

## **Giving Voice to Voiceless: A Study of Sivakami's Novel The Taming of Women**

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### **Abstract:**

Sivakami's novel *The Taming of Women* articulates the voice of the voiceless women. They are enforced to go through many worst situations in course of their life and accept them as if they are an integral part in the women's life in Indian society. My present paper reflects the dilemma of the Dalit women in the patriarchal society. Besides, it shows the hard realities existing in Indian society in which the women have been caught in the command of men and have become victims and accepted their unchangeable fate. In every civilized society, there are some types of inequalities that lead to social inequity. And in India, it comes in the garb of 'Casteism'. The dalit women are deprived of their primary rights of education, possession of material goods and right to equality. Thus Dalit Feministic Literature emerges to voice for all those oppressed, exploited and marginalized Women who endured this social inequality and exploitation for so long. The major concern of Dalit Feministic Literature is the liberation of Dalits Women from this timeless burden of slavery. Dalit writers like Sivakami use their writings as a weapon to vent out their anger against the social pecking order which is responsible for their degradation. After a so long sleep now, they have become conscious about their identity as human being. The suffering represented by the Dalit writer Sivakami is not that of an individual but of the whole outcast society. The primary apprehension of this present paper is to show how Dalit Literature has become a medium of outburst of these muted voices. The paper makes an attempt to understand the idea and voice of the Dalits and their voyage from unspoken and passive objects of history to self-conscious theme.

Key words: Self-Conscious, individuality, Exploitation, social group, Subaltern, male prejudice, oppression, patriarchy.

### **Introduction**

P. Sivakami is an Indian writer writing in Tamil. She is one among the most well-known Dalit writers in India. She became the first Tamil Dalit woman to write about the patriarchy and the Dalit movement. Her first novel *Removal of old things* was translated and published in English as *The Grip of Change*. She quit her job as Secretary-ranked bureaucrat in the administrative service and established her own political party named as the Forum for Social Equality. Sivakami's literary works highlight the suppression faced by women and especially Dalit women.

This paper explores the way in which the writer presented the women characters. This novel deals with the concept of male sexism, suppression, sexual abuse, incest, rural lifestyle and poverty. This paper is to see how the author presents the domestic violence committed against women in families as well as outside the family circle. She has portrayed the concept

brightly in her novel through various characters. This novel is based on how women struggle to preserve their honour and how they are oppressed by the men. Dignity for women is still a question mark in most of the places in the world. It is based on the women being oppressed in both upper and lower classes. The story begins when the central character Anandhayi discovered her husband Periyannan's paramour. When Anandhayi successfully trapped the woman who had an affair with her husband, "Periyannan, came thundering down the steps. He released the woman from Anandhayi's hold and pushed her aside. Anandhayi crashed to the ground with a loud sound". The moment he thrashed her, she got the labour pain and delivered her baby. He didn't come to see the new born baby too. This shows that this man does not have any apprehension for his pregnant wife and for his baby which is inside the womb. Anandhayi's mind was filled with disappointments and she lost the peace in her mind.

Anadhayi prays to god, saying: "Sami.... let the slut come down and she will get it from me. She who has climbed up has to climb down" (Sivakami, 94).

Anandhayi has to face a lot of troubles in order to bring up her children like Kala, Dhanam and Arul. In a state of poor quality, she asserts that: "Having a girl in the house is like having a fire in the belly.... I will have peace only when I hand her over to a husband." (Sivakami, 108)

Hence, all men select women just for physical satisfaction. They only see the women who are befitted into the household responsibilities and produce children. In this perspective, Sivakami is more critical of it to raise voice against such tyranny. The novel *The Taming of Women* – portrays the bias between men and women. The story tells about the miserable life of Anandhayi who is married to a womanizer, Periyannan. Periyannan who is a contractor is not happy with the wealth that his farms bring him. He has a greedy desire for power that money can only bring him. Besides, he has also a hunger for women in terms of physical needs. His is only longing for sex with them. It does not matter for him whether she may be his wife, his concubine, and his daughters and so on.

Anandhayi's mother-in-law advised her: Why should a woman who's just given birth go hungry? So, the husband went to a whore, uh! Still, why should you go hungry? Is he all that you have in your life? Don't you have your children, enough prosperity? Acres of fields and cattle of your own? Just because he went off with someone, here she wants to pine away. After all, there are five children; can't she just wash her hands off him forever?

