

The Portrayal Of The Socio-Economic Status Of Dalit Women In Sivakami's *The Grip Of Change* And *The Taming Of Women*

P. Uma^{1*}, Dr. T. Deivasigamani²

^{1*}Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University, Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu-608002, umakups10@gmail.com

²Associate Professor, Department of English, Annamalai University.

Abstract

This present study aims to explore the socio-economic status of Dalit women from Sivakami's novels *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women*. It also highlights how Dalit women depend on their husbands, fathers, and brothers for their survival. Sivakami is a well-known Tamil Dalit novelist; she has made a remarkable contribution to Indian literature, especially Dalit Literature. Her writings mainly concentrate on patriarchy, caste, gender, and social injustice of Dalits. The present paper analyses how Dalit women suffer from socio-economic factors and how her women characters struggle, and resilience against oppression and discrimination due to socio-economic status. In *The Grip of Change*, Thangam is a Dalit woman who has different kinds of experiences from the upper caste landlord Paranjothi Udayar and the village leader Kathamuthu. In *The Taming of Women*, the protagonist Anandhayi suffers at the hands of her own husband for her survival and to fulfill the family expenditure and her children's needs. Through an in-depth examination of characters like Thangam and Anandhayi. The reveals the intricate dynamics of power and privilege within Dalit communities and questions the socio-economic environments of Dalit women. This study contributes to the discourse on the intersectional nature of oppression and the necessity of inclusive approaches to social justice and amplifies the voices and experiences of Dalit women by highlighting their resilience and aspirations for change. It also emphasizes the importance of addressing intersecting forms of discrimination and the Socio-economic status of Dalit women.

Keywords: Dalit women, Gender Discrimination, Indian Society, Power Structure, Suppression.

Introduction

Sivakami, is a contemporary Tamil Dalit novelist, poet, short story writer, and social activist. She was born on 30th November 1957 at Permbalur in Tamil Nadu and after completing her Higher education joined the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in 1980. Despite her prestigious career in Civil Services, she faced innumerable discrimination and challenges due to her caste and gender which profoundly influenced her writings. Her writings are characterized by their realism and deep empathy for her characters. Her narratives often present a vivid depiction of rural Tamil Nadu, capturing the socio-economic and cultural milieu of Dalit communities. The Central themes of her novels are the pervasive and systemic nature of caste and gender-based discrimination and its devastating impact on Dalit lives. Sivakami highlights the dual oppression faced by Dalit women, both within their communities and in the broader social context. Her work frequently underscores the importance of social justice and the need for collective action to combat oppression. She particularly portrays the struggles of Dalits to reclaim their identity and assert their dignity in the face of relentless social exclusion.

Sivakami's first novel *The Grip of Change* (Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum) was originally written in Tamil and later translated into English and published in 1989, this novel is one of her most acclaimed works and centers around the life of a Dalit woman, Thangam, who faces brutal violence and discrimination. It critiques both the caste system and the patriarchal structures within Dalit communities. Her second novel, *Ananthayi* was first written in Tamil Language and later translated into English as *The Taming of Women*, this work provides a comprehensive overview of Tamil Literature including Dalit Writers. Sivakami's analysis highlights the socio-political context of Tamil literary movements and their evolution over time. *The Taming of Women* was published in 2004, and explores the oppressive dynamics within a Dalit family, focusing on the experiences of its female members. Through this narrative, Sivakami addresses the intersection of caste and gender-based violence.

Sivakami's contributions to Tamil and Dalit literature have been instrumental in bringing the issues of caste and gender discrimination to the forefront of literary and social discourse. Her novels have inspired a new generation of writers and activists, encouraging them to challenge oppressive systems and fight for equality. Her novels continue to be studied and appreciated for their honest portrayal of Dalit life and their call for social change. By giving voice to the voiceless, Sivakami has ensured that the struggles and aspirations of Dalits are recognized and remembered. She remains a towering figure in Tamil Dalit literature, her work resonating with readers and activists alike. Through her powerful storytelling and unwavering commitment to social justice, she has carved out a space for Dalit narratives in the literary world, advocating for a more equitable and inclusive society. The present paper highlights how her women characters Thangam and Anandhayi struggled for survival due to their socio-economic status.

Objective of the study:

The objective of the study trace how Sivakami's women characters represent the voice of Dalit women and also represent the socio-economic status of Dalit women with from her novels *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women*.

