



Caste Clashes, Conflicts and Struggles in Bama's *Vanmam* (Vendetta)

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Abstract - Dalit Literature is a literature about Dalit's protest, pain and agony. Most of the Dalit Literature is the voice of the voiceless in the caste-rooted Indian society. Bama is a celebrated dalit woman writer. *Vanmam* (2002) is the third novel of Bama which brings out the issue of caste incited by the upper-caste Naickers between the two sub-castes in Dalit community- Pallars and Parayars at Kandampatti village. The loss on both sides makes them understand the role of the upper castes and state machinery, especially the police who immortalize their animosity. Towards the end of the novel the sub-castes of Dalits put an end to their vendetta and they are united. Since then they lived together in mutual tolerance and friendship. The novel mirrors inter caste rivalry in Dalit communities in India in general and in Kandampatti village in particular. This paper explores the caste clashes, conflicts and struggles among the Dalits and how they are used by the uppercaste people in promoting the animosity among themselves.

Keywords: Voice of Voiceless, Dalit, casteism, annihilate, downtrodden, underdogs, discrimination, enlightened

1. INTRODUCTION

Bama is one of the Dalit women writers, who have been actively involving in social issues, particularly Dalit issues in India. This novel is differentiated from her earlier novels as it focuses the involvement of the church and Christianity which empowered the Parayars community towards the rational thinking. Bama retains her critique of casteism in the church and also portrays the Dalits as more assertive in this novel than the earlier ones. Among the contemporary Dalit writers, Bama, the nun-turned social activist has carved a niche for herself as a powerful voice of the voiceless underdogs. Bama in her popular autobiographical novel *Karukku* (1992), records the harrowing experiences she has undergone as a woman as well as a Dalit nun. What is the most appalling in the work is her startling revelation of discrimination in the Church and the institutions, a subject hitherto unexplored. Her other major works are *Sangati* (1994) and

Kusumbukkaran (1996). Bama's *Vanmam* (meaning vendetta) translated into English by Malini Seshadri, strikes a chord in Dalit writing. Unlike her earlier works, many of the Dalit writings, in *Vanmam*, Bama instead of blowing up the agonies and sufferings of the downtrodden, she loudly raises her voice and vehemently asserts the need for the unity and solidarity of the suppressed for a better future.

2. VANMAM

Bama's *Vanmam* (Vendetta), which first appeared in Tamil in 2002, is not the usual novel of atrocities against Dalits, though atrocities are depicted, particularly the brutality of the police against women when they cannot vent their rage on the absconding men. But rather than focus on violence, it strikes at the heart of one of the most problematic aspects of Dalit identity: the enmity that frequently exists among different Dalit castes themselves. The protagonists here are two Dalit castes, Parayars and Pallars, in Kandampatti village of Tamilnadu. The Parayars are Roman Catholics and the Pallars are Hindu, identifying themselves as DKVs or Devendra Kula Vellalar. The Parayars' Christianity influences them to the extent that they are on the one hand more assertive, and on the other hand appear more ready than the Pallars to talk of humanity, forgiveness and compromise. The Pallars are portrayed as the victims of Hindu discrimination and caste feeling which make them susceptible to be used by Naickers.

3. COMMUNITY FIGHT: NAICKERS MAKE CONFLICT AMONG DALITS

The other large Dalit community, the Chakkuliyars, appear only by name; they are not portrayed in all the events that are depicted. The Naickers appear occasionally, but they