the novel *Beasts of Burden*. Mother Arokkyam laments about their life in the society. The mother here is simply the medium of articulation minus subjective agency. She frames her identity and existence within this voice of scriptural and social authority.

All the Dalit novels express the reflection of writers. Iyayam's point is that a testimony narrative like this is not merely a testimony of a private life. It must be treated as a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony, which can penetrate us like an actual life. The novel *Arumugam* goes beyond certain textually allocated passages. It relocates the text in the broader national arena from regional demarcation. It is an attempt to remove or transgress the caste label attached within this text. It also focuses the novelist's caste background to foreground the richness of regionality, which has been shadowed by using the same caste label and on redefining Dalit literature in modern explanation. The novel *Arumugam* highlights certain important issues such as labour exploitation, prostitution and forced urbanization by offering a broader Indian perspective to those social issues.

In the novels *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*, the writer takes different parts of evolving the character. He clarified that the existences are unique, their relationship with the class, their lifestyle, and the standards of Auroville, moral gatherings, convictions and public customs particularly in Dalit. Individuals whose lives are confined are not extraordinary people or blasphemers, but rather detestable individuals. Iyayam censures the Indian story structure and language by uncovering the redundancy of acclaimed discourses in social orders that have made various

chronicles. Dalit essayists exhibited the change of passionate life through their works and found some unacceptable lines, clashes, and persecution in societal issues.

Similarly, Iyayam called attention in the wake of acquiring political autonomy and social equity. Dalit literature is devoted to see all the significances and disgraces related to human existence in the privileged. They attempt to communicate the struggles about the normal world and the entire void throughout everyday life. Arumugam's pitiful voice about his concern is close to home. It is a legendary word to allude to their neighbourhood divine beings that are accepted to have retaliated for their disgrace. At the point when Arumugam communicates the powerlessness of Dalits to endure as noble individuals in the public eye, the two words apply to history. This sets up their language and three settings, which are close to home, verifiable, social, and legendary.

In his novel *Arumugam*, Iyayam depicts Dalit women who have no work, as commercial sex workers, in order to make two ends meet but have internalized a moral value system that renders them torn between the ethical and the pragmatic. Their maternal cravings remain unfulfilled and often, as in the case of Chinnapponu, meet a cruel, violent death at the hands of their clients over an argument regarding their professional fee. Iyayam also highlights the poignancy of a widow who is torn between her maternal protectiveness towards her son and her sexual desire for a companion. The young widow seeks hard to repress her sexual needs but is sexually overpowered by her benefactor at the workplace. Torn apart by guilt and punished by her son with instant desertion, the young Dalit widow struggles through a momentous search for her son whom she traces after two decades, only to embrace him, justify her conduct to him and then commits suicide.

Imayam's Dalit women are lovingly portrayed. They use authentic and colourful vocabularies that are endearing and energetic and very loving towards their men. But unlike Dalit writers, Imayam adopts a moral, bourgeois stand regarding sexual assaults on Dalit women. He holds them responsible for their conduct or for what befalls them without considering the unjust, oppressive casteism, patriarchal structure within which they are located. Women in his novels get hysterical over loss of honour and are emotionally dependent upon men and crave for male protection, even if only that of a five-year-old son. The cultural and political unity of Dalits would stand to gain positivity through such an exercise.

Although it is possible to identify a few Dalit writers from earlier times, the real originality and force of Dalit writing, which today comprises a substantial and growing body of work, can be traced to the decades following the late 1960s. In the following decades, Dalit writing becomes an all-India phenomenon. This writing reformulates the caste question and reassesses the significance of colonialism and of missionary activity. It resists the reduction of caste to class or to non Brahminism and vividly describes and analyses the contemporary workings of caste power. So, Tamil Dalit literature studies must chart out its critical course of intervention as a tool to aid Tamil Dalit writer's agenda of working towards Dalit liberation or empowerment through writing.

Chapter - V

Bama and Iyayam as Dalit Writers

Dalit literature is the literature of the oppressed people, talking about their pains, agonies, disappointments, defeats, humiliations, oppressions, and depressions. It also speaks about their vibrant culture, dreams, and values. Convictions and their struggle for annihilation of caste was carried out in order to build a casteless society. It reveals their resistant and rebellious character, their strength, and stamina to live amidst all odds and their resilient nature to love life and live it happily. It brings out their inborn tendency to celebrate life and to fight against the caste-ridden society by breaking through this inhuman system without breaking their identity. It heals and strengthens them to fight for their rights. People who are discriminated against in the caste framework and socially excluded on account of their caste who militantly oppose such a system of discrimination and dehumanization are Dalits. It also includes people who are marginalized based on class and gender.

In this modern era, literature raising voice against the injustice or rather deconstructing the pre-existing notions appears to have caught the limelight, and, of course, the attention of any sort of readers. 'Literature of Marginality' is one which comes under this genre and seems to have been sprouted out of the bleeding hearts of the oppressed. Not only it covers the oppressed groups, but it seems to cover the readers from the oppressor groups too. Such contemporary books coming out, one after another, seem to project how the marginalized people are darkened by sporadic incidents of oppression in some quarters still occurring. Dalit writers like Bama and Iyayam take the pen to articulate and record their experiences of hurt and humiliation through centuries of neglect and a stubborn refusal to consider Dalit writing as a subject.

The translations of Dalit literature into English provide a space for unravelling and sharing the bitter longstanding Dalit experience of untouchability and social stigma with the mainstream readers. To a great extent, these translations do succeed in conveying the message of oppression through the source text that has been able to accomplish in its language and literature. The issues for translation become crucial as it captures the literature of the marginalized, for each and every word is loaded with pain and stems from the personal account of agony and shame, the writers with their community have gone through over centuries.

Dalit is a word and a symbol of change and revolution. One feels this to be true when one reads the novels of Bama and Iyayam. Even though Dalit writings found a voice in the nineties, it did not have much impact among the masses. Since the early tendency was to assimilate it into broader discourse of Dalit writing, suspending the identities of caste and gender. Later, with the emergence of Bama and Iyayam, it became a sort of a counter-discourse that resisted and re-wrote the masculinity discourse within the Dalit community. It is also an attempt to project the subversion of Dalit woman making sense about their lives and looking forward to the future with hope.

Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay pointed out that Dalit literature is not a literary movement in an ordinary sense of the term. *Karukku* is the narration of painful and bitter memories, of despair, disillusionment, and the pathetic conditions of life and in a subdued culture of the people, where women were subjected to sexual harassment and physical assault. Incidents are narrated, re-narrated and reinterpreted each time to express the oppression of Dalits. Bama's rewriting of self is thus the rewriting of Dalit history.

Like all writers, Dalit writers too have a cause and an agenda for their writing. This is because a Dalit writer faces more difficulties than writers belonging to the other castes, owing to their subaltern position with society and especially, Dalit women confront more troubles than their male counterparts. So, either male or female writer, every Dalit writer's priority is to discover his or her own voice and establish an identity of their own. With the help of this identity, they proceed to establish the identity for their community and eventually aim to liberate it from the clutches of Casteism. Bama and Iyayya do that through their writings.

Bama and Iyayya first discover their own voice in their works and establish their hold as Dalit writers. They then proceed to find a niche and chalk out an identity of their community among others in Tamil society. They do this by transferring the individual voice that they found for themselves to represent their voiceless community. Bama and Iyayya examine the three level strategies – Content, Technique and Language, which they used to accomplish their goals in the field of Dalit literature. Bama and Iyayya capture the Dalit language, make it their own and find their voice in it. It is this voice that they transmit to those who have been deprived of the prospect of being heard. Their voice becomes the collective voice for the entire community and the beginning of a revolution. Their writings establish the unique balance of feminist inclination in the works of Bama and Iyayya that explores how to be effective from the suppressed and poor economic background of Dalits.

Bama explores the wretched realities of everyday caste oppression faced by Dalit communities through her own life experience from her childhood until writing the novel. With her own multifaceted identities of a Dalit (Parayar) woman and a Christian, she encapsulates varied levels of oppression, manifested particularly on her

and in general on the Dalits in the novel. Subsequently, after *Karukku*, she wrote two more novels, *Sangati* (1994) and *Vanmam* (2002). *Karukku*, an autobiography; *Sangati*, a work that is catalogued as a novel but consciously defies the accepted form and notions regarding novel writing; *Vanmam*, a novel and a collection of short stories. Within a short span of time, her works have been translated into English and French.

Bama writes in a stark, spoken Dalit vocabulary, often using phonetic spellings, disregarding grammar, literary style, which is an aesthetic yardstick not acceptable in mainstream writing in Tamil. Feminist writing lacks a tradition in Tamil writing. Bama defies by interrogating monolithic and univocal notions of feminism in the Indian social context. This largely explains why she is better received and understood in the French or the English academic or publishing world rather than in a fiercely masculinist, upper caste, market-driven Tamil world of letters and journals. Bama's non-sanitized diction, her liberal use of authentic words, her depiction of sexual violence and her questioning of discrimination against women by family, state, or church where they could hardly receive any appreciation. Her credibility has risen higher in Tamil Nadu as she has reached respectable shores earlier than those who have been writing for decades.

Amidst a number of writers who are active in producing Dalit literature, Bama is considered to be a pioneer defining the subjectivity of Dalit women to foreground her ideological leaning towards the understanding of caste oppression faced by Dalit Community. *Karukku* can be considered a unique piece of writing on account of Bama's inner quest for self-discovery. Bama uses certain literary techniques like the first-person narrative and the autobiographical genre. The personal voice of Bama becomes the collective voice of the community through the usage of the first-person

narrative 'I' which becomes a direct narration of a Dalit. It stands for Dalit women's history.

In addition to this, the first-person narration also adds to the authenticity of the narration and brings about the desired effect on its readers, especially Dalits, who identify themselves with the novelist. Though it is structured as a novel, *Karukku* does not follow the conventional principles of fiction. Her narration by extension becomes that of the community. Through this non-linear technique, Bama makes *Karukku*, a discourse of the Dalit community where the writing of an individual becomes the writing of the people. Using the discourse of participation and drawing from a narrative that speaks about ordinary lives, her texts represent the collective voices of women who are on the margins in society. Bama's remark in her interview to *Outlook Magazine* substantiates this: "I began writing to stop myself from taking my own life. *Karukku* came out naturally. It was more of an outpouring of my experiences in life than a literary act" (109).

Dalit autobiographies are so popular among the readers because they speak the truth. It is the experience of not only a writer, but also of many Dalits in this country. It makes the reader identify with the writer. It is an attempt to assert and free oneself, hence written in an autobiographical style. It has several motivations like liberal individualism, quest for freedom, the need for religious conversion and opposite self-representation. For women, autobiography served as a mode of speaking for themselves, against the grains of male-dominated societies which both historically and among contemporarily accounts were the mouthpiece for everyone.

After centuries of silence, when Dalit writers felt the need to express themselves, they could only turn inward and talk about their own experience.

Autobiography became a fitting vehicle for this expression. The portrayal of Dalit life's experiences was representative of the entire community. Although she initially intended *Karukku* as a vehicle to carry her own story, her far-sighted outlook is on Dalit liberation and empowerment, which remain her main agenda. In *Karukku*, Bama provides not only an account of her life, but a poignant exposition of oppression from upper castes in and around the village, representing the entire community. In support of her views, she prefers to detail every single old woman like her grandmother. This enables her to go on so far as to represent a Dalit individual in her novel – mother, grandmother, brother, old man and so on.

Bama celebrates the vibrant and colorful culture of the women in her society. Further, to add as an example, one can consider the robust, toothless, betel chewing grandmother, the village's honorary midwife, a character in the novel who provides her own personal experience. She has a marked influence on the author-narrator. The old grandmother was abandoned by her husband. She worked almost till her death and single-handedly brought up her children. Her wise counsel and homespun wisdom fill the narrator's ears with greater poignancy. The atrocities that her grandmother witnessed seem to change her at the very core of her heart. The grandmother in *Karukku*, while relating several incidents explained to her that the elder from the street was carrying the parcel uncomfortably because he was a Parayar, an untouchable. That incident sowed the first seed of fury and revolt in Bama. The very thought that an important elder of her community should be put to such humiliation infuriated her. The self-questioning had begun. Bama began to wonder, "What did it mean when they call us 'Parayar'? Had the name become obscene? But we too are human beings (13).

The basic theme of *Karukku* is the humiliation meted out to a particular group of Dalit in a village in which the narrator is a part and parcel of that group. It talks about their lifestyle, their style of living, their hard work, their culture, their belief system, their entertainment, their spirituality, their love, their fight, their struggles, their pain and agony, their joys and sorrows, their tears, and dreams and much more. Because of the themes and content, the novel could be looked at more as a socio-political and cultural emancipation than a novel, in perfect balance. As Lakshmi Holmstrom says in her article “Not Victims but Rebels: Images of Women in the Protest Literature of Tamil Christian Dalits”: The events of Bama’s life are not arranged according to a simple, linear, or chronological order, as with most autobiographies, but rather, reflected upon in different ways, repeated from different perspectives, grouped under different themes, for example, work, games and recreation, education, beliefs, etc. It is her driving quest for integrity as a Dalit and a Christian that shapes the book and gives its polemic. (74).

The content and the events described in the novel deem its position as the first Tamil Dalit classic text on the Christian Dalit community. Bama’s *Karukku* is a frequently studied and researched text in the academic circles and colleges, not just for its style but for its content: the events which it narrates and the atrocities against the Dalits. By doing this, she represents the whole community – a community that has been silenced for centuries and kept out of mainstream literature.

Language is another reason for which *Karukku* is often discussed and researched by the academicians and Dalit critics. Bama’s language makes her novels more unique and effective. She unabashedly uses the Dalit language throughout the text, including the narration. She does this because she firmly believes that the

language of her people alone can communicate their story authentically. While doing this, she inadvertently breaks the rules of grammar and vocabulary. Bama's work is among those that are exploring and changing identity. The language that she uses becomes a tool that enables her not just to express herself but also to begin a revolution. Her experiences form a part of the larger movement among the Dalits.

The language that she uses enables to discover the voice of the voiceless. Bama feels very proud about using this language of her own people. She used this technique as an instrument in bringing about a change in Tamil Dalit literature. The grammar of Bama's language has now become part of the Tamil language and was recognized by the pandits. Her writing created a place for her own community. She has gained more attention among the readers, as much as she did for her content. Other Dalit writers are amazed by the language used by her, which also inspired them to follow a similar mode to rare individual voices.

Bama speaks for both men and women in all her three novels: *Karukku*, *Sangati* and *Vanmam*. When Bama is seen as a Dalit woman writer, one can see that she, irrespective of her gender, fights for the entire Dalit community: both men and women. Although she is a woman, she does bring out the double marginalization of the women in her community, she does fight for a holistic solution. She celebrates her community and wishes for a holistic Dalit liberation – in body and mind, both psychologically and sociologically and as a whole community.

The language and the lingua franca used by Bama in *Karukku* reflect the struggle for survival in the caste-ridden, oppressive village life of a Dalit woman. She uses the language of her own people, thus breaking the rules of grammar and vocabulary of the Tamil language. In *Karukku*, the exclusive narrative language is

used as a tool to find the voice of the voiceless. Even though it is a translated work in English from Tamil, the tone and effect of the language – although slightly falling short of the polemic in the original – has not been completely lost in translation. This ‘unpolished’, ‘crude’ language and idioms are probably, at times, the only armour to cut through the thorny paths of a Dalit woman in her everyday walks of life.

According to Geetha Hariharan, it is in a gamut of struggles and hardship that Bama ventured into the writing of the novel, and which indeed would have had to be contained in such a nuanced usage of language.

After seven years in an unreal world, she grew up as a nun and left the convent, and the real world she hoped to change was not found, and she did not know how to live. It was this terrible period of isolation that forced her into doing something that would help her to survive. She began writing about her childhood: about being Dalit. She wrote about a culture of survival – the hard work and the noise, whether of songs or quarrels. She had the women speaking the earthy language they spoke, which is the only armour these women have against both landlords and husbands. This novel can also be considered a community’s history; rather, a cultural biography of a community.

