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THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF WOMEN IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY: A STUDY OF SIVAKAMI'S 'THE TAMING OF WOMEN'

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ABSTRACT :

In the patriarchal Indian society, women pass through manifold trials and tribulations apart from the discrimination in terms of their caste and gender. Their oppression is seen both at home and outside. The dual pressures of caste and gender place women in a state of exploitation by the men. She is reduced to a mere body, to the position of a mere sexual commodity. Women have been the object of violence in greater degree from their own men folk, and also from so called upper caste men. In Indian society, women is subjugated and ill-treated in many ways. It is all because of the age old patriarchal society in which the men are always upper hand and dominate the women irrespective of the class, background, plight and predicament of the women. One gets a clear picture of Dalit women and her pitiable predicament from the works of Indian Dalit women writers like Bama and Sivakami. Their writings articulate the voice of the voiceless women. They are forced to go through many trials and tribulations in the course of their life

and accept them as if they are an integral part in the women's life in Indian society. The present paper 'The trials and tribulations of the women in Patriarchal Society' portrays the harsh realities prevailing in Indian society in which the women have been caught in the clutches of men and have become victims and accepted their unchangeable fate.

KEYWORDS : Trials, Tribulations, Oppression, Exploitation, Sexploitation, Vulnerability.

INTRODUCTION

The Taming of Women (2012) is Sivakami's second novel translated from Tamil into English by Pritham K. Chakravarthy. Sivakami's background as a Dalit woman IAS officer, for three decades of work experience in the field makes her the ideal person to have written this book. She writes from first-hand experience of the society she portrays, a life that at once feels familiar and alien to urban middle class readers. The essence of a lower socio-economic class with its trials and tribulations, the struggle for power across genders and class even that among peers, their thought processes have all come across in the translation.

In this novel, Sivakami portrays the trials and tribulations and the miserable plight of the women and how they are subjugated by men in patriarchal Indian society. Sivakami categorically explains about all ages and generations of women who are made to undergo physical assault, sexual exploitation, and gender discrimination. Unable to bear the torture put in by men in Indian society, how the beautiful woman is forced to end her colorful life is also depicted in this novel. Women have to pass through manifold trials and tribulations in the course of their lives in a small village. Anandhayi married to a womanizer, Periyannan, a contractor, is not content with the wealth that his farms bring him. He is hungry for the power that money can bring, and tyrannical in his treatment of the women in his life – be it his wife, his concubine, his old and ailing mother, his daughters or the many women for whom he has an insatiable appetite.

When his young son dies at home and

Periyannan finds it difficult to take care two households and manage his official work (procuring contracts to build bridges and roads), he persuades Lakshmi to move into his family home even when his wife, Anandhayi, is in labour. Anandhayi prays to her God, claiming, "Sami... let the slut come down and she will get it from me. She who has climbed up has to climb down." It is also a portrayal of the sort of misdirected hatred women reserve for each other, a social and cultural interpellation where the worst discrimination and judgment comes from other women. Instead of focusing that violent hatred towards her openly cheating husband, Anandhayi's anger finds its source in the women he sleeps with. Her tribulations in bringing up her daughters Dhanam, Arul, and Kala is perhaps best captured in the lines, "Having a girl in the house is like having a fire in the belly ... I will have peace only when I hand her over to a husband."

Periyannan is king of all he surveys, until he encounters and is enslaved by the beauty of Lakshmi, whom he gets home as his second wife. Lakshmi reaffirms the image of a destitute woman ending up as a concubine. Like Nagamani and Thangam, in *The Grip of Change*, she too is a childless widow. Her youth is exploited by numerous men; the last one abandons her at a lodge. Her sexual exploitation results in a damaged uterus and she is unable to conceive a pregnancy. Periyannan is introduced to her as a rich childless widower (he has, in fact, a wife and six children) who is enthralled by her beauty and sets her up in a house in the town away from his family home. He pampers her with clothes, jewellery and holidays at hill station. Lakshmi was born in a Tevar's family and only daughter surrounded by brothers and doting parents. Her post-widowhood lifestyle alienates her from her natal family and she fears a violent reprisal if she ever returned home. She is happy to live with Periyannan.

In this novel, at many places, the wife emerges as the "other woman". While Periyannan has numerous liaisons, with professional prostitutes, with distant relatives, even with the mid-wife Muthakka who visits to help his wife deliver his fifth child, Anandhayi is held always a captive by repeated pregnancies, enormous amount of domestic chores, and work at the far-flung family land and is constantly subjected to severe violence by her husband. In fact, even when she is in labour, Periyannan pushes her on the floor, assaults her and mounts the stairs to sleep with another woman. While he is enamored of Lakshmi's seductive beauty and pampers her. He refuses to give her money so that she may visit a midwife to abort her foetus. He orders her to carry on with her pregnancy. When she points out that her health is fragile and she can't bear the burden he pushes her aside violently and shrugs it off. She ultimately pawns her nose stud to meet the expenses of abortion. Laxmi, once she enters Periyannan's house, although given a separate room upstairs, is tormented and almost butchered by Periyannan physically and sexually.

