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Resistance of Dalit Women in Bama's Vanmam.

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Abstract

The present paper aims to highlight the resistance by Dalit Women in Bama's Vanmam. The present study aimed at probing the struggle that Dalit women has put in representing their voices in a deep-rooted male dominated society. The novel under study reflects Dalit women from a different perspective. Earlier, Dalit women were represented as victims constantly crying, unable to speak against violence inflicted upon them, always cursing their birth in the Dalit community. Bama's Vanmam portray Dalit women in a different way we find educated women opting out of marriage, standing with the men of their community in their struggle against the upper-caste people. They are also politically conscious and eager to take part in meeting held by the men of Dalit community where the discuss Ambedkar ideas.The present study will focus on the women characters in the novel and their resistancewithin the community and outside the community.

Keywords: Resistance, Dalithood, Caste, Sexual Violence, Gender.

Dalit Women as Workers: Bama's novel Vanmam represent Dalit women primarily asworkers- honest, hardworking, poorly-paid and exploited workers. Her novels makes a statement about the sexual exploitation and economic exploitation of Dalit women and also argue that it is their Dalit identity which makes them more vulnerable to injustice in comparison to other women workers. Dalit women are always easily to violence, brutal oppression not only by upper caste, male landlords or state administration but also by Dalit men. There is thus a see-saw movement between their characters' Dalit identity and their positions as women in a stratified society. Bama critique patriarchal structure as much as they protest against casteist division in society.

Beating Women: In Bama's fiction, Dalit women are beaten-up by their husbands or Brothers at home and ill-treated at work by upper-caste landlords. She presents a spirited fight put up by Dalit women against male-highhandedness. She locates violence towards women as a result of patriarchal mindset of the people, she also reveals how Dalit womencan subvert it through their humour, hard work or more importantly through access to education. She celebrates shrews who use their tongue to overcome male brutality or single women who rely upon education to carve out a life free from male authority. She also posits education and collective organized efforts to counter a violent, casteist structure.

Valorizing Women Who Opt out of Marriage

In the novel, we can examine that Bama validate the women who opt out of Marriage to escape violence and subjugation. The writer agrees to feminist belief and Marxist perspective but also gives argument to enlarge the theoretical orientation to add, specifically, the realities of caste in present Indian society. In *Vanmam*, intra-caste conflict among Dalits is talked and strategies are discussed to resolve the same. In many aspects, *Vanmam* is not as touching and moving story as Sangati or Karukku.Certain issues, even incidents narrated or discussed in her earlier two works are taken up again in *Vanmam*, without adding anything new to the previous two tales to enhance the quality of discussion. The narrative is less; catchy, sometimes, rather

tepid.

Repetition as a Deliberate Narrative Strategy

Although Bama had employed repetition as a deliberate narrative strategy in *Karukku* and *Sangati*, she had used it to add a new interpretation or reveal another critical understanding of the narrative material than given in her previous treatment. This engaging trope is missing in *Vanmlam.* Disappointing as this may be, a critical study of *Vanmam* is warranted as she subjects both the community of Dalits Paraiyars and Pallars to an objective evaluation and calls for unity among them on both levels social and political.

This aspect is again explored in an objective and social milieu in her *Vanmam* (2002) where she analyses the conflicts occurring between the Dalits communities like caste hatred, mayhem and violence within them.

Dalit Internal Division and Caste Hierarchy

Vanmam highlights how Dalits have also segregated themselves on the basis of caste.. If Pallars and Paraiyars are outcastes in the eyes of Odaiyars, Naickers, Naidus, Chettiars and Pallars, Paraiyars and Nadars treat each other as outsiders within their own social habitat. In the novel, we find that, Pallars follows Hinduism while the Paraiyars follow Christianity.This kind of idea is promoted by the Upper Castes and Naickers to keep the Dalit communities divided. This results in Paraiyars and Pallars getting into arguments and tiffs over whose lands should be watered first. Even though, the two communities are landless they involve in an argument and even they are ready to kill one another over an trivial argument like whose landlord's land are irrigated first and better.

