Chapter 6
SUMMATION

India is a democratic country which has a highly well developed societal system based on the Hindu values of life which are highly patriarchal on the basis of social status, caste, and gender. Caste and gender are the two significant factors that segment people hierarchically and also mould the identity to the groups of people. In India culture and identity are determined by the ethnicity which is responsible for the categorization of caste groups. The constitution envisages equal rights to all people regardless of power, money, caste and religion, whereas most of the people are illiterate and live in villages and they are not aware of the constitutional rights and safeguards guaranteed. Caste based ostracism is most candidly practised in villages today. The government is also much reluctant to enforce law against the practice of untouchability. “Untouchability is a crime”—a dubious statement and meaningless directive in the Indian hierarchical structure” (Savio and Rosary Royar 87). Consequently, Dalits are humiliated perennially and face human rights violation.

Caste becomes the identity of a social group in Indian social context. Every caste need anatomize its own identity. Dalits hitherto have been burdened with imposed identities as Untouchables, Depressed Class, Harijans or Scheduled Caste. Dalits are ostracized everywhere; No one accommodates them compassionately. They have to conceal their identity in order to be approved and accepted basically as human beings. Thus Dalits’ worldly life is suppressed whereas the upper caste people enjoy the power and freedom; Dalit identities are obliterated and devalued; their cultural history also. And this, in turn makes their life in society stigmatized and degraded. Casteism is considered,
in Dalit perspective as an instrument of oppression and subjugation. In Indian society, Dalits want to recreate their history and culture to have a dignified identity and assertion.

In Indian society, casteism is one of the sediments of the well designed and well developed hegemonization of Brahmanical culture, practice and ritualism. Caste stratification exists as a result of the construction of purity-pollution theory based on the Brahmanical texts like *The Laws of Manu*, *Rigveda* and the *Upanishads* and ideas; Brahmans consider themselves as pure and others as polluted. But economically speaking the Brahmanical caste are exploitative and others as productive. All the sociologists and historian who publish their pamphlets or books on caste invariably adhere to the purity-pollution theory to examine the evolution of caste system in India and they consider, “terms like “upper castes” and “clean castes” as uncontestable synonyms” (Ilaiah: *Buffalo Nationalism* 95). In contemporary Indian society, caste makes its multitudinous existence and it has spread almost in all minds living in the nooks and corners of very Indian society regardless of their educational background. Even politicians who are the sole part of the governance do not want to eradicate casteism and stratification but want caste and the Brahmanical hegemony to survive.

In Tamil society seclusion on the basis of the impurity has a later practice, as compared to the rest of the country. In this connection Ravikumar writes:

In Tamil Nadu the segregation of Dalits on the basis of impurity began during the Chola period (850-1300 BCE). The inscription dating back to 1027 BCE, found in Tirumoolanathar temple at Bahoor of Pondicherry, is the earliest evidence we have of the practice. In it there was an order to appoint people other than untouchables and those above ten years and below eighty years of age to carry out the de-silting of the pond at Bahoor. Since the water in the lake was meant for
purposes other than irrigation it is evident from this order that untouchability was prevalent at the time. (8-9)

Literature and society are inextricably linked to each other in all its turmoil, pains and pleasures. No one can fully understand literature when it is detached from society. Every literary text blossoms and spreads its fragrance when it becomes connected with social institutions, people and their cultural life. Literature in this perspective, is neither a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth 4) nor a faithful reflection of life as such, as a mirror reflects the image in front of it but a well thought out and seriously planned “criticism of life” (Arnold 163); it need not talk about “what is” but about “what should be” and “what ought to be.”

Literature can hugely contribute to establish social intercourse among the people and tries to achieve fellow feeling. Literature is a form of propaganda to the literary artist; it is more democratic than any other forms of art. It is a semiotic revolution that opens many vistas.

The institution of literature in the West, in its relatively modern form, is linked to authorization to say everything, and doubtless too to the coming about of the modern idea of democracy. . . The freedom to say everything is a very powerful political weapon, but which might immediately let itself be neutralized as a fiction. (Derrida 37 - 38).

Dalit Literature is an attempt to disseminate the issues related to the problems of a marginalized section of the Indian society. It gives a clarion call to Dalits to organise themselves for the agitation that may lead them to liberation from the caste hierarchy and hegemonic structure of Indian society in their own language; it is the basic form of protest. History witnesses that many races attained their liberation only through pen. Voices, which hitherto have pronounced submission to authority have begun to argue for
rights and to make new narratives “Language becomes a site for contest between different 
social groups” (Ravikumar: 140). If Dalits perceive that they have achieved some 
privileges. It is due to the Social ruptures created by some sort of political struggles lead 
by the veteran Dalit and non-Dalit leaders like Pandit Iyothee Dass, Rettaimalai 
Seenivasan, Dr.Ambedkar, E.V.R. Periyar and so on. It is the duty of the present day 
Dalits to transform the “Previlages” into “rights” which literature alone can make.

Dalit Literature is variously criticized by many critics who raise their concern 
about the lack of aesthetic qualities for they still inhabit in the theory of sublimity which 
may bring out the aesthetic sense in literature. They have conveniently forgotten that 
literature is a document of the criticism of society on all its turmoil and tranquilities; they 
are not able to withstand the resonances, created by Dalit writings. Dalit narratives are 
self reflexive narratives often considered as testimony. The voices seem to speak out to 
testify against the charges perennially levied on them.

