CHAPTER 2
DALITS IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

The structural pattern of the Indian society is antediluvian and also extremely complex. Its antiquity covers the span of almost five thousand years since its first known civilization. During this long period several immigrants, belonging to different ethnic strata and linguistic families have originated and have fused together to form new variants. Also, it influences one another in various ways, to contribute to its development: socially, politically, economically and culturally. Consequently, these contributions yield themselves into diversity, richness and vitality of heterogeneous Indian society.

Indian history witnesses several kinds of people starting right from the primitive hunters and food gatherers, nomads of different types, settled agriculturists, artisans, and intruders like Aryans, invaders like Christians and Muslims and immigrants like Jews. The most major religions of the world—Hinduism, Christianity, Jainism, Islam and Buddhism are found in this mystique land. All these things form a bewildering variety of the Indian culture and consequently, Indian society has acquired a composite cultural pattern characterized by plurality of the cultural patterns.

This variant has formed stratifications in terms of language, money, religion, colour, casteism and the like in the contemporary scenario of Indian social structure. Among these strata, casteism seems to be the oldest surviving structural pattern in the modern Indian society regardless of the type of habitat of people: city, town and village with its myriad forms of subordination and superordination. Economic stratum, which is found mostly in the city, based on the habitations like the juxtaposition of the sophisticated multi-storeyed apartments and the inconvenient slums restricts the people in mingling together though they need depend on each other. Whereas casteism, as
stratification unleash violence and captivates the people even in urban areas where it is common to find a number of educated people; it unveils hierarchy of people. From time immemorial, sociologists and anthropologists work on the caste system and are fascinated by its antiquity. The social hierarchy imposed by the caste system is wholly internalised in the Hindu society, though “the identification of the Indian subcontinent with a single people whose religion is Hinduism was only made in the recent history . . .” (Omvedt 1).

The mode of stratification of people, based on the caste is not known among the aborigines of this land; the credit of which is mostly ascribed to the process of Aryanization in the Indian history which has been spearheaded with the intrusion of Aryans into this land. Aryans are aliens to Indian tradition who are identified primarily with two primal differences—“language and the observance of varnasramadharma” (Thapar 6). No sooner had they settled, than they created their literature in their language, Sanskrit. These literary texts are known as Vedas, Puranas and Aranyakas and Upanishads. Also in the later days, they have imposed some rules in the society to wreak subordination and these rules have been laid down by Manu in his Manusmriti (The Laws of Manu). They were initially racist and considered themselves superior to the earlier inhabitants.

The origin of caste dates back to the “Purushasukta myth” embodied in one of the Vedas, the Rigveda, and the myth authenticates the creation of humankind in Hindu perspectives. Purusha is considered as a Hindu deity and monstrous primeval being with “a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and thousand feet” (Rig Veda 10.9.1)). The text says Purusha has been sacrificed and out of him the four fold categories of Indo-Aryan society have been born, these categories are technically called as varnas. “His mouth became the Brahman, his arms were made into warrior, his thighs the people and from his feet servants were born” (Rigveda 10.9.12). The varnas are named as Brahmans, Kshatriyas,
Vaisyas and Sudras. The Brahmans, as they are assumed to be born from the mouth of the primeval body, are considered as intellectuals and have become the preachers and priests; the warriors, as they are believed to be born from the chest have become the warriors and rulers; the Vaisyas are considered to be born from the thighs and they have become the business men and the Sudras are born from the feet of the primeval body which is the lowest part; they are made as servants and are considered as the lowest caste in the hierarchy within the varna stratum. Though the myth is the Brahmanical document, it promptly unveils the birth of casteism into the Indian subcontinent.

As far as the social status of these four fold categories is concerned, the first three in the hierarchy—Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas are the Indo-Aryan race and are considered as Dvija—twice born groups—born first at physical birth and as second time when initiated into varna status. The Shudras were the fourth varna; they were from outside the Indo-Aryan group and were the progeny of unions between the Indo-Aryan and the Dasa (the pre-Aryan inhabitants of the land). They were emerged as cultivators, but were denied twice-born status. Outside this fourfold vertical varna structure there was a fifth group—Avarna or Panchama—whose ethnic status was so low and their occupations so degraded and polluting . . . (Dube 6) and this fifth category of people are known by the term, “outcaste” and are segregated from society and any physical touch between people of varna and avarna seems to be prohibited. Within these five categories one can find many divisions based on their occupation; these myriad divisions have come to be known as “Jatis” (Caste). Varna and jati are the functional aspects of casteism.

The Aryan wit has formulated rules and regulations for life in society within this stratification of people, by which the Aryan intruders have subjugated the aboriginals of
this land. In the *Rigveda* or in any other Vedas, there is no mention about the untouchables, but there are references in other Vedic literatures to untouchables who are known with various names as, “Ayogava, Chandala, Nishada and Paulkasa” (Srinivas 29). The Aryan social stratification has witnessed to exist from ancient to modern period of Indian History. When the constitution drafting committee had been formed, the committee analysed the social status of people of various strata and all the castes belonging to the *Avarna* stratum and some castes from the *Sudra* stratum, whose condition has been economically weak have been included in the list of Scheduled Caste; also they might have considered the criteria prescribed during the British imperialism, which has defined the Scheduled Castes as people who,

1. experience untouchability
2. are not allowed to enter temples
3. are denied access to Brahmans
4. eat beef
5. do any vocation that is capable of polluting *

(Murugappan and Jesi 31)

The most of the people of this group are fond of calling themselves as Dalits. Consequently, in course of time, all the people notified in the list of Scheduled Caste have come to be identified as Dalits. “Dalit” as a word is derived from Marathi which means in broader conception, “broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way” (Zelliot 267). Those people are identified by various phrases like “Depressed

* Translated by the Scholar
Classes”, “Untouchables”, ‘Scheduled Castes’, or by Gandhi’s euphemistic phrase, “Harijans” (Sons of God), but none of the phraseology clearly states the sociological, and psychological status of this stratum of people as the modern phrase ‘Dalit’ does. Dalits are regarded as aliens, they have to “make their living by their innate activities, which are reviled by the twice-born” (The Laws of Manu 10.46). They are not allowed to change their occupation, deprived of the right to education, and to possess assets. They are subjected to all kinds of humiliating treatment. Today according to the census of 2011 Dalits cover eighteen percentage of the total population of India.

Caste is everything; caste holds the people like a creeper. People are identified with their caste in Indian society. When a person is met for the first time by a stranger, the stranger asks the exact place where the person comes from. Even when the person says a city’s name; the stranger asks further probing questions to know the exact place of the person, and thereby he comes to know of his caste. People show great affinity to their caste, and reciprocally, they show aggressiveness of disapproval towards other caste people, especially on Dalits. “. . . caste holds us down like a taproot. It is at the centre of religion, politics, education, and every other wretched thing” (Bama: Sangati 102).

