CHAPTER III
THE PROBLEMS FOCUSED BY BAMA

In *Karukku*, Bama focuses the vulnerable condition of Dalit people and how they are victims of circumstances due to their poor economic background. They remain landless agricultural labourers who are politically, powerless. She focuses other major problems such as untouchability, discrimination in the new religion, Christianity. She painfully notes that their rich culture is robbed and they are left with no culture. She appears to be as concerned about the survival of the Dalit community as Horen Tudu is about the Blacks of East Bengal where he wonders “whether, globally, the Black race will survive into the next millennium”.

In *Sangathi*, Bama focuses many problems the Dalit women have to face in society that is riven on the lines of caste and gender. Bama’s fictional landscape is seared with the violence on Dalit women, wife-beating, sexual harassment, loneliness, women abandoned by their husbands, ignorance, marginalization, denial of freedom in homes and, ultimately, the succumbing of the entire Dalit community to the economic exploitation of the upper castes. Anandakrishnan in “Dalit Girl Child’s Future Bleak” says that “Dalit women had a tougher fight to wage than other women and must struggle harder to break away from the system if they are to gain entry into the knowledge society” (4).

In *Vanmam*, Bama focuses the problems of the Dalits from a different angle. Poverty is the main problem for Dalit people. Though she focuses the problems of the entire community, she does not fail to reveal the problems that Dalit women face such as injustice, social inequality, poor economic condition due to ignorance, subordinate status in the family. The government appears to take a number of welfare measures. However, they only reaffirm the Dalit’s poverty. In “Life above Poverty Line”, Aman Sethi captures the bitter irony thus:
Until recently, Chandavati was too old to work and feed her family of four on Rs. 200 a month. Bhagonia’s family ate one roti a day. Chunki Devi’s husband broke stones by day and battled tuberculosis by night. But one day, the ‘pradhan’ and the ‘gram sachiv’ issued them yellow ration cards inscribed ‘Above Poverty Line (APL)’ making them the Dalit basti’s richest family. (40)

Bama also shows the Dalit community getting embroiled in the microphysics of politics.

In *Oruthathavum Erumaiyum*, Bama delineates the deplorable state of Dalit people, their psychological wounds due to stigma, ignorance, frustration, suffering inflicted wantonly by the merciless caste people, uncertainty, Dalit children being sold into bondage to pay off debts and, finally, the Dalits remaining in bondage to the caste people. A. Varadarajan in his Foreword to *History of Hindu Imperialism* by Swami Dharma Theertha, says:

So far as the hindus are concerned, all power has remained for many centuries in the hands of a small group of hereditary exploiters whose life and interests are even to-day antagonistic to the welfare of the masses of India. The Chief national institutions of the Hindus such as sacred literature, the social organization, the religious institutions and the state have been originated, developed and used, and are being now used with the primary object of keeping the masses ignorant, servile and disunited for exploitation by the privileged classes. This is the position even today.(i)

In the novel, *Karukku*, Bama focuses many problems the Dalit people have to face in the caste-ridden society. Most Dalit victims of abuse are landless agricultural labourers. Lack of access to land makes Dalits economically vulnerable. Their dependence is exploited by the upper caste landlords. The impoverished condition of rural Dalits made struggle for survival a condition of life. They are the sons of the soil,
yet in the so-called democratic system, they have no hope of owning their share of that soil. They are condemned, day after day, to grief and despair and poverty are immutable aspects of their life. There is a frightful piece of statistics that Mari Marcel Thekaekara provides to suggest the magnitude of oppression: “In India Dalits faced constant discrimination. Every hour two are assaulted, everyday three Dalit women are raped and two Dalits are murdered – simply because they come from a caste considered ‘Untouchable’; the bottom of the heap.”

