

## **Bama's *Vendetta (Vanmam)*: Victimization of the Oppressed by the Government**

**M. Yovan Jeeva Rajatom**

M. Phil., English Literature V. O. Chidambaram College Thoothukudi Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu, India

### **Abstract**

This paper presents the oppression of the government. It revolves around three castes namely Naicker, Pallar and Parayar. Naickers had farmlands. Pallar and Parayar worked in their fields. After that Naickers turned their farms into orchards. Some Parayars and Pallars took some of the orchards on lease. Some of them worked as guards for them. But Parayars didn't depend totally on the Naickers alone and they did all kinds of jobs. Everywhere all over the world, especially in Tamil Nadu, India, common people are being victimized by the people in power or by those who possess money. They show the power of their position and money to oppress the people inferior to their rank. These authorities would also stoop themselves in favor of men higher in power to go against law, doing immoral activities. It is a hierarchy. The person oppressed by his higher authority will oppress people lower to them. Likewise the police department is also affected by this hierarchy.

**KEYWORDS:** Victimization, Oppression, Caste, Government, Hierarchy.

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It is a hierarchy. The person oppressed by his higher authority will oppress people lower to them. Likewise the police department is also affected by this hierarchy. They are oppressed and controlled by Politicians. So they bend themselves and support them in their corrupt activities. But even if a small mistake is committed by a common man, they would be very honest and express their power, who once stood dumb under the Politicians. Not only if we commit mistakes, if we are correct too, they would suppress us like policemen charging penalty even if we have all the documents while driving, and they expect us to act as senseless dolls in response to their evil collaboration with power and money.

We can trace such incidents in Bama's *Vendetta (Vanmam)*. In this novel, the story is set in the village called Kandampatti. Here caste dominance plays a major role. From east to west in the village, the caste status of the residents rises steadily. The high caste people reside near the bazaar and people from other castes should cross over the roads of the people higher in caste for them to reach the workplace, schools or to buy anything from the bazaar.

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Among the castes of Kandamatti, Parayars are only from the Christian religion. The Naickers defended the Pallars as they were Hindus. The Naickers stirred up and maintained the enmity between the Pallars and the Parayars so that they would fight within them and not rise higher than them.

In that village, due to some past clashes between the Pallar and the Parayar, there were no common festivals. And now the Parayar boys, who came for leave to their village plans for a get together for Vaigasi festival. Jeyarasu along with Samynathan, Antony and other boys started Kazhani Arts Troupe and they conducted different events for the evening gathering. Seeing this, Pallars too organized arts events in their streets. If Parayars played songs about Ambedkar, Pallars played the songs about Immanuel Sekaran and this caused jealousy between both of them.

Parayars didn't stop with this. Antony and his fellow members seek Nattamai's permission to install Ambedkar statue. They didn't mind the advices of the elders about what the problems a statue will bring and they went around collecting money. They even got thousand rupees from the Pallar street Nattamai and finally they inaugurated Ambedkar statue.

But Pallars were not so happy with it. They quarreled between themselves on the matter of donation they gave and said that Immanuel's statue could have been put up instead of Ambedkar's. Naickers too goaded them by saying

"...they're of a lower caste than you. If you challenge them, they will become docile. Just because they have seen some money recently, they've become so arrogant... They've forgotten their true status... they're acting big. If we let them go on like this, it's not good for you and not good for us" (Sheshadri 62)

In return for Ambedkar statue, Pallars plan to put up a flagpole on the same place near Ambedkar statue. They bought back the donation they gave earlier and set up their own flagpole taller than Ambedkar's pole and anchored it with wires on four sides, one of it touching the Ambedkar statue. Here starts the Vendetta!

Sesurathnam, a Parayar fellow goes secretly and cuts off the wire. In revenge, nearly ten to fifteen Pallar youngsters went to the bazaar and targets Sesurathnam. A blow of aruval hits Sesurathnam's hand. Seeing this, the boys standing nearby screamed and ran away. Sesurathnam managed to run and enters into the nearby house, but the chasing mob entered the house and hacked him one after another to death. They went throwing his body in the bazaar. When this news reached Parayar street and boys armed with knives and sickles entered the Pallar street and fired the roofs of Pallar houses. Two Pallars were slaughtered in the fields by Parayars. In return, Pallars killed Lourdasamy and Vargheese.

Hearing the news, Policemen came to the streets and all the men of both streets had fled away. Pallar street women are well informed and they had already shifted to their nearby villages. But Parayar street women are still in the streets. Policemen told that they've bought the corpses to the bazaar and asked them to identify them. They also tricked the Parayar street women, saying that Collector is waiting in the bus stand and asked the women to come with them to tell him what happened.