In addition, *Karukku* can be viewed as a powerful feminist narrative. *Karukku* is a double-edged reference to the stem of the palm leaf. The serrated edges of the leaf recalled by Bama not only the social cuts of people like her every day, but also the more important fact that they had to cut through this stifling system. Despite the general outpouring of criticisms from the Tamil literary circuits about the usage of the ‘crude’ and ‘ugly’ employment of language, lexicon and the idioms in the novel, her own village community had ostracized and excommunicated her for almost a period

of seven months after the publication of her novel. They were infuriated and felt that they had been portrayed and shown in a poor and ugly light. Later, educated youngsters of the village community who pacified the community people brought her back with joy. Geetha Hariharan, however, notes that though Bama's own people accepted her and welcomed her for her contribution towards the empowerment of the Parayar community, the rest of her readership failed to appreciate her narrative style and language.

This book, when finally published, caused a commotion since her own people were furious that they were shown as 'ugly'. Then understanding grew, particularly among the young, and she was invited to the village for the erection of an Ambedkar statue. Among the rest of her readership, there was discomfort about the subject matter of her writing; about her narrative style and her language, which was criticized as neither beautiful nor acceptable.

The title of the books *Karukku*, *Sangati* and *Vanmam* are used by Bama as a symbol, which encompasses not only her revolutionary struggle of survival in a multi-layered oppressive system, holding raised shoulders but also a pointer to inspire and to Dalit Parayar women, Parayar community and Dalits in general. The word 'Karukku' in Tamil refers to a double-edged sword. K. Latha in her essay on *Karukku* explains the word 'Karukku' in Tamil and how Bama uses this in her title. According to Latha, it has Biblical connections, which Bama brings to focus that she belongs to the Catholic sect of Christianity, and such a reference would be relatable to people, particularly to her Parayar Christian community. Latha states: The title of the book *Karukku* is used by the author as a symbol. The term 'Karukku' generally refers to the serrated or toothed edge of the stalk of a Palmyra leaf. The sharp edges found on both

sides of the stalk symbolically refer to a double-edged sword. The word is also used as a pun and in the Tamil language the word 'karu' means seed or embryo, which also implies the meaning of newness or freshness. While discussing the symbolical significance of the term 'Karukku', Bama makes an orientation that the words found in the epistle to Hebrews in the *New Testament* is for the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (123).

Furthermore, in an interview, Bama herself has explained the larger meaning and the symbolic message behind the title *Karukku*. We must cut through the system instead of cutting ourselves, she says in an interview with Geetha Hariharan.

According to Bama, one edge of the thorny sharp represents the oppressive caste society has cut into different walks of life while the other edge refers to resisting the oppression and never letting ourselves down.

In addition, Bama explains how the same metaphor could be used in situations of any kind of oppression, in schools and universities where the Dalit students face discriminations not only from the authorities and teachers but also from peer groups. In any case, the oppressed Dalit students have to be firm and rooted in their soil, identity and education, agitate and organize as Baba Saheb Ambedkar asked to do. According to Bama, thousands of obstacles may come in the way, but there will be success if people fight against oppression with hope.

Taking further from the symbolic reference of the title, it is not only a symbol of Bama's own struggles in facing multifaceted oppressions; it could be emulated in general for the Dalit community. As an autobiographical novel, it talks about life struggles and the stories of a collective Parayar community. Pramod K. Nayar has

argued that Dalit autobiographies must be treated as testimonial, atrocity narratives that document trauma and strategies of survival. The shift between generic conventions of individual writing style and collective biography and as one of the subaltern agencies, the novel *Karukku* takes up a strategy of witnessing in the narrative, Bama operates as a witness to a community's suffering, calls upon the larger readers to undertake a rhetorical listening as secondary witness.

Bama's *Karukku* departs from the conventions of autobiographies and moves on to a form of testimony. This form enables the author not only to voice the lived experiences of herself but also gives voice to those who are victims of a multi-layered marginalization, in the form of social, linguistic and literary marginalization. In order to make this point clearer, the novel *Karukku* departs from an individual location to a community, in a particular case, the Parayar Christian community, through a narration of trauma. The significant aspect here is that the authenticity of Bama's suffering and the narration also points at something beyond it. The testimonial life-narration and the writing enable Bama to put forth and share her tale of pain, so that the personal testimony attains a stature of an accurate historical witnessing of traumatic oppression of a social structure. The literary form of autobiography functions as presupposing an autonomous individual subject, whereas testimonial is a genre where the author or narrator takes up the lead, standing in for an entire social group. There is no one like a problematic hero in the novel, but the problematic collective situation in *Karukku* is the caste.

In the preface of the novel *Karukku*, Bama starts with a personal 'I': 'there are many congruities between the saw-edged Palmyra *Karukku* and my own life'. She elaborates the context of her life as 'events that occurred during many stages of my life, unjust social structures that plunged me into ignorance'. *Karukku* is thus

both the title of her personal autobiography and an account of the whole community. It is significant that the first noun in Bama's narrative is not a unified subject "I" but a collective "our". This is the opening line of *Karukku*: "Our village is very beautiful" (1). When she describes her community, she never uses 'my people', instead, she writes: "Most of our people are agricultural labourers" (1). Bama has clearly stated the genre here – it is not a personal autobiography alone, but a collective archive of suffering. Bama is the narrative voice through which the sufferings and atrocities of two communities, Dalit and Christian, are addressed to us.

Sangati is a record of Dalit women's experiences of the joint oppression of caste and gender faced by multiple Dalit women, and it is an autobiography of a Dalit community. The experiences of Dalit women are narrated in first-person narration. The narrator in the early chapters is Pathima, a girl of twelve, and in the last three chapters, it is the same narrator, but she is a young woman; the reflective narrative voice is that of an adult intermittently present in all three narrations, and it investigates the past and probes the present. Written in a conversational tone, *Sangati* professes to record a series of conversations held between the writer – the narrator and her maternal grandmother.

Sangati analyses Dalit women's oppression as a triple jeopardy of oppression but double patriarchies – discreet patriarchy of their own caste and an overlapping patriarchy of upper caste as well as poverty. Discreet patriarchy dictates that power rests with men in the community and the institutions led by them – the caste courts, the church, the panchayat, etc. The text traces an account of Bama's portrayal of how Dalit women are being sexually exploited by the patriarchy of the upper caste.

Sangati does not follow a linear structure or even a semblance of a plot. It holds the reader's attention through a series of representations of women, of different age groups, drawn from the labouring Parayar community facing numerous forms of oppression. Bama focuses specifically on the dual oppression faced by Parayar women, on account of their caste and gender, at home and in society at large. She thus fuses Dalit discourse with feminist course, constantly underlining how each discourse impinges on the other. She chooses to represent this matrix through a kaleidoscopic presentation of Dalit women subjected to violence and injustice at the hands of husbands, fathers, brothers, priests, panchayat leadership, police force, upper caste landlords, politicians who seek their vote, quacks and exorcists who violate "possessed" women.

More endearing moments of the narrative pertain to Dalit women who manage to subvert the prevailing system through humour, shrewish conduct, abusive speech, or wit. Shanmugakizavi pisses into the landlord's mud pot for disallowing Dalit women from using his well. Kaliyamma drives away her violent husband by taking recourse to verbal obscenities, abusive speech, and exaggerated protestation. She matches every act of physical violence with verbal violence and shocks her tormentor into passivity. Bama underscores the need to reformulate feminist paradigms and seriously reconsider ground realities as prevalent in rural, caste ridden India. Her writing is an activist intervention at multiple levels. It forms a subtext within Dalit discourse in Tamil even while providing a counter discourse to traditional mainstream writing.

In *Sangati*, the novelist by portraying the character Mariamma and her sufferings presents how poor Dalit women are exploited by the upper-caste landlords.

Mariamamma is a Dalit among Dalits. She is doubly oppressed by a patriarchal and tyrannical society. She has no exemplary endurance and indomitable spirit to bounce back against all odds. So, she simply accepts her fate and wants to put an end to her problems by suicide. However, suicide cannot be a solution to the injustice done by the patriarchy.

The caste difference, inequality in economics and patriarchy of the upper caste are the key factors in sexual violation in our society. In *Sangati*, Bama suggests remedies to ameliorate the Dalit woman. Women are the victims in the patriarchal society. Owing to poverty, ignorance, and lack of education, they are denied their rights in politics, education and in every sphere of human activities. So, the novelist conveys that woman should put in efforts to protect themselves and establish that they are also human beings like others. She conveys that, “We should educate boys and girls alike, showing no difference between them as they grow into adults.” (123). If women are given freedom like men, they will prove their strength. The novelist concludes the novel with the hope that men and women with equal rights will live as one, with no difference between them.

Bama’s *Sangati* creates an independent space amongst the larger body of Dalit writing through positive subversions. In *Sangati*, many strong Dalit women had the courage to break the shackles of authority, to propel themselves upwards, their defiance to change their difficult problem – filled lives and quickly staunch their tears. *Sangati* looks at the lives of those women who dared to make fun of the class in power that oppressed them. And through this, they found the courage to revolt. It flouts the tradition of a novel and is filled with interrelated events in the life of her community.

Sangati belongs to a genre which believes that literature does have a moral purpose. The novel justifies the role of literature in social justice, provoking a social consciousness in the reader. Her introduction of a new form and language does produce the desired results thus defying the yardstick of what is regarded as a standard writing in Indian writing in English. Bama very blatantly renders the experiences of Parayar women, their sexual and gender discrimination, humiliation which by itself is rare in women's writings. She challenges the notion of Dalit writings as mere sob stories and goes to make them angry, which is a much stronger and more compelling reaction than shedding futile tears. She also talks about varied experiences of Dalit women that were hitherto not dealt with in the mainstream or Dalit discourse.

The life writings of the marginalized are enriched with ethnographical insight in addition to auto ethnographical elements, which draws them closer to the genre of auto ethnography. Bama's *Sangati* is viewed as a word, a blend of autobiography and ethnography, combining the study of self and culture. The novel moves from the story of an individual struggle to the perception of a community of Parayar women, a neighbourhood group of friends and relations and their joint struggle. In this sense, *Sangati* is perhaps the autobiography of a community. Bama portrays the ordeals of the women folk, which start at a very young age from looking after their siblings, struggling hard to make both ends meet with their drunkard men folk, accepting discriminating practices in the workplace, enduring sexual violence at home and in the workplace to subsisting with marginalization in all domains. Through the critics' view, Bama's *Sangati* is an autobiography of a community based on the assertiveness of self-revealed in Bama, which substantiates it as an auto ethnography.

In *Sangati*, the life-writing of Bama is not merely the personal accounts of the writer but the everyday life of the whole community, their ethos, and the social, cultural, and political factors, which destine their marginalization, are elucidated. As the representative of the oppressed community, Bama speaks of their anguish, emotional turmoil, and their anxious attempts to break the shackles of marginalization in her narrative. The social implication is complemented with the individual representation in this life-writing. Indeed, she has the more serious responsibility of enlightening not only her people but also the outside world about their predicament and victimization. Auto ethnography serves as the best genre to realize this objective. The social cause gains more significance than the individual representation in Bama. The fact that autobiography and ethnography have become inseparably linked in her writing has been justified by various critics and scientists.

The auto ethnography of Bama is the mimetic representation of the family life of Dalits. Bama brings forth the horror of domestic violence. Bama's *Sangati* is a precise record on the predicament of Dalit women as the victims of domestic violence and two-fold discrimination – as women and as Dalits in all domains. Women's health is given the least importance, though they are the pillars of the family. The women, however, dutiful, and selfless are victimized by their husbands who think that they have every right to thrash their wives. It is not uncommon to see husbands brutally attacking their wives for no reason. Nobody can question them because the husbands are considered their masters and saviours. Tormenting and thrashing one's wife are common and an everyday occurrence in almost all the households. A man has all the rights over women, even to kill her. Thus, the men in the Dalit community assert their superiority over their women.

Another area where discrimination between men and women is quite evident is the payment of unequal wages despite both doing the same work. The gender discrimination in Dalits is further revealed in the novel through specific birth control methods used in Dalits. The practice of having large families in Dalits is largely due to gender discrimination, which makes it a duty of women to undergo sterilization. Bama authentically points out that even their conversion to Christianity, which advocates liberal humanism, does not guarantee their freedom from discrimination.

Dalit women have to endure more marginalization than the men of their community in the religious domain also. The pervasiveness of superstitions and occult rites in Dalits has its roots in the patriarchal oppression, which together with caste oppression makes Dalit women prone to mental ill health. The repressive atmosphere both at home and outside makes Dalit women victim of various psychological ailments revealed in the form of fantasy about spirits and ghosts such as 'peys'. In *Sangati*, Bama brings out the use of supernatural existence, which is believed that women are often possessed by 'peys' (spirits). The people have a strong belief in all these supernatural existences and mostly women are the victims of these 'peys'. And even among women, there is no tinge of information heard of upper caste women becoming possessed or dancing in frenzy. The narrator comments saying that even the so-called 'peys' always seem to be set on women from the Pallars, Parayars, Chakkiliyars and Koravars communities. The story connected with a particular pey named Esakki is narrated in detail in *Sangati* and provides an instance of the intimidation and savagery suffered by Dalit women in a male-dominated society in the name of honour of the family. In her analysis of the cases of women possessed by peys, the narrator marvels as to how only women, those too only Dalit women, are

possessed by peys and spirits and nobody else. She slightly reaches the conclusion that it is their own mental ill health due to repressive routine in and out of the homes that makes them victims of such fantasies. The theory that peys only possess women who lack courage in their hearts confirms the above hypothesis. Ironically, the stories of peys and spirits are used as an excuse to curtail the freedom of women, who are told to be afraid of the dark and unknown.

The fact that the life-writing of Bama is not merely restricted to her personal accounts but an authentic representation of the people of her community is explicitly seen in her novel *Sangati*. Bama brings in the full circle of autobiographical element at the end of the novel when she says that being a woman, particularly being an unmarried Dalit woman, has posed great difficulty for her in everyday life. She asks the basic question as to why a woman can't belong to anyone but herself. She not only speaks for herself but for her community at large. Thus, it is more of an auto ethnography than mere autobiography.

Sangati is not just a creative work of pure imagination, but it is culminated with the confluence of objective themes. Dalit women are the main theme of *Sangati*. It reveals their protest and strategical ways and means of resistance in times of oppression and rejection. It celebrates their resilient nature and builds up hope. It talks about the strength that enables them to swim against the current and live with zeal and zest. Bama has very much succeeded by transforming individual predicaments into universal miseries and sufferings of women. This is one of the reasons that *Sangati*, the community autobiography of Bama demands further the exploration of reading and understanding the deep socio-economic issues of our society.

Another chasm between theory and practice on the precincts of Church has been the continual discrimination against Dalit Christians. The presence of casteism in

church, which becomes a focal point, is touched upon in Bama's novel *Karukku*, *Sangati* and *Vanmam*. The values propagated by the church stand in variance with their current practice. While in theory, the church recognizes no difference of class, colour, caste, and gender, but in practice, there are deep entrenched prejudices within its realm. One such gender bias is revealed in its forbidding women to act on stage in the company of men. Due to it, whenever the need arose, men had to be cast in the role of women. Despite its modernistic outlook and professed equality, the sweeping and cleansing in churches are done mostly by Dalit Christians, while the upper caste Christians stand aside and watch. This practice gets covert as well as overt support of nuns and priests who tell Dalit women that they will gain merit by sweeping the Church. The argument seriously sounds just like the preaching of Brahmins to Dalits regarding their usefulness, where God has situated them.

The hardships faced by Dalit women in their daily life make them strong; as a result, they can even face acute pains and are not soft or chicken-hearted. The novel *Sangati* is full of instances where women single-handedly faced difficult situations and emerged victorious. There are a lot of souls searching in *Sangati* regarding the factors responsible for the degradation faced by Dalit women. The chief factor, which the narrator emphasizes repeatedly in the text, is the lack of education in Dalit women that does not allow them to come out of the cycle of poverty and oppression. The writer satirizes such enlightened Dalit women for detaching themselves from the social reality around them and trying to leave their fold to chase behind it. The upshot of it is that they alienate themselves from their own clan, while upper castes never accept them. Such education, instead of bridging the gap and bringing a better understanding of their conditions and ameliorating them, seems to be widening the gulf between the two.

Vanmam deals with the internal animosity among Dalits in Tamil Nadu. It prevails not just in Tamil Nadu, but in every state of India. Whether it is animosity between Dalits and the elite sections or Dalits with sub-sections, it is very pertinent to know that women are subjugated in every sphere of life both by men of the upper caste and by their own men and their community. The novel *Vanmam* is about animosity between two castes within Dalits. Pallars and Parayars are the two Dalit castes discussed in the novel. Pallars are recognized as Hindus and Parayars are Christian converts.

