Chapter - 3

FEMALE DEFIANCE MADE VISIBLE

This chapter analyses the consciousness of women in the inevitable state of subaltern. The memorable characters in these novels represent their radical nature, raising voice, challenging attitude and mobility against the existing threatened and subjugated system. The selected literary works contain the marked resistance of women. She is accustomed to suppression in the male dominated world and it makes her life more complex. The depictions of women in these novels expose the tremendous inner strength to resist the enormous repression in their existence. Status, state and situation of women may be different but their urges to break away the confinement prove their defiance.

In Jewish mythology, the character of Lilith is projected as rebellious who refuses to accept the headship of Adam. This legend of Lilith is familiar among the feminists for discussion. Even in the Old Testament and the New Testament references are made of some powerful women like Esther, Judith, Susannah, Virgin Mary and Anna.

Indira Gandhi in one of her speeches expressed rebellious thoughts against suppression as follows:

We are the women of India
Don’t imagine us as flower-maidens
We are the sparks in the fire. ¹

To seek their individuality, women strive to go beyond the interpreted margins of the patriarchal society. They raise their voice against the situation which dominates their individual self. Their act of standing against man’s harassment signifies a new road for the tormented women. For instance the protagonist in Saguna, the first autobiographical novel in English by an Indian woman, has not limited her role in the kitchen and crosses every barrier to find her life as a student of medicine.
These selected Christian women writers encourage women as a class to come out of their confined state by describing women’s roles. They have also attempted to write about the liberated single woman’s life in society, a religious woman’s passion and women’s stand up against protocols.

3.1. Untouchables and Patriarchy

In Sangati, Bama portrays vigorously celebrated Dalit women characters in the rural area. Their lives are embedded within family structures and notion of sexual chastity, in addition to the economic burden of supporting the family. The observation and experience from childhood and the question which rise in the mind of Bama about the existence of Dalit women enable her to present this novel more effectively.

Bama through her autobiography of community projects the resisting female characters on whom the local landlords and own caste men exercise control and assault. And Sangati reflects the protesting voices of many Dalit women.

Bama interrogates the sufferings and experiences of characters in her surroundings. She says:

But my favorite game was Kabaddi (a team wrestling game played in many Indian villages). I liked the whole business of challenging, crossing over and vanquishing the opponent.²

She is a daring and challenging Dalit Christian woman. Her writing not only catches the outcry of the provoked Dalit women but also reveals the vulnerability of females. Besides, her literary works strengthen the voiceless women to resist impositions.

Vellaiyamma Kizhavi all alone struggles hard for survival brushing aside all odds till the end of her life. This prudent lady is protective of herself without
falling into the hands of cruel males after her husband abandoned her. She defends herself if anybody talks about character. Her inner strength enables her to take up the responsibility of two daughters without any support. Mangalasuthra which is considered as sacred seems valuable to Vellaiyamma during awful famine; she sells it to get over the difficult moment. Instances of her defense against tormentors document her valiant nature while collecting firewood. She stands as a model of Dalit women who make their survival possible through resistance of all kinds.

Even children bare the disparity (unjustness) at the work place and their minds immediately react with budding spirit. In the match factory, a Paraiya child is abused by the children from another village. So the Paraiya children rebel by keeping away from work. They are very sensitive and unite to demand respect and positive attitude towards their community. The new generation protests at caste oppression and humiliation. Various forces of the present era influence Dalits to bring caste oppression consciousness which is clearly unfolded in the author’s another literary work, Vanmam.

The emerging awareness on political liberties reflects the rebellious stand among the women at the village council. Women as minority group attempt to get recognition in the political realm which is kept as unfamiliar to them. The unfair charge in village panchayath on Mariyamma shatters her life. Blame compels her to break her silence. She exhibits defiance by revealing the facts of the vile act of a upper caste man courageously. The panchayath limits the woman’s participation in its affairs. Unlike older generations, women are interested to seek the ongoing events. Even when men try to drive them from the meeting held to decide Mariyamma’s case, they are obdurate and attend without going back. The multiple voices of Dalit women like Kaliamma and Anandamma are resounded in support of innocent Mariyamma. They argue for themselves noticing the injustice to women and the unquestioning indecent life of men in the village. Dalit men
deserve to be ridiculed by their own women for their cowardice to react to the snobbishness of the upper caste men. The potentiality of women is thus visible in *Sangati* while attempting to voice against the injustices in the village assembly.

Bama praises the guts of Sammuga Kizhavi, who is a memorable rebellious portrait among the humiliated Dalit women. The humorous revulsion of this lady creates problems for the dominant men. Srinivasa Ayya puts a fence of barbed-wire around his well to stop the low-caste people. But stubborn Sammuga Kizhavi rebels against him as a trespasser and swims in his well. Finally she is caught by Srinivasa Ayya and courageously retorts:

Ayya, the water in your well is not at all good. It's all salty.
(S, p.117)

Instead of disappearing from the place, she spits into the well in front of him and deliberately changes her clothes. Enraged Srinivasa Ayya has complained to the Naattoomai. Later she takes revenge on him by pissing into the water pot of this Landlord, when he beats up the low-caste child who unknowingly touched his pot. After casting vote at the election, the Congress Party people order her to get out of the car. But she demands to drive back by car as they give a ride to get her vote. She compels them:

You made sure of my vote, and now you're going to leave me stranded here, are you? We get no good out of voting for you, so at least let me have a free ride. Just give me a ride home, Ayya.
Otherwise I'll speak to all the people in our street and none of the women will vote for your party. (S, p.101)

These political people are forced to obey the command of Sammuga Kizhavi who is bold enough to resist the male domination. Bama praises her:

I thought to myself it might be good thing if we had even a handful of people with Sammuga Kizhavi’s guts. (S, p.118)
Bama reflects upon Dalit women’s insights on the marginalized role of women in the dramas they exhibit creatively. Men themselves perform the role of woman by making woman’s face invisible on the stage. Once, the play of Jesus is staged by the village men. The artists have delayed the entertainment while searching the fellows to enact the role of baby Jesus and Virgin Mary. Seeing this commotion, the women like Kanni Maria, Bhakkiyam, Amalorpavam who gather there to watch the performance discuss the possibilities of women as artists on the stage. Paathimapillai claims:

But why shouldn’t they give the role of Our Lady to a woman who is just as fair as the man they want?....(S, p.33)

They question the mere neglect of woman as a performer and think to get this privilege to seek the identity.

The women portrayed in Sangati fortify themselves against atrocities of the male which is inevitable for existence. They are rebellious in their own way and the subversion which they exercise rescues them from physical torture of their caste men. They are determined to make their unheard voices audible to the entire world. The present generation of Dalit women acquaints with men at work places and prefers love marriages. They go beyond the conventional nuptials arranged by the parents. They prefer to select the companions of their own choice. Mariyamma is only forced to marry drunkard Manikkam owing to her embarrassment in the village and for the future of her sisters. But in the beginning, the stubborn Mariyamma refuses to marry him and expresses her enraged words:

That fellow hasn’t married all this while only because no one was willing to give him a bride. I’d rather hang myself with a couple of lengths of rope than marry him.(S, p.41)

Awareness is seen in the younger generation while pursuing marital life, where they expect better and happier future.
Bama’s progressive mind pushes her to criticize social, personal and religious attitudes which bind women with various factors. She condemns the educated people who follow upper caste culture by denying their own better culture. For instance in the author’s community, woman is not harassed in the name of dowry. But inhuman practice of dowry exists by imitating other’s culture.