Hearing this, Sesurathnam's wife, being pregnant, also came along with the women in their streets. On seeing the dead bodies, all the women started crying loudly. But the police threatened them and forced them into the van. The van crossed the bus stand and there was none waiting there and the van reached Vadakkoor police station. When the women cried more and more being understood that they were trapped, Policemen used lathis to beat them into silence. They were pushed into the lockup room. Along with Sethurathnam's wife, there was Chellakili, who was

expecting a baby after seven years of marriage, Chinnamma, holding a new born infant of two months and Mary who has left her six months baby at home, sleeping in the cradle, thinking that she would return soon after seeing the corpses.

How pathetic their condition was. Without even considering their situation they were in, the brutal policemen have beaten them and have shown their bravery! Chellakili pleaded with the police, but of no use. Next day she explained the whole thing to the Inspector. Inspector on seeing them, ordered to release Sesurathnam's wife, mother of infants and old women. But they refused to release Chellakili and fifteen others. After Inspector's exit, a policeman kicked in her lower belly for complaining about them and kicked her again. Another policeman beat her lower back with lathi. Chellakili curled down on the floor and felt a sharp pain in her belly. Yes, she lost her baby. What an agony!

Without any men for support, women suffered a lot. They were surrounded by Policemen and were watched. None were allowed to enter or leave their streets. Rosemary, smartest among them, took the cart to bring back the dead bodies from the bus stand. On seeing it, women wept louder beating on their bellies. Police didn't allow them even to cry. Women gathered there took the bodies to the graveyard and dug a big grave and buried the three bodies there.

After a while, more policemen swarmed in the streets, bus stand and in the bazaar. There wasn't single male in the village. So, policemen took advantage and "On the pretext of searching the houses for the men, they would enter and talk vulgarly to the women and even misbehave with them. (Sheshadri 88). Policemen who should act as protectors, here they themselves turn as villains.

Meanwhile, Rosemary took few women and met the women in the vadakkooru police station secretly. When the policemen came to know this matter they started beating utwomen with lathis and said, "Come on... tell us the truth... otherwise we'll crush you. We'll give you such a thrashing that they'll come and surrender before us" (Sheshadri 89). Receiving the beating, women ran into their houses and cried. Thirty to forty policemen entered each houses, dragged them out into the streets and started beating not only women, but also the children, young girls and old women. They blew their lathis brutally on their faces, arms, legs, bellies and everywhere. They were not allowed even to buy medicines for their wounds.

There in the station, only six were released and the remaining ten women were sent to Madurai jail, accusing them of setting fire to the Pallar houses. This is the real character of police, who won't catch the real culprit but would produce someone else to close the case. This is happening everywhere around us.

Ten to twenty Pallars stayed in KumaresanNaicker's castle. Pallars initiated the murder. So, first the action should be taken on them only. But here Parayars who took revenge were running here and there, and the police were humiliating their women. The reason is that, Police are corrupt, coward being who fears power and bends with high caste Naickars, who would be beneficial for the government, but would show their bravery on the oppressed one, who couldn't raise their voice. This is made clear from the following sentences said by a Pallar fellow Marichamy.

"The police won't dare to touch a single hair of ours. You mean to say they'll dare to step into our KumaresanAyya's cattle shed? And will Ayya allow them to take us away? Already, through KumaresanAyya, we've given the police a list of all the main fellows in their street who should be arrested. Those fellows dare not show their faces" (Sheshadri 92)

Here, where goes the braveness of the police. With the power of police, if they are honest and brave, no culprit can dare to say any word on police. But here,

these policemen had spoiled their image by themselves and so fellow comments on police that they won't dare to touch a single hair of them. Their braveness is only with the voiceless people.

There comes Kumaresan with the Inspector. The inspector says, "What you need to do first tomorrow is... make ten or fifteen fellows come and surrender before me. Pick some good for nothing fellows and bring them. The rest of you can go back to your houses. We'll see to everything else. Don't be afraid" (Sheshadri 92)

Here we can see that the Police was searching for the main persons from the Parayar streets, through Kumaresan. But here, the Inspector asks for good for nothing fellows to surrender. Having seen the culprits in the Naicker's house, what they must have done? But here they helps Naickers and never took any action on them. What a shameful, immoral act. They spoil the dignity of police among people through their activities. Antony also says,

"It's so unfair... they've arrested only our street women and filed cases against them. In other streets, they've not beaten or arrested or imprisoned anyone. The police are all against us" (Sheshadri 93)

People from several places visited Pallar street and gave different kinds of aid. But no officials visited Parayar street. But, the church people assisted both Pallar and Parayarpeople. Women couldn't go for work for their living. They managed with their cattle and help from the church. If school or college reopens, they can't go to study crossing the bazaar. They have no money for paying the fees, as they can't go for work. Only if that twenty members of them got surrendered, then only they can be free to move elsewhere. So, the boys of Parayar streets persuaded twenty fellows to surrender by explaining their pathetic situation. After that only Parayar street women are released.

