

Inter-Caste Discrimination in Bama's Vanmam

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ABSTRACT

Bama is a celebrated subaltern woman novelist, short story writer, essayist and social activist of Tamilnadu, India. Her writing are translated into the various languages including English, French and several other regional languages. It is focuses on Dalit's experience, their intelligence, humour, resilience, and individuality. Her main consideration is on Dalit women experience, and she viewed Dalit women are hardworking, land brave women who works continuously at home and work place, they manage the family single-handedly. Bama's *Vanmam*, portrays intercaste clash between Pallars and Parayars and also the pain and sufferings of the downtrodden, through the novel, her expression raises her voice and forcefully asserts the need for the unity and solidarity among downtrodden for a better future. The present paper focuses on the most dynamic resistance to the caste-ideology that operates so forcefully in India. The dynamics of caste and Dalit issues are closely linked with their ideas of identity and the self. It delineates the story of Dalits and their struggle for existence. It also deals with the internal conflict between two castes (Pallars and Parayars) within Dalits. This paper throws light on the explosion of enfold voices of oppressed and how the novel *Vanmam* cries out for sequence among Dalit communities.

Keywords: Dalit, household, *Vanmam*, downtrodden, Pallar, Parayar,

Theme of Dalit literature

Dalit Literature highlights the disabilities, difficulties, atrocities, and inhuman treatment meted out to Dalits in society. It offers an unusual glimpse in the writings produced by untouchables on their own behalf. The main object is to create social awakening among the downtrodden. Dalitness is basically a mean towards reaching a sense of cultural identity. The inferiority complex depend on "to be a Dalit" has now disappeared. Dalitness is a source of clash against the establishment, in other words, the so called oppressive tactics of the society. This change is the desire for justice to all men in the world. Dalitness is a matter of appreciating the potential of one's total being. Thus, the individual, culture, social burden, and Dalitness cannot be isolated. At present, Dalit individual seeks a complete social and cultural freedom with the help of their self-elevation and self-identification. Today, Dalit literature rejects the degraded Hindu social set-up which promotes *Varnashrama*. Dalit writers have recently exposed the cruelties and prejudices of the caste society committed against the Dalits, and they instill a new social and cultural consciousness among the members of the Dalit community. Hinduism opposes the fundamental rights of women. The *Vedas*, Holy Scripture of Hindus, is quite unfavourable to its women no matter the caste. As for as Dalit women are experience inhuman and are subject to no prominent freedom. The society refuses all kinds of privilege inherited by the women, and thus, in classical era, all led an unbelieving life. Dalit women are "Thrice alienated" by gender and caste. They are subjected to severe exploitation at the work place; also suffer on caste ground and gang rape from upper caste, while

at the same time they may be beaten up in their own house as well. Dalit women have most horrible position in Indian society even today, though the rigidity of Untouchability had been relaxed to much extent, but status remained almost same. Women are compelled to go for hard labourers with discrimination of wages, sexually abused frequently and have to go for most dirty and odd jobs. They are not permitted to wear decent dresses and ornaments in some places even if they afford. While society extracts all the necessary services, it looks down as downtrodden. In this case, a woman's caste is more important than her gender. Upper caste women have greater access to economic resources, education, and information. They exercise their authority over social, economic and religious institutions.

Introduction

Bama is a Tamil Dalit woman writer novelist. She was born as Faustina Mary Fathima Rani in the village Puthupatty, near Virudhunagar Distric in Tamil Nadu in 1958, she accepted the pen name "Bama." Bama's celebration to Dalit literature is significant. She has created a Dalit spoken idiom that renders a distinct resonance to her writing. Her autobiographical writings break all conventions of life. She has manipulated such a specific rhetorical strategy to create a space of inter subjectivity, of being the victim and the witness simultaneously. She has also created a Dalit feminism that celebrates Dalit women's lives and work-culture thereby engendering a communal and gender bonding. Bama's *Vanmam* shows a noticeable departure from her other novels *Karukku* and *Sangati* as she adopts a linear and descriptive tone to reveal a pronounced empathy for Paraya victimhood in the ensuing conflict between the *Pallars* and the *Parayas*.