- To investigate how gender and caste factors shape the socio-economic status and experiences of Dalit women, as depicted through the struggles and resilience of the protagonists in these narratives.
- To understand the socio-economic status of Dalit women in India and highlight the complexities of power dynamics within Dalit communities due to gender roles. It also emphasizes the role of literature in advocating for social justice and inclusive policies.
- To highlight how the caste system and gender inequality affect the socio-economic status of Dalit women in society.
- To explore the marginalized status of Dalit women within their community and in society.
- To explain the psychological conditions of Dalit women due to the suppression and oppression faced by them.

Scope of the study

This study focuses on the literary analysis of Sivakami's novels *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women* on the portrayal of Dalit women's socio-economic status. A detailed examination of the novels explores themes of gender, caste, and socio-economic factors affecting Dalit women. It focuses on the protagonists, such as Thangam and Anandhayi, to understand their struggles, resilience, and agency within oppressive socio-economic environments. It also examines the development of narratives within the broader socio-economic realities of Dalit women in India to highlight systemic oppression and marginalization.

Review of Literature

R. Aparana. (2018), in her article "Expression and Suppression of the Self in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*" examines the dual oppression of Dalit Women in the society, particularly the patriarchal structures that objectify them. It revisits the novel with a reflective perspective, affirming the unity of the narrator, protagonist, and author. It challenges and deconstructs previous representations, narrative techniques, character development, and the concept of authorship itself. The non-linear narrative moves through memories, highlighting the complex psychological journey of the author and the instability caused by conflicting emotions and recollections.

C. Subashini and P.R. Princelin (2018), in their article, "Women on Double Marginalization in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*" examine the dual marginalization of Dalit women as depicted in Sivakami's novel *The Grip of Change*. This marginalization stems from economic, social, and cultural impoverishment and is exacerbated by caste, creed, religion, or race-based discrimination. The article discusses how Dalit women are doubly oppressed due to their caste and then due to their gender in a patriarchal society. It highlights the severe exploitation of Dalit women, both socially and economically, by upper-caste Hindus and their men. The authors aim to shed light on the pervasive caste prejudice and gender discrimination in Indian society as portrayed in Sivakami's work.

Tanmoy Singha (2018), in his article, "The Voice of the Voiceless: A Study of Sivakami's *The Taming of Women*" highlights the struggles of Dalit women in a patriarchal society. It portrays the harsh realities of Indian society where women are trapped under male dominance, leading them to become victims who accept their unchangeable fate. Sivakami's novel gives a voice to these voiceless women, detailing the numerous trials and tribulations they endure throughout their lives, which they come to accept as an integral part of their existence in Indian society.

B. Siva Priya (2019), in her article, "Suppression and Sufferings of Dalits: A Study of P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*," explores the inhumane treatment of Dalits, depicted in the literature of Dalit writers. These writers aim to eradicate untouchability and promote equality, believing that their authentic perspectives are crucial. Sivakami, one of the pioneering Tamil Dalit writers, highlights the dual oppression faced by Dalit women due to both gender and caste, inflicted by upper-caste men and Dalit men. The article specifically examines the suffering and struggles of Dalits as portrayed in Sivakami's novel *The Grip of Change*.

R. Jayakumar and Dr. T. Deivasigamani (2022), in their article, "The Portrayal of Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women*". discusses the depiction of male domination and its effects on women's subordination in Sivakami's novels. The article examines how patriarchy and gender inequality are portrayed, highlighting the miserable plight and subjugation of women in Indian society. Sivakami's characters experience physical assault, sexual exploitation, and gender discrimination. The novels show that women only attain dignity by transgressing social stereotypes and entering the public domain. The characters Thangam, Lakshmi, and Anandhayi are depicted as being trapped by a patriarchal society, resulting in a fractured social identity.

Findings and Discussion

Sivakami's novel explores the themes of caste, gender, and social injustice and also portrays the harsh realities faced by Dalit women in rural India. The novel is set in a rural village in Tamil Nadu and follows the life of Thangam, a Dalit woman who suffers severe oppression and violence at the hands of her upper-caste landlords and her community. After being physically assaulted by the upper-caste men, Thangam seeks justice, but her plight is largely ignored or dismissed by the village authorities. The novel vividly depicts the systemic and pervasive nature of caste-based discrimination.