Bama foregrounds the affinity between the two groups and uses feminist strategies of representation, rereading and historicizing the oppression in her narrativization of Dalit experience. She points out in her writing that Dalits would have to help themselves and assert their difference from the dominant castes as a strategy of self-affirmation. She also writes about the Dalit in Dalit's own vocabulary refusing to follow traditional notions of form, style, aesthetic paradigms or acceptable forms of diction and grammar. She seeks to represent women by tracing gaps in literary history, emphasizing difference as a principle of affirmation even if it is located as social advantage to the group. Bama affirms her Dalit identity and refuses to be accommodated into mainstream literary circles. Dalit writing in Tamil and Bama's in particular employs feminist thought and modes of resistance. Her works adopt a more militant framework as they break free from the shackles of the upper middle-class matrix that often invade literary discourse.

Bama's *Vanmam* has been described as a discourse of discontent, a politics of difference from mainstream feminism, and it has been criticized for marginalizing Dalit women. Dalit feminist discourse questions Indian feminisms hegemony

speaking about all women. According to Dalit feminists, Dalit women are facing three ways of oppression, namely caste oppression at the hands of upper castes, class-based oppression at the hands of the upper and middle castes and as a woman who experience patriarchal oppression at the hands of all men and men of their own castes.

Bama's *Vanmam* is in many ways a marked departure from her earlier works *Karukku* and *Sangati*. Moving away from her earlier autobiographical mode, *Vanmam* steers clear of the familiar confessional, conversational tone and adopts a linear, descriptive, and omniscient narrative. The narrative is less impassioned, less dramatic, and often dull as compared to Bama's earlier works. Another marked characteristic of Bama's writing is her wit and bouncy humour, the celebratory resilience and earthly vigour of her characters and their vocabulary is also not evident in *Vanmam*. The self-effacing, omniscient narrator is also an implicated participant as evident in the pronounced empathy for Parayar victimhood in the unceasing strife between Pallars and Parayars that forms the subject of the novel.

Bama's *Vanmam* raises an important aspect of Dalit life that has been less recognized and little acknowledged in Tamil Dalit writings. The fixing of Dalit as a homogenous, univocal category largely governed the critical perspective on the Dalit literary discourse in the last two decades. This inevitably led to easy vilification of Dalits and their writing whenever intra-Dalits strife took place or was written about. Even as Dalits were able to bargain better in the political domain, they were constrained to erase their cultural, community or vocation specific distinctiveness - aspects that lent them individuality and self-esteem.

Dalit writers began to display a sharper and more candid self-appraisal of Dalit subjectivity in the context of plurality and cultural or religious diversity amongst Dalits. In Bama's *Vanmam*, there is intra-strife among Dalits, which is discussed, and

strategies are debated to resolve the same. In many respects, *Vanmam* is a less intense or moving tale in comparison to *Karukku* and *Sangati*. Certain issues or even incidents narrated or discussed in her earlier works are taken up again in *Vanmam*, however, without adding a new or different dimension to the quality of discussion. Although Bama had employed repetition as a deliberate narrative strategy in *Karukku* and *Sangati*, she had used it to add a fresh interpretation to her earlier treatment. This engaging trope is missing in *Vanmam*. Disappointing as this may be, a critical study of *Vanmam* is warranted as she subjects Dalits – both Parayars and Pallars – to an objective scrutiny and calls for the forgoing of unity among Dalits on social, and more significantly political grounds.

In *Vanmam*, the plot is rather weak as it merely details the events involving two Dalit castes in a village called Kandampatti in Tamil Nadu, which may be considered a microcosm of the Indian subcontinent. It is a village surrounded by beautiful mountains where people of different communities have lived for generations. The Parayars of the village are Christians, and their churches are in the western part of the village. Next to the Parayar streets are the streets of Pallars who Dalits are, but Hindus. Away from the Dalit streets are the streets of Naickers, Nadars, Thevar and Chettiyar. Agricultural land owned by the landlords is in the western part of the village, and therefore both Parayars and Pallars have to walk through the streets of the upper class to reach the fields. The Parayars and Pallars of the village are labourers in the fields of the landlords, and they are destined to lead a pitiable existence with the husk thrown by them. The Parayars work hard day and night to turn even barren land into fertile fields. Despite their hard labour, they have to remain half-fed with porridge. With an adequate glossary and a delightful absence of proof errors,

the volume communicates well and brings forth the importance of translations in the English publishing world.

The other value-added inputs in this volume are an interview with Bama and an insightful introduction by R.A. Azhagarasan to the text and the context of Bama's writing in the Tamil Dalit literary domain. It is a much-needed theorization of Tamil Dalit literary context, its trajectory and the reading strategies that require to be evolved in its wake. His emphasis on the need to locate Dalit writing in Tamil as an anti-caste discourse rather than a construction of victimhood is well taken. Azhagarasan's introduction rightly points out the lingering doubt that might rise in the reader about the authorial voice being caught up in the complexities of the caste equation that she describes. This is obvious in Bama's construct of the subjugated, yet reasonable Parayar and the cruel, insensitive Pallars. What one might sense while reading a text in Tamil with all its regional and caste variations of diction, usage and relationship among the speakers gets lost in English. However, *Vanmam* does not fully transcend this rubric and Parayar victimhood remains an integral construct of the novel.

Vanmam shares the discourse of modernity, addresses issues concerning contemporary society and its contradictions. The crux of the novel can be understood in the author's own words as marginalized people, those who have been pushed to the very edges of society, have to put aside their internal enmities if they are to reclaim their self-respect and their rightful place in society. *Vanmam* is all about combating cruelties based on caste system with a constructive strategy of empowerment where education made all the differences in their lifestyle. They wanted to improve their lifestyle because they are able to ponder and realize what went wrong. In their hearts, they ask why God has made them like this, lower caste Dalits.

Imayam's first two novels, *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*, have been translated into English and Malayalam. *Beasts of Burden* (*Koveru Kazhudhaigal*) was published in 1994. There were discussions on books by Tamil writers and sessions on film. However, for Imayam, it was S. Albert, a professor of English from Trichy who opened the door to the world. Imayam recalls the professor narrating an anecdote about Hemingway who was advised by someone in Paris to go back to his homeland and write about it. This set Imayam thinking seriously about his own writing and themes.

From 1984-1985, he completed the first draft of the novel *Beasts of Burden* (*Koveru Kazhudhaigal*) and showed it to Albert. Instead of offering his comments, Albert told him the story of Chekov, a writer who had come to him with a draft to rewrite it. This happened seven times. After that, the writer rebelled, and then he was asked to publish it. Describing this work, Imayam says that it introduced the dramatic monologue into Tamil writing. He had consciously worked on the form and on portraying real-life situations. He wrote *Koveru Kazhudhaigal* more or less in a single, sitting, one night after, hearing a vannaatti, a washerwoman and a cry about her life. In general, the novel was enthusiastically received.

The title *Beasts of Burden* (*Koveru Kazhudhaigal*) means 'mules' but carries the sense here of 'beasts of burden'. The story is that of a Vannaan (washerman) family, who traditionally carry their bundles of washing on mules. The title, though, refers ironically to the washer men themselves. The story is that of decline and change in the village, seen through the perspective of the Vannaatti, Arokkyam, who serves a Dalit community of agricultural labourers, attached individually as bonded labourers to Goundar families. Ritual status and payment in kind are giving way to a contract based solely on cash wages. Her own children rebel against both the old order and the new one.

Beasts of Burden (Koveru Kazhudhaigal) gives us an extraordinarily detailed picture of a lifestyle that is reclaimed and told with pride, without any attempt to Sanskritise. Such pride, incidentally, is a characteristic of Dalit writing today. Yet, it is not even the rich ethnographic detail that makes it so valuable, but the rare insight it gives us into the life of the woman, Arokkyam, literally on the margins of society and poised between Hindu ritual and Christian devotion. The names of the characters in the novel, incidentally, have a ringing poignancy: Arokkyam means good health, well-being; Savuri is the Tamil version of Xavier.

The novel *Beasts of Burden (Koveru Kazhudhaigal)* is constructed between two journeys: a pilgrimage of hope at the beginning and a routine trip to the washing pool in drudgery and despair at the end. Between these, it is sign-posted by rites of passage giving a sense of cyclical time, but also by landmarks of historical and linear time. This climate of time and change is important to the novel whose primary theme is Arokkyam's dilemma within changing systems of belief about self and society. The indomitable but suffering mother figure is a repeated image in Dalit writing. She is often the sole breadwinner of the family, sacrificing everything for the family. Dalit men are a continuing symbol of oppression but also of struggle, sacrifice and sense of duty. But women did not challenge nor change the nature of the functions and duties that were traditionally theirs. The portrait of Arokkyam is in that tradition but at the same time different from within, from the perspective of her own dilemma. Iyamam presents her as trapped within the dilemma of her time. She has neither skills nor the economic independence which would enable her to take risks and take responsibility for change.

Imayam's second novel *Arumugam*, which appeared in 1999, is a tale of an emotional bond between a mother and son. Raman and Dhanabackiyam are the couple in the novel where Arumugam is the son of this couple. After the death of Raman, Dhanabackiyam gets a job in Pondicherry and takes her son Arumugam along with her. Their lives go well until he sees his mother lying down with a British man, Jerry Albert.

Arumugam runs away from his mother and his life starts there. Wherever he goes, he looks around the events that take place and observes them. Apart from his mother, he encounters various women characters like Vasantha, Chinnapponu, Abitha and Lakshmi who shape him like a real mother. Through the character of Arumugam, the ups and downs of life were portrayed clearly and beautifully; after his innocence is snatched from him. So, Imayam uses a technique of not being himself as a narrator but rather he allows his own character to speak for themselves. Through the characters in the novel *Arumugam*, Imayam brings out the humiliation and oppression, the Dalits face in the society based on caste struggles. The detailed description of the day-to-day life of these people brings the reader closer to them. He did not follow any protocol or principles in writing this novel, he made the day-to-day life lead the story, and it worked really well. The author effortlessly enters the character's mind and brings their thoughts beautifully.

Language is the most preferred method of communication in our life. It is an attempt to examine the language used by the Dalit people in Tamil society as reflected in the character of Imayam as he is not using his language but the language of his characters. He is not a narrator of stories. Instead, he lets one of his characters speak. The characters in *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam* speak of their condition, sufferings

and struggles, and the pain they undergo comes out through their speech. Imayam's novels have a third-person narrator. Each Dalit writer has his or her own style of wielding the language through which their painful experiences are revealed. Their stories are based on real life. Arumugam, who is obviously the narrator, is superior to the characters. The writer himself limits the use of direct exposition by the narrator and substitutes himself with the privilege of seeing into the minds of more than character, based on the analysis of the language used by the upper-class people to treat the poor, lower class people. Imayam writes in a formal style reporting the happenings and incidents with a complete lack of inhibition as he uses the colloquial conversational styles of the protagonists both in their reference to their work and in their exchange of banter between themselves. Imayam's novels *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam* reflect through the formal reference to their life. The books have mourning songs and laments (oppari) – the cultural heritage of the Dalit people and a necessary part of life, which reflects their painful experiences though they are being rapidly lost in the changing times.

In the novels of Bama and Imayam, the remarkable thing is that it is written in a spoken, demotic style. It makes no concession to polite language; it still distinguishes between a more formal narrative style and the tough colloquial style of the reported conversation. It reveals the richness of remembered detail, which becomes important by the way of reclaiming and cherishing a lifestyle. Bama's novel *Karukku; Sangati; Vanmam* and Imayam's *Beasts of Burden (Koveru Kazhudhaigal)* and *Arumugam* are real life stories of risks taken and of challenges, choices and changes. They are also considered stories of quest and self-discovery. Their ways of doing away with the caste are by uncovering its dynamics to reveal complexities

without judgments. The result is that the stories of all the five novels, which are rooted in specificities of a certain experience, have a resounding universality: it is simply about how life goes on.

Bama's novel avoids the pronounced biases and moral censuring of a community that had invaded Iyamam's works. Iyamam's novels *Beasts of Burden* (*Koveru Kazhudhaigal*) and *Arumugam* foregrounded the dominance of a particular Dalit community over the other Dalit communities often resulting in a duplication of the hegemonic caste structure of Hindu society among Dalits and how this has percolated even amongst Dalits who have converted to Christianity. Iyamam's novels received hostile criticism on account of their critique of Parayar's dominance over Dalit communities who stand further below in the caste ladder.

Bama's interventions in the field of literature are pivotal in marking the life struggles, everyday caste oppression and the survival tactics of Dalit women and Dalits in general. Like her first work *Karukku*, her second novel *Sangati* is also an acclaimed piece of literary work which portrays similar life struggles. As it is in the novel *Karukku*, the language spoken by the women in *Sangati* is also vigorous in nature and is close to proverbs and folklore, which is very appealing to the readers. Left with the minimum possibilities of empowering themselves in a society that keeps them out of power, privilege, and dignity of Dalit, they exhibit enormous skills for survival and combat. Bama's works depict these women in their struggle and how they employ themselves to challenge or subvert the domineering pushes on them using language, idioms, and songs. Dalits have gained enlightenment in a political sense, rather than merely accumulating university degrees. Bama's works coincide with the Ambedkarite vision of Dalit empowerment. If *Karukku* upholds education, *Sangati* foregrounds organized agitation, while *Vanmam* enjoins unity among Dalits.

Thus, the language in the hands of both the Dalit writers, Bama and Iyayam, has become a powerful weapon. The characters portrayed in the novels are based on real characters as well as the experiences faced by them. When the voice of the writers and characters reach the desired and required distance and readership, their voice will definitely be heard. The resistance that follows will prove to be a bear resistance and will bring along with it the desired effect. Removing each and every stumbling block which stands as a barrier in the way of attaining equality and dignity is a Himalayan task, which has already been started. Every attempt made by writers towards attaining that goal will become a beacon of light showing others the path and a milestone in their journey towards equality and dignity.

Chapter - VI

Conclusion

This chapter briefs the condensation of the other chapters and the future scope for research. The introductory chapter gives a detailed account of Indian literature and traces the development of Dalit Literature, biography of Bama and Iyayya and their literary achievements. The introduction gives a precise account of research novels taken for study, which establishes the uniqueness of the title, 'Psychological Trauma of Casteism in the Select Novels of Bama and Iyayya' taken for this thesis writing.

India is one of the world's largest democracies, but in its caste structures, a large section of people lives a life of subjugation, segregation, and insufferable conditions. In recent years, the socio-cultural and political assertion of this oppressed class – the Dalits – have been recorded by a diligent literary genre called Dalit Literature, which etches the pain and suffering of past generations and centuries of hypocrisy, deceit, and violence, sustained in the name of tradition. After centuries of silence, the Dalits have come to express the harsh reality of their life.

Dalit writing in Tamil emerged in the 1990s with the birth centenary of Ambedkar, the champion of Dalits. Literature then had failed to recognize the rich culture and values of Dalits. The new Dalit literature broke the silence, which was forced upon them and started unfolding the seething discontent of Dalits against their exploitation by the upper caste people. It also flashes the disability of marginalized people who are getting suppressed and subjugated by the casteist or capitalist society. It also deals with the sufferings of low-caste people who are considered inferior among Dalits and are enslaved and exploited by the upper-castes as well as within

their own community. It also explains how these exploited people are simply acquiescent and enslaved by upper caste people.

Dalit literature is a literature created with Dalit consciousness about Dalit life. It is significant that Dalit literature owes its origin to a revolutionary struggle for social and economic change. This explains the various aspects of serious thought in Dalit literature. It is closely associated with the hopes for freedom of a group of people who as untouchables are victims of social, economic, and cultural inequality. This literature is characterised by a feeling of rebellion against the establishment of negativism. Literature is one of the chief media for Dalits to enhance and uplift the entire lower classes and aims to create consciousness to solve their problem. The characteristic of Dalit literature is in its reaction to exploit brutal frankness, thereby exposing the atrocities of higher society with burning anger and hatred and a call for ruthless vengeance against the society and people who have created such inequality and an inhuman atmosphere.

