

SOCIAL ENDURANCE OF WOMEN IN P. SIVAKAMI'S NOVELS THE GRIP OF CHANGE AND THE TAMING OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT:

The tolerance of women in society is inexpressible. P. Sivakami has adopted writing as the medium of expression. Her writing proved to be a way of acquiring empathy worldwide. Women have undergone torture and humiliation throughout their life right from childhood. Sexual and verbal abuses are rampant, and explaining their sufferings is very challenging. Women take oppression silently. The reason is the unawareness of women about their rights. This article will analyse the women in Sivakami's novels *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women*. In *The Grip of Change*, Thangamis from the Parayar family, where she is subjugated by caste and gender. She gets assaulted by her upper-caste landlord and also the Dalit leader. She uses her body to get hold of her position in the new household and thrives in getting the same. Similarly, the women in the novel undergo trauma which they recover using strength and willpower. In *The Taming of Women*, Anandhayi is seen getting over the oppression using her body as her tool. The women in both novels have survived the repression for the benefit of the family. This article shows how women survive the trauma and build an enthralling personalities, making them the novels' central figures.

Keywords: *oppression, society, trauma, family, gender*

INTRODUCTION:

Palanimuthu Sivakami, a popular Indian novelist-cum-politician, is the first Dalit woman to write a full-length, semi-autobiographical Tamil novel *Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum* (1989), with which she illustrated the literary scenario and added a new magnum opus to Dalit Literature and Dalit Feminist literary tradition in Tamil. Sivakami is a well-known Tamil novelist and is also recognized as the first Officer in Tamil Nadu, Dalit woman I.A.S. Her first book, *Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum*, took her into the glare of ads and gained a much larger audience and was widely praised when Sivakami herself translated into English under the 2006 title *The Grip of Change*. Her other famous works are *Anandayee* and *Karukkuvettu*. Besides, she has edited a Dalit Literary monthly, *Pudia Kodangi*,

since 1995. Sivakami also conceded the 1995 President Award for her short film *Oodaha* (Through), which the National Panorama picked for her. Sivakami's books depict the provincial story of ladies who endure at the hands of men who unequivocally have faith in and represent a man-controlled society. In contemporary society, the contentions and battles are between tireless ladies and overbearing men. The male characters, Periyannan and Kathamuthu, in the books *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women*, live in poor villages; both are not just hungry for the influence that cash could bring them but also additionally unjust in their treatment of the ladies throughout their life, be it their spouses or on the other hand their old and weak mom or their daughters or different ladies for whom they had a

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voracious craving. The basic amenities in both novels play a vital role in the growth of the story. The food changes according to the gender and class of the characters. The dressing is also affected by the status in the family and society. The husband's identity directly affects the home, which provides shelter to the women in the novels. The women in the novels depend on the family and cannot see themselves as self-determining women. The women have no quest for developing or overcoming because of inferiority from the ancestral period. Women are patronized as sole caretakers and the most responsible in the family, which makes them bound to family ties.

Social Survival of Women in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women*:

The first Tamil novel by a Dalit woman, Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum (later translated as *The Grip of Change*), went past condemning caste lovers by the use of fiction with biographical factors to explain how people are shackled and tangled amongst themselves. Instead of being the journey of her man or woman voice and consciousness, it is miles a unanimous expression of the women of this oppressed community keen and waiting for change. Capitalist society treats women as mere labourers. The two widowers, Thangam and Nagamani, provide two different household types. Thangam lives in a hut, while Nagamani lives in a concrete house. Men think to be the household's bread givers and are responsible for saving the women around them. In *The Grip of Change*, Kathamuthu says, "She was a struggling widow, so I provided her with a haven" (10). The house becomes a constitution because it builds its own rules and differs from every other family or community. Udayar family allows the women to speak for themselves; even Kamalam, Udayar's wife, has asked her brothers and brother in Thangam. The Chakkiliyar family has different rules so are the rules of Harijan communities. The beliefs and rules are set on female bodies rather than the men in the story. Her fertility determines her worth. Thangam wails, saying, "I am a childless widow. There is no protection for me" (6, *The Grip of Change*). The house sets the boundary for women in *The Taming of Women*. Anandhayi is engrossed with household work and nurturing her kids. Periyannan, her husband, brings home Lakshmi and keeps her in the upper part of the house. Anandhayi is limited to the first floor while her husband enjoys his life upstairs.

