CHAPTER 5
CULTURE AND AESTHETICS

The term, “culture” has a very long and comparatively complex history signifying various and different things at different times. It is derived from Latin word “culture” meaning “tending”; an agricultural term that has been extended to signify the development and sophistication in human attitude—the cultivation of values. Culture is complex and multilayered which may include assemblage of practices, beliefs and facts that factually determine the life of people, language, ideas, aesthetic tastes, skills and usages, those can be categorized as narrative, psychological, structural and genetic. To put it succinctly, culture is the conglomeration of the entire intra and inter social transactions which is construed as the value system of a particular society.

Culture is racial in the sense every human race has its one practices and beliefs. Man is a social animal, he comes into contact with other people and during his transaction of life with others, he acquires many new things apart from his original which also makes the reservoir of his culture and consequently culture is dynamic. The practices, undertaken by a particular group of people may be rejected by the same group of people in course of time, because mankind has commenced their career at the bottom and has walked their way up from savagery to civilization.

Culture is historical and specific and in that sense it is interpretative. In the present day context, culture is pluralistic. In this connection Geertz observes:

The concept of culture I espouse is essentially semiotic one. Believing with Max Weber that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not
experimental science is search of laws, but an interpretative one in search of meanings. (5)

Raymond Williams lists four contemporary uses of the term culture. To him, culture is seen as:

a) a particular way of life of a group in a particular period,
b) a general process of intellectual spiritual and aesthetic development
c) works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity, and finally
d) the signifying systems through which necessarily a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored. (11-20)

Based on his observation, culture is a system that creates meanings, knowledge and subjectivities.

Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes and its own meanings. Every society eventually expresses its institutions through various arts like literature, painting and etc., produced by it in search of the common meanings underlying in such pattern and for seeking approval of those institutions and customs prevalent in their society. India is a land that is commonly known for diversified and pluralistic cultures. Each society contributes some elements for the nation’s plurality; even their different, and the varied mode of their living contribute to the culture of this land. Dalit society which is rich in aesthetic sense also contributes something to its part. Bama details on the contribution of Dalits to Indian culture and the cultural preservation and transformation by Dalits.

Bama describes village in all its natural settings and the village seems to be very beautiful in Vanmam, the village, Kandampatti that is placed at the foot of a mountain and the people who live in the village is vividly pictorially portrayed. There are many
caste people, who are hierarchically arranged starting from the west spread towards the east. The settlements of Pallar and Parayar, two predominantly existing Dalit communities are secluded and ostracized. One can find a gap between these settlements and those of others. These outcaste settlements are usually found in the east almost in all the villages and to note that the Pallar settlements are usually named as “Pacheri” and the Parayar settlements as “Cheri”. These people are treated as untouchables, may be because of the profession they indulge in. The Pallars and Parayars have to pass through the other caste settlements to go to the bazaar and Church. Bama writes, “As one moves from east to west in the village, the caste status of the residents steadily rises” (Vanmam 5). Pallars and Parayars are the only agricultural labourers in the village but the lands are situated in the western side adjacent to the upper caste settlements; “they all belong to the upper-caste people” (Bama: Vanmam 5) and it is found in the village that Parayars are the only Christians, yet the church “is in the western part of the village” (Bama: Vanmam 5).

In villages, one can witness that people live in clusters and they are secluded within their caste. There are different types of settlements based on caste, each settlement is named after the caste of the people who reside there: Nadar settlements; Koravar settlement; Chakkiliyar settlement; Pallar settlement, the Parayar settlement and so on. People from one settlement may not mingle with those of other settlements.

Dalits’ life is enshrouded with similes and narration of stories which often mythicise their sufferings; they often narrate some beautiful stories that are metaphorical and through this metaphorical stories; they want to hand down their sufferings and ill treatment. Bama uses the story of Nallathangal happened in Archanavaram, a village situated adjacent to Puthupatti where the novel Karukku is set. Bama uses this story as an intertext. Nallathangal is the sister of Nallannan, the King of Madhurapuri. Nallathangal is married to Somanathan, the King of neighbouring country Ratnapuri. Alankari, the
wicked queen of Madhurapuri becomes envious of the happy married life of Nallathangal. Years pass and one day, drought strikes Ratnapuri. Nallathangal with her seven children seeks refuge in her brother Nallannan's palace. Nallannan promises all help, while Alankari tortures Nallathangal. But Nallathankal hides the misdeeds of Alankari from her brother as she does not want their family life to be disturbed. Nallathangal is forced to leave her brother's palace. She decides to kill her children and commit suicide. She throws her children one by one into a well and kills herself. Nallathangal suffers like anything and she finds consolation only in her death and all the troubles and hardships seem to cease with that.

In Sangati, there is a narration of another story of Esakki which is narrated by Vellaiamma Kizhavi, Bama’s grandmother. Considering the birth order, Esakki is the eighth girl in an upper caste family. He has fallen in love with a Vannan boy which has been opposed by her seven brothers, since vannan is considered as an outcaste in the in the Indian social structure. But the little girl has eloped with the Vannan boy and they have settled in another place. Esakki’s brothers have searched for her all over. At last, they have found her and beheaded her without caring that she is pregnant. They also have opened her stomach and have taken the infant and twisted its head. From that day onwards Esakki has turned into a demon god. It is believed that Esakki is more powerful and “If Esakki gets her hands on you, she won’t let you go easily” (Bama: Sangati 50). The grandma adds “For Esakki, they must always offer cradles dolls and such things. She demands them” (Bama: Sangati 50). In both the stories, Bama metaphorically symbolizes that Dalits are suffering at the treacherous hands of the upper caste people in the caste-ridden society to earn their livelihood and to make their identity unique, and there is no end for their suffering. Death is the only deliverance for Dalits from misery and their suffering just like Nallathangal and the vannan boy mentioned in the Esakki
story. Bama dexterously uses the story to depict the suffering and relinquishment of suffering.

