

**Ceaseless Sadism against Women in P. Sivakami's
*The Taming of Women***

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**P. Sivakami
Leading Tamil Novelist**

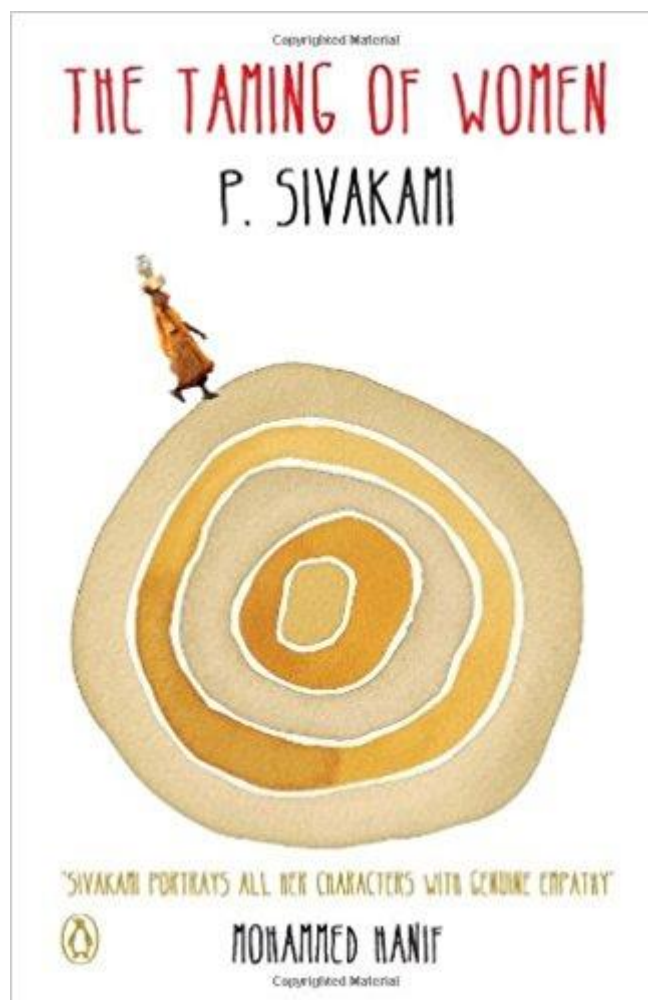
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Abstract

P. Sivakami is an Indian writer writing in Tamil. She is one among the most prominent Dalit writers in India. She became the first Tamil Dalit woman to write about the patriarchy and the Dalit movement. Her first novel *Pazhainya Kazhidalum* (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 (Forum for Social Equality). Sivakami's literary works highlight the suppression faced by women and especially Dalit people. She is capable of bringing many comic elements to a very serious theme. This paper explores the way in which the writer presented the women characters. This novel deals with the concept of male chauvinism, suppression, sexual abuse, incest, rural lifestyle and poverty. The main aim of this paper is to see how the author presents the gender violence committed against women in families as

well as outside the family circle. She has portrayed the concept vividly in her novel through various characters.

Keywords: P. Sivakami, *The Taming of Women*, Gender violence, Incest, Sexual Abuse, Male chauvinism, Patriarchal society.



The Taming of Women

This novel is based on how women struggle to safeguard 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 protagonist Anandhayi discovered her husband Periyannan's paramour. When Anandhayi successfully trapped the woman who had an affair with her husband, "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) 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

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that this man does not have any concern 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. The crone, Anandhayi's mother-in-law advised her:

Why should a woman who's just given birth starve? 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 wealth? 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? (17)

Cultural Practices

Sivakami did not forget to add the most common theme of cultural practices like the purification of the baby and the house. Periyannan was eager to know about the baby's horoscope alone from the Iyer. When he found the baby's horoscope lucky, he offered the Iyer flowers, bananas, coconuts, two baskets of paddy, a vessel full of tamarind, a measure of chillies and a measure of yellow gram in a gunny bag.

