CHAPTER 3
HARD PATHS AND HARDY WOMEN

The depiction of the status of women in the ancient Indian literature seems to be quite contradictory that it sometimes provides a high acclaim to women and sometimes a degrading position. One can identify invocations addressed to God, accompanied by His wife, the goddess which essentially signifies women are treated equal to men. Women have enjoyed respect and reverence during the ancient days. Several literary texts and inscriptions pervasively remark the status of women in the ancient days, even women have owned properties and they have been heads of the social organizations. Women are considered as the primal energy in the ancient literature. The concept of women as Shakthi, the primal energy force is depicted in the great Indian epic Mahabharata which also delineates that the deterioration of women brings destruction—Gauravas have been destroyed, since they have humiliated Draupadi. The plethora of God and Goddesses has instilled respect and reverence in individual’s mind—Ardhanareeswarar, an idol of Lord Shiva and Shakti as two halves which emphasizes the equality of male and female is highly worshiped.

In Vedic society women have been allowed to do all ceremonies like men; there is no seclusion of women from domestic and social affairs.

The Aryans, when they come to India imported a social system in which women found an honoured place from the Rigveda and other sacred books of the time, it would appear that girls, like boys, were allowed to run free, without the cloying over-protection which was to be the feature of the puranic age. . . . Some attained positive intellectual eminence, . . . (Prabhu 216)
Even women take part in religious ceremonies and man’s life cannot become a spiritual whole, unless he is accompanied by his wife. The women have actively involved in the family sacrifices along with their men. She has seen in her own hut in the sacrificial compound. In the early Vedic period women used to chant hymns in temples, they have enjoyed power and freedom in the Vedic society.

Later stages of Indian social history witness that there have been a gradual decline and degradation of women; many restrictions were gradually imposed on the freedom of women. Men have taken upon themselves to think and plan for their women, and consequently, women have become to be marginalized; they have lost their pomp and power. Women have been restrained from attending social functions and religious ceremonies: they are forbidden to learn and chant Vedic hymns.

Manu in his social code, *Laws of Manu* observes a controversial statement on the status of women in Indian society; he avers at one point:

Fathers, brothers, husbands, and brother-in-law who wish for great good fortune should revere these women and adorn them. The deities delight in places where women are revered, but where women are not revered all rites are fruitless. Where the women of the family are miserable, the family is soon destroyed, but it always thrives where the women are not miserable. Homes that are cursed by women of family who have not been treated with due reverence are completely destroyed, as if struck down by witchcraft. (48)

Later in the same text, he considers women as sensory objects which are to be guarded. He observes:

Men must make their women dependent day and night and keep under their own control these who are attached to sensory objects. Her father guards her in
childhood. Her husband guards her in youth, and her sons guard her in old age. A woman is not fit for independence. (197)

This safeguarding of women is the cause of their perennial suffering and subjugation. Though one can say that women are the weaker sex that need be guarded by the male counterparts, the inherent meaning in the above code of Manu unveils subordination of the status of women; moreover, Manu considers women as sensory objects. This kind of codes prescribed exclusively for women becomes the impediment in the path of their growth and this gradual deterioration of women eventually led into their secondary position in domestic and social affairs. After the impact of the western education, they organize their own rally of women liberation organizations for their upliftment and empowerment.

Being a Dalit woman is worse than being a woman, being a woman is a biological phenomenon, whereas being a Dalit woman is social as well as biological bondage. Upper caste women are an adjunct to man and a slave in the household. Dalit women have to additionally face outside world which is necessitated by economic deprivation and an immediate need to earn livelihood. Their subjugation is acuter. They are treated with contempt by the upper caste women. They are subjugated in their own family; they are economically and sexually exploited by the landlords. These myriad forms of subjugation are the qualitative difference between the Dalit and non-Dalit women.

Even the women liberation organizations do not raise a voice of opposition against the atrocities, wreaked on Dalit women by the male chauvinists. The problems of Dalit women are not included in their agitations, therefore Indian society witnesses a need for a separate movement for emancipations of Dalit women. Both the organizations—Dalit and non-Dalit women organizations unveil different and distinct problems, Dalit women liberation activists seem to address the caste based violations wreaked against Dalit
women in addition to the regular problems of women. The analysis of gender issues on the basis of material conditions of class, caste and race inevitably ends in sentimentality, as Sharmila Rege observes:

Since many of the vocal feminists of 1970s were white middle class and university-educated, it was their experience, which came to be universalized as “women’s experience.” Thus sweeping statements such as “all women are niggers” and “all women are dalits” were made. The ambivalence of the left towards women’s issues was thus countered by an assertion that women are essentially connected with other women; the “subjective experiences of knowledge” became the basis of theorizing the universal experience of womanhood. Experience thus becomes the basis for personal politics as well as the only reliable methodological tool for defining oppression. From such an epistemological position, there was either a complete invisibility of experiences of dalit women or best only a token representation of their voices. There was thus a masculinisation of dalithood and savarnisation of womanhood, leading to classical exclusion of dalit womanhood. (90 – 91)

Hence Dalit women have to fight for their own rights.

Not only the women dominated modern feminist organizations but also the male dominated Dalit liberations organizations have left in lurch the Dalit women; they only concentrate on the general problems related to caste. In this connotations, Anupama Rao writes, “The women’s movement has in its enthralment of ‘sisterhood’ failed to note the ‘caste’ factor while the Dalit movement has remained patriarchal and sees the Dalit women’s oppression merely as a caste oppression” (4). Dalit women caught in the multilayered and multi-structured ostracism within and outside their community like gender discrimination, economic and sexual exploitation, domestic violence and so on.
Gender disparity is a significant phenomenon of Indian society regardless of the caste and socio-economic status of people. Generally, the boy children are very much cared; even the birth of girl child is considered as a curse. In many parts of our society, the birth of a boy child is still celebrated and if a girl child is born, people go to the extent of poisoning the child to death. Such discrimination is shown even at birth. In this connection, Sudhir Kakkar observes, “At birth of a son drums are beaten in some parts of the country, conch-shells, blown in others and the midwife paid lavishly, while no such spontaneous rejoicing accompanies the birth of a daughter” (58). Every literature by women writers faithfully portrays this patriarchal attitude of Indian society and Bama also details on gender discrimination observing, “. . . in our village, they didn’t make any difference between boys and girls at birth. But as they raised them, they were more concerned about the boys than girls” (Bama: Sangati 3). Bama brings out this type of gender discrimination prevalent in her village. In all aspects, the people show disparity and the girl child becomes less privileged. Bama’s grandma says that if a boy child cries, the mother rushes at once and feeds the child, but it is not so in the case of the girl child. Even in feeding the child the mother shows such discrimination. Bama narrates an account of discrimination that is shown by mothers towards their children in her novel Sangati. Once when Lourdu, a neighbouring woman has been playing dice-game, Muukkamma another lady announces her that her son is crying, lying in the cradle. She says:

‘Ei, sister-in-law Lourdu, haven’t you got any common sense at all? There’s your son screeching like a crow, having pissed all over the cradle-cloth. And here you are chucking a dice around. If it were a girl at least, you could leave her to cry. But how can you come away, leaving your son bawling by himself?’ (Bama: Sangati 31)
As soon as Lourdu hears the words, she flees to take care of the infant. Here one can note that a child whether it is a boy or a girl it is the duty of the mother to quieten, people discriminates between boys and girls even as infants and they pronounce a reason for that, it is the boy who has to look after the parents during the old age and the girls are prone to be married off to others.