Dalit’s life is also intermingled with songs. They use song on all occasions like on weeding, on transplanting, on harvesting the crops or on doing anything else in order to drive away the monotony of work. They use songs also to tease each other. They use songs from cradle to grave as lullabies (rorattu songs) to elegies (oppari). Form cradle to grave they have songs. These songs are sung to relieve themselves from the sorrows and troubles of life. Bama’s fiction also shares the women’s jovial life with a lot of extreme fun and frolic. Women gather together, chat, gossip and discuss problems with each other. Their life is extremely mingled with joy, mirth and humour. They are skillful in singing; they compose songs instantaneously that deal with the problems of real life. One popular song about a man who often fights with his wife over trivial matters goes thus:

As we cleaned out teeth.
In spring by the river.
It is because I spluttered over you.
You haven’t talked to me for eight days? (Bama: Sangati 77)

Another song about a man who is involved with a mistress after marriage runs this way:

Eighteen sweet paniyaarm.
You handed to her across the wall.
But whatever you might give away.
You still are my husband. (Bama: Sangati 77)

Bama also explains the dirge in Vanmam. Kaanikka Mary, wife of Sesuratham wails aloud for the death of her husband. This kind of wailing is literally known as “oppari” in Tamil. While doing this oppari the victim’s relatives enumerate the qualities of the dead person and wails aloud.
I’m just going to shop’, you said . . . I’ll come back soon, you said . . . raja . . . was this the end that was written in your stars . . . you have abandoned me to this plight . . . ey raja, who is there left for me you have gone before you could even see the face of your child that is be born, raja. Ey . . . raja . . . raja . . . emma . . .’

(Bama: *Vanamam* 84).

The persons, performing the dirge usually address the deceased as “raja” “ayya”, “saami” and the other laudatory words. This rich culture full of folklore, folksong and sharing was part of the culture and the part of positive identity of Dalits.

The village *Panchayat* is one of the significant parts of the village culture; even today one can witness such type of *panchayat* system to redress the problems. The headman of the village hears the problem of the concerned people and in consultation with other members of the *panchayat*, the redresses the issues. The *Panchayat* usually assembles in a public place either under a tree or in a community hall, usually adjacent to the village temple. The headman arranges such meetings. In Puthupatti and Kandampatti villages also, the headman summons the people to gather in the community hall at that night. The victims usually greet the elders by falling down at full length and then they stand on one side of the gathering with their arms folded.

Through the work Dalits indulge in, Bama describes how those works contribute to the development of their culture, and also signifies that they always do productive work. Most Dalits are the landless agricultural workers who usually strive hard for their gruel and all the livelihoods. She also portrays how Dalits are exploited. They work hard in the field from the daybreak to sunset, whereas they are given only a meagre amount as wages. They “can survive only through hard and incessant labour” (Bama: *Karukku* 48). They do the works like tilling, sowing, weeding, and reaping the crops. Though the land is owned by the upper caste people, Dalits work as bonded labourers. Bama says, “. . .
each paraya family is attached to a Naicker family, as pannaiyaal” (Bama: Karukku48).

_Pallu_ literature, in Tamil elaborates on these labours. On critiquing _Pallu_ literature, Gnasekaran observes, “These songs are mostly sung by the people who lived in _Marutham_ landscape and particularly in the paddy cultivating fields; those people were called as Mallars (Pallars). Later these have been complied under the name of “_Uzhathi Pattu_” or “_Pallisai_” *(Song by Ploughmen). Tamil people used to divide the landscape into five parts, as _Kurinchi_ (Mountain), _Mullai_ (Forest), _Marutham_ (Fertile agricultural lands), _Neithal_ (Sea) and _Paalai_ (desert) and the people lived in _Marutham_ landscape has come to be known as Pallars, as they have occupied the lowlands which suit the purpose of irrigating the crops and they have indulged themselves in agriculture.

Tilling the land, though it is considered as foolish outcaste task by the Brahmanical construct of Indian society has its own scientific fact. Tiller has to know the quality and fertility of the land first in terms of its capability to be able to plough. The plough is one of the inventions of ancient men, which has considerably changed the lives of human beings like the invention of fire and wheel. Plough is one of the main things which have motivated the philosophy of food production and consumption. In the process of production the outcastes are involved and as soon as the production phase becomes over, all the strata of the society consume the produced crops and consequently exploitation of the working class begins with this phase through neglecting to offer correct wages. Kancha Iliah rightly observes:

Tilling the land with the wooden plough, with the help of power of the yoked cattle, is one of the most scientific and materialist processes that our ancestors have handed down to us. . . . The tiller’s knowledge about the land and its nature and character is a basic necessity to conduct the

* Translated by the Scholar
operation of tilling efficiently. A tiller understands the soil by examining its very surface itself. . . . The tiller has to assess the moisture levels of the soil at the beginning of the tilling process itself. . . . The farmers (several shudra, chandala and Adivasi communities) perform the task of tilling have developed highly sophisticated knowledge. . . . A Brahman pundit does not know how to measure the levels of rain—the tiller knows it in its all dimensions. (Post-Hindu India146)

The farmers even predict the rainfalls by looking at the sky, even when the entire folk of our scientists fails to rightly judge the possibility of raining and the movement of monsoon using the sophisticated, scientifically developed instruments and satellites. The process of tilling becomes the primeval force of human existence. This process is not celebrated in the Hindu scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedas, because these texts are Brahmanically based and the Brahmans consider that tilling the land for cultivation is the task of outcasts.

Dalits are also indulged themselves in the construction labour, “digging wells, carrying loads of earth, gravel and stone” (Bama: Karukku 48). When these jobs are not available, since cultivation in India is monsoon based, Dalits used to gather firewood, and sell it to the upper caste people. In villages which serve as a background to Bama’s fiction, the Pallar and Parayar work hard in the fields whereas, the other Dalit castes “the Koravar or gypsies, washing Vannan and leather-working Chakkiliyar would sweep the streets, dredge and clean the drains and make a living that way” (Bama: Karukku 49).

The art of leather-making which is the base for many professions like farming and industrial works like making footwear and wallets, is still considered as unclean and anti-divine by the Hindu socio-cultural philosophy and the chakkiliyar, one of the outcastes in
India is indulged themselves by peeling of the skin of dead animals. The processing of leather is now considered as central to human existence. Peeling the skin without making any hole from the dead body of the cattle involves certain skills like cultivation of hand and knife usage skills in a very advanced manner. This art is being handed down to generation to generation orally; the antiquity may be traced in “the Sanskrit inscriptions . . . The vilavatti plates, . . . mention the tax payable by the carmakara or the leather workers” (Subramaniam 19). This leather becomes useful in making agrarian usable commodities like leather ropes, bags, shoes and musical instruments.