Dalit literature is one of the protest literatures: it questions the authorities hitherto 
subjugated them; it protests against the laws created by the Brahmanical hegemony which 
prevents Dalits from their pursuit of knowledge. Hinduism restricts Dalits from chanting 
the Vedas, practising meditations, aspiring to renunciation, intonating mantras, going on 
pilgrimage and entering temples. Dalit literature is a form of revolt against these 
hegemonic norms. These norms consider Dalits as dogs, and women as unclean objects, 
whereas Dalit literature ascertains that Dalits are human beings not cattle. Whenever 
Dalits step out of the spaces provided for them, they are severely punished; through the 
 writings, Dalits step out of the space provided to them and the so called critics attack 
these narratives with their fanged and feigned criticism. This is also a punishment for 
transgressing the laws of Manu which expects the depressed to be silent.
Writers like Bama, Sivagami, Imayam and Raj Gautaman have raised their clarion call against social injustice and Dalit literature abounds with their writings. Under the stewardship of Indian leaders like Pundit Iyothee Dass, Ambedkar and E.V.R. Periyar, Dalits do subvert themselves from their subjugated position fighting aggressively for equal rights, freedom and to re-establish their identity presently with the announcement of Thirumavalavan, one of the Dalit literary artists turned politician which seeks Dalits as to be part of Governance, their protest has reached a new paradigm.

Dalit literature seems to claim new identities that are perennially neglected by the Brahmanical forces in Indian society. Dalit narratives narrate life as being lived with trauma and atrocities. These narratives are groundbreaking works on human rights violation in the form of collective and personal narrations, which “claim new identities and assert their participation in the public sphere” (Schaffer and Smith 19). Having provided the readers with an account of subaltern life, these narratives claim their representation in public sphere. These narratives are to be studied within the socio-political space in which the particular narratives are produced. These narratives reveal the deep fissures and faultiness in the Indian socio-political scenario, as the trauma which is exposed, is deep rooted in the traditional institutions like family or caste.

Dalit literature deals not only with the subjugation and subordination but also of the poetics of liberation. It deals with an ethical commitment of giving Dalits their true value; it is collectively called as a movement towards achieving equality. The arduous and long battle that Dalits have to fight for their survival protesting against the patriarchy in the possible strongest term, Bama partakes all the characteristics of a Dalit writer, whose “Pen is like a sharp axe with which he (she) is cutting the weeds thickly grown over the centuries in this ancient land” (Waghmare 20). Each of her novel talks about the conflicts between caste Hindus and Dalits, educated and uneducated Dalits, and
traditional and modern Dalits with a myriad exploration of human relationship with Dalit communities and other communities. Bama’s writings assure a promised land beyond this life of bondage and oppression by providing a wholly new and cognitive argument and methodology for the better survival of the Dalit folk in their own language that is not refined.

Dalit literature has born as one of the corollaries of caste hegemony and upper caste dominated literary icons who deny a space for Dalits, as feminist writing has originated as response to male dominated literary space. Bama, in this connection writes, “In the traditional Tamil literature, there was no place for the labour-class, Dalits. If at all Dalits were given place, they were depicted by the upper caste writers as sick people. . . . The literature of dominating castes can never voice and demand for the liberation of Dalits” (“Dalit Literature” 97).

Bama has found a new dauntless literary tradition representing the victims of Indian society as heroes and heroines in her fiction. All her stories are the microcosm of Indian society and culture. Bama’s fiction mostly arise from her own experience in the society where the rejected in the country is condemned to live in. Bama has begun her career with an autobiography entitled, Karukku in which she faithfully discusses “the traumas of early childhood . . . with intense self examination and a critique of all the deadening, decay and torpor of Indian civilization” (Anand: “Mulk Raj Anand Speaks…” 2). Bama is inspired by the events, she has experienced. The sublimated impulses burst out of her mind as lava burst out of a volcano, and consequently novel has become a narration of reality to Bama.

Bama like many other Dalit writers considers literature as an art and instrument as well which may sweep away the age old decayed practices. She conceives that literature should present the social evils in myriad manifestations with a solution. Her interest lies
in exploring the stresses and strains generated in Indian society for Dalits in their daily
transaction of life. Dalits are considered as the subaltern in Hindu society. They are
vulnerable even for no reasons. Subalterns are characterized by submissiveness to
authority and defiance. The perennial oppression of Dalits by the dominant caste of
Hindu Society forces them to be submissive to authority and in course of time when they
are aware that they are treated as subalterns without any right through the educational
opportunities they refuse to obey in some cases. Bama focuses both the attitudes—
submissive and aggressive in her fictions. Bama views the problems not with the artist’s
eyes which may excessively focus the aesthetic quality of an art but with the reformist’s
eyes.

Dalits are in no way considered as Hindus, though some of them identify
themselves with Hinduism. This is evident from the recent negligence of their entry into
the temple in Srigaranahalli village of Karnataka and for doing ritual in Pazhag
Kallimedu, a village in Tamilnadu. In Karnataka when some Dalit women try to enter the
temple, they have been penalized with some amount by the authorities. Even the
politicians who have to fight for equality also condemn the act of Dalits’ entrance to
temple. Sathish reports, “Even as the Dalits entered the temple on April 24 Deve Gowda
(the former Prime Minister) said that he was deeply hurt by the developments in
Srigaranahalli. He found fault with those demanding entry into the temple . . .” (103). In
Tamilnadu Dalits’ demand of holding mandagapadi (sponsoring a day’s event during
festival) has been rejected and there is a turmoil in the village. Dalit representatives
affirm that they demand their rights, whereas the upper caste Hindus strongly reject their
plea of holding mandagapadi saying “. . . it is important to adhere to agama rules and
customs” (qted. in Jaisankar 4). These types of discriminations are often implemented on
Dalits in the name of the traditional rules enunciated in Hindu Vedas that are unintelligible to most of the Dalits.

It is paradoxical to claim that India has achieved Independence; almost sixteen percentage of the people cannot walk freely on the roads, cannot draw water from the public wells, can drink tea in tea shop only in the tumblers specifically meant for them, cannot carry the dead for funeral through the common streets, cannot educate children on par with the dominant castes, cannot claim their job opportunities in private sector companies, are not allowed to do any rituals within the religion they belong to.