When the boys have illness they are brought to the hospital whereas the girl child is not taken to the hospital. Everything is done half-heartedly in the case of a girl child. The boys are respected; they are allowed to eat as much as they need and can run off to play, But a girl child is forced to work at home all the time like “cleaning vessels, drawing water, sweeping the house, gathering firewood, washing clothes and so on” (Bama: Sangati 7), because society views girls as a source of misery and boys as the saviour of the family. Indian society is conceptually male centred and male dominated since the advent of Aryans. Consequently, it imposes many mandatory rules and regulations to girls and women in order to restrict their public participation. All the time girls are deemed to be in home and not allowed to go out. Even the games girls used to play are designed as indoor games such as ‘thattangal’ and ‘thayam’; boys play ‘kabadi’ and ‘chellanguchi’ or marbles which are outdoor games. If a girl plays the games of the boys, the society abuses her saying, “who does she think she is? She’s just like a donkey, look. Look at the way she plays boys games” (Bama: Sangati 7). Even Bama’s grandma in Sangati cares for her grandson only. When she brings something to eat from the field such as cucumber or mango, she usually searches for her grandson and not Bama or the other granddaughters and the granddaughters will get “the skin, the stones and such; she gave the best pieces to the boys” (Bama: Sangati 7-8).

Education is the liberating force; it liberates people from all bondages and endows them with courage and strength to perform anything. Women also need such education to
relieve themselves from the social bondages or slavery, whereas in most of the villages
the girls are not allowed to go to school as soon as they attain puberty. The grandma in
Sangati advises Bama’s mother, “As soon as she gets her periods, you stop her from
studying, hand her over to some fellow or the other and be at peace” (Bama: Sangati 9).
Among the villagers there is a grotesque custom that they seek a man’s hand in marriage
very early for the girl children as soon as she attains puberty, since having a girl child at
home even after the attainment of puberty is considered as an additional and unnecessary
responsibility and burden, and also they think that it is insecure to keep such girls. And
there is also some tittle-tattle among the people about the unmarried women and the
grandmother observes, “Keeping young women at home is like keeping a fire going in on
belly” (Bama: Sangati 9-10), and she explains that the Bama’s mother and aunt have been
married very early.

Usually in villages women are not allowed to study beyond a level, also because
of the fear that a suitable boy may not be available for marriage. People are compelled to
marry within their caste and the search of the suitable bridegroom becomes very difficult
if the bride is educated. Consequently, Bama is put in such a muddle and her family
decides to stop her from going to school saying, “it would be difficult for me to find a
husband in my community” (Bama: Karukku 74). At this juncture, a nun who has taught
Bama intervenes and smoothen the hurdle to make Bama go further in her studies. The
nun has emphasized the need for girls’ education and insisted the Bama’s mother not to
stop her from going to school. The nun is very humane that she moves on to the extent of
pawning her own earring in order to meet out the expenses of paying the college fees,
knowing the pathetic situation of Bama that her family is unwilling to send her further to
college.
Not only in homes, but also in churches women are ostracized. Bama explains that boys are allowed to enter sacristy, whereas girls are not allowed. Even when there is a play put up during the festival days, the girls are not allowed to play any role. Instead, the boys, dressed up like girls play that role. Bama also explains how desperately the boys have searched for a light skinned boy to play the role of infant Jesus but finally, they have found a girl baby only to play the particular role. Ironically the role of Mother Mary in the play has been played by a boy dressed up like a lady.

Bama portrays the character of Bhakkiyam, the seventeenth child by birth order in her family and is well known for joviality and skirmishes. Even at church, the jovial attitude of Bhakkiyam is astoundingly revealed. It is very common in church for the people to offer grains and pulses depending on the season for the use of the priest. Only women carry these offerings; they go through the aisle in a queue to offer the grains or pulse. One day Bhakkiyam also stands in a queue without having any offerings and others poke at her for empty-handedly standing in the row. At last, when her turn comes, Bhakkiyam takes out a hen concealed in her sari and gives it to the priest. Everyone laughs, when the hen has flapped its wing furiously and as the priest has loosened it, the hen has gone away. Some boys have dreaded and have caught it. But it is only the women who have been scolded for laughing at church. “‘Why are you laughing in church? Disrespectful donkeys! Don’t you have any sense of what is right?’” (Bama: Sangati 35), someone from the men’s side observes. During the festival times, usually men sing songs over the mike; even when some women are dexterous at singing, they are not allowed to sing. They have even stopped the performance of Kummi.

Bama explains the games that boys and girls are used to play, when they have been little children; games reflect some amount of their life they use to observe around them. Even in games, boys dominate girls. “When we played ‘buses’, there were always
boys at the start and finish of the rope as driver and conductor, who allowed the girls to enter in the middle, and shouted at them. And when we played husbands and wives, they were the ones in authority; they took the roles of policemen and shop owners” (Bama: Sangati 31).

Bama explains how girls are humiliated, when they indulge themselves in love with another caste men which are vehemently opposed, that too if a boy marries out of his caste, people will not bother but in case of women marrying out of her caste they make chaos. Once a girl has fallen in love with a Pallar boy; the girl belongs to Parayar community. The girl has been beaten up by her father and brothers. Bama writes, on the condition of the girl and the torments, she received in the hands of her father and her brother thus:

. . . her brother, caught her by her hair . . . and dragged her in right from the street.