Bama in Karukku refers to a substantial rock, “Vannaan Paara” by name, on the top of which there is a pond, “. . . the Vannaan boys would wash clothes there, steaming and whitening them” (Bama : Karukku 2), and consequently, the rock is named so. Vannaan (washer man), one of the Dalit communities in Tamilnadu washes the clothes of the whole village. In Indian society the traditional Hindu upper caste women are assigned only the subsidiary role in the social life whereas in this particular community the women are indulged in creative humanitarian work and in cultural process. Professional clothes-washing involves washing all kinds of clothes. They have a unique culture, aesthetic sense, and sense of service which could be termed as “Chakalatwam” (Ilaiah: Post-Hindu India 69). Chakalatwam is a social process of collecting dirty clothes from house to house, carrying them to the pond where they wash all the clothes, washing and drying them up. They will not use soap to wash but soil or mud as soap, this seems to be the earliest discovery. They use a specific soil which is black in colour which contains the chemical character of a detergent, and also it prevents the spread of germs. The second major breakthrough in the process of chakalatwam is the process of heating the clothes after dipped in the water with soil soap. This enables killing of germs. The idea of the modern washing machines’ inclusion of usage of hot water for washing is preconceived
in the washer men’s ancient practice of heating. The process of heating clothes is known as “vellavi” in Tamil. The process does not only revive the beauty but also it preserves the health of the whole village.

When these sorts of works are not available, Dalits used to go to the jungle to collect fire woods as one of the means of earning livelihood. On their way to the jungle, they have to give bribe to the ‘Guarder’, who lives in the forest bungalow. Bama explains how difficult it is to go into the jungle by climbing up the steep mountain slopes, collect dried firewood and tie them together into bundles. While doing this, “the twigs and thorns would scratch and tear your face, your hair, your arms and legs. Sometimes your skin would be all torn and bleeding” (Bama: *Karukku* 51). They bring the fire wood after all the struggle: threat to health, climbing up the steep mountain slopes, passing and crawling through the trees. Some people usually sell the bundle to the Naickers or other upper caste people and they usually give “Seven or eight rupees” (Bama: *Karukku* 52).

Children, while attaining the age twelve are usually taken to the fields along with their parents to make some money and the girl children need look after the chores at home like caring siblings and cooking. “If there were boys in the house, they would graze sheep and cattle” (Bama: *Karukku* 52).

Bama explains Dalits’ struggle of their living. They collect grains during the harvest time. She says, “We used to take wide winnowing tray and stiff broom to collect the ears of grain falling of the sheaves that were being carried to the threshing floor. We would winnow the grain collected and take it home” (Bama: *Karukku* 53), and the Dalits used to sell the grain, so collected “There were Nadar men who would set up shop in our streets, weigh the grain, and take it in exchange for tapioca or some other good things” (Bama: *Karukku* 53). As the same, they exchange the cotton pods also. The trades men always collect many and pay only a meagre amount thereby, they swindle the Dalits.
Food habit of a particular society is determined based on the climatic condition, crops commonly found, social stratification, mode of production and economic status of the particular society. But for Dalits it is generally the economic status and the profession they indulge in determines the foodstuff, they consume. Bama makes some references to food and dress that are in vogue among Dalit communities. Food and dress invariably express the culture of particular people concerned. The way of dressing communicates some details about the particular person. Bama expresses her deep concern and her psychological anguish over the lives of Dalits.

Dalits usually eat *kuuzh*, or gruel, watery foodstuffs made up of *ragi* or rice respectively and they use very ordinary combinations to go with because their economy gives way only to that mode. They usually cook at evening, as they return from fields. Bama says, “To go with kuuzh there would be something or the other—onions, groundnuts, moulded jaggery, green chillies” (Bama: *Karukku*71). Sometimes this *kuuzh* is brewed without rice to meet out the taste of the person who eats it. Bama narrates such a practice by an old lady Shanmugam, by name. Shanmugam usually cooks the gruel without rice and she comes out with her own interpretation for doing so. She observes:

‘If you cook it with rice, the rice grains get in the way and you never feel as if you swallowed your kuuzh. Just try the ragi-kuuzh on its own. It will slip down your throat as easy as anything, with each gulp. And if you take some bites of vegetable pickles from the Nadar’s shop, in between your mouthfuls, it will surely be as good as nectar from heaven’. (Bama: *Sangati* 37)

If they have a little money they will go to the shop and purchase pickle. Bama introduces another side dish to go with their *kuuzh* namely, “*Kadichukira*”, which the shop owners prepare at their homes using brinjals and red chillies. “It always went very well” (Bama: *Karukku* 72). These are the common substances that Dalits used to eat.
Sometimes this *kuuzh* is accompanied with the dried fish either in the form of fry or gravy. Bama talks about the food the grandma used to cook and eat. She appreciates the deliciousness of the food. The grandma cooks *kanji* and a delicious *kuzhambu* flavoured *Karuvadu* (dried fish). Sometimes, probably at the weekends, when a cow is butchered in their street the grandma used to get the intestines and cook gravy out of it and she also cooks a *ragi kali*. When some guests arrive at their home, they usually cook a good meal for the sake of cherishing the guest. Tamil people’s culture is embedded in cherishing culture. Every literature praises the act of cherishing guests in Tamil Culture.

Thiruvalluvar enunciates in his couplets,

\[
\text{The guests arrived he tends, the coming guests expects to see.}
\]

\[
\text{To those in heavenly homes that dwell a welcome guest is he” (86).}
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Here the Tamil poet Tiruvalluvar intends to say that those who nurse their guests and make them depart in good manner and patiently waits for another guest can gain heaven after their death and the people in heaven will hold them in high esteem and serve them well that he will be treated as guest to the people in heaven. So in Tamil culture heaven is considered as a prize for those who regularly cherish the guests; Dalits are of no exception.

Dalits usually buy vegetable, meat and greens that are cheaply available; due to their poverty, they cannot afford much to buy good things as done by the upper caste people. Bama in *Karukku* says, “We’d go to the lakeside in the evenings, pluck some wild greens like kuppaikira or thoyilukkira and eat it . . .” (*Karukku* 72). These varieties of greens are not reared up in fields by any other but are available free of cost. Considering the purchase of meat, dalits usually purchase beef, because it is available at a cost less than mutton, they also buy cheap varieties of fish like “silebi kenda and kenda” (Bama: *Karukku* 72) for making curry. Sometimes they may not have enough to eat, during those
days they have to either starve or go to bed with half-filled bellies. “. . . there are times when there was nothing at home at all. My mother would somehow manage to relive our hunger with a little left over rice or kuuzh” (Bama: Karukku 72).

Sometimes Dalits suffer like anything without even having their gruel to eat. Bama’s mother explains an episode in times of famine when the upper caste people could afford to some rice. “. . . in those days we used to go with our brooms and winnowing trays, dig into the ant-pits, sweep them out and bring away what we found. We sifted out the grass seeds that the ants had gathered and found enough to feed one person in each of our families” (Bama: Sangati 82).

Dalits usually purchase dresses on the time of festivals only, because of their poverty. Bama’s dresses are almost cast-off, since in her family they used to purchase only two clothes per year one for Christmas and another for Chinnamalai festival, “celebrated at the hill grotto of our lady” (Bama: Karukku 75). They have to adjust with those two clothes throughout the year.