Balasubramaniam enunciates in his Tamil article “Sarvadesamayamahum Ambedkar” [Internationalising Ambedkar] this regard as:

Among the Dalits only a very few are attained socio-economic emancipation, whereas majority of them are still retained as Dalits who are in Socio- economic enslavement by the Indian society. It is true that in the era of globalization all the working classes are subjugated but subjugation of Dalits is proportionality even worse that it does not allow entry into the small scale and large scale trades. Job opportunities in the private sector companies are possible only when they hide the caste identities. While mingling with other castes in society or intending to do a ritual rite in a temple used by all caste people or using common pathway to graveyard for cremation the atrocities encountered by Dalits are not considered as law and order problem but only as a social custom. (20) *

The aftermath of the so called independence witnesses the movement of the status of Dalits from bad to worse.

Indian society not only ignores the problems of Dalits but also conveniently pretends that casteism does not exist. This aim operates through ostracism of Dalit

* Translated by the Scholar
colonies from the mainstream society, excluding them from social life, and preventing their entry into public places; education and right to express them are perpetually denied. The upper caste people are not ready to bear after the naming of public property with Dalit leaders. Whenever Dalits rise demanding their rights, they are suppressed by the power politics, thinking that the uprising of the oppressed may destroy and confiscate the symbols of power, as Manu warns against such subversion saying that the denial of the duty of king may result in that holy offerings will be eaten by crows and dogs; the lowest will reach the top. Even government and justice play a role against Dalits. A commission has been organized to probe into the issue of the massacre of Dalit Mancholai tea estate workers who has waged procession for their proper wages on one of the banks of the river Tamirabharani in Tirunelveli, a city in Tamilnadu. The report of the committee pronounces, “the lathi-charge made on those in the procession was inevitable: the drowning of eleven people was an accident, police did not beat them when they tried to swim ashore; the six injured died while they were trying to swim across the river” (Ravikumar 108). From the pronouncement of the judgment by the committee, it is clear that the police are not responsible even for the death of the workers. This is the justice that Justice Mohan Commission has awarded despite almost all TV channels have telecasted the footage of the police machinery beating up the marchers to prevent them swimming ashore and the intellectuals of Tamil society have condemned it. This is an example for how justice is denied to Dalits.

Dalits actively participate in politics as laymen; they represent various political parties and work for them in full spirit and strength. All political parties want to utilize the service of Dalits, but they are not allowed to contest the elections from a general constituency and in some places contesting from the reserved constituency also becomes
arduous for Dalits. Melavalavu panchayat constituency of Tamilnadu is an example where the Dalits are brutally butchered for contesting in the local body election. Melavalavu is a village near Madurai; the Panchayat president post is reserved for Dalits since 1995. But the government has not been able conduct elections for many years. At last election has been conducted and when Murugesan a Dalit youth has been elected as president, the outraged upper caste has resorted to gruesome multiple massacres in which six Dalits, including Murugesan has been butchered through a seriously planned and well thought out operation. Democracy is denied to Dalits and it is regarded as Hindu Property; there is no space for Dalits in this system, since they are treated as “Others.”

The idea behind the allocation of reservation in the electoral constituencies is to ensure proper and adequate representation of Dalits in politics. This problem does not stop with Melavalavu only but also has extended to Pappapatty, Keeripatty and Nattamangalam. The term “Common” mean differently to Dalits in social context. For example “Common Well” means well that is prohibited for Dalits to draw water from it; “Common Path” means that the path cannot be used by Dalits even for carrying the dead to graveyard; “Common Temple” denotes into which Dalits cannot enter.

Thirunaalkondaseri, a village near Mayiladudurai in Tamilnadu witness that the dead body of the eighty five year old Dalit Kunjammal is not allowed to be carried through the common path leading to crematorium, the incident happened on 2016Rajadurai writes in his Tamil article, “Endru Thaniymintha Suthanthira Soham” [When will the Melancholy of Freedom Quench], “Dalit are imposed on the caste based deterioration even after death” (8)*. It is in this sense that “general constituency” must be understood as referring to one in which Dalits cannot contest.

* Translated by the Scholar
Equality is fundamental to democracy and also it is said that equality is provided and safeguarded through constitution, whereas to social structure and reality is just opposite to that. Even when the nation attained independence from the British, the freedom remains only with the upper caste people; Dalits position continuously degrades. In this regard Ambedkar rightly says on *Swaraj*:

> It can only mean one thing, namely, that while today it is only the administration that is in the hands of Hindus, under swaraj the legislature and Executive will also be in the hands of Hindus. . . Under swaraj the untouchables will have no way of escape from the destiny of degradation which Hindus and Hinduism have fixed for them. (Writing and Speeches vol. 1. 414)

The position of Dalits reveal that they are not able to elect their representatives at least from the reserved constituencies and only those who are in the good books of non-Dalits can occupy such position. Dalits have still not acquired the socio-political independence.

Empowerment of Dalit women begins with realization of their rights. Dalit human rights movement should work towards that step which is inevitable for eradication of gender, caste and class discrimination. The progress of Dalit community is measured in terms of the progress of their women folk. Women always face violence in the caste-stratified Indian society, where the constitutionally acclaimed fundamental right, equality is only preached rather than practised. Dalit women are more victimized by the institutionalised caste and gender stratification in their search to attain equality.