Dalit writing incorporates writings of women who have voiced their protest the oppressive power structures operative in the Indian caste, class, and patriarchal system. In an attempt to subvert the phallocentric domination in society, as well as in literature, women writers such as Bama have penned down her painful experience of being a female subaltern. Originally, the term 'subaltern' was used in the military for denoting hierarchy in army forces. In a non-military sense, the term 'subaltern' was used for the first time by Antonio Gramsci in an essay in the early twentieth century. For him, the term stood for any person or a group of people, of inferior rank and station, because of race, class, gender, sex, ethnicity or religion. In the mid-20th century, the term 'subaltern' began to be used as a reference to the colonized people

of the South African subcontinent. In the early 1980s, the term gained a momentum when at Oxford, the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) was formed under the leadership of Ranajit Guha. It was a group of South Asian scholars who were interested in postcolonial and post-imperial societies in South Asia in particular and the developing world in general. In recent decades, it is regularly used as a term in history, anthropology, sociology, and literature.

Historically and politically, subaltern literature is the outcome of European Imperialism. It was mostly in the 18th century when European countries, especially Britain, tried to consolidate the imperial power. In the process of development, Europeans exploited the natives and indigenous people of occupied lands, and this process involved military conflict, the massive displacement of people and greed for profit. But more than accumulation of wealth, it entailed ideological notions of subject races of subordinate people and justified the necessity of imposing authority on those seen as inferior. This was a period in which economic supremacy and political authority of Europe became global.

The socio-political and religious coercive forces in the Indian context have persuaded the marginalized voices to produce literature of resistance. The struggle was initiated by B.R. Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule and Namdeo Dhasal and strengthened by Baburao Bagul, Om Prakash Valmiki, Kanchallaiah and Faustina Bama. It has led to the institutionalization of Dalit literature and its incorporation in the canon. These writers have succeeded in the portrayal of the lived reality from an insider's perspective. They not only face the politics of resistance from the centre to remain at the fringes, but also the politics of assertion from the margins to shift from their defined peripheral space. Thus, Dalit means crushed, ground or broken to pieces, and

he/she faces the challenge of writing as a political act of emancipation of the Dalit self and the community as a whole. The Dalits are trying to write about themselves into the Indian narrative. The journey becomes even more demanding when a Dalit woman decides to raise her voice. Her task is to overthrow the dominant ideologies and social structures and embolden the oppressed sex.

A special feature of this ideology was its strong belief that European science, politics, and religion were superior to any other. Hence, emerged the belief that reality should be interpreted in these terms. Along with the belief in Eurocentricism, they also believed that colonized people were lesser human beings – less human, less civilized, and less cultured and more like savages. European anthropologists considered colonized people as primitive, barbarian, inferior, unfit to rule or manage their resources. So, it was the White man's burden to civilize and educate them.

Subaltern literature, thus, articulates the unsaid and unheard ordeal of the marginalized. Unlike Dalit men, only a few Dalit women have written their personal narratives that remain nameless and faceless in the so-called mainstream literary circles. A major handicap for Dalit women is their lack of education and the ensuing inability to pen down their experiences. Majority of these women lead simple and ordinary lives, busy earning their livelihood. They work very hard to survive as they are much below the poverty line. Despite these challenges, some Dalit women have been able to narrate their sorrows and pains.

It is mainly education and ushering of democracy that brought slow transformation in society. It awakened all sections of society and Dalit, Adivasis and nomadic tribes were no exception. The period from 1920 to 1956 was vastly influenced by Dr. Ambedkar. This period is often called the Renaissance phase in the

history of Dalit movement. Dalits integrated themselves and conducted the first conference of Dalit writers in the auditorium of Bengali High School, Dadar, on 2nd March 1958. At this conference, a resolution was passed to announce the entry of Dalit literature as a perfect segment of knowledge. Furthermore, it was argued that only Dalits have the experience and authority to narrate the pain of Dalits.

Dalit literature is an endeavour in the process of restoration of humanity. Dalit voice for centuries remained submerged and Dalit consciousness did not find a way to break itself free of all sorts of shackles. Contemporary Dalit writers envisage a society that is based on a new order, a society that values the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Dalit literature has many affinities with African American literature. Both these literatures are the outcome of movements for human rights and against exploitation. The most popular form of writing for Dalit and other subaltern writers is the autobiography. Expression of self is the most important feature of a work of art. And autobiography is the mirror in which the writer reflects his or her own image. However, the man's image in the mirror is visible not only to himself, but also to the people around him. This establishes the relationship between self and society.

Dalit writing, like any other writing, has its own significance. It is not just a piece of writing, but it stands as the voice of multitudes of Dalits. It is an expression of their feelings, expression of their right, and expression of their identity. Dalits being marginalised all the time is the main focus of Dalit literature. It is purely their own creation, which builds back their lost identity and gives the outer world a chance to step in and stand in the shoes of Dalits. Dalitness is carried and spread to many different communities. Dalits are considered untouchables not just in the society but even among the writers' community. The revolution in the title begins with the

writing of the work itself. Dalit women face triple oppression inside the shape of caste, magnificence and gender, which prevails in the social hierarchy.

Dalit literature articulates the oppressions and exploitations faced by Dalits in a caste ridden society. Dalit writing as a political form of writing records the cultural and social lives of Dalits, and ideologically, the writing offers a call for resistance. Accessing the values of life, Dalit people are always suppressed by the topmost in the hierarchy of caste. Pages of literature consist of the roots of all our modern life. Literature in all its forms can be seen as written records, and one among them is Dalit literature. The word 'Dalit' means 'ground', 'suppressed', 'crushed' or 'broken to pieces.' Dalit literature focuses on the subjugated life of people categorized as Dalit. It is an outburst of the burning flame of exploited people from many centuries. The suppressed anger erupts only through self-narratives of Dalit. According to Victor Premasagar, the term expresses Dalit's weakness, poverty, and humiliation at the hands of upper castes in Indian society.

Tamil Dalit literature began only in the early 1990s when the birth centenary of revolutionary Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was celebrated. It witnessed political awakening of Dalits and the creation of Tamil Dalit literature. Critics condemn these literatures of lament, but they too have a central place within the creative core. It is characterized by the call for self-identity and assertion. It tramples all conventions with its intensely personal expression; concerned with the life of the subaltern and deals out stark brutality. This literature should be viewed not as a literature of vengeance or a literature of hatred but a literature of freedom and greatness.

The Brahminical forces are still at the helm of affairs in our country. The Brahminical forces are strongly injected in most areas and in most of the minds of our

people. It is strongly rooted in the spiritual soil and has a religious sanction. Our people, who are highly religious, accept anything and everything without questioning as if it is given in the name of God and religion. Brahmins, who had the advantage of getting education and employment unlike other people, stubbornly believe that they are intelligent people and cling on to power and authority. The nature of Brahmanism is such that it easily permeates everywhere and gradually and silently kills everything in order to establish its ideology.

Dalits face a lot of problems in their lives. They don't have an identity of their own, they are not allowed to do what they want, and they are restricted to an extent that they are prohibited from using the same roads which the higher caste people use. They are made to do menial jobs and are always under paid. Dalits in general face so much discrimination, but the women in Dalit community face double discrimination, one being a Dalit and the other being a woman. They are subjugated and dominated by both men of Dalit community and both men and women of higher caste.

This study teaches us and makes us understand how one side of the society suffers and how the other remains heartless. The finding of this research is that it is not about belonging to a higher caste or lower caste that is important, but what matters is the individual self and how one builds up himself or herself. One should break the stereotypes as the saying goes: 'little drops of water make a mighty ocean.

Revolution in a political sense is a tool to get a sudden change in political power and political organization. Revolts against the government are typical of the perceived oppression in various disciplines like economic, social, and political issues. Revolution makes many changes not only in the society or government but also in the individual person like understanding values of the society, change of political

structure that makes the person as a reader of the society and to use the legal and non-legal powers.

The strong feeling for changes makes people revolt against it. Suffering is the major reason for this revolt. Mainly, a change comes out of understanding the real unpleasant situation of the reason for suffering. The revolution does not begin with the reason for happiness but for the reason for desires that happened in the past. The individual suffering does not belong to the individual person alone, but it should be considered a problem of the whole society. The main reason for people's revolt was that there were certain limitations for their sorrow to be revealed, but they don't have the ability to adjust themselves for the suffering continuously. To a certain extent, they try to overcome that and revolt against the rulers or one who is the reason for their suffering. So, they revolt to protect themselves for their future life. The rulers are the main reason for the revolution.

Revolution as the word means not only revolts against the rulers or government, but also shows the power of unity to have some ability to make changes of their own. But here, the revolution is for getting some identity and self-respect among the society. Naturally, Dalits are not considered normal human beings, they are just avoided and separated from the society. The high-class people always make the poor as a slave, and they are forced to work for the high-class people and always make them as dependent.

After some years, Dalits started to come out from that slave situation and started to gain some education amidst a lot of troubles. They face to make some changes in their own society. They received education to come out from the clutches of slavery. They took some actions through their writing, used their political power to

help others, started to give education to their children and made the children with the positive thought of being low caste in the society. But they did not get any permanent freedom or retrieve the self-identity in the society because the society accepts only the people who have money and power. However, it refuses poor people and forces them to work under them. The low-caste people also agree with these commands because there is no other way than this to get money to lead their life. But they are also not treated properly as well as lose their identity.

In the same way, Bama and Iyayam also try to make the low-caste people revolt not only through their action, but also through their mind and get an identity in the society. In the novel, only a small number of people were ready to make a revolution against the upper caste people to get some justice. There was a reason behind it because they gained some education and awareness. So, they represented the voiceless people of their own community. Some of them had power to ask questions against the upper caste and others were only standing behind to support them. But with this action of revolt, they didn't get full victory to retrieve their identity and freedom. In the end, they got some satisfaction that they have got something better than before. In the society, the common thought is that the low-caste people can do only some kind of revolt to get rid of it or against the high caste people to prove their self.

Bama and Iyayam, the most celebrated contemporary Tamil Dalit writers who have been at the forefront of Dalit literary activism had given Dalit aesthetics the visibility. It had previously lacked in the literary campus of India. The works of Bama and Iyayam are found in English, German, French, Telugu and Malayalam translations. Dalit Writers like Bama and Iyayam have already broken the stereotypes, and that is how Dalit literature has flourished finding a space for it in the

vast arena of literature. The novels of Bama and Iyayam examine by using autobiographical techniques and allowing the characters to apprehend how women are oppressed in the caste-infested society as they indicate how caste and gender play collectively to shape our society.

Bama and Iyayam's novels resist all kinds of social injustices, oppressions and atrocities in any form that dehumanizes and humiliates a person who may be based on caste, class or gender. Bama passes through many emotional encounters and experiences in which her community is besmeared with all sorts of indignities. The whole process is a trail of discovery, which makes her a self-made woman. Her grandmother's passive endurance of the suffering and ill-treatment at the hands of the higher caste people, the elderly Dalit people's submissive behaviour before the upper caste people and her traumatic agony and humiliation in the school, the college and the nunnery make her a revolutionary character in fighting against the evils of oppression. The territorial restriction of her community's settlement in a higher caste dominated area, her vocation as a teacher and a nun makes her understand the meaning of 'Parayar'. And this becomes the motivating factor in her life to fight for the liberation of the untouchables. Her own humiliating experiences make her actively engage in alleviating the sufferings of the oppressed. Bama said in an interview that she was happy with what she was and also with what she had to live. The only regret is the realization of her inability to do some concrete actions against caste discrimination and its endless violence in her own village.

The present study throws ample light on the most agonising experiences of a hapless Dalit vested with a greater degree of creative potential, self-awareness, and quest for achieving loftier and nobler things in the life of a woman. The journey is

tedious, the encounters are painful, the experiences are revealing, but then the process of self-discovery, identification and empowerment has to be a necessary ordeal, which is purgatory to an oppressed soul. But the obvious point of departure is that the Inferno of the individual's act of commission or omission of the society or the land in which she had no option but to be born.

It is also an attempt to analyze the novel *Karukku* of the subaltern theory of the character Bama and her struggles through the caste system, applying the concept of exploitation of marginalisation in Bama as a subaltern. Bama witnessed the sufferings of Dalit people and came across Dalit characters' survival in this paper. The hands of the superior class are the solution of social problems in this society. They should not exclude themselves from the lower-class people. They should treat themselves equally as human beings. They should in all situations provide equal rights to the weak and marginalized people of the society. It ends with the scope and chapterization of the dissertation.

Faustina Mary Fatima Rani, also known as Bama Faustina Soosairaj, is a Tamil Dalit writer. During school holidays, she used to accompany her grandmother to work in the Naicker landlord's fields. She has seen with her own eyes how her grandfather and grandmother were ill-treated because of their caste and status. The other force that propelled her to liberate her from the fetters of hegemonic relations was her father's insistence on education. As a voracious reader, Bama read Tamil writers like Jayakanthan, Parthasarthy and Rabindranath Tagore, to name a few. These influences had a telling effect on the young Bama. She, thus, emerged as a significant voice in Dalit women's writing not just because of the forceful portrayal of atrocities on Dalits, but also because the very act of writing becomes an act of empowerment.

Despite the misery in early life, Bama had a carefree childhood and her brother Raj Gauthaman, who was also a writer, introduced her to the world of books and inspired to write poetry. Later, she turned to writing fiction. After acquiring college education, Bama became a schoolteacher. In her writings, she depicts the oppression she faced as a student and as a teacher. Her life took a big turn at the age of twenty-six when she took a vow to become a nun. But even in the convent, she realized that the situation for Dalits was no better. Thus, seven years later, Bama walked out of the convent and decided to write her experiences in the form of an autobiography that saved her from ending her life amid all the struggles. The resultant work *Karukku* was hailed as a masterpiece and Bama rose to prominence in literary circles. Literature enabled her to empower herself and to empower others as well. She created her own pen name Bama, which stands for a blend of sounds.

Hailed as the first Dalit woman writer in India, Bama's *Karukku* is the first autobiography of its kind in Tamil Dalit literature. The autobiography received the anticipated criticism leading to her banishment from her village for the next seven months. The work, however, received critical acclaim and was awarded the Crossword book Award in 2000. Bama became a recognised name with the publication of more works, thereafter, to fundamentally challenge and overthrow hierarchies and to re-search the Dalit female identity.

Bama's fiction pronounces her as a leader of the downtrodden and a harbinger of social change. Her works communicate her voice in support of Dalits, who are otherwise called *taazhthapatoor* or *odukkapattor* in Tamil, meaning marginalized or oppressed. When Bama left the convent and her village with a sense of alienation,

Karukku was born. The life as portrayed in *Karukku* throws light on the most agonising and hapless lives of Dalits. Bama's portrayal shows that she is the representative of Dalit experience. It is indicative of the unfortunate situation bequeathed in a greater degree of self-awareness and quest for achieving loftier and nobler things in the lives of Dalit women. The journey is tedious, the encounters are painful, and the experiences reveal agony. But the process of self-discovery, identification and empowerment has to be necessarily an ordeal. The unpleasant experience and an oppressed soul must compulsorily undergo a traumatic change. The individual's act of commission or omission is not an individuals, but that of the society or the land in which she has no option but to be born.

The painful moments of having lived a life of doubly marginalized – a Dalit and then a woman – inspired her to express this suffocation and anguish. *Karukkudo* does not belong to the conventional formalized archetype of autobiography. The first of its kind in Tamil language, the work does not follow a linear pattern of events. The protagonist is unnamed, and many episodes are presented through various viewpoints. Instead of reflecting upon her life's journey, the writer chooses to interpret the narrative from a larger perspective – her pain signifying the pain of her community. From the childhood memories of discrimination between the sexes to the comparative analysis of Dalit culture and the church, *Karukku* makes the text, a study in Dalit literature in general.

Bama is not pessimistic about the future of women. She asserts that women can tide over oppression and neglect if they are willing to learn and attain knowledge of the world around. In this respect, she echoes what Ambedkar had said once. Addressing women of the depressed class in 1927, Ambedkar made a significant

statement which is true even today in his Autobiographical Notes. You should devote yourself to learning and cultivation of the mind. Don't be in a hurry to marry.

Marriage is a liability. You should not impose it upon your children unless they are able to meet the liabilities arising out of marriage. Above all, let every girl who marries stand by her husband but refuses to be his slave. This is possible when a woman can make a choice between right and wrong. It can be through awareness and education. Aurobindo said that the progress or culture of a nation can be measured by the degree of progress women have made. Women are the true ambassadors of the nation's culture. A nation that neglects its culture will lose its soul and perish.