Thangam's experiences highlight the brutality and dehumanization faced by Dalits. Sivakami delves into the intersectionality of caste and gender, showcasing how Dalit women are doubly marginalized. The novel is a critique of the societal and legal systems that fail to protect the marginalized. Thangam's fight for justice symbolizes the broader struggles of Dalit communities against entrenched caste hierarchies. The novel continues to be relevant in discussions on social justice and human rights, making it a must-read for those interested in Indian literature and social issues. Thangam is the protagonist of *The Grip of Change*, and her experiences drive the narrative forward. As a Dalit woman, she epitomizes the dual oppression of caste and gender. Thangam's strength and determination are evident throughout the novel. Despite facing severe violence and discrimination, she fights for her dignity and rights.

The Grip of Change does not shy away from depicting Thangam's vulnerabilities. Her suffering highlights the systemic oppression faced by Dalit women, making her a deeply empathetic character. Thangam's character serves as a symbol of resistance against the caste system and patriarchal norms. Her struggle for justice represents the broader fight for marginalized communities. Throughout the novel, Thangam evolves from a victim of oppression to a symbol of resilience. Her journey underscores the potential for agency and resistance even in the face of overwhelming odds. Kathamuthu is a complex character who plays a significant role in Thangam's life. He is a local Dalit leader who initially appears to be a protector and advocate for justice. His character is portrayed as a charismatic and influential leader within the Dalit community. His ability to navigate the social and political landscape is a key aspect of his character. Despite his initial portrayal as a champion for Dalit rights, the character is revealed to have self-serving motives. He manipulates situations to his advantage, often prioritizing his interests over genuine justice. His character is full of contradictions. While he advocates for Dalit rights, his actions often betray a lack of genuine commitment to the cause. This duality makes him a complex and realistic character. His character reveals the complexities of leadership within oppressed communities and his flaws and manipulative tactics highlight the internal conflicts and power struggles that can exist even among those fighting for justice. Paranjothi is an upper-caste landlord who embodies the oppressive and violent tendencies of the caste system. These characters serve as supporters of Thangam in her fight for justice. They represent the small significant support systems within marginalized communities.

Thangam is economically dependent on the landowners and the men in her community. Her livelihood is tied to her labour in the fields owned by upper-caste landlords. Her economic vulnerability is exacerbated by her status as a widow, leaving her without the financial or social support typically provided by a husband. Thangam's work in the fields is back-breaking and poorly paid. The wages she earns are insufficient to support herself and her family, reflecting the broader economic exploitation of Dalit labourers. She introduces herself to the Inspector of police: "I belong to a Hindu Scheduled Caste community and a poor Parayar, an orphan and a widow. He would earn her living by working for a Dalit wage" (TGC 11). Despite her hard work, Thangam is often denied fair wages and subjected to economic exploitation by upper-caste employers. Her economic status limits her access to necessities and social mobility. Her marginalization is compounded by her caste and gender, which deny her opportunities available to others. Her attempt to seek justice for the violence inflicted upon her is also hindered by her socio-economic position, as she lacks the resources and influence to challenge the powerful upper-caste landlords. Thangam and other Dalit women have limited access to resources such as healthcare, education, and legal aid. This lack of access perpetuates their socio-economic disadvantages and reinforces their marginalized status.

The novel highlights how economic dependence on upper-caste employers restricts their freedom and autonomy. It also portrays several other Dalit women who share similar socio-economic conditions as Thangam. These women face economic exploitation, lack of fair wages, and dependence on upper-caste employers. The collective experiences of these women highlight the systemic nature of economic oppression within the caste hierarchy. Dalit women often rely on each other for support, sharing resources, and providing mutual aid within their limited means. This communal support is crucial for their survival but is not sufficient to overcome the broader structural inequalities they face. The intersectionality of caste and gender means that Dalit women are often at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. They face discrimination not only from upper-caste communities but also within their Dalit communities, where gender roles restrict their economic opportunities. The novel also contrasts the socio-economic status of Dalit women with that of upper-caste women. Upper-caste women, while still subjected to patriarchal control, enjoy better economic conditions and greater access to resources compared to their Dalit counterparts. These women have more stable and secure lives, with access to better education, healthcare, and legal protections. Despite their relative economic privilege, upper-caste women are still constrained by patriarchal norms that limit their autonomy and subject them to male dominance. Their economic status does not fully protect them from gender-based oppression.