The restriction is evident from the description of the household in *The Taming of Women*:

Around the seventh month of her pregnancy, she had reduced all strenuous work. She truly yearned to see the green fields again. Of course, until the time the baby was old enough to be carried, she could not step

into the fields or their farms or to Muttankadu beyond. She was restricted to cooking and this house. (20). The food shows the story's emotional background and the special occasion happening in the household. The food also portrays the role of women in the household. Even though the women in the house prepare the meals, they must be served to the men first, then the wife or daughter can eat them. Kanji is served as the staple food in *The Taming of Women* and millets, and corn is served on special festive occasions. In *The Grip of Change*, casteism is also reflected in the food habits as the upper class does not prefer to eat non-vegetarian food as the lower caste can eat mutton. The lower caste cannot afford the luxury of a luxurious vegetarian meal. The economic status of a person is also made evident through food habits: A festive mood animated the Puliur Cheri. Raw and boiled paddy were hulled separately, the first to make sweet flour, the second for food. If they did not get even one rice meal in three days of the festival, wouldn't the guests spit on their faces! Only a few households had the special mountain millet, thenai. That golden grain would be soaked and pounded along with jaggery and mixed with carefully collected honey. The god Murugan's favourite food! But how many could afford such a rare variety? (83)

The change in the lifestyle of Thangam is evident in the use of food in the plot. Her journey from having leftover food in the verandah to blissful mutton curry in the kitchen is splendid. Thangam almost burst out with pride at his praise: "His gratitude made her feel restless. She wondered if she should fall at his feet. Eventually, the smell of mutton curry wafted through the house." (89). Dressing reflects the prominence of women in both novels. The old crone in *The Taming of Women* walks without a blouse showing the diverse period of helpers in the house:

"Paati, why is it that you never wear a blouse? Who wore blouses in those days?"

Only your mother sashays around with a blouse since her marriage."(62)

The change in time and approaches of a layman to clothing is also understood from the novel *The Grip of Change* "Educated people follow fashion. It is all outward appearance" (82). Women blindly trust the men in the family, consider them the ultimate caretaker, and associate their identity with their husbands. The reason is the superstitions prevailing from an ancient society. The patriarchal society has given an elite description of women, which assigns all kinds of roles to women. They take themselves responsible for their family and the people around them. The preference is always given to men in the family of all generations- father, son and husband. Women become dependent on family, and their world revolves around household chores and finding it challenging to identify their true selves. The repression

they go through is enormous. The verbal abuse, sexual exploitation and inequality are beautifully portrayed in both the novels of P. Sivakami.

CONCLUSION:

Women in the 21st century are far more career-oriented and educated than in the previous few decades. Women have understood their true worth and have outdone many men in the same. The opportunities are now equally available to all. P. Sivakami is a thriving example of the same. Her bold writing and imaging have acquired the topmost position in the literary genre. Through the story of Thangam and Anandhayi's protests, Sivakami can formulate the poignant tale of a woman's struggle to battle and survive in a patriarchal society and culture that indicates that a stimulated and resistant speech optimistically substitutes silence and repression. The novels thus serve as an icebreaker from the beginning to the end and draw attention to the violent realities along with a message that a democratic approach to remove these oppressive agendas from the social fabric is necessary. Sivakami deconstructs women as survivors of casteism and reconstructs them as a community of patriarchs. Moreover, she does this by posing in her culture a multitude of myths about women and their exploitation by people. Through a gendered interpretation of caste and gender, in *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women*, womanhood is reinvented as a new social entity induced by caste and gender mutations.

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