*Karukku* reveals Bama’s strong disapproval of “tali” custom and disfavor of life enforced by religious members of the church. Repellingly she says:

> It’s by calling on all this stuff about God, the promises made to him, our sins and our good deeds, and Heaven and everlasting Hell, that the priests and nuns frighten the life out of us. But God created us so that we can be happy and free. I am sure that God doesn’t want us to be living like slaves to the day we die, without any rights or status, just because of a cord around the neck.... (S, p.95)

She says, the woman is empowered by God himself. It is the fear created by the promise made during wedding that deters the combating nature of woman. Repressive hold and male’s tying of a thread around the neck cannot curtail the liberty and rights of a woman. Irrespective of low caste and high caste women, she gives a call to be aggressive challenging the violent nature of men and to realize their own personality. She advises:

> If she doesn’t get out of the moment she realizes he’s not a man but a pey and make a life for herself, then of course she might as well climb that tamarind tree. (S, p.96)

In Paraiya street, Bama witnesses the heart rending brutish act of Thaayi’s husband. He violently whips her with the waist belt inhumanly and abuses her with obscenities. She is made fun of by cutting the hair. This heartless man’s act makes Bama to react in a furious way with anger, she interrogates her mother:

> Well, Amma, just because he’s tied a tali round her neck, does it mean he can beat his wife as he likes? It’s just pitiful to see Thaayi, Amma.(S, p.43)
Even at that young age revulsion fills the mind of the author against all the lamenting states of women in the community. She broods over this case and thinks Thaayi should stop enduring the unending pain and rescue herself.

Survival is impossible for most of the Dalit women within the relationship of marriage in the family. Of course, outwardly they are illiterate and of ignored class, but they never remain as handicapped against this plight. Marriage does not assure protection or dependence on the earnings of the spouse. As a result, they reluctantly break the walls of existence obsessed with marital discord. Karuppasaami’s daughter, Pecchiamma comes out of her estranged life with her alcoholic husband who has a mistress. She raises her strong voice in front of Naattaamai of the panchayat unveiling her torment and aspires to end her marriage. She enters a second marriage as a rejection of her past miserable life. There is a similar situation in the case of upper caste Hindus. Pottalu Mandai Ayya’s daughter is given in marriage to a man along with all the property. Perturbation of marital life instigates her to violate the norms and to separate from her distrustful husband. Women are restlessly engaged in work from dawn to dusk. Bama writes of the upper caste Hindu woman:

Women are overwhelmed and crushed by their own disgust, boredom, and exhaustion.... (S, p.59)

Women in this village are tormented both physically and mentally. To overcome this harassment, the traditional form of resistance is accomplished. They find a kind of escapism and express the pressures of marital life without breaking the customs of conventional marriage. The incident of Irulappan’s wife, Virayi, who is possessed by Esakki is a illustrative of this context.
Besides the enslaved life of Dalit women, she is pressed to involve in ceaseless work from dawn to dusk. At night, they require to submit to their spouses even if unwilling. Bama states:

I sometimes think that because they have neither pleasure nor fulfilment in their own sexual lives, they derive a sort of bitter comfort by using these terms of abuse which are actually names of their body parts. (S, p.68)

They counter their dissatisfaction and express their agitation by ugly tirade and articulations which alleviate them to some extent. The novelist ponders over the Dalit women’s own savagery towards their own men. Unlike Hindu upper caste women, out bursts of these women are furious. They engage in brawl, physical tussle and indecent behavior. Raakkamma of Kuppacchipatti is persecuted at the hand of her brutal husband. She has combated with him by riposting to his abusive words. She curbs him with shrieks and screams as:

Ayyayyo, he’s killing me. Vile man, you’ll die, you’ll be carried out as a corpse, you low-life, you bastard, you this you that…. (S, p.61)

But her husband shows his wrath with physical violence and kicks her lower belly. She immodestly lifts up her sari in front of the gathered people and rebels by ranting:

How dare you kick me, you low-life? Your hand will get leprosy! How dare you pull my hair?....(S, p.61)

The episode of Kaliamma’s duel with her husband, Chinnappan depicts the way of counteraction with blows. Bama expresses:

When I watched them, I wasn’t so disturbed inside myself. Because Kaaliamma was ready to fight, one to one, head-on. Sometimes, she was the one who came out victorious. If he hit her, she was ready to strike him back. (S, p.63)

Kaliamma challenges him to share the house hold works with her. Fighting is a manner which women accept with dare to relieve the inhuman treatments. Thus Dalit women consider various avenues such as street fights, wailing, violent speeches and improper manner to protest in their own way.
Dalit community has its own advantages and self-identity. Many Dalit women are oblivions of this and present themselves as low as ‘deep pit’. But Marypillai opposes such inferiority and confidently finds herself as lucky as a part of Paraiya community which is free from inhuman rules of upper Hindu caste. Some think they are dark-skinned because of the use of ragi-kuuzh for food which is rich in nourishment. By listening to this Rendupalli defends:

Ei, go on, di. You silly donkey, even if our children are dark-skinned, their features are good and there’s a liveliness about them. Black is strongest and best, like a diamond. (S, p.114)

She disapproves the upper caste’s way of preventing the birth of female child who is merely considered as expense to the parents. To some extent, Dalit women are conscious of their self-respect and realize that caste-identity has its significance which makes them to feel proud.

Bama’s economical empowerment strengthens her to lead independent existence. Again the caste prejudices offer the path full of thorns to Bama. She is forced to disguise herself as a woman of a different caste to get a rented house. Inspite of this, her honest mind and honour for her own caste do not allow her to hide her identity as Paraichi(a woman of the Paraiya caste). She protests:

I often get angry enough to shout it out aloud: I am a paraichi; yes I am a paraichi. And I don’t like to hide my identity and pretend I belong to a different caste. The question beats away in my mind: why should I tell a lie and live a false life? (S, pp.120-21)

She rejects the idea of woman’s identity as daughter, wife and mother through depending on man. Because husband treats a woman as his property and extends his control over her deeds, mind and body. So she raises the question of the individualistic recognition of a woman out of wedlock and suggests:

Why? Why shouldn’t a woman belong to no one at all but herself? (S, p.121)
She gives a call to woman to have self-recognition and self-hood besides her forbidden life.

Bama’s way of dealing with her unbearable situation as a single woman is challenging. She is teased at every step of her day to day life by her colleagues. As an indomitable woman, she ignores their talks as:

It’s only when your purse is heavy that you fear the journey, as they say. You have to tell yourself the dog is barking at the sun; that’s all. (S, p. 121)

With confidence she is determined to confront all hardships and to struggle against men and women of other castes.

The incident of madness of Manacchi depicts the psychological stress of women. Bama catches the attention of the reader by narrating this episode of possession. She tries to enlighten the ignorant women who are victimized by mental strain and whose freedom is curtailed at every level. Women should strengthen their mind and should not let fear to engulf them. She fills their mind with words:

If there isn’t courage in our hearts, we lose our strength and become good for nothing. If we are brave enough, we can dare to accomplish anything we want. (S, p. 58)

She stresses the requirements of personal recognition and self-hood within marital life without suppressing woman’s identity. As a wife, she should be outspoken of her trapped situation which demands home centered roles and should find freedom of expression. She expresses:

We must give up the belief that a married life of complete service to a man is our only fate. We must change this attitude that if married life turns out to be a perpetual hell, we must still grit our teeth and endure it for a lifetime. (S, pp. 122-123)
Many incidents quoted by Bama show Dalit Christian women’s struggle against discrimination and thus claim self-respect. Reflective of frustration in women shows the changing aspects of life. The potentiality of these women is expressed in the following lines:

Yet they possess a rare spirit which allows them to grasp life by the scruff of its neck and cope with whatever it throws in the face. Resilient and rebellious, they refuse to be cowed down and no matter how many blows fall on their heads, they seem to cheekily thumb their nose at adversity. And they laugh, sing and celebrate with great vigour. As the indomitable women in this book where Bama celebrates their vibrant, colorful culture will testify.\(^3\)

Sarah Joseph’s exhibition of women’s world and the aspects of women are entirely different in *Othappu*. In *The Daughters of Alaha*, the author focuses on the inspiring characters with their resistance, strong and courageous attributes against marginalization in the society. The place of Kokkanchara represented in, *The Daughter of Alaha* pictures the challenging lives of women facing the realities of life. Many inescapable conditions demand exercise of the rebellious nature of women. The author tries to inspire the silenced class of society to raise their questions for self-preservation.

Kokkanchara Mariya is a vigorous character. In Thrissur town, the dominant class has forbidden the life of Mariya’s family. This stout-hearted lady without accepting such prohibition as loser migrates her family to the border of the city. Her settlement in the cemetery area is really a challenging existence. She overcomes all turmoil and leads her life. The prayer of Alaha is depicted as resistive power which Mariya uses against evil powers and the toils of human life. The novelist cites many occasions of Mariya’s exercise of Alaha’s prayer. For instance the mothers of screaming kids approach Mariyamma to soothe them. Women of Kokkanchara believe that this uncomfortable situation to the children is because of possession of evil power, Varodhana. By sprinkling bottle water and chanting Alaha’s prayer, she wards off that so called wicked power. She fends off
bad power with her prayer when she gets human bones while planting field beans. She recites this at the end of the novel, when the whole Kokkanchara is attacked by flood. This litany imparts effectual power for her to withstand the obstructing circumstances and things in the mundane life. She rejects the practices of Roman Catholic Church and follows the traditions of Surayees.

