
BATTLE FOR EXISTENCE AND EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY OF BAMA'S VANMAM

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Abstract

Vanmam is a sad saga of victimization. Bama's main concern in Vanmam is to admonish the subaltern the need for education and unity. It is a portrayal of the life of downtrodden people, their struggle for existence and ambition for empowerment. It encompasses vandalism, breach of trust and human rights. It ends with a ray of hope that there will be a day in future that Dalits living on this soil can lead a happy and respected life. This hope can only be realized through education. This realization that education alone can change the lifestyle of downtrodden people by breaking the shackles of dark days of filthy abuse and inhuman treatment changed the entire perception of the people. So, to meet the dawn i.e., a life full of hope, self-esteem, Dalits need to coalesce, revitalize themselves with education and only then this battle for existence and empowerment can be won in the true sense of the term.

Keywords: victimization, education, human rights, realization, empowerment etc

In the Indian literary milieu, the last decades of the 20th witnessed the emergence of highly talented Dalit authors who explore the miseries and misfortune

of their communities with utmost commitment. What is 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 Kusumbukaran (1996). Bama's Vanmam (meaning vendetta) published in 2008 in Tamil, translated into English by Malini Seshadri, strikes a chord in Dalit writing.

In Vanmam she narrates the events involving two Dalit castes in a village called Kandampatti in Tamil Nadu. "It is a village surrounded by beautiful mountains where people of different communities live for generations. Agricultural land owned by the landlords is in the western part of the village and therefore both Parayars and Pallars have to walk through the streets of the upper class to reach the fields."

The Parayars and Pallars of the village are laborers in the fields of the landlords in spite of the hard labor they have to remain half-fed with porridge. "Sometimes they would come home hungry after their bath and look eagerly into the kanji pot. But it would be empty because their younger brothers and sisters would have finished off the food" (45).

While delineating the existence of Dalits Bama avers Bama "what a life . . . even a dog's life would be better . . . can't live and can't die either . . ." (113)

Even though there are two to three incidents where Pallars turned against Parayars and these incidents did not affect their relationship. the educated youths of Paryar streets formed the "Kalani Arts Club" and conducted various cultural events successfully. These developments on the Parayar street make the Naickers grew jealous and they accused the church of encouraging the Parayars. ". . . they belong to the Church, they get lots of support. Also, many of them are now educated" (2). Youngsters wanted to install a statue of Ambedkar. Further, they desired the involvement of all Dalit the venture. The Pallars donated Rs. 1,000/- for the statue, which was unveiled in a colorful function. The solidarity in organizing the programme and the speeches made on the occasion infuriated the landlords who conspired to annihilate the unity of the downtrodden.

Goaded by the Naickers, some of the Pallars demanded to return the money donated for the statue. The corporate life of the Parayars and Pallars faced a serious setback over the issue of putting up a flagpole near the statue of Ambedkar. "How to arrogate they are to lay a hand on the wire you people have put there. Don't let them get away with this. It's either you or them now" (80). In the violence that followed, innocent people from both sides were mercilessly butchered and houses and

belongings were destroyed. The worst affected by the violence were Parayars.

The Paraya men dispersed to different places out of fear. Under the guise of searching for men, police "enter the house of Parayars and talk vulgarly to the women and even misbehaved with them" (88). The women were dragged to the street and they were beaten brutally, "with no regard even for the infant and the aged, they kept and swirling their lathis down hard again and again" (89). They got blown everywhere in their bodies. "All the women had swellings and black bruises all over their bodies as the blood clotted and congealed under the blows" (89). Chellakili, a pregnant Parayar woman was kicked in the lower belly by a policeman with his boot. As she lay there on the floor of that police lock-up, she felt a sharp pain in her belly . . . and had an abortion right there" (86). Parayars had an important work so he had to skip the Christmas celebration.

Even then, when there was Easter festivity going on the aggression broke out in the village which was a shocking incident for the villagers. When the murder of a Paraya came to trial in the Court of Law there evolved a common notion of peace between the two communities.

Jayaraju, a prayerful young man and who is educated said with the public, "we just began to develop slowly and now there will be murderers and court cases raid . . . people are scattered and studies ruined could not even attend the church how long can we go on like this?"

(126). The two groups resumed discussion which led to a compromise between them. They unanimously declared, "After all, life is short. We work, we eat . . . we die. Why take on unnecessary problems?" (129).

"On every Pongal festival, with great festivity, they would set their families taking with them offerings of a rooster one or two large pumpkins, four, five stalks of sugar cane, and a measure of rice" (7). A decade ago, the Parayar community educated youth forced them to impede the practice, ultimately which was pursued by Pallars also. Bama's ultimate concern in Vanmam is to edify the subaltern the need of solidarity and unity. In Vanmam the author articulates from side to side the disposition Anthony while presentation the figurine of Ambedkar, which is fit to quote: 'Educate! Organize! Agitate' . . . There is a slogan that all should get the education and moreover, we have to know the societal realities. We should be in a position to realize that how society marginalized and discriminated against us. We should realize that we should fight for the unity among ourselves. We should not be afraid of the evil spirit in the society.

In the brilliant history of Kandampatti, only the people from Naickers challenged for the post of President and won. The enlightened from the Parayars side and Pallars meadowed Kaaliyan of the Pallar Street as the joint candidature which is a clever decision. The Parayars and Pallars crusaded jointly for Kallaiyan which facilitated him to triumph the ballot vote. The Dalit voice must resonate in the state legislature and in the

national parliament . . . we must capture the levers of government power. Let they be the first step towards that goal." (134).

Conclusion

Bama through the voice of Anthony on the day of inaugurating Ambedkar's statue declares "society has marginalized us, discriminated us ... we shall strive together to see that justice prevails... Arise and face the new dawn. Don't remain docile.

References

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