Another important aspect that shrouds over the life of Dalits is superstition; they speak a lot about the existence of ghosts and devils. Besides ghost and devils, they also believe that the big trees, found in the forest are the abode of ‘Muni’. “It had buried seven cauldrons full of coins amongst the branching roots of the tree, and kept guard over the treasure. Then towards the north, there were wandering troupes of Ayyankaachi” (Bama: Sangati 54), a crowd of ghosts who come with torch in their hands troupes. People also construe, “The merest glimpse would induce fever, frightful diarrhoea and eventual death” (Bama: Karukku 6).

Bama also narrates an incident that happened in a village. A lady has approached her neighbour for her jewellery to be worn during the time of her relative’s marriage. The Ayyankaachi troupe has overheard it and has exactly gone to the neighbour’s house
demanding jewels taking the shape of the lady who has demanded. The neighbouring lady has given the jewel and in the next morning, there has been quarrel over the supposedly stolen jewels, each woman is beaten up by her husband. At that time a peasant comes holding the jewel and explains. “‘They have their own songs, those peys. What do you think they sang, as they danced? ‘Ei, try Saktimukta’s jewellery on Anna. Oh he looks very fine.’ And so they tried the ornaments on each one as they danced and sang”. (Bama: *Sangati* 57). Actually the man who explains this incident has danced naked among the ghosts and the ghosts also wear the jewellery on him and at once he has showed his spade in front of the troupe and the entire troupe has run away. It is believed that on seeing iron, the ghost may run in fear. Every time in the village some people are possessed by ghosts.

Another important element connected with superstition is the practice of exorcism. It is believed that when people commit suicide by any means, their spirit may not go from the world since the desires remain unfulfilled and that such spirits may possess people. Here Bama’s grandmother says to another woman that a girl, Manacchi, by name is possessed by the ghost of a lady belonging to Chettiar caste, who has committed suicide by drowning herself in a well. All the people are talking about Manacchi’s possession and her frenzy dance. It seems that the upper caste people are fond of humiliating and exploiting Dalits even when they become ghosts; the ghost of a Chettiar lady possesses only a Dalit woman. The people arrange an exorcist to drive away the spirit from Manacchi. Usually in villages people believe that such people can drive away the spirit through their power and the man uses a smart musical instrument, called ‘*Kodangi*’. The possessed person will dance in a frenzy way.

The man plays the instrument and according to the speed of his playing the possessed person will dance with an unkempt hair. The people belonging to the house of
the possessed person will usually offer a cradle and a sari-blouse to drive away the spirit. The exorcist will pluck out some hair from the possessed person’s head and nail it in the banyan tree, for doing so, usually the exorcist follows the possessed person at night. At the next morning people will go to the banyan tree and offer the blouse and cradle. No women is destined to go to that particular place either at night or at the next morning, since it is believed that the spirit may re-enter another woman’s body. Bama also explains how another lady Virayi, belonging to Vannan caste has been possessed by Esakki, a kind of ghost.

Irulappan’s family had summoned the soothsayer to beat his kodangi drum. When we arrived there, a huge crowd had gathered already. Irulappan’s wife Virayi was sitting in the middle of the crowd, her hair loose, her eyes staring about . . . The soothsayer began to beat his kodangi drum. . . . her head began to sway in time to the rhythm . . . Virayi swirled and whirled . . . ( Bama: Sangati 47-8)

There are many festivals celebrated in the village with all its glory and happiness among the people; celebrating festivals is the way of expressing the culture of people. Every festival has its underlying pattern for celebration and all the festivals lead the people into joy. People wear new dresses, cook sweets at home, shares meals and sweets with friends and relatives, goes to temples, churches or mosques or gurudwaras or etc. as the case me and spend the day with friends and relatives. They not only share sweets and meals but also the happiness through their activities. Festivals are the occasions to Dalits whereby they temporarily renounce or forget all their melancholy. Bama describes Christmas, Easter and the Chinnamalai festival in her novels. During Christmas, New Year and Easter, The Parayars used to cook idli, dosai and paniyaram in the morning; they slaughter a cow and eat beef. Bama here expresses her strong disapproval while
saying that every other caste used to eat beef, but it is only the Parayars who are considered as low-caste. Paraya people have a high opinion of themselves in believing that they are considered as a clan in Brahmans and when the other Brahman clans have peeped to see that these people eating the meat of a cow at once they are ostracized from that group and are known as Parayars the low-caste in society. Here Bama might have alluded to that incident on saying, “All of them eat their fill, but see, it’s only we people who are called low-caste” (Bama: *Karukku* 64).

At night, during the festivals they usually stage a cinema in the community hall and all the people gather around the community hall in anxiety to look into the cinema, to be staged. In the next day people used to go and meet the priests and mother superior in respect; they also offer garland and fruits as a mark of showing their respect, Even when the Paraya people have not tasted the fruits; “they made their offering, knelt before them in all humility, and received the sign of the cross on their foreheads” (Bama: *Karukku* 65) and then they take part in the congregation.

The children wear their new dresses with joy and go to the community hall. They feel happy and proud about their clothes that they “finger each other’s new clothes in turn and talk endlessly about them, sharing . . . happiness” (Bama: *Karukku* 60). Elders go to shrines to worship with candle and little boys used to light their *Beedi* in those candles, such a joy shrouds over the village during festivities. The boys are very eager to talk over the mike set, as soon as it arrives.

Bama, then describes the ‘Chinnamalai festival’. Chinnamalai is an adjacent area of the Bama’s village, Puthupatti. She also narrates a myth over the place; every festival has its own myth. In Chinnamalai, Mother Mary has appeared to a priest in his dream. Once, a priest has travelled to the nearest place to perform prayer. On returning, the day has fallen out and the bulls have refused to move and consequently they, the priest and
the cart-man have stayed there. During his fast sleep, Mother Mary has appeared in his
dream and has demanded a church to be erected in that place. There they have built a
church and there is usually celebrated festival to commemorate the appearance of Mother
Mary. People used to gather over there.