For the poor class women, an oppressive custom which treats them as commodity is “dowry.” Unexpected demand for dowry at the time of Chiyyamma’s matrimony frightens Mariyamma’s family. But Mariyamma and Kocchurodu oppose the bridegroom’s expectations and take a strong decision not to pay two thousand rupees.

Marginalised people of Kokkanchara are further pushed to the borders by the arrival of urban people in the name of progress. Chakkuni’s wish to purchase the house of Mariyamma is protested by Annie and her Granny. It is true, they belong to an alienated class but they are outspoken to the suppressions.

Kocchurodu is a confident woman; she never hesitates to lead her life alone when her husband absconds. She appears as a religious woman following the prayers of Roman Christians. Devotion to God by kneeling, reciting prayers and her active participation in the procession organized by church against communists show her deep faith in religion. But the writer, Parvathi Aithal and the critic, Dr. Vini Prasad recognise it as her resentment towards her careless husband who is a member of the communist party.

In the case of Nonu, we know her as wife from her hard-hearted husband, Laazer who harasses her and the young daughter. She realizes that peace and happiness are far from her in his company. She decides to have a life with a neighbour. So she elopes with the carpenter to an unknown place discarding her marital life. Going through the same psychological trauma, Kocchurodu responds to the pain of Nonu as defender and stands against her brother, Laazer who plans to obstruct the marriage of Chiyyamma.
Chinnama, Mariyamma’s youngest daughter witnesses the travails of women in marital affairs. So she rejects the proposal of Kosseppoo and asserts her decision in front of Kutipaapa:

The only thing is that I have not married. But what about those who are married? Are they happy? (TDOA, p.117)

All her sisters are suffocated in marital life, thus they are forcefully made to accept miseries. Observing this, her conscious mind provokes her to select a companion of her choice. But she is deceived by such choice. Instead of depressing herself, she joins a religious group to have solace and indulges in spreading the Gospel.

The character of Kunjile articulates various persecutions of women. She never projects her anger and nowhere protests directly. Her silence itself is the resistance to unfavorable situations. Even though she is the breadwinner, male domination shows its brutish face but this does not hinder her pace. She continues her life by earning for the livelihood.

Annie is a young girl who narrates the struggling life of women of various age groups. She is aware of women’s toilsome state and the company of the experienced Granny makes her to be sensible towards life. She discusses every minute happening with rationality. Inhabitants of Kokkanchara are restricted to use some words. Annie listening to new words tries to comprehend by addressing them as children with her stick. Sometimes atrocities of the influential class pressurize the low class people to change their names and they even hesitate to mention the name of their settlement. But Annie refuses to alter the name of Kokkanchara which has its own significant history which she appreciates.

Annie’s self-interrogation pricks her not to yield to the mortifications. Unhygienic rice purchased for low price at the departmental store affects the health of all Kokkanchara people. Annie refuses to eat such rice. The church
arranges processions against communists, but this young girl is not fascinated to participate. With resisting attitude, she observes the developmental process which would displace them further. Many happenings around Annie are far beyond her understanding, but she ponders over it and if it appears as injustice she is skeptical and raises questions. It shows her consciousness of harassments and humiliations. All women in *The Daughters of Alaha* have spirit to make their existence possible in the strangulating atmosphere.

The writer, Parvathi Aithal mentions that:

> When Yemandan Vaaru and his groups came to demolish the home of eight rooms. It was these women who faced them. Broomsticks and firewood were their instruments in this resistance. (TDOA, p.148)

The church takes the responsibility to solve this problem. It arranges a meeting and prohibits women's participation. Knowing the passive attitude and expecting their men to be mute observers before the church leaders and Yemandanvaaru, the women go to Chirracchi’s shop to purchase alcoholic drinks to make them outspoken and courageous. This adventurous life is often visible in the women of Kokkanchara.

Kokkanchara women join Charaka class as instructed by the church priest. The low amount received in this job turns their life hard and they fail to bear the family responsibility. So they suppress the service mentality and decide to work in factories which give more money than Charaka class. They rebel against Francis when he tries to convince them. They say:

> We don’t want this job. You don’t have wife and children you know. So you can turn wheel by sitting. (TDOA, p.55)

At the end, a natural disaster shows its cruel facet. The women try to stem the flooding river without assistance from their men. They also attempt to protect the existing environment when urbanization keeps its pace in Kokkanchara. Men
are represented as weak and irresponsible by the author. Women fight against the toils and support the family members. The author draws the strength in them and the character of interrogative attitude.

Sarah Joseph's literary works are enlivened. Her women characters are repressed and discontented, but they strive to have an unfettered existence. In this novel, the female characters encounter male escapism from responsibility and this inevitable situation itself creates women to be conscious of her life. Their mere living places them to raise voice and act according to their changing attitude. They are not passive but they fight against all odds to be alive. Though woman is caught in the web of dominant powers, the author portrays the tale of three generations of women who open up themselves to the resistance. Jancy James quotes:

The first of the three novels—Aalaahayude Penmakkal—outstanding for its deft interweaving of the Sthalapurana (place legends) and micro legends of ordinary women of extraordinary power and their struggle for survival, received many awards. (O, pp.xvii-xviii)

3.2. Resistance of Nuns against Dogmas

In Karukku, Bama is a voice against the males of their own caste, the dominating church and higher class people in her environment. Her story expresses her attitude which opposes the structures of suppression and the patriarchal system. The focus on women's harassment and the fascination to transcend limits are noticeable in her presentation of the Dalit world. Bama's evoking voice against various suppressing forces strengthens the female-self and insists to show boldness. She opines that Karukku is a lance which exposes the discrimination at every stage of her life.

Karukku articulates the Dalit Christian woman who is compelled to reveal the dehumanized and underprivileged existence. It records the protests against injustice even that of the protagonist as a child. Bama traces how she is exposed to
the humiliation of Dalits by narrating the event of an elder person of her community. His way of bowing low and carrying the parcel to the Naicker rise question in her mind about the dehumanized treatment.

The honour which is received by Bama’s brother as an educated lad creates sense of self-determination in Bama to study hard. Ignoring all encountered discrimination as a student, she works hard to get success. But she feels embarrassed to stand in the class room when the names of scheduled caste students are announced for special tuition. With contempt, she expresses her decision to the teacher as:

I didn’t want their special tuition or anything else, and sat down. (K, p.19)

She outshines in her studies with her sincere effort by rejecting the arrangements of the government which humiliate her in a certain way. Disparity between students of different castes in the attitude of school’s authority enrages Bama. Once, she is not allowed to take holidays to attend the first communion of her sister and brother, but the rich family students are permitted to get. This makes the author to interrogate the partiality. She raises a question:

How is it that you are allowing these others to go; why is it that you only refuse me? (K, p.19)

The challenging streak in Bama leads her to be above the discriminating rules for rich and poor students. She is least bothered that she has no good clothes and jewellery, even though her classmates have looked down her for that. She discloses great revulsion for such things and concentrates on studies and scores highest marks. She urges Dalit Christian girls to complete their education which calls for courage and ability to counteract the infinite humiliations. She expresses:

Yet, because I had the education, because I had the ability, I dared to speak up for myself; I didn’t care a toss about caste. Whatever the situation, I held my head high. And I completed whatever I took up, successfully. (K, p.20)
An educated woman Bama is herself a model for other women and spurs on to face the absurdities of life.

Bama traces out prejudices over caste in society. She narrates events in her social life where the malady of discrimination appears and catches the readers with her defiant acts towards such entangled circumstances. While travelling by bus, she is ordered by a Naicker woman to move to another seat knowing Bama’s caste. Without obeying her, she firmly occupies the seat and that Naicker lady sitting next to her moves to another seat forcibly. To escape from the crisis her mother suggests her to pretend to be of a different caste. But she never keeps herself as a voiceless person and is reluctant to make pretention of another caste.