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 household chores until she got back to normal from her delivery. Periyannan does not want Muthakka to leave, so he insisted upon her staying for a few more days and went "Brushing against her body, Periyannan walked out of the kitchen" (7). His sheepish attitude is revealed when "He chose to come, avoiding Anandhayi's line of vision, and on the pretext of fondling the child, he brushed his hand on Muthakka's breast" (21). As soon as he heard his wife's voice, he moved to the fields. Periyannan's arrogant 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 regret"(43). It shows that Periyannan is having more concern for his bulls than for his wife. These words expose the materialistic attitude and the man's disinterest towards his wife.

Being Beautiful Is Dangerous for Women

The townsfolk knew that Periyannan and the village Supervisor Kangani are at war. Kangani already bought three contracts for his son Manickam which made Periyannan jealous. In order to take revenge he exploited the name of the village Supervisor's family members. Veni, the Supervisor's sister-in-law became a scapegoat because of her tragic flashback. When Veni was a schoolgirl, she was tall, fair, plump and had long hair. She was seduced by her teacher Rangasami and PT master.

One day, when Rangasami was enticing her thus, the PT master entered the room. 'This is not how you are going to get her listen. She has to be caned,' he said and began to wallop her. Before Rangasami could intervene, the PT master came on to her. And so, she became a plaything for everyone. (28)

This shows that being beautiful is also dangerous for a woman. Her beauty has become a poison for her chastity. After that incident, she dropped out from school. Veni could not find peace at home too. She was harassed by her nephew Manickam. She could not accept what had been happening to her:

Did he not know whom he was touching? I am his aunt, for God's sake! Of course he knew it was me; . . . I cannot even speak about this to anyone, lest they spit on my face. As it is, my name is in the mud. People will think I am teaming up with Akka to complain about the first wife's son. I still cannot believe where he chose to touch. (148)

Not Safe Even in Her Family

It shows that a woman is not safe even in her family. She was completely depressed after that and unable to share her feelings with anyone. She was scared what the society would speak about her character if this matter was leaked. A woman was abused by the men, but this patriarchal society blames only the women victims. It is the reason for most of the crimes being buried as untold mysteries.

Suspicious All Around

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 wall, he caught him and enquired, then he came to know that he was a deaf vagabond. Periyannan suspected her when Anandhayi felt pity for him. He abused her with vulgar words, “Endi, is he your secret lover? Why are you so sorry for him?” (59). When she answered him back again he scolded her “I only have to whistle and I can have any women I want. Do you know that?” (59) These dialogues explicate the dominant and cheap nature of the antagonist, Periyannan. As a woman, she is restricted 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.

Deserving Sympathy

Sivakami depicts the sympathetic situation of the women in this novel. Vellaiyamma 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. He 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 labour. Her cheek swelled up like a paniyaram” (65).

Traditional Control

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 hither 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.

Chauvinist Male Characters

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 behaviour. "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 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.

When Kala and Dhanam bathed in the backyard, with their skirts raised to their chest, they could see a gang of young men peeping at them beyond the tall lemon tree and fences. 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" (113). As a woman, she was not even allowed to express her dislike in her marriage proposal. In *Women, Tradition & Culture*, Malladi Subbamma said "Women's situation has to undergo a transformation, only laws won't do. The Constitution of India gives equal rights to women, but in reality that is not so" (7)

Patriarchy over Beloved Concubine

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, 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.

Only One Success in Life - Suicide

The novel ends with the tragic death of Lakshmi. Her frustrations stimulated her to commit suicide and die. Her attempt to commit suicide alone was successful in her life. Even after her death Periyannan did not change his nature. He kept on accusing Anandhayi as bad luck for him. From the beginning till the end the women suffers much and they are made submissive under men according to the tradition. Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar says “Women are natural story tellers even when they do not write or publish” (435) but Sivakami is extraordinary in her writing and narration. Sivakami teaches the readers, how a woman is being treated in the society and how she should be treated. A writer’s job is to enlighten the broken society with good writing. As a good writer Sivakami brings out the truth of men ill-treating women, instead men should give women love and care, provide them the space they need to be free and happy.

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