Bama explains the proceedings of the festival and the entertaining activities of
children. They have a rosary at the evening and they used to stay there at that night.
Children pluck out the tamarind pods and eat them either by roasting them or grinding
them in stones. They play climbing on the banyan tree and enjoy the beautiful weather. In
the next morning there will be a prayer. After the prayer, they go to the shrine of Jesus
Christ and offer their offerings in the collection box placed there. They return home,
plucking some neem and tamarind leaves. People say that these things are medicines and
storing of which in their houses may prevent the approach of the insects. Neem tree is
natural medicine that can repel all kinds of insects and in Tamil Culture the neem tulsi
and the like are connected with religion and tulsi and vilvam leaves are distributed at
temples. People also eat it great veneration to God. Thus Tamils take care of their
health. They return home walking barefooted, since they do not have money to purchase
footwear. In some villages, the untouchables are not allowed to wear footwear or the
upper garments. Bama explains how the entire mountain is decorated during the
festivities as Dalits festivals are characterized by scintillating colours. A typical Roman
Catholic festival is explained in this chapter including the car festival and slaughtering of
cattle and chickens. For celebrating theses festivals Dalits collect fund from each family.
The resurrection of Jesus Christ is dexterously brought before the crowd by the priests
and nuns. As soon as the prayer is completed, they carry home with them holy water and
they drink the water and sprinkle it in full devotion.
Bama also describes the functions celebrated in Dalits’ families like puberty, wedding, and funeral. In *Sangati*, she explains the custom related to the puberty function. People usually celebrate a girl’s attainment of puberty; Mariamma attains puberty. They make a hut usually and make the girl sit in the hut almost for sixteen days. The hut is made up of Palmyra fronds of coconut tree fronds and the hut is made by the maternal uncle of the particular girl. During the stay of the girl in the hut, she is not allowed to come out or to go for any work; she has to rub herself with turmeric and have a bath and wear freshly-washed sari and eat rice or any other food with gingelly oil. Young women goes to the hut to whisper and gossip, there will be giggles throughout the sixteen days. They used to play games like *thayam*, *pallanguzhi* or *thattangal*. The girl who has menstruated need to be in the hut holding an iron rod. In the villages, it is believed that there is a chance for the menstruating women to be possessed by ghosts, since ghosts are attracted towards the menstrual blood and as a result people warns her to hold an iron rod in her hand and people believe that the iron rod will threaten the ghosts and the ghosts may not approach the girl. Still one can witness that the young girls after attainment of puberty used to wear iron ring in their anklet or in one of the fingers in her legs.

The evening of the day in which the girl first menstruates, the women returns home from work and gather together in the particular girl’s house and bathe her with the water mixed with turmeric powder and neem leaves. The girl’s mother goes round the village and invites all the relatives to attend this function. And while bathing the girl, the women around her sing ululations in chorus. At the end of the sixteenth day they dismantle the hut and burn all the Palmyra fronds; the girl comes out and once again goes to work as usual to monetarily assist the family.

Some better off families set up a function at the sixteenth day by hiring loudspeakers and tying banana tree in front of the gate of their house; it is customary for
the Tamil to tie the banana tree in front of the house during the functions to welcome the attendants. The girl is again asked to wear a new sari and blouse, the uncle of the girl donates the cooking vessels; and the other relatives too come to their home with gifts to the girl in the form of utensils and grains and some people gift the girl with money. The family holding the celebration usually offers a nice feast to the attendants.

In Tamil society, marriage is considered as an auspicious ceremony. Ancient Tamil folks’ life reveals five patterns of marriage: the romantic pattern, the bride price pattern, the pattern of securing a bride by attaining success in a fight, the pattern of selecting a groom by conducting a bull fight competition, and a pattern of second marriage by paying the bride price during the lifetime of the first wife, who has no siblings. Romantic pattern refers to the romantic courtship which culminates in the consecration of marriage either with or without elopement. In this pattern elopement takes place when the parents do not consent for the marriage.

Bride price pattern refers to the pattern of obtaining bride by wife purchase, the bridegroom have to pay a price for the bride to her parents either in the form of ornaments, wealth or hamlets The bride price, in ancient Tamil culture need not only always be in the form of articles but also doing service to his future father-in-law, which provide space for the bride’s father to know the groom properly.

Marital connections between royal houses and commoners lead to the third pattern of marriage: Pattern of securing wife through fight. A ruler desirous of marrying a girl of common origin must demand the girl’s father and if the latter concedes, marriage may take place. Some parents may reject which may lead to rivalry between the ruler and the commoners culminating in an open fight. The success of which decides the matter; the combat is often in the form of a duel.
Among the shepherds, there has been a practice of a strange pattern for selecting a heroic groom for their daughter on the basis of his success in a competition. Ferocious bull is brought in an arena which has to be subdued by the boys. The successful bull-catcher may marry the girl who owns the bull “The striking feature of this pattern is that love and romance play only after marriage and are not all the cause of wedlock. The abilities and courage of the groom are given more prominence than any other factor in deciding the groom for a girl.” (Manickavasagom 234).

There is another pattern of marriage recorded in literature which seems to be less common, in which a man marries for a second time while his first wife is alive for the sake of a sibling. This is a legally consecrated second marriage against the licentious life led by the most men. Here the first wife herself receives the newly wedded couple, as they enter the house and the man has to pay bride price for securing the hand of the new girl in marriage. On all the patterns of marriage, it is the groom who pays the bride price and there is no evidence of dowry system among the primitive Tamil folks.

Bama’s grandma explains a typical Dalit marriage. Usually at the Dalit marriages, there are no celebration even then the grandma used to maintain a marriage as a grand celebration, since on that day they cook the real rice and serve it to the guests on hearing this Bama exclaims, “Ei, Paatti, are you saying they had a grand wedding just because they served real rice? That happens quite often now. You know!” (Bama: Sangati 80), and grandma says that on those days there has been a famine and even during the famine, they used to cook rice. They used to have a pandal of “cholam stalks” (Bama: Sangati 80). Usually Dalits give vessels as seer. The grandma in the story says, “I gave her a bronze bowl, two brass tumblers, a wide-mouthed vessel, a copper water pot and a tall bronze pot. On top of all that I gave her a grinding stone as well” (Bama: Sangati 80). Also the grandma narrates about parisam, a money gift given by the groom’s parents to
the bride on the day of betrothal. The grandma also narrates about moi, money gift given at wedding by the guests either to the groom or to the bride. Meal is served to the guests and after that “the bridegroom would sit down with a bronze bowl in front of him. The guests would put a five or a ten into the bowl after they had dinner . . . That was the moi ceremony” (Bama: Sangati 81). Even now one can witness the “moi virundhu” among the Tamil folks especially in the Madurai and Tanjore region. There is also a mention of the mode of collecting moi in the later days by which people used to announce it through mike; “O, all of you family and kin gathered here at the wedding of such and such, son of such and such, so and so gives a moi of this many rupees”. Then all the people there will shout out, “Nalla kaariyam, well done!” And the women will raise a kulavai” (Bama: Sangati 81).

