



Conflicts Of Pride in C.S Chelappa's *Vaadivasal*

Dr. Vidhyavathi Prasath

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government Arts College for Men, Nandanam
Chennai-35. Email id: pravith_vidhu@yahoo.co.in*

Abstract

Vaadivasal written by C.S Chellappa in Tamil and translated by N. Kalian Raman in English is a short story with a mix of excitement, anticipation, fear, joy and pathos given for the first time in a prose narrative. Vaadivasal is hailed as a milestone in the annals of Tamil prose fiction. It is a simple story deep rooted with the culture, tradition and legacy of people in and around the city of Madurai (Tamilnadu, India)—the place which is known for bull taming. The story is about the bull-taming contest which is familiarly known as “Eru Thazhual” in Tamil. Though it is a story on the contest between man and animal; where man has to hold tightly to the hump of the bull in order to bring it down; and in the end either the arms or the horns win, it is even more important on various other backgrounds.

Key Words: vaadivasal, significance of bull in history, tradition, religion and agriculture, subaltern exploitation, ethnic conflicts

Introduction.

Vaadivasal not only speaks about the famous jallikattu contest but under its shadow it speaks about the arrogance and superiority of the upper class notwithstanding the rising power of the subaltern class. It is where C. S. Chellappa marks a difference. Unlike Earnest

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Hemingway who lets his protagonist to kill the bull in *The Undeclared*, C. S Chellappa speaks not only about bull-fighting but about bull-taming.

Jallikkattu may not be as systematised and spectacular as the Spanish bullfight, it depends more on the split-second gut feeling of the fighter. The goal of the fight is not to kill any living being.

(<http://www.thehindu.com/books/books-authors/in-chellappasarena/article5075458.ece>) [i].

The protagonist of *Vaadivasal* never kills the bull. He only tames the bull with great fervour. But the owner of the bull; notwithstanding the control of an inferior man on his superior bull kills it ruthlessly. Chellappa lets his protagonist to tame the bull not to kill the bull. He uses his story to give a feel of the feudal world in which the taming takes place. It also tells about, “hierarchy, love, intimacy, pride, friendship, revenge and above all, the man-beast duel” (*Vaadivasal* xxvi). For these multiple angel he portrayed; the staunch literary activist and the winner of Sahitya Akademi Award; C. S. Chellappa will always be remembered. It is not only for his books *Suthanthira Thagam* (The Thurst for Freedom) and *Vaadivasal* but he will always be remembered for his matchless commitment to the cause of Modern Tamil Literature.

The story *Vaadivasal* revolves around Periyapatti arena, the place which is very famous for jallikattu. “If you ever hold down a bull, you should do it at Chellayi jallikattu. The best sanguvaadi ever” (3). The story springs through the mixture of man and animal characters and the conflicts that revolve not only between man and animal but also between man and man. The conflict between man and animal is the conflict between Picchi, the protagonist and the fearsome bull Kaari, which is the prized possession of a Zamindar.

As the kaari turns to face him and Chellappa’s outstanding Tamil classic unfolds. The ground shakes and the pages trembles. Picchi’s grip on the bull is just a breath behind the author’s grip on our imagination as the sport of jallikattu spins the reader in and out of the arena.

(<http://www.thehindu.com/books/books-authors/in-chellappasarena/article5075458.ece>) [ii].

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Picchi is the son of Ambuli Thevan an expert bull tamer who was killed by Kaari, in the jallikattu at Uslianoor. Since then kaari was the prized possession of the Zamindar Mokkaiah Thevar. “Ambuli, he is the man!...passed away the year before last, after pouncing on this Kaari bull in the Challi held just before it passed into the Zamindar’s hands” (21).

Picchi could not rescue his father in that Challi. He was hopeless and helpless as he had to obey his father’s words. “Whatever happens, don’t rush into the fray. Swear on your father. After me this arena will be yours to rule” (30). Ambuli Thevan, was gored by the bull and was dead after few months of the jallikatuu. He said before he died;

This Kaari donkey caught my eye not in my youth but when I was already old; else, I would have pressed it down with a single hold, easy as pushing it down in the mud. Now when I am dying, news that Ambuli Thevan was spun around and felled by Mokaiah Thevar’s kaari has come to stay. (28-29)

Picchi’s very purpose of coming to Periyapatti arena is to tame the same bull; “the kaari, which had not only destroyed his father’s dream but also his very life” (30). Picchi wanted to bring back his father’s art of taming bull. His father “was as cunning as Yama, Lord of death...That whole art has gone with him” (21). Picchi has come to Perriyapatti arena not to tame any other varieties of bulls such as Karambai bull, Vathalakulam bull, the Billai-Adusakudi bull, the Mayilai-Kattuparayam bull or the Corral-Pannaiyur bull; but only to tame “Vadipuram Bull” (57), “Black devil” (57), “Demon Kaari” (57)—the bull that had taken his father’s life. However ferocious the bull is, Picchi will make victory his way to fulfill his father’s unquenched victory. Moreover he has the genetic talent, “deciding when to jump on which bull is part of his natural instinct” (61).