Hinduism is obsessed with casteism, whereas theoretically, Christianity has no caste disparity, as it considers everybody as children of God. The Christian missionaries have come to India to spread Christianity. Many missionaries have tried different modes to convert people to Christianity. During the reign of Shajahan, a Muslim ruler in the medieval period of Indian history the Portuguese missionary has indulged in conversion. They are the people who have begun “the abominable and cruel practice of slave trading for which they kidnapped many orphan Hindu or Muslim children whom they converted into Christianity” (Majumdar, Ray Choudhuri and Kalikinkar Datta 465), this incident seems to be the forceful conversion of people to Christianity. The English government,
during the modern period or the period of colonization has assumed a neutral position as far as the religious issues are dealt with. They have initially not encouraged imparting any religious instruction in the schools conducted by the British Christian missionary. But on later course of time, they too must have indulged themselves in the process of conversion. They have said that if the people accept their faith and religion, they will provide their children education and give them some money for the better living. In the village where Bama lives, it seems that only the people of Parayar community have converted to Christianity and not even the other Dalit communities like Pallar and Chakkiliyar. They might have thought that the conversion is the only way to come out of untouchability, since the Christian priests teach about the equivalence of all. But in course of time, Christianity is impacted and inflicted with the casteism by the influence of the Hindu tradition; untouchability creeps in and the converts remain as Dalit Christians and consequently, they are not even able to avail the concessions granted by the government.

In Indian society people usually convert themselves to Christianity to get rid of themselves from the clutches of caste tyranny. The colonial novels celebrate conversion into Christianity, for the conversion into Christianity provides them with food, shelter and education and equality to all. More and More Indians especially Dalits convert them into Christianity believing, “Christians are not obsessed with caste as the Hindus were” (Gunasekaran 12). Ideologically the theory of creation seems to be different from the Hindu philosophy of creation, whereas in practice people are segregated and separated on the basis of caste even in churches. Jesme observes on the class disparity found in the convents:

The less-educated and the less privileged among the professed nuns belonged to a lower class, undergoing a different manner of training under a separate Mistress. These sisters, though also from the lower strata, were differentiated form the
cheduthies as they, too, took the three vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, and wore the sister’s habit. These nuns could not sit on chairs alongside other more privileged sisters but only on their ‘trunks’. They were given jobs in the kitchen, parlour, fields or compounds. . . . There is a ‘Fair Ethelamma’ and a ‘Dark Ethelamma’ in the province. The fair one belongs to the higher strata and the dark one to the lower, not only because of the difference in complexion, but mainly because of the disparity in education and wealth. . . . Despite our proclaiming the ideas of justice and equality before God, such class distinctions exist in the convents and seminaries. (47-8)

Bama is of no exception, she is also a Dalit, converted into Christianity, and decides to take up the position of a nun to help the poor and the destitute. In convents the Tamil nuns are treated differently. She undergoes double ostracism: first as a Tamil and second as a Dalit. “Tamil people were looked upon as a lower Caste. And then among Tamils, Parayar were a separate Category” (Bama: Karukku 24). Bama is informed by a sister that by certain order the Harijans are not allowed as prospective nuns. Bama feels alienated. She enunciates, “I lamented inwardly that there was no place that was free of caste” (Bama: Karukku 25).

The schools run by the missionaries unleash the caste disparity. It is common to note such disparity. The Dalits are ill treated and the welfare schemes offered to them are misappropriated by the authorities. Jesme observes:

According to government rules, the scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe students are given a quota of a certain number of seats. To keep these seats for the management, sometimes false numbering is resorted to. Fictitious application numbers are allocated where by those seats can be grapped (57).
The convent where Bama undergoes training is attached with a school. In that school the Dalits are allotted menial jobs like “Sweeping the premises, swabbing and washing the classrooms, and cleaning out the lavatories” (Bama: *Karukku* 25). Dalits are forced to do those jobs in schools. An article entitled “Dalit Children in India – Victims of Caste Discrimination” enumerates:

A survey by Indian human rights organization Navsarjan Trust reveals that teachers, local governments, and community members routinely subject the children of manual scavengers to discrimination and forced labour as part of daily experience of attending school and living in their communities. . . . reports reveal rampant discrimination against Dalit children and students in direct contravention of numerous international and domestic laws banning caste discrimination and ‘untouchability’ practices. (n. p)

In schools, one can find such kind of disparity even today. The teachers speak very insultingly about the low caste people; they are not considered as human beings. “According to their notion, low–caste people are all degraded in every way. They think we have no moral discipline nor cleanliness nor culture. . . . all the menial jobs there done by Dalits who were abused all the time and treated in a shameful and degrading way” (Bama: *Karukku* 26).

Bama, on completion of her studies, gets a job of a teacher in a school run by nuns by chance. By that time she has realized that the nuns are nothing but “whited sepulchres” (Bama: *Karukku* 102). She has worked in that school for five years. There have been many poor children and also three fourth of them belong to Dalits. There have been many atrocities wreaked against the poor people, instead of serving them and that has irritated Bama. “They ran a boarding school which was nominally for the sake of destitute children, but in fact they made those children do every menial task that was
needed. They behaved as if they were queens there, and everybody else was there only to run errands for them” (Bama: *Karukku* 103). Even there are a few nuns with slightly humane attitude; they are not able to do well as they are ostracized from the entire community of nuns. Amongst them, one can witness the caste divisions, class divisions and racial divisions. Bama avers, “I learnt that God has always shown the greatest compassion for the oppressed. And Jesus too, associated himself mainly with the poor” (Bama: *Karukku* 104); she feels that nobody teaches the real God. They are eager to show God as “loving, Kind, gentle, one who forgives sinners, patient, tender, humble, obedient” (Bama: *Karukku* 104), but not as “just, righteous, angered by injustices, opposes falsehood, never countenances inequality” (Bama: *Karukku* 104); in such a way she has begun to understand God and His ways and decides to become a nun to serve for the entire humanity.

At the first instance after her training as a nun, Bama has been posted at a convent, where there is no connection between God and suffering poor. The school is fed up with children from wealthy families; there is no love among the people who used to preach God as loving and merciful.