The Dalit community is a deeply wounded one. For centuries its power has been systematically undermined. The irony cannot be missed that the upper castes thrive on the services rendered to them by the downtrodden. The Dalits dig the village graves, dispose off dead animals, remove human waste with their bare hands. They have for their services, a heinous treatment called “the second tumbler” at the tea stalls. The Dalits are forbidden to use the tumbler meant for the upper castes: the other. Any attempt to defy this social order is put down with an iron hand. More Dalits in rural areas live in segregated colonies away from the Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. At the end of the day, they return to their huts in their colony without electricity; kilometers away from the nearest water source; and segregated from all non-Dalits. They are forbidden by the caste people to draw water from public wells, to enter places of worship or to wear shoes in the presence of the upper castes.

The curse of untouchability continues to this day. In upper caste families, the servants are Dalits. After servant has cleaned the rooms, pots and pans, one of the family members will sprinkle ‘holy’ water to purify all that has been so systematically sanitized. This is a normal scene in the villages. The case of the Dalit Christians is more redeeming than that of the average Dalit Hindu. Both face discrimination that is poignantly brought out by Vivek Deshpande who in “Village quiet after Dalit killing” says, “We thought we could mingle with the upper castes in the village, but they always made us feel that we were not their equal. If we had a function, they wouldn’t eat at our place” (10).
Ironically, the Dalit Christians have been co-sharers of the burden of oppression with the other Dalits. The fate of a Dalit is the same whether he is a Hindu or Christian or Muslim. In general, the social and economic condition of Dalit Christian is in no way better than that of a Hindu Dalit. Most of the Dalits whether they are the Hindus or Christians, often live side by side, while the other caste people, the Hindus or the Christians live separately. Even the Caste Christians do not treat the Dalit Christians as their equals.

Down the ages acts of discrimination have been perpetrated during feasts in the cemeteries and places like the church. It is a baffling fact that the church that should have been the first to break this kind of discrimination has encouraged the violation of human dignity by choosing indifference. Even in the rectory, the Dalits have to stand and talk, while the others could sit and talk to the priest. The Dalit Christians have little choice but to yield to this situation owing to their minority status, economic backwardness and lack of political clout. Arundati Roy in *The God of Small Things*, provides a historical account of how Dalit Christianity emerged in Kerala:

> When the British came to Malabar, a member of Paravans Pelayas and Pulayas (among them Velutha’s grandfather, Kelan) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability. As added incentive, they were given a little food and money. They were known as the Rice-Christians. It didn’t take them long to realize that they were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests… It was a little like having to sweep away your footprints without a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all. (74)

However, the Dalit community has a culture of its own. Dalits who are the children of the soil find ways of expressing their identity through folk arts and classic arts
in the oral and written forms. But these rich cultural treasures were stolen from them by
the upper caste oppressors. Their cultural heritage has been desecrated and destroyed and
a foreign culture is being imposed upon them. The upper caste people are determined
that Dalits are prevented from producing a culture of their own. It is a sad saga of Dalit
history that they have suffered decimal and deprivation in an even handed manner. Even
as the upper castes deny the Dalits the freedom for cultural expression they have also,
系统地 and deviously, appropriated many Dalit art forms and codified and
modified them to suit their purposes. The Dalits, deprived of the freedom to seek
meaning and strength became a sort of ‘No people’. They now, turn to the upper class to
supply them with signifying systems as well as value systems. The upper caste,
ingeniously, used the appropriated art form and the various traits of their culture to
oppress and dehumanize Dalits.

The culture which ought to become the source of strength is turned into an
instrument of oppressin and domination. This manipulation of culture in order to
dehumanize the Dalits has continued, unabated through the centuries. The Dalits have
neither financial stability nor the political clout to make their voices heard. It is the upper
caste that determines what the Dalits should think and how they should act and how they
should look at their status in the society. The attempts to obfuscate Dalit history and
culture continues to this day. This is evident from the wistfull reflection (expression) of
Iniyan Elango who, after carefully study ing the contemporary position of Dalit
community, reports as follows: “The first thing those who enslaved the black people did
was to erase all records and memories of our great heritage and history. This is because a
rootless people will always wallow in self-pity and self-destruction” (Elango 2002).

