

## **Are Women The Born Sufferers?**

### **A Feminist study of P. Sivakami's *The Taming of Women***

**Dr. Siva Nagaiah Bolleddu**

Associate Professor, Department of English

[bsivanagaiah@gmail.com](mailto:bsivanagaiah@gmail.com)

&

**Yash Raj**

Research Scholar, Department of English

**Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation**

**(Deemed to be University)**

Vaddeswaram, Guntur -522502, A.P.

#### **Abstract:**

P. Sivakami, in her work, *The Taming of Women*, vividly evokes a world where women and men are in constant conflict, scrambling for the little power to which they can hold on. It is her superb satiric eye-capturing in comic vignettes the life of women in a village transforming into a small town that brings relief to this blistering vision of humanity, leaving us simultaneously amused and devastated.

**Key Words:** Double marginality, patriarchy, gender issues, socio- economic condition.

While defining the feminist theory and its meaning Pramod K. Nayar in his *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism* mentions, "Feminist theory argues that the representation of women as weak, docile, innocent, seductive or irrational—sentimental is rooted in and influences actual social conditions, where she does not have power, is treated as a sex-object or a procreating machine, has fewer political and financial rights and is abused"(Pramod K. Nayar, 83).

Similar to the observations made by Pramod K Nayar, Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford's view on the concept of double colonisation in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy is more pertinent and prevalent in locating the pitiable conditions of Dalit women who experience the oppression of caste discrimination, violence and that of patriarchy at home and in society.

P. Sivakami's *The Taming of Women* (2012) depicts the double marginalization of Dalit Women. The form and nature of marginality depends upon the degree of economic, social, or cultural impoverishment. *The Taming of Women* focuses on the marginalization of Dalit women as the communities insult and ill-treat the women of lower caste; first because of their caste and then because they are women in a patriarchal society.

P. Sivakami's *The Taming of Women* deals with the sorrows and sufferings, trials and tribulations, despair and degradation, poverty and powerlessness of the Dalit. The novel is one lofty image of the grief of Dalits especially the women who are devoid of the inevitable essentials such as human dignity, liberty, honor, justice, education and security.

In *The Taming of Women* Sivakami portrays the conflicts and struggles between tenacious women and tyrannical men in contemporary society. The central character Periyannan lived in the poor village. He is hungry for the power that money could bring them but also tyrannical in his treatment of the women in their life, be it his wife or his old and ailing mother or his daughter or the other women for whom he had an insatiable appetite.

The opening chapter of the novel is introduced with a bang. Periyannan's wife Anandhayi was pregnant while Periyannan had taken another woman to sleep with him into his room. This shows the inhuman attitude towards women by men in their house. Periyannan pushed Anandhayi not taking care of her pregnancy. Periyannan was the king of all he surveyed under his control. Sivakami writes, "Periyannan, his torso bare, came thundering down the steps. He released the woman from Anandhayi's grip and pushed her aside. Anandhayi crashed to the ground with a loud sob" (4).

Anandhayi is an industrious woman. But her husband Periyannan prefers to have contact with many women as he considered that as a matter of pride. The women were kept by him to assert his virility. Such women happen to be always poor, without any social support and are either widow or abandoned by their husbands. Such a woman is an obvious victim of male power. One of them is Lakshmi who suffered pain and humiliation because of the treatment given by both the father and the son. Periyannan's chauvinist attitude started to attack his beloved concubine Lakshmi too, as days passed. His suspicion stabbed her with vulgar comments on her character. She injured Periyannan with a sickle when he beats her, for not giving a physical pleasure to him. After this incident she escaped many times, unfortunately all her attempts are failed. He captured and brought her home each time hitting and slapping. Earlier Anandhayi saw Lakshmi as her competitor in her life. Since Lakshmi got settled with Periyannan's family, Anandhayi too felt pity on her pathetic state. When Lakshmi warned Anandhayi's daughter Dhanam to break up her love affair with the preacher's son Daniel, a misunderstanding erupted among the family members. Dhanam's wrath grew like a thorn by that time, and she hated Lakshmi because of that incident. She troubled her enormously, "Lakshmi's new blouse that was

drying on the clothes line was ripped to shreds. If Lakshmi took her soap and stepped outside for turmeric powder, the soap disappeared. Cow dung was mixed in her bathwater” (179). This situation proves that even a woman can bring more problems for other women. Lakshmi was hurt not only by Periyannan but by Dhanam also. Periyannan tortured her physically; his daughter Dhanam’s words accused her psychologically. Lakshmi said, “It is not that I want sex that desperately. I want love, a relationship, a support, a comfort, a kind word- not like this, and everyday torture. Kicks, punches and slander” (216). It shows that even though she is a concubine, as a woman she longs for love and care.

