

Caste, Gender and Political Awakening: A Feminist–Subaltern Reading of *Vanmam*

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the representation of Dalit women in *Vanmam* by Bama. The study explores how caste and gender intersect in the novel and shape the lives of Dalit women. It places *Vanmam* within the strong phase of Dalit writing in Tamil during the second half of the twentieth century, when writers began to question caste hierarchy and literary traditions. Using feminist theory and subaltern theory, especially Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's idea of the 'subaltern' this paper analyses how Dalit women are shown as both victims of violence and powerful agents of resistance. The novel records sexual, economic, and physical exploitation and also celebrates women's humour, labour, courage, and faith in education. At the same time, *Vanmam* examines conflicts between Dalit communities and argues that political unity and education are necessary for liberation.

Keywords: Dalit women, Caste conflict, Patriarchy, Subaltern, Intra-caste division, Ambedkarite ideology.

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