He kept on lifting her by the hair and smashing her down against the floor. Her forehead was broken and bruised and blood poured over her face. While she was cowering, unable to bear the pain, he pulled her by the hair so roughly that it came off in bunches. He kicked her in the ribs again and again until she couldn’t even breathe. Her father came rushing up when he saw what was going on. I thought he must surely be coming to pull the boy away. Instead, he brought a piece of firewood and aimed four blows at her. (Bama: Sangati 107)

Everything is for the simple cause that the girl loves a boy belonging to Pallar caste. It is only a worthless cause which causes the girl almost dying.

Even the church is not supporting the cause. The priests preach of Jesus Christ as the embodiment of love and also they say, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (St. Luke 6: 36). But some priests are very cunning and cruel in nature that they are not ready to love, forgive and to be merciful on human beings. When the case of the girl has
been brought before the parish priest; the priest patiently listens to the entire case, and then at the mass, he has begun to ridicule the girl. Also “he spoke about her as if she had been behaving like a whore, cast suspicion on her morals, met her in a room alone and leered at her made false promise to her, and kept her running between church and her home like a dog; but he never organized a wedding or anything for her” (Bama: Sangati 108). She can succeed in getting a letter of permission for arranging the wedding in another parish only through recommendation. The marriage has been conducted whereas both the families have turned hostile towards them and the couple has to lead a secret life. Those people believe, “. . . if a man marries outside his caste, it is nothing. But if a girl marries outside her caste, people do shout like anything as if the honour and pride of the whole community is lost” (Bama: Sangati 109).

Family is constructed only by women; women know to manage the emotions of the family members. The family without women may easily be deconstructed. Even when the main controller of a family, usually the eldest women among the family members dies the family is again maintained and reconstructed only by another woman in the particular family. Bama brings out of such episode in Sangati. Bama’s aunt, on dying, has left behind her two daughters; Seyakodi, six years of age and Marriamma of sixteen years. Though sixteen years of age, Mariamma has not attained puberty and the entire village has tittle-tattle on this and this incident worried the grandma further. Menstruation and attainment of puberty is a natural process, but the people in the village do hoax about the people who do not attain puberty and menstruate. Consequently, the grandmother takes Mariamma to the hospital run by the convent. Here comes the description of the upper caste women. The grandma says “. . . each one is like a Mahalakshmi, a goddess every time you look at them, their hair is sleek with oil and they are wearing fresh flowers” (Bama: Sangati 12). She consults the doctor and brings home some medicines and
explains the position of the nuns and the pigs, reared up in the convent. She says they have a plenty of food. The nuns look as white as anything, and the pigs they rear too are very white and it is fed with wheat and milk powder. Madathi, a neighbouring women, on listening to these things brings out her pang of angst saying, “Here we are, working away like dogs before we can afford to buy wheat and milk powder from the priests and look at the good luck that falls upon those pigs” (Bama: Sangati 13). Here Bama wants to bring out the anguish that Dalits toil in the fields all through the hours of a day and they are paid only a meagre amount as coolie; Using that meagre amount they are fed to half of their stomach with gruel and some onions or green chillies whereas in the convent, even the pigs have a very good food like wheat and milk powder. The position of Dalits becomes more worsened than that of the pigs; pigs enjoy a very pleasant life whereas Dalits work like dogs and cows and are exploited. It is this Mariamma who goes to the field to work and look after her younger sister and her father who is a drunkard and always remains at home without financially contributing to the development of the family.

Indian society pays no respect to the works done by women in her family and it assigns women an inferior position to men regardless of the nature of human habitat i.e. rural or urban. Hindu scriptures, in the later days have confined women to domestic chores. Women are fondled, loved and revered in the domestic domain, whereas there are many social, legal and moral handicaps in the Indian society. They have to lead a routine life of childbearing, rearing, cooking, praying and fasting for the well being of the family members. The scriptures specifically say that a woman has to be maintained and protected initially by her parents and then by her husband and sons, respectively during the period of her childhood, youth and old age. But there is no such confinement to men in Indian society. Though the constitution acclaims equal rights legally, Which has been
culminated by the fervent struggle of great men, women still suffer in the male-dominated patriarchal Indian society.

Women are often exploited saying what has been written and said in the scriptures and society always shows examples, stereotyped in the characters like Sita, Savithri, Draupadi and so on, and that they always talk about *pativrata*, by which the Hindu dharma means that woman is someone who reflects her husband’s state of mind shares his distress and delight, grows sick when he is absent and dies for him and with him. Women are prescribed with some codes of conduct to be blameless. The blamelessness also includes doing the domestic works without any fail. Sumitra Bhave observes:

I feel that a woman’s character must be blameless. I am not talking only of her relationship with men, but also of her devotion to duty and her moral attitudes. A woman of good character influences her family and by extension the whole society for the better. Many people make the mistake of thinking that the woman who is loyal to her man and has nothing to do with any other man is a woman of good character . . . A courageous woman, a woman who is willing to bear hardships for her family who struggles hard to impress a sense of moral values on her children that is the woman I would call a woman of character. (185)

Women are beaten up like anything in the households by their husband, even for their slightest mistakes. The grandmother narrates the story of Anantamma who has cooked a meal of crab. She has brought from fields and has eaten before it is served to her husband. When the man turns up home and knows this, he has beaten up Anantamma like anything. It is customary in the Indian families to serve the food first to the husband and then the woman has to eat the leftover.

Women are subjected to domestic violence more often. Domestic violence can present itself in multitudinous ways, each being unique in causing the differing sense of
victimization. Husbands occasionally beat their wives, as if she were an animal, with a belt or with a stick and nobody can stop him. In Dalit communities, it becomes very common to note that men beat women even for no reasons and on sometimes the violence may lead to the death of the concerned woman. The women encounter innumerable sufferings and Bama’s grandma tells her how her aunt has died because her husband beat her to death. The grandma brings out her anguish saying, “I reared a parrot and then handed it over to be mauled by a cat. Your periappan actually beat her to death. My womb, which gave birth to her, is still on fire. He killed her so outrageously, the bastard. . . . Heaven alone knows what kind of death he’ll die” (Bama: Sangati 10). The grandmother tells Bama that the man is crazy with lust; he needed her body every single night; when she has refused, he beat her with the available material and once with a rice-pounder, made of stone. Not only in Dalit communities but in other communities too or to say women in general are harassed by men and they also expect women not to retaliate with words or by beating and they claim, “She is my wife, I can beat her or even kill her if I want” (Bama: Sangati 10).