That year, they didn't celebrated Christmas as they have to pass through Pallar street to reach the church. So, they skipped the service to avoid trouble by Pallars. Meanwhile, women took courage and sent their children to schools and people started moving with their life as before. After that Easter came and even though the elders advised them not to, the young boys and girls along with the women demanded to celebrate it. Finally everyone agreed. Though they were busy with their work for Easter celebration, they felt somewhat uneasy in their minds.

Meanwhile, the Pallar street youngsters were planning to target few of Parayar boys to finish them off. Parayarstreet boys armed themselves guarding the edges of the Easter procession. Even though pallars gave disturbances, they managed to reach their streets safely. But Savariappan, who went in search of her missing daughter was surrounded by ten to fifteen Paallar fellows and was hacked to death.

The Policemen took Savariappan's corpse to the police station in darkness and they opened the matter next day morning. See the worst partial activity of the police, that when the deathwas on the Parayar side, they took all efforts to hide it, and pacify them but not enquire or catch the murderer. But if the same thing happens on the Pallar side, they would take immediate action, without even considering women and children.

After the death of Savariappan, Pallars started mocking at them and made insulting comments on Savariappan's death, that they've done nothing in response to it. This infuriated the Parayar boys. The three fellows Paulraju, Sahayaraju and PanneerSelvam, who ran away when Sesurathnam was murdered, waited for revenge, with aruvals hidden under their clothes.

One Friday afternoon, these fellows went to the bazaar they saw a group of three to four pallans. Seeing that the Policemen were sleeping, each one of them hacked down a pallan and ran away. While returning, one of them comments on the actual behavior of Policemen as,

“They’re fit only to eat and sleep, da... the gun is only for company! They’re all cowards. If any poor innocent fool falls into their clutches... they’ll take him to the station and give him hell. But can they face anybody one on one? Not a chance!” (Sheshadri 116)

Hearing the news, Parayar street fellows started running towards the field with knife and sticks for revenge. They chopped off Chandana Mary’s head and hacked down. Amalorbhavam as they couldn’t get any Parayar street men. Many parayar street men had fled to other villages.

At this time, Pallar street men gave complaint about the bus stand murder and listed all the educated Parayar youngsters and some elder men who were in government jobs and the police tried hard to track them. The police, who were supposed to stand by justice to find the real accused, here acts as a worker for men in power or men with higher influence. They won’t act on their own. They don’t have guts to stand for truth.

“Whenever a Parayar had been murdered, the Government had turned a blind eye. So had the upper-caste people and politicians. Now that the murder victims were Pallars, they were constantly coming to convey their condolences and support” (Sheshadri 119).

These lines by Bama, clearly describes how Government acts partial to the men favor to them. Only in the Government logo there would be written “Vaaimaye Vellum” (Truth alone Triumphs). But in real, they show a blind eye towards the truth and join hands with the wicked to do all sorts of mischievous activities. More than this, they stimulated Pallars by saying “Those fellows have killed so many of you. Why didn’t you take revenge?” (Sheshadri 119).

After few days, police arrested few of the fellows who were studying who had come for vacation. Some of those with government jobs also were put in jail. But as they couldn’t find some of them, they tortured the women. Noticing them that they are managing with the earning by milking cows, they chased away the milk men from entering the streets. Such rude the police were, that they couldn’t show sympathy over the women starving for food, the basic essential for living. After this, they milked their cows and distributed within them and they had only boiled milk for two weeks.

Naickers were delighted on seeing the condition of Parayars that they can’t raise their heads. They revealed the possible hiding places of Parayars so that the Pallans could ask the police to raid there and capture them. Naickers stirred up Pallans by saying, “...those Parayan fellows are receiving help from the church officials... but don’t worry, we’re here for you... we’re all Hindus, and so we’ll always support you” (Sheshadri 122).

At this time, Sesurathnam’s murder case came for hearing. So, Pallars came for compromise. But the youngsters and women refused. But the elders advised them to be calm and they went to Nattamai. Considered the things that children can’t go school and people unable to go for work etc., the two Nattamais met on a place with five men on each side. Even though the boys on both sides quarrelled among them for revenge, finally they agreed to live in peace and join hands to be with harmony.

After that, Panchayat President election came and they nominated Kaalaiyan of Pallar street to be a joint candidate for the post of President. Till that time,

only Naickers were nominated. In the election, Kaalayan wins and the story ends with the celebration. It was a great thing that they have come together and this made their victory in the Panchayat President election.

There is an old saying, "If a village is split into two, only the mischief-maker will celebrate". Like Pallarsin the novel, many people are supported by the people in power or people with high influence or money. The people enjoying this support, does injustice to the people inferior to them and suppress the voiceless. But they fail to realize that, they too were one among them and they too are being victimized. In this world, good doers are becoming less in number. Those who want to be honest also are being suppressed and controlled. So, to establish justice and to achieve something great, every people should get united like Pallar and Parayar in this novel, besides their enmity or differences that the men of Politics had laid on us. By doing so only, we can achieve anything high like Kaliappan winning the President election.

**Reference:**

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