The novel highlights the economic exploitation of Dalit women as a key aspect of their oppression. Their labour is undervalued and underpaid, trapping them in a cycle of poverty and dependence. This kind of exploitation is enforced through both caste and gender hierarchies, which work together to maintain the socio-economic status quo. Thangam's struggle for justice is not just a fight against physical violence but also against the economic structures that perpetuate her marginalization. Her quest for fair wages and economic independence is integral to her fight for dignity and rights. The economic dimension of her struggle emphasizes the need for broader socio-economic reforms to address caste and gender inequalities. The socio-economic conditions of the women characters in the novel illustrate the systemic nature of inequality. Economic exploitation is deeply intertwined with social and cultural discrimination, creating multiple barriers

to equality and justice. The novel calls attention to the need for systemic change to address these intertwined forms of oppression and improve the socio-economic status of marginalized women.

Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* provides a vivid depiction of the socio-economic status of Dalit women, highlighting their struggles and resilience in the face of systemic oppression. Thangam's story, along with those of other Dalit women, underscores the harsh realities of economic exploitation and marginalization, while also showcasing their strength and determination to seek justice and improve their lives. Through these characters, Sivakami calls for a deeper understanding of the socio-economic dimensions of caste and gender oppression and the need for comprehensive reforms to achieve true social justice.

The Taming of Women

Sivakami's *The Taming of Women* is a powerful and evocative novel that delves into the complex and often oppressive dynamics of gender roles in Indian society. The novel explores the rigid gender roles and expectations imposed on women in traditional Indian society. The protagonist, Anandhayi's character depicted as a strong and resilient woman who battles against the oppressive structures of patriarchy. The story highlights how women's lives are controlled and dictated by male authority figures, particularly through marriage. The protagonist Anandhayi is an illiterate woman who depends all her needs to her husband and her economic status completes her silence. The novel portrays her efforts to assert her identity and agency in a society that seeks to subjugate her. This theme of resistance is a central element of the narrative, providing a nuanced look at the various forms of rebellion, both subtle and overt, that women employ. In the novel *The Taming of Women* the socio-economic status of women is intricately tied to the themes of patriarchy, caste, and economic disparity. It provides a vivid portrayal of how these factors intersect to shape the lives and experiences of women in rural Indian society. The present article is an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic status of women in the novel: Women in the novel are largely economically dependent on men, whether it be their husbands, fathers, or other male relatives. This economic dependence reinforces their subordinate status and limits their autonomy. Women's primary role is confined to domestic labour, which is undervalued and unrecognized economically. They are responsible for household chores, child-rearing, and managing daily household needs, which are seen as their natural duties rather than contributions deserving of economic value. Many women also engage in agricultural labour, working in the fields alongside men. Despite their significant contributions to the agricultural economy, their labour is often unpaid or underpaid, further entrenching their economic marginalization.

The socio-economic status of women in *The Taming of Women* is characterized by economic dependence, labour exploitation, and the intersectional oppression of caste and gender. However, the novel also highlights the resilience and resistance of women who navigate and challenge these oppressive structures. Through the experiences of characters like Anandhayi, P. Sivakami provides a poignant critique of the socio-economic inequalities faced by women and underscores the importance of economic empowerment and education in the struggle for gender equality and social justice. "I am an able woman. Why do I have to depend on him? I will eat from my earnings" (TTW 63). The family unit is a microcosm of the broader social structures that enforce conformity and subservience. Through Anandhayi's interactions with her husband, children, and extended family, Sivakami examines the intricate dynamics of power and control within the household. Sivakami's writing is marked by its raw and unflinching portrayal of the realities faced by her characters. Her use of a realist narrative style brings authenticity and immediacy to the story, drawing readers into the emotional and physical landscapes of the characters' lives. The novel is deeply rooted in the cultural and social milieu of Tamil Nadu, providing readers with a rich tapestry of local customs, traditions, and dialects.

In *The Taming of Women*, Anandhayi is the central character. She is complex, and multifaceted, and serves as a powerful lens through which the themes of patriarchy, caste, and resistance are explored. Anandhayi's character is portrayed as a strong and resilient woman. Despite the oppressive circumstances she faces, she continually strives to assert her identity and maintain her dignity. Her strength is both physical and emotional, as she endures and resists the various forms of control exerted over her. Anandhayi's courage is evident in her willingness to challenge the status quo. She defies the traditional expectations placed upon her as a woman and a lower-caste individual. This defiance is not always overt; everyday acts of rebellion collectively signify her resistance. Despite her struggles, she exhibits a deep sense of empathy and compassion, particularly towards her children and other women in the village. She is protective of her children and desires a better future for them, free from the oppressive constraints that she faces: "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 he wants to pine away. After all, there are five children; can't she just wash her hands off him forever?" (TTW17).