It was not that the upper caste men exploited the lower caste women. The overall picture presented in the novel is that rich or poor, upper caste or lower caste, the seeds of corruption exists at all levels. Most of the women get married out of compulsion. They are forced to lead their life as prescribed to them. Oppression and injustice form an inevitable part of an untouchable’s life, especially the Dalit woman, who has become an example of tolerance and sacrifice. For instance, when Lakshmi was mentioned to Periyannan, she was referred to as ‘fair’. But after that she was treated like a bitch by Periyannan, who always tried to bring the women under his control.

Sivakami depicts the sympathetic situation of the women in this novel. Vellaiamma was the mother of Periyannan. She lived by using her own finances. If anyone advised her to take rest and live by son’s earning, she would burst into a rage. “I am an able woman. Why do I have to depend on him? I will eat from my earnings” (63). After getting a big building contract, Periyannan had thrown a bundle of currency at her feet and insulted his own mother

Vellaiyamma, by shouting at her if she had ever seen this much money before in her lifetime. She longed for death to come and take her life. Her husband's memory hit her most of the time. Her husband committed suicide by drinking yergum (a poisonous plant milk) and she could not forget how she was beaten and slapped by her husband. Her husband was a spendthrift, and when she refused to give him money, "He flew into a rage, called her a squanderer and slapped her on her cheek. It was a strong blow; after all, he was used to hard labor. Her cheek swelled up like a paniyaram"(65).

The author had described not only Periyannan as a chauvinist, but the other male characters also. Vadakathiyaal came over to work for Anandhayi at home and in the garden. Anandhayi was shocked to see Vadakathiyaal son's behavior. "Her son stood by, with one leg raised, ready to kick her, saying, 'If I kick your face your teeth will fall off'" (104).Vadakathiyaal suffered under the men in in her family, starting from her husband, son and brother-in-law. "I was thrashed around even after my children grew up. See this loose teeth; it was he who knocked it. Once he threw a heavy lock on my face and this is the scar" (105).She expressed her grief to Anandhayi about how she was being whipped by her brother-in-law: "He says a younger brother's wife is as good as one's own wife and an elder brother's wife is half one's wife" (105). Women are facing spontaneous hindrances and disturbances from the men in the society.

Sivakami depicted the traditional control over the women in a family, with an illustration of Kala's cycle-riding incident. When Kala's father Periyannan found his matured 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 freely. He did not spare

his mother also, when she tried to stop him. Vellaiyamma became a victim of his beatings too. It shows that as a man, the antagonist Periyannan controlled all the women around him.

Most of the Dalit women get married out of compulsion and circumstance. They are forced by the manmade destiny to lead their life as prescribed to them. Oppression to a greater or lesser extent produces anger or hurt and oppression and injustice form an inevitable part of an untouchable's life, especially the Dalit woman, which has become a life of tolerance and sacrifice. The atrocities that are carried out on Thangam had greatly affected her psyche, completely changing her way of life and thoughts. Whenever Thangam remembered her life in Puliur, she wept. She equated the incident in the sugarcane field with the repulsive experience of stepping on shit while walking on a riverbank. She could not recover easily from the sorrows and troubles she had suffered.

The Dalit women have darkness spread around them and also within them. To wear the new clothes of hope, advancement and aspiration, they have to get rid of the torn clothes such as submission, intra- Dalit strife and illiteracy. They cannot avoid clashing with each other. As the lower castes are divided, they are not able to offer a tough fight to the upper castes. The Dalit women should shatter their particular identities and identify themselves as one class whereas the Dalit men must pave the way for their own women.

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