

The Fragmentation of Subaltern Identity in Bama's *Vanmam*

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ABSTRACT

The research unfolds the “Fragmentation of Subaltern Identity in Bama’s *Vanmam*” due to the oppression of intra-caste division. It examines the exploitation of caste-based oppression, its fallouts, and collective resistance. The discrimination between *Pallar* and *Parayar* takes place even in the name of late leaders like Ambedkar and Immanuel. The rivalry among the marginalized Dalits is fuelled by the upper caste, denoting systematic oppression. The residual effects of segmentation result in double marginalization and bloodshed among the people of the same community. The separation among Dalits occurs due to religious conflict, political power, education jealousy, and manipulation. It highlights the external force of ruling castes, exploiting the voice of Dalits to maintain power. The objective includes finding out the reason behind identity fragmentation and how educational understanding of an experience brings the voice of the subaltern - the understanding of the difference between the knowledge and experience of the subaltern. Marginalization due to power dynamics creates tension and discrimination among the Dalit members. The need for the voice of the subaltern, the factors that muted their identity and the ways are to be discussed. It throws light on the strength of the voice and the weakness of the voiceless subaltern. When rivalry turns to brotherhood, a voice for rights and harmony can be attained. The subalterns are often referred to as voiceless, but the hidden truth is that their voices are broken. If their

voices get solidified together, they will be loud and powerful. The bonded voice of the subaltern brings identity and collective resistance.

Keywords: Caste, Oppression, Subaltern, Voice, Power.

Bama's novel *Vanmam* (Vendetta) explores caste-based rivalry and conflict within the subaltern community. The tension revolves between *Pallar* and *Parayar* people and the intra-caste division of the Dalit group. They are discriminated against by the landlord; on the other hand, the landowners, *Naickers*, manipulate the animosity between these two sub castes to maintain their power. The rivalry results in loss of life among the Dalit people. *Naickers* support *Pallars* to conserve their power over land and money. The story concludes with harmony among the *Pallar* and *Parayar*. The united voice of the subaltern gives relief from their oppression and defragmentation of identity.

Fragmentation due to intra-caste discrimination plays a pivotal role in subaltern identity. The upper caste *Naickers* want the subaltern group to be underdeveloped. They manipulate the *Pallar* group through every possible way, using religion, politics, and social education, to act against *Parayar*. They support the *Pallar* group only to maintain power over them. Religion plays a vital role in the division of the subaltern group. The subaltern people are united by their marginalization. They suffer a lot for their basic needs like water, shelter, and clothes. Before the period of colonization, all the subaltern members are treated like slaves. They are not allowed to enter the temple, school, and public meetings. They act according to the words of the landlords and are provided with little wages. The arrival of Christian missionaries brings light to the dark lives of Dalits. The priests and the nuns offer free education and food for the subaltern children. This attracts many, and they start sending their children to school. Thus, the revolution starts with the educated subalterns; they question the landlords. Some of the indigenous subalterns convert to Christianity, and many do not. As a result, there develop Christian *Parayars* and Hindu *Pallars*.

Christianity gives rights to enter the church, which attracts the marginalized group, and equality brings happiness more than faith does. In the Christian community, priests are considered superior power. The important decisions are taken according to the suggestion of the priest. In the novel *Vanamam*, Anthony convinced the *Parayar* group to build an Ambedkar statue by explaining his conversation with the priest: "Do you know why he has Kamaraj's picture hanging there? Because he is a *Nadar*. That's why" (Bama 58). The specification about the caste division turns even to the leaders. The rivalry among the people starts in the name of the late leaders. Not only Ambedkar and Kamaraj but also Srinivas, who is praised by the *Pallars*. The caste consciousness of the subaltern group lacks humanity and sows the seed of rivalry. They deny the advice of older people and believe that war brings peace.

The *Parayar* evolve a lot and work in different sectors. They dress up neatly and start completing their degree, which is undigested by their landlords, the *Naickers*. They always want the *Pallar* and *Parayar* to be under their control, working for them. When the young generation start to shine, they become subject to jealousy and rivalry. The *Naickers* support the *Pallar* to some extent because they fulfill the wish of the landlords. Both *Pallar* and *Parayar* work for different landlords in their fields. While watering the crops, the dispute arises among Subalterns and that ends in death. They do not even realize that they are working for their landlords, and not for their own welfare.

The intra-division among the Dalits makes the people undergo double and triple marginalization. When the murder happens between two subaltern groups, the women in the *Pallar* group are shifted to a different place, and the men in the *Parayar* group run out of the village. The *Parayar* subaltern women are mistreated by the police. The political power of the landlords is misused for the brutal treatment of police towards the *Parayars*. Power is used against the subaltern people when they start asking for their rights and freedom. It can be compared to the period before independence when the British were ruling India. The number of Indians was more than the colonisers, but due to the fear of power, they lived under their control.