Vanmam

Vanmam starts with the murder of a Paraiyar farm labor, Mariyasu at the hands of Karupasami, a Pallar farm labor, over distribution of water to their respective master's lands. As Karupasami's master safeguard him, he escapes with Mariyasu's murder and surreptitious disposal of his body. In this way, the animosity between the two communities is promoted and kept aboil by Naickers. "God knows when we, Paraiyars and Pallars, would stand united," exclaims a Paraiyar woman, Mekelamma (27). Mekelamma's lament becomes the central refrain of the novel. One incident leads to the other. If a member from the Pallar community becomes the aggressor in one incident, a Paraiyar becomes the aggressor in another. The upper caste landlords augment the feeling of hatred and prejudice, calls the police and settle scores with the Paraiyars. The novel is written from the Paraiyar's point of view, and it also significantly demonstrate how the Pallars community is being used by the Naickers community for their own political benefit.

Paraiyar vs Pallar

The Paraiyar community, thanks to education accessible through missionary-run schools, is considered advanced socially and economically. There is a greater political awareness among them and they are highly resented by upper castes for emulating Ambedkarite ideology. *Vanmam* draw how Paraiyar youth, mostly college-educated, pursuing a post-graduate degree, organize cultural activities, sports competitions and awareness campaigns to spread Ambedkar's thought in their community, when they return home from their hostels during vacations. Dalits political unity is being hoped because of thispractice. Pallars are mostly school dropouts and their youth are shown to be either working for Naickers or roaming around unemployed but they are always jealous of Paraiyar's youth. But in spite of the best efforts of Paraiyar youth, caste strife between the two communities does not get stalled, resulting in rampant police brutality, forcing young men and adult males to either flee and live incognito or rot in jails.

Paraiyar youth, no matter how much they claim themselves to be radical but they are also orthodox in their behavior towards their women. The young men held the meeting just after the cultural programme was over to discuss the future action plan. But the women were not invited for the meeting.. Jayarasu announces, "We shall continue with our cultural programme. As a meeting is scheduled to be held at *chavadi*, women are asked to return to their homes quietly" (80). The educated girls protest, but to no avail. Selvarani observes, "these boys call themselves great reformists. But if there is a 'village meeting', they ask us, women, to go horne. What kind of justice is this?" (80) Older women explain to the girls, "Oh, come on. Men shall be men and women shall remain women" (80). However, when the police attack on the men, beating them orarresting them, Paraiyar women, both young and old stand out to protect them, take care of them and their work, take command of the household and also help them to get bail.

Similar to Cemetry Feud

In fact, the section in *Vanmam* on Paraiyar women's management of the crisis following Paraiyar-Pallar conflict is retelling of Bama's portrayal of women's response to the feud already present between the two communities in her previous works. Young women call the police, they also drive the carts to carry the dead bodies of the men and dig up a number of grave to bury the men. Police go beyond their limit during the raid on the village, and their treatment of women are largely sexual intimidation, molestation and physical violence. During the raid the women were not allowed to leave the village for anything not even for work, they were forced to survive on small means which they can earn by selling the milk of their cattle. They stay together at one house and fought against police repression through their gendered bonding. But as soon as the situation normalises,the Dalit boys return to their college by borrowing money, girls are forced by their parents to abandon their studies and work at home. Thus, the impact of caste-based discrimination in the heart of women is more acute. Even pregnant women, ,old women and lactating mothers and school going girls are forced to abandon their studies and stay at home. When Paraiyars boys plan strategy to take revenge of the Paliars' murder of innocent Paraiyars, Rosamma points out,

"You men will kill and run away and dodge the police. Here, we women are beaten up by the police and intimidated by the Pallars as well. We can neither go to work nor cook and eat in peace... lord... what a life... worse than a dog's... we can neither live... nor die..." (134-35)

Punishment Meted Out to Women

Vanmam highlights how women becomes the victim of caste-based violence which is endangered by men. They do not want it. They do not precipitate it. Yet they become its victims. *Vanmam* posits strong warning to the issue of Dalit Identity. Non-Dalits tend to homogenise Dalits, erasing out differences, contradictions and anomalies that prevail among various Dalit communities. For the outsiders, Dalits are one single community who are illiterate, uncivilized and untouchables.