They claimed that God’s love is limitless, subject to no conditions. Yet inside the convent there were innumerable conditions about how you should be and who you were in order to deserve love. When outsiders arrived, flaunting their wealth and education, they were treated with one sort of love; if they did not have these things, they were treated in a different way . . .” (Bama: *Karukku* 106). Bama realizes that the churches teach one thing but practise another thing, here love is subject to what one has in their pocket, and “it is injustice that dances like a demon in the convents . . .” (Bama: *Karukku* 106).
Bama also assesses the proceedings of the contemporary church; they are not backing up the cause of the oppressed but rather they turn them into slaves in the name of God, while they live in comfort. Only the upper caste Christians enjoy the fruits of the religion; the upper caste people are able to come out of the caste based oppression, wreaked on them by the Hindu hegemony, whereas Dalit Christians are humiliated and deceived by the name of God, by blindfolding their eyes, they are maintained as stone steps that others tread through. Bama concludes:

... Dalits have also understood that God is not like this, has not spoken like this. They have become aware that they too were created in the likeness of God. There is a new strength within them, urging them to reclaim that likeness which has been so far repressed, ruined, obliterated, and to begin to live again with honour, self-respect, and with a love towards all human kind”. (Bama: Karukku 109)

Christianity as a whole as it is practised today has no love for humanity; Love is restricted based on caste, class and level of wealth.

Originally church and the missionary come to India with a view to serve the humanity; they have provided education to the suppressed and the exploited free of cost. Now the face of church has changed and that they exorbitantly charge for providing quality education and only rich people are accommodated. They justify their stand by saying that the money collected is used for service in other places. Nominally they admit a few poor. They usually shun the rich ones and lurk in corners trembling. There is disparity based on the economic stratification—rich and poor. “The rich children would say, we don’t want to sit next to those ones, they are dark-skinned, they are poor, they are ugly, they don’t wear nice clothes” (Bama: Karukku 112).

A nation is an “imagined political community” (Anderson 6) which comprises of a cluster of many people with varied attitude each. Everyone images their identity. Though
the members know and can identify each other well, they live in the “image of their
communion” (Anderson 6). The members of each community think that they are part of a
larger community. Macleod observes, “central to the idea of nation are notions of
collectivity and belonging, mutual sense of community that a group of individuals
imagines, it shares. These feelings of community are emotive foundation for the
organization, administration and membership of ‘state’ . . .” (69); this sense of
belongingness is the root cause of all the problems, when their identity is not accepted.

Dalits literally identify themselves with Ekalaivan, a Dravidian indigenous boy
belonging to the Sudra stratum, who has not only dared to learn archery but also come to
rival Arjuna in this art and as a measure of punishment for illicit learning this art that has
been deprived of for his community, his thumb has been cut off and also with a character
in Ramayana whom the valiant and righteous king Ram, as portrayed by the Hindu
mythology slays the boy for his blasphemy of learning penance and meditation
presumptuously in order to maintain the cruelest Hindu law and order.

The name provides a kind of identity. Dalits have the practice of calling out
people not by their names but by their nicknames. They use to have a large number of
nicknames to each person focusing their prominent character as the modern day cartoon
does. Bama narrates about the people’s practice of having nicknames and she details on
the generally used nicknames, by which people are well known: “Munkovam”, “Midday-
Masala”, “Murugan-Spring Pig”, “Kazhinja”, “Medanda”, “Kaakkaa”, “Kalkundaan”,
“Naadodi” and so on.

Pallars, Parayars and Chakkiliyars are the prominently existing Dalit communities
in Tamilnadu. Each of these castes has their own perspective and understanding of their
caste and identity. When this kind of identity is denied they are locking their horns with
each other. Pallars and Parayars are often on locker heads. The Pallars consider Parayar inferior to them in the caste hierarchy, “because they eat beef” (Bama: Vanmam121) and reciprocally the Parayar consider the Pallars inferior to them and disgusting creatures, since they “eat pigs that feed on shit” (Bama: Vanmam121).

Pallars, though come under the layer of Scheduled Caste with regard to the constitutional classification are not ready to be accepted to be considered as Dalits because they believe that the very word “Dalit” gives them an inferior status. They usually identify themselves as Devendrakula Vellars; they consider themselves as the worshippers of the God Indra, since they are perennially associated with agriculture. There are many researches, conducted and published by which the Pallars ascribe themselves belonging to higher positions. They claim that the ancient rulers belonging to the Chera, Chola and Pandya dynasty belong to their caste. Another research conducted by Raja Devendrar considers the Pallars as the aboriginals of the Indian sub-continent. Pallars also consider themselves as Mallars, traditional agricultural workers and not considered as Depressed Class as they aspire to rise above the level, Scheduled Castes or Dalits. “Everywhere they’re calling Parayar arts as “Dalit Arts” and promoting them . . . It seems “Dalit” means them, not us. We are better than them’ . . .” (Bama: Vanmam 54), observes a Pallar boys in the story.

Bama brings out an intra-caste trouble among the Dalits. Among the Dalit group, which contains many castes the Pallar, Parayar and Ckakkiliyar are considered as prominent. Always, people find some dispute between the Pallar and Parayar. After the dispute between the Chaliyar and Parayar “there were also skirmishes between the Pallar and Parayar on many occasions” (Bama: Karukku45). They fight together even for no reasons. The first dispute has risen because of a ripe banana. When a Pallar man drives his cart loaded with ripe bananas, a boy from the Parayar street has pulled off two
bananas and has eaten them. Both of them have exchanged abusive terms and the verbal abuse lead to a fight. After this particular incident, the boys on both the side are harboured with vengeance. The second fight has erupted in a ration shop which has gone to an extent of killing a Parayar boy by a group of Pallar boys. The often fight together like this. “They fight to the death at one moment; the next moment they join together again. Suddenly and for no reason at all they will be fighting and wrestling with each other” (Bama: *Karukku* 47), and the upper caste people take this as advantage and they invariably instigate violence between the Pallar and Parayar and make themselves benefited.

Pallars treat the other Dalit communities as down to earth creatures. When a Parayar boy is assaulted by Pallars in the orchard, the Parayar street *naatamai* along with ten people goes to meet the Pallar street *naatamai* and the youngsters of Pallar street yells and shouts. “You’ve raised a thieving donkey, and you dare to come and talk about justice? If you touch anything in our orchard, we’ll break your arm. Just be thankful we let him go without breaking his arm this time. Get lost . . . you low fellows . . . beggars” (Bama: *Vanmam* 70). The Parayars are treated as beggars and the Pallars are screaming like “vultures circling around carrion” (Bama: *Vanmam* 70); in the caste hierarchy the upper caste people consider the Dalits inferior and among Dalits, they consider each other inferior and beggar-like. Pallars consider Parayar inferior and address them as Beggars, and inturn Parayars consider Chakkiliyars inferior. Even the *naatamai* also shares the emotion of the Pallar youths and asks the Parayar *naatamai*, “teach your fellows that they shouldn’t steal from the farms and orchards” (Bama: *Vanmam* 71). The infuriated Parayar *naatamai* retaliate with exchanging some sort of harsh words and calls for a panchayat meeting in the *chavady* to discuss the issue. Jeyaraju proposes the idea of meeting the priest demanding justice, which has vehemently been opposed citing the
priest’s caste and his status during commotion. “When there was a problem . . . it was this same priest who was the first to run away from the village. (Bama: Vanmam 72).