Violence perpetrated against Dalit women provides ample evidence of their widespread exploitation and discrimination to which they are subject to both in terms of power relations of male hierarchy in a patriarchal society and in the name of their caste, which intensifies and shapes the violence against them within their community and also
outside their community. In Indian society the patriarchal attitudes shape Dalit women’s experiences of violence in domestic sphere multiplying the gendered harm prosecuted against them by which they are forcibly coerced towards the inhuman treatment including sexual assault, parading naked and using filthy language; this insecurity effectuated through the structural violence against Dalit women in domestic sphere and in workplace acts as an agent of coercive control over them, which ensures that Dalit women continue to be disempowered, socially and sexually subordinated and suppressed and physically, sexually, and economically exploited.

Dalit women’s vulnerability is multidimensional that it arises from the perennial patriarchal hegemony of the Brahmanical society which has segmented the society into many segments on the basis of caste, class and gender, the factors which have perpetually promoted untouchability and its accompanying violence and the dominant castes unleash violence against Dalit women through the acts of sexual assault, verbal abuse, physical attack, forced incarceration and so on. violence is targeted on these people perpetually for a long time in order to reinforce cast class gender norms or to punish Dalit women who demand equal rights to dominant castes by transgressing the norms developed by the Brahman hegemony and the violence against Dalit women also aims at the interception of the constitutionally enacted provision like their right to equality, right to secured life, right to legal remedies and right to development.

While there are a number of constitutional and legal provisions enacted to protect Indian citizens generally, as well as to specifically protect socially marginalized citizens such as Dalit women, these legal measures are not being implemented to protect them from violence, nor to allow them legal redress once violence takes place. The underlying reason for this culture of violence and impunity for violence is that the patriarchal caste system perpetuates both caste sanction and
impunity and state impunity for this violence.” (Irudayam S, Mangubhai and Lee 427-8)

Given their vulnerability to violence in all avenues of public and private life, Dalit women respond to their discrimination and violence perpetrated against them by the upper caste people with courage and resilience. They protest against the oppressor and this is one of the multiple existential strategies, they adopt to endure discrimination and exploitation. Irudhayam, Mangubai and Lee note an event happened in the life of Sabitri Devi, a Dalit women in Bihar. Sabitri Devi works in a farm of Baldev, a dominant caste landlord for which Baldev gives only a meagre amount of grain as wage and Sabitri Devi retorts, “All day long my entire family toils and then you give us this cracked adulterated grain. . . . sometimes you come to my toddy shop to drink what if I was to adulterate the toddy with water or urine: how would you like that?” (qted in Irudhayam S, Mangubhai and Lee 337). When Baldev comes to her toddy shop, she eventually mixes her urine with toddy and her spit in fried *channa* consecutively for three days. When Baldev comes to know of this he has broken her arm by beating by an iron bar from that day onwards Sabitri never goes to work in Baldev’s farm and she continues to earn her livelihood by selling toddy and she is no longer dependent on any dominant caste member (337 – 38). Sabitri has invented a novel way to take revenge on the dominant caste man who continuously exploits her

A cursory reading of Bama’s narratives reveals the huge personal and social harm and suffering that violence inflicted. Consequently a number of women remain silent, and silence is also a coping mechanism which may avoid further violence. These women employ the notion of fate in an attempt to rationalize the violence and focus on the amicable survival. Whereas a few women seek support from the women’s organization like the self-help groups for emotional strength to encounter the insurgency and attempt
to reconstruct their lives, no longer remaining as the passive victims; Dalit women possess such courage to face the conflicts regardless of their opponent’s caste, gender, social status, power or authority. They assert their own rights, even when they are suppressed by the perpetrators. From the speech of Dalit women one can imply that they have sense of equality and demand equal treatment, though denied by patriarchy on the basis of caste and gender; it serves as an impetus for their assertion. Their assertion in turn acts as contempt against the established authority that deserves punishment from the dominant caste people.

One of the remarkable existential strategies of Dalit women is their resilience in the post violence phase. Their resilience is manifested in their determination to live in the society exclusively for their family and in the tenacity they have exhibited in their various attempts to sustain against all odds. Dalit women exhibit their broader concern, while protesting against the perpetrators for the welfare of other women. They fight for justice and for wider systematic social changes for which they need to wait and travel a long way. Veerammal, a Dalit domestic violence victim says:

From the days of Dr. Ambedkar to date, every Dalit organization is fighting against caste discrimination. But no satisfactory remedy has yet been found. Society considers us, just because we are born into a Dalit caste, as untouchables. Hence we, Dalits are made to feel ashamed of our community. But this situation should not be allowed to continue. This kind of discrimination should never happen to future generations of Dalits I’ll do my utmost to eradicate such discrimination in society. (qted. in Irudhayam, Mangubhai and Lee 347)

The social stigma is even worse to Dalits. They are not allowed to mingle with the upper caste families. Their social movement is restricted to only within their social group. In Indian society, the subjugation of Dalits by others and power domination are
the routine realities. Dalits are assigned with some dress code: they are not allowed to wear fine clothes and shoes. The dominant caste expects total subordination of Dalits. In some places even the sight of Dalits before commencing any auspicious event is considered as ill-omen.

Dalits cannot enter the homes of dominant castes. Alternatively, Where Dalits work in dominant caste homes as domestic servants, sweepers, toilet cleaners, etc., they must enter dominant caste homes through the rear entrance. Dominant castes can enter Dalit homes, through such contact is rare. Dalits cannot wear footwear or fancy clothes in the presence of dominant castes, but must remove shoes or wear tattered clothing in their presence. When dominant castes pass by, Dalits cannot remain seated, but must stand at attention. (Irudayam S.J, Mangubhai and Lee 84)

The dominant castes extemporaneously utilize the services of Dalits and they are considered as ad hoc servants. Dalits are expected to play drums for the upper caste during their ceremonies like wedding, religious festivals and funeral. As drums are constructed with leather peeled out of the dead animals, the caste deliberation considers playing drums as a polluted job and Dalits are the only suitable drummers. Dalits are required to clean up after the dominant caste functions. Dalit women also work as midwives. In Bama’s Sangati, Bama’s grandmother works as a midwife. For these services Dalits are paid with a meagre amount. There are also some services for which Dalits are the unpaid labourers like the removal of animal or human carcasses from homes roads and other public places. The practice of unpaid labour is technically called as beggar in Indian tradition.

