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Original Article

Quest For Dalit Female Identity in P. Sivakami's Novel the Grip of Change and The Taming of Women

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Abstract

Sivakami,a Tamil Dalit novelist wrote about patriarchy, the Dalit movements and atrocities of Dalits, especially Dalit women. P. Sivakami's writing gave voice to voiceless women of Dalits to express their challenges. Since childhood our boys grow with a sense of entitlement to the world whereas girls are brought up with a sense of gratefulness for being allowed in it. Women undergo physical and mental torture, humiliation and oppression throughout their life. Caste system and patriarchy are two prevalent and widespread traditions in Indian society. In case of Dalit women, they are exploited on three grounds- first gender, second caste and third is class. This article will be based on the atrocities of Dalit women in P.Sivakami's novels The Grip of Change and The Taming of Women. In The Grip of Change Thangam is the victim of both the upper-class landlord and the Dalit leader. She uses her body to hold the position in the family. In The Taming of Women Sivakami takes apart the nuts and bolts of patriarchy to find that it is essentially a game of chess that men and women play using emotion, violence, sex and social norms as pieces. The aim of this study is to analyze the struggle of Dalit women about their dependency on their father, brother or husband for their survival in the society.

Keywords: *Dalit, atrocity, humiliation, patriarchy, emotions.*

Introduction

P. Sivakami is a Tamil Dalit writer. She was born on 30th Nov.1957 in Perambalur, Tamil Nadu. She was a former IAS Officer and activist. She is considered as the first Dalit woman novelist who consistently expresses her views on current social and political issues.Being a firebrand leader she made a space for herself and began contributing toward her social goals.She was passionate about social irregularities and injustice. She wrote almost 6 novels and 60 short stories. The writing of Dalit literature is closely associated with the hopes for freedom by a group of people who, as untouchable, are the victims of social, economic and cultural inequality. The sufferings of Dalits / Untouchables are inexplicable. Being poor and powerless they are pushed to the marginalised position where they are deprived of their basic needs and human rights. Dalit writers like P. Sivakami use their writings as a weapon to vent out their anger against the male dominating society which is responsible for their degradation. As a result after a long time they become conscious about their identity as human beings.Her novels talk about the conflicts and struggles between tenacious women and tyrannical men in contemporary society.

The Taming of Women

It is a novel which gives the glimpses of Dalit Patriarchy. It is the novel of P. Sivakami in Tamil language and translated by Pritham K. Chakravorthy from Tamil to English. The novel portrays trials and tribulations of women by men in Patriarchal Indian Society. Different ages and generations of women are depicted in the novel who undergo physical assault, sexual exploitation, gender discrimination and incestuous violence. The novel depicts the miserable life of Anandhayi whose husband , Pariyannan , is a paramour. He has a desire to become powerful and wealthy as well as he has a hunger for women in terms of physical need. It does not matter to him who the woman is. Muthakka is a maid who stays with Anandhayi when she delivers a baby. Periyannan wants her to stay back for a few days and goes "brushing against her body, Periyannan walks out of the kitchen".

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This attitude of him shows that age does not matter to him. It is only his lust which tempts him for a sexual relation.Periyannan fathered six children namely- Mani, Kala, Dhanam, Balan, Arul and Anbu. In the novel,boys and girls grow up differently. Mani and Anbu grow up with a sense of ownership where they are held responsible for nothing. On the other hand, Kala, Dhaman and Arul are brought up with a sense of servitude where everything is their fault. Once Kala was beaten black and blue by Periyannan when he found her riding a bicycle. Mani thrashed Dhanam when she was found with Daniel. Lakshmi, his second wife, lives in the same house. Periyannan was in so erotic love for her and ready to risk everything he had like his wealth, work, respect and status.He wanted to gain control over her. Whenever she doesn't work according to his wish, Periyanna takes it on his ego. Driven by such madness he assaulted her violently and drives her to the verge of suicide.

Anandhayi , Periyannan's wife,has no identity as a wife.When she was in labour delivering the 6th child, her husband Periyannan brought home his new mistress Lakshmi and slept with her in the room above the stairs in the same house. Can the pain of Anandhayi be imagined? Being a wife delivering the child of a man who is inhumane and mad in search of physical pleasure.