In Sangathi, Bama focuses many problems the Dalit women have to meet in their
homes and outside their homes. “Love opens the most impossible gate,” says the Bible.
But in the world, hatred, violence, intimidation, oppression, humiliation, harassment and
domination over poor, innocent and vulnerable people persist everywhere. Disparity at
the social, economic and political levels is the root cause for all evils in the society. Psychologically, man reacts when he is suppressed and degraded by others. He even becomes violent. But, when he fails to have an impact on his oppressor, he furiously turns his frustration on his wife. This is one of the reasons for wife beating in Dalit families where women are harassed and humiliated by men who cannot take out their anger on the upper caste oppressors. Bama says, “[…] I wonder whether all that violence was because there was nowhere else for them to exert their male pride or to show off their superiority. All that suppressed anger was vented when they came home and beat up their wives to pulp” (S 56).

Wife beating is a daily happening in most of the Dalit families. A Dalit woman’s problems begin from the time she gets married. Unfortunately, she becomes a victim in the hands of her husband too. The Dalit man becomes violent like an animal when he is frustrated in the world outside. Bama feels a growing resentment at the injustice – sexual abuses, endless daily harassment and humiliation – the Dalit women face. Many women suffer from a corroding sense of inferiority, which often expresses itself in a lack of self-respect. As a consequence, many Dalit women do think that they belong in the gutters of the slum. Subashree Krishnaswamy in “A Call for Action” presents the typical picture of a Dalit woman: “As Dalit women, they have a double cross to bear: not only are they exploited outside home by the upper castes, they are also abused by the highly patriarchal men within the community”(4).

Dalit women are victims of sexual harassment. Even before the sun rises, the Dalit woman goes to the field for her daily survival. When she returns home, she has to cook for her children and her drunken husband. She feels exhausted having worked throughout the day in the field under hot sun. She is forced to accommodate her husband at night whether she likes it or not. To the drunken husband, she is just an available body, not a woman with feelings. In her tiredness, if she refuses to share his bed, she is subjected to violent beating that she succumbs to him, finally. This harassment at home
is worse than the treatment she received from the place where she works. Bama exposes such atrocities heaped on Dalit women, both within and without their communities.

The dependence of the Dalit woman on her husband has serious downsides. Her financial insecurity compels the dependence. Most Dalit marriages are forced upon the women by their parents. The parental monitors gag the women who have to silently put up with disharmony in marriage. Most often disharmony leads to marital ruptures when these women are deserted by their husbands. The helplessness of the Dalit woman is thus exacerbated. Now, one may suggest that the Dalit women could think of marrying outside their community to escape the stifling patriarchal decree. R. Uma Maheshwari in “Women and Words: Forging New Bonds”, records a wistful statement by Bama: “We are willing to marry out of the community but nobody is willing to marry us. Upper caste men look at Dalit women as polluting beings, except when they rape us”.

The marginalization of the Dalit woman is a complex multi-layered reality. Marginalization for the Dalit woman begins at home. The Dalit community, like most Indian communities, favours the male child. The girl child is not welcome and becomes an object of discrimination. In the Dalit home, the male child is celebrated while the girl child is seen as a curse.

Freedom for a Dalit woman, even in her home, is still a distant dream. From her birth to death, she has to obey instructions of the society and also the men folk at home. There is no freedom of thought or of action. Education is denied to her. In many Dalit families, women are still like caged birds. They are forced into silent acceptance of their low status. They are not allowed to raise their voice in protest against the denial of their rights.

The coming of age of a Dalit woman is not merely the end of innocence. It is, ironically, the irredeemable end of personal freedom. The sense of bondage is ensured by the telling of stories of devils that will catch them if the Dalit women go out alone. In
Sangathi, Bama narrates many incidents in which Dalit women were said to have been possessed by devils. This is some evidence that the Dalit women are not only under the grip of ignorance but also under the clutches of an irrational fear of the unknown or mysterious to which they are forced to submit. They are frightened with incredible tales about ghosts and evil spirits. They are warned not to go to field or anywhere alone, but as a group. They believe that they would be haunted by evil elements if they go astray. Stories whipping a fear psychosis are thrown on them to which they yield. Bama, as a young girl, wondered as if those stories were true. But later, as a grown up woman, she put them aside saying they are systematically fabricated to keep the Dalit women down; in terror, that they remain trashy objects in the eyes of men.

