



Vanmam: Vendetta

By Bama; translated from the Tamil By Malini Seshadri;
Introduction By R. Azhagarasan

Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, 2008. Hard Cover.
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Recent years have seen a rise in the genre of Dalit literature with Bama at the forefront. Characterized by startling language, ethnographic detail, and native idiom, Dalit writing in Tamil has gone hand in hand with political activism, and with critical and ideological debate. However a large portion of this writing has concentrated on the theme of victimhood. Vanmam, Bamas third full-length work, is an exception focusing instead on the inter-caste rivalry within Dalit communities. It highlights the animosity between the Pallars and the Parayars of Kandampatti village who identify themselves as Hindus and Christians respectively and describes how the landowners of the dominant Naicker caste stoke the fires of intra-Dalit hostilities to benefit themselves, ignoring the human costs paid for time and again in misery, loss, and death. An important contribution to the corpus of Dalit literature, this translation makes Vanmam available to a wider reading public. A comprehensive introduction skillfully sketches the history of the Dalit movement in Tamil Nadu, and an interview with the author carrying visuals of her village Kandampatti provide the context for this novel and, in a broader...

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