Anandhayi's relationship with her husband, Kandhan, is fraught with tension and conflict. Kandhan represents traditional patriarchal authority, often exerting control over her through physical and emotional means. Despite this, she finds ways to resist and assert her autonomy, highlighting the power dynamics within their marriage. Her role as a mother is central to her character. She is deeply concerned about the well-being and future of her children, particularly her son, Muthu. Her interactions with her children reveal her nurturing side and her desire to break the cycle of oppression for the next generation. Her interactions with other villagers, particularly women, underscore her role as a figure of resistance within the community. She often becomes a silent supporter or a source of strength for other women facing similar struggles. Her

character challenges the traditional roles assigned to women in her society. Throughout the novel, Anandhayi grapples with her sense of identity and self-worth. The constant devaluation she experiences due to her gender and caste status pushes her to question and ultimately affirm her values and humanity. Her journey is marked by her quest for autonomy. She seeks to carve out a space where she can exercise control over her own life, despite the restrictive societal norms. This search for autonomy is a driving force in her character development.

Anandhayi faces numerous moral and ethical dilemmas, particularly in her efforts to protect her children and challenge injustices. These dilemmas add depth to her character, showcasing her as a woman who, despite her struggles, maintains a strong moral compass. She symbolizes the broader struggle of women in patriarchal and caste-based societies. Her character serves as a representation of resistance against systemic oppression and the quest for dignity and equality. Through Anandhayi, P. Sivakami highlights the strength and resilience of women who, despite facing immense challenges, continue to fight for their rights and identity. Her resilience, courage, and compassion make her a compelling protagonist, and her journey serves as a powerful commentary on the intersections of gender, caste, and power. Anandhayi's story, *The Taming of Women* offers a profound exploration of the human spirit's capacity to endure and resist in the face of adversity.

Conclusion

Sivakami's major characters Thangam and Anandhayi, faced multiple oppressions of caste, gender, and economic hardship that shaped their existence and resilience. Thangam, the protagonist of *The Grip of Change* embodies the harsh realities of systemic oppression. Her struggles reflect the pervasive discrimination that Dalit women endure, from violence and exploitation to economic disenfranchisement. Her determination to confront and navigate through the entrenched power structures signifies a broader quest for dignity and justice among Dalit women. Sivakami's depiction of Thangam character underscores the persistent socio-economic struggles while highlighting the potential for resistance and change within these constrained environments. In *The Taming of Women*, Anandhayi's narrative enriches our understanding of Dalit women's socio-economic status. Anandhayi's experiences shed light on the compounded difficulties faced by Dalit women who are often trapped in cycles of poverty and subjugation. Yet, her story is also one of perseverance and aspiration for social mobility. Anandhayi's resistance to traditional norms and her pursuit of a better life for herself and her family highlight the latent strength and fortitude that characterize many Dalit women's lives.

References:

1. Sivakami. P *The Grip of Change* Trans. P. Sivakami. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan Pvt. Ltd. 2009.
2. Sivakami.P *The Taming of Women* Trans. Pritam K. Chakravarty. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2012.
3. Jayakumar, R., and T. Deivasigamani. "The Portrayal of Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women*." *Specialusis Ugdymas*, vol. 1, no. 43, 2022.
4. M. Grey et al. "Dalit Women and the Struggle for Justice in a World of Global Capitalism." *Feminist Theology*, 14 (2005): pp. 127 - 149.
5. Priya, B.Siva. "Suppression and Sufferings of Dalits: A Study of P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*". *Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, volume-09, no.3 2019.
6. Pushpendra Singh et al. "Unequal Reward for Equal Work? Understanding Women's Work and Wage Discrimination in India Through the Meniscus of Social Hierarchy." *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, vol. 12 2020, pp. 19 - 36.
7. R, Aparana. "Expression and Suppression of the Self in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*". *SMART MOVES JOURNAL IJELLH*, vol. 6, no. 11, Nov. 2018, pp. 23.
8. Raj, Yash, et al. "Raising the Voice Against the Atrocities: A Critical Study of P Sivakami's *Taming Of Women*." *Journal of Critical Reviews* vol.7, no. 4, 2020.
9. Sita Ram Bairwa et al. "Status of Dalit women in India." *International journal of research in social sciences*, vol. 6 2016 pp: 507-518.
10. Subashini. C and Princlin, P.R. "Women on Double Marginalization in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*". *Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, vol. 2018, <https://oiirj.org/oiirj/>
11. Yedukondalu Narendra et al. "Indian Dalits Under Attack." *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)* 2023.