Bama narrates, in Sangati episode of the humiliation of ‘Thaayi’, a woman of her caste who is light skinned and is beaten up heavily everyday by her husband. “Thaayi’s husband was beating her up again and again with the belt from his waist. She did even have a chattai on. Everywhere the strap fell on her light skin, there were bright red weals” (Bama: Sangati 42). The man who humiliates his wife claims that the wretched fellow is his wife and he has the right to beat or to kill; he believes that a wife is a slave. When another man comes in support of her, the fellow sexually abuses her that she may have sexual relationship with that particular man. Thaayi’s husband is not an exception while scolding her, “‘you common whore, you, any passing loafer will come in support of you, you mother fucker’s daughter. You will go with ten men!’” (Bama: Sangati 43). On
seeing these things, Bama is bewildered and she complains her mother of this episode and her mother says her that once he has cut off her hair and has made it hung over their gate. “When my mother said this, a variety of emotions grew up in my heart: anger, excitement, fury, pride, resentment and hatred” (Bama: Sangati 44).

The fights and fisticuffs between husband and wife in a Dalits’ settlement become a common affair to witness. Everyday there will be some quarrel even for the meanest reasons. Bama narrates a quarrel between a pregnant lady and her husband; the lady has demanded the wages of the man, as he drinks alcohol every day and eats in the coffee stalls and food stalls with all the money he has earned. He has chased the lady with a firewood on his hand to beat her without having any regard for her being pregnant; he has been intervened by some men in the chavadi but he manages to get her by her hair and drags her in the street to his house and beats her up locking the house.

Women need undertake some strategies to escape from the family violence wreaked by men on them. Bama brings out a situation whereby a woman Rakkamma by name has done a filthy act to escape from her husband’s beating. Once when Bama has been eating the ragi-kali with intestine gravy Mariamma who is pregnant, also joins them. Soon another lady, Chadachi by name joins and they gossip about the fight between Rakkamma and Packiaraj, a newly married couple living in the nearby street and the commotion based on the incident. Bama soon leaves to witness the quarrel. There is exchange of obscene words by both Rakkamma and Packiaraj. Rakkamma used to retaliate with words against Packiaraj and infuriated Packiaraj says, “Is she a woman, to talk to me like this. The savage mundane. Keep all your arrogance in your parents’ house in Kuppachipatti” (Bama: Sangati 61). Indian society assigns passive roles to women and it expects women to be passive whatever atrocities and violence are wreaked against them. Society usually disgusts the woman who retorts and retaliates the husband. There is a
crowd of people watching the quarrel. Here Bama explains the familial violence against women; the atrocity that men unleash against women is explained. while the quarrel is on, Packiaraj, “dragged her by her hair, pushed her down, and kicked her lower belly” and Rakkamma in retaliation “got up after that kick and wailed out aloud. . . . She lifted up her sari in front of the entire crowd gathered there (Bama: Sangati 61). It may be obscene and a woman is not expected to behave like this in front of others; the society may scorn at and scold such woman but there is no way for the woman to escape from such familial atrocity. “. . . it was only after she screamed and shouted and behaved like that he let her go. I realized that she acted in that way because it was her only means of escape” (Bama: Sangati 62).

The male ego is the prominent cause for the domestic violence on women, along with the humiliations they have to bear day in and day out on the hands of upper castes. Their suppressed anger and frustrations are revealed in their words and in their activities, Since they are constantly oppressed by powerful people around them. Kamble in this connections writes, “Their male ego gave them some sense of identity ‘I am a man, I am superior to women, I am somebody. If the whole village fortunes us, we will torture our women” (156-57). Dalit women also retaliate to some extent to domestic violence they meet out, but their voice is muted by the male dominant definitions and restrictions of femininity. This episode clearly portrays a Dalit woman’s experience to come out of her husband’s blows.

The very same experience is narrated by Sumitra Bhave in Pan on Fire. Rukmani a character narrates what has happened to her during an encounter with her husband which seems to be more repugnant.

But I am telling you a woman finds it a terrible nuisance and my husband never explained anything either. Just grabbed like this and I ran out of the room yelling.
. . around midnight it was my husband who came in and made straight for me by
the neck. I screamed still I burst and ran into the street. . . . After two times, my
husband caught me in the street and beat me senseless. (81)

Dalit society is essentially and principally matriarchal; women take an active and
leading role in the daily transaction of business; women also work to yield money for
their convenient and comfortable living, whereas in the upper caste families, women do
not come out and go to the fields to work. To Bama’s questions, her grandmother
answers, “If they stay at home, how are they going to get any food? Even their cows and
calves will die of hunger then” (Bama: Sangati 6), and she concludes, “we have to labour
in the fields as hard as men do, and then on top of that, struggle to bear and raise our
children” (Bama: Sangati 6).

Bama explains the pathetic plight of her grandmother, who usually works for a
Naicker family. “she’d rise before cock-crow at two or three in the morning, draw water,
see to the household chores, walk a long distance to the Naicker’s house, work till sunset,
and then come home in dark and cook a little gruel for herself” (Bama: Karukku 49). The
grandmother has also served as a kothachi, who supplies personnel to work in the fields.
She goes to the landowners’ houses early in the morning and knows the available works
and distributes work to the people of her street and collects wages and distributes them in
the evening.

Dalit women are hard working and they are also the breadwinners of their family.
Usually, when women work hard in the fields, there is segregation in allotting work on
the basis of gender like men sow seeds by ploughing and women carry the baskets filled
with seeds. There are numerous jobs in the field for women just like planting saplings,
weeding, reaping and so on which require equal strength of labour as their male
counterparts do but for which women are usually paid minimum wages less than that of men. Rekha Ojha observes:

In most of the state Dalit women workers are paid unequal wages for equal work; it means Dalit women are paid lower wage for a similar work than that of male workers. In most of the state minimum wage act is introduced but minimum wage rate is not provided to Dalit women workers. (82)

When these works are not available, since they are all seasonal, they go into the forest to gather firewood and sell them in the streets; thereby they earn to fill their bellies. Poor economic condition is one of the reasons that make Dalit women as slaves to the upper caste people. When there are no works in the agricultural field they have to go to the landowner’s house for household works to yield revenue for their families. They have to cross a hard and difficult path in course of their lives.

In agricultural field they get seasonal employment in planting, harvesting etc. . . . Concentration of women workers in such fields accords them the status of family workers and the consequent low wages, more work and an exploitative atmosphere. In addition to this, they have to collect fuel, fodder and water for family consumption. (Singh 183)

During the work women also encounter many difficulties in workplace related to their job. Bama brings out the fate of a character, Mariamma by name in Sangati. Soon after the attainment of puberty which has no function as the other upper caste households do, Mariamma has gone to work. The youths go for digging well; it is a tiresome and troublesome job including the cracking of dynamite to break the rocks. Men are involved in cracking dynamite and women go down and bring up gravel filled in baskets; both the works are equally tough and also hazardous, but as usual men are paid more than women. Women are exploited in such a way wherever you turn and compare the wages received
by men and women, in villages even at present times women are paid less. Bama says even in “tying up firewood bundles, the boys always got five or six rupees more. And if the girls tied up the bundles but the boys actually sold them, they got the better price” (Bama: *Sangati* 18).