Before marriage, there is a custom among the tamil people to have betrothal and during the betrothal parisam is given as a confirmation of bride and groom. Betrothal is an important ceremony that is conducted before the wedding whereby the women of the village and bridegroom’s father goes to the bride’s house and confirm the marriage ceremony in front of the bride’s father and her maternal uncle; usually the particular ceremony takes place before two or three months from wedding. Bama narrates her experience of attending a parisam celebration in her street,

Mutthirulan carried a presentation platter in his hands, containing a betrothal sari, material for a ravikkai, a bundle of betel leaves, some betel nuts, a bunch of bananas, a coconut, and the parisam money of a hundred and one rupees. Everyone sat down. Mutharasi’s father Sakkarai, came out and sat down with them. Immediately after that the elder naattamai took the presentation tray from Muthirulan, asked the maternal uncle for his consent, and then placed the tray in Sakkarai’s hands (Bama: Sangati 82-3).
On the day of wedding there is a custom among the Tamil community to provide “box-rice” as a gift to the guests attending the wedding. Box-rice is nothing but a box made up of fibre filled with rice “They usually took this rice home, covered it in water, and ate it in the next day” (Bama: Sangati 85). There is a lengthy description of the wedding ceremony and the celebrations followed by the marriage. Some of the practices of the wedding day like “tali-tying”, a central rite in the wedding ceremony that is considered significant for the Hindus seem to be the impact of Aryan culture as such the Tamil culture in the ancient days does not witness any stern evidence of tali-tying in the marriages. Feminists usually see “tali” the sacred thread as one of the things which shows male patriarchy and male dominance. Bama also talks about another ritual that takes place during the wedding ceremony – “anointing-with-oil ceremony.”

The bride and groom put away their wedding clothes and came and sat down side by side, wearing their everyday sari and vetti. Then the women from the family poured a little oil into the brides cupped hand and asked her to rub it the boy’s head. She usually felt terribly shy, and did as she was told with her head bent low, never looking up. In the same way, they then poured some oil into the boy’s hand and asked him to rub it all over the girls head. After this, they mixed some soap-nut powder with water and asked them to rub this too over each other turn by turn. They then had to pour water over each other. All people assembled there helped with all of this giving the couple a good rub to their heads. Some of the relations, uncles and nephews there, sometimes threw bran and chaff on the couple’s heads, just in fun (Bama: Sangati 86-7)

After this bath they dress themselves in new clothes and the elders in the village exchange the couple’s garlands. In the night the wedding parties arrange a feast for the relatives and
friends and the relatives reciprocate with some kind of gifts either in the form of money or in the form of things; everything is announced through mike.

History witnesses many things; in the olden days during the marriage, the girl’s family did not give any dowry. It is the boy’s family which gave dowry to the girl’s family and there are evidence in Bama’s narratives for the same social practice. Kings choose their brides by giving gold and pearls as gift to the bride’s family. In course of time the system has begun to transform and the bride’s family gives dowry to the grooms. But in Dalit communities still there are some places where one cannot find any demand to dowry and denial of marriage for the sake of dowry. Bama observes, “In our streets, there is no snatching and grabbing in the name of dowry and such like. People may do with what they have. Instead of the women bringing a dowry at the time of marriage, in our case, the man gives a parisam, a bride-price. He gains respect according to the amount he is able to give” (Sangati 89). But with the impact of the so-called upper caste people, everything is changing; the system of dowry by the girl’s family has begun to creep in into the socio-cultural perspective of Dalits. Of all the five patterns of marriage, evidenced in ancient Tamil society, Dalits undergo the romantic pattern and bride price pattern.

Bama also describes a funeral.

In our streets, even when there’s death, it is the women who will go and sit by the corpse and sing dirges. The men remain outside. If a woman dies, the other women get together, bathe and prepare the body and lift it on to the bier. When the burial takes place, everyone will go to the graveyard, both men and women. (Bama: Sangati 89).

It is unusual for the upper caste women to go to the graveyard and attend the burial.
Bama narrates the customs and habits to be followed by women in conjugal life, which seems to be very different from that of the upper caste women.

If a man dies, there is no rule that says his wife must immediately go into white saris nor that she must behave in such and such manner. She will carry on in her usual way. And this is because, even when her husband is alive, it is not compulsory that a woman must wear a pottu on her forehead, nor bangles and other jewellery. . . . Some women never wear a tali though they marry and live with their husbands. Talis are not that important among us. (Bama: Sangati 90)

Also the widow remarriage is prevalent. Among the upper caste people, widows are not allowed to remarry and the very same act is treated as bringing indignity to the entire family. They usually wear the white saris and in some communities the head of the widows is tonsured, which is the cruelest practice.

A widow is called moonda, a reproach full term which means ‘shaven head’ because every widow is supposed to have their hair shaven off. She is considered a bad omen and people avoid looking her on her face. In explicit terms it is considered that she does not have a life after the death of the husband. (Pandya and Preeti Shah 15 – 6)

But the Dalit women are free; they continue their work as usual and in some cases they go for the second marriage also.

Looking at the surface level the games, people used to play are the pass time activities. Cultural analysts say that there is nothing to be considered as pass time elements in games but they are the explicit reflection of the lifestyle and culture of a
particular group of people. Paramasivam, in this connection says “Games are the outlets of a particular conceptual element that is imposed on the society”* (85), or it may be the reflection of what the particular society intend to execute through its members. When one analyses the Tamil games, one can find that “pallanguzhi”, Pandiattam, Aodu-Puli Aatam are the few traditional games that are being played in Tamil society then and there in the villages even now. Due to the invasion of the technological development, importance given to the traditional games is abated and the place of those games are replaced by computers, mobile phones and iPods.

In the villages, children are fond of making models using clay and make them as their toys to play with and it entertains them. Their games also reflect the culture of this land and their way of life. Bama explains an incident of conducting a playful procession to St. Sebastian church in the night. They make a toy chariot and take it to the church. They make drums of cattle-membrane and skin and bang them while conducting a seminar. They come back home only after reaching the shrine of St. Sebastian and put down the chariot. When they grow older, they have no time to play; they need go to work like catching fish in ponds, collecting plants like ‘Manjanathi’ and some fruits to eat and to sell. The reader may not fail to note the aesthetic sense of culture when she used to say, “. . . the older girls would play dice games, or hop and catch, or other indoor games with tamarind seeds and pebbles, and board games like pallaanguzhi, and thattaangal” (Bama: Karukku 57). The games mentioned here, “Pallanguzhi” and “thattangal” have its own aesthetic qualities and posses antiquity and games used to be played by girls.