Due to the illegal and wrong activities of the priests in the church, even the staunch churchgoers also do not accept the idea. Having discussed some possible solutions, the committee has unanimously accepted the proposal of lodging a complaint in the police station. So the matter has been taken to the police station. The inspector asks a series of questions; for all the questions, the naattamai meekly answers that has been opposed by some youths. “Anthony found the naatamai’s polite manner very irritating. ‘After all the inspector is just a human being like us. Why should the naattamai go around addressing him as “ayya” and “saami” and be so humble and everything? Because we behave like this they treat us worse than dogs’ . . .’” (Bama: Vanmam 74). When the inspector calls Sevanu, the victim’s father, he bends in respect. One can notice that naattamai, Sevanu and the elders speak humbly whereas the youngsters want to have honour and lead a dignified life; consequently one can notice the submissive and aggressive attitude of people and the youngsters feel the submissive attitude of the elders humiliating. Inspector after examining Chinnappan’s wounds promises to come to their residential area on the evening.

The Pallars are much annoyed by the inspector’s call. They discuss this issue very seriously and they boast of themselves. “We are the descendants of kings”, says the pallar youths. They have decided to convene a meeting in their community hall. At the meeting, the Pallars speak, “The parayars are so inferior to us, and always will be. We are not untouchables, we are of royal descent. We are not Dalits. We are now Devendra kula vellars or Mallars Not pallars. So we must not have any type of communication with those low Dalit parayars” (Bama: Vanmam 77-8).
Pallars and Parayars seem to dislike each other, whereas the Chakkiliyars will not get together with these two castes though they also belong to a Dalit community; they are always too submissive to the upper caste because of their full dependence. They indulge in the works like peeling the skin of dead cattle, cobbling, and cleaning the streets and lavatories. They are more ostracized than the other two prominent Dalit communities—Pallar and Parayar. When the boys approach the Chakkiliyar street naattamai to discuss installing Ambedkar’s statue and the naatamai says, “Already we’re having so many problems. Now you want us to attract the anger of Naickers also? Please leave us out of it” (Bama: Vanmam 59). They think that donating for a public cause like this may attract the anger of the upper caste, because of which they may not be provided with jobs in their houses and it may be difficult to make out their livelihoods. Yet the boys want to organize all the three castes and so they say, “This is a good opportunity . . . If we three castes get together, no one in the village can do anything to us” (Bama: Vanmam 58).

Dalits are forced to live hiding their caste identities, and when they reveal their identities they usually meet out only discredit, or they are belittled by the activities of the upper caste people. When Bama comes back home from school, a Naicker woman sits beside her in the bus. During the conversation, Bama reveals her identity as a paraya, the woman instantly stands up and moves to the next available seat saying, “polluted” (Bama: Karukku 20). In home, when she tells her mother of this episode, her mother promptly replies, “say you are from a different caste” (Bama: Karukku 20). Bama also conceals her caste to some extent, because of the nuns’ attitude towards Dalits. “. . . they spoke ill of us. When they spoke about Dalit in such terms, I would often shrink myself. They did not know then that I myself was a Dalit, and in those early days, I did not have the courage to tell them” (Bama: Karukku 114). The nuns and priests have different conceptions about the existence of Dalits.
Installing statues of their leaders Dalits seek their identity revealed to others in *Vanmam*, Bama portrays an incident whereby the Dalits try to install the statue of their veteran leader Ambedkar, duly by the efforts of the Dalit youths. Anthony in *Vanmam* involves himself in all the public causes and never hesitates to stand up for justice. Once he gathers the other boys and put forth the idea of installing Ambedkar statue in his village. They approach the street *naattamai*, Sevathian; he says, “just keep your mind on your studies and forget all these da” (Bama: *Vanmam* 57). When Sevathian put forth an idea consulting the priest on this issue the boys narrate an incident whereby the priest has refused to hang the picture of Ambedkar on the walls of church even when he has Kamaraj’s picture hanging. Of course, the church need be free of caste bias; the priest has to equally weigh all the people regardless of their caste and status. There should be no disparity and discrimination on the background of anything like caste and socio-economic status within the boundaries of church. The priest, “because he’s a Nadar” (Bama: *Vanmam* 58) denies to hang the picture of Ambedkar, the architect of modern India who is equally weighed on par with Kamaraj. The boys have decided to collect donation from the Pallars and Chakkiliyars also to install an Ambedkar statue. They have collected donation from all the people, friends and strangers and have bought a statue and it is made ready to be unveiled.

Dalits are very poor that they are not able to get at least their food to fill their bellies. They lead a very mean life shrouded by poverty and subordination. Marginalization and poverty go hand in hand; Dalits are ostracized because of poverty also. In this connection Gurung and Michael Kollmair observe, “Marginality and poverty are often used as synonyms. . . . In other words, poverty is a state of economic, social psychological deprivation occurring among people or countries lacking sufficient ownership, control or access to relationship . . .” (16).
Bama focuses that Dalits are very poor; they are not able to afford to nutritious food. Even in the adolescent period which require more energy and psychologically considered as the period of development, Dalit youths suffer on want of proper food; many of the days they spend foodless day and night.

The boys who were on vacation did not have regular meals. There just wasn’t enough food. So they would just take some kanji at about twelve ‘o’ clock and that was the meal for the morning and afternoon together. After that . . . nothing until the evening. Sometimes they would come home hungry after their bath and look eagerly into the kanji pot. But it would be empty because their younger brothers and sisters would have finished off the food . . . they would just go hungry. (Bama: *Vanmam* 45)

Even for food they have to depend on the things available at cheaper cost. During the rainy days in the villages, Dalits used to catch all sort of fishes and sell, the Dalits who sell fishes can eat only some kind of fish that are available at the cheapest cost. Bama says, “We mostly bought and cooked Curries out of “silebi kendai” and “paambu kendai. Because that was the cheapest we could get. The upper caste bought and ate ayirai, keluti, and viraal” (*Karukku* 3). It shows the economic imbalance. Notably the uppercaste people feed on the costlier things.

Dalits have only a few clothes; they are not affordable to purchase dress as they want to. Consequently they have to manage with the dresses available with them. Here Bama explains how she has suffered psychologically during her studies at college for want of adequate dress and ornaments. Bama undergoes the course of poverty throughout her studies. She has no ornaments and even no footwears to wear.

