Inter-Caste Struggle in Bama’s Vanmam

Dr.V Iyappan

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Annai College of Arts and Science, Kivilacheri, Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu, India.

ABSTRACT

The present research paper focuses on cold war between the Pallars and the Parayars, and there were occasional reports of strifes between them. The Pallars regretted having cooperated with the Parayars for erecting the statue. The Pallars got together and erected a flagpole near the statue of Ambedkar simply to assert their status against the status of the Parayars. Also the monetary contribution made by the Pallars for erecting the statue was taken back from the Parayars. The situation turned tense when Sesurathnam of the Parayar community cleared the wires of the flagpole, which were disturbing the statue. The fellow was butchered to death in broad daylight by a gang of Pallars. It was a fateful day in the history of Kandampatti village. The force to take revenge was running high amidst the Parayar youngsters.

Keywords: Strifes, Community, Status, History, Revenge.

People in India still lead their life with the deadly disease named caste. Common people are being discriminated with this system. Instead of treating a fellow being as an equal human being the disease which we inherit never allow as to accept the reality of life in society. In order to lead a happy life people are suffering within the social order of caste system.

Bama’s Vanmam exposes the pain of Dalit community and brings out the both, witnessing and experiencing the inter caste animosity within the community. Vanmam presents a marked deviation. Instead of merely representing the atrocities committed to the Dalits, Vanmam moves on to examine the subtle working of various castes and sub-castes in an orthodox South Indian setting. B. Azhgarasaran endorses the same by stating: “Vanmam occupies a unique place as it brings to the fore, the centrality of the issue of caste and not simply the atrocities against Dalits.” (xiii)

With such a preoccupation Vanmam has turned to be a trend setter. Of late as B. Mangalam remarks: of animosity alive between them. Also the upper-caste men of Kandampatti preserve their prestigious caste status not only by keeping the low-caste people under their control, but also by keeping the Dalit community divided. B. Mangalam at this juncture observes: “If Parayars and Pallers are outcaste in the eyes of Naickers, Odiayars, Chettiyar, Naidus and Nadars, Pallers and Parayans treat each other as outcaste within their own social habitat.” (17)

The upper-caste men are afraid of the collective strength that will be born if the Pallars and Parayars of the village come together so as to assert their Dalit justice. Hence, they involve in all activities that will keep the flames of rivalry burning between the Pallars and Parayars. The consequence is inter-caste strife and rivalry: Dr. Ambedkar’s pronouncement demands attention at this point: Caste forms a graded system of
sovereignties, high and low, which are jealous of their status and which that if a general dissolution cause, some of them stand to lose more of their prestige and power than others do. (Ambedkar 72)

True to Ambedkar’s observation, neither the Pallars nor the upper-caste could accept the raise of Parayars in the social scale. Access to education and better economic status has brought about changes in the lifestyle of the Parayars, which is intolerable to the upper-caste men. They raise strong criticism about the attitude of the present day Parayars. The fact is that the Pallars seem to be serious of the Parayars while the upper caste men seem to be threatened. Bama states:

Wealth, power, social standing, status bestowed by having been born in a particular caste—all these weaken human relationship. When people are denied humane treatment, when their self-respect as human beings is destroyed, they raise protesting voices. But these voices are interpreted as threatening howls by that intent on vendetta and violence, and they are mercilessly crushed. (V7)

True to the above-mentioned fact, the upper caste men crush the Dalit people at large, and they, in turn, crush each other forgetting that they are breeding vendetta at the cost of wholesome betterment of each other.

The rivalry is so consistent that there are gruesome murders committed by both the parties at regular intervals for trivial issues. The murder of Marraasu, for instance, was committed when a dispute broke over whose land owners field had to be watered first. Marraasu belonging to the Parayar community worked in the field of Ranga Naicker while Karuppusamy of the Pellar community was a farm worker in the fields of Palanivelu Naicker. Marraasu was killed at the hands of Karuppusamy. The irony of the situation arises out of the fact that Marraasu laid down his life for the noble cause of irrigating his upper-caste master’s fields.

The murder kindled up in many Parayars a sense of blind rage pushing them to take revenge. But in some people, especially educated youngsters it opened doors for self-analysis. Saminathan, a college educated youngster also the nephew of Marraasu, reflects: “Because we have no money, no education, they killed and buried and my chithappa in a ditch…as if he were mere dog or something.” (V11) The young mind does not stop with sympathizing but moves on to find a way out of such indignities and violence. He decides: “After I finish college, I must go to study law. My sister Kuttiyamma too must get good education. All young fellows in our street must get to good positions.” (V12) Education is certainly a way out for inescapable hurdles in human life. The backbone of any reformation is education, which has got the power to narrow the divide between what is called subordination and hybridist in society. Hence, he thinks that a graduation in law for him and a good education for his sister Kuttiyamma would do well. This progressive urge ignites a luminous spirit in Saminathan. On the other hand, the murder in itself is a way of asserting the superiority of one’s caste over the other. The Pallars are inferior to other upper caste people and the only sects of people with whom they can claim superiority are the Parayars:

The Parayars are inferior to us and always will be. We are not untouchables we are not untouchables we are of royal descents. We are not Dalits. We are now Devendra Kula Vellalars or Mallars. Not Pallars. So we must not have any type of contact or communication with those low Dalit Parayans. They don’t have any valor. We must get together with our own caste people from all surrounding villages and make sure these Parayars don’t dare raise their heads. (V77-78)

The neglected, insecure Parayars react strongly to ascertain their equal status. Anthony, a Paraya youth, rightly reveals the frustration stating: “if we just keep quiet… caste people in the village will think we are timid cowards” (V72). While some people of these communities
rigorously tend to slap on the face of the society, their caste identity and valor, there are also characters, like Jayaraju, who initially hide their caste identity thereby claiming a dignified treatment in the society. The episode of Jayaraju returning to his village and pretending that he never knew the way to his own street is loaded with ironic humour. It is not only the inferior treatment of the upper caste people that has a role to play in Jayaraju’s pretension, but also his own sympathetic, inferior attitude towards himself. At the heart of heart, he feels inferior of his origin but tends to cover it by claiming superiority over fellow men. Hence, he dresses differently, behaves differently, and remains an introvert. He establishes connections with church associated people and remains aloof from the rest of his community. Contrary to violent assertion Jayaraju’s pretension can be studied as a kind of withdrawal.
References

Ambedkar, B.R. “Annihilation of Caste”. 
  Writings and Speches. Vol 1. 
  Mumbai: Government of 

Azharasan, R. “I am a part of collective 
  Awareness”. Interview with Bama 
  Vanmam. Trans. Malini Seshadri. 

---. “Bama in Context”. Introduction 
  Vanmam. Trans. Malini Seshadri. 


Jamaradas, K. “Sub Caste Rivalry is a creation 
  Ambedkar.org/research/Sub Castes 
  Rivalry Is A Creation of BSO.htm>

Mangalam, B. Rev. of “Vanmam 
  Vendetta.” The Book Review 32. 

---. Rev. of “Sangati: Evants.” The Book 

---. “Tamil Dalit literature: an overview 
  Language.” Language Forum 