



Interrogating Patriarchy and Gender Violence in Dalit Culture: A Critical Study of Palanimuthu Sivakami’s “The Taming of Women

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Abstract

The Dalits have been inclined as the untouchables of Indian caste system. Dalit women within their own community are still crumbling in the cobweb of patriarchy and violence heaped over casteism. Literature by Dalit women has been outshining as an attempt to articulate the unheard, unspoken voice highlighting the issues of caste identity to feminist literature rising as Dalit feminism. Palanimuthu Sivakami, through the novel ‘The Taming of Women’ delineated the concealed weeps of persistent women and extreme hostility of brutal men. It scream the voices about complexities of life and the sexual harassment and extreme violent exploitation of Dalit women. The violence is highlighted through the life of the protagonist Anandhayi and the other women (Lakhsni, Kala, Arul, Dhanam, Poongavanam, Balan and Neelaveni) through her existing conflicts. Valid depictions of Dalit women’s experiences have been overlooked in the writings of Dalit women. The representation of Dalit patriarchy is highlighted in depth. Debt, untouchability and the rigid varna system victimises and tortures both women and men. However, the sufferings of Dalit women are layered as the novel throws light on the double marginalisation of women within their caste and out of their caste as well. The paper intends to elucidate the rigidity of patriarchy instigating violence towards women with the family and dalit community. It intensifies the rise of Dalit feminism among the Dalit women although in the end the dawn of freedom from the rigid patriarchy is crushed and buried by the brutal patriarchal violence.

KEYWORDS: Dalit, untouchable, women, patriarchy, double marginalisation, exploitation

INTRODUCTION

‘The Taming of Women’ by is an unsophisticated Dalit narrative of the conflicts and contradictions by brutal men towards persistent women. The constant verbal and physical violence exhaustively

germinated the perennial inner sufferings of the women. It explores the life of the protagonist Anandhayi and the lives of the other Dalit women through her.

Palanimuthu Sivakami is one of the most significant writers of Dalit feminism in India. She was born on 30th November 1957 in Tamil Nadu. She served as an Indian Administrative Officer in Tamil Nadu till 2008 and then she left the services and joined the Bahujan Samaj Party. Her passionate interest and career in writing began from the beginning of her life. Sivakami being a Dalit woman herself has experienced and witnessed the

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lingering pain and miseries of the Dalit women which she has inscribed in her writings by weaving in her novels highlighting Dalit feminism and gender violence. She is the most precious gem of her community as she is the first woman to write a novel 'Pazhaiyana Kazhidalum', 'The Grip of Change' in English (1989) on Dalit women. Her second novel 'Anandhayi', translated by Pritham K. Chakravarthy to English as 'The Taming of Women' which is the most significant of all.

The Dalits has been inclined as the untouchables of India in the Hindu caste system. Surprisingly, the touch and even the shadow of the Dalits were reckoned as sin and impure. They were cornered by the only menial works like sweeping and cleaning excretes of the upper caste and clearing away dead animals. Unbelievably, along with them their homes are outcasted far away from the villages of the upper caste. However, the position and status of the Dalit women within their own community are still crumbling in the cobweb of patriarchy and violence heaped over the caste system. Nevertheless, literature by Dalit women has been outshining as an attempt to articulate the unheard, unspoken voices and highlighting the issues of caste identity to feminist literature rising as the Dalit feminism. Moreover, valid depictions of Dalit women's experiences have been overlooked in the writings of Dalit women. Although, translations of Dalit literature into English have largely been done by individuals outside the community but the important nuances in language are often overlooked.

This paper intends to elucidate the rigidity of patriarchy fomenting violence towards women within the family and community. The violence is highlighted through the life of the protagonist Anandhayi and the other women (Lakshmi, Kala, Arul, Dhanam,

Poongavanam, Balan and Neelaveni) through her existing conflicts. It intensifies the rise of feminism among the Dalit women although in the end the dawn of freedom from the rigid patriarchy is crushed and buried by the brutal patriarchal violence.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

Some of the major objectives are-

- I) To understand the varied realities of the brutality of men exploitation and violence towards women within the family and Dalit community of the Indian society.
- II) To analyse the conflicts of the Dalit women for their rights from their own community.
- III) To highlight the rise of feminism among the Dalit women crushing over the rigid patriarchy.