Bama narrates two incidents which involve hazard in the workplace and because of which the workers are affected. First, while carrying the gravel up from the pit Mariamma’s foot slipped and fell down. She has got serious injuries all over the body and has been admitted to the nearest hospital. It has taken seven or eight months for her to recover. In the second incident narrated by Bama in *Sangati* two young girls, helping to sow seeds in the field has died because the seed-gram is mixed with chemical fertilizers and the girls have eaten the poisonous seeds and have died; the landowner has not even warned them.

In the Dalit communities, all the family members need work in order to earn their livelihood; even children are not exempted. Children cannot enjoy the period of their childhood. They are not able to feed on the things that fascinate them. In the story, *Vannam* Kuttiyamma cites her father who comes far from her and goes near to him to demand fifty paisa, she hints, “I’m going to buy some mangoes . . . that the squirrels have chewed” (Bama: *Vannam* 4). Usually in the villages, one may find the good mangoes, that are sold for high rates and the squirrels-chewed mangoes are also sold at half the rate of good mangoes. Bama here talks of the predicament of a little girl of eleven years old Seyarani who is nicknamed as Maikkanni. She is the eldest in their house; there are five younger children, three boys and two girls. Her father is a womanizer, who lives with another woman her mother is pregnant for the seventh time. She looks after all the household works. She is not allowed to go to school, since the entire family depends on the meagre income earned by the little child.
The day Maikkanni learned to walk, she started to work as well . . . From the time she woke up, she sprinkled the front yard with water and swept it, and then carried on with all the housework: swept the rest of the house, scrubbed the cooking pots, collected water, washed clothes, gathered firewood, went to the shops cooked the kanji . . . whenever her mother has a baby, Maikkanni goes off to our neighbouring town to work in the match factory. . . . At that time they managed entirely on what Maikanni earned. (Bama: Sangati 70)

She stoically accepts her fate. There are many like Maikanni who toil from their childhood. They are not able to even enjoy their childhood “throughout her childhood the little girl suffered bullying and curtailment of activity, but none the less she felt herself to be an autonomous individual . . . her future passivity was only a dream” (Beaviour 350). Maikanni is not able to even dream of her future.

Maikkanni explains how difficult it is to work in the match factory and because of which she has got pain in her guts. “The stink from the drugs they use pulls at my guts” (Bama: Sangati 71). The match factories accommodate the children to work, though there are stringent laws prohibiting child labour. For that painful work, each labourer manages to get forty to fifty rupees each. The factories pay only less amount compared to the work they wreak. Maikkanni brings her wages on every Saturday and hands it over to her mother regularly; anyhow sometimes her father waylays her. At the workplace the children are harassed physically and mentally; they are beaten up heavily by the employers for no reason. The factories are mostly ill facilitated that they do not provide the labourers adequate basic amenities including drinking water and toilets. Sometimes the children are sexually harassed. “In our streets the girls hardly ever enjoy a period of childhood. Before they can sprout three tender leaves, so to speak they are required to behave like young women, looking after the housework, taking care of babies, going out
to work for daily wages” (Bama: *Sangati* 75). Maikkanni is an archetype of Dalit children’s suffering.

Bama and her grandmother go to the field to collect firewood. On that occasion, the grandmother warns Bama of the sexual assault of the upper caste men. If the upper caste men see the Dalit women doing any work in solitude, they will rape her. The Dalit women are raped not because they are women, but because they are Dalits. Bama explains how Mariamma has been sexually exploited by the landowner Kumarasamy Naicker while returning after collecting firewood. On her way back the path has scorched, since bare-footed. She has leaned the bundle on a tree and has gone to the well, owned by an upper caste man of the village, Kumarasamy to drink water in order to quench her thirst. At that time the landowner has been in the pump-set shed, he snatches her hand and pulls her inside, the little girl has got frightened and unwittingly escapes. She comes to the village and tells her friends of this incident, they also warn her not to let anybody know of this because “it is you who will be called a whore” (Bama: *Sangati* 20) and also they express their anguish over the social system saying, “The landowner is an evil man, fat with money. He’s upper caste as well. How can we even try to stand up to such people” (Bama: *Sangati* 20). They have gone together and have brought back the firewood bundle. The landowner Kumarasamy, being afraid that his reputation may fall down, if the girl tells the village the truth, has gone to the village headman and castigates Mariamma of having sex with Manikkam, another lad belonging to the Parayar community. In villages it is very common to one to witness a headman for each community separately. It is this man who usually redresses the issues connected with those people by calling out a village Panchayat. Among the Dalit communities, it is customary to hold the village Panchayat meeting at night, since all through the day Dalits have to toil very hard for their daily bread and butter.
MulkRaj Anand also explains an incident of the same sort wherein Pundit Kalinath, a Brahmin priest calls Sohini, an untouchable belonging to chakkiliyar caste to clean the lavatories in temple. During the time of her cleaning, fascinated by her ravishing beauty, he fondles her breast and tries to molest her. She screams for people to assist her to relieve her from the sexual clutches of Pundit Kalinath. At once the priest shouts at her saying that she has polluted him by her touch. The priest has not only disgraced Sohini but also captivated the sympathy of the crowd. A man, who thinks that accidental touch of a Dalit pollutes him, touches a Dalit girl that too for an ignoble purpose. Sohini’s brother Bakha, unable to wreak vengeance on an upper caste man expresses his sympathy to her sister saying, “My poor sister! How can she show her face to the world after this? . . . why was she born a girl in our house to bring disgrace upon us” (Anand: Untouchable 65). Bama’s characters, Mariamma and Kumarasamy resemble Mulk Raj Anand’s Sohini and Pundit Kalinath respectively. The fire in the words of Bakha is the fire that resembles the anger and anguish of Dalit youths that continues even after several decades.