Some of the students asked me, ‘Why aren’t you wearing anything in your ears and about your neck? You don’t even have chappals on your feet’, they said. It
was true that almost all of them came to college wearing all kinds of trinkets and with fine clothes. But where would I go for such things? I even pawned my small earrings in order to pay my examination fees. And my clothes certainly weren’t anything much. (Bama: Karukku 75)

Bama goes to college just with the clothes she has been wearing. For a week she goes around wearing the same dress and all are astonished to see and some of them have even asked her whether she does not possess other clothes. Bama here undergoes a psychological pain on the questions of her classmates regarding her dress, even when she manages to reply them, “. . . my mother was bringing my belongings” (Bama: Karukku 74-5). She has felt deeply humiliated. Her father too writes a letter scolding her for joining college based on the advice of the nuns. Bama has been urged to complete her studies and so she has endured all the shame and humiliation and stayed on. Bama has been ostracized from their classmates. After a week her mother meets her to deliver clothes and other amenities. When she scores high marks, the nuns and priests have praised and, the students who ostracized her have become friendlier; education breaks social ostracism to some extent, and there has never been at least a question about the clothes and ornaments.

Bama explains a situation whereby she has undergone a Psychological agony and her Psyche has much been turned. In the fourth year of his studies at college, college day has been celebrated all the students attend the function in “silk saris and decked out in their best things” (Bama: Karukku75-6). Bama has no silk sari or even a decent sari and also. She does not want to borrow a sari from her fellow-students. Consequently, she has locked herself in a bathroom. Bama says, “I wanted to weep and weep when I considered my plight. And I realized how deeply shamed one can be for the lack of a few rupees in one’s hand” (Bama: Karukku76).
Bama feels comfortable with life, when she has started to work after completion of her B. Ed. She can buy the things as she wants to and can go wherever she wants to. She has realized that money can always afford oneself all kinds of comforts to live in. Even when Dalits toil hard by day and night, “They live on gruel every day, they wear nothing more than a couple of rags, they own neither property nor land nor even a decent house to live in. . . . How can they even hope for luxuries?”(Bama: *Karukku*77).

Upper caste people are provided with all the amenities life requires to lead a prestigious life. Dalits are not able to afford even the fuels to burn their hearth to cook, and consequently, they collect cow dung and make it dry and use the dried dung as fuel. Here Bama and her grandma go off to the fields to collect cow dung. Dalits are in austerity and are compelled to do the menial jobs in order to earn livelihood and they are forced to suffer pain and humiliation. Society unveils injustice to Dalits by keeping them as slaves. Bama feels pain saying, “I was pained to see even older people trembling, shrinking like small children, frightened by the power and wealth that the sisters had, burying their pride and self-respect, running to do the menial tasks assigned to them” (Bama: *Karukku*26). Dalits accept all these sufferings admitting as fate.

Economic imbalance turns the life of people into a difficult arena. The poor are not allowed to have their due reverence by others, whereas people usually glorify the riches. In this case, people are segmented as rich and poor and that too for the Dalits who are also poor, the condition becomes even dismal and they are doubly ostracized first as poor within their own community and then as Dalits in general. Bama undergoes such a humiliation. People “. . . patiently accept and endure their hard lives, consoling themselves that this was the destiny ordained on them, that they cannot see a way to change the caste they were born into nor the poverty that is part of that caste nor indeed the humiliation of it all” (Bama: *Karukku* 80).
Dalit colonies are uncongenial places to live in that there is no hygienic condition
to live healthily; sanitation is not known to that settlements. The boys loiter clothless,
since they are poor. In some villages, Dalits’ colonies are juxtaposed to cemetery.
Considering the definition of Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany who observe:

. . . for the present purpose of Indian poverty can more usefully be defined as the
sum of low standards of nutrition, health, housing, general material consumption
and formal education. By these criteria, the untouchables are overwhelmingly a
poor people. The principal source as opposed to measure of untouchables’ poverty
is their relationship with agricultural land. There is a relentless logic that flows
from being an agrarian people without strong land assets. (30)

Dalits are extremely poor, as they do not own any of them listed out in the definition.

The Dalits are living at the fake end of the village. The Dalits have a need to go to
the upper caste settlements whereas they never come into the Dalit’s settlements. On
narrating about the houses of Dalits, Bama describes, “Three-quarters of them were
cottages with palmyra-thatched roofs” (Bama: Karukku 7). Mulk Raj Anand also
describes such a colony of the untouchables in his debut novel Untouchable. The opening
lines of the novel read:

The outcastes’ colony was a group of mud walled houses that clustered together in
two rows under the shadow of both the town and cantonment, but outside their
boundaries and separated from them. . . . The absence of drainage system . . . the
ramparts of human and animal refuse that lay on the outskirts of the little colony,
and the ugliness, the squalor, and the misery which lay within it made it an
‘uncongenial’ place to live in. (9)

The colony where Dalits used to live in is a forbidden place. In that antipathetic
situation, Dalits live like Yahoos, huddled up together. Bama’s description of the colony
 coincides with that of Anand when Bama construes, “To the east of the village lies the cemetery. We live next to that” (*Karukku* 7). Living beside the cemetery may yield diseases and the fume which arises when a dead body is burnt does harm and eventually Anand’s description of an ‘uncongenial place’ is well described by Bama also in her novel. Omprakash Valmiki also portrays a typical outcaste colony in which “. . . the stench was overpowering that one would choke within a minute. The pigs wandering in narrow lanes, naked children, dogs, daily fights . . .” (1).

Even during the festivals Dalits are ostracized. It is believed that Religion and festivals unify people, whereas on the contrary, Dalits are ostracized even in celebrating festivals; for which Christianity is no exception. Bama astonishingly says that the Nadar Christians will not join the festivities. “They never joined in the Dalit celebrations” and “when the procession went along their street they only peeped at it as Hindus did and stayed inside their houses” (Bama: *Karukku*100). Bama then explains her bent of mind from theism to atheism, presumably because of the disparities within the church and the society and she ascertains, “what passes for devotion now a days is merely a matter of doing things out of a sense of duty” (Bama: *Karukku* 202). The rituals may have lost their significance because of their meaninglessness. Nobody reflects on why they celebrate the festivals, instead they mumble with meaningless words that are irrelevant to the context, and also because they want to captivate the people as slaves.