DISCUSSION

'The Taming of Women' is a coarse story of uncountable exploitation of women by the dominance of patriarchy in the Dalit community. This novel delineates the concealed weeps of the persistent women and the extreme hostility of brutal men. The weeps of the varied women are such intense that every single line of the novel echoes in the mind of the readers. It is quite obvious as the depth of violence is operated by death incidences and the survivors are succumbed to the threat of life.

The novel begins with the labour pain of Anandhayi in a dark room. She wasn't surprised to see her husband Periyannan, a government sub-contractor and a farm owner, copulating with another woman right above her room when she was pacing up and down while delivering his child. The rigidity of patriarchy was so severe that Anandhayi was not taken to the hospital even after the case was turning complicated. Surprisingly, no



doctor or nurse was informed by her husband and the family. Moreover, the initial four deliveries were done by Muthakka, the servant of their home. Anandhayi screams in pain to Periyannan, “Saami... Let the slut come and she will get it from me. She who has climbed up has to climb down.” When the woman came downstairs, Anandhayi grabbed and swung the hair of that woman several times. Shockingly, Periyannan came down, released the woman from his wife’s grip and pushed her aside who just delivered his baby. He heartlessly moved out of the home without acknowledging his wife’s physical and mental health. Sivakami outrageously augments the cruelty of Dalit men exploiting women’s identity.

Interestingly, the violence by patriarchy is habituative by women towards women as well. The aged crone, Periyannan’s mother keeps nagging her daughter in law that she has given birth to eleven children and Anandhayi is wailing in giving birth to just the fifth child. She even complains that the food is tasteless that Anandhayi prepares. A woman like her is herself a part of the violence of her son as she never stood against her son’s physical violence towards his wife. “The crone’s white sari was now cream coloured. Only the red border was still bright. Her breasts now hung loose, almost down to her stomach”. It is quite intriguing that this old woman’s body has begun to shrink yet she was ruled and oppressed by her son. The crone says, “It is mother earth’s punishment when Periyannan’s field fails to propel any crop. The society is seen to follow patriarchy to an extreme rigidity that “all the groundwork like tilling and ploughing was done by the menfolk. The women generally worked on the field”. It exemplifies the oppression of women in Indian society and those women are dominated by father, husband and son till death.

Nonetheless, Anandhayi’s son Mani exhibits sheer hatred and annoyance towards his sister Kala for her pleats falling on her chest in the beginning. The dominion of a brother’s rigid male ego collides with a sister’s femininity. Kala valorously stood against her brother which ended with a huge fight. The lumps of Dalit feminism are undeniable throughout the novel yet somehow it is ruptured by the savagery of the ruthless men. Besides this, when Periyannan was returning home at nine in the light from the election propaganda he saw Kala riding a bicycle which utterly infuriated him. He then rushed to the kitchen and mercilessly thrashed Anandhayi for granting freedom to Kala and then brutally hit Kala so aggressively that she could not wake up from her bed for days. When his mother obstructed him, he blew her away and hit on the wall. She was soon married off without her consent but there too she encounters physical violence from her husband and domination from her mother-in-law. Although, when she was in labour her husband wanted to take her to the hospital but Anandhayi rejected. It shows how sometimes women are themselves responsible for the rigidity of patriarchy. “When the roots are loose, what can the leaves do?” Anandhayi, the mother of the home, didn’t have a stable state in the family. The entire tree of the family is dominated by the men of the family with extreme domination and violence.

