

CASTE DISCRIMINATION: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF THE BAMA'S VANMAM VENDETTA

U S SARANYA, JOTHISWARI

Abstract: Caste plays a major role in the life of human being. Though the evolution has given a maturity in the body but the mind is still oriented with the feeling of caste, sub-caste and political issues. Even though the colonizers have left the country still they are ruling us in terms of the oriented western ideology. In India caste plays a predominant role and daily newspaper carries an incident or issue about the caste. A Dalit in India faces many problems they are either being used as laborers with less wages, raped and molested or political riots and ill-treatment takes place in terms of caste based ideologies. Now education has refined the man kind and Dalit have obtained an opportunity to gain education and they have evolved to lead a prosperous life but still the ideology and mind set of the upper caste and the way they see the Dalits have not changed. India suffers double colonization one from the west and one from their country men in the name of caste. The proposition of the paper is to bring into light the colonialist ideology of the upper caste people towards Dalit from the novel *Vanmam Vendetta* written by Bama. She puts forth the real life incident which happened in her place.

Keywords: Caste, Colonization, education, Dalits.

Introduction: The novel "Vanmam-Vendetta [vengeance, revenge] (2008) written by Bama portrays the animosity between two castes within Dalits. Pallars and Parayas are the two Dalit Casts discussed in the text. Pallars identified themselves as Hindus and Parayas are mostly Christian converts. A small rift between them caused by the upper class people make the women suffer and later how the women manage to lead their life without the help of men and how they speak out bravely to the police about the murder and injustice happened to them shows the strength of the women in the novel. It is very pertinent to know that Women are subjugated in every sphere of life both by men of upper caste and by her own men. The concept of the novel is how the land owners of the dominated "Naicker" caste stroke the fire between Pallars and Parayas to preserve Naickers own status.

Bama states that a village situated in south Tamilnadu and the real life events that took place in it inspired me to write the novel *Vanmam* in 2002. Marginalized people, those who have been pushed to the very edges of society, have put aside their internal enmities if they are to reclaim their self-respect and their rightful place in the society.

In the village of Kandampatti, where the novel is set, the people have been living for years with the burden of fears of their fellowmen, and of what the future may bring. Due to these unnecessary rivalries with

dalits the young men are forced to live in hiding. Children cannot go to school, women are widowed and children are orphaned. The loss on both sides makes them realize the role of dominant castes and state machinery especially the police in perpetrating their animosity. The story ends when yet another killing of an innocent parayar by the agitated pallars leads to a serious rethink in both caste groups. They realize that the dominant castes have been following a divide and rule strategy to keep the fires of *Vanmam-Vendetta* burning between the two castes. The parayars and the pallars confess and decide to sink their differences put the past behind them and show a united front at the panchayat poles. United they are and make history by capturing power for the very first time from the entrenched dominant caste leadership. *Vendetta* has many faces and takes many forms.

Colonial ideology: Mekkamma the mother of Swaminathan goes to chinna swamy naikers field to work when she returns she gets a letter from her son. She takes it to the chavady to look for a person who can read the letter. Senniappa is 70 yrs old man who has passed eighth standard he was able to read and he is the one to read newspaper aloud to other people. He told her that her son is coming for vacation and he has finished education. Her daughter kuttiamma also is studying 6th in local school her

husband sacrificed the money to educate their children.

The parayars used to depend on the landlord for their living they used to toil the land whole day and get only quarter the amount for hard work and the rest is enjoyed by the upper caste people. Due to education their life style changed. Nowadays the Parayar never depend on any one they do many kinds of jobs as tailors, lawyers, masons, plumbers, drivers, conductors, teachers, policeman, and many other trade and professions. Before ten years the Parayars would get the odaiyar offering from the landlord houses such as rooster or one or two pumpkin, sugar and rice. As more and more of the Parayar boys left the village for education they stopped getting the offerings from the landlords. "Very soon after the Parayars had given up the practice of making harvest offerings to their landlords, the pallars also stopped doing it. The landlords were angry with the Parayars for behaving like this and for spoiling the Pallars also." (7)