Bama, when she was a girl, had two unsolved questions in her mind: Why do devils possess women, especially Dalit women? And why do they spare men? She was not able to untangle the puzzles, established. She wondered why such tales on evil spirits remained in Dalit’s colonies only. However, she was aware of the fact that there is no protection to the Dalit women who are met by the upper caste men if they go out single. They can never count on the charity of the upper caste men. So, in order to protect them a sense of morbid fear is sustained to keep the Dalit women away from the wicked eyes of the upper caste men. The upper caste men embody the devils of the stories to the Dalit women.

The Dalits succumb to the upper caste people’s argument that Dalits are non-entities, an inferior race. From the cradle to the grave, it is instilled in them that Dalits are inferior and low-caste. Their parents probably taught them that; the schools they attended taught them that; the books they read, even their churches and ministers often taught them that; and above all the very concept of segregation teaches them that. Swami Dharma Theertha in History of Hindu Imperialism says that “The ancient Brahman masters of Hindu India, who had established themselves as a separate nation with all exclusiveness, arrogance, selfishness and cruelty which we associate with the White
imperialists, did exactly what we accuse the latter of having done” (163). The whole cultural tradition teaches them that Dalits do not deserve certain things. So these men are merely the children of that culture. They only preserve what their folks have taught them. Thus Dalits willingly submit themselves to the pathetic situation of collective ignorance and collective submissiveness.

In *Vanmam*, Bama focuses many problems that the Dalit community has to face to establish its self respect. It is shocking that while there are millions who have no access to proper food, there is a life of luxury on the other side. Good nutritious food is alien to the Dalit people. While poverty prevails among people of all the communities, it is more among Dalits. They are not respected in jobs of government and private sector and in the educational institutions. Several villages in India remain marginalized and the Dalit continues to be harassed, humiliated and tortured. Owing to their social status, they are compelled to do free chores for the upper caste people. If they refuse, they are often beaten up. The Dalit community is also barred from temples frequented by the upper caste, and prevented them using public toilets and hand pumps. Untouchability and caste oppression are prevalent in hundreds of villages in diverse forms. Caste conflicts have been occurring in many parts in which people have been murdered, maimed, women raped and property damaged and looted. It is an open secret that politics manouevers are behind all such grisly violence.

Bama focuses the injustices that history and tradition visit upon Dalit women. On the one hand there is the bleak prospect of emancipation and, on the other, the obvious prospect of death. They, however, aspire for radical social, economic and political change and they do not look back. They continue to be trapped within the frame of upper class orthodoxy; they are treated as submissive and contemptible creatures who are untouchable. The Dalit woman who seeks a job in a town is making a symbolic statement. Her act of seeking a job is, in more than one sense, a lay of journey towards
respectability, if one reckons the traditional Dalit woman who is made to do menial jobs like sweeping roads, cleaning drains and the toilets.

Under these oppressive conditions, the Dalit woman would find a social equality a distant dream. Bama trains her pen at social equality as well as economic free equality. That is why she takes on the citadels of caste and social exploitation that caste engenders. Bama, takes it upon herself, the mission of the fleshing out the words social justice, social transformation, the economic interests, socialism, gender equality and scientific spirit into social realities. Durga Sob in “Dalit Women; The Triple Oppression” says:

- Dalit women, however, are triply oppressed: (1) oppressed by the so-called high caste people, which equally affects both male and female Dalits (2) oppressed by the design of the Hindu patriarchal system and (3) oppressed by Dalit males…Dalit women are living a history of pain, agony, sorrow, misconduct, maltreatment and suffering.

Bama dwells on the irony about the social condition of Dalit women. Although they contribute a lot to the country’s economy by working at home as well as in the agricultural fields, equal property rights are denied to them. Without a change in their economic status their social status would not improve. A change in the economic status can come about only if the women are encouraged to participate equally in all walks of life. The stark reality is that the female child is an unwanted object in most Dalit families that the number of women is dwindling fast and that female foeticide is one of the primary reasons for this decline. The writer dreams of a society where the girl child is wanted and given all the encouragement.