Picchi who comes as a strange person with zero knowledge of Periyapatti arena wins the heart of Pattaiya—the old man of the village and a great fan of Picchi’s father. Having come to know through Marudan, Picchi’s brother-in-law as well as his cohort in bull taming; that Picchi is the son of Ambuli Thevan, Pattaiya develops a natural love towards Picchi. Having understood who Picchi is and his purpose of the day, he shakes the initial conflict that

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he developed with Picchi and befriends him. In fact he is the one who teaches Picchi about the intricacies of the arena and the nature of various bulls. He wished for Picchi's success to bring back Ambuli Thevan's skill. "Picchi, you must...this Kaari donkey..." (78). He also feels happy when Picchi tames Kaari. "You have avenged yourself, Picchi! You've redeemed your father's honour" (75).

However Murugan another bull tamer from South province, who was supposed to be the Zamindar's man develops a conflict with Picchi because of egotism. Like the conflict between Pattaiya and Picchi gets resolved after better understanding; the conflict between Picchi and Murugan also gets resolved when Picchi rescues Murugan from the bull Billai and substitutes him in taming the bull. Picchi wins for him and gives the reward to him; not accepting the reward as his own.

The third conflict is the actual conflict between Picchi and kaari. It was a tough conflict as who would win. "Which one would tire first-the hand or the horn" (67). The fourth conflict is developed between Picchi and the Zamindar. The Zamindar took pride that his kaari is unconquerable. "He was confident that his kaari would tear Picchi apart as easily as a piece of plantain fibre" (59). But his confident is broken when Picchi tames a couple of less eminent bulls and the Zamindar recognised Picchi's bravery when eventually he tamed Kaari. Thus the fourth conflict gets resolved by recognising the valour of the young man.

The fifth and the final conflict is between the Zamindar and his pride. He could not tolerate his bull's defeat and a subaltern winning his bull. When the entire village celebrates Picchi's victory and his bravery; "You have avenged yourself, Picchi! You've redeemed your father's honour!" (75), the Zamindar's ego was hurt. The bull had become the victim to the man's pride. When his revolver exploded twice, it was all done; "it's only a beast!" (81). But at the same time C.S. Chellappa, strikes a note that; "If an animal's pride is hurt, it lead to destruction; it's the same with the man's pride too!" (8)



The various conflicts on which the story flows do not foretell anything. Nether it does signify anything specifically. It is just an authentic record of the happenings of the jallikaatu in a vivid, accurate and fluent narrative. C.S. Chellappa has described the custom and tradition of the people. He brings forth the ancient history and the predominant role of bulls played in history. He speaks about the inseparable role of the bulls in Hindu religion. He narrates the prominent role of bulls in farming. “If a bull wins, it is sent for breeding...the one which lose are sent for farming” [iii].

Here Zamindar’s pride is self-centred. Besides bull contest as a taming sport he has taken it into a pride of class distinction. It is his arrogance and the upper class chauvinism that does not want the lower class to rise. Otherwise the other’s pride to win over in jallikattu is only to save the natural breed. A decade ago, there were nine lakh bulls, but now there are only 60,000. It is only due to our ignorance. Jallikattu is our identity. It is more than entertainment; it is a livelihood. [iii]. C. S. Chellappa has made bull taming as an idol of bravery through his writing to all people across the world. He has given:

“A gripping account of a sport that the Supreme Court banned in 2014 for the cruelty to animals it supposedly involves but which jallikattu supporters insist is a keen contest between man and beast.”

(<https://thewire.in/101794/the-taming-of-a-demon-bull-an-extract-from-c-s-chellappas-classic-novella/>) [iv].

The Supreme Court had revoked its ban due to the jallikattu protest in 2017 which started at Marina, Chennai and set ablaze across the city, ventured across the country, and to overseas to some extent. However a thorough reading of the text *Vaadivasal* published four years prior to the protest will show us how important the sport is for farming.

The stark reality of the ethnic conflict and the angst and despair of the subaltern class; be it Picchai or Karri, the bull that becomes the poor victim of the man’s pride is occasionally present. Besides that bull taming is to be celebrated not only to preserve identity but for the very livelihood of mankind.

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International Journal of Research

ISSN: 2348-6848 Vol-5, Special Issue-14

11th National Conference on Nature, Culture, Language and Literature: Narratives and Critical Practices held on 16th and 17th April 2018 at **The Department of English, SRM University**, Kattankalathur, Chennai, Tamilnadu



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