Bama offers a corrective appearance and a critical self-analysis on the subject of victimhood in *Vanmam* because whenever inter-Dalit strife took place, it usually led to vilification of Dalits whose voices remain submerged. The conflict between two Dalit communities which was helped along by organizing joint sports competition and celebrating each other's festivals cause to extend of covetousness and handling funds, culminating in the murder of a Parayar by a Pallar. The remaining of the novel deals with a series of revenge and counter retaliations ending in a bloody caste clash. In the interview Bama says, "The events I portray in *Vanmam* are around in Kandampatti. So, she cannot take it as a generalized statement." But it is difficult not to get into generalized ending.

Review of Literature:

Sudhakar Rao in his article "A Speech on Intercaste Clashes Among Dalits in Bama's *Vanmam*" highlights that the two Dalit castes in a village called Kandampatti in Tamil Nadu which may be considered a microcosm of the Indian. It is an area of atmosphere by beautiful mountains where people of different communities live for a generation. The Parayars of the village are Christians and their Church is in the western side of the village. Other to the Parayar areas are the areas of Pallars who are also Dalits, but they are Hindus. Away from the Dalit areas of the village, are the streets of Naickers, Nadars, Thevars, and Chettiars. In the village, most of the agricultural land owned by the landlords of Caste Hindus it is in the western side of the village and therefore both Parayars and Pallars have to walk through the land of the upper class to reach the fields. The dominant castes landlords are twisting these two communities internal clash for the political and power gain.

Radhika in her article "A Study on Caste Clashes Among Dalits in Bama's *Vanmam*" deals with the internal enmity between two castes within Dalits. Pallars and parayars are the two Dalit castes discussed in the novel. It is situated in the village called Kandampatti where people of different castes live. The Dalit are labourers in the fields of the landlords, and they are destined to lead a deplorable existence with the shell thrown by them. Despite their hard struggle they have to remain half-fed with porridge. *Vanmam* is about combating cruelties based on caste system with constructive strategy of empowerment. It presents a

pragmatic depiction of life and struggle of Dalits and is a bidding farewell to the age old poisonous practices of the upper caste people. It is a lesson to all Dalits who fight among themselves in the darkness that they united, stand the tactics may divided they fall.

Sivanagaiah in his Review “Discourse on Caste and Sub- Caste Practices in Bama’s *Vanmam* ” portrays that *Vanmam* is about hostility between two Castes within Dalits. Pallars and Parayars are the two Dalit castes discussed in the novel. Pallar identified themselves as Hindus and Parayars are mostly Christian converts. The concept of the story is how the land owners of dominant “Naickers” people stroke the fire between Pallar and Parayars to preserve their own status. The peaceful bonding between the two communities raise through cultural events, sports, and celebration of festivals turns out to be a mere facade to create jealousies over socio-economic status. Unfortunately, alternation to Christianity becomes the key factors in causing their separation. The inhuman caste fight starts through Hindu Pallar murder Christian Parayars.

INTER CASTE CLASH

Vanmam is about hostility between two castes within Dalits. Pallars and Parayars are the two Dalit castes and mainly discussed their intercaste dispute in the novel. The protagonists are two Dalit castes, Parayars and Pallars, in Kandampatti, Virudhunagar District, in Tamil Nadu. The Parayars are Roman Catholic, the Pallars are Hindu, these are identifying themselves as Devendra Kulavela Velalar, a kind of grandiose claim to both high caste and divine status. The Parayars’ feels Christianity power that they have to the length that Pallars are on the one hand more assertive, and on the other present more accessible than the Pallars to talk of their people’s mercy and adjustment. Pallars are pictured as suffer with Hindu unfairness and community affinity which make them susceptible to being used by Naickers, the dominant caste. Bama actually moulding a whole dichotomous structure among Dalits directly religion and movement. The theme also concentrates on how the land owners of the dominant “Naicker” caste blow the fire among Dalits to retain Naickers own dignity. The other Dalit community, the Chakkuliyars, mention only by name; they are removed from all the events depicted in the *Vanmam*. Naickers involved occasionally, but they almost never directly resist the often tenacious Parayars. Brahmins are never present, but Brahminism very much is. For, though the Naickers stoke the fires of conflict and try to infuriate the Pallars into action. Here, Bama build it clear that it is the truth of caste, which inherently involves scale and enmity that lays the ground for the vendetta depicted in the novel, in which Parayars and Pallars savage and suicidal attack each other. The novel ends with the murder of an innocent Parayar that leads to begin of recognition among both the community about how they have been made assurance in the hands Caste Hindus. Finally, a settlement desired in electoral politics.