In some parts of India the Jogini system is prevalent. Jogini is the sexual service offered by Dalit women.
The jogini system figures prominently in the social context of many Dalit women in Mahabubnagar and Nizamabad district of Andra Pradesh. As in Devadasi system the jogini system too Dalit girls are inducted by Hindu temple officiants into a life of ritualized rape. . . . joginis lead their lives in their own homes sexually serving men in the community generally irrespective of their relationship to the temple based community.” (Irudayams.J, Mangubhai and Lee 85-86).

Joginis are considered as the property of the concerned village to be used and abused by any men. Joginis are dedicated to god from as young as five years old. When they attain puberty, they are usually given to an elder in the village—a priest, rich man or landlord. She is considered as the concubine of that man until he is fed up with her which may take even several years. Joginis are vulnerable to sexual violence. The system of jogini is a ritualized prostitution.

Dalits are subject to capital punishment. In villages Dalit homes are looted and destructed by the dominant caste people. In Uttar Pradesh, a Dalit woman has demanded wages, having completed her work in the field of an upper caste man. The upper caste man has reciprocated that he will give it on the next day. Whereas she has kept on arguing and has been verbally abused; on that night some landlords have approached her residence and have burnt down her hut. All her grains have been burnt up in that fire. Sometimes the capital punishment may take the form of social boycott which is technically termed as “Targeted Economic Violence” by which the upper caste landlords decides not to give any jobs to the concerned Dalits in their fields, thereby crushing the economic empowerment of Dalits. Also the very same incident has happened in Keelvenmani, a village in Tamil Nadu.

In Keelvenmani, forty four Dalits have been brutally massacred by the upper caste landlords, following an agitation by the agricultural workers demanding an increase a kilo
paddy in their wages. A poem entitled “Christmas at Keelvenmani” narrates the brutality thus:

In that petrol-pond

banked by a wall of human flesh

(that gangs of goons who stood around)

that wretched hut drowned. (38-42)

The incident in Keelvenmani is an instance of capital punishment, in which the upper caste landlords have set fire to the huts of Dalits who have been at the outskirts of the village and even children are not spared.

Dalit narratives characterize the emergence of Dalit women’s voices in literary discourses. Bama tries to reconstruct the image of Dalit women represented in the phallocentric mainstream literature. Bama’s works oppose the passive identity of Dalit women and celebrate their self pride and dauntless spirit. The feminist movements in India are the outstretch of the western feminist movements and theories, both of which considers the problems of upper class and middle class women not of those living in the edges. Consequently Dalit women are considered as the gendered caste subalterns. Gopal Guru reasons out, “social location which determines the perception of reality is major factor that makes the representation of Dalit women’s issues by non-Dalit women less valid and less authentic”(81). The interrelationship between caste and society dominates in the Indian societal structure, which predominantly pushes back the Dalit women’s issues.

Dalit narratives rightly affirm that Dalit women face multi-structured violence and marginalization. Bama’s writings react against caste oppression and resist Dalit patriarchy. It powerfully resists the oppression wreaked against Dalit women. Her fiction “has successfully resisted the constraints imposed by existing hegemonic discourses and
created through positive subversion an independent space for itself. The gendering of Dalit discourse unravels the multilayered structures of oppression and foregrounds the need for recognizing the challenges from within” (Mangalam 110). The gendered subalterns’ untold miseries and the patriarchal oppression are historicized in Bama’s narratives in order to bring them out of the haziness of timelessness by including many Dalit women’s lives.

Getting educated and obtaining jobs in government sector or private sector may help emancipation of Dalits. But Dalits should remember that schools unleash violence. Students encounter the same ostracism and exploitation in the name of caste, as they encounter in other public space. Even politics and governance is influenced by caste. “Dalits encounter the same problems in the workplace as they are treated in the social space. . . . Caste influence is deep rooted not only in the politics but also among the officers” (Rajangam : “Vishnupriya Maranam Sollum Seithigal”[Information Derived from the Death of Vishnupriya] 9)*. Vishnupriya, a Deputy Superintend of Police in Salem region of Tamilnadu has found dead on September 18, 2015, following her investigation of Gokulraj’s honour killing. Vishnupriya belongs to a Dalit community. It is alleged that she has been ill treated by the higher officials, which has led her to frustration and has which has resulted in committing suicide.

School and education system is believed to be the only tool that can bridge the gaps, made up of caste, class and race, but in India there are educational institutions run by Nadar, Sengunthar, Devangar and so on and that they admit and appoint their respective caste people, where will the depressed go. Bama expresses her existential agony saying “. . . it seems that Nadar schools only admit Nadars, and Naicker schools only admit Naickers. And then, Aiyar schools will only teach Aiyar children. If it is all

* Translated by the Scholar
like this, then heaven knows where all the Dalit children can go and break their heads” (Karukku 119). The entire system marginalizes Dalits saying that the standards of education will fall down, if they admit Dalits. Amidst all these existential mystifications, the Dalits’ survival becomes problematized.