Bama deals with caste disparity and discrimination in some of the significant social constructs: school, college and church. At the age of three, Bama witnesses the caste disparity in society. Bama has to walk through the streets of Naicker and Pallar to reach home from school. Usually she walks for half an hour which can be reached within ten minutes. She used to watch over the entertaining activities found in the street—the performing monkey, cyclist, merry-go-round, giant wheels, temple, stalls, and so on. One
day she witnesses an elderly Parayar man who works in the Naicker’s fields holds Vadai by the edge of the wrapping paper. While the parayars are working hard, the Naicker, “Seated on a piece of sacking spread over a stone ledge” (Bama: Karukku14) watches the process of the ongoing work in the field. At that time Bama notices this man (Paraya), “bowed low and extended the packet towards him, cupping the hand” (Bama: Karukku 15). She details the whole episode to her brother and laughs but her brother says, “. . . everybody believed that Naickers were upper caste, and therefore must not touch Parayas. If they did, they would be polluted” (Bama Karukku 15).

Dalits are restrained to come in contact with the upper caste people; the upper caste people believe that the touch of Dalits can defile them. “An outcaste could not even cross the path of a caste member. To avert such misfortune, an outcaste used to wear a bell which warned the cast Hindu of his approach to avoid an accidental encounter” (Dean 222). The upper caste people are leeches that suck the blood; those people exploit Dalits, the upper castes depend on their physical labour whereas they are not allowed to have any physical touch and Dean Portrays even more abusive episode that the untouchables are used to wear a bell to announce a caste man that he is a Dalit and thereby even the accidental encounter is avoided. When Bakha accidentally touches a caste man in Untouchable, the upper caste man shouts and scolds Bakha using abusive derogatory terms like “low Caste Vermin, Swine, Cock-eyed Son, bow-legged scorpion” (Anand: Untouchable 46). Bama also ostensibly portrays the same predicament of Dalits in this episode. The upper caste people treat Dalits as cattle.

On cudding over this incident, Bama thinks of her grandma, who is working in the house of a Naicker. In villages, the upper caste people are used to call the Dalits by name, regardless of their age and as response to that call Dalits have to call them with laudatory phrases as ‘Ayya’, ‘Master’, ‘Maharaj’, ‘Sami’ and the like, even when the
upper caste people are small boys; the grandma also encounters such experience. There is no reverence for Dalits, even when the caste people are profited by Dalits’ physical labour. The upper caste people physically and psychologically keep a distance from the working class, Dalits. Bama avers, “The Naicker woman would pour out the water from a height of four feet, while paatti and others received and drank it with cupped hands held to their mouth” (Karukku 16) and also they used to serve the leftover meals to Dalits as wages for household works.

Educational institutions are the places, which unleashes the caste inequality and because of which the Dalit students feel the sense of alterity within the same educational institution. Teachers speak badly about the Dalits. Bama studies in a convent which is usually attached to a Roman Catholic church. The teachers, nuns, and the priests, who belong to the upper caste have some preconceived ideas about Dalits, their ways of lifestyle and morals; consequently, for everything that happens within the enclosure, they usually berate the Dalit students. Such a dissimilitude is shown even today. Bama explains of an incident, whereby the little children including her playmates touching a tender coconut on the coconut tree that crooked and makes its trajectory over the compound wall. Everyone touches; finally, the tender coconut has fallen down on the touch of Bama. Everyone complains of Bama responsible for this incident. The next morning, in the assembly the headmaster calls out her name and says, “You have shown us your true nature as Paraya . . . You Climbed the coconut tree yesterday . . . and you stole a coconut” (Bama: Karukku19). She has not been allowed inside the class and has made to stay out. Bama explains her psychological ailment of bringing shame and insult because of this incident, she utters, “I was in agony . . . I was in shock and pain” (Bama: Karukku19). She decides to meet the priest and make an appeal over this incident and request to let her get into class. The priest also says, “‘After all you are from the cheri.
You might have done it” (Bama: Karukku 19). Finally, she has been allowed to get into the classroom through a note from the priest, she shows the note to the headmaster and the headmaster has abused her using bad words and then let her in. Bama, on hearing these responses deeply felt hurt. She explains, “The tears started welling up in my eyes, and I wept . . . when I entered the classroom the entire class turned round to look at me, and I wanted to shrink into myself . . .” (Bama: Karukku 19).

Then Bama explains, when she has been admitted to another school in a neighbouring town. She has felt her poverty through the clothes that other students, who belong to upper castes, as presumed by her has worn smart clothes and jewellery. In the hostel, Bama brings out how the warden-sister reacts to the Dalit students. The warden-sister is prejudiced against the Dalit students about their food and possession. She is not able to abide by the Dalit students; she scolds them for no reason. She says, “‘These people get nothing to eat at home; they come here and they grow fat,’ . . . when they stay here, they eat their fill and look as round as potatoes” (Bama: Karukku 20).

Actually, on entering the college, Bama has thought that she may have got rid of the caste disparities, whereas the colleges unveil the practice of untouchability in a different level when compared with that of the schools, that in college, it takes an aggressive from; education fails to bring equality. Usually in colleges one may notice the homogenous caste group which does not allow the other caste member to creep in and especially the Dalit students are carefully eschewed, and Bama concludes, “I would not be rid of this caste business easily, whatever I studied, wherever I went” (Bama: Karukku 22). Everyone, regardless of their position based on education, for example, principal or warden and religious persons—priests or nuns, has some preconceived ideas on Dalits’ lifestyle, manners, food, possession, festivals and culture that degrade or deteriorate Dalits’ existence in society.
Christian tradition is bound in observing the sacraments—baptism, confirmation, and communion which the Christians believe the foundations of faithful Christian life. Baptism is the foundation of the sacraments which can relieve one from his original sin. Even Jesus himself undergoes the sacrament of baptism, though he claims that he is the Son of God. The second sacrament confirmation signifies strengthening one’s faith and through communion, the third sacrament one can receive the Eucharist, the food for eternal life, by which the Catholics believe that they partake the body and blood of Christ. Catholics recognize the importance of communion, as the Eucharist is the central focus of the sacramental life. Bama gives an account of the principal’s and warden’s comment, when she approaches them to give permission to leave her home, to attend a communion of her brother and sister. Bama is annoyed and challenges them head-on for not leaving her with their reply, “what celebration can there be in your caste, for a First Communion?” (Bama: Karukku 22). The comments of the principal significantly reveal that Dalits may not celebrate any festivals.

Bama feels psychological ailment, on seeing her community suffer like anything, as the consequence of caste discrimination at various social institutions: society, school and college. There is no place left out without caste disproportion. Society unveils caste discrimination in all its constructs—school, college, convents, churches and so on. The low-caste people suffer to the core like anything. “If you are born into a low caste, every moment of your life is a moment of struggle. People screw up their faces and look at us with disgust the moment they know our caste. It is impossible to describe the anguish that looks causes” (Bama: Karukku 27).