Periyannan asserts his patriarchal power by repeated, brutal acts of violence on all the women in his household - his aged mother, his adolescent daughters, his wife and his concubine. In this novel, women, irrespective of age, are subjugated by physical violence. Periyannan stays away from the house for long and each time he returns home he brutally assaults Anandhayi, scolds her for being a careless housewife, and insinuates that she courts secret lovers during his absence. He takes no interest or responsibility for their children's upbringing, blaming Anandhayi for every minor lapse of any of their children. He creates an atmosphere of sheer terror during the brief intervals he stays at home.

For all his preferred love, Periyannan tortures Laxmi's body almost every night. He is constantly insecure about her, does not let her talk to anybody and often has sex with her violently. While he inflicts violence upon his wife as a matter of right and pins her down through recurring pregnancies, in the case of his concubine, he literally locks her up in a room, comfortably furnished, but cut off from human contact. Food for Laxmi is pushed through the door by one of his daughters and a maid follows her like a shadow, if at all she is ever permitted to visit the fields. Imprisoning or holding captive a woman's body, causing psychological torment is a strategy used by Periyannan to wield power and authority over women. He never gives sufficient money to his wife to run the home while selling off parts of his land or mortgaging his house to give expensive gifts to Laxmi.

Unable to put up with his violent conduct, Laxmi elopes, first with a lorry driver plying to her hometown and later with Manickam a young, rich, philandering son of Periyannan's arch enemy Kangani. Each time, Periyannan hires a taxi, spends vast amount of money to hunt her down and brings her home. Violence and sexual abuse increase manifold after her return home. Periyannan also grows more suspicious and insecure

about her. Instead of releasing her from the pact of living together mutually agreed upon earlier, he beefs up security to hold her captive. In a way, the freedom to break away, a privilege enjoyed by the concubine, denied to a wife in a traditional society is hardly open to Laxmi. The points of intersection that intrude the lives of Laxmi and Aanandhayi are barely distinguishable. They are subjugated, assaulted and held captive. As Periyannan is rich, he hardly bothers about Laxmi's poor but upper caste family. He throws a wad of currency notes on her father's face and drags back Laxmi to his house. While motherhood ties down Aanandhayi and she is unable to even commit suicide (she attempts once but unclasps the noose when she looks at her infant daughters sleeping at her feet), Laxmi is bound by the rigours of her sexual identity.

As a concubine, Laxmi has to put up with whatever methods her master may employ to extract pleasure through her. She is reduced to a mere body, to the position of a mere sexual commodity. Whether in terms of gifts, jewellery, sarees or hiring men and cabs to locate her whereabouts, Periyannan flashes money and keeps a check on Laxmi. When he brings her home after her first elopement, he along with his son, Mani, drags Laxmi from the gate to the room, beating her up viciously. Mani assaults her violently and she is numbed with shock. After all, she had treated him like a son. The ageing Periyannan needs Mani's physical prowess and henceforth does not chide him over his failure in studies or his secret drinking bouts. Thus, Mani establishes his patriarchal authority in the household by exercising (like his father) physical violence on women. Both the father and the son beat up the unmarried daughters/sisters and resent the visits of the married ones to their natal home.

Laxmi, finally, consumes poison to free herself of ceaseless torture. Periyannan weeps bitterly at her death but soon turns to Aanandhayi with vengeful violence. Laxmi finds freedom only at death, when she liquidates her own body. Through her suicide, she affirms her claim to an identity beyond the body. Aanandhayi is left to face the ire and viciousness of a husband who had lost his material prosperity and official clout resulting in a diminished income. He also becomes a more desperate man as he can no longer get even with Laxmi after her successful attempt at an escape from his clutches through her suicide.

Periyannan treats Aanandhayi worse than a maid, denying her any money even for her personal expenses. His neglect of his children's upbringing and education result in their irresponsible, disrespectful, abusive conduct towards their mother. As they always saw their father keep his wife subjugated, the children grow up to deny their mother any subjectivity. While Aanandhayi put up with Periyannan's brutality on account of her responsibility towards her children, his ill-treatment of her has, however, forged a callous, abusive behaviour among her children who fear their father's authority and look down upon their mother as powerless and therefore dispensable.