Education, in the modern society is considered as one of the medium for change, but in reality modern education, teaches Dalits to remain as same as they are. They are not educating the Dalit students by making them aware of the present situation. In turn they direct them to adjust with the existing situation rather than to change it and consequently. God has created everyone out of same clay and His own breath whereas the church which promotes the same God, behaves as an anti-God agency in matters related to Dalits, they not only ostracize Dalits but also God himself since it is God’s breath that animates everybody. The poor Dalit children are made to work from dawn to dusk. On seeing, all these atrocities the narrator argues with the authorities. In many parts of India Dalits have to fight their losing battle for their rights. From independence to present time they face many types of problems often. They have to give the most of the crops yielded to the owners of the land, the upper caste men from whom Dalits borrow the land; Dalits own only a meagre amount of the yielded crops. These landlords lead a wealthy and more comfortable life exploiting Dalits. The welfare of Dalits are completely ignored and they are pushed to the outskirts of the mainstream society.

Not only schools, even the higher education institutes like universities foster caste discrimination. It is a wrong and misleading interpretation that the level of education may diminish the caste hierarchization and discrimination, because casteism is deep rooted in Indian minds. The recent institutional murder of Rohit Vemula a Dalit research scholar of the University of Hyderabad on January 17, 2016, confirms the existence of caste
stratification in the universities, which is a consequence of “the predominance of deep rooted casteism and Hinduism in the Indian universities” (Vasudevan: “Nindru Kollum Saathi” [Slowly Grinding Caste] 20)*. Statistics show that from 2007 to 2013 nine Dalit students have committed suicide in the University of Hyderabad. In 2008 Senthilkumar has committed suicide because of the caste based atrocities in the same institute, University of Hyderabad. Senthilkumar is a Dalit scholar belonging to Tamil Nadu to whom the research supervisor has not been allotted because of his low caste status. Once educational opportunities have explicitly been neglected to Dalits, whereas now the scenario is not so explicit but circuitously deny educational opportunities thus towards forbidding Dalits entry to the higher education institutes. Dalits have to revise their strategies in order to attain socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural independence. Dalits have organized their own liberation strategies in the Indian social concern. Raj Gautaman assigns two dimensions for Dalit liberation movements:

First cutting through nationality, race and language, Dalit culture should identify itself with the cultural features among other people similarly discriminated at birth, due to the skin colour like the blacks or due to their gender like women. Second, in India there are other people like them who cannot be considered of Indian nationality but are of a subservient position. (263)

Those people must be joined together to build a distinct culture that radically differs from the existing nationalism. Dalit issues share a common border with racial problems and feminism. Dalit culture is bound to protest, in order to attain that standard sub-nationalism. Dalits have the need to challenge the Brahmanical Hindu society and the existing Christian society that ostracize the Dalits. The hegemonic classes in Indian society impose the

* Translated by the Scholar
living strategies on Dalits to further their interest which seems to be the ideological burdens on Dalits. These type of ideological burdens can be discarded only through protest, Dalits who are accustomed to live a subservient life that is steeped in guilt, fear, despair, centuries of exploitation, ignorance, and slave mentality, will find it difficult to come out with the protesting mindset, but only by ignoring, attacking, humiliating and ridiculing the dominant hegemonic culture and its symbols of bondage and slavery, Dalits can get out of their mental agony; they should protest against these symbols and hegemonic cultural identities which subjugate and exploit them perennially and should direct their protest towards the destruction of these symbols.

Society as seen today seems to be venomous enough to blow wounds on Dalits, it radically exploits Dalits. All the hegemonic structures—Government, Caste, Religion, God, Code of Conduct, Ethics and etc. are still puppets in their hands to benefit the socio-economically emancipated people. According to the Hindu laws the Dalits are anarchists but they are really the rebels. Dalits’ way of life is entirely different, compared to other upper caste people. They have their own culture and the antipodal cultural elements are easily discernible. The upper caste people are not willing to accept these antipodal elements.

In communities where division of labour, ownership of properties, and the individualistic behaviour related to these are less, among them the antipodal culture can be observed. During community worship and festivals hedonistic behaviour and violation of normal mores are seen among most of these people. (Gautaman 265)
The spirit of rebellion usually sprouts out during festivals. In Tamilnadu there are many events of caste clash that sparked out during the festivals. This is an expression of their rebellious psyche.
Education has offered a platform for Dalits to hide their cultural identities. Among the educated youths, employed and dwelling in cities, the characteristics of this antipodal culture seems to disappear, as they readily accept the influence of western and Brahmanical culture. The culture of Dalits has rooted deep in the subconscious stratum of mind. Many in urban areas consider this antipodal culture as rustic and barbaric and deliberately want to obliterate it. Nowadays the educated youths organize themselves and do work for making the people aware of the need for liberation from the upper caste hegemony using the social media like WhatsApp and Facebook. They create their own groups to expose their cultural values that have been devalued and demeaned for decades and its significance in the contemporary social life. This strategy gives momentum to the Dalit liberation movements. They want to follow the devices generated by their veteran leader Ambedkar: inter-caste marriage, education, protest, destroying the Hindu *shastras* and conversion. Ambedkar opines that the Hindu *shastras* devalue and deteriorate the Dalit culture, but in the modern days not only the Hindus but also the other religions consider Dalit culture as barbaric; consequently the educated youths need deroot the deep-rooted caste bias in all the religions, merely contemplating on the ideologies on the leaders may not liberate Dalits from the dominant culture that has made them upside down. So the protest culture has to take a newer form. When Dalits project their culture in this way, they appear to the power hegemony as criminals and anarchists, consequently they ban such activities. Evidently three books that are brought out in Tamil Nadu celebrating the culture of the present untouchables, two by Senthil Mallar of *Mallar Meelpukalam*, and another one by Arunthathiar on the history of Madurai Veeran are banned, alleging that these books may bring forth disharmony among
different castes. Though Indian constitution envisages freedom of expression, the ban is enforced by the constitutional constituent, Government.