Pallanguzhi aatam is the game, played mostly by girls. Now the girls who attain puberty and the women who are pregnant are the only people who play these games as pass time activity. Pallanguzhi is the game played by two persons at a time. In the board

* Translated by the Scholar
used for playing this game there may be fourteen pits (seven in right and seven in left) which are to be filled with beads. The game is started with equalization among the players. The equalization among the player is collapsed when the first person begins to play, she has to take the beads from one pit and spreads it to all other pits; one bead each. There is a temporary loss in the pits of the person and when a person comes to complete a round, she may get many beads and sometimes she may not get any. When a person loses all the beads the game comes to end. This game explicitly reflects

In a society, where there is equalization among members, the equalization is shaken by a particular means, by which one’s treasure becomes another’s without any violence. The loss of the loser becomes permanent and also the gainer’s gain. Economic imbalances are created when there arises the thought of accumulation of wealth by an individual. The treasure that is accumulated in a particular place is invariably taken from another place. Pallanguzhi culturally justifies the sense and desire of accumulation of property by an individual and poverty which is the result of property accumulation by a single man”.* (Paramasivan 86-89)

Bama discusses the games men usually indulge in like ‘silambam’, ‘kabadi’ and ‘gambling’. In olden days, in every village, there has been a youth stone. It is believed that a man is usually allowed to marry, only when he lifts the stone. It needs a strenuous effort. In the evening, people in the village lift the stone up and throw it down to the ground. They consider it as a way of demonstrating their strength. Silambam literally meaning “bamboo fight” or “stick fight” is a popular martial art, practised in south India. Originally silambam has been practised using bamboo sticks. The origin and development of silambam in Tamil culture dates back to 300 BC and Many scholars note the evidence

* Translated by the Scholar
for *silambam* in many ancient literary texts like *Tolkappiam*; the first grammar book of Tamil language, reported to have been composed during 300 BC. It has been practised as a defence mechanism against the foes. Rajagopalan writes in this regard, “Stick fight (*silambam* fencing) of Dravidians using cane bamboos is predominantly a prehistoric method of defense and attack. Paleolithic and Neolithic man found it quite handy in south India as a weapon for defense and attack against animal and human foes” (3). The bamboo staff, used in *silambam* is usually five feet in length and is swirled, while attacking enemies. Nowadays it is used as a training method in javelin or spear fighting. Modern *silambam* is used as a mode of self defence against enemies, for demonstration or recreation during festivals and important occasions and as a sport. There are references of “*Jalli-Kattu*” used to be held during *Pongal*. *Pongal* is a harvest festival in which the farmers usually convey their gratitude to the forces which have helped them in cultivating crops like sun and cattle. The game, ‘*Jalli-Kattu*’ reflects the cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu. During Christmas and Easter, there used to be held *kabadi* matches. Boys from the neighbouring villages also participate in the games. It seems to be a happy occasion.

Bama then explains some people and their dexterity. There too, she does not fail to recognize and record the difficult and hard path of the Dalit women. She talks about a person known as Uudan, whose identity is well known by his nickname and his real name is not known. He blows the flute well and hence he is known as Uudan, the blower. He is illiterate but beautifully plays flute and people are not aware of where he has learnt that art from; he is such a dexterous player.

Bama describes another man Pig-Pavulu, he is identified with his nickname, ‘Pig’ accompanied by his real name, Pavulu. He can sing well, play drums and dance during
some days of festivities; he and his son used to bring ladies from Madurai and entertain the people with record dance show and plays. Bama describes an incident whereby the people of the village has come to know of his dexterity in playing musical instruments. One day during a festival when there has been a “Sapparam Procession, the drummers were completely drunk and were stumbling about . . . this boy and four or five other youths . . . plucked away the drum, flute and the conch from the musicians, took over the music, . . . he played even better than the professional drummer” (Bama: Karukku 62).

Bama mentions about the “Villuppaattu” one of the Dalit aesthetics. Another one man, Pavulu by name used to indulge himself in that art and he also owns a group of people for making villuppattu session. This Pavulu accompanies a group of vil, he also stages villupaattu at the bazaar. Bama verbalizes:

In fact, several people were excellent at dance and song and rhythm, though they didn’t even have a whiff of learning. . . . Some people beat out an accompanying rhythm to the songs by holding a wide mouthed clay pot against their bellies, and tapping on it with a small stone . . . They always swayed their heads according to the beat. You’d want to keep watching them forever (Karukku 62).

Usually Dalits learn these arts in order to earn their livelihoods; all the other caste members have their own land and they are somehow able to manage to earn their livelihoods and be able to live in all comforts. Dalits are the only people who have to struggle for earning their livelihood to fill their bellies and consequently, they learn each and every art to earn some. Even the musical instrument, “Kadam” is played by some people. It is amazing, among the Dalits “even the little ones were good at singing and dancing” (Bama: Karukku 62).

Parai is one of the instruments that the Parayars play during the festivals and also there are some connotations that Parayars are named after the name of the instrument.
Bama makes note of the usage of the instrument *Parai* in *Vanmam*. While the boys are planning to unveil Ambedkar statue, they conduct a procession to the destination with full of bustle and excitement with the sound of *parai*. The procession reaches the bazaar where they are to unveil the statue. “When the Ambedkar statue was unveiled, everyone clapped and the women made the traditional ululating sounds of celebration” (Bama: *Vanmam* 60). Every celebration is accompanied by the ululation in Tamil culture and ululating is considered as a sacred activity.

Much contrary to the notions of Brahmanism language, music, song and art are not considered as leisure time activities in Dalit perspective, but those are viewed as organic expressions of the process of labour and production; work and song are part of life. They are meant to lighten the people from the monotonous and burdensome labour and to reenergize people, so that they can get back to creative and productive work once again. They are cultural instruments emerged in the productive communities and are part of organic process of expression and productivity.

*Parai* or *Dappu* is entirely made up of leather and wood. As a small stick strikes the dried leather, it makes a musical sound. The playing of this instrument is an artistic process as it is slung over the shoulder with a leather strip and stick in both hands beaten in a rhythmic manner. It produces a melodious sound that spreads across vast area making social atmosphere very sacred and sensitized. *Parai* has been used by kings to convey the message of ensuing war during the ancient times and so the instrument and the music are equated with courage. Later the importance of *Parai* has been reduced to a secondary position and the modern historians erroneously record this instrument as the one used during the funeral processing and thereby they provide a suboptimal position among the musical instruments and eventually become dalitized.
Usually in the villages the activities like *silambam, kabadi, jalli-kattu, kummi, villupaatu* and etc. are performed to ascertain their culture and heritage. ‘*silambam*’ and ‘*pidi*’ are considered as martial arts of ancient Tamils. In *pidi*, the combatants use shot sharp edged weapons made up of wood or metal, held one in each hand and fight. In *silambam* the combatants use a long pole of five feet to fight. Besides, there also other pastime activities, like staging a cinema is also observed. Bama makes note of such occasion in her novel, *Karukku*, and to make her description livelier she talks about the popular actors like MGR, Jayalalitha, Nambiyar, Rajinikanth, and Kamal Hasan.