Periyannan and Aanandhayi have three daughters - Kala, Danam and Arul. Severe, savage violence is meted out to each one of them by their father or Mani, their elder brother. Their younger brother Anbu reports about them maliciously to the parents, gets a larger share of the eatables from the grandmother and blackmails them to indulge him or else be ready to face their father's ire. Each of the daughters gets beaten up by the father or by both the father and the elder brother. At times, they are even dragged to the cowshed and thrashed. After marriage, their father strongly resents their visits to his house or their bonding with their mother. Danam, in fact, is beaten up by her husband at her marital home and violently threatened/chided by her father during her visits to her natal home after marriage.

In the lives of all the three daughters, Periyannan's intolerance of a woman's attempt at self-articulation or her interrogation of male injustice precipitates enormous violence against them. Danam, who uses speech in a more subversive way than the other daughters, is thrashed the most. Kala, a voracious reader amongst the three is taken out of school forcibly. Arul, the most imaginative and cherished by her father for having brought him luck at her birth, is forced out of his home when she tries to counsel him to give up drinking. The two sons are never shown to be beaten up, even for their grave lapses.

The married daughters are not encouraged to visit their natal home or converse with their mother while the sons are kept tightly under a leash by him. If they raise a whisper, they would get no share in the property, he threatens. Thus, all the children are controlled treated harshly by the father and are moulded by him in such a manner that they perceive their mother as someone who deserves the violence she receives from her husband. Thus, he subverts the mother-daughter bond and the daughters, brought up on a staple diet of violence, grow up

to be violent towards their mother -abusive and bereft of empathy. Victims of patriarchal abuse themselves, the daughters turn abusive towards their mother or resent Laxmi. They are not equipped with education or sensitivity to perceive the two women as fellow victims. Although abused by their father, they are in awe of his authority and power. As economic power and social prestige rest with their father and their mother is reduced to a domestic drudge and a child-bearer, the daughters fear the former while feeling ashamed of the latter.

Periyannan is very cruel towards his daughters. Kala, the eldest of the three daughters is a studious girl and a voracious reader of fiction. She borrows books from her friend's brother and devours them after school hours, reading up a novel a day. Her father, during one of his rare visits to home catches a glimpse of her reading. He quickly snatches the book and interrogates, "From where did you procure this?" The younger siblings report from Dingumalli Annan. Dingumalli is the mentally retarded brother of Kala's classmate Maariayee. Periyannan flares up, "How dare you bring books over from a male fellow? Has your mother let you loose on the streets?" and thrashes her, hitting her hard on her head with the book gnashing his teeth like "a wrathful dog." (P.48) He turns around and hits another child for munching uncooked rice and swirls over to grab his wife's hair and hit her for her "incompetent" child-rearing skills. He then leaves home leaving behind a dazed and numbed family. Kala is found that night, lying on the cold floor of the terrace, staring blankly at the stars.

When Periyannan is busy electioneering sees Kala cycling on the back lane and asks her to return home. At home, he drags Aanandhayi by her hair, abuses her character, and thrashes her until she faints at the kitchen by the hearth. When her grandmother shields the young Kala, Periyannan hits his old mother and thrashes Kala black and blue. Kala receives a further punishment from her father, when she is stopped from going to school. She is hardly thirteen or fourteen and she is punished so harshly for such an innocent activity like cycling. She is married off to a school teacher but is unhappy as her husband is unable to provide her luxuries but instead helps his elder brother financially. She comes back to her natal home after a bitter fight with her husband. Her husband hits her hard in the presence of her brother-in-law and abuses Kala over her father's sexual escapades. Her father however resents her stay, calls up her husband and dispatches her to her marital home. Kala receives no affection or support from her natal family either before or after marriage. Getting beaten up by father and brother before marriage and by husband after marriage seems to be the fate of both Kala and Danam.

Periyannan's daughters get no share in their father's property. Nor do they get any streedan at the time of marriage. They are married off before they turn fifteen and are denied any privileges if they visit their natal home. Arul, the youngest, an intelligent, sensitive girl who is given to speaking to creepers and trees, announces her wish to remain unmarried and denounce motherhood. Once when Arul defends her mother when her father chides her for no fault, Periyannan gnashes his teeth threateningly at her. Her visits to her father's house come to an end following this incident. Thus, all the three daughters are left to fend for themselves and receive no support from their family - either material or emotional.

One can comprehend the miserable plight of the women in patriarchal Indian society. The women are caught in the clutches of men. They are forced to undergo all kinds of oppressions all through their lives and they accept the fate which cannot be erased. The reader is convinced that 'being born as a woman on this earth is the sin on her part'. One can accept this truth after focusing on the trials, tribulations, the pitiable predicament and consciousness of Laxmi, Anandhayi and her three daughters in this novel.

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