The novels of Bama and Iyayam deal with the caste ideology that operates at a deeper level and also in more complex ways. The dynamics of caste and Dalit issues are closely linked with our ideas of identity and the self. Bama is very much pained to note that society is not sensitive to the plight of Dalit women. Dalit women are not only victims of patriarchal society but also of caste-hatred. In *Karukku*, Bama investigated the different layers of exploitation of Dalits, especially Parayars in Tamil Nadu, within and by the church. This chapter focuses on the discrimination based on caste identity, dual pressures of caste and gender specifically faced by Dalit women and among the two Dalit groups - Parayars and Pallars in the novels *Sangati* and *Vanmam*.

Following *Karukku*, Bama published *Sangati* in 2005. The work witnesses a shift from the personal to the general. While *Karukku* is an autobiography of an individual, *Sangati* is the autobiography of a community. *Sangati*, as the title signifies, is composed of events. It offers a series of stories of real life narrated by different

women characters. These stories are accompanied by general comments and author's opinions. *Sangati* records the lives of Dalit women who face double oppression from the upper caste and also from patriarchy, male authority.

Sangati does not follow the parameters of a traditional novel. It has no plots in the normal sense; it has many stories told by different protagonists. *Sangati* means events, news, happenings, and the book, therefore, has interconnected anecdotes. Bama says that her mind is crowded with many anecdotes: stories not only about the sorrows and tears of Dalit women, but also about their lively and rebellious nature. *Sangati* is a manifesto for equality and emancipation of women. It tells us about the double standards of men; they get better wages than women for working in fields and in construction work. Women are also vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse in the work market. Apart from economic disparity, they are maltreated at home by fathers, husbands, and brothers.

Sangati deals with several generations of women: the older women, like the narrator's grandmother Vellaiamma, the writer herself and the generation coming after her. The book is in the voices of many women speaking and addressing one another as they share the incidents of their daily lives. There is a special quality in these women. They may be oppressed and tortured, but they do not take things lying down. They are simplistic; they are subtle women. They have the ability of undermining the authority figures by ridiculing them or playing tricks on them. They may be suffering; nonetheless, they can laugh at their masters.

Sangati becomes extremely popular with the readers because of the message it gives. It is a message of self-confidence instead of self-pity. Women in *Sangati* do not lack confidence; rather, they make fun of them who oppressed them. They have the courage to revolt. Bama says: "These women swim against the tide and have

self-respect and vitality. The stories in the book are based on memories of personal experience of Dalit women, narrated in the first person” (53). Women in *Sangati* go through the process of metamorphoses. It is a passage from innocence to experience. In the earlier stories, we get graphic pictures of Dalit women – as infants, young girls, who are oppressed, maltreated, and persecuted. We are told how girls suffer hardships in the villages. There was indeed a great disparity between the two sexes. The birth of a girl child was not welcome. Girls were given shabby treatment – they would not go to school; they would do domestic chores and stay at home confined. On the other hand, boys got preferential treatment and were free to indulge in frivolous activities.

In the latter part of the novel, we have stories where women, though still suffering, have the courage to face the world. It is a typical story of the emerging bold woman. It is a story of disharmony between a husband and his wife – Pakkiaraj and Raakkamma. The couple has frequent quarrels. Most interesting is the scene between the husband and his wife facing each other in a fight in the street. We find that the husband was hitting her body and hurling filthy abuses. If he was showering, she was giving it back. This kind of retaliation by a female is aimed at setting a new trend in man-woman relations in Indian society. The keynote is a woman’s revolt against a man’s oppression.

Vanmam is the third novel that envisages the subaltern dream of equity and justice in society. Set in a village called Kandampatti in Tamil Nadu, *Vanmam* exposes the internal fissures in the sub communities of Parayars and Pallars and their harrowing experiences. The village streets marked for segregated castes and sub castes of Dalits and landlords epitomize the Indian situation in general. The personal

vengeance coupled with starvation, atrocities and unreasonable quarrels within communities leads the Dalit youth to choose the path of education and solidarity, which alone can turn the cherished Dalit dream into reality. “Educate, Organise Agitate’ is a slogan which the Dalit shout to claim their individuality. We must realize how society has marginalised and discriminated against us for which Dalits must strive together to seek justice and to arise and face the new dawn and make a new world.

Bama’s *Vanmam*, published in 2008 in Tamil and later translated into English as *Vendetta* by Malini Seshadri, strikes a chord in Dalit writings. Unlike her earlier works and many of the Dalit writings, in *Vanmam*, Bama, instead of blowing up the agonies and sufferings of the downtrodden, loudly raises her voice and vehemently asserts the need for the unity and solidarity of the suppressed for a better future. Bama writes about Dalit women in her novels in her capacity as a Dalit woman herself. She makes it evident that writing for a Dalit woman is a political act. She seeks to subvert dominant perception, representation, and articulation of Dalit women’s lives.

In Bama’s writings, there is a close link between education, writing and empowerment that Bama posits as tools that could liberate women of their caste. Dalit literary writing is a mode of activism that seeds to free Dalits from the clothes of dominant ideology and ‘casteist’ oppression. This fiction argues for an activist intervention in the context of Dalit empowerment in Tamil Nadu. She believes that reading and writing are a political practise for a Dalit. She likes to foreground Dalits’ resistance on account of their caste.

A Dalit is kept away from formal education due to social, economic, and ideological paradigms. The Sanskrit tradition was totally inaccessible to a Dalit.

Things have changed over the ages for Dalits in the Indian social milieu. In modern India, there is less social prejudice and more economic opportunities for Dalits. In post-Independence India, the situation has not improved much indeed. *Vanmam* deals with the internal animosity among Dalits in India. Whether it is animosity between Dalits and the elite sections or Dalits with sub-sections. It is very pertinent to know that women are subjugated in every sphere of life both by men of the upper caste and by their own men and their own community. The novel *Vendetta* is about animosity between two castes within Dalits. Pallars and Parayars are the two Dalit castes discussed in the novel.

Bama belongs to the class of first-generation learners in her community and has found a place in academic circles by virtue of being a schoolteacher and more significantly, as a writer. She lays great emphasis on education as a means of social empowerment. As a revolutionary writer, she forges close ideological affinity with feminist thought. Women and Dalits are both oppressed groups, oppressed on account of their birth. *Vanmam* shares the discourse of modernity, addresses issues concerning contemporary society and is contradictory. The novel is all about combating cruelties based on the caste system with a constructive strategy of empowerment. *Vanmam* is situated in the village called Kandampatti where people of different castes live. The houses of people are clustered based on the caste they belong to. The Parayars and Pallars live in the eastern part of the village. The children of both Parayars and Pallars go to schools. Most of the Pallars leave the village to get education. From this it can be understood that it is the education which made all the difference in their lifestyle. They wanted to improve their lifestyle because they are able to ponder and realize what went wrong.

Vanmam delineates the story of Dalits and their struggle for existence. It is about the Dalits who struggled hard to live and survive, despite several inhuman treatments meted out to them. It is the victory of the victimized over the caste-based discrimination. Education played a crucial role in the change of the situation in the village where some of the educated people started their fight against this caste-based politics played by the upper caste people. They also realized that the upper caste people used Dalits as pawns to instigate anger and fume among Dalits so that they can benefit from this policy of divide and rule. In the beginning, Dalits who led a peaceful life started fighting among themselves, instigated by other caste people. This struggle for domination consumed the lives of a number of innocent Dalits for no fault of theirs and made them scapegoats most of the times. This animosity continued for several years among Dalit communities despite several compromises.

Bama enters a highly problematic area of inequality and violence between various Dalit communities. *Vanmam* documents hatred and vengeance among the various Dalit communities, an area too touchy to be addressed and too complex to be grasped. It is sad but true that the graded inequality that sustains caste order is replicated among the Dalits as well. The hierarchy among the Dalits in Tamil Nadu has the following structure as given: Pallars, Parayar and Arundathiyar. The novel has chosen to lead with the top two castes among the Dalits. The idyllic bonding between the two communities turned out to be a mere facade to mask the burning jealousies over socio-economic issues. Unfortunately, conversion to Christianity becomes the key variable in causing this divide. The caste clashes begin with Hindu Pallars murdering a Christian Parayar. The story ends with the murder of an innocent Parayar that leads to the dawn of realisation among both the parties about how they

have been made pawns in the hands of Caste Hindus. Finally, a resolution is sought in electoral politics.

Vanmam shows how Dalits have internalized the given social system of segregation based on caste. If Parayars and Pallars are outcastes in the eyes of Naickers, Udaiyar, Chettiyar, Naidus and Nadars; Pallars and Parayars treat each other as outcastes within their own social habitat. While Parayars have embraced Christianity, Pallars remain within the Hindu fold. This fact is played up by Naickers and other upper castes to keep the two Dalit communities divided. The novel, in fact, opens with an account of the murder of a Parayar farmland, Mariyasu, at the hands of Karupasami, a Pallar farmland, over the distribution of water to their respective master's lands. As Karupasami master protects him, he gets away with Mariyasu's murder and surreptitious disposal of his body. In this way, the enmity between the two communities is nurtured and kept by the Naickers.

The novel is written from the Parayars point of view although an objective analysis is undertaken to demonstrate that Pallars are used by Naickers for their own political gain. The rest of the novel deals with caste clashes, forcing men to hide. Children are forced to remain at home. High castes and police officials put oil to fire and ultimately women are widowed, and children are orphaned. *Vanmam* is for forging unity among Dalits. Education for Bama is not limited to formal education. She lays equal emphasis on spiritual education but wants this to be free from interference from ecclesiasts and officialdom. Dalits have to be enlightened again in a political sense, rather than merely accumulate university degrees.

Vanmam, through fights, fumes, animosities, combats and compromises, presents a realistic portrayal of the life and struggle of Dalits and is a bidding farewell

to the age-old venomous practices of the upper caste people. It is a lesson to all Dalits who fight among themselves in the oblivion that united they stand, divided they fall. It is the struggle for existence which made Pallars and Parayars to fight among themselves. But as the dawn of realization struck the chord of compromise, they understood that their struggle to raise the standards of their lifestyle can only be a meaningful endeavour. *Vanmam* ends on a note of enlightenment that united we stand and divided we fall. Bama's works coincide with the Ambedkarite vision for Dalit empowerment. If *Karukku* upholds education, *Sangati* foregrounds organized agitation, while *Vanmam* enjoins unity among Dalit communities.

Bama and Iyamam as Dalit writers mainly deal with focusing on the narrative techniques and the subaltern language used by both the writers in the selected novels for study. Casteism is considered a social problem as it disturbs the sound governmental politics and democracy and paves the way for mutual group conflicts. Casteism is manifested in the form of clashes between various castes for higher share in the socio-economic rights and power. Bama's *Karukku*, *Sangati* and *Vanmam* portray caste and gender discrimination.

Bama's *Karukku*, *Sangati* and *Vanmam* point out that in the present social context, conversion does not ensure or encourage social transformation. Dalit experience suggests that, in practice, a Dalit is not allowed to get rid of his or her caste identity that stigmatizes socially. The hope for social transformation through religious conversion, thus, remains elusive. The novels of both Bama and Iyamam trace an account of the oppression unleashed by the upper castes towards Dalit women in terms of labour, exploitation and the threat of rape. Being a Dalit woman was constantly to be on a bed of thorns. A Dalit woman had to safeguard her honour,

which was always insecure due to the sexual abuse fears from the upper caste men. In *Sangati*, upper caste women have greater access to economic resources, education, and information. They exercise their authority over social, economic, and religious institutions, whereas the Dalit women did not have these privileges. Both the patriarchy and the caste system result in the oppression of the lower-caste women.

Playing the spokesperson for the women of her community, Bama states that it is on her to speak out the truth that all women are slaves to men; her women are the worst sufferers; it is not the same for women of other castes and communities. Our women cannot bear the torment of upper-caste masters in the fields and at home they cannot bear the violence of their husbands.

The writer also comments on how the upper-caste women treat them with contempt. This is where Bama draws a comparison between the lifestyle of those women and that of the Parayar. She takes pride in saying that here women work hard and earn their own money and do not depend on their husbands for economic freedom. In spite of being subjugated in body and mind to men, these women resist their men by means of shouting names of their body parts and obscenities. Shouting and shrieking are tools of survival for these women, observes the author. She only hopes that they would realize that they own their own self-worth, honour, and self-respect.

The narrative methodology is woven in such a manner that the particular is interwoven into the general status of women across the society. She also deftly brings out the ignorance and innocence of her women when it comes to voting and electing the government. Every aspect of society is discussed, analyzed, issues including cinema, inter-caste marriage and how it is not for a woman to marry outside her caste. Even when a girl writes or speaks in public places, at once the men condemn her saying that she is after all a girl. They don't credit her with any kind of achievement.

Bama brings in the autobiographical element in full circle at the end of the novel *Sangati* when she says that being a woman and a Dalit woman particularly and being unmarried has posed great difficulty for her in everyday life. She asks the basic question as to why a woman can't belong to anyone but herself. She also speaks for women when she says that women too as individuals have their own desires and wishes. She says that if women do not speak for themselves and come forward to change their condition, then who else is going to do it for them. A change in attitude is the need of the hour, and she is optimistic of inequalities coming to an end. Therefore, speaking the unrepresented in literary discourses so far, Bama has linked together the caste as well as the gender oppression, in the process of redefining woman from the socio-cultural perspective. She has made herself heard in her attempt to move from the position of the subaltern to the centre.

Beasts of Burden is the translation of *Koveru Kazhuthaigal*, the original Tamil version of the novel. It has been translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom. Imayam is the pen name of V. Annamalai, a schoolteacher in Cuddalore District, Tamil Nadu. For his second novel *Arumugam* (1999) he won the Agni Akshara Award and the Tamilnadu Progressive Writers Association Award.

The Tamil word 'Koveru Kazhuthaigal' means mules or donkeys. The title refers to the washer men community who traditionally carry dirty cloth bundles of upper caste people on donkeys for washing. They also carry poverty, discrimination, hard-work, ignorance with them, which cannot be wished or washed away from their life. The story is about the change in a village as seen through the eyes of a washerwoman, Arokkyam, who is a member of a Dalit community of agricultural labourers to upper caste landowners. It is located in the early seventies when ritual status and payment in kind were giving way to a contract based on cash wages.

Imayam's novel *Beasts of Burden* narrates the life of the washer woman Arokkyam and her family. This novel can be read both as the individual stories of these characters and the story of Dalit life and struggle as a whole. The lower caste and untouchable communities find themselves facing severe exclusion. The significance of identity depends partly on the fact that goods and resources are still distributed according to categories. The self-perseverance of the people of how they are perceived by others will significantly affect life opportunities such as living place, marriage availability, educational and employment opportunities, which are often closely correlated with categories of identity.

The novel *Beasts of Burden* also begins with a man's portrait of a woman and a mother. The story is that of decline and change in the village, seen through the perspective of Vannaathi. Arokkyam, who serves the Dalit community of agricultural labourers, attaches individually as bonded labour to Gounder families. Ritual status and payment in kind are giving way to a contract based solely on cash wages. Her own children rebel against both the old order and the new one.

The novel *Beasts of Burden* represents the struggles of a community, making a critique of the religious life and the poor condition in the village, and he describes the dreadful division and oppression. He is very much against calling a particular type of literature as Dalit literature. The Parayar settlement in five streets was next to the Pallar settlement next to the cemetery. The low-caste people are ghettoized. As they are the walking carrion, they live close to the place of the dead. When they go to shell the groundnuts for the Naickers, they do the work in the cowshed. When the Naicker ladies give the leftover food to the Parayar ladies, they would stand far away and throw it into the vessels kept on the ground.

As a self-consciously Dalit novel, *Beasts of Burden* gives us an extraordinarily detailed picture of a lifestyle that has now passed, reclaimed and told with pride, without any attempt to Sanskritise. Such pride, incidentally, is the characteristic of Dalit writing today. Yet, it is not even the rich ethnographic detail that makes it so valuable but the rare insight it gives us into the life of a woman, Arokkyam, literally on the margins of the society (her house is outside the Parayarcolony, and the colony is outside the caste village). The climate of time and change is important to the novel whose primary theme is Arokkyam's dilemma within changing systems of belief, about the self and the society.

The novel *Arumugam* was originally written in Tamil, and it has been translated into English by D. Krishna Ayyar. As a Dalit schoolteacher in Vridhachalam, Imayam lets ideology emerge from life. Like the boy who runs away from home when he sees his widowed mother sleeping with a white man in his second novel *Arumugam*, Imayam says that a writer cannot work within the confines of the slogan. It is a tale of emotional bonding between a child and his mother woven together with strings of love. It is the story of Arumugam, the little boy who grows up before his time, whose innocence is snatched away from him with his experiences.