At Christmas, Easter and on New Year’s day, people hang up posters of Rajinikanth and Kamal Hasan here and there. Nobody seems to know what the festival is really about but to Dalit perspective festivals and rituals are the means by which they refresh themselves and feel happier and so they want to celebrate the function with their known hers or film stars. . . . Different fan clubs will hang up these pictures during their competitions (Bama: *Karukku* 70).

At nights, the young men go for hunting not only as a pastime activity but also to save their crops from the foxes and wild pigs. Bama also describes an episode of hunting a porcupine. One day some young men have caught a porcupine and tied it to the lamp-post in front of the community hall and children used to gather over there. Hunting a wild pig is treated as an act of gallantry. Bama describes:

If they caught a wild pig, they would thrust it into the fire, burn off all its bristles, smear it with turmeric and wash it, decorate it with flowers, garland it, tie it high up in a bullock cart, and take it from street to street. . . . The man who caught and killed the pig would receive a new veshti and shoulder cloth. . . . The entire village would be in high spirits . . . (Bama: *Karukku* 64)
Bama also acclaims that it is forbidden to kill a deer whereas if the foresters are given a portion of meat as bribe, they will allow the people even to kill a deer.

Every society in the world has its own mode of worship; the antiquity of worshipping God can be found even in cave paintings. All these antique modes of worship have been transformed as religion later. Many social scientists identify six types of worship be found in the Tamil culture. They are animism, animatism, naturism, totemic, fetishism and ancestor worship. Animism is a kind of worshipping soul; Animatism, the collection of sacred and profane elements; fetishism, state worship and ancestor worship celebrates the ancestors of a particular clan. Folk gods worshipping is commonly found among many people, which are radically different from the Shaivites and Vaishnavites. Each folk god has its own mythical pattern.

Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relating to the sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community church, temple, mosque, gurdwara or etc. The Philosophy of religion originates in man’s faith in a power beyond himself whereby he seeks to quench his emotional and spiritual needs and gain knowledge of what is unexplained or not able to be explained and these beliefs and faith find embodiment through his acts of prayer and service to humanity. Religion aims at the all round development of personality of human beings and also teaches human beings to live harmoniously with each other.

Man tries to obtain correct notion of nature and his existence, and in course of his pursuit of understanding the meaning of his living, he has begun to create deities, as his untutored mind cannot comprehend nature as a whole and thereby giving birth to many gods and goddesses. Their mode of worship also differs on the basis of their way of life; some pray in peace offering fruits and flowers whereas some people slaughter animals
and offer them to their gods and goddesses and their altars reeked with the blood of slaughtered animals. Mudaliar notes down as:

*The Eyinar* of palai worshipped the dreaded goddess korravai (equated with kali), and sacrificed buffaloes at her shrine. She had matted hair, shining skin of cobra, carved tusk of boar in her hair resembling the crescent-string of tiger’s teeth, striped skin of tiger, bow, stag to ride, drums and pipes. (201)

The mode of worship or Gods to be worshipped has been decided by the nature of land and the lifestyle of people. The hunters whose abode is hilly region have begun to worship Lord Muruga and offered honey and millet flour, The shepherd classes whose abode is fields, as they find the pastures to feed their cattle have begun to worship Thirumal and the fisher folk whose main business belong to the sea and consequently their abode is beside the sea they have begun to worship Varunan and it is evident from what Mudaliar observes, “They planted the vertebral bone—backbone of the whole and established Varunan in it and worshiped him” (202)

In the villages each temple belongs to a particular community; they go to the temple and worship and others are forbidden to go to that particular temple. Also they have a clan-God system, whereby a particular clan of a community own the temple and they worship; every year they conduct a festival to the concerned temple. Bama says, “A temple where the Naicker community worships . . . the Naickers’ fields surrounding it are called the Perumaara fields” *(Karukku 1).*

Most of the people in Indian society are theists and those people imaginatively make different idols and worship them as Gods. These idols are mostly shaped in the form of human beings by which they communicate that there is a strong relationship between God and people. Originally during the ancient days when people have been nomads, they have begun to worship nature, since nature seems to be an unresolved riddle
to human beings and because of the fear of nature in the mind of common man. So eventually, sun and snake have become Gods. When they indulge in agricultural works as they have settled in the plains and plateaus, there has been a need to subdue nature to human beings and they have continued to worship nature in order to obtain the highest yield in their fields. They believe that through worship they can subdue nature.

God’s nature and structure are determined by the needs of a particular society. When they have started to worship idols, they have tried to make the idols which invariably resemble their daily life or which may assist them to do a particular task. Eventually the persons who do agriculture have tried to make the god Indra who signifies rain or Balaraman who is incarnated having a plough in his shoulder. Most village gods have weapons in their hand because they resemble the people living in the particular village who indulge in

saving crops saving water stored in pools and tanks for irrigation, saving the harvested grains and saving the cattle which are useful for agriculture. These protections have become the basis of the village economy and consequently the gods and goddesses stand to protect all these things beside the fields, on the banks of pools or in the boundary of the particular village.* (Paramasivan 137)

On seeing these deities an anonymous fear is evoked in the beholding mind. These Gods have come to be identified as small gods and these are not worshipped by the Brahmans and eventually there is a belief among the people that these gods do eat meat. Consequently the worshippers offer goats, sheep, roosters, or pigs based on their food habits. Usually in these temples one may find an altar on which the offered animals head is placed. Bama describes a mandavam that is situated at the west side of the village and

* Translated by the Scholar
the Muniappasamy temple situated beneath the *mandavam*. She describes an episode wherein a Dalit, Bondan, by name has confiscated the belongings of Muniappasami and Muniappasami walks along the street demanding his belongings. “‘Return my offering to me, put back my bell, otherwise I will burn down this entire street until nothing is left but ashes’” (Bama: *Karukku* 5), and also it is believed that Muniappasamy has been pacified when those things have restored.

Aesthetic richness of Dalit culture is expressed in Dalit art forms which are indigenous dance and music forms. Combination of many art forms is found in the lifestyle of Dlaits. Dalits’ culture is basically expressed through these art forms. Dalit aesthetics is the culture of celebration. It expresses creativity, aesthetic richness and artifacts. They are expressed through *Parai*, appealing colour in costumes, imitating film stars, dancing even in funerals, and all these things are flavoured with realism that invariably colours the entire Indian aesthetic outlook. Suffering and resistance to power politics are the cultural aspects of Dalits.