A skirmish between Chaliyar and Paraiyar takes place over the cemetery. The rich folk of Chaliyar have bribed the reserve police to torment Paraiyar men. In this critical situation, many men try to manage without getting arrested and harrowed by police men. Women’s daring is memorable in hiding their men in two or three houses and it shows their wit to rescue them. Illustrating the reasons of labor pain and contagious diseases, they somehow avoid the entrance of police inside the house. Bama finds that:

The police were furious that the women were smart enough to continue working and taking care of their children even without their men. (K, p.35)

In this context, women are not dependent on their men’s earnings. They go with their work as day-laborers and also consider the hardships of men who disappear into the fields and forests and protect them supplying gruel.

Paati, Bama’s grandmother agitates the Palla boys for their betrayal towards Paraiya people because Palla boys are sheltered at Paraiya houses during violence. The brilliance of Paraiyar women is appreciable. When a young boy died, Paati and other women have smartly buried the dead body and draw out the
boy's father from hiding by disguising him as women in the midst of patrolling police. At last, the cemetery case turns out to be in favor of Paraiya community. Some people wish to give mass in a way to express their thankfulness. Meanwhile many women desist from this kind of celebration remembering the priest’s negligence towards Paraiyars. He has not extended his assistance to protect Paraiya men. However, the women prove themselves as courageous. They have firm self-credence to overcome any disputes.

Bama raises her voice regarding the inhuman lives of Dalits which has existed for generations. Endless questions cling in her mind considering marginalized status of Dalits even though they are educated. She queries the crude social code which afflicts the feelings of lower caste through questions like:

Are Dalits not human beings? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have such attributes as a sense of honor and self-respect? Are they without any wisdom, beauty, dignity? What do we lack? They treat us in whatever way they choose, as if we are slaves who don’t even possess human dignity. And if ever a Dalit gets wise to this and wants to live with some honour and self-respect, they jump up and down as if something really outrageous is happening. (K, p.24)

Limited and controlled lives of Dalits persuade Bama to expose her repulsion. Through her reformist ideas, she demands freedom and redemption.

The author establishes as a challenging voice to religious manmade traditional patterns which strike at the day-to-day routine of Dalits. Religion influences by controlling the lives of followers and creates fear of God through priests and nuns. But Bama is possessed with revolutionary thoughts even at an early age. She elucidates the incident, where she touches the holy Host with her fingers and chews to examine the threatening words of the nuns about the Host.

Bama is good at reciting litany, so the nuns select her to teach the prayers to other girls. But once she is hit by a nun for making mistake out of nervousness.
Furious Bama decides not to attend catechism class or church service and plots to fling a stone at that sister. She complains for having to attend midnight mass at Christmas and Easter. The celebration of festivity by the priests and the sisters is criticized by her as mere duty with the absence of devotion. She protests the religious members' cruel and neglecting manner towards children. The existing empowered code spurs her to struggle against injustice.

The devotional surroundings of Bama create deep rooted wish to dedicate herself to God as nun. The hypocritical attributes of religious members shrink her love and devoutness towards God. Her repugnance towards insincere religious members is exposed in arguments and her enquiry of their deeds. She questions herself:

Why should I go to Pusai every day? Why should I take communion? (K, p.88)

Out of anguish, she decides to offer prayer to the Almighty in her own way without the intervention of the representatives. Instead of chanting litany, she searches God through mind's eye and by performing good deeds in everyday life. She breaks the traditional accepted form of prayer.

Bama is moved by the ill-treatment of the authority towards Dalit children in the boarding school which she regards as 'whited sepulchres'. Instead of assisting the poor students, they trouble them. At such tormented circumstances, she squabbles with nuns for the sake of destitute children. She devotes her life as a nun with a yearning to uplift the suffering children in spite of her relatives' forbidding. But her high spirited dream is shattered confronting the comfortable life inside the nunnery and the repeated prayers in decorative language which are distant to the principles of Jesus. She rebels and speaks out:

When there did not seem to be this connection, I asked why it wasn't there. We should never believe one thing and do another. We should speak up about what we believe. That is being true to oneself. Everything else is play-acting. (K, p.91)
She has raged at the act of religious members who accept this order with a service mind but when they enter, there is a gap between their deeds and words. Her favorite game is Kabaddi which comprises challenging and conquering the opponent. The same inspires her to accost against the odds of life.

In the nunnery, she notices the division of nuns according to caste and language. Instead of practicing how to serve the needy, they are very conscious of individual’s caste identity. Though they crush the feelings of Bama by lowering the Tamil Paraiyars, she proudly and honestly regards herself as Dalit. She is even subdued for the different birth dates in her degree certificate and in her christening certificate. The abuses of the supervising sister in the training do not stop Bama to speak up for the lower caste.

Every nun takes an oath to submit her life to serve the poor. Bama as a nun enters a school, full of wealthy children and unwillingly obeys the demands of the rich students. Uncompromised thoughts towards such an act provoke her to question the religious authority which makes her conscience stricken. Service to the rich God, lack of humanity, control of the low caste people as slaves in the name of devotion through power and positions, exploitation and deceiving Dalit Christians by proclaiming themselves as Gods are the realities of the snazzy religious members which irritate her. As a result, she comes out of the false world of “obedience” and “faith”.

To realize God in the outside world, Margalitha breaks the procedure of the seminary and comes out with the help of a nun, Aabelamma in Othappu. But frustrated Bama strives hard to slip away from the clutches of the repressed and artificial atmosphere. She rebels and hates to live within the disguised renunciation of the sepulcher.

Through her writings Bama brings out the angst among the Dalit Christian due to the alienating situations. She evokes her community people by her
radicalization. Radical measures of Bama influence the lives of Dalit Christian women. Her literary work Karukku has a unique role in changing the minds of Dalits and coaxes them to challenge the existing oppressive system in their community. It is like a call to her people to break the bindings of slavery and unite. It inspires them to struggle for their rights. She is a role model to those who want to undermine traumas of life at the hands of the elite class. She appeals the community people to educate themselves which empowers and brings changes. In her opinion, this book has created awareness among the people.

Sara Joseph initially portrays the heart-rending sufferings of Margalitha and peeps into her psyche. She focuses on her individual approach to life. Othappu depicts the transgression of ordained conformity of the system by a reverend nun, namely Margalitha. This radical novel pictures women in the society of Kerala. The bold writer Sarah Joseph lights the flame of awareness among women by projecting the distinguished female figures in the story. The author shows the daring of women who protest the dominant authority underlying the power.

Sara Joseph is recognizable for her outspokenness. She stands as a “raising voice” towards the inhibitions on women. As G.S. Jayasree appreciates:

She says, “I am proud that I am born a woman. I feel fortunate to be living in an age that hearkens to the promising voice of women. As I am not a ‘male writer’, I have no compulsions to reproduce the values of the ruling class. The culture of the dominant class is against women, just as it is against those low of caste [...] My duty is to write fearlessly about the world of women-women, who are denied self-determining rights over their own bodies by the oppressive gender regime.”

Her resisting thoughts and feelings about the oppressive world are reflected in her writings. Jancy James argues:

Othappu is an iconoclastic novel only to the extent that it questions and exposes the hegemony of irrational and materialistic functionaries within the Church that defeat and nullify its spiritual resources. (O, p.xx)
The religious environment and practices both at outside and inside the residence of a Christian family appeal every Catholic girl in her juvenile age to wait for an insistent divine call. They are moved by the religious members who are dressed in fine white clothes and selfless service. These members expect security to life and power within the religious order.

The protagonist, Margalitha receives a sacred call and hastens to the illusioned spiritual cloister. Like every nun in the convent, she accepts Jesus as her spouse. The ironical view is that Jesus is a bachelor. He nowhere claims to be a spouse to any woman when he was alive. Faith and practices of Christian religion allow the person to get involved with service mind. The outer world adores the religious vocation as a spiritual job with rigid celibacy. But the courageous writer, Sarah Joseph points out falsity of the sacred world which shatters the spirituality of Margalitha with its materialistic functionaries.