Imayam had done a great job by bringing the essence of life in a very simple language in his second novel *Arumugam*. This is the story of Arumugam, the son of Raman and Dhanabhagiyam. Arumugam lost his father very early, and he was supported solely by his mother. Dhanabhagiyam got a job in a hospital, and they moved to Pondicherry. Their lives went well until Arumugam saw his mother sleeping with another man, Jerry Albert. Arumugam ran away from his mother, and

his life starts there. Wherever he goes, he looks around the events and observes them. Apart from his mother, he encounters so many female characters like Vasantha, Chinnapponu, Abitha and Lakshmi who shape Arumugam like his real mother. The life's ups and downs along with death were portrayed beautifully.

The detailed description of the day-to-day life of these people brings the reader closer to them. Imayam did not follow any protocol or principles in writing this story, he made the day-to-day life to lead the story, and it worked well. The author effortlessly enters the character's mind and brings their thoughts beautifully. It is not a wonder that Imayam's novel is being appraised, not because of its literary exposure but for its content, choosing a particular way of exposing the life and it is exposed. Some criticized that his novels elucidate outdated problems. But this is the achievement of his novels, which critics have taken into consideration.

Both Bama and Imayam criticize Dalit community itself as responsible for the suppression of another lower community among the Dalits. Even though they are Dalits, they do not support the capitalistic behaviour against the other depressed classes, and their writings expose this kind of dejection towards Dalit people who consider themselves head or leader for all the lower communities. They stand separately from the writers who only narrate Dalit's anguishes for creating sympathy. The works of Bama and Imayam depict the reality of Dalit existence and reveal the suppression through the view of suppressed and the agony of suppression.

A writer should not confine himself or herself between producing works and making criticisms, but the writer's work fulfils only when it influences actual life situations. Even though all the writers in Tamil Dalit literature write only about the sufferings of Dalit society, Bama and Imayam on the other hand write about the

oppression within the community instead of supporting their dominance over the other lower communities. Both the writers exhibit these thoughts in all their works. Like this notion, the characters that Bama and Iyayar adopted in their novel create confinements within their self and society, and they simply accept the other caste's captivity and don't want to get relieved from that confinement. So, all suppressed people are liable for their confinement and abetting slavery without reacting against it. It is actually mental disability which makes the downtrodden to suffer slavery.

Bama and Iyayar have used the local Tamil dialect in their works, which are oral in nature. This Tamil, as Lakshmi Holmstrom (translator of *Karukku*) says, is a 'Dalit style of language' which aims at subverting the given decorum and aesthetics of received upper-class and upper-caste Tamil. Since caste has its material and geographical existence in India, especially in Tamil societies, the use of this dialect has become a tool of strengthening the content of the works of Bama and Iyayar. It also helps the readers to situate the issues in the culture properly and get the region specificity. Inability to capture the dialectical variation may not be a serious issue compared to the failure to catch such cultural codes, especially in the context of Dalit literature. One who reads the novels of Bama and Iyayar can obviously feel the rhythm, the orality, and the implied caste cultural markers of the narrative. But completing the broken sentences of the dialect lies the orality of the text.

In Bama's *Karukku* and *Sangati*, women are engaged in folk songs and folk dances with the folk music. In *Karukku*, after the Easter Pussai in the Church, the woman stood in a circle and sang. Bama is exclusive in her narrative technique with a mere illustration of children playing games. She can communicate the impact of caste-class, gender oppression, family, culture and socio-economic status of the community. The caste-consciousness is deep-rooted that it is indeed even reflexive in

the games of the children as they replicate the role of the ruling 'Naicker', 'Nadar Mudalaali' who suppress the outcaste. The miniature life and culture of Dalit community are visualized through these children's games.

There has definitely been a shift in the method of storytelling in *Karukku* and *Sangati*. In *Karukku*, the protagonist is both the narrator and a participant. However, in *Sangati*, the protagonist is not a participant but only an observer. Renaissance to oppression is not limited to violent and military forms. The creators, Bama and Imayam, utilize an assortment of writings, techniques, and styles as weapons of opposition. Safe language is an amazing weapon for the abused. The names are committed to the weapons of Dalit ladies. Bama shrewdly utilized this protection from the norms of magnificence to withstand the pressing factors applied by her local area. Raj Gauthaman said at the presentation of the arrangement that their propensity for kidding and mockery at last gave the Dalits the boldness to face the persecution of the gatherings.

In *Sangati*, Bama declared the boldness of Dalits on the grounds of development in the culture. Indeed, even in the midst of difficulty, fatigue and debilitation, you might be enticed to renounce an existence of euphoria and bliss. Likewise, Bama accepts that her novel will raise trust, and those Dalit ladies who have finished perusing her book will partake in the triumph as they battle as pioneers of the new society. Bama has given a decree tending to the worldwide circumstance and saving conventional practices, customs, rights, and possession.

The novels of Bama and Imayam focus on the confirmation that Dalit writings are narratives of trauma, pain, resistance, protest, and social change. Dalit texts document the sufferings and atrocities committed upon a large section of the

population. The writing proceeds from a real experience of poverty, violence, rejection and suffering. Trauma traditionally refers to the destruction of subjects and the self. But Catty Caruthu argues, “Trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also fundamentally, an enigma of survival.” (86) Dalit writing achieves this. It reveals the structure of the traumatic experience, that is, the caste in India. Also, it gestures at the ways in which the victims have fought to overcome and survive the event.

The language used by both the Dalit writers, Bama and Iyayya is close to proverbs, folk songs, and folk lore. The language used in the novels gives several examples of witty rhymes and verses made up on the spur of the moment to fit an occasion. The narrative centres on the individuals’ experience and the caste identity never leaves her, or they can discard it. Proudly, they embrace the identity bestowed upon them in the face of humiliation and subjugation that it entails. Throughout their works, Bama and Iyayya use the Dalit Tamil dialect more consistently and easily than many of their contemporaries. All their novels taken for study employ the narrative techniques in a skilful manner with a vivid, lively, and inventing style.

The caste communities of Dalits gesture towards an autonomous embodiment beyond just being restricted as a polluted shadow. It counter-looks caste with an oppositional gaze, with a resistant touch, and with an act of annihilation. The struggle against civilization unravels insidious violence and its chronic inalienable dishonour. It integrates experience, understands inheritances, and anchors the living present with a conscious community through civilized memory. The novels of Bama and Iyayya follow the linear structure or even a semblance of a plot. It holds the reader’s attention through a series of representations of women, of different age groups, drawn from the

labouring Parayar community facing numerous forms of oppression. They focus specifically on the dual oppression faced by Parayar women, on account of their caste and gender, at home and in society at large. Thus, they fuse Dalit discourse with feminist discourse, constantly underlining how each discourse impinges on the other. They choose to represent this matrix through a kaleidoscopic presentation of Dalit women who are subjected to violence and injustice at the hands of husbands, fathers, brothers, priests, panchayat leaders, police forces, upper caste landlords, politicians who seek their vote, quacks and exorcists and violate possessed women. More endearing moments of the narrative pertain to Dalit women who manage to subvert the prevailing system through humour, shrewish conduct, abusive speech, or wit.

Bama and Iyayar underscore the need to reformulate feminist paradigms and seriously reconsider ground realities as prevalent in rural and caste-ridden society. Their writings are an activist intervention at multiple levels. It forms a subtext within Dalit discourse in Tamil even while providing a counter discourse to traditional, mainstream writing. The protagonists of both writers are portrayed as victims of gross social oppression. So, the select novels of Bama and Iyayar taken for study are clearly complementary and contribute to the construction of a Dalit point of view and an emerging Tamil Dalit literature. Dalit critic Raj Gautaman writes, we have to stop reading Dalit literature as if it consisted merely of stories of individual men and women, and of their tragedies, but should read it as the story of the Dalit struggle as a whole. It also presents the self and the community. Both the writers share their personal journey, thus, becoming the part of the journey of oppressed people of a community.

This thesis analyses the select fiction, commenting on the characters' social situations and their implications. It also focuses on the trauma undergone by the characters of Bama and Iyayya, their sufferings and struggles and the pain they undergo that comes out through their speech. Each Dalit writer has his or her own style of wielding the language through which their painful experiences are revealed. Their ideology emerges from life and the portrayal of real- life situations in their works. They have a concern that Dalit writers are not addressing the greatness in Dalit life – a life where language is alive, where there is no widowhood and where there is happiness.

So, the novels of Bama and Iyayya narrate the tales of the oppressed Dalit people. When the voice of the writers and their characters reaches the desired and required distance and readership, their voice will definitely be heard. The resistance that will follow may bring along with it the desired effect. Removing each and every stumbling block stands as a barrier in the way of attaining equality and dignity though a great task has already been started. Each and every attempt made by writers towards attaining that goal will become a beacon of light showing others the path and a milestone in their journey towards equality and dignity.

Scope for Further Research

This study opens grounds for further research. Further, studies can address the following issues:

The scope of this research is to identify similar works and different dimensions the Dalits hold. It would be a novel attempt if research were done on the works of Bama and Iyayya to voice out the caste issues and to live a better life in the society. It can also focus on the themes of subaltern testimonial autobiography, Double consciousness, Dalit Feminism, Dalit Semiotics, Investigating the Dalit Perspectives, Caste-less community and so on. It can also be a comparative study with African American Literature. The novels of Bama and Iyayya can be compared with popular contemporary Dalit writers to show how they depict the Dalit condition.

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[Home](#) > [Vol 17, No 3 \(2021\)](#) > **Owenita**

Caste Stigma in Bama's Vanmam

M. Charmaigne Owenita, Dr. V. Francis

Abstract

Bama's Dalit writing has been used to reimagine the ways of writing about Dalit women's lives and identities in a male-dominated and racist society that extends to the social-economic, political and sexual spheres of their lives. This paper focuses on the issue of caste identity in Bama's *Vanmam*. It discusses the contribution of Dalit women writers and their works in developing the genre, especially the works of Bama as an autobiographer who breaks all the shackles and takes up the courage to fight against injustice. It is also an attempt to present the theme of identity crisis based on caste discrimination which was established from the beginning of the novel recounting the past of Bama's life from her early years up to late adolescence as a Dalit. This paper also projects how the novel envisages the subaltern dream of equity and justice in society.

Keywords

Dalit, Literature, Bama's Vanmam.

Full Text:

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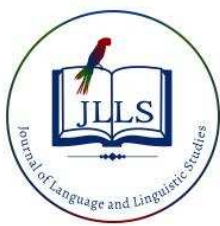
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Caste Stigma in Bama's Vanmam

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APA Citation:

Charmaigne Owenita, M., & Francis, V. (2021). Caste Stigma in Bama's Vanmam. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(3), 1910-1912

Submission Date: 08/10/2021

Acceptance Date: 22/12/2021

Abstract

Bama's Dalit writing has been used to reimagine the ways of writing about Dalit women's lives and identities in a male-dominated and racist society that extends to the social-economic, political and sexual spheres of their lives. This paper focuses on the issue of caste identity in Bama's *Vanmam*. It discusses the contribution of Dalit women writers and their works in developing the genre, especially the works of Bama as an autobiographer who breaks all the shackles and takes up the courage to fight against injustice. It is also an attempt to present the theme of identity crisis based on caste discrimination which was established from the beginning of the novel recounting the past of Bama's life from her early years up to late adolescence as a Dalit. This paper also projects how the novel envisages the subaltern dream of equity and justice in society.

Keywords: Dalit, Literature, Bama's *Vanmam*.

1. Introduction

Literature brings out the feelings of society in the writings. Literature helps us grow, both personally and intellectually. It links us with the broader cultural, philosophical, and religious world we are part of. It enables us to recognise human dreams and struggles in different places and at different times. It helps us to develop mature sensibility and compassion. Our cumulative experience in reading literature shapes our goals and values by clarifying our own identities positively and accepting the admirable in human beings. It enables us to develop a perspective on events occurring logically and globally.

In Dalit literature, the writings give importance, especially to the marginalised and oppressed. Dalit literature is literature written by the people of Dalit with the consciousness of being a Dalit. The writings are based on the experiences and culture of the people of the Dalit community. It is a field of study where the Dalits express a life they are living. It is the literature of lived experience. Dalit literature puts a human into the centre and gets a strong protest against the caste problem, racial discrimination, and the troubles of the tribals. It believes in human liberty. The term 'Dalit' is extended to the oppressed, rejected, tortured, hated, exploited, deprived and dejected. Dalit literature is a literary system which aims at removing the Varna system and caste in Indian society.

Dalits have an identity crisis. They take an opportunity to deal with other religions to get a social identity of their own. Sometimes they protest religion for social reasons. Dalit literature is written by

Dalits, on Dalits, and for Dalits. It expresses the suppression, exploitation, humiliation and oppression. This literature is the literature of exploited people. Initially, the Dalits started writing about the caste problem that they faced. Some writers tried to avoid Dalitism as a personal attack on great individuals or progressive intellectuals.

In contemporary Dalit Literature, writers expanded their horizons through their constant struggle for equal rights. In such writings, autobiography holds up deep fascination for people of all ages, races and sexes. An autobiographer seeks liberation through the creative act of writing. Bama is significant among many writers who actively participate in propagating Dalit literature. Bama is a Tamil Dalit feminist writer, a teacher, a short story writer and a novelist. The works of Bama portray the issues of caste-based oppression and gender discrimination.

Bama's *Vanmam* is the third novel that envisages the subaltern dream of equity and justice in society. *Vanmam*, published in 2008, highlights the happenings between two Dalit castes in a village called Kandampatti in Tamil Nadu. Bama raises her voice to assert the need for unity, liberty and equality of the suppressed class for a better future. *Vanmam* exposes the internal fissures in the sub-communities of Parayars and Pallars and their harrowing experiences. It depicts how village streets are marked to segregate castes and sub-castes of Dalits, and the landlord exercise supremacy in general. The personal vendetta coupled with starvation, atrocities and unreasonable quarrels within communities in such a locale led Dalit youth to choose the path of education and solidarity. They realise that it helps to retain the cherished Dalit dream of independence.

Bama's *Vanmam* focuses on the rivalry among the oppressed communities. It also attempts to study how the upper caste people exploit this animosity between the two castes – Parayar and Pallar and perpetuate this rivalry by exercising a divide and rule policy. In the aftermath of violence and the loss of many lives, self-realisation happens among the marginalised people paving the way for peace. Bama's *Vanmam* is an attempt to bring to the forefront the experiences of the Dalits everywhere. The novel puts forth the inter-Caste rivalry among the landowners of the upper Caste Naickers stokes the fire of intra-Dalit hostilities to benefit themselves.

The Naickers are characterised to be the dominant upper class under which the Pallars and Parayars work, earning their daily wages. Throughout the novel, we can see that Pallars and Parayars work in the Naicker's field and earn their wages, and they are fully dependent on the Naickers for their financial needs. The Naickers always support the Pallars. The Parayar community youngsters like Jayaraju, Saminathan and Antony started an arts group called Kazhani Arts Troupe, and they organised many games and competitions which have a social message. The Naickers grew jealous of the developments on the Parayar street and accused the church of encouraging the Parayars.

The landlords were angry by the unity in organising the programme and the speeches made in the programme. They conspired to destroy the unity of the downtrodden. Misguided by the Naickers, some of the Pallars, who had not realised the evil intentions of the Naickers, demanded to return the money donated for the Ambedkar's statue. While a flag pole was erected near the statue of Ambedkar, the wire that was used to tie the flag touched the statue. Sesurathnam, a Parayar boy, secretly removed that wire which became a problem among the people in the village, especially among the two castes that led to several deaths.

When during the trial of the murder of a Parayar, there evolved a common notion of peace between the two communities. Jayaraju, an educated Parayar young man, declared in public, "We were just beginning to progress slowly and now these murders and court cases and police raids . . . all over people scattered about, studies ruined, not even able to attend Church . . . how long can we go on like this? (*Vanmam* 126). The two groups resumed discussion which led them to compromise. They unanimously declared, "After all, life is short. We work, we eat . . . we die. Why take on unnecessary problems?" (*Vanmam* 129).