Dalit protest is misinterpreted by the upper caste hegemony and government. They protest to revive humanity and to retrieve their glorious past and to regain their rights to live not simply to survive. They want to establish their culture through their protest; they want their culture to be approved by others. In this process Dalits are the victims of the oppressors and the perpetrators of violence, each of their attempt towards liberation is seen as rebellion and violence by the upper caste hegemony. The oppressors categorise Dalits as rowdies, rouges, barbarians and extremists. Raj Gautaman records of what the accused has said in the case of immolating Dalits at Keelvenmani village.

Earlier these coolies used to work hard
were respectful They came and stood in the backyard
Now, influenced by the communists, they appear and stand
in the veranda with their footwear on
They talk with us face to face, on equal terms
They have grown lazy and arrogant. (267)

It is evident that the equality is denied, wearing sandals, entering the landlord’s house and talking to him face to face seem to be very serious offences and an insult to the upper caste people. Dalits are imposed with some regulations by the dominant culture. Direct contact between Dalits and the dominant cultured people are essentially forbidden. But when a situation demands Dalits to talk with a superior caste, the Dalit is expected to debase himself, often he requires to be quiet without uttering a word in reciprocation. When he does not obey
these regulations, the members of the superior caste will be outraged and categorize him as an arrogant and disrespectful person.

Thiruvalluvar in his couplet observes:

The learned are said to have eyes
the unlearned have but two sores (393).

Decades ago, the Tamil saint-poet Thiruvalluvar has succinctly brought out the significance of education for all the strata of society without any disparity and discrimination in terms of caste, race, religion gender and etc. In Indian society, education and literacy have been considered as symbols of dominance. When Dalits send their children to schools, they are discouraged by the dominant one. If a Dalit reports to the words of an upper caste member or reciprocates with anger for their subordination and humiliation, the upper caste member considers that it is the pernicious effect of education. Hindu shasthrs stress Dalits not to go to school but to toil in the field and slog like a slave. Ambedkar gives significance to education in the scheme of things that he suggests to Dalits to liberate them from bondage. Towards the liberation of Dalits Raj Gautaman advocates:

Dalits should defy and discard these rules. Do not fall at any one’s feet! Do not tie the shoulder cloth around the waist! Do not stand with hands folded across the chest! Do not bend! Do not bow heads! Should stand firm, straight, thrusting the chest forward. Should not keep a distance from the upper cast man. Should not take up residence away from the village. Similarly, dalits should start using aluminium or ever silver vessels instead of mud vessels. Here mud pots should be given up not because it is stigmatized but because the upper castes insist that Dalit should use only mud vessels.

(269-70)
Dalits feel that the religious conversion is the only way to shun the caste identities and the caste based exploitation. So they convert themselves to Christianity, attracted by the proselytizing of the Christian missionaries. By the process of religious conversion Dalits give up their constitutional provision of reservation in higher education and job opportunities under the name of Scheduled Caste. What changed is only the nomenclature being referred to as “Dalit Christians” Even in churches they assume subordinate positions. Palwekar observes:

It is paraiya Dalit Christians who sweep the church and the women from other caste wait until they have finished. The writer once complained it to the nuns, but their response was absolutely rubbish. They told that Dalit women could get merit by sweeping. God would bless them specially. Thus these poor illiterate Dalits are fooled in the name of god. . . . Even today Dalits are not allowed to sit with other castes inside the churches in Kanchipuram district. (40)

Almost all religions in the contemporary India are obsessed with caste. Ambedkar has declared that Hinduism is obsessed with caste hierarchy. So he wants to convert himself to Buddhism, analyzing the merits and demerits of the religions in India, and also before his death he has embraced Buddhism with an estimated half a millions of his followers in Nagpur. Ambedkar has perceived that religious conversion is one of the strategies that can annihilate caste and he sees Buddhism as the strongest revolutionary against Hinduism. Deciding to quit Hinduism he writes:

I am sorry, I will not be with you. I have decided to change. This is not the place for giving reasons. But even when I am gone out of your fold, I will
watch your movement with active sympathy, and you will have my assistance
for what it may be worth. (Annihilation of Caste 316)

and he has addressed Hindus as the sick men of India.

Many Dalits have followed their master in converting themselves to religions like
Buddhism, Christianity or Islam in order to protect themselves from the vehement caste
clutches of the Hindu philosophy; day by day they begin to realize that they are treated as
Dalits even in their new fold, as the religions they have converted to too stratify them based
on caste. Churches and mosques are swept by Dalits, while the upper caste people are
waiting. Dalit pastors are not allowed to share their seat in the podium with the upper caste
pastors and there too they need to lead a secluded life, which inevitably keeps them outside
the boundaries of society, politics, religion and human rights. Arundati Roy observes:

It didn’t take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan to the fire.
They were made to have separate churches, with separate services and separate
priests. As a special favour they were given their own separate paraiah Bishop. After
Independence they found that they were not entitled to any government benefits like
job reservations or bank loans at low rates, because officially, on paper, they were
Christians, and therefore casteless. (74)

Roy’s literary rhetoric throws light on the present day status of the Dalit Christians, having
historical connotations. As Dalits’ strategy of converting to other religions to shed away the
caste hierarchy has resulted in vehement failure. They have to create their own footprints in
religion. They should create a religion of their choice which almost all Dalits can follow.
They must revive the small god worship which has been their tradition and religious culture.
They must retain their identity and develop and commemorate their symbols of identity to
sustain themselves in the general cultural space, regardless of their immediate acceptance in the general space.