The Indian society ascribes to the Dalit woman a lowly social value. This impacts the treatment of the Dalit women within the Dalit household. The reluctance of a Dalit mother to give birth to a girl is reflective of the overwhelming social acceptability of the girl child. The quality of mothering shows in the nurturing of the girl child. She is a
subordinate of the male child. This gives her only the secondary claim in all matters like, food, education, medical care and so on. So the Dalit girl is born into a system which accepts the social paradigm of male superiority and gender discrimination. Bama chooses to become the scream of the dispossessed girl child that asks for a paradigm shift.

Bama’s novels, thus, become sites of social amelioration where the social cartography for the future is envisaged. She manouevers her pen towards the process of social and economic empowerment of vulnerable groups. She exposes the official line which claims to have put several schemes for the Dalit women. Bama is more interested in knowing how much if such benefits percolate to the Dalits: The empowerment of women and elimination of gender discrimination must go beyond the level of overtures. The empowerment as seen by Bama would happen only with the end to the violence against them such as physical, sexual, verbal. That kind of empowerment would usher social justice and create an atmosphere of peace, mutual trust and complete security.

Bama makes a strong case for education. Any step towards empowerment becomes meaningful only when the downtrodden are allowed to enjoy the power of education. It is much more potent for the liberation of the Dalits than all the anti-poverty schemes of the self-serving governments. Bama wants everyone to see that anti-poverty schemes only free the body from physical hunger. But education would enable the Dalits to break all the societal shackles that hold them in perpetual bondage. Education would give the Dalit the eyes to see through the vacuous political diatribes about eradication of caste-evil.

In the collection of short stories *Oru Thathavum Erumaiyum*, Bama focuses the Dalit community that has been deprived of education. Dalit people have already been milked to depletion by the upper caste. Bama knows that her people are gullible and will swallow anything given to them. Bama wants Dalits to awake from the slumber and must
prove wrong the Latin axiom, ‘Populus Vult decipi’ (the people wish to be deceived). The tide of gullibility would change only when the Dalits stop accepting their social situation as an upper caste given. They will have to steer their fates clear off upper caste constructions like the Dalit as a polluted human being. Not being able to do that would only push them deeper into the vortex of dehumanization.

Bama’s credentials as a chronicler of the plight of her people is endorsed by Jai Arjun Singh in “Small Rebellions: Stories by Bama”, where he pays homage to her skills thus:

Bama has a definite feel for the people as she writes about (her own parents were labourers and she experienced this life firsthand as a child). she expertly captures the cadences of their speech without holding anything back – which means readers with delicate sensibilities must be warned that the language is strong. Even cheerfully cross in places. But this, it can be argued, is imperative to a book where words themselves are repeatedly used as instruments of subversion, to shake up the established order.

The Dalit needs to be educated to understand the conspiracy of society in denying them the right to possess property. The state of being dispossessed as an engineered reality will dawn on them only when they have the access to the laws of the land. In the absence of an education that ensures the access to legal justice, they would languish as the property of the upper castes, subject to their extra-judicial authority. The stigma of untouchability with which the Dalit is banished from the social mainstream keeps them effectively on the margins of the economic, social and political spheres.

Reading between the lines of an invidious socio-political text that is the Indian reality, Anandam Latha in “Is the Emergence a Dream?” reflects on the representation of
Dalit discourse during a conference on post-caste society at Calcutta University, 7th September, 2006. She reveals that:

The ordinary man of the marginalized class is compelled to accept the standardized values set by the upper caste. A few decades ago living conditions were unbearable to this class. [She also makes a reference to Arjun Dangle who records their miserable existence in ‘Dalit literature: Past, Present and Future’ in the following words:] “Treated like animals they lived apart from the villages and had to eat leftovers from the higher caste people in return for their endless toil”.