*The Taming of Women* (2012) is the second novel of Sivakami in Tamil language. It is translated by Pritham.K.Chakravarthy from Tamil into English. Sivakami in this novel basically portrays the harsh realities and the miserable dilemma of women and how they are conquered and dominated by men in patriarchal Indian society. She firmly explains about the ages and generations of women who are forcefully made to undergo physical assault, sexual exploitation, gender bias and incestuous violence. She also depicts how the beautiful woman is forced to end her colorful life due to intolerable torture. Men do not show respect to the women. Hence, dignity of women is still a question mark in most of the places in the world. The problem arises whenever women claim their demands. So empowered woman is a threat

to male domain, male power and male authority. In a way, men always attempt to control women both deliberately and thoroughly. They always stop the voice of women and they refuse their literacy and economic rights.

Women could empower themselves through voice and literacy by which they are able to take apart the barriers set up by men. Writing becomes a powerful instrument for women to raise their voice. But the feminist movement in India intentionally excludes Dalit women as marginalised and stigmatised within the predominant caste system. But later on, the caste ingredients paradoxically become a dividing factor both in the struggle against male oppression and also against the participation in the typical literary standard. Hence, this very exclusion ironically injects power to lead Dalit women's separatist movement and literary expression. In this way, it is assumed that novel as a literary genre becomes an important tool to express the voice of Dalit women. So, they begin to challenge the caste-centered narratives in order to create a separate literary standard for them.

The novel *Taming of Women* depicts the discrepancy between the village patriarch Periyannan and his wife, Anandhayi. Though Anandhayi has a voice of assertion and spiritual strength to question her husband's domination, slowly and typically submits to the hands of male power and is tamed to silence. In a way, the novel reflects the subsidiary position of women that has designed their "silenced" identities. These silenced spaces of women facilitate the absence and the voiceless condition of woman. This is really an approach of male structured society to dominate women.

### **Methodology**

Keeping in view the availability of the resources and feasibility of the present research Paper, the author conducted his research on the basis of secondary source of data. Secondary data has been collected from the various journals, research articles, book thesis and internet. The methodology of the study also includes the thoughts and writings of various authors in the stream of academic and research fields. Thus the author utilized all resources available and carried out exhaustive studies for the present research paper.

### **Periyannan - The Antagonist**

Periyannan is the antagonist of the novel who is always trying to bring down the women under his control through sex and power. Muthakka is a maid who came to help Anandhayi in her domestic chores until she got back to normal from her delivery. Periyannan does not want Muthakka to go away, so he insisted upon her staying for a few more days and went "Brushing against her body, Periyannan walked out of the kitchen". His shamefaced attitude is revealed when "He chose to come, avoiding Anandhayi's line of vision, and on the alleged reason of fondling the child; he brushed his hand on Muthakka's breast". As soon as he heard his wife's voice, he moved to the fields. Periyannan's haughty and careless nature is proven, when he refused his wife's cousin Iyyakannu's pleas to lend his bulls just for two days: "You are free to take your sister, but don't touch my bulls. What am I to do without my bulls . . . don't make me say things I might feel sorry". It shows that Periyannan is having more

concern for his bulls than for his wife. These words expose the selfish attitude and the man's disinterest towards his wife.

Since Periyannan is a building contractor, he got a new bridge project and earned a lot. He stayed in a rented room with his new concubine Lakshmi, and so he came home very rarely. When Periyannan saw a man near the fence, he caught him and enquired, and then he came to know that he was a deaf beggar. Periyannan assumed her when Anandhayi felt pity for him. He abused her with vulgar words, "is he your secret lover? Why are you so sorry for him?". When she answered him back again he scolded her by saying that "I can have any women I want. Do you know that?" These dialogues make clear the dominant and cheap nature of the antagonist, Periyannan. As a woman, she is controlled to show sympathy on a deaf man too. Her husband is the representative of the male patriarchal society which justifies their own actions and condemns women for their mistakes.

Periyannan is wealthy and prosperous and belongs to the upper caste community. So, he does not care and respect the needs and wants of a poor woman like Lakshmi. She is condensed to a mere body and mere sexual product.

Mani, Periyannan's son also gains and learns the role of patriarchal ability. After the first elopement of Lakshmi, Periyannan and Mani both drag her from the gate to the room and beat her too much. Hence, both the father and the son play the vital role of patriarchy where no woman is left out whether she may be the unmarried daughter and sister. They resent the visits of the married ones to their natal home. Though Lakshmi is concubine, she as a woman longs for love and care. By enduring a lot of humiliations, she wants to lead a happy and peaceful life, which is reflected in her statement:

"It is not that I want sex that desperately. I want love, a relationship, a support, a comfort, a kind word not like this, everyday torture, kicks, punches and slander" (Sivakami, 216).