It was once when the Parayar fellows won the volleyball trophy and when they were walking in the street of Naickers the Naickers asked them which place they were from the boys didn't answer to their question. And Ashokan asked the boys that if you all belong to our village which street are you from? Then one boy named Xavier replied to them as a slap on their face as "The Parayar street... also known as R.C.Street" (18). Then the Naickers exclaimed about the Parayars behavior and how arrogantly they replied and one of the Naicker told that the Parayar who replied was Muniyappans son who worked in Gopalam's house. This was the same fellow who came with his father who held out his hands for food but now just because he has got a bit of education he is behaving as if he is very important fellow. For which came a reply from the boys that "What's there so special about you people? If you're here, we shouldn't laugh, is it? we shouldn't talk? This is a free country. We will talk anywhere we like. We will laugh. We will play. And we will win. See, we have won this volleyball cup. Take a good look at it" (18). Thought the Naickers were furious, there was nothing they could do. And they muttered

"At one time they were starving without even gruel, and now look at their power! And their clothes! Even better than what our children wear. When they're at the bus stand, we can't even tell who they are. Also, both the men and the women of their caste are

getting educated. All this is coming from their religion. We can't let these fellows go on like this. The Pallars are better; at least they're still respectable towards us" (18-19).

As Saminathan approached the chavady there was so much laughter and fun and he went and saw there were group of boys laughing. Anthony told about Nanamma son Jayaraju who joined first year in his college. Innaasi continued to say what really happened he told to Saminathan that he was returning from the hospital and he got into the bus and he saw Jayaraju in the bus with glasses with shirt tucked in and he saw the bicycle mirror and combed his hair and thinking that he would recognize him he went straight to him but he asked him what's the way to R.C. Street? Innaasi was in shock so he never replied but instead he followed him and Jayaraju went straight to Naickers and asked them the way to R.C.Street. They were all confused and he went into Parayar street and asked the people seated over there the way to the street. He closed his nose with kerchief and made a remark that it was stinking. Irulaandi Thatha who was sleeping in the chavady by hearing Innaasi narration said that "When one learns to write a few words, one can't even remember way to one's own home, it seems. If you snatch away his dark glasses and give him a couple of thumps on his bum, he will automatically remember the way home." (22). Innaasi continued the narration that Jayaraju pretended as though he doesn't belong to the Parayar caste so he followed him till his home and when he reached home he asked Jayaraju and that was making all the others laugh aloud. Innaasi went straight to Jayaraju and said "Eley, you the son of a waster, so you're already forgotten the days when you used to play and fall and roll in this very mud, have you? You miserable wretch! To ask me the way to R.C.Street... what cheek! Think of those days when you used to run around here with your bare bottom unwashed. And you're talking of smells, eh..." (24) After hearing it everyone in the chavady started laughing loudly and for one week they didn't see Jayaraju in and around in the village.

In the west of the village is a lake it is Seenivasan Naicker's well located at that place and many people from the street would go to take bath from that lake. Naicker shouted at them and asked them do you think this is your father's well for which Joseph one among the boys said "Yes this well was dug by my father. So this is where we will bath. All the wells in

your farm and fields were dug by our people only. So we will go and bath in any of them. Yes! As soon as he finished speaking they all shouted in chorus, 'Yes...this is our well. We will bathe only here'(30). Seenivasan Naicker was absolutely boiling in fury.