2. Conclusion

The novel concludes with typically Bama's optimism, hoping for a result-oriented future. We must be on our guard if anyone tries to provoke us and create enmity between our castes. With this determination and united strength, they gained success in their conviction to live together forever and not yield to the instigation of the upper caste people. Bama has felt the affinity between the two groups is important and uses feminist strategies of representation and historicising the oppression in her narratives of Dalit experience. She points out in her writing that Dalits would have to help themselves and assert themselves as a strategy to overcome upper caste domination.

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[Home](#) > [Vol 17, No 4 \(2021\)](#) > **Owenita**

Identity Crisis of Dalits in Imayam's *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*

M. Charmagne Owenita, Dr. V. Francis

Abstract

Dalit Literature is the literature of the oppressed people, telling about their pains, agonies, disappointments, defeats, humiliations, oppressions and depressions. It also represents their vibrant culture, dreams and values. The present paper attempts to examine how Dalits are represented in society and the identity crisis faced by the Dalit people in the Tamil society as reflected in Imayam's in *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*.

Keywords

Dalit, Literature, Imayam, Beasts, Tamil Society.

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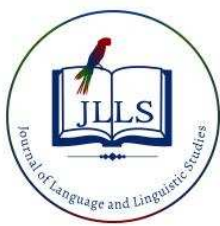
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Identity Crisis of Dalits in Iyayam's *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*

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APA Citation:

Charmaigne Owenita, M., & Francis, V. (2021). Identity Crisis of Dalits in Iyayam's *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 2873-2876

Submission Date: 10/10/2021

Acceptance Date: 24/12/2021

Abstract

Dalit Literature is the literature of the oppressed people, telling about their pains, agonies, disappointments, defeats, humiliations, oppressions and depressions. It also represents their vibrant culture, dreams and values. The present paper attempts to examine how Dalits are represented in society and the identity crisis faced by the Dalit people in the Tamil society as reflected in Iyayam's in *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*.

Keywords: *Dalit, Literature, Iyayam, Beasts, Tamil Society.*

1. Introduction

Literature is a camera that captures not just moments but also emotions. It reveals the reality in its true colours, immersing people in nostalgic occurrences and also mocks the repercussive episodes. Dalit literature reverberates the melancholy of the marginalized, echoes the cries of oppressed women, demonstrates the plight of the destitute, marks the identity crisis of the anonymous people and records the revolution of the rebels. Significantly, the inceptions of Dalit works should be pulled in the battle for social and financial change. This clarifies all parts of profound thought in Dalit's books. The Dalit writing is firmly identified with the expectation of freedom for a bunch of individuals since they are not the casualties of social and financial disparities.

Caste ideology operates at a deeper level, and the dynamics of caste and Dalit issues are closely linked with our ideas of identity and self. All Dalit writers in India wish that the people in India should show empathy for the pain of a Dalit. But to experience the pain of a Dalit, what is needed is to unlearn the typical and usual response that we give to the lived experiences of a Dalit. Iyayam, a prominent Tamil Dalit writer, suggests in most of his novels how Dalit women are forced to be used as commodities to hold off poverty and help themselves and their dependents survive. Ignorance, sexual harassments, poverty, anger towards rites and rituals, injustice and slavery, are the main themes of Dalit Literature. These themes are also focused on in Iyayam's novels. The explanations behind the utilizing realities are evidenced that Dalit writers can uncover human suffering on the planet through their writings. The works crafted by Iyayam show this point well.

Iyayam's novels *Koveru Kazhudhaigal (Beasts of Burden)* and *Arumugam* foregrounded the dominance of a particular Dalit community, often resulting in a duplication of the hegemonic caste structures of Hindu society among Dalits and how this has percolated even among Dalits who have

converted to Christianity. Imayam's novels received hostile criticism because of their critique of Parayar's dominance over Dalit communities, who stand further below the caste ladder.

The novel *Beasts of Burden* is considered one of the classics of modern Tamil literature, especially in Dalit writing. The first and foremost striking feature of this novel is the portrayal of the delicate caste structure among Dalits. Imayam's *Beasts of Burden* (1994) portrays Dalit communities, their lives, culture, and legislative issues. In this novel, Imayam depicts the predicament of lower-caste people who fall into double subjugation in society. Imayam criticizes the lower caste people who become counterfeit and battle against the individuals who are viewed as subordinates among Dalits. Both the novels *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam* have one common feature that is sexual harassment of women by the upper caste.

The title *Koveru Kazhudhaigal* means 'mules', which have been utilized by the washermen to wash garments. It ironically refers to the washermen community and their predicament. The mules have the responsibility of carrying and thus beasts of burden. This story is about the Poothurai Vannaar Catholic family, who works among farming labourers in the Dalit province. The story also depicts the economic changes occurring in the progress of the novel and developments taking place in the village, which are seen throughout the perspectives of the protagonist, Arokkyam.

Representation of Dalit women is an integral aspect of Tamil Dalit Literature in terms of space and voice granted to Dalit women characters. Dalit women characters are portrayed as lively, vibrant, earthy, witty and hard-working women who have the inner strength to face crises and work tirelessly at home and outside. Imayam's *Beasts of Burden* carries within itself the grief and pain of the Dalits. Imayam has beautifully captured the ringing poignancy the trials and tribulations of a washerwoman, Arokkyam, who is trapped between the dilemmas of changing times. The vannaathi woman, Arokkyam, washes the clothes and serves the colony where the Dalits live. The novel discloses the Intra-Dalit strife and the sorrows of the lowest of the low-born. Arokkyam's dilemma within changing systems of belief about the self and society captures the reader's interest. The scriptural and patriarchal authority voice speaks through the mother character in the novel *Beasts of Burden*. The mother character Arokkyam laments about their life in society. The mother here is simply the medium of articulation minus subjective agency. She frames her identity and existence within this scriptural and social authority voice.

The story revolves around the life of Arokkyam, depicting her sufferings and pains that are caused when her son Joseph moves away with his wife Sahayam. Her grief intensifies when her daughter, Mary, is seduced by Chadayan, the Kothukkaaran. As her first son Joseph is away from her, she doesn't want her second son to depart from her. Hence, she denies her second son Peter from becoming a priest. But then Peter elopes, bringing her more pain. The grief thickens with the death of Mary's husband, Diraviyaraj. When everyone is fortunate to frame their lives to live independently, the Dalits alone are so unfortunate that they gift their life with great devotion and diligence, unaware that surrendering oneself is slavery. This dependence on other people has paved the way for the Dalits to survive in a home without happiness and in a society without safety and security.

The Dalit people constitute a large segment of the population, and they have been forced to mobilize themselves in order to fight for their rights and justice in postcolonial India. Dalit human rights emerge in a national context, but they write about their own lives, explicitly referring to the atrocities committed against them. Indeed, the narrative tradition of recognizing the outcast human in India offers strong parallels with other such humans. In its representation of suffering humans, Dalit writing generates an abject type for possible appropriation by a global literary field for human rights. They invoke objectification - deliberately echoing objectification to signal social processes of economic and political oppression – modes of atrocity and injustice and the representational process.

The next novel *Arumugam* (1999) is a tale of an emotional bond between a mother and son woven together with strings of love. Thrown from a secure, loving home into the cruel world, Arumugam learns that his perceptions of life are as unreal as wisps of smoke and finally he understands the reality of life. In *Arumugam*, Imayam presents the people living around Pondicherry Auroville and their sufferings. It

is in recognition of the Dalit and the other that is the bearing witness to another Dalit that the protagonists of the Dalit narrative discover their own humanity. The primary witness proposes a programme for the community, nation, or even humanity. This is the ethics of primary witnessing to the survivors duty to remember. Imayam writes in a formal style reporting the happenings and incidents with a complete lack of inhibition as he uses the colloquial, conversational styles of the protagonists both in their reference to their work and in their exchange of banter between themselves.

In the novel *Arumugam*, the writer brings out different aspects through the conversion character. He explains that life is not the same for all individuals in society, especially for Dalits, the relationship between them and the upper-class people, their way of life with the rules and regulations of Auroville, the ethics, the conventions, the beliefs, and traditions of life in the society. The characters who are confined to a limited way of leading their life are not great thinkers or rebels but people who belong to the lower class. Imayam criticizes the Indian dominant narrative forms and their language by exposing the duplicity of dominant discourses within the society generating a different history. The Dalit writers reflect the narrative recovery of emotional life through their writings, pointing out the fault lines, conflicts, and repression within dominant historical narratives. Imayam's narratives, in the same way, reveal that even decades after political independence, social justice is still a dream for the Dalit.

Imayam offers multiple voices within the ravings of the abused woman in order to foreground the Dalit condition in the novel *Arumugam*. Arumugam's anguished voice narrating his trouble is the personal one. The mythic voice is the reference to their local god, who will, he believes, avenge his humiliation. The historical voice is subsumed into these two when Arumugam expresses the poor Dalit's inability to be recognized as humans with dignity in the society. Their voices and the three contexts thus set out are the personal, the historical-social and mythical.

In the novels *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*, the writer takes different parts of evolving the character. He clarified that the existences are unique, their relationship with the class, their lifestyle and the standards of Auroville, moral gatherings, convictions and public customs, particularly in Dalit. Individuals whose lives are confined are not extraordinary people or blasphemers but rather detestable individuals. Imayam censures the Indian story structure and language by uncovering the redundancy of acclaimed discourses in social orders that have made various chronicles. Dalit essayists exhibited the change of passionate life through their works and found some unacceptable lines, clashes and persecution in societal issues.

Dalit writing reformulates the caste question and reassesses the significance of colonialism and of missionary activity. It resists the reduction of caste to class or to non-Brahminism and vividly describes and analyses the contemporary workings of caste power. So, Tamil Dalit Literature studies have to chart out its critical course of intervention as a tool to aid Tamil Dalit writers' agenda of working towards Dalit liberation or empowerment through writing.

2. Conclusion

Thus Imayam's novels narrate the tales of the oppressed Dalit people. When the writers' voices and their characters reach the desired and required distance and readership, everyone will hear their voice. The resistance that will follow may bring along with it the desired effect. Removing every stumbling block stands as a barrier to attaining equality and dignity, though a great task has already been started. Every attempt made by writers towards attaining that goal will become a beacon of light showing others the path and a milestone in their journey.

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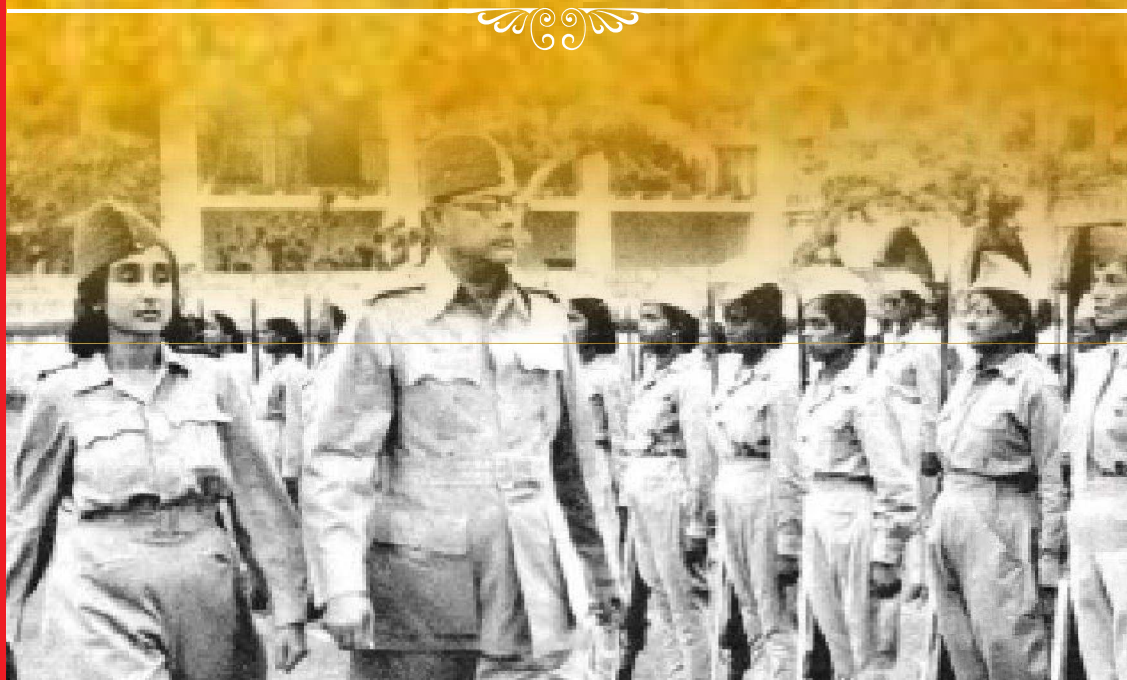
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**'NO REAL
CHANGE
IN HISTORY
HAS EVER
BEEN ACHIEVED
BY DISCUSSIONS.'**



सुभाष चंद्र बोस
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साहित्य, संस्कृति एवं आधुनिक सोच की त्रैमासिकी

UGC Approved Care Listed Journal

केंद्रीय हिंदी संस्थान के सहयोग द्वारा प्रकाशित

RNI No. DELBIL/2012/42547

ISSN 2277 - 7083

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शुल्क : तीन वर्ष (12 अंक) ₹ 3100

पांच वर्ष (20 अंक) ₹ 5100

(डाक/कोरियर खर्च सहित)

आजीवन सदस्यता ₹ 21,000

विदेश के लिए (3 वर्ष) 100 डॉलर

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Account Name : Aadhunik Sahitya

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Bank : Federal Bank Ltd.

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New Delhi-110088

IFSC Code : FDRL0001680

‘आधुनिक साहित्य’ द्विभाषी त्रैमासिकी आशीष कुमार के स्वामित्व में और उनके द्वारा एडी-94डी, शालीमार बाग, दिल्ली-110088 से प्रकाशित तथा आभा पब्लिसिटी, 163, देशबंधु गुप्ता मार्केट, करोलबाग, नई दिल्ली से मुद्रित। स्वामी/संपादक/प्रकाशक/मुद्रक : डॉ. आशीष कुमार।

'AADHUNIK SAHITYA' A quarterly bilingual (Hindi & English) Journal of Literature, Culture & Modern Thinking owned/published/printed/edited by Ashish Kumar from AD-94-D, Shalimar Bagh, Delhi-110088 and printed at Abha Publicity, 163, Deshbandhu Gupta Market, Karolbagh, New Delhi.