The scriptures provide numerous instances that tell us about Anandhayi's suffering and trauma.

"……Things are strewn about this house and you don't seem to be interested in setting them in order. Did your secret lover get you this skirt? Hey! Stop those words, eh ? And if I don't? You are a fine one to talk.You are the one who has a bitch around the house, and you accuse me of having a lover?

Even their daughter ……. …….. doesn't have the right to borrow a book from one of his male neighbours.

The Grip Of Change

The Grip of Change is the English translation of Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum. *The Grip of Change* is an autobiographical fiction: partly autobiography and partly fiction. Her novels portray the rustic story of women who suffer at the hands of men. Kathamuthu, Thangam, Gauri and many other characters experience the caste bias. Kathamuthu, the protagonist and Naiker, the jewellery shop keeper enjoy the company of each other, still Naiker exhibits caste consciousness from time to time.

In *The Grip of Change,* Thangam and Nagamani provide two household types. Thangam lives in a hut while Nagamani lives in a concrete house.Men in the society feel that they are bread provider and are responsible for their safety, that is why, Kathamuthu says (for Thangam) "she was a struggling woman, so, I provided her with a haven." In the novel, P.Sivakami depicts that a woman is bound to follow all rules and regulations while men are free from all beliefs and rules. Thangam has no identity of her own. She is treated as a body in the novel. After the death of her husband she is being treated as a surplus woman and forced to be a prostitute. Her right to a share of land was not given to her because her body was 'Infertile' which could not produce a child. Thangam, a childless widow, wails, "I am a childless widow. There is no protection for me." It depicts that her fertility decides and determines her worth in society. To earn her livelihood she moves out of her house and works in the fields of an upper class landlord Paranjothi Udayar. Unforfunately, she could not save her 'Body' there and was raped by him while working in the sugercane field.She could not oppose because he was her paymaster. Sivakami's experience of dalit women treated inhumanly is observed here.She also throws light on how Dalit women are oppressed.Udayar,who raped Thangam, was not punished rather he haughtily defends his behaviour saying that she ought to be appreciated of being touched by a man from a higher caste. Thangam's dignity as a female or human is not acknowledged and Udayar says " Ungrateful whore, even if she was hurt by the hand adorned with gold! A karachi could not have ever dreamt of being touched by a man like me!". It can be said that poverty is more powerful than the identity of a woman because this poverty makes a poor single widow to bear the sexual exploitation silently. Later, in search of justice she approaches Kathamuthu, her so-called guardian. Earlier he provided shelter to her but soon he also turned into an animal. One afternoon when she was sleeping in the kitchen, he rapes her and is so tormentd that she can not see his face. Then she becomes a mistress to him forever. This shows that she doesn't have an identity of hers; she has no voice of her own . She needs a male voice to protest her. Nagamani, a widow, is second wife of Kathamuthu. She is also the victim of domestic structures. Gowri, Kathamuthu's daughter felt embarressed when her classmate called her 'nonsense' just because of caste discrimination and gender biasedness. She informed her father about the same but he was unmoved.

All these examples of the novels depict that female identity is known by a male character. She is a wife, daughter or prostitute or a body to satisfy the lust of male around her but she doesn't have an identity of her own.The progress in the social ladder could not change the dominant and

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exploitative nature of the male figures in the novel.

Conclusion

This paper concentrates on sexual domination of Dalit women in the hands of man, may be a male from her own family or a man of upper caste who is the bread giver for her.She is a victim of caste outside and of patriarchy outside and inside her home.They are uneducated, so they work in the fields of their landlords and husbands. As a result , they are molested and sexually abused by them though these females are only the employers who provide them a means of living.

Through these novels *The Taming of Woman & The Grip of Change* P. Sivakami laid down a path of hope for Dalit Women to create an identity of their own. She raised her voice to support them. She encourages them that if you want to be heard , you have to speak, if you want to be answered ,you have to question and if you want to be recognised you have to speak louder.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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