One needs to look at the dynamics of education for the upper castes. The upper castes are beneficiaries of education which becomes the key to social respectability, political manoeuvrability and economic stability. The fact that education promises these triple benefits makes the upper castes work towards consolidation of interests. Thus the educated clan becomes the force behind the denial of the privileges of education to the Dalits. The Dalits, under the circumstances, are left with very little choice. An extract from Sashi Deshpande’s novel *Small Remedies* must needs be deployed at this juncture to understand the way the upper caste treated the Dalits even when they were an integral part of their everyday life. She refers to the confession of an upper caste woman who says:

We had to wear our oldest saris when she fitted us with the bangles and after we’d finished we had to have a bath – because she’d touched us. Such a smiling, loving woman. I can still remember how gently she held our hands in hers, how softly she pushed the bangles up so that she wouldn’t hurt us. But she was unclean because of her caste. (98)

There is a need for the Dalit to be emancipated. That emancipation will come as the fruit of education. So, they need to seek the access to education. On the other hand, they have to look to their own upper caste masters for access to education. But to yield to
the legitimate demands of the downtrodden is as good as conceding to them the hitherto non-existent respectability in society, the hitherto unheard of manoeuvrability in the political sphere and the hitherto unrealizable economic stability. Under the circumstances the way open to the Dalit is a fight for self-determination which is justified by P.M. Sureshkumar in the following manner:

As a result of age-long oppression, exploitation and insult by the caste Hindus and forcing on the Dalits the theory of Karma, the latter have become the eternal victims of a wounded psyche. The eternal liberation of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled tribes... lies in their self-realization, self-respect, self-reliance and self-determination of their own destiny. (x)

Closing the doors on all reasonable debate on facts and genuine grievances of the Dalit people will, possibly, force the agitation. And then, labeling it coercive, undemocratic, blackmail, anti-development and so on will yield no fruitful ground. No serious effort on has been made to lay the foundations of structures to enable the oppressed classes which compete for an equal footing. The society is not willing to realize the basic right of the outcaste to life and livelihood. The growing tendency of agitation across the country is mainly because of some factors such as exploitation, artificially depressed wages, inquisitions, socio-political circumstances, inadequate employment opportunities, lack of access to resources, under-developed agriculture, geographical isolation and lack of land reforms. These factors contributed to the growth of protestation movements. There must be a social equality to have a social harmony and prosperity.

Centuries of oppression have inflicted on the Dalit people deep psychological wounds, the trauma of low self-esteem. It would be a threat to the unity and integrity of the country. The value of land and houses owned by the socially underprivileged is sharply lower than those held by other sections in the country. It reflects the current social and economic disparities between privileged and underprivileged classes. The upper
ruling class preaches one thing and practices are something else. But, in reality, they act like any other hypocritical politicians, keeping one yardstick for them and another for the low class people. Such hypocrites may call themselves friends of the poor, but in fact, they are real enemies to the downtrodden people. It is necessary that the majority community accept the minorities as equals even though they are different. It is salient to accept that they will remain different. What we need in the society is an acceptance of the fact that the good of each group is greater than the sum of its parts.

Pluralism of faith and pluralism of culture are crucial in multi-caste societies such as India. A core component of democracy is cultural pluralism. Where this is absent, there inevitably arises protests, sometimes non-violent, and at other times, violent. Caste discrimination is a very emotional and sensitive issue. In a federal setup like India, it should be approached in a realistic fashion and should be solved amically. The situation has not been as bright and blooming as envisaged by the Dalit people. Suppression throughout the nation continues in isolated forms; and for many centuries people have been fighting against it in scattered areas to structure an international recognition. To save hapless dumb-dependent race of Dalit is the greatest concern of the time. It is necessary to protect them from the jaws of deterioration.

This situation leads to an impasse. The upper castes, in their best interest, would not want to preside over the dissolution of a social order they constructed over centuries of social evolution. The Dalits, even in their abject helplessness, are convinced of the need to over turn such an oppressive social order. They see that the key to their emancipation is in the hands of the upper castes who also hold the key to the Dalit’s access to education. From the point of view of the Dalit, the refusal to act is tantamount to acceptance of perpetual oppression. The sustained oppression is articulated by Anupreeta Das in “Dalit Writing makes its Mark”, in the following words:

In rural India, Dalits cannot draw water from the same well as those from upper castes or inhabit the same spaces. Even in urban areas, where
education and economic class increasingly override caste, discrimination continues in subtle forms. Indian law guarantees political and social equality to all citizens, but many Dalits—who fall outside the four-tier caste-system say they still are made to feel inferior. Poverty and social stigma, they say, tail them everywhere.