If the spirit of freedom arises in their minds, people of different castes, races, and religions be united for the sake of freedom. In the same way, the split in subaltern group paves way for the power-gain of the upper-caste people.

In the village president election, a *Pallar* is the only nominee, and he is elected for the position. The purpose of the election is completely changed by the *Naickers*, and it becomes a monarchy. In *Subalternity and Language: Overcoming the Fragmentation of Common Sense*, Marcus E. Green and Peter Ives explain fragmentation in identity due to political structure: "Although Gramsci often associates the problem of political fragmentation among subaltern groups with issues concerning language and common sense, there are only a few notes, where he explicitly connects his overlapping analysis of language and subalternity." The village people are also unaware of the voting power; when the educated young men start to fight for their rights, victory comes to them in the form of a position in the village society. They became equal to the *Naickers*, which triggers their landlords, and they start attacking them.

The fragmentation among the subalterns is utilized by the landlords. They ask the *Pallars* to send their children to school, where the *Naickers'* children study. They also include the thought that the *Parayar* people are lower than them. The *Pallars'* thought of superiority towards the *Parayars* create issues over their roads, schools, grocery shops and later ends in deaths. The loss of lives between the two groups is considered an inevitability of fighting, but the real reason behind the deaths is identified later. The loss of the subaltern group is considered a victory by the landlords.

The Dalit members consider that their power will be raised only by killing others. They do not realize that it is not the end but a series to be continued. The fight for their prestige and name becomes beneficial to the people of higher caste. The earlier forms of discrimination, such as untouchability, segregation, and endogamy, has taken thousands of years to be overcome. Through education, writing, protest, and law and order, the level of the marginal people is lifted. The struggle for necessity is overcome

after many generations till the discrimination among their own groups makes them continue in the same working class. The effects of such division and caste consciousness weaken their community's ability to resist systematic oppression. The rivalry among the people comes to an end only due to self-realization. The split in any community can be resolved through the understanding of collective resistance.

Dalit people often suffer for land and employment. Economic competition and land ownership conflicts reinforce divisions and prevent collective progress in economics status. The ownership and rights are given to people according to their blood lines. Landlords' children become landlords and Dalits remain Dalits. Many leaders protest for the welfare of marginal people. In many cases, power holders are landlords, and they make the subaltern people to remain in the same state. The growth of subalterns is restricted by the ruling class.

The lives of marginal people are not even considered. The only motto of the upper-caste people is to rule over the working class. The voices of the subaltern are muted through their power. To break the systematic oppression, understanding and analysis are mandatory for the Dalits. Education can be used as a tool to organize the diverted marginal people and their strength.

Subalterns are often considered voiceless. In the prose "*Can the subaltern speak?*", Spivak gives an elaborate explanation about truth construction. "The intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation. The problem is that the subject's itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of representation." The truth is non-fictional, bona fide, and the actual events, happened. In the same way, the construction of truth is information, collected as news from different perspectives of people. The disintegrated subalterns are always manipulated by the truth construction, like they are inferior to landlords. The constructed truth gets transferred from one generation to another without any questions. When the rational Dalits protest for their rights, the ruling caste starts the process of atomization among the subaltern. The fear of the loss of power makes the landlords create tension among the subalterns. The goal of the

ruling class is to attend to the separation of the working class. The unity of the subaltern achieves their rights and peace from the landlords. The collective gathering of marginalized groups may become the centre, and the people of other classes may become the peripheral.

To understand the subaltern identity, knowledge and experience play a significant role. The intra-caste division among marginal people brings ethical and moral dilemmas. They are separated by economic conditions or religious status. The fight for power among Dalits is educated by the uppercase people without proper understanding of the Subaltern; the marginal people trust the words of the oppressive community. This is explained in the work *Orientalism* by Edward Said. He gives the difference between knowledge and experience: Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental, and his world." Knowledge can be gained from oral or written stories. The non-subaltern people often guide them to the path as they wish without understanding the proper need of the subaltern. The pain and solution can only be calculated from marginal experience. The ultimate need for the Dalits can be identified by the experienced subaltern. The Dalits should be treated equally and provided with the services according to their equity.

The voice of the subaltern is muted due to political power and ignorance. The fragmented voice can be united by self-realization. The novel ends with the unity of *Pallar* and *Parayar*. Once the scattered voices are brought together and allowed to express their will, the ultimate equality is attained. The voiceless subaltern can provide a voice only after the bonded voice. At some points, the voices of the Dalits are low and do not reach the ears of the powerful political system. The fragmented identity of the subaltern should be united as subaltern. The voice of all Dalits should be brought out and patched together. The loud voices of marginalized people should echo over every nook and corner of the world. The position of the Dalits should be changed, and their voices should be answered. The identity split should be united as a single voice. A voiceless subaltern can be transformed into the voice of subaltern identity.

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