Dalits consider the inter-caste marriage as one of the strategies that will annihilate the caste hierarchy on the contrary those marriages are not accepted by society as it involves a Dalit boy, and it almost always affect the Dalit youth in the name of “honour killing.” Indian society in conceived of the idea of killing preserves the honour of the family, though there is no honour in the subhuman practice which is more barbaric and brutal executed by bigoted persons. There is no difference between an animal which kills another animal to prey on and the perpetrators of the honour killing. Rajasekaran writes, “Families aggrieved by inter-caste marriages especially those involving Dalits, seem to have taken over the task of dispensing justice in the most brutal manner possible for the sake of caste or family “honour”” (“In the Name of Honour” 29). The recent example of honour killing is executed at Udumalaipet of Tamil Nadu in which the victim Shankar belongs to the pallar community a sub sect of Dalits.

The honour killings have no state boundaries, but are executed throughout India. Caste identity and caste-based voting coupled with caste purity and emergence of identity politics lead to such horrific crime. The pity is that even the government is not in a position to prevent honour killings, even when there is a stern ruling against honour killing, pronounced as a verdict by the Supreme Court of India, since the political “parties have to pamper the casteist ego of intermediate groups” (Rajasekaran: Caste Constituencies 30). Data from national crime records 2013Bureau show that 28 Dalits have been massacred in Tamil Nadu but the number of massacres is increased to 72 in 2014. When the caste Hindu girls parents commit suicide after their daughters’ elopement, the Dalit colonies are looted.
Balasubramaniam writes in this Tamil article, “Sarvadesamayamahum Ambedkar” [Internationalising Ambedkar], “Indian law 1955 states that untouchability is a crime. But when there happen the honour killings, the government which has to rectify those through law, becomes mute thinking that the honour killings are executed as a result of collision or animosity” (21).*

In India Dalit community are scattered. They all work for their emancipation individually. Some recognize themselves as Dalits, whereas some do not recognize themselves as Dalits. Waghmare writes, “Marginalized sections . . . are scattered here and there and lack cohesiveness and strength. . . . They live in physical or psychological ghettos. The social organizations in which they are imprisoned by customs and traditions build a wall of segregation around them however they struggle for emancipation” (16 - 17). Among the social organizations politics takes the front fore in segregating Dalits, since Datits are considered as more vote banks for several political parties. Those political parties consider that the union of Dalit may ostracize the so called mainstream politics and also think that Dalits ascendency to power may dismantle the structure called Goverment. Bama’s Vanmam typically explores the union of paraiyar and pallar the prominent Dalit communities which has resulted in winning of the Panchayat president post for which the dominant Naicker community restrains the union, inflicting violence between paraiyar and pallar. As Dalits are working towards emancipation and empowerment, they should organize themselves under a single umbrella as Dalits and univocally voice their needs and demands to the government in a single voice.
Dalit narratives invariably express the strategies adopted by Dalits to sustain themselves in the world on par with the upper caste people. Dalit narratives are coupled with silence and violence, Bama is not an exception. Dalits try to re-establish their glorious past through a fine literary rhetoric of thorough narration of their lifestyle. They also focus on Dalits’ return to humanity through human relationship, as Foucault says:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or organized up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourses can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point of opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power: it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it

*(History of Sexuality* 100-101)

Literature need not only be ideological; in the cultural arena it has embarked to reflect the political praxis which makes a conducive address of gender, class, caste, race, law, religion, religious outfits, governance and other social institutions, that act as the determinants of national life, without anytime competing with aesthetic features of a text. These texts are not only the critiques on history which survives in disruptions and contradictions, these writings are born as a result of interaction between political reality and aestheticism.

Dalits are the landless agricultural workers, by whose relentless labour the upper castes dwell comfortably in their houses. India is the country which solely relies on the agriculture as its major revenue source, yet the agricultural lands are not owned by government; it is the dominant caste who own almost the entire part of agricultural lands. Ambedkar insisted that land should be brought under the control of the government in order
to protect the Dalit landless farmers from being swindled by the upper castes. Karl Marx suggests Indian government to take over the responsibility of at least the irrigation, as the climatic conditions are irregular and for irrigation the cultivators inevitably rely on the tanks, rivers and pools for which cooperation among people in sharing water among themselves is annually problematized. In this regard Marx writes, “An oriental government never had more than three departments: finance, war and public works. The British government in India has administered numbers one and two in a rather minded spirit and dropped the third entirely, so that Indian agriculture is being ruined” (99). If lands are owned by the government the crops can be evenly distributed among the people, which may eradicate the socio-economic inequalities among them, socio-economic equality may be helpful in annihilating caste. Dalits work for their emancipation in their full might and their cause must be supported by the government.

To conclude the present study, Bama is a socially realistic and conscious writer who narrates the every day events in her fiction; her stories are not merely fictitious but also a social criticism under the conditions fixed for such criticism. Her characters are not mere shadows that fret and strut their hour in the stories but the stereotypic representation of the persons one can meet in his daily life and also her stories portray the different strategies the adopt in the course of their struggle for liberation. Bama’s fiction with Dalit consciousness clearly exhibits that Bama’s fiction is coloured with characters that are not individuals but stereotypes that reflect and represent the entire community. The characters may fall into three major classifications as “the residuals” who accepts whatever happen and however they are humiliated; they stoically accept everything for their amicable existence in the society, “the
emergings” who have the qualities of both submissiveness and aggressiveness, they change their strategies accordingly and they are the people who feel the need for being liberated and the final category “the aggressives” who are vehement in protesting against the traditional system which ostracizes and exploits them and have an intense desire for an uncompromising liberation.

Bama is a raconteur; she has produced socially realistic novels and short stories out of her own experience in Indian society. The present study is an attempt to analyze Bama’s fiction in sociological and cultural perspectives. There are scopes for future research also. Bama’s works may be analyzed in comparison with those of Afro-American writers as both are dealing with the same cause. Bama’s works can be linguistically analyzed and the researcher may find many linguistic innovations in her fiction. Also there are many Dalit writers whose works may be analyzed in the same social, cultural, political and historical perspectives.