Margalitha, an affluent Roman Catholic girl follows the sacred call and joins the closed community of convent in her teenage to realize God. The so called devotional world of convent opens to her, there she realizes that spirituality is practiced in words not with soul; and hypocrisy is hidden behind the veils in the interior world of the convent. The author says:

In the convent, Margalitha used to attend the Mass only to discharge a duty. Day after day, again and again, she lent her voice, not her soul, to the printed prayers that had lost their resonance and fragrance. She would chant her prayers loudly, dozing at the same time. (O, p.149)

The pretending life of nuns in the congregation mechanically discharging the duty suffocates her. She expresses her grievance to Jesus:

I went like sheep among wolves to proclaim your Gospel.
(O, p.89)

Her quest for God by renouncing worldly life in the convent proves as an illusion. The disguised daily life in the adored divinely place makes her soul to
encounter a kaleidoscope not the dedication to service. As she grows up, her matured mind and inner self do not admit the religious order.

Margalitha’s father shows his unwillingness to send her to the convent. He guides her by explaining the reality of life. He makes an attempt to convince her by saying that convent life is a comfortable life in the King’s place and warns her against the wilderness. He advises that the real meaning of service relates to the selfless service to the needy. Young age naturally creates an attraction. Margalitha experiences womanhood by giving birth to a child in her dream. Karikkan is a young priest who is allowed to visit the nunnery to train for the songs of the devotional groups. He is an attraction to all nuns in the convent as “Thirukumaran.” Consciously and unconsciously, Margalitha loves him in the behavior restricted atmosphere of the ordained religious institution.

Religion is a commitment which Margalitha accepts to serve others outside the family. Her reasons for entering and departing from the holy order are entirely different. The hidden words of her father in the sub consciousness, the love of motherhood and deep attachment to Karikkan rise skirmisher in her soul which turns her sleepless. She says:

For days and nights, every moment, I considered and re-considered. I reasoned with Jesus. He tells me not to come to him in the garb and prayers of hypocrisy or to choke my soul. (O, p.6)

She reveals her soulless devotion to God in the cloister and shares this self-cognition with Aabelamma. She rebels against the religious order which enforces marginalized role to woman pertaining to religious duties within the congregation. Moved by thoughts and deeds of sister Jereemia, she expresses her resentment to the unequal status of nuns. Aabelamma notes that:

But Margalitha’s mind was stout with rebellion. She disagreed with ninety-nine things out of a hundred. In order to give vent to her resistance and resentment, Margalitha joined Sister Jereemia’s Eucharistic Order. (O, p.136)
Her failure to find God in the convent insists upon her to come out of the cloth-schemed system. Latha Anantharaman quotes:

Margalitha is not a brave rebel. She left the convent not because of a high-minded crisis of conscience but simply because she did not believe. She could not surrender her life to the church.\(^5\)

Margalitha has not staunchly protested the intolerant functionaries in the convent. In the process of self-discovery, she breaks out the closed religious order and yearns to search God outside the convent. She liberates her soul from the restricted conformity without interrogating the structures and practices of conventional faith. Sarah Joseph regards Margalitha’s affirmative act as appreciable. But the Catholic religion condemns the nonconformist attitude of Margalitha and her dalliance makes religious minded people to subside her as evil. She is outcasted from society and from the blood relatives.

The real meaning of religion is to live a life according to the consciousness. Most of the nuns in the nunnery have adjusted to the irrational system and triple vows are only impractical in the spiritual way. But Margalitha has the potentiality to realize spirituality and sexuality by leading her life in the material world. So she exits from the convent like ‘a wind that never returns’ and the convent life is closed to her like ‘milk once pressed out, cannot return to the udder.’ The self-determined ex-nun leaves her family of nuns and searches her identity to realize God in the outside world.

Margalitha denounces the self-enclosed situation and breaks the false practices of religiosity. Being enlightened of the situation inside the world of sacred place, she protests the family’s wish to send the brother’s daughter, Riny into the holy vocation. Her resisting voice is heard as:

One need not choose the way of another just because of a likeness in appearance, said Margalitha. Instead, Riny should study well and find a job for herself. (O, p.53)
Sister Jereemia influences rebellious thoughts in Margalitha. She stands against the authorities and norms of the convent. She declares herself as priestess and forms the Eucharistic order of sisters unknown to the convent authorities. She says:

This authority has been vested in me for the liberation of widows, prostitutes, tender virgins, and all women who bleed.... (O, p.137)

Her resentment shows her inner desire to fight for the equality of the women within the religious institution. Because the holy order allows only priests to offer sacred sacrifice to God. As defiance, she wears the white cloak to offer holy sacrifice and declares:

I am not just a nun, but one who fulfils the will of God; chosen to fulfill the incomplete. (O, p.136)

Violating the age old conventions and rigid rules of the congregation, she tries to seek justice for nuns to question the rights of women and to question the foul acts within the religious institution. Margalitha accepts Jereemia’s created order and celebration in the darkness. Both Sister Aabelamma and Sister Jereemia powerfully raise their impact on Margalitha and compel her to cast away the shackled life of her accepted institution.

The suffocated life against her consciousness finds no way to sustain in the devotional place. She realizes herself as a flower without fragrance. So she invariably breaks the commitment of religious order. This act though makes her to be ostracized; she silently presents herself as an example to those who wish to follow the consciousness to walk in the right path. Her provocative act leads her to realize selfhood by serving humanity. She has not accustomed to the rituals of the convent and silently sets her steps outside the nunnery to venture her own way of life.
A girl from a prestigious and an affluent family and a reverend nun of a respectable and comfortable order of Christianity turns her journey on the way of thorn. She suddenly encounters poverty, scarcity and inferiority. On one side she has to face the ugly eyes of men and on the other side, she is condemned as grotesque in the social structure. But nowhere, she loses her confidence and tries to lead her life in the midst of all odds by earning her livelihood.

The authoritative men at her home are least bothered to entitle her with ancestral property. The well wisher and a lawyer, Yohannan Kasseessa tries to seek for her the rightful share of the family’s property or a teaching job in her father’s school. But his attempt proves as unfruitful to give justice to a wanderer and a homeless ex-nun like Margalitha. Her own family segregates by punishing her as a fallen woman and is reluctant to allow her to exercise her right over the ancestral wealth. The belief in her own potentiality insists her to take a questioning spirit when the turmoil of mundane life and escapist attitude of Karikkan confronts her. She has dauntlessly demanded a teaching job in her father’s school from her beastly brother. It is visible in the whole story where she appears as strong protesting female figure. This submissive lady projects herself as a woman who fights for her right. The author remarks:

Margalitha was a born fighter. (O, p.194)

Initially she stands in front of her brother, John Channere to claim her right. So the author writes:

The Mayor was struck by the awareness that the dignity of her personality dwarfed him. (O, p.192)

She raises her voice against her brother when he lifts his hand to hit and turns her cheek by remissing her brother’s anger. She reminds him her way of going in litigation to get her right. Protesting thought to suppress her brother’s rage finds her picketing at the school gate. This hurts the dignity of Mayor John Channere. Against to injustice, Margalitha determines to hold satyagraha to seek
her right when requesting for the job and refuses to compromise. Even when Karikkan’s faith in Margalitha shakes in the matter of Augustine and he is suspicious of their relationship, she boldly justifies them as:

Two free human beings. (O, p.206)

The self-assertive nature of Margalitha enhances her personality and she faces the enormity of the problem in life easily. Her challenging attitude and inner strength redefine her.

Rebekka, a free believer loves her life and this self-existence saves her from all imbalances of marital life and makes her to rise like a phoenix. She appears as a woman who strongly faces and breaks the constraining situations. The suspicious attitude of her husband disheartens her and she is haunted by his hostility. There is a rift in the mutual understanding of this couple. The author writes:

Thomas Vaidyar worked hard to break Rebekka’s will and make her cry. (O, p.30)

The patriarchal hold of Vaidyar suppresses liberty and the bold trait in her. She is victim of his venomous treatment, for instance, he enjoys applying vicious powder to her eyes. The mediocre conduct of her husband makes her unyielding. She splashes water on her face to save the child in her womb. She locks Vaidyar inside the room and leaves home by throwing the key into the well. Utter failure of marital relationship has mounted the sufferings. Vaidyar’s aversion turns his family life into a misery and he lacks concentration in his profession. This hinders his regular income. At this critical juncture, she stands up to take the job as cook in the theatre group of Naasthikan George. She is called as drama woman and a kept woman by her relatives. It gives a clear picture of a conventional society where a woman’s presence is undermined in the public sphere and a woman artist is underrated. The novelist writes:

Naasthikan George was amazed that Rebekka was not at all concerned about the public gossip about her. His theatre company was her livelihood, a refuge for her children. (O, p.33)
She never listens to the condemning words of her relatives from whom she expects no assistance. In order to feed her children and earn livelihood, she takes an independent decision against oppressive hold of the structure.