Next day the youngsters gathered near the chavady and spoke that they would spend their time valuable and make use of the vacation and they thought to something for the Vaigasi festival. Jayaraju crossed them Saminathan stopped him and spoke to him and asked him about the plans for organizing the Vaigasi festival and they discussed that every year they are showing movies of the stars and it is total waste. Then Saminathan came up with an idea of putting up stage shows and street plays. Then they said shall we start R.C.Street Young People's club as Jayaraju was already starting the proceedings. Then many said that there are so many clubs in and around and why don't we start a Arts troupe and everyone like the idea and they kept various names for the troupe and finally Kazhani Arts Troupe was the name which was fixed as everyone like the name. The youth were filled with energy and enthusiasm. Saminathan told the boys to take bath and wait near the bus stand to work out the plans as only few days are left for the festival. The boys left to bath in the well that day even Jayaraju joined them and Anthony was filled with surprise. And they bathed for a long time discussing things. That night they met in the bus stand and Jayaraju spoke that lot of members should be added to the troupe and the membership fee should be collected as two rupees each. Martin put forth his view that lets make Jayaraju the president of the troupe and everyone accepted this and they carried him around Dr.Ambedkar's statue and they fixed Saminathan as treasure and every one paid five rupees and registered their names in the troupe and they came to a decision that even girls will be attending the troupe if their parents permit. Jayaraju came home and told his mother about the troupe and he being nominated as president. It gave happiness to her but she warned him to be careful with the boys. That day Jayaraju couldn't sleep he was tossing around thinking of his name, photo and degree in the banner for the festival. Turning point in the novel

After the death of Mannangatti the Parayars and Pallans got closer. Abraham continued

"I've been observing this ever since I was old enough to understand things. Our panchayat president is a Naicker; the milk society president... Naicker; the co-

operative society president... again a Naicker. Our fellows blindly vote for them and get them elected, and then go and stand before them with folded hands and slave for them. That's all the sense our fellows have!" (14).

Saminathan said to him that recently even our people stood in the election and won the post. For which Abraham said that those victory are the slap on their face. Five years ago Pallan and Parayars came to an agreement and the Parayars stood for Milk society and the Pallans stood for co-operative society and all the votes were given to them and they both won the election.

"The Naickers became utterly scared. If the two castes were to work together and put up a common candidate, they could snatch away even the panchayat president post! They thought, all these years these people have been coming and standing before us with folded hands, ready to serve us; we mustn't get to a situation where we have to bow before them. And so the Naickers made plan to destroy the unity between Pallars and Parayars" (15).

Even now who has killed your uncle Marraasu it was a Pallan and how did Pallan do it was from the courage given by Palani Naicker. The Naickers tell the Pallars that "look, you and we are Hindus, and we Hindus must stick together" (15). After discussing the events with Abraham it was time for Saminathan to go home he thought of his uncle's murder in his mind and went home with heavy thoughts in his mind "After I finish college, I must go on to study law. My sister Kuttiamma too must get a good education. All the young fellows in our street, and the girls too, must get to good positions. Only then we can take a confident stand" (15-16).

Before the incident happened Pallars and Parayars were together and if it was New Year or Christmas the Pallars would come to the Parayar street and enjoy and if it was Pongal the Parayars would go to the Pallar street and celebrate it and they used to address one another as 'machaana' and 'maaple'. Both the caste people gathered and talked among them and Pallars asked the Parayars not to show the witness of the Pallars murders to the police and so the Parayars accepted and from then on they were in unity. And the village people spoke that

Let them say whatever they want to. We should not retrace our steps. What is past is past. But the children who are yet to be born must be able to live in this village. So let's trust one another and try to get

along together. We must be our guard in case anyone tries to provoke us and create enmity between our two castes (pg130).

This was the constant message from the elders of both streets. Later on after the amicable situation of both the castes the upper class people mocked at them "what sort of fellows are these? After so much killing... So much wandering around like refugees... they're supposed to be united again. Shameless fellows!" (pg: 133).

Conclusion: Later on the people of Pallar and Parayar decided that they would nominate a person to from their own caste to contest in election against the Naickers. It caused much heart burn among the

Naickers. They nominated Kaalaiyan from the pallar caste. He won the panchayat president election in kandampatti. Then the people of the both caste said that "it's not enough that we have won in this Panchayat election. The Dalit voice must resonate in the state legislatures and in the national parliament..... As Ambedkar, the champion of the downtrodden, said, we must capture the levers of government power. Let this be the first step towards goal." (pg134). From then on the Parayars and Pallars remained determined that whatever anyone might say they would never fight again and only time can heal the wounds they said and lived together in mutual tolerance and friendship.

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U S Saranya

Ph. D Scholar /School of Social Studies and Languages

VIT University, Vellore-14

S. Jothiswari

M. Phil/ Department of English