Bama explains how Dalits are exploited by the Naickers, even when they strive hard. Bama and her grandma go to the fields even before the cock-crow to pull up the groundnut plant and separate the groundnut pods from the plant. At the evening the
“Pannaiyal would measure the cleaned groundnut pods by the marakkaal, and pay us five or ten paise for each marakkaal. However hard we pushed ourselves, it never came to more than five rupees in all” (Bama: Karukku 50). The Naickers exploit the physical labour of Dalits in such a way. *Marakkaal*, mentioned here is a vessel used to measure paddy, rice, groundnut and all in the ancient Tamil culture.

Bama used to go to the fields with her grandma to help her in her works. Also, Bama brings out some issues related to de-shelling of the groundnut from the pods. She says, “If you used your teeth, your mouth would fill with dust and your throat would choke” (Bama: Karukku 51). While de-shelling the pods, they should dexterously exploit both the hands and care should be taken that the groundnut should not be broken into pieces.

Exploitation takes many forms and the people belonging to upper caste usually confiscate and swindle the working class, Dalits—they are paid less for their physical labour and also, they are cheated by paying a meagre amount for the grain they exchange. “Our hard work was exploited half the time by our Naicker employers. The rest of the time we were swindled by these tradesmen” (*Karukku* 53), laments Bama. Also there is gender discrimination in giving wages that women are paid less than men, however they toil in the fields and their situation remains same without any change or it travels to the worse condition than the previous days. Many companies now use Dalit children to work in their industries like sticking label on match-boxes, making crackers and using chemical. Bama observes, “These tiny crab-like children pour their kuuzh into their carriers half asleep, totter along to the van, climb in and go off to work . . . they return home exhausted . . . these little ones’ fate is the smell of match box solution, not the smell of knowledge or learning” (*Karukku* 55).
Bama highlights different kinds of exploitation and voiceless condition of the Dalits. The upper caste people bribe the policemen to demolish Dalit superiority; they feel that the Parayars are disobedient; consequently, they want to wipe them off. During the period of commotion between the Pallars and Parayars, Pallars are guided and supported by the upper caste, Naickers, because of their subordination. They are not harassed as much as the Parayar women except that the Pallar men are in exile. Not only the policemen but also the Naickers do guard the Pallar men. These Pallar men are aided by the Naickers in murdering the Parayars and now the Naickers safeguard them. They are very happy over the murder of three Parayars. Thereby the Pallars are unwittingly exploited by the upper caste and by the police. There are some intellectuals among Dalits who warns the others that they are exploited and others are not ready to believe them or act according to their advice. There are also some persons like Kandasamy among the Pallars who are worried over the incidents that dismantle the unity of Dalit communities and also felt that their business has been spoilt. During the days of spending money on court cases, Kandasamy expresses his agony over spending money unnecessarily. He observes, “. . . instead of spending money on court cases and this and that, it is better to just get along peacefully. Let’s not go about doing any more of this . . . cutting and stabbing one another,” (Bama: Vanmam 92).

Due to these types of exploitation, the upper caste people are benefitted what they want to do with Dalits. In Vanmam, Kumaresan Naicker aids the pallars to hide in his cattle shed. While the Pallars have been speaking about the generosity of Kumaresan Naicker comes there with police Inspector and the police Inspector asks the Pallars to nominally surrender a few men and return to their street. In the Pallar street, people has begun to settle in their houses and the normal position returns in the Pallar street. But the Parayars seem scattered that no one has returned to their houses. On the contrary, the
police have begun to arrest the Parayars who take refuge in the neighbouring villages. Consequently, Parayars have to search their hiding places again. After a long gap of time, when normal position returns to the colonies of Dalits, there remains a little fear within their minds about fisticuffs and fightings which lead to the killing of their own men.

Dalits are also politically exploited; the causes of Dalits and their inhuman sufferings are not usually addressed by the politicians. Our politicians do protest against the atrocities wreaked against the people across the world; for instance, the cause of Srilankan Tamils’ sufferings is addressed almost by all the political parties in Tamilnadu. We stage protest in Tamilnadu for the suffering of Tamil people in other lands. Whereas Dalits are considered as aliens and their cause for liberation is not supported by the politicians, but Dalits are exploited by the politicians in the sense that whenever there nears the election the politicians march into Dalit colonies and they meet Dalits for the sake of getting votes. At that time the political parties offer innumerable and falsified promises to Dalits. “Here all the politicians want to do politics on the basis of identity”* (Rajangam 9), for making them survive in the political arena and to profit themselves. Dalits relate politics to their life; they are not able to differentiate the issues connected with politics and with life. They are very naïve and easily gullible. Bama portrays their attitude towards politics, their gullibility and realization of their exploitation by the Indian politicians. Bama reminds about the time of election. It seems that each person has his own view about politics. For Bama’s questions, her grandma answers, “I stamped on the picture of the man ploughing” also she brings out the reason for that saying, “. . . it’s only because of the plough and bullock that our stomachs are going to be filled without them our lives are nothing but dust”. (Bama: Sangati 99).

* Translated by the scholar
Through this thought provoking observation, uttered by Bama’s grandma, one can find that the Dalits are mostly farmers tilling the ground and growing crops. Election commission allocates emblems to each political party as a mark of identity whereas these ignorant Dalits relate it to life and their occupation.

Dalits also relate politics to religion. In Sangati, Bama talks mostly about the Dalit Christians who believe in the triune existence of God. When confronted by a question of why they should not vote for communists Anandamma overs, “. . . those fellows say there is no God. We say we believe in the one and only true God, . . .” (Bama: Sangati 99). Communists are the people who once have not believed in the existence of supernatural elements and have worked for delivering the people from all types of bondages including religious bondage. All these things show the ignorance of the Dalit women. This type of ignorance is promptly utilized by the Indian politicians for their benefit of getting votes during the time election by paying a lip service; Dalits are considered only as the vote banks. When they realize that they are exploited by the political parties based on the vulnerability and unchanging living conditions, they are desolately left in existential agony observing, “who is going to change the writing on our foreheads? . . . whether it Rama who rules, or Ravana . . . our situation is always the same”. (Bama: Sangati 98). But they put an end to that that they again go behind the politicians whenever they approach for their beneficence. Consequently, they experience an everlasting pain and angst.