The niece of Channere Varkey-Master, Rebekka is sensible towards woman’s liberation and combats the suffocation of woman’s life. She rescues Margalitha from the untold miseries disregarding John’s forbidding to enter Channere house. He says:

Channere house is not a thoroughfare for stage-and-paint women. (O, p.26)

Courageously she saves the unconscious Margalitha from the banana-ripening room and prays by keeping her hand on her head. She is a striking woman with the quality of strength. In contrast to Margalitha, she is very active and the embodiment of a vivid and impressive image with a strong resisting voice. Jancy James points out:

Rebekka, the niece of Channere Varkey-Master and Margalitha’s aunt, is another rebel against conventional faith practices. (O,p.xxv)

Rebekka is a free believer and claims herself as a receiver of the Holy Spirit without ordination in any particular religious institution. With selfless service of prayer, she heals the pangs of the people and challenges the nuns and priests who routinely count the rosaries as religious members. She attacks them by saying:

Those who stuff their stomachs three-four times a day will not receive the Holy Spirit! I have suffered much. I have begged. Suffered rejection and abuse at the hands of the rich. Maddened by hunger, I have eaten paper soaked in water. (O, p.39)

The church authority questions Rebekka’s spiritual deeds and her past marital life to control her. They emphasize the power of religious duties to the priests. In return, she displays intransigence by walking out of the church. She holds to her strong view as a recipient blessed with the words of God and strikes at
Paul by saying that education and affluence are not significant to preach the words of God. Her radical thoughts and opinions make him spell bound who ridicules of her revelation of God.

Healers hold independent prayer sessions because it fetches money for them. But Rebekkechi appears as a true follower of Jesus’ doctrines and acts as an indignant figure towards artificial faith healing-sessions. She has potentiality to defend the hypocrites publicly. Chandy Doctor is a materialistic man, with his impressive healing crusades in English and he hypnotizes the educated and the rich people. Rebekka is treated as a sinner by the religious order but this same order blesses the Doctor through Daniel Achen. Rebekka as a disguised man protest at Chandy and creates uproar in the prayer meeting session. As a provocateur, she attempts to make the followers of Chandy Doctor to be aware of his healing deeds.

In another incidence, Rebekka participates in the promised miracle campaign organized by a popular priest. But she finds herself unable to bear the profiteers around her. She declares that without the assistance of these religious members, she has the power to talk directly with God. Observing their materialistic attitude, she quotes:

Do not be a party to selling Jesus in the market place.  
(O, p.229)

Her words reveal their hypocrisy:

They will pocket their wages for saying their part of the script and go home. I too have been paid...(O, p.229)

When her attempt to unveil the secrets of these heal dealers to the crowd proves as pointless, she goes to the extent to cut her tongue to show her penitence. Even though the volunteers physically assault her to the ground, she withstands all the humiliations. Thus Rebekka is a rebellious and vibrant character in Othappu.
She resentfully tackles her unhappy wedlock and openly discloses the mysterious lives of pretentious charismatic people. Janey James expresses her views:

The core of *The Scent of the Other Side* lies in the two variants of spirituality, both independent of the religious establishments as evinced through the lives of Margalitha and Rebekka. Both acquire courage, cruelly opposed by all, because their decisions and actions are non-conformist and they are a danger to the dictates of hierarchical structures, both secular and religious. Though Margalitha intends to send a social message, she never speaks in public and hence social reactions to her are subtle and silent; but Rebekka raises her voice against the hypocrisies of all complacent public and private powers and hence meets with direct and even violent physical assault. (O, p.xxix)

Rebekka is not bestowed with harmonious marital life. And Margalitha never finds her own spirituality within the accepted religious family. But realism of life and rational thoughts make them to forsake the enclave of particular systems. Rebekka is more assertive than Margalitha.

Sarah Joseph sketches very interesting women characters in her feminist gospel *Othappu*. Onslaughts and hegemonic boundaries curtail the freedom of women in all areas of life. The author remarkably brings out her revolutionary thoughts and reforming suggestions pertaining to women’s condition in the present society. Janey James declares:

> It is a feminist gospel that transcends and challenges the limitations of all institutions, including the family. (O, p.xxxi)

She projects female figures, who, irrespective of their accepted life come out of that oppressive hold and find their own way realizing their individual identity. Her different female figures in the novel *Othappu* are portrayed as various branches of a particular religious tree. And all the characters are presented with distinctive dimensions with deep-rooted impact of religion in one way or the
other. Woman is married or unmarried; she is touched by the faith of religion in her life. She also reflects her opposition to the atrocities of women and creates awareness to fight against injustice and gives a call for articulation.

Aabelamma is Margalitha’s superior in the convent. The novelist proves how the religious vocation holds the nuns through its constraints. She is pushed into the system at a young and ignorant age. Penury of her family and brainwashing, keeps her association with the foul structure. She is conscious of the corruptive spiritual practices inside the institution. Later she reveals this by protesting at Silvy and Margalitha’s Amma not to send Riny, a child to the imprisoning sacred place of God. But nowhere she is portrayed as longing to separate from the confinement of the cloister. Aabelamma expresses:

> Once you are caught in a system, it is best to cooperate with its dictates. If you walk out, your rebellion will exact a crushing physical and spiritual cost. (O, p.5)

The word “caught” in her statement discloses her inevitable existence in the oppressive system. She does not have the strength to show a bold front to being excluded to the margin of a religious vocation, because she is supportive to the family financially and gives an image which glorifies the prestige of the family. Her sacrifice and renunciation to the congregation assure her security of life which is impossible in the outer world. Though she is committed to the holy order internally, she dislikes the pretentious practices of spirituality and function that are impractical. She is caught up in the web of this order. She is branded as sinner by the society if she dissents and deserts the illusionary land of spirituality. So she never cerebrates to cross the boundary. But she reveals her inner struggles with the systems oppressions when Margalitha suffers from sleeplessness. She says:

> Those who do right, sleep well. You must do what you believe to be right. It has been years since I slept. Many others with us here are sleepless too. They may claim to have slept like logs. One look at their eyes and face, and you know they haven’t slept a wink.... (O, p.6)
Chapter 3

Female Defiance Made Visible

The vantage point of this character is evident. As a mute combatant, she evokes a heroic stance in Margalitha to disentangle herself from the cloth scheme of things. The male authority in the family of Channere is extended over the servants also. But, a maidservant shows her boldness by rescuing Margalitha. She makes up her mind to raise her voice against the escalation of violence even not worrying for her job. Though this maidservant hails from the needy section, the distressed plight and inhuman confinement towards the ex-nun Margalitha instigates her to resist the dominant character, John. As a supporting character, she is aware of the real situation of women in the world and rightly holds the act of Margalitha by saying:

Don’t married women walk out of their homes? Why can’t this be seen like that? (O, p.47)

It expresses the author’s attitude to liberate women from the closed structure.

Activist Sarah Joseph points out the denial of religious ordination to the women clergy. Woman is discriminated in this aspect due to gender. The religious structure denies the authoritative role to woman. Woman’s faith, her rigid celibacy, commitment and renunciation in the way of spirituality are ignored by the theological system of men. Within the convent the female figure of Sister Jereemia draws the attention of the readers with her protest against the prohibition on women to be priestess. As Jancy James says:

She declared herself a priestess and ‘celebrated Holy Mass, in the darkness of the night like a ghost’ wearing a loose cloak liberating herself from the nun’s habit. (O, p.xxvi)

In that nunnery, she has the courage to raise her voice against the Mother Superior who orders her to confess of the Eucharistic offer made to God. And she
becomes victim to the violent act of the Superior in her attempt to get justice for the subordination. The words in the Bible:

And God said, Let us make man
in our image, after our likeness: and
let them have dominion over the fish
of the sea, and over the fowl of the air,
and over the cattle, and over all the
earth, and over every creeping thing
that creepeth upon the earth.⁶

The word “them” itself indicates, man and woman have equal authority over creation. In the same way, Sister Jereemia argues through her act that there should be no disparity between men and women in performing of the Holy Mass. She takes the lead to open the eyes of other nuns to realize their personality.