Women are not allowed to speak in the Panchayat meetings; the little girl Mariamma in the Panchayat is beaten up again and again and not the boy and even the amount collected as penalty varies. The headman closes the proceedings of the Panchayat saying, “It is you female chicks who ought to be humble and modest. A man may do a hundred things and still get away with it. You girls should consider what you are left with, in your bellies” (Bama: Sangati 26). Such a disparity is shown against men and women. Mariamma’s father keeps a woman and he is not questioned by the Panchayat. Whatever the man does, the society remains mute and when it goes wrong and comes for a public discussion, the blame falls on the concerned woman at the end.
Bama is haunted by the memory of how Mariamma has been humiliated in front of all others. She questions her grandmother of why she has not gone to the Panchayat and talk to them backing up Mariamma with truth. The grandmother replies, “Big woman, small woman, nonsense! Once you are born a woman can you go and confront a group of four or five men? Should you ever do it? . . . Don’t you go dreaming that everything is going to change just because you’ve learnt a few letters of the alphabet” (Bama: Singati 28). The Grandmother used to say that women are not treated on par with men. Women need suffer right from their birth; whatever the men say is right and women always speak wrong. She also observes, “You’ll get kicked and beaten and trampled on for your pains” (Bama: Singati 29).

When Mariamma with her younger sister goes to work in the field, People are used to tittle-tattle of her over the incident happened in the village Panchayat. She is criticised for no good cause. She feels heartbroken and frustrated. Even women do not show any compassion. The grandma is kept in the state of bewilderment over the marriage of Mariamma. She has an idea of finding a partner to marry Mariamma and proposes the idea to Mariamma’s father. He scolds Mariamma for her alleged misbehaviour and finally concludes that this girl will be married to that boy, Manikkam. The grandma at first refuses but then accepts the idea; The girl is married to Manikkam. From that day onwards, “Mariamma suffered blows and kicks and beatings everyday, and was reduced to no more than a half-life or even less”. (Bama: Singati 42). Mariamma’s life becomes a prey for an upper caste man’s foolishness. Bama expresses her psychological agony. Family unleashes violence against women; marriage tortures. Women are subjugated and subordinated in married life. Simon De Beavoir in this connection says, “Marriage today . . . is forced much more tyrannically upon the young
girl . . . the women’s body is something he buys; to her he represents capital she is authorized to exploit” (450).

Indian society reckons women as the emblem of family honour and pride, which in turn leads to women’s becoming victimized of violence both within and outside the caste; Dalits are not exempted from this notion. Dalits undergo different from of degradation ranging from verbal abuse to physical assault which invariably takes the form of violence against their women. Dalit women are reprimanded by their landlords for dressing well and by the Dalit men. The landlords, on seeing a Dalit woman usually try to molest her. Rape and molestation are the new dimensions of caste war, used as weapons of reprisals and to crush the morale of the depressed section of people.

Though it is admitted that women belonging to all castes and classes face the danger of being raped and molested, in the case of Dalit women, the possibility becomes manifold because of the collocation of their powerlessness with their susceptibility to such attacks and also because of their need of their nature of dependency on the landlords for their economic necessities. The body of Dalit women becomes a site for assertion of caste based pride and domination.

Baburao Bagul’s famous short story, “Mother” also depicts how Dalit women are decimated under the crushing impact of caste and gender. The story movingly depicts the trauma of elegant Dalit widow caught in the quicksand of exploitations seen through the eyes of her own son, Pandu. Abetted by the taunts and comments of his classmates and neighbours of his mother’s supposed immoral behaviour, inculcates the patriarchal notions of purity of women and starts considering his mother as a whore, how he used to call her with. His reaction, on seeing his mother wearing new clothes, shows how even small children consider women as the honour of the family.
As he remembered one by one her actions of this morning, a slow fearful suspicion suddenly gripped his heart. It was true, then perhaps the overseer was her lover. His heart started beating loudly; he no longer felt like eating. To keep himself from worrying about it, he took his school books and slate and sat near the door, reading—his usual practice but he couldn’t concentrate. The thought of what the children at school would say to him the next day worried him he thought wildly of running away from the shame and dishonour. He now felt like rolling in the mud, weeping and wailing aloud. (Bagul 211-12)

The desire to keep a tight rein on the sexuality of women is adequately represented here through Pandu’s stream of consciousness in the story. Being a child he is not able to beat his mother and consequently, remains silent. The husband of the mother is a prototype of suspicion and jealousy who examines her body to find out the evidence of her infidelity. The beauty of the protagonist becomes the curse and the husband would prefer her to be as not to excite admiration from anyone. “His blows were always aimed at destroying her full blown beauty. He hoped she would loose a lot of blood, become lame or deformed, ugly and so in spite of his ebbing strength he would aim at her face her nose, head, eyes. Then he threatened to kill her when she was asleep” (Bagul 214). He even tries to brand her with a hot iron rod to make her unattractive. It is the extent of her tragedy and she is vilified by the neighbouring males and females alike. Her cry of anguish, “you all have tortured me—you, your father, the men in this street also women” (Bagul 217) brings out her inability to assail as she is a woman. Dalit women in the society are judged by the sexist standards of sexual behaviour and the society is not ready to believe her and also not ready to appreciate her innate qualities like kindness, devotion, love, sacrifice and etc.
Dalit women are not only subjugated for being women but also for being Dalits.

Bama’s grandmother delivers babies. In that village, there is no hospital; people at first try the home-made medicines and even when the illness is not abated, they move to hospitals only in the next day. Childbirth and confinement have held only at home. The entire village sends for Bama’s grandmother. Only the upper castes seem to be excepted, they will not send for the grandmother since “she was a paraichi” (Bama: Sangati 3). Her grandmother skilfully delivers the babies whatever difficulty the mother faces; whether it is the twin babies or the baby lay in the breech position or it is a premature birth.

Grandmother never charges for this service; some people give her betel leaves and betel nuts.

When the village meets turmoil because of some problems based on caste, it is the women who financially, morally and mentally support the entire village and their men who are hiding in the forests. Bama dexterously explains the activities of women during the days of commotion. Women, as usual go to the fields to work for earning their livelihood. On their way take gruel for their men hiding in the forest as the men are being searched to be arrested by the police. Even when they have been smart enough to manage without their men, from sunset, they have begun to be scared. They cook the gruel and go to the church to sleep with their children and some with cattle. Now nearly all men hidden at different places are arrested and the case is heard in Madurai Court. Parayar women collect money for the expenditure of the case. At that time a boy has died from the parayar group. The street is constantly patrolled by the police. It becomes impossible to the father to see his son’s body before cremation. Even then the women have managed to bring his father to the cremation by disguising him in a woman’s attire. The father is not able to cry aloud on seeing the boy’s dead body fearing that he may be arrested. To bring him the women has to cross the Mandavam fields, which is situated about four or five
miles from the Parayar street. People used to say that there is a ghost and Bama

describes,

. . . a fire breathing pisasu lived in the branches of that tree, keeping guard over
seven cauldrons of coins. It would try to lure the passer by . . . it stood very tall
between the sky and the earth. Its hair hung in long matted locks. Each nail had
grown as long and sharp as a knife. Its eyes glowed like torches. Smoke streamed
out of its mouth and nostrils (Karukku 42)