Dalits are ostracized and consequently, their relationship with other caste is in turmoil, because of which one can witness fisticuffs and fights between Dalits and other upper caste. In Karukku, Bama portrays an inter caste conflict between the Chaaliyars and Parayars over the cemetery issue. She also portrays how the police force which has to safeguard all people turns against Dalits and reduce them to the secondary position
supporting the Chaaliyars. Some of Parayar men has beaten up a Chaaliyar boy and the
Chaaliyar folk has lodged a complaint against the Parayar community, the infuriated
Parayar mob suddenly run towards cemetery and Bama, being a child of eleven
hesitatingly follows the mob to cemetery. On reaching cemetery, the mob moves towards
the Chaaliyar settlement throwing stones at the houses, the people hardly find any
retaliation from the Chaaliyars. So the children, accompanied the mob have thought that
the Parayars has won the battle and consequently rejoicing, whereas much to their
disappointment, the policemen has come out of the Chaaliyar settlement and have driven
the Parayars back “ruthlessly and mercilessly beating up those they caught” (Bama: Karukku
34). All the people begin to flee fearing for lives. The men run to the field to
hide there and “just lay down among the crops and held their breath” (Bama: Karukku
34). Police still drive the remaining men and have entered the village continuously
raining blows and the Parayar people are arrested and loaded in the lorry. The situation,
enumerated in the novel has dexterously caricatured to show how far it is problematic,
pathetic and afflictive to live in a society as Dalits, they have to vie even for their basic
existential needs. The government machinery is no exception in wreaking vengeance
against Dalits. There has been no enquiry, conducted by the police against the complaint,
lodged by the Chaaliyars. The police have begun to rain blows ruthlessly on Dalits
believing the complaint being true. Children and women have come fast to their home
and stayed locking inside and they heard the painful sound of their men, caused due to the
blows of police personnel. Policemen’s anti Dalit incumbency is well exemplified by the
novelist, Bama. “For the past few years, Puthia Thamizhgam party leader Krishnasamy
avers that there is a tentacle spread of some caste in the police department and the effect
of which is invariably reflected during the atrocities and the cases”* (Rajangam 9).

*Translated by the scholar
Only a few men have left, as they have hidden themselves in the mountain caves, fields and woods. The very existence of Dalits is problematised during the period of the fray, the schools have been closed. The atrocity of the police personnel has become vehement day by day.

The police enter the houses searching the hiding men. “They kicked open every door and looked inside all the rooms. They peeped into the bathing area” (Bama: Karukku 38). They have bruised the hiding people. Even women are not left. The police rain blows on women also. In the north street, while policemen has been beating up Mariappan’s son, a five rupee note has slipped from his pocket; his mother stoops to pick up the note and a policeman, “put his boot against her stomach and kicked her aside and took the money himself” (Bama: Karukku 37); Not only are the women physically harassed but also are sexually humiliated. The police use obscene language and swear them and they ask the women to entertain them during the nights as their husbands are not in their household; they have “winked at them and shoved their guns against their bodies” (Bama, Karukku 40). On all these, Dalits are not even free to cry, fearing the sound may induce the police come into their houses. Bama wants to cry out on seeing all these atrocities of police and suffering of Dalits whereas she is not allowed. Because any sound from a house may induce the police to enter the particular house. Consequently, she presses her throat so as to not to make any sound. They find no psychological outlet for the physical, mental and sexual suffering; such difficult is being a Dalit. For harassing and humiliating Dalits, the Chaaliyar folk have bribed the police personnel, as it is gossiped by the Dalit women. They say:

. . . the Chaaliyar folk invited some people known as the “Reserve Police” . . . butchered a sheep for them and arranged feast. They have taken oath to
destroy our boys, they say, so without counting the cost they are slaughtering sheep at the rate of two a day and feasting the police” (Bama: *Karukku* 36).

In this contentious passage, Bama not only brings to our notice that the policemen are bribed but also the luxurious and rich state of the Chaaliyar folk and also has contrasted it with the poverty and subordinate state of Dalits.

Bama picturizes some strategies, Dalits adopt to safeguard themselves from the police and their blows—the village head man locks himself in Bama’s house, some women reasons out the police by saying that a woman started labour pains, physical deformities like cold, fever and small pox, women have stayed in church during nights, some men hide themselves in the church belfry.

Bama explains the hardships they faced during exile and they also share the strategies, they undertake to come over the period of commotion Dalits usually take many strategies to safeguard themselves from Police atrocities and from the rioters. Michael Raju in *Vanmam* explains how he has held his life during commotion and when he has been searched by police.

I left the plough in the field, and let the cows free, knowing they would get back home anyway. Once it became dark, I wrapped my towel around my head and face and crept quietly towards the village. As I came near the village from the west, I saw policemen coming in my direction. Quickly I darted towards Parasurama Naickers haystacks which was nearby . . . I went into it pulled the hay over myself and stood still. The police have the rustling sound and came straight to the haystack. I felt barely alive . . . I held my breath . . . The haystacks were making me itch all over . . . and tickling my face, making me want to sneeze. How I wished I were already dead! . . . when it became really dark I slowly came out . . . but I found I couldn’t enter our street (Bama: *Vanmam* 99-100).
The Dalits have to run to the edges and corners in order to have their lives spared. They ought to take painstaking efforts, holding their breath which may become threaten to their life.

Even the children are psychologically much affected due to the subversion, suppression and humiliation and their psyche used to create such character, even in the games, they used to play; Dalits are not considered as super-ordinates but only as subordinates. Their psyche is made up of such stuff. Bama narrates another incident of games in which they play the role of shopkeeper and customer. The shopkeeper is Naadar and the customers are Dalits and they used to call the shopkeeper as “Mudalaali” (Bama: Karukku 56). In those days it is customary to call the upper caste people with respected phrases like, ‘Ayya’, ‘Saami’, ‘Maharaj’, ‘Mudalaali’ and so on.

Bama, here narrates her experience as a child. She also narrates about the games which she used to play along with her friends during their childhood. They have no gender differences in the days of their childhood, the boys and girls play together. Some of their games have life likeness. “Two or three boys would play of being Naicker. The rest of us would call them. ‘Ayya, Ayyaa’ and pretend to be their pannaiyaal. These boys would act as if they had a lot of power over us. They would call out to us ‘Yeppa, Yeppa’, humiliate us, and make us do a lot of work” (Bama: Karukku 56). Bama, here writes out her agony of being a Dalit.

Casteism plays a vital role in Indian society and is considered as a part of the people’s lives; it gives identity to all people in Indian society. Casteism invariably allocates the status of hierarchy at birth itself. This casteism makes many people “untouchables” who are subjected to innumerable atrocities by the members of grown up castes. Though many people like Gautama Buddha, Mahavira, Bharathiar and etc. oppose the operation of caste system, the caste system continues to prevail in various forms. In
that system Dalits are the most affected that they do not find any place devoid of ostracism, humiliation and oppression by the name of caste. “Dalits in India have been socio-economically oppressed, culturally subjugated and politically marginalized for centuries” (Shah 14). Dalits are denied access to many places like common well, schools, hospitals hotels, temples, etc., because of caste discrimination that perennially exist in Indian society, despite the constitution of India prohibits the practice of untouchability by any form.