In the Protestant denomination, women have the liberty to perform the ordained duty as clergy. But the Roman Catholic Church curtails this vocation to women and their leadership in the church. By the minor character of nun Jereemia, the literary woman, Sarah Joseph attacks the norms of the church. She puts forward the inner feelings of women character with her minute observations and highlights the affects of religion. Irrespective of their existence, women have deep rooted religious faith and unconsciously they are forced to be with the limitations. She projects female figures of various backgrounds as protesting at the restrictions and resistance in their own way.

An outstanding writer, Sarah Joseph enters deep into the psyche of the women characters and throws light on the fully absorbed religious faith. It may be a married or an unmarried and a rich or a poor woman, she presents various aspects of the debased and oppressed conditions of women. She depicts them as posing questions against the dominating structures to re-discover themselves.
3.3. Struggles of Single Women

Simran in Dev and Simran as a married woman refuses to be entrapped in the typical image of female. She desires to live in the contemporary world with self-assertion.

Indu Swami writes:

The hard fact is that woman herself is responsible for the troubles of another woman. In our society, it is not only man who suppresses the liberty of woman but woman too. Not only mother-in-law and sister-in-law, even one’s own mother may be cruel to her daughter to please those who expect complete submission from a woman after marriage.⁷

Simran’s mother appears as a symbol of Indian traditional womanhood and expects her daughter should oblige to the old notions. Simran with her uncompromising voice protests at the stereotyped way of life of her mother. She expresses:

I wanted to say, for God’s sake don’t turn me into a bloody doormat, you’re a doormat, one in the family is enough.
(DAS, p.28)

Even Simran tries to exhibit resistance against her mother’s attitude, again comes across her crude life set-up with a patient smile. She responds by showing her dismay.

Sa. Usha, a Kannada writer expresses in her poem:

Don’t play that tune again
what your mother,
hers mother and her mother
had played on the snake-charmer’s flute
into the ears of nitwits like me.⁸

In this poem, the poetess shows the different outlook of the mother and the daughter. In the same way, Simran longs to be released from these age-old constraints. Maya’s cousin takes upon herself to care for her dying husband out of
love even though she finds it a drudgery. For contempt of this situation, she wishes the death of her husband and her release. By remembering such incidents, Simran thinks of her relationship with Dev and finds an absence of “grand passion” in married life.

Woman is prohibited to discuss sexual feelings. But Eunice De Souza through her character encourages to voice woman’s repressed emotions of sexuality which is against sexual prudery. Pregnancy is considered as a hindrance by Simran which confines the femininity of woman. Of course Simran’s friends show their concern but her single widow life is intruded by males. Without yielding to them, she deals with her life by sharing past and present events through letters to her dead husband. The wish to be in the remembrance of Dev pushes her to the world ignoring the advices of her friends, relatives and mother-in-law. She interrogates her marital life with Dev by replying to Maya who is in confusion to enter wedlock.

Maya is presented as a feminist and works at a women’s redress centre. She discusses about legal protection of women against oppression. She narrates her resistance to oppressive acts of men. Once she uses vulgar slang for a man who calls her as ‘pervert.’ It is evident that a woman may be from the middle class or poor class if she is unable to bare the mortification; rebellious attitude is shown by the use of boorish words. Woman is always praised for her mute attitude and is barred from voicing herself. Maya voices out on the kind of repression that Dev exhibits when he tries to stop her from speaking.

Maya tries to understand the concept of marriage and it is presumed to be an inconvenience. A way of contempt gives voice to think that the idea of marriage is not an absolute thing: the expectations of three meals a day and in a submissive way. She concludes her view without considering the comfort life within marriage; she quotes from Wallace Stevens’ line:

‘The imperfect is our paradise.’ No perfect husbands.
No perfect wives. No perfect life. No perfect death
No perfect world. No perfect lawyers. What to do? (DAS, p. 10)
She opines that perfection is impossible in matrimony. It appalls her, but she decides to enter into a new relationship with daring just to have the experience of a marital life.

Vimi, Rishad’s girl friend is an independent girl. Though Rishad wants to give a sense of security to her without any expectation, she is able to take care of herself. Eunice De Souza does not view motherhood positively. Vimi views a kid as a typhoon in the house. The career oriented women seem to ignore parental life. Deblina undermines the sexist values in her own way. She is not confined to the vested values of the Indian society. Alienated from India, she reacts against the hostile conditions of women through her e-mails. Knowing the lonely life of the young widow Simran, she advices her to remarry. She says:

Someone will turn up again who wants to look after her, and doesn’t mind – widow no issue. (DAS, p.110)

Her rational ideas are influenced by the west and education. That’s why, she pressurizes Simran to come over to the west and suggests to take a partner to begin a new life. She is not at all interested to go through the routine traditional life.

Women in Dev and Simran in their own way show their resistance to shortcomings with endurance. The author demonstrates women’s defiance to make up their living. Unlike the older generation, independent and educated women seek non-confined life.

Eunice De Souza pays attention to the realities of the urban women existence in the Indian scenario. Woman in the urbanized world is aware of education, freedom and individuality. In spite of this, women’s sufferings vary from generation to generation and they are exposed to onslaughts in different ways. She gives a call to women globally to grow and to realize their individuality.
Dangerlok is Mumbai – the swirl, the scum, the acid aftertaste, the lingering, the seductive city who lures you and then enters your head and heart like a disease. And in between all this stands the protagonist, Rina Ferreira (positively modelled after Eunice) who is an English Literature Teacher, who lives in Santacruz East with her two parrots – Totha and Tothi and her hoard of books, writing letters to David (a man who she once loved and may be still does), enjoying a casual cab ride, observing her neighbors, friends, cabwallahs, the existence of them all and the humour and irony behind things that seem so little and normal on an average day.9

The central protagonist, Rina Ferreira in the story of Dangerlok faces malevolent situations in the city of Mumbai. She strives to search herself and attempts to defy the established notions in society.

A.V.V.V. Malleswaramma writes:

De Souza encourages the emergence of a powerful woman even from the otherness. They should demonstrate against the politics of Patriarchy and fight for total identity in the human race. They should ejaculate their mortification and repression to get equity. She needs to outstrip herself to be an independent woman despite the ridicule she faces.10

Rina is a lonely modern woman who struggles with angst to find space for herself in this double standard world. She shows her resistance to the limitations of life by expressing her feelings in poetry. She is indifferent to the world with her two parrots and stray dogs. Thus the novelist displays a mode of resistance of a contemporary woman towards the suppression of life. Self-assertion is the proof to make her individuality visible to the universe.

The patriarchal world determines that a woman’s ultimate destiny is marriage. Rina denies the created norms of society. While being alone, she has
only basic desires and wishes physical intimacy. But she has not desired to be inside the system of marital life. For instance Rina expresses to Jay:

Jay, will you stay with me forever if I promise you passion and scorn? (D, p.22)

Though cultural limits expect woman to be fixed in her defined roles, Rina genuinely expresses the need for a man’s presence. Exchanging her silk brocade wedding sari for two stainless steel containers displays that she is not merely emotional towards wedlock. She devalues the aspect of marriage and her alienation from this world conveys her reluctance towards marital life. Eunice De Souza observes contemporary urban working women’s contempt to traditional obligations in marital life by elucidating the character of Vera.

As an English literature teacher, the protagonist is indifferent to contemporary literature and rejects to teach Post- Colonial literature. She is critical of saint Tukaram who attacks the brahmins but neglects his own family.

Eunice De Souza points out the emerging voice of Rina in her marginalized position in the profession. At the college syllabus meeting, a man colleague gives preference to the study of poet, T.S.Eliot over the woman writer, Arundhati Roy. In this context, Rina shows her reluctance to leave out an activist and a bold female writer such as Arundhati Ray and insists the members to include in the syllabus. She complains when her name is spelt wrongly in the seminar. But the organizer ridicules her way of protest as school teacher mentality. She makes him understand with the following words:

It’s nothing to do with teaching, there’s a way I spell my name. (D, p.18)

She finds conversation of men over women in the seminar sacrilegiously commenting on their ideas. When her turn arrives in the discussion, she ignores
the poet who rebukes her for her bad accent. This is her kind of subversion of the dominant figures around her.

Sometimes she hates to go to college because of uncomfortable train – bus trips, she has to take. This she confides to the priest who has arrived to give a lecture to the students. He responds by telling her to be aware of her responsibility towards the students. She radically disobeys his advice. She is outraged when the principal does not permit a student to take rest who is suffering from a severe eye infection. She is visualized as a voice of protest by the author. Thus an empowered urban college lecturer is portrayed who resists the various situations that emerge in her isolated life.

Rina projects her rebellious nature when the irritable clerk refuses to give stamp at the post office and at a driver who comments on the smoking girls. The author upholds the protagonist as a strong woman with a positive attitude. She is supportive of this middle class working woman. Rina’s letters to David revealing on every day happenings in the metropolis narrated in Dangerlok is to create awareness among the urban women and make them conscious of the absurdities.

3.4. **Combative Urbanite Women**

Mutual honesty, compatibility and emotional commitment are the basis of a successful marriage. In *The Dead Cannot Hear*, Sujatha once again travels through lovelessness and loneliness by becoming a victim within marital relationship. Her husband acts as unworthy with his pre-marital affair.

A woman is expected to be loyal and she has to make life beautiful with her endurance. On the other side, the conservative customs celebrate the powers and deeds of men. Alice Saldana tries to redress the odds of women at the hands of males by representing the protagonist, Sujatha and her self-decision in breaking the traditional social order. She does not want to drag the false marital relationship
in the name of wedlock. Moreover, Sanjay marries her by accepting a substantial dowry. Sheetal Y. Thakore writes:

Man's extra marital affairs are taken for granted but a woman's friendship with another man is considered obscene.

The marital relation of Sujatha proves to be the worst. In spite of abdicating from his duty as husband, Sanjay exercises his power on Sujatha and tries to put her in servitude. This very fact motivates her to consider suicide and her orthodox family background perpetuates fear. But the passive natured Sujatha after self-introspection decides to be detached from the dishonest husband.

The timid, shy Sujatha is deprived of parental love and a similar situation in her marital life brings her to the stand, there she comes out of her shell. Her inner power makes her to realize that suicide is not the final solution. Then she prepares herself to face life. Embracing the painting profession appears as a way to get rid of the tyranny of her family and community. Sanjay is indifferent to his responsibilities as husband and tries to dominate Sujatha with his rude behavior. He spills coffee over the table, throws everything on the mirror and abuses. She resists his attitude by ignoring him. Sujatha says:

Ignoring him will be my defence. (TDCH, p.35)

Family and culture of India identify Indian woman with specified roles and norms. She has to take care of her husband as a modest wife. In order to please, a Hindu woman has to eat food after her husband does. But Sujatha sits to eat before her husband's arrival and notices annoyance on the face of her mother-in-law. With great effort, she shows that her survival is important. She has neglected Sanjay's command for asking for food. In these circumstances, she strongly defends against him with self-respect. Her mother is a traditional Brahmin woman and cares for her husband by performing stereotypical roles in the family. Within the cultural fabric of male dominated society, a woman has to hide the miseries of the household. But Sujatha is an awakened woman; she breaks the stereotypical
image of women. She reveals the extra-marital affair of Sanjay to her parents and puts an end to her faulty marital relationship.

Sa. Usha writes in her poem:

Circumambulating the holy plant
in the yard, making rangoli designs
to see heaven, turning up dead
without light and air,
for god' sake, I can’t do it.
Breaking out of the dam
you’ve built, swelling
in a thunderstorm,
roaring through the land
let me live, very different
from you, Mother.
Let go, make way.  

In this poem, the daughter doesn’t want to trace her steps in the shackled way imitating her mother. She longs to follow one’s own path of new life. Sujatha also desires to liberate from constraints unlike her conservative mother and demands her emancipation. In spite of her mother’s unwillingness, she decides to become an artist.

Sanjay spends money on another woman by taking money from the joint account. She protests his act and agrees to divorce to free her from the bitter life with him. She takes a decision to violate the social taboos to attain new life. Sujatha tells to him:

You can have your divorce as quickly as you want and please get out of my house. (TDCH, p.42)

She finds comfort in her life with Prem. Rejecting Sanjay when he comes back; she enters into a relationship of true companionship. Visiting the court is toilsome to a woman of her community. But Sujatha with the guidance of Prem goes to court to give her evidence for the divorce. She displays her reluctance to live with Sanjay. His suicide makes her mother to accuse her at which she chafes. But she doesn’t worry about the nagging of the community and neighbors.
The helper Uma is sexually harassed but she becomes an earner. She is aware of her oppression, so protests to enter a marital life and strongly defends male’s existence as a part in her own life.

Rosanne escapes from the harassing and cruel father by marrying a neighbour, who runs a brothel. Her unspoken baneful oppressions lead her to suffer psychologically when she is used as a material for his business. This suffocates her and she gets rid of this closed cage by joining as a singer in a reputed hotel of Mumbai. The male’s savage hold on Rosanne is severe. Like Uma, she also obviates man in her life.

Saldanha’s protagonist, Sujatha belongs to the upper caste of Hindu religion. After her divorce, her parents show their happiness on Sujatha’s remarriage only knowing that the boy belongs to the same caste. But the elopement of Shaila, Sujatha’s sister’s daughter, with a poor Christian boy stirs the orthodox rich family. The author focuses on the younger generation’s transitional attitude towards life through inter-caste marriage.

The female images of Alice Saldanha come from different upbringings. The author is very keen in presenting the disadvantageous and tiresome realities of women in Indian society irrespective of religion or caste. Saldanha’s fictional figures are capable to overcome of their stifled position with their uncompromising nature. With the help of authorial intervention, the writer shares such resisting aspects and awakens a sense of consciousness among women.

Mridula Martis, a corporate woman with a positive attitude, is a bold professional in the midst of males. This competent lady with indignation and tactics copes with the situations of discomforts in patriarchy. On one of the office assignment, Mridula and her friend visit a factory in a remote place of Andhra
Pradesh. The factory foreman behaves blatantly by staring at the bare arms of these ladies while explaining the process of the firm. The ridiculous attitude of Mridula to this flusters the foreman. Even thoughtfulness holds them away from the trap of Ram, an employee at the Chennai office. Her consciousness inspires her to step out of the machine centered corporate world. She is not acclimatized to work under men and yearns to have an exciting job. She seeks to exclude from the boring profession. Unhesitatingly, she pursues her determined goal of learning to dance in spite of disagreement from well-wishers.

Mridula projects a young mind; Sushila's defending nature to the imposed situation of the male dominated society. She discusses the maid's courage to reject the bridegroom of her parent's choice, who is fat and dark. Whether a woman is from the rich class or the poor class, the empowering attitude is visible in the contemporary woman by protesting at suffocating conditions.

Being alienated in the land of new culture, Mridula is successful in her determination. She traces out the way of maintaining good relationship carefully with John, who teaches her tap dance and is not professional with girl students. Her protesting attitude appears in the case of Ricardo who leaves Sandra for the sake of Nicole. Her advice to Cindy's friend who works in the Department of Civil Services depicts self-confidence and courageous attitude. The irritable acts of this woman's husband and son depress her. So the author convinces to realize her individuality.

Mridula has started her dance class, "Dance with me." The visit of a portly elderly man and his request to dance with her disturbs her. Without entertaining him, she rejects his wish to dance against all such odds. She focuses on the dance class with self-consciousness.
Thus this chapter has analyzed the various attitudes of militant women and their defiance. The facets of feminist assertions presented by women writers expose women to the issues of injustice and are intended to raise protest against violence. Bama expresses her intention to write *Sangati* in the following words:

That is, I resolved to write about Dalit women, especially about those who stood up to protest against the atrocities...not simply about the victims.\(^\text{13}\)

This analysis gives a light of self-consciousness and courage to the women's world. Women should be identified as human and should have privilege to fulfill their individual interests against disturbing circumstances in dominant society.
Notes