Such is the ghostly appearance of the ghost, and women have to pass through this tree to
bring the boy’s father to the crematorium. Ghost is more ferocious than the caste system;
people, possessed by the ghost are destined to die, and no other choice is left. But the
women manage to go into the forest passing through the ghost and the ghost has done no
harm to the women, though it is more ravening than the caste people. Bama symbolically
explains that even the ghost has the humane attitude that it has left the women in times of
such crisis whereas the caste people and the police are in no way have the humane
thoughts but ghostly temperament for Dalits that the police is roaming here and there to
arrest the boy’s father. When they are intercepted by the police, “the accompanying
women had immediately raised a funeral dirge, an oppari, wept aloud and said, ‘The sad
news has just reached us saami. We come from the next village to attend the funeral’”
(Bama: Karukku 43).

Bama explains in Vannam how women are ill treated by the police machinery.

During the days of commotion, when many persons have been killed, the policemen
threatened women; dragged them into the police van and moved them to the bazaar where
they have kept the corpses. On seeing the dead bodies, the women wail aloud but the
policemen do not “allow them to mourn” (Bama: Vannam 84). Then the policemen take
the women to the nearest police station. On hearing this, all the women shout angrily abusing the policemen.

You wouldn’t even let us cry our hearts out for our dead ones . . . and now where are you taking us da? Stop and let us off, you rascals! Don’t you have sisters . . . what hearts of stone you fellows have . . . not an ounce of sympathy . . . let us get down at once da . . . you sons of whores . . . bastards.’ (Bama: Vanmam 84-5)

The infuriated policemen spare their lathis to beat the women to keep them silent. The policemen wreak atrocity on all of the women. Sesurathnam’s wife Kaanika Mary is not an exception.

Sesurathnam’s wife was in the last stages of pregnancy. After seven or eight years of being childless, Chellakili was also expecting a baby. Even worse Chinnamma was holding a newborn infant, less than two months old in her arms. Most alarming of all Selva Mary had left her six month old baby asleep in the cradle at home, thinking she could soon get back after seeing the corpses in the bazaar. Now she was in a police cell, . . . Chellakili plucked up courage and described how they had been tricked and brought there . . . The Inspector looked at them and then he ordered that Sesurathnam’s wife, the mothers of infants and the old women should be released. Chellakili pleaded all she could. But he did not release her . . . one of the policemen kicked Chellakili in the lower belly with his boot . . . Another policemen hit her hard on her lower back with his lathi. Chellakili curled up and collapsed on the floor of the cell . . . She had an abortion right there. She had lost her baby. (Bama: Vanmam86)

The remaining ladies who are on the street are in stress of not knowing what they need do. None of them sleeps at night fearing the approach of the policemen by anytime.
On the next day more policemen have come to the village. Parayar women are very scared of policemen because “on the pretext of searching the houses for the men they would enter and talk vulgarly to the women and even misbehave with them” (Bama: Vanmam 88). Meanwhile, Rosemary gathers all the women and plans to get the women released from the jail; they decide to meet the priest and seek help from him. They go to the police station through the fields and meet the women, jailed. When the policemen come to know of this, they thrash the women and also curse them in the foulest terms. In the entire village, one can hear the shouting, screaming and wailing. Bama writes:

Not only the women but even the children, the old women, the young girls . . . all of them received blows. The policemen swing their lathis brutally . . . landing blows on people’s faces, arms, legs, bellies, thighs, anywhere and everywhere . . . They weren’t allowed to go anywhere either, even to the hospitals to get medicines for their wounds (Vanmam 89).

Even when they go into the houses to escape from being attacked by their lathi, the policemen enter each and every house and drag them out into the street and beat them. All the women gather in one house and sleep, fearing such raids.

Though ostracized, exploited, humiliated and sexually exploited in the Indian society, Dalit women are mentally and physically strong. When the policemen ask the women to take the corpses, the women arrange a bullock cart, and ready to take the corpses. Meanwhile, the police themselves bring the body and hand over them to the ladies. The women take the bodies to the burial ground and perform the cremation. “The policemen were astounded to see the women doing burial themselves.” (Bama: Vanmam 87). They even make arrangement for releasing the previously arrested women. Rosemary and few other women go to the station and visit the women in the police station and deliver them essential commodities. Some women are released and others have been
shifted to Madurai jail, on the accusation of setting fire to Pallars’ houses. Rosemary meets the priest and makes arrangements to get the women released. During those days women have not been allowed to go out and so they have not been able to earn their livelihood and suffer because of the unavailability of grains for making food. Through the help of a priest of the nearby village, they have managed to get rice also.

Dalit women are not usually broken down during the period of turmoil; they accept their fate and continue their work. They can manage to earn money. “They milked the cows and distributed the milk to all the houses. For two weeks, morning and evening everyone had only boiled milk whatever the police, the women managed to get around it. . . When anyone in the street died there was often no relative or friend to send for only the women were left to dig a grave and bury the body” (Bama: Vanmam 124).

Bama also speaks of the various strata of the suffering of Dalit women and brings out the reason for being possessed by ghosts and devils.

At home they are pestered by their husbands and children; in the fields there is back-breaking work besides the harassment of the landlord. When they come home in the evening, there is no time even to draw breath. And once they have collected water and firewood, cooked a kanji and fed their hungry husband and children, even then they can’t go to bed in peace and sleep until dawn. Night after night they must give into their husbands’ pleasure. Even if a woman’s body is wracked with pain, the husband is bothered only with his own satisfaction women are overwhelmed and crushed by their own disgust, boredom and exhaustion, . . . The stronger ones somehow manage to survive all this. The ones who don’t have the mental strength are totally oppressed; they succumb to mental ill-health and act as if they are possessed by peys. (Bama: Sangati 59).
Bama explains a quarrel between the couple, Chinnappan and Kaliamma. There is only exchange of words. Though the entire episode is presented in a comic way the words of Kaliamma seems to throw light on the predicament and existential anguish of women. “I too went and worked all day in the fields in the baking heat; I too came home half-dead. But after that just to make you a decent meal I’ve had to rush about for firewood and water. I’ve even had to go to the shops. Can’t you realize that I’m only an ordinary woman?” (Bama: Sangati 64). Dalit women are the slaves of the slaves. Their very existence is more problematized compared to that of the life of the upper caste women. They are doubly ostracized, doubly harassed and doubly humiliated. “I have to say that even if all women are slaves to men, our women really are the worst sufferers. It is not the same for women of other caste and communities. Our women cannot bear the torment of upper caste masters in the fields and at home they cannot bear the violence of their husbands” (Bama: Sangati 65). Bama, here compares the predicament of Dalit women with that of the upper caste women. Even the upper caste women also unleash torment on Dalit women. Landlords, upper caste women and Dalit men treat Dalit women with contempt as if they were different species from a different planet. Upper caste women are treated with contempt by their husbands at home; they are not allowed to come out of home; they spend all the day locking their doors and to say succinctly, they are the slaves of their husbands, whereas they present themselves to others as dignified persons. Whenever they come out, they present themselves with a stylish hair-knot decorated with screwpine flower. Bama compares the upper caste women to cobras; they stink the Dalit women and in their households, they become stamped upon for no rhyme or reason.