Inability to Accept Caste Divisions within Dalit Group

Vanmam alerts us to this disturbing facet of Dalit life, where while they accept a unified, singular identity in politics as Dalits, culturally, they are not able to come over the differences that exist amongst them. The upper castes people use this weakness of the Dalit community to use against them and exploit them. It is worth noting that the heterogenous character of Dalit community is a remark on the society that it is pluralistic,where homogenisation is unwelcome as well as unfair. However, for purposes of political empowerment, Dalits are expected to damage their culture, leave their regional differences and work for one particular political party under a common banner. Dalit unity is a must criteria for the dalit if they want to overthrow the supremacy of upper caste in society.

Vanmam in all the twelve chapters reiterates this fact. Paraiyars initiate negotiations to arrive at peace between the two communities. Paraiyars have lost number of people and economic set-back and pending court cases. While Naickers is furious, Pallars and Paraiyars agree to withdraw cases against each other and put up a common candidate for the panchyat board election. The newly chosen Dalit president Kaalaiyan (belongs to Pallar community but voted to the post by both Paraiyars and Pallars) foregrounds the need for unity among Dalits if they wish to defeat upper-castes' domination over them. He also assures to work for victory of the Dalits at the State assembly elections and Parliamentary elections.

Seeking Political Power

At the end of the novel we find that there is a democratic resolving of intra-caste differences, which discomforts the Naickers. Kaalaiyan comments, "As Ambedkar pointed out, we need to capture political power first. Let the Panchayat election be the first step towards that goal" (158). The novel ends with a positive optimism hoping for result-oriented future for "though there are fears lurking in our minds, there exists clarity of thought and a strong will as well." (157)

To Conclude

Bama's fiction has gained her critical acclaim over the years. If initially, her use of Dalit vocabulary and unorthodox use of language was criticized by mainstream authors and critics. In *Storylines*: *Conversations with Women Writers,* Bama recounts, "In literary circles there were some who discounted it as not being literary enough... not keeping to the generic definitions of novel or autobiography. Some of them were upset by the obscenities used and found them un-parliamentary. But there were also those who welcomed it as new and experimental... once they commented on the language and called it vulgar and obscene, I was all the more convinced that it was my language, our language." (15)

The main objective of Dalit literature is liberation of the Dalits, in particular but the liberation of the oppressed in general. It is basically a cultural activity which comes under the broad movements of Dalit political liberation. It is cultural politics. It takes the form of protest.

Bama's writing seems like an activist agenda. Writing has embowered Bama to a great extent. Bama entry into the academic world, her presence in various conferences in Indian metros and even abroad, her presence at literary events are various facets of her social empowerment. In turn she through her writing tries to encourage Dalits to adopt education as a sure strategy for self-empowerment and acceptability in society. Her writing while using spoken Dalit women's vocabulary is addressed to non-Dalits who need to be educated and sensitised about Dalits' struggle for a dignified existence. Meanwhile, it also shows possibilities of success to her Dalit reader.

In most of her works, there is a feminist narrative on Dalit women's lives, *Vanmam*, a novel, through which Bama repeatedly urges Dalits to unite and help themselves.In *Vanmam* forging of unity among Dalits is stressed upon most forcefully. For Bama, education is not just limited to formal education.She lays equal emphasis on spiritual education but wants this to be free from interference from ecclesiasts and officialdom. Dalits must achieve enlightenment in a true sense, instead of just accumulating university degrees.

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