अनुक्रम

संपादकीय

- डॉ० आशीष कंधवे / राष्ट्रीय दृष्टिकोण और संतुलित शासन के मंत्र / 8

कथा-संसार

- डॉ. गिरधारी लाल लोधी / एक दान...महाविद्यालय के नाम / 15
- मनीष कुमार सिंह / अंधेरे की परछाईयाँ / 19

चिंतन-मंथन

- कोमल / राम की शक्ति पूजा और आज / 24

आलेख

- डॉ. अनीता यादव / सुरेंद्र वर्मा के एकांकी नाटकों में स्त्री स्वातंत्र्य की छटपटाहट / 28

शोध-संसार

- डॉ. आर.के. पाण्डेय एवं कल्पना सिदार / आदिवासी समाज की संस्कृति का स्वरूप / 31
- डॉ. आलोक प्रभात / कुँवर नारायण की मिथकीय चेतना / 34
- डॉ. कल्पना मिश्रा एवं कु. चिंकी यादव / गौविन्द मिश्र के उपन्यास 'पाँच आँगनों वाला घर' में सामाजिक परिदृश्य / 37
- डॉ. (श्रीमती) सविता मिश्रा एवं अन्तिमा गुप्ता / चित्रा मुद्गल की 'पोस्ट बॉक्स नं. 203 नालासोपारा' उपन्यास में तृतीयलिंगी समाज की मार्मिक दास्तान / 41
- डॉ. ऋता दीक्षित / ज़हीर कुरैशी की हिन्दी-गज़लों का मूलस्वर / 46
- डॉ. साधना / रामकाव्य परम्परा और अभिनन्द कृत रामचरित / 51
- प्रो. (डॉ.) अनुसुइया अग्रवाल एवं कु. कुसुम / संजीव बख्शी के भूलनकांदा उपन्यास में ग्रामीण संवेदना / 56
- डॉ. (श्रीमती) शैल शर्मा एवं ज्योतिबाला साहू / छत्तीसगढ़ी लोक-जीवन में रामधुनी की प्रासंगिकता / 59
- प्रो. (डॉ.) अनुसुइया अग्रवाल एवं कुमारी महेश्वरी पात्रे / भगवानदास मोरवाल के उपन्यासों में ग्रामीण जीवन / 63
- डॉ. आर.के. पाण्डेय एवं चोवाराय यदु / गिरिजा कुमार माथुर के काव्य में अभिव्यक्त विश्वबधुत्व और मानवतावाद / 67
- डॉ. (श्रीमती) सविता मिश्रा एवं मिनेश्वरी / साकेत में उर्मिला का चारित्रिक वैशिष्ट्य / 74
- डॉ. स्वामीराम बंजारे एवं शैलेन्द्र कुमार साहू / छत्तीसगढ़ के रचनाकारों के नवगीतों में पर्यावरण चेतना / 78
- डॉ. कल्पना मिश्रा एवं सीमा मिश्रा / सत्यभामा आडिल की लम्बी कविताओं में गांधी दर्शन / 83
- स्नेहा कुमारी / 'कुरुक्षेत्र' की वर्तमान संदर्भों में प्रासंगिकता / 88
- डॉ. हितेश कुमार एवं शंकर लाल कुँजाम / छत्तीसगढ़ की अस्मिता: जनभाषा छत्तीसगढ़ी / 91
- डॉ. अजीत कुमार पुरी / नई कविता की सामाजिक पृष्ठभूमि / 98
- डॉ. सत्य प्रकाश तिवारी / जिद्दू कृष्णमूर्ति के दर्शन में मूल्य मीमांसा / 102
- विजय सिंह एवं डॉ. गुड्डी बिष्ट पंवार / शैखर जौशी की कहानियों में चित्रित पर्वतीय समाज / 106
- विवेकानन्द उपाध्याय / मध्यवर्गीय कहानीकार- अमरकांत / 115

- सीमा देवी / गौस्वामी तुलसीदास के व्यक्तित्व उत्थान में रत्ना की भूमिका / 118
- मोहन लाल / आदिवासी- विमर्श के दृष्टिकोण से हिन्दी फ़िल्म 'न्यूटन' / 121
- श्रीमती नायराह कुरैशी / हिन्दी का वैश्विक परिप्रेक्ष्य / 127
- डॉ. दीपा शर्मा / पुरुषों के प्रति घरेलू हिंसा : पीड़ित पुरुषों के विशेष सन्दर्भ में व्यक्तित्वगत अध्ययन / 130
- बबीता चौहान एवं डॉ. तबस्सुम खान / हंस संपादक राजेन्द्र यादव के उपन्यासों में मध्यवर्ग व भारत की स्थिति / 135
- कुंवर पाल सिंह एवं प्रोफेसर शांति नयाल / भारतीय आयुर्वेदों में अध्यापक शिक्षा से संबंधित दिये गये सुझावों का समालोचनात्मक अध्ययन / 140
- डॉ. नवनाथ गाड़ेकर / मराठी से हिन्दी में अनूदित संत गोरा कुआर के अंगों में विद्वत् भक्ति / 145
- डॉ. पूनम कुमारी / समाज का दंश झेलती विधवा नारी / 150
- डॉ. सुधा शर्मा / उषा प्रियंवदा के उपन्यासों में अस्तित्ववाद की गूँज / 154
- राजेश्वर कुमार / छायावाद और निराला का भारतबोध / 158

काव्य-कलश

- कमलेश / एक दीया समर्पित / 165
- डॉ. अरुण तिवारी गोपाल / गीत / 166
- समीर उपाध्याय / आगे बढ़ना ही है तो एवं शब्दोत्सव / 167
- अंकुर सिंह / सरस्वती वंदना एवं शिव वंदना / 168
- अभय शुक्ला / गज़ल / 169
- नंदा पाण्डेय / गीली मिट्टी एवं मनरंगना / 170

पुस्तक-समीक्षा

- डॉ. रामनिवास 'मानव' / वर्तमान दौर की कथाएं कहती प्रियंका 'सौरभ' की कृति 'दीमक लगे गुलाब' / 171

ENGLISH SECTION

Research Article

- Ms. Desiree Ann. A, Dr. J. Minny & Dr. D. Dhanalakshmi / **Leaving, Loving and Yearning: Ifemelu's Zigzagging Emotions in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*** / 175
- V. Chandra and Dr. J. Dharageswari / **Animal World with Anthropomorphic Representation: A Study of R.K. Narayan's *A Tiger for Malgudi*** / 180
- D. Bhuvani and Dr. J. Dharageswari / **Eccentricities of New World -Bharati Mukherjee's Fictional Narrations: An Analysis of Refashioning Self** / 185
- Suriya R and Dr. T.S. Ramesh / **Chanakya's Hypothetical Sense of Transformation in David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*** / 191
- Ms. Ethina and Dr T.S. Ramesh / **The Matter and Manner; From Flat Mediocrity to Sparkling Charm in Translation** / 195
- Ms. M. Charmaigne Owenita and Dr. V. Francis / **Racial Segregation in Bama's *Vanmam*** / 199
- Ms. K Manjula and Dr. Shymaladevi / **Political Ideas and Religious Beliefs in Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*** / 205

Racial Segregation in Bama's Vanmam

–Ms. M. Charmaigne
Owenita
–Dr. V. Francis

The terms Dalit and Dalit literature have been a subject of arguments, controversies, etc. The term 'dalit' refers to the vision of caste binaries and caste based oppression, discrimination and celebration of the politics of otherness. Most of the thinkers and creative writers related with dalit literature have expressed their consensus on the inference that dalit literature is a manifestation of cultural conflict of the society, economically and culturally deprived groups of society. It is not a literature of caste but of a specific consciousness that deprives innocent individuals from their basic rights of self-survival, self-preservation and self-expression. Much of Dalit Literature is found in the regional languages and it has to be translated into English to receive due attention everywhere. Several Tamil Dalit Literary works have been translated into English and in other languages and have received appreciation.

This paper which focuses on the issue of Racial Segregation in Bama's Vanmam. It discusses the emergence of Dalit Literature and the works Dalit writers in the development of the genre. Especially the works of Bama as an autobiographer, breaks all the shackles and takes up the courage to bring out the inter – caste rivalry and the caste clashes, loss of innocent lives, the several abuses and the torturers faced by the dalit women. It is also an attempt in presenting the theme of identity which was established from the beginning of the novel recounting the instigated rivalry by the upper-class Naickers between the Pallars and Parayars. And none the less projects how autobiography has been used as a form to reimagining the ways of writing about women's lives and identities in a male-dominated and racist society. Bama at last brings out the message that the internal enmities should be put aside to obtain a rightful place in the society. The novel shows the sufferings of Dalit community in the hands of upper-caste communities in church, places of education and society. These also show the sufferings of the Dalit women in the hands of the upper caste men and also in the hands of their own husbands. Overall this paper provides an outlook of power, social status, self-identity and weakened human relationships.

Literature is the work of art. It brings out the feelings of society by the writings. Literature is one of the parts of our living life and it provides the creative art of author's psyche. Indian Writing found its way in English Literature, as the writers who are natives of India started voicing out their emotions. This emerged as a new field in literature called Indian Writing in English. It became a captivating sector as the writers started including their native culture, language, customs and their traditional framework.



Thus it was accepted by the people all around the world as it provided a microscopic view of the ancient and contemporary India.

Dalit Literature could be seen as an emerging field in Indian English Writing, because over the past decades the dalit communities have used their writings as a revolutionary and radical protest seeking a new voice and identity. With India, being world's largest democracy, our society still remains to be a community with major caste divisions. The ancient scripts state that a section of Hindu society was badly treated. Later, they came to be known and called as the 'untouchables'. Discussions started arising on the mistreatment of the marginalized people. Many philosophers and scholars started voicing out their oppression against the undignified treatment of the low class people. Casteism is an inescapable reality which has mared the Indian society. Our constitution has guaranteed equal rights to all its citizens, yet the reality is just the contrary. A few Indian writers emerged to backlash their pain and agony using literature as a weapon to revolt against the evil practices of casteism. For more than three centuries these longing souls have been in search for identity in the society which led to the development of the genre. Their genre of writing deals with the themes such as self, love, pity and loneliness.

The terms Dalit and Dalit literature have been a subject of arguments, controversies, etc. The term 'dalit' refers to the vision of caste binaries and caste based oppression, discrimination and celebration of the politics of otherness. Most of the thinkers and creative writers related with dalit literature have expressed their consensus on the inference that dalit literature is a manifestation of cultural conflict of the society, economically and culturally deprived groups of society. It is not a literature of caste but of a specific consciousness that deprives innocent individuals from their basic rights of self-survival, self-preservation and self-expression. Much of Dalit Literature is found in the regional languages and it has to be translated into English to receive due attention everywhere. Several Tamil Dalit Literary works have been translated into English and in other languages and have received appreciation.

Dalit Literature being a literature of pain and protest gives importance especially for a race called lower class urging for equality. The origin of Dalit Literature starts from the exploitation of the lower class and portrays the quest for equality. Arjun Dangle defines Dalit Literature as, "It is one which acquaints people with caste system and untouchability in India, its appalling nature and its system of exploitation. In other words, Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys, sorrows and struggles of those in the lowest

Stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science thus finally ending as revolutionary".

The most marginalized segment of the society was given to the Dalit women. Marginalization denied the most basic human rights and social justice to the Dalit women and children. In the region of Dalit Feminism, patriarchal violence became the most stressed issue. With a dire need to stop the violence against Dalit women writers emerged to attain their dutiful rights as a citizen. With Dalit Literature not only being a literature of rejection and protest, but also a literature of reconstruction of past, many writers contributed a deal of support from their part.

Autobiography holds a deep fascination for people of all ages. Dalit autobiographies record Dalit's experiential reality, humiliation and oppression that they had faced for centuries. The main aim of the Dalit writers is to liberate themselves from the caste – based politics. So, Dalit writers felt that, there was a need to produce their own writings to portray their outburst for justice. Poems, short-stories, novels and autobiographies written by Dalit writers are charged with the psychological trauma experienced by them.

In contemporary Dalit Literature writers expanded their horizons through their constant struggle for equal rights. In such works the doubly marginalized women had decided to rescue themselves from historical and cultural invisibility and set about creating a literature of their own. As a result, Dalit literature forms a kind of separate literature. In such writings, autobiography holds up deep fascination for people of all ages, races and sexes. The success of this genre is mostly seen as an act of empowerment, a way of struggling to take control of one's existence through the command of the word. In fact an autobiographer seeks liberation through the creative act of writing.

Amidst a number of writers, who actively participate in propagating Dalit literature, the works of Bama portray the issues of caste based oppression and gender discrimination. Bama, originally called Faustina Mary Fathima Rani is a Christian Dalit activist. Her novels focus on caste and gender discrimination. They portray caste-discrimination practiced in Christianity and Hinduism. Bama's works are seen as embodying Dalit feminism and are famed for celebrating the inner strength of the subaltern woman. Bama rose to fame with her *Language in India*.

Bama is a renowned Dalit writer, teacher, short story writer and a novelist. Being born as Tamil Dalit women, she has bitter experience on caste discrimination since the early days of her life. Bama was born in 1958 in a Roman Catholic family from Puthupatti in Madras. Bama Faustina Soosairaj had her early education in her village and after graduation she served as nun for seven years. After that she came to know that there were separate training centres for Dalit women. Seeing the way the dalit people were treated, she felt that she had taken a wrong decision and thus gave up on becoming a nun. Thus began her career as a Tamil Dalit writer and Bama became her pen name.



In her recent novel *Vanmam- Vendetta* (2008) Bama concentrates on the internal differences among Dalits. *Vanmam* published in English in 2008 and it is her third novel. To Bama Dalit Literature is not merely Literature on Dalits but a critique of the Hindu social order. The aim of my paper is study the internal animosity among Dalits in Tamilnadu. In fact it is not only happening in Tamilnadu also in every state. Whether it is animosity between Dalits and Elite sections or Dalits with sub sections, it very pertinent to know that Women are subjugated in every sphere of life both by men of upper caste and by her own men.

The text traces an account of the aggressive exploitation of Dalit women in terms of double day labour, domestic violence, priests in the Church, upper caste landlords and their own ignorance and suggests remedies.

In *Vanmam* Bama tells the inter-caste rivalry between Dalit communities. It highlights the vengeance between Pallars and Parayars and shows how dominant Naickers use that to their likeliness and stroke the fire between the other two castes in favour to themselves. Their ignorance is paid with a he price of misery, pain, sufferings and death. It traces the segregation faced by the Dalit people on the basis of race and caste. It portrays the violence, hardships and the loss of numerous lives undergone by the Pallars and Parayars due to their meaningless grudges and jealousy. This paper brings out the way, how the people are segregated among themselves on the basis of caste, thus leading to a huge rivalry and loss of identity. Thus racial segregation becomes the main theme that revolves in the novel along with other themes such as quest for identity and freedom, brutality and patriarchal dominance.

The characters in the novel *Vanmam* face a huge racial segregation that has mainly contributed to the plot. It could be viewed as a discourse of the caste and inter-caste struggles faced by the people of Dalit community. The upper class lords like Naickers manipulate the emotions of the Dalit people, in a way of seeking revenge for the prejudices. As a whole, *Vanmam* explores the pain and animosity of various castes and sub-castes with a century – old Dalit politics in TamilNadu. B. Azgarasan states the same saying, ‘*Vanmam* occupies a

Unique place as it brings to the fore, the centrality of the issue of caste and not simply the atrocities against Dalits’.

Bama’s *Vanmam* begins with the description of the cultural geography in the Kandampatti village. The readers are able to understand that the streets, chavady and fields are divided based on the caste divisions which are shown in the novel as three factors of dispute. The Naickers are characterized to be the dominant upper class under whom, the Pallars and Parayars work, earning their daily wages. The Pallars, who identify themselves as Hindus and the Parayars, who are mostly Christian converts work in the fields and orchards of the upper caste landlords.

At the beginning of the novel the youngsters of both the castes come to Kandampatti village for their college vacation who wanted to change their village. On the other side, the elders from Pallars and Parayars clan, work in fields of Naickers and have constant fight over whose field should be watered first. This leads to the murder of a Parayar farmhand, Marrasu by a Pallar farmhand, Karuppasamy. After that murder Karuppasamy was saved from punishment with the help of his landlord, Palanivelu. This is the first murder that Bama shows as an example of the hatred and vengeance that prevails between the Pallars and Parayars. Through this murder we are able to identify hoe enmity between the Pallars and Parayars are kept alive and also nurtured by the upper class, Naickers.

This could be seen when Saminathan says, after knowing behind his uncle, Marraasu's death: "We should get ourselves an education, qualify as lawyers, and come back to put an end to this sort of injustice. It's only with an education that we can get a proper understanding of such matters" [Vanmam 12]. Through these lines we are able to see the way education plays a major role on the attitudes, customs and behaviour of people. The fictionist tries to convey that education could be a better tool to fight for rights and freedom instead using violence. While the elders are more concerned about creating problems, the young minds are ready to fight for their rights and want their voice to be heard and accepted, through this Bama tries to show the way the Dalit people are trying to break out from their long, framed suppression.

The main theme of racial segregation, is at last resolved as the people of both the castes, the Pallars and Parayars understand their mistake and decided to strive together and make sure justice prevails to make a new world, for their future generations. The climax of the novel ends in a smooth way hinting an optimistic note in the lives of the people. The novel concludes with an ending that the people could never forget the vicious and aggressive happenings and to create a peaceful environment for the next generation.

Bama has a very simple writing style. She does not use complicated terminologies and theories to explain her point. Her writing style has a simple language and the accent she uses gives the readers an exact depiction of the scene, she wants to convey. In the novel *Vanmam*, the novelist depicts the real life incidents and sufferings faced by the subaltern people. Through her beautiful choice and arrangements of words, she creates an accessible and friendly writing style.

The main themes in her works are caste and gender discrimination which is practiced in the marginalized regions. She also focuses on the inner strength of the subaltern women and it also turns out to be one of the main themes like inequality and quest for self-identity which could be derived from her own life experiences.



According to Bama, Marginalized people have been pushed to the very edges of the society have to put aside their internal enmities if they are to reclaim their self respect and their rightful place in society. The translator of novel, according to Malini Seshadri, the novel *Vanmam* is a narrative of events involving two dalit castes in one small village in one state in India. She also commented that honesty stands in the novel and it lacks artifice. She concludes, translating *Vanmam* has been a journey of discovery for me and valuable learning experience.

On the whole the novel *Vanmam* is a heart –touching novel with startling language that shows the extreme consequences of racial segregation and the later realization of peace and harmony.

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