Amidst all their difficulties, Dalit women also enjoy some amount of freedom which is denied to other upper caste women. And also they contribute to the development
and preservation of the culture of this land. Women usually sing songs while planting paddy saplings, weeding or harvesting; they sing the lullaby to make their babies sleep in their cradles, dirges to their dead and kummi during the festival seasons. During the celebration of Christmas the girls are allowed to do kummi, Gnanapoo who has been watching from the crowd criticizes and she collects some women of her age and does on the stage. Gnanapoo was fifty years of age. “She didn’t wear a blouse with her sari” (Bama: Vanmam 51). This shows that Dalits are treated as cattle, they are not given due reverence and they are not allowed to wear the upper garments. This custom is prevalent even now in some parts of our country. “Dalit women are required to wear their sari in a particular fashion—more revealing of flesh and figure than the fashion worn by dominant caste women—in the presence of dominant castes” (Irudayam , Mangubhai and Lee 84).

On seeing the women dancing well the men admit point-blank, “we’ve been underestimating our women’. . . ‘If they set their minds to it, they can turn pillars into dust, and dust into pillars” (Bama: Vanmam 51). Usually, in the Indian society women are not allowed to perform anything in public places; opportunities are denied. Once society was designed giving prominence to women; women were the heads of the folk; they decided what to do and what not to do. They led the entire village. They are considered as productive. Because of which in the Sangam period of Tamil literature one can witness many women poets like Aivvaiyar; society was matriarchal then. After the advent, the Aryans whose society was principally patriarchal subdued women in course of time.

Also in some of the castes of Dalit communities, leading to second marriage while the first husband is alive is prevalent. Bama brings it out through the life of, Pechiamma. Bama meets Pechiamma, her schoolmate and learns from her that she has married again for the second time when her first husband is alive. Bama feels anguish over such
incidents, since amongst the Christians the second marriage is prohibited when the husband is alive. After two days, Irulaayi of Arunthathiar community, to which Pechiamma belongs comes to the Bama’s house and Bama enquires of the second marriage of Pechiamma and she comes to learn that Pechiamma’s husband is a drunkard and blows her heavily. Consequently, she has broken the marriage with her husband and marries another person. Irulaayi observes, “. . . it’s only the Pallar and Chakkili communities who can end one marriage and go and marry a second time” (Bama: Sangati 92). Dalit women enjoy freedom at least in selecting their spouse. They switch over for selecting next man as her spouse, when the first husband is not treating her well or humiliating her. Bama observes, in this connection, “a woman need not spend her entire life burning and dying, with a man she dislikes, just because of this thing called marriage” (Sangati 92). The upper caste women do not enjoy this kind of freedom. “She has to accept that even if he is only a stone or a blade of grass, he is still her husband” (Bama: Sangati 93). Every other community demands that a woman must stay within the household of her husband even when she dies of torture, and in many cases, this kind of torture leads to suicide.

In her street, there are a number of restrictions for Dalit women. They are never allowed to go to the cinema theatre that is situated in the nearest town fearing that the women may be assaulted by the other caste men and in turn which may lead to a communal clash destroying the peaceful living of the people. Whenever Dalits are assaulted there will be no one to question. Dalits are assaulted for their being Dalits that is other caste people think that Dalits are born to be beaten up by them. To the questions of the Bama the grandma answers only Dalit women are sexually assaulted or harassed and not the upper caste women since they have caste-power, money, political support and everything, because of which the culprits are afraid to touch the upper caste women. It is
only the Dalit women who are treated lower than the cattle. In this connection, the modern Indian English Poet, Chandramohan writes in a thought provoking poem entitled “The Rape and Murder of a Tribal Girl”:

No newspaper carried a head line or a photo feature,
No youth were roused to protests,
No city’s life came to a standstill,
No furore in the parliament,
No nation’s conscience was haunted,
No prime minister addressed the nation,
No TV channel discussions,
No police officials were transferred or suspended.
No Candle light marches,
No billion women rising,
A tribal girl was raped and murdered (1-11)

Such is the predicament of Dalit women.

One may argue that there are women participating in every nook and corner of the public life in society. Of course in the cities, women do, whereas the situation is not promisingly changed in the villages. Still, there are some villages which promote the marriage of girls in an early age; girls after attainment of puberty, not allowed to go out and to talk with their boyfriends as done earlier. Bama observes in this connection:

The position of women is both painful and humiliating, really. In the fields they have to escape from upper caste men’s molestations. At church they must lick the priest’s shoes and be his slaves while he threatens them with tales of God, Heaven, and Hell. Even when they go to their own homes, before they have had a
chance to cook some kanji or lie down and rest a little, they have to submit
themselves to their husbands’ torment. (Bama: Sangati 35)

Hence to say the freedom of women is reduced to a secondary position even in the age of
science and technology. It is pertinent to note that women in all society have to endure a
number of hardships concerning their economic situation, reproductive life, household
divisions of labour, health and social practices.

Such is the condition of women in the society and that too, the position of Dalit
women becomes even still worse that they face harassment physically, mentally and
sexually outside the home like their workplace and also in their own home by their
husbands and in some families even the son is used to beat the mother; they are doubly
humiliated and harassed all for a simpler cause of their survival. The women show a high
resistance and resilience and to aver candidly resistance and resilience are Dalit women’s
existential strategies. Dalit feminism succinctly points out that Dalits’ struggle have
tended to forget a gender perspective. In Dalit society every woman lives under the
double power of caste and patriarchy; they are doubly oppressed. Dalit women are
considered as the objects of lust and sex. Dalit women’s course of life reveals a tale of
endless miseries, inhuman victimization and shocking gender discriminations.