Though she wants to lead a new lease of life, situation does not allow her to remain such. She has to see a tragic death at the end of the novel. Her disappointment and depression motivate her to commit suicide and die. She consumes poison to free herself to unending torture. At death she finds freedom and liberation from the inhuman torment. Hence, she affirms her claim to an identity beyond the body.

Periyannan is really narrow-minded in terms of his daughters but he loves his sons too much. Danam, who uses speech in a more rebellious way than the other daughters, is thrashed the most. Kala, a diligent reader amongst the three is taken out of school by force. Besides, Arul, the most creative and appreciated by her father having brought him luck at her birth, is forced out of home. But the two sons are really never shown to be beaten by his father if they have done wrong. He always gives priority to the male members and women are only his object of enjoyment. So, the unfairness of gender is obviously deep rooted to the society.

Further, Periyannan's daughters do not get share of their father's property. They forcibly got married before they turn fifteen. They are deprived of all human rights. But, Arul who is a clever and creative girl announces her wish to remain unmarried and condemn motherhood.

Arul is the mouthpiece of Sivakami through which she wants to ventilate her spleen against all oppressions and to resist against the so-called rigid norms of the patriarchy.

Periyannan is so cunning that he does not want his daughters to be educated. He knows that if they become educated, they do not remain under his control. Hence, he does not send any daughter to any academic institution to study. Though Kala is a bookish girl and an insatiable reader of literature, he prohibits her to continue her study. Once she borrows books from her friends and reads at her home. But, when Periyannan looks at her reading, he quickly snatches the books and interrogates her:

“From where did you acquire this?” Again, he raises a question: “How dare you bring books over from a male guy? Has your mother let you slack on the streets?”(Sivakami,148).

### Traditional Control

Sivakami depicted the traditional control over the women in a family, with a portrait of Kala's cycle-riding event. When Kala's father Periyannan found his grown daughter roaming around riding a cycle with her friend, he hit her with a broomstick. He bashed Anandhayi till she went unconscious, for letting their daughter to wander without restraint. He did not spare his mother also, when she tried to stop him. Vellaiyamma became a victim of his beatings too. Kala begged her mother that she was not interested in marrying the man of her father's choice. Periyannan scolded her “Is she going to be his wife or just sleep with him? How dare she say she doesn't like him? Let her say that once more and I'll skin both the mother and daughter alive”. As a woman, she was not even allowed to express her dislike in her marriage proposal. It shows that as a man, the antagonist Periyannan forbidden all the women around him to do anything without his knowledge.

Hence, Sivakami's women in the novel *The Taming of Women* are not generally subjugated to male bigotry rather they flare at the oppression inflicted by men. They bring feminist realization to empower themselves as Dalits and women in order to emerge as free individuals. The question of faithfulness is a burning question where it cannot be seen as an important quality by men but the same behaviour in females is cause for comment. Sivakami teaches the readers how a woman is being treated in the society and how she should be treated. She raises her voice against the so-called unending discrimination in terms of caste, creed and gender and wants to bring equality among people in the society.

### Conclusion

At the end of the novel, Anandhayi got angry at the everyday tortures and betray put forward by her husband. As she raises her voice against patriarchy and puts question to her husband: “Sure I sit home entertaining every passer-by. Who is here to stop me? Because you want to hide, your shady doings, you are shifting blame on me. How fair is that” (Sivakami, 59). Hence, a question comes to our mind that “being born as a woman on this earth is the sin on her part.” Sivakami depicts the terrible condition of women in Indian society. Vellaiyamma, who is the mother of periyannan, does not want to remain under the realm of male structured society. She wants to live by using her own money. If anyone gives advice to her to depend

on and live by son's income, she gets angry and raged. She frequently says: "I am an able woman. Why do I have to depend on him? I will eat from my wages" (Sivakami, 63). Sivakami's portrayal of; "able woman" like vellaiyamma is worth mentioning and by which she wants to break the chains of patriarchy. Sivakami teaches the readers how a woman is being treated in the society and how she should be treated. She raises her voice against the so-called rigid discrimination in terms of caste, creed and gender and wants to bring equality among people in the society.

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