Apart from this, the disunity and conflicts of contrasting religions have combatively settled in the community of the Dalits. Anandhayi’s daughter Dhanam’s relationship with Daniel, the son of the Christianity preacher, consequences into severe violence and the unending fight only coerced Daniel to commit suicide. Although, Arul, the youngest daughter of Anandhayi, “lived in her own world”. She never complained of any food, she was even satisfied with porridge. “She would patiently string



wildflowers and garland the clay Pillayar under the lemon tree'. The lemon tree represents the umbrella of sourness showering in the lives of women until death. Dhanam and Arul were on the dawn of feminism in an unequivocal path but with divergent perspectives.

Furthermore, one of the most heinous parts of the novel is that Periyannan was aroused by the beauty of Lakshmi and thus without the consent of his wife he married her. Also, confessing about his previous marriage and children did not bother him much as he considered it to be least important to Lakshmi. Similar to Anandhayi, Periyannan began to violently abuse Lakshmi physically and mentally. She ran away a lot of time but she was brought back relentlessly. Again, when Lakshmi tried to run away, Mani held her hit on her chest even after she was treated as her own child. The novel portrays women of different generations living in the same house to whom Periyannan till the end of the novel keeps under his control. Here, women are shown to be objectified and subservient to men, conforming to the accepted gender roles that are expected of them. Patriarchal views of femininity support the authority of men in society, as well as subjugation and subordination of women. Anandhayi reluctantly till the end of the novel continues to live with her violent husband Periyannan without even trying to move out of the web of violence. However, Periyannan's second wife Lakshmi attempted several times to run away from the torturing life but quite determinatively Periyannan brought her back even not bothering about the expenses he faced a huge debt. But in the end of the novel, Lakshmi gave up her life because she realises that it is only a dream for a woman to escape towards a dawn beyond the rigid patriarchal society.

Through the novel, Sivakami highlights the sexual harassment and

extreme violent exploitation of Dalit women through the characters out of Anandhayi's family like Poongavanam and Neelaveni. It is quite saddening how in the last chapter of the novel, Poongavanam is left pregnant and cheated by her lover Duraisami who left her alone but later when he returns Poongavanam fearlessly dashes him away. The uttermost violence towards women in the novel is seen through the character of Neelaveni who whose beauty was only a curse to sustain. All men in the village were sexually attracted to her. She was even harassed sexually by her teachers which resulted in her dropping out of school and remained unmarried throughout her life. The ray of feminism radiantly gleamed the hope to sustain by trespassing the ruthless domination, exploitation and gender violence.

Sivakami prominently evokes the mankind where the constant lingering conflicts and trouncing of women by men for even the slightest of power to which they can hold on. This novel shares similarities with Alice Walker's epistolary American novel 'The Colour Purple'. The issue of gender violence within the community is prevalent in both the novels through Anandhayi in 'The Taming of Women' and Celie in 'The Colour Purple'. Significantly, both the authors belong to the subjugated communities and have written enormously exemplifying the submerging embedded history of the concealed subjugated lives of women within the community. In 'The Taming of Women', the women are mostly exploited by the men of their own family and community, similar to 'The Colour Purple' where Black women are exploited by the black men.

CONCLUSION

'The Taming of Women' screams the voices about complexities of life of the Dalit women. The slightest of roar



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towards the wave of feminism by the women solely are trapped even before converging at the shoreline. Sivakami highlights the pain and miseries of the Dalit women deeply through the varied characters within the family and community.

The title in the Tamil version of the novel is ‘Anandhayi’ which centralises the character of the protagonist. Her character is a blend of both absolute subjugation and feminism as well. She survived with pain and miseries till the end of the novel. The novel although ends with a continuation of gender violence. Interestingly, the English version of the novel holds the apt title to the novel ‘The Taming of Women’. It is absolutely true that the women characters have walked through the path of feminism by overstepping the dominance of patriarchy, yet in the end most the women characters are dominated and tamed by the brutalism of men.

It can be concluded that the dawn towards absolute feminism in the Dalit community is a miles away dream which can never sustain even after the women sets on a verge to stay away from the patriarchy.

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