The impasse, seen from closer quarters, as Bama is seen to animate in her novels, is between the loss of the privileges that come from an existing social order that is unjust and the gain of privileges that come from an existing social order that is unjust and the gain of privileges that come from rupturing and dismantling that very social order. For the upper castes the process of consolidation involves the use of force to snuff out any force of mutiny. For the Dalits the process of emancipation would involve a struggle against hardened systems that cannot be successful without the spirit to rage and mutiny.

The average Dalit is trapped in a vicious cycle of debt and bondage. For toiling in the fields they are paid a few kilograms of rice or a meager salary a day. Most live on the brink of destitution barely able to feed their families and unable to send their children to school or break away from cycles of debt bondage that are pressed on from generation to generation. Their pathetic situation makes them witness of a horrendous reality. The creditors tighten their noose round the Dalit who is trapped in financial indebtedness. Under the circumstances, it is the Dalit child who is traded off when it comes to realizing from the creditors’ clutches.

Bama highlights this situation for illuminating the more serious reality of loss. The Dalits lose on all fronts. But the most serious loss is that of their selves. Their enforced anonymity makes them non-entities who have no presence in the day-to-day reality of society. Alone in the margins, they languish in a state of alone-ness. On the margins, they are devoid of love and fellow-feeling. They have no means to articulate their state of social imprisonment. The voice of the Dalit is muted by the fact that their
alone-ness and anonymity keeps them apart from the other communities who have no patience for the agony of the Dalits.

There are two, equally compelling, realities which pull the Dalits apart. On the one hand, there is the need for survival. On the other, there is the need for an identity. Since both survival and identity for the Dalit, are determined by the relationship they enjoy with the upper castes, it cannot be free of upper caste interests. The relationship forces the Dalits to either choose the tangible reality of survival or the intangible reality of identity. While survival impacts the physical sphere with an immediacy, they prefer to put survival over identity. By making the choice themselves, they play into the hands of the upper castes who sustain the status quo by engineering marginalization.

It is a rigid world, where hard and frozen minds refuse to see the truth about humanity. Sheer necessity hinders the Dalits and keeps them from moving in the fond hopes of a permanent future. Bama does describe the agony of the landless Dalits. She is a kind of writer whom Meenakshi Mukherjee characterizes in “Women Writing” as belonging to that category of women “who have encountered indifference if not downright hostility from the family towards their aspiration”. She pours her heart which beats with compassion and sympathy for the poor Dalits. She knows the mind of her people. This is her instinct. It comes to her spontaneously. The Dalits are not only innocent but ignorant also. They are ready to believe and accept whatever is said to them. This is mainly because of their poor understanding and inability to pick social subtleties that involve the machinations of the upper class people.

There is no value for human life, especially Dalits’ life. No sympathy is showered on Dalits when they suffer. Chellakkizhi’s, a Dalit girl, death is illustrative of how upper caste men behave. The owner, who is the cause of her death, does not show any sympathy for her, but he tries to hush the matter providing two thousand rupees to the victim’s family. No action is taken. At least, even a formal enquiry is not initiated by
the officials for they are bribed to maintain silence. The amount of money paid as a bribe is a measure of the value of a Dalit life. It takes only a few thousand rupees to silence the justice machinery. It also shows the monetary value that the upper castes attach to the life of a Dalit.

The third chapter highlights the problems of the Dalit people, especially the Dalit women who suffer more in the caste based society. The same amount of problems, if not, more than that is understood to be suffered by the Black people especially Black women, who live in a society that is not free from racism. Having examined the miseries of Dalit people as focused by Bama in her novels, the next chapter shows how Alice Walker focuses the problems faced by Black people in a predominantly racial setup.