The Protagonist of the story appears to be the young educated Parayar. They are portrayed in all their catastrophe and arrogance through village youth Jayaraju, who starts as autocratic with his mannerism of cleanliness and scorn for the dirt and smell of the Dalit Street, but is begin in as a leader of an active youth association; Anthony, full of tricks but concerned for justice and many others. But unique are immaterial in this novel; neither Jayaraju nor Anthony is considered much in the deals half of the novel are mainly to the young as a group, both among Parayars and Pallars. Among them, the major differences are: the Pallars are less educated, and consequently more bitter and susceptible to being manipulated. They are depicted as the main aggressors. In a sense, this is a realistic differentiation: in almost every libertinage of India, there are two main Dalit community, often at odds. The Parayars, Malas in Andhra Pradesh, Mahars in Maharashtra and the Chamars across north India have led in education and in movements of liberation; and they have been perhaps more likely to reject Hinduism. Today, we have a number of Dalit sub-castes— Pallars, Madigas, Matangas, Valmiki and they are asserting themselves, usually in opposition to

the first group, very often receive a strong Hindu identity. It is clearly not a happy situation for “Dalit unity” in Tamil Nadu, especially southern region.

Pallar and Parayars youths develop their enmity and it leads at the end murder. In this novel a Pallar youth murdered to the Parayar youth. The loss on both groups creates them to understand the role of Caste Hindus and give equipment notably the police in perpetrating their enmity. They noticed that the Caste Hindus have been followed segregation and rule policy to keep the fires of *Vanmam* fiery between the two castes. The Parayars and Pallars admit and decide to dissension their inequality put the past behind them and vision a united confront at the Panchayat. Finally, after facing police brutality and understand their basic needless difference and vengeance, they are decided to unite themselves. Both caste people understand their past history by apprehending power for the very first time from the rooted Caste Hindus leadership. *Vanmam* has in many faces and holding many forms. To quote Bama:

It is seen in the way human relationships are broken and caste aside; the indifference and lack of concern; killing people with words or with silence; mocking those from weaker section of society; denying basic humanity to those caught in poverty. (vii)

The novel develops how Dalits have internalised the given social system of discrimination based on caste. Like, Parayars and Pallars are lower caste in the mind of Naickers, Odaiyars, Chettiars, Naidus, and Nadars. But treat each other as downtrodden within their own circle habitat. While Parayars and Pallars remain without land, they go to the extent of murder each other arguing over which landlord lands should be irrigate better. The novel in fact opens with deal of murder of a Parayar farmer, Marraasu at the hands of Karuppasamy, a Pallar farmer, over the issuance of water to their respective master’s lands. In such a way, the controversy between the two communities is provided and kept awake by Naickers. God knows when Parayars and Pallars, would stand declare, exclaims Mekkelamma. And Mekkelamma’s wail becomes the central prevent of the vanmam. That incident began to the other.

The novel also depicts how Parayar youth, most of the degree holder, organize cultural activities, sports competitions, and awareness campaigns to spread Ambedkar’s thought in their community. Desire for political to unity among the Dalits lies with this segment. Pillars are mostly school dropouts and their youth are appears to be either working for Naickers land or unemployed but always envious of their Parayar counterparts. But, although the best efforts of Parayar adolescents, caste conflict between the two Dalits does not get stalled, consequence in uncontrolled police brutality, forcing young men and adult males to either flee and live disguised or decay in jails. Parayar youth, although they fashion themselves as radical, are yet orthodox in their attitude towards their women. After the cultural programme, the young man wants to hold a meeting at the Chavadi to discuss their future action plan. But they do not invite or want women to be present and the Educated girls protest, but to no avail. Selvarani observes:

They take pride in being reformists. But when it appears to a public meeting, they ask the women to leave. That’s not fair, is it?’ Older women explain to the girls, ‘After all, a woman is a woman and a man is a man.’(5)

Peria Rayappan was in the fields picking cotton. He knew nothing of what had happened in the village. When he saw more than ten angry Pallars rushing towards him carrying knives and sticks, he was terrified. He had no weapon ready to hand. Even if he had one, what could he have done against a mob of so many? His wife Amalobhavam, who had also been picking cotton, and Chandana Mary from the north street were there too. They too were terrified at the sight of the angry mob. They urged Rayappan to run and hide,

but they themselves stood their ground, their hearts in their mouths. Since they had not been able to get hold of the Parayar street men, the Pallar mob was crazed with blood lust. With a single blow one of them chopped off Chandana Mary's head:

Suddenly there was the sound of many voices... lots of people had come, and the beams from their torches pointed in all directions. Who could they be ... may be the Pallars back again? Or ... was it his street people coming this way to hide? From where he crouched hiding in total darkness, he couldn't see a damn thing. Rayappan became even more agitated.(118)

However, when the police giddiness down on the men, hit them or arresting them indiscriminately, Parayar women young and old stand by them, preserve them, nutrition them, take over their chores. Run the household single-handedly and also arrange for their bail or professional help.

In *Vanmam*, Parayar women's worship of the crisis following Parayar-Pallar conflict is almost a renarration of Bama's representation of women's identity to fight between the two Dalit communities in her earlier works *Karukku*, *sangati*. In *Vanmam*, they Young women approached the police, drive carts to carry their dead and dig up a mass grave and bury the men. When Police focus on women, during the raid on the village largely comprise sexual threat, and physical violence on young girls. While Dalit women are not allowed to quit the village for work, they alive and nurture their children by selling their dairy milk. They also leave together at one house by turns and subvert police torture through their gendered bonding. But when the situation normalizes, while Dalit boys return to their college by borrowing money, girls are forced to give up their studies and stay at home. Thus, the impact of caste strife on women is more acute. Even pregnant women, lactating mothers, old women and school-going girls are rounded up, jailed and severely beaten up by the police.

In the novel, Parayars initiate negotiations to arrive at peace between the two communities. They have suffered more in terms of human lives, economic setbacks and pending court cases. While Naickers exhalation, Pallars and Parayars agree to withdraw cases against each other and put a common candidate for the Panchayat board election. The newly elected Dalit president, Kaalaiyan (belonging to Dalit caste vote to kallaian), Parayars and Pallars, foregrounds the need for unity among Dalits if they wish to defeat upper castes' domination over them. He also promises to work for victory for Dalits at the state Assembly and Parliamentary Elections. A democratic resolving of intra-caste differences becomes the accepted mantra at the end of the novel, much to the discomfort of Naickers.

Vanmam moves away from this viewpoint to a presentation of the dynamics of intra-caste interaction, conflict and violence. In the bloodshed that follows the aversion between the Pallar and Parayar communities in Kandampatti, there are no winners, no saints, and no heroes. Trivial issues are magnified into imagined monstrous wrongs, the flames eagerly prevalence by the higher castes that fear that the hitherto submissive caste which are slowly demanding equal status and the right to be treated as human beings, will slip out of their grasp. While education liberates the younger generation from the shackles of the caste system and encourages them to question the servility of their last brethren, there is the grim reminder of how it is often like walking the tightrope between two world- an educated, democratic ethos, and centuries of oppression and unquestioning servitude. The women, victims are often experienced harsh patriarchal system; emerge nevertheless as gritty survivors, strong in their tenacious grip on the realities of their world. They

sometimes shrill but always plaque review on the state of affairs that whirl around them like an evil whirlpool, leaving them battered and bent but still unbroken, is as revealing as it is to be crush in its implications of what it takes to be a female inhabitant of the countless Kandampatti that dot India.

CONCLUSION

Bama's *Vanmam* has never created on the victimhood of downtrodden. Pallars and Parayars becomes Dalits which means united to get success the caste position and receptive their last attract and it only possible with Education. Education was providing them Empowerment, It means improvement not only in terms of education or economics but also in terms of social position and sharpness in go away goer to get empowerment Dr.Ambetkar's life mission is right remedy. Dr.Ambetkar's philosophy can right remedy to social condition, it can architect properly the mechanism of social cultural order by surpassing caste and inter-caste differences